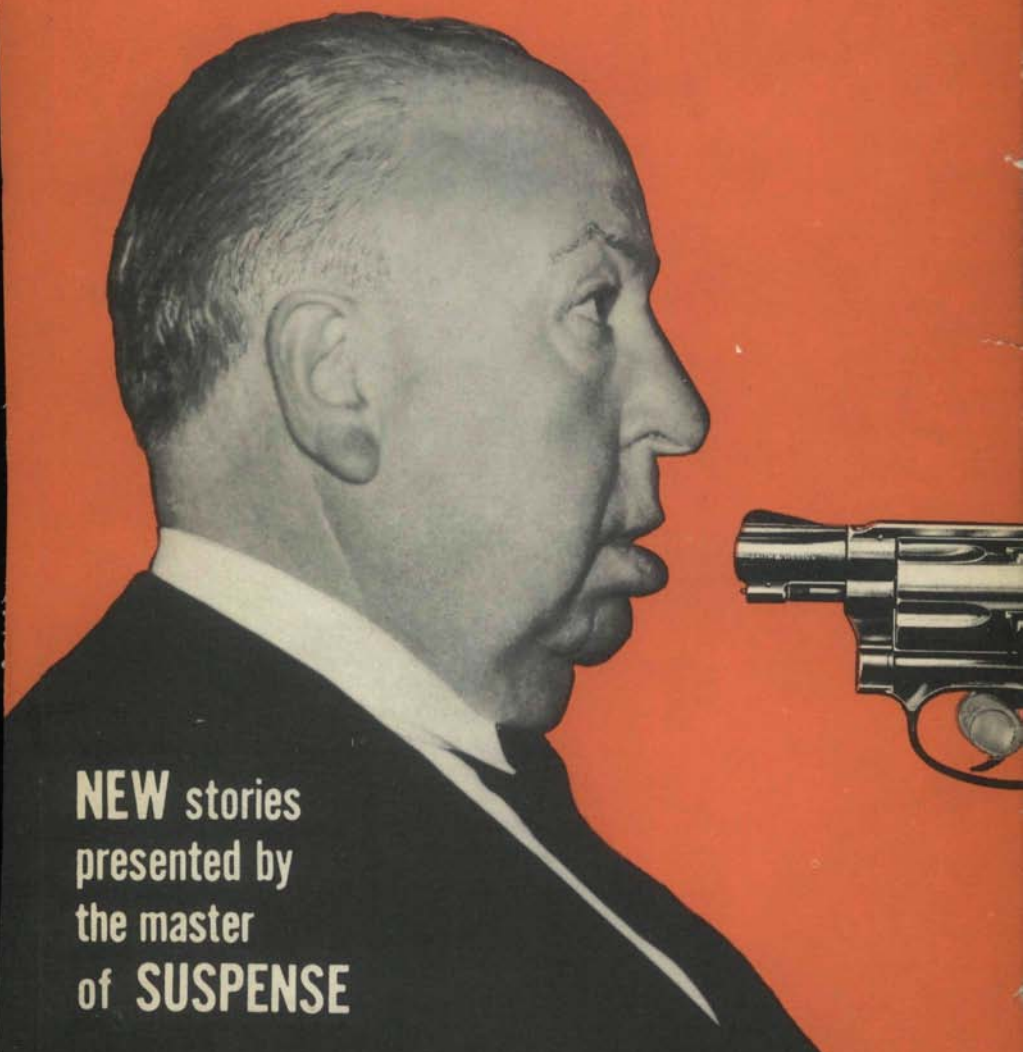


ALFRED

OCTOBER 50¢ K

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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



October 1967

Dear Reader:

I would not keep you in suspense regarding my predicament on the cover as I would elsewhere in these pages. If there seems to be an aura of embarrassment about me, it is not because I let someone *else* waylay me, but that I simply ran into my own alarm clock. You see, it had been removed from its overhead shelf for a minor adjustment by a gunsmith: the trigger finger had become worn.

For years the buzz of a conventional alarm set my teeth on edge. Now I enjoy the melodious crash of a .38 caliber revolver neatly rigged to a former clock-radio. Its report approximates the state of world affairs, so I hardly miss the radio broadcasts, and I awaken to a smoky aroma not too far removed from that of burning leaves and frying bacon.

I shall only have to exercise care that the clock-.38 is not left on a low table again.

Chances are good that any UFOs observed in the coming weeks will be made of inflated pigskin. Good reading for all sports is contained herein, but if you have ever envied a football star, I should like you to examine the private life of one collegiate headliner in this month's novelette. Surely, then, you will feel considerably more comfortable about your own situation.

Alfred Hitchcock

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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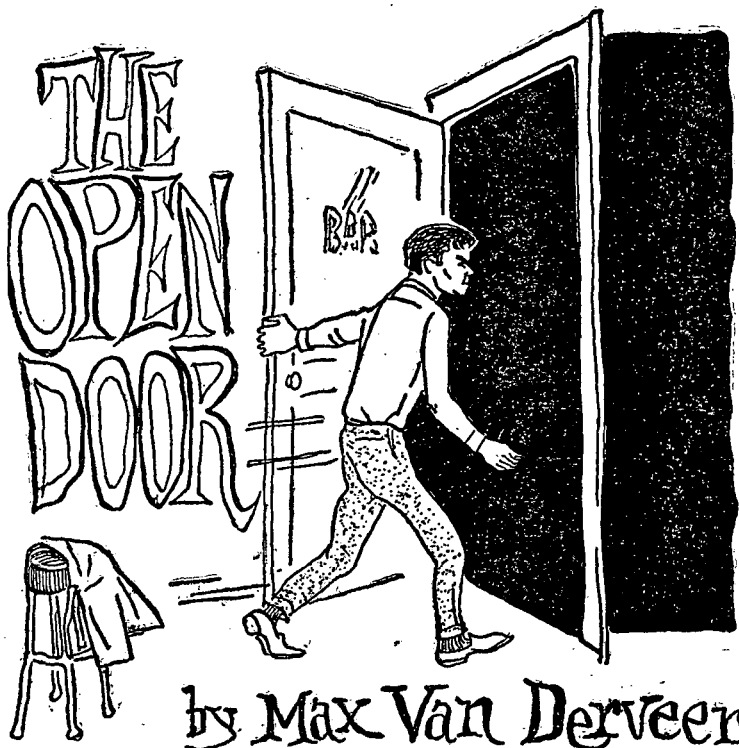
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When opportunity comes through the door, the prudent man is a deliberate subscriber.



GEORGE NATALLI was bored to hell-and-gone with the street where he had been born, his job and his life. No one along Italy Street was surprised, of course, for George was a restless young man who dreamed.

Now, dreams were not to be bad-mouthed, but George's dreams touched grandeur. Once, they had encompassed only Antonia Pashio. Today they were of riches—and George was only a barkeep for Old

Man Ricca on Italy Street, a youth impounded by birth.

George had been, and was, in love with Antonia Pashio. He had expected to go off to war in a place called Vietnam, return and marry Antonia, have many children by Antonia. But Italy Street knew George Natalli had been dreaming. Antonia Pashio would wait for no man. A climber, Antonia used people, including George, to get the things she wanted. The street saw through her. George Natalli did not. So he had gone off to war in his dream, and had returned to brutal reality. He had a hole in his chest, a medal in his hand, but Antonia was gone. He could live with the hole and the medal, but living without Antonia—that was something else.

No one knew where Antonia was, only that she had gone away with a man. George searched but it was as if the earth had swallowed her. He returned to his job at Ricca's, totally dejected. Days were long, nights even longer. It was only the new dream that kept him going. Day and night he began to imagine himself swathed in luxury. He had no idea where this wealth was to come from, but he knew it was out there, that someday it would be dropped into his lap, and that eventually—with this wealth—he would find Antonia and take

her for his own, his lovely bride.

Eyes rolled. Italy Street wagged its collective head. Dreams were fine, but to dream as George Natalli dreamed? Well, that was almost a sin.

The street door of Ricca's Bar opened that cold, gray afternoon, a small, middle-aged man in expensive attire limped in, and George was immediately wary. The man obviously was not a product of nor belonged on Italy Street. He was smooth and controlled, did not seem to look at anything in particular inside the bar, yet George had the impression the man had taken in and categorized everything that surrounded him. The man straddled a bar stool, placed his hat on a stool to his right, then asked for brandy. His voice was smooth and controlled too.

"Is that your best?" he asked as George poured brandy into a snifter glass.

"Yes, sir."

The man nodded. "It's what I want." He rubbed his palms. He was suntanned and manicured. "Cold, isn't it?"

"Raw," admitted George, placing the snifter glass on the bar. He took the bill and started to turn to the cash register. "Keep the change," the man said, and then he looked George straight in the eyes. "Is your name Natalli?" he asked.

"Have I found George Natalli?"

George was unable to keep the surprise from his face.

The man chuckled heartily and put out a hand. His shake seemed genuine. "Wilder, here," he said. "Bruno Wilder. I just came from Los Angeles. You don't remember me?"

"No," George said slowly, frantically searching his memory.

"Saigon. About eight months ago. You have a hole in your chest," Bruno Wilder said.

"Yeah," George admitted.

"Any complications?"

"Only the cold. When it's cold, like today, the hole aches."

"There are warm, year-round climates, you know."

"Well, I think about 'em, of course, but—"

"I got my limp about a month after you got your hole. I was a captain. You don't remember that bar in Saigon, eh?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid I don't," George said truthfully.

Wilder tasted the brandy. "Well, I must admit you were pretty deep in your cup that night, George."

"I must've been drownin'. How did we hook up? I mean, you a captain and me just a corporal in the ranks. How did we—"

"I never did buy that class distinction jazz, George," Wilder said. "You were alone and I was alone

that night. After a while we got together. You waved me over. You really don't remember?"

"Sorry."

Bruno Wilder grinned and wagged his head. "I'll say one thing, George. You talked. You seemed to have the weight of the world on your shoulders, and you really unloaded. You insisted that I see your Italy Street." Wilder made an issue of looking around the bar this time. "So this is Ricca's, huh?"

"Yep."

Bruno Wilder grunted, finished the brandy and gently pushed the snifter glass across the bar. "And how's your mother, George? You seemed to hold her in very high esteem."

George poured more brandy. "I buried her about three weeks ago, Mr. Wilder."

"Oh? Well, I'm sorry to hear that. But I suppose there is a wife now. Antonia?"

George jerked and Bruno Wilder's eyes narrowed on him in speculation. "No Antonia?" he asked.

"There's no Antonia, Mr. Wilder. Let's leave it at that, huh?"

"Well, certainly, lad. I'm sorry I mentioned her."

"I'm a loner these days. I don't have a wife or girlfriends."

"I see. But it's not the way you want to live, is it? Your future is

why I really came to Italy Street, you know."

"My future?"

"I'm in the investment business, in Los Angeles. I can open the door of opportunity for you, George, but not here on Italy Street. You would have to return to Los Angeles with me."

"Me? In Los Angeles?"

"It's warm in Los Angeles, George. Your chest won't ache."

"Mr. Wilder, level with me."

"All right. I'm an ambitious man, an opportunist. I gamble. But sometimes it takes guts to gamble."

"Guts I think you might have, Mr. Wilder."

"How 'bout you, boy? What I have in mind is ambitious, a golden opportunity—and will take guts to pull off. I can't do it alone. I have one man. I need another."

"Okay, I'm him."

Bruno Wilder looked mildly surprised. "Just like that?"

"Now who is surprised, Mr. Wilder?"

"All right, lad, all right. I believe you are the man I've been looking for, but I must warn you. There's an element of danger involved. Someone might even get killed."

George blinked hard. "When do we leave, Mr. Wilder?"

"I have reservations on a six-thirty flight tonight. Can you be

ready for the coast by then?"

"I'm ready now."

"Your compensation in this venture, George, will be twenty thousand dollars plus expenses. You can return to Italy Street when it is finished."

"Not me!"

"Then there is a single stipulation. You cannot remain in the Los Angeles area."

"There's always Hawaii, Mr. Wilder! Who are we gonna rob?"

"Was robbery mentioned, George?"

"Ain't that it?"

"I'll tell you after we have arrived in Los Angeles. Let's travel. You have to pack."

A wizened man came from the back room, cocked his head as if he smelled trouble.

"I just quit, Ricca," George said, stepping out from behind the bar.

The old man said nothing as George Natalli went out the street door with the limping stranger. He merely wagged his head and rolled his eyes.

Striding along Italy Street, Bruno Wilder beside him, George kept his eyes straight ahead as they moved toward his rented room. What was in the immediate future for him? It reeked of danger, yet there was \$20,000 at the end of the rainbow. Money. Just what he had been dreaming about.

On the other hand, who the hell was this Bruno Wilder?

George had never been in Saigon in his life.

The flight west was George's first on a commercial jet airliner. He had enjoyed it, and now they were rolling quietly through the brilliant neon of Los Angeles in a limousine. He was excited and impressed. Beside him Bruno Wilder rode in silence. George wondered if Wilder could smell his excitement over being chauffeured.

"George?" Wilder broke the silence. "You will meet two people at the house. My wife will be one. She is a beautiful girl, twenty-three, healthy, vibrant."

George said nothing. He sensed the coming warning.

"The point is, lad, she is private stock. Don't ever forget it."

"I understand, Mr. Wilder."

"You will also meet Nate Balinger, my personal secretary. Nate is the other man who will have a role in our venture. You and Nate will be working together."

"Fine with me, Mr. Wilder. Any-one you say."

"He appears mild and bookish. He isn't."

"Tough, huh?"

"Cold. Nate is very cold. You won't like him. He has one loyalty in life. Me."

"Okay with me, Mr. Wilder."

"It's only fair that you know. Here we are."

George lapsed into awe as they rolled through open gates in a high, iron fence and curved up a drive toward lights that seemed to spill from every window of a sprawling, massive house. Darkness prevented him from taking in the splendor around them, but he sensed the manicured symmetry and he squirmed in anticipation of what was ahead.

"Lordy, Mr. Wilder," he breathed, "you've managed all of this?"

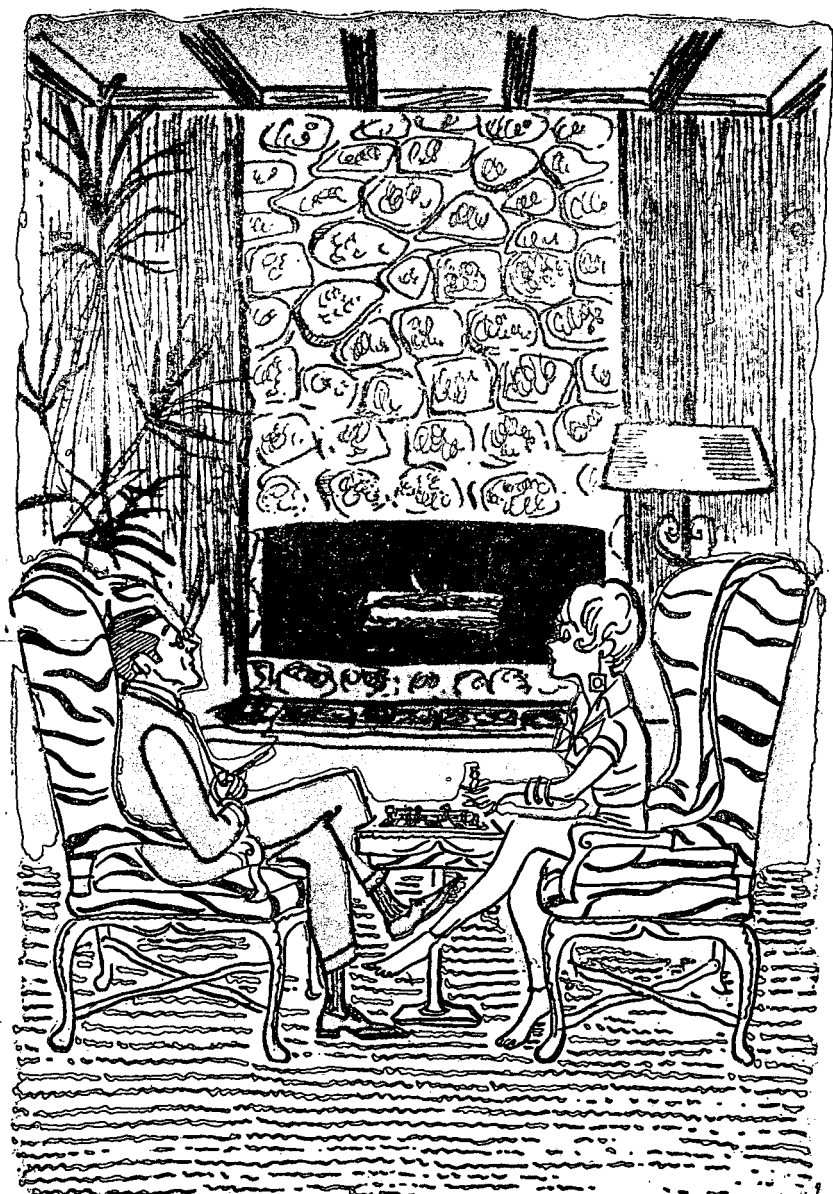
"I don't deal in peanuts, boy."

The interior of the mansion fascinated George. Even in his wildest imaginings, he had never conjured such richness. A maid took his suitcase and silently disappeared up a wide, curving staircase. Bruno Wilder smiled.

"Tomorrow you can orient yourself, George. Come. My wife and Nate are waiting."

They entered a luxurious, paneled den. A man and a blonde girl sat facing each other from identical wing chairs. Between them was a low table, and on the table was a chess board. A game had been in progress, but was forgotten with the entry.

The man stood. He was slight, of indeterminate age, and immac-



ulately dressed. Incongruously, his nose was bridged by a pair of old-fashioned, gold-rimmed glasses. Behind those glasses were the darkest eyes George had ever seen. Nate Ballinger did not offer to shake hands upon introduction. Vainly and unnecessarily, he straightened the neat triangle of his tie into his collar and merely bobbed his head. George's dislike was immediate. He understood what Bruno Wilder had meant. Nate Ballinger was a cold, dangerous man.

The blonde girl was something else. George felt the stir all through his body when he turned to her. She was seated with an unaffected naturalness and had a deep tan. There was an unpainted freshness about her that was captivating and a figure that was artfully molded, without being blatant, in a white blouse and pink Capri pants. When her dark eyes met his, they were frank. She stood, a hint of a smile at the corners of her lips. Her fingertips were warm against his palm, alive. He felt slight pressure but he managed to keep his face a mask as she turned and kissed Bruno Wilder flush on the mouth.

"Hi, darling," she breathed.

Wilder grinned, took a moment to look deep into her eyes, then patted her hip and chuckled at George. "As you can now see, lad,

I like to play games. They amuse me."

The only thing different about her was her hair. Once it had been long and black. Now it was fashioned in a short style and was blonde.

She looked at him. He could see that she was amused. "George," she said.

"Antonia," he managed.

"How have you been?"

"Fine."

"I've kept track of you."

"Yes, I can see."

"I know almost everything there is to know about you. I still have a friend or two on Italy Street."

"You supposedly disappeared. Dropped out of sight."

"It's the way I wanted it, George. My true friends have respected my desire for privacy."

George turned his stare on Wilder. "Why?" he asked simply.

"Antonia thinks you are the right man for us."

Behind George, Nate Ballinger said, "It's late, Mr. Wilder."

George resisted a strong impulse to turn. He did not like having Ballinger behind him, out of his vision, but now Wilder was nodding. "After midnight, yes, Nate. George, shall we retire?"

He wanted to protest, but it was as if Wilder had the faculty to read his thoughts. "There will be

ample time in the morning for talk." His eyes flicked significantly to his wife. "We can relive the old days then. Antonia will show you to your room."

"Come, George," she said with a small smile.

He followed her from the den and up a staircase. She preceded him along a wide, carpeted corridor and, staring on the play of her muscles, savoring the wafting smell of her, he knew a tremendous desire to reach out and crush her in his arms and once again know the warm, moist taste of her lips.

She stopped in an open doorway. There was lamplight in the vast bedroom and a huge bed had been turned down. A breeze puffed curtains at two open windows. He saw his suitcase on the floor at the foot of the bed.

"The bath is to the left," Antonia said. "Private."

"Antonia . . ."

"There is no awakening hour around here," she continued as if he had not said a word. "Sleep as late as you like. If my husband wants you, you will be called."

"Antonia, please . . ."

"You knew, didn't you, George? You weren't surprised when you saw me."

"I had a hunch," he admitted. "It had to be something like this.

I knew I had never met your . . . your husband before in my life. When he came into Ricca's, when he started telling me all of those things about myself, about my life and—"

"Bruno is a big man, George."

"And twice your age."

"Not quite in years."

"I loved you! We were gonna get married! As soon as I got back we were gonna—"

"Don't you still love me?"

"What?"

"Well, don't you?"

"My God, Antonia, what are you tryin' to do to me?"

"Two can be amused by games, George. My husband needed a man. I told him about you. I convinced him: 'George Natalli is the right man for you, Bruno-darling.' What I didn't tell him, of course, was that I've had a tremendous yank lately to see you again."

"Antonia, this is crazy!"

"Is it?"

The challenge was bold as she stood quietly waiting, her lips expectant, the dark eyes daring, and he was reflexively tempted. He caught himself lifting his hands to take her shoulders, before her husband's words in the car came crashing back: *She is private stock. Don't ever forget it.*

Somehow he steeled himself. He straightened. He entered the bed-

room. "See you in the morning, Mrs. Wilder."

He had wanted it to come out clipped with indifference. It didn't, and she still stood in the doorway when he looked over his shoulder. There was hidden laughter in her dark eyes.

"Chicken," she said softly, and then she was gone.

George closed the door and put his shoulder blades against it. An involuntary shudder went through him. He shook his head. Presentiment was strong in him. It was like the day he had been shot in the chest. There had been presentiment that day, too. Before he had left the encampment, he had felt strongly that he should not be going on the patrol . . .

He went to one of the open windows, looked down on a magnificent swimming pool. Flickering shadows cast by lights at each corner of the pool played on the smooth water. He shook his head again. Bruno Wilder seemed to have every imaginable luxury at his fingertips. How had he managed it? He had said he was in the investment business. That was a lot of rot. Truthfully, was Bruno Wilder a big criminal? Was he in the rackets? This business ahead, what was it? It had to be something more than penny-ante if a man could afford—and was will-

ing—to put out \$20,000 for assistance.

George felt a strong urge to be back on Italy Street, the \$20,000 be damned.

He showered, shaved, doused the lights and rolled into the soft bed. He was wide awake. He stared up at the dark ceiling. A feminine giggle he recognized came to him. He stiffened, sat up in the bed, listened hard. The giggle came again. It was followed by a hoarse laugh.

George left the bed, padded to one of the windows, spread the curtains, looked down on the lighted pool. Two figures splashed through the water. Then one was suddenly out of the pool, and he was looking down on Antonia as she stood in the light of a lamp. A man left the pool to join her.

George sucked a deep breath when Bruno Wilder took Antonia into his arms. They became locked. They kissed for a long time.

George turned back into the bedroom. There was a pain in his chest. He would leave California in the morning.

The sunshine was warm and bright. George breakfasted alone at a small table on a patio that overlooked the brilliant swimming pool. He had slept poorly, and now he was troubled. He was not sure how he was going to tell

Bruno Wilder he had changed his mind about \$20,000. He was not sure how he was going to tell Wilder's wife goodbye.

Movement in the corner of his eye alerted him. He sensed danger. He snapped his head around and saw the maid approaching. He drew a breath. Damn, why was he so jumpy?

"Everything all right, sir?" the maid asked.

"Fine, fine."

"Mr. Wilder will not be down for at least another hour."

"But I'm down," another voice said.

She was healthy and radiant in the sunshine as she came through the French doors. She wore a fresh white blouse, fresh white shorts, her feet were bare, she carried a cup on a saucer, and she looked as if she had slept for fourteen straight hours. She dismissed the maid and sat opposite George, picked up the silver coffeepot and filled her cup. She extended the pot. "You?"

He nodded. She poured. Then she asked, "How did you sleep?"

The door was open. He could let her have it. Instead, he lied. "Fine."

"Do you have a cigarette?"

He extended an open package, snapped a lighter flame for her. Her fingertips against the back of

his hand were cool as she bent to the flame. She drew smoke deep into her lungs, exhaled, then looked pleased as she sat back in the chair. "The first cigarette of the day is the best. You're an early riser."

"Habit, I guess."

"Bruno never gets up much before eleven."

He managed to curb the wince.

"We each have a bedroom."

"Message conveyed, Antonia," he said after a moment, "but I'm really not interested."

"Aren't you?"

It came out soft. She seemed to be mocking him. He waged an inner battle. Wasn't he ever to be free of her?

"I'm going back to Italy Street," he said.

"Why?" This time she was blunt. She drew on the cigarette, sent two thin streams of blue smoke at him. "Are you afraid of what's ahead?"

"I'm not a toy, Antonia! I'm not a child's toy to be—"

"Twenty thousand is a lot of dollars, George. You've never seen that much money in your life."

"I want the money, all right," he admitted, "but—"

"Then it's me."

"Hell, yes, it's you! What did you think—"

"I have memories, too, George."

"It's no good this way, Antonia!

It isn't fair to you or to—"

"Not even if something could be worked out?"

"Worked out?"

"Walk me," she said simply. She stood. "Let's take a look at the grounds."

They walked. They did not talk. They reached a knoll at the rear of the grounds. George put his hands on a low iron fence and leaned. On the other side of the fence were four graves.

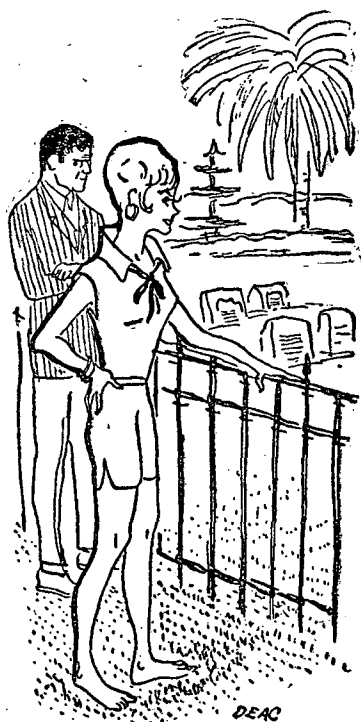
"The Wilder family burial grounds," Antonia said.

George turned. From the knoll, there was a clean view of the estate and the mansion. He allowed the sculptured magnificence to soak in. Here was the richness in all of his dreams in reality.

"George, don't you want to kiss me?"

He found her looking up at him with curiosity. Standing there in the bright sunshine, barefooted, brown, unpainted, she was very appealing. He caught her shoulders, pulled her against his chest and kissed her hard. When he finally broke off, she stood like a child, her hands clasped at the base of her spine, her body twisted slightly.

"Better," she breathed. "Now you are the George I remember." She took his cheeks in her palms, got up on her toes and kissed him



warmly. "Please," she said. "Please stay. When this is finished, I'll convince Bruno. I'll convince him we need you around the house."

Then she was gone, running down the knoll and across the green grass, her brown legs flashing in the sunlight. He sat down on the grass. He was breathing hard, his thoughts whirling. Why? Why had he left Italy Street?

He knew. There were twenty thousand whys and he still could collect them. In dollars. He also might be able to have Antonia.

Resolutely, he started back.

George found the \$100 bill on the thick carpeting when he entered the mansion through the French doors. He picked it up gingerly. He had never seen a \$100 bill in his life. He stared at it, then he slowly took it in the room. He was alone.

Could he pocket the bill? Would anyone miss it?

He crossed the room and looked through an open door into the den. Bruno Wilder was there, wearing a deep lavender lounging robe and seated in one of the wing chairs. A saucer was balanced on his bad thigh and there was a coffee cup in his fingers.

"Ah, George. Come in. My maid said you were up early."

George entered the den. His eyes searched for Nate Ballinger. He and Bruno Wilder seemed to be alone. He crossed to the small man and extended the \$100 bill. "I found this on the floor in the other room."

Wilder clucked. "See what prosperity does to a man? I'm getting careless." He put the cup and saucer on the low table in front of him and removed a fold of bills from a pocket of his robe. "I took some money for you from the safe this morning. I was counting it as I came into the den. I must have dropped that bill." He counted the

fold in his hand. "Yes," he said, "I'm a hundred short." Then he extended the fold and looked George straight in the eyes. "With the bill you have in your hand, you now have two thousand dollars. It's expense money, George—if you go along with my proposition. Sit down."

George sat.

"We're going to steal some money," Wilder said. "Game?"

George, his heart hammering hard and his fingers working against the fold of bills in his hand, said, "Where, and when?"

"From two men, tonight. You and Nate. I cannot be personally involved. One of the men would recognize me."

"Is this the investment business you spoke of, Mr. Wilder?"

"I've invested, yes, George. A large sum of money. But I expect to receive a sizeable return for that investment. I've paid a man, a bookkeeper in Las Vegas, for valuable information."

"I'm listenin', Mr. Wilder."

"Millions pour through Las Vegas casinos each month. It's taxable—if all of it were reported to the federal government."

"All of it isn't?"

"Reputedly, there's a skim-off, with a certain amount of untaxed funds going into underworld treasuries across the nation. These

funds are carried by special couriers to various cities. Five men will arrive in Los Angeles from Las Vegas this evening. Each will be carrying a certain amount of cash. They will arrive individually, and they will make a delivery to two men in separate rooms at a downtown hotel. Later these two men will board an eastbound train. They have separate compartments, but the compartments are next door. You and Nate will take the money from them before the train leaves the station."

"Nate knows the men?"

"On sight only. They will not recognize him."

"There will only be two?"

"There may be others in the station, watching, making sure the money goes aboard the train. You will have to use extreme caution."

"All right. How do we do it?"

"Nate will be in the station waiting room when you arrive. He will be dressed as a priest and will be carrying a plaid suitbag. You will wear a business suit and carry a suitcase. When you see Nate move, you move. Follow him through the entrance to the trains. You will have compartment tickets. Follow him aboard, go into your compartment, open the suitcase. There will be a conductor's uniform inside. Put it on and leave the compartment. Nate will be waiting.

He will show you the doors on which to knock. Tell the occupants you are collecting tickets. When they open, Nate will take over. After you have the money, return to your compartment, change back into the business suit and leave the train. If anyone asks you why you are leaving, tell them you are ill. Bring the money here. Nate will go on in the train."

"It sounds simple."

"It won't be. These boys are professionals. That's why I'm offering twenty thousand dollars."

"And after?"

"You get out of the Los Angeles area. I don't care where you go." He took a business card from his robe. "See this man at this address. He'll provide a passport if you think you'll need one."

"I go tonight?"

"Spend the afternoon finding passage. Use Antonia's car. You have two thousand. Go anywhere, but get yourself a reservation for tonight. The important thing is that you disappear. When word gets back to Las Vegas, they'll flood the city and it won't be fun if they find you. Cops live with thieves. Las Vegas doesn't."

"Just how much, Mr. Wilder, are we gonna steal?"

"It could be as much as a million dollars."

George paused to deliberate.

A million dollars—the figure made George's head reel. Newspapers, radio, television, magazines, people talked in such terms, but was it possible that such an amount of money, in cash, could be carried by a single human being? Was it possible that before this day was out he, George Nattali, would be carrying such an amount?

A careful man could parlay a million dollars into a lifetime of luxurious living. With Antonia at his side, he could . . .

He obtained a passport, but was unable to book passage for that night to anywhere. He tried the airlines and finally got a reservation on a flight to Miami. Then he became crafty. He looked up chartered air flights and drove Antonia's borrowed car to the small field. He could get a chartered flight to Denver anytime that night. From Denver, he would fly commercial to Mexico City and in another week he would be in Geneva.

He returned to the mansion and displayed the Miami flight ticket for Wilder. "Nothing to Hawaii, but I figure I can go on to Rio from Miami."

"They say it's a beautiful city," Wilder nodded.

"What do I do now?"

"Wait until it's time to go to the

station. Swim if you like. I can find you a suit. Antonia is in the pool. You two can talk over the old days. I'm going to nap."

When George joined Antonia at the pool, he felt as if he were a man afraid of height who was being forced into making his first parachute jump. He found Antonia to be a beautiful contrast of brown and white. Tiny beads of pool water glistened against her brown skin; a white, one-piece swimsuit molded her trim figure. She looked up at him from the water. He could feel his face flush.

"Hi," she said. "What do you think?"

"Tonight? It's big."

"I told you, George, my husband thinks big. He's been planning this for a long time."

"And you, Antonia? Do you also think big?"

"Well . . . I've learned some things from Bruno."

"A million dollar take?"

"A million dollars is big, George. Yes."

"And me on the premises—in addition to a husband? That's not big, Antonia. That's dumb."

"Are you suggesting something else, George?"

"What if I managed to parlay my twenty thousand into much more?"

Her expression became a com-

bination of curiosity and anticipation. "Explicit, George. Be explicit."

"You'n me in another corner of the world."

"Parlaying the twenty thousand?"

"Perhaps already parlayed."

"How, George?"

And there it was, what Italy Street had always seen in Antonia Pashio and what he—until now—had refused to believe. He suddenly was sick inside. He turned from her.

"George?"

He managed to keep on walking away from her without looking back over his shoulder.

"George!"

He kept walking. He entered the mansion. There was the familiar pain in his chest. Taking Antonia with him would relieve the pain—but how much pain would there be after the million dollars had been spent? How much grief when Antonia someday turned *him* in for a newer, and richer, model of a man?

In the station that evening, Nate Ballinger's makeup as a priest surprised George. He thought him the most likely looking priest he had ever seen. Nate sat reading a magazine, occasionally using a finger to push the gold-rimmed glasses back up his nose. He did not seem to be aware of the move-

ment or the people around him. But George was alert. Nate bothered him, looked too innocent. Like nitro, Nate could explode in a man's face. Right now George thought Nate was also being careless, as he did not seem to have noticed the man sitting on the bench opposite him. The man wore a red sport jacket and was studying Nate.

Train calls were announced. Nate continued to read. The east-bound train was blared over the speaker system. Nate put away his magazine, but did not leave his seat. George fidgeted. What was the delay? The train had been announced. Why didn't Nate board?

George nervously lit a cigarette. When he looked up from the flame, his heart leaped. Nate was gone. He stood, saw Nate crossing the station, the plaid suit bag across his shoulder. Immediately behind him was the man in the red sport jacket. George picked up his suitcase and hurried after them, squeezing in behind the man in the red jacket when they were passed by the gateman. George wanted to call out to Nate, warn him, but Nate moved quickly along the station platform, the suit bag riding his back. When he turned to board a car, the man in the red jacket continued on down the platform.

George drew a breath of relief and followed Nate. Inside the compartment, he changed into the conductor's uniform and cap quickly, drew another breath and then stepped into the corridor. Nate was to his left, the suit bag still across his shoulder. He jabbed a finger at two closed compartment doors.

George looked up and down the empty aisle, then stepped to one of the doors. He was suddenly perspiring and trembling.

"Move, man!" Nate hissed.

When George looked over his shoulder, he saw the open knife

in Nate's free hand and his heart leaped. George knocked on the compartment door, said, "Tickets?"

The door opened. A fat man who looked like a school teacher filled the opening and frowned. "We ain't even out of the station yet—"

The fat man grunted as Nate stepped around George and disappeared into the compartment. The door closed. George heard the sound of scuffling inside and then there was a loud groan. Perspiration dribbled into his eyes.

"Pardon me?"

George flinched at the sound of the woman's voice. She stood waiting for him to allow her to pass. She eyed him curiously as he stepped back. *No, Nate*, he thought, *don't make a sound now.*

The woman left the car. George heard the opening and closing of a door. Then Nate was before him again. There was a satisfied gleam in his cold eyes. He hefted the suit bag, pushed the glasses back up his nose. "Half done, boy. Let's go."

George knocked on the next door. The routine was repeated, and then he was facing another portly man who sucked air when Nate moved in on him. The door closed. George heard a gasped, "Noooo . . ." that trailed off.

The door opened. Nate was in



the corridor. He passed the suit bag to George. "Scram fast, boy."

George returned to the compartment, changed into the business suit, stuffed the conductor's uniform and cap into the suitcase, and left the train with the suitcase and the heavy suit bag. No one seemed to pay any particular attention to him, but he was sweating profusely and his knees felt rubbery. He entered the station, expecting men to move in on him from all sides. No one approached. He crossed the station, went out the street door to the sidewalk. He drew a long breath and got into a cab. They were several blocks from the station before he dared zip open the suit bag and shove a hand inside. His fingers against the packages of money tingled. He zipped shut the bag, lit a cigarette and inhaled a long drag.

When he left the cab at the office of the small airfield, he had regained composure. He cockily gave the driver a twenty dollar bill and told him to keep the change. Leaving the suitcase on the floor of the cab, he took the suit bag and was halfway to the door of the office when the voice knifed him: "Natalli!"

George crouched and spun, but it was already too late. Nate, still in priest's clothing, came out of the shadow of a car and was on

him. Nate Ballinger palmed a small gun. He allowed George to see the weapon, then took the suit bag from him and said, "Mr. Wilder is waiting in the car."

"You're stupid, George," Bruno Wilder said. "Didn't you realize this afternoon we would follow you?"

They drove to the mansion. Wilder was at the wheel. George, perspiring heavily, once attempted to offer a weak excuse, but Nate slammed an elbow deep into his solar plexus and for the next few minutes George gasped for air.

At the mansion, Wilder turned to George. "I warned you not to touch Antonia. You did. It was an indication you could not be trusted. However, I must admit you gained a point when you found and returned the hundred-dollar bill. If you had pocketed it, I doubt if you would be in your present predicament. I would have sent you back to your Italy Street. But you did return the bill and that, unfortunately, returned a measure of faith in you, if only briefly."

Nate wiggled the gun in his hand. When the front door of the mansion opened and Antonia came running down the steps, Nate said, "All right, Mr. Natalli, out."

George refused to move. "Antonia?"

"Sucker," she whispered softly.

Nate took George from the car and pointed him away from the mansion. The gun nudged his spine. Behind him, he heard Wilder say, "And where do you think you are going, darling?"

"I wanna watch," Antonia replied. "You promised. You said if I'd lead him on, if I'd—"

"You bloodthirsty cat."

Antonia laughed. "Didn't I do my part, darling?"

The laugh lifted the hairs on the back of George's head. He broke. He ran low in a zigzag pattern, expecting the blast of the gun at any second. But instead of the blast something solid slashed against his head and drove him into a nose-dive along the grass. Pain streaked from his head down into his shoulders and arms. He did not lose consciousness, but he seemed unable to move. Then hands fastened in his armpits and he was put on his feet.

"Boy," Nate Ballinger hissed, "you never want to run from me. I once almost broke the world's record in the hundred-yard dash."

The incongruity of the words escaped George. He was too frightened to comprehend, nor did he have the strength to fend off the hands that now propelled him up a rise in the ground and then through a fence gate. The true horror of where he was did not sweep him until they stopped at the edge of a fresh mound of dirt. He lifted his head slowly and looked around and fresh terror clutched him as he recognized the shadows of the Wilder burial grounds.

Beside him, Wilder said, "I'm sorry it has to be this way, George, but I can't have you talking in the future. There's too much at stake."

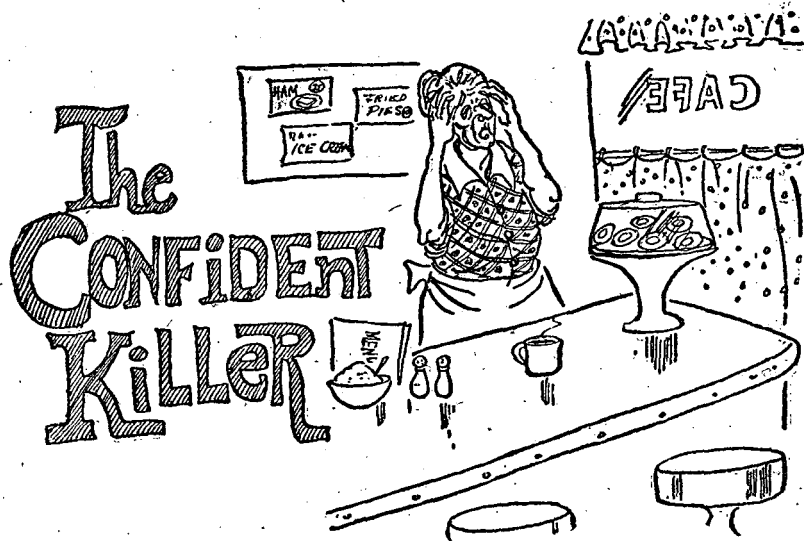
On the other side of him, Antonia said, "It looks as if you are about to become a member of the family, George." Her laughter was a cackle now.

Behind him, Nate Ballinger pressed the muzzle of the gun against the base of his neck.

George screamed, but did not hear the blast of the gun, nor was he conscious as his body pitched into the prepared grave.



Work, the choicest of balms for grief, becomes especially rewarding when executed for the cause of one's anguish.



MOM RODDENBERRY took the news of her daughter's death like a durable hill woman. Her sallow, bony face went as gray as fog. Her slate-gray eyes went out of whack as she tried to keep on seeing me. Her gnarled hands lifted and grabbed her wrinkled cheeks, as if she could make a physical pain that would lessen the hellfire scorching her inside. A wail like a cat caught in a steel trap split her thin lips.

Then she steadied, pulled her shoulders together, stood gasping

behind the counter in her cafe. "Gaither . . . Jerl Brownlee murdered my girl?"

"That's what I'm trying to say, ma'am."

She took off the clean white smock that she wore over her simple gray dress as her cafe uniform and came around the counter, a small, spry woman that the Smoky Mountain winters and endless toil had whittled down to a collection of hickory sticks and leather.

"Is Pretty at Doc Weatherly's un-

dertaking parlor now, Gaither?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Will you walk over with me?"

"You know I will!"

"And tell me the whole of it."

Her fingers were like wires on my wrist. "Every last detail. You hear me, Gaither?"

She turned over the cardboard sign that hung inside the glass part of the cafe door. The sign said "Closed." We stepped onto the sidewalk. The old lady closed and locked the door, then stood a minute looking up and down the dusty street like she was a stranger, although she'd lived in the town of Comfort all her life.

"Not much here to satisfy a gal young'un who dreamed of fancy

clothes and big city excitement, Gaither."

"She wasn't a bad girl, ma'am."

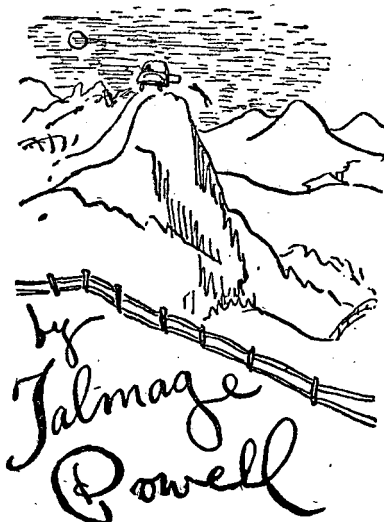
"That she wasn't, Gaither. Just too innocent and ignorant of the ways of the world and too—attractive to men."

With me at her side, Mom Roddenberry thought of the short eighteen years of Pretty's life, I reckon, as she set off with dogged hill-woman's stride. "I'm listening, Gaither," she prodded.

So I told her how Pretty Roddenberry had come to her end, as we tramped toward the old gingerbread house where Doc Weatherly lives upstairs and undertakes on the ground floor.

Pretty had met her death in cruelly simple manner. She'd sneaked up to the Brownlee lodge to keep a date with Jerl. He was the last of the Brownlees, had inherited a timber and tobacco fortune, and figured he was cock of any walk he cared to set foot on.

Jerl didn't show up in Comfort often, preferring to spend his time and squander his money in resorts where fancy women were plentiful. With a bunch of friends, he had boozed it up at the UT-Clemson game last week, which took place in Knoxville. The swanky Brownlee lodge being on a thousand-acre estate across the line in North Carolina, the gang had



trekked over and kept the party roaring.

They caroused over land, lake, and mountainside for three days before they fizzled out. Finally Jerl was left alone, surly and restless. He got to thinking of that cute little trick he'd made a few passes at previous when he happened to be in Comfort, so he called her on the phone, and she was dumb enough to sneak up there.

Who knows what went through Pretty's excited mind as she dolled up in her best dress and perfume? Did she think she could tease her way into that rustic mansion and let it go at that? Did she think Jerl would actually take her away from the drabness and boredom of an isolated little mountain town such as Comfort? Did she kid herself into thinking she might even have a chance of marrying into the Brownlee millions?

Ever how her noggin worked, when the showdown came she just couldn't snatch off her clothes and jump into young Jerl's bed. But she'd called her shots all wrong. She hadn't figured on the size of Jerl's spoiled selfishness. His boozing had sharpened all the meanness in him. Even sober, he reckoned that anything he wanted should be his for the taking.

Pretty fought him. It must have been an unholy sight, Pretty strug-

gling and begging for mercy, of which there was none in the inflamed face before her. She barked his shins and scratched his face; then he knocked her down and busted the back of her head. Maybe she struck the big fireplace or a piece of the heavy furniture.

Jerl thought he'd killed her then and there. He dragged her out, put her in his car, got in and drove a ways across the mountain until he was off the estate, then shoved her out. He must have thought he was reasonably safe. Days, even weeks, might pass before anybody found Pretty's body. By then, Jerl figured, it wouldn't matter what folks suspected. Suspecting and proving are two different matters. He'd just deny that she ever had come to the lodge. Nobody, he reckoned, could prove that some hill renegade hadn't seen her walking up the road and got passionate ideas.

Only thing, Jerl hadn't figured on a situation which the Brownlees themselves had set up. For years the Brownlee estate had been posted and the old man, before his death, had kept a mean caretaker up there to enforce the rule. As a result, the thousand acres teemed with game, and a mountain farmer with a taste for fresh meat had set out that morning to do a little poaching, thinking Jerl's drinking party had adjourned to the low-

lands and wouldn't bother him.

The farmer heard Jerl's car booming around the curves on the gravel backroad, ducked into the timber, and his popping eyes witnessed Jerl's final act. The minute Jerl got back in his car and rounded a curve, the farmer went sliding and tumbling into the thicketed ravine where Pretty's body had come to rest.

A final flicker of life twitched through Pretty's china blue eyes. Her silken mane of yellow hair

was a bloody tangle about her face as she tried to speak. The farmer dropped his ear close to her lips and caught her final words. She told him what had happened, as if there was any doubt in his mind.

The farmer ran a shortcut to the lodge, broke a window to let himself in, and phoned the sheriff's office in Comfort. Sheriff Collie Loudermilk had flashed the word to the sheriffs of neighboring counties. Roadblocks were set up in minutes.

With Jerl Brownlee in the net, Collie had sent me, his deputy, to fetch down the body. I'd brought the poor broken thing to Doc Weatherly's, gritted my teeth, and dragged my feet to Comfort's only decent cafe, wishing it was just for a cup of Mom Roddenberry's good coffee.

Mom didn't interrupt my tale once. She had a good grip on herself now. She took my words like the seasoned willow takes the slashing sleet. Her suffering was too deep to show on the surface.

We stopped in the shadow of the porch that rambled across the front of Doc Weatherly's place. Mom Roddenberry lifted a hand and touched my cheek. "You're a good young man, Gaither Jones, and I'm beholden to you for telling me the straight of it."

"She was a sweet, human girl,



Mom. She was tempted. And she tried to overcome. You always remember that."

"Yes, Gaither, I will."

"And be sure we'll get Jerl Brownlee, Mom."

She lifted her eyes slow-like, and they were the hoar frost that rimes distant peaks. "Yes, that is all that's left now, Gaither; justice; eye for eye, tooth for tooth. If Pretty is to rest easy in her grave, Jerl Brownlee must reap his due."

I didn't need to answer that one. We were both hill people.

"Again, I'm obliged to you, Gaither. Now I know you got work to do. I'll just ease inside alone to spend a last minute with my daughter."

I watched her creep up the porch steps. Each one added about ten years to her narrow, bony shoulders. The door of the undertaking parlor opened, swallowed her. I turned, jammed my hands in the pockets of my tan twill, kicked some hollihocks growing alongside the walk, and cursed my way back up the street to the office.

The short-range walkie-talkie, which the taxpayers begrudged Collie and me out of the mail order catalogue, was crackling when I walked in.

"Gaither, where in dad-blasted thunderation you been?" Collie Loudermilk howled through the

static, sounding like a banshee.

"Playing pool and drinking beer," I said sourly, looking across the street at that "Closed" sign on the cafe door. "You bringing in Jerl Brownlee?"

The walkie-talkie like to have spit fire. "He spotted my car blocking Miden Falls road, skidded off the curve, turned over twice, straight down the mountainside."

"He's hurt? Maybe bleeding to death?" I inquired happily.

"He bounced out healthy as a jackrabbit and with the same ideas. I've lost him, Gaither, somewhere in the gorges, above Cat Track Holler. If we don't flush him out of this wild country before nightfall, we lose him. He's got the whole compass to aim at, a good chance of making it out of these mountains. If he does that, well heeled as he is, next thing we know he may be playing with them French girls in that Riviera place."

"I reckon you need me and Red Runner and Old Bailey," I said.

"Naw," Collie growled, "I'm just fiddling with this gadget in hopes of communing with a braying jackass! Will you stop wasting time?"

"You're doing all the talking," I said, and cut him off.

I grabbed the two dog leashes off the wall peg, and skedaddled out of the office, around the old brick building to the dog lot be-

hind the jail. Old Bailey and Red Runner heard me rattling the gate open. They snuffled out of their kennels, long ears nearly dragging in the dust. Their baggy, forlorn eyes spotted the leashes, and a quiver went through both dogs. They perked up quick. I swear those bloodhounds can even smell out the prospect of smelling out a man.

A setting sun threw streamers of golden fire across the peaks in the west and twilight was settling in the valleys when me and the two dogs homed in on Collie Loudermilk's location.

Collie is a skinny, sandy man who looks like he couldn't last out a mountain winter in front of the fireplace, but he's the kind of gristle that can dull a knife. He's been sheriffing in Comfort for twenty years, and knowing him firsthand, it wouldn't surprise me if it's twenty more before I inherit his job.

While the hounds and I got our breath in the shadows of the gorges, Collie shook out a sports jacket that would have cost me a month's pay.

"Lying loose in the back seat of Jerl Brownlee's wrecked car," Collie said. "Let's hope it's his and that he's worn it recent before he pitched it back there."

Collie squatted before the excited

dogs, held out the jacket, and they took a good long whiff. I stayed with them, keeping the leashes slack, as they snuffled around for a few seconds. Then with a howl fair to curdle the blood, both dogs hit the ends of the leashes, almost jerking me off my feet.

We tracked Jerl up a long hollow where the briars were as thick as riled-up bees, and across a long stretch of naked shale, where only a dog's pads had good footing. Collie slipped halfway across. He burned skin off his knees and elbows as he slid and rolled twenty feet down the slope. He got up cussing because I was holding up the dogs, waiting for him to climb back to us.

Beyond the shale, Jerl had jumped a spring-fed creek, which held us up for a good ten minutes, and crossed a soggy meadow. Then he'd stumbled onto the dim remains of an old logging trail and picked that route up through the timber.

I didn't have a dry rag on me by this time, I was sweating so hard from the exertion. The dogs had lather on their flanks and wet tongues hanging from the sides of their mouths. Collie looked as fresh as a new-grown stinkweed, eyes anxious on the purple shadows that closed in about us.

As the dogs tugged me along, I

began to lose track of the number of gullies we crossed, the patches of underbrush we slammed through. My legs felt as if they had fallen off, and I looked down in the failing light to make sure they were still there, like a pair of pump handles underneath me.

Then of a sudden my glazing eyes glimpsed Collie's shadow shooting out ahead of us. I still didn't see the flicker of motion that had caught his attention. He splashed across a seep that would turn into a creek during a heavy rain, and dived into a canebreak. A minor hell erupted in there. Sawgrass and reeds rattled. A covey of birds sprayed out in all directions. Cattail fluff showered into the air.

Collie came out just as the dogs and I cleared the seep. He had Jerl Brownlee by the shirt collar, Jerl draped on the ground behind him.

"Got him, by gum," Collie said, backhanding an ooze of blood off his nose.

"You done all right, Sheriff," I said, nodding, "after me and the dogs cornered him for you."

Jerl was about the most bruised, scratched, begrimed, and generally trail-weary young punk you'd ever want to see. Collie and I and Jerl's rubbery legs finally got him back to the sheriff's car. We put the dogs in front with Collie. I got in back

to guard the prisoner, who didn't look much like it was necessary. We'd come back for my car later.

Jerl didn't have a word to say all the way back to town. He was doing plenty of thinking, and by the time I shoved him in a jail cell, he'd about decided he was still Jerl Brownlee, cock of any walk.

He watched me lock the cell door with hooded eyes. Then his battered lips twisted in a sneer. "You yokels don't think for a minute this is going to work out your way, do you?"

"Looks like it might," I said.

"You dumb rube," he said. "With my dough, I'll have the choice of the finest legal brains from New York to Los Angeles. There are jurors to buy, judges for sale. There are a thousand loopholes in the law, and ten thousand technicalities. With my loot, I can fight this thing to the highest courts in the land, no matter how long it takes. So before you wallow in any naive sentiments about the workings of justice or pat yourself on the back, deputy-boy, just answer me one question. Have you ever heard of a millionaire ending up in the electric chair or gas chamber?"

His question was still rattling around in my head a few minutes later as I trudged across the dark street. The "Closed" sign was still on the door of Mom Roddenberry's

cafe, but there were lights in the flat overhead where she and Pretty had lived. I fumbled for the banister of the outside stairway that led up the side of the building to the flat.

The old lady answered my knock, searched my face for a minute, and invited me into a plain, but comfortable and clean parlor.

I sat down on a studio couch. Mom eased to the edge of a chair across from me. A hard stillness came to the apartment.

"Gaither," she said, "you did catch him. He's locked up. I've already heard."

"Yes, ma'am. But I got a dreadful feeling that rich boy will get out of this."

"Why, lad, we *know* he done it! Cold-blooded and mean. Pretty said he did—and she wouldn't tell a lie with her dying breath."

"I know, but we run up the first stump right there. We got a witness that says that she said it. They call it hearsay evidence. The lawyers he can afford will cut our case to nothing."

The old lady thought about it,

hands crimping like talons. Then she raised her slaty gray eyes. "Might be a game two can play, Gaither."

I frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Would a mountain jury convict an old woman if she was temporarily pixillated by the murder of her daughter?"

The hairs stiffened on the back of my neck as I began to get the drift.

She rose slowly. "Mom Roddenberry's cafe always supplies meals for the jail prisoners across the street. Tonight you got a prisoner. I'm going down now, Gaither, and fix his supper. I reckon that's why you came over, to fetch the prisoner his tray?"

I gulped. "Well, ma'am . . . Come to think of it, yes."

"A real mouth-watering meal for the man . . ." She patted my shoulder in passing. "But don't you dast get forgetful and throw the scraps to Red Runner and Old Bailey."

"No, ma'am," I promised. "I reckon such a fine pair of dogs deserve better than scraps tonight."



One who thrusts against a logjam should not position himself downstream.



ONE MOMENT it was the quietest night of all summer. The moonlight etched every blade of grass on the broad lawn, and it was so still I could hear the ringing of the doorbell when Willy pressed the button. Elm Avenue (Millionaire Row) was the perfect picture of expensive security. Then everything changed. Just like that, the lid blew off.

The ornate door swung silently open upon pitch darkness, and then came eruptions of flame and the shocking crash of gunfire. The first shot took Willy under the

heart and broke him like a stick. He never had a chance.

Sam tried to run—my brother Sam. He was fast, but the shots cut the legs out from under him. He went on his face in the moon-silvered grass, then tried to crawl. From my place in the bushes across the street I could see the agony in his face. I could almost smell his fear.

Two men came running out of the dark doorway onto the lawn. The big one in the lead was De-



tective Captain Greco; Big Charlie Greco of the racket squad. The other was a sergeant who worked under him. I'd seen him often enough.

Sam tried to plead with them, but his words came too fast and low for me to make out. I could see Greco's face twist as he laughed. He put his police revolver down close to Sam's face and shot him through the head, just like killing a broken-legged horse; no more, no less.

By then lights were coming on in the big houses along the block and excited voices were calling out. It was time for me to go. I slipped back in the bushes along the side of the house near which I was crouching and made it through the back yard to the next block where my old car was parked. Nobody bothered me when I drove away.

I didn't go near Sam's apartment as the police were probably searching that already, and fortunately I'd left nothing there to tell them I was back in town. Instead, I took the Boulevard out toward the lake and rented a motel room under a brand new name. I was safe enough as long as they still thought I was a thousand miles away, but a couple of days more in town and people would have known I was back. Then I

wouldn't have been safe in any case.

I didn't sleep at all the rest of that night. The morning TV news gave me the official story. "Alert police trap torture robbers," was the general way it ran. "Two desperate robbers killed while resisting arrest. Acting on an anonymous tip that the home of millionaire manufacturer Francis Brown-ing was to be robbed, Police Captain Charles Greco staked out the home and fought it out with the hoodlums. Both bandits were killed during the exchange of shots. No police officer was injured."

I almost cried when I listened. *Exchange of shots! Greco fought it out!* Neither Sam nor Willy ever carried a gun. They were professional burglars, not killers. They could put down a citizen with judo, but the last thing they would do was kill. I knew it. What's more, Greco knew it, just as he knew the M.O. of every racket figure in our town, and that what he and his sergeant had done last night was cold-blooded, calculated murder.

The "exchange of shots" was just as phony as the "anonymous tip." Maybe the citizens would swallow that, but I never would. Only one man besides myself was still alive who had known which house the boys had planned to hit last night. He knew because he

had picked the house for them, planned the job, told them what jewelry to look for and how to find it, knew that the old man and his wife would be "alone" and would answer the doorbell if it rang. Only the one man—the man who set up all the big, professional jobs in our town—and he was Sam's boss, Big Herman Schmidt, the fence.

Big Herman was a legitimate businessman with a string of seven jewelry stores, downtown and in the suburban shopping plazas. He was also the fence who handled seventy percent of the hot merchandise in the area. He belonged to fraternal orders and sold diamond bracelets, emerald necklaces and engagement rings to some of the best people on Elm Avenue. Then he bought the same jewelry back from people like Sam, reset the stones and started all over again.

Big Herman's right hand officially didn't even know he had a left hand, but the hands washed each other, and he got richer and richer. He owned apartment houses and business buildings, hoodlums and burglars—and Charlie Greco.

Herman had a system. He planned the jobs and fingered them, then Sam robbed the house he was told to rob. If he took jew-

els worth \$80,000 and brought them to Herman, Herman would give him \$4,000 and a nice pat on the back. If Sam didn't like this arrangement, Herman would call Captain Greco and the racket squad would score another mysterious victory over local crime.

I don't know how he'd figured out that Sam was getting ready to cut out. Maybe he could just smell it like an animal can smell that you're afraid. Anyway Sam had underrated Herman for sure. Last night was proof of that.

I'd come into town the night before, just around dusk, in answer to a note from Sam. It was the first time in two years that I'd been back. I went straight to the apartment like he'd told me in the note, and Sam gave me the setup there.

"I've got it all planned, kid," he told me. "Just this one more job. It will be a big one. The old fool keeps a hundred thousand in cash in a wall safe as well as jewelry worth as much more. On top of that I've been saving my cash and holding out on Herman on the last few jobs. There's \$123,000 in cash and stones already in the kitty."

I knew enough to say, "You're taking a long chance, Sam."

"It will be worth it. And it has to be *now*. If I wait any longer,

Herman will guess or find out about the cash and small stones I've held out on him. You know what that means."

"I know what it means anyway. He'll follow you anywhere you go, or send a contract man to look for you."

"He won't find me, kid. This is the big one, the big stake. This is enough to go straight. I dive into an ocean of small-time marks and he never finds me. I stay away from the hoods and don't flash a roll for a while. The squares all look alike, and that's what I'll be. If I stay, sooner or later the cops get me for a long rap. I know that. This is my one big chance. You see, kid?"

I saw. He just might make it. After all, what did he have to lose? None of Big Herman's boys lasted forever. There was only one thing I didn't understand. "Why did you send for me? I've been straight and working for five years now. You know that."

"Sure, kid, and I don't want to mix you up in this. All I want is for you to cash in if anything goes wrong. I'll tell you . . ."

It wasn't quite that simple when he explained it, of course. Those things never are. That's one big reason I'd gotten out five years before and taken a legit job.

"There's my kitty, see? One

hundred and twenty grand of it in a locker at the bus station. This is the key. You hold it, kid. Pick it up tomorrow morning. If anything goes wrong, you hold it. Herman won't kill me till he gets that money. You can buy me back with it, see? If he won't deal, you keep it. If nothing goes wrong, and it won't, you meet me at this address in Chi in three days. I'll give you five grand for a stake and we split up till it's safe for me to come out of the wall again. This way it's all smooth as silk; everything covered. You see?"

I saw all right. I was his insurance policy. That money and I were his insurance. It just might work at that.

Of course it hadn't worked. Big Herman had known that Sam was taking him, and decided to square the score. Greco had been waiting with orders to kill. I'd half expected something like that. That's why I'd been there to watch. Sam and Willy didn't want me along, of course, so I'd driven my own car out to the neighborhood and sneaked through back lots to where I could watch from the bushes. Sam and Willy always worked together, but Sam had all the guts of the team. Maybe Willy got scared and squealed, but I suppose I'll never know how it really was.

I sat in the motel room and felt sick. I know Sam wasn't really any prize. The world could spare him, if you looked at it that way, but he *was* my brother. That counted with me. Hate for his killer began to come over me and crowd out the sick feeling.

It wasn't Greco I blamed so much. Charley wore the badge and strutted around in front of the marks, but he was really nothing but a punk. He was Big Herman's personal contract man, and he killed when and whom he was told. There was nothing personal in it for Greco. He wasn't worth hating any more than the gun he used.

Besides, if I could get Herman, Greco's shield and his boss would be gone. The honest cops (and there were plenty of them on the force) would skin him then and nail his hide to the door. Charley Greco would get his whether I ever touched him or not.

I knew who had really killed Sam and Willy just as sure as if he'd pulled the trigger himself. I knew who had to be killed if I wanted to even for Sam—Big Herman Schmidt. I made up my mind right there in the motel room just before it got to be dawn. Big Herman didn't know it, but I started to kill him right that minute.

The biggest thing I had going

my way was that none of them knew I was in town, let alone that I was wise to what had happened. They wouldn't be on their guard or looking for me. They wouldn't be looking for anybody. As far as they knew, nobody on earth cared about Sam or Willy.

I kept things that way. I checked out of the motel early and cleaned out the bus station locker. The cash and stones were in an ordinary black attache case. I put it in the trunk of my car and got out of town before anybody was stirring.

I drove into another state and laid up for a week, getting ready for the kill. I rested and ate well. After all, expense was of no consequence now. I bought a .38 at a sporting goods store. It was cheaper than buying through the local hoods. I also bought an over-size clasp knife and honed it to an edge I could shave with. I planned to cut Herman's heart out, real slow, and listen to him squeal while I did it. The gun was just in case I had to shoot my way out.

All the time my nerves were steady and, inside, I was cold as ice. I even slept well. I'd never killed anybody in my life—all I'd been before I went straight was a numbers runner—but somehow I didn't even think of this as killing a human being.

I rented a safe-deposit box at a

local bank and put most of the money and all of the jewelry except one piece (a flashy diamond ring) in it. I fixed it so no one would have access to the box unless I was present. I bought a pair of fancy sunglasses and a suit and hat a bit more sporty than I usually wear, just so nobody would recognize me driving into town. There wasn't much chance of that anyway. Then I was ready.

It was just about dusk when I hit town. As I'd planned, I could lose myself in the heavy early evening traffic downtown so nobody would spot me.

Big Herman lived in the new Country Club district. It was just as expensive as Elm Avenue, but not quite as exclusive. Given time, he might make it all the way to the top.

I drove by the house and saw that lights were on on the ground floor and two big cars were in the garage. There was no sign of guests or any special activity, and I knew Herman kept no regular servants. A staff came in and cleaned once a week, but he ate out most of the time. When he was home, his wife cooked, and she did the light cleaning. I guess he figured it was cheaper that way. It had been a joke around town for years that he didn't trust the help enough to let them stay in the

big house overnight while he slept.

Actually I didn't care much. My business with Herman wouldn't take long. How long does it take to cut open a fat man and pull out a stone heart? If it came to the worst and there were servants, I could always use the gun through one of the windows. I didn't care, and I guess it would be all the same to Herman.

I suppose I should have had one of those elaborate, foolproof plans that the murderers in detective books always work out. I'm not quite sure why I didn't. For one thing I didn't feel like a murderer. I was all mixed up, full of hot hate and a cold sick feeling all at once. I kept remembering Sam when we were boys in the old Ironbound District, and then Sam with his sharp clothes and big talk, and finally Sam lying on that moonlit grass looking up at Charley Greco like a hurt animal. I was a man with a dirty but necessary job to do, that's all.

So I didn't think about plans. All I needed was to get close enough to Big Herman to use the knife or gun on him. I didn't even try to sneak in. I drove right up to the front of the house and went up the walk between two big oak trees and rang the front doorbell. I could hear Herman yell at somebody inside when the bell rang. If

he'd answered the door himself, that would have been that. Everything would have been easy. Lazy as usual, however, he sent his wife instead.

The first thought I had was that this didn't look like Big Herman's sort of woman. She was small and blonde, where he was big and dark. She'd been pretty once, but it was hard to tell that now. Her dress must have cost \$500 though it was very plain. Still she managed to look like a dog I remembered from when Sam and I were kids. That dog had had so many stones and pop bottles thrown at him that he couldn't move at all without dodging. The woman at the door was like that dog.

"I want to see Herman," I said, putting on a bold face.

"He's busy," she said. "He's going out in a minute."

"He'll see me," I told her. "It's about money; big money. You tell him that."

She cringed. She was Big Herman's woman, and I was nobody at all; and she actually cringed. That's what being married to him had done to her.

She tried to make up her mind, but she didn't have time. I heard Herman's voice from the back of the house. "Big money I will always talk to."

I followed her back through the

hall. I had the knife open and the four inch blade stuck under my belt. The loose sport jacket hid it, but I could reach it easily. The .38 was under my left arm. I didn't feel either angry or sick anymore. I was perfectly calm and sure of myself. How was I to know how stupid that was? I'm not a professional killer; not a contract man.

A big color television was playing in the den. The lights were low, and there were glasses and an open whiskey bottle on the bar. Everything looked very expensive and normal. So did Herman. It was a warm evening and his coat was off. I could see the diamond links shine in the French cuffs of his silk shirt. He was smiling, and he put out his hand to me. "Good evening, my friend," he said.

A contract man wouldn't have let him finish speaking. A real pro would have shot him from six feet away and then walked out of the house. I was only a punk. I forgot how smart he had to be just to be Big Herman. I forgot what I was doing. I started to shake hands.

His right hand took mine and vised it till the bones grated. He pulled me forward a little, and his left came round in a long looping swing and exploded against my ear. The lights went out. I never had a chance. For him it was easier than stomping a bug.

When I came to I was sitting in a straight wooden chair in the middle of the study. My hands were tied to the chair behind me and my feet hobbled. My head was ringing and I felt sick inside.

Big Herman, standing spraddlegged in front of me, didn't even look ruffled. He had my knife and gun and was juggling them from hand to hand. While I watched, he tossed the gun carelessly onto a big table against the wall. There was a flicker of movement as it thudded down. His wife was standing next to the end of the table, her shoulders flat against the wall and her hands at her thighs like a soldier at attention. Her face was perfectly blank. When he tossed the gun, she flinched.

"You punk," Big Herman said. "You filthy, stupid punk. What made you think you could walk in here with a rod and a shiv? You think I am stupid, maybe? You think I got no eyes, you punk?" He leaned over me. His face was greasy and his breath stunk. With my own knife he cut a little nick in the skin of my left nostril. "Suck on your own blood, punk," he said. "Think. Just as easy, I cut your throat."

"You're making a mistake," I tried. "How would I know? I'm from out of town—a stranger. I don't mean no harm. I've got a

deal to talk, that's all. Believe me."

He studied my words. In that fat face he should have had pig's eyes, but they were almost yellow. It wasn't natural. The pig had cat's eyes. They studied mine.

"Talk you will. That's true. But no more lies, or I cut you to dog meat. Out of town? Yes. I know all the punks here. Stranger, no. I have seen you or somebody like you. Who are you?"

"Nobody," I said. "It's the truth." Blood and sweat were trickling down my lip into my mouth. "Nobody at all."

He had sixty-dollar alligator shoes on his size twelve feet. He stomped down with a heel and broke the big toe on my left foot. He took my knife and waved it at my right ear. His breathing was like grunting.

I started to whimper. I'm no hero. I never was anything but a punk. Maybe you're a hero. Then you be one.

"Now I know you," he said. "I work over your brother once, and he snivel like you. Your brother Sam." It wasn't even a question. I began to realize how he'd gotten where he was.

Amazingly, his face changed. He almost relaxed. I couldn't figure it till he began to talk again.

"Now I understand," he said. "You hear about poor Sam, and

you come to see if I can help you. You come to Sam's boss, yes? But what can I do? I am sorry too. Sam was a good boy, but I can't go around killing cops. Nor can I let you kill cops either. Besides, Captain Greco would not let you kill him. He'd break you in half real easy. Do you understand?"

I began to understand that I might just possibly stay alive. I



tried to stop crying, but the relief was too sudden. I couldn't. By this time I was really beginning to hate Big Herman; not for Sam, but for me. The need to kill him was becoming a very personal thing with me. I hoped he would cut me loose.

He wasn't in any hurry. "First I make sure," he said. He went around behind me and worked the wallet out of my hip pocket. I hadn't thought to get new identity papers. The driver's license carried my name. "Good," he said. "My eyes are still good. I see the bulge where your gun is, and I see the family likeness to poor Sam. Very good."

"If you'd given me a chance, I'd have told you who I was," I said. "I got nothing to hide. Like you think, I just want your help. Now how about letting me loose from this chair?"

"All in good time." He went on poking through my wallet. In one of the side pockets he found the diamond ring I had held out of Sam's kitty. I'd had a vague idea I could use it to prove I had the kitty in an emergency, in case I had to buy a lawyer or buy myself free of Greco or Herman. None of my thinking was too clear. Sure, it should have been, but it wasn't. Like I said, I'm no pro.

The ring interested Herman.

He went to his desk and got out a jeweler's glass and examined it in the light. I began to sweat cold again. I was right.

At last he turned back to me. "This is interesting," he said. "I know this ring. I sold it. Sam stole it. What else did he steal that I don't know about? What else?"

"I don't know *nothing* about that," I said. I tried to speak up, but it came out more like a whine. "Sam sent me that for a birthday present. Honest, Mr. Schmidt, that's all I know."

"Honesty you don't know," he said. "Honesty is not in a punk like you. I read you easy. You came to kill. You have all we did not find at Sam's place. Well, punk, you are going to give Sam's money to me. Then maybe I let you live."

Right then I knew I was dead. He wouldn't have talked like that if he meant to let me live. He would kill me and say he caught me trying to rob the house. No questions would be asked. I tried desperately to think of a way out. There wasn't any. I couldn't even stall for time.

"Talk," he said. "Talk now."

I needed a miracle. I got it.

Herman shrugged, went back to his desk and picked up the phone. He called police headquarters and asked for Captain Greco. Charley

wasn't there, so he tried another number. This time he got his man.

"Charley? Get over here right away. I got a punk I caught here who knows where Sam's holdout is. Yes, that's what I said. He'll talk. Then you can have him. I'm pretty sure he's going to resist arrest." He smiled at me. "Yes, come as fast as you can. I'm at home."

That made the picture clear. Big Herman and I both had it clear now. So did somebody else. I'd forgotten Herman's wife. All this time she hadn't moved away from the wall. She could have been a shadow.

She moved now, putting out her hand and picking up my .38 from the big table where Herman had tossed it so carelessly. He never even noticed her move. He was looking at me. She put the gun about three inches from his back-bone and pulled the trigger four times.

The first shot broke his spine. The others must have torn his heart and lungs. He died before he knew it. The shots drove his body forward to my feet. He was dead with his head in my lap.

I opened my mouth to scream in pure terror and shock, but the woman slapped me, hard. "Be still."

I looked at her and she looked at me. Her face was chalk white, but

for the first time it looked alive.

"Twenty years," she said. "Twenty years since he bought me from my father. Every day of the twenty years I've waited to do that."

She drew back her foot and kicked Herman. The kick was hard enough to knock his head off my lap. She said, "Pig."

I didn't know what she'd do next, but I remembered even through the shock that Greco was on his way over. I had to take a chance. "Lady, cut me loose! We've gotta get out of here."

She just looked at me. It was like a nightmare. "Please, lady," I said. "Greco will kill us both."

She relaxed a little. "I'll let you out of here," she said. "You gave me an excuse and an alibi for this. I owe you for that. And you hated him too. I'll stay here. Greco will think you did the killing. That's what I'll tell him. He won't find you though, I guarantee that."

"How can you guarantee anything?"

"Use the brains you have. My husband had a file on Captain

Greco. I have that file now. He will do just what I tell him, and be very grateful to me. He hasn't any choice."

She cut me loose with my own knife. "There's blood on those pants," she said. "Better get rid of them as soon as you can. Can you get out of town right away? Have you money?"

"Yes to both questions," I told her. "Nobody even knows I'm here." I left the gun for her to show. I'd used an alias when I bought it, and I wouldn't need it again.

She walked me to the door. I wanted to thank her, but I didn't know how. We shook hands. In a way, we'd both killed Herman, but in another way, we were no more responsible than the gun was.

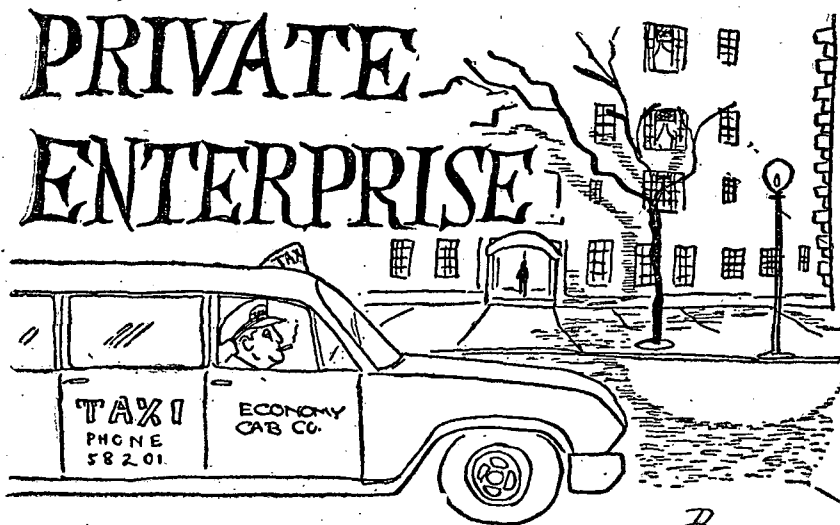
She looked at me, and I saw that she had once been a beautiful girl. "Don't think of it," I said. "He killed himself."

"Yes, oh yes," she said. "Only why did he take so long?"

I don't know. Like I said, I'm no pro.



Who can tell that when business accelerates, it is not getting a push from strictly private enterprise?



THERE's nothing like private enterprise; it gives a man a chance to go as far as his energies and capabilities permit. I'm all for an opportunity like that, and I operate my own cab. Of course, "opportunist" is sometimes synonymous with "angle boy," but we'll let that ride.

At any rate, semantics aside, when I got a discreet tip that Roger Arnold was not likely to be elected Man of the Year by the Morality League, I was more than intrigued. Arnold, it seemed, was a

wealthy industrialist with a thriving plastics business and a wife and kiddies in the suburbs.

He also had a winsome young lovely stashed away in a posh city apartment.

By
Carroll
Mayers

Once I'd learned the basic situation, I set about dealing myself in. A couple of afternoons a week, upon leaving his midtown office, Arnold would taxi to that apartment to assuage briefly the cares of the day. Other times, when the business world was particularly burdensome, he would find it necessary to return to his "office" during the evening.

On a number of such occasions, my cab would chance to be waiting outside his main office in the afternoons, and outside his "branch suite" when he finally left to return home after those evening visitations.

Naturally, we got to the casual chatter stage; the weather, sports, politics, a few jokes. Gradually, the man-to-man, "confidential" status evolved. In slightly over a couple of weeks I became Arnold's regular shuttle service. When I considered my ingratiating sufficiently solid, I let him understand I was aware of the chippie on the fire, but that he needn't be concerned. I was a man of the world myself, heh heh.

Arnold appreciated both my dependable service and my pledged discretion. A fat tip three or four times a week was proof of my continued faith in private initiative.

All of which, you might say, was phase one. Phase two was spawned

one night when Arnold actually had been obliged to return to his office for some extra work. He'd alerted me to his schedule; I was to pick him up at ten o'clock, then journey to the "branch" for a limited dalliance before going on to his home.

I gauged my runs around town accordingly, was awaiting Arnold on the dot. He emerged promptly, climbed in with a cursory remark. He seemed preoccupied.

I didn't press; if Arnold did have something on his mind, it was no real business of mine. When, however, he remained silent all across town, still hadn't spoken when I braked before the chippie's apartment building, I ventured a slight query.

"You all right, Mr. Arnold?"

"Eh?"

"You okay? I mean, you haven't said much."

He drew a breath, gave me a close look. "It's never come up, Harry—are you married?"

I grinned. "Not me. I play the field."

Arnold sighed again. "Then you don't really know anything about women."

My grin held. "I wouldn't say that. I've got a sister."

"She's single?"

"Yes."

"You live together?"

This was a tack I shouldn't have triggered, because my sister, a real shrewd gal, was the one who had tipped me about Arnold's extra-curricular activities. Peg had gotten a job with Arnold's firm six months ago as a file clerk in the clerical pool.

"No," I answered Arnold, "we each have our own place."

He nodded. "From your attitude, I thought as much. You live apart—she can't make too many demands on you." He paused, then added plaintively, "That's one trouble with women, Harry. They're so possessive. They don't understand a man."

I wasn't too sure what he was trying to say. I shrugged. "I suppose so."

"It's true. You take Maxine, my—ah—ladyfriend, here. I've been more than generous; given her jewelry, furs, nice clothes. I'll admit she's been—ah—appreciative. But she doesn't understand how I feel now."

"You mean, some of the glow's gone, Mr. Arnold?"

"In a word, yes."

"You'd like to break it off?"

"I would." The plaintive tone returned. "You see, Harry, as you suggest, I've become—ah—bored with Maxine. There's another girl, my private secretary; lovely creature. I'd like her to take over here,

but Maxine just refuses to vacate."

"There's always spot cash, Mr. Arnold. Enough, I mean."

He shook his head. "I've offered Maxine twenty-five hundred dollars. She demands double." His voice shook. "Dammit, Harry, that's too much! I won't give her five thousand on top of everything else!"

"Maybe you'll have to."

"No." He climbed from the cab. "I'm going to settle this matter once and for all tonight."

I nodded in accord. "Let her know where you stand."

"I fully intend to. I won't be long."

I watched Arnold enter the apartment building with mild amusement. Maybe detachment is a better word, because one way or another it was evident he meant to continue his private relaxings. Maxine or her successor, I'd still have my lucrative shuttle service.

I settled back on the cushions, fired a cigarette. Twenty minutes passed; a half hour. Maxine, apparently, had a stubborn streak.

Then Arnold emerged, his exit abrupt. Watching him quickly approach, I sensed an odd mixture of restraint and panic.

"Harry," he breathed, his eyes bleak and a tic pulsing riotously in his cheek, "you've got to help me!"

A tingle of inspiration touched me. Arnold already was supplying a stipend for my services, as I'd just considered, but that payment, while regular, was relatively small. Clearly, whatever had just transpired was serious. Maybe I could hike the ante considerably.

"Sure, sure, Mr. Arnold," I soothed him. "You can depend on me. What happened?"

"I—I hit her!" he stammered. "She wouldn't listen to me. We argued. She still wouldn't listen, ran into the bedroom and tried to slam the door. I caught her, slapped her—" He broke off, mouth quivering. "I didn't mean to hit her. It just happened. And then she fell, struck her head—" Arnold stopped again, clutched my shoulder. "Harry—I think she's dead."

Bingo! How much more serious could it be? I wasn't certain what my ploy would be, but I knew opportunity was knocking again, but hard.

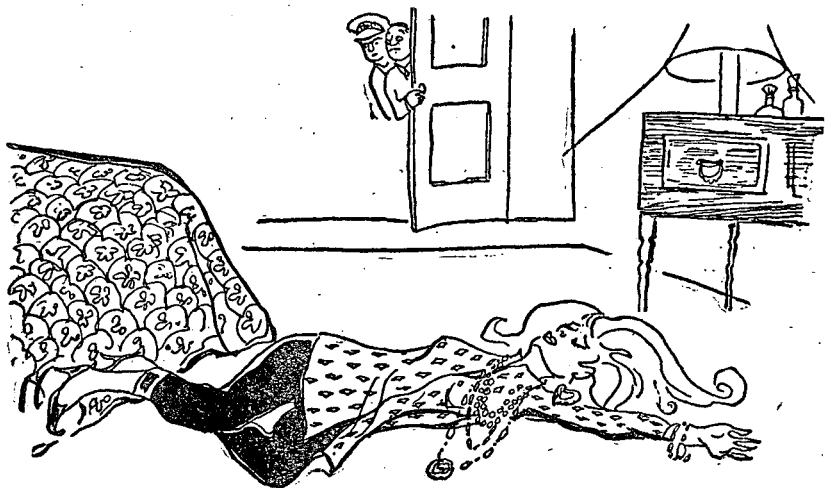
"You're sure?" I pressed.

"N—no. But she's so still . . ."

I made a decision. "Get hold of yourself, and show me up there."

The apartment was on the third floor. Nobody was in the elevator or hall. Arnold's hands shook violently as he let us in with his key.

He'd left the lights burning. I moved into the bedroom, Arnold hesitantly following. The mercenary Maxine was a voluptuous blonde, clad in navy blue pajamas and rajah coat that represented maybe two weeks' hacking receipts. She lay sprawled face up before a vanity, a nasty bruise on her left temple. I studied her lax features,



then knelt, pressing a palm beneath her breast.

"Is she . . ." Behind me, Arnold choked, could not phrase the word.

I removed my palm, laid an ear against her chest. After a long moment, I got to my feet. "She's dead, all right," I told Arnold shortly. I herded him out of the bedroom, closing the door after us.

The jitters were rapidly reclaiming Arnold. "I didn't mean to hit her! It was an accident!"

I was certain of my tactics now. Arnold had asked for my help and he'd get it. "Hang on," I said, my fingers biting into his arm. "You could tell the police that and maybe they'd believe you. But it would be messy; the tabloids would have a field day." I gave him a direct look. "I figure there could be another way."

My intimation registered. Through all his panic and uncertainty, Arnold read me. He managed a deep breath. "Harry," he rejoined shakily, "You get me out of this—get me clear—I won't forget it."

I flapped a palm casually. "That part can wait," I told him. "The important thing now is to get you away from here. You drive, don't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Take my cab. Drive it to Columbus Park, leave it there. Likely

nobody'll pay any attention. Walk a short distance, get another cab and go home."

He still was unsure. "But what will you do? What about—the body?"

"I'll take care of the body," I said. "My sister's place is only six blocks from here. I'll walk there, borrow her car, drive back here and park in the service area. It's dark there now. With any luck at all I can carry the body down the inner fire stairs to the service door. I'll drive out of town, bury the body in some remote spot." I gave Arnold a tight grin. "Let Missing Persons eventually worry about what became of her."

He bit his lip. "It's so risky. Somebody might see you."

"Sure, it's risky, but I'll chance it." I crossed to the door and cracked it open. "Give me your key so I can get back in here. Okay. We'll leave separately. Nobody's in the hall now, so get moving."

Arnold hesitated another moment, taking a full breath. "I won't forget this, Harry," he repeated. Then he eased out of the apartment.

I returned to the bedroom and entered the bath, where I dampened a face cloth. I knelt again beside the beauteous Maxine, started chafing her wrists, bathing her cheeks and forehead.

A few minutes later she came around. Her gaze swiveled vacuously in the first seconds of consciousness.

"Easy, easy," I admonished.

Full comprehension still wasn't present, but her eyes began to focus. "Who—who are you?"

"The name's not important at the moment," I said. "You'll be all right. Just relax. Then we'll have a little talk . . ."

My sister Peg's lips quirked in a half smile as I lolled on a sofa in her apartment an hour later, recounting the rather hectic evening. Peg's a svelte redhead, with all the proper equipment.

"I realized Maxine wasn't dead when I first looked at her face and happened to see her eyelids quiver," I explained. "From then on, I did some fast improvising. I'll easily milk ten thousand from Arnold—as a start. I'll give half of it to Maxine to finance a trip to Hollywood, a crack at a movie career. That's what she wanted the money from Arnold for. Meanwhile, she'll keep under wraps at a ho-

tel, and out of circulation."

Peg's smile became full blown. "You're pretty sharp, Harry. We should really clean up."

I chided her. "*We?*"

She nodded pertly. "You haven't dropped by lately. I've been moving right along at the office. The past couple of weeks I've been Arnold's private secretary."

For a second I missed it; then I goggled at her. "You mean, *you're* the lovely creature—"

"In person," Peg assured me. "Since I still use my ex-husband's name," she laughed delightedly, "he'll never be aware of our relationship." She kissed me on the cheek. "Harry, it's perfect! Between us, we may never have to work again!"

As I told you, Peg's a real shrewd gal. I had to hand it to her, the way she'd played her cards and curves, and latched onto Arnold. I shouldn't have been too surprised, though. Peg's a great believer in private enterprise, knows how handsomely the right initiative can pay off. It sort of runs in the family.



Procrastination, in retrospect, is the foe of reality, the irritant of peace, the balm of despair.



Undertaker, Please Drive Slow



by
Ron Goulart

HE KEPT telling me she wasn't dead. I listened, nodding, smoking a menthol cigarette, watching the autumn wind shuffle the dead leaves in the big flagstone back yard outside his den windows.

George Oland's breathing had been getting more raspy as he talked and he stopped now and pointed a big freckled hand at my cigarette. "Maybe you ought to put it out."

Twisting the butt in a seashell ashtray I aimed an elbow at the window with the sliced screen. "Why should your daughter want

to burgle the house?" I probed.

"I don't know if she did, Mr. Lowe. I don't know what the poor kid is up to." He rested his palms on the coffee table in front of him, then picked up the letters again. "It's been two and a half years—two years, seven months—but I always knew she hadn't drowned. I knew she'd come back."

Two years and seven months

ago, according to the clippings he'd shown me, Nancy Oland had jumped over the side of a yacht at a spot down the coast from San Pedro. She'd left no note. Her body had never been found. Apparently she had jumped sometime before dawn and no one had missed her for several hours. The police decided none of the other people on the yacht were involved.

Then, five days before he'd called me, Nancy's father had received a letter from her, telling him to register at a motel out near Palm Springs the next day and wait for her. Oland, who'd never once left his house since his daughter disappeared, took a bus out to the desert. He waited two and a half days and the girl never showed. The motel people had never heard of her. Reluctantly he came back home to Glendale, where he found his house had been broken into and that someone had gone through Nancy's old room, a room he kept just as she'd left it.

I'd told Oland the obvious. Someone wanted him out of his house and had used the one sure lure. He said no, he knew Nancy was alive somewhere; alive, confused and needing help. He wouldn't go to the police about the break-in, but called in a private detective agency.

He handed me the new letter,

mailed in Glendale, the one that had pulled him out into the desert, and one of the letters his daughter had written him the semester she was away at UC in Berkeley. "You can see it's the same writing," he told me again.

I held the two letters, not looking at them. The writing had seemed similar the first time he'd shown me, but I wasn't a handwriting specialist. Usually I worked on skip tracing, divorce stuff, bugging and debugging, but every once in a while, and a lot of times it was in the fall when the Santa Ana wind was blowing and the canyons above Los Angeles were burning, a client would show up with an odd one—like Oland's daughter who had come back to life. "Let me take these to a handwriting man," I said.

"No," he said, grabbing both letters. "It's the first word I've had." He fingered the new letter. "She's a sensitive kid. She's afraid, after all the fuss made when she went away. I know she wants to see me."

"Jumping into the Pacific Ocean isn't like taking a two week vacation." It was a bright, harsh afternoon but in here there was a twilight feeling.

Oland was big, heavy, had thick white hair and a sheriff's moustache. He straightened up in his

wicker chair. "I don't know if I care for your flippancy, Lowe."

I cocked my head. "Okay. For fifty bucks a day you can find a lot of guys who'll humor you." I stretched out of my chair.

"I don't want to be humored," he said, rising and blocking me. "I know your agency. They did work for my company when I was still active. I want you to handle this. It's just that I don't want you to mock me, Lowe. I know Nancy's alive. Please find her."

"What was taken from here?" I asked him.

His big head shook. "Nothing. Nothing I can tell."

He'd shown me the room upstairs, a pink and white young college girl's room. It was obvious someone had carefully searched it. There was a subtle disorder. "Now," I said, moving a couple steps back, "you know what I feel. We're not going to find her."

"We have to look," Oland said, and sank back into his chair. "Somehow we have to look." He covered half his face with his spread fingers, began crying.

I turned, went to his desk and picked up the photos of Nancy Oland he'd shown me. She had been a tall girl, nearly five-ten. Pretty in a strong, outdoors way, a brunette, she was twenty-three when she disappeared. "I'll take

one or two of these," I told him.

"Don't take the one of her in the navy blue suit. It's the only copy I have."

It didn't make any difference which ones I took, since I didn't think the girl was alive. "How about friends of your daughter's? People she might have been in touch with."

Oland took out a handkerchief, wiped his eyes. "Nancy was a quiet girl. There was no regular man friend in her life. I can give you names and addresses of a few of her close friends. The last year before she went away she lived in Hollywood with a girl named Beth Eisner. Then there's Carrie Milligan, she's been a friend since high school." He told me how to find them and a few others.

The wind scattered brown and yellow leaves against the glass. "I'll ask some questions. Probably drive out to Palm Springs and talk to the motel people." A gray cat, fat and dusty, had come into the room and was watching us from under the heavy desk.

"She's going to be coming back," Oland said, to the cat. Up again, he led me into the hall. He held out his hand and I shook it. I couldn't think of anything more to say to him.

Oland's big brown shingle house was on a wide street, tree lined.

Most of it looked like Southern California in the Thirties, pleasant with a porched, Midwest feeling. The present, though, was infiltrating. Nearby were a liquor store, a coin laundry and, directly across, a pizza place; the World Pizzeria, featuring Pizza Of All Nations.

I went over and wandered in. It was two-thirty in the afternoon so I was ahead of the school letout crowd. The tables were empty. An old woman in slacks, with blue tinted hair, was resting against the counter eating the house specialty, a pizza dog. Behind the counter a small man in a buff jumpsuit was talking on a wall phone.

I rested my left elbow on the formica and waited. The man made a just-a-minute gesture at me, spoke into the phone, his head bobbing. He hung up and hurried over. "I always call my mother this time of day. She's past seventy and I share a two room apartment with her in Pasadena. She broke her hip last April and her life is pretty circumscribed."

I added the information to my store of countermen's autobiographies and said, "Coffee."

The old woman down-counter said, "More people should call their mothers."

When my coffee came I asked the guy, "You here most days?"

"Except Sunday," he answered.

"Sundays I push mother around Forest Lawn. She likes the pageantry."

"More boys should push their mothers' wheelchairs," the blue-haired woman said. "Another hot dog, Don."

I got Don back in front of me in a few minutes. "From here you can get a fair view of the brown shingle house across the street. Right?"

He admitted it. "A retired gentleman lives there, as I understand. Never leaves the indoors, though he did last—let me see—last Tuesday."

"Notice anyone prowling around over there?"

"No." He put his tomato stained thumb against his small nose. "But last Wednesday, and then again this past Monday and Tuesday, there was a girl in here; dark-haired girl, tall, very attractive. I often say to my mother it's darned hard to get to know girls in this town. Attractive ones do come in here, and certainly I kid around with them. I mean, I have a fair sense of humor, but it never seems to lead to anything."

"If I had a daughter," said the hot dog woman, "I'd drag her in here and introduce her to you, Don. You're a gentleman."

"What about this brunette?" I put in.

"She asked me if I knew the fellow who lived there. Asked me if I ever saw him leave his home. I had to tell her the story in the neighborhood is he never goes out at all, due to a personal tragedy. Usually I don't incline toward gossip. I always hope if I'm nice to a girl it will lead to something."

"This girl came in more than once then?"

"Wednesday. Then again Monday and Tuesday, as I said. Sat there at table three, right near the window. Usually spent nearly a couple of hours. I was flattered and assumed she might be dropping in to chat. After the first encounter, however, she rarely spoke. Very attractive girl, sports car lover."

"What?"

"She likes sports cars. Drives a little red one. I saw her park it out in front."

I drew out one of the studio portraits of Nancy Oland. "Know this girl?"

Don took a pair of rimless glasses from the breast pocket of his World Pizza uniform. After moving the photo as though it were a stereoscope slide, he said, "No. She's not the one. Are you a police officer?"

"Nope," I said.

"What about all this police brutality we hear about?" asked the old woman.

I smiled at her. "Not a word of truth to it."

"The girl in here was smaller than that," said Don. "I have a little hunch she'll come in again. My mother tells me any girl who likes pizza wouldn't make a good wife. I don't agree."

"My uncle married a woman who lived for three years on nothing but pizza," I said, taking the picture back.

Outside, the afternoon street was filling up with transistor-eared high school kids. I looked at the bell-bottomed girls and felt obsolete. You do sometimes at thirty-six.

Carrie Milligan wasn't home at the Beau Geste Apartments in Hollywood. The manager of the building was doing handstands beside the pool, a thick bronze guy about my age. He told me Carrie worked the cocktail hour shift at the Great Depression, a bar down on Santa Monica Boulevard. Two airline stewardesses came home from a flight while I was talking to him. They waved and called, "Hi, Sonny," walking along the catwalk stairs to their apartment. Sonny's portable phonograph changed records and a lot of Tijuana brass came out. A blonde in a scarlet bikini ran out of a ground floor apartment and did a fair jackknife



into the pool. "We're like those coffee shops down the street," Sonny said. "Open twenty-four hours. One continual round of fun and games. The basic rent is only \$150

a month and no lease required."

I told him I was studying for the ministry and liked quiet nights. I drove my secondhand car to the Great Depression and bumped up

into the customer lot. The hot wind was carrying the smell of the burning hills. Walking toward the back entrance to the low black building, I noticed a dusty red sports car parked next to the garbage cans. The registration was taped to the windshield. The car was Carrie Milligan's, an interesting coincidence.

The Great Depression was chill and dark. All the walls were covered with a collage of trivia: candy wrappers, comic book pages, stills from Bogart movies, newspaper photos of FDR, Thomas Hart Benton prints, Rockwell covers, Krazy Kat, Amelia Earhart.

The two waitresses weren't from the Thirties. They were Carnaby style, striped pants, boots, caps. One, a brunette with wide-set smoky eyes, was leaning, hands locked behind her, against a post.

I sat at the black bar and ordered an Olympia. When the bartender brought it I asked, "Carrie Milligan works here, I believe?"

He had a fluffy moustache and he touched both ends of it before he answered. "Yes, that's so. Why, pal?"

From my coat I took a card an insurance man had left under my apartment door the week before. "I'm Ralph E. Minton, with Los Angeles Provident. We're trying to locate a missing beneficiary. I won-

der if I might speak with Miss Milligan."

He felt his moustache again, seemed to want to find a resemblance between me and the typeface on the card. "That's her holding up the pillar. Tell her Rick said you could talk a few minutes in one of the empty booths. She going to get some money?"

"It's difficult to say at this stage. There is surely cause for anticipation."

Only the dark girl's eyes moved when I spoke to her. "My name is Lowe," I said. "Nancy Oland's father says you were a friend of hers. I'd like to talk to you."

Her long hands moved and came to rest on her legs. "Check with Rick."

"I got his permission."

She detached herself from the post and walked to an empty rear booth. "What does Mr. Oland want?" she asked when she was seated.

"He got a letter from somebody claiming to be Nancy," I said, across from her. "Know anything about it?"

"Nancy's dead," she said. Her voice was soft, far off. "She killed herself. Mr. Oland won't believe that." Swinging her long legs up onto her bench, she cupped her hands on her knees. "You know that spiritual? 'Undertaker, please

drive slow, because the lady that you're taking, I hate to see her go.' That's Nancy's father. He hates to see her go and he's trying to make it as slow as he can. She's been dead for nearly three years."

"Been out there lately, to the Oland home?" I'd brought my beer with me. I drank, watching her thin, sad face. She was pretty in a forlorn sort of way.

"No. I wasn't very close to Nancy the last year or so. I've never been near her father since she died. He called me a few times. I haven't seen him."

"You and your red car weren't out there the beginning of this week?"

Carrie smiled faintly, shaking her head. She touched the visor of her cap. "Couldn't have. My car was in the garage Monday and Tuesday."

"What for?"

Her hands massaged her knees. "If it makes any difference, I took it in Monday before work here and picked it up Tuesday noon. I had it lubricated, and the oil changed. Okay?"

"Think of any reason why somebody would want to hurt Oland this way? With a fake letter?"

"Oh, come on," she said, swinging her legs down. "It's a mean old world. Lots of people get hurt, a lot worse than Mr. Oland. All he has

to do is sit around that big house and hide from the daylight and pretend Nancy didn't jump. There are worse lives to live." She left me, adjusting her cap with a flourish.

On the parking lot I stood by her car for a moment, lit another cigarette and decided they weren't any easier on my respiratory system than the non-menthol kind. The only garage sticker I could find anywhere on her car indicated it hadn't been lubricated since November of the year before, seven thousand miles ago. Thinking, I got into my old car and fought for a place in the confusion of traffic.

Beth Eisner was a rangy brunette too, a year or so older than Carrie, not quite as sad. She had a three-room cottage up in Beverly Glenn, a ten minute climb above Sunset Boulevard where, she told me later, she worked as a secretary. After I'd identified myself she released the chain lock and let me into a big sparse livingroom. The furniture was simple, quiet. A bad oil painting of Beth was hanging over the full bookcase.

"I keep thinking this whole block is going to burn down. I sleep pretty well. One thing I always come bolt awake for is a fire engine. I think I can hear them as far away as Oxnard." She took a perch on a low sofa and let me pick my own.

From a canvas chair I asked, "Who would try to make Nancy Oland's father think she's alive?"

She bit her lower lip. "That's what it is?"

"He got a letter, supposed to be from her, telling him to meet her at a certain time out in Palm Springs. He went, waited. When he finally came home he found he'd been robbed."

"Poor Mr. Oland. He wants to believe she's alive."

"You drive a compact?"

"Yes, that's it out in front."

I'd checked. "When's the last time you saw Nancy's father?"

"Something like a year ago," she said. She was wearing a dark pull-over and tan corduroy pants. "I used to go out there to visit him. I had to stop. I like Mr. Oland, but all he'd want to talk about was the possibility Nancy would turn up alive. He didn't really know Nancy at all, not even when she lived with him."

"Was it here that she lived with you?"

"No, an apartment down in Hollywood, one of those fake Moorish ones. Six months, at least, before she died she had a place by herself. Her father doesn't know that."

"What about guys?"

"I'm pretty sure Mr. Oland told you Nancy wasn't much interested in men."

"He said something like that."

"Well," Beth said, "that isn't really quite the story. Nancy knew several men, quite an assortment of people; people Mr. Oland probably wouldn't admit existed. You know, Nancy's mother died back around 1950 and her father started turning off that long ago."

"You've never told him any of this?"

"No, and you shouldn't. He's not going to believe anyway," she said. "Nancy was nervous, high key. She was never quite sure what she was up to. She'd tried a couple of colleges. She was always drifting, looking for some kind of edge, a handle to things." Her eyes closed for a second. "I think the last few months of her life she was addicted somehow, to something. Maybe that's why she killed herself."

"I've seen Oland's clippings on the suicide. There didn't seem to be anything suspicious about the others involved."

"On the boat? No, they were straight. Nancy had friends on two or three levels."

"What about Carrie Milligan?"

Beth shook her head. "I guess she's like Nancy, like Nancy several ways, but a little more in control."

"What do you know for sure about Nancy being hooked?"

"I'm not certain," said the girl. Her face had grown paler. "I began to get odd feelings about her, the way she was acting, so I moved out. I did offer to help, in my dumb pigeon-toed way. I maybe should have stuck. I don't know. I didn't like Carrie—or Tamerlane."

"Who?"

"Jack Tamerlane," she said. "He was the one Nancy saw most. I think he also saw Carrie a lot. They were a kind of trio. Tamerlane's a big tall guy, a skinny cowboy looking guy. He even did do extra work in Westerns now and then, Nancy told me."

"And how straight was Tamerlane?"

She let out her breath. "He was sent up for possession of narcotics, went away a while before Nancy killed herself. Maybe that was the reason." She shrugged. "Maybe anything was a reason. I keep trying to figure."

"I'll check into Tamerlane," I said.

"He's out of prison." She leaned back, frowning. "I heard from a friend, someone who knew us both, Nancy and me. Tamerlane's been out nearly a month."

That would fit. I shook out a cigarette, looked at it, let it slide away. "Yeah," I said.

"You're wondering what to tell

Mr. Oland. I'm sorry. I should have kept quiet." She spread her hands. "I still wonder about Nancy, and worry. I suppose I feel she's still alive, too."

I pushed up to my feet. "Thanks," I said.

The day was fading, night was coming. You wouldn't be able to see any stars.

I phoned a couple of cops. Jack Tamerlane, age twenty-eight, had been free for nearly four weeks. He had a moderate sized narcotics record. He lived now and worked at a place called The Birks' Works Farms, a tourist attraction run by a remote relative of his, out on the road to Disneyland. They sold country style lunches and souvenirs to fifteen hundred smog-dulled people a day.

I figured I could get there by freeway in under an hour, talk to Tamerlane before bedtime. If he weren't there, I could still look around, ask questions, buy a souvenir.

A private cop stood at the redwood gate to Birks' Works Farms.

"I'm Ferguson with the Urban Parole Authority," I said. "Jack Tamerlane around?"

"Employees live in the rustic auto court half a mile down-road. Gate eleven. He's in cottage fifteen. Why you want Jack?"

"Routine," I said, a reason that

usually works to avoid questions.

The guard nodded.

I drove on down and turned in at gate eleven. In among some trees were three dozen cottages. I parked next to what I thought might be a willow tree and started to search for cottage fifteen. It wasn't hard to find. A dusty-red sports car was resting in the slot next to it. Lights were on in the front room of the shingle cottage, which was a miniature version of the Oland house. Putting my guerrilla knowledge to work, I skulked around the back of Tamerlane's and came up in the dry brush under his side windows.

A television set was murmuring and above it I could make out Carrie's voice, not soft now. "Well, you have to put some faith in me, too. I know whether somebody followed me out or not."

"Swell, swell," said Tamerlane. "Stop yelling."

"Come on now," the girl said. "Did you find the stuff?"

"Why sure," he answered. "Taped under her bureau drawer in a plastic bag."

"What's it worth?"

"Oh," said Tamerlane in his slow, careful voice, "it was worth fifty thousand when I gave it to Nancy to hold. Probably sixty, sixty-five now."

"I still say you'll get hurt for sidetracking it."

"Not this late," said Tamerlane.

"You've got old Oland really thinking she's alive."

"So?" It got him away from where I'd told Nancy to stow it. I always got good penmanship marks in school. Miss Cooper always said that was the only thing I did good."

I felt up under my arm, touching the holster of my .38. Quietly I moved around to the front, climbed the small porch and knocked on the door.

When Tamerlane looked out a six-inch opening I said, "I'd like to talk to you about Nancy Oland."

"It's him," Carrie said.

Tamerlane lost his slowness. The door slammed shut. There was running inside and then the back door sounded. I cut around to the car side of the cottage. Tamerlane was half into the red car. He saw my gun coming out, ducked. He popped up and a tire iron came sailing at me. I dodged, and he started running out from behind the car, around the next house.

From the next parking slot I spotted him running through the dark trees, heading for the tourist buildings. I went after him. Once through the woods, Tamerlane scaled a wood fence and I heard him go rattling down a board street. Then it got quiet.

The fence was spotted with let-

tering, ornate announcements that beyond the fence there was an authentic ghost town. The fence creaked and swayed as the sharp hot wind brushed it. Cutting around, I found the back gate to the town, picked the old padlock and let myself in.

There was one street, two rows of badly imagined frontier buildings, a saloon, a jail, a hotel, a souvenir shop. It was silent, dark, with wax figures leaning against hitching posts, lined up at a long bar, sitting in the hotel lobby. In a buckboard parked outside the livery stable one of the men on the seat was breathing a little. From ten feet away I called, with my gun loosely ready, "Jump on down, Tamerlane."

He didn't move for nearly a minute. Then he stood. "I don't have a gun."

"Over here."

"Why don't you toss yours aside and take me on, man to man?" He hopped to the dusty street.

I grinned. "You're letting the setting overwhelm you."

"I'll take you on if you're not scared." He started to run at me.

I shot him in the leg.

A sticky hot rain was falling. George Oland took back the pictures of his daughter. "The whole story doesn't ring true, doesn't

make a bit of sense," he protested.

I had told him most of what I'd found out; about how Tamerlane had highjacked a shipment of heroin coming in from Mexico, given it to Nancy to hide in a safe place for a while, a safe place like her old room at home. Before Tamerlane had had a chance to do anything he'd been caught on another deal and locked up. As soon as he got out he set about figuring a way to retrieve the stuff. Since Oland never left the place, he and Carrie, who knew Oland believed Nancy still alive, came up with a way to get him out of the house. When I'd said it all I added, echoing Beth Eisner, "I'm sorry."

"If you knew Nancy you'd know how false it all is."

I left my chair. "I'll get going."

"You haven't found her," said Oland. "You didn't even go out to Palm Springs and check."

"Tamerlane admits writing the letter to get you out of here for a day so he could dig around." I stepped around him, into the dim hallway. "There's nothing else to find out."

"I want you to stay on the case and find Nancy."

"No," I said. I got to the front door and opened it.

Oland caught my arm as I hit the porch, kept telling me she wasn't dead.

Some people, reputedly, have consciences that will stretch.

OPENING her eyes, Kate Swain looked up, through flame-colored trees, at feather clouds floating in a blue bowl. She lifted a heavy hand to brush dried leaves from her face, blinked vaguely, struggled to sit up. For a moment her mind chased cottony memories, catching wisps of pictures hinting at things she should know. Sighing, she mused, *I must have been asleep, but what in the world am I doing in the woods?*

It wasn't even a familiar woods. Disjointedly, finding her limbs stiff and heavy, Kate rose to her feet and looked for some landmark she might recognize. There was none.

She sniffed the air, briefly enjoying the tang of autumn leaves. "I feel like I'm miles from nowhere." Her own voice was hollow, unfamiliar in her ears. "Sounds like I'm catching cold." She looked down at her dress, brushed at clinging moss and soil. "It's pretty



thin for fall." Shivering, she wrapped herself in her arms, for the warm sun could not disguise the nip of frost in the air.

Looking vainly about for a path out of the trees, Kate thought, *I feel like a fool. Surely I must have come with someone, but I can't remember.* As panic threatened, she fought it down and started walking.

It seemed miles before she came to a road—little more than a gravel path, really—and saw, beyond it, the distant glimmer of sun on water.

Snapping her fingers, dancing a step or two, Kate exclaimed aloud, "Now I know! This is the old Skinner's woods; outside Carville, where Rod and I used to picnic. But that was years ago! What am I doing here now?"

As if to answer her, an ancient car hiccupped into view around a bend in the road. Kate waved her arms. The grizzled driver must have been blind; serenely he looked the other way and the car chugged on out of sight.

Stunned, Kate shouted, "Please!" and ran after him a little way, then stumbled into a walk. Her linen pumps were never intended for this kind of road. "Miserable, mean old man," she muttered. "When I remember who brought me out here and left me, I'll certainly have a

score to settle! What a dirty trick!"

Nagging at her was the thought that she ought to be worried about her lack of memory. She attempted to capture again the fleeting pictures which had touched her mind on awakening, but they refused to be caught. A whisper of inevitability walked with her, as though everything would be revealed in due time—right around the next corner, perhaps.

What *was* revealed around the next corner was the old Skinner farmhouse, a picture of desertion. Kate stood, appalled. The garden was choked with weeds, the windows were broken and sagging in their frames, the shingles curled and gaped around a crumbling chimney. Kate shivered. Then she saw the old car parked in the rutted driveway. *The old goat, she thought, will have to take me to town or I'll steal his mangy car!*

She stumbled to the door of the house; it, too, sagged in its frame and Kate stepped through it gingerly, afraid to lean on the rotting wood lest it fall in completely. The damp, sour smell of long disuse wrinkled her nose. *Surely he can't live here.* There was a hollow, thudding sound in the back room of the house and the man suddenly appeared with his arms full of the pieces of a chopped-up chair.

Smoothing back her hair, Kate

pinned a charming smile on her face. No sense in getting his dander up by saying all the nasty things she had in mind. "Good afternoon, sir," she said sweetly. "May I ride with you to town? That is, if you're going that way?"

The old man paused, looked at

her, shivered. Brushing her aside, he pushed his way out of the door and staggered with his load of wood to the car. Tossing the wood in through the open door, he turned, brushed past Kate again, and disappeared into the inner room. The hollow thudding resumed.

Kate closed her mouth with a snap. Small chance that he would voluntarily give her a ride. Unless . . .

Kate marched out of the door and down the driveway with a determined swing, saying to herself, "Won't I just teach him a lesson in manners, though! I won't give him a chance to say no!"

Climbing into the car, she discovered that she would have to sit on the chopped wood which was heaped everywhere but on the driver's seat. She composed herself and spread her skirts neatly, rehearsing the technique of scorn which always brought her husband, Rod, so quickly to heel. To reduce a man to shaking anger required few words, she knew, provided they were well chosen and bitingly spoken.

The old man finally appeared with another load of wood. Stopping at the open door of the car, he surveyed her and the wood within. Grunting, he reached in and dropped the load into her lap!



He brushed his hands together, dusting them, and then climbed into the driver's seat and pulled the door closed. With a groan, a rattle, and a sigh of despair, the old car came to reluctant life, backed down the driveway to the road, and they headed for town.

Kate was livid. She tried to push the wood from her knees but there was no place for it to go. In her best fishwife voice she shouted at the man, giving him a piece-by-piece description of what she thought of his background, his parents, and his present habits.

He ignored her, driving with a straight back and a flat, tuneless whistle.

Kate wanted to clout him over the head, but thought just in time that he might drive them into a tree. Finally she collapsed into speechlessness. She was shaking with a fury beyond anything she could remember.

The bright afternoon was dimming toward dusk, when they drove into the town of Carville. It seemed, to Kate, to have changed little in the years she had been away. The streets were deserted—it was supptime. Wheezing asthmatically, the old car approached the railway station.

Feeling a little ashamed, now, of her tirade, Kate smiled to think how glad the old man would be to

get rid of her. "You may let me out here," she said firmly. He paid no attention. "Now!" she shouted, as they roared past the depot. The car rattled on. Kate panicked. "Please," she begged, as another block went by.

The old man shrugged his shoulders more firmly into his brown corduroy jacket and drove another three blocks, pulling up in front of a grocery store. Climbing out of the car, he walked briskly into the store without a backward glance.

Kate climbed out too. Standing, smoothing down her dress, she glared after him. "Well, good riddance to you, too!" She turned and trudged the weary blocks back to the railway station.

As she approached it, lights went on inside the ticket office, and the thought suddenly struck Kate that she had no purse, hence no money. How was she to buy a ticket for home?

Well, she used to know all the conductors on this run. She'd get on the train and explain the problem when someone came to collect her ticket. Probably he'd take her name and address and let her pay later. At least she'd be on the way while arguing about it.

A flood of weariness washed over Kate. If she could just sit down and get warm, she could decide on all the right answers. She

ached from contact with the load of wood she had been sitting on. She entered the station, conscious of her light dress and bare arms, and walked to the bulletin board. Checking the schedule with the big, white-faced clock on the wall, she found she had an hour to wait. She went into the ladies' room.

Kate was shocked when she looked into the mirror. Her long black hair, escaping from its bun, was trailing down her neck; her white, strained face was drained of all color, even the lips. Her eyes, always pale, were now washed out to the shade of sea foam, and there was a nasty purple bruise on her forehead. *I look like a ghost*, she thought; *no wonder the old man didn't want anything to do with me!*

Examining the bruise, Kate decided it was not a recent one, yet she couldn't remember when or how she got it. She tidied herself as much as possible without the aid of comb or lipstick, pulling her hair back into its usual severity and straightening her stocking seams. Then she sat down to wait.

The room was warm and, despite all her attempts to think clearly of the situation she was in, Kate found herself dozing off at intervals, all her weary muscles finally relaxed. *I don't know why I'm so tired. I couldn't have walked more*

than a couple of miles altogether. Of course there was that nightmare ride. The old boy certainly did a wonderful job of ignoring me; he must be a confirmed woman-hater! Imagine him having the nerve to go out to that old house and steal the furniture for stove wood. Maybe—maybe he was embarrassed at me catching him. Maybe that's why he pretended I wasn't there.

Between catnaps, Kate checked the clock, shrinking from the moment when she would have to get on the train and face the conductor. She used to be a regular commuter on this line, living in Carville with Aunt Hannah and working in the city, fifteen miles away, but a lot can happen in a few years. Faces change, and she'd never had any close friends here anyway.

"You never had any close friends anywhere," she told herself. "Just Rod. And what's happened to you and Rod, to the wonderful relationship you had when you were first married? Where did you go off the track? When did you stop purring at him, and start snarling? Was it when you refused to share Aunt Hannah's money with him, when you wondered if he married you for that money? Is that when you fell out of love?"

Her heart cried at the thought.

Oh Rod, Rod! What happened to us?

Kate shook her head to clear blurred eyes. Since she could remember so much, she should be able to remember how she got here.

The faint whistle of the approaching train brought her wearily to her feet. No one had come into the washroom while she was sitting there. Stepping out into the waiting room, she saw that it, too, was deserted, and she was glad. She didn't want to speak to anyone.

The train puffed into the station, the conductor swung the folding steps down, descended, and turned to speak to the porter. Kate climbed up and into the coach unaided. Half a dozen people were scattered throughout the car, but no one looked at her. She chose a seat away from the others. Her face burned painfully at the thought of the coming interview with the conductor, and she hoped no one was close enough to listen. Sinking back against the seat, she closed her eyes, trying to decide how to explain the situation without embarrassing either herself or the conductor. "Please don't let him throw me off the train," she whispered. "Please!"

As the train picked up speed, her sore heart thumped, "I must get home to Rod," in unison with the

click of the wheels. The conductor, coming through from the back of the car, stopped at each seat to punch tickets. She heard the rustle of people searching pockets and making jocular remarks—all the little, everyday sounds of a train ride—and then the conductor had finished with all the others and was coming up the aisle to her. She looked at him beseechingly. He moved up to her seat, glanced casually at her—past her—and went on into the next car without stopping.

Dizzy with relief, Kate sagged back into the seat and closed her eyes. *He pretended not to see me, she thought. He guessed that I didn't have a ticket and is letting me ride free. Oh, the blessed man!*

And then the refreshment man came along, hawking his wares. He thrust wax paper wrapped sandwiches under passengers' noses, dripped wet soda bottles across their laps, and generally seemed very anxious to make sales. Kate watched with amusement, enjoying the nasal twang in his voice, wishing she had the price of a soft drink. Finished with the other travellers, he turned and marched past Kate without blinking an eye.

She was amazed. He, too, pretended not to see her. But why? She certainly didn't look so ragged that she couldn't buy a soft drink.



Panic pounded at her ribs, smothered her, brought a cold sweat to her forehead. She looked down at her body, clearly visible in the light from the ceiling fixtures; she examined her rumpled dress and soiled pumps, saw minute runs in her stockings reminiscent of her walk in the woods. She felt of her arms and legs. *I'm here, she thought frantically. I'm real. I feel, and think, and speak.* Why didn't he see me? Then, belatedly, "The conductor didn't see me," she said aloud. "The old man in the car didn't see me. Maybe all these people on the train don't see me!" Rising to her feet, lurching into

the aisle, she shouted at them: "*Do you see me?*"

They were wrapped up in their books, their newspapers, their conversations. No one saw her. Kate screamed, and screamed. No one paid any attention.

When the train was pulling into the station, Kate started for the exit. She was first off the train, stopping for nothing, prepared to jump to the platform if the steps were not yet in place. She ran through the station and, magically, the way opened for her. She brushed by many people, but no one stopped her, no one took her arm and demanded to know why

she was in such a hurry or where she was going. She didn't even break stride for the revolving doors to the street, passing through on the momentum left from the last person coming in.

Then she was outside, running in the dark, instinct turning her steps toward home and Rod, blinded eyes failing to see curbs and cars and people going by.

Miraculously her flying feet carried her through the dangers safely. Her urgent body arrowed across the city, straight to the target of her own front steps. Gasping, sobbing, stabbed by pain and fear and bewilderment, she fell on the doorstep and scratched feebly at the door. No one came. She seemed to lie there for hours, and no one came.

Lights shined through the windows; she could hear movement inside the house. Strength to crawl to the window came to her, and she peered in. Rod was sitting in his favorite armchair, the newspaper spread across his knees, eyes staring at the rug. His shoulders appeared tense, expectant; his face turned slowly toward the window. Kate glared at him. He shuddered.

Kate's dog, Floozy, whined inside the door, and Rod's footsteps, sounding reluctant, approached. The door opened. Floozy's small body hurtled by Kate and down

the steps, a bundle of ecstasy in the moonlight.

She didn't see me either, Kate thought dully. My own dog didn't even sense I was here. What am I to do?

She turned to face Rod in the doorway, expecting him to be oblivious. But his eyes were on her, cringing in his white face. He sagged, clutched at the door frame, put out a protesting hand to push her away, as if he couldn't bear the sight of her. "Kate! No!" His voice was a hoarse, pleading whisper of horror.

In that moment, looking at his outstretched hand, Kate knew why she was there. She threw back her head then and laughed . . . and laughed . . .

Kate stirred in Rod's arms, heard Rod's voice begging her, "Sweetheart, wake up! Please! You've been making such horrible sounds—shouting."

Rod shook her roughly, demanding, and her hysteria trailed away into sobs. She opened her eyes. They were in bed, and the early morning sun warmed the familiar blue carpet in a cheery, reassuring pattern. The nightmare dissolved, fled, leaving only the memory of uneasiness and pain.

"Darling," she said, "it was horrible. I don't remember exactly

what it was, but I hated you. You were . . . different. You . . . it's no use. It's all gone."

"It must have been quite a production while it lasted," he said. "You were thrashing about and moaning. You've been having a lot of these dreams, lately, haven't you? Something on your mind?"

"I don't know. Nothing important. At least," she searched his face anxiously, "I sometimes wonder if you really *are* the same as always. Sometimes I think you've changed, Rod."

"What nonsense!" He goaded her cheerfully out of bed, caught her and hugged her. "Besides, we shouldn't waste time on silly nightmares. Today is a very special day. I have it all planned."

"What are we going to do?" She sat down at the dressing table and began to brush her long, black hair. Looking at his reflection in the mirror, she was warmed by pride and a special sense of possession.

"We're going to have a picnic, just like we used to. Over in Skinner's woods, at Carville. I'm driving you there in a very special

car. I want you to see it, honey. It's a dream. The newest sports model Rafferty's has on display. I think we should buy it."

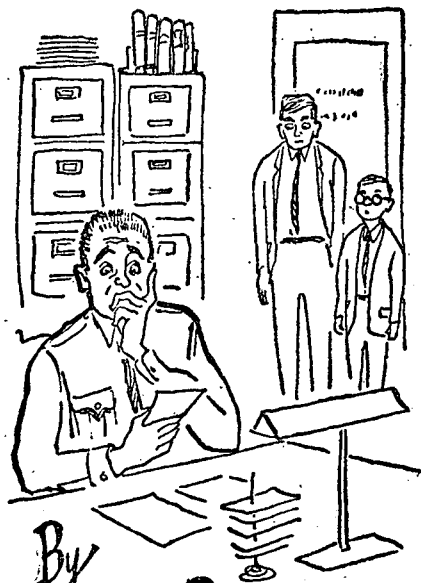
Kate slammed down the brush and turned sharply to face him. "Not with Aunt Hannah's money, Rod. We've been through this so many times. I won't let you have that money. If you aren't capable of earning enough to buy the car yourself, then you'll have to do without it."

He looked at her quietly for several moments, then grinned. "We have it on loan for the day anyway. We'll talk it over when you see the car."

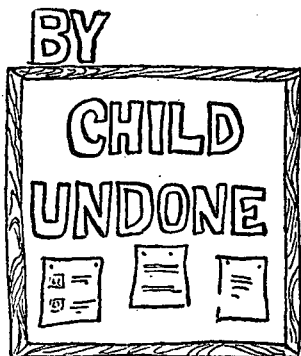
Kate turned grimly back to the mirror. Suddenly she leaned forward to stare at herself as the July sun poured through the window and lighted her milky skin. Then she relaxed, sighing. *Only a shadow*, she thought, but for a moment she could have sworn there was a big, purple bruise on her forehead. Dismissing the thought, Kate went to the closet and chose a light summer dress and linen pumps to match.



It seems that modern sources of information have not entirely displaced the academic, after all.



By
Jack Ritchie



back and died almost immediately.

George Clinton died the next night in an equally direct fashion.

Our Police Department receives a number of letters every day—some offering information or seeking it, others obscene, some threatening, some rambling tirades. A great many of them, to be truthful, we drop into the wastebasket. We simply do not have the personnel or the budget to follow through on everything that comes through the mail. There are some messages, however, which do command our attention.

IT was well past midnight when Henry Wilson returned home after a late show. As he inserted the key into the lock of his apartment door, he was shot once through the

This was one. The envelope and notepaper were of an ordinary type which can be purchased at any of a thousand stationery departments. The message was typewritten, without salutation, and unsigned. It had been received by the commissioner's office earlier in the day and forwarded to my department for action. It read:

On the supposition that any organization as large as yours might inadvertently overlook the matter, I suggest that you compare the bullets which killed Henry Wilson and George Clinton.

I believe you will find that they were fired from the same gun.

I looked up at Detective Sergeant Harrison. "Well?"

He nodded. "It checks out. The same gun."

"I presume you had the lab go over this letter for fingerprints?"

"Sure, but nothing. Just Millie's prints. The commissioner didn't touch it."

Millie Tyler is the commissioner's secretary. She opens and pre-reads his official mail, so when it becomes necessary to forward a letter from his office to the fingerprint department, Millie's invariably appear on the paper. The technicians in the laboratory claim to be able to recognize her prints

on sight, and we grant them that.

I drummed my fingers lightly on the desk. "If the writer of this note knew that the bullets came from the same gun, the question is obvious. Why?"

"I have a sneaking suspicion."

"So have I, especially since he took the pains not to forward his fingerprints. Did Clinton and Wilson know each other?"

"As far as we've been able to find out, they never even saw each other in their lives. There's just one thing common to the both of them. They were members of the American Legion."

I looked out of the window.

Harrison cleared his throat. "I'm sure we'll come up with something more than that, sir."

As long as we were stuck at that point, I asked, "Did they both belong to the same post?"

"No. They lived on opposite sides of the city."

"But at least they attended the same war?"

"No. Clinton was a World War II vet and Wilson a Korean."

I picked up the report on the first victim, Henry Wilson.

Henry Wilson had been a bachelor, thirty-eight; bookkeeper with a construction firm, steady worker. Not particularly extrovert in conversation, but he did belong to four weekly bowling leagues. Saved

his money, but wasn't fanatic about it, worth around six thousand in a savings account. Had twenty thousand in insurance, ten of which was G.I. and the other ten with a private firm. The beneficiaries were half a dozen charitable organizations.

"Was he a nut on charities?"

"No," Harrison said. "According to the people who knew him, Wilson took out the insurance policies early in his life because they were good buys. Low rates, you know. He figured that if he got married he could always change the beneficiaries."

"But evidently he didn't. Any matrimonial prospects or rejects?"

"None that we've run across so far. I guess he preferred bowling."

I turned to the file on George Clinton.

Age, forty-six; veteran of Second World War; vice-president of Madison Avenue advertising agency. Divorced in 1963; wife and two teen-aged daughters promptly returned to the state of Washington where her parents still lived.

Clinton drank heavily, but evidently kept it under control during working hours. Had a trigger temper. According to an associate, Clinton engaged in a fist fight with a customer at a downtown bar three days before he was shot.

He lived alone, his body found

in apartment near door. Neighbor says he heard something that *might* have been a shot at one in the morning, but wasn't sure enough to bother the police.

"What about this fist-fight thing?" I asked.

"We're looking for him. The bartender says he drops in occasionally, but he doesn't know the guy's name or anything about him. You know how it is in those crowded downtown bars. The faces get familiar, but there's nothing worth remembering except a man's favorite drink."

I put Clinton's file in the Out tray. "So we're left riding two tiny parallels. Both victims belonged to the American Legion, and they lived alone."

"And they were both men."

"Thank you," I said.

"Well, that could be important, you know."

Late that afternoon, Sergeant Harrison came back to my office. "The bartender just called and said that the customer who had the fight with Clinton is in the place right now working on a whiskey sour."

"Has it occurred to you to pick him up?"

"I already sent somebody," Harrison said. "They'll bring him in."

I told my secretary, Sue Adams, where I'd be and we took the

elevator down to the interrogation rooms.

Fifteen minutes later, two detectives brought in a man in his early thirties. He was neatly dressed, though at the moment he was perspiring and his hair was a bit disturbed and moist. He informed us that he was the junior partner of Polk & Polk, Certified Public Accountants.

"Honest," he said, "I never even saw this Clinton before."

"Then what was the argument about?" I asked.

"There was no argument. I mean no talk at all. I guess he had a lot of drinks in him and he bumped into me on his way to the cigarette machine or something. I said, 'Watch it,' and the next thing I knew, he swung at me and it went like that."

"You didn't know who he was?"

"I swear. Not until one of those detectives told me."

"Where were you at one a.m. Tuesday?"

"At home. In bed asleep. My wife will vouch for that. She's a light sleeper and very jealous. I couldn't go anywhere without her knowing."

When I got to the office Thursday after lunch, Sue Adams informed me that the commissioner had received another letter and that it now lay on the desk in my office.

I unfolded the notepaper carefully, anchored it open with a ruler, and read:

Reading the newspapers, I see that you have definitely established that one gun killed both Clinton and Wilson.

Good for you.

The revolver belongs to me and I intend to use it again.

I sent for Sergeant Harrison. He read the message and pursed his lips. "It's not signed."

I studied him.

He flushed. "I wasn't expecting him to sign his real name, but you sort of expect to see something like 'The Avenger.'"

"How do we know it's a 'he'?"

"We don't," Harrison admitted, "but somehow I just can't picture a woman writing notes like this. I guess I'm an incurable romantic."

"Take this letter to the lab and see if there are any fingerprints besides Millie's."

There were none.

The third man to die was William A. Wheeler, musician and music teacher.

I was routed from my bed at three in the morning—and so was Harrison for that matter—by the call from headquarters. Half an hour later, I joined Harrison and we stared down at the pajama-clad body of William A. Wheeler.

"According to the reconstruc-

tion," Harrison said, "the buzzer got him out of bed at two in the morning. Wheeler left the chain on the door when he opened it, but that didn't help any. As soon as it was open a few inches, the murderer fired."

The photographer finished and two ambulance attendants put Wheeler's body on a stretcher and covered it.

Harrison continued. "The man in the next apartment was hunched over hot milk trying to beat insomnia and heard the shot. He didn't jump up right away, but thought it over before he decided that it just might have been a shot, though it wasn't anywhere near as loud as the ones on television. So

he peeked down the hall and there he saw Wheeler's hand sticking out of the partly opened door. Didn't see any signs of the killer though, and he phoned the police right away."

I looked about the apartment. It was rather cluttered. I noticed some small trophies on one of the shelves of a bookcase and examined them. They had been earned by Wheeler while a member of the swimming team at Jefferson High in 1946 and 1947.

"What do we know about Wheeler?" I asked.

"Nothing yet," Harrison said, "except that he's thirty-six."

At ten-thirty that morning Millie Tyler, the commissioner's secretary,



brought an unopened envelope to my office. "This came in the commissioner's mail and it looks like another one of those letters. I'm almost beginning to recognize the style of typing."

I opened the envelope, carefully extracted the note, and read:

I trust that by the time you receive this you will have found the body of Wheeler?

Are you perhaps thinking that I detest the human race so much that I kill indiscriminately?

You are only half right.

I do not kill indiscriminately.

I wondered about the swift mail service until I studied the envelope again. The letter was postmarked at eight the previous evening, six hours before Wheeler had been killed.

I sent the letter on to the lab and it was returned to me just before Harrison came into my office.

Harrison read it and shook his head. "He's crazy."

"We all are," I said, "only at different times."

"And confident. I mean, mailing the letter six hours before he kills the man. Any fingerprints?"

"None at all," I said. "Not even Millie's."

Harrison opened his notebook. "About William A. Wheeler; he played the clarinet, gave class

lessons under the city's musical development program, and took private pupils on the side. One of the rooms of his apartment is soundproofed."

"What about friends, acquaintances and so forth?"

"The normal number. We're checking them out. Wheeler had two brothers, one's a dentist and the other operates a drugstore. Wheeler spent two years in the army during the Korean War with various post and regimental bands, including overseas."

"I suppose he was a member of the American Legion?"

"No. Veterans of Foreign Wars. But that's still a service organization. He was a swimmer in high school. Got some trophies."

I worried my pipe. "What the devil connects Wilson, Clinton, and Wheeler? Do we have anything that goes across the board? No matter how trivial?"

Harrison ticked off a series. "They were all men, they lived alone in apartments, they were single or divorced, they were all former servicemen and members of a veterans' organization, they were killed in the early hours of the morning, they all had brown hair and they all could swim. I checked up on that last thing after I saw Wheeler's trophies."

I closed my eyes. "You forgot

that all of them inhaled and exhaled from time to time, and they were notorious for having their features fixed at the front of their heads."

Harrison was mildly reproving. "You told me you wanted anything connecting them, no matter how small it was."

I conceded. "Did Wheeler carry insurance?"

"Ten thousand, G.I. insurance; one thousand allocated for burial expenses, and nine thousand to his mother. She's widowed, on social security, and lives in an apartment over her son Albert's drugstore. You don't suppose she killed him for the policy?"

"Of course not."

Harrison was faintly dubious. "How can you be so positive about that? I know it's unnatural, but mothers do sometimes murder their children."

"But not after they've grown up."

He rubbed his jaw. "You know, I never realized that before. Makes you stop and think," and he stopped and thought a while.

The next morning Sue Adams greeted me as I came to work. "This time the letter's addressed directly to you instead of the commissioner. I opened it along with your other mail. It's on your desk now."

In my office I examined the en-

velope for a moment. It had been mailed early yesterday evening.

Dear Captain Hayes,

I address you directly since the papers mention that you are in immediate charge of this case. I assume that you have found victim number four?

I feel a great deal like the race driver who knows that taking a curve at 75 miles an hour will result in catastrophe. And yet he attempts to round it at 74 miles an hour . . . and then 74.5 . . . and then 74.6. To come ever closer without disaster becomes the joy of the game.

How many dare I kill before you learn to anticipate me?

Perhaps I will kill one too many.

I got Sue Adams on the intercom. She gets to work a half hour before I do and is usually briefed on the night's happenings.

"Sue, why didn't you tell me that they found number four?"

"I don't think they have," she said. "At least I haven't heard anything. There were two homicides last night, but they were husband and wife affairs, one a hammer job and the other knife. Not what we're looking for, is it, Captain?"

When I returned from lunch at one, Sue had been fretting impatiently. "They found number four,

I think. Harrison left fifteen minutes ago and he's probably there by now." She handed me a slip of paper with an address on it.

When my driver left me off, I walked up to a small cottage set back on the lot in a tree-shaded older part of the city.

"His name's Fairbanks," Harrison said. "Charles W. Fairbanks, but the neighbors called him Charley. Age 72, widower, no children. Retired and living alone on social security and a pension."

I looked down at the body on the kitchen floor. Charley Fairbanks had been shot through the right temple.

Harrison continued. "The doctor estimates that he died between one and three a.m., give or take. Anyway, nobody in the neighborhood remembers hearing the shot. At that time of night everybody's usually asleep. I guess that's why the murderer chooses that time to strike."

"Brilliant deduction."

"It looks like Fairbanks was sitting here at the kitchen table having a cup of coffee."

"Between one and three in the morning?"

"He lived alone so he made his own hours. When he felt like drinking a cup of coffee, he drank it. Anyway, the murderer stood right outside and fired through

the window screen beside him."

"Who found his body?"

"His niece. I talked to her a little. Being that Fairbanks lived alone and because of his age, she phones him every day at about noon. This noon he didn't answer so she came over to see if anything was wrong."

"What about insurance?"

"Only a two thousand dollar policy and the niece is his beneficiary, but it's understood that she pays his funeral expenses. Also, he owns this cottage and that goes to her too." After a few moments of silence, Harrison sighed. "Fairbanks couldn't swim a damn stroke."

I looked at Harrison.

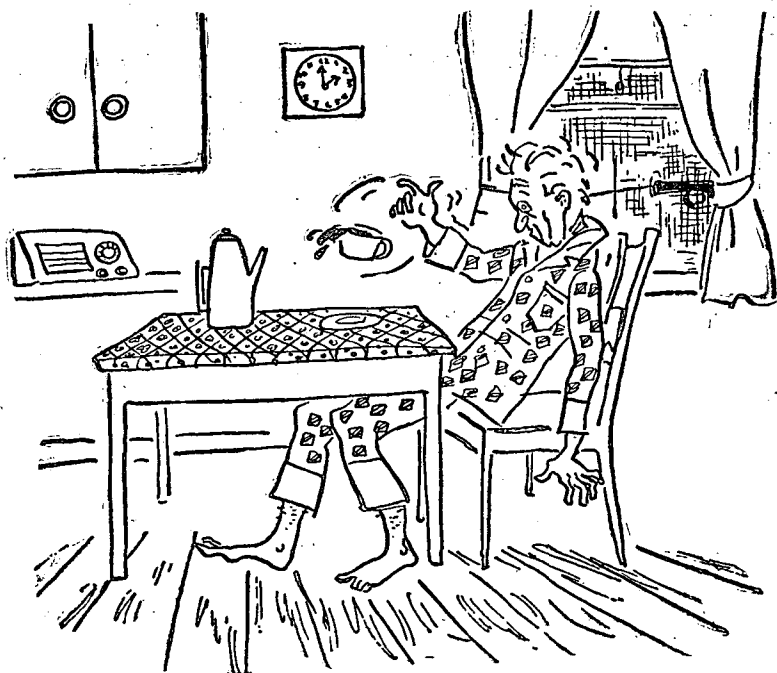
He cleared his throat. "I mean that there goes another one of our connecting links. About all the victims being able to swim, you know? And not only that, what hair Fairbanks had was gray and before that red. So that also shoots our theory about them all having brown hair."

I looked out of the window.

"Stop using the word 'our'."

Harrison was not yet defeated. "But at least he spent two weeks in an army camp outside of Lincoln, Nebraska, and then World War I ended. Been a loyal member of the American Legion since it was founded in 1919."

Harrison nodded to himself. "So we still got this: they were all men,



they lived alone, they were all former servicemen and members of a veterans' organization."

I took a deep breath. "Are you really happy with that?"

Victim number five met his death between two and three a.m. the next morning. We were able to pinpoint the time of death because he had been a night watchman and was required to punch the clock hourly. When he failed to do so at three, the Merchant Police responded automatically and found his body lying inside the heavy wire fence enclosing the Hum-

phrey Tool and Die Company.

At nine that morning I had the personal effects of the victim on my desk. I read the information on his driver's license. "Richard M. Johnson. Born 1912. That makes him 54."

Harrison seemed shaken at the report we'd just gotten from the lab. "But Johnson can't be number five. It doesn't fit our pattern."

"But the bullet does," I said. "It came from the same gun that killed the others."

"Johnson was never in the army, the navy, the marines, or even the

coast guard," Harrison said a bit plaintively. "Double hernia and classified 4-F. And he didn't live alone either. He had a wife and two grown children who boarded with him."

I put my hand on his shoulder. "That happens sometimes. Did you really have your heart set on those veterans' organizations?"

He nodded. "Now the only thing tying the victims together is the fact that they were men and there are millions of those." He frowned thoughtfully. "They weren't murdered in alphabetical order, were they?"

I am ashamed to admit that I had momentarily considered that too. "No," I said testily, "they weren't."

Harrison rubbed his jaw. "I don't think the murderer's insane at all."

"Why not?"

"Well . . . I know it's insane to kill people in that chain letter style, but that's not really his *type* of insanity. He just wants us to *think* that there's a mad killer running around loose. He's got an understandable motive for killing at least *one* of his victims, but he prefers to have us running around looking for a mass murderer instead of examining each case individually and coming up with an answer that would hurt him."

There are times when I have the feeling that I underestimate the intelligence of some of my associates. Not often, but it is there.

"All right," I said, "and which one of the victims is his real prey?"

"I don't know," Harrison said. "Maybe he hasn't even gotten around to him yet."

At ten that evening I was still in my office. I was tired and hungry and wanted to go home to a hot bath, but the fact that someone else would be dead by tomorrow morning kept me going over and over everything we had on the murders.

The door to my office clicked open and Sergeant Harrison and his somewhat owlish ten-year-old son, William, entered. They both seemed rather formally dressed and Harrison explained: "Just got through with the Father and Son Banquet at the Y.M.C.A. Thought I'd drop in and see if there was anything new?"

"There isn't," I said and stared morosely at the sheet of paper on my desk.

1. Henry Wilson
2. George Clinton
3. William A. Wheeler
4. Charles W. Fairbanks
5. Richard M. Johnson

I became aware of Harrison's son at my elbow. "Well," I said somewhat irritably, "do they mean

very much of anything to you?"

He pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. "Sure, Captain Hayes. They were all vice-presidents of the United States."

I regarded him stonily for nearly twenty seconds and then rose and went to the nearest set of encyclopedias.

William was correct.

I immediately recalled all off-duty detectives, sat down at the city directory, and began assigning stake-outs.

One of them—outside the mansion of the very rich Mr. William A. King—apprehended King's nephew and only heir as the young man prepared to put a bullet through his sleeping uncle's skull.

Mr. King's namesake had served as vice-president under Franklin Pierce.

I held a small coffee and cake celebration in my office.

"I think it's a little unfair of the murderer," Sue Adams said. "Who in the world is expected to remember vice-presidents? Now if they had been the names of our presidents, I would have gotten

suspicious right away. Everybody knows our presidents."

Sergeant Benjamin Harrison cut a piece of chocolate cake and handed it to his son, William Henry. "At first I thought the murderer might be that certified public accountant with Polk & Polk."

Millie Tyler put sugar into her coffee. "You mean the one who slugged it out with that vice-president with the advertising firm on Madison Avenue? Well, frankly, at the time I thought it might be his wife, but then she had this alibi about being in the state of Washington."

Sue Adams had a one-track mind. "If he'd just mentioned somebody like Jefferson or Lincoln."

I rubbed my jaw thoughtfully and tried to think back. Now that she mentioned it, it seemed to me that. . . .

The Commissioner opened the office door. "We're making out a citation for you, Captain. I keep forgetting your first name."

"Rutherford," I said. "Rutherford B. Hayes."



Is it extraordinary that a person who is dull himself may cause dullness in others?



SWALLOWING hard as I studied Velma stretched out beside me, I could only think: does murder start as simply, as matter-of-factly, as this? In hundreds of other crummy hotel rooms, people were having affairs, but was any other lover staring at his woman, his mind full of killing?

I've never bothered figuring exactly what it is Velma has for me, but she has it all the way. She's hardly the most beautiful woman, nor the cleverest, but there is a kind of wistful, childish charm about her, a dash of pure pixie innocence. Even in small talk Velma has a refreshing naivety. Could be her appeal is the obvious: both of my ex-wives had been take-charge, sophisticated, worldly women.

I knew what I was going to do, yet it seemed absolutely unreal.

By Ed Lacy

How was it possible for a middle-aged and cynical joker like myself, a man with his own small ad agency and a comfortable income, to say, "Velma, we have to kill Arthur!"

The words sounded hollow in the quiet hotel room, not because I had any feelings about her creepy husband, but only because I'd never thought of murder before in my life. Yet I'd mouthed the words and I'd meant them!

Velma sat up, slim, cute, wide-eyed, as if waiting for the punch line to some poor joke. "Come on, Frank, why so mad? Okay, Artie's taking me to Nassau for a week's cruise and you and I won't see each other next week. But this—wild talk, I don't like it even as a gag."

"Honey, it isn't a gag and I'm not talking wildly. I've weighed every word. Velma, can't you understand that I'm fed up with this backstreet romance bit? I want you for myself, for all time. Bullheaded Artie won't give you a divorce, and you tell me things won't work out if you just leave him, so . . ."

"Frankie, darling, don't be angry with me. I really know Arthur and his bookkeeper's mind, narrow as an adding machine. Unfortunately, I'm on the credit side, if that's the correct term, where he lists his assets, and if I walked out on Ar-

thur, he'd follow us, crawling and wailing, spoiling life for us. We couldn't be happy. Darling, if only I'd met you first!" Velma snuggled against me, and I felt the soft warmth of her smooth skin.

Gently pushing her away, I said, "Honey, let's face up to some facts. We love each other. Arthur won't budge, so he has to be removed. It's that simple."

"In time we'll work out something and . . ."

"Pure bunk! I've been selling myself that line for the last five months. Not a thing will change in time. It has to be *now*!"

"But, Frankie, merely because he's taking me on a cruise? You never talked of . . . of killing before. How can you say it so calmly?"

"Baby, do I sound calm? I'm not, I'm all nerves. Honey, I'm neither a criminal nor a violent type, but when you leave me, the thought of Arthur touching you . . . Well, if I ever meet him on the street, I don't know what I'll do. This cruise provides a foolproof means of knocking Artie off."

"But, sweet, you know how the cruise came up? After Artie turned down my plea for a divorce, without alimony, he suggested the cruise and it's the first time in our six, lousy, married years he's ever got off a dime. The cruise won't

change me and, if it will make you happier, I won't go. But please, stop talking about . . . murder."

"Velma, I want you to go on the cruise, it's our only out. Otherwise, I'll explode one of these days, beat Arthur to death and end up in jail! Velma, I know what I'm doing, believe me."

"Oh, Frankie, I do believe you. But how c-can a cruise mean a safe way of k-killing Artie?"

I poked my finger at her cute pug nose. "Baby, do you recall how we first met?"

She giggled nervously. "How can I forget? I saw you on the street and, from the rear, thought you were Arthur. I went boldly up to you and made a fool of—"

"Because I'm the same height, weight, age as your hubby, look a little like the dope. Velma, listen carefully: cruise ships generally dock here Saturday morning, unload passengers, take on supplies, then sail again in the afternoon for another week's cruise. Your ship is due to sail at 6 p.m., meaning it will already be dark. I want you to take your time, stall, don't board the ship with Arthur until after 5 p.m. You'll go to your cabin where the steward will have a fast look at Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Harper. The steward has other cabins to handle, plus seeing a steady stream of different passengers all spring

and summer. Now, I'll board the ship, as a visitor, at 5 p.m. Nobody will stop me, or ask my name. When all the other drunken visitors have gone ashore, I'll remain on deck. The stewards will be busy, will assume I'm a passenger. By 7 p.m. the ship will be well out on the Atlantic. The other passengers will be in their cabins, unpacking, sobering up, getting ready for dinner. It's now very dark and—"

"I still don't understand. What's all this to do with . . . us?"

"I'm coming to that, Velma. All you have to do is insist on Arthur going to the stern of the ship with you, for a last look at the shore lights, or you have a headache. He'll do that. I come up, hit him on the neck, throw him over. We're already a dozen miles at sea, so his body will never be found. Then you and I, as Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Harper, return to our cabin and dress for dinner. Simple?"

There was a moment of heavy silence in the cheap hotel room, Velma giving me a childish, big-eyed stare. "But your luggage, Frank?"

"I'll wear Arthur's clothes, we're the same size. We enjoy the cruise and the following Saturday, when the ship docks in New York again, Mr. and Mrs. Harper walk off. No passports are involved. Immigration will be a mere formality. Honey, I've been on these cruises be-

fore, and I know the procedure."

"After we leave the boat, then what, Frankie?"

"Nothing. We go directly to my place and start living there as Mr. and Mrs. Frank Preston. Keep your office job or toss it over, whatever you like. In time, we'll get legally married, but the main thing is, all the time we'll be living together, no more of this sneaking around. Arthur has no friends or family, who's going to miss him?"

Shivering slightly, Velma leaned against my chest. "Frank, can it actually be so easy, no risk?"

"Baby, the only risk is that his corpse might come ashore, but the odds are in our favor. Yes, there's another risk, somebody *might* see us in the brace of seconds it takes to toss Arthur over. But on these cruises, the first few hours after departure people are in their cabins, unpacking, resting from the going-away shindigs. As for my handling Artie, a chop on the neck and over he goes; a few seconds of danger rewarded by our lifetime together." I listened to my own voice, like an outsider, amazed at my calm manner, as if I killed a man any old day. I didn't tell Velma the *real* risk, whether I could go through with a murder. But I despised sniveling Artie so deeply, wanted Velma so badly, I felt I could do it. The . . .

Velma shook me. "Frankie, didn't you hear what I asked?"

"I'm sorry, honey. What did you say?"

"I asked if the cabin steward wouldn't notice that you're not Arthur?"

"Darling, passengers are a blur to a steward and he'll only get a fleeting glimpse of Arthur when you first go to your cabin. Sure, you, a redheaded dish, he'll probably remember, but when he sees you and a man of Arthur's stature return to the cabin to dress, why should he doubt they are Mr. and Mrs. Harper? If you mistook me for Arthur, he surely will. Baby, all we have to do is play things cool and we're set."

Velma shivered like a little girl frightened by a bad dream. "Oh, Frankie, Frankie, I'm scared!"

I held her tightly. "So am I, hon, I'm almost hysterical. But a few rough seconds and we're together forever. Velma, it's the only way. I just can't take this anymore, and beating Arthur to death in a street brawl isn't any answer. Darling, all you have to do is have him at the ship's stern at 7 p.m."

Things broke our way. It was drizzling when the liner left the Narrows and rocked out into the ocean, so the dark deck was empty. Artie wore a new, tan trench coat and when I slugged him on the

neck, I propped him against the rail for a second, removed the trench coat and his wallet. He went over like a sack, vanishing instantly into the wake of the propeller. I tossed my coat over and put on the trench coat, then grabbed Velma for a moment, to keep her from screaming, or maybe to keep myself from yelling. I kept whispering, "Velma, it's done! Done! Done!"

She nodded, her face blank with shock. I shook her. "Baby, snap out of it. We've made it."

"Yes, yes. Listen, can I have a drink?"

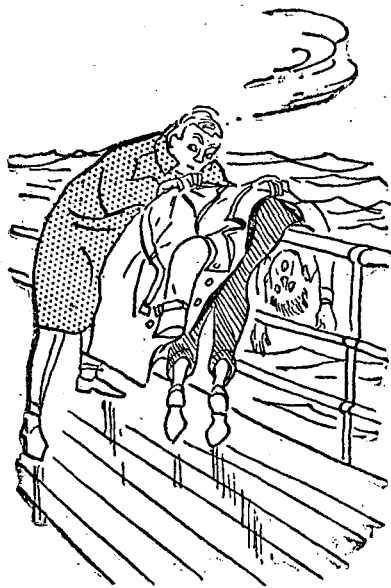
"Sure, but just one. Let's go."

That was the first and last show of nerves we had. We walked back to *our* cabin. I took the key from Arthur's coat pocket, unlocked the door. When I rang for the steward and ordered drinks, he said, "Yes, sir, Mr. Harper." After he left, Velma and I stared at each other . . . and laughed, too loudly.

I didn't shake as I opened Arthur's bag, hung up his (my) things. Velma opened her suitcase and also a smaller bag she had for toilet articles. I found a well-wrapped package in 'my' bag, which I tossed to Velma. She said it was a gift Arthur had mentioned buying her. I examined the wallet. He really had meant to live it up, had \$563 in cash. I had plenty of cash on me, but I'd purposely

left my wallet and papers ashore.

Velma and I had a few drinks, ate dinner casually, danced, returned to the cabin and slept soundly, to my surprise. The next morning was sunny and we relaxed in



deck chairs. I was wearing a new pair of walking shorts Arthur had bought in some bargain basement, and Artie's sport shoes, which fitted fine. At the Captain's Dinner that night, Arthur's tux was hardly in the best style, but it made me appear an old married type.

Oddly, there wasn't a single moment of remorse for either of us. Velma had difficulty remembering

to call me Arthur, but solved that by calling me "honey." We truly had a ball on the ship. Tuesday morning we docked at Nassau and as we were about to leave for Paradise Beach, the steward told me I was wanted in the purser's office. The purser asked mildly, "Are you and Mrs. Harper leaving us today, sir?"

"The ship is our hotel in port, isn't it?" I asked, tense.

"Mr. Harper, surely you remember buying only a one-way ticket for you and your wife? You told our city office you'd leave the ship here, island hop, then return by plane."

"Oh yes," I said quickly, "but I thought my secretary had informed your office about changing our minds. That girl—I don't know why I keep her. Anyway, we decided against the island hopping. Can we keep our cabin and return with the ship?"

"We're delighted you're staying with us. That will be an additional \$330 in passage. We'll take a check, if you wish, Mr. Harper."

"I'll pay it in cash, leaving less money for the wife to waste in the Straw Market."

When I returned to our cabin, I had to keep my anger under wraps. "Velma, why the hell didn't you tell me you and—that we were to leave the ship here?"

Her sweet face was so startled I knew she wasn't lying when she said, "Leave the ship? Why do that? When Ar—you first mentioned the cruise, I was told to ask for a week's leave. I mean . . . I don't get this."

I dug the tickets from an inside coat pocket, which I suppose I should have done at once. Sure enough, they were for a one-way passage. Showing them to Velma, I told her, "It doesn't matter now, but I think—*somebody* was going to stay here, or island hop and return later by jet, although I don't see any plane tickets and five hundred bucks isn't much for that kind of touring. Honey, think back carefully." I dropped my voice to a whisper. "Are you certain he didn't mention leaving the ship here?"

"No, no. I was to ask at the office for a week's leave and he was doing the same at his. A second honeymoon, he called it. He wasn't the talkative kind, which was one reason he bored the heck out of me, but after I asked for the divorce and made a scene when he refused, why—he said he had this surprise for me. We'd go on a cruise, that he realized I didn't have much fun in life, all that pleading jazz. I told him it wouldn't change my mind, but agreed to take the week's cruise since he already had the tickets."

"Well, let's forget it and start for the beach. I guess, with \$500, he could have spent a few days in the islands, then used a credit card for the plane ride back to New York. Let's go."

We rode a glass-bottomed boat to Paradise Beach and had a great time. Velma was a redheaded dream in a bikini, her slim body already a fine tan. Oiling her skin, I warned her to be careful of the tropical sun. We left the beach at 3 p.m. and took a boat back to the main street, where Velma bought the usual straw bag and hat and a few souvenirs. It was hot, and we returned to the ship to dine in air conditioned comfort, then went on the night club tour, sweating through Limbo dances, rum, and the usual tourist routine.

The following morning we swam at Paradise Beach again, then stopped at the post office where Velma sent a few cards to the girls in her office. I didn't send any cards; I was supposedly fishing 'someplace' on the Cape. I grinned as I thought how well I was keeping in Arthur's character; he'd be too cheap to waste money on postal cards. By 4 p.m. we were on the ship, tossing coins to the native divers while waiting for the liner to depart.

The two-day voyage back to New York was restful. We danced,

played bingo, slept a lot, and were very happy. I had murdered and really didn't feel a thing, except thankfulness that Velma would be mine from now on.

The night before we were due to dock, I filled out our Customs forms. We were each well within our duty free limit but Velma seemed a little nervous. "Honey, in the morning, all we do is walk off the ship?"

"Almost. Tonight we put our bags outside the door so they can be taken up on deck. Saturday morning, while the bags are being put ashore, we line up for Immigration: we'll be asked if we're citizens, and that's all. If necessary, I'll show Arthur's credit card for identification, and you'll show them your office ID. Then we get our landing cards and leave the ship. Customs men wait for us on the pier, we show them what we've bought, and we leave."

"That sounds simple. Honey, how about that bottle of perfume Ar—you bought me? Should I declare that? I've never even opened the box."

"No. If Customs insists on seeing it, doesn't believe it was bought here, we're still under our limit. Customs won't be any problem; we're not smugglers."

Saturday morning was clear and after an early breakfast we watched

the liner go slowly up the New York Harbor. Velma was still a bit tense, but Immigration was a snap. Our landing cards were stamped and as we started down the gangplank, me carrying Velma's small toilet bag, she whispered, "Will the Customs people search us? Undress us, like on TV?"

"Stop being silly. Velma, show them the things we've declared, all in the straw bag you're carrying. They may run a hand through our bags and that will be the ball game."

Velma handed me Arthur's gift package. "Honey, I . . . what will I do about this?"

"Baby, stop shaking. I told you, if asked, explain it was given to you here, last Saturday, before sailing. If they think it was bought in Nassau, why, you add it to our declaration."

"Frank, it *isn't* perfume!"

"Dammit, watch what you call me!" I whispered. "What's in the package, Velma?" I hefted it in my hand; it was not very heavy.

"I—well—I tore off one side of the paper wrapping a little while ago, curious as to the brand of perfume it was and . . . Honey, look at it!"

Turning the little package over to the torn side, I abruptly stopped walking down the gangplank.

What I saw was green—a thick green stack of \$20 bills!

People behind us called out to keep moving. Slipping the package into my trench coat pocket, I took Velma's arm, gripped it. "Where did this come from?"

"I don't know! I merely tore part of the wrapping off and—Oh, Fr—honey, what do we do?"

I stared at Velma. She gave me her helpless, childlike look of despair. She whispered, "I swear, I never knew he—he had money. Darling, what do we do?"

I forced a grin. "Relax and forget it, act natural. I'll keep it in my pocket for now, open it while we're waiting for Customs, spread the money around my pockets, no bulge. Velma, it's okay, the odds are the Customs men won't look in my pockets and . . ."

We'd walked off the gangplank. Now, two large men blocked our way. I knew they were police before one of them flashed his shield, asked, "Mr. Arthur Harper?"

"Yes. What's all this about?" I asked sharply, and as I said the words, at that split second . . . How clearly it came to me!

The other detective shook his meaty head in amazement. "You must be some kind of a nut. You steal \$50,000 from your boss and then have the nerve to return to New York . . ."

*"Whose house is of glass, must not throw stones at another"—
but then this is an automated age.*



DR. ZINNKOPE'S DEVILISH DEVICE

DID you ever stop to consider," Chief Endicott said to Larry Congour, FBI agent, "what would happen to a country if everyone's eyeglasses suddenly were shattered?"

"No, sir," said Congour, "I haven't. But it sounds interesting, I'll have to admit."

Division Chief Roger Endicott was a man in his early sixties. He had been considerably leaner and much happier in the old days with

the FBI when he had been in on the kill of big-name gangsters. Now he sat behind a polished desk on which lay a single sheet of paper bearing a coded message, and his big left hand rubbed repeatedly over the thick gray hair at the back of his head.

That hair-rubbing, Congour knew, was the tip-off. Chief Endicott had a major assignment for him.

"Something near sixty million

By Edwin P. Hicks

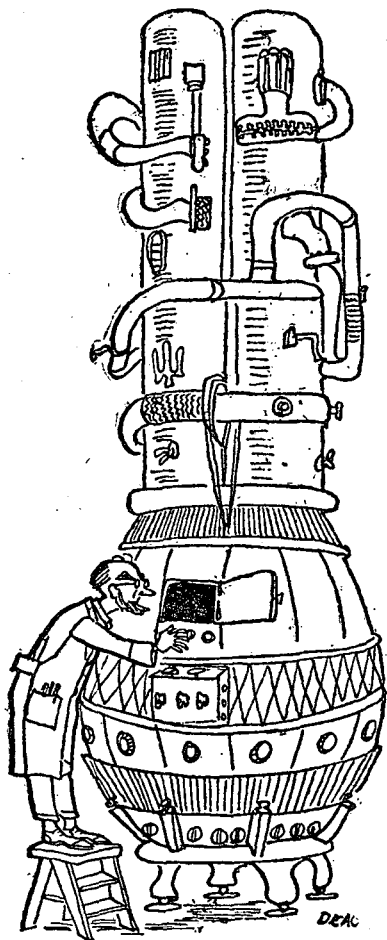
pairs of eyeglasses are sold to customers in the United States alone every year," said Endicott, "and remember, not many of us buy a new pair every year. And did you ever consider how many windshields there are in the country—on automobiles, trucks, jeeps—even airplanes. Then, too, there are plate glass windows, and ordinary windowpanes in residences, and electric light bulbs; glass bottles for soda pop, beer and liquor; lenses for cameras, microscopes and telescopes; test tubes and instruments of all kinds. I tell you, Larry, the number of different uses for glass is amazing. I forgot to mention drinking glasses, wine glasses, glass dishes—even good quality chinaware."

"Yes, sir. It must be terrific, but I never thought of it that way before."

"Who runs the army?" Endicott asked.

"Sergeants," Congour said, thinking of his tour of duty as a second lieutenant in World War II.

"Nonsense!" said Endicott. "I mean top officers. They usually are men with a little gray in their hair—all right, even some of your old buck sergeants are pretty grizzled. The fact is, a majority of the older officers, field grade and up, wear glasses. Map readers, plotters, your military brains can't function with-



out the assistance of spectacles."

"That's true, of course, but I never really thought about it."

"Well, here's where you're going to change your thinking habits. By the way, you wear glasses, don't you, Larry?"

"Only for reading fine print,"

Congour said. *What was the old devil leading up to? Another physical checkup?* Larry was forty-five, and there were plenty of active FBI men much older than that on the job every day. Some of them were dyeing their hair, most of them were either going on a diet or getting off one, trying to keep their poundage down, trying to keep in physical trim. No FBI agent with a wife and college-age kids could afford to get old.

"I've been doing some research on your college background," Endicott said. "You studied hard in the sciences—chemistry, physics, mathematics—why did you suddenly swing over to law?"

"Science came easy to me, but after I got my degree and served in the war and came home again—way back then—there didn't seem to be a happy future for young scientists. Too, I decided that test tube work was too confining. I wanted to get out more, go where the action was. Somebody told me about the FBI and the legal requirements, so I took a crash course in law, passed the bar exams, applied for an FBI job and got it."

Chief Endicott nodded. "You were good in science, one of the honor students in your class, and then you threw it all away to become a flatfoot!"

Endicott growled like a bear in disgust, but Congour knew he was pleased.

"Remember," the chief said, "a few years back—oh, ten years or more—that series of broken windshields out west, around Oregon or Washington?"

"Yes, sir, I recall something like that."

"The matter quickly disappeared from the news. For a time we put a muzzle on Dr. Bernard Zinnkopf. Then the government built him a laboratory and kept him and it under wraps. You've heard of Dr. Zinnkopf, Larry?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid not."

"One of Uncle Sam's Einsteins—a silent genius, one of the leading physicists of our time. He may be ahead of our time. I'll give you a file on him and his experiments. Read it, memorize it, and return it to me. Dr. Zinnkopf has the scientific brain of a Marconi or an Edison. He deals in laser beams, blacklight, sound waves, and atom smashing. He's so far out in science that other leading scientists of the world have difficulty understanding him, but in practical matters he wouldn't know how to drive a nail through a piece of tar paper. He's a genius, and it is vital to protect his discoveries from espionage."

Congour moaned inwardly. So

he was to become a bodyguard for this old crackpot. "Where is this old Professor What's-His-Name?" Larry asked without enthusiasm.

Endicott grinned. "Don't take it so hard. One of these days you'll be sitting behind this desk, and then you'll really know what being hamstrung is. Dr. Zinnkopf is the name—Dr. Albert Mendelssohn Zinnkopf. But when his mind is a million light years away creating, you could yell 'Hey-you!' all day and he wouldn't even know it. The esteemed professor only recently has been installed in a brand new laboratory halfway between Winslow and Devil's Den—ever hear of either before?"

Congour shook his head, stifling a groan.

"It's not as bad as it sounds. A \$50,000,000 atomic reactor is being built there, with power companies from a half dozen Midwestern states as well as the Federal government backing it. A number of top-rated scientists will staff the setup when it's completed, but Dr. Zinnkopf is the only one there at present. By the way, Devil's Den is a state park, and gets its name from a hole in the ground. Dr. Zinnkopf is there with a half dozen minor assistants working on his glass-smasher."

Congour whistled. "What are you afraid of, that he will try to use

it, stir up some trouble with it?"

"He already has," said Endicott. "All this is graveyard—on your oath—top drawer. This is what they told me in Washington, day before yesterday. He demonstrated his toy on an island in the South Pacific a month ago. There were a couple of uninvited trawlers offshore, as usual when we're trying out something. When that thing was triggered, the trawlers went blind. Our own ship went blind—all glass instruments on it shattered as if they were hit with a hammer. Three of our spotting planes fell like dead ducks into the sea. Young ensigns served as our ship's eyes, made repairs, plotted the course, searched out the damage done to the ship's equipment. They told me in Washington that the captain and all the senior officers on board, together with a delegation of Congressmen, aged ten years. They got down and kissed the dock when the ship finally reached a repair port. How the trawlers got home, nobody knows."

"Good lord!" said Congour.

"So the government hurried Professor Zinnkopf off to the shiny new laboratory just completed in the Devil's Den country and would gladly have buried the apparatus at the bottom of the cave, but they were aware certain powers now knew the score and might dig it up

again. As powerful as the test was, Dr. Zinnkopf wasn't satisfied. So, although they've taken the trigger of the machine from him, he's there in the laboratory making checks and tests and having a generally good time with his devilish device."

"I guess all this makes sense if you know the score," Congour said.

"Sorry, Larry, I can't fill you in on everything. Not now, anyway. You're better off not knowing the real score."

"Okay, but can you tell me how Zinnkopf's machine works?"

"I can tell the principle only. You've heard of glass or fine crystal being broken by a shrill note. You also know that when you blow a dog whistle, it makes no sound, yet your dog hears it. This Zinnkopf apparatus works on the same principle. It produces a powerful, all-shattering tone, so high-pitched no human can hear it. Yet it will smash lenses, beer bottles, windshields—everything made of glass within its range."

"What is its range?"

"They haven't told me that yet—but that's none of my business or yours."

"Okay, so I go there and keep a day and night watch over this super dog whistle for how long?"

"One of the scientists assigned to

the atomic reactor is in the pay of—shall we say—an unfriendly power. The reactor itself is an experimental project but of no military importance. We are certain that this man is after the Zinnkopf machine, and we are giving him plenty of rope."

"How will he hang himself?"

"You'll tighten the noose."

"Okay," Congour said, "but so far I don't even know where the rope is hanging."

"This tainted scientist," said Endicott, "goes by the name of Dr. Hans Kaempfert. We expect him on the scene next month. You are now Dr. Robert Fitzpatrick, with appropriate credentials from the University of Chicago. You are assigned to Dr. Zinnkopf's laboratory as an observer on leave from Chicago. Actually all you have to do is keep out of Dr. Zinnkopf's way. You are, appropriately enough, nothing but a cipher in the good doctor's mind. But don't let it hurt your feelings—the real pros working at Zinnkopf's side are hardly any closer to him."

"When Dr. Kaempfert arrives, you will lose little time in confiding your annoyance about Dr. Zinnkopf. You are irritated because Dr. Zinnkopf refuses to let you work on the machine as an equal. As a matter of fact, you feel you really deserve most of the cred-

it for creating it, but he grabbed all the credit and now goes around with his head in the clouds. Who does he think he is anyway—Isaac Newton? Then, when you have established your relationship with Kaempfert . . .”

“Yes?”

“Then get closer to him. Let Kaempfert know you still have access to the laboratory at all times—to Zinnkopf’s files, papers, everything. Let Kaempfert get the idea you can deliver the goods—the plans to the machine—and then ease off. Play hard to get. He’ll make you a money offer in time. Ask him three times what he offers and stick to it. When you make your final deal, get in touch with me before making delivery. Don’t let him have a thing until you get your instructions from me.”

Congour, as Dr. Fitzpatrick, found Dr. Zinnkopf to be as advertised—a very strange cookie. The good doctor tolerated his presence, and that was all. He was working, continually working, on improvements to the accursed glass-smasher. It was a large, double-barrel device with the steel housing at its base shaped something like a great pot-bellied stove. The overall height of the machine was about fifteen feet. A half dozen

assistants kept busy working on parts, assembling, polishing, making laboratory tests on the strength of the metal. At times hideous sounds emitted from the laboratory, and these sent the half dozen Doberman pinscher watchdogs, on duty outside, into a frenzy. There was a high cyclone fence around the laboratory, and the dogs roamed free inside, controlled by special dog handlers.

A quarter of a mile away, construction crews were beginning work on the foundation for the atomic reactor. There were no dog guards around the site of this construction because it was of no military importance. The dogs around Dr. Zinnkopf’s laboratory, Congour believed, were a mistake. You don’t bait a trap and stand over it with a loaded shotgun. Or do you?

Dr. Kaempfert, woolly-haired, with yellow eyebrows and round blue eyes, made his appearance right on schedule. He was assigned to the reactor plant, he said, and had arrived early to be in on the ground floor as construction began. He applied for permission to visit the laboratory and was put off by Dr. Zinnkopf. After the third rejection, Dr. Kaempfert complained that Dr. Zinnkopf was not extending him the courtesy one recognized scientist should

give to another without question.

If Dr. Zinnkopf heard any of Kaempfert's blasts, he showed no sign of it. Zinnkopf put in twelve hours a day at the laboratory, most of the time at his desk, fingering his straggly goatee, his gray eyes glazed—his great mind a trillion light years away in space, or perhaps down at the bottom of Devil's Den. He hardly knew that Dr. Kaempfert existed, and he apparently didn't give a scholarly damn about any courtesy one member of his profession might owe another.

By the second week, the indignant Dr. Kaempfert was confiding in Dr. Fitzpatrick, who had instant access to the laboratory—the men in charge of the Doberman pinschers permitting. Once when Fitzpatrick tried to take Kaempfert inside the enclosure, they were turned back, just as Dr. Fitzpatrick knew they would be. Kaempfert stormed and raged. It did no good. Dr. Fitzpatrick could get in, the guards said, but not Dr. Kaempfert.

There followed a week in which Kaempfert cursed government red tape while Fitzpatrick loaned a sympathetic ear, and then the newcomer got down to making propositions. He was in a position to make it interesting to Dr. Fitzpatrick if he would photograph Dr. Zinnkopf's machine. He

wanted to have a look at it—if for no other reason than to spite childish Dr. Zinnkopf. That would show the crazy old goat that he, a man of importance in the scientific world, was not to be de-



nied. The offer was made in jest, after the two of them had downed a couple of bottles of lager in a tavern across the Oklahoma state line, some thirty miles from Winslow. Dr. Fitzpatrick laughed, Dr. Kaempfert laughed, and two black-eyed Cherokee Indians, in a booth next to theirs, laughed.

A week later, over another bottle of beer, Dr. Kaempfert renewed the offer. He'd give two thousand dollars just for a picture of Dr. Zinnkopf's machine. Dr. Fitzpatrick pretended to be drunk, very

drunk, and Kaempfert knew he was pretending. Suddenly he was out with it—he would give ten thousand dollars for the plans of the Zinnkopf weapon. Fitzpatrick asked thirty thousand. For the next hour Dr. Kaempfert blustered and kept on ordering beer. Finally he agreed.

Fitzpatrick stipulated the payoff must be cash and all in five and ten dollar bills. Dr. Kaempfert said he would need three days to get the cash. They parted, both in extremely good humor.

The next morning Kaempfert left in a plane from the Fayetteville airport, heading east. That afternoon "Dr. Fitzpatrick" was in conference with Chief Endicott in a Fayetteville motel.

"Now what do I do?" Congour asked.

"Take the money and make delivery as you promised."

"You have a set of plans?"

"Yes. Give him not only the plans but also a working model of the machine."

"What!"

"You hire a truck, take him to the red barn a mile south of the government property. An exact working model of the Zinnkopf machine, except for what is called the trigger, will be hidden in the east side of a haystack to the right of the barn. Explain to him that

the machine was kept triggerless as a precaution and you could not get it, but that once they have the thing out of the country the plans will permit them to make a trigger very easily."

"What if he balks?"

"He'll not balk. Besides, here are a set of photographs showing Dr. Zinnkopf working on his big machine in the laboratory. Dr. Kaempfert will recognize at a glance that he has the real thing—a working model of the great glass-smasher."

"But *will* it work?"

"It will work."

Dr. Kaempfert nearly danced a jig when he saw the photographs and the plans, and he was speechless when Dr. Fitzpatrick took him to the haystack by the red barn and dug out the small model of Dr. Zinnkopf's machine. He handed an attache case to Dr. Fitzpatrick. Inside was the cash in five and ten dollar bills.

"The model is yours," said Dr. Fitzpatrick. "I took it from a back room in the laboratory. Dr. Zinnkopf will never miss it. The conceited ass has forgotten there was such a model. In fact, he wants to forget it because it was I who made the first working model. It was supposed to have been destroyed some time ago. Take the model; only don't let it be seen

around here. Leave the truck at the Rooney farm on Winslow Road before noon tomorrow."

Dr. Fitzpatrick helped load the model, which was of highly polished metal and resembled faintly a double-barrel bazooka, into the truck. It was six feet long overall, and with the shining gadgets on the side and in the steel drum which formed the base, weighed about two hundred pounds. They covered the machine with canvas, which Fitzpatrick provided, and Dr. Kaempfert drove the truck away.

Later that day, Fitzpatrick was informed, the scientist paid cash for a new station wagon in Fayetteville, and two men helped him load the machine into it. He gave instructions for the return of the truck to the Rooney farm and headed north over U.S. 71, with the model of the machine in the new station wagon.

That night Dr. Fitzpatrick was no more, and Agent Larry Congour was reporting to Chief Endicott.

"First the thirty thousand bucks," said Endicott.

"Heck," Congour kidded, "does a cop have to be honest all his life? I thought you and I would split it. Didn't think you'd want to hog it all."

"Cut me in on it!" another voice rang out.

Congour turned to see Dr. Zinnkopf, clad only in a gaudy pair of shorts, standing in the doorway to the adjoining room. He had an electric shaver in his hand and was about to rid himself of the famous Zinnkopf goatee!

"Meet Joe White," Endicott said. "He says he thinks you conned your science profs into any good grades you got in school. Says you don't know any more about science than he does. White is one of the instructors at the FBI Police Academy in Washington."

The two of them had a big laugh at Congour's confusion.

"But," Congour said, "I obeyed orders. Kaempfert actually drove away with that model. Where do we pick him up?"

"We don't!" said Endicott. "We let him take the little old machine out of the country. *It is the real McCoy*. It's the same machine that blew out all the glass on our ship in the South Pacific—as well as every piece of glass on the uninvited trawlers."

Congour's mouth opened wide.

"You see, Larry old man, we don't want that damn machine around. You pull the trigger and every piece of glass for a thousand miles around goes *smash*. We had a governor on it when we tested it

in the Pacific, but there is no governor on the machine Kaempfert is getting away with. And the plans for the trigger that went with the machine don't show any governor."

Congour's eyes got bigger.

"It's a dirty trick we're playing on our *friends*, I'll admit," said Endicott. "But they wanted it so badly, and this is one machine they are welcome to. The moment they spark that machine, *zingo*, their spectacles go bang, their light bulbs shatter, their picture tubes explode, their test tubes crumble, their million dollar telescopes go boom, they'll lose control over any spy-in-the-sky satellites they may have, and they'll all be eating out of paper plates."

"But what about the big machine in the laboratory?"

"Dummy. Made to scale, several times larger than the real thing—but just a shell, nothing at all inside."

"Okay, you wise guys," Congour said, "but what's to keep them from bringing that machine back over here someday—smuggle

it in and turn it on for vengeance?"

"Dr. Zinnkopf," said Agent White. "He's in a hidden laboratory in Alabama. He's developed another sound wave device attuned to a certain Achilles heel which he thoughtfully built into his first machine. As soon as those people turn on their stolen machine once and break every piece of glass in a thousand mile radius, Zinnkopf will press the button on his machine and the glass-smasher will vibrate into a million pieces. It's not complicated at all—you know how the space control boys have the power to turn on cameras on space ships in orbit and even on the moon. Very, very simple, Larry, I assure you."

"But the copy of the plans?" Congour persisted.

"Those plans are for the empty dummy—except for the trigger. The plans for the trigger which Dr. Kaempfert has are very, very real. Those people will discover there's something missing, of course, but they'll just simply have to try out the working model—and boy, will it work!"



There comes a time when what had been is acknowledged as lost, and the door is firmly closed thereon.



THEY CALLED him Tabby but not because he was cuddly—which he wasn't—or because his movements were catlike—which they were. People just felt that Octavius didn't fit his last name, Navarro, or his ancestral swarthinness.

Although he didn't like the nickname, he never got angry when anybody called him Tabby. He

never got angry at anybody for anything. He was an emotionless man whose job gave him the only kicks he got out of life. Tabby was the national syndicate's top trigger-man.

SPOTS

Right now he had a contract to make a hit on Charlie Blecker. The syndicate's Los Angeles executives were more than just a little peeved at their former bookkeeper who'd helped himself to one hundred thousand dollars of their weekly take and disappeared. It wasn't the money. One hundred thousand was easy enough for them to replace. It was a matter of principle. The syndicate deplored dishonest employees.

Navarro was a real pro. He spent the first week compiling a dossier on his intended victim—his friends, habits, interests, hobbies—everything he could dig up about him. When he was done he

studied the folder carefully and the man began to take shape.

Charlie Bleeker was a big spender who liked all the things a thirty-ish, swinging big spender would like. Yet he was too smart to start spending big until the heat had cooled down, Navarro figured. He'd have to stash the dough and try to blend in as best he could with the simple livers of the world.

Now, Navarro had to pick out the city Charlie Bleeker was most likely to hole up in. According to his dossier Charlie hated small towns and he'd never head for such obvious places as Chicago or New York. Since he was still friendly with his ex-wife and she

pretty but hard-faced chorus-girl type opened it a crack and looked at him questioningly.

"I'm a friend of your ex-husband," he said. "Can we talk? Inside?"

She looked him over carefully, seeming unable to make up her mind if she liked what she saw. "Which one?" she asked. "I've had three."

Navarro was surprised but didn't show it. "Charlie Bleeker."

She didn't bat an eye as she opened the door wider to let him in.

He refused her offer to sit down. "I won't take too much of your time," he said. "I'm looking for Charlie, and if you can tell me where he is I might be able to do you both some good."

She didn't buy it. "Look, I don't

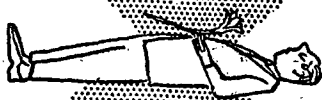
THE

lived in San Francisco, Navarro decided that would be the most logical place to start working.

After packing a clean shirt, a clean gun, and a toothbrush, he headed north in his inconspicuous late model black sedan.

Six hours later he was knocking on Norma Hendrick's door. A

MARK



By Lawrence Wasser

know what you're selling, but I do know that Charlie's on the run, and if a character like you is looking for him it's *not* to do him any good."

Navarro was smart enough to know when to switch his pitch.

"Okay, sister—"

"The name is Norma, *brother!*" she interrupted.

"Okay, Norma. Like I was starting to say, I got the contract on him and I thought . . ." he looked pointedly at the apartment's modest furnishings, ". . . you could use some dough."

For some reason that struck her as being extremely funny and she laughed until her mascara ran. He waited patiently until she stopped and wiped her eyes.

"I'll give you ten grand if you can tell me where to find him," he said. "I'll find him anyway, and you just might as well make some dough out of it. What do you say, sister?"

Now she was dead serious. "Look, mister, if you're not kidding about the ten grand I think I can earn it. Charlie called me from Las Vegas last night. He wants me to meet him down there, but I told him to get somebody else. I know the broken-noses are after him and I don't want to get caught in any cross-fire. He didn't tell me where he'd be, but I don't think

you should have any trouble finding him."

In his business it paid to be suspicious, and Navarro was all business. "How come you're so eager to sink on him? I heard you two were still friendly."

She looked at him as though he wasn't for real. "Listen, I found out a long time ago that friends pay off a lot better than enemies. Besides, for ten gees I'd tip you where my own mother was hiding out."

He thought that over for a moment, then bit. "Okay," he said. "And thanks for the tip. I appreciate it."

"Don't appreciate it, brother," she purred. "Pay for it."

He reached for the doorknob, then turned. "If he's there I'll mail you ten big ones."

Tabby got into his car mentally chewing on her tip. The more he chewed, the harder it became to swallow. It just didn't add up. Vegas was hardly the place a smart guy like Charlie was likely to pick for a hideout. It attracted too many of the kind of people he was trying hard to avoid. She was obviously trying to get him out of town by giving him a bum steer. He'd show her he wasn't the patsy she tagged him for.

He opened a fresh pack of Italian twists to smoke while he wait-

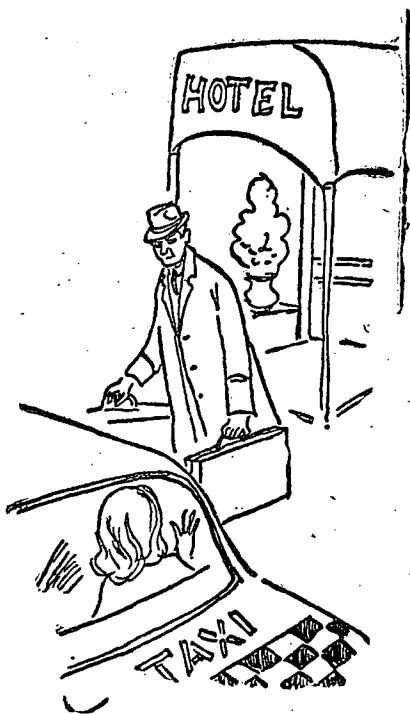
ed and was halfway through his third one when she came out. He started his car and trailed her to the drugstore and then to the beauty parlor. If his hunch was right she'd eventually lead him straight to his pigeon. He felt stronger than ever now that Charlie was here in San Francisco.

After a week of nothing, his feeling was getting weaker and weaker. *Maybe I got the job doped out all wrong*, he thought.

Then, the very next morning Tabby got his first break. A telegraph messenger went into her building and fifteen minutes after he left she rushed out and hailed a cab. Navarro followed her to a once fashionable but now somewhat seedy residence hotel. As soon as the cab pulled up, a man walked quickly out of the lobby carrying a suitcase and an attache case and jumped into the back seat. Navarro watched calmly as Charlie kissed his ex-wife warmly. The cab made a U-turn and drove back to Norma's building.

Navarro pulled up on the other side of the street about twenty car lengths behind the cab and watched Charlie and Norma go into her building.

About half an hour later Norma closed the window facing the street. She was carrying a bottle and two glasses on a tray.



"That's it, Charlie," Navarro said. "Drink and be merry; tomorrow—" He suddenly realized he was talking to himself and stopped. He'd heard that was one of the first signs of old age. Leaning back, he shifted into a more comfortable position. All he had to do now was wait until the streets were free of possible eyewitnesses to his getaway. He also wanted to give his victim time to get relaxed and unwary.

A little past midnight Tabby decided the time was right. He

reached into the glove compartment and from its specially built false bottom took out a .38 with silencer attached. After checking it carefully he put it in his pocket, then walked up the two flights and, using a celluloid strip, opened Norma's door quickly and quietly.

The bedroom was the first room off the foyer and Navarro opened the door and looked inside. Norma was asleep and alone in her bed. He checked the bathroom next; then the livingroom. Charlie was gone.

Navarro went back to the bedroom and shook Norma awake. She opened her eyes slowly and was about to scream when she recognized him. "You! What are you doing here? What do you want?"

"Charlie Bleeker. I saw him come in here with you, and he didn't come out. Where is he?"

She pulled the covers up around her chin and sat up. "Do me a favor," she said. "Turn around so I can throw something on. I feel uncomfortable in bed when there's a man in my room."

He turned around and saw the luggage, three suitcases and a large steamer trunk, piled in the corner. "Taking a trip?" he asked.

"That's right, and I'm not coming back. Any objections?"

"Not from me," he said.

"Okay. You can turn around now." She was wearing a negligee that was a lot more revealing than the bed covers. Navarro didn't seem to notice. "Now I'll say it again, sister. Where's Charlie?" "Oh, don't worry about him. He's gone. Good and gone."

He shook his head. "I was outside watching all the time. He didn't come out."

She pouted coyly. "Feel free to search the apartment. But I'm telling you he's gone."

Navarro was stumped. Maybe Charlie beat it out the back way, he reasoned. But why should he do that? He was sure Charlie hadn't spotted him. Yet he was gone, and that was the only possible answer. "I must be getting old," he muttered.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing," he said. "I was only talking to myself."

"You must be getting old," she kidded.

He almost-smiled. "That's what I was telling myself," he said. "Sorry I bothered you."

Tabby went back to his car and put his gun away. Then, turning on the inside light and tilting the rear view mirror, he searched his face for telltale age lines. At forty-five he *looked* ten years younger and *felt* like a man of thirty. Yet Charlie had spotted him. He shook

his head, turned off the light and slumped down in the corner of the seat with his eyes closed. In the morning he'd have to try to figure out the next place Charlie would logically head for.

The cab's screeching, braking stop woke him with a start and he tried to squint out the early morning's sunrays. The cabbie parked in front of Norma's building and went inside.

Navarro took out his comb and stroked his hair back in place. The cabbie came out, struggling with a suitcase in each hand and one under the arm. Navarro leaned forward. He recognized Norma's luggage. Then he leaned back. No sense following her now that Charlie knew she was being watched. From now on he'd avoid her like the plague.

The cabbie had stowed the luggage by the time Norma came out. She got inside and the cab took off. Then it took another second for Navarro to realize that she'd left the trunk behind.

He jumped out of his car. Maybe Charlie hadn't seen him. This time he took the stairs two at a time, worked the celluloid strip again, and headed straight for the trunk. It was locked, but it took him only a few seconds to open it with the help of his pocket-sized tool kit.

The method Norma had used to dispose of her ex-husband was obvious even to a person not familiar with the effects of poison. Navarro slammed the trunk lid shut with more force than was necessary.

Anger was something new to him—but so was an unfulfilled contract.

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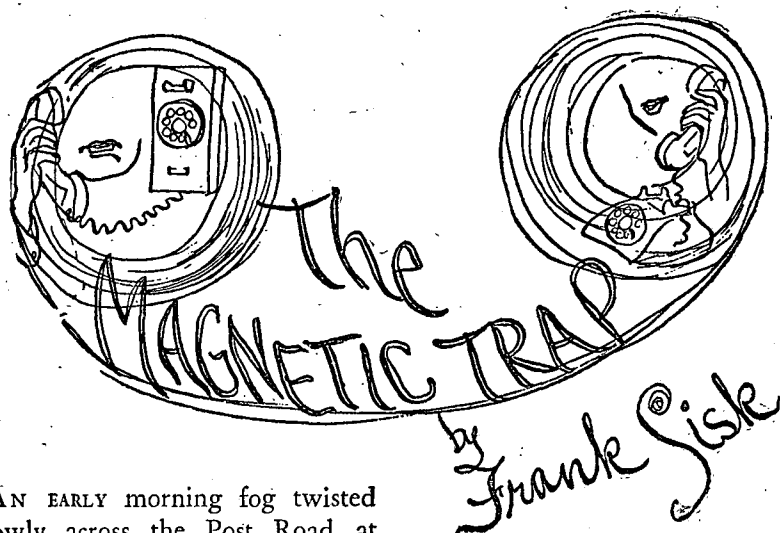
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Most sincerely,

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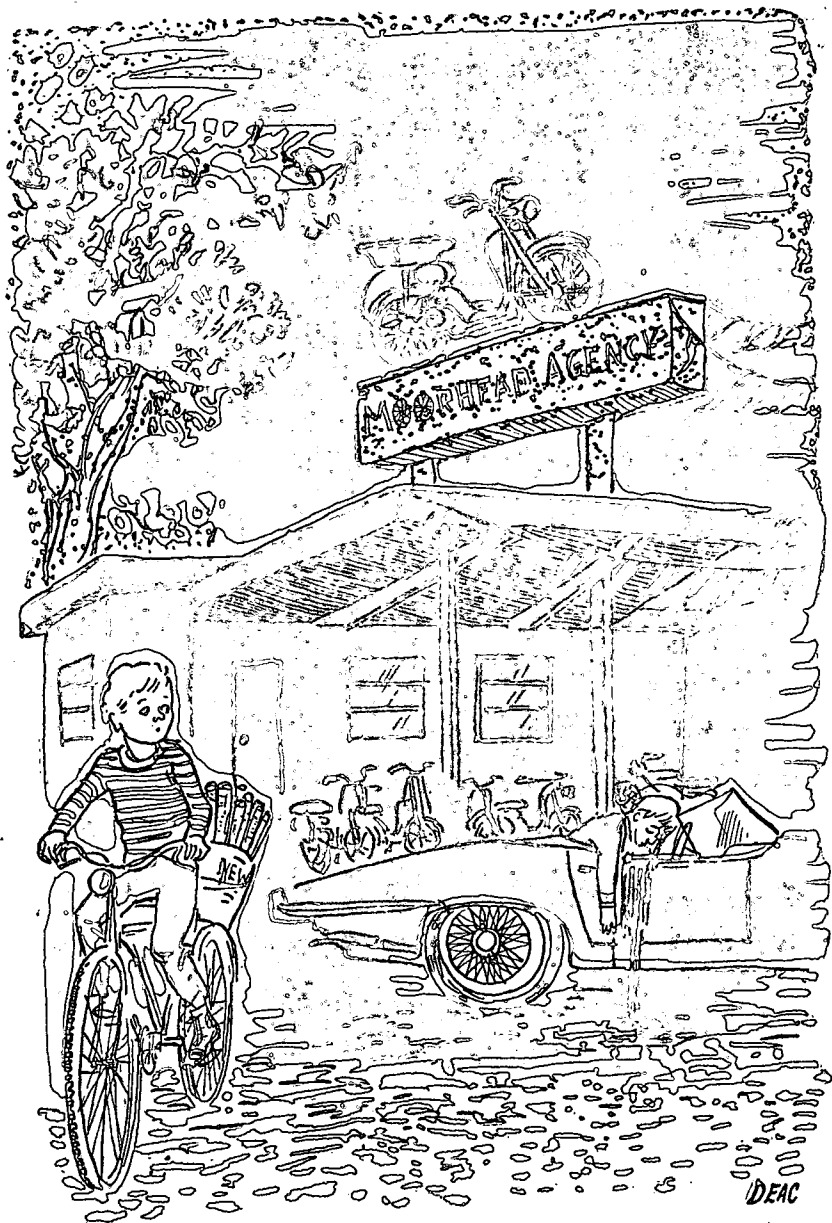
In this new dimensional world of electronics, response to one's own "sixth" sense may no longer be the ultimate.



AN EARLY morning fog twisted slowly across the Post Road at Four Corners, lifting. By seven a boy on a bike, coming through a rift, was able to see the maroon sports car with the wire wheels which was parked in the lot beside a dozen chained motorcycles that were the stock in trade of the Moorhead Agency. The boy dismounted at the locked office door and thrust a folded newspaper into the mail slot. Then he walked curiously along the front of the building to the car. When he was still twenty feet away, he noticed a man

slouched behind the steering gear. After a moment he recognized the man as Mr. Moorhead, owner of the place. The boy failed to recognize the man at once because of the sagging mouth and a swath of brown that masked the upper half of the face—but it was definitely Mr. Moorhead.

Ninety minutes later the police made positive identification: Andrew J. Moorhead, age 36, height 5'11", hair black, complexion sal-



low, married, wife's name Georgiana (Crosby) Moorhead, no offspring, record of motor vehicle violations only (minor). Death caused by small caliber bullet fired at close range and entering right temporal fossa, no evidence of egress.

The Moorhead residence at 3 Appleyard Circle was a white, well-kept house in neo-Georgian style with both a doorbell and a big brass knocker. Thomas McFate, captain in charge of homicide, used the mother-of-pearl pushbutton at exactly 10:13 by his wristwatch. He was accompanied by a rumpled detective in need of a shave named Petrini.

Within a minute Mrs. Moorhead herself opened the door. She had been notified earlier by telephone to expect these official visitors, and why. She showed no signs of surprise now.

"Please come in, gentlemen," she said in a voice firm and pleasantly modulated.

"Thank you, ma'am," McFate said, and both detectives followed her lead along a plushly carpeted hallway to a comfortable room with one wall of books that could only be called a library.

"Coffee, either of you?" Mrs. Moorhead asked.

McFate, who always wanted coffee, declined for both of them as he always did under such circum-

stances. As he took a deep seat in an overstuffed chair, he studied the woman quickly without seeming to move his hard gray eyes. She was an ash blonde in her middle thirties and rather attractive in an aseptic sort of way. She wore a simple but probably expensive dress the color of green fern, trimmed at the neck and wrists with a delicate white lace. She looked cool and composed. In McFate's opinion, she would have looked cool and composed in the tropics.

"You may smoke if you wish," she said.

Petrini started to draw a vile pipe from his coat pocket but thought better of it upon catching the caveat in McFate's expression.

"Your husband must have been quite a reader," the captain said to Mrs. Moorhead, with a glance at the booklined wall.

"Well, not really," she said. "The typical male reader—newspapers, an occasional news magazine, and once in a lifetime a bestseller with a reputation for spice."

A framed photograph on the mantelpiece above the neat red brick fireplace somehow confirmed the late Mr. Moorhead as being this kind of non-intellectual reader. It depicted him in a red sports shirt open at the neck to disclose a black-figured white foulard. His smile carried the hint of lechery,

his eyes a flirty gleam, it seemed.

"Then all these books are—" McFate purposely let the sentence hang.

"Most are my father's," Mrs. Moorhead said, "but many are mine."

"Then your father is alive?" McFate knew the answer to this question, as he would know all or part of the answers to future questions, but he liked to hear the nuances behind the answers.

Mrs. Moorhead lit a goldtipped cigarette taken from an ebony box on a table at her elbow. She used a tall silver lighter which stood beside the box. She did not inhale. "My father has been dead for nearly eight years," she said.

"I beg your pardon," McFate said. "One sad subject at a time is enough for any woman."

"But I inherited his love for these fine enduring things," Mrs. Moorhead continued. "Literature, all the arts, even the present-day theater. Dad worshipped O'Neill and Williams."

"Now that you mention it," McFate said, "have you ever been on the stage yourself, ma'am? I mean you've got the—" Again he let the sentence dangle.

"Not on, Captain. But of the stage, in an amateur way. Long ago at college." She took a showy puff of her cigarette. "I used to direct

and stage manage the productions."

"Interesting, very interesting."

"But it's been years." She seemed momentarily to contemplate the disappearance of time. "*Lysistrata* was the last thing we did. Years and years ago."

McFate cleared his throat and the air. "Well, time has a habit of slipping through our fingers, ma'am, so with your permission I'd like to put a little of it to use right now. There's certain essential information we must have in cases like this and I thought it best to get it now before you have to go through the ordeal of identifying the body."

Mrs. Moorhead said, "There can be no doubt it's Andy, can there?"

"None whatsoever."

"Then I'd rather not—"

"We'll cross that bridge later, ma'am, but the law requires a sworn identification by the spouse or next of kin. Does your husband have any close relatives in this state?"

"No."

"Detective Petrini will take notes as we go along. Are you ready, Bill?"

"Go to it, boss."

"How long have you and Mister Moorhead been married, ma'am?"

"Seven years. Seven years last month."

"At that time was Mister Moorhead engaged in the motorcycle

business, with his own agency?"

"No, he's only had the dealership for the past year."

"What was his business interest before that?"

"Oh, several things really. Insurance, used cars, real estate. Frankly, Captain, Andy rather drifted from one thing to another seeking his level, you might say."

"What, specifically, was he doing when you first met? That's one thing we'd like to know for certain background purposes."

Mrs. Moorhead smiled a bit sorrowfully, shrugged her graceful shoulders and snubbed out the half-smoked cigarette in a pottery ashtray as large as a pie plate. "Andy was the golf pro at the country club, the Blue Lawn. Dad and I had been members for years, but Andy was the first pro the club ever had who really knew his business. I began to take occasional lessons from him."

"And you married after your father's death?"

"Well, yes."

"Would your father have approved of the marriage?"

Mrs. Moorhead, for the first time, displayed a flash of real emotion: anger. "That's enough, Captain."

"Sorry, ma'am. Sometimes the questions we have to ask aren't too polite." McFate resettled himself in the deep chair and gazed at the

ceiling for a few seconds before inquiring, "Was it Mister Moorhead's custom to come home for lunch?"

"Really, Captain!"

"Missus Moorhead, this isn't as irrelevant as it may sound. We'd like to establish a daily routine, if possible."

"He did not usually come home to lunch," Mrs. Moorhead finally replied with some reluctance. "Except on Saturday, of course."

"Of course. Saturday is a half day at the motorcycle agency, isn't it?"

"More or less. There were times when the half day might be considerably extended by a special customer."

"Into a full day?"

"Yes."

"On these special Saturdays, ma'am, did your husband ever come home to lunch?"

"I'm afraid I don't keep such precise records as all that."

"It's a ten-minute drive from here to there, isn't it?"

"I've never clocked it."

"Well, obviously your husband was a busy man and closely tied to his business. May I assume that much?"

Mrs. Moorhead smiled tolerantly. "That's right. Andy liked the dealership and he was determined to make it a success."

"Was it making money?"

"Is that question necessary, Captain?"

"I think so, and I guess you've answered it, ma'am. Was it breaking even?"

"Almost. Another six months and—"

"To your knowledge, had your husband borrowed money from any source to make up his business losses?"

"He may have, but I don't think so."

"You, then, were his sole creditor, if you'll pardon the term?"

Mrs. Moorhead's smile this time was amused. "I gave Andy financial assistance, if that's what you mean. After all, we were business partners as well as marital."

"Thank you." McFate paused thoughtfully, then asked, "What time did your husband usually close shop on week nights?"

"Oh, nine, nine-thirty."

"And then he came right home?"

"Generally. On rare occasions, though, he might take a prospect to the Club for a few drinks."

"The Blue Lawn Country Club?"

"Why, yes."

"He's now a member himself?"

"Why, yes."

"Well, on these occasions when Mister Moorhead, for one reason or another, did not come directly home after closing up shop, were you ever concerned or worried?"

"I'm not disposed that way, sir."

"Last night, for instance—when he failed to come home at all, weren't you the least bit worried?"

"Ignorance is bliss, Captain, and last night I took a sleeping pill a bit after ten. Until this morning I was totally unaware that Andy hadn't come home."

"What did you do when you found out?"

"Do? I did nothing."

"Why not?"

"Well, actually I was considering several courses of action when your office telephoned and took the matter out of my hands."

McFate closed his eyes briefly, said, "I see." Then, "Let's see if we can reconstruct a few things that happened last night at the motorcycle agency. Maybe some of it will link up with something you already know but don't regard as significant. First, your husband locked up around nine-thirty, according to what one observer tells us."

"What sort of an observer?" Mrs. Moorhead's tone was faintly scornful.

"This one is a young fellow who owns a motorcycle," McFate said. "He says he was driving by shortly after nine-thirty and saw the office lights on. He wanted a new spark plug, so he wheeled over to the door and tried it. It was locked. He

knocked, and your husband came from a back room—the stock room, presumably—and told the young fellow the place was closed for the night and to come back in the morning. The young fellow tried to explain that he only wanted a plug but your husband told him to clear out. Seemed to have something bugging him, to quote our so-called observer.”

“This isn’t very helpful, is it?”

“Not unless you can think of a reason why Mister Moorhead would be so brusque with a customer.”

“I imagine he was often brusque with customers.”

“I see,” McFate said, again closing his eyes. “Well, anyway, around ten the lights in the office went out.”

“According to certain observers?” asked Mrs. Moorhead with a note of mockery.

McFate solemnly nodded. “That’s right. Run-of-the-mill people passing by in cars. A few of them live in the neighborhood there.”

“Is that all you have?”

“Not quite, ma’am. There was one other observer, an elderly man who lives in the rooming house diagonally across the road from your husband’s place of business. He happened to be looking out his window around ten-fifteen and he

saw a man—let’s assume it was Mister Moorhead—walk to the maroon car and get in. He had somebody with him, however.”

Mrs. Moorhead showed definite interest. “Somebody?”

“A woman,” McFate said. “Our elderly man is almost sure it was a woman. Of course, he was seeing this from at least a hundred yards off. The only light was from a single highway luminaire, and the fog was already beginning to roll in.”

“That’s all he saw?” Mrs. Moorhead asked with a hint of tension.

“Well, he saw the headlights of the car go on and he waited for it to move away. But it didn’t move. He watched for a few more minutes, then went to bed.”

“But he was sure that it was a woman?”

“Fairly sure. Why?”

Mrs. Moorhead moistened her lips, then said, “I’m not really surprised.”

Leaning forward, McFate asked, “Somebody you know?”

“Somebody I know of, rather.” Mrs. Moorhead reached automatically for another cigarette and got to her feet. “I’d hoped to keep silent about the matter, out of respect for Andy’s memory. But under the circumstances I must tell you what I know.”

McFate shot a glance at Petrini. “By all means, ma’am.”

Mrs. Moorhead used the tall lighter. "There was a woman—actually a very young woman, a girl—who had been pestering Andy for the last several months. She had a crush on him and she wouldn't let him alone no matter what he did to discourage her."

"What is her name?"

"I don't really know. Pansy or Patsy, something like that."

"How did this young woman happen to meet your husband?"

"In the line of normal business routine. She came to the agency with her brother, on the rear saddle of a cycle. That should give you an idea of her viewpoint."

"Where did you get these little details, ma'am?"

"From Andy. The situation amused him at first. Even when she began phoning him here at home, he wasn't inclined to take it seriously. He rather kidded her along, like an adult with a child. But she soon proved to be no child."

"I see."

"About a week ago she began to make the most absurd threats." Mrs. Moorhead dispatched her fresh cigarette into the pie plate. "Even now, in the light of what's happened, it all seems incredible."

"What was the substance of these threats?"

"Well, she said she was preg-

nant, but I never believed her."

"And accused your husband of being responsible?"

"Yes. Ridiculous!"

"Did Mister Moorhead consider it ridiculous?"

"Of course. Whenever she took this line, Andy summarily hung up the phone. And when she rang back he wouldn't answer."

"You take this as a sign of innocence?"

"There were other reasons. Especially when she began to make these wild threats."

"Yes, please tell me about those threats, ma'am."

"To be cruelly concise, this little baggage told Andy that he must leave me and go away with her. If he refused, she would kill him. Or her brother would kill him."

"You heard only one side of these phone talks, didn't you?"

Mrs. Moorhead smiled mysteriously. "On several occasions I heard both sides," she said.

"You, uh, eavesdropped on an extension?"

"I listened on an extension, yes, at my husband's request. He felt during this last week that the girl was getting out of hand, and he wanted a witness to these vicious threats, just in case."

"So he asked you to listen in?"

"More than that, Captain. He asked me to record the conversa-

tions on tape, say for evidence."

McFate's cold eyes gleamed. "Did you manage to do that?"

"I managed to get substantial parts of the last two conversations."

"I don't suppose you have them around?"

"Of course I have."

McFate worked out of the deep chair to his feet. "Do you mind playing that tape for us, Missus Moorhead?"

"I do mind! But I also realize it's necessary."

Ten minutes later Mrs. Moorhead, with a portable tape recorder set for playback, lit a third cigarette and said, "In either of these cases, you'll notice I pick up the dialogue midway. This is because I was not sure, until I heard her voice, who was on the phone. As a result there was always a non-recording lapse while I—"

"... don't believe you're being very reasonable," said a recorded male voice.

"Andy the dandy," snapped a waspish female voice. "Big word, reasonable. I'm shook, I'm real shook, lover boy."

"Don't you think you're being unjust, under the circumstances," the male voice said calmly.

"So what. I know what I want and I know how to get it. So there."

"Just what is it you really want?"

A second's pause. "A daddykins for my unborn child. You." A giggle followed.

"But why me?"



Another pause slightly longer than the first. "You're as good a candidate as any."

"And if I refuse?"

"You'll live long enough to be sorry—no longer. Count on it."

"I don't think I quite understand. Spell it out for me."

Another short pause. "I don't play seconds to nobody, mister. You leave that bag you're married to. That's what I mean. And you and me cut out of here for good."

"I can't possibly do that."

"If you don't, my brother will kill you. Or I'll kill you. I swear it."

You have until tomorrow night to make up your mind."

"Goodbye and no, thanks," the male voice said with finality, followed by a distinct *click*.

A pause much longer than the preceding three was then succeeded by another recorded voice easily recognizable as Mrs. Moorhead's: *"Be it attested that the foregoing is a truly recorded telephone conversation between my husband Andrew J. Moorhead and a female known even to him only as Pansy or Patsy on this twelfth day of September at nine-fifty-five p. m., nineteen sixty-six."*

The second conversation, except for verbal variables, was materially like the first, also concluding with Mrs. Moorhead's quasi-legal attestation.

"I'd like to take that tape along with me," McFate said.

"You're welcome to it," Mrs. Moorhead agreed, "if you think it will help your investigation.

Driving back to headquarters, McFate said to Petrini, "When you let me off, I want you to tour the city and talk to everyone you see on a motorcycle."

"And ask for Pansy?"

"Or Patsy," McFate said.

An hour later Captain McFate took the reel of magnetic tape to Arnold Blum, who ran the I.D. lab. "Didn't I hear you have some

new equipment here for analyzing voices?" he asked.

"A sound spectograph?" Blum inquired in his soft whispery voice.

"I guess that's it. What's it do?"

Blum's smile had a quality of silken patience. "What does it do? Well, it does very efficiently what it is intended to do, Captain. It scans eighteen inches of magnetic tape six hundred times in a single minute and converts the sound frequency and amplitude to—"

McFate raised a hand. "All I want to know is whether this spectograph makes a readable print of the human voice."

"As readable as a fingerprint," Blum assured him.

"Good. On this tape there are three different voices. Make prints of each. How soon?"

"Come back after lunch, Captain. Two-ish."

It was one-ish when Petrini reported in: "No Pansy or Patsy, boss, and I've talked to seventeen Hondas and twelve Yamahas. But one thing is sure. This Moorhead was a real swinger with the leather set. Viola, Mimi, Karen, Joanie—I got the last names too—were just a few of the chicks he chopped it up with, and I don't mean goose liver."

"I thought as much," McFate commented.

"But nary a one bore the guy a

grudge. In fact, all hated to hear he was gone. A big spender, they said, and loads of laughs."

McFate's phone rang. It was Blum. "I'm ready now," he whispered. "Interesting too."

McFate and Petrini started the long walk along the echoing corridors. In the lab Blum greeted them with a smile of quiet satisfaction.

"Well?" McFate asked.

"Come over here a minute, boys."

The detectives followed Blum to a wooden table upon which six strips of paper, approximately 10" x 10", had been tacked down flat. Each paper contained an intricate pattern of inked lines that reminded McFate of an enlargement of a map showing the estuary of a river. He said as much to Blum.

"An excellent analogy," Blum purred. "For the vocal chords *are* in every sense the meeting place of our enunciatory tides. It is here that our lips, teeth, tongue, soft palate and jaw muscles commingle and—"

"Let's rest the jaw muscles," McFate said. "Tell me what these tracings mean. Maybe I'll understand that much."

Blum sighed. "As you wish, Captain. To put it in a nutshell, these are visual facsimiles of the electronic impulses recorded by the voices on the tape you brought in."

"I gathered that. What do they tell us?"

"You said the tape contained three different voices, Captain," Blum said silkily. "These patterns tell us there are only two."

"Two? Are you sure?"

"Unmistakably. The articulators never lie. Two of these prints represent the male voice. Two represent a female voice attempting to disguise itself through higher pitch and somewhat flat delivery. And these last two represent that same female voice presumably speaking normally."

"Impossible," Petrini said.

"She said she used to be a stage manager at college," McFate said, shaking his head.

"But what I mean, boss," Petrini said, "is how did she get her husband to cooperate?"

Blum intruded a whisper. "After listening to the tape a few times only, I think it safe to assume that the male did not intentionally cooperate."

McFate snapped his fingers. "Those peculiar pauses."

"You noticed them?" Blum asked. "Step over here and listen to this particular passage." He went to a bench, with the detectives at his heels, and switched on a tape recorder.

"*I don't play seconds to nobody, mister,*" the alleged Pansy or Patsy

said. "You leave that bag you're married to. That's what I mean. And you and me cut out of here for good."

"I can't possibly do that," Moorhead's voice said, surprisingly calm at second hearing.

Blum stopped the tape. "The male takes the proposition rather nonchalantly, doesn't he? As if he were replying to—Well, just listen to this." He lifted a small portable recorder from the floor, placed it on the bench and flipped a trigger.

"There's roast beef for dinner tonight," whispered Blum's recorded voice. "We shall dine at seven sharp. I'm counting on you. Now promise me that you'll be here on time."

"I can't possibly do that," Moorhead's voice said.

Blum turned smilingly to Mc-

Fate. "I believe that's how it was done. The female phoned the male. Her side of the recorded conversation was loaded to elicit a desired response. Later she erased her part of the dialogue and dubbed in her irascible alter ego. The noticeable pauses between exchanges occurred because our female lacked the technical facility to dub always close to the male's voice. Probably afraid of erasing the cue."

"Erasing the cue." Petrini dazedly rubbed his beard stubble. "Do you think she might have erased her husband, Captain? A refined lady like that?"

"Let's find out," McFate said, starting toward the door. "Right now she's at the morgue to make a formal identification of the body. She may have tears in her eyes, but I doubt it."

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Resiliency, strangely enough, seems to be a subtile adjunct of punctuality.



CLAUDE ERNST heard clocks striking in his head the way some people hear voices, but never thought of this as a mental aberration. For the most part, he found it useful to know what time it was without having to look about for a timepiece. If an important customer were due at ten, bong! Ten would strike in his head no matter how deeply he was engrossed in his figures. It was the same at closing time, seven, and at 7:55 when he slapped his money on the zinc of the corner cafe and started home for dinner. At precisely eight, not a minute before or after, he would open the door of the

by Audrey
Davenport

apartment over his bookshop, greet his wife with automatic affection, and sit down on the edge of the bed to exchange his shoes for his slippers.

No, he didn't consider it an aber-

ration, and neither did he think he'd been born with a special gift. He knew perfectly well that his youth had been haunted with so many gongs, bells, and buzzers that these were merely the echoes that remained after the real ones had been silenced.

His childhood on a farm in Alsace had been regulated by a gong that hung by the back door. Its sonorous boom summoned him to the milking, to meals, to work in the fields, and even sounded the knell of an early bedtime. Later, an alarm system in the school he attended divided his waking hours into forty-minute and ten-minute intervals, and a similar setup had been applied in the munitions factory where he'd worked during the war when a lung weakness kept him out of the army.

The phenomenon was of little interest to Claude and he had never mentioned it to anyone, not even to Berthe. It did provide him, however, with the only individual trait in an otherwise pale personality; his punctuality was noted by everyone who knew him.

"You can set your watch by Claude Ernst," became a byword, and many of his neighbors around St. Sulpice did, indeed, check their watches by one of his daily movements.

Claude Ernst had had very few

dreams or aspirations in his life. Once he had dreamed of children, but his wife of seventeen years was barren. He dreamed from time to time of being able to play the organ, but he couldn't read a note of music and it hadn't occurred to him to study it. He dreamed, with every new shipment of books, of uncovering a rare edition, but his finds had been few and insignificant.

Then suddenly, in his forty-eighth year, a new dream, call it even an aspiration, stirred in him. The cafe where he went twice a day to drink an aperitif or a beer wasn't the kind that attracted tourists, or even the impoverished young foreigners who swarmed the quarter. It was small, dark, and not very clean. Consequently, almost all the faces there were familiar, and the occasional new ones were so like the old that he scarcely noticed them.

One day in the middle of winter, however, Claude saw a young woman in her twenties installed at a corner table, writing in a student's notebook. She was not really pretty, certainly not beautiful. Her nose was not quite straight, and her mouth was too full. Still, his eye was caught by her clean, shiny brown hair, by the warm glow that the heat of the cafe brought to her complexion, and by a general air

of softness and femaleness. His gaze lingered until his "clock" struck 12:55, then he started home for lunch.

The girl was there every day after that, at midday. She let a small coffee grow cold as she bent over her notebook, oblivious of anyone else. Probably writing a novel, Claude thought with approval, and wondered whether someday he would be selling it in his shop. Toward the end of each morning he began to look forward to seeing her, to watch her face begin to glow from the heat, and after some weeks he began to dread the coming of spring for he knew that she, like so many others, only worked in cafes during the winter months because they had no fuel in their rooms.

Although the girl began to occupy a small part of his thoughts, and even once invaded his dreams, Claude was not in any sense falling in love with her. Rather, she had made a little stir, like a breeze that partly opened a door that he had closed long ago. He found himself looking up from his books when he heard the click of high heels on the pavement outside, to catch a glimpse of slim legs under short skirts hurrying by. Sundays, when he and Berthe walked along the quai or in the park, he was newly aware of pretty women of

all ages and thought how pleasant it would be when they shed their heavy winter coats for sheer dresses and bared arms.

From here it was only a step to experiencing a desire not only to look at pretty girls with shiny hair, but to talk to them, stroll with them in the park, even to touch a hand to a slim waist, to caress a rounded bosom. Then one afternoon as he was cataloguing a ten-volume work by a 19th Century Jesuit, he stopped suddenly and asked himself why he shouldn't do these things before half a century of his life had gone by.

Berthe, he reflected over the beans and sausage, had not had a trim waist since 1950, and her complexion was yellowed by a malfunction of the liver. He wondered whether she was content with her life and what, in fact, she did with the hours that he was downstairs in the shop. Although she marketed and cooked, she had a woman in to clean their four rooms. He knew that she devoured cheap paperback novels, the sort that he didn't stock himself; he knew that she hated Paris and would have preferred the country near Evreux where her father had orchards, but she didn't complain, and she didn't nag him for things she knew were out of reach. She was really, as women went, a very reasonable woman. It

was a pity, for her sake, that they'd had no children—an occupation in youth and a solace in old age—but now, for the first time, he was pleased that there weren't any.

If the idea of murder entered his mind, it exited almost immediately. He just wasn't the type. Nor was Berthe the sort of woman who got murdered. It just wouldn't look credible in the Sunday papers and besides, a guilty conscience or fear of discovery had no place in his plans.

March blew in with a sunny spell that brought crowds out to bask on the cafe terraces. Claude's "clock" continued to strike the measured movements of his days and nights, and the only thing that was different was that he began to complain to his drinking companions of a slight kidney ailment that often forced him to go off for a few minutes to relieve himself.

On April 19th, at seven o'clock, he closed the door of his shop and walked to the cafe where he ordered an aperitif. Presently he excused himself, walked through the door marked W.C., then swiftly out a back door that led to the courtyard and into the street. Seconds later he mounted the two flights of stairs to his apartment, opened the door, and strode to the kitchen.

Berthe turned, astonished to see him so early, and opened her

mouth to ask what had happened. With the flat of his hand he gave her a powerful swat on the side of her head that sent her spinning into the pantry where she landed in a bin of potatoes; then he turned and left the apartment, closing the door behind him, went down the street, reentered the cafe by the courtyard door, and picked up his drink and the strand of the conversation.



At five to eight he paid for his drinks, and at eight precisely he entered his home and called out a greeting to his wife.

Not finding her in the kitchen, he went into the bedroom and found her sitting on the bed, staring at him in horror.

"Berthe, what's the matter? Are

you ill?" he asked solicitously.

"Claude!" She shrank back as he approached her. "Why did you do it?"

"Do what? My dear, what is the matter? You're trembling! Tell me at once!"

She burst into sobs. "First you beat me, then you lie! Have you become a monster?"

"A monster? Beat you?" He sat beside her and pulled her, protesting, into his arms. "My dear, you must calm yourself and tell me exactly what is wrong. There, there!" he stroked her shoulder and waited for her trembling to subside.

Berthe looked up at him, now more puzzled than afraid. "You mean you don't remember?" she whispered.

"Remember what, chérie? Tell me what has upset you so."

"You came home," she said slowly, "almost an hour ago. So early! You came into the kitchen and . . . and beat me! Here, see the bruises, there . . . and there! And then you left!" She stared at him. "Don't you remember, Claude?"

"Berthe, my dear, I was not here an hour ago. I went straight to the cafe, as usual. You have only to ask, everyone saw me. But if someone has come and done such a terrible thing to you we must

notify the police at once!" He stood up and started toward the phone in the entrance hall.

"No, Claude! Don't telephone!"

"But why? Whoever it is who comes into my house and hurts my wife has to be caught and punished!"

"Oh, Claude. No!" She sank down again, her face in her hands.

He stared down at her, a look of sudden comprehension crossing his face. "It's something you imagined, isn't it, Berthe?" he asked softly. "You slipped and hurt yourself and then, a moment's amnesia, a moment's madness, perhaps, and you imagined a thing that couldn't have happened."

He came closer and took her hand. "But there's nothing to worry about, my dear. Women of a certain age have such experiences, I'm told. Tomorrow we'll see the doctor and have him prescribe a sedative. For tonight, you must rest. I'll finish preparing dinner, and I'll make you a hot drink before you go to sleep."

Berthe hardly uttered a word for the rest of the evening, only glancing at her husband from time to time with the look of a hunted deer. He talked in the normal way, of a couple of sales he had made that day that were out of the ordinary, of the new government crisis. When the light in the bedroom

had been turned out he put a hand on her shoulder to reassure her, but she shrank away. "Tomorrow morning the doctor," he murmured. Then he turned on his side and fell into a deep, refreshing sleep.

The following evening it was almost twenty past seven when he let himself noiselessly into his apartment, once more surprised his wife in the kitchen, and let her have a straight left to the eye. Regaining the cafe a couple minutes later and taking up his drink, he reflected that by morning she would have a memorable shiner.

When he came home promptly at eight his supper was laid out on the table, but his wife had locked herself in the bedroom. He tapped at the door, calling her name, then knocked more forcefully, insisting on knowing that she was all right.

"Berthe," he called out, "if you don't open the door at once I shall have to call the doctor, and perhaps the police. I must know that you are all right! As a matter of fact," he added, "the doctor was at the cafe when I left. He must still be there. I'll run and fetch him."

A moment's hush, and then she opened the door. "You say you just saw the doctor, at the cafe?"

"Of course. You know he often drops by on his way from the

clinic. We arrived about the same time. He told me to remind you to take the sedative he gave you this morning."

Then he looked more closely and saw that her eye was swelling rapidly. "My God, Berthe! Your eye! Have you hit yourself with something?"

She took a step backward, shook her head in a dazed fashion, then closed and locked the door.

Claude ate his supper with relish, washing it down with some wine, then took the evening paper to his chair under the lamp. When he had finished it, he cleared the table, stacked the dishes in the kitchen sink, and laid out a game of solitaire. At a quarter to eleven he yawned, put away the cards, tried the bedroom door which was still locked, and then knocked on it gently. There was no response.

He shrugged, took off his clothes, found a blanket in the hall closet, and stretched out on the sofa. It was not as comfortable as his bed, but he managed to sleep well enough.

In the morning the door remained closed. He prepared his own breakfast and opened his shop. He worked at his catalogues through the morning, interrupted only once by a regular customer, and several times by the tantalizing click-click of a pair of high heels

on the pavement outside the shop.

He cut short his pre-luncheon drink, explaining to his old friend the curé, who had joined him, that his wife was not feeling well. "Nerves," he added. "I must get back early and see if she needs something."

But apparently Berthe had taken with her whatever she needed. Her clothes were gone, and a few small relics that she had cherished. Claude found some soup on the back of the stove, and fresh bread purchased that morning. He carried it, with some cold ham and a round of cheese, to the dining room and ate slowly, and with pleasure.

That evening he explained to the concierge that his wife had gone to Evreux to care for her mother, who was ill. As Berthe had no intimates, no other explanations were necessary except for a casual remark to the doctor and to the curé, who both inquired after her.

Before summer had officially arrived, Claude received notice of her intent to divorce him. Of course he agreed, through his lawyer, to permit the divorce, and offered her a handsome settlement, although strictly speaking it wasn't called for since she had deserted him for no apparent reason. Still, one might as well be generous.

During that spring and early summer, somehow his interior

clock ran down, and the hours of his life ceased to strike with such monotonous regularity. Sometimes he closed the shop early and went for a stroll in the Luxembourg where he would find one or two girls with whom he had struck up an acquaintance. He took his aperitifs in a variety of cafes, and lounged on sunny terraces in different parts of the city.

He considered the matter of his annual holiday. All the summers of his marriage had been spent at his wife's family place in Normandy, but now he contemplated spending the month of August at one of the seaside resorts where brown-skinned girls in bikinis could be found in abundance. He did, in fact, spend a delightful four weeks on the south coast of Brittany, and felt ten years younger when he unlocked the door of his shop in September. He gave the cleaning woman a little extra to come in and prepare his meals, and many of his evenings were spent learning to read music. Perhaps someday the curé would let him try the organ at St. Sulpice.

It was in October, or perhaps early November, that he heard that his former wife was rumored to be a bit "queer," never leaving her room. It was a pity. He himself found life a constant source of stimulation and enjoyment.

Prompted by time and "a little trouble," one's perspective often manifests an amazing volatility.



the EYE of the Pigeon

By
EDWARD
D.
HOCH

TOMMY CAME awake suddenly, as he always did, trying for an instant to remember where he was. He knew from the softness of the mattress that it was not a jail cell, nor his old flat back in North Beach, and almost as quickly as these thoughts passed through his mind he remembered that it was Sarah's place. Good old Sarah—she'd always had the softest bed in town.

"You awake?"

He opened one eyelid and saw her standing by the side of the bed, wrapping the familiar faded housecoat around her ample thighs. "Yeah," he mumbled into the pillow. "I'm awake."

"You getting up? Want me to fix breakfast?"



"Yeah." He sighed and closed the eye again. It had been a good many years since he'd hopped out of bed the first thing in the morning; it had been a good many years

since he'd held a job that demanded it. Tommy Far was middle-aged at thirty-eight, a small balding man with a weak chin. People rarely looked twice at him, which was often an advantage.

"Come on, Tommy. Coffee's on!"

Finally he rolled out of the bed and rubbed the sleep from his eye. He had only one eye now. The other had been lost one hot afternoon in the exercise yard at State Prison, when a man he didn't even know had kicked him in the face during a brawl. "All right, all right," he mumbled. "Let me brush my teeth and stuff, huh?"

She was waiting with the coffee when he reached the table, and he sat in his soiled undershirt drinking it. He'd known Sarah Banburg off and on for the past five years, ever since he'd got out of prison the last time. He supposed she'd been good for him. Certainly she'd fed him and loved him, and talked him into getting a glass eye instead of the patch he'd wanted to wear. In many ways she was like him, one of the ugly people who lived by their wits on the fringes of society. He sometimes tried to picture her as a young girl, but that was impossible. People like Sarah Banburg had been old all their lives.

"You going to get us some mon-

ey today?" she asked him from the stove. The scent of frying bacon was heavy in the air. "The money from my check's just about gone."

"I'll get some," he told her through a mouthful of toast. "Some good horses running at Aqueduct today."

"I'll need money for food tonight, Tommy. If you're going to stay here you gotta pay your way! Not like last time!"

"I'll get the money. Stop bugging me so early in the morning."

He left her after breakfast, breathing in the crisp spring air as he walked quickly past the brownstone fronts along Clark Avenue. When he reached the bowling alley, a few of the regulars were already there, studying the day's forms over coffee. Tommy spoke to a couple of them and then went through to the rear, where Big John was racking up the balls for a game of pool.

"You're out early," he said to Tommy.

"I'm staying with Sarah for a few days. She's just down the street. What looks good at Aqueduct today, John?"

"You know as much as I do. Some of the boys are getting down on Tough Tiger in the fifth."

Big John Miller was a giant of a man who had run the bowling

alley and pool hall on Clark Avenue for more years than anybody could remember. None of the kids came there any more, because Big John had never tried to compete with the color and chrome of the new places in the shopping centers. He didn't seem to mind. He was content with customers like Tommy Far and the others.

"Maybe I'll shoot a game with you," Tommy said. He liked pool, because his eye was no handicap.

"Sure," Big John told him.

They were halfway through the third game when the call came for Tommy. He took it in a musty phone booth that smelled of stale cigarette smoke. "This is Tommy."

A familiar voice spoke softly into his ear. "Need some dough these days, chum?" Tommy grunted in recognition and the voice went on. "Be in the parking lot over at the New Century Theatre in ten minutes." Then the line went dead.

Tommy Far strolled back to the table. "I gotta go out for a while, John. If I'm not back by post time, put two bucks on Tough Tiger to win."

It took him nearly ten minutes to walk the eight short blocks to the New Century Theatre. Like most of the newer shopping center movie houses, it was open only in the evening on weeknights.

Now, before noon, there was only a single car in the parking lot, snugged against one brick wall of the theatre like some wounded animal in hiding. Tommy knew the car, even though it carried no unusual markings. He walked to it and got in on the passenger's side.

"How you been, Tommy?" the driver asked.

"Pretty good, Craidy."

Sam Craidy was a hard-looking man with steel-gray eyes and a heavy hand. Though he always dressed well, there was a suspicious look of uncertainty about his clothes, as if they didn't quite fit him, or as if he'd borrowed them from a friend. Tommy had never known him to laugh, or even smile. He might have been a truck driver on his day off. He wasn't. He was a detective who operated out of the Tenth Precinct.

"Got a job for you, if you need a little cash."

Tommy Far rubbed his damp palms against the rough cloth of his trouser legs. "I'm not so good at this stuff anymore. I been losing my contacts."

"Fifty bucks, Tommy."

"For what?"

Sam Craidy wasn't looking at him. He was staring straight ahead, across the empty parking lot. "Last night, a little after mid-

night, a kid was mugged and rolled outside the High Spot bar. He's in the hospital with a badly fractured skull. The doctors think there might be some brain damage."

"Happens every day," Tommy said, letting his hand rest for a moment on his artificial eye.

"The kid was on his way home from a college dance. His name's Jim Peterson. His father is managing editor of the *Morning Standard*."

Tommy Far nodded. There was always an angle. "What do you want?"

Craidy sighed, his hands tight on the steering wheel. "It's just about noon. I want the names of the guys who did it by tonight, before the *Standard* goes to press with its morning edition. That's about nine-thirty."

"I don't know if I can," Tommy said. "I don't have the contacts like I used to."

"Fifty bucks, Tommy. By tonight."

"I'll see."

"You do that. You know how to reach me."

Tommy slid out of the car and started walking. He didn't look back when the detective gunned the motor and shot out of the black-topped lot in the opposite direction.

Tommy Far had done this sort

of work for Craidy in the past. It was a regular source of income, and one never had to worry about taxes. He didn't like to think of himself as a "stool pigeon" or police informer. He was just doing a job, and once the money was in his pocket he didn't think twice about its source. Tonight, with fifty dollars, he knew he could make Sarah happy. The two of them could live on that much for a week or longer, and with a bit of luck he might be able to boost Craidy to seventy-five. Perhaps Sarah could even find a new dress for herself.

Tommy strolled over to the High Spot, a little bar off Clark Avenue where the jazzy crowd gathered. By night it was all neon and noise, and he never went near it, but during the day it wasn't so bad. You could even get a pretty good ham sandwich there at noon.

"I hear you had a little trouble here last night," Tommy said when the bartender had brought his sandwich.

"Messy," the man said. His name was Fred something, and Tommy knew him slightly. "Kid got his skull cracked open out in the parking lot. I had the cops here all morning. Son of the newspaper editor. Them cops are quaking in their boots. I can see the headlines now."

"They're trying hard to crack it, huh?"

"Damn right. The paper's been riding them about crime and stuff already. You know—not-safe-to-walk-the-streets—that sort of thing. You can imagine what they'll say now."

Tommy grunted and went back to his sandwich. "You know the kid?"

"He's been in before. Nice fellow."

"Early for him to be leaving a college dance. Girl with him?"

"No. He was alone. Looking for somebody, I guess."

"Who worked him over?"

"Got me. Place was crowded. I didn't see a thing."

Tommy finished his sandwich and tossed some money on the bar for a draft beer. "Who all was around last night? Anybody I know?"

"The usual crowd. We get a lot of kids with this jazz. And older folks too, who don't dig the discotheques." He went back to polishing glasses. "Friend of yours was here," he added as an afterthought. "Big John Miller, from the bowling alley."

"Yeah?"

"He was with a couple fellows I didn't know. You sure notice Big John, even in a crowd."

Tommy finished his beer and

left the High Spot, heading back along Clark to Big John's place. He knew a dozen—a score—of fringe characters who might have knocked the kid on the head for a few dollars. Still, it sounded more like a fight of some sort, a stepping outside after a disagreement at the bar. If that were the case, Big John might well have noticed something. He knew everybody in the neighborhood by his first name, and very little escaped him.

"You're back," John said. "I just phoned in your bet on Tough Tiger."

"Thanks," Tommy told him. "Want to shoot some more pool?"

Big John shook his head. "I gotta take care of the alleys. We got a few customers on them."

Tommy glanced out and saw a group of housewives in slacks getting ready to bowl, wondered why they'd picked this place rather than a shopping center. "I hear there was some excitement over at the High Spot last night," he said casually.

"The kid who got bashed? Yeah." John started down the steps to the level of the alleys.

"Who conked him? Anybody I know?"

Big John shot him an odd look. "No. Nobody you know, Tommy."

"You were there, huh?"

"I was there."

"How did it happen? What was the action?" Tommy was beginning to taste the fifty dollars.

"You're asking a hell of a lot of questions today, ain't you?" Big John moved away from him and talked to the housewives. He watched the first one throw a gutter ball, then walked back to where Tommy was standing.

"I like to see these fresh college kids get their lumps," Tommy said.

"He got his, all right. One of the guys crowned him with a tire iron."

"Who were they?" Tommy asked again.

Big John was watching the bowlers. "Huh? I don't know their names. Three guys. One of them plays piano at the High Spot sometimes. Little guy with a broken nose."

"Next time I see him I'll have to congratulate him."

John glanced sideways at him. "Don't fool with them fellows, Tommy. They're out of your league." He stared back at the bowlers and finally he added, "If they thought you were a stool pigeon, you might lose that other eye."

"I'm no—"

"I know, I know. But they might not. Stay away from them, Tommy."

"What's such a big deal about a mugging outside a bar, anyway? It happens every night in this town. What'd they get—twenty bucks?"

Big John glanced around to make certain they were not overheard. "Nothing like that, Tommy. The kid had over a thousand in cash on him."

It took Tommy Far most of the afternoon to track down the little piano player with the broken nose. The bartender named Fred had obviously known him, but just as obviously wasn't about to talk. Tommy talked to a blonde named Maggie and the fellow she was living with, then to a sax player who sometimes played with the group. Maggie told him the piano player's first name was Felix, and the sax player supplied the rest of it.

"Felix Faust. He used to play piano there on weekends, till the jazz stuff caught on. He doesn't work anywhere right now. Lives with a couple other guys at the Greenwright Hotel."

Tommy knew the Greenwright. He'd stayed there more than once when he was especially down on his luck. It was a dead-end for most of the regulars, the prostitutes and pimps and queers and addicts, who inhabited the depths

of his world. He remembered those days when he'd run with the crowd, remembered the night the cops had picked him up for stealing that car. He hadn't been so old then. The two years in prison had passed quickly, and then he'd come back to the Greenwright and met Sarah. He'd lost twenty pounds and his right eye in prison, but he didn't hold any grudges. Nobody went through life without a few hard knocks.

Tommy crossed the grassy square that faced the Greenwright, wondering how it had been in better days. Now the turf was worn thin, and the pigeons pecked up the grass seed, and the bums slept there under the stars at night. He could tell from its lobby that the Greenwright had once faced better times, even though the high gilt ceiling was now cracked and peeling.

"I'd like some information," he told the room clerk.

"Wouldn't we all?" He was a young fellow with slicked-down hair and a high-pitched voice. "You a cop?"

"Do I look like a cop?" Tommy brought out a crumpled dollar bill and passed it across the counter. "I'm looking for my girl. I think she might be shackled up with a guy named Felix Faust."

The fellow's eyes brightened.

He wasn't the sort who saw a dollar every day. "You're all wrong," he told Tommy as the bill vanished into his pocket. "Faust is here, but not with any girl. He's got a room with two other guys."

"I don't believe that."

"Here's the registration," the room clerk said, flipping through the tin file box on the counter. "Felix Faust, Robert Salamagan, Jonathan Gazag. They're in room 305."

"You're sure?"

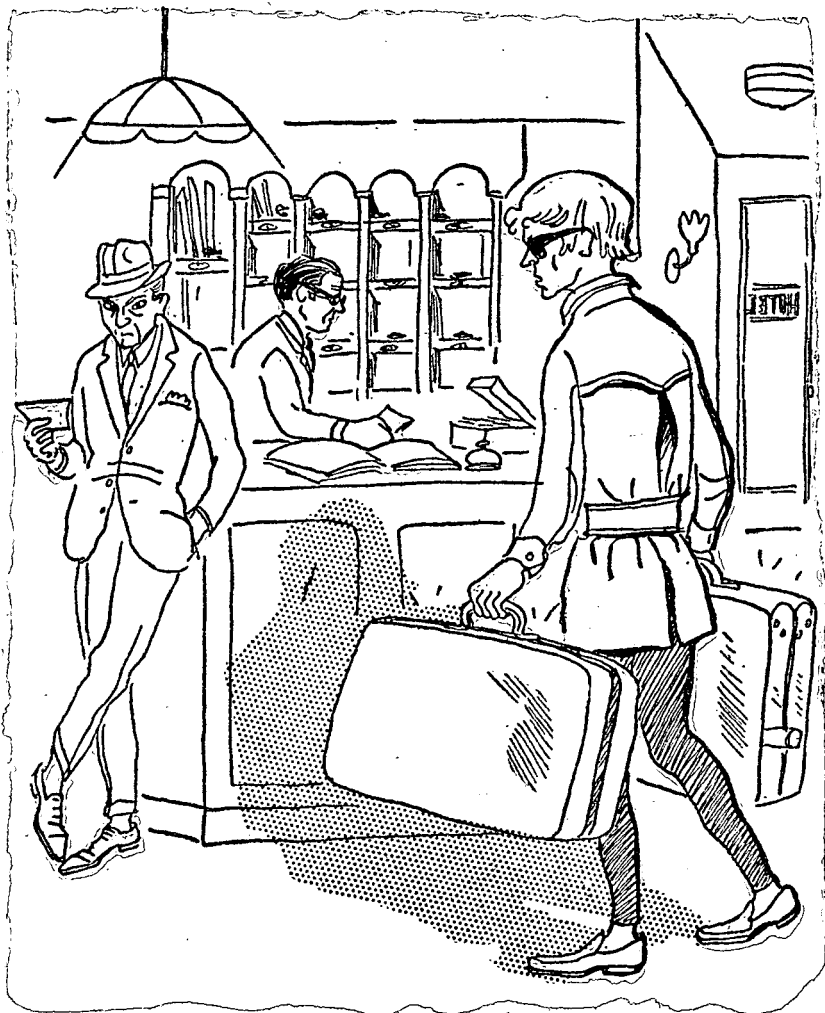
The clerk glanced toward the doorway. "Don't turn around, but Gazag just came in. That fellow with the luggage."

Tommy picked up a blank registration card and pretended to study it, turning half away as Gazag stopped at the desk for his key. He was a medium-sized young man, with nervous hands that trembled a bit as he set down two suitcases to accept the room key. The suitcases were brand new and very expensive.

"Does he always wear the dark glasses?" Tommy asked when the young man had gone upstairs.

The clerk shrugged. "Who knows? They've all been 'high' for three days."

Tommy slipped the clerk another dollar as he left the lobby. He could afford it. He was going to make himself some money be-



fore the night was over, for sure.

He phoned Sarah to tell her he'd be home before dark. "Around eight o'clock," he said. "And pick up around the place. We'll prob-

ably have a very important visitor."

After talking to Sarah, he bought an evening paper and read through it while he had a bowl of soup and a sandwich for supper.

The assault on young Jim Peterson was a page-one story, even in the opposition newspaper. He was still in poor condition in the hospital. The article said he'd been robbed of twenty-three dollars and a wrist-watch.

Tommy finished his soup, then found a phone booth. He called the special number and was told that Sam Craidy was out but would be calling in shortly. "He'll know who this is," Tommy said, speaking low into the phone. "Tell him I have the information he wants and the price is one hundred dollars. Have him call me at this number around eight o'clock." He gave Sarah's phone number, and then hung up.

As the sun hung low in the sky, the chill he'd experienced in early morning returned. Summer was still a long way off. He wondered if it would ever come.

Sarah was waiting for him at her apartment. "Did you eat supper?" she asked.

"I had some soup and a sandwich. That's all I need. Anybody call?"

"No. Who's the visitor we're expecting?"

Tommy glanced at the kitchen clock. It was nearly eight. "A man with some money. A lot of money."

The telephone rang and he went

to answer it. Craidy's voice came to him from the other end. "You got something for me, chum?"

"Three names and the address where they're staying. All yours for a hundred bucks."

"We agreed on fifty."

"It got bigger than I figured. There's more to it."

"Let's have the information."

"You come here. With the money." Tommy gave him the address. "Park on the next street and come in the back door."

"I don't want any of your games, chum. It's getting close to ninety-thirty."

"You'll have them in time, don't worry. But they'll probably be gone by tomorrow." He was remembering the suitcases.

"All right," Craidy sighed.

Tommy Far was smiling when he hung up. Things were going his way.

"Why are you bringing him here?" Sarah asked.

"I want to make sure I get my hundred. And I don't want to meet him on the street somewhere."

The telephone rang again. This time Sarah answered it, then turned to Tommy. "It's for you. Big John, down at the bowling alley. He sounds . . . funny."

Tommy took the receiver from her and listened to Big John's

voice. "You're in trouble, Tommy. I tried to warn you. They know you been asking questions."

"Who?"

"Faust and his friends. The room clerk at the hotel told them. They were just here looking for you."

"You didn't tell them where I was?"

John's voice faltered. "I got a business to think of, Tommy. I... I'm sorry."

"How long ago did they leave?"

"Just now. You got maybe five minutes if you get out of there fast."

"Yeah."

"Tommy..." His voice hesitated. "One other thing."

"What?"

"That horse you bet on this afternoon, he finished last."

As Tommy ran down the back stairs, a number of thoughts crowded into his mind. The bartender at the High Spot had known Faust's name, and Big John had known Faust's name, but they'd both denied it. Nobody wanted to get involved anymore. That was why people like Craidy had to pay people like Tommy for information. That was why...

"Tommy Far!"

He turned in the doorway at the sound of his name, vulnerable to the darkness on his right side.

"Who—?" Startled, he stopped.

"You been asking questions about me and my friends. Too many questions."

Tommy saw them then, standing very close, still wearing their dark glasses despite the night. There were two of them, with the third acting as lookout. *Too soon, too soon.* Big John had lied about that too. He hadn't called Tommy right away. "I don't know you guys," he said.

"You wouldn't be thinking of telling the cops what you know, would you?"

"No, no!"

The little one hit him, hard, and Tommy went down in the dirt, automatically shielding his good eye. One of them kicked him in the stomach. "You won't be talking to anybody when we get done with you."

"My eye!"

"You shoulda thought about that sooner."

Tommy rolled over in the dirt, feeling the kicks to his body, remembering how it had been that day in the exercise yard at the State Prison. All his life, people had been kicking at him. All his life...

At first the eye would not open, and even when it did the scene was all blurred and white. Then it

gradually cleared, and Tommy saw Sam Craidy standing over him. He was in a bed—not Sarah's, but a hospital bed.

"How you feeling, chum?" Craidy asked.

"Lousy."

"We got them all. I pulled up in the car just as they were about to finish you off."

"Will I get my hundred?"

"Sure you will. That gal Sarah's waiting outside to see you, too."

"How's the kid—Peterson?"

"The doctor thinks he'll be all right."

Tommy tried to lift himself in the bed. "It was in time for the morning editions?"

"It was in time. Lie back, fella."

"I have to tell you the rest of it, Craidy. I have to give you your hundred-bucks worth."

"What rest of it?"

"The kid, Peterson. He left the college dance early, and he didn't have his girl with him."

"So?"

"He lied about the twenty-three dollars. He had over a thousand on him, and they got it all."

"What are you talking about?"

"All that money, and he came to the High Spot to find someone like Faust. All that money, and then he was going back to the dance. Don't you see, Craidy? He took up a collection among the other kids. Rich kids. They sent him down to buy dope. Only Faust and his friends were the wrong ones to ask, when you're flashing a roll like that. They took the money and kept the stuff for themselves. They knew the kid couldn't tell the truth."

Above the bed, Craidy looked bleak. "What in hell am I supposed to do with information like that?"

"Check it out. Forget it. I don't care—as long as I get my hundred."

"You'll get it," the detective said. He turned to leave. "It looks like I've got some more questions to ask."

"And Craidy . . ."

"Yeah?"

Tommy Far relaxed against the pillow and closed his eye. "Send Sarah in. Even she's going to look good to me tonight."



The greater the bed of ignorance, the more profuse are the shoots that sprout flowers of hope.

Cartwright counted his change. "Cartwright can't count right," he could still hear them saying. His ears grew red. Why did they always have to tease him like that?

NOBODY
listens to



Why couldn't they accept him as one of them? All right, so maybe they were smarter than he was, but did that mean they had to make his life miserable?

Cartwright walked slowly home from the drugstore, carrying with him the memory of the chocolate ice cream soda he had just finished. He bought a chocolate ice cream soda at the drugstore every Saturday evening after he had received his pay for working in the Cooper yard all week.

They all made fun of him because he did not have a girl to take out on a Saturday night. They would drive past the drugstore, knowing he was in there, and they would hang out of their car windows, waving and yelling just so he would notice them. Cartwright kicked a stone as he walked toward home. What did he care? He didn't care at all. He didn't need them. He had a life of his own, and he had his secrets, knew a great many things that other people did not know. He smiled to himself. If they only knew that he knew, they would be glad to invite him out in their cars with their loud radios and their louder girls. They would respect him. They would realize that with his knowledge, he was better than they were.

Cartwright went upstairs to the

room above the garage that he rented from the Coopers. It was small and stuffy but Cartwright liked it. In it he could be alone with his thoughts and his secrets—like the one about Mrs. Cooper and the real estate man. Cartwright sat down in his chair by the window and wriggled his feet out of his shoes. It was not quite dark, so he did not put on a light.

Mr. Cooper did not know about the real estate man, but Cartwright knew. He knew that the man would come by in the afternoons, and sometimes Mrs. Cooper would get into his car and they would drive off together, but other times the man would go into the house and they would stay in there for an hour or longer. Cartwright, in the yard, would go on with his work as if the real estate man was not even there.

Lights flashed on Cartwright's window as a car turned into the driveway and stopped. Mr. Cooper got out and went into the house. He must have worked late at the office. He was usually home before dark, especially on a Saturday. He often said he hated to work on Saturday, but Mrs. Cooper did not seem to mind it. Usually she went to the country club to play golf, would stay for lunch and get home in time to take a bath and prepare a late dinner.

Suddenly the kitchen door slammed and Mr. Cooper came striding toward his car. He backed it out of the driveway, spraying shell as he spun his wheels. Oho, Mr. Cooper was mad! Well, why shouldn't he be? Mrs. Cooper had not come home yet. He was probably going to the country club to drag her out of the bar. Sometimes Mrs. Cooper lost track of time.

Cartwright got up and began to pace his room. He was bored. It was still early and he had nothing to do. Lights were beginning to wink on in the houses along the street. Maybe he should go for a walk.

It was a mild night and there was going to be a full moon. Cartwright liked the moon when it was full; it seemed so near and so bright. He liked to imagine he could see people walking around on it. He wondered if it was crowded up there. It might be a nice place to go with someone like Mrs. Cooper. He moved silently up the alley between two houses to where a square of yellow on the back lawn denoted a lighted bedroom window. He stood in the shadows and watched.

The woman was not as pretty as Mrs. Cooper. She was older and she slouched before her mirror as she lit a cigarette. Cartwright frowned. Women shouldn't ought

to smoke. It made them look tough and smell unpleasant. He did not like women who smoked. Mrs. Cooper did not smoke, but Mr. Cooper did. He smoked coarse fat cigars which seemed to go with his coarse fat body. Cartwright often thought it was such a waste for a beautiful woman like Mrs. Cooper to be married to a man like that. Cartwright felt deeply about such things.

He moved on, leaving the woman to puff in her solitary bedroom. He did not like the feeling of distaste she aroused in him. He walked to the end of the block and turned the corner. Just ahead lay the country club with its discreetly lit windows and its discreetly unlit parking lot.

Cartwright was familiar with the parking lot of the country club. He also knew to whom most of the cars belonged. It was a game with him, guessing who was buying whose wife a drink and who was sitting in a dark car with whose husband.

Cartwright stepped aside quickly as a car without lights narrowly missed him as it left the parking lot. It looked like Mr. Cooper's car, but if it was, Mr. Cooper did not wave to him. Cartwright was part shadow, blending into the night and the silence. He had a gift of invisibility. He could drift like a



puff of air—listening and looking.

Then there was Mrs. Cooper, as he had known she would be. Her car was parked beneath a giant tree whose heavy-laden limbs shielded it from the rest of the world. Her head was back against the seat and her eyes were closed—her lovely dark velvet eyes. He wished she would open them and look at him. If she would see him once, as a person instead of a simple yardman, Cartwright would never ask for more. Such happiness, rapture, would warm him for the rest of his life.

Of course she would not look at him. She saw him every day; she

saw his big hands with the grubby fingernails and his big feet that always seemed to be tripping over things. That was what she saw, because that was all there was to see.

Cartwright felt sad. He did not often feel sad, but when he did he wanted to scrunch himself together into a small tight heap and bury his face in his knees and cry—like the time the kitten died. It had only been a stray, but it mewed at him and looked up at him with those soft large eyes in the tiny face and he had tenderly carried it upstairs to his room over the garage. There, he poured a saucer of milk and stood watching it drink, daintily, even though it was starving, and he had been able to see the flesh filling out the bones and the fur taking on a glossy vibrancy and the eyes growing larger, contented and satisfied. He had talked to it, but it paid no attention to him. It just went on drinking. Then it had died. It had died beside the half-finished saucer of milk, and its body had seemed to shrink in his hands and the tenseness flow out of it as it finally hung still. Cartwright had felt sad for many months afterward.

Now, unseen by Mrs. Cooper, standing in the shadows beside her car, the sadness came upon him again. She was like the kitten—

soft and purring and satisfied—only now she was still.

Footsteps came toward the car, and Cartwright sank deeper into the shadows as the man approached and bent to look through the open window at Mrs. Cooper. It was the real estate man.

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long, honey." He kept his voice low. "I couldn't get away any sooner." He pulled the door open and got in beside her. There was a moment's silence and then Cartwright heard his startled exclamation. In an instant the man backed out of the car and broke into a run, leaving the car door open.

Cartwright came forward cautiously. "Mrs. Cooper?" he said softly. "You all right, Mrs. Cooper?"

She did not answer him or even look at him. He leaned closer and squinted in an effort to see better in the darkness. Although the moon was bright, it did not penetrate the living umbrella that was the tree.

There were marks on her throat, rough red marks. Cartwright stared at them. How could that be? Who could have marked her like that? He would take her home and bathe her throat and soothe her skin and make her well again. He would do this for her. She was his Mrs. Cooper.

Cartwright did not know how to drive a car, so he reached inside and lifted her out. Carrying her as if she were a fluff of dandelion, he left the parking lot and walked along the dark street until he reached the Cooper house.

The house was dark. Mr. Cooper was still out somewhere. Cartwright carried his lovely burden into the house through the kitchen door which Mr. Cooper had not locked when he had stormed out earlier in the evening. He carried her upstairs and into the bedroom. Placing her carefully on the satin-covered bed, he went into the bathroom to wet a cloth for her throat. He felt excitement at what he was doing; he was helping Mrs. Cooper for whom he had love. She would thank him and maybe she would look at him differently.

Wringing out the cloth, he carried it back and laid it on her throat. Her face seemed darker than usual under her suntan. She did not open her eyes.

He sighed and sat on the edge of the bed to wait. Soon she would open her eyes. Soon now. Cartwright waited. The moon climbed high, the shadows shifted on the rug, the trees let light into the room. A pale shaft fell across the bed, across the white silk blouse with the deep, deep neckline, across the still face pointed to the

ceiling, across the lovely soft throat with the ugly bruises.

Go away, moonlight! Cartwright wanted to shout. *Let her sleep until she wakes!* When she wakes she will see me here, waiting.

He waited, motionless, a watcher. She did not stir. He was growing tired of waiting. Would she ever wake up?

"Mrs. Cooper," he said. No reply. He repeated her name, more loudly this time. Still she did not reply. "Wake up, Mrs. Cooper!"

He bent over her, his hands on the bed on either side of her shoulders. "I want you to wake up, Mrs. Cooper. I brought you here. You are safe with me. I want you to open your eyes and look at me." When she made no move, he grasped her shoulders and shook her. "How dare you ignore me when I helped you? Don't you want to look at me? Don't you want to see me? Don't you want to say hello to Cartwright?"

By now he was raising her by the shoulders and slamming her back to the bed. Her head was lolling, and her long blonde hair which had been piled on top of her head had come loose of its pins and was flying around her stubborn face. He grasped a handful of it and dragged her to a sitting position.

"I'll teach you to ignore Cartwright! You are nothing but a snob! How would you like it if I told your husband about the real estate man?" He laughed. "I'll bet you're surprised I know about that! Well, I know a lot about you, Mrs. Cooper, and if you don't open your eyes and say, 'Hello, Cartwright,' I am going to tell the whole town."

He let her drop and straightened up. His face felt flushed as he looked down at her sprawled on the bed. She was no longer pretty. She seemed shrunken, like the kitten. With a feeling of sickness, he turned to leave the room.

Mr. Cooper was standing in the doorway with a policeman. "We would like you to come along with us," said the policeman.

"Why?" asked Cartwright.

"The police want to question you about Mrs. Cooper's murder," said Mr. Cooper. He did not look at the bed.

Cartwright let them take him by the arms and lead him to the car waiting at the curb. Another police car had pulled up behind it and several men got out and went into the house.

Cartwright did not understand. Didn't they know that he had helped her? Didn't they know that he had carried her all the way home in his arms? He tried to tell

them, but they did not seem to be listening.

At the police station they put him in a room with a different policeman. This one would listen; Cartwright knew it the minute he saw him.

"I carried her home," Cartwright said.

"You killed her in the car in the parking lot of the country club, didn't you?"

"She was in the car," said Cartwright.

"Why did you carry her home?"

"I like Mrs. Cooper. I wanted to help her."

"And you continued to beat her dead body after you had placed it on the bed."

"She wouldn't open her eyes."

"You loved Mrs. Cooper, didn't you, Cartwright?"

"I love Mrs. Cooper."

"And you were jealous of her husband."

"The real estate man always calls in the afternoon."

"And you were frustrated because she never gave you a tumble."

"Mr. Cooper was mad when he came home today and she wasn't there."

"You knew she would be at the country club."

"I didn't want her to see me. Not at first. I wanted to look at her for a while."

"Before you killed her?"

"Mr. Cooper didn't even look at her when him and the policeman came to the house. He already knew she was dead. Why didn't he tell me?" Tears began to well up in Cartwright's eyes.

"Mr. Cooper reported his wife missing."

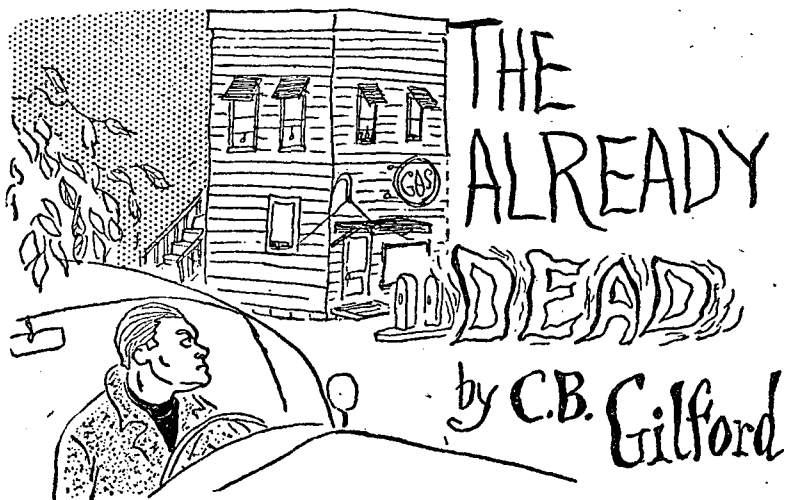
"He knew she was dead! Why didn't he tell me? If I had known she was dead, I wouldn't have shook her like that!"

"That will be all for now, Cartwright," said the policeman kindly. "We'll talk again tomorrow."

Cartwright managed a smile as the policeman led him out of the room. He was friendly and kind. Cartwright liked him. Cartwright had known he would listen to him. Cartwright had known it the minute he saw him.



Anonymity is seldom a perpetual cloak, especially on the wearer's conscience.



JOEY MARVEN was sweating. Not just during daily practice in the stadium where sometimes fairly good-sized crowds came to watch, nor just on Saturday afternoons when he quarterbacked the team to one spectacular victory after another—those were times of honest sweat. Joey Marven was suffering from the big sweat, the inside kind that drips out of the conscience and isn't expelled by the pores, but accumulates, gnaws, and rots away that thing called a man's integrity.

He wasn't cheating on exams.

He didn't have to, he was in the top third of his class. He wasn't stealing or involved with gamblers. He didn't have to do that either. With his athletic scholarship and his regular allowance from home, he always had enough money.

A NOVELETTE

But in quite another way, a more important way, he was cheating, stealing, gambling; cheating on another human being, stealing something more precious than money from that other human being, gambling with that other human being's future and happiness—a woman, of course.

He was in a trap, and should have known that traps don't open up by themselves and let the victim out. The victim has to burst out. Violence aimed at something—somebody—is the only way. He should have known. That was the way it was on the football field. When you couldn't find a pass receiver, and the tacklers were overwhelming you, you burst out. But of course he didn't see that in the beginning, while the trap was closing.

He sneaked out to see Tris Kinnard on a Wednesday evening. He had realized he'd have to go back at least once more—not to start everything all over again, for he'd told her it was finished, and as far as he was concerned it was finished—but she'd taken his decision pretty hard, and he wanted to double-check on how she was getting along.

Her shift at the Red Carpet, he knew, ended at midnight, so he waited till past that time, then

drove out to the edge of town, to that crummy old service station and general store. He parked in his usual place, well off the highway and under the trees, where his car was least likely to be noticed. Lights shone from a pair of second-story windows. She was home.

He eased out of the car, not forgetting to shut the door softly, walked across the empty gravel parking space, keeping to the shadows; and climbed the stairway at the rear of the building which led to her apartment. Familiar movements . . . familiar paths. He hesitated at the top of the steps, then knocked softly.

Suddenly he found himself smiling. He had never knocked at this door before. If he did it now, automatically, naturally, that meant he had accepted the fact that the love affair was finished.

There was no answer to his knock. Strange. He was certain that she was home. She might have left a light on in her absence, but not two lights. He knocked again, and waited.

When there was still no answer, he tried the knob. It turned easily. Opening the door, he walked in—and saw her instantly.

Joey Marven, the man with the quick reactions, as the sportswriters described him, couldn't move now. Tris Kinnard was in her tiny

kitchen just off the livingroom. Still wearing her waitress' uniform, she was kneeling in front of the open oven door, and her head was inside. The smell of gas was heavy, even at the door where Joey stood.

Nothing in Joey responded. His brain was as numb as his body. He could only stare at the horrible sight. The open door let in fresh air, but gas still poured from the oven. Was Tris unconscious? He couldn't tell from the position of her body. Or was she dead? The seconds ticked away while he stood motionless and did nothing.

Was he doing nothing because he wanted her dead?

That awful suspicion of himself roused him finally. He lunged into the kitchen, seized the girl by the waist, dragged her away from the stove, lifted her in his arms, and carried her out into the fresh air. His brain was functioning now. He hurried down the steps, laid his burden on the grass in a patch of moonlight. Trying to stay calm, he searched for a pulse. It was there, feeble, but it was there. Her breathing was shallow, but she was breathing.

He'd studied first-aid. He knew the routine, so he knelt over her and began artificial respiration. The fresh air itself would revive her, he was sure, but he wanted to help

her get more oxygen into her lungs. As he worked rhythmically, pressing on her rib cage, then letting go, his mind worked too. He was taking a chance . . . he should call a doctor or get her to the hospital . . . but if he did, he would be involved . . . and that had to be avoided at almost any cost.

The gamble succeeded. When he stopped the artificial respiration, she was breathing easier. Her eyes remained closed, but her pulse was stronger too. She would live. The natural processes could take over now.

Joey raced back up the steps, entered the apartment holding a handkerchief over his nose and mouth, trying not to breathe. He turned off the gas, opened every window. The place had to be made habitable again. There was nowhere else to put the girl.

When he returned to Tris, he found her stirring, struggling back toward consciousness. Thinking she'd catch pneumonia lying there on the grass, he lifted her again and carried her to his car, let her lie prone on the front seat, both doors open.

Then he paced on the gravel for a while. An occasional car raced by on the highway, but apparently nobody noticed him or his car with its wide-flung doors. He checked the girl's condition every few min-



utes. She was improving, but he wanted to get her back upstairs as soon as possible.

Finally he went up himself. He walked all through the place,

sniffed in all the corners. The smell of gas was still present but faint. The brisk night breeze had been clearing it out fast.

He sat down on the sofa, won-

dering if it were safe to bring Tris back up here yet. His eyes wandered for the first time to the little desk against the far wall. Among the litter there was a bright little white envelope. It was propped up against a pen-holder so that it would be very visible, but somehow he had failed to notice it. Her suicide note?

He rose from the sofa and approached the desk shakily. This wasn't good. He sensed it before he saw it. Then there it was, scrawled boldly on the face of the envelope. "Joey." He was trembling violently as he ripped the thing open.

"My dearest darling Joey," it read. "I will be dead when you read this, but what does it matter to you? I was already dead as far as you were concerned. You had found another girl. I guess I hope you will be happy with her. I'm not sure. All I am sure of is that I can't be happy without you. I can't face all those empty years ahead. I hope Alison Blair loves you as much as I do. But she couldn't. I don't think you love her. Do you know what love really is? Or are you just selfish and ambitious? Forgive me, Joey. I love you whatever you are. Goodbye. Tris."

He dropped the letter onto the desk, and it landed on a scattering of newspaper clippings. He recognized them because they matched

his own collection. "Joey Marven leads State to victory . . . Joey Marven throws three TD passes . . . Joey Marven named 'back of the week' . . . Joey Marven likely to be State's first All-American in ten years . . ."

He turned away, put his face in his hands, trying to control the trembling that shook his whole body. Ye gods, it was all there on the desk! If he hadn't just happened to come by tonight, Tris would have been dead, and whoever found her would also have found all that stuff on the desk. It was all spelled out—for the police, for newspaper reporters, for everybody to see.

Joey Marven was already news, but on the sports page. Now he would have been on the front page. Girl commits suicide over football star . . . Alison Blair, daughter of tycoon Francis Simpson Blair, named in suicide note . . . dead waitress accuses Joey Marven of choosing ambition and money over real love . . . and on and on and on. The press would have a field day with big sports name Marven, and big business and society name Blair.

It would be the end of everything that he had just decided he wanted. The Blairs didn't mind publicity, but of the right sort, not the seamy, sensational. He could

just imagine old Frank's rage when his precious name was linked with a tawdry affair of a waitress gasping herself in a cheap apartment over the guy his own daughter was ready to marry. A daughter of the Blairs and an unknown waitress in the same triangle!

Joey staggered back to the sofa and sat there, shivering at the close call. He was too distracted to hear the sound of slow, dragging footsteps ascending the stairs outside. He wasn't prepared at all when Tris spoke to him from the open door.

"Joey . . ."

He spun to stare at her, not sure in the first moment whether it was Tris herself or whether Tris had died and this was her ghost come to haunt him. Her face was pale except for the dark hollows of her eyes. She'd always had a gaunt look, but now the thing that stared back at him seemed a skull dug out of a grave. Her hair, her long, glorious blonde hair, hung limply about the skull like the headpiece of a shroud.

"Joey," she asked, "why did you stop me?"

He had no answer. He stood up, confronting her as she leaned for support against the door jamb. Then when it seemed she was about to fall, he grabbed her, picked her up and carried her back

to the small but neat bedroom.

There he deposited her on the bed gently, arranged her limp body so she would be comfortable, put a blanket over her because the crisp autumn night air was still blowing through the place. Her hair splayed out over the pillow. Her blue eyes, which seemed to have darkened almost to black, gazed up at him reproachfully.

"Why did you stop me, Joey?" she asked again.

He sat beside her on the edge of the bed. He felt groggy, confused. "Because what you were doing was crazy," he answered her.

She fingered the little charm she wore on a silver chain around her neck, a miniature football. It was the only gift he had ever given her, and she had never gone without it. "I love you, Joey. I don't want to live without you."

"That's crazy," he argued with her. "You're only nineteen, Tris. You'll get different ideas about a lot of things. You can't just decide to end it all now."

They talked on, covering the same ground they'd covered last Sunday night when he'd first told her it was finished between them. Sunday to Wednesday . . . in those three days she had changed from a beautiful young girl to a zombie. He grew desperate. He had to convince her. As he talked, he remem-

bered how it all began, and wondered how, when it had begun so wonderfully, it could have come to this.

It had been his fault, because he had known Alison Blair, been almost engaged to marry her, before he met Tris Kinnard.

Alison had chased him all through the previous school year, his junior year, because he had become a football star. He'd merely been flattered in the beginning, amused to have a wealthy girl chasing him. Then gradually he'd started to recognize the possibilities. His own parents were middle-class, and that was probably what he was condemned to be, but Alison was *rich*. She consorted with all the *best* people. When she took him home to meet her father, Francis Simpson Blair came right to the point.

"Are you and Alison serious?"

Joey remembered the conversation so clearly. "Well, not exactly, sir," he'd answered. "I mean . . . we have rather different backgrounds . . ."

"You do that," the big man agreed, "but Alison seems serious. She brought you here to meet me, and despite your humility about your background, you had the guts to come here to meet me. Tell me, Mr. Marven, are you ambitious?"

"Yes, I am, sir."

"Are you ambitious in the direction of Blair Corporation?"

"Your company has an excellent reputation, sir."

"Yes, it does, and I've been thinking about how you might fit in. I didn't like the idea at first. I figured Alison was just impressed with your muscles, your glamour, your reputation, but then it occurred to me that your reputation just might fit into the Corporation. You might be All-American next year. Then you might play pro ball. Well, that might be all right too. The American public is very sports-conscious these days. They admire sports heroes. You might be a real asset to the corporation. And you happen to be pretty smart too."

So Francis Simpson Blair had practically accepted him into the family. He still really wasn't engaged to Alison, but she always talked as if they'd get married after Joey's graduation. She probably would have preferred to make it sooner, but he'd held out for some reason.

He'd thought he knew what that reason was when at the end of summer he'd gone off on that little one-week vacation trip he'd wanted to take alone, and met Tris Kinnard.

Then it all happened so quickly—love at first sight, wild, wild pas-

sion—but more than that. It had been beautiful at the same time; idyllic, nothing cheap or sordid about it, the most perfect week of his whole life. Tris Kinnard was a magic girl—to him, anyway—but a nobody.

He realized that fact, but he didn't think about it during that week. She was a waitress there at that resort, trying to earn a little money to start to college; had left home because her parents quarreled. Not much of a background, but a sweet girl, sweet and beautiful, and he told her an hour after they'd met that he loved her. Maybe he had.

Of course she hadn't bothered with her waitress job during that week. Time was suddenly precious; and they spent every minute together. It was almost as if they were on a honeymoon.

But then, of course, the week ended. It was time for him to return to school . . . his senior year . . . early football practice . . . a great season looming . . . maybe All-American . . . graduation . . . Alison Blair . . . marriage . . . maybe a few years as a pro star . . . sandwiched in with Blair Corporation . . . and then the future . . . prosperity . . . wealth . . . importance . . .

So what was he to do with Tris Kinnard?

The alternatives were clear. Call it finished, walk off and leave her, return to the university. Or, tell Alison Blair he was in love with another girl, marry Tris Kinnard, say goodbye to Blair Corporation and all that sweet deal.

Well, he didn't do either. He couldn't give up the alliance with the Blairs, and he couldn't give up Tris Kinnard, at least not quite yet.

Therefore, he compromised. That involved lying. He told Tris an incredible pack of lies. He had to keep her existence a secret, he told her. There was another girl—he was partially truthful—from whom he had to get disentangled; and that would take time. He had to keep strict training for football—partially truthful too. He added for good measure that he had very conservative, straitlaced parents who lived just a few miles from the university. All these problems would have to be worked out. It would take time.

Tris wasn't to be dissuaded. She came to town, found herself a job and a place to live, remaining invisible and waiting patiently for the moments when he could sneak away. It was a beautiful arrangement for a few weeks. Their meetings had the added flavor of being secret, forbidden, infrequent, and therefore electric with the buildup of anticipation.

The pressure built up too—studies, football, Alison—but worst of all his conscience. He was lying, cheating. He didn't intend to square everything so that he could marry Tris. Married to a waitress for the rest of his life? Condemned to middle-class mediocrity, held back by a wife who was lower than middle-class?

It was his conscience, not the fact that he was tired of her, that compelled him finally to say good-bye last Sunday night. "It just won't work," he had told her.

"It just won't work," he said again now to the pale form lying there on the bed.

"Yes, I realize that, Joey," she said. Her sad eyes looked up at him without life, without luster. "You've convinced me of that."

"All right then. You forget about me. You go somewhere else and find somebody new. There are plenty of guys. A girl like you can have her pick."

"I love you, Joey."

"You'll get over that."

She shook her head. "I'll love you forever. I don't want anybody else. All I want to do is die."

"No, you can't do that!"

How much more could he say to her? Did he dare tell her that if she insisted on committing suicide, she could at least do it somewhere else, destroy those clippings,

not write him a farewell note, leave him out of it completely? No, he couldn't give her instructions like that. She loved him, yes, and claimed to desire his happiness, but women were too unpredictable. Perhaps if he mentioned that involvement with her suicide would ruin him, it would be the very thing to cause her to trumpet his name to the world.

"You're going your way, Joey," she went on, "and I can't stop you. I have to go my way too. My way is death. You can't stop me."

She meant it. Hadn't she already proved that she meant it?

Then the thought came to him. If she was absolutely determined to die, what difference would it make? What difference would it make if he were on the scene to keep his name out of it . . . and helped her to die?

So he had to pretend again, to lie and cheat again, and he did a good job. He told her he'd changed his mind about everything. Her suicide attempt had changed his mind. When he'd been afraid that she was dead and forever beyond his reach, he'd realized it was she whom he loved and wanted to marry, not Alison Blair.

She shouldn't have believed him, but she was confronted with such desperate alternatives—love or death—who could blame her for

grasping frantically at the straw?

Tris remained home at her apartment through the weekend, not returning to her job, regaining her strength and equilibrium. Joey had a bad Saturday afternoon on the gridiron, almost losing the game with his erratic passing, and spent the last half on the bench. He was distracted, of course, not being able to give his full attention to football.

On Sunday he protested to Alison that he was still feeling glum about the game, and begged off from spending the day with her. Instead, he met Tris at a prearranged rendezvous along a side road a quarter of a mile from her apartment. Nobody saw her climb into his car.

"Where are we going?" she asked. She was radiant, beautiful again. Three days' rest and the reassurance of Joey's love had worked wonders.

"No place in particular," he answered. "Just thought we might spend the day together. Walk around in the fresh air. Then have dinner at some nice place."

"Oh, wonderful, Joey!" She clapped her hands, and then leaned across and kissed him on the cheek.

His skin burned under the touch of her lips. The kiss of Judas in reverse—the victim kissing the betrayer. He comforted his conscience

with the inevitable logic of the situation. He couldn't marry her. No law said that he had to marry her, or be in love with her. If he didn't love and marry her, she would kill herself. He was only assisting a suicide. Yes, that was a crime, but it wasn't murder.

Joey appeared to be driving in random fashion, but he had the destination already picked out. He had been there before, not with Tris or Alison, but with another girl, long discarded. It had been a memorable afternoon with that other girl, so he remembered the place well. He had revisited the spot two days ago to check his memory and make detailed plans.

He had decided it would be safer to make the suicide appear as an accident, preferably an accident in which the body might not be discovered for a long time. He had considered and rejected a number of methods, including gas again, with his removing all evidences of himself later, but obvious suicide of any kind attracted publicity, and there was always the chance of a slipup. A quiet, private drowning was the method he chose. The mechanics were simpler, and it was something he could bring himself to do.

Tris wasn't aware of the distance and direction of their seemingly aimless wandering. They were

nearly a hundred miles south of the campus when he eventually stopped the car well off a seldom-traveled country road in the midst of lonely hills and woods.

"Let's take a walk and scuff around in the leaves," he suggested.

His suggestion was a command to her. They went off hand in hand through the trees, although she stopped every now and then, flung herself into his arms, and kissed him passionately. She was feverishly gay, pulling him along deeper into the timber, initiating the embraces, chattering, laughing.

It was indeed a fine day for a hike in the woods. Some of the trees were losing their foliage, but most of it was still attached, brilliant yellows and reds and browns. The air was warm, and tangy with the smell of fallen leaves.

They came to the lake—not much more than a pond really—seemingly as a surprise. It nestled in a tiny valley, dark green and cold-looking amid all the warm colors. Tris was delighted. She let go of Joey's hand, ran down the hill alone in a swirl of flying leaves, and stood at the edge of the water enraptured.

"Isn't it lovely?" she called up to Joey.

He was checking the perimeter of hills and finding them empty of any human sign. He didn't know

who the owner of this property might be, only that it was unfenced and probably useless except for the pond, and there was no house anywhere close by.

Joey joined Tris at the pond. She squeezed close to him, trembling with happiness.

"Joey, we're so alone here," she said.

Yes, he had planned that. His eyes were surveying the surface of the water, the banks, the hills around them once again. There was no one in sight, and still enough foliage on the trees to provide an effective screen.

"Oh look," Tris said, "there's a rowboat." He knew, of course, that it was there, half-hidden beneath some overhanging branches. "Let's go for a ride, Joey."

He pretended to humor her. They untied the boat, pushed off, rowed to the middle of the pond, then drifted.

"Water looks inviting," he said after a few moments. He was impatient. The longer they stayed here, the more dangerous it was.

"You mean to swim, Joey?"

"Sure."

"You're crazy. It's ice-cold." She dipped her hand, pulled it back quickly.

"I don't care about that," he said.

She knew from the summer that he loved to swim. She couldn't

swim a stroke, but she had been content to lie on the beach and watch him.

Joey rowed back to the bank, stepped out of the boat, and told Tris to row out to the middle again by herself. If the water proved too awful cold, he might want to climb aboard. Tris did as she was told. Remaining on the bank, Joey stripped down to his shorts, his eyes roaming the hills, still finding them empty. Then he plunged in.

The water was indeed cold, but he scarcely felt the shock. He swam to the boat, grinned up at Tris. She looked worried.

"Joey, you'll catch pneumonia."

In reply he dived down toward the bottom. It wasn't very far, perhaps eight feet. There was the usual muck down there, mud and rotted vegetation, but it was a smooth bottom, what he had hoped for, and what he needed. He came up gasping, and grabbed onto a gunwale of the boat, right amidships, where Tris was sitting.

"Joey, aren't you frozen?"

He looked up at her, debating for the last time. She wanted to die. If he left her, which he was going to do, she would take her own life. He wasn't committing murder, only being an accomplice to a suicide.

Then, after a final glance around the rim of hills, Joey pulled down

mightily on the gunwale. Tris was too startled to utter a sound. The boat flipped over, and she joined him in the water.

It took a moment for him to find her. He merely wanted to make sure that she wasn't able to hang onto the boat. He discovered the boat was sinking too, and she was several feet away from it, thrashing about in the water, inexorably weighted down by her clothes.

Joey was prepared to push her under the surface but, as he had hoped, he didn't have to. She was her own efficient executioner. Her frantic efforts only exhausted her breath. She looked at him, a look of puzzlement, then of understanding. Once she understood, she gave up the struggle. He wanted her to die, therefore she would die to satisfy his wish. She sank slowly, as if some invisible hand were pulling her down.

He waited, treading water. He was alone now. Both Tris and the boat had disappeared. Only a few bubbles broke the smooth surface of the pond. Finally he dived.

He found her body quickly, towed it with him while he searched for the boat. When he found it, there was merely the matter of inserting the body beneath the boat. That would keep the corpse there for a while, and, if it were found, the inference would be

clear: the girl had drowned when the boat capsized. When he surfaced, almost out of breath, the job was done.

He swam to the bank where he had left his clothes, pulled the garments on over his wet, shivering body, then walked back to the car. He saw no one on the way.

That evening, he entered Tris' apartment with his duplicate key, searched the place, and took away with him all evidences of his connection with the dead girl. When he left, he threw the key into the woods.

Except for two long-distance telephone conversations with his parents, during which they expressed their worry about last Saturday's game and Joey tried to reassure them, the week went by uneventfully until Friday. Then the evening newspaper carried the story. A body had been found.

The gruesome discovery had been made on wooded land belonging to a farmer named Carl Finch. There was a small lake or pond on Finch's property. Finch kept a rowboat there, and he had found the oars floating on the pond. Suspecting the boat had sunk, he had grappled for it and found it. When the boat was recovered, a body floated up, the body of a girl.

That much would have been bad enough, but Finch recognized the

clothes the girl was wearing, because he had *seen* that girl. The previous Sunday, he related, the girl came into Finch's woods accompanied by a man. "They were on my land, trespassing," Finch was quoted as saying, "but I didn't want to run them off because they looked like such a nice young couple, very romantic. I was up on top of a hill. I guess they didn't see me. I watched them for a while. They both looked very happy, especially the girl. She ran and skipped through the woods, and I could hear her laughing. They came to my pond, and the girl ran to it. Then she saw the boat, and it looked like she wanted to take a ride. So they both got into it together and rowed out to the middle of the pond. I didn't want to be a peeping tom, and it was dinner time, so I left. I didn't see them after that."

Joey Marven almost fainted. It had been *that* close.

"The young man," Finch went on in the newspaper account, "is probably down there in the pond with her."

The authorities seemed to have agreed with Mr. Finch, for dragging operations had begun for the second body. Thus far none had been found. That seemed strange, because the pond was so small, a body should have been easy to

locate within a matter of hours.

The dead girl had not as yet been identified, but the matter was being checked against lists of missing persons. Farmer Finch had not seen a car, nor had anyone else. It was being speculated that the couple might have been hiking, or had arrived in the neighborhood by bus, or been taken there in a third party's car. Still, the circumstance was suspicious, would continue to be until the second body was found.

Had Mr. Finch gotten a good look at the young man? Finch had never been close to the couple, but he claimed he had keen eyesight, and he would certainly recognize the young man if he saw him again.

Joey Marven was in a cold sweat when he put the newspaper down. He had a dinner date with Alison, and he decided to keep it, but he was a poor companion that evening, and he took Alison home early.

The next day, Saturday, was worse. He'd gotten very little sleep. He started the game at quarterback and played badly. He rode the bench most of the second half, and State barely squeaked by.

Joey found the Sunday paper interesting on two counts. The first concerned the story on the sports page. What had happened to Joey

Marven, was the question asked. He had begun the season brilliantly, but had fallen apart in the last two games. The coach was angry and puzzled. Joey didn't seem to have his mind on football, he suggested.

The other story appeared on the front page. The lake on Carl Finch's property had been drained. There was no second body there. The state police and the local sheriff weren't sure yet, but they were coming to conclude now that the unidentified girl had been murdered.

Francis Simpson Blair was concerned enough about his prospective son-in-law to fly in for a visit. "What's the matter with you, Joey?" he demanded.

"I don't know exactly, sir."

"Well, look here now. You've got to find out what's the matter, and correct it. It isn't just a few football games we're talking about. You're going to build your career with Blair Corporation on your reputation as an athlete. That reputation is a solid business asset. It's got to be protected. I want it protected. Something's bothering you. What is it? Want to confide in me?"

"There's nothing to confide, sir."

"Maybe you should see a doctor. Maybe a psychiatrist."

"No, sir. Please, I'll be all right . . ."

Joey was Alison's property too, and she was concerned. Alison was tall, slim, with a fashion model look and a bony face. Last weekend she had been sympathetic, motherly. Now she was angry.

"People are asking me all the time," she told him, "what's wrong with you? It's gotten embarrassing. I'm having to avoid my best



friends, and that just won't do."

"I'm sorry about that," he said.

"Do you realize the position you've put me in, Joey? Everything you do is news. Everybody knows about our relationship, so all of this bad publicity involves me too."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry! Is that all? What are you going to do about it?"

He was angry now too. "Do you want to call it quits? Is that what

you're telling me? Just tell me!"

"I didn't say that. I want you to snap out of it, that's all."

Snap out of it, that was all. He had killed a girl—or helped a girl kill herself—for her sake. And now she asked him to snap out of it.

"If you have any consideration at all for me, Joey, if you really want me, you'll have to snap out of it."

Next day the front page of the newspaper still reported on "The Girl in the Pond." An autopsy had confirmed the fact that she had indeed drowned, but there were no signs of struggle or violence.

What had happened? Police theorized that the drowning could have been an accident. Had her male escort simply become frightened and run away, afraid that he would be accused of murder? Why didn't he come forward now? Or had his relationship with the girl been a secret for some reason, and was he afraid to reveal that relationship?

A search for the young man was under way. Farmer Carl Finch had furnished a description. Clothes—gray sport jacket and trousers; not much help there. The physical description was better. Judging from his height when he was seen beside the girl, about six-two. Probably weighed about a hundred and

ninety; broad-shouldered; close-cropped, dark brown hair; rather good-looking. Looked rather like an athlete, in fact—lithe, graceful, kind of rangy, probably a fast runner.

"I would guess," Carl Finch had said, "that he was of college age, and that if he goes to college, he's probably a football player. I'm a sports fan, especially football. I played a little at State years ago. This fellow maybe ought to be an end, or maybe a running back."

Joey stared at the words in the paper. He knew his own dimensions. He was six feet, one and a half inches tall, and had weighed in last time at a hundred and ninety-two—and Finch had said he would recognize the girl's companion if he saw him again.

Joey started keeping the gray items of his wardrobe in the closet, and began wearing dark brown and blue.

At Wednesday's practice session the coach ran nothing but pass plays. Next Saturday's game was one of the toughest on the schedule. If anybody were going to snap State's victory string, the Wolves were the ones who might do it, and they would certainly do it if Joey Marven wasn't in top form. So, on Wednesday afternoon Joey threw a couple of hundred passes, and the coaching staff watched

anxiously throughout his workout.

So did a sportswriter and his photographer who were allowed to watch the practice. Afterward they begged for a brief interview with Joey Marven. The coach said he didn't mind.

"How's State going to do Saturday?" they asked Joey.

Joey hadn't had his mind on football very much that afternoon. Most of his passes had fallen into the arms of his receivers guided by experience and instinct, not by concentration, but he tried to pay attention now.

"We'll beat 'em," he answered automatically.

"You feel like you're in good shape, Joey?"

"Sure."

"Everybody knows you weren't up to par the last two games, Joey. How do you explain that?"

"All of us have our bad days."

It went on like that for a few minutes, eager questions and listless answers. Then the photographer interrupted, "How about a picture, Joey? No action thing this time, just stand there all sweaty and dirtied up. Shows you really worked hard today."

The man had raised his camera and aimed it at Joey, close-up, almost on top of him. As the camera clicked, Joey's mind clicked too . . . "I'm a sports fan, especially

football . . . I'd recognize him if I saw him again . . ."

Joey lunged, grabbed the camera, smashed it hard on the ground, then put his foot on it, pulverized it into twisted, useless metal with his heavy cleats.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

"No pictures. Just no pictures, see?"

Later, Alison cornered him. "Joey, I heard what you did to those reporters today." She was quivering with rage, her gaunt face aflame.

"I didn't want them to take pictures. I didn't say they could. Nobody said they could."

"You're a public figure!"

"I don't want to be a public figure."

She turned away, but the tautness in her shoulders and back was eloquent. "You're out of your mind these days," she said. "That's the only way I can describe you."

Yes, it was an accurate description. He was out of his mind. He had been for quite a while now.

Joey didn't want his face to appear in any newspaper that Carl Finch, football fan and State alumnus, might see, but his violence had the opposite effect from that which he'd desired.

The newspaper had a lot of pictures of Joey Marven on file. Vengefully now, they printed

several, along with an account of Joey's encounter with the photographer. Two weeks ago Joey had been a hero both on the campus and in the town, but since he had dared to manhandle a journalist, he was fair game for bitter editorial gibes. In the process he received more publicity than ever before.

Desperate, he told the coach his decision on Friday. "Look, I won't be any good tomorrow. If you put me in at all, I'll just mess it up. I don't want to be there tomorrow. I'm resigning from the team."

Frances Simpson Blair had flown in to watch the game on Saturday. He and Alison finally cornered Joey in his dormitory room. The tycoon was better controlled than his daughter. He was cold, rational, deadly.

"You've made an ugly situation for yourself, young man. The student body was with you against that newspaper, but if you don't show up at the stadium this afternoon, you'll be letting them down. They'll all consider that unforgivable. In one day, you'll lose all the admiration, all the good will, all the friendships you've built up here for four years. Nobody likes a quitter. All right, you've had some bad luck, you've been off your game. But you can't quit, not even if they grind you down in the dirt and walk all over you. The

coach can take you out. But you can't quit!"

"Sir, I can't go out there today . . ."

"Now listen to me, boy. Is Alison important to you?"

"Yes."

"Is what I say important to you?"

"Yes."

"Is your future with the Blair family and Blair Corporation important to you?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then you get out there!"

"I can't do that, sir."

On Sunday morning, along with the sad tale of State's first defeat of the season, the newspaper reported that "The Girl in the Pond," whose body had been discovered almost a hundred miles away, had been identified as a resident of this university town. Her name was Tris Kinnard, and she had been a waitress at the Red Carpet.

The girl had lived alone in an apartment over a store and service station on the edge of town. The owner of the building had noticed a lack of any signs of occupancy, had entered the apartment with his own key. His description of his missing tenant had been eventually linked with the corpse a hundred miles south.

The building owner, a man named Klein, had made a rather positive identification. The bloated

corpse itself was not recognizable, except for general dimensions and the color of the hair. What Mr. Klein did remember, however, was a small pendant or charm which she had always worn on a silver chain around her neck. The pendant was in the form of a tiny football.

Early Monday morning Joey consulted with his academic dean, and requested honorable withdrawal from the university. He might simply have run away, but his instinct for self-preservation, still functioning, told him that such a move would be too dramatic, would call too much attention to itself.

The dean was reluctant to accept withdrawal as the answer to Joey's problem. Like so many others, he counseled that Joey see a doctor, any kind of doctor. "After all," he said, "you didn't come here just to play football, Mr. Marven. You've been a very good student. The difficulty you've had on the athletic field shouldn't dissuade you from your primary goal of an education. As we all know, a man needs a college diploma these days."

"I'll have to do without it for the moment, sir. I just can't stay here."

The morning newspaper, which he purchased after leaving the dean's office, confirmed his fears. There was a long article on the

front page concerning Tris Kinnard.

The situation was perfect for juicy speculation. The girl had been lured to a pond and drowned by a young man whom a witness had described as "looking like a football player." Her corpse had been identified because of the football charm on a necklace. The girl had arrived in town at the start of the school year—and, incidentally, the start of the football season.

Except for these clues, the girl's life was a mystery. Both her landlord and her employer stated that they had never seen her with any male escort, yet a girl like Tris Kinnard would surely have attracted masculine attention. She must have had a boyfriend, and he must have been the fellow who took her to the pond and drowned her, and he very likely was a student at State. Not necessarily a football player, but there was always that possibility.

The local police would not go so far as to say they intended to question every member of the State football squad. They would, they announced, initiate an inquiry into Miss Kinnard's history, try to locate her relatives, try to discover where she had lived just previously to her arrival here, whom she might have known there, and therefore why she came to this

university town when she did.

It was obvious enough to Joey Marven that somebody would soon connect two hitherto unrelated facts—Joey Marven had played his first bad football game on the day before Tris Kinnard died.

Joey drove south slowly, his mind a turmoil. He did not know precisely why he was driving in that direction.

To cover his tracks? It was rather late for that. Perhaps to confront that fellow Carl Finch, see if the man would recognize him, remember him—and if Finch could identify him, what then? Put Finch into the pond? He thought about it vaguely, not really considering or planning it, but just letting the possibility cavort in his imagination.

The miles ticked off, as if some relentless magnet were pulling him. He turned off onto the familiar side road, parked in the same place where he had parked before.

Now there was a change, he noted, in the hills and woods. The trees were almost bare. The earth, which had displayed some green before, was now brown with a thick carpet of fallen leaves. The bright colors of autumn had given way to the desolation of approaching winter. There was a frosty bite in the air. The season of death was here.

He walked, certain that he was following the exact route that he had taken before, his feet treading on the imprints they had made at that other time. He could see those imprints stretching out ahead of him, marking the path he must take, and remorselessly his body, his legs, moved him along it.

No, there was a double path, two sets of prints parallel to each other; one for himself, one for Tris. He glanced sideways, and he saw her there. She was laughing, chattering, desperately gay. She took his hand and pulled him along the double path. Her hand was warm, almost hot, but he could not withdraw his own from its grasp. She was beautiful, her blonde hair flying, her eyes sparkling, her lips parting as she laughed.

"I am going to marry Alison Blair," he told her.

She didn't hear him. She only pulled him farther into the woods.

"Of course," he added, "I'm in love with you. I really don't feel anything the same about Alison. I don't even like her really, and she doesn't like me, only the idea that I'm a famous football star. The minute I stop being that, she won't have any feeling toward me at all. And her old man . . . to him I'm only an asset, worth a certain amount of money to his corporation, but I've got to think

about my future, you see. That's why I'm going to marry Alison. But I'll always be in love with you, Tris."

They came at last to the lake.

"I thought they'd drained it," he said.

They must have repaired the dam though, and then there must have been rain. Yes, rain—there was a dampness in the leaves underfoot—and it wasn't a very big lake.

Tris had let go of his hand, and had gone running down the hill. She stopped at the edge of the lake and stood gazing at it.

"Isn't it lovely?" she called back to him.

He looked around at the perimeter of hills. The trees were bare now. He should have been able to see Mr. Finch, but he couldn't. The man was there, he knew, watching. Mr. Finch would be watching. "They looked like such a nice young couple, very romantic." Yes, Mr. Finch was always watching.

He joined Tris at the edge of the little lake. "Oh look," she said, "there's a rowboat. Let's go for a ride, Joey."

Of course he would take her for a ride. He loved her, he wanted to please her. He loved Tris. Why couldn't he always have remembered that? So he untied the boat, and they rowed out to the middle

of the pond where they drifted.

"Water looks inviting," he said.

"You mean to swim, Joey?"

"Sure."

"You're crazy. It's ice-cold."

He rowed back to the bank anyway. He was a swimmer, and if you were a swimmer, you swam. Tris rowed the boat out into the middle again, and he stripped down to his shorts and plunged in.

"Joey, you'll catch pneumonia. Aren't you frozen?"

The water was his natural element. He belonged there. "I love to swim," he told her.

"You go your way, Joey," she answered, "but I have to go my way too. My way is death."

"No, you can't do that!"

"You can't stop me. I'll love you forever. All I want to do is die."

Because he loved her, it was up to him to help her if she wanted to

die—as an accomplice to her suicide, not as a murderer.

He reached up, grabbed a gunwale, and flipped the boat over. Then she was there in the water beside him. She looked at him, first in puzzlement, then in understanding. He wanted her to die, therefore she would die to satisfy his wish. Slowly she sank.

"I love you, Tris!" he shouted after her. "Don't leave me!" Then he dived. After a frantic search he found her. "I love you, Tris," he whispered, embracing her, letting her blonde hair, her mermaid's hair, swirl about his face. "You're the one I love. I've decided that now."

Taking her with him, he found the sunken rowboat, and crawled under it. Now there would be two bodies, as there always should have been.



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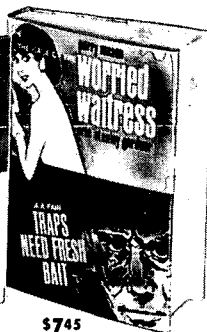
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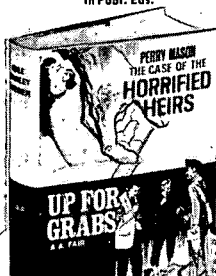
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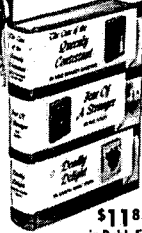
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