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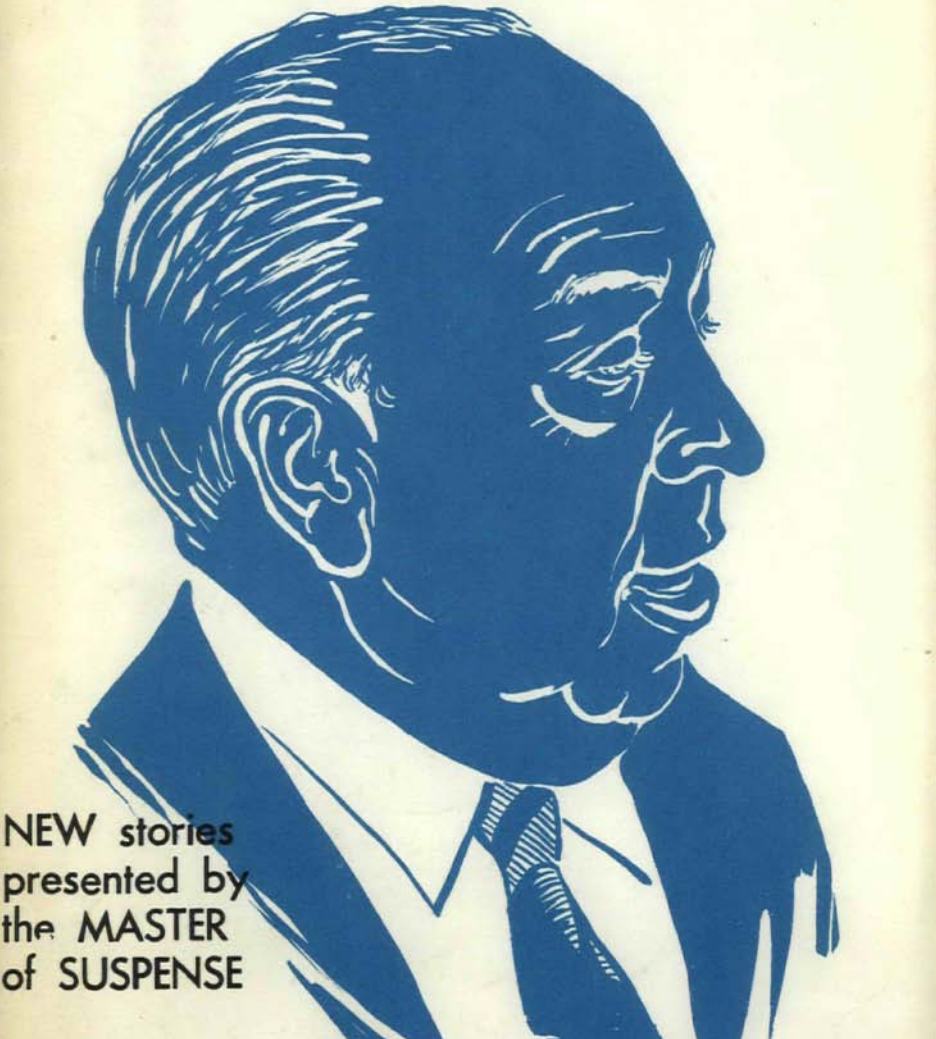
ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories presented by the MASTER of SUSPENSE

August 1969

Dear Reader:

Come in out of the heat of your own singular battle, which is further aggravated by the caloric intensity of midsummer; linger a while herein, and then be thankful for your own set of circumstances.

Depicted in the lineup that follows are some splendid conflicts, involving either wit or brawn. Among these stories, you will meet a unique primate, a renowned photographer, an international fortune hunter, a personage whose firearms do his talking, the fastest woman in the world (or, at least, in a particular hotel), and a little man with a big talent for mimicry.

These are by no means all, but epitomize a small portion of the idea. As you know, I am not one to let the tiger out of the cage until the appropriate time, and of course I cannot accomplish this unless we get on with it. So try to keep a cool head as you make your way along the twisting paths within, and you will find your guides to be experts indeed.

Alfred Hitchcock

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VOLUME 14, NO. 8 AUGUST 1969

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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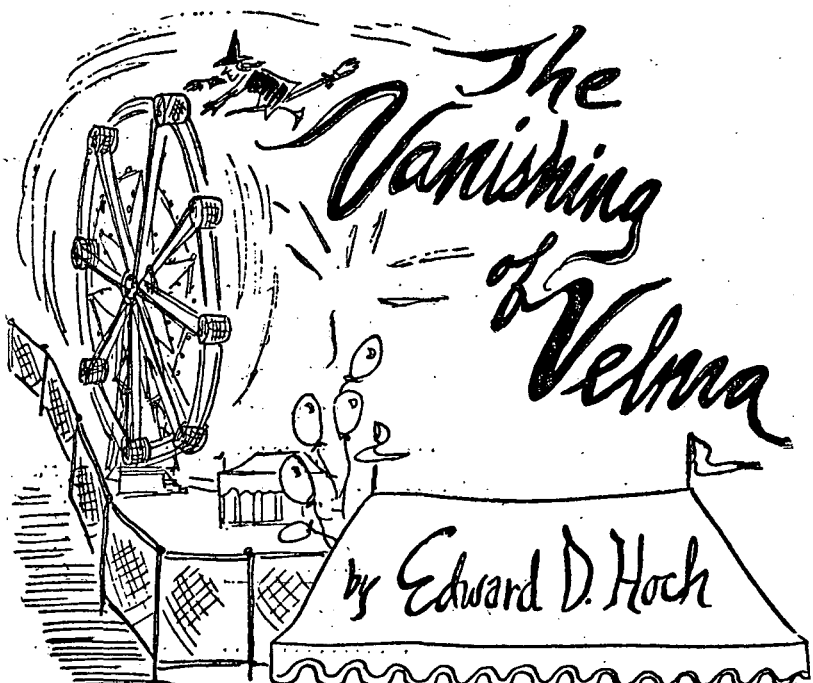
SHORT STORIES

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 14, No. 8, August 1969. Single copies 50 cents. Subscriptions $6.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $7.00 (in U.S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 2441 Beach Court, Riviera Beach, Fla. 33404. Publications office, 10 Ferry Street, Concord, N. H. 03302. Second class postage paid at Concord, N. H. Postage must accompany manuscripts if return is desired but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited material. Manuscripts and changes of addresses should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 2441 Beach Court, Riviera Beach, Fla. 33404. Printed in the U.S.A.

A witch's curse in a world of imprecations may be extravagant ornamentation.



REMEMBER Stella Gaze?" Sergeant Fletcher asked, coming into Captain Leopold's office with the morning coffee.

"Stella Gaze? How could I forget her?" It had been one of Leopold's oddest cases, some three years back, involving a middle-aged woman who'd committed suicide after having been accused of practicing witchcraft. He thought of Stella Gaze often, wondering what he could have done to handle things differently. "What about her?" he asked Fletcher.

The sergeant slipped into his favorite chair opposite Leopold's desk and carefully worked the plas-

tic top off his cup of coffee. "Well, you remember that her house was directly adjacent to Sportland Amusement Park—in fact, when they couldn't buy her land they built the ferris wheel right next to the house, with only a wire fence separating them."

"I remember," Leopold said. Stella Gaze—no witch, certainly—but only a neurotic woman whom no one understood. She'd tried suicide before, and in the end had been successful.

"Well, listen to this! Last night about ten o'clock, a girl vanished from the top of that same ferris wheel! What do you think the newspapers will do with that when they get it?"

"Vanished?" Leopold scratched his head. "How could she vanish from the top of a ferris wheel?"

"She couldn't, but she did. It wasn't reported to the police till later—too late for the morning editions, but the papers will be onto it any minute."

As if in answer to Fletcher's prediction, the telephone buzzed, but it was not a curious newsman. It was Leopold's direct superior, the chief of detectives. "Captain, I hate to ask you this, because it doesn't involve a homicide—not yet, anyway. But you worked on the Stella Gaze case out at Sportland three years back, didn't you?"

"That's right," Leopold answered with a sigh, already sure of what was coming.

"We've got a disappearance out there. A girl missing from the ferris wheel. I know you're not working on anything right now, and I thought you might help us out by handling the case with Sergeant Fletcher. The papers are already trying to tie it in somewhat with the Gaze thing, and you'll know what to tell them."

"I always know what to tell them," Leopold said. "What's the girl's name?"

"Velma Kelty. She was there with a boyfriend, and he's pretty shook about it."

"I'll talk to him," Leopold said. "Any special reason for your interest?" He'd known the chief of detectives long enough to ask.

"Not really. The boy is Tom Williams, the councilman's son."

"And?"

A long sigh over the phone. "It might turn out to be sort of messy, Captain, if anything's happened to her. She's only fifteen years old."

So Leopold drove out to visit Tom Williams at his home. He'd never met the boy, and knew his father only slightly, in the vague manner that detectives knew councilmen. The house was large and expensive, with a gently curving driveway and a swimming pool

arely visible in the back area.

"You must be the police," the oy said, answering the door himelf. "Come in."

"Captain Leopold. You're Tom Villiams?"

"That's right, sir." He was about wenty, with sandy hair cropped hort and a lanky look that was ypical of college boys these days. Have they found her yet?"

"No, I guess not. Suppose you ell me about it." Leopold had folowed him onto a rear terrace that verlooked the pool. It was empty ow, with only a rubber animal of ome sort floating near the far cor-ier.

"She went up in the ferris wheel nd she didn't come down," the oung man said simply. "That's all here is to it."

"Not quite all," Leopold correctd. "Why don't you start at the beinning. How old are you, Tom?"

The young man hesitated, runing a nervous hand through his andy close-cropped hair. "I'll be wenty-one in two weeks. What's hat got to do with anything?"

"I understand Velma Kelty is nly fifteen. I was just wondering ow you two happened to get toether, that's all."

"I met her through my kid sis-r," he mumbled. "The thing was-'t really a date. I just took her to portland, that's all."

"How many times had you been out with her this summer?"

He shrugged. "Two or three. I took her to a movie, a ball game. Anything wrong with that?"

"Nothing," Leopold said. "Now suppose you tell it like it was, in detail this time."

He sighed and settled a bit deeper into the canvas deck chair. "I took her out for a pizza earlier, and she suggested we play some miniature golf. Sportland was the closest place, so we went there. I parked my car in the lot by the golf course and driving range, but when we'd finished she suggested going on some of the rides. We went on a couple, but the rides right after the pizza upset my stomach a bit. When she suggested the ferris wheel I told her I'd watch."

"And you did watch?"

"Sure. I paid for her ticket and watched her get into one of those little wire cages they have. It was dark by that time, around ten o'clock. You know how they light the wheel at night?"

"I haven't seen it in a few years," Leopold admitted.

"Well, they have colored neon running out on the spokes of the wheel. It looks great from a distance, but close up it's a little overwhelming. Anyway, I didn't remember exactly which of the colored cages she was in, and by

the time it had reached the top of the wheel, I'd lost it in the lights."

"Was she alone in her cage?"

"Yeah. The guy tried to get me in at the last minute, but my stomach wasn't up to it. The wheel was almost empty by that time."

"What happened then?"

"Well, I waited for her to come down, and she didn't."

"Didn't?"

"That's right. I watched each cage being unloaded. She wasn't in any of them. After a while I got sorta frantic and had the operator empty them all out. But she wasn't in any of them."

"Who did get out while you were standing there?"

"Let's see—the ones I remember were a father and two little kids, a fellow and girl who'd been necking—they were right ahead of us in line—and a couple of college girls who seemed to be alone. I suppose there were others, but I don't remember them."

"Could she have gotten off on the other side of the wheel?"

"No. I was watching each car when it was unloaded. I was interested in the way the guy was doing it, giving the good-looking girls a quick feel as he helped them to the ground."

"Why did you wait a couple of hours before calling the police?"

"I didn't believe my eyes, that's why! She couldn't have just vanished like that, not while I was watching. The guy operating it told me I was nuts."

"Didn't he remember her?"

"No."

"Even though he wanted you to join her?"

"He said he was busy. He couldn't remember everybody."

Leopold glanced at the official report of the patrolman who'd been summoned. "That would be Rudy Magee?"

"I guess that's his name. Anyway, he dismissed the whole thing, and I guess for a minute I just thought I was cracking up. I walked around for a half hour, just looking for her, and then went back to the car and waited. When she didn't come, I walked over to the ferris wheel again and told the guy—Magee—I was going to call the police."

"I see," Leopold said, but he didn't really see very much.

"So I called them. That's it."

Leopold lit a cigarette. "Was she pregnant, Tom?"

"What?"

"You understand it's my job to ask all the questions, and that's one of them. You wouldn't be the first boy who wanted a fifteen-year-old pregnant girlfriend to disappear."

"I never touched her. I told you she was a friend of my sister's."

"All right." He stood up. "Is your

sister around now?" he persisted.

"She's out."

"For how long?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? She's sorta loose."

"I'll be back," Leopold told him. "What's your sister's name?"

"Cindy. They call her Cin."

"Who does?"

"Her crowd."

"Is she fifteen, too?"

"Sixteen."

Leopold nodded. As he walked around the side of the house, he looked a bit longingly at the swimming pool. The day was warming up, and a dip in the clear blue water would have felt good.

He got back in the car and drove out to Sportland.

Sportland was still big, but it had perhaps retreated a little into itself since Leopold's last visit. The lower portion, once given over to kiddies' rides, had been sold off to a drive-in movie, and the rides in the upper part now seemed a little closer together. The ferris wheel was still in the same place, of course, but Stella Gaze's house had been torn down for parking.

"You Rudy Magee?" Leopold asked a kid at the ferris wheel.

"He's on his break. Over there at the hot dog stand."

Magee was a type—the sport-shirted racetrack tout, the small-time gambler, the part-time pimp. Leopold had known them through all of his professional life. "I want to talk about last night," he told the thin, pale man, showing his identification.

"You mean that kid—the one who lost his girl?"

"That's right."

"Hell, I don't know a thing about it. I think he dreamed the whole bit."

Leopold grunted. "You worked here long? I don't remember you."

"Just since the place opened for the season in May. Why? I gotta be an old-time employee to know people don't disappear from ferris wheels?"

Leopold was about to answer, but a third man had joined them—a stocky, thirsty-looking fellow who looked vaguely familiar. "Well, Captain Leopold, isn't it? You working on this Velma Kelty case?"

Leopold looked him up and down. "I don't believe I caught the name."

"Fane. Walter Fane from the *Globe*. You've seen me around headquarters." He pulled an afternoon paper from under his arm. "See? We've got it on page one."

They had indeed. *Girl Vanishes at Amusement Park; Councilman's Son Quizzed.*

"Is that the way it is, Captain? Or have you found the body?"

"What body?" Leopold asked.

"You're a homicide captain, right? If you're on the case, there's a body."

"Not this time. I'm just helping out."

"Give me a break, Captain. I can still phone in a new lead for the late sports edition."

Leopold gazed over at the ferris wheel, and at the new parking lot beyond. "Are you superstitious, Fane?"

"Huh?"

"Three years ago, a woman named Stella Gaze was accused of witchcraft."

"Yeah." His eyes brightened a bit. "She lived out here somewhere."

"Right next to the ferris wheel. The house was torn down after she killed herself. But if a girl really did vanish from that ferris wheel, who's to say Stella Gaze's spirit isn't still around?"

"You believe that bunk, Captain?"

"You wanted a new lead. I'm giving you one."

The reporter thought about it for a moment, and then nodded. "Thanks," he said, heading off toward a telephone.

"We can go back to your wheel," Leopold told Rudy Magee. "I want you to tell me how it happened."

"Nothing happened. Nothing at all," Rudy insisted vehemently.

"Well then, tell me what *didn't* happen."

They reached the wheel and Rudy took over from the kid, standing on a raised platform where the cars came to a stop, helping people in and out over the foot-high metal sill. "Watch your step," he told two teen-age girls as he accepted their tickets and shut the wire cage on them. Though Leopold could see only their knees and upper bodies from the ground, he knew Magee was getting a good view from his position.

Rudy let a few cars go by with empty seats before he stopped the wheel again to load the next passengers. "When there aren't many customers, I balance the load," he explained to Leopold.

A young hippie type with sideburns and beads came by. "Is Hazel here?" he asked Magee.

"Not now," the pale man answered. "Maybe later."

Leopold watched the wheel turning against the sky, noting a tree too far away, a lamp post just out of reach. He tried to imagine a fifteen-year-old girl swinging like a monkey against the night sky, trying to reach one of them, and then decided it was impossible. If Velma had gone up—and that was the big *if*—then she'd surely come down as well.

"Satisfied?" Rudy asked curtly.

"Not quite. I understand you've got an easy hand with the girls when you're helping them in and out. You must have seen Velma."

"I told you, and I'm telling you. It was busy. I didn't notice anybody."

But his eyes shifted as he spoke. He was a poor liar. "All right," Leopold said. "Let's try it another way. Lying to me is one thing, lying before a grand jury is something else. The girl is missing and we want to find her. If she turns up dead and you've been lying, that's big trouble for you." He took a chance and added, "They know about your record here, Rudy?"

"What record? A couple of gambling arrests?"

Leopold shrugged. "Why make more trouble for yourself?"

The thin man seemed to sag a little. "All right. I was just trying to stay outa trouble. Understand?"

"Everybody wants to stay outa trouble, Rudy. Now suppose you tell me about it."

"Well, the guy shows up just before ten o'clock with his broad. She's got long black hair and looks about eighteen. They argue for a couple of minutes, because she wants him to go up with her and he doesn't want to. Finally he buys her a ticket and she goes up alone. All alone—nobody sharing the seat with her—just the girl alone."

"And?"

"And she never comes down. Just like he said. Damnedest thing I ever seen."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure. I was sorta watching for her. You know."

"I know, Rudy. What did you think happened?"

"Hell, I was scared. I thought she opened the cage and jumped. I figured we'd find her body over in the parking lot somewhere."

"But you didn't."

"No. Besides, somebody would have seen her, you know. But I just couldn't figure anything else. Say, do you believe that stuff about the witch and all? Do you think she put a curse on this place before she died?"

Leopold shrugged. "It'll make a good story for a few days, keep them off the kid's back. Maybe by that time we'll find out what really happened to Velma Kelty."

The missing girl had lived with an aunt and uncle in the East Bay region of town, ever since her parents had died in the crash of a private plane some eight years earlier. Captain Leopold drove over to the house, knowing that he was only retracing the steps covered earlier by the missing persons people.

The uncle was a lawyer named Frank Prosper. He was a bulging,

balding man whom Leopold had seen occasionally around City Hall. "You mean you've only come to ask more questions?" he challenged, "and not to give us any word of her?"

"There is no word," Leopold said. "I wanted to ask you a few things about her. And about Tom Williams. He seems a little mature to have been dating her."

"We've always had trouble with that girl," Prosper said, biting off the tip of a cigar. "My wife's brother was a wild sort and she takes right after him."

"What do you think about Williams? Do you think he might have harmed her?"

"I don't know. He's not a bad kid. Only thing wrong with him is that he thinks his father's God's gift to politics. Old man Williams is the last of the old cigar chompers." Leopold thought this last was a somewhat odd comment from a man who himself was smoking a cigar at the moment.

"You mean he's crooked?"

"Nothing of the sort! He's just a man who believes in political power at the ward level, the way it was practiced a couple of generations ago. The country has passed men like Williams by, but he doesn't seem to realize it."

"I'd like to know more about your niece. Do you have a picture of her? A snapshot would be fine."

"I gave one to the missing persons people. Here's another." He held out a framed photograph of a shyly smiling girl in a short red dress. She wore her black hair long,

half covering a pretty, if unexceptional, face. She seemed several years older than fifteen. Leopold would have taken her for a college girl.

"She doesn't look like the wild sort. What was the trouble?"

"She hung around with a fast crowd. Hippies. That type."

"Tom Williams, a hippie?" Somehow the scene didn't ring true to Leopold.

"Not Williams. His sister. Talk to his sister."

Leopold nodded. "I was thinking of doing just that."

She was in the pool when he re-

turned to the Williams house, splashing around in a brief two-piece suit that stopped just short of being a true bikini. When Leopold called to her from the water's edge, she left the rubber animal to float by itself and kicked out with energy toward where he stood.

"You're Cindy Williams?" Leopold asked, stretching out a hand to help her from the water.

"Just call me Cin," she replied.

He shook the dampness from his cuffs and took a good look at her. Yes, he supposed even in the bathing suit she could have been called a hippie—especially by a paunchy lawyer like Frank Prosper. Her hair was long and stringy, not unlike the missing girl's, except that it was blonde. She had the same sort of pretty but unremarkable face. He'd seen her type many times before, downtown, wearing tight jeans and laughing a bit too loudly on a street corner. He wondered what her father, the councilman, thought about it all.

"Velma Kelty," Leopold said. "She was your friend."

Cin Williams nodded. "A year younger than me, but we're in the same class at school."

"I'm investigating her disappearance. Any idea what might have happened to her?"

Cin shrugged her loose, bony shoulders. "Maybe it was the witch." She gestured toward the final edition of the newspaper, where the headline now read: *Girl Vanishes at Amusement Park, Witchcraft Hinted.* Walter Fane had phoned in his story on time, and Leopold supposed it was a slight improvement over the earlier headline.

"Were there any other boys beside your brother?" he asked the girl in the bathing suit. "Someone else she might have dated?"

"Gee, I don't know." She was starting to dry off her long suntanned legs with a towel.

"I hear she hung around some with hippies."

"I don't know."

"We'll find out," Leopold said.

A voice called from the terrace at the back of the house. "Cindy, who's that you're talking to?"

"A detective, Daddy. About Velma."

Councilman Williams, whose first name was also Tom, came down the flagstone walk. His son looked a great deal like him, as did the daughter to a lesser extent. There was not a cigar in sight, and despite what Prosper had said, Leopold doubted that he smoked them. "You're Leopold? The chief said he'd put his best man on this thing."

"Captain Leopold, yes."

"Any clues yet, Captain?"

"No clues. It's not the sort of case where you look for clues."

"But the girl disappeared from the ferris wheel."

"Perhaps."

"If there's any way I can help out, down at City Hall . . ."

"Do you know the girl's uncle? Frank Prosper?"

"Yes. He's a lawyer, active in politics. I know him."

The tone was one of prompt dismissal. Perhaps they only belonged to different parties. Leopold looked back to where Cin had finished drying herself. "I was asking your daughter about hippies. I understand Velma traveled with a pretty wild crowd."

"What gave you that idea?" Williams asked. "She was with my daughter a great deal. And with my son recently, of course."

Young Tom Williams came out then, to join them and stand beside his father. He seemed very young, still a boy. "Is there any news about Velma?"

"No news."

"She'll turn up," the father decided. "It's probably just some gag."

Leopold didn't have an answer for that. Standing there with the three of them beside the pool, he didn't have an answer for anything.

Fletcher came in with coffee the next morning. "Anything on the girl, Captain?" he asked, settling into his usual chair.

"Nothing."

"You going to turn it back to missing persons?"

Leopold sighed. "The chief wants me to stay on it another day. He promised Councilman Williams we'd do our best."

"What do you think happened to her?"

Leopold leaned back in his chair. "What do I think happened? I think somebody's trying to pull a neat trick. I think the ferris wheel was chosen because of Stella Gaze and all that talk of witchcraft. But I don't know who's behind it, or what they're trying to accomplish."

"Young Williams?"

"Yes. He has to be in on it. You see, whatever the plan was, it called for witnesses at the wheel to verify the boy's story. Unfortunately for him, Rudy Magee wasn't about to verify anything. That threw him into such confusion that he walked around for an hour or two before even calling the police. That tells us something very interesting, if just a little bit sinister."

"Sinister?"

"Look at it this way. Young Williams and the girl are going to fake a disappearance for some reason—publicity, a joke, anything. She goes up in the ferris wheel, after a big scene with him to draw atten-

tion—and then does her vanishing act. Big witchcraft thing, Stella Gaze and all that. Except that it doesn't work because Magee gets scared and denies everything. So what happens? Williams goes away for a while, *but then he comes back and calls the police.* Why? There were two other courses open to him. He could have forgotten the whole thing, or the two of them could have tried it again some other night. Why did he call the police with the weak story he had?"

"You said it was something sinister."

"It is." Leopold swiveled in his chair to stare out the window. The headquarters' parking lot was damp and misty, its asphalt surface dark with water from a morning shower. The view wasn't much.

"Sinister how? Like witchcraft?"

"Like murder," Leopold said.

There were other crimes that day, the usual assortment of a city's troubles, and it was not until late in the day that Leopold's mind went back to the vanishing of the fifteen-year-old girl. It was yanked back suddenly by a telephone call.

"Captain Leopold?" A girl's voice, soft.

"Yes."

"This is Velma Kelty."

"Who? You'll have to speak louder." Already he was signaling Fletcher to trace it.

"Velma Kelty. The girl on the ferris wheel."

"Oh yes. I'm glad to hear from you, Velma. Are you all right?"

"I'm all right."

"Where are you, Velma?"

"At Sportland. I'd like to meet you here, later, after dark."

"Couldn't I come out now?"

"No . . . Not yet. After dark."

"All right, Velma. Where should I meet you?"

"Ten o'clock. By the ferris wheel."

"Yes. Of course. I'll be there, Velma."

He hung up and called to Fletcher, but there'd been no time to trace it. There was nothing to do but wait till ten o'clock.

The rain came again about eight, but it lasted only a few minutes. It left behind a summer dampness, though, and a light mist that clung to the road as Leopold drove. Approaching the Sound, he might have been driving toward the end of the earth, were it not for the bright neon of Sportland that told him some sort of civilization still existed out there at the water's edge.

It was five minutes to ten when he reached the ferris wheel. Rudy Magee was on duty again. "You must work all the time," Leopold

observed. "You're always here."

"Every other night, alternating with the afternoons," Magee said. "What's up?"

"I thought I might ask you. Seen anybody familiar tonight?"

"Yeah. Now that you mention it, that reporter Fane was nosing round."

"Oh?" Leopold lit a cigarette. "Anybody else?"

"Like who?"

Leopold glanced at his watch. It was just ten o'clock. "Like Velma Kelty, the missing girl."

"Never laid eyes on her. I'd know her from the picture the papers published."

"She's not on the wheel now?"

"I told you I'd know her. There's nobody but a middle-aged couple and a few strays."

He slowed the wheel to a stop and released a young man from his cage. Then he slowed it a few cages on and opened it for a young lady. Leopold saw the hair first, and knew. Rudy Magee saw her too, and let out a muffled gasp.

Velma Kelty had come back.

Leopold beckoned to her and they walked away from the shaken Magee.

"I suppose you're going to tell me you were riding around on that ferris wheel for the last forty-eight hours," Leopold said.

"Sure. Why not?"

He peered at her in the uncertain light. "All right, young lady. You nearly scared that ferris wheel operator to death. I'm taking you home to your uncle."

"I can find my way," she told him. "I just wanted to see you, to show you I wasn't really missing."

"Sure." They were in better light now, crossing to the parking lot. He glanced sideways at her and reached out to touch her long black hair. Then he twisted and gave a sudden tug. It came away in his hand.

"You creep!" Cindy Williams shouted at him, clutching for the wig.

"Now, now. You're playing the big girls' game, Cindy. You have to expect these little setbacks."

"How'd you know it was me?"

"I guess because it looked like you. That's a pretty old trick, to start out a blonde and then change to a brunette. You fooled Rudy Magee, anyway. Of course you had the wig hidden in your purse when you got on the wheel a while ago."

"I just wanted to show you it could be done," she said. "Velma could have worked it just the opposite—gotten on the ferris wheel as a brunette and gotten off as a blonde."

"But you didn't show me anything of the sort, because it didn't work, did it? I recognized you as

soon as I got you in the good light, and Tom would have recognized Velma a lot sooner than that, wig or no wig, because he was watching for her." He sighed with exasperation. "All right, get in the car. I'm still taking you home."

She slid into the front seat, pouting for several minutes as he turned the car out of the Sportland parking lot. Presently the garish neon of the amusement park subsided into the background as they drove toward town.

"You think I'm involved, don't you?" she asked.

"I didn't, until tonight. That was a pretty foolish trick."

"Why was it?"

"I might have told Prosper she was alive, gotten his hopes up."

"You think she's dead?"

Leopold kept his eyes on the road. "I think Tom was playing a stunt of some sort and it didn't come off. He waited two hours before calling the police. Why? Because he was trying to decide what he should do. But then he called them after all, even though Magee didn't back up his story. Why again? Because he couldn't come back and try his stunt the next night. Because Velma Kelty really had vanished, only not in the way he made it appear."

"How, then?"

"I wish I knew." He pushed in the cigarette lighter that rarely worked and reached for his crumpled pack. In the light from passing cars her face was tense and drawn. Once again, she looked older than her age.

"You must have some idea."

"Sure I do, lots of them. Want to hear one? Velma Kelty died some-

how at your house, maybe in the swimming pool, and your father the councilman is implicated. To protect him, you and Tom cook up this disappearance, with you using that black wig. How does that sound to you?"

"Fantastic!"

"Maybe."

They drove the rest of the way in near silence, until they were almost to her house. "By the way," he asked, "how'd you get out to Sportland tonight?"

"Tom drove me," she mumbled. "He dropped me off."

He pulled up in front of her house. "Want me to come in with you, have a few words with your father?"

"N-no."

"All right. This time."

He watched till she reached the door and then drove on. He was thinking that if his own marriage had worked out he might have had a daughter just about her age—fifteen or sixteen—but that was a heck of a thing for a cop to have on his mind. Velma Kelty might have been his daughter too, and now she was gone.

He went home to his apartment and turned on the air-conditioner. He fell asleep to its humming, and when the telephone awakened him he wondered for an instant what the sound was.

"Leopold here," he managed to mumble into the instrument.

"It's Fletcher, Captain. Sorry to disturb you, but I thought you'd want to know. We found her."

"Who?" he asked through bleary cobwebs.

"The missing girl. Velma Kelty."

"Is she all right?"

"She's dead, Captain. They just fished her body out of the Sound near Sportland."

He cursed silently and turned on the bedside lamp. Why did they always have to end like this?

"Any chance of suicide?"

Fletcher cleared his throat. "Pretty doubtful, Captain. Somebody weighted down the body with fifty pounds of scrap iron."

Leopold went back to the house with the swimming pool, rousing Tom Williams from his bed just as dawn was breaking over the city. "You'll wake my father," young Williams said. "What do you want?"

"The truth. No more stories about ferris wheels, just the truth."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"They just fished Velma's body from the Sound. Now do you know what I'm talking about?"

"Oh no!" He seemed truly staggered by the news, as if he refused to comprehend the truth of it.

"That trick with your sister was

a bit of foolishness. Is that the way you worked it the other night, with a wig?"

"I swear, Captain, Velma Kelty got on that ferris wheel. She got on and she never got off. I can't imagine what happened to her, or how she ended up in the Sound. What killed her?"

"They're doing the autopsy now. Her body was weighted to keep it at the bottom, but not heavily enough, apparently. It wasn't any accident."

"I . . . I can't imagine what happened to her."

"You'd better start imagining, because you're in big trouble. You and your sister both. Someone killed the girl and threw her body in the Sound. Maybe she was raped first."

"You don't know that!"

"I don't know much of anything at this point, but I can speculate. Did you do it, Tom? Or maybe your father? Or maybe some of the hippie crowd she hung around with? Anyway, the body had to be disposed of, and Velma's disappearance had to take place somewhere else. The ferris wheel seemed logical to you, because of the witch stories, so Cindy put on her wig and you pulled it off. Except that the wheel operator was ready to deny everything. That threw you for a loss, and you spent a couple of hours wondering what to do next."

"No!"

"Then why did you wait all that time before reporting her disappearance? Why, Tom?"

"I . . . I . . ."

Leopold turned away. "You'd better think up a good story. You'll need it in court."

Fletcher looked up from his desk as Leopold entered the squad room and crossed to his private office. "Did you bring the Williams kid in, Captain?"

"Not yet, soon." His lips were drawn into a tight line.

"Crazy story for him to make up, about that damned ferris wheel."

"Yeah." Leopold shuffled the papers on his desk, seeing nothing. "How's the autopsy report?"

"Nothing yet."

"I'm going down there," he decided suddenly.

The medical examiner was a tall, red-faced man whom Leopold had known for years. He had just finished the autopsy and was sitting at his desk writing the report. "How are you, Captain?" he mumbled.

"Finish with the Kelty girl?"

"Just about. I have to submit the report. Her things are over there."

Leopold glanced at the clothes, still soggy with water. Dark blue

lacks and sweater, sneakers, bra nd panties. A heavy piece of cast ron, entwined with damp cord, ested nearby. He looked back at he doctor. "Was she raped, Gus?"

"No. I wish it were that easy. Something like that I could under-tand." His face was suddenly old.

"What was it, Gus?"

"Fifteen. Only fifteen years ld . . ."

"Gus . . ."

The doctor stood up and handed ver his report. "There it is, Cap-ain. She died of a massive overdose f heroin, mainlined into a vein ear her elbow . . ."

It was late afternoon when Leo-old returned to Sportland. He ould see the ferris wheel from a ong way off, outlined against the lue of a cloudless sky. For the first ime he wondered if Stella Gaze eally had been a witch, if she eally had put a curse on the place. Maybe that was some sort of an xplanation.

"You're back!" Rudy Magee aid, strolling over to meet him. "I ear they found the girl."

"They found her."

"Not far from here, huh!"

"Close, Rudy. Very close."

"The kid was lying, then?"

"Let's go for a ride, Rudy, on our ferris wheel. I'll tell you all bout it."

"Huh? All right, if you really want to. I don't usually go on the thing myself." The kid took over the controls, and he preceded Leopold into one of the wire cages. As the wheel turned and they started their climb, he added, "Great view from up here, huh?"

"I imagine with all this neon lit up at night it's quite a ride."

Rudy chuckled. "Yeah, the kids like it."

"I know how Velma disappeared," Leopold said suddenly.

"You do? Boy, I'd like to know myself. It was a weird thing. The kid played some trick on me, huh?"

"No trick, Rudy. You were the one with the tricks."

The pale man stiffened in the seat beside him. "What do you mean?" The caged seat swayed gently as it reached the peak of its ascent and started slowly down.

"I mean that you've been selling drugs to these kids—hippies, college kids, fifteen-year-old girls. I suppose it was a big kick to go up on this wheel at night with all the colored neon and stuff while you were high on LSD."

"You'd have a tough time proving that," Rudy said.

"Maybe not. Maybe Tom Williams has decided it's time to talk. That was the key question, after all—why he waited so long to report Velma's disappearance to the

police. The reason, of course, was that he was high on drugs at the time, probably on an LSD trip. He had to wait till it wore off a little. Maybe you even had him convinced that Velma never did get on your ferris wheel."

"I told you she got on," Magee mumbled. "But she never got off."

"She never got off alive." Leopold watched the scene shifting beneath them as they reached bottom and started up once more. "LSD had become too tame for Velma and her hippie friends. So you maybe sold her some marijuana. Anyway, before long you had her on heroin."

"No."

"I say yes."

He rubbed his palms together. "Maybe I sold the kids a little LSD, but never anything stronger. Never horse."

"Some people call it *horse,* Rudy. Others call it *Hazel.* I heard the kid ask you for Hazel the other day, but it didn't register with me then. Velma Kelty bought the heroin from you, and mainlined it into her vein as she was going up in the ferris wheel. It's a pretty safe place, when you consider it. Only she was fairly new at it, or the stuff was a bad batch, or she just took too much. She crumpled off the seat, into this space at our feet—and she rode around on your ferris wheel for the rest of the night, until the park closed and you could weight the body and toss it in the Sound."

"You're as nutty as he was. Somebody would have seen her there."

"No, not from ground level. This metal sill is a foot high, and I noticed that from the ground you couldn't see below girls' knees. A small fifteen-year-old girl could easily crumple into that space, seen by you on that platform every time the wheel turned, but invisible from the ground. The seat just looked empty and of course you were careful to skip it when loading passengers."

"The people in the seat above would have seen her there," Magee argued.

"So you kept that seat empty too. Williams said you weren't busy that night. There were only a few others on the wheel. Besides, Velma was wearing dark blue slacks and sweater, and she had black hair. In the dark no one would have seen her there, especially with all this neon blinding them."

"So you're going to arrest me for disposing of a body?"

"For more than that, Rudy. The narcotics charge alone will keep you behind bars a good long time. But you know the effects of an overdose as well as I do. Velma

elty was still alive after she col-
psed—physically incapacitated,
uporous, with slow respiration,
ut still alive. She could probably
ave been saved with quick treat-
ent, but you were too afraid for
our own skin. So you let her slow-
die here, crumpled into this little
ace, until the park closed and
ou could get rid of the body."

"The policeman came, he
oked."

"Sure. He came and looked two
ours later. Naturally he didn't
eck each individual seat, because
o one would believe she could
ill be there unseen. Perhaps by
at time you had stopped the
heel anyway, with her body near
e top. Or maybe you'd even man-
ged to remove it, if business was
d enough to give you a few min-
es' break."

Rudy Magee's hand came out of
s pocket. It was holding a hypo-
rmic syringe. "You're a smart cop,
ut not smart enough. I'm not go-
g back inside on any murder rap,
even manslaughter."

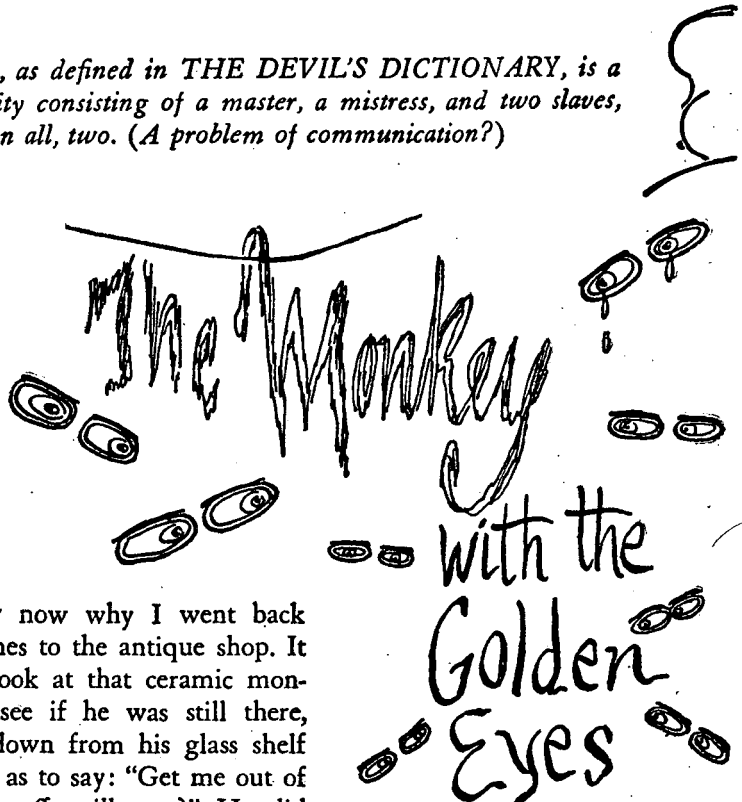
Leopold sighed. The wire cage
as nearing the ground again. "Do
you see that man watching us from the ground? His name is Sergeant Fletcher, and he's awfully good with a gun. I wouldn't try to jab me with that, or yourself either."

As he spoke, Leopold's hand closed around the syringe, taking it from Rudy's uncertain fingers. "How did you know it all?" he asked quietly, staring into Leopold's eyes.

"I didn't, until I saw the autopsy report. Velma died of an overdose of heroin, and she was last seen alive getting onto your ferris wheel. I put those two facts together and tried to determine if she could have died on your wheel, and just kept going around, without being seen. I decided she could have, and that she did."

The wheel stopped finally, and they got off. There was a bit of a breeze blowing in off the Sound, and it reminded Leopold somehow of Velma Kelty—the living girl, not the body in the morgue. He wished that he had known her. Maybe, just maybe, he could have saved her from Rudy Magee—and from herself.

Marriage, as defined in THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY, is a community consisting of a master, a mistress, and two slaves, making in all, two. (A problem of communication?)



I KNOW now why I went back three times to the antique shop. It was to look at that ceramic monkey, to see if he was still there, leering down from his glass shelf as much as to say: "Get me out of all this stuff, will you?" He did look pretty silly in the midst of dainty glass and gilded china and pewter.

"How did you get here in the first place?" was my immediate thought on seeing him. I must have said it out loud because Ellen, my sister, turned from her inspection of a majolica plate to ask if I had said something. I shook my head, then took Evo down from his shelf, turned him upside down, looked at his bottom and let out a muffled yelp.

Ellen came over. "What is the matter?" She read the price tag (thirty-seven dollars) and went back to her plate.

by Ruth Perlmutter

I turned the little monkey right side up and he looked helplessly at me out of those golden eyes of his. Olive drab with silver-gray whiskers—the muttonchop, bristling kind—he was without a doubt the most unbeautiful thing I had ever laid eyes on.

"What do you see in him?" Ellen had come to stand beside me.

"The price is outrageous, don't you think?" I asked.

"Not if you like it. I don't."

Some trick of light and shadow across the ceramic face gave me the jolting impression that those golden eyes had blinked. I turned to see if Ellen had caught it, but she was intent on something at the other end of the shelf. I hastily put Evo back and drifted away to look at a framed print of mushrooms, bordered with crimson burlap. Feeling eyes piercing my back, I turned to find the monkey's shining orbs fastened on me, and I hurried into the next room. Fled would be a better word.

The second time I saw Evo was when I went to that antique shop with my son Dick. He had heard they had an old English horn and he wanted to price it. The minute we opened the door and that bell jingled off in the distance, I remembered this was where I had seen the ceramic monkey. Was he still perched up there on the glass shelf? He was—and eyeing me balefully.

I decided to avoid that room altogether but of course that was where the English horn turned out to be. Discomposed as I was, I reminded myself that this was utter nonsense. Whoever heard of being afraid of a figurine! A freakish one at that, with hands like feet and feet like hands, one trying to scratch the other, it seemed. Involuntarily, I did it for Evo—scratched him, I mean.

Dick caught me at it. "What in the world did you do that for?" he asked.

"What?"

"Scratch the monkey. What if you knocked it over? The sign says: 'If you break it, you have bought it.'"

My hand was still on Evo—frozen in the act. What could I say? I pulled it away, guiltily, and in so doing felt something splash on my finger—something like a tear. I looked up to find Evo's woeful eyes watching, pleading.

"Let's go," said Dick, starting for the door.

"You're not taking the horn?"

"Not at that price. Besides, the mouthpiece is wrong."

"Why not try it?" I parried for time to get a good look at the ceiling, to see if there might be a leak or drip . . . anything to explain that tear on my finger.

Dick put the horn to his lips and gave with a mighty blast that brought the shop owner out of a back room. I dashed to the door and out without looking back.

The third time I went to the antique shop was entirely against my will, without even knowing I

was going, in fact. I was driving up the River Road with Nina, my neighbor. We had no definite plans; we were just getting away from the house, soaking up the autumn colors while they lasted. Suddenly, without warning, Nina turned off the road and pulled in at the antique shop. I had hoped she would not notice it and pass on. Certainly, I had no intention of calling her attention to the place, knowing how keen she was about antiques. Yet here I was, as though the whole thing had been planned.

Nina turned to me apologetically. "Do you mind?" she asked. "I know you don't go for antiques, but I'm looking for a mate to that Chinese vase you don't like. It won't take a minute. Come on. You'll like the place." She was already out of the car.

I sat where I was, said, "No thanks. I'll just sit it out here. You go ahead." As I watched her go down the flagstone steps, I felt smug and safe. Even the sound of the bell, when she opened the cherry-red door, meant nothing to me out in the autumn sunshine. I breathed in the good air with its haunting scent of burning leaves. It was good to be alive. I got out of the car, stretched myself, and sauntered down the path toward the back of the house to look across the valley at the tapestry of the many-colored trees on the hillside.

It occurred to me that Nina was taking an unusually long time. I looked up at the shuttered windows, half expecting to see her motioning for me to come up. The windows were blank. I became uneasy. Maybe she had found something. What if she had found Evo and wanted him? I raced around the building, in the front door, and headed straight for Evo.

He was gone!

I looked everywhere, in every room, until I came face-to-face with Nina and the auburn-haired woman who owned the shop.

"Where is he?" I asked her —almost belligerently.

"I beg your pardon. Where is who?"

"Evo!"

"Evo? Who on earth is Evo?"

The two of them stood there gaping at me with open curiosity.

"Evo is a ceramic monkey I saw the last time I was in," I explained.

The owner snapped her fingers. "Now I remember. You came in with that horn-blower. Should have asked my permission before he blew that horn. It is an antique, you know."

"That horn-blower, as you call him, happens to be my son. He also happens to play first French horn in an orchestra."

Nina caught the sparks flying be-

tween us and leaped into the situation with her usual aplomb. "I still don't get this Evo bit," she said. "What does it stand for?"

"Evolution," I explained crossly. "I thought of the nickname the minute I saw him."

"Say, that's cute. Where is this little monkey?"

"The sculpture in question was sold," said our hostess primly.

"Sold!" I fairly screamed it. "When?"

"Last week. Thursday, to be exact."

"To whom?" I was glaring at her now.

"I do not know," she said even more primly. "He paid cash and took it with him."

Nina was watching me, half-amused, half-amazed. "For someone who doesn't go in for antiques, this one seems to have quite a hold on you."

"It was not strictly an antique," said the woman. "I don't even know where it came from, to tell the truth."

"How did it get here then?"

"I don't know that either. One morning I went out to the packing room and there it was . . . sitting in the sunlight, bright and sassy as you please." She looked at me and actually smiled. "Do you know, I thought you were going to take it for sure. I would have brought the price down just to be rid of the little nuisance."

"Why a nuisance?" asked Nina.

The woman began rearranging things on the shelf where Evo had been. She seemed fidgety and nervous; she also seemed ashamed of being so. "I don't know," she finally answered. "There is nothing I can put my finger on." She tried to shrug it off, but the shrug was more of a shudder. She looked me full in the face. "Do you know that damned monkey had me seeing things that weren't happening?"

"Seeing what things?" Nina persisted.

"Well . . . things like finding him in places where I hadn't left him."

"You mean he got off the shelf?"

"Oh, no. Nothing definite like that. Nothing you could pin down as a fact. Just mean, cussed little tricks like—well, like sitting with his back to you. Things you couldn't be sure you hadn't done yourself, absentmindedly." The auburn-haired woman looked at me intently. "You don't know what he could do to you."

"Don't I?" My voice was quiet and measured. Then I came out with everything. "I'm sure I saw him blink the first time I was here. The second time, I'll swear he shed a tear, a real tear, when I left without taking him. That is," I added, "unless you have a leaky ceiling." I

turned to Nina and said, "Not a word out of you, please. This really happened. That is why I wouldn't come in with you at first. I was afraid."

In the days that followed, I developed a downright rage about losing Evo. It was as though somebody had cheated me by buying him right under my nose. That somebody turned out to be Doug, my husband. He gave him to me on my birthday.

"Dick said you showed an affinity for the little monster," he explained. "I suppose you have a name for him."

"Of course. Meet Evo, short for evolution, naturally."

"Naturally."

Little did any of us suspect the effect this odd figure was to have on us. He went into the niche on our brick fireplace as though he had been made for it, and solved a long-standing problem of the house. Namely, what did the builder have in mind for that shelf? Being so high, Ellen, who is fervid about such things, said it was made to hold one thing and one thing only—a madonna.

Dick, unimpressed by his aunt's religious bent, had suggested something more down-to-earth, like an African fetish. Doug put an end to this everlasting dispute by placing Evo in the place of honor. "Let him reign over the household," was his pronouncement.

There was a painful pause. Everybody turned to me for my reaction, especially Ellen, who seemed to challenge me.

"Why not?" I said. I looked squarely at Ellen and repeated, "Why not?" To myself I was thinking I could keep an eye on Evo. No telling what he might do. The very first night he had Dick complaining that it was no good practicing horn in the livingroom anymore.

"How come?" Doug asked.

"I can't do a thing with Evo watching. I don't like the way he looks when I hit a sour note, and I don't like the sounds he makes."

"Oh, come on now," said Doug.

"Well, they're certainly not coming from my horn."

"What kind of sounds?" I asked apprehensively.

"Heckling sounds. Unflattering sounds."

"So he's an ape," said Doug, matter-of-factly. "What do you expect?" He went back to watching TV.

Dick took his horn and withdrew to the kitchen and closed the door. I took my knitting and sat on the davenport facing the fireplace. I began to work as though I were not conscious of that monkey up on the wall, did not even look in his direction. I could hear

Dick blowing sweet and loud in the kitchen. Then he hit a really bad note, and my glance flew toward Evo at once. All I could make out in the firelight were those two blazing eyes looking down on me as much as to say: "You are not going to blame me for that!"

I became suddenly furious for no reason at all. Furious at what, for heaven's sake? At Evo? At Dick? At myself? I went into the TV room and accosted my husband. "Doug," I announced, "I would like a little light in that place where Evo is. Would it take a lot of doing?"

"Not too much. What's the matter? Is Evo afraid of the dark?"

"If it's too involved, all you have to do is say so."

"Who said it was too involved? It just seems foolish. What are you doing, making a shrine?"

"It was your idea," I snapped, "putting him up high and mighty to reign over us, as you put it."

"I never expected you to take me up on it. I was only trying to forestall a fight between you and Ellen."

Dick entered the room. "What's the matter? You two fighting?"

"Your father is jealous of an ape, I'm afraid."

"Evo?" There was a snicker in his voice.

"Yes, Evo!" I was emphatic. "Don't you dare smirk."

"Who's smirking? He is the best thing that's happened to us," said Dick.

"How is that?" I was really curious.

"Well . . ." It was plain to be seen that our son was trying desperately to be honest and polite at the same time. "Let me put it to you straight. That inane chunk of china," he was looking directly at me now, "Evo, as you choose to call him, is a very real symbol. I think he's the most honest thing in this house."

"Is he taking psychology or humanities this year?" Doug asked me.

"Parents!" Dick's voice was intense. "I am trying to communicate with you. Listen to me!"

Suddenly a sharp crash came from the livingroom and we all raced to see what had happened. Instinctively, we headed for the niche.

It was empty!

Then I saw Evo lying on the floor, face down. I picked him up and checked as though for blood and bruises.

"What do you know," said Dick, looking over my shoulder. "He's not broken."

Ellen stood in the doorway, brought away from correcting papers by the noise. She said nothing, just stood there. The rest of us

hovered over the figurine—inspecting, marveling. There was no chip or crack anywhere. The golden eyes looked up at us serenely, forgivingly, maddeningly inscrutable.

Doug gauged the distance of the fall. "Impossible!" was his conclusion. "It would have to break. Why didn't it?" He took Evo and turned him round and round in his hand.

Very much on edge, I placed the monkey far back on his shelf over the fireplace. Even that deep in shadow, it seemed to me that there was a mischievous glint to his eyes.

"Don't look so smug," I said under my breath, but Ellen caught my words.

"Worshipping your idol?" she asked.

"You and your one-track mind," I said bitterly.

"Well, you said something. Don't deny it."

"Probably telling him off . . . like who's boss here," said Dick.

"I have labored under the assumption that I was boss around here," said Doug. "And I do mean labored."

"Let's call it a day and get some sleep."

That night Evo had four stealthy visitors. I know, because I was the first to tiptoe out to the livingroom. No sooner had I got there than I heard Dick's familiar shuffle. Thinking he was headed for the kitchen and a midnight snack, I slipped out there myself. He did not come and I was about to call out and ask whether he wanted a sandwich. Then I heard him talking in a low voice. I looked and found him standing in the semi-darkness of the street light. He was looking up at Evo.

"You jerk!" he said. "You are disrupting this whole house. Do you know that? For three cents I'd break your neck. And I could do it, believe me."

For a moment I thought he was going to, but he must have thought better of it, for off he went, back to bed, without even bothering about food.

The next to come was Ellen. She was in her bare feet and came guiltily. She, too, stood in the dim light looking up at the fireplace and once more I was about to whisper . . . she was that near. I wanted to make my peace with her. Before I could find my voice or the words to use, I saw her do a strange thing. She deliberately reached up, turned Evo facing the wall, and went off like a sleepwalker into darkness.

I was beginning to get a creepy feeling about all this cloak-and-dagger business in the middle of night, when my husband stomped in boldly, turned on the light, took Evo down, tossed him experimentally from hand to hand, then raised him

as though he were going to drop him to the floor. This was too much for my frayed nerves. I let out a shriek that brought Dick and Ellen back on the scene in a hurry.

"Sorry," I apologized. "Stubbed my toe in the dark." Then I added, "Since we're all awake, how about a snack?"

We had our snack and trailed back to bed without saying one word about Evo, the cause of this mass insomnia. The next morning, as soon as they had all left, I phoned Nina. Almost before I had the receiver back in the cradle, there she was, standing in the doorway with Spunk, her poodle. They both had that eager, gossip-loving look about them.

"What's up?" Nina asked.

"It's about that ceramic monkey. You know, the one from the antique shop." It came as a shock to hear myself referring to him so impersonally. It was like publicly disowning someone near and dear.

"You mean Evo?" Nina asked. "What about him?"

"He is an evil influence. I am sure of it." I told her about what had happened the night before.

"You have told me about everybody except yourself," said Nina when I had finished. "How do you feel about him?"

"I'm not sure. That is what has me tied up in knots. One minute I want to throw him out the window—"

"What good would that do if he doesn't break?" Nina said. "Personally, I don't believe that for one minute. How about letting me have a try at it?"

"No!" I'd had enough of this crusade to demolish Evo. I added, "Thirty-seven dollars is too much to scrap just like that."

"So is the peace and quiet of a home. Just give the word and— What are you growling about, Spunk?"

We both turned and looked at the poodle. He was half growling, half whimpering, and looking fixedly at Evo.

"What is going on here?" asked Nina, a note of fright in her voice.

I held up a shushing finger.

"What are we listening for?" Nina asked nervously.

"Maybe Spunk heard the same sound Dick claimed he heard coming out of Evo last night," I told her.

Suddenly Nina seemed relieved. "I'll bet I know what it is," she said. "Something I learned in ceramics class. Sometimes, long after pieces are fired, they give with a ping. You know how they tap china to see if it has a good ring. I will bet that is the answer."

I was not convinced. "It might account for the sounds. How about

the savage feelings this little monster seems to push out in people?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake," said Nina, "stop biting your nails. Let me take Evo to pottery class. Maybe the teacher can tell what makes him tick."

Very slowly I spoke what was in my mind—had been since the night before. "Nina," I said, "I think it would be better if I found out what makes me tick."

Nina looked at me aghast. "What are you saying? It better not be what I think it is." Then, not taking any chance on its not being, she hurriedly added, "Not a psychiatrist?"

"Why not? Surely the feeling I have about this monkey is not normal. I think I had better find out about it . . . without telling my family, if possible."

"Well, if your mind is made up —and I can see it is," said Nina with enthusiasm, "I know a good one."

"You mean you have gone?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Not me. Can't afford it. Where is your phone book?" With that, she scrambled to look up the number.

The day I went to see the psychiatrist, I took Evo along and plumped him down on the doctor's desk. "This," I said, "is what I have come to see you about." I proceeded

to tell him everything that had happened. After an hour of telling, the doctor seemed to be paying more attention to Evo than to me. A couple of times, I could swear he started back in alarm as though at something that little ape had done. With his back to me, I could not be sure what Evo was doing, if anything. The doctor regained his composure, opened a book and set up an appointment for the following week.

"In the meantime," he said, "can I keep . . ." he cleared his throat before saying it, ". . . can I keep Evo? For the week, of course. I would like to study him."

I was disappointed. "I had hoped

you could clear things up right away," I said. Then I added, "Yes, you can keep Evo . . . for the week."

All the way home I tried to figure out what I was going to tell the family about Evo's disappearance. It was a lot of worrying for nothing. Nobody seemed to notice he was missing and I began to breathe more easily. Then at dinner, it happened.

"Evo's gone," said Doug casually.

"I noticed that, too," said Dick.

Ellen excused herself and went to look. When she came back, there was a pleased expression on her face. "Well," she announced, "I, for one, am glad."

Doug and Dick were both looking at her in surprise.

"We thought you had spirited him away," said Dick.

"Why would I do that?" There was genuine surprise in Ellen's voice.

"Oh, come on now," said my husband. "You are not going to tell us you didn't dislike him."

"Of course I didn't dislike him."

"Then why did you get out of bed last night and turn his face to the wall?" I said it without thinking.

"Aha," said Doug.

"Sleepwalking, eh?" This from Dick.

"As I remember, you both did some sleepwalking last night," I said sharply.

"I was hungry," said Dick.

"Then why didn't you come out in the kitchen?"

"What did he do?" said Doug.

"All I have to say is, that since Evo came into this house, everybody is very interested in what everyone else is doing. Which reminds me," I turned to Ellen and asked, "why *did* you turn Evo facing the wall?"

Ellen's eyes were twinkling. "Don't you remember when we were little?" She was watching me amusedly. "When you got a doll I wanted—anything I wanted?"

"You hid it!" I shouted. We both laughed.

"This is all very touching," said Doug irritably. "What I am interested in knowing is, what happened to Evo?" He was looking directly at me. "Where is he?"

"In a psychiatrist's office," I said smoothly.

"You have to be kidding," said Dick.

"I am not kidding."

They were all looking at me now.

"What, may I ask, is a china monkey doing in a psychiatrist's office?" Doug was having trouble restraining himself.

"I took him there for help."

"My dear woman," said Doug, "you are the one who needs help.

Where is that silly little ape now?"

"The doctor asked to keep him. Consultation, I guess."

Nina, unable to control her curiosity, came over to borrow a cup of sugar. "For the breakfast cereal," she explained as she tagged along behind me, plying me with questions about what had happened at the doctor's (all very sotto voce, of course).

"They all know I went," I told her abruptly. "Go ask them."

I should have known she would. When I entered the livingroom with her cup of sugar, Nina was saying, "That little trouble-making monkey is the cause of it all."

"What all?" I asked.

"You know," said Nina. "All the screwy behavior going on."

"What screwy behavior?" Doug demanded.

"Oh, oh." In spite of the fact that she was my best neighbor, I enjoyed watching Nina squirm. "Got to be going," she said and beat a hasty retreat toward the door. Halfway there, she turned to look at me reproachfully. "I thought you said you told them," she said bitterly.

"Told us what?" Doug wanted to know.

"About going to the psychiatrist," I said.

"I am referring to what she said about behavior."

"You have to admit," interposed Dick, "that getting up in the middle of the night to talk to a monkey, a china monkey at that, well, that is a little screwy."

"You keep out of this," Doug told him and turned to me again. "I repeat, what did Nina mean?"

"She must have meant Evo's blinking his eyes, crying tears, all kinds of tricks to work his way into my sympathy and my house so he could ruin it." I was beyond caring what I admitted now.

"What are you talking about?" Doug was mystified.

"I'm talking about your quaint idea of putting an ape in the place of honor in our house—raised high and mighty—to watch over us."

"A darn good job he's done, too, if you ask me," said Dick. He was earnest about it. "We are communicating with each other at last, right down to basic truths."

"All I have to say is, nuts!" Doug was running his fingers through his hair in a frenzied way. "I do not believe one word that has been said tonight." Then, unaccountably, a change came over him and he grinned. "Do you know something?" he said. "Dick is right. That crummy little weirdo has really brought this house to life." He turned to me. "Get him back if you can manage it without getting

yourself laced into a straitjacket."

When I got to the doctor's office, it was locked, with a sign on the door saying he was out of town. I wanted Evo back and was not to be put off by a sign on a door. I routed the superintendent from his quarters.

"Weren't you notified?" he said. "The office is closed."

"All I want is the monkey I left with the doctor. Can I have it please?"

"A monkey?" The superintendent was eyeing me skeptically. "What kind of a monkey?" Then something seemed to click. "Was it a shiny little thing with big yellow eyes?"

"Golden," I corrected him. "It is still on the doctor's desk, most likely."

"I don't think so," the man contradicted me as he fumbled with some keys. "Doc took quite a liking to the little monkey. Talked to it like it was real."

The door swung open and I walked into the doctor's office with the superintendent close behind. The desk was empty; the chair was turned to the wall. Evo was nowhere to be seen.

"That's the meanest trick yet, working his wiles on the doctor like that. He belonged to me, that vicious ape."

Suddenly, we both froze. There was a noise halfway between a snort and a snicker.

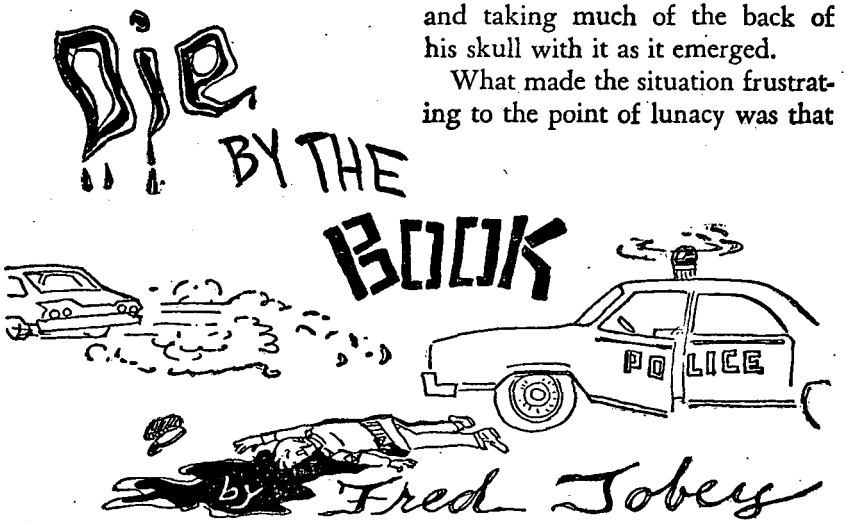
"What was that?" said the superintendent, heading for the chair from which it was coming. "Well, I'll be darned! Look who thinks he's taking Doc's place." He wheeled the chair around and there sat Evo, as smug as ever.

Right then and there I reached my decision. I knew what I had to do, and all the way to the High Level Bridge I kept explaining to myself that it was the only way.

Fortunately, the footwalk of the bridge was empty. I walked out, stopped at the middle and threw Evo over the rail. He struck the concrete abutment, bounced off unbroken, and plunged into the water. I stood there, numb, watching to make sure he did not reappear. Then I went home.

A dish is sometimes so sauced as to resemble red herring.

Die by the Book



by Fred Jobes

SOMEONE in the department was going to have the heartbreaking duty of telling pretty, redheaded Rose Donahue that her husband would not be home that night—or any other night, ever.

Patrolman Jim Donahue lay dead in the middle of Highland Street. Just a few feet away his police cruiser stood at the roadside, engine running, flasher pulsing endlessly on its rooftop. Donahue had been shot at close range, the bullet entering at the bridge of his nose and taking much of the back of his skull with it as it emerged.

What made the situation frustrating to the point of lunacy was that Donahue, a policeman who literally lived by the book, had broken one of the strictest rules of the department by failing to radio headquarters to say he was stopping a traffic violator, and to give the registration number of the offending car. Now the car was gone, leaving no clue to the identity of car or driver. It didn't even seem to help much that another motorist had actually witnessed the murder.

At the police station, Chief Otten

and Lieutenant Gould were questioning Mr. Elman, the elderly driver whose phone call had alerted them to the killing. They were trying to temper urgency with caution, because they feared that at any moment they might lose their informant for a while. Mr. Elman was very near collapse from his experience, and it would have been hard to tell whether the quaver in his voice was due mostly to age or to fright. The chief made a mental note that the man's driving capability should be checked. How much was he able to see out of those watery blue eyes?

Despite their careful handling of Mr. Elman, the questioners seemed to be finding out little that the desk sergeant had not learned over the phone. Mr. Elman had been driving up Highland Street, a secondary highway which at that time in the morning, just after nine, carried little traffic. A block ahead on the right, another car made a right turn into Highland Street, not stopping at the intersection although there was a stop sign. Close behind the car came a police cruiser with its flasher going. Car and cruiser both pulled to the side of the road and stopped. A uniformed policeman got out of the cruiser.

Mr. Elman's car came abreast of the others, he said, and passed them. He had to pay close attention to the narrow road, to give the policeman a wide enough berth, but after passing he heard a noise like a loud backfire, and looking in his rear-view mirror he saw the policeman fall to the roadway. Frightened, Mr. Elman speeded up and swung left at the next street. He stopped at the first phone booth he could find, and asked the operator to connect him with the police.

After hearing his story the desk sergeant dispatched two cruisers, one to Highland Street and one to pick up Mr. Elman at the phone booth.

Chief Otten asked Mr. Elman if he saw where the other car went after the shot was fired. No, Mr. Elman was much too busy trying to get away from the neighborhood. He thought the car was moving as the policeman fell, and somehow he had an impression that it went up Highland Street, not turning off, but he wasn't sure.

What about the make of the car, and the color? Well, it was a light color, Mr. Elman thought; one of those popular shades, maybe blue or green, but he couldn't even guess at the make. Cars these days all looked about the same to him, he said; the popular ones, anyway. It was a sedan, though, he was pretty sure of that, and not one of those cloth-top models.

As for the car's number plate, Mr. Elman didn't think he had seen it at all.

Patiently Chief Otten phrased his remaining questions. Could Mr. Elman tell them anything about the occupants of the car? Were there others besides the driver? Could he give any description of the driver?

Mr. Elman's watery eyes overflowed, and tears coursed down his wrinkled cheeks. He wanted to help, he said in a voice that faded to a whisper, but he hadn't really seen the driver. The police car had been in between, and then his eyes had been on the road, busy with the task of getting past the policeman.

Mr. Elman swayed in his chair. Chief Otten signaled Lieutenant Gould to follow him into his office, and they left their informant in charge of the desk sergeant.

"If the killer is heading out of town, Sam," said Chief Otten, "he's had nearly half an hour's start, and he'll be on one of the main arteries by now." The chief made a fist and drove it into the palm of his other hand. "We've got to give the State Police something to help them spot that car or the driver. For all they know right now, it could even be a woman."

The chief's phone rang. It was the radio serviceman reporting that the radio in Donahue's cruiser was functioning normally, with transmission loud and clear from Highland Street to headquarters. The chief relayed the finding to Gould, and said he wasn't surprised. Even if the radio had been out, there should at least have been an entry in Donahue's log—but the log was blank.

"I just don't get it," said Gould. "We've all had it drummed into us never to get out of the cruiser before calling in the number of the car and why it's being stopped. And Jim would be the last one to break that kind of rule."

"Exactly," said the chief, "and there must be a clue right there, Sam, that we're missing somehow. Somebody Jim *knew* must have been driving that car. Somebody he knew *so well*—"

Gould shook his head as the chief paused. "Jim had his flasher going," he said, "so there must have been a violation. If there was a violation, Jim would have called in anyway, even if it were somebody he knew. That's the way he operated. It would have to be his own brother or his wife before he'd skip the procedure."

"He hasn't got a brother," said Otten, "and as for his wife, if you mean that, don't forget that whoever he stopped pulled a gun on him and shot him. There's been nothing like that between Rose

Donahue and Jim. She's devoted to him."

Gould nodded agreement. "By the way," he said, "has somebody talked with Rose?"

"I called the house," said the chief, "but there was no answer, so I sent a car over there. There ought to be a report in by now." He reached for the phone.

The report was in. Rose Donahue had not been home, but the investigating patrolman had talked with a neighbor, a close friend of the Donahues, who had seen Rose leave with the car that morning, driving Jim to work as usual. Rose would not be back for a few days, the neighbor said. She had gone to visit her parents in upper New York State.

"Get Jim's file out and locate Rose's parents," said the chief. "Call them and confirm that. Find out when they expect her—it's probably a five or six hour drive, at least."

Otten looked at the wall clock: nine forty-five. Soon, the killer would have had an hour of precious time.

At ten o'clock the desk sergeant came into the chief's office with the news that a stolen car had been found in woods off a dirt road, not far from the town's main shopping plaza. Finding it had been more or less luck. A patrolman in a cruising car had caught an unfamiliar glint of sunlight on metal through the trees, and had turned off the highway to investigate. The car, a heavy convertible, had been driven into low brush at the roadside. The key was still in the ignition, but when the engine was started it seemed to run on only a couple of cylinders. The desk sergeant thought this a likely reason for its having been abandoned. It had been reported stolen early that morning from Rhode Island. The sergeant laid a teletype clipping on Otten's desk.

The teletype message said the Rhode Island State Police thought the car might have been stolen by Joe Carroll, an escaped prisoner who had overpowered and disarmed a guard in a mental hospital where he had been taken for examination.

There followed a detailed description of Carroll. The chief had just started reading it when Lieutenant Gould came back into the office.

Yes, said Gould, Rose Donahue's parents were expecting to meet their daughter at four-thirty that afternoon, but they thought she might phone them en route, from wherever she had lunch. Understandably, they were terribly upset by the news of their son-in-law's murder.

"Well, at least that confirms what the neighbor told us," Otten said,

"and there's nothing more we can do there, I suppose, until we hear from Rose."

He turned his eyes back to the clipping in his hand, to finish reading the description of the escapee. Carroll was slight, it said, deceptively meek in appearance, hair red and usually parted in the center, eyes hazel. At the time of his escape he was wearing—

Chief Otten never felt entirely sure of the mental route by which he arrived at the possibility that struck him at that moment, although he liked to think it was an intuitive matching up of a number of quite separate bits of information. He secretly realized, however, that it might have been nothing more than a slow double take on what Gould had said to him a moment before. Anyway his head suddenly jerked up and he bellowed for the lieutenant to come back into the office. Gould, who had not gone five paces, swung around and hurried back, alarm on his face.

"Sam," said the chief, "*what* did Rose's parents say about when she was getting there?"

"Said she'd be there at four-thirty."

"No, no! That isn't what you told me the first time! Exactly how did they put it?"

Gould looked puzzled; then, after a second or two: "Oh, I see what you mean. Her mother said, 'We're meeting her at four-thirty.' Is that what you're getting at?"

"Yes! Why would they say they were *meeting her* at a particular time? Why not just say they were *expecting* her late in the afternoon?"

Gould looked dubious. "Maybe they're meeting her somewhere for supper?" he suggested.

"Or why couldn't they be meeting her at a *bus*? How do we know she drove her car up there? Sam, get Rose's parents on the phone again as quick as you can, and give me the connection in here. Then be ready to put this message on the teletype as soon as I've talked with them—I hope!" The chief began scribbling furiously on a pad.

Ten minutes later the word was on the teletype to pick up Jim Donahue's green compact sedan—with an armed killer at the wheel. In less than an hour the killer was in custody. He still had a gun when they caught him, but this time he didn't get a chance to shoot it.

Two days after the murder, Rose Donahue sat talking with Chief Otten in his office. She was able to summon a wisp of a smile now, and her big gray eyes were dry, though they still showed the signs of prolonged crying.

"He saw you parking your car at the shopping plaza," said the

chief, "and tucking your keys up over the sun visor. He's told us all that. He knew right then that he had a car to replace the one that had quit on him."

"I know it was wrong to leave the key," said Rose. "I was supposed to get another one made, so Jim and I could each have one." She gave a rueful sigh. "But I never seemed to get around to it. I suppose Carroll thought he was very lucky to find a car so quickly, with a key."

"Not really," said Otten. "He was at the plaza because a busy shopping area is the quickest place to pick up a car with a key in it. That's well known. But it's risky, because the owner may not be gone more than a few minutes, and then the car will be reported stolen. The time Carroll decided he was really lucky was when he saw you go to the bus stop. If you were taking a bus, you probably would be gone half a day at least, maybe longer. He was banking on that, and I think that's why we caught him so easily, in the end. He didn't think that car was going to be missed for a while."

"I used to drive when I went to see my parents," explained Rose, "but the last two times I went on the bus. I hate long drives, and Jim really needed the car sometimes, too, when I was gone. It seemed so convenient to do the shopping and then leave the car at the plaza, right next to the bus stop, and Jim could pick it up at noon."

"If Carroll had taken it slow and easy till he got out of town," said the chief, "he probably would have been safe till noon, anyway, when Jim went to pick up the car. But he was driving fast and running through stop signs. We can only guess what Jim thought when he saw your car speeding toward Highland Street, but maybe he thought you had forgotten something and were hurrying back to the house for it."

"That's just what he would think," said Rose, "and he'd do just what he did, too—chase after me and stop me. About the only thing we ever quarreled about was my careless driving. He said I was a policeman's wife and was going to drive by the rule book, the way he had to do things. He probably was so angry he didn't even think it might be somebody else in the car."

"If you see Carroll when he comes to trial," said Otten, "you'll realize Jim had a better reason than that to be confused." He stood up and walked around to look at the back of Rose's head. "No man married to Rose Donahue," he said, "could ever have overlooked Carroll's shock of bright red hair."

The artist chooses his subject; we judge only what he makes of it.

The ARTIST

by AL Nussbaum

THERE's something about me and cameras that is almost a miracle. My parents gave me an inexpensive reflex camera when I graduated from high school, and from that day to this, a period of thirty years, I never took a poor picture.

I didn't come from wealthy people and photography can be an expensive hobby, so in an effort to earn money for film and cameras, I always kept a camera handy and took pictures of everything that might have news or human-interest value. Long before hippies began wearing beads, I often wore a necklace of two or three cameras and roamed the area from Brooklyn to the Bronx, searching for new subjects. Even when the newspapers didn't care to publish any of

my pictures, I was always complimented on their quality.

I might have remained just another semiprofessional if I hadn't been on the scene when a hospital fire broke out in 1939. At least three fire companies were at the blaze and the firemen had crisscrossed the street with hose. The police were too busy trying to control a crowd hypnotized by leaping flames to check for press credentials. My cameras and gadget bag got me past the police lines and into the small circle of newspapermen and other photographers.

It was apparent the building was going to be a total loss. Sparks, smoke and flame belched from almost every window, and the firemen were pouring huge streams of water into it without noticeable effect. I took a few shots, then turned up the collar of my jacket to shield my face from the heat.

Just then a girl about my own age climbed onto the ledge outside a sixth-floor window. She wore the pale-blue uniform of a student nurse and stood with her arms braced against the sides of the window opening. As she looked fearfully down, the bright flames shone through her dress, silhouetting her slender figure.

Firemen who had been watching the fire with resignation now leaped to action. Two sped to the hook and ladder truck to get the circular rescue net—there wasn't time to raise the ladder. Others ran to position themselves under the girl so they'd be ready to hold the net for her as soon as it arrived. The photographers began feeding fresh film into their cameras and checking exposure settings. They expected her to delay her leap until the net was in place, but she didn't.

I was the only one prepared and I got two pictures. The first was taken a split second after her body arced into space; the second captured the moment of impact. The pictures sold quickly and were picked up by one of the wire services. They earned me three news photography awards and a full-time job with a national magazine.

I soon learned, however, that success wasn't an unmixed blessing.

It all began to take shape with the execution of Mike Dwyer, a longshoreman who had killed his wife one hot August afternoon. The magazine I worked for was planning a series of articles, advocating an end to capital punishment. I was assigned to cover the execution. Cameras weren't allowed, of course, but I wasn't supposed to let that stop me. My expense account absorbed the cost of two miniature cameras—one disguised as a tie clasp; the other as a

wristwatch. My job was to record the horror of the spectators during the execution.

I didn't follow orders. Inexperienced as a professional, I acted on impulse. Instead of concentrating on the spectators' reactions, I focused on Mike Dwyer's. I caught his tear-filled eyes and trembling lips as the black hood was lowered over his head; I captured the contortions caused by the three monstrous jolts of electricity he suffered before being pronounced dead; and I showed the fine spirals of smoke that rose from the points where the electrodes had touched him. I was sure these would be a more powerful statement against capital punishment than something as secondhand as audience reaction.

Unfortunately, my boss didn't share my satisfaction. I had produced stark realism years before the public had been conditioned to accept it. When he saw the prints, he went into a rage. "This is a family magazine. We can't publish anything like *this*!" he yelled, slamming the pictures onto his desk. "Just what was going through your head?"

He didn't fire me, but he came close to doing it, and before long I almost wished he had. The people I worked with asked themselves the same question he had asked me, but they supplied an answer, too: they decided I was some kind of freak who enjoyed horror. Like some people who think they can figure out a man's character from the type of books he reads, they decided that the pictures I took were an indication of the kind of person I was deep inside.

Sure, it was crazy, but that's the situation I was up against. I tried to tell them I wasn't unfeeling. If anything, I was quite the opposite. I explained that I took the kind of pictures I did because I believed the only pictures worth taking were ones that could be printed without a caption, or at most a short one. To take this kind of picture, I had to be completely objective. I had to be able to disassociate myself from my subject, whatever it might be. They listened, but remained unconvinced. They continued to think I was lacking in some human quality.

Circumstances didn't help. I was continually being assigned to cover minor disasters. The one time I drew a routine assignment, covering a parade, the reviewing stand collapsed and I found myself photographing the dead and injured pinned beneath the wreckage. The pictures won an award, but my personal popularity reached zero. Now, not only was I mixed up inside, I was followed by a black

cloud as well. It was depressing.

I'm not especially tall, or handsome, or well-built. I had polio as a child and it left me with a slight limp. Despite these imperfections, I had never had difficulty getting dates with girls—until my success as a photographer. Girls still went out with me, but seldom more than once. When they learned what I did for a living, they wanted to see some of my pictures. After that, they always had "previous" engagements when I called. They were well aware that I wasn't the only photographer who was sometimes forced to work with unpleasant subjects, but they were quick to say that my pictures were "different."

World War II came at a time when my spirits were at their lowest, but the military didn't want a man with a limp, regardless of how able he was. I became a war correspondent and was soon too busy for romance. I covered the war in Europe for a news service and my professional reputation grew. When Israel fought the Arabs in 1948, I was there with my cameras; and when war broke out in Korea a couple of years later, I was one of the first civilians in the front lines.

During those years I didn't take as many pictures as some other photographers did; but if you try to recall a few of the photos that appeared in newspapers and magazines, it's almost certain the ones you think of will all be mine. Invariably, my pictures burn themselves into people's memories.

After Korea I returned to New York and a well-paying job at a news magazine. As always, everyone soon began to treat me like a leper; however, I tried not to let the coldness of my co-workers bother me. The time didn't pass swiftly, but it passed—and then I met Judith.

There was a cafeteria in the same building that housed the magazine offices. One morning a woman slid onto the seat across from me and set her tray down. I looked up and glanced around the room. There were plenty of vacant seats. I turned back and found her regarding me with large brown eyes. There was the barest trace of a nervous smile on her lips. "Do you mind if I sit with you?" she asked.

I shrugged and shook my head. I was pushing forty, then, and feeling lonely, and I recognized her as one of the editorial assistants from the magazine. She was thin and frail-appearing, but not unattractive, and she wore her dark hair at shoulder length like a schoolgirl. I guessed her age as thirty-one; it turned out she was thirty-four. Her left hand had no rings. I returned

her smile, and the stiffness left the set of her shoulders.

Looking back, even if I had known how short a life we would have together, I don't think I would have done anything differently. I needed someone, if only to talk to for a few minutes, and I think she did, too.

"Everyone in the office is a little afraid of you," she announced solemnly.

How do you tell someone without sounding ridiculous that no one understands you? I can't recall what I said, but I must have managed it without looking like a fool. Judith Keller—that was her full name—gave me sympathy and understanding. Here, for the first time, was someone who had seen my work and could still look me in the eye without thinking a monster stared back. She shuddered when she spoke about some of the pictures I had taken, but she didn't hold it against me that I did my job well.

"You're not just a photographer," she said. "You're an artist. It's wrong to try to judge an artist the same way you would other people."

I needed Judith and she needed me, and I was happy that my pictures didn't come between us. We had lunch together every day, and went to dinner and shows as well. Once when we danced and she felt the hard bulge of the small camera I always carried, she understood immediately. "A policeman carries a pistol when he's off-duty because he never really is," she said. "Why shouldn't it be the same for a photographer?"

Six weeks after we first spoke, we were married and moved into an apartment in Brooklyn. Judith insisted on working at first, but a few months later, when the doctor confirmed the fact that we would be having an addition to the family, I made her quit. She stayed home, fixing baby clothes and preparing the baby's room.

From the sixth month on she suffered from minor spells of dizziness. The doctor gave her some green pills and prescribed plenty of rest. That's why I wasn't too happy when, during her eighth month of pregnancy, she decided we should spend an evening out.

"It seems like ages since we went anywhere," she said. "And after the baby's here, it'll be a long time before we can go out again. Please, honey. Let's go somewhere Saturday."

What could I do? I saw a ticket scalper the next day and bought a pair of orchestra seats for a popular musical. I could have bought a fine camera for what they cost me, but I figured they were worth it. I

wanted everything to be perfect.

That was ten years ago, but I remember everything clearly. The subway entrance was only a block from our apartment, so we decided to take the train into Manhattan as we had done when we were newly married. Judith said it would be romantic and the exercise would be good for her. It was a warm summer evening, and we walked hand in hand like a couple of teenagers out on a date. Passersby, noticing Judith's condition, smiled at us and we smiled back. At the steps to the subway I showed her the tickets I'd bought, and she hugged my arm with affection.

"Those tickets must have cost a fortune," she accused mildly. "You're so extravagant, I'll bet you'd use color film to photograph a zebra."

I squeezed her hand, and we went down the steps and past the turnstiles. The platform was surprisingly empty. Judith used the unexpected privacy to stand on tiptoe and kiss my cheek. "You're the best husband a woman could ever want," she said.

"Thank you, ma'am," I answered.

"You know what I'd like?" she said, pointing to a nearby vending machine. "Some salted peanuts."

I was glad she didn't have a craving for pickles and ice cream. "Your wish is my command," I told her, and walked to the machine.

When I turned with the package of peanuts in my hand, I saw Judith painfully trying to climb from the tracks to the platform. During the moments my back had been turned, she had either stumbled or had one of her dizzy spells and fallen to the tracks. Now, with the sound of the approaching train loud in our ears, she didn't have the strength to pull herself back onto the platform. Her hands were trembling as she reached frantically toward me for help.

I'll never forget the expression on her face the instant the train struck her. Her eyes were round with mingled shock, surprise and horror, and her lips were parted to release a scream no one ever heard. The picture I took is one of my best. It's in color.

There can be no quarrel with compassion for another's distress, certainly; yet the manner of alleviating it may, at times, seem somewhat unique.

THE HEIR

by Talmage Powell

RICHIE kept rubbing down the car even after the wax was emitting little squeaks under his strong, tireless hands. He gave the rear fender a final flick with the polishing cloth and stepped back at last, knuckling sweat from his forehead. Looking at the results of his morning's toil with critical eyes, his head moved in an almost imperceptible nod of satisfaction. The big car glittered like a faceted jewel on the white gravel driveway. He'd need a magnifying glass to find another mote of dust on it.

Richie enjoyed the moment of standing there and looking over the job he'd done. Then he noticed the reflection of himself in the car's mirror-like surface. He grew intent as he studied the hazy, distorted image, the husky, big-boned frame clothed in knit shirt and poplins, the gaunt face stamped with a hard knowledge older than its seventeen years, the thick, unruly, dark blond hair.

"Man," he muttered to himself

with a faint grin, "you some kind of a flip character?"

It was a good question. If someone had told him a month ago that today he'd scrounge a job to sweat through, Richie would have laughed. A month ago, he would have stolen the hubcaps for profit and then smashed the windshield of the big, shiny symbol of the Establishment for the hell of it.

Turning from the car, he bent and picked up the wax can, chamois, and small pile of used polishing cloths from the edge of the driveway. He carried the stuff toward the three-car garage, the toe of his sneaker disconsolately kicking the gravel now and then.

A month had seemed like a long time, but now that it was over, it was hard to believe it had really happened. It seemed just hours ago that he'd got his first sight of the big colonial house with the white columns and heard the soft voice of Mrs. Duffield.

His steps lagged. He lifted his eyes to gaze at the rolling green hills of the New Jersey countryside, the meadows, the white fences along the distant edges of the vast estate. The sky was so clear and blue it didn't seem quite real, and he still wasn't used to the taste of unpolluted air.

In a few hours now, he and the three others would go back, and soon all this would be a blurring memory.

The cool shadow of the garage slipped across him. He passed alongside the station wagon and shook out the polishing cloths when he reached the basin in the rear corner.

It had all started when Jim Atkins, the Vista volunteer, had called Richie, Wormy, Dom, and Cooly together in the makeshift office of the neighborhood youth corps. Outside, a steamy twilight had been settling over the noise and stink of a Newark slum.

His face more serious than usual, Jim had looked them over. They were a tattered, polyglot collection. Cooly was a gangling, loose-jointed Negro. Wormy might have passed for a skinny beggar from the alleys of Barcelona. Dom was put together like a barrel, topped by a swarthy, steaming Sicilian face. Richie carried his rangy power with a glint of mischievous humor and challenge in his blue eyes.

"I'm sticking my neck out," Jim had said. "I wouldn't pick a ratfink to chop it off."

"Man, we planted no bugs in your socks," Wormy had said. "What gives?"

Jim's face had relaxed in a grin. "How'd you characters like a month's vacation out where the trees grow for real?"

Eyes hooding, the four had waited with slum-bred caution for Jim to cue them in.

"The setup is simple, fellows," Jim had said. "You know how a few private clubs and individuals have opened their pools and facilities to some of us this summer. Well, one of these is a Mrs. Duffield. She owns Duffield Acres, a big estate out in the country. It's got some horses, tennis court, swimming pool, places to hike, trout stream. She'd like to have you as her guests."

The four had exchanged silent messages with their eyes.

Atkins, tall and lean and dark, was a cool cat, even though he spent his winters studying at Columbia. He'd piped the silent conversation.

"No gimmicks and nothing up my sleeve, you toms," he'd laughed. "She's just a lady along in years who says she'd like to see some splashing in the pool and hear some noise around the place."

"Well," Cooly had shrugged his thin shoulders, "if it'll make her feel good thinking she's rehabilitating somebody, I don't like to make old ladies feel bad."

His companions had nodded agreement.

"Okay," Jim had said. "Wash a shirt and meet me here tomorrow morning. We'll drive out in my station wagon, if we can keep it wired together. I'll glom some of this deal for myself and get out there for a day or two every chance."

Knowing that they had been hand-picked, screened out by Jim, had been good for a laugh. The four had got together later that night and passed around a jug of muscatel Dom had taken from his old man.

"We supposed to get converted," Wormy had said, "and help cool things for the rest of the summer when we come back."

"Yeah," Dom had nodded, "they think they so smart. But they ain't fooling nobody."

"Don't scum it, man," Cooly had said. "Take a lesson from my Uncle Howie. Two-three times a month he gets a free feed just for turning in the Good Shepherd Mission and singing some hymns."

"We got a ticket," Richie had summed up. "That's what counts. Who turns down a ticket?"

Richie had expected Mrs. Duffield to be one of two types, a socially-conscious clubwoman hell-bent on being charitable, or a bugged-out old biddie who, after a greedy lifetime, wanted to con her Maker with the brotherly love bit before the lid was nailed on the Big Box.

The prejudgment had been a

goof. Mrs. Duffield had fitted neither slot. Instead, she'd turned out to be people.

She was a slender, trim, active woman in her forties, with crow's feet crinkling the corners of her eyes and a sprinkle of gray adding silver highlights to her brown hair. Richie sensed her natural friendliness right off. It was like her smile, honest and real. Strange as it seemed to her visitors, she'd assumed they were four normal, nice youths and she was going to enjoy the month as much or more than they.

She lived on the estate with two servants, a grizzled old man named Traxler who took care of the grounds and livestock, and a giantess, Hilda, who didn't talk much but who ran the big colonial-styled house and loaded that unbelievable dining room table.

The grounds, the spacious house, the beds with clean sheets weren't quite real at first, but the strangeness wore off quickly, and then the days dissolved with a rush. The four swam, hiked, fished, learned to stay on a horse. There were evening cookouts and trips to the suburban shopping center.

They learned right away that Mrs. Duffield was a cookie who could take care of her own candy. She rode like she was part of the horse. Only Dom could out-swim her, and he'd been a frog since the day his brothers had thrown him off the docks when he was four. She trimmed them all at tennis, and held her own over the pool table in the rainy-day tournament in the game room.

"We supposed to be sharks," Wormy had lamented later.

"It ain't that we so bad," Cooly had said. "Man, she just good. She do anything she put her mind to."

Best of all, a guy knew where he stood with her. If she had something to say, she said it straight from the shoulder. Then the matter was finished, no jawing about it later. It felt pretty good, knowing a person like her really cared if a guy doped off or forgot for a minute he was a decent human being.

She treated them impartially when it came to divvying up the pocket money or asking if anybody had suggestions for dinner tonight, but before long, Richie sensed that he was her favorite. For some reason, she related to him in a way she didn't to the others. The feeling grew to be more than mutual respect or mere liking. She would smile at him first, with maternal fondness, if she joined in whatever they were doing. If she needed some help in her flower garden, she wouldn't call for Traxler. She would say, "Busy, Richie?"

"No, ma'am."

"How about giving me a hand? I won't keep you long."

"Sure."

Sometimes, working near her, or at the dinner table, he would catch her studying him covertly. She would always glance away, but not before he'd glimpsed the shadows that lurked so deep in her eyes. The others never noticed, but he did. He saw the ghosts of pain and loss.

He knew, from chinning with Traxler, that she'd lost her husband several years ago. Mr. Duffield had died from a sudden heart attack. No one had expected it. He'd never had a tremor in his chest before.

But Traxler clammed up every time Richie mentioned the third Duffield, her son. He learned that the boy's name was Albert Jackson Duffield II, that he was about Richie's own age, and that he'd elected to spend the summer away from home. That's as far as Richie got, even with trying to flatter information from Hilda.

Albert Jackson Duffield, second, began to bug Richie. If A. J. was visiting pals or spending a summer at a camp, why all the mystery? How come the bleak-eyed silence on the part of Traxler and Hilda?

Richie put two and two together, coupling the mystery with the secret suffering in Mrs. Duffield's eyes. Were they—especially Richie himself—after all, just brief substitutes to break the silence of the big, memory-filled house? When she had those quiet maternal talks with Richie as they gardened or sneaked a late snack out of the refrigerator, was she wishing her own son was there?

A month ago, Richie would have boiled at the idea; but not now. By the end of the month, he just wished there was something he could do to help her.

He woke that final morning knowing the day was going to be a drag. He hated the hours they'd have to wait for Jim Atkins and the rattling station wagon that would take them away so to kill time, busy his hands, and dull his mind, he had rolled the big car into the driveway and concentrated on the kind of wax job the car had never had before.

He finished putting the polishing materials away and came out of the garage. Mrs. Duffield had come from the house and was standing to one side, looking at the car. When she heard the crunch of his footsteps, she glanced in his direction. Richie knew she understood about the wax job. It was the only way he had of saying thanks.

"Thirsty?" she said after a moment.

"Like I could drink the creek dry," he grinned.

"Let's see what we have in the house."

He followed her into the huge kitchen with its gleaming porcelain, stainless steel, and racks of copper cookware which Hilda kept burnished to the brightness of new coins.

She opened the refrigerator and lifted out a pitcher of lemonade and two frosted glasses. Richie took the pitcher and glasses and crossed to the table. They sat down across from each other, and Mrs. Duffield poured. She didn't sip her drink right away, but sat watching each little movement Richie made.

"I'm going to miss you, Richie."

"I know," he said. "I'm on that scoreboard myself."

She studied his face, feature by feature. "You're more intelligent and sensitive than most. Don't let anything or anybody ever twist it up inside of you, Richie."

His face pinked. "I'll try, Mrs. Duffield."

"And never stop trying. Each of us has to try, day by day, whatever the circumstance or background."

Was she trying to tell him something? Was it bugging her so bad she had to let it out?

He lifted his eyes slowly. "Did he stop trying—your son?"

He had the uncomfortable feeling that she was looking right through him.

"My son desires to live in a Greenwich Village rathole," she said.

"Please, Mrs. Duffield. I'm sorry. I'm a fink for bringing it up."

"His hair is long and filthy," she said. "He never bathes."

He had to look away. The lines had deepened and drawn her face into a mask of despair.

"All he wants from me is money," she said. "He won't see me or talk to me anymore. I tried everything, even to telling him I wouldn't support his habits. He said he would steal—or kill himself and his blood would be on my hands. He hates everything I am, everything I stand for."

The room seemed close and hot to Richie. "Please—you must be wrong. Hate you? Hate all this?"

"Despises might be a better word." Her voice thickened, choked. "Nothing is quite good enough for him. He escapes the hatefulness of existence with drugs."

Richie had no more words. Still unable to look at her, he felt her cold fingers touch the back of his hand.

"Thank you, Richie. I feel a little better, sharing it with someone at last."

Her fingers trailed away. He heard her get up and leave the room. He sat staring at the win-

dow, his face moody, his eyes reflecting a growing determination.

Mrs. Duffield was herself again when the time came to say goodbye. She walked with them to Jim Atkins's station wagon. She shook hands with them one by one, receiving their thanks and telling them what a pleasure their company had been. She saved the farewell to Richie until last. She held onto his hand, studying his face as if impressing a portrait in her memory.

"Maybe things will work out," he said.

"Good-bye, Richie."

"So long, Mrs. Duffield."

He got in, and Jim goosed the accelerator to coax the station wagon on its way. Richie resisted the urge to look back.

That evening Richie, Wormy, and Cooly slouched on the stoop in front of the tenement where Cooly lived. Dom had a good reason for being absent. He'd got in a fight with his old man and the juvenile fuzz had picked him up.

The night was hot and sticky. Through a pall of boredom, traffic inched, little kids played tag on the sidewalk, guys propped up lamp posts and gassed on street corners, girls in cheap miniskirts strolled past.

"She's got a son," Richie said.

"Who?" Cooly asked. "What you talking about?"

"Mrs. Duffield, you dope."

"Oh, her. Nice lady. But it's over and done, Richie. Why you trouble your soul?"

"You think I'm stewing because I had a look at the other side?"

"Ain't you?" Cooly asked.

A man and woman came out of the building and had to walk around the three youths sprawled on the steps.

"The Village ain't a very big place," Richie said. "And how many hippies in the colony? A few hundred? Guy put his mind to it, he shouldn't have much trouble turning up Albert Jackson Duffield, the second."

"Who?" Wormy said.

"Her son, musclehead."

"Why you want to find him?" Wormy asked.

"Give him a little eye-opener," Richie said. "Change the spots on the dice. Make him see what he's thrown away, what he's doing to himself—and to her. We owe her that much."

"I don't owe nobody nothing," Cooly said, a stubborn note in his voice. "But I got plenty coming to me."

"Me too," Wormy echoed.

Richie raised from his propped elbows and looked at them. "I'd like some traveling company."

He read their refusal in their silence. He got up and dusted off the seat of his pants. "Okay," he said. "I guess I'll have to fly it solo. Keep it cool, you rat-finks."

He stepped down to the sidewalk and walked away in the darkness.

A week after he'd hitched a ride with a trucker and crossed into Manhattan, Richie was still haunting the hippie hangouts in the Village and asking the same questions. He got along on his hoarded pocket money that Mrs. Duffield had so freely passed out. But the time was long and the money short, and self-doubts were plaguing him the night he put the question to a brassy blonde waitress in a sleazy MacDougal Street coffee house that featured the music of a psychedelic quartet.

"Know a brother named Albert Duffield?"

The music twanged with hypnotic insistence; the lighting rose and fell in weird shades of yellow and green.

"Sure. He comes in. That's him over there."

Richie's gaze jumped in the direction of the girl's pointing finger. He almost tipped his chair over as he got up. He wound his way past half a dozen contorting dancers and paused at the table where A. J. D., number two, sat alone. He didn't even look up.

The figure before Richie had spurned its one-time promise of lean, virile manhood. The guy was a scarecrow in greasy slacks and baggy shirt open to his navel. Love beads lay in a hard glitter against his sunken chest. His finely-featured face was all but lost in the filthy mat of beard and unkempt dark-blond hair.

A final dissonance shimmered. The Dantean lights subsided. Richie slipped into the chair across the table from Albert.

"Do I know you?" Albert looked at him with bloodshot eyes.

"No," Richie said, "but your mother does."

Albert sat up. "You're not part of the scene. Fade, pops."

"Don't bug me, kid. All I want is a little talk."

"Yeah? How much is she paying you? What's the pitch? To chum it up? Bridge the communication gap? Cop out, creep."

Richie curled his hands to keep the tension inside. "You don't know what you're doing to her."

"I could care less!"

"Or yourself. Come on, kid. I'm trying to be a soul brother. Can't we talk about it like men?"

"About what?" Albert's teeth were already yellowed and old behind his savage sneer. "The gold-lined trap? The stupid, shiny gad-

gets? The rotten mess she and her kind have made of everything?"

Richie sat staring with the feeling that the specter couldn't be quite real.

Albert lurched to his feet, still talking. "You came for a message? I got one, man. Go back and tell her she's the symbol of everything that stinks!"

Watching the boy's headlong flight, Ritchie half rose from his chair. Then he slumped back. He shuddered slightly with a sense of being out of focus. Everything seemed drawn and twisted. Even the air was slimy with filth.

The amplified music resumed its assault on the senses. Richie was almost immune. His mind was too occupied with other things.

He felt like a dope, yet he'd got himself too teed-off on this thing to shuck it, like that, from his mind. He'd let the mental picture become too vivid to erase it easily, of the boy walking the private road to the house with the tall, white columns and of Mrs. Duffield's face as she ran forward to meet him.

Richie ordered an espresso, sipped, watched, tried to dig the scene. He gave it up at last and motioned to the waitress.

"I forgot to tell Albert something. Know where he pads?"

"Sure," she said. "Down the block. You can't miss it. It's in the walkup over the secondhand book stall. The stairway opens on the sidewalk between the store and empty place next door. Try the right rear apartment."

The worn and creaky stairway was so dark Richie had to grope his way. The corridor was lighted by a tiny bulb that shed a little more light than a firefly. The smell was worse than Richie's Newark home. It churned his stomach as he made his way to a door where patches of old paint clung in dirty blisters.

He knocked, and when several seconds ticked off without an answer, he knocked again, harder. The lock was broken, and his knuckles jarred the door open a few inches. He pushed it wider and thrust his head inside. "Hey, kid? You home?"

He didn't get a reply, but he heard—or imagined he heard—shallow breathing. He fumbled along the grimy doorjamb. Failing to find a switch, he pushed the door wider and scratched a match. In the flare, he got an impression of Albert's body sprawled on a bed.

He stepped inside, heeled the door closed, and pulled a dirty string that brought dim life to a naked bulb that hung from the cracked ceiling.

He looked around, and his slum-hardened senses were sickened. An

animal wouldn't have lived in the place. In a flurry of faint scratchings, roaches scurried from a table cluttered with dirty dishes and scraps of rotting food. Gnats swarmed the sweetness of empty beer cans strewn on the ramshackle bureau. Tiny rat eyes peered briefly from behind a soggy garbage can. Filthy socks, shirts, pants lay in careless rancid wads where they had been taken off.

The final touch was the limp, unconscious form on the sway-backed, sagging bed. Albert lay on a lumpy mattress that had dirty puffs showing where the filthy ticking was torn. He'd shucked his shirt, and one naked arm was curled up about his head, the other at his side. He was deep in drugged slumber.

Studying the wasted face, the open, hanging mouth, Richie shook his head slowly. He imagined Mrs. Duffield seeing Albert like this. She'd have wished she was dead.

Richie's gaze lingered on the needle marks pocking the arms like a rash from a scabrous disease. Then his eyes moved to the rickety table beside the bed. The hypo syringe, candle, and teaspoon lay where Albert had dropped them after popping the mainline.

Richie's finger toyed with the folded squares of paper scattered just beyond the syringe. There were

five of them, each a little packet of heroin cut with milk sugar. Plenty to keep Albert happy for quite a while.

This is living? Richie wondered. This is her son? The punk I wanted to send back?

He was nonchalant as he struck a match and lighted the candle. He crossed the room, drew some water from a rusty tap into a grimy glass. Returning to the bed, he opened a packet of horse and mixed it with a little water in the teaspoon. Quite calmly, he heated it over the candle until the drug dissolved. Then he picked up the needle and filled it.

"So long, punk," he said. He pulled Albert's arm a little away from his body, and the needle lowered toward the vein.

The next afternoon Richie sat on the stoop in front of the tenement in Newark and read the story on an inside page of a New York newspaper.

Wormy drifted up. "What you reading, man? They going to kill the poverty program?"

"Says here the scion of a prominent New Jersey family killed himself accidentally with an overdose of drugs over in the Village Hippieville," Richie said. "The fuzz made a routine investigation, and that's it. The matter is all closed up for keeps. It happens all the time."

"Yeah," Wormy said. "What's a scion?"

"Well, it's like . . . it means an heir," Richie said. He got up, tossed the paper to Wormy. "Read the funnies."

"Where you going, Ritchie?"

"For a bus ride," Richie said. He gave Wormy a long look, his eyes touched with nostalgia. "Good-bye, Wormy. Good-bye and good luck."

Richie started along the winding private road as, behind him, the big inter-city bus closed its door with a sigh of air and trundled on its way.

In a few minutes, Richie rounded a bend beyond the row of maples, and the view spread before him, the white fences, the lush meadows under the clean sky, the cottage where the caretaker lived, the three-car garage, and the beautiful home with the white columns that crested a rolling green hill.

Richie's feet became eager pistons. He put Albert forever to rest in his own mind with a final thought: Guy spits out his candy, it's up for grabs.

He saw her then, crossing from the house to the garage, already clothed in black. He shouted and waved. Mrs. Duffield stopped and stared, as if not believing her eyes. Then she turned toward him and stretched out her hands.

I'll make one hell of a fine son, Richie thought, *the kind the Duffield name and money should have had from the start.*

He closed the distance between them with a rush.

The estate of man is said to be fleeting and paltry—yesterday in embryo, tomorrow a mummy or ashes.

Sea Change

By HENRY SLESAR

FROM the day Jane Brissom gave her the invitation, from the moment the travel folders were in her hand, Margo Wheeler underwent a pronounced transformation. Her students, the indifferent, mop-headed teen-agers who yawned their way through her lectures on English Grammar, noticed it first. They smiled more. They kidded with her after class. They seemed to recognize that she was almost as young as they were, and just as interested in getting some kicks out of life. When she was tired, wearied by teachers' conferences, bored with grading papers and untying the snarled word-knots of her students' compositions, she would lean back, say the magic words, and feel herself restored. A month in Europe! Two weeks on a transatlantic liner, and a month abroad! Was there anyone else so happy?

Maybe Jane Brissom, Margo thought, but she doubted it. At forty-five, a matchstick of a woman with watery eyes, random features, and a pitted complexion, Jane Brissom needed more than a vacation to make her happy. Margo couldn't resist the small, secret smile when she thought of Jane, although it was cruel, and rank ingratitude on her part.

Two nights before the sailing, she went to Jane's apartment and found her in the helpless confusion of packing.

"Look at this mess. Just look at it!" Jane said in anguish. "It's like an old clothes sale. I just don't see *what* I'm going to wear."

"Why, you have some very nice things," Margo said. "I always thought your clothes had such . . . taste." She wrinkled her small, pretty face. "Of course, if you hadn't loaned me that money, you could have gone out and bought a whole new wardrobe. I feel like such a *stinker,* Janey."

"Please, Margo, I *want* you to come along. It wouldn't be any fun all by myself. You're doing me a favor, really."

"Some favor," Margo laughed. Then she whistled as Jane picked up a glittering, bib-style necklace from the bureau and placed it forlornly against the flat, protruding bones of her chest. The necklace, with strings of multi-faceted stones, was a fire in the dim room. "Oh, Janey," Margo breathed, "what a hunk of jewelry!"

"Yes," Jane said sadly. "It was the only thing of Mother's I didn't sell after she died."

"Is it real? Are those real diamonds?"

"Oh, they're real, all right. The last time it was appraised I was told it would cost eleven or twelve thousand to replace. It might be worth even more now." She lowered the necklace, and with its borrowed light gone from her face, she seemed older and more haggard than ever.

"Could I try it, Janey? Just for a minute?" She took it in her hands.

In the mirror, the flashing fire around her throat, Margo looked at herself with exultation.

"Oh, it's beautiful! You've just *got* to take it with you, Janey. I mean, if you think it'll be safe . . ."

Janey smiled. "I've never had any occasion to wear the darned thing, so safe or not, I'm taking it. Besides, I've got my protection." She reached into a suitcase and produced a clumsy, black-handled revolver, holding it as casually as a shoe.

"Janey! You mean you're taking a gun along?"

"Don't make a fuss about it. We've had this old gun in the house ever since I was a little girl. It's just another part of the inheritance, that's all."

"Is it loaded?"

"Of course it's loaded. And don't think I won't use it if some *man*—" She flushed, and put the gun back into the suitcase. "Never mind about the gun, it's only sensible for two women traveling alone to have protection. And from what I've heard about Paris—" She snapped the suitcase shut. "Well, I'm ready for them."

Margo smothered a giggle.

The idea didn't come to Margo until morning. She thought she had dreamed it at first, but it was a waking, fully-conscious dream. She was so excited that she telephoned Jane at eight-thirty, and extracted a sleepy invitation to come over.

The older woman was still in her nightdress, a cotton bag that encased her thin body from neck to ankle.

"It's an inspiration!" Margo said. "That's what it is!"

"What is?"

Margo sat on the bed and curled her shapely legs beneath her. "Look, let's face it, Janey. We just won't have any fun at *all* on this trip if we don't—well, you know—meet people. *Men.* And you know as well as I do that there's nothing deadlier than two schoolteachers on a cruise—"

"I don't know anything of the kind," Jane said stiffly.

"But everybody *laughs* at that sort of thing, it's an old joke. The mousy schoolmarms on their sabbatical—"

"Well, I suppose there's something to that."

"But that's what I mean, Janey. Why do we *have* to be what we are? Why do we have to be schoolteachers? Why couldn't we pretend we're the kind of people who *belong* on a luxury liner, first-class passengers and everything? Why, the necklace alone—"

"Don't forget, it's only *one* necklace. We couldn't very well take turns, could we?"

Margo lowered her voice.

"Janey what if *one* of us pretended to be rich? I mean *really* rich. With that necklace, who would doubt it?"

"One of us?"

"It has to be only *one,* don't you see? As you said, there's only one necklace. But more important, the *other* one could be sort of a—servant. A maid, you know. Then there wouldn't be any *doubt* about how rich we were. One of us, anyway."

Jane walked over to her.

"Are you really serious? You

mean we should pretend to be some kind of heiress and servant? For the whole trip?"

"Wouldn't it be *marvelous?* Can't you see the *impression* we'd make? We'd have every man on board in the palm of our hands! Who knows?" she tittered. "We might even meet a *real* millionaire!"

Jane folded her arms. "And who gets to play Cinderella? No, never mind, let me guess."

"Why, *you* do, of course, silly. You didn't think I was suggesting that *I* be the one? It'll be fun, really. I'll be your lady-in-waiting, and you can be very, very *grand* in your umpty-thousand dollar necklace—"

The older woman smiled. "You know, I really think you mean it, Margo."

"Of course I do!"

"Well, I wouldn't think of it. It just wouldn't be fair."

Margo chewed her polished thumbnail.

"All right, then!" she said brightly. "We can do it another way. We can take turns!"

"Turns?"

"Of course! We're going *both* ways by ship. We have *two* cruises, don't we? You can be the millionairess one way, and I can be her the other!" She hugged herself joyfully. "Oh, Janey, wouldn't that be fantastic? You're just *bound* to meet some fine, wonderful *man.*"

The word was like a bullet. It made Jane Brissom spin about, but she wasn't injured; she was suddenly radiant with a hope that had been suppressed for a lifetime.

Ten minutes later, they tossed a coin and Margo Wheeler won the Europe-bound trip.

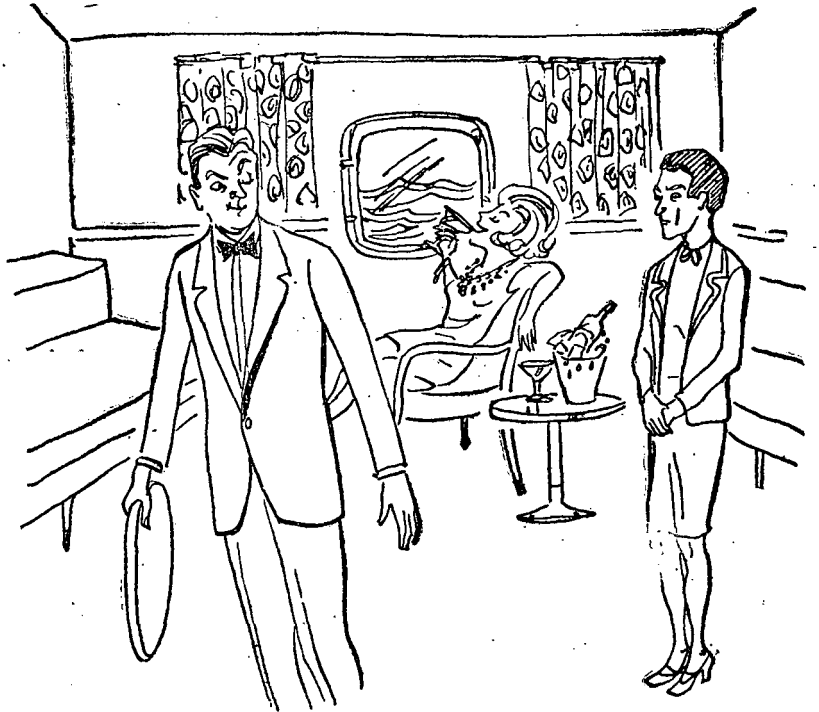
They called the ship a Queen, and when Margo first saw its imperious bow and regal funnels, she felt as if in the presence of majesty. Jane was more practical; she took charge of luggage, tickets, and tips, and even before they boarded, they were playing their parts: Margo, the spoiled rich girl, accustomed to red carpets; Jane, the servant, rolling it before her.

In the stateroom, Margo produced a surprise, a bottle of champagne, and Jane rang the steward's button to ask for glasses. The steward was a wiry cockney with a wise, handsome face and bright, merry eyes, and he guessed their relationship at once. He poured Margo's drink for her gallantly, and gave Jane a companionable servant-to-servant wink on his way out.

"To Europe!" Margo said, lifting her glass.

"To you, madam," Jane said respectfully. Then they giggled like the schoolgirls they taught.

There was a "welcome aboard"



party the first night out. Margo wore a powder-blue gown with a low neckline, ideal for the real glory of her attire. Jane put it around her neck herself, touching the diamond-encrusted strands lovingly.

"How does it look?" Margo asked, twirling before the mirror. "Does it look as good as I think it does?"

"It's lovely," Jane said flatly.

"But I feel so *awful*. I mean, wearing *your* necklace—"

"A bargain's a bargain," Jane said. Then she put on a severe black dress with cuffs and collar. The mirror image was depressing, but she smiled gamely. "I *look* like a servant, don't I?"

"You look *fine*, Janey."

"Yes," the older woman said.

The party was slow in starting, the passengers diffident with each other. Then the band played with determination, and the drinks began to flow, and the dancing started, and with the suddenness of a popping cork, the festivities were under way. At their center, glittering, gleaming, dazzling with inner and outer radiance, was Margo

Wheeler. From the sidelines, Jane watched her necklace sparkle in and out among the dancing couples, watched Margo tango with one man and meringue with another, saw her laughing with a gold-braided officer and sharing a drink with a bold-eyed man in evening dress.

At eleven-thirty she danced by Jane's table and waved. "Hi, Jane," she said gaily. "Listen, would you be a dear and get my stole?"

"Your stole?"

"You know, the one with the sequins. I'm going for a walk on deck."

"Oh," Jane said. "Yes, of course, miss," she added.

Jane left the party at twelve; Margo didn't return to the stateroom until two. She made just enough noise to wake Jane, then she apologized.

"It's all right," Jane said. "Did you have fun?"

"Did you see *him*?" Margo said. "Oh, Janey, he's a dream. His name is Gordon Baylor, and he's in investments or something. Listen, would you mind very much if I changed dining room tables? He's asked me to. You wouldn't mind, would you?"

"Why should I?" Jane said dryly. "I'm only your servant."

"Oh, I wish *you* could meet someone, Janey. That would make everything perfect." She sighed happily, and started to get ready for bed. Just before she turned off the light, she said, "Oh, would you mind doing me a favor, Janey? That blue knit suit of mine got awful rumpled in packing. Would you iron it for me?"

"All right," Jane Brissom said.

Margo didn't see Jane until late the next morning; she had risen early and gone out on deck. Margo was strolling with Gordon Baylor when she spotted Jane in conversation with the room steward. The little cockney bowed and moved off as they neared.

"Good morning, Jane," Margo said coolly. "Gordon, this is my maid, Jane."

The man with the bold eyes nodded indifferently and looked away. "Let's go on forward," he told Margo. "The captain's an old friend of mine; I'll introduce you."

"That would be lovely. Oh, Jane," Margo said casually, "you won't forget about ironing that suit? And be sure that my black formal is ready for tonight, won't you?"

"Yes, miss," Jane said, in a choked voice.

They moved off together, but their voices carried in the ocean breeze. "She's a gem," Margo was saying. "She's been with me for years."

In the deck chair, Jane sipped her bouillon and grimaced.

That afternoon, Margo returned to the cabin for a change of clothes, and found Jane writing a letter. She told her the exciting news: the captain was having a small party in his quarters that night. Jane became flustered, and worried over her clothes, until Margo said, "Oh, but you're not invited, Jane. I mean, I'm awfully sorry, but you *couldn't* be, really."

"Not invited?"

"Well, it's only a small party, and I couldn't very well ask my—well, my maid, could I?"

"No," Jane said bitterly. "I guess you couldn't."

There was no doubt that Margo Wheeler was having the time of her life. She found a wellspring of small talk and coquetry that she never knew she possessed; she seemed to catch fire each night from the glittering necklace that never left her throat. Gordon Baylor was getting interested; she knew he was intrigued, awed by her obvious wealth, impressed by the maid who jumped at her every command. And Margo made her jump; she didn't miss an opportunity. When Jane began to mutter and complain, she'd remind her that her turn would come on the return trip; but Jane, whose conquests amounted to nothing more than servant-to-servant conversations with the cockney steward, grew lonelier, more bitter, and more miserable with every hour of the voyage.

On the fourth night, when Margo staggered into the stateroom at one-thirty, intoxicated by champagne and her own success, Jane was waiting up with folded arms.

"All right," she said coldly. "I've had enough."

"What's that?"

"I'm sick and tired of playing servant, Margo."

The younger woman blinked, and touched the diamond strands. "But it's just two more days. Two more days and we'll be in Le Havre—"

"I don't care! I'm not having any *fun*. I'm not meeting anyone—"

"But the return trip—"

"I don't *care* about the return trip. I want this farce over now. There are half a dozen nice men I could have met if they didn't think I was your housemaid."

Margo only half-stifled a tipsy giggle. "Really, Janey? You really think that's true?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Margo said, flinging her stole to the bed. "You think it would make that much difference? Honestly, Janey, sometimes I think you have no

sense at all! You wouldn't have a *chance* with a decent man, servant or not. So you might as well face the truth."

Jane gasped. "How can you talk to me like that?"

"It's true, isn't it? You've got as much chance to get a man interested in you as—as—" She floundered for a simile, and then dropped onto the bed. "I'm tired," she sighed. "Let's talk about it tomorrow."

She was asleep almost at once, fully clothed, the diamond necklace still coruscating around her neck. Even the hateful glare of her roommate's eyes didn't disturb her peaceful slumber.

"I'll show you," Jane Brissom whispered. "I'll show you, damn you!"

In the morning, Margo apologized. "Gosh, Janey, I don't know what came over me. I guess I was drunk; that's all there is to it. Let's not let it spoil things, huh? It's only two more days—"

"Very well, Margo, we'll forget it."

"You're sure you're not angry?"

"No, of course not," Jane said.

"There's a party in the main ballroom tonight. For everyone. You'll be there, won't you?"

"I'll see," Jane said, not looking at her.

Jane didn't attend the party. She sat up in the stateroom until it was over. When Margo waltzed in at three, still giggling over the evening's hilarity, her lipstick smudged and her gown rumpled, Jane was sitting quietly in the armchair near the porthole, looking out at the turgid sea with a strange air of tranquillity.

"You should have been there!" Margo said breathlessly. "Jane, it was absolute heaven. We danced under the stars . . ."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it."

"Gordon wants me to meet him in Paris. He knows all about it; he's been there umpteen times—"

"Am I to be your servant in Paris, too?"

"Of course not!" Margo tittered. Then she set her face in a pout. "You're not still angry with me, are you? About those silly things I said last night?"

"They weren't silly," Jane said coldly. "They were true."

"Oh, no, Janey—"

"They were true, Margo. I can't get a man. I never could. Not the way you can, with lipstick, and a permanent, and some pretty jewelry. It's harder for me." She stood up, and held out her hand. "I'll take the necklace now, Margo."

"Take it?" Margo looked bewildered, and touched the diamond strands protectively. "But we still have another day to go, Janey.

There's the big farewell party tomorrow night—"

"You can do without it. I need it now."

"But what for? Janey, you're not going to tell anyone about—well, about our arrangement?"

"I don't intend to spoil your fun. I simply want the necklace. There's something I want to do with it."

Margo stared at her, and then laughed brassily.

"You *are* going to wear it! You think you can *still* get some man interested, don't you?"

"Give me the necklace, Margo."

"I won't!" Margo shouted, stepping backwards and stamping her foot. "What good can it do you now?"

"That's not your affair. It's my necklace and I want it back."

"I won't give it back!" Margo's voice rose toward hysteria. "It's mine until we reach Le Havre. That was the agreement. It's mine! It's mine!"

Jane's unlovely hands became fists. She shivered, as if cold. Then she turned to her bunk, and lifted the pillow. She brought out the awkward, black-handled revolver; her grip on the butt was insecure, but the wavering muzzle was trained in Margo's direction.

Margo didn't believe it for a moment. She sat down limply on her bunk, and stared incredulously at the dark, menacing hole of the weapon.

"For heaven's sake, Janey," she whispered, "put that awful thing down."

"I want my necklace, Margo."

"You're crazy! You're absolutely crazy, Janey! You could—kill me by accident—"

"It wouldn't have to be an accident," Jane said with loathing. "I could kill you gladly, Margo, believe me!" Her anger made her hand shake, and Margo cowered against the wall.

"Please, Janey, you don't know what you're doing—"

The older woman took a step forward; Margo shrieked and leaped from the bunk toward the wall. Her hand slapped at the steward's call button, and she punched it vigorously, over and over. Then she whirled to face her roommate, and there was more fury than fear in her eyes.

"I'll have you locked up!" she screamed. "I'll have them put you away!"

Jane hesitated, turning uncertainly toward the door. In another moment they heard footsteps and a genteel knock.

"Steward, ladies!" said the cheery voice.

Margo smiled triumphantly, called, "Come in!"

The door opened, and the wiry

cockney steward entered. Jane lowered the revolver sadly, and stared blankly at the porthole. Outside, the sea rolled by silently.

The steward glanced between them, and the merriment went out of his face.

"What is this? What's going on?"

He went to Janey and took the gun from her limp hand.

"You fool," he said hoarsely. "You want to wake the whole ship?"

"She wouldn't give it to me," Jane said weakly. "I tried to make her give it to me—"

The steward smiled thinly. "I'm sure the lady will be reasonable." He turned to Margo. "Won't you, lady? You won't make trouble for us, will you?"

"Trouble?" Margo said. "What are you talking about?"

The steward came closer, his manner more obsequious than ever. His arms shot out, and his large hands locked on Margo Wheeler's throat. She made no sound, and hardly struggled. She looked toward Jane with round, terrified eyes, but Jane only watched with quiet interest. Margo made one last rally for freedom from the ever-tightening grasp, but it was too late. Without air, there was no strength. Then, without air, there was no life. She closed her eyes and died.

The steward lowered her lifeless body slowly to the cabin bunk. When he straightened up, he looked at Jane and clucked.

"Would have been better my way," he said. "If you'd just swiped the bloody thing." He shrugged his neat shoulders. "Well, this way there won't be any complaints. I'll get a trunk or a laundry bag, and over the side . . ."

"The necklace," Jane said dreamily.

"Ah, yes, the necklace. Your mistress' pretty necklace." He bent down and unhooked it, held it up to the light. "We'll have a good time in Paris on this, ducks, see if we don't." He put it in his pocket, and went to the door. "I'll be back in five minutes. Good job, old girl. We working people got to stick together."

He pinched her cheek before going out.

The efficacy of words, it seems, lies not in volume, but in their intricacy.

WHAT THE GREEK SAID

by Frank Sisk

AVENUE C, on a Saturday afternoon, is always deserted, and never more so than in the summer. Iron or wooden grills protect the blank street-floor windows. Trucks stand locked and idle at the curbs or in the alleys. Monstrous cats crouch atop any garbage can that has no cover. Fat black flies swarm along the gutters where melon shards and fruit pulp fester in the heat. A police cruiser tours the area about once an hour.

This particular Saturday afternoon in August was no exception until 4:35. At that time a taxi cut slowly through the humid quiet and came to a stop at the curb in the middle of the block. A small man, fiftyish, with a disabled right leg, climbed from the back with an effort. He wore a porkpie hat, a sports shirt and slacks, and scuffed suede shoes.

"Buck ten," the driver said.

The small man paid exactly that amount, and the driver left with a hoarse imprecation.

Alone, as far as the eye could see in either direction on Avenue C, the small man turned to face a wide store front, its grimy windows unbarricaded. One window bore in chipping goldleaf the legend *Paramount Wholesale Produce,* the other advertised *Celery & Bananas.* Pausing just long enough to light a cigarette, the small man limped

to the door—*1456*—between the windows and opened it without hesitation.

The murky interior was mellow with the smell of bananas faintly spiced with celery and a few other edibles. A shadow slouched on a box six feet inside and to the left of the door, and it had a voice. "Trotman?"

"That's me," the small man said.

"Closer."

The small man limped up to the shadow, which frisked him without bothering to rise from the box. "Now drop the butt on the floor and step on it."

Trotman took the cigarette from his dry lips and complied with the order.

"No smoking," the shadow said. "House rules. Don't forget it. Ferris is waiting in the back office—the blue light back there—and try not to fall over any of the boxes."

Moving carefully through the dimness, Trotman reached the door under the blue light and knocked twice.

"It's open," a heavy voice said.

Trotman opened the door and entered a room where the scent of stale tobacco smoke took over from the bananas and the gloom was displaced by garish light. Just inside the door, in a chair teetered back against the wall, was a thick-necked man known to Trotman only as Louie the Link. Behind a battered desk on the far side of the room sat Ferris, a black cigar stump held between brownish teeth bared in a permanently rictal grin.

"Greetings, Trotman," Ferris said somehow between the clamped teeth and through the cigar. "Have a stool."

A stool actually stood in front of the desk. It was about two feet high with a round wooden seat.

Not hesitating too long, and managing to conceal his hatred, Trotman sat on the stool, bringing his chin on the same plane as the desk top.

"You're looking fine, Trotman," Ferris said, "except for that leg of yours. Never did heal right, did it?"

"Mind if I smoke?" Trotman said, producing cigarettes.

"Got a rule against it. Didn't Pippie tell you?"

"He mentioned it, yeah."

"I make the rules—" Ferris allowed a cloud of blue smoke to issue from his grinning mouth,"—and I break them. That right, Louie?"

"That's right, boss."

"Rules of the game," Ferris said. "Required to maintain a good front. No rules, no action. No action, no profit. Contradict me if I'm wrong, Louie."

"You're right, boss."

"So there we are," Ferris continued, mopping his domed forehead with a folded handkerchief. "No smoking."

It was oppressively hot in the office but Trotman couldn't seem to sweat. A cold flame burned deep inside his heart and he kept it there. "I never knew selling bananas was that complicated," he said.

Ferris went on grinning but, for a moment, his gray eyes were flecked with annoyance. Then his teeth unlocked a sixteenth of an inch, letting the cigar dangle, and what passed as a laugh came out. "A yokker you're not, Trotman. You talk like that Greek."

"What Greek?"

"You know what Greek. That Greek across the street, that old pal of yours. Lap."

"You mean Jimmie Lapadopolus?"

"You said it, I didn't. I can't." Another simulated laugh escaped. "Lap's as far as I go. Lap, the celery king."

"He sells a lot of celery," Trotman said imperturbably.

"He sells a hell of a lot less than he used to," Ferris said.

"He's got competition these days, sure."

"You bet your sweet life he's got competition, and he's going to get a lot more of it. Tell him that the next time you see him."

"I don't see him much," Trotman said.

"You saw him three days this week. Don't try to tell me you don't see him much."

"Well, I won't be seeing him again."

"So the Greek said no to his old chum. That it?"

"A pretty fair guess," Trotman said. It was the sort of guess he wanted Ferris to make. What the

Greek really said, if known, would have made Ferris swallow his cigar and turn green.

"So much for old chums, Trotman. So much for Lap the celery king. By Thanksgiving he won't have a stalk to his name. He'll be off the Avenue and up the creek. Bet on it."

"One thing, he said he's going to report your operations to the Better Business Bureau," Trotman said with a straight face.

"You don't say."

"And he's going to block your application for membership in the Chamber of Commerce."

"On what grounds?"

"Claims you're not legit. Celery is just a facade for something else."

"Like what?" he said guardedly.

"Like—" Trotman inserted an interval of suspense, "—like bananas."

Ferris regarded Trotman in hard silence for several seconds. "In other words, the Greek finally found out where the real bread comes from."

"I'd say so."

"Go on."

"He said he didn't have any spare cash because you were pushing him to the wall with cut-rate prices. He said if it was celery I needed just to help myself because he was almost giving it away anyhow. But if I insisted on lettuce, the bankable kind, he said I'd do better to see you—and to bring along a few pints of blood as collateral."

"Bright boy, that Greek." Ferris' static grin grew vicious with satisfaction. "Louie."

"Yeah, boss."

"Go out and patter with Pippie until I give you a whistle."

When the door had closed on Louie's back, Ferris said, "This type transaction, I keep the details up here." He tapped his right temple with a rather dirty finger. "To myself. Now, how come you didn't go to Hoffner this time?"

"My brother Bernie went to Hoffner a month ago and now he's in the hospital," Trotman said with an anger he didn't have to fake.

"I seem to've heard about that," Ferris said. "Hoffner is still a little crude. I don't like it crude."

Since when, you hyena? Trotman thought bitterly.

"Not for quite a while," Ferris said as if mind reading. "Not since —hell, Trotman, when was it you sort of slipped and fell off the scaffolding?"

"Sixteen months ago."

"Not since then." Ferris removed the cigar from the vise of stained teeth, spat to the right, replaced the cigar and said grindingly, "Since then I changed my entire collection policy."

"Glad to hear it," Trotman said.

"I bet you are. Why kill the goose? That's my motto now. Why even damage the goose? Why make the sawbones rich on my own investment? You know, Trotman, I asked myself these questions a dozen times over, and finally I come up with a perfect solution."

"I'd like to hear it."

"All in good time. First, another question. How much do you need?"

"Twelve bills."

"Steep, very steep."

"Don't tell me, Ferris. I know."

"The banks won't give it to you?"

"I filed personal bankruptcy a year ago. You know damn well the banks won't let me have ink."

"Twelve bills," Ferris said. "What's the sudden squeeze?"

"Hospital, doctors."

"Your brother Bernie?"

Trotman nodded.

Ferris shook his head sadly. "How come he went to Hoffner instead of me?"

"He saw me in the hospital myself sixteen months ago," Trotman said coldly. "He figured Hoffner might be easier to do business with. We didn't know about your new collection policy, whatever that is."

"When's he getting out?"

"Tomorrow morning." Trotman could have said that Bernie, who had died two hours ago, was coming out in a coffin, but that was his own little secret.

"So you've got to slap it on the barrelhead tonight. I notice you're working again."

"Steady."

"Same take-home as before?"

"A little better. I got a few private deals on the side."

"I'm going to say okay, Trotman." Ferris opened a drawer in his desk and took out a metal box. "You learned to meet your obligations in the past. I don't think we're going to have any trouble in the future. Twelve bills. Right?"

"Right."

Ferris opened the box and began counting out money. "The interest rate is still the same," he said with his unabated grin. "Everything else it keeps going up. Inflation, like the President says. But here we hold the line. Six percent a week on the unpaid balance. In advance. And I like to see the balance reduced on a loan of this size by at least twenty-five bucks a week, starting a week from today. Fair enough?"

Trotman nodded, trying to look morose about it; he didn't intend to repay a nickle.

Ferris passed a sheaf of bills across the desk. "I think you'll find it all there, less interest. Count it."

Trotman counted it: $1128. "Want me to sign anything?"

"Not a thing." Ferris again tapped his temple. "I keep it all up here."

Trotman got off the stool and thrust the wad of money into his hip pocket.

"Just a reminder, though," Ferris said. "Next Saturday, same time, I expect to see you here with ninety-seven bucks—the seventy-two interest and the twenty-five principal. Understand?"

"Sure, Ferris. I been here before, remember?"

"You remember," Ferris said. "Me, I never forget. And in case you're a little late, Trotman, we won't even go looking for you. Our new policy is to leave the goose alone. Let him work, let him earn, let him pay. But on time."

"I'll be on time. Don't worry."

"The worries are for you, Trotman. Strictly. You got a daughter going to be married next month. A pretty face, so I hear. Well, if you want to keep her face pretty for the wedding, you will *always* be on time."

Almost sick with hatred, Trotman left. What actually sustained him until he got out onto the Avenue were the words of Jimmie Lapadopolus spoken confidentially several times during the week:

I got the man for the job. He's from the old country. Call him a cousin. He got in political trouble there and had to leave. He's trying to get a start here. He doesn't fit in with the celery business, but in certain other jobs he is a good workman, and is trying to raise money for the cause. For a fee of one thousand dollars. . .

In the newspaper next morning, Trotman found the notice of his brother's death in the obituary column and, on page three, a brief story about the discovery of Ferris' body, the throat cut from ear to ear, head down in a garbage can in front of 1460 Avenue C.

Smiling cruelly, Trotman limped to the phone in the hallway and dialed a number.

"Hoffner Hardware," a woman's voice said.

"Let me speak with Mister Hoffner," Trotman said. He was sure Hoffner would want to lend him $1200 for funeral expenses.

Diverse are the ways of viewing.

by Lee Russell

STILL shaken by the taxi's swerving climb, the plunging glimpses of sea below, I climbed the sun-baked steps toward Raoul and Alicia's villa. In my shoulder-bag rode Alicia's twenty-two postcards, rubber-band-bound in the order received. The cards had finally, thanks to my little six-year-old neighbor, brought me flying to Palma. They reported only that "We are well," or "The weather's fine," but were all I had heard from my sister since her wedding letter: ". . . Raoul is handsome, charming and, *oh, so* good with Timmy!" Timmy's father had died unreconciled to the boy's malformed arm.

I reached the balustraded terrace and Alicia, paler and slighter even than I remembered, rose, stumbling, from her chaise.

"Marian! Oh, thank God!"

She stopped and drew a sharp breath as a stocky, white-jacketed houseboy appeared in the door-

way. He had approached quietly.

"Oh—Pedro. This is—an old school friend who's passing through. She'll be staying to tea."

Pedro still stood.

"Bring tea out here. Now!"

He withdrew, but Alicia still watched the doorway. I saw her violet eyes shadowed and underscored ten years before their time. I crossed, grasped her arm and could feel the bone.

"Alicia, what's wrong!"

She looked back at me, her eyes both imploring and warning.

"Look, tell you what. I kept my cab. Let's go back to town for tea."

She seemed to shrink away. "I can't."

"What do you mean you can't? We have to talk. I didn't fly—"

"You don't understand. I *can't.* I'm not allowed out. Raoul's across the island, but Pedro has his orders."

"Orders! And who else is here?"

"No one."

"Then we're two to one. Come on."

I hustled her down toward the cab. As Pedro reappeared, silently again but betraying haste, I called back, "Taking the senora *out* to tea."

Back in Palma, seated on a large, shaded *café-terrase,* I ordered omelets and a huge tea. Alicia looked half starved. She sat like a child let out of school, visibly breathing the fresh, sweet air and gazing about at the scattered tea guests, the waiters idling beneath hanging urns of flowering vines and the tourists and natives passing in the sunlight beyond the boxed hedge.

Then she said, "You'll have to pay for all that, you know."

"So I dragged you off without your purse."

"I mean I haven't *any* money—here, home or anywhere."

"But I thought Walter left you *well* provided for!"

"His insurance paid for the villa. The rest is in trust for Timmy. I get the income, but just endorse the checks."

"You mean you let Raoul handle your whole income?"

"I have to."

"But why?"

The waiter brought two golden, fluffy omelets. I cut into mine.

"Because of Timmy." Alicia leaned forward and gripped the table edge with both hands. "Marian, I haven't *seen* Timmy in over a year—since Raoul supposedly sent him to that French school. Occasionally, Raoul drives me to town and places calls, but once *I* phoned that school from the villa and Timmy's not there and *never has been.* I even described him—his arm, you know."

I laid down my fork. "You mean you don't know where Timmy is?"

"Or how he is—or anything. When Raoul caught me phoning, he ripped out the phone. He said he'd had Timmy transferred and it was best I didn't know where!"

"But you do talk to him on the phone?"

"I don't even know that. He had a baby voice. Now there's a boy's voice—and Raoul always cuts us off before we can say anything much."

I sat appalled. Automatically I urged Alicia to eat, which she did.

The waiter brought tea sandwiches and petits fours and Alicia ate four each of those. Shamefaced, she explained, "I'm always hungry. I'm afraid to eat anything Raoul doesn't, and he's seldom home. But better always hungry than always sick like before."

"You've been *sick*, too?"

"All last spring. You see, if anything—should happen to Timmy, the trust money would be released to me. Then if I should die . . . I wrote three wills in your favor and they all disappeared. I couldn't cable. I'm always watched. I tried to send a message out with the maids and they were caught and fired. I got to send those postcards only by insisting that unless you heard from me regularly you'd come to see what was wrong. And even those Raoul minutely examined. I've been terrified he'd realize what I was doing before you did."

"But this is a civilized place. You're not cut off. Surely, some friend—"

"I know no one here and the only people I ever even see are at our own dinners and they're all Raoul's great friends, completely charmed by him while I'm characterized as 'the invalid' and perhaps not even quite right in my head."

I signaled for our check. "You're not going back there. You're coming with me on the night boat. We'll send for your things."

"And Timmy?"

I opened my mouth and closed it.

"Raoul's waiting. I don't know what for, but right now he's supremely confident and enjoying his cat-and-mouse game with me. Until I know Timmy's safe I can't risk pushing Raoul into action."

"But we've got to do something!"

"*You'll* have to do it, Marian, the way you always used to. All I can do now is get home to explain about you before Pedro does. See that black limousine parked down the street? That'll be Pedro."

I paid and we rose and left the cafe. I tried once more. "Come to the police with me now."

"Raoul's connections—I have no idea how far they go."

Reluctantly I let Alicia get into a cab. "Are you sure my arrival won't push him? Will he believe I'm just a friend passing through?"

"Probably. He's never seen a picture of you, and he's forever playing the gallant to cover his contempt for women. He'd never think a woman, or even two women, capable of anything."

"Well, this one is!"

"Thanks, anyway, for coming," Alicia said quietly, with no mention of how long it had taken me.

Having cabled my husband, I crossed on the night boat. Then, at our consulate, I quietly but insistently repeated, "But Timmy's my blood nephew and a native-born citizen," until the wearied man promised to phone Paris.

Bob's reply to me was at American Express. I checked into a hotel and the next morning met Bob's plane. He listened to the full story during the cab ride in, then cabled for photostats establishing Alicia's first marriage, Timmy's birth and Walter's death, and went to the consulate himself.

The next day the consulate phoned us: "The French have no record of your nephew by name or description at any school. They'll pursue this, though. Foreigners don't wander around France unaccounted for."

Bob thanked him and we waited. On the third day final word came: "No record of your nephew or of any boy with a malformed arm except living with or institutionalized by his family."

All that afternoon Bob and I just sat or paced about our room. "We *must* go to the police," one of us would say, and the other would point out that the Spanish police could only consult the French, who had already been consulted. Over a hotel dinner neither of us wanted, I recounted everything again. We stepped out to the terrace for coffee.

Then Bob said, "That could be it! Raoul's overconfidence!"

He got the home phone number out of the consulate and phoned the man we had been dealing with: "Would the French have information on Raoul's birthplace and living relatives?"

"Well, will try."

Late the following day the answer came: Vieuxpont. Two younger brothers still lived on the family estate nearby.

Bob and I flew to Nice and hired a car, but at Vieuxpont the police stayed politely but firmly unbelieving until they had phoned Paris at Bob's insistence and expense. Forty minutes later, two carloads of us arrived at a large, crumbling villa and, in a third-floor servant's room, we found Timmy—thin, ill and tended by an old woman. Raoul's

brothers, who had denied his presence, shrugged.

"Our nephew by marriage. Worth little, but we keep him."

Timmy had no papers and, worse, did not remember me. Bob's and my passports showed names two removed from his. Nevertheless, Bob persuaded the police to take him to the nearest hospital and have his stomach pumped out. The results were inconclusive. The brothers were not arrested and the police would not release Timmy to us, even after another call to Paris.

"You will have to bring the mother," an officer said. "In the meantime, the boy will be kept here safely under guard."

So we flew back to Spain where, armed with the airmailed photostats, we saw the consul himself and the Spanish police. Later, in Palma, we were met by pre-instructed, aghast local police. We were hurried into one of their cars and again I was sped up hairpin turns. We found Raoul and Alicia just rising from dinner on their terrace. Pedro backed toward the balustrade opening already blocked by an officer.

Raoul lit a cigaret, then asked: "Yes, officers? There is something you want?"

"Timmy's safe," I called to Alicia as two officers moved to Raoul's sides. Except for one flash of malice toward us, his face remained impassive during the exchange in Spanish. No hand was laid on him and he was allowed to go change. Bob and I went with Alicia to pack.

"What," I asked Bob when we had finished, "is Raoul being arrested for—exactly?"

"I don't know." Bob clicked shut one case. "Timmy was with relatives and it's only Alicia's word that it wasn't with her consent, and here her consent may not be necessary. There'll be no proof of poison unless Pedro talks. And she won't get any of her money back."

Alicia, dressed now in a light suit, sank down onto the bed. "I don't want anything back. I just want to get Timmy and go home."

I stared at Bob. "You mean Raoul may get away with all this?"

Bob closed the other cases. "He quite well may. Anyway, any trial would be local, and if everybody here's his great friend and thinks Alicia's—perhaps unstable . . ."

Alicia and I followed as Bob carried her cases down to the large, cool hall. Raoul and the police stood waiting by a carved-stone center table, Raoul's faint smile conveying his assurance that he would still somehow come out on top. The villa, for example, bought with Alicia's money, was almost certainly in his name. I could not

resist a parting shot, however ineffectual:

"You didn't get away with it all, anyway!"

I got a pretty shrug. He said in English, "But it took two nations, madame, and do not forget that even now the last cards have not been played."

Cards! I opened my shoulderbag and pulled out Alicia's twenty-two postcards.

"All mailed by me," Raoul said with a contemptuous turn of shoulder.

"*And* read by you, I'm sure—the written messages anyway." I slipped off the rubber band. "But why do you think I suddenly arrived?"

"You decided to squander your husband's money."

Out onto the table, I dealt, column-style, picture side up, the first eight cards and said, "A little friend of mine, just learning her letters, sometimes brings in my mail. When she brought in Alicia's last card I let her see the whole set. She dealt them out like this onto the dining table, then asked, 'How's come your sister keeps sending you the same pictures, over and over, instead of different ones?' "

Raoul and the police looked down at the column of colorprint views.

I poked the cards into a straighter line. "The view titles, as you can see, are variously in Spanish, French and English. I glanced at them but my little friend began reading aloud—reading, that is, the only letters she *could* read so far in any language—the capitals."

Everyone looked down at the titles:

Hotel de ville
Episcopal palace
La Lonja
Palacio de Almundaina
Hotel de ville
Episcopal palace
La Lonja
Palacio de Almundaina

"You permit, senora?" The officer in charge swept up the cards and started to lead Raoul away.

"Not two powerful nations, after all," I called after Raoul. "Just one wife and one small girl."

It is not always that a silent man has nothing to say, but that for one reason or another he cannot speak.

"We use Nut," decided C. Bob Reynolds, the Houston investor. "He's been out of circulation, and he's good. Set it up, Gerald."

"How much?" asked the male secretary.

"Twenty."

Gerald looked surprised. "Double?"

"Certain people have been looking for Alf for seven years. Now we have him."

"Sure, Mr. Reynolds, but—"

"Don't question my judgment."

"Sorry, Mr. Reynolds. Do you want a backup?"

"Gerald, you-all are talking like a man with scrambled brains. Certainly I want a backup. The smart man always protects his investments. Harry Cuff in Seattle will do. Nut and Harry are strangers to each other."

Los Angeles simmered in an August heat wave, but Taylor Thomas Turner looked like a man with built-in air-conditioning as he moved briskly along the busy sidewalk that Tuesday morning. His attire was fashionable and unwrinkled, his face smooth and deeply tanned. At 39, he was the picture of comfort and confidence,

a healthy at-ease businessman walking from parking lot to office and humming as if he knew this would be another profitable day. He turned into a store, purchased two small packages of mixed nuts and then went next door and entered

his office. His secretary, perky and smiling, placed the stack of mail on his desk before reading from a note pad: "A Mr. Gerald Munroe telephoned. He will call again at ten o'clock."

None of the mail was demanding. Taylor pushed the stack aside, opened a package of nuts and sat back. He munched and waited. He was curious, but patient. The clack of his secretary's typewriter in the outer office filled him with contentment. The string of eleven drive-ins—Turner's Corner, Numbers 1 through 11—he had put together in the Los Angeles confines had been profitable, and he liked having an office headquarters for the drive-ins. His secretary was an efficient girl and his managers were honest men. He'd had only one deadbeat who had dipped into the till too often and for too much. Of course the guy had paid in the long run. He had been shot to death, and his killer never had been caught. But that was part of the game when you ran a place that remained open into the early hours of every morning. You never knew when a killer might drive in.

Taylor thought of his wife and children. He liked Mildred and he thought his kids were gunners; a boy and a girl. That part had worked out to Mildred's satisfaction, and he was pleased with the split in sex, too. Too bad they also were only props.

If the circumstances were different, he would at least consider taking all three with him when he entered his second life, but it was not to be. No part of this first life was to find a place in his second. There could not be links. Therein rested the success of the second; he was to be a totally new person, a man born an adult. It was a program he had nurtured for almost

twenty years now, and it was a program not to be destroyed in the final six months of the first phase. On his 40th birthday he was to become a new being; he had set the goal long ago and he had since gradually accumulated the wealth that the reincarnation would demand.

The phone buzzer summoned him. His secretary said Mr. Gerald Munroe was on the line.

"Gerald?"

"Nut."

"Long time." Taylor heard the faint click that meant his secretary had put down her receiver.

"Got a proposition for you, Nut. Twenty thousand."

"Mmm. Twice the normal."

"It's big."

"Where are you?"

"Across the street in a public phone booth."

"Watch for me. I'm parked in a lot one block to the west."

"Right."

Taylor drove at a sane speed that allowed the blue sedan to remain in his rear-view mirror. The tiny strip of beach was twenty miles beyond the suburbs. He turned from the highway and braked on the edge of the strand. The blue sedan stopped beside him and he lifted a hand to Gerald as he stepped out into the hot sunshine. He looked around. They seemed to be alone. Above them other cars whisked along the highway.

The two men shook hands and Gerald Munroe said, "C. Bob sends greetings."

Taylor nodded as he fished the package of mixed nuts from his pocket and stripped it open.

"Still on those things, huh?" said Gerald. He lighted a cigarette.

"Some men smoke, some drink, some get hooked on acid. I like nuts," said Taylor. "Who?"

"Alf the Bookkeeper," said Gerald, looking out to sea. "Seven years, but we finally found him. He's living comfortably in a little town in Iowa, living retired, kinda. Has a little bungalow, a flower patch, a modest set of wheels, the works. These days he's George Chair, 906 Elm Street, Marshall, Iowa."

Taylor grunted. He had never known Alf the Bookkeeper, but he'd heard that Alf had disappeared with $500,000 in numbers money—and who was going to complain to the police?

"How we found him is complicated and not important," said Gerald. "Nor is C. Bob interested in the return of the green."

"Vengeance," mused Taylor.

Gerald looked mildly surprised. "I didn't know you were interested in reasons, Nut."

"I'm not. Thinking out loud."

Gerald dipped into the blue sedan, took out a new briefcase and passed it to Taylor. Taylor flipped it onto the seat of his car and got behind the steering wheel. He glanced at his wristwatch. If he hustled, he still had time to get to his bank before the closing hour.

He returned to the city. The blue sedan did not trail him. A cream-colored station wagon did. Taylor grunted. Everything felt normal. C. Bob backed up every move. Taylor briefly debated shaking the tail, throwing C. Bob a curve, then decided against it. With a $20,000 investment, C. Bob was entitled to insurance.

Taylor put the money in the bank safety deposit box and stared down at the cache. Alf was to be his last job, he had decided. This box plus four others in the city would yield more than a million dollars in cash now. A man could disappear into some remote corner of the world, live in peace and comfort, and enjoy a second life without fear of being found and gunned down by an emissary of a mobster who might decide that he no longer needed Taylor Thomas Turner. There were the police, too, the FBI. Someday a cop, an agent, could catch up with him. It was not probable, but it was possible. . .

Taylor took the special gun and the silencer from the box, put both in the briefcase and walked out of the bank. He used a public phone to obtain a reservation under the name of P. W. Anderson on a night flight to Des Moines, Iowa, and then informed his secretary he would be out of the city for at least four days. He did not tell her where he was going.

His wife was briefly disturbed when he told her that drive-in business was to take him to New York City for a few days. She never liked to see him go on trips, but she helped him pack a suitcase, and then he went down to the patio swimming pool and waved his son and daughter to his side. He kissed both and lightly spanked two small behinds. Before leaving, he stood for a few moments and watched them frolic again in the pool. This was to be his last memory of them. When he returned from the Midwest journey it would not be to the house. It would be to clean out five safety deposit boxes and be off again to seek his second life. The drive-ins would provide for Mildred and the kids.

The following morning he slept for two hours in a Des Moines hotel, awoke refreshed, was informed that Marshall was a fifty-minute drive on an interstate highway. He rented a car and headed out through the rolling countryside, driving leisurely. Time was not a

factor, nor was the tail he knew he had. He made no effort to spot him. After the tail reported to C. Bob Reynolds in Houston that Alf was dead, he would be pulled off.

Taylor found Marshall to be a quietly bustling town of 22,000 population. He stopped at the newspaper office, asked to see a city map, was directed to a large map on a bulletin board, oriented himself in relation to Elm Street, and drove out there. He found 906 to be a yellow bungalow with a short, fat man down on his knees in the front yard. The man was digging around the base of a plump evergreen. Taylor approached him with the briefcase snuggled between his elbow and his ribs.

"Mr. Boone," Taylor said.

The fat man looked around his shoulder before straightening up on his knees. He looked at ease, but Taylor sensed that the man was prepared to spring, too.

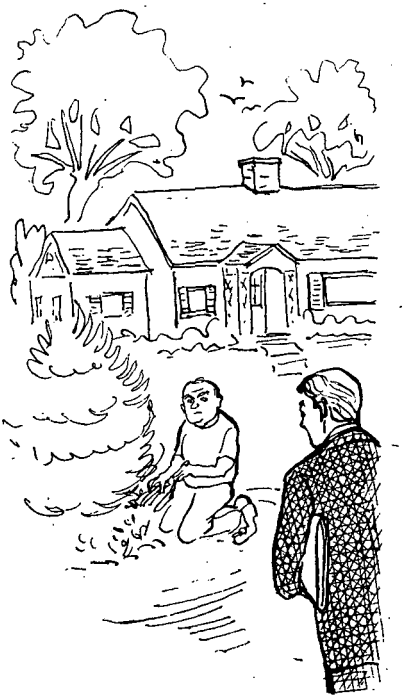
"Are you Mr. William Boone?" Taylor asked. He turned on a grin. "P. W. Anderson here. Blue Cross Insurance. Des Moines. You wrote us about—"

"My name is Chair," interrupted the fat man. "George Chair."

Taylor frowned. "Is this 906 Prospect?"

"No, 906 Elm. Prospect is two streets east."

"Oh. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair."



"Hit the next corner, Mr. Anderson, turn to the left and go two blocks. That's Prospect."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry to have—"

"Nothing lost." The fat man returned to his digging.

Taylor drove to a motel located on an access road just off the interstate and checked in. Inside the unit, he drew the drapes and then sat and meticulously cleaned the already clean weapon. He heard someone check in next door. He wondered if it was his shadow, but

he did not bother to investigate.

He went down the road to a combination bar and steak house that evening, enjoyed a steak dinner, purchased two small packages of mixed nuts while paying his tab, then returned to Elm Street. He parked across the street from 906. No one seemed to be following him. The night was quiet and dark, but there was light inside the bungalow. A picture window was draped, a smaller window to the left of the front door was not. Taylor could see through a dinette into the kitchen. George Chair had opened a refrigerator door. He took out a can of beer, flipped the door shut, popped the top off the beer. The bullet smashed into the base of his skull just as he lifted the can and began to tip back his head.

Taylor drove to Main Street. He did not hurry. No headlights trailed him. At the stop sign he removed the silencer from the gun and put silencer and gun into the briefcase. He drove carefully through the business district and turned onto the street that would take him out to the access road and the motel. He planned to remain overnight in the motel, return to Des Moines the next day, be in Los Angeles before midnight, and be traveling again the following day. He thought he might try Hawaii first, then make arrangements to go on to Bombay.

He opened a package of mixed nuts with his teeth as he drove. He turned into the access road and lifted the sack to his mouth. As he tilted back his head, he glimpsed a flash of headlights. He braked hard and jerked the steering wheel, but it was too late. The lights smashed into him and he was spinning. He had no sensation of losing consciousness.

He awoke to whiteness: walls, bed and dark-haired nurse. The nurse summoned a man in white and then Taylor was alone in the room with him.

"My name is Doctor Hatch."

"Doctor."

"Do you know where you are?"

"In a hospital, I assume."

"And do you know why you are here?"

"There was an automobile accident, I believe."

"There was."

"What kind of shape am I in?"

"Excellent—considering the accident. The woman driver of the other car was dead at the scene, I'm told."

"That bad, huh?"

"You may be stiff and sore for a few days, but—"

"Then I can leave here tonight? It is still night?"

"I need to conduct a thorough

examination before you can go."

"I'll take a chance, Doctor. I'll just pay and—"

"The police want to talk to you."

"Police?"

"A woman is dead."

"Yes, you said, but—"

"I'm going to send in a nurse. We need some information for our records. You seem to be clear-headed now."

"Look, Doctor—"

"And then our police chief will talk to you. He's waiting."

The doctor left the room, and the nurse entered. She carried a clipboard and a ballpoint pen. "Hi," she said. Her smile was quick and bright. "I need your name, for one thing. No one seemed to find identification on your person or in your car."

Taylor clamped his lips.

"Mister . . . ?"

Taylor waved her away. "Beat it."

She stiffened, and then she left the room. Taylor sat up slowly. There were aches, but he seemed capable of functioning. He swung his feet from the bed and started to stand. A uniformed policeman entered. He was a tall, browned man of fifty years with a full head of gray-black hair. His uniform was immaculate and his shoes gleamed with a new shine. He bobbed a billed cap in his right hand.

"Hold it, fella," he said in a mild tone. "Where do you think you're going?"

Taylor sat on the edge of the high bed. "I'm okay."

The policeman nodded. "Who are you?"

Taylor repeated, "I'm okay."

"Fella, we found a gun in a briefcase in your car. A gun and a silencer—and we've had a murder here in town tonight. Do you know anything about that?"

"Look—"

"In addition, you ran a stop sign when you entered the access road. I've got two witnesses who say you cruised right through that stop as if it wasn't there. I've also got a dead woman, Mrs. Cal Hess. And in case you don't know it, Hess is a big name around here. For one thing, Cal Hess is a state senator."

Taylor felt as if a noose had been slipped over his head.

"Who are you?" asked the policeman. "What's your name? Where are you from?"

Taylor remained grimly silent. Thoughts whirled inside his head. Somehow he had to escape this man, this room, this town.

"Fella?"

Taylor tightened his lips.

"George Chair. What's that name mean to you, fella? We can match the slug and the gun, you know."

Taylor said nothing, and the po-

liceman suddenly was very angry.

"Look, I'm holding you! Manslaughter with a motor vehicle, for the present! But you might as well talk! I'll get it out of you eventually! Why did you kill George Chair? Who are you?"

Taylor envisioned a flight back to Los Angeles. He saw himself entering the banks, cleaning out the safety deposit boxes. He saw himself on another plane, winging over the Pacific.

"As soon as Doc releases you, I'm taking you downtown to jail. Meanwhile, you don't leave that bed."

Honolulu: Taylor saw the blue of the sky, the palm trees, the beaches, the rolling, white-capped water of the ocean.

"Fella, I'm talking to you!"

Taylor suddenly looked the policeman straight in the eye, but he said nothing.

"You're entitled to a lawyer, of course."

Taylor remained silent.

"Do you want me to get you one?".

Taylor chewed his lower lip.

The policeman turned and bawled, "Doc?"

The doctor appeared. He looked perturbed. "This is a hospital, Chief."

"How soon can I have this man?"

"Tomorrow sometime, I think."

"I'll have to handcuff him to the bed."

"Not in this hospital."

"Doc, he's a killer!"

"He has been in an automobile accident. He needs to be under medical observation. That's all I know."

"Then I stay in the room."

"You can stand *outside* this room."

"Doc, look—"

"You run things at the police station, Chief. I'll run things here. You probably can have this man tomorrow."

The doctor stepped to the corridor, motioned with a finger. The nurse carried in a silver tray with a white towel on it. The doctor took a hypodermic syringe from the tray, pushed up the sleeve of Taylor's hospital gown, reached for bicep flesh.

Taylor jerked back. The doctor rammed the needle into Taylor's arm. "So we do it the hard way," he said. He withdrew the needle and turned to the policeman. "There. You can go home and sleep now, Chief. This man will be doing the same thing until about six o'clock tomorrow morning."

Taylor battled the drowsiness. He had meant to bolt as soon as the room had cleared. He had anticipated fleeing, stealing a car,

driving to Kansas City yet this night, booking a flight. Instead, he slept. . .

At ten o'clock the next morning, the police chief and one of his men handcuffed Taylor and escorted him from the hospital bed into an official sedan. Taylor slouched low in the seat.

"What's the matter with you?" growled the chief. "Don't you want the town to see what a killer looks like?"

The town did not bother Taylor. A shadow did. C. Bob Reynolds, in Houston, had been informed by now and had issued instructions. A free man might remain silent, but how was C. Bob to be sure of the clamming now? There was only one way.

It was a twenty-yard walk from curb to jail door. There was space, concrete, sunshine and people. People wanted to get a look at a killer. They milled, they shuffled, they murmured. Was there another killer in that crowd? Taylor hunched into himself and attempted to find protection by walking immediately in front of the chief of police, making himself as small a target as possible. The chief shoved him. He stumbled forward. He did not hear the shot, but the slug skimming across his sideburn brought a howl from him and he pitched into the suddenly shrilling audience.

He was patched, booked as a John Doe and hammered with new questions: Who was he? Where had he come from? Who had taken the shot at him? Why did someone want him dead?

Taylor remained close-mouthed and finally was left alone in a cell on the second floor of the jail. It seemed he was something special. He was the only prisoner confined on the second floor. He felt reasonably safe now. There were no outside windows, and he could see anyone who entered the door at the end of the corridor. All he had to do was get control of himself, figure an escape, and fly. Once he had

cleaned out the bank boxes and was winging across the Pacific, he would be home free.

On the other hand, he'd like to make one short side trip to Houston. C. Bob Reynolds was not indestructible. . .

Four attorneys visited him in the next three days. He refused to talk to each, refused to give his name. The chief of police tried twice, then seemed to give up. A jailer, affable by virtue of years and attitude, brought his meals. Then there was a fifth lawyer, the county attorney, attempting to establish a name for himself so that he could go into private practice. He brought information. George Chair's bungalow had been searched. Some secreted papers had been found. George Chair once had been Alfred Branowitz, bookkeeper for mobsters. The FBI had been informed and was sending agents to Marshall. The young county attorney sure would like to get the straight story before the FBI took over. It would be a feather in his hat.

Taylor told the young county attorney what he could do with his feather.

The young man reddened. "Senator Hess is suing you, too!" he raved. "He is seeking $200,000 for the loss of his wife and—"

"Suing whom?" Taylor interrupted. "He doesn't even know my name. Nor do you."

The affable jailer was chuckling when he brought the evening meal. "Hey there, mister, you really turned on our young Sam. You got him spitting mad."

"Sam?"

"Our county attorney. The boy has got ambitions."

"Who doesn't?"

"Not me."

"You're happy just pushing ham to prisoners."

"Ham is good meat."

"Two meals in a row?"

The jailer shrugged. "We got it, we serve it."

"How about bringing me a can of mixed nuts?"

"Huh?"

"I like mixed nuts. You can buy them in cans."

"Nothing special for you, mister."

"Mixed nuts are special?"

"For you I guess they might be."

When he came up to the cell with breakfast the next morning, the jailer had news: "Two FBI agents are in town. Came in last night. Newspaperman from the East, too. Man, you really stirred up things when you killed George Chair. Who are you anyway?"

"I'm not talking to anyone."

"I'll bet you're gonna be talking to them FBI boys."

"No. I don't want to see anyone."

"And that newspaper guy has already offered me ten bucks if I'll sneak him up here."

"Forget it."

Taylor was taut. He knew C. Bob Reynolds. The Houston man was not above trying anything to get to him. He'd send in two hit men disguised as federal agents, he'd send one disguised as a newspaperman, if he thought there was a chance of getting a job done.

"Don't get so excited, fella. Nobody gets up here. But the chief has a message for you, too. Says you can have a can of them mixed nuts if you'll talk."

Taylor shook his head.

The FBI agents came up to the cell around noon. They were accompanied by the police chief. The agents asked questions, the chief remained in the background. Taylor remained silent. He felt reasonably safe with the agents as long as the chief was in sight.

Taylor was left alone that afternoon and when the jailer arrived with the evening meal, he wagged his head and said, "Boy, you sure got wheels spinning, mister. Phones jangling, strangers showing up in town. I never seen so many newspapermen in my life. They're coming in from everywhere. I don't know who you are, but you must be important. Well, guess it won't last, though. You're gonna be moved."

Taylor was instantly alert. "To where? By whom?"

The jailer shrugged. "By the FBI, that's all I know. They're working on the papers with the chief."

"I don't want to be moved."

"I don't think you got much to say about it, fella. Here . . ." The jailer took a sack from his trouser pocket. "Something special for you. Mixed nuts. The chief says it's okay. He's cooled, had a change of heart. He says you have to be treated like a human being, even if you are one of them killers like you see on TV. Hit men? Is that what they really call you guys?"

Taylor sat silent.

"Eat up, mister. You ain't gonna be going anywhere until tomorrow, at least."

Taylor quickly gulped down three handfuls of the mixed nuts after the jailer had departed. They were not the best nuts he had ever eaten, but they temporarily satisfied his special hunger.

And then he became violently ill.

He died within the hour.

The two FBI agents were angry, but they moved and talked quietly while waiting for the preliminary autopsy report to come from the hospital. The chief of police was

upset, too, but he was also confused.

Then the report was before them, and one of the agents grunted. "Figures. Jequirity beans were mixed in with the nuts."

"Beans?" the chief said.

"The jequirity is an extremely toxic bean. Where did those nuts come from?"

"One of the newspapermen gave them to my jailer to give to the prisoner. The prisoner had been asking for mixed nuts. I relented. I didn't see any real harm in it."

"Which newspaperman?"

"I'm . . . not sure. One of those fellas here from a New York paper, I think."

"What do you want to bet we don't find him?"

They searched. They did not find their man.

Then the agents got a call from Washington: "Your prisoner was a man named Taylor Thomas Turner. We matched the prints from the gun with a set in the armed services file. He was Navy during the Korean thing."

"And since?"

"Mr. Clean. No record anywhere. Owns a string of drive-ins in the Los Angeles area. There is a wife, two children, a $50,000 home. The wife is a hang-up. She looks, talks, acts clean. She was under the impression her husband was on some kind of business trip pertaining to the drive-ins. He told her he was flying to New York City. It's shaping up as if Taylor Thomas Turner was living a double life. And do you want a kicker?"

"Kick."

"The wife wanted to know if her husband had been shot to death. Claims she always had a premonition that he would die of gunshot since he was such a gun-hater."

"Gun-hater?"

"Seems he wouldn't allow a gun in his home, wouldn't associate with people who liked guns, including run-of-the-mill hunters, wouldn't even allow his drive-in managers to keep guns for protection. Turner's theory seemed to be, give a robber what he asked for."

"Which is exactly what he got—in a way—isn't it?"

It is said that suffering can be healed only by experiencing it to the full—which can be terribly permanent.

I'LL RACE YOU

By Fletcher Flora

Miss Malin in 912 wanted a bucket of ice and a fifth of gin. The ice and the liquor were taken up by the bellhop named Fritz. He happened to notice when he got to her door that it was exactly 11 p.m. She had left the door cracked for him, but he knocked and waited for her invitation before he entered.

It was apparent that Miss Malin had been drinking. Not that she was disheveled or loud or in any way offensive like a lot of women get when they've been drinking; on the contrary. She was wearing a smart little black dress with a very short skirt in the current fashion, and there was a single strand of cultured pearls around her throat and small gold rings with matching pearls in her ears. Her short brown hair was brushed and glossy, and there was about her that delicate and enchanting fragrance that meticulous women invariably have right after a hot bath and a careful toilet. Miss Malin, in fact, was a doll, strictly high class. She looked now as though she had dressed herself for an occasion. The fact that she had been drinking was apparent to Fritz's practiced

eye and ear, after a few moments, only in the excessive restraint of her movements and the exaggerated precision of her enunciation.

"Just set it there on the table beside the bed," Miss Malin said.

The only light in the room came from a small lamp burning on the same table on which he set the ice and gin. Miss Malin was standing outside the perimeter of light at the glass doors opening onto a terrace. She turned into the room and sat down on the edge of a chair with her knees and ankles neatly together and her hands folded in her lap. She sat there staring at her hands. Fritz lingered, thinking of his tip.

"Will that be all, Miss Malin?" he said.

She turned her head and looked at him, her face toward the light, and he noticed that her face appeared tired and her eyes were full of shadows. Perhaps she had not heard his question, or chose for her own reasons to ignore it. Anyhow, instead of answering it, she asked one of her own.

"What is your name?" she said.

"It's Fritz, Miss Malin."

"Fritz. That's a nice name." She nodded her head gravely. "I used to have a dog named Fritz. When I was a little girl. It was a toy fox terrier. It got run over and killed."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Miss Malin. They're nice little dogs."

"I cried when it happened, but it didn't do any good, of course. It never does any good to cry. I've learned that. Something has always happened to things I loved. Things and people. They died or went away or got lost, and it never did any good to cry. Have you ever been alone, Fritz?"

"Sure. I guess everyone's alone sometimes."

"You're mistaken, Fritz. Not sometimes. Always. You're always alone. You or me or anybody, all alone in the universe."

"Is that a fact, Miss Malin?"

"Yes. Yes, it is. I thought and thought about it, and it finally just came to me in a flash. It was a kind of revelation or insight or something. Aloneness, you see, is the only *reality*. Everything else is illusion. Lovers and friends and dogs named Fritz, they're all illusions."

"How about me, Miss Malin? Am I an illusion?"

"You're real in your universe, and I'm real in mine. The trouble is, we can't get *to* each other. We can't *reach* each other. There you are, and here I am, and there's no way between. There's no way to get here from there, or there from here."

"Okay, Miss Malin. If you say so."

"Thank you, Fritz. I'm glad you

agree with me. It's a question of seeing the truth, you understand. It's a question of being aware of reality. Some people are aware only once in a while, in little flashes once in a while, and so they *feel* alone only once in a while. You see what I mean, Fritz? Do you see? When they are sad or discouraged or depressed about something, they have these little flashes, their moments of truth, and know that they are alone, all alone for all their lives in the universe. But usually they live with the illusion of comfort and company and love that aren't really there. That's it, Fritz. Comfort and company and love are the big lies that aren't there."

"Never mind, Miss Malin. You'll feel different in the morning."

"You think so? That's very sweet of you, Fritz. It's very sweet and kind of you to try to comfort me. But comfort is a lie, nothing but a lie, and lies in the end are cruelest of all."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Miss Malin."

"Not deliberately. Not to be cruel. You're a very kind young man, Fritz, and you would never be deliberately cruel. I can see that. It's not your fault that you are not aware of reality; at least not oftener than now and then. It's not your fault that you tell lies out of kindness. Do you know where I am this instant, Fritz? Can you tell me?"

"You're right there. Right there where I can see you and hear you and could touch you if I wanted to. You're there, and I'm here."

"You see? You are not *aware*. You simply don't understand that it's all an illusion. You must understand that I am *not* here. Not really, that is. I am naked and cold and alone in a universe that was created with me, the instant of my birth, and will end with me, the instant of my death. I can't escape, and you can't get in. I'm alone in my private universe."

"Sure. Just you and God."

"No." She shook her head and stared down at her hands again. "Just me."

Fritz was feeling uneasy. He was beginning to feel, indeed, that he had gotten over his head in something he had better have avoided. In his own defense, he effected a slightly condescending manner.

"You know what you need, Miss Malin? You need another drink. You like me to open your bottle and make you something? Service of the house."

"No, thank you, Fritz. I'm not at all sure now that I care for another drink. If I have another, I shall certainly have several more in addition, and then I'll simply go to sleep and wake up again in the morning. I am very tired of going

to sleep at night and waking up again in the morning. What I am thinking about is going to sleep and *not* waking up in the morning. It seems to me, everything considered, that it would be much more satisfactory."

"You don't mean that, Miss Malin. You oughtn't to talk that way."

"Haven't you ever wanted to die, Fritz?"

"Not me."

"Haven't you ever even *thought* about dying?"

"Not seriously. And when I thought about it at all, I can't say the idea appealed to me."

"I have, Fritz. I'm very addicted to thinking about dying. Do you know that dying is quite complicated? It is. There are so many *details* involved. So many ways of *doing* it. You would hardly believe how difficult it is to make up your mind." She had looked up from her hands at Fritz as she spoke, and now she turned her head away slowly and stared at the glass doors with the little balcony outside. "I was standing there thinking about it when you came." She looked back at Fritz and saw that he had begun to edge toward the hall door. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"It's been a busy night," he said. "I'd better get back to work."

"I don't suppose you'd care to make love to me before you go?"

"I couldn't do that, Miss Malin. I might get into all kinds of trouble."

"I didn't think you would. It doesn't matter. It would only be an illusion anyhow."

Fritz had by this time edged his way to the door. He paused there, his hand on the knob, and looked back at her.

"You take my advice, Miss Malin. You have a nice strong drink or two and go to bed. You'll feel better in the morning."

"Are you going downstairs?"

"Yes."

"I'll race you," she said.

He went out, closed the door, and started down the hall toward the elevators. He felt a compulsion to run, but he didn't. He knew somehow, however much he hurried, that she would be downstairs ahead of him.

The man who would bell a cat has accomplished half the deed by making a beginning.

by Edward Y. Breese

I was hired at eleven o'clock in the morning to do what I thought would be a routine job. By two in the afternoon my new employer was in Northside General Hospital with a broken back. Somebody had wired two sticks of dynamite to the starter of his rented convertible.

When I heard that on the radio, I went down for a look under the hood of my own car. It's a good thing I did. There were a couple of thunder sticks neatly wired in there too. If I hadn't felt like listening to music, they'd have had me for sure.

It was clear that somebody didn't want that little old routine job to get done. Right then I mentally took it out of the Routine File and put it under High-Priority-Lower-the-Boom.

One thing really bothered me, and it wasn't the dynamite. What was it that made Pop Ellerby that important? That I had to know.

I went upstairs and clipped on a belt holster so that the big revolver rode high in back of my right hip where my jacket would hide it. I put money in my wallet, booby-trapped the fire-escape window and the two doors so I'd know if visitors had come in, and went down to my car.

I freed the dynamite very carefully, wrapped it in old rags and put it in the glove compartment for future reference. Then I wheeled on up to Northside General.

Dan Ellerby was still in the recovery room while the anesthetic wore off and the body and leg casts set hard. Fortunately I knew the floor nurse, who owed me a couple of favors. That's how the red tape got cut and I got into recovery.

"Outside the door, mother," I told the blonde young nurse at the bedside. "If he even squeals, I'll call you." Doris, the floor nurse, backed me up.

Dan was conscious, but groggy, and was glad to see me. "Go get 'em, Johnny," he said. "You get 'em good for me and Pop."

"Don't waste your breath, Dan," I said. "My car was wired too. I got personal reasons now for hanging somebody's head on the wall. Who do I see?"

"I don't know, Johnny. Honest I don't. Like I told you, I just came looking for Pop. I got in at six this morning. I rent a room and this car, then I go by Pop's, and after that right to your place. My car was rigged in a restaurant lot while I ate lunch. I don't know who did it."

"It wasn't the Peace Corps," I said. "You must have been tailed at least from the time you left Pop's. But why? What makes Pop so hot? Diamonds in his teeth or something?"

"I don't know. You're hired to find out. I'm a rich man now, Johnny, and I'll spend every cent to get them. I may never walk again."

Back of me the door opened and the little nurse came in. "You'll have to go now," she said. "It's time for him to have another shot." She already had the loaded syringe ready in her hand.

"Doris told me ten minutes," I said. "Where do you come in?"

"I'm the nurse on duty here. I make the decisions."

She sounded official enough, but it didn't wash. This wasn't the girl who had been on duty when I came in.

She saw it in my eyes as I turned, and tried to spike me with the loaded needle. By pure luck she broke the syringe against the cylinder of my gun under the jacket. When she realized what had happened she threw the broken pieces at my eyes and dived for the door.

I was after her fast but I didn't shoot because I wanted this one alive. Halfway down the hall Doris got in her way, but the nurse made a javelin of her fingers and jabbed for the solar plexus, and Doris went down in a heap. It was a real judo jab. Just as I stumbled over Doris, Blondy made it into an elevator a split second before the door closed. That was that.

I hauled a gasping and irate Doris to her feet. "Johnny Hawk," she spluttered, "I've broken the rules for you more than once, but I draw the line at having my neck broken! Just what is this all about?"

"I wish I knew, honey," I said, "but I think you'd better have the remains of that syringe analyzed in the lab. I think you'll find it held poison. Northside General has just had its first attempted murder of the season."

"Murder! Who'd want to murder that poor man?"

"Who?" I said. "I don't even know why, but somebody has his whole heart in the job. If I don't find out soon, it'll be a double funeral and you can save on the flowers."

Inside the recovery room we found a white and shaken Ellerby. He was still too weak to talk much.

"You'd better see there's a police guard put on this man," I told Doris. "Check what that shot was in the syringe and it'll give you an official reason to ask. Till you do that, at least get a nurse and a couple of your biggest and toughest orderlies in here. He shouldn't be left alone for a minute."

"Will do," Doris said, sniffing at one of the fragments of glass from the syringe. "I'm pretty sure right now what this'll turn out to be."

"You get 'em, Johnny," Dan tried from the bed. "Find Pop."

"Like the man says, Johnny," Doris added, "you go get him. I don't like anybody killing my patients."

"Okay," I said. I put my hands on her shoulders and kissed her on the mouth. It was warm and good. "Just keep the home fires burning, honey. I'll be back."

In the hospital parking lot I checked my car again, found it clean. That didn't surprise me. This crowd had imagination, as proved by sending in the "nurse." They weren't likely to try the same trick twice, or at least I didn't think so.

I decided my first stop had better be the rooming house where Pop Ellerby lived. At least he *had* lived there for a couple of years, but for the past month nobody'd seen him there or anywhere else. That was why Dan had come down to Miami from St. Louis. Pop's letters had suddenly stopped. A phone call to the landlady revealed that he

hadn't been home at all, or left any word where he was going.

Pop Ellerby was an independent old coot. At seventy-eight he still wasn't ready to be "wet-nursed like some runny-nosed kid," but he'd never pulled anything like this before. Dan had always had regular notes from him. True, the handwriting was getting a bit shaky, and sometimes the train of thought got muddled right in the middle of a sentence, but at least he wrote.

Alarmed, Dan had taken off and come looking for his father. The rest you know.

The trouble was, it just didn't make any sense. I'd known Pop and Dan for years. Neither one was the sort anybody had a logical reason to kill. At least I'd have sworn to it before all this ruckus exploded. Neither had ever had the slightest connection with the rackets. Dan was well-to-do, but I wouldn't have called him rich enough to attract kidnappers. Besides, there had been no ransom note or any other contact.

Pop himself lived simply. He had his Social Security and a small annuity he'd bought for himself. He wouldn't let Dan give him money. "Won't be a burden," he insisted. Of course he was a cantankerous sort at times, but not enough so to make killing-type enemies.

If there wasn't any reason for him to vanish, there was even less for the sort of murderous attacks that had been made on Dan and me since. But there was a killer loose who saw it the other way around. I meant to find out why.

Pop's landlady was Lily Smith. She liked rum punch and men, any men that could be induced to like her, but she kept a clean house, and was good to the elderly boarders even when she didn't have to be. Most people liked her. I know I did.

Lil came to the door when I hammered the old brass knocker. I asked about Pop.

"I dunno, Johnny," she said. "I really don't. His boy was here this morning. I'd have told him, if I'd known. The old fella just walked out one morning and ain't been back."

"It's not that simple, Lil," I said. "Somebody tried to kill Dan twice since he saw you."

Her green eyes flicked, and I thought she looked scared but not surprised. "I got nothing to do with it, Johnny. I don't *want* nothing to do with it. You hear me, now?"

I heard her—and I heard more. Somewhere down the street a car cornered on smoking rubber and came roaring in our direction. Instinctively I shoved Lil down on the floor inside the hall and barely

had time to dive for the rug beside her.

On the street a shotgun slammed once—and then a second time. The two loads of number one buckshot went past a couple of feet above my spine and made a jigsaw puzzle of the mirror hanging at the end of the hall.

I rolled and twisted on the floor enough to get a glimpse of the car and the white face of the gunner in the front seat. It was somebody I knew, but the car was gone before I could get my own gun into action.

Lil rolled as far as she could to flatten against the wall. She didn't scream, but when I sat up she got her arms around me with a grip like a passionate octopus. Her whole body was shaking.

"They mean business, Lil," I said. "Somebody's dead serious. *Dead* serious."

Her rum-flavored breath blew into my face. She moaned. Lil wasn't trying to be seductive right then. "I can't, Johnny. I don't dare."

"One round was meant for me, Lil," I said. "The other was for you. I can't help unless you do talk."

She buried her face on my chest and hung on and shook while she thought it over. "Okay," she said finally. "I need a drink first."

I got us both up and back to her rooms on the ground floor, rear. She poured me two fingers of thick, brown Jamaica rum and almost a full tumbler for herself. She was still shaking.

"Honest, I don't know where Pop is," she said. "He just went out. He said he felt sick and was going to get some medicine. I haven't seen him since, but there was a man came and got his things."

"What sort of man? Why didn't you tell Dan about this?"

She answered the questions in reverse order. "Because I was told to keep my mouth shut. He was a nice enough guy, Johnny; real friendly. He had a paper, a court order to pick up Pop's things. I let him have them. Later, somebody called on the phone and said to forget I ever saw Pop. Said I better forget or I'd be fixed so I couldn't remember."

"Now you know what he meant," I said. "Who signed that court order, Lil?"

"I didn't read it that close. Just enough to see it was from a court. It sure looked real enough."

"Did the man who brought it show you a badge?"

"I didn't ask for one. He was nice and clean and seemed okay."

"He's got nice clean friends. You just met a couple of them. Were you threatened at that time?"

"No, not then. He just said Pop

wouldn't be back for a while. Tell the truth, Johnny, he was such a friendly man I wasn't worrying, really. Had other things on my mind. It was a couple weeks later, after I got a letter from Pop's boy wanting to know if he was okay, that I got a phone call. Not the

same man. This voice was tough, but sort of educated too, if you know what I mean. He said I was just to tell people I didn't know fact one about where Pop was, and stick to it—or else."

That would have been just about the time Dan Ellerby began making serious inquiries. He'd told me he'd written the Missing Persons Bureau and got back a routine letter that they'd check it out. Apparently they either hadn't or had gotten nowhere, but somebody heard and phoned Lil.

That was all she could or would say. It didn't help much, except to bring in the possibility of someone with a court or political connection. Still, how could Pop interest anyone like that?

Whatever was up was hotter than Italian peppers. It was so hot it was lethal. That didn't figure—but the attempts on Dan and me proved it out.

I had one new lead, the gunny who'd just tried to sieve me with the shotgun. I knew who he was and how to find out where he lived. Also I was pretty sure he didn't know I'd spotted him.

When Little Charley Ryan got home a couple of hours later, I was waiting in his apartment in a rundown northside section of town. I let him take two steps into the dark room before I laid my gun barrel back of his ear and cut him down. When he came to, he was scientifically tied into a straight chair with short lengths of light-cord.

I was sitting in the one easy chair in front of him and cleaning my nails with his switchblade knife. He blinked to clear his eyes.

"Hello, Charley," I said. "We're going to have a nice long talk."

"Johnny Hawk! What's goin' on? I never done nothing to you, Johnny."

I stood up and backhanded him hard enough to loosen a couple of front teeth. "You tried, you little punk," I said. "Fire a shotgun into my back, huh? It'll take a better man than you. Now who bought the hit?"

He was scared. "I dunno what you're talking abou—"

He shut up when I hit him again. His eyes rolled white as he fought the lashings. Finally, he got it out. "I don't know. Honest, Johnny, I don't. I din't even know it was you. They tol' me some old dame an' a tourist."

"Charley," I said, "something else you don't know. I can take a week killing you and enjoy every last minute of it."

I could see that he believed me. "You better talk, Charley. You better come up with some news. Fast. Something I can check out and find is true. I've got no patience,

Charley, where people shoot guns at me. No patience at all."

"I don't know, Johnny." He stuck to it. "I dunno. It was Pete Starkey brought me in, but he never tol' me who wanted the hit. He din't even say it was you. I swear it. Just a dame and some tourist getting his nose too close to something."

I laid the edge of his own knife along the bridge of his nose and pressed a bit. "Too close to what, Charley?"

"I don't know. Why don't you ask Pete?"

I used Charley's phone to call a man I knew who works at the Hall of Justice. "Who does Pete Starkey work for?"

"It was Mike Calvo till he stopped lead. I'm not sure now, but some think it could be Lou Silver. Don't quote me."

I hung up. Lou Silver was a lawyer around town. He'd started as a bail bondsman's runner and worked his way through the local diploma mill to pass the bar exams. For a while he'd been with one of the big criminal practice firms, but I doubt if they let him do much more than open the mail there. Later on he set up an office of his own, strictly on the shyster side. Come to think of it though, he'd apparently been getting prosperous the last couple of years. I tried to think what I'd heard about it, but it eluded me. Anyway, I had another prospect.

"Charley," I said, "you're in luck tonight. I'm just going to gag you and leave you here. When somebody finds you and cuts you loose, you tell Pete Starkey I'm going to kill him on sight. Okay?"

"Johnny, don't leave me like that. What if nobody finds me?"

I laughed at him. "Then you'll likely starve to death. Meantime you can meditate on the sin of getting careless with a shotgun." I gagged him well, figured in time he'd work the chair over to where he could kick on the door or wall and attract attention.

It was getting on to nine at night, but I went downtown to where Lou Silver had his office. People like Lou only go home to kiss their wives or change clothes. They live in their offices.

This one was on the second floor of an ancient building in a side street under the shadow of the courthouse tower. The blinds were drawn, but there were lights on and I could see the shadows of several people moving around inside. I decided to wait till the crowd in there thinned out or till Lou came out on the street.

The lights of a cheap restaurant across the street reminded me that I hadn't eaten since a sandwich at

noon. I took a booth where I could watch Lou's windows and ordered their best steak. Actually it wasn't bad, and the onion rings were the way I like them.

By the time I'd gotten to the pie a la mode a young fellow and girl came in together. He moved over and took the booth behind me. She started to follow—but then sat down across the table from me.

"Hello, Mr. Hawk," she said.

I took a good look. Allowing for the change in clothes and hairdo, it had to be the phony "nurse" from Northside.

"Don't do anything reckless," she said. "My brother's in the booth behind you with a gun."

I flipped my jacket open just enough to let her see my big .45 holstered with its muzzle to the rear. "This will shoot through that seat back like it was wet paper," I told her. "I don't even have to draw first. Now tell your brother to go sit at the counter. I'd hate to have to hurt him."

She thought it over for a minute, did as I'd told her, then said seriously, "I want to talk, Mr. Hawk, I'm Rhoda Myers."

"So I gathered when you didn't come shooting. The question is, what have you got to talk about?"

"You're looking for an old man named Ellerby." It was a statement. "What's it worth to you to know where he is being held now?"

"Nothing," I said and saw her eyes widen. "Nothing at all. I know where he is. What else is new?"

"I don't believe you. How could you know where he is?"

"I've got a secret weapon," I said. "I call it a human brain. When I wonder what two and two make, it finds out and tells me four. He's in one of three places."

"You interest me," she said. "Which three?"

I laughed. "An old nobody tells his landlady he's sick and going for medicine. . . . He doesn't go to a society doctor or a private hospital. He goes to the clinic at City Memorial like all his friends do. Since he didn't come back, that means he really was sick. So they put him in a ward or a nursing home, or he's dead. That's three places. In the morning I can get a court order in his son's name and find out which one." I paused.

It was her turn to laugh. "That doesn't make you any genius, mister. Can you fill in the rest of it? Can you tell me right where his bed is? Can you spell out why it's worth killing to keep him covered up? Like you say, he's a nobody."

"Some of it," I said. "Some I can figure. Back of it has to be money. He must have had some money that somebody wanted to take when he was sick. He can't have had much,

not near enough to kill for, so he has to be just one of a group; one unit in a crowd that gets taken for a few hundred or a couple of thousand each. That adds up to a racket, and a racket means a mob. I think I see where Lou Silver fits, but there has to be somebody in City Memorial too, a convalescent home on the county list, the strong-arms like Pete Starkey, and people like you, honey. That adds up to big money and a lot of people with something to lose if the racket's busted up. How'm I doing so far?"

"You're doing fine, mister," she said. "You have it all except the names, and in time you'll get those. That's what I've got to sell."

"Then sell me. I'm listening."

"Just this," she said. "The old man's alive now, but he won't be by the time you can get a court order. Like you figured, there's a lot of people scared and big money involved. He's the only real link you've got with anything. He'll die a 'natural' death tonight, unless you break him out first. To do that, you have to know where his bed is."

"So I do," I said. "What's your price? Not just for that, but to spill all you know. Names, dates, the works."

"Not too much," she said. "When I got mixed up in this I didn't contract for murder; not mass murder. I was Lou Silver's office girl, and then his girlfriend. When I found out how he was getting rich I didn't much care at first. He even talked me into going up to the hospital this afternoon. I knew better, but he told me the man would die anyway. Still, I was glad when you stopped me. I never killed anybody."

"Get to the point," I said.

"Okay. First, I want a clean bill of health with the fuzz, no charges and no time. I'll cooperate with what I know. Then I want runaway money, at least a couple of thousand to take me a long way from here and keep me till I get a job. That ain't much to ask, is it?"

"No," I said. "Not too much. I think it can be arranged—that is *if* you level. Any holdout, any trouble with Silver, and all bets are off. You play it straight with me, though, and I'll take care of you. My word on it."

"I'll take your word," she said. "The old man was interviewed for welfare at the hospital admissions by 'Doc' Parradine who has worked for the county twenty years. On Doc's say-so he was certified incompetent by Dr. Leo Miller, who is a cousin of Lou Silver. He was put into Happy Haven Rest Home, owned and operated by Bat Marmore, for observation and treatment. Outside of small-fry, that's

the mob. Doc spots them, Dr. Miller certifies them, and the two of them get a court order to appoint a legal guardian. That's either Lou Silver or some other lawyer in the ring. Once the old bird is committed they pick his bones at leisure."

"What's it worth to them?"

"Sometimes not much," she said, "but sometimes they make a real hit when the victim has some property. Usually there's savings and a pension of some sort to be 'administered' and spent for the patient's care till he dies. Your old friend had a couple of thousand in his mattress. The trick is to pick somebody old and feeble and with no relatives or local contacts to follow up for him."

"That's where they went wrong on Pop Ellerby," I said. "How come?"

"I don't know. Maybe he is senile, or just independent, or thought he wouldn't get free treatment if he admitted to a son. Maybe they just tranquilized him too much and his brains scrambled. Anyway, it wasn't till the son wrote Missing Persons and an inquiry was made that they got scared and started destroying records. When the son actually showed up, they decided he ought to be knocked over."

"They came close to it."

"Yeah. If he hadn't gone to you first, or if the dynamite in his car had finished him, they would have been able to cover up easy enough then."

"When are they planning to kill Pop?"

"Tonight," she said. "Pete Starkey is up there in the office now, waiting for somebody else. When he comes, they'll go get the old man and dump him in the swamp. You better get a move on."

"If they're waiting for Little Charley Ryan," I said, "he's not coming. I'll get started."

"What about me, Mr. Hawk? I can't go home or anywhere else I'm known. They know or guess by now I've skipped out. They'll kill me sure."

"You come with me," I said. "Send your brother to some pal of his. You can wait in the car while I get Pop. I'll need you to testify after it's all over. Then I give you your money and you can blow town."

"You trust me that much?"

"I've got no choice, honey. Besides, if this is some kind of a trap, whoever set it's going to wish he was never born. I don't play for marbles when a friend's life is in the balance."

That's the way we settled it, and it took me about twenty minutes to drive to Happy Haven. The place

had big grounds, heavily obscured by ornamental tropical shrubbery. It had been a mansion, and then a gambling house and bagnio. When times changed in the fifties, it had failed as a restaurant. Later on, Bat Marmore had bought the place and added a couple of wings. He cut up the big old rooms into cubicles, and even put beds in the halls. The county paid him a flat daily rate for old people, sick and senile charity patients they didn't want to fill up the hospital beds. Bat kept them till they died. Because of inadequate public hospitals, there were a score of places like Happy Haven operating in the area.

Some were decently run. Some weren't. The county allowance wasn't enough to leave room for profit after anything but minimal care. A joker like Bat was after money.

The big iron gates were closed for the night, so I parked a little way down the road. The wall was rough stone with three strands of barbed wire on top, but I got over it.

I'd no more than hit the ground when a big police dog came at my throat. I must have lit so close to him he hadn't time to bark an alarm. Quickly I put the barrel of my .45 across his neck just back of the ears and snapped his spine. It was all over before either of us really knew it had started. I waited for the beast's friends to show up but he must have been out by himself. The grounds were large, and none of this had made enough noise to be heard from the house.

I knew better than to ring a front doorbell at that time of night, but I figured there'd be somebody in the kitchen at any hour of day or night.

Before I could move off, there was a great scrambling and thrashing around behind me and Rhoda came over the wall right under the muzzle of my gun. When she saw me she jumped a foot.

"I told you to wait at the car," I said.

"I can't, Mr. Johnny Hawk. Suppose Lou and the rest of them came along and found me? I feel safer closer to you."

I could see her point. "Stay outside the building, though," I said. "I've got to get in and get Pop out of there fast. I don't think Bat Marmore is the kind that would use a gun, but if any shooting starts I want you clear of it. And cut out the mister bit. Just call me Johnny."

She nodded, took another step forward and tripped on the carcass of the dog. Her first jump was only a rehearsal for this one.

"You see what I mean," I said. "Now stay well back. If you hear trouble start, cut for the car. In case I don't make it, go find Captain

Ryan of City Homicide. He knows me and he's honest. He'll run them down and protect you. Got it?"

"Ryan of Homicide," she said. "I won't forget."

I left her and went around to the back door of Happy Haven. As I'd thought, there were lights in the kitchen, and a couple of slack-lipped boozers making like a night shift of cooks.

When I walked in they were crumbling hamburger into a big iron stew kettle. The meat had been around too long, and the steam from the kettle had a sour reek that made me queasy. They were insulating their own noses with cheap gin from a bottle on the white-topped table. They noticed my arrival, but without any real curiosity.

"Who're you?" one of them asked.

"I'm from the county Health Inspection Office," I said. "You want I should take a look at that stew you're fixing?"

"Look, mister, I could care less. We don' buy this stuff. Half the time we don' even eat it ourselves."

"Okay," I said. "So you're not to blame. You don't be nosey and neither will I. Where's the boss?"

One said, "Gone home, I think."

The other added, "If he ain't gone, he'll be in his office down the hall."

"Thanks," I said. "Give my compliments to the chef." Nobody bothered to reply.

I went into what had been the main floor hallway where a couple of shaded fifteen-watt bulbs were burning. The whole place—rooms and hall—was full of beds, and the beds full of patients, all of them wearing the same blue and white striped hospital gowns, of coarse material and long unwashed. In the heat nobody had even a sheet over him. The room doors had been taken off their hinges and the windows had been barred from the inside, to keep anybody from climbing out and making a break for it.

There was a floor "nurse" on duty. About fifty-five, she had the hardest face I'd ever seen on a woman and the blank, glassy eyes of a pill addict. "Who're you?" she said when she saw me. "No visitors allowed at night."

"I'm no visitor, honey," I said. "Bat's expecting me. You know what I mean."

She actually gave me a raddled leer and a wink. "He's up front in the office." Then, "Stop by on your way out. I've got a bottle of good Scotch."

I went up the hall, picking my way between moaning old people and the stertorous wheezing of the almost-dead. Light showed under the door marked *Office*. I went in

without knocking and found him.

"Come right on in, Johnny," Bat Marmore said. He was back of a big, antique mahogany desk, and holding a .38 automatic steady as a rock and pointing right at my wishbone. "Close the door gently," he said. "We wouldn't want to disturb the patients, would we? Lou phoned and told me to watch for you. When he saw you leave the hash house with his office girl he figured you might be headed this way. We can have a nice talk while we wait for him and his boys."

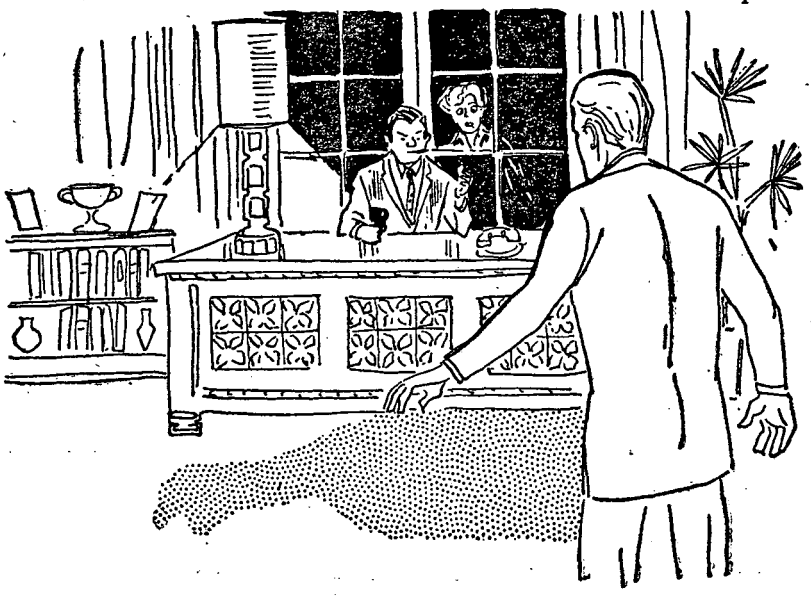
"You're making a bad mistake, Bat," I said as easily as I could manage. He was, too. A real pro would have shot me before I even saw him, before I cleared the door. Bat was like I figured him—real tough with the old folks handcuffed to the beds, a fast man with his mouth but without guts for the big time.

"Come now, Johnny, you'll have to do better than that." He laughed.

"I will," I said. "I promise you, Bat. I purely do."

He was a small man, running to flab and wattles from rich food and laziness. His suit was expensive, his eyes mean, and the hand holding the gun manicured soft. The office was air-conditioned and richly furnished, and behind him expensive drapes framed French doors to a patio.

Over his shoulder I got a sudden flash of Rhoda's face peering



through the glass, but as quickly as it had appeared, it was gone again. I began to feel better.

"Be reasonable," Bat said. "Lou had to wait for somebody, but he won't be far behind you. Your real business is with him."

That tipped me Bat wasn't planning to do his own killing. He'd hold me till Lou Silver and Pete Starkey and whoever else showed up. That eased my mind.

It figured, of course. Bat Marmore was as soft physically as he was hard and greedy inside. His weapons were the attorney and the bribe, not the gun. He could be ruthless and merciless with the poor devils on the beds in his institution but I didn't believe he could pull trigger.

"Why don't you make it easy on yourself, Bat?" I said. "Spill all you know to me and on the stand and you'll get a light sentence. Anyway, you'll live longer."

He didn't really understand that I meant it. "You're crazy, Johnny," he said. "It's *you* that's under *my* gun. Remember?"

"It only looks that way, Bat. I can kill you before you see my hand move. You've heard enough about me to know that."

"I ought to kill you now," he said. "I caught you breaking in. I don't know what stops me."

"It isn't in you or you'd have done it already. That's why I can kill you when I get ready."

Suddenly all the lights in the building went out. Neither of us expected it, but I was trained to react a lot faster. I let my knees go limp and hit the floor in front of the big mahogany desk. He got off one shot that went over my head into the wall. Then I put both hands on the desk and heaved it into his lap. He went over backward onto the floor with all that weight on his chest and midriff. Next thing he knew, I had his own gun nuzzling his ear.

"Here we go, Bat," I said low and close to his head.

"Don't kill me," he yelled. "Johnny, no! Don't kill me."

"You'll talk," I said. "You'll turn state's witness?"

"Sure, Johnny, sure. Anything at all. Just don't kill me."

I knew perfectly well that once he got out from under the gun and safe in the arms of his lawyers he'd renege on that promise, but at the moment he was worth more to me alive than dead. I stood up and dragged him out from under the desk, letting it scrape and bruise him plenty.

There was a sudden, urgent tapping at the glass doors. I got them open, and Rhoda said, "It's me."

"All right, honey," I said. "I'm back in control. Come on in."

There was still no light in the building, though reflected glow from the city lights was beginning to come through the doors and windows. None of Bat's people had showed. The door was heavy but not quite soundproof. I could hear some sort of ruckus on the other side.

"I found the meter box," Rhoda said. "I cut all power to this place."

"Good work, honey. That was all the edge I needed. Now Bat's going to take us to Pop Ellerby. Aren't you, old buddy?"

When he didn't talk I back-handed him across the teeth. "Aren't you, Bat?"

"Okay," he said. "Okay. Whatever you want."

I gave Rhoda Bat's gun, and drew my own. "Put your hand on my shoulder," I told her. "Bat, I'm going to be right in back of you. Try to pull loose or run and I'll blow your liver right out through the front."

He knew I meant it.

Rhoda fumbled in her bag and brought out one of those little keychain flashlights women carry. When she pushed the button the light was weak. I switched it off to hold in reserve. "Lead on, MacBat. And no monkey business."

I opened the office door and the noise from the house came in and pushed at us. There must have been close to a hundred "patients" in the big old building and its wing, and in the dark every last one was expressing his (or her) feelings vocally. There were screams and whimpers, screeches of crazy mirth, moans and wails, calls for help and howls of rage. The cries rose and fell in a long, ghastly ululation.

Somehow I kept hold of Bat while he found his way to the stairs and we groped our way up to the second floor. Here, too, the hall was full of beds and the wailing and screaming tormented our ears. We moved slowly to the front of the building, to a locked door, and I heard Bat begin fumbling with his key. I lighted the flash just long enough for him to find the keyhole.

The room was a small one with only one bed. Pop Ellerby was fastened to it with leather cuffs at wrists and ankles. He was very weak and his eyes wandered, unfocused. I don't think they'd fed him in days.

"Get him loose," I ordered. "We've got to get out of here."

It was later than I'd thought. Light came through the heavy drapes at the barred window as a car came quickly up the curving gravel drive. As it braked to a stop by the front door and a little to our right, three men piled out. The headlights stayed on.

Two of the men were Pete Starkey and Lou Silver. The third was a tall old man with rumpled white hair. All I could see of his face from above was a beak like a vulture.

"Who's grampa?" I asked.

"That's old number one himself," Bat said. "Doc Parradine, who spots the pigeons. This was his idea from the start. He always likes to be in at the death."

The three of them conferred briefly. The dark house and the awful noises coming out were enough to tip them something was very, very wrong. Parradine snapped an order that I couldn't hear. Starkey pulled open the trunk of the car. First thing he grabbed was a five-cell flashlight. He switched it on.

Inside the trunk were half a dozen stutter guns. There was also a small, oblong wooden crate with shredded paper packing showing under the lid, and the usual clutter of jack and tools.

"Better give up, Johnny," Bat hissed in my ear. "They get in here with those guns, they'll massacre us all."

He could have been right. I wasn't about to wait and find out. In the end I might have gotten the gunners, but those machine pistols would have killed patients like flies under a sprayer.

I took a chance and put one of the 300 gr. .45 hollow-points into the wooden box. I was right. It was where Pete kept the dynamite he hadn't yet wired into somebody's car.

There must have been six or eight sticks left in there. The blast made twisted junk out of the car and killed all three men on their feet where they stood close together.

The noise shocked the patients quiet inside the building. For a minute there was absolute silence.

"You're going to court and sing," I said to Bat. "You hold back one fact and all the lawyers in the world won't keep me from you when you get out." I could see by his face that he understood.

Off in the distance I could hear fire and police sirens converging on the site of the blast. Back of us the old people began to howl again.

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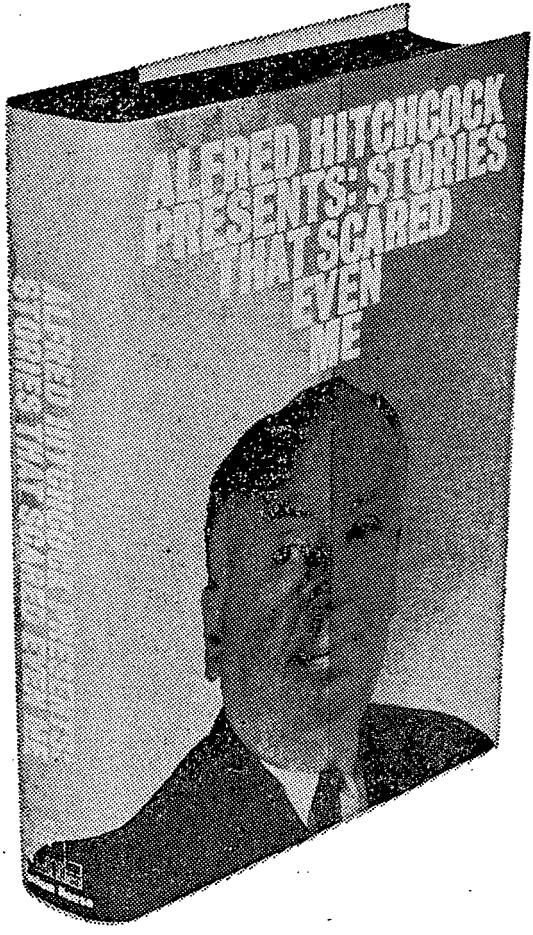


The military are often likened to chronic hotel guests—no roots; dwellers, as the French phrase it, "sur le branche."

I WAS dawdling over a second cup of coffee, rereading Marcie's letter and despairing anew at today's mobility which can put the width of a whole continent between a woman and her first grandchildren, when I noticed activity at the old Brockman house next door. I put down the letter.

The mock orange hedge which separates our two yards was too high for me to see the ground floor, but the shutters on a second floor window suddenly flew back, framing a young, very pretty girl with uptilted chin and sleek dark

by Margaret E. Brown

hair. Resting firm, capable hands on the windowsill to smile at someone below, she seemed so utterly, blissfully happy that I too smiled involuntarily. She saw me sitting in our sunny breakfast nook and threw a friendly disarming smile in my direction. I liked her at once.

People in the Brockman house again and young people at that! I could hardly wait for Frank to come home that night to tell him the good news.

It had been a long, lonesome winter for me, with Marcie and her husband transferred to a branch office in Oregon and Frank,

Jr. away at college. Brampton is a small Southern town on the outermost suburbs of Washington, D. C., and doesn't offer too many diversions. Besides, I never was much for ladies' clubs, for listening to a flock of elderly hens cackle about their grandchildren or preen themselves on growing old gracefully.

"We should have had a dozen children," Frank often said that winter. "A natural-born mother like you misses having someone to cluck over."

Well, I *do* like young folks, and the next morning I made up a fresh batch of oatmeal cookies and stepped through a gap in the mock orange to ring their back bell.

Anne Jordan opened the door instantly. "I was just going to go borrow a cup of something and invite you over," she smiled, wiping dusty fingers on the seat of her blue stretch pants before taking the cookies. "Come on in and have some coffee."

I saw that my first impression across the widths of our yards had been deceiving. Her slender figure, good bones and open smile had given an appearance of extreme youth; but up close, tiny lines around her wide gray eyes revealed that she was past thirty.

"I'm thirty-two," she told me that day, "and I feel like a nineteen-year-old bride! After twelve years of marriage, we finally have our first real home."

"Her husband was in the army," I told Frank at dinner, "and you know what that means: military housing, packing up and moving every time you've just got used to a place."

My younger brother Don, who teaches botany at the college here and lives in a neat bachelor apartment on campus, was over for dinner that night and he grinned at my enthusiasm. "Sounds as if you've adopted her."

"Oh, you know Alicia," Frank teased. "All strays and orphans."

Although Anne *was* orphaned at an early age and shunted from one indifferent relative to another while growing up, she was by no means a stray. Her marriage to John Jordan was a rock upon which to anchor; and now that he had finally fulfilled the promise he'd made when they were first married—the promise of permanency, a proper home, civilian life—she had fallen in love with him all over again.

"He never minded army life, but I hated it," Anne confided. "Most people got two- or three-year assignments to one spot, but our limit always seemed to be eighteen months. Once, in Germany, I planted rose bushes. I thought that even

if I only saw them bloom one spring, it would be worth it. New orders came six months later for Japan. After that I just stuck to zinnias and petunias."

Standing at her kitchen window that first day in early spring, she gestured happily to the deep back yard and its long-neglected garden where a few scattered crocuses poked up through the dead grass. "I noticed a little nursery on the edge of town the other day. Do you suppose I could find a Dorothy Perkins rose bush there? It's an old-fashioned rambler. My grandmother had one."

All my frustrated maternalism went out to her and after that I was over almost every day, lending a hand with painting cabinets, washing crystal from Germany, polishing brass trays from India, and helping Anne decide where all the accumulation of twelve years of travel could be positioned to best advantage through the Victorian-sized Brockman house.

I remember her satisfaction as she stood a massive pair of heavy iron candlesticks on either side of the wide center staircase in the entrance hall.

"I bought them in Spain," she said. "I knew how perfectly they would look someday in this exact position," and they were the right touch: thickly twining tendrils and grape leaves of black iron formed a stubby five-inch diameter and stretched up nearly four feet from a heavy block base, enhancing the formal red and black wallpaper of the entrance hall. Her decorative sense was superb and the Brockman place bloomed and took on new beauty under her sure touch.

"Don't forget I've had years to plan it," she said once, and showed me a thick loose-leaf notebook bulging with ideas and pictures she'd clipped from a long line of homemaking magazines. "It's just as well John didn't resign his commission any sooner. Look how my taste ran in those early days. Ultra-super-modern. Ugh!"

I had a sudden heart-wrenching picture of a trickling stream of bright women's magazines following her around the world; of the days spent dreaming over, choosing and rejecting from their shiny pages. It was as if she had held her life suspended, refusing to become attached to any place or unmovable thing or person until now, when she could let herself begin to live.

Throughout the long slow spring, I showed her the town, introduced her to Mr. Higgins at the greenhouse, and rummaged with her in the secondhand shops where we found several lovely chests to refinish. It was like having Marcie

back, furnishing her first home, all over again.

We saw little of John at first. He was a stocky, capable man, not quite six feet tall, with an aura of restless energy. He helped move the heavier furniture, then absented himself, relieved to escape the

endless discussions of the best color for the den, of whether the dining room should be papered or the badly-scratched paneling replaced.

He told Anne cheerfully, "Two things: stay inside our budget and no pink ruffles in the den!"

As he left for Washington one day, he said to me, "It's wonderful of you to take her under your wing. She's needed a friend for a long time and I'm afraid I just can't work up much interest in interior decorating." He smiled at Anne, happily engrossed with fabric swatches. "I haven't seen her so excited since we were married."

"Darling," Anne said, holding out two pieces of fabric, "do you think the federalist blue or—"

"Ask Alicia," he protested and blew her a kiss. "I'm off to my office. I didn't know civilians worked so hard!"

John had found an excellent job in Washington as personnel manager of a small but growing paper products firm. It had recently merged with a larger business and John had been brought in as a neutral outsider to smooth over the merger and effect a friction-free working relationship between the two groups of employees. So far, he had managed to preserve his neutrality, but he was constantly being faced with complaints as old precedents and outmoded traditions were changed for progress' sake.

"I only hope it continues to be hectic for a good long time," Anne said. "At least until John gets used to the placidity of civilian life. He's always enjoyed settling flaps. That's why he made such a good administrator in the army." For a moment there was a shadow of apprehension in her voice. "I just hope he doesn't start missing it when the office settles down."

During April and May, John's office continued to demand long hours and Anne began to join us for bridge on Friday nights when Don was over for dinner, a regular habit with him. Yet it was understood that even if she held seven no-trump, doubled, redoubled and vulnerable, the moment John's car could be heard in the drive she would leave us, running across our back yard, cutting through the hedge to greet him.

Looking at the handful of face cards she had flung down one night, Don said wistfully, "It must be nice having a wife who would leave a hand like that to welcome you home."

Frank and I looked at him in surprise. It was the first time we had ever heard him regret his choice of bachelorhood, and Frank chuckled, "Better take warning, Don! Another remark like that and Alicia'll have you marching down the

aisle. Like tomorrow, possibly."

Frank was so close to the truth that I could feel myself blushing as I pushed down the mental list of eligible females that I'd been checking off. "It's no disgrace to want my brother happily married," I argued. "He's forty now. How's he going to feel at fifty, with no family to cherish and to be cherished by?"

"Lucky!" Don answered. "Admit it, my dear. How many women do you know like Anne who are content to center their lives around making a home for their husbands?" And he cut the deck for three-handed rummy.

By June, the main improvements to the house were complete. There remained only the small additions and deletions of decor which would allow a dedicated homemaker a lifetime of happy puttering.

The yards and flower gardens were to have been John's project; but, as the office yet demanded long hours, Anne tackled it under Don's supervision. Despite his lack of a garden of his own, Don has a bright green thumb and keeps our garden in a constant state of upheaval, shifting bulb beds and shrubs like a housewife rearranging furniture.

He often dropped in to help Anne re-pot the begonias into hanging baskets for the patio or to prune back an overgrown lilac; and he even found the exact rambling rose bush Anne had longed for. The exuberant hug she gave him in enthusiastic gratitude sent him stumbling through a border of sweet williams.

He and John devoted several Sundays to digging up young dogwood sprigs in the surrounding woods to transplant along their back fence. Anne had volunteered to help, but was instantly voted down by everyone; for by this time, her condition was decreed too delicate to allow unwarranted strain.

All of us were delighted at the prospect of a baby. Frank and I had hardly got used to the idea of grandchildren before Marcie and her family had moved so far away; and Don had already decided that he would plant a Japanese walnut in the back corner that fall. "It

should be just right for easy climbing in five or six years," he declared.

John was happiest of all. He had wanted a child for years, but Anne had held back.

"How heavenly it sounds to say so confidently 'in five or six years our child will be climbing a tree planted this fall,' " she glowed. "To know that he isn't going to be dragged all over the world, transferred from one school to another."

"For heaven's sake, Anne!" John exploded in exasperation. "You always make military life sound like existence in a concentration camp. What's so terrible about raising a child in the service? Think how much more sophisticated all the kids were that we knew, how quickly they learned a bit of foreign languages."

"A bit is right," Anne said hotly. "Kitchen vocabularies learned from the maids they were constantly left with. No chance to form ties or build a feeling of belonging."

"But they learned to belong anywhere, honey. And most of them were as well adjusted as any kids in Brampton."

"And what of the ones who weren't, John? You can't have forgotten little Kevin Lentz, whose bedroom was over ours in Japan. The way he cried for hours every night."

"He was an emotionally disdisturbed child and you can't know he wouldn't have been the same if his father had been an accountant in Brampton. Besides, it was his first move and he was just upset at leaving his dog behind. He's probably learned to adjust by now, just as our child—"

He laughed abruptly. "Look at us! Our first fight since we came to Brampton and it has to be in front of Alicia and Frank!" The talk moved lightly on to other subjects and I was the only one who even noticed what John had almost said, though Anne's large gray eyes had been momentarily puzzled.

From that moment on, I began to distrust John vaguely; and once started, many small incidents seemed to take on uneasy significance. I noticed a restlessness about him, his lack of real interest in the house; and one day in July, I heard him remark that with all the improvements they'd made, the house had easily doubled in value.

By late fall, the office merger had settled down into a smooth routine; and, as John became a normal nine-to-fiver, a bored impatience seemed to grow in him.

Anne put it down to the adjustment to civilian life and prospective fatherhood, but I was not so sure; and early one November day

when he came over to return a pair of pliers, my concern for Anne's happiness lost its discretion.

"John," I said hesitantly, "I know it's none of my business, but are you happy here in Brampton?"

He shrugged. "Oh, I suppose I'm as content here as I would be in any one place."

"But you don't like being in just one place forever?"

He sighed. "I wish Anne could

see me as clearly as you do. She's so intoxicated with this house, this town, with you. Oh yes, most definitely with you," he repeated irritably, noting my look of surprise. "You're the closest thing to a mother she's ever known. She'll miss you the most."

"*Miss* me!" I exclaimed, aghast.

"Look, Alicia, I know I must seem like a heel, but I've tried to live like Anne wants and I just can't. I said I would try civilian life and I have. That was our deal. But I see it just isn't my bag."

"But it's only been a few months!" I protested.

"Months of knowing that I'll be doing the same thing for the rest of my life, the same job, the same place, the same people. No offense to you or even to this town, but in the service you have the adventure of never knowing where your next assignment is going to be. How much excitement do you think I can get out of watching leaves fall off the same tree year after year after year?"

"But Anne—"

"I know, but she's a good sport, and frankly I don't think she actually hated the army as much as she says now. I never heard her do much complaining before."

"Because she loved you," I pleaded; "because she knew you'd keep your promise and give her a home."

"But I have and I will! We can keep the house, rent it out during our overseas tours. We're bound to be stationed in Washington once in a while if I request it. And even if we don't, she'll get over it."

"The way that child Kevin got over the loss of his dog?" I asked caustically.

"Now, Alicia," he said, grinning boyishly at me, but I was not about to be gotten around so easily.

"I think it was nasty of you to wait until she was pregnant at last."

"I didn't plan that, honest. But I won't pretend I'm sorry. I've wanted a son for years, but Anne would never agree to it before."

"When will you be leaving?" I asked bleakly, suddenly feeling older than my fifty-two years entitled me to feel.

"It's too soon to say. I've started the paper work, but I don't know if they'll let me reenter at my former rank. That's why I haven't told Anne yet."

"You needn't worry about *my* telling her," I assured him. "I couldn't bear it."

Anne's love and trust in John were painful to remember. In such a short time she had become a dearly-loved daughter to me and I cried as I thought of the baby whom I might never see, who would be born in some goodness-knows-where base hospital.

"It isn't fair," I raged that night to Frank as we lay in the darkness of our bedroom. "He talks of Anne not understanding him and thinks that because he wants a thing, she will come to want it, too. And he's wrong-wrong-*wrong!*"

Frank put a comforting arm around me. "You're getting too worked up, honey. You forget that she's his wife and not your daughter. Why, you didn't get this upset when Marcie moved to Oregon."

"Marcie was different. She was excited about going. Anne won't be."

"Maybe when the baby is born—"

"It will be worse! Oh, Frank," I sobbed, "I was so looking forward to that baby."

In the next few days, I found many reasons to be out of the house. I didn't want to see Anne's face, so full of luminous content, knowing what I did; but as I was leaving one morning, Anne intercepted me. With a child's anxious directness, she asked, "Have I done something, Alicia? You act as if you're avoiding me deliberately."

"Of course not, dear. I've been catching up on a lot of shopping. Thanksgiving sales, you know," but I had missed our long talks and when she wistfully invited me to come in for coffee, I couldn't resist.

As we were entering the house, I saw Mr. McKeon, our mailman, trudging up my front walk. "You go ahead and pour," I called to Anne. "I want to see if there's a letter from Frank, Jr. or Marcie."

"Just a postcard from Frank, Jr.," Mr. McKeon greeted me. "He needs more money. Say, he sure does go through a lot."

I agreed that he did, indeed. We're all so used to Mr. McKeon's reading any unsealed mail that no one bothers to get angry about it anymore.

"If you're going back to Mrs. Jordan's, you can take her these and save me a few steps. Just bills and circulars and a letter from the army marked 'official business.'"

"They never stop." Anne smiled as she left the mail on a small hall table for John. "You wouldn't believe how endlessly the army tries to keep you involved. This one probably says, 'Are you sure you don't want to stay active by joining the reserve?'"

Yet the envelope filled me with apprehension. Its bulk was greater than that of a normal form letter, and I couldn't help wondering if this might be the last time I would see Anne so serenely happy.

As I drew the livingroom drapes that evening, I saw John drive in. He gave me a cheery wave, but I stared back coldly. That he could be so callous! Moving jerkily around our kitchen, slamming silverware on the table, pounding the veal as I would have enjoyed pounding John, I could imagine Anne going through similar movements next door, graceful despite the eight-months' burden she carried within her. I could almost see her dashing upstairs for a quick dab of lipstick as she heard John's car, making herself pretty for an adored husband who was about to smash her ordered dreams.

Then Frank came home and I forced myself to push down the hatred I felt for John and the compassion for Anne, to make light conversation over our meal. Frank was fond of Anne, but old-fashioned enough to hold that a wife's place was by her husband wherever he wanted to go; and that, after all, it was really none of my business. I was too depressed to court a lecture from him.

We were just beginning our dessert when I heard running footsteps across our back yard and Anne burst into the kitchen without knocking. Her voice was ragged and she gasped from the exertion.

"Alicia—Frank—you've got to help me! It's John. He—he slipped—he fell—on the stairs! I think he's dead!"

She stumbled to a chair, crying wildly, as Frank sprang up and rushed out the door. Her gray eyes almost black, she clutched at my hand sobbing, "Please—*please* help me!"

Instantly my mind shot back twenty years to the day a crash from the den brought me on the run to find Frank's most cherished possession—his great-grandfather's gold watch which hung inside a bell-shaped glass—lying smashed on the hearth and a shaken six-year-old Marcie terrified by the enormity of her guilt. She had looked at me

with the same expression as was now in Anne's eyes and whispered, "What will Daddy say? Mommy, please help me."

I hugged Anne briefly, fiercely. "Go lie down on the couch," I ordered. "You must think of the baby. I'll take care of everything," and I ran to follow Frank across the yard.

We found John at the foot of the wide staircase, his body twisted at a grotesque angle. His head lay against the foot of one of the heavy iron candlesticks and a small pool of blood had oozed out from the wound where he had struck.

Frank knelt briefly, listening for a pulse beat.

"Is he alive?" I whispered.

"Can't tell," he grunted, rising heavily. "If he is, it's just barely. Where's the phone? I'll call a doctor."

"In the den," I gestured. As Frank moved past me, I went nearer to look down at John lying there so quietly, and hated him even more than before. If dead, I thought, especially if dead by Anne's push, he would be an even more destructive force in her life than alive.

Then I saw the crumpled letter in his hand, half under his body. Frank's voice called from the den, "The doctor says I'd better call Chief Norton, under the circumstances, but doc's on his way."

The sound of the dial clicking out the numbers of our local police station spurred me into what had to be done to protect Anne.

By the time Frank returned, I had finished and the official army letter, now smooth and flat, lay casually among the other opened bills and circulars on the hall table.

"I'll stay here," Frank said. "You'd better go to Anne. Poor kid! Damn shame this had to happen now."

Anne sat in the same chair as I had left her, her eyes still dark with horror. "He's dead, isn't he?" she asked numbly. "He was coming up the stairs behind me. He couldn't understand why I was so furious. I didn't know I could feel that much anger. That letter! The army—and he expected me to be pleased because it was Germany again! *Germany!* But I didn't mean to—I didn't want—"

"Hush!" I said sharply. "Shut up and think about the baby for a minute."

Her voice cracked with tension. "You think I *haven't* been thinking of my child while you were over there?" She was on the ragged edge of hysteria.

"He slipped," I said deliberately. "He slipped and fell and struck his head on the candlestick. It was an accident. Do you understand,

Anne? It was only an accident."

I couldn't be sure that she heard me. She had the withdrawn look of one listening for a faint, faraway sound. Suddenly, she clutched her abdomen and slumped across the table in pain.

I sat there beside her, stroking her hair and repeating slowly over and over, as to a retarded child, "It was an accident. He slipped and fell. You loved him. You were happy together. It was an accident." At last I saw the lights of a car swing in next door and I ran across to bring back the doctor.

He ordered an ambulance immediately and little Todd was born that night. It was a near thing for Anne and him and hours passed before we were sure both would live.

By the time Chief Norton could question her about that night, it was just a brief formality; and John's death was put down as a regrettable accident. I think even Anne eventually convinced herself that John had fallen unaided.

When she was home, at last, with her young son, I asked, "You *will* stay on here, won't you, Anne?"

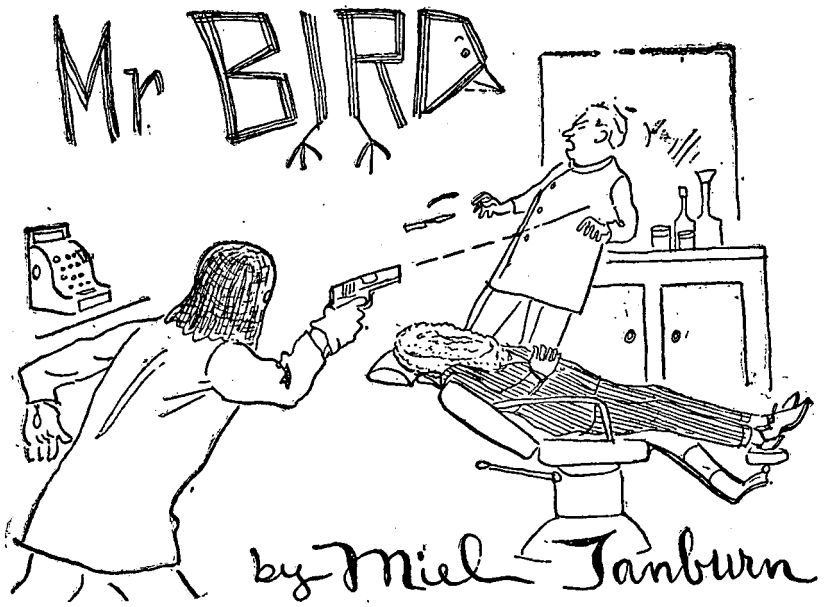
Her clear gray eyes widened in surprise. "Why, of course. This was our first real home, our only home." She blinked away the tears before they had a chance to form.

So Anne has stayed in Brampton and become a very dear part of our lives. Little Todd is beginning to talk now and it's adorable to hear him try to say Alicia; it comes out "Weesha." He's almost as precious to me as Marcie's children whom I see too seldom.

And Don! He spoils Todd dreadfully, always bringing him toys and sweets. He's planning to adopt Todd when he and Anne are married next spring. It will be a fine marriage; they have so many common interests, not least of which is Don's love of Brampton and complete lack of wanderlust.

Why, if I'd had any doubt but that their happiness would be the final outcome, I'd never have given the iron candlestick a low swinging putt into John's head when he moaned lightly, lying at the foot of the staircase, while Frank phoned the police.

Apropos the current "see and tell" trend, perhaps the following could be termed "hearsay."



MY NAME is Bird, and I'm as mild as my name.

One afternoon I was sitting in a barber's chair, getting a shave, when a hoodlum burst into the barber shop. He held a pistol in one of his gloved hands, and his head was entirely covered by a burlap bag, from which two eye-holes had been cut.

"All right," he snarled, "empty the cash register and gimme the dough, all of it! And don't make any funny moves!"

The barber, fortunately, had not yet begun to shave me, or I fear he would have put a substantial gash in my cheek. As it was, confused and frightened, he turned to put down the razor he held in his hand.

The hoodlum apparently thought the barber was going to attack him with the razor, for without warning he fired two shots into the barber's chest, killing him instantly. Then he quickly advanced to the cash register and proceeded to put the currency into his coat pocket. Aiming the pistol alternately at me and a waiting customer, he hurriedly retreated from the barber shop.

"The whole thing didn't take thirty seconds," the customer told the police officers who arrived soon afterwards. "I mean, this guy comes in, goes bang-bang with the gun, empties the till, and he's gone! It was awful."

"Did you get a description of him?"

The customer shook his head. "What's to see? He was covered up with a bag. You couldn't tell nothin'."

The officer looked questioningly at me.

"Ha," the customer said. "That guy was in the chair with a hot towel over his face. Even if there was something to see, he couldn't have seen it."

Two ambulance drivers arrived to remove the barber's body. The officers looked at each other morosely and said, "Well, let's go make our report. This one's gonna be tough to crack."

That was when I spoke up. "Gentlemen," I said, "my name is Bird. I believe I have information that may help you solve this brutal murder."

The officers looked skeptically at me.

"It's a rather delicate clue," I added. "I prefer to give it directly to the chief homicide detective at police headquarters. May I ride there with you?"

They acquiesced, reluctantly.

"My situation is somewhat peculiar," I confided to the officers as we rode downtown, "and I am afraid that after I describe it to you, you will distrust me even more than you obviously distrust me now. But, you see, I am a rather strange variety of Bird—"

"You can say that again," one of the officers said.

I smiled. "I'm afraid you don't appreciate my pun. The fact is that my name and my hobby are one and the same. I have long been a close student of some of our feathered friends, most particularly the parrot and the mynah, and after such a long and close relationship, I have acquired some aspects of their most notable characteristic."

"You mean you can fly?"

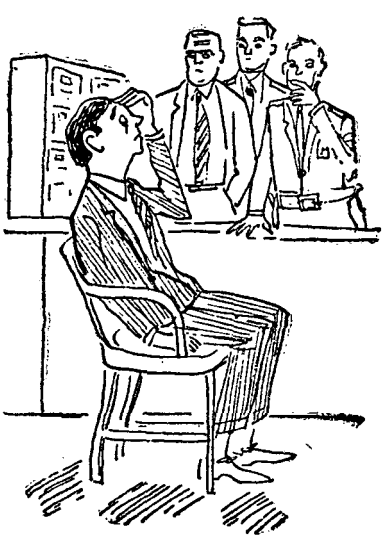
"Not that, but under certain circumstances, I can reproduce sound. That is what I intend to reveal to the chief of detectives. I sincerely

hope I can help solve this one."

When we arrived at the police station, I noticed, of course, that the two officers indicated to the chief of detectives, with a circular motion of their index fingers at their temples, that they thought I was insane. Needless to say, they were surprised when the detective shook my hand warmly and greeted me like an old and dear friend.

"Mr. Bird!" the detective said. "It's good to see you again. Why, I'll bet it's been two years since we last met."

"If you check the records, I believe you'll find it's been nineteen months since you convicted Esquire Eddie. Isn't that right?"



"You know this guy?" the officers asked.

The detective lighted his pipe and smiled in reminiscence. "Mr. Bird was our biggest help when we sent Esquire Eddie up," he said. "He is a unique individual. It appears that his hobby of raising birds, in a manner that defies medical science, has rendered him capable of, ah—"

"You needn't spare my feelings," I said. "I can talk like a bird. Mimic, that is. Under certain circumstances."

"Yes, under certain circumstances," the detective said. "We nailed Esquire Eddie after a clothing store holdup and murder. There were no eyewitnesses, and Eddie would have gotten off, if it weren't for Mr. Bird."

"I don't get it," one of the officers said.

"Of course not," the detective said. "You have to understand that Mr. Bird is a very unusual man. He was—what shall we call it, an *ear*witness? You see, he was in the clothing store when Esquire Eddie shot the proprietor, but Esquire Eddie didn't know it, because Mr. Bird was in a dressing room, trying on a suit of clothes."

"*Trying* to try it on," I interrupted, correcting the detective. "You'll remember that the light

bulb had burned out in the dressing room and I was in almost total darkness when Esquire Eddie demanded money from the clothing store proprietor. It is only when I am unable to *see* that my peculiar ability manifests itself, as if my ears can compensate for my eyes."

"In other words," the detective said, "Mr. Bird was able to reproduce the voice of the holdup man, which we identified as Esquire Eddie's voice."

"Today, sir," I told the detective, "it appears to have happened again."

He smiled expectantly. "You heard the voice of the man who murdered the barber?"

"Yes, sir, I did. Very clearly. It was just coincidence that the hot towel was wrapped around my face, blocking out the light. But I know I can give you his voice."

"Gentlemen," the detective addressed the two officers, "you are about to witness a remarkable demonstration—if Mr. Bird is in good form. Please sit down, Mr. Bird."

"Thank you," I said, sitting and closing my eyes. "It will take just a moment to put myself in the mood."

"It's a kind of self-hypnosis," the detective explained. "Even Mr. Bird doesn't know how it works."

"I'm prepared," I said. "Are you listening?"

The policemen said they were ready.

"Okay, then," I said, and I let the voice come out: *"All right, empty the cash register and gimme the dough, all of it! And don't make any funny moves!"*

I opened my eyes and saw that the others were smiling in recognition.

"Lefty Miller," the detective said.

"No doubt about it," one of the officers added.

"It's Lefty Miller's voice to a T!" the other officer agreed.

The detective explained to me, "Lefty Miller is quite well known to the force. It seems that you've done it again, Mr. Bird."

"Will you be able to convict him?"

"Now that we know who did it," he said grimly, "we'll get the evidence."

"Good. I am glad to have been of service."

The detective smiled contentedly, with admiration for my talent. "Are you still against my telling the newspapers about this?"

"Yes," I said quickly. "Just as before, I wish no publicity. None at all."

"You're sure a wonder."

The officers nodded agreement. "We never saw anything like *this* before."

I shook their hands and bade

them good-bye, then went directly from the police station to collect my payment from the man who *really* shot the barber, a man I shall call Smith.

"They fell for it?" Smith asked me.

"Certainly."

Smith rubbed his hands in glee. "First Esquire Eddie and now Lefty Miller," he chortled. "Pretty soon I'll control all the rackets in this town."

"Please," I said, "I don't want to know about it."

"Don't you?" Smith asked, a happy twinkle in his eye. "Don't you want to know how I planted the gun in Lefty's place, along with the money I took out of the barber's cash register? Don't you want to know what a really first-class frame-up you're helping with?"

"No," I said, and I finished counting the cash. It was all there. "I presume you'll contact me in the future, if my services are needed?"

Smith said, "Yeah. There's a young guy on the South Side who's starting to muscle in on some of my rackets. We're gonna start tape-recording his voice and I'll get the tapes to you soon, so you can begin learning his voice. But can't you speed up the process?"

"I'm an actor, not a parrot," I said. "I'm sorry it takes me a year to learn to mimic someone's voice, but, frankly, I'm surprised I can do it at all."

I left Smith, with a nice package of $5,000 in cash in my breast pocket. My name is Bird, and I'm as mild as my name—but I like money, and with $5,000 you can buy a lot of Birdseed.

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I want to thank all of you for your interest.

Most sincerely,

Pat Hitchcock

The task assumed with reluctance is automatically augmented in difficulty.

THE RELUCTANT SPY

A Novelette by Earle N. Lord

THE MAN who walked into my office at Thoreau High School looked harmless enough at first glance. There was something about him, however, that made me think he did not belong in any part of a public school. As a parent or a teacher, or even as an outraged taxpayer, he simply did not fit into any category.

Small and dapper in appearance, with a fine head of crisp, sandy hair, he appeared to be in his early fifties. A series of little curved lines under a pair of deep brown eyes gave him the soulful expression of a Saint Bernard. Carrying a pair of

gray-rimmed glasses as he entered the room, he smiled gently at me as I rose to greet him.

I was much interested in his appearance and general manner because that was all I had to deal with besides his name. The man had refused to give the appointment clerk any reason for seeing me, nor would he divulge which student he wished to discuss. As a teacher-counselor, I had no background information to work with before the interview and this flustered me.

He smiled again as he sat beside my desk. Laying his glasses on the edge, he took a pipe out of his jacket and started to fill it from a leather pouch.

"You're a hard man to see, Mr. Randall," he said, taking out a pipe lighter.

"I'm sorry if you had trouble, Mr. Goodman. I'm equally sorry to tell you, you can't smoke in here." I winced inwardly. This was hardly the approved way to begin a cold interview.

Mr. Goodman frowned. "Well, son, I couldn't work here for long then. I'll just fondle the pipe while we chat," he added pleasantly, studying me.

I shifted my weight in my chair, waited several long, long seconds for him to begin, but when nothing further was said by the man, made an effort to get something started. "Which student did you wish to discuss?"

"Now, there is the hang up, Mr. Randall. That's where I had all the trouble with that girl out there. I don't want to see you about any students. I want to offer you a job this summer."

"Selling what?" I asked with a nervous laugh, thinking the man was an encyclopedia salesman with an enormous amount of nerve.

"No selling. Just observing and reporting what you see." He put the unlit pipe in his mouth and began to draw on it. He was still studying me and it made me squirm.

"I must have missed something. Just what business are you in?"

"I'm in the spying business, Mr. Randall, C.I.A." He said this in a quiet, matter-of-fact manner, and no longer smiling.

It was now my turn to study Mr. Goodman. He looked quite sane and perfectly harmless. "I thought the C.I.A. worked outside of the United States."

"We do. We want you to help us this summer when you take your tour through Mexico."

I sat back and thought about this. A few days before I had reluctantly signed up for a fifteen day tour of Old Colonial Mexico, as the brochure described it; reluctantly, because I had been practi-

cally ordered to take the trip. When I had gone to see my faculty adviser at U.S.C. to sign up for my normal dose of summer classes, he advised me to take the summer off. He said I had worked hard for the past three years in my high school and in graduate work at the university, and went on to say that it was time for me to get away from schools of all kinds. He suggested I take one of the many tours offered teachers during the summer so I could see some new faces and have some new experiences. What the man didn't say, but I caught anyway, was that I had been either teaching school or going to school ever since leaving the service and that I was getting stale.

I pulled my thoughts back to Goodman. This man was certainly a new face and a novel experience.

"You want me to start a revolution in Old Colonial Mexico?"

He chuckled. "I'm afraid my outfit has a bad reputation with the general public. It is largely undeserved. No revolutions for you, Mr. Randall. We simply want you to help us prevent a serious attempt at sabotage, one which could conceivably start a major war if it succeeded."

I waited for the rest of that particular paragraph, but it did not come. As a history teacher, the thought of being involved in something which could start wars was a startling idea. "You aren't going to leave that hanging there. Go on, man, explain yourself."

Goodman smiled. "I don't like to sound corny, Mr. Randall, but I must first have your promise not to discuss this with anyone."

He felt corny. I felt silly. "Not to a living soul," I said, not quite believing this man and beginning to suspect that a very, complicated practical joke was being played on me. I read a lot of mystery and detective stories and a lot of my buddies knew this.

Mr. Goodman put the unlit pipe on my desk and became very brisk and businesslike. "Last year we penetrated a West Coast group who work for Red China. They are terrorist in orientation. We now believe they are planning an incident designed to make trouble between us and the Soviets. If they could bring it off, the least it would do would be to put a serious crimp in our space program. It was originally designed to start a shooting war between us and the Russians."

Goodman frowned. I don't think he liked telling me these things. "We've checked you out carefully, Randall. You had a good, solid army record. You are a solid, stable person, the best in that tour group for our purpose."

"What purpose?"

"In July a member of that tour group is going to pick up some sabotage equipment vital to the scheme and either bring or send it into this country from Mexico, probably disguised as a souvenir. We don't know the motive of this person. He may think he's bringing in drugs or jewels, or he may be an agent who knows exactly what he's doing."

"Why not warn all members of the group and scare him off?"

"They'd just bring in the stuff in some other way. This way, at least we know how they're bringing the devices in and have a good chance of intercepting them. We'd like to get our hands on the things; they might be very useful to our side."

"What do these devices do, Mr. Goodman?"

"You don't have to know much about them to do the job we want you to do, Randall. As far as we can tell, they are tiny transmitting devices which can, on radio command, send out a powerful homing signal for several hundred miles. The plan apparently is to plant one of them inside one of our big rockets, then fire a missile at it after it's launched, probably from a submerged submarine. The device would guide in the hostile missile to the rocket and destroy it."

"And that would start a war?"

"If we didn't know who fired the rocket and we had three men in it, it might. It certainly won't start anything between us and the Russians, but it could cause serious trouble between us and China. If they get their gadgets inside the country, we'll probably warn them not to use them. We'd rather pick up the devices and the people planning to use them first."

I was bewildered by all of this. "How could I possibly be of any use to you?"

"You could help a lot. We are planting one of our men in the group. Your main job will simply be to back his cover story. If you agree to help us, he will take the name and identity of Philip Mannerly, a teacher at this school. No one else on the tour teaches here. We want you to greet him like an old buddy when you attend the orientation meeting next week. He'll ask for you as a roommate. When he needs help on the trip, he'll have you to back him up."

"Did anyone in the group ever teach at Will Rogers Junior High School? Mannerly taught there before he came to Thoreau."

"That's good thinking, Randall, but we've checked it out. No one on the tour ever taught at that school either. Your job will be to keep on doing that kind of thinking, to protect Mannerly's cover,

and warn him if he slips. A slip is usually fatal in this business."

He picked up the pipe, tamped the tobacco in its bowl, stuck it in his mouth, and began to draw on it again. "Will you help us, Mr. Randall, for no other reward than the Agency's appreciation, oral appreciation, that is?"

"I have a problem, Mr. Goodman. I'm having a hard time believing that this isn't some kind of weird joke. Do you have some kind of identification with you?"

Goodman smiled, then began to laugh. "I'm sorry, Mr. Randall," he said, taking out a handkerchief and dabbing at the corner of his eyes. "Professional spies don't carry credentials. If you need reassurance, call the local F.B.I. and they'll back me up."

I told him I meant to call and said, with a great deal of misgiving, that I'd help him.

Goodman then showed me a picture of the agent who was to pose as Philip Mannerly and asked me to remember it for the orientation meeting. Thus I began my reluctant career as an amateur member of the C.I.A. As soon as he left, I began to feel mysterious, sneaky, and secretive. That afternoon several members of the faculty asked if I felt all right, so I decided to learn to control myself.

Three days later on a bright Sunday afternoon, I performed my first mission for the C.I.A. I managed to find the house at which the tour group was meeting, out in the vast reaches of the San Fernando Valley. I then managed to recognize the phony Philip Mannerly from the picture that Goodman had shown me.

I really was not very proud of my actual performance on this last task, however. I nearly blew it. The prospective members of the tour were meeting in the back-yard lawn and patio of the man and woman who were attending the trip as hosts. I had not realized how very susceptible I am to feminine beauty until I walked into that yard and saw the girl to whom the agent happened to be talking. She was a lovely brunette with smoky green eyes and did not look like any schoolteacher I had ever seen. I unconsciously veered in her direction and when I got within ten feet of her, Philip looked away from her and at me. I didn't know who the guy was at the time, but I admired his strength of mind for doing this. It must have been like leaving the Taj Mahal and strolling into a mud hut.

"Dave!" he said with a delighted tone. "What a coincidence! Are you going on the trip, too?"

I stopped short, wrenched my eyes off that girl and looked at the

man. He was smiling intently at me with a little, questioning frown forming on his handsome brow. I then recognized him from the picture.

"Philip!" I cried belatedly. "You bet I've signed up. Anyone else from Thoreau going?" I looked back at the girl and moved closer.

"No, Dave," Philip said, a certain air of sadness creeping into his voice. Without consciously meaning to, I had planted myself firmly in front of the lady. I don't think Mannerly was eager to introduce the two of us but there was hardly any way he could avoid it.

"Marian," he said tightly, "this is my friend, Dave Randall. He works with me at Thoreau High. Dave, this is Marian Adams. She teaches high school in Ludlow, California."

"There's a coincidence," I said, feeling a strong urge to communicate with this lovely girl. "I was out there last month."

Her eyebrows went up into graceful parabolas at my remark. For some odd reason, she seemed upset and alarmed.

I went on. "I took our tennis team out to Ludlow on a hot Saturday afternoon. We beat you, eight to one."

"Are you the tennis coach at Thoreau?" she asked, smiling, and the alarmed expression went away.

Philip broke in. "It's strictly a minor sport at Thoreau. Dave's a broken down sub-administrator who teaches history and coaches tennis on the side. Primarily, he rides a desk as a counselor."

"Philip," I said firmly, "don't be bitter. Why don't you fetch Miss Adams and me something to drink? I see a large punch bowl on the far side of the lawn." My attitude was that the government owed me something for my public-spirited cooperation and now was the time for them to start delivering.

When he returned we chatted and sipped drinks for a few, brief moments. Then the hostess came out, gave us a briefing on trip details and procedures, handed us a batch of printed materials to read and digest, then forced us to meet the rest of the group. There were twenty-seven of them and it took some time.

They turned out to be an interesting collection. I was surprised to learn they weren't all school people. I had forgotten that often only one member of a family is a teacher and that the others could be anything else. Besides teachers, there were in this group another counselor, a junior high school vice-principal, and a retired elementary principal. The eleven non-teaching tourists included housewives, a

pharmacist, a retired ship captain and a lawyer. What added real spice to the mix for me was the thought that at least one of them was an American traitor working for a hostile government. Philip, I knew to be at least one other agent on our side. There could be more. Goodman had said nothing about this to me.

As I worked my way through the group, a few of them stood out. Marian introduced me to her friend, Betsy White, and to Betsy's husband, Peter. They were an oddly matched pair. Betsy, as plain as Marian was pretty, had somehow managed to marry the most distinguished member of the assemblage. Peter White looked like a high-ranking diplomat, with immaculate, beautifully tailored clothes, silver-gray temples, and a Palm Springs tan. He turned out to be a San Pedro doctor, and had a knack for making you feel clumsy and ill-mannered. I shook hands with him and noted that he had a grip to match his personality. It was limp and cool. Betsy, on the other hand, was the warm-hearted, sturdy, all-American girl type. I wondered how they ever met.

Then there was Ralph Richards, an English literature instructor from a private girls' school. He looked a little like Cary Grant, apparently knew this well, and made all of the married men nervous just by walking by their wives on his straight line to Marian Adams. It took the combined and concerted effort of both Philip Mannerly and myself to pry him loose from her. I admired Philip's style. It was direct and to the point.

"All right, Ralph," he said in a big, booming baritone, "you really must make more of an effort to meet all the other members of the group."

"Philip and I will try to keep Miss Adams from becoming lonely," I added. "We have met all the other members of the group."

Ralph did not want to meet anyone else, never would have moved had not Marian helped us.

"Ralph, Miss Emily Wilson is standing over there all by herself," she said. "She teaches English literature, too, and physical education, so you have much in common."

Miss Wilson looked like she could handle wrestling as well. I pitied Ralph, but gently took one of his arms, Philip took the other, and we pointed him at Emily, giving him a firm push. He walked across the lawn as if he were wading through molasses. Philip and I smiled at one another and turned around to see Marian waving gaily at us from across the street as she entered a small red sports car.

Then I looked at Philip the Spy.

"Looks like an interesting group of people, old buddy," I said, "especially that one."

"We are expected to work together, old friend. You are supposed to take direction from me," he said thoughtfully as he watched Marian drive away.

"Only on matters involving national security," I said, wishing that our government would not hire strikingly handsome agents. I had always thought they were supposed to be plain and unassuming and not stand out in crowds.

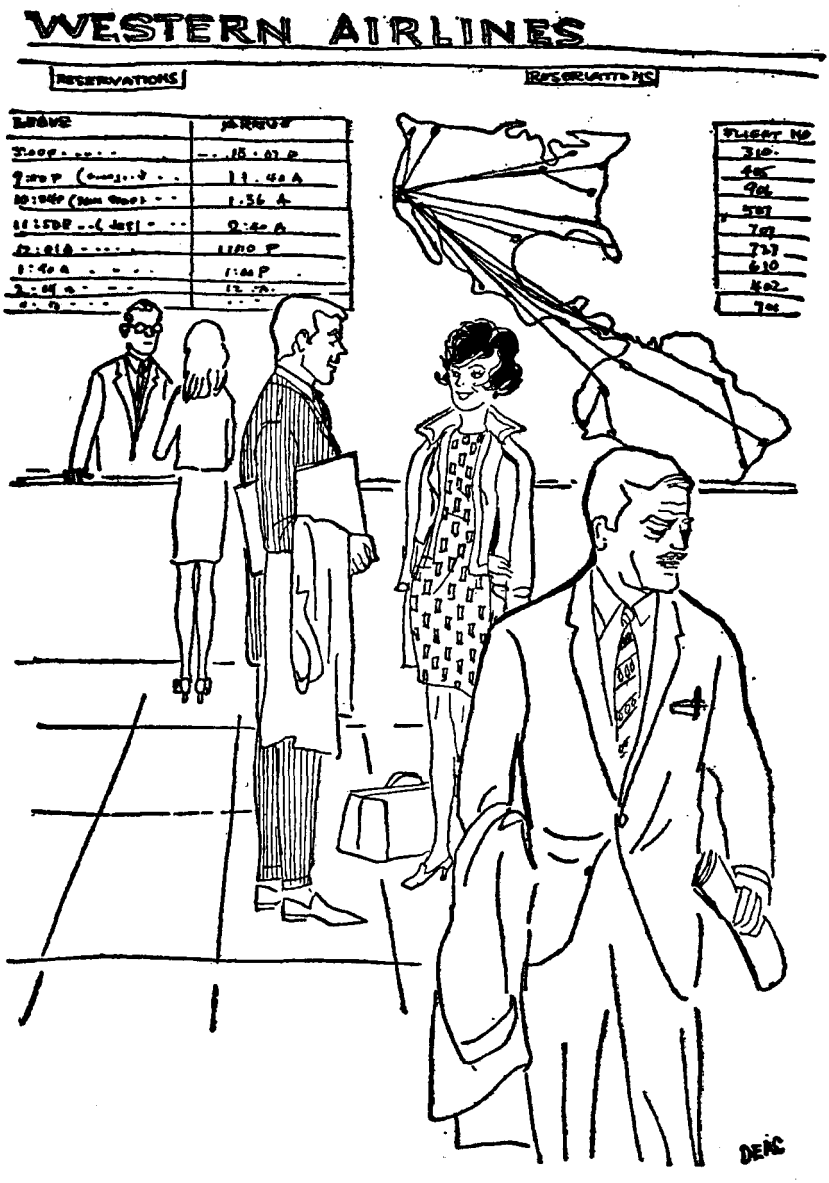
I said my good-byes to the hostess and drove home from the Valley to my apartment in Westchester. The next day was a Monday and I was soon back in the prosaic, humdrum world of the public school. I heard no more from Goodman, the spymaster, or from Mannerly, the impostor. I tried very hard but simply could not think of any valid reason for getting in touch with Marian Adams.

As the semester drew to its normal frantic ending, I stopped thinking about Goodman and the false Mannerly and my mission to Mexico, and crawled right back into my comfortable rut. Even when school was out and I was as free as the proverbial bird, I thought of the affair as more of an illusion than as a reality.

However, when the day of departure finally arrived in the middle of July and I checked in at the reservation desk at Western Airlines, Mannerly was there greeting me like an everyday friend and Marian Adams was also there, looking just as lovely as I had remembered her. Even better, she seemed to be genuinely pleased to see me. We began to chat enthusiastically enough to drive Mannerly away. Putting on a long face, he mumbled something about needing breakfast and wandered off. I remember watching him go and liking him for it.

He did not reappear. When we boarded the big 707 at nine a.m., he was among the missing. Someone must have been pulling some powerful strings because the big jet was held for fifteen minutes while he was repeatedly paged over the airport p.a. system. The plane then left without him for Acapulco. We had been given seats on the plane according to our room assignments and I was haunted by that empty seat beside me all the way down on the three-hour flight. I did some plain and fancy worrying about how I was supposed to know what to do on the tour without Mannerly.

When we stepped off the jet into the humid blast of the Acapulco airport, I looked around the facility, half expecting someone like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Goodman to rush up to me and tell me what was going on. No one approached me then, or later, as we passed through customs and then waited for taxis to drive us eighteen miles into Acapulco. It wasn't until I was ushered into the blessed coolness of an air-conditioned room in our hotel that I got the word. When I handed the bellboy a tip, he glanced back over his shoulder nervously, then handed me a folded slip of paper and left the room rapidly.

I had a bad feeling about that piece of paper and waited until the bellboy shut the door behind him before I opened it. I had a worse feeling after I read the damn thing. It was short and unsigned. It said: "Mannerly killed in airport lavatory. Be careful and do nothing until you hear more from us. Destroy after reading."

I made a strong mental note to be careful *after* I heard more from them. I tore up the note, flushed it down the commode, lay down on the bed, and began to do some serious brooding. This was not the way I thought things were supposed to go on secret missions for the United States Government. Mannerly was a good guy and the good guys never got killed in any of the stories I read.

It was siesta time so I ordered some cold drinks and kept right on brooding for the next three hours. Then my new roommate arrived. He had been waiting impatiently, he told me, on an alternate list, and had been flown in on a flight following ours when Mannerly turned up missing. He told me cheerfully that he had bribed a girl at the tour office to put him on the top of the list.

I found it hard to brood with this man in the room. He was as happy as a lark to have been included in the group. I also found it hard to return his enthusiastic and friendly greetings, considering the circumstances, but tried anyway.

Still lying on the bed, I studied the new arrival carefully for any telltale signs of his being another C.I.A. agent, but I couldn't find any. I decided that he would have made a wonderful spy, however, because it would have been impossible to suspect him of anything. Appearing like a burlesque of Mr. Peepers, he was small-boned, short, thin. He wore black-rimmed glasses and a happy, gentle smile along with a general air of sweetness and bashfulness. He looked like he didn't have a brain in his head nor a well-developed muscle in his body.

He told me he was a first grade teacher and that answered a big question for me. I could just barely imagine him handling first grade

boys if he really worked hard at it. Second or third graders might have posed a problem for him, however.

To cap it all, he gave his name as Delbert Q. Havening, the Q. standing for Quaverly. He said shyly that it was a literary name and then asked me how I liked it. I was speechless.

Delbert hummed and sang little songs to himself as he unpacked

his things. It took me a while to realize that these songs were current rock and roll. When I asked him how he learned the words, he said he listened religiously to his car radio as he drove back and forth to work. I reflected sadly that fifteen days with Delbert Quaverly Havening could be a long time, indeed. When he finished unpacking, he put on the wildest sport shirt I have ever seen, turned around to look at me, and smiled wickedly.

"Come on, tiger, let's live a little. We will now go downstairs and sign up for one of those wild nightclub tours of Acapulco. We'll tour with a group tonight, then hit the town by ourselves tomorrow. Arriba, arriba, y vamanos!"

I felt like yelling "Ole!" but did not. I decided that one of the interesting events of this tour might very well be watching this character on a nightclub spree. I accepted his spirited invitation.

Delbert and I left our eleventh floor room and its panoramic view of the harbor and a bunch of palm trees, and headed for the cocktail lounge. There the local courier had set up housekeeping and was busily signing up tour members for trips to the harbor, city, and its nightclubs. I spotted Marian seated with Emily Wilson and looking rather forlorn. She looked pleased when I suggested our joining them, and brightened even more when I introduced Delbert to her and Emily. Emily positively beamed at Delbert. I think she looked upon him as a challenge to her physical training skills.

We found the girls eager to go on the nightclub tour so we all signed up together. Marian then persuaded Betsy and Dr. White to come with us, and they in turn asked two other tour members to

join us. Transportation was four to a taxi, and this made eight, so we had a party.

We met the courier in the hotel lobby after an early dinner. He was a flamboyant native promoter dressed in tropical whites, with a flashing smile set in mahogany. As the group assembled, he began shipping us out in taxis in groups of four.

I noticed the odd little man with the green felt hat at the first spot we visited, a seaside nightclub featuring a water skiing act alongside in the harbor. The man was not in our party, but he seemed to be more interested in us than in the scantily clad girls zipping by in the bay.

We had a drink as we saw the show, then moved on to the next club, which featured a tropical decor and some extremely emotional Mexican singing. The man with the green hat had now joined our party of about twenty people. He had a small, impassive face and looked bored. He sat behind and to the left of me in the crowded club, and again seemed to be completely disinterested in the show.

By this time, we each had imbibed two large tequila cocktails, and Delbert began his first performance of the evening. When two singing sisters began to sob emotionally in their act, Delbert began to cry right along with them. When they stopped, he kept right on crying with loud heart-rending sobs and sighs. Our insouciant guide with the mahogany skin and gleaming smile came over and managed to quiet Delbert. The management then brought on the next act, a native rock and roll combo whose drummer was a stoic, impassive Indian.

I thought the contrast between the Indian's wild drumming and his poker face was mildly amusing. Delbert apparently thought it was hysterical, and he began emitting peals of weird, high-pitched laughter. Some small worry lines now appeared around the smiling eyes of our guide. He looked slightly to one side, nodded his head about a quarter of an inch, and two three hundred pound norteamericanos appeared out of nowhere. They walked up to Delbert, lifted him daintily by his elbows and carried him out.

The guide reassured me that he would be handled gently. The rest of our party left ten minutes later when the show ended, and we found a much better show going on outside.

The club's huge, roly-poly doorman, dressed in a large acreage of tropical whites and topped with a wide-brimmed straw hat, now had a 115-pound helper named Delbert Q. Havening who had somehow

managed to obtain his own straw hat, one even larger than that of the enormous porter. When a cab pulled in, they would both take off their huge hats with sweeping flourishes, bow solemnly to one another, then open both doors of the cabs with magnificent grand gestures. The show was so good it had attracted a crowd of several hundred. Traffic, ordinarily hectic in this area, was now backed up for several blocks in all directions. Police were blowing whistles, cabbies were yelling and honking, and the nightclub manager was screaming furiously at his bouncers and our guide to get Delbert out of there.

Our guide, still smiling in a strained manner, studied the situation, then came back to me. "Señor, can you walk that small maniac down the street to the next intersection? I'll send a taxi for you later, when this clears up."

The crowd booed angrily when I grabbed Delbert by the arm and started to lead him away. He greeted me with a loud cry of "Amigo," gave me a Mexican *embrazo* including a kiss on each cheek, but then came peacefully. Several minutes later we were picked up by a taxi containing Marian and Emily, and were then given a high-speed, thrilling ride to the Quebrada Cliffs. Taxis in Acapulco seem to be piloted for the most part by frustrated ex-bullfighters. Delbert kept yelling "Ole!" whenever our driver made a near miss on other cars, and he pounded the driver's back with enthusiasm when the driver leaned out of his window and slugged a pedestrian. I just closed my eyes.

The Perla nightclub at the Cliffs was the last stop on the tour. It was on a series of terraces on the side of a sea canyon looking out over a gorge into which Pacific rollers surged. The entertainment, of course, was the diving of a young boy into the shallow waters of the gorge from one of the high cliffs overlooking it. After we were seated at a small table on one of the terraces, I noticed the man with the green felt hat sitting one level above us. I asked our guide, who was nervously keeping near Delbert, who the man was. He told me that several people from other hotels had joined the party after it started, and that green hat was one of them. I got up and walked to an isolated position where I could easily be reached by the man but he made no move toward me. Like everyone else in the place, he seemed to be interested in Delbert.

Delbert did not disappoint his fans for very long. He had several more Margaritas, waited decently until the native diver had made his spectacular leap, then stood up

and announced in loud, high-pitched tones that he was going to make the same jump from our terrace. It would have been quite a leap, for he was at least fifty yards from the sea, and it posed a definite threat to the people on the terraces below. They scattered at his announcement.

The Perla had large imported bouncers too, and a pair of them plucked Delbert off the table where he was kneeling to say a little preflight prayer, and carried him up the steep stairs to a waiting taxi. Delbert sang a few bars of *When I'm in Your Arms, Darling* as they hauled him away, and was given a round of generous applause by the crowd, most of whom probably thought it part of the act. I followed Delbert out with Marian and Emily. I think I was blushing for the first time in about thirty years. I felt responsible for the little clown.

As I climbed the stairs, I bumped into the man with the hat. I felt him push something into my coat pocket as he descended the stairs, but decided to wait until I got Delbert to bed before I looked at it. Emily and I had to carry him through the hotel lobby. He seemed to be asleep when we arrived, but when we got into the center of the lobby he woke up and yelled, "Bring on those girls, those big, beautiful girls." This brought out the manager and some of his bouncers. Marian put her hand over his mouth and muffled him while Emily and I hauled him into the elevator. Life was not dull around Delbert, even when he seemed to be asleep.

Marian and Emily seemed to be much amused by Delbert and were apparently even more amused by my having to play nurse and keeper. The three of us managed to pour him into a bed, then the girls said their merry good-byes.

To the accompaniment of Delbert's loud and ripping snores, I read the note that had been pushed into my pocket. It asked me to meet the sender by the diving board of the hotel pool at 3:00 a.m., and it was signed "Goodman's friend." I glanced at my watch. It was only 2:40. I listened to Delbert snore for twenty minutes, while glancing at a travel folder. The snores were more interesting. The little guy might look like Caspar Milquetoast but he sounded like King Kong.

When he began to vibrate a picture on the wall, I rolled him over on his happy little face and he desisted. Then I tiptoed out of the room and down two flights of squeaking stairs. When I came out on the patio facing the pool, I saw a shadowy figure standing by the

diving board. I walked toward the pool and when I got about ten feet away, the figure moved out of the shadows and I saw he was wearing a hat and pointing a gun right at me. It suddenly became very still and I could hear just two sounds, the water gently lapping in the pool and my heart beating in the middle of my throat. *This is unfair,* I thought inanely. *I am much too young to die.*

Then I heard a soft, swishing noise behind me and to my right, and the menacing figure before me crumpled and collapsed in a heap, his hat falling off and rolling several feet to one side. Whirling around, I found Delbert standing four feet behind me, holding a gun with a weird-looking gadget on its business end. It must have been a silencer, an absolutely perfect silencer, for I heard no report from the weapon.

Delbert was rumpled. His hair was hanging down in his eyes and over glasses, and he had a bathrobe on about halfway, exposing a portion of a white hairless chest. He smiled pleasantly at me, gun in hand.

"How can I possibly protect you if you don't tell me when you're going out? How did he get you to come out here?"

Wordlessly, feeling ashamed of myself, I handed Delbert the note.

From thin air, he produced a small pencil flash and read it, nodding his head as he did. He started to hum one of those Bob Dylan songs through his nose, then looked at me and was serious.

"Goodman would never let his name be used like this. I suppose I should have told you I was taking Mannerly's place, but we thought you might have given him away." Delbert sounded brisk and efficient. He walked over to the body, humming again, and began rifling its pockets. As he rolled the body on its back, I saw the face of the man who had been following us. His eyes were still open and he looked surprised. I guess he was. Delbert transferred several items from the man's pockets to those of his bath-

robe, including a large wad of paper pesos from a wallet.

"He won't need these, now," Delbert said brightly, then ushered me up the stairs and into our room. He sat me down on a bed and poured me a stiff drink. It tasted like kerosine.

"Now, Mr. Randall, may I have your attention," he said, "your continuous, undivided attention?"

I nodded, while enjoying the burning sensation in my mouth and throat.

"Any more notes you give to me," Delbert said. "These people tried to kill you. I would like to prevent them from doing that. OK?"

"OK," I said, beginning to revive a little. I had thought I was dead down there by the pool and it shook me up. The death of the man with the green felt hat had shook me up some more. I hadn't realized you could die so fast. It was like blowing out a candle. I looked at Delbert. "What about that body?"

"Oh, yes, the body!" Delbert said, turning back into a harmless idiot. "I knew I had forgotten something." He smiled brightly at me and strode across the room to the phone, humming one of his little tunes. He dialed two numbers on the dial.

"Hello," he said cheerily. "This is Havening. I left a body near the diving board of the main pool. Take care of it for me, please."

There was a pause while he listened, then he spoke again. "Randall's all right, a little shook up by a near thing, but otherwise hale and hearty. Ta, ta."

Delbert then gave me another stiff drink and put me to bed. I wondered sleepily what kind of room service he had called upon, whether Goodman was on the other end of that line puffing an unlit pipe, and then I drifted off into a chilling series of nightmares in which I was rescued from several horrible monsters by a little smiling boy with short pants and horn-rimmed glasses. This tiny kid kept repeating, "Never fear, Delbert's here," after each rescue, and then I would try to strangle him. I awoke in the morning mentally and physically exhausted to find Delbert bustling around the room, humming rock and roll, and looking like he could climb Mt. Everest before breakfast.

On this day, I first became acquainted with the true magnitude of our problem. In my sheltered life which had restricted my overseas experience to military travel, I had never really seen the American tourist in action. In the morning those who wished (and I did not) were taken on a shopping tour of the city of Acapulco. I was nursing

a headache and a glass of seltzer in the hotel lobby when the bus returned with the shoppers and their purchases. I stood in amazed silence as the group debarked from the bus, booty in hand, carrying such things as large model sailing ships, tin Christmas trees, ten gallon hats, and quantities of wildly colored serapes and blankets. With twelve days to go on the trip, we already had a half-ton of assorted merchandise!

I mentioned my concern to Delbert and he laughed.

"Don't worry about the stuff they buy. Just worry about the people who buy it. We are looking for phonies, people who are playing roles that don't fit them. Don't push or crowd, just watch and listen, and report anything odd to me. People on the outside, like Goodman, will do the checking for us."

I told Delbert I already had one phony for him in Ralph Richards. I'd heard this clown describing his brave and daring Viet Nam war experiences to a bevy of admiring girls at poolside that morning. He told them about having personally exterminated hundreds of Viet Cong several years before the American army was allowed to shoot back, and he did it with weapons that didn't arrive until four years after his courageous exploits. Delbert looked worried and asked me if I had said anything. I told him I'd just shrugged and walked away.

"Next time, don't shrug and don't walk away. Just swallow what you hear whole, and tell me about it later."

I then brought up something which had been bothering me. "Won't they be extremely suspicious of you, Delbert? It's pretty brazen, substituting one agent for another."

"It's so obvious we hope they won't suspect me," Delbert said, a serious expression flickering across his cherubic face to be replaced quickly with an idiotic grin. "Besides, who would ever suspect me of being an agent? You're the one they're worrying about. As Mannerly's cover, you're automatically suspect. They know how we operate, and they know you backed him up with his claim to have been a teacher. So you must not push or probe. Just sit and listen. I'll poke around a little when I can. You just back me up when I ask you to."

I took his advice and spent the day in the water and in the outdoor bar restaurant facing the sea breeze. I watched the girls displaying their beautifully bronzed bodies, the parachute skiers being towed around the harbor, and the gardeners spraying the exotic vege-

tation around the hotel with great billowing clouds of insecticide. Mexican bugs were not allowed on the premises and very few Mexican nationals.

That night we met our courier, an officially licensed government guide. His name was Otto and he looked like Napoleon the Third with his imperially trimmed beard and moustache. He gave us a stiff lecture on tour discipline and introduced us to our bus, an air-conditioned monster with green-tinted windows. He was a proud and patriotic man, and I don't think he liked being in Acapulco.

Next morning, we climbed aboard the bus and began a long climb through the emerald mountains of the West Coast of Mexico. We were on our way to Taxco, the city of silver in romantic Old Colonial Mexico. That's what the travel folder said. I sat next to Delbert and across from Marian and Emily, which helped a lot. I groaned as I looked up at the luggage racks and all those bulging bags of merchandise. I slept during much of the eight-hour journey, something I'd learned to do in my army travels. I tried to watch the scenery but after several hundred thousand ears of green corn had gone by, my attention flagged.

Delbert tried valiantly to organize a community sing, leading off with a quavering tenor version of *Fight on for Old S.C.*, and then tried to coax other passengers to sing some of their college songs, but the rest of the group seemed to be as sleepy as I was. The sing degenerated into a muted chorus of soft sighs and snores, then even Delbert dozed off. I noticed that he did not snore on buses, only in rooms alone with me.

We arrived in Taxco in late afternoon and stopped at a collection of silver shops. The group bought a few hundred more souvenirs. I even bought something. I had to choose between a $3,000 silver chess set, discovered and recommended by Delbert, and a four-dollar black

glass statue of an Aztec god. After some deliberation, I chose the latter. After I made the purchase, several tour members made a point of congratulating me. They'd evi-

dently been worrying about my not buying anything. Delbert asked me suspiciously if the god was hollow and acted much relieved when I reassured him it was solid glass, with no secret compartments.

Our hotel was on top of a hill, overlooking a city which looked much the same as it had appeared in the Sixteenth Century. That evening we went swimming in a modern pool, feeling very much out of time and place. We had dinner on a veranda and watched the setting sun light up the city's famous cathedral. Our party consisted of Marian and Emily, Delbert and myself, and another couple from our group, Bill and Edith Wells.

Bill was an aeronautical engineer and mentioned that he made servomechanisms for a living. When I asked him to define the term and he didn't hear me, Marian gave me an excellent definition of the word and used several other technical terms I'd never heard before. I glanced at Delbert in the middle of her lecture and he gave me the high sign to cease and desist. Recalling the speed and flawless style she had recently displayed in the pool, I shifted abruptly from aeronautics to aquatics.

"Marian, you swam beautifully in the pool just now. Did you ever swim competitively?"

"In high school, I went to some meets," she said coolly as she studied a large plate of tropical fruit which had just been placed before us.

"How about now?"

"Oh, I work out with the high school team once in a while, but it's such a bore being bussed to Fullerton from the school," she said, making a face. "I hope we can afford our own pool someday." She speared a piece of golden mango with a tiny fork.

I now had another subject to drop. I'd just discovered that Marian Adams was not a teacher at Ludlow High School, at least she hadn't been at the school during the current year. When I'd taken the tennis team there, we'd been invited to use its brand new pool after the matches. It was an Olympic-sized, flush-decked beauty, and I'd spent an hour in it with part of the team.

We watched the lights come on in the city below and listened to several hundred dogs tuning up for a moonlit night of mass barking, baying, and virtuoso howling. I turned in early, tired from the long bus ride and still a little hung over. The dogs and some noises from a working silver mine below the hotel bothered me for about twenty seconds and I soon fell asleep.

Delbert went out on another

nightclub tour and woke me up with some impassioned singing when he rolled in at three in the morning. I told him about Marian's slip about her claimed place of employment and he briskly said he'd have it checked out by Goodman, who was apparently somewhere in Taxco. I went back to sleep, gloomily telling myself that it would be foolish to fall in love with a Red Chinese agent. I think I dreamed about her anyway.

Next day we were back on the bus with our load of tourists and souvenirs, on our way to San Jose Purua, the Shangri-La of Mexico. As the bus groaned along, I brooded over the cleverness of the plan we were trying to stop. They were hiding a tree in a forest! They easily could have disassembled a hydrogen bomb and hid it in the hundreds of packages we were hauling. Added to what we were carrying, dozens of packages were being mailed home at each stop. I decided that we had an impossible assignment and told Delbert this. He told me not to worry because we had lots of help.

The Spa, itself, was an unusual place. It was a plush and luxurious hotel isolated in a tropical mountain setting complete with wildly colored vegetation and strolling peacocks. The Spa had elaborate facilities for bathing the human body in the warm, golden, pungent water peculiar to the place, facilities ranging from public plunges to individual bathhouses. The resort was high enough in the mountains to be chilly at night, and this frustrated my first attempt to get someone to go swimming with me in that golden steaming water.

I settled for a sumptuous dinner instead. I ate with about ten of the tour group, including the Whites, Marian, Emily, and Delbert. We all commented about the colorful spread of unknown tropical fruits, and then the conversation turned to where all of us had gone to school. That's the fascinating sort of thing that schoolteachers like to talk about in their spare time.

Delbert led off by claiming to have gone to Fairfax High with Herb Alpert, and then went from there to U.C.L.A. I really expected something more fantastic from him, something like Gremlin High or Leprechaun Polytechnic. Nor was I surprised to hear Marian claim that she attended Ludlow High. She probably did before they put in the swimming pool. I was startled to hear Dr. White say he had gone to a high school in Singapore, and I should have been startled to hear his wife, Betsy, state that she had attended Rogers Junior High School in Los Angeles. I nearly missed the significance of

this statement, but was alerted by a glance that passed from the doctor to her when she said it. The glance said: "Be silent, you little fool," in the silent language of dirty looks. I followed Delbert's instructions and did not probe, but let the conversation drift elsewhere.

After dinner, I again tried to talk Marian into trying the pool but she thought the yellow water might stain her suit and begged off. I wandered back to my room, wondering why Betsy White's mention of her junior high school would upset her husband. Delbert was in the room doing Yoga exercises, and I asked him for his help but he made no comment.

I drank a beer and brooded some more, and then I caught it.

"Delbert," I said, "Mannerly, the real Mannerly and not the agent, taught at Rogers Junior High before he came to Thoreau. He taught there for seven years. Betsy White must have been going to that school when he was teaching there, so she must have known our man was an impostor before the trip even started when she met him at the orientation meeting. If Dr. White doesn't want her to talk about it, he's in on it too."

Delbert, who was now standing on his head in the corner of the room, looked about as pleased as a man can look in that position. He told me I had something very important and that he would telephone Goodman in the morning. I decided to celebrate by going for a swim alone. I was still curious about that golden water.

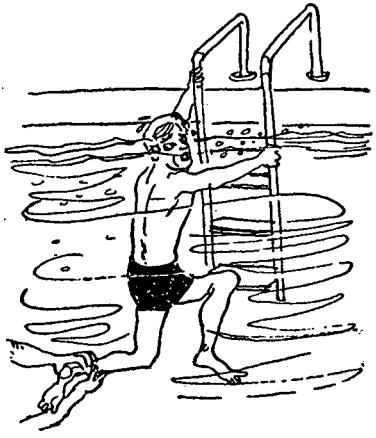
I changed into trunks, grabbed a towel, and started for the pool. A soft, warm drizzle was falling outside and I found the place to be deserted. The pool was well lit by both exterior and underwater lights. I tested the water with one foot, found it to be pleasantly warm, put my stuff down by poolside, then dived into the deep end.

When I opened my eyes underwater, I saw nothing but amber light. I could not see my hand when held two feet in front of my eyes. I went up to the surface, took a big gulp of air, then dived back down to the bottom. I wanted to see if there was a layer of sediment on it.

I was feeling the tiled bottom and finding no sediment on it when I heard someone quietly slip into the pool. I decided to see who my companion was, thinking it was either Delbert or Marian. When I surfaced, I started a circle of ripples in the quiet pool. I watched them converge with another circle of little waves coming from the opposite direction, but there was no one visible in the water. It took precious seconds for

the meaning of this odd fact to register. When it did, I made a big, splashing lunge for the side of the pool and the metal ladder leading out of it.

This probably saved my life. Just as I began my watery leap, two powerful hands grabbed at my ankles from below. One hand slipped off as I lunged, but the other held on and began to pull me back down into the golden water. I later



on thanked the Lord above for some water polo experiences I'd once had and for my army hand-to-hand combat training. With two hands and one leg free, I managed to break the drowning hold in time to struggle weakly to the boiling surface and breathe again.

I caught a quick glimpse of a dark-haired, brown-skinned body slipping out of the shallow end and made a weak effort to get out of the pool and chase him. The best I could do was to get up the ladder, breathing great, ragged gasps of lovely cool air, and stumble slowly down the path that my assailant had taken. After a few steps I ran into Delbert coming towards me down the path, wearing trunks and carrying an umbrella in one hand and a tray with two bottles of beer in the other. He was about as pale and blond as a man can be, and he was not wet. He said he'd almost had the beer knocked off the tray by a running man in bathing trunks. He also said he didn't think he could identify the runner. I knew I couldn't, so I took a beer and went back to the pool with Delbert. I told him my tale and he told me not to go swimming alone anymore.

We sat down under an umbrella in the soft rain and Delbert gave me a summary of a background report he'd received concerning Marian. Instead of being an English teacher, she was a private secretary to the president of a small electronics firm in Southern California. The firm had recently gotten into trouble for under the table dealings with Red China. Its president had escaped with a heavy fine but had almost been sent to a federal penitentiary. These were sad words to me. I didn't want that girl to be a spy.

We loafed around the Spa for another day, then loaded the bus for an involved journey to Mexico City which would take us through a series of historical towns, all of which had places to see and in which to shop. One of them had a central market with hundreds of stalls. Trying to watch thirty people shop in it was an interesting experience for me. I gave up and stopped worrying about spies. As far as I was concerned, we had located several agents in the group and it was now up to Goodman to do something about them. Delbert agreed with me on this but asked me to continue to give Marian a lot of attention to avoid arousing her suspicions. I felt like a heel doing this, but with this girl, it wasn't hard to be a heel. Spy or not, she was the most charming girl I had ever met and was pleasant company to boot.

When we finished the historical part of our tour and arrived in Mexico City, I began to enjoy myself. We went to the bullfights, to a museum of anthropology, saw the Ballet Folclorico in the morning and the Floating Gardens of Zochimilco in the afternoon.

Delbert again began to put on his act full force. He jumped into the bullring to fight the bulls himself, and was carried out of the place to the earsplitting whistles and catcalls of several thousand enraged aficionados who wanted to see him fight. He was ejected from the museum for lying down on a sacrificial altar and offering himself to the Aztec gods. At the Floating Gardens he left our pole-driven boat, began changing boats in the bumper to bumper traffic, and was lost from our party when he joined a water-borne mariachi band going in the opposite direction. When last seen, he was vigorously attacking a marimba while the band cheered him on.

I had a quiet dinner with Marian, then waited up for him in the hotel lobby. He was brought back at two in the morning by two spectacular Mexican girls dressed in formals. They reluctantly handed him over to me, explaining that he was "mucho hombre." I told them he was getting to be "mucho pesto" and guided him into an elevator while he sang the Trojan fight song to a gathering of nice, respectable Mexican citizens. I felt like the original ugly American.

When I got him inside the room, he became cold sober and we had a pleasant, little chat about the spy business. I asked him how he ever got to be an agent. He said he had attended a journalism school for three years, decided that newspaper work would be too routine and restrictive, and talked his way into

our counterespionage network. He said they'd taken him because of his weird personality traits and encouraged him to be his normal, psychotic self when working. Their theory was that no one could suspect him if he did.

I asked Delbert what the risks were and he gave me an odd answer. He said that if you blew your cover, the other side either killed you or doubled you, offered you a job working for them. I told him I hoped he'd be given a chance if his time ever came. He warmed to this and told me he was glad I had not been shot or drowned and hoped they'd make me an offer next time instead of trying to exterminate me.

Next morning, we loaded the plane with several tons of souvenirs and flew home. I was seated several yards from Marian on the plane and didn't see much of her on the flight. She asked Delbert to switch with Emily but I'd already asked him not to, so he pretended not to understand her. I did not want to sit alongside that lovely creature for three hours and chitchat, then watch her get arrested.

When we disembarked from the plane at L.A. International, Marian stood behind me in the lineup for customs inspection. Our party had been given a large room of its own and things proceeded very slowly. Dr. White and his wife were taken into a side room, apparently for a special search. Marian seemed to be upset by this and asked me if I knew why they would do such a thing. I dummied up, did not respond to her efforts to make small talk, feeling pretty depressed about the whole business.

We had a long, cool silence, then she spoke. "When will I see you again, Dave?" She had a worried little frown on her forehead, but managed to look startlingly beautiful even when frowning.

"I'll give you a call in a week or so, Marian," I said, making a valiant effort to appear cold and distant to her.

She did not seem to understand and looked quite flustered. "In a week or so," she repeated incredulously. I don't think the girl had ever experienced a brush-off before.

The customs officer grabbed my stuff. He examined the black glass statue very carefully, tapping it with a pencil. I told him it was solid and he smiled. He hardly looked at the rest of my things. With Marian, he seemed to have a different attitude. While I put my suitcase back together, I watched him begin a meticulous, item by item search, and he apparently found something interesting inside a straw horse. When I turned to say good-

bye to Marian, she was being led off to a side office by another inspector. She gave me a hopeless, troubled glance as she disappeared into the room. She looked lovelier than ever and I felt like Judas Iscariot. I looked around for Goodman, the spymaster, and I think I would have punched him in one of his lovable St. Bernard jowls if I'd been able to find him.

He was nowhere in sight, though, and I couldn't find Delbert either. He had vanished when we entered the customs area. I grabbed a cab and went straight home to my Westchester apartment, not far from the airport.

I didn't hear from Goodman that afternoon and I didn't know how to contact him, so I decided to sit tight and wait it out. I stayed in the apartment and read a detective story, with half my attention on the plot and half on the silent phone.

That night, I set the Aztec god carefully on a small side table by my sofa, locked all the windows, filled a sock full of table salt and tied a knot to keep it in. I then turned out the lights and sat down behind the front door with my improvised blackjack in hand. As I sat and waited, I stared at the statue's silhouette in the half-light created by a bright moon outside. It was a beautiful thing, exactly like the one I had bought in Taxco, but it was not mine. Mine had several tiny scratches I had placed on its base. This one had appeared in my hotel room in Mexico City the night before we flew home. I wondered who was coming through the door behind me, the door whose recently oiled hinges I'd never oiled. I only suspected about five members of the group, but would not have been surprised if any of them came creeping through that carefully prepared door.

Even though I expected it, I still jumped when a key slid softly into the doorknob beside me and began slowly turning the lock. I stood up slowly and the floor squeaked. The slight noise of the turning key stopped with my movement, but I thought I could hear someone breathing on the other side of the door. Then the door opened about two inches, without a sound. I could hear my heart beating now. A tiny pencil flash poked in through the open door and swept across the room to the rumpled bed with its huddled lump of pillows beneath the blankets. The flash remained on the bed for several seconds, then the door swung open and in stepped my visitor. He stiffened a little and started to turn his head toward me when he heard the swish of the sap coming at him. It made a dull thud as it impacted behind his right ear. I caught him

as he sank with a soft moan to the floor. I pulled a large gun out of an inside holster in his coat, then picked up the fallen flash and turned it on his face.

It was my turn to groan. It was Goodman. I swore softly, pushed the door shut, then shielding the light with one hand, I gently patted his cheeks with the other. His eyelids fluttered, then opened. He smiled wanly at me in the dim light.

"My, my, what a way to greet a friend," he said.

"Why sneak in?" I said angrily, feeling extremely foolish.

"I wanted to get inside to protect you. We think the gadgets must be with you." He sat up and rubbed the back of his head. "What on earth did you hit me with?"

"A bag of salt. The gadgets are in that black statue. Why haven't you contacted me before this, man?"

Goodman stared at the statue and chuckled softly. "It reminds me of the purloined letter." He turned and looked straight at me with that disconcerting gaze of his. "As for contacting you, son, that can be a dangerous business. We tried to contact you in Acapulco and lost a good man. We kept a respectful distance after that. Of course, you made it unnecessary with your thoughtful practice of reporting all your findings to Delbert in your hotel rooms. We bugged them all the way." Goodman frowned. "What happened to that chap in Acapulco? I have to make a report."

"Delbert shot him, then had him disposed of by others. I've wondered if he was from the other side. In a way, I'm glad to hear he isn't one of our agents."

"Don't say that," Goodman said, standing up. "I wish he was one of ours, man. Delbert is literally one in a million. He plays his parts by ear and improvises as he goes. It's almost impossible to anticipate his next move."

"Not impossible, Goodman," I said. "He may be coming through that door tonight."

"I expect you're right. I can't imagine Peter White sneaking through a door. This is more in Delbert's line."

"White is an agent?"

"He was the original agent on the tour. The plan was probably to bring in the gadgets in his wife's luggage. Betsy White apparently doesn't know who or what she married last March. When she blew our agent's cover at the orientation meeting, realizing he was impersonating Mannerly, and told her husband about it, Dr. White arranged to eliminate the false Mannerly, and substitute Delbert for him. Delbert probably later decided

to use you and your statue to bring in the devices when you became suspicious of the Whites. It was a clever plan, but a bit too complicated for my taste."

Soft footfalls were approaching the door, and I motioned to Goodman. I also handed him back his gun, and he crossed to the far side of the room. It was several minutes before the key slid into the lock and the doorknob again began to turn. There was another pause, then the door slid open, and a beam of light entered the room, swept over to the bed, then around to the statue, then back to the bed. The door swung open further and a small figure entered the room with the odd-shaped pistol—my old friend from the Acapulco poolside—in hand.

With my improvised weapon I slapped the pistol out of his hand, spun him around and caught him in the stomach with my left knee, part of my army dirty fighting technique. I then hit him solidly and he went down into a little crumpled heap. I had some clothesline ready and tied him up.

I turned on the lights, and he opened his bright blue eyes, blinked owlishly several times, then smiled broadly at me.

"Good heavens, Dave. I really sold you short, didn't I? Where did I slip, old buddy?"

"You made an absolute hash out of keeping S.C. and U.C.L.A. straight, but that didn't make you a spy. When you insisted on calling yourself a Trojan instead of a Bruin and sang the wrong fight song, I thought you were a confused C.I.A. agent. You checked on Marian Adams' background in an unbelievably rapid time, which really proved nothing, but it made me wonder."

"I almost said I was from Notre Dame," Delbert said with a winsome little smile while rubbing his jaw with his bound hands, "but I liked that Trojan fight song so much."

"Your slip was switching the statue and letting me bring in the gadgets for you. That was sheer arrogance. I'd marked the statue."

Delbert's smile flickered a little at this, then brightened at the sight of Goodman when he stepped in from the shadows.

"You must be Goodman," he said. "I've seen your picture. Have you gathered in the others?"

"We let Peter White go, but we'll pick him up now. We let the Adams girl go in spite of the mechanism you planted in her luggage. What is that thing, anyway? It's driving our technicians crazy."

"It's a part of a Mercedes Benz. I don't know what its function is. It just looks complicated."

Goodman helped Delbert to his feet, then walked over to the end table and picked up the statue. He turned to me.

"We'll get you another of these, Randall. You'll want a souvenir of your tour."

I told him not to bother, that I had something else in mind, and escorted him and Delbert to his car. When I got back to the apartment, I dialed Marian. The phone rang eleven times before she answered.

"Two questions, Miss Adams," I said briskly. "First, why pretend to be a teacher when you are a secretary?"

Marian sounded somewhat nettled when she answered. "You have to be a teacher to go on that tour if you're single."

"Next question," I continued, "can you be ready to fly to Las Vegas to be married in thirty minutes?"

She waited several rather long seconds before answering. "Why wait until three-thirty in the morning for this?" she sputtered. "I practically threw myself at you at the airport and you walked away."

"I thought you were a Chinese spy at the airport. Now, I find you are just a phony schoolteacher. Beautiful impostors I can deal with, lady. Spies I avoid religiously, when marrying people, that is."

There was another long pause, then she answered softly. "Handsome lunatics I can deal with. Come on over."

I thought little of the girl's judgment but went anyway. Retired C.I.A. agents just can't afford to be too choosy nowadays.

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