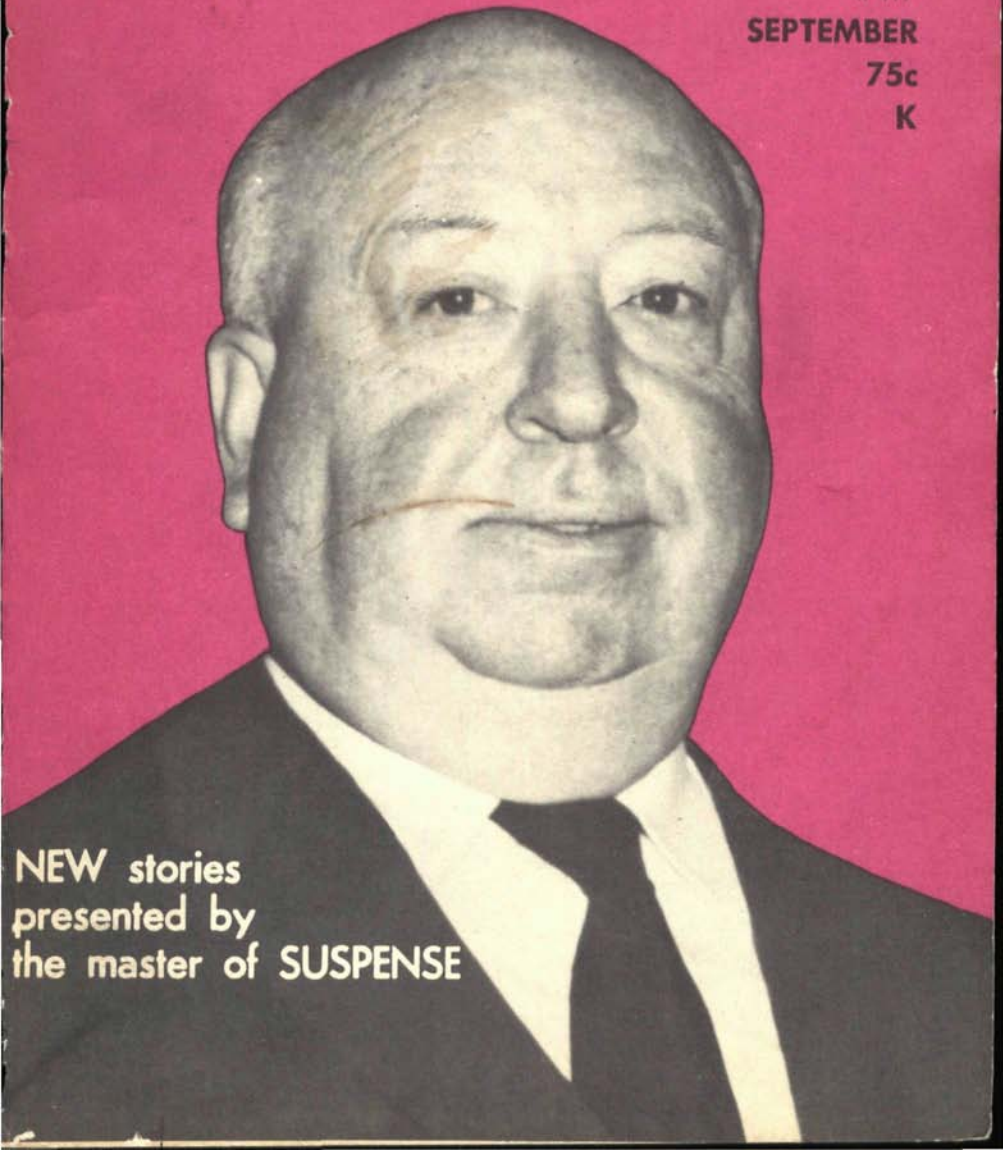
ALFRED

HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

47417
SEPTEMBER
75c
K



NEW stories
presented by
the master of SUSPENSE

September 1974

Dear Reader:

This summer has yielded a grand crop of the mystery, as you will see by the continued excellence of this month's issue. It could hardly be otherwise with a list of such notable authors as that on the opposite page, from Frank Sisk with *A Wanted Man* to George C. Chesbro and his novelette of murder and intrigue titled *Four Knights Game.*

The plots and counterplots brought to fruition within are peaches all. You just may go bananas over the bad apples who stalk through these pages. Their lives naturally do not constitute bowls of cherries.

I fully expect our good fortune in bringing you the best of the harvest to continue into the fall. Stay close at hand. I will streak the next issue to you as soon as it ripens on the presses.

Good reading.

Alfred Hitchcock

Richard E. Decker, Publisher
Gladys Foster Decker, Editorial Director
Ernest M. Hutter, Editor

Patricia Hitchcock — **Associate Editor**
Frances E. Gass — **Associate Editor**
Nick J. Sartorio — **Circulation Director**

Marguerite Blair Deacon, Art Director

VOLUME 19, NO. 9 SEPTEMBER 1974

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S
mystery magazine

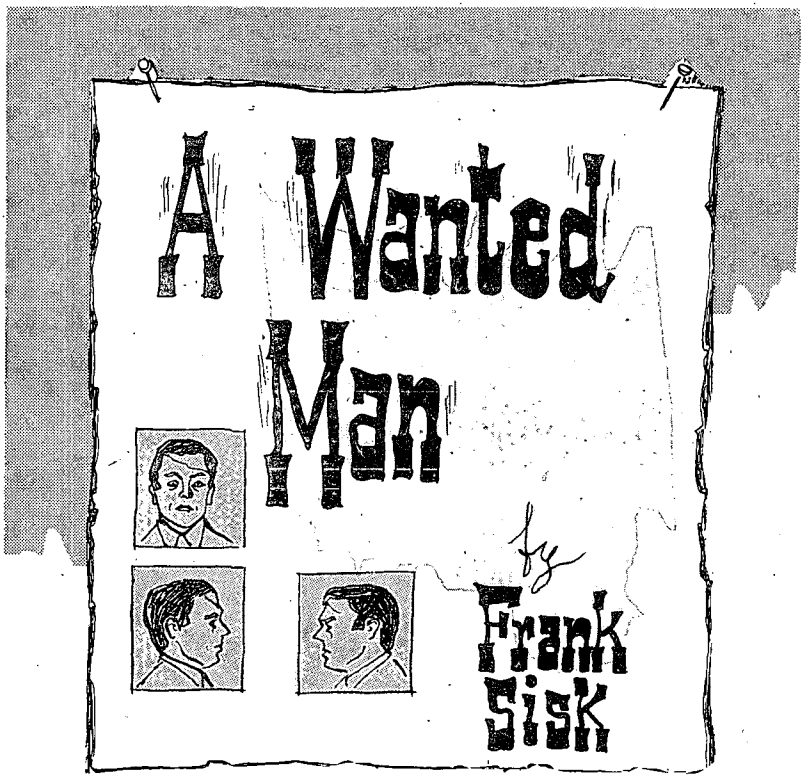
CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

SHORT STORIES

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 19, No. 9, September 1974. Single copies 75 cents. Subscriptions $9.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $10.00 (in U.S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 784 U.S. 1, Suite 6, North Palm Beach, Fla. 33408. Postage must accompany manuscripts if return is desired but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited material. Manuscripts and changes of address should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 784 U.S. 1, Suite 6, North Palm Beach, Fla. 33408. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A.

Of all that man cherishes, perhaps most precious is his own identity.



Milton Dunkle was making his weekly visit to the post office for the purpose of sending a money order to his ex-wife, when he noticed among the several front-view and profile photographs on the bulletin board a fairly good likeness of himself. He approached for a closer look. The man depicted was wanted by the FBI for a variety of charges.

Bank robbery, Milton Dunkle

read. *Hijacking interstate carriers. Illicit possession of firearms. Transportation of stolen goods across state lines. Assault of federal officers. Interstate flight to avoid prosecution . . .*

The wanted man's name was Gerard Dunkle aka Gary Dunkle, Jerry Dawson, Milton Dinkler.

This last alias caused Milton Dunkle to utter a silent obscenity. He read on:

Age: 34; height: 5'11"; weight: 170 lbs; hair: light brown; eyes: gray; complexion: ruddy; build: medium; scars or marks: a scar runs diagonally from hairline across forehead, result of a childhood knife wound . . .

Milton Dunkle stopped here and read it all over again. Except for the ruddy complexion and the knife scar it was an almost perfect description of himself. He was 33, not 34; he was 5'10" instead of 5'11"; and his weight was closer to 165 lbs than 170, but these discrepancies were negligible when viewed against the mug shots of Gerard Dunkle which were so much like the ones that had been taken of himself for his ID badge when he was employed by the shipyard.

He continued apprehensively to read the rest of the poster:

Race: white; nationality: U.S.; occupation: sheet-metal worker occasionally employed in aircraft and shipbuilding industry . . .

"Conniving devil," Milton Dunkle muttered.

Social Security number: 098-10-9943 . . .

Milton reached for his wallet and found his own Social Security card. He compared the number with that listed for Gerard Dunkle. They were identical.

"Conniving rat," Milton Dunkle said under his breath.

Record: arrested in District of Columbia twice on suspicion of armed robbery; convicted on second offense and sentenced to penal term of 2 to 5 years; parole violation.

Caution: presumed to be armed and dangerous.

The date on the poster was 14 months old. This meant that Gerard Dunkle was still at large or that the persons responsible for putting up and taking down posters were not on the ball. If Gerard were still loose, only the devil might know what criminal thievery he'd been up to, probably all in the name of Milton Dinkler. Or maybe it was Milton Dunkle by now.

"Conniving damned jailbird," Milton Dunkle said to himself.

Feeling unwonted guilt, he glanced warily over his shoulder. Nobody was observing him.

Quickly he detached the Dunkle poster from the bulletin board, folded it in half and thrust it into his topcoat pocket. Then he went to the mail slot marked *Out of Town* and deposited the envelope containing the money order.

The post office was 12 blocks from his apartment. On such a sun-filled winter day this should have made a nice invigorating walk, but Milton failed to find the walk at all to his liking. It reminded him that he could no longer afford a car. This depressed him. His depression was not helped by the nagging fact that he'd just mailed another alimony payment to Agnes. To depress him still further was the incriminating poster in his pocket, a poster that was presumably visible in post offices throughout the country and on file in every police headquarters.

At the corner he could have sworn that the cop directing traffic there gave him the once-over twice. The rest of the way home he walked with his culpable face nested in the turned-up collar of his topcoat.

The apartment was a one-room affair with kitchenette and bath. Spartan was the word for the furniture. There was a lumpy couch which preserved his chronic insomnia. For the purpose of eating or simply sitting there were two folding chairs and a card table. There was a floor lamp with a tattered silk shade. On an unpainted maple chest, the do-it-yourself kind, stood a portable TV set and a telephone. The hardwood floor was scantily covered by two worn scatter rugs, one of which was covered with newspapers turned to the *Help Wanted* pages.

Entering this austere abode, Milton shed his topcoat on the back of one of the simple chairs. Going to the kitchenette, he filled a small kettle with water and placed it above an electric burner on the small stove. Then he got the folded poster from the topcoat pocket and walked to the uninviting couch.

When was the last time he'd seen Gerard Dunkle?

It must be at least 10 years ago. Yes, it was all of that. It was certainly well before he'd met and unfortunately married Agnes, and that was seven long years ago.

He remembered the scar on Gerard's forehead more than he remembered anything else. That last meeting occurred in a cafeteria, early in the morning. In either New London or Groton, he couldn't be sure which—but he remembered the rest of it.

He was shuffling slowly in a chow line, gathering his usual

breakfast on a metal tray—tomato juice, warm Danish pastry, butter, scrambled eggs, coffee—and becoming gradually more conscious of the back of the man's head in front of him. Its shape and the color of hair were uncomfortably familiar. So was the contour of the ears. Then he realized with a sickening jolt that he was, in some inexplicable sense, looking at the back of his own head.

"Double the scrambled eggs, mac," said the as-yet-unseen face. The tone and inflection of the voice were so close to his own that it was hard to tell the difference.

"Right," the counterman said. "How about you, mate?"

"Single order of eggs is fine," Milton said in a voice which parroted that of the man in front of him.

The man turned inquisitively, gray eyes narrowing, and gazed into Milton's surprised gray eyes. The livid scar on the man's forehead was what he saw first and right away he knew he was face to face with his first cousin.

"For cry sake," Gerard said, grinning suddenly. "If it ain't old Cuz Miltie I'll eat another double order of scrambled eggs."

'Is that you, Gerard?"

"Nobody else, man."

"Well, this is a surprise. Do you live around here now?" he asked.

"Just passing through, Miltie." He ordered a cup of coffee. "Yeah, just passing through. I'm in the trucking business."

By the light of present knowledge, Milton could read "hijacking" into the context. What he probably said at the time was something like *Good, glad to hear it. Myself, I'm training as a sheet-metal mechanic here at the shipyard;* but underlying whatever he said was a definite recollection of acute embarrassment, like that of a man caught naked in front of a mirror. For as he exchanged amenities awkwardly with Gerard, others in the line began to look at them with strange grins, amused at the sight of a man talking to himself.

When they came to the cashier, Gerard said, "This is on me, Miltie."

"No, I'll get it."

"Tell you what. Heads it's mine, tails it's yours." He flipped a coin. "Tails. Tough. I'll get it next time."

Knowing his cousin now (and even then), he assumed the coin had two tails.

What else had transpired at that last meeting?

Not much. Fortunately time was short. He'd had to punch a time clock at seven. He seemed to

remember Gerard asking if he were married yet and his asking Gerard the same question. What had Gerard replied? Oh, yes, something about being engaged to Libby Davis. *Engaged.* Gerard emphasized the word with a left-eyed wink. In the interests of broad or ribald humor he was an inveterate winker. *You must remember Libby Davis, Miltie. The little girl with the grown-up chassis.*

Milton Dunkle remembered Libby Davis . . .

In the kitchenette the kettle started whistling. He got up from the couch and steeped himself a tea bag. In a crumpled waxed-paper wrapper he found a couple of broken saltines.

Libby Davis. Pretty little Libby Davis. Pretty when she was 16 anyway. She'd be 32 now. Twice as old. If she's still alive. Engaged to, married to, deserted by, divorced from that—

The phone rang. He glared at it moodily from the card table where he was finishing his simple repast. It rang again and he looked at his wristwatch: 4:13. Since it lost 10 minutes a day, the time was actually 4:23. Unless some emergency like illness came up, he wasn't due at the motel until six. Nobody had called him in a month but the daytime desk clerk, so should he just ignore it?

The phone rang for the third time and he went wearily to answer it.

"Mr. Dunkle?" The voice was feminine, professional, the operator's.

"That's me."

"Milton Dunkle?"

"Right."

"I have a collect call. Will you accept it?"

"Where from?"

"Portland, Maine."

"Like hell I'll accept it."

"Just a minute, sir." The operator's voice turned away a few degrees and grew indistinct and then came on again. "Here's your party."

"Cheap, cheap, cheap," said a twangy voice which could belong to nobody but Agnes.

"There's nothing in our divorce papers that says I have to pay to hear you talk, Agnes. Just the opposite. I'm paying so I don't ever have to hear your voice again."

"Oh, shut up, Milt."

"It's your three minutes."

"And I don't want to waste it. First, where's the dough? Ma's got to go to the hospital and I'm trying to help her out with—"

"I put a money order in the mail."

"When?"

"Yesterday. Late. You prob-

ably'll get it sometime tomorrow."

"I heard that line before. How much?"

"Twenty-five."

"Twenty-five. How about the arrears, chum? You're already six weeks in arrears. You know that, don't you?"

"I was out of work, Agnes."

"Since when?"

"Since the shipyard lost a big government contract. That's since when. Four months ago."

"So what are you doing now, collecting unemployment?"

"Not anymore. I'm doing something else."

"Like holding up banks?"

Milton swallowed a piece of pharynx. "That's a funny kind of crack to make, Agnes. Why you want to make a crack like that?"

"Not so funny if you been to a post office lately. And I been. Yesdee morning. And you want to know what I seen there, Milt? With my very own eyes practically popping out of my head. A picture of you, Milt, big as life and wanted by the Feds. No reward or I might've gin them a buzz. Oney it wasn't you after all. Just a guy with the same last name and almost the same silly face. Prolly one of your creepy relatives."

"Thanks, Agnes. Is that all?"

"That's all. But that money order better be here by tomorrow or else."

"It'll be there. Don't worry."

"I ain't gonna. You crap out, chum, and it'll be you and the judge. 'Bye."

On the way to Your Dollarsworth Motel, Milton Dunkle's thoughts returned to Libby Davis and the youthful days when he used to visit his grandparents on summer weekends in Queensport.

That was where he'd first met Gerard, learning immediately not to like him much. It was a period for Milton when he often disliked himself too. Something about his face he found painfully insufficient: the indecision of the hairless chin; the uncertainty of the gray eyes; the mouth's mild infirmity; nasty nostrils in a flange of a nose—something easy to dislike.

The awkward outwardness was readily matched by flares of inward tumult.

Gerard's case was different, at least so far as Milton could perceive. Though the older cousin was no more attractive than the other he gave a strong impression of self-confidence. He never passed a mirror without giving himself a glance of admiration. He openly praised himself on general performance.

At times Milton envied his

cousin's aplomb and proudly presented him as the only son of his father's only brother.

"Some people think we kinda look alike," Milton would say.

"That's his good luck," Gerard would add.

Gerard seemed to be everyone's favorite—his grandfather's, his grandmother's, finally Libby's.

Libby Davis had been, in an unspoken way, Milton's girl until Gerard came to the farm for a visit. After that Gerard boasted, with good reason, that she was wholly his. Milton massed his dubious resources to fight for her. What ensued he still recalled as the Battle of the Barn.

Both boys went to the barn and stripped to the waist for trial by fisticuffs. Gerard fell readily into a professional stance and began to weave around Milton with fancy footwork. He feinted a few times, grinning wolfishly, and then came in close for the kill. Milton swung a clumsy roundhouse. It landed on Gerard's ear and sent him reeling.

Gerard abandoned professional antics and came back wildly. Milton, a bit surprised by his own calmness, met the assault with another roundhouse. This time Gerard landed on his back in the hay. He lay here, cursing savagely, and then he got to his feet slowly with something gleaming in his right hand—a keen-edged sickle.

"Hey, Gerard, none a that," Milton said.

"I'm going to cut your damn hands off," Gerard said, advancing.

Milton, backing hastily, began to look around for something with which to ward off the flashing sickle. He saw the wooden handle of something protruding from a nearby wheelbarrow. Dodging around a ridgepole, he ran the half dozen steps to the barrow and grabbed the handle. It held a hoe. He turned just in time to meet the oncoming Gerard. He parried the swinging sickle purely by accident before getting the hoe properly in hand. Cursing like a drunken sailor, Gerard leaped at him again. Milton swung the hoe in a short sharp arc, striking Gerard in the forehead. Blood gushed. Gerard dropped to his knees and screamed. Presently Grandpa Dunkle appeared on the scene.

"Boys, what in hell goes on here?"

Gerard staggered to his feet and, face dramatically dyed with blood, began to sob out a pack of lies.

His mind still brooding over that long-ago incident, Milton entered the lobby of Your Dol-

larsworth Motel. Edna, the bookkeeper, was presiding over the desk.

"Where's Charlie?" Milton asked.

"In the coffee shop," Edna said in a tone that sounded even icier than usual. "And Mister Magruder wants to see you in his office right away so you'd better get in there."

"Did he say what for?"

"Not in so many words."

"Well, tell Charlie I'm here now if he wants to leave."

"Maybe that won't be necessary," Edna said.

Milton gave her a searching look. She turned her back.

He walked under a foreboding cloud to the motel owner's office. Was it possible that Magruder had seen the poster in the post office? Of course it was. If dim-witted Agnes had noticed it *anybody* could notice it.

Milton rapped softly on the owner's door and a gruff voice ordered him to enter.

P. C. Magruder was a fat man with a benign face that was not presently benign. It was truculent, frowning.

"I understand you wish—" Milton said.

"That's right, Dunkle," Magruder said. "I wish to give you your walking papers. Here." A pudgy hand shoved a thin envelope across the desk. "You'll find your wages up-to-date. No extras in lieu of notice. Nothing like that. And I'm pretty sure you won't have the gall to ask. That is all, Dunkle. Now get out of my sight and off my premises."

Milton wasn't really bewildered by this outburst but he pretended to be. "What are you driving at, sir?"

"I'm driving at embezzlement, that's what I'm driving at. Now get out of here, Dunkle, before I get my Irish up."

"Don't I get any explanation?"

"You don't need one. You know exactly what I'm talking about. So take your money and leave. Immediately."

Still pretending bewilderment, Milton took the envelope from the desk and left. In the lobby he passed Charlie coming from the coffee shop. Charlie nodded but said nothing. Edna's back was turned again.

Milton Dunkle walked out into the cold winter night with the feeling that fate had unjustly struck him down. It was like the feeling he'd had years ago right after the Battle of the Barn. It was a feeling of being misunderstood and then misjudged.

He painfully recalled the accusing expression on his grandfather's face as he packed the wounded Gerard into the pickup truck for a trip to the local doctor. He was left, without words to defend himself, in the reproving custody of his grandmother. The next day Libby Davis refused to speak to him. A few days later his disgruntled father came to collect him.

Nobody ever thought to ask for his side of the story.

Now Magruder hadn't asked either.

What had he done that was so criminal? Nothing that wasn't common practice among night clerks. It was almost like an unwritten privilege that went with

the job. A guest arrived without luggage. He paid cash for a room. He said he was staying just for the night and left an early wake-up call. You pocketed the cash and destroyed the registration card. When the guest departed in the bleak dawn you hung a card on the doorknob that instructed the maid to make up the room right away.

You didn't overdo this thing. You did it probably twice a week. In view of the miserable wage meted out by Magruder for the dreary six-to-six shift you could almost consider the pocketed cash a deserved bonus.

Yet, as Milton Dunkle entered the loneliness of his little apartment, he was followed by a pervasive sense of guilt.

Hell, man, he told himself, if anyone were guilty in this embezzling business it should be Agnes; Agnes and her weekly blood money.

That night on the lumpy couch Milton slept restlessly and dreamed of gargoyles. The first dismal glaze of dawn woke him. Exhausted, he slid from the couch and went to the kitchenette where he prepared a cup of instant coffee to wash down a leftover cruller.

Like any other man suddenly without a job, he began to audit his assets and liabilities. He didn't take long. The final check from Magruder covered only the three days of the current week that he'd actually worked. Money in pocket amounted to $26.43. Loose change in an empty jelly jar counted out to $2.79. All told, he had on hand barely enough to pay the monthly rent on this so-called furnished apartment, and the rent was due the day after tomorrow.

Some kind of immediate action was necessary. First, he'd go down to the state employment office and file an application for unemployment compensation. That would take a few weeks to clear. Meanwhile, to make ends meet, he'd try to rustle up one of those under-the-counter jobs where *no* records were kept; part-time dishwasher or sweeper or—

Wait a second, he told himself, reminded by the wanted poster still lying on the floor near the couch. Wait a second, man. You *can't* go down to the state employment office and fill out an application. Your Social Security number will trap you. That's one more place where this poster is bound to be on file. It would take you a month of Sundays to prove a case against that lousy Gerard and in trying to do so you would have to involve all your past employers, including Magruder, and—

oh, the hell with it, he decided.

The only real way to get on top of this situation is to do what the FBI and all the fuzz in the country haven't been able to do yet, and that's find Gerald Dunkle aka Gary Dunkle, Jerry Dawson, Milton Dinkler and (why not?) Milton Dunkle. But how do you go about it?

After giving the question less than 10 minutes of thought, Milton went to the phone, got the operator and asked her to find a listing for Edward Davis in Queensport. The operator came back in a few seconds with information that there were two Davises listed in Queensport, neither of which was Edward. There was a Chester B. and a Theodore W.

"Theodore W. Put me through to him." *Theodore, Ted, Ed,* thought Milton Dunkle. His grandparents had always referred to Libby's father as Ed.

A woman's reedy voice said, "Hullo, hullo."

"Good morning. Is this Mrs. Davis I'm talking to?"

"That's right. Who's this?"

"Name's, uh, Harris. George Harris. We never met, ma'am, but I used to go to high school with your daughter Libby."

"Never knew but one Harris. Hiram I think his name was. You any kin of Hiram?"

"No, I'm not. What I'm calling about, ma'am, is—"

"Raised goats," Mrs. Davis said.

"I see. What I'm calling about, ma'am, is Libby. I'd like to get in touch with her. The high school class is planning a reunion next month and we're hoping—"

"Libby don't live home no more."

"Could you tell me where she lives?"

"Stamford."

"You happen to have the exact address?"

"No. A phone number's all I got. Wait a second." Pause. "Here it is." She gave the number, two digits at a time, and then said, "If you talk to her, tell her to come home for a visit."

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

He got the operator again and gave her the Stamford number. The ringing went on and on. The operator cut in and was saying the party was not answering when a man's voice came on the line.

"Yeah, who you want?" the man asked in a tone of annoyance.

"I'd like to speak to Miss Davis," Milton said.

"Never heard of her," the man's voice said.

"Miss Libby Davis?"

"If you mean Libby Dunkle, she ain't here. She works days."

Click! The man hung up.

Milton recalled the operator, and asked for the address of the number he'd just called. She gave it to him. He walked to the couch, flopped down and began to ponder his next move.

Two hours later he was aboard a bus bound for Stamford. On the seat beside him stood a scuffed leather suitcase. It contained whatever personal effects he'd felt were worth packing. In his topcoat pocket, wrapped in a scarf, was a 32-caliber revolver with a two-inch barrel. He'd obtained this from a pawnbroker in a trade for the portable TV set, the only piece of furniture in the apartment which had belonged to him. He'd never had a revolver before, but something told him he would need it in bringing Gerard to justice. Anyway, he was cutting loose from the enfeebling depression of the past. He was sick of always being the patsy.

As the bus hummed along the turnpike Milton began to feel free of something, curiously unencumbered. He watched the glint of sunlight on the snow-patched landscape and somehow it instilled him with a strange hope. Hope gleamed intermittently in the normally dark reaches of his heart. By the time the bus reached the Stamford terminal he was as nearly optimistic as he'd ever been in his life. He was almost sure that an essential form of luck was just around the corner.

A taxi took him to the address of Libby Dunkle née Davis. The neighborhood was ramshackle. The house itself, a three-story wooden structure, wore an old coat of yellow paint. A grayish-white placard pasted to the inside of the front door advertised *Light Housekeeping Rooms to Let.*

A slatternly old woman with stonelike green eyes answered Milton's doorbell summons.

"No vacancies," she said flatly.

"I don't want a room. I'm looking for Libby Dunkle."

"Libby Dunkle? Oh yeah. What time is it?"

Milton looked at the watch that lost 10 minutes a day and said, "Three forty-five. Why?"

"Libby's shift quits at three, that's why."

"Then she ought to be here any minute."

"More likely, two or three hundred minutes. Right now you'll find her in the Friar's Tap."

"Where's that?"

"Two blocks up." The woman jerked a thumb to the left. "First dive around the corner. You can't miss it unless you're lucky."

The Friar's Tap was not a place for celebration; it was for the drowning of sorrows. It had a bar

side and a lounge side, with motes of dust dancing along the slanted beams of the late-afternoon sun.

Three men sat hunched in silence over the bar. The bartender stood, back to the door, watching colored images on a TV set. Nobody else was in the bar side.

The lounge side contained tables and booths, most of which appeared in the gloom to be unoccupied. Moving slowly and looking left and right, Milton was beginning to realize that he probably wouldn't recognize Libby Davis if she were standing in front of him. He hadn't laid eyes on her in 16, 17 years.

"Oh, sweet mother."

The voice, soft and plaintive, emanated from somewhere just behind him. Turning, he peered toward the nearest booth. He saw a figure rising.

"Oh, sweet mother, it can't be. Oh, sweet heaven, no." The figure, risen now, was a woman.

Milton approached the booth and said, "Libby? Libby Davis?"

"Oh, Jerry, what have they done to you? It can't be. It's impossible."

"I'm not Gerard," Milton said. "I'm Milton. Do you remember me, Libby? Milton Dunkle."

The shadow began to subside like a balloon losing its supportive air.

"Mind if I sit down, Libby?"

Silence, utter silence.

Milton took the seat across the table. From the pale-pink light of a red-shaded lamp he was able to discern the woman's features. There wasn't a trace of the girl he remembered. The hair was ginger-colored rather than dark brown. The sluggish blue eyes were cushioned on purple puffs. The cheeks were mottled, the mouth stupidly petulant.

"I must be soused already," she was saying in a tearful voice. "I must be seeing things."

"No, Libby, you're doing all right. This is Milton here, not Gerard."

"I'm seeing double again," Libby said, resigned.

"No, you're not. Here, let me show you something." He took the folded FBI poster from his coat pocket.

A waitress came to the booth. "What can I get you folks?"

"A beer for me," Milton said impatiently. "What's yours, Libby?"

"Another beer, Kate. With a shot of vodka."

As soon as they were alone Milton Dunkle slid the unfolded poster across the table to Libby. "Take a look at this. My damn double, Gerard. That's what you're seeing, Libby. Sure, we

look alike. But not what you call identical. For instance, that scar on his forehead."

"The plastic surgeon removed that scar a year ago, Jerry," Libby said, staring dopily at the poster. "Jeez, you fooled 'em in the long run, Jerry. Your hair turning white overnight and all. You fooled 'em, that's a fact, baby."

"What are you talking about?"

"I mean this picture don't look like you at all anymore. And with your fingerprints burned off, you had it made, kid. A fresh start. What we always talked about. But we never got a good shot at it, did we, baby? Never."

"What the hell you babbling about, Libby?"

"You're beginning to sound like your old self, Jerry. Mean. Boy, do I need another drink!"

The waitress arrived almost on cue. When she'd left, Milton leaned toward Libby and spoke as clearly and precisely as he could. "*I am not Gerard. I am Milton.*"

"Milton's dead," she said, reaching for the shot glass.

"No, he's not, Libby. What's the matter with you anyway? Milton's alive and sitting right here, buying you a shot and a beer. Now where in hell is Gerard? That's what I want to find out. I got to find Gerard. You understand that, don't you?"

"If you want to find old Jerry, pal—" Libby downed the vodka and fumbled vaguely for the beer, "—if you want to find that no-good rat, what you got to do is go to a little cemetery outside Red Bank, New Jersey. That's where you'll find Jerry."

"You mean he's dead?"

"Dead and buried seven, eight months ago. That's why nobody can find him. He figured it out right down to the wire. Big joke on the fuzz. You really got a head on your shoulders, Jerry."

"I'm not Jerry," Milton said. "I'm Milton Dunkle."

Libby grinned foolishly. "That's not what the little gravestone says, pal. Here lies Milton Dunkle. That's what it says. Go out to Red Bank and take a look if you don't believe me. And look at the death certificate too. I should know. I followed his instructions to the letter. He got awful skinny toward the end but he still liked his little joke, the no-good rat." Tears were thinning her mascara.

The fingers of Milton's right hand drummed on the tabletop as if meditating privately and then scuttled with an unexpected self-volition toward the open-faced poster, pinning it down and drawing it in his direction. Watching these fingers, strong and spatulate, Milton Dunkle realized they were

the last true clue to his identity. Their distinctive personality was in their prints. Unlike the printless fingers of the late Gerard Dunkle R.I.P. Milton Dunkle, clutching clay in Red Bank, these fingers of his were living testimony.

Or were they? And who cared? And what difference did it make now?

Maudlin Libby, a catch in her voice, said, "It's not a bad picture of you, Jerry. Looks the way you used to look before the cancer got you."

Milton observed his fingers folding the poster, a ready reference to a conscienceless career, and slipping it into his breast pocket. Feeling profoundly calm, he slid from the booth and stood erect.

"Hey, baby, where you going?" Libby asked, wet eyes wide.

"I got some catching up to do," Milton said. From the thin wad of bills in his pants pocket, he took a 10-spot and put it in a dry space on the table. "One of these days you ought to run over to Queensport and see your old lady."

"Please don't leave, Jerry. Pretty please, Jerry," she begged.

"I got no choice, Libby. Goodbye."

"I'm all alone, baby."

"I guess everybody is." Milton turned resolutely and strode toward the door.

Libby's broken voice pursued him. "I need you, Jerry. I need you bad. I want you . . ."

Everyone would be wanting him pretty soon, Milton thought as he stepped from the Friar's Tap into the chill grip of winter dusk; the FBI, fuzz galore, sheriffs and their deputies, Agnes and her shyster, the alimony judge and his fat bailiffs, everybody—but it was better to be wanted by all the wrong people for all the wrong reasons than not to be wanted at all.

The lights of the city center were visible in the distance. Thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of the topcoat, he began to walk to the bus terminal where he'd left his suitcase. The fingers of his right hand touched the butt of the snub-nosed revolver and then grasped it companionably.

Extricating oneself from a tight spot may prove even simpler than getting into it.

It was a season in Manhattan when the wealthy ladies had ceased to wear their fine jewelry. They wore cheap paste replicas or no jewelry at all, because it wasn't worth being held up and possibly injured on the way home from some swank dinner dance. That was why I didn't really expect anything as I lounged in the lobby of the Plaza Hotel watching the arrivals for the charity ball that night.

Then all at once she was there, swooping through the revolving door as if the world were hers. She was lithe and lovely in her shimmering gold gown, like a goddess imagined in some half-remembered dream. In that first moment, however, my eyes were not on that lovely face or figure, but on the dazzling diamond choker that circled her pretty neck. I hadn't seen one like it in years, but there it was, catching and flashing the lights as she crossed the lobby a few feet ahead of an older man in evening clothes.

In that instant I knew it was real. She was not the sort to wear

by Edward D. Hoch

imitation anything. She could have walked into that lobby without a diamond on her and still caused a stir. If she chose to arrive wearing that choker, it was the real thing.

I left the lobby soon after that, already plotting my next moves. I knew from past experience that these affairs usually begin to break up shortly before midnight. By that time I'd be ready. At the apartment I picked up my gun, along with the moustache and rubber nose I wear for jobs like this. Then I had a decision to make. I wanted to do the job alone, and was pretty sure that I could swing it without Sammy or anyone else—but should I risk it? For a lady that lovely, the guy might just decide to play hero, and then I'd have a murder rap on my hands.

Reluctantly, I decided to take Sammy along, at least to keep the guy in line while I got the choker. It would only cost me a grand, maybe less if Sammy were hard up, and he was always hard up.

I dialed his number and listened to the familiar whining. "Hey, Chief, how are you? How's business? You been scoring without me?"

"I need somebody for tonight, Sammy. An hour's work, maybe less."

"Sure, Chief. You know me."

"Five?"

"With hardware?" Sammy asked, meaning guns.

"Yes."

"Then I gotta have a grand, Chief. You know that."

I hesitated to make it sound right, though I'd already figured on that much. "I'll go for it. I need you." Then I went on to outline exactly what he should do. It was a standard job, the sort Sammy and I had pulled before, with only a few new twists to fool the police.

I was waiting outside the Plaza when the first guests began to drift out of the charity ball, heading for their hired cars or waiting for the doorman to signal a cab. This was the tricky part, and I knew too well that all sorts of things could go wrong. If Sammy was on schedule, he would have stolen a taxi thirty minutes earlier from a lower Manhattan diner where the drivers take their breaks. Right now that taxi would be parked across 59th Street at the entrance to Central Park, waiting for my signal. With luck, that signal would come before a cruising police car spotted the stolen cab. Then it was a matter of Sammy's skill in maneuvering into the right position in line.

I was hoping the lady with the

diamond choker would leave with a large group of others. Standing in line while awaiting a cab, it was more likely her position could be calculated. If she and the man who escorted her were fourth in line, Sammy could slip into fourth position without too much difficulty. The cabs at the Plaza don't have space to form a long line. They have to turn right from 59th or come across it from the park. Either way, I figured a driver of Sammy's skill could slip in ahead of someone.

What if the lady had a car of her own—a big black limo with a chauffeur? I was ready for that one too. Sammy would pick me up with his taxi and we'd go after them; but I was hoping we could get them into the cab. In close quarters there was less chance the escort would try for a hero's role.

After thirty minutes of waiting I began to grow nervous. The bulk of the guests had departed, and the doorman's frantic whistling for taxis had tapered off to an occasional toot. I nervously smoked a cigarette while squeezing the rubber nose in my pocket. The longer I lingered here, the better the chance that I'd be recognized by some cop on the beat who knew me.

Then I saw her again, coming down the steps like some famous actress. My eyes focused on the diamond choker and I almost forgot to signal Sammy. There were two couples ahead of her, but they seemed to be together. That meant one cab. I glanced over my shoulder and raised my arm as if stretching. Almost at once I saw Sammy's cab cross 59th Street and edge toward the hotel entrance.

He was third in line! The lady with the choker would enter the taxi ahead of his!

"Pardon me," I said suddenly, darting in front of the lady and her escort.

"What's this?" the man grumbled. "That's our cab!"

I was already inside, slamming the door. As we drove away I saw them turn toward Sammy's taxi.

"Where to, mister?" my driver asked.

I hesitated, waiting to see what direction the cab behind me would take. It went by us and turned east on 58th. "Over 58th," I said. "Stay with that cab ahead."

"You mean follow them?"

"Just stay with them." I couldn't jump into Sammy's cab as I'd originally planned, but this might work out even better.

The cab ahead wove through the dark streets until it reached the haven of a Sutton Place apartment. I shoved a couple of dollar

bills at my cabbie and hopped out. The moustache and rubber nose were already in place.

As I'd hoped, the lady was first out of the taxi while her escort lingered to pay Sammy. My cab had already turned the corner when I reached her, pushed her aside, and slammed the door on the man. Sammy knew what to do. He stepped on the accelerator and the cab shot forward with its unwilling passenger.

"What is this?" the lady gasped, clearly terrified.

We faced each other on the deserted sidewalk, with the street light catching the glitter of her diamond choker. I showed her the gun and said, "You know what I want. Take it off."

There was a sound to my left and I saw the doorman appear from her building. I turned to cover him with my gun. "Don't move. I'd really hate to hurt anyone." Then, to the lady, "Come on—I want that choker. Quit stalling."

Her hands went to her neck. The doorman was frozen helpless, and Sammy was already out of sight with her boyfriend or husband. She had no choice—but when our eyes met there was something else there, something I couldn't quite read.

"I suppose there's no chance of bargaining with you," she said quietly.

"None whatever. You shouldn't wear things like that if you don't want them stolen."

The diamond choker came away from her throat and she held it out to me. That was when I saw it, in the glare of the overhead street light—a group of ugly dark bruises on her neck. I knew in that instant she'd risked wearing this valuable piece of jewelry for just one reason, to cover up those bruises.

"Thanks, lady," I told her, moving backward so I could see them both. Our eyes met again, for just an instant, and then I was gone.

Sammy was already waiting for me at my apartment. "No trouble, Chief. I drove the guy a few blocks away and dropped him near the East River. Then I went back and ditched the cab in Central Park. Did you get it?"

I tossed the diamond choker onto the table. "Yeah, I got it."

"Jeez, it's a beauty!"

"Funny thing—I think she was wearing it to cover up some marks on her throat."

"Who cares why she was wearing it? We've got it now."

"Yeah," I agreed. "I'll try to unload it in the morning."

"What about my grand?"

"You didn't have to do much for it."

"I got rid of the guy, didn't I? You couldn't have handled him alone. No chance you could have."

"Maybe." I stared down at the necklace. "Can you wait till I get the cash for this?"

"No dice, Chief. If I wait, I gotta have more than a thousand."

"All right," I agreed with a sigh. Better to have him out of it anyway. I went into the bedroom and got the money. "You didn't leave any prints on the cab?"

"Course not!" He took the money and counted it carefully. This is not a business where people trust one another.

"I'll call you again," I said as he left.

"Yeah, sure. Take it easy, Chief."

I locked the door after him and sat down to study my prize. The jewels glistened in the light from overhead, and as I studied them I could see again the deep bruises on the lady's neck. Bruises, in a line, made by fingers that had tried to choke the life from her.

Had she been mugged? Raped? Or simply assaulted by that man in the car with her? Was he her husband or her lover? I had to know the answers.

She could only have risked wearing this diamond choker to the ball because there was nothing else in her wardrobe to cover the finger marks on her throat. Understandably, she had not wanted them seen and commented upon. Did that mean the man who accompanied her was unaware of them? Had they been inflicted by a secret lover in a moment of anger?

I tossed the necklace across the table. Damn it, I was acting too much like a detective and not enough like a thief.

I picked up the *Post* the following day before noon and read the story: *Socialite Assaulted by Jewel Thief*. There was a two-column photograph of Mrs. Arnold Madison displaying the bruises on her throat, bruises which she claimed I had inflicted during the robbery!

I threw down the paper in disgust. Hell, the doorman was a witness! He must know it wasn't true!

Of course she'd slipped him money to lie about it. That was easy enough. Now she could appear in public, because there was a certified explanation for the bruises. Me! I was the explanation!

I didn't like it.

I read the rest of the article. The man with her had indeed been her husband, a prominent stockbroker; but that fact didn't answer all my questions.

I read the article through twice, and spent a long time staring at her face and bruises on her throat.

Then I decided I would have to see her again.

"Mrs. Arnold Madison?"

The voice on the other end of the phone line seemed to hesitate. "Yes?"

"I read about your robbery in the afternoon papers. A terrible thing."

"Who is this?"

"That doesn't matter," I said. "I'm just someone who may be able to get your necklace back."

"Please call the police or the insurance company if you have any information."

"Mrs. Madison—"

"Who is this?" she asked again.

"What about the bruises on your neck?"

I heard her sharp intake of breath and knew she'd remembered my voice. "You're the man who robbed me!"

"But not the man who tried to strangle you."

"What do you want?" Her voice was the cool hiss of a cornered serpent.

What did I want? "To see you, to talk about the necklace. Maybe to arrange for its return."

"For how much?"

"My price would be reasonable. We could discuss it."

"All right," she agreed after a moment. "You can come here."

"No, thanks. I don't like police."

"Where, then? I don't like jewel thieves."

"Do you know the flower show at Bryant Park? It's in a big tent there, all this week." I wanted a place where there would be plenty of people.

"I'll be there. What time?" she asked.

"Four o'clock?" I didn't want to give her time to think about calling the police.

"All right."

I hung up and left the phone booth quickly. I knew there hadn't been time for a trace, but I never take unnecessary risks.

I reached the big striped tent in the center of Bryant Park at ten minutes to four, and scouted the area for any plainclothes cops I might know by sight. Everything seemed normal, and exactly at four I saw her alight from a cab on 42nd Street and hurry up the steps to the park. She was alone.

Without the rubber nose and moustache, I didn't think she'd recognize me right away. I circled her a couple of times in the crowd, making sure she wasn't being watched, and finally approached her as she stood admiring a display of orchids. "Haven't we met before?" I asked quietly.

She turned, smiling. "I believe we have! But I didn't recognize you without your moustache."

"Are you enjoying the show?"

"In truth I've never been much

of a gardener." She was wearing a white turtleneck sweater which effectively hid the bruises on her neck.

"I'm sorry about last night." Seeing her now, I knew I'd been right to come. She was a mystery that needed solving, if only to satisfy my own curiosity.

"Why should you be? I imagine it's your profession." She eyed me openly for the first time. "But you do look much better with your own nose."

"You didn't call the police?"

"No. I felt I'd be safe enough here." They had strolled out of the tent and found a bench on which to sit. "Now, what about my necklace?"

"Would you be willing to buy it back?"

"The insurance company—"

"I don't deal with insurance companies. You can have the insurance and the necklace both."

"That would be against the law."

I shrugged. "You should never have worn it last night. A woman with your beauty doesn't need diamonds."

"Thank you for the compliment. I thought gentlemen thieves only existed in bad novels."

"I may not be a gentleman thief, but I don't go around choking my victims, either. Why did you tell that to the police?"

She shrugged. "They saw the bruises and jumped to the conclusion. At that point, the truth would have been much too complicated."

"The truth being that your husband tried to kill you."

Her eyes came up, startled, almost afraid. "Why do you say that?"

"I wasn't sure till I knew the man in the taxi was your husband. Someone tried to choke you, and you didn't report it to the police. You wore the necklace to hide the bruises. From your husband or merely from the others at the charity ball? I figured you couldn't wear the necklace around the house all day. If you were trying to hide the marks from your husband, you would have covered them with makeup rather than the necklace. And if he knew about them, chances are he caused them."

"You're pretty smart."

"I get by."

Her eyes met mine again. "Let's get down to business. What will you take for the necklace?"

"In these inflated days it's probably worth a quarter of a million."

"It's insured for half that amount. And a fence would give

you a quarter of it, wouldn't he?"

"You know a great deal about the business."

"My husband and I are prepared to pay you fifty thousand dollars for its return."

She was willing to deal, and that surprised me. I'd come half expecting a police trap, or some stalling tactic. Instead, I had myself a deal. "Seventy-five," I said, so as not to appear too anxious.

She shook her head. "Fifty or nothing."

"You'll collect from the insurance company too?"

"That's our business. Yes or no?"

I stared over at the big striped tent, trying to figure all the angles. So far the caper had cost me only one grand, paid to Sammy. A profit of forty-nine thousand was nothing to be sneezed at, especially since I'd avoid the risk of trying to fence the choker myself. "Yes. It's a deal."

The tension in her face relaxed, and I wondered why she was so anxious for the deal to go through. "Very good. Can we arrange it today—tonight?"

"I suppose so." Once I'd agreed to it, I was anxious to get the thing off my hands. "Where will the exchange be made?"

"My apartment?"

I shook my head. "Too much chance of a police trap there."

"You still don't trust me."

"Do you trust me?" I countered.

"All right," she sighed. "We'll be anyplace you name—but it can't very well be done in public."

I had to agree with her there. I thought about having Sammy steal another taxi, but decided against it. Sammy was getting greedy and it would only cost me money. "How about the lower level of Grand Central Station?" I suggested. "It's closed at night now, but we can get down there easily enough."

"Fine. Nine o'clock?"

"Agreed. I'll see you there."

I left her on the bench and walked away fast. There didn't seem to be anyone following me, but I took no chances. I went in the 42nd Street entrance to the library, took the elevator up one floor, and exited on Fifth Avenue. Then I grabbed a rush-hour bus down to my apartment to wait.

As nine o'clock approached, I grew increasingly uneasy. I was expected to go to the lower level of Grand Central Station with the diamond choker in hand, to exchange it for fifty thousand dollars in cash.

Where would Mrs. Madison and her husband come up with that

much cash on such short notice? I'd met her at four, with the banks already closed for the day. It was doubtful if people, even as wealthy as the Madisons, kept that sort of cash around the house.

That meant a trap.

Yet, if it were to be a trap, why not this afternoon in Bryant Park? The answer seemed obvious—this afternoon I wouldn't have had the necklace along. Tonight it would be with me and the police would be there waiting—but maybe I had a trick or two up my sleeve too.

I arrived at the station early, with the necklace in a bag of sweet rolls I had bought. Then I found an empty locker along the ramp to the lower level and left the bag inside. I placed the locker key in an envelope and taped it inside the swinging lid of a trash receptacle where I figured it would be safer than in my pocket.

When I went back down the ramp to meet Mrs. Madison and her husband, I found the lower level completely empty. Though I knew the area was patrolled by station guards, I figured no one would bother us for a few minutes.

The Madisons arrived promptly at nine, she with her hands stuffed deep into the pockets of a black coat, he with arms swinging and an air of jaunty uncertainty about him. I'd seen him only briefly outside the Plaza, but it was enough to know this was the same man—Arnold Madison himself.

"Well," he said as they reached the point where I stood against the closed ticket windows, "I understand you're the man responsible for last night's robbery."

"Let's just say I can arrange a deal," I said.

"Do you have the necklace?" He was a tall man, with hard gray eyes, whom I immediately disliked. His fingers were long and tapering—I could imagine them leaving those marks on her throat.

"I have it. Let's see the money." If the police were to appear at that moment, I had nothing incriminating on me.

No police came. "Show him the money," Madison said to his wife.

"Gladly." Her right hand came out of her pocket, and I noticed the dark glove first. Then I saw the pistol, a cheap, small-caliber automatic almost hidden in the palm of her hand. "I'm sorry," she said to me, lifting the gun.

Then she shot her husband cleanly through the back of the head.

It happened so fast that I had no chance to move, no opportunity to shout a warning. As Arnold Madison fell dead at my feet, she tossed the weapon down and

started to scream. I realized in that instant the deadly cleverness of her plan. The meeting with me, and this rendezvous tonight, had been used by her to rid herself of the man who'd tried to kill her. For some reason—money? social position?—divorce had been out of the question. Now she'd killed him, and provided a perfect fall guy for the police.

I was the fall guy! That's why she'd told me she was sorry before she pulled the trigger. The shot and her screams would bring the police running, and they'd find me with the gun at my feet and the necklace in my pocket. Socialite slain during deal with jewel thief. It would be her word against mine.

Only the necklace wasn't in my pocket, and that just might save me.

A station guard appeared, running, followed by a uniformed policeman. She was still standing there screaming over the body of the man she'd murdered when they reached her. "That man," she said, pointing to me. "He killed—"

"I saw it all," I told the officers. "I heard a commotion down here and came to investigate. They were arguing and I got here just as she shot him."

"He's lying!" she flung at me. "He stole my necklace! It's in his pocket!"

The officer stared at me uncertainly. Already others were running up, attracted by the noise. "There's nothing in my pockets," I said calmly, "except my identification. But I'd suggest you take the lady's right glove to check for gunpowder particles."

"Don't believe him!" she shouted.

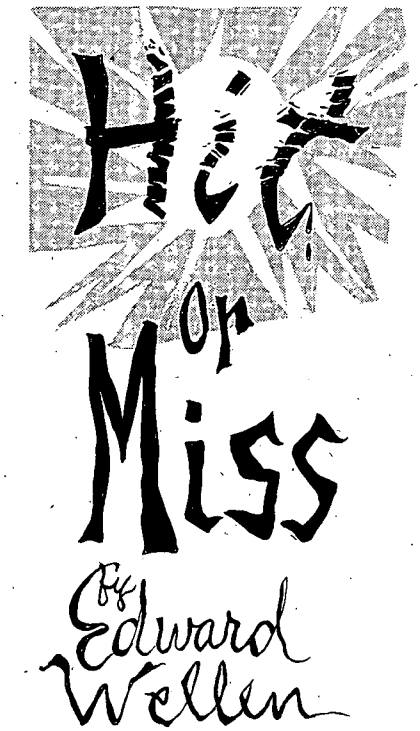
"What sort of identification, sir?" the officer asked me.

I flipped open the wallet to show my badge and ID. "Detective first grade Charles Barnes, assigned to the 91st Precinct. You can call them and check if you want."

That was when the lady's mouth fell open.

Sometimes being both a cop and a robber can get you into some tight spots, but it can get you out of them too.

Never to be beholden to anyone, one must give credit where due.



Finley Crowe stepped into the Hotel Granville, cased the lobby, went to the phone booth at the far end, and riffled his right hand through the pages of the Manhattan directory as his left hand reached below to remove a slip of paper taped to the underside of the shelf.

Still pretending to be hunting a number, and using his body as a shield, he brought up the paper, unfolded it and read it. All it said was *819*. Finley Crowe now knew that the man he had to kill was staying in room 819 of the Hotel Granville.

He balled the slip of paper and tossed it at the first sand urn he passed. Too sure of his aim, he failed to see that he had missed the desert waste. The ball hit the rim and bounded to the carpet.

Carefully watching carelessly to make sure that no one noticed him, Finley Crowe gained the stairs and started up.

Leroy Moore bent to pick up the ball of paper. He straightened slowly, silently cursing his aching back. He started to drop the crumple of paper into the sand urn, then something moved him to stay his hand.

He unwadded the paper and smoothed it out enough to read it. All it said was *618*. Leroy Moore

made up his mind to hurry and play 618 and play it big. It would have been a sin to overlook this sign.

Clifford Fant, in Room 618, had a hangup hangup. His hand shook so that it took him three stabs before he hung up the phone.

The girl had disguised her voice but he knew who it had to be. Making time with her, though she was hardly his type, was paying off now. It wasn't luck but forethought that had given him a pair of ears in syndicate headquarters—and now a voice.

"There's a contract out on you. You'd better hurry out of there. The hit man knows where you are."

Then, before he could ask questions or even frame questions to ask, *click*!

It was new to him to be on the same side of the law—the wrong side—as his clients. He had always managed to stay on the right side while advancing the fortunes of those on the wrong side. A syndicate mouthpiece, he had lately begun practicing the art of avoiding subpoenas.

Now it seemed that his former clients were taking no chances on the privileged communications between client and lawyer remaining privileged. They were not trusting to the canon of ethics alone to seal his lips, and since syndicate headquarters itself had put out the contract, it meant there was no appeal.

He tried to pull himself together but the walls of the room closed in like a trap. *You'd better hurry out of there. The hit man knows where you are.* He didn't dare check out. He would just disappear. He could carry what effects he could on his person and sneak out. He looked around.

His gun, of course; he had started packing a gun these past few weeks, sensing that something like this might happen. It was one more thing putting him on the wrong side of the law, because in his fugitive state he could hardly have openly sought a permit. Even as he stuck the gun in his waistband he knew it would avail little against the skilled hit man they would have sent after him. Still, its solid weight was some comfort.

Now to fill his pockets with razor, toothbrush, socks, shorts; really not much else worth taking or risking taking. *You'd better hurry out of there.* Quick. Otherwise, dead.

Murray Lenox, in room 819, shot too much lather out of the can of shaving foam. His finger

had been too heavy on the valve because he had been thinking savage thoughts about Ms. Missy.

Ms. Missy; he had invented the name so that she might ride the wave of women's lib. He had plucked her out of a nothing rock group going nowhere. Did she guess why he had picked her? Her voice and delivery were nothing special. Did she know he loved her?

He had spent months on the road, hitting every radio station with a disc jockey having a halfway decent following. It took a lot of buttering—and a lot of bread—but he had publicized and payola'd her recording into a hit number. Now that she was high on the charts and had hit the Big Apple, Ms. Missy had a swelled head.

She had come right out and said that maybe Murray's cut of the take was too much, that maybe for the same amount she could get a big-time agent-manager who would make her more than a one-shot.

He had just looked at her, turned, and walked away. Walked away with stiff dignity, though expecting her to call after him and say she was sorry and beg him to come back.

She hadn't called after him, and she hadn't rung up yet, but give her time. She would miss him, realize how much she owed him and how much she still needed him.

He slapped the foam on his face. He had enough to build a Santa Claus beard. He looked in the mirror, he looked in his heart. Some Santa Claus. He reached for his razor, stopped at a knocking.

Missy!

He limped eagerly to the door.

Finley Crowe rapped again on the door of room 819. He had waited a few minutes on the landing before venturing onto the eighth-floor corridor. That was as much to get his breath back after the climb as to screw the silencer onto his gun.

The years of being a hit man were telling on him. No, it was just the years. The hit stuff didn't bother him.

The door of room 819 opened.

Crowe stared, but it was only the lather that had taken him aback. The right build, the right color hair, and the right color eyes; this was Clifford Fant, all right.

He and Cliff went back to the old days, but he had never let sentiment get in the way of his work.

The man's head jerked at the sight of the gun. His hands went up to push the sight away.

The man had time to say, "No." Yes.

Just as Clifford Fant eased past the last doorway on the sixth floor and silently made it onto the stairs, he came face to face with Finley Crowe coming as silently down.

In Crowe, the feeling that he was seeing a ghost prompted the motor reflex of his gun hand. If it was the knowledge that he had already done his number that slowed Crowe, it was the knowledge that his hit man had found him that sped Fant.

It was a draw. They held each other at gunpoint.

Fant said, without hope, "Let's talk this over."

Crowe's reply was a real shocker. "Sure."

Crowe's credit card let them into room 819.

They looked down at the stiff just inside the door. Fant shivered. But for the 618-819 mixup, which he and Crowe had figured out together, that shattered, spattered face would be his. He shivered again. He could still wind up a corpse if Crowe should decide they couldn't pull it off. He edged away and inched his hand toward the gun in his waistband.

Crowe, turning to face him, smiled at what he plainly took to be Fant's squeamishness. "You registered here under another name, didn't you?"

Fant nodded.

Crowe nodded. "So it don't matter if the cops never find out who the stiff is, as long as the mob thinks it's you. Only problem might be the stiff's fingerprints. If I thought I had to, I'd scrape the guy's fingers raw. But look at his feet."

Fant frowned puzzledly. "Are you talking about *toe*prints?"

Crowe permitted himself a flash of irritation. "No. I mean, look at his shoes. One shoe's built up a bit. Means he was never in the armed services. That, together with the odds he's a square john, means his fingerprints won't be on file. I'll just check his I.D., make sure." He went through the stiff's pockets. "The guy's legit—if being a talent representative's legit. Now, change shoes with him." He handed Fant the stiff's wallet and keys.

Fant stared at Crowe. "What?"

"Change shoes with him. That'll be good enough; who's going to notice the inch difference when they lay him out?"

Fant grimaced as he walked back and forth in the dead man's shoes. The stiff's shoes fitted Fant fine but they gave him a limp.

Still, that would prove a plus worth getting used to when he went forth in his new incarnation.

Crowe got up from tying the shoestrings on Fant's shoes on Lenox's feet in neat bows.

"Okay, Fant. Now we're all set for the switch."

Fant stole out into the corridor, found a linen cart in the service closet, and sneaked it back to room 819. He and Crowe wrapped Lenox in a sheet. When Fant bent to pick up his end of Lenox, his gun fell out of his waistband. Crowe picked it up and politely handed it to Fant. They stuffed Lenox into the linen cart, rolled the cart to the service elevator, and took it down to the sixth floor. Fant found he had kept his key; he let the three of them into room 618.

Fant and Crowe lifted Lenox out of the cart, unwrapped him, and arranged him on the floor.

Crowe fitted his silencer onto his gun again. For a moment Fant felt faint, but Crowe simply drove another bullet through the body to pin the killing to this room. Crowe unscrewed the silencer and pocketed it and the gun. Then he fiddled with the air-conditioner till it stopped working. This gave him the excuse to open the window. The open window took care of the missing first bullet.

Together, Crowe and Fant went over 618, wiping all surfaces that might have taken fingerprints.

Before leaving room 618 for the last time, Clifford Fant looked down at the body of Murray Lenox, and felt a sudden sympathy for Clifford Fant.

Fant and Crowe went out with the linen cart and hung the *Do Not Disturb* sign outside the door of room 618.

They got the linen cart safely back in its eighth-floor closet and Fant let them into room 819 with Lenox's key. Crowe helped Fant clean up the mess in the room. Crowe found the bullet embedded in the wall. He gouged it out and pocketed it, then looked around and sighed. Fant echoed the sigh. There seemed nothing more to do but part.

This working out of their mutual bind suited both; Fant, because it meant he stayed alive but passed for dead—which would help him stay alive under a new name and in a new place; Crowe, because it meant he kept his name for always making a clean hit.

Before leaving, Crowe rested his eyes on Fant's face, the look saying that his eyes had better not ever rest on Fant's face again.

Fant took no chances on Crowe's changing his mind. He

quickly packed Lenox's bags, then phoned the desk to say he—Murray Lenox—was checking out. He worried as he signed the tab with Lenox's name, but none of the Hotel Granville's personnel—desk clerk, bellhop, or doorman—focused on anything but the formalities and the gratuities.

He changed cabs several times, winding up at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. His gun would force him to forego planes and to go by bus, train, and rented car, but that made it all the easier to lose himself. He would travel on Lenox's credit cards till it became dangerous to do so; the monthly billing date would be the deadline. Then Murray Lenox would disappear, say while out boating or swimming in very deep waters.

At which point Clifford Fant would take on a new identity and live out his borrowed life above one border or below the other as best he might.

Ms. Missy used the Hotel Granville's courtesy phone to call room 819. Room 819 did not answer. Ms. Missy's rocker platforms carried her to the desk clerk. She was not too worried to give him her best smile. Mr. Lenox? Sorry, Mr. Lenox had just checked out; she had missed him by minutes. Sorry, Mr. Lenox left no forwarding address. Ms. Missy's smile died.

It was Leroy Moore's lucky day. Number 618 hit.

He told his boss that he was quitting, and there were hard feelings when he told the man what he thought of him.

Leroy Moore made big plans to spend his big money, but when it came time for him to collect his winnings he found that the runner with whom he had placed the bet had kept his twenty dollars instead of passing it on to the policy bank. The runner had figured 618 would not come out. It had, and the runner had decided his best bet was to be among the missing.

The syndicate boss' words came out wrapped in cigar smoke.

"We only got this Leroy Moore's word he played twenty bucks on 618. Be good public relations, though, to give him his twenty bucks back. If that don't suit him, maybe he'd like a few broken bones better. Now, about the runner that took off: quick as we find him we finish him. Get Finley Crowe to do the job. There's a guy that don't never mess up a hit."

There are times when that one little step which one omits may, indeed, safeguard his innocence.

One Step to Murder

Adair leaned back in his chair at the kitchen table which he used as a desk and mopped perspiration from his face with the towel slung around his neck. Then he paused, frowning at the open window in the kitchen's rear wall. Someone was clumping down the fire escape out there.

Now the sleazy curtain was twitched aside and Adair found himself looking into the business end of a pistol.

The man holding the gun leaned in far enough to ask, "Did you see the guy that ran down this fire escape a few minutes ago?"

"No," Adair said. "Who are you? An irate husband who came home before you were expected?"

The man snorted and lowered the gun. "I'm a police officer. Stay put. I'll be back in a minute."

Then he was gone, his footsteps rattling down the metal stairs toward the ground, one floor below Adair's window. Adair blinked, shrugged, and turned his attention back to his typewriter.

He had just typed: *At that very moment on the other side of the city, the killers were laying plans for their next move in the deadly game*—when he heard the footsteps returning up the fire escape.

This time the man pushed back the curtain and stepped in over the low windowsill. Adair was glad to see he had put his gun away.

"My name is Brooks," he said.

by Jamie Ellis

"There's been some trouble upstairs—"

"I don't know a thing about it," Adair told him.

"In the apartment directly above yours, a man was shot to death just a few minutes ago. Did you hear—"

"No," Adair said. He eyed the man—young, large, wearing a T-shirt, rumpled slacks and house slippers—and added, "Is that the new autumn uniform for cops?"

"What? Oh. No, sir, I live in the building." The man took a leather folder from his hip pocket and flipped it open to show Adair a shield and ID card. "The shooting took place right at eleven forty-five. Surely you heard—"

"Not a thing. Good night and good luck."

With this, Adair turned back to his typewriter, while the young cop, Brooks, stared at him with growing anger.

"Now, just a minute," Brooks snapped. "You don't seem to understand. There's been an attempted robbery and a murder here tonight, right over your head! The killer took off down the fire escape—he had to go past your window."

Adair sighed, leaned back in his chair, and said, "Look, pal, I've been working here for the past three hours. In all that time no

one has been on that fire escape until you showed up. No one at all."

"You were in the kitchen all the time?"

Adair frowned. "Well . . . I did go to the bathroom once or twice. I guess it's *possible* someone—but you said this happened within the last ten minutes. I haven't moved out of my chair for at least half an hour."

"I see." Brooks leaned out the window, called, "Simmons? I'll be up in a minute!"

Then he turned back into the kitchen. He looked at the table, half hidden under heaps of yellow copy paper, ash trays and dead beer cans, with Adair's typewriter on the end nearest the window.

"I live alone," Adair said, "and I'm a lousy housekeeper."

Officer Brooks nodded. "Your name is—"

"William Pitt Adair, age 45, profession, writer."

"This is where you work?"

"Good a place as any." Adair hesitated, then asked with some reluctance, "What happened upstairs?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Farley—do you know them?" Adair shook his head; Brooks continued: "Someone broke into their place, entered through the fire-escape window. The Farleys were in bed, asleep. Mrs. Farley was awakened by a noise. She got up to investigate. As she came out of the bedroom, she was slugged. Next thing she knew, she was tied to a chair in the livingroom."

"She didn't see the thief?" Adair asked.

"Not then. But she could hear voices from the bedroom, and see that the light had been turned on in there. The thief was trying to force Mr. Farley to give him the combination to a little safe built into the bedroom closet."

Adair interrupted, "What in the world were they doing with a built-in safe, in a cheap fleabag like this?"

"Mr. Farley ran a cafe in the neighborhood. He had the bad habit of bringing the day's receipts home with him. That's why he had the safe installed."

Adair grunted. "He never heard of night bank depositories?"

Brooks shrugged beefy shoulders. "I wouldn't know. In any case, Farley wouldn't give the thief the combination. He started to yell. The thief shot him—twice—and ran out to the livingroom. Mrs. Farley got a glimpse of him then, as he cut across and into the kitchen, and—"

"Out and down the fire escape?" Adair said. He stared at the dingy wall opposite his chair,

then shook his head. "I don't think so. He must have gone up to the roof."

"No, sir. The fire escape ends outside the Farleys' kitchen window. From there up to the roof is a twenty-foot stretch of bare brick wall."

"Well—"

"Two shots were fired, Mr. Adair. My wife and I heard them. We live just across the corridor from the Farleys. I was over there pounding on the front door in a very few seconds, and inside the place seconds after that. It's—strange—that you didn't notice any of the racket."

Adair smiled wryly. "I don't pay much attention to what's going on around me when I'm working."

Brooks studied the older man with some interest. In appearance, William Pitt Adair was nothing to write home about. He was short and pudgy, with a round, jowly face and a crop of limp brown hair liberally sprinkled with gray.

At the moment he wore a pair of Bermuda shorts, a stained short-sleeved shirt, and a bath towel that hung limply from around his thick neck.

Brooks said slowly, "You didn't see or hear anything. You don't know the Farleys. That about it?"

Adair squinted at Brooks from under shaggy brows. He said, "That's it. Now, if you'll excuse me—"

The wail of a siren cut through the night outside.

Officer Brooks headed for the window, stepped out onto the fire escape, then leaned back in long enough to say, "That will be the homicide squad. They'll want to talk to you, Mr. Adair. To everyone in the building, of course. So try not to get too engrossed in your writing."

"Fat chance," Adair muttered.

He barely had time to open a fresh can of beer and sit down again at the typewriter when the doorbell buzzed.

This time, as Adair had half-expected, his caller was someone he knew—Sergeant MacIvers, of central homicide.

"I'll be darned, it *is* you," the bulky sergeant said.

Adair sighed. "Yeah. How are you, Mac?"

"Fine. Captain Holcomb wants a word. Upstairs."

Adair didn't argue. As the two walked along the dimly-lit corridor to the stairs, MacIvers said, "After you quit the newspaper racket a couple years ago, you just dropped out of sight. What happened to you, Adair?"

"I retired," Adair said, sardonically.

"Huh. In the old days, you'd've been up in this dame's apartment and had the case all solved before us dumbos from homicide even showed up."

Adair didn't answer.

There was a group of curious tenants in the third-floor corridor, grouped around the open doorway of the Farley apartment. Adair saw that the door itself, the wood around the lock splintered, was propped against the wall to one side of the doorway. Young Brooks must have kicked it in.

Inside the apartment, Adair looked around, while Sergeant MacIvers went across the livingroom to join two or three plainclothesmen who were talking together outside a closed door in the far wall.

Adair's bushy eyebrows climbed as he noticed the furnishings in the room. Evidently the Farleys had money, and at least one of them had very good taste. The livingroom was done in shades of pastel blue and silver, and the difference between it and Adair's place was enough to make him wince.

The one jarring note was a wooden kitchen chair, lying on its side near the center of the room. A tangled mass of adhesive tape lay around the chair, a few lengths still dangling from the chair itself. He eyed it critically.

Against the wall in front of the chair was a big color TV set. Two fat easy chairs and a sofa were ranged around, centered on the television set.

Now a large, silver-maned man in a neat gray suit came toward Adair, hand outstretched.

"Well, well, Bill Adair in person," he said.

Adair gave the proffered hand a brief shake, and said, "How are you, Lieutenant—no, it's Captain now."

"Yeah," Captain Holcomb said. "What's with you, Bill?"

"I get by . . . MacIvers said you wanted to see me."

"Sure! Old friends like us should keep in touch."

Adair snorted. "You start talking about friendship, George, and I'll start asking for a lawyer."

Holcomb laughed jovially. "Same old Adair . . . No, I thought you might be able to help us on a couple of minor points. Come on into the kitchen. Little more private in there. What've you been doing since you quit the *Times*?"

"Sleeping a lot better at night," Adair said.

"Uh-huh. I'll bet." Holcomb gestured in passing at the overturned wooden chair. "That's where Mrs. Farley was tied.

Bound hand and foot with adhesive tape, and gagged with a few more yards of the stuff. She'd almost managed to work her hands free when Officer Brooks came in."

Adair nodded. "Nice of the killer to bring that chair in here from the kitchen. Saved messing up these easy chairs with sticky tape."

"Yeah," Holcomb said, deadpan. "Very nice."

The kitchen was empty when they reached it, except for a fingerprint man plying his trade around the window that opened onto the fire-escape landing.

Captain Holcomb straddled a chair and rested his arms on the top of the chair's back. He nodded Adair to another chair, and said, "It's like this: Officer Brooks lives just across the hallway. He came home tonight, as usual, a little after eleven o'clock. He works the three-to-eleven shift in scout-car division. Anyway, he barely had time to take off his shirt and reach for a drink, when he and his wife heard a sudden burst of loud voices, then two gunshots.

"Brooks ran out to the corridor where he heard a strangled, moaning sound coming from the Farley apartment. He busted in the front door—it was bolted on the inside—and found Mrs. Farley trussed up like a Christmas turkey, more or less. He tore the gag from her mouth. She was somewhat hysterical, but managed to tell him what had happened.

"Brooks gave the apartment a fast once-over. He found Mr. Farley in the bedroom, lying on the twin bed nearest the door. His wrists and ankles were taped together, and he had two bullet holes in his chest.

"Brooks went on through the joint, and out onto the fire escape. Nothing to see out there.

"Then, while he stayed with Mrs. Farley, his wife went back to their place and called headquarters. A scout car was here in a couple of minutes, and Brooks and one of the officers started a quick search of the building. They ran into a little problem."

Holcomb rested his chin on his crossed arms and looked across the table at Adair.

Adair shrugged. "I told the kid it was possible the killer went by my window while I was out of the room."

"Yeah. But not too likely. And there's a young couple in the apartment directly below yours, Bill. Tonight they spent an hour or so admiring the full moon, sitting on the bottom steps of the fire escape. Brooks found them

there right after he talked to you. They told him that no one had gone up or come down those stairs—at least, not all the way down—in all the time they were there. So . . ."

"So?" Adair frowned.

"How did the killer get out? Brooks was at the only door, this couple at the bottom of the fire escape. There's no other exit from the apartment."

Adair shifted restlessly on his chair. "Maybe the killer never left."

"Maybe. Of course, he might have gone down the fire escape just one flight—to the landing outside your window, and then into your place . . . But you say he didn't do that."

"Now, look—"

"I'm not accusing *you*, Bill," the captain said, looking shocked. "It never occurred to me—"

The kitchen door suddenly swung inward and Adair glanced around. A tallish blonde was standing there, wearing a pair of frilly pajamas and a robe. Her long hair was tousled and her feet were bare. She blinked at Adair through red-rimmed eyes. Behind her stood one of Holcomb's detectives.

"Have you—have you caught the man?" she asked hoarsely.

"This is your neighbor from downstairs, Mrs. Farley," Holcomb said. "Have you met?"

Inez Farley's eyes narrowed. "I don't know. You understand, only the bedroom light was on. The rest of the apartment was dark, and I only got a glimpse—"

"For crying out loud," Adair muttered. "What is this?"

"It *might* be the same voice I heard," Inez Farley said nervously. "I can't be sure—about anything."

"Of course," Holcomb soothed. "Try to take it easy."

The detective with the woman reached past her to pull shut the door. Adair turned back to Holcomb.

"We have to check out everything," the captain said, with a deprecating shrug. "And, of course, when young Brooks talked to you, a few minutes after the killing, you *were* in a sweat—sweating like a field hand, Brooks said—sitting near an open window on a cool night like tonight. As if you might have been running up and down fire escapes . . ."

Adair sputtered, "Of all the—listen, when I work, the sweat runs in streams. It *is* work, believe me!"

"Of course. How successful have you been at this writing kick, Bill? Make a lot of money?"

Adair snorted. "Hell, no. But

enough to get by, without turning burglar. And I had some savings—"

"Uh-huh. Why did you quit your solid job at the *Times*?"

"A lot of reasons. A stomach ulcer, for one. I was sick of people and their lousy problems, for another. None of your business, Holcomb, to begin with."

The captain studied Adair's somewhat flushed face for a moment. "What kind of stuff do you write now?"

Adair grimaced. "Fact-detective stories."

"Oh, brother," Holcomb said, his gray eyes widening. "That's certainly a switch on what you wrote for that lousy newspaper. The 'fact' part, I mean. Well, stay put."

The captain walked out of the kitchen. Almost at once Officer Brooks came in. Adair saw that the young cop had taken time to put on a shirt and regulation shoes.

Brooks eyed Adair with some interest, even a touch of pity. He said, "Too bad—for you—that those people were camped down at the bottom of the fire escape, Mr. Adair."

Adair didn't answer. He lit a cigarette and puffed it thoughtfully, drumming his fingertips on the tabletop. He had told Captain Holcomb the truth; he had walked away from the newspaper game because he was heartily sick of sticking his nose into the messes

people made of their lives. It was no coincidence that these days he wrote only about historic criminal cases, all safely closed and far removed in time from the present.

He had no intention of getting involved in this lousy business tonight, even though his old friend Holcomb was apparently dallying with the idea that Adair might know more about it than he was telling.

He looked up at Brooks. "Funny thing. With all night to work in, the killer picks the time just after you, a cop, come home—when you're sure to hear the shots."

Brooks shrugged. "But I did hear the shots. So did my wife, and two or three other tenants on this floor. And Mrs. Farley didn't fire them—no way."

"You know her?"

"Just to say 'hello' to in the corridor. My wife and me sometimes went to Farley's cafe for hamburgers—he was a buddy-buddy type, you know? Big smile and glad hand. Did have good hamburgers at his place."

"Did the wife work there?"

"No. She sort of dabbles around in arty stuff. Belongs to one of these little theater groups, you know? That kind of thing. Calls herself a 'set designer,' I think." Brooks smiled wryly.

"Set designer," Adair said. "That figures. I guess a kitchen chair to be tied to is a little more dramatic than an easy chair—and easier to work with."

"Huh?"

"Nothing. When you broke in the front door, what did you see? She was in the chair—"

"Yeah. She managed to get her hands almost free from the adhesive tape. Had it all over her, looked like a mummy."

"You happen to consider that she might've wrapped herself up? That her hands were almost free because she hadn't been able to get them any tighter?"

"Sure," Brooks said. "It's the first thing I did think of. But there isn't any way she could have shot her husband, ditched the gun—we haven't found it anywhere—and got herself in that chair before I was inside."

Adair grunted dubiously. "Maybe—maybe not."

Brooks glanced at the closed door, back at Adair. In a confidential voice he said, "I think she had a boyfriend, some guy who helped her set things up. Then at the right time *he* killed Farley and took off, leaving Mrs. Farley with a sort of perfect alibi. You know?"

Adair sighed. "Could be. Only how did he get out?"

Brooks shuffled his size twelves, looked embarrassed, and muttered, "Heck, Mr. Adair, lots of guys get tangled up with women. End up doing things they wouldn't dream of, ordinarily. Especially guys your age. You—"

"Yeah, I know, I know," Adair said. "Did Holcomb put you up to this, or was it your idea?"

Brooks stood motionless, staring. His face reflected a moment's chagrin. Before he could speak, the door opened and Holcomb bustled in.

"Okay," the captain said without preamble. "I know you used to be hell with the women, Bill, but I just can't see you and Inez Farley as a duo. For one thing, she's a good head taller than you, and twenty years younger."

"Thanks—I think," Adair said. "You finally tumble to the fact that the lady did it, all by herself?"

"I . . . don't know about that. She's certainly in it. That bump on the back of her head wouldn't daze a fly. Looks like she rapped herself with the heel of a shoe or something. No, we found the gun just now. Right where these boneheads of mine should've looked in the first place."

"In the water tank?" Adair said.

"Yeah. Naturally. Little .22 target pistol with a silencer. Two shots fired. No prints on the gun, but—"

"Captain," Brooks said suddenly, "those shots I heard didn't come from any .22, much less one with a silencer!"

"That *is* a problem," Holcomb sighed. "But the doctor tells me Farley died of a .22 caliber bullet that smashed through his heart. Very likely from that gun. We'll know for sure when ballistics runs a comparison test."

Brooks shook his head firmly. "It wasn't a .22 I heard."

Adair rose, paced to the kitchen window and back again, trailing a cloud of cigarette smoke. He stopped. "See if you can find a TV schedule," he said.

Holcomb frowned, then nodded his head slowly. He thumbed the puzzled Brooks out of the room.

"Found out a couple of things about Inez," the captain said. "Seems she's interested in more than stagecraft at this amateur theater where she hangs out. She's been having a cozy affair with one of the actors and her husband found out about it. A friend of his we talked to says that Farley was about to divorce her—and he had all the money in the family. So Inez would've been out in the cold without a dime."

Adair nodded absently. "So she arranged this stage play of her

own. Waited till her husband was asleep tonight, drilled him with a silenced gun, then set the stage and waited."

"Yeah," Holcomb said. "Since she'd be the obvious choice for the starring role, she needed a very good alibi. Only—" The captain broke off with a discontented shrug.

Adair went on, "She knew when Brooks would get home. Knew how he would react—as he did—to the sound of shots. All very nice, except she made a bad mistake by trying to make anyone believe that a normal red-blooded wife, sleeping in the same room with her husband, would get out of bed herself to investigate a strange noise."

Holcomb laughed shortly. "My wife wouldn't dream of it—she'd make *me* get up. Every time."

"So would any other wife," Adair said.

"But the burst of loud voices, men's voices, and the shots," Holcomb said. "You think—"

"Let's find out," Adair told him, as Brooks came back in, carrying a folded newspaper.

Holcomb took the paper, opened it to the night's television schedule. "Well, now, at ten-thirty, there was a shoot-'em-up gangster movie on. For about the tenth time." Holcomb lifted the paper closer to his eyes. "Uh-huh. There's a tiny penciled check beside the movie listing."

"That's that, then," Adair said.

"Wait a minute," Brooks protested. "For gosh sake, how could this dame know there'd be the sound of gunshots in the movie just when she wanted them?"

Holcomb snorted. "Everybody in the country that ever watches late movies on television has seen this one at least once. Loud voices? Gunshots? That's about all there is to the thing."

"She knew that," Adair said. "She waited until the night it was on—tonight—and then when she was sure that Brooks was home, the first scene that started that would end in gunfire, she turned up the sound as loud as it would go. Then turned the set off immediately after the shots."

Brooks was shaking his head again. "No, sir. She just didn't have *time* to turn off the set and get settled in that chair like I found her."

"Big, expensive set like that, it probably has a remote-control device to go with it," Adair said.

Holcomb was already on his way out. In a very few moments he was back, gingerly holding on his palm a little black box studded with push buttons.

"Under a sofa, where she'd

kicked it after using it to turn up the sound, then turn off the set," Holcomb said.

The fingerprint man Adair had seen earlier poked his head in the kitchen door. He said unhappily, "Captain, I—"

"The print you lifted off this button that turns off the set, it matches Mrs. Farley's—right?"

"Wrong," the man said dismally. "It's not her fingerprint. Or her husband's."

Holcomb muttered a few short, ugly words. He squinted thoughtfully at Adair. "So. She *did* have help, after all."

Adair ran his fingers through his mop of limp brown-gray hair. Then he brightened. "She was wearing pajamas and a robe . . ."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm afraid we'll need your prints, Adair. You're really all that's left—"

"Not quite," Adair grinned. He turned to the fingerprint man. "You can push buttons with your fingers and you can also push buttons with your *toes*, and a person's fingerprints and toe prints don't match—"

The man, swearing under his breath, was gone.

Adair, Holcomb and Brooks stared at each other, waiting. They didn't have to wait long. They heard a woman's voice lifting in protest, then screaming that subsided into frustrated, hopeless sobbing.

The fingerprint man came back. He said briefly, "Her right big toe."

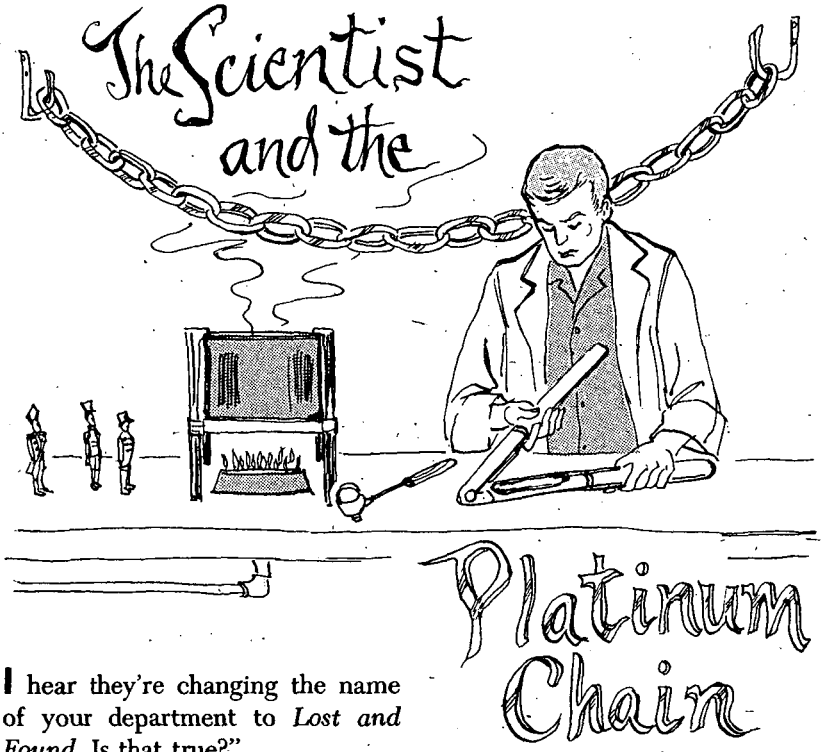
Not long after that, Captain Holcomb walked downstairs with Adair. At Adair's door, the captain said, "How about coming along downtown with me? I'll be off duty in an hour, we can go somewhere for a late drink."

"No thanks," Adair said. "You're a nice guy, George, but I don't want any part of you, or murder cases."

He nodded, went inside the apartment and shut the door gently but firmly in the captain's face. On the door hung a little, black-lettered sign: PLEASE! DO NOT DISTURB!

The captain snorted and walked away.

To the well-informed, the best ideas are frequently common property.



The Scientist and the Platinum Chain

"I hear they're changing the name of your department to *Lost and Found*. Is that true?"

Edgar Grey's freckled face wore an expression of sweet and honest curiosity. It was a friendly jibe, if somewhat short on tact, but Lieutenant Trask didn't strike back; instead, he rolled with the punch, slyly turning the other cheek.

"You're batting five hundred," he said. "We're the 'Lost' part; you two handle 'Found.' "

Cyriack Skinner Grey, relaxed in his wheelchair, smiled at the exchange, mentally calling it a draw.

"First a sack of diamonds, and

now a platinum chain," Edgar said. "What next?"

"You, I hope!" the detective said. "And I won't even ask your father to help in the search, because there won't be any!"

"Platinum's a very heavy metal," the elder Grey said, snubbing both of them. "A chain of over a hundred links, even small ovals, could weigh five pounds or more."

"A good estimate," Trask said, a note of admiration in his voice. "They told me sixty-two troy ounces—they run twelve to a pound, as I'm sure you know—or about eighty-three ordinary ones."

Edgar whistled softly. "That's what's disappeared this time? And in a locked room, yet—to coin a phrase." He was only fourteen, but had an I.Q. high enough to justify a "genius" rating, and the chutzpah of the ten most feisty cabdrivers in New York. That he was amiable and good-hearted may be credited to paternal guidance and example, particularly the latter. "Must be worth a fortune; what's platinum selling for these days, Dad?"

"Last time I bought some—a crucible for the lab—it came to one hundred sixty dollars an ounce, as a rough estimate. It's scarcer than gold and a lot more useful."

"The chain's a mere ten-thousand-dollar item," the lieutenant said. "But that's not the problem; the company probably spends that much on paper clips annually. It's almost certainly the murder weapon, which is what bugs us. The victim was strangled—garroted, so to speak—with something like that, judging from the marks on his neck. And," he added, looking at Edgar, "the room wasn't locked."

"I didn't mean that literally," the boy explained. "It's just a term used in detective stories—which you guys never read, any more than doctors go for medical fiction—for all cases where the victim apparently couldn't have been killed in the circumstances. That is—" Here he broke off in some embarrassment.

by Arthur Porges

"A good definition will take more thought," his father said dryly.

"Nevertheless, I get his point," Trask said. "And he's right. There's no way that chain could have disappeared, but it did."

He saw Grey jabbing at a shiny

metal box on one side of the wheelchair, and asked, "Say, what's that? New, isn't it?"

The scientist-engineer, having lost the use of his legs, spent much time in the chair and, as his friends maintained, not altogether in jest, had fitted it with more conveniences than many a luxury apartment.

"Yes," he said. "It's a cooler, much miniaturized, with no bulky compressor; uses the thermal-electric cooling effect that was developed recently. Now I can offer you iced tea, lemonade, or even ice cream. Not you, Edgar," he added with mock sternness. "You can make it to our refrigerator, and this thing holds only about a quart." He looked at the detective. "What'll you have?"

"Lemonade will be fine," Trask said, fascinated as he watched the golden liquid spurt fragrantly from a tiny faucet into the glass Grey held under it. He sipped, nodded approval, and said, "It's really cold; your gadget works," and as Grey's eyebrows rose, added quickly, "as I'd expect."

"So far," the scientist said, "we've had just a few highlights. Now let's have it from the beginning; seems an interesting case."

"Right," Trask said, gulping the last of his drink. "The murder took place at Ezekiel Cooper & Sons; a very old firm, started over a century ago, and still run by the family. Silversmiths, although nowadays they also work in gold, platinum, and even rarer stuff for alloys; maximum security, naturally. With all that gold around, especially at today's prices, nobody gets out unsearched to the skin." He handed the empty glass to Grey, who refilled it.

"The man killed was Nóah Cooper—they go for biblical names—new president of the firm. His father, Esau, died a month ago. Well, Noah was in his suite of rooms, busy with lead soldiers . . ."

Here he paused, obviously expecting a reaction, which was immediately forthcoming, but from Edgar, who exclaimed, "Wha-at?"

"That's right," the detective said, smiling a bit wryly. "With all that gold around, Noah Cooper went for molding lead soldiers—and don't sneer; he duplicates rare old types that sell for fantastic amounts. Even his modern replicas cost plenty, and they're meticulously made for accuracy and detail; beautiful work. Anyhow, he has the little lab as part of his suite. He melts the lead over a gas flame, by the way. None of that is relevant, probably. What counts is that he was a mean and nasty fellow, very hard to get

along with by anyone's standards.

"Now, the suspect: old employee named George Witherspoon. He's also a hardhead, but a real artist in metal. Best man they have, but set in his ways and full of pride. Hates to take orders, which Noah likes to give, unpleasantly. Naturally, they clashed the minute Cooper took over from the former head, his father. Wednesday last, Witherspoon was hauled up on the carpet again; Noah wanted him to cut corners on a fancy gold medallion they were making for a wealthy industrialist, and the old man balked. Admittedly, he's slowed down a bit, and is crotchety, but does do top work and won't be rushed. People outside heard them quarreling, then a scuffle of some kind, but didn't dare go in; Cooper didn't welcome anybody meddling or even coming in unless asked. OK, about ten minutes later Witherspoon comes out, looking rather dazed, and says, 'He's dead.' I should say," Trask went on, "that while Cooper was only thirty, and the old man sixty-two, anybody could spot the winner if they tangled: a flabby hundred and twenty pounds against a hulking, vigorous two hundred; in fact, the old guy could have pinched Noah's head off with two fingers. But the fact is, or so it seems, he used the chain." He paused for a long drink of the cool lemonade, cleared his throat, and said, "The chain; in 1900, when the firm was already well-established, Jacob Cooper had the idea of a company chain, one platinum link for each year since their founding. Everybody went for it, so today there are a hundred and twelve links and the chain hangs from two sterling hooks in the president's suite—or did; now it's gone."

"Simple," Edgar said. "Witherspoon melted it down after the murder."

"Not over a gas flame, all Cooper has in there," the lieutenant said quickly. "None of the fancy ovens and torches used in the real workshops. I looked into that, sonny; platinum melts at seventeen fifty-five centigrade. Just try getting anywhere near that with gas!"

Grey nodded approval. "Absolutely right," he said.

"Nor did he toss it out of a window," the detective said. "There aren't any, as such; the whole building's sealed and air-conditioned. Partly for dust control, but also in case of theft. No, it wasn't dropped to the street, nor down the john, either; we checked—although a long, five-pound chain doesn't go down a

pipe very handily—beyond recovery. Witherspoon didn't take it from the office; too bulky to hide in his clothes, and plenty of people saw him come out."

"But he did report the death," the scientist said. "How did he explain it?"

"He didn't. Maybe it was shock at first, but having refused to comment, he now says, in effect, 'I didn't do it, because if I did, where's the chain?' As to who else could have done it, he denies that's his problem. He's a rough old boy, quintessential down-Easterner in some ways."

"It must be hidden in his offices," Edgar said confidently. "No other possibility, is there?"

"So it seems," Trask admitted, "but we can't find it. We even remelted Cooper's caldron of lead—he was making soldiers when Witherspoon showed up, it appears—thinking he might have dropped the chain in there. Since lead melts at only three twenty-seven degrees, the platinum would just be imbedded in the mass when it hardened. But no dice; not a scrap of platinum in the stuff when we poured it out. And of course we ransacked the suite, too. There's only the one door, where Witherspoon came out in full view of six office-workers, so—" He shook his head, lips pursed. "And don't tell me," he admonished Edgar, whose mouth was opening, "that he made all that platinum into fake 'lead' soldiers in ten minutes—and over a piddling gas flame. They're all lead. Idiotic as it seems, I even checked that—I don't know why. When a soldier weighs like lead, is soft like lead, shines like lead, melts like lead, then it's lead—period!" He looked at the elder Grey for confirmation.

The scientist was laughing, a full-throated, joyous sound, as he said, "I'd say you're right about the soldiers; the time element alone would rule them out." Then he said cryptically, his deep-set eyes twinkling, "There was a time when a dentist would take off his gold ring before going to work." Trask and his son both looked at him, their faces equally blank. "Ed, please go upstairs and get me the big chemical encyclopedia. You know where it is." It was characteristic of their relationship that he said please.

The boy gave him a wondering glance, and left.

"Tell me," Grey asked the lieutenant, "did you get the impression at any time that Witherspoon himself was puzzled by your failure to find the chain?"

Trask hesitated, thinking. "Now that you mention it, his reaction

was a bit odd when he heard some details of our search. But, damn it, he must know where the thing is; he put it there!"

Edgar returned with the huge reference book, and handed it to his father.

"Excuse me while I check an old man's doubtful memory," he said with outrageous hyperbole, since his memory included even the logs of the first hundred integers. When he looked up from the book a few minutes later, there was a tiny fire burning in each eye, different in kind and intensity from the previous twinkle.

"About the dentist—" Trask began, but was interrupted.

"The old-timers made their own fillings by mixing silver and mercury to get amalgam. Now, mercury swallows up gold as easily as silver, although it's a noble metal and resists most reagents except aqua regia, a mixture of nitric and hydrochloric acids."

"No acids or mercury in Cooper's rooms," Trask said.

"Not the point," Grey said. "There was molten lead, and as I just verified—it's not well known even among people like Witherspoon working in precious metals exclusively—platinum does dissolve in lead. You didn't find a whole chain in the lead mass, but I'll bet you have a mighty valuable alloy in that caldron!"

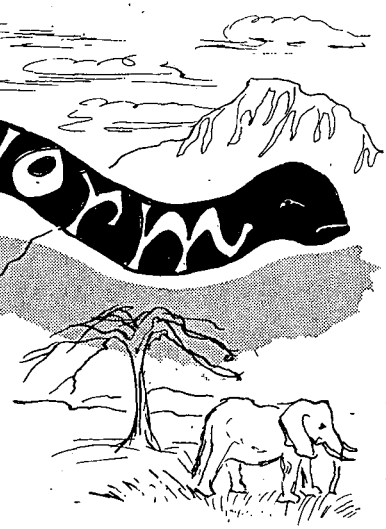
Edgar and Trask looked at each other wordlessly.

"I didn't ask *you*," the scientist told his son, "because you specialize in pine beetles and math. Maybe now you'll learn a bit of chemistry!"

When the detective called back the next morning, he reported verifying an iron pot full of lead-platinum alloy—and a confession from Witherspoon, who was charged with manslaughter, having killed in an angry quarrel, and not in cold blood. In a panic, he had dropped the chain into the melted lead, thinking only of immediate concealment, and never dreaming it could be undiscovered for long. Which prompted Edgar to tease his father with the remark: "So there are times when it's better *not* to know chemistry!"

When playing the shell game, one should beware of possible pitfalls.

The Werewolf



"I wish he were dead . . ." Alicia whispered the words to herself, standing at the edge of the Nairobi hotel veranda, as she watched her husband hurry down the broad entrance steps to the street with two of the other hunters from their safari. "Dead! Dead . . ."

They were supposed to be having an evening on the town, without their wives, but she knew Gregg would shake the others after dinner, and meet that little French girl somewhere. It was the same in every city, in every country. Always another girl.

He looked back and waved to her as he crossed the open square with his friends, heading toward the bright lights of the avenue.

Alicia turned from the steps and, for the first time, noticed a uniformed native youth standing behind her in the deepening twilight.

As she crossed the veranda toward the lobby, he sprang to open the door, bowing and smiling.

She frowned. He could have

heard what she whispered as she watched Gregg leave.

Much later, she wondered if it might have been a waiter in the dim hotel bar where she stopped for a drink before going to dinner; or it could have been that man, fat and brown, sitting at a nearby table who heard what she said. He was, certainly, watching her.

Back in California, in a public place, she would never have spoken such words out loud. In Africa, however, you felt that the native servants didn't know enough English to understand what you were saying.

Alicia had dinner alone in the hotel dining room, and then retired immediately, weary from the day's shopping.

by Vincent McConnor

Her bed was uncomfortable under its canopy of netting which kept out a few insects but prevented any fresh air from reaching her.

The night was humid and a distant but endless wail of native music, flutes and drums, came through the open windows.

She turned from side to side, trying to decide what to do about her marriage. Should she leave Gregg when they returned to California? Get a divorce?

Long after midnight she heard him return; listened to his jaunty steps in the next suite as he prepared for bed, humming to himself. She knew he had been with that pretty girl from the hotel boutique. When they visited the shop after lunch, she had been aware of Gregg's immediate reaction as the girl greeted them, and knew that he had arranged a rendezvous while she discussed perfumes with the old Frenchman who owned the place.

In the morning, as she lifted the napkin from her breakfast tray, a folded slip of paper fell out of it and dropped onto the bed.

Alicia looked at the departing maid but there was no indication that she was aware of the note.

On the slip of coarse paper, when she opened it, was an unfamiliar address printed in pencil. Under that were several additional words: LADY FIND WHAT SHE WANT HERE.

Somebody thought she wanted something. There was so much that she wanted . . .

As Alicia ate breakfast she realized that she had to go to that address. She had to find out what

was there that someone thought she wanted.

Gregg had a late morning appointment with the head of their safari to plan another African trip for the following year.

Alicia sat on the veranda with two of the other wives watching him stride across the square with their husbands. For once she didn't care where he was going because she would be free to leave the hotel without having to answer any questions.

She listened to the chattering women for another ten minutes before excusing herself, telling them she had to do more shopping, and tipped the doorman to find her a taxi.

Alicia showed the slip of paper to the native driver and sat back in the small cab as it lunged through blazing sunlight into the unfamiliar city. She brought out a perfumed handkerchief from her purse and held it over her nose as streets narrowed into alleys.

The taxi driver finally stopped in front of a small shop. A dusty window displayed a clutter of carved figures.

Alicia knocked on the door as her cabby drove away and, when there was no response, pushed it open and stepped inside. As her eyes adjusted to the faint light seeping from a window high in one wall, she saw a narrow hall leading to an archway hung with beaded curtains. She went toward it, reluctantly. "Is anyone here?"

There was a whisper of movement behind the curtains and a girl appeared. Dark-skinned, wearing an exotic native costume, her arms covered with gold bracelets, she smiled and motioned for Alicia to enter.

Pushing through the beaded curtains she found herself in a low-ceilinged room, filled with layers of incense smoke. The only light came from brass lanterns suspended at different heights. There seemed to be several glass display cases, and strange carvings on low tables.

The girl motioned toward a teak chair.

"I don't quite know why I'm here . . ."

Without speaking, the smiling girl vanished through another curtained door.

Alicia sat down, tentatively, looking at the jumble of objects on display—mainly brass and ivory. Most of it seemed to be tourist junk, although she didn't really know much about African curios.

"Welcome, Mrs. Logan. I have been expecting you."

She turned, startled, and through the veils of incense

glimpsed the figure of a man on a pillowed divan, almost invisible under a low canopy of looped draperies. His hands rested on a round brass-topped table but she was unable to see anything of his face. The hands were lean and dark brown. They protruded, to her surprise, from immaculate white shirt cuffs and the sleeves of a gray business suit. "I—I came here because of a most curious note I received this morning . . ."

"Quite so. We heard that there was something you wanted."

"Something that I . . . I haven't the slightest idea what you mean."

"Shall we be quite direct, Mrs. Logan? Precisely to the point? I believe you said there was someone you hated. You wished that he were dead."

She realized, to her surprise, that the gentle voice had a British accent. "How could you know that?"

"You are in Africa, dear lady. The faintest whisper can be heard many miles away. And, in Africa, death can always be arranged."

She got to her feet. "I think, perhaps, I'd better go . . ."

"Please . . ." One of the brown hands lifted in a languid gesture to detain her. "Your death wish, I believe, was concerned with your husband. I can, quite easily, arrange to release you from what is, apparently, an unhappy marriage."

"How could you possibly arrange for the—the death—of my husband?" She sat down again.

"First of all, I must know if you wish to have this take place while you are here in Nairobi."

"I—I don't think so. No . . . There might be difficulties with the authorities. I would be at a great disadvantage."

"I understand. Then you prefer to have it happen after you have returned to the United States. When will that be? I know you are leaving Nairobi tomorrow, by plane."

"How could you know that? We only made our reservations this morning."

"I have my informants, Mrs. Logan. But they did not learn when you will actually be returning to your home. Precisely when you would wish the matter to be—as they say in your country—finalized."

"We're flying back to California next week, after a few days in Paris."

"Then I shall arrange for your wish to be fulfilled within a matter of weeks after you reach California. Say three weeks?"

"That would be perfect. But how can you do this from such a

distance? Thousands of miles . . ."

"I will arrange everything here, in front of you, today." A long brown finger flicked a small metal bell on the table. "I am sure, Mrs. Logan, that you have heard of the legendary werewolf that existed in middle Europe many centuries ago . . ."

"But that was superstition, wasn't it?"

"Not according to certain documents I have inspected in the British Museum. The werewolf was, of course, a man who changed into a wolf and prowled at night, killing its victims."

The beaded curtains whispered as the girl returned and bowed.

Alicia could understand nothing of what was said but, apparently, instructions were given.

The girl bowed again and disappeared through the curtains.

"Here in Africa, Mrs. Logan, we do not have werewolves, but there is a remote mountain area where certain curious shells can be found." One skeletal brown hand came into the light with an oval black object which looked like a large seed or nut. "When this shell opens a worm slips out. It sleeps by day but comes alive at night. That is when it prowls and kills, which is why I call it the wereworm. It will enter a man's ear and cause instant death—silently and painlessly—leaving no trace."

Alicia could hardly breathe, her eyes held by the shell, as she listened to his explanation. "No trace?"

"Nothing that could be found by any medical expert. Death is always believed to be from natural causes."

"That sounds perfect . . ." She realized, to her surprise, that she was beginning to relax, in spite of this strange conversation.

"I shall insert this shell into a carved animal head which you can ship to California with your other belongings. The carving has no great value and the customs inspectors should ask no questions. I will give you a bill of sale for, let us say, fifty American dollars, so that no one will be suspicious. The worm should break from its shell in about three weeks. You will be able to hear it, perhaps, moving about inside the carved head. One word of warning! You must arrange that no other person will be in the room where it is kept at night—I presume the bedroom—except your husband."

"That's no problem. We occupy separate suites."

"Excellent! Be sure that all doors are kept closed. Ah! Here we are . . ."

Alicia turned to face a dark-

skinned youth carrying a large carving which he set on the table. She saw that it was the gleaming black head of a horned animal with flared nostrils and thick lips. The two horns extended to points several feet above the head, and tight curls of hair encircled its small ears and under the chin. There were no eyes, only twin empty holes. There was something about the beast's face that repulsed her.

When she looked up the young man had gone.

"Observe me, Mrs. Logan." The brown fingers held up the shell again. "I will insert this into an eye." He leaned forward, without exposing his face to the dim light, and pressed the shell into an eye socket.

She heard a faint tapping sound as it dropped into the hollow head and bounced, for a moment, at the bottom.

"When this is delivered to your hotel there will be protective covers on both eyes so that the worm cannot escape."

"Do I remove them later?"

"That will not be necessary. The wereworm will remove one of the covers when it wishes, after it breaks out from the shell."

"I can't believe this will work! That this small shell can produce something that will, actually, kill a man."

"Let me assure you, Mrs. Logan, it will do exactly that."

"Very well. I am—grateful."

"The beauty of the wereworm is that it leaves absolutely no trace. Death will appear to be from natural causes." The brown hand gestured in the dim light. "This carving will be packed in a wooden box. You will find it among your luggage when you are leaving for the airport."

Alicia got to her feet as she opened her purse. "You said this would be fifty dollars, I believe?"

"The bill of sale which you will need for customs and which, very possibly, you may wish to show to your husband, will be made out for that amount. But the wereworm is extremely rare. And my services, I must add, are absolutely unique. The fee is two thousand dollars."

"Two thou—"

"American money. There are traveler's checks in your purse for much more than that."

Suddenly, Alicia felt a genuine fear for the first time in her life. "How could you possibly know what I have in my purse?"

"It is necessary for me to know everything, Mrs. Logan, when I do business with a stranger." He laughed. "Two thousand dollars for one genuine wereworm, which is, of course, my own name for the creature. The natives, in the mountain area where it breeds, call the worm something else. Not easily translatable, I fear, into English. Night devil? Yes! That is fairly close. The night devil . . ."

The oblong wooden box was waiting in the hotel lobby, with their other luggage, when the Logans came down from their suite.

Alicia explained to her husband that she had bought him a present on one of her shopping expeditions.

She showed the bill of sale to the customs inspector at the Nairobi airport, who didn't bother to open the box.

When they arrived in Los Angeles, one of Gregg's business associates eased their way through customs. Only the elaborate leather cases containing her husband's guns were opened and

checked by the inspector on duty.

The carved head was unpacked by their butler, Willett, the day after their return to the spacious mansion in the hills above Vista Beach.

Alicia supervised its installation in Gregg's bedroom on a pedestal, between two tall windows, facing the bed with its cover of zebra skins. The entire suite had been done in an African decor and the carving looked completely at home in its new surroundings.

Gregg saw it for the first time, later that day, when he returned from business appointments in Los Angeles.

She took him upstairs to his suite and flung the door open.

He was delighted with her present but, immediately after dinner, departed for his usual evening of pleasure elsewhere.

She spent the evening alone in the drawing room, thinking about Roberto Corro. He had been in her thoughts constantly while she was in Africa. Dear Roberto . . .

They had talked last night, after her return, on the private line in her bedroom. She had waited to call until she knew that her husband was asleep.

One day soon she would marry Roberto, but meanwhile they must continue to be discreet. There could be no secret meetings for the moment; no rendezvous in his beach house near La Jolla . . .

All their friends knew that Roberto had been a constant visitor for the past two years. They had bought many paintings from his gallery. Her husband liked Roberto and frequently played tennis with him. He came to all their parties.

She had taken Gregg to the Corro Gallery in La Jolla many times and, at her urging, he had begun to collect paintings, including the small Renoir in her bedroom.

She couldn't tell Roberto why they had to be more careful these next weeks; would never be able to tell him what she had done . . .

Meanwhile, they must do nothing to attract attention. Nothing that would make people suspect she might have a reason to kill Gregg . . .

There was no way that anyone could learn the truth. That was hidden, forever, in a dark hole of a shop in a nameless African alley.

Nothing happened with the statue for more than a week.

Then, seated across the breakfast table from her husband, Alicia had the first word that the worm was alive.

"You know, I heard a noise

from that statue last night," he told her, busy with his scrambled eggs and broiled kidneys.

"Statue?" At first she didn't realize what he was saying.

"That head you bought in Africa . . . Kind of a scratching sound in the middle of the night. You suppose there's some kind of insect inside the thing? Termites?"

"I thought it was made of solid wood."

"Even so, the wood could be infested with an African bug of some kind. Maybe you should call an exterminator. Have the thing sprayed."

"I doubt if that's necessary." Mustn't let him do that! The worm could be destroyed. "I'll have a look at it."

She went upstairs after Gregg left to play golf with some business cronies. He would be telling them about his African safari, boasting about his kills and the trophies that would be arriving later from that German taxidermist. Little did he know that there was another African trophy in his room—a living trophy.

She stood beside the carved head and bent close to the polished black wood. No sound came from inside. The eye sockets had been closed with covers made from a lighter-colored wood.

Was it possible that there was a small living thing hidden inside that could kill a man?

She lifted the carving with both hands and discovered that it wasn't heavy. She shook it, carefully.

There was a whisper of movement from inside the head—barely audible—a dry, scraping sound as though the seed was sliding from side to side. Sounded like two pieces. The worm must have broken out from its shell and left the two halves on the bottom of the hollow carving.

It was alive!

After that she went into Gregg's suite every morning, after he departed on his projects for the day, but there was no further indication that anything was happening.

She was careful, at night, to lock the connecting door between their suites—not that her husband ever tried to open it anymore.

He spent most evenings on the town; except for the nights that guests were invited when, after dinner, he would show them the films he had shot in Africa.

Alicia made sure that Roberto was included in every dinner party.

Her husband had obviously found some new night creatures. They left traces of their scent on his jackets.

Let him pursue them for the

moment! She would be rid of him in a few weeks, without the unpleasant bother of a divorce.

The next development came when, once again, they were at the breakfast table.

"That statue of yours . . ."

She looked up from the morning paper. "What now?"

"It's hollow."

"How did you find out?"

"One of those round pieces of wood that covered the eyes has fallen inside. You can shake the head. Hear it rattling around."

After breakfast, when Alicia heard the car roar down the front drive, she went up to his bedroom and stood before the carved head. The wooden cover had disappeared from the left eye.

She picked up the carving and shook it; heard the rattle of the eye cover inside. Quickly she set the head down before she could harm the living thing that was sleeping there. It must have knocked the cover out of the eye socket in the night. Now, whenever it wished, it would be able to get out.

The following morning she noticed tiny marks on the carpet in Gregg's bedroom. They were like small burns, reaching out from the bottom of the pedestal in every direction. She saw that they had gone within a few inches of her husband's bed and stopped there. When she touched one of the silvery marks she found, to her surprise, that it wasn't a burn but was unpleasantly moist.

She left the room, feeling revulsion, went into her own suite and locked the door.

Next morning her husband was dead.

The attorneys handled everything.

Unfortunately there had to be an autopsy, but the coroner's verdict was that Gregg had suffered a heart attack.

His personal physician confirmed that he had been treating him for a heart condition. Gregg had not wanted anyone to know.

The church was crowded for the funeral. Alicia sat alone because neither she nor Gregg had any family. The servants sat in the row behind her.

She was aware of Roberto, near the back, but didn't look at him.

After the ceremony at the grave, she had the chauffeur drive her home to the silent mansion.

She ate lunch in her suite, barely tasting the food.

Afterward she called Roberto on the private line and arranged to meet him in half an hour.

Slipping a coat over her black dress, she left the house, informing

Willett that she was going for a drive. "Tell anyone who calls that I'm indisposed."

She got into her car and drove into the hills to the familiar place of rendezvous.

Roberto was there ahead of her. He took her in his arms as she got out from the car and kissed her. "Licia . . ."

"My dearest . . ."

"Soon, now, you will be Licia Corro!"

"Yes, my love. But not for at least six months!"

"I cannot wait six months."

"Sooner than that and people would surely talk."

"Isn't it about time we should start seeing each other openly? I'm an old friend and friends don't stay away when there's a death. There's nothing to hide! We're going to be married."

"There might be gossip if we were seen together so soon. We must wait a bit . . ."

"Do you really care about gossip?"

"I just don't want people to talk about us. Now or ever."

"But we must make plans for the future! A long honeymoon on the Riviera. Maybe take a villa or, if you prefer, keep traveling."

"Anywhere but Africa! I never want to see Africa again. Will you call me tonight? The private line, darling. Use the private line."

"Not tonight. I have to drive up to Los Angeles. An important collection of Impressionists is being auctioned. Are you going to be all right in that big house? I worry about you, alone there at night."

"Alone? With five servants!"

"Even so, I worry." He studied her face. "You're looking beautiful . . ."

"I keep trying to look sad but it's difficult. I'm feeling much too happy. Even wearing black doesn't depress me."

"Blondes should wear black more often."

When he walked her back to the car later, he kissed her passionately. "Will you call me tomorrow? At the gallery?"

"Yes. It's best that I call you. At least for the moment."

As Alicia drove home she thought about the future. All that beautiful money would soon belong to her. From what the attorneys said it was going to be much more than she had anticipated.

Roberto would, very likely, close his gallery in La Jolla before they left on their honeymoon. She would insist upon it. He could open another, larger gallery, when they returned—in Beverly Hills or New York.

There was so much she wanted

to do for Roberto. So much . . .

She spent the afternoon at the antique French desk in her bedroom, facing the open windows, answering more of the condolences she had received after Gregg's death.

It was an ungrateful task, writing the brief, almost identical notes. Most of the people were unknown to her.

She had dinner on a tray in her bedroom, picking at the food, without appetite.

Before retiring she went for a drive down the coast and parked at the edge of a palisade, overlooking the ocean. She sat there for an hour, her eyes on the far horizon, dreaming of the future. Her marriage to Roberto Corro . . .

The drive relaxed her and when she returned home to the silent mansion, she went up to bed immediately. She would certainly sleep tonight . . . So wonderful to know that the adjoining suite was empty. Gregg wouldn't be waking her in the middle of the night returning from his latest conquest. No more night creatures, blonde or brunette, to trouble her sleep.

Hair brushed and wearing a new negligee she had bought in Paris, she glanced at the closed door to Gregg's suite.

That hideous statue was still in there. Maybe she ought to destroy it . . . Why not? Now!

She went to the door, unlocked it and flung it open. She flipped the wall switch next to the door and all the lamps came alive.

The gleaming black beast head, on its pedestal, drew her across the room.

She came to a stop in front of it, staring at the obscene face with its empty eye socket. She turned and hurried to the marble fireplace, snatched up the heavy antique poker and carried it across the room, raised the poker and smashed it down on the head. Again and again. The carving split into many pieces, falling to the carpet.

Alicia was smiling as she let the poker slip from her fingers. She was rid of that horrible monstrosity. Willett would have the maid clean the mess away in the morning.

She turned off the lights and went into her own suite, leaving the door open behind her. No point in closing it anymore.

Relaxing in bed, she planned how she would redecorate Gregg's suite for Roberto. No more African decor . . .

No! She would buy a new home—something smaller than this place. Maybe find a property near the ocean. Roberto liked the

beach. They would hunt for it together. Get an architect to design a very special house for them—something worthy of the magnificent paintings and fine antiques they would have.

She switched off all the lights except the lamp on her bedside table, reached for the telephone and dialed Roberto's beach house. It rang several times.

Alicia set the phone down reluctantly. So Roberto hadn't returned from that auction in Los Angeles. Probably met some friends . . .

She snapped off the lamp and settled down to sleep.

Tomorrow she would finish the last of her answers to those miserable notes of condolence; spend some time in the library with Gregg's collection of travel books, and plan where she and Roberto should go on their honeymoon. Certainly the south of France. Maybe Portugal . . . Greece . . .

She was wakened from deep sleep by something touching one of her fingers. When she moved the finger the sensation stopped.

Her imagination, of course . . .

She reached out toward the bedside table, lighted the lamp, and looked down at the quilted bedcover but, of course, there was nothing there. She must have had a nightmare.

Checking the clock, she saw that it was after midnight. She had slept less than two hours. This was ridiculous.

She switched off the lamp again and as she settled down in bed a frightening thought came to her. What if the wereworm hadn't been buried with Gregg? It could have crawled back into that carved head! Maybe she disturbed it when she destroyed the statue . . .

She had left the door open between the two suites! Suppose the thing was here now? In her room . . .

Alicia turned the lamp on again.

As she started to get out of bed she saw the small livid marks on the carpet.

She froze, horrified, unable to move—opened her mouth to scream but no sound would come.

Something seemed to be pressing against her throat, choking her. Anyway, nobody could hear her. The servants' quarters were on the opposite side of the mansion.

She got back into bed and pulled the covers over her head.

What could she do? Ring for the servants!

She uncovered her head and sat up in bed, staring at the small electric button on the bedside

table and considered pressing it.

No! Mustn't do that. Couldn't tell the servants there was something in her room that had killed her husband. They would only call the police and she couldn't explain anything to them.

Roberto! He was the only one to whom she could tell the truth. Surely he would be home now.

She snatched up the phone and dialed. Heard his phone ringing, but there was no answer.

As she set the phone down she saw more marks on the carpet. They seemed to circle her bed.

She moved back against the pillows.

Something black was moving across the quilted spread. Not much larger than a thick thread. Wiggling toward her like a tiny snake. Suddenly it darted forward so fast she couldn't see it anymore.

She felt only the faintest sensation as it slid across the back of her hand and around her wrist.

Alicia screamed . . .

The maid found her when she brought up the breakfast tray. She set it down carefully on a table and ran downstairs for help.

Willett came up alone and, realizing that Mrs. Logan was beyond anyone's help, phoned the police.

That done, he looked around the room and noticed the door standing open into the adjoining suite.

He went into the other bedroom and saw the smashed head on the floor. Such an ugly thing! Good riddance . . .

His first instinct was to clean up the mess of splintered wood; then he saw the poker and realized that Mrs. Logan must have destroyed the statue for some reason. Better leave that for the police.

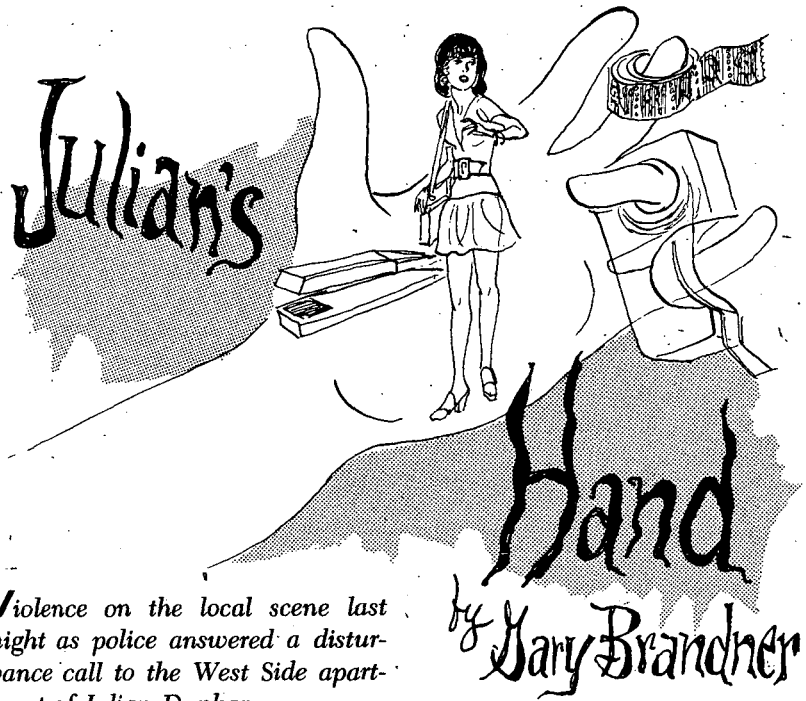
As he moved closer he noticed bits of shell on the carpet in a mess of dried leaves and twigs. There seemed to be two small black shells, broken in half. They must have been inside the hollow carving.

Now Willett saw a folded slip of paper. He picked it up and carried it to the light from the windows.

When he unfolded the bit of paper it felt coarse and unpleasant to his fingertips. There were several words printed in pencil:

ONE FOR THE MURDER, ANOTHER FOR THE MURDERER.

Well, the morning after, alcoholics revert to "the hair of the dog," don't they?



Julian's Hand

by Gary Brandner

***V**iolence on the local scene last night as police answered a disturbance call to the West Side apartment of Julian Dunbar . . .*

At first it was only an itch, an irritation of the skin under his left arm; nothing more.

Julian scratched idly at the spot while he shaved. Shaving was the only thing he still did naturally with his left hand. In all other actions he had been converted in early childhood to conform to a right-handed world.

He blew the whiskers out of his electric shaver and rinsed them down the sink drain, mopping the porcelain clean with a sponge. Before leaving the bathroom he turned sideways to examine the itch in the mirror. There was a

slight reddening in a spot the size of a dime—an insect bite, or maybe some allergy. Julian dabbed medicated salve on the spot and rubbed it in. He finished dressing and went out to the kitchen.

Margaret, her bright little eyes watching him, sat at the table. Julian poured a cup of coffee from the electric percolator and carried it over to sit opposite her. It was bitter. After sixteen years of marriage he still missed sugar in his coffee. Margaret had shown him statistics that proved he was better off without it. It was easier to drink his coffee black and bitter than to argue with her.

She did have a point. It was a man's responsibility to his family to take care of himself. At one time Julian had hoped his family would consist of more than just Margaret. A son would have been nice, but it wasn't Margaret's fault that she was not built for childbearing. Was it?

"Don't scratch yourself like that," Margaret said.

"Sorry."

"You look like an ape."

"I didn't realize I was doing it."

"Are you going to talk to Hugh Biggerstaff today?"

"Talk?"

"Don't play games. I mean talk about the opening in the Sales Department, as you know very well."

"I'll see him if I get a chance."

"Make the chance. He's not going to walk out there and hand you the job, you know."

"I suppose not."

"It may be too late now. You should have gone in to see him last week."

"We've been very busy."

"I'll bet. You just get in there today and tell Hugh Biggerstaff that you're the man for the job. The years you've been with that company, you should be making a lot more money than you are, and it's obvious you're not going to make it in Accounting. Sales is where the money is. And Sales is where they pick the top executives from."

"I'll talk to him today," Julian promised.

"You're scratching again."

Julian finished his coffee and rinsed the cup at the sink. He leaned down to kiss the air an inch from Margaret's face and left the apartment. He drove downtown to the highrise office building where he worked, and parked in the subterranean garage. He stepped into the elevator and touched the button for the twelfth floor where the offices of Datatron Systems, Inc. were located.

The elevator stopped at the

street-level lobby and the girls who worked in the building got on. Bright-eyed and colorful, they chattered about their dates and their clothes and always made Julian feel good. They smelled of cologne and hair spray and soap. The heat of their firm young bodies warmed the elevator car, and for the short ride upward Julian savored the nearness of the girls. At each floor, as more of the girls got out, he felt a growing ache of loneliness. By the twelfth floor he was the only one left. He stepped out into the carpeted corridor and rubbed at the rash under his arm.

The first three hours were occupied with the regular entries, checks, and cross-checks that Julian made every day. He never found these tasks dull or routine. He enjoyed beginning his day in an orderly manner and then he would be ready for any new problems that arose in Accounting. On this day there were no new problems, and by eleven o'clock he had no further justification for not talking to Mr. Biggerstaff.

To stall just a little longer, Julian went into the men's room and combed his thinning hair, then reknotted his necktie. He scratched once more under his arm and walked down the hall to the oak-paneled office of Hugh Biggerstaff, ready to get it over.

Julian tapped lightly on the open door and stood there several seconds while the vice-president of Datatron Systems, Inc. finished what he was writing before he looked up to acknowledge Julian's presence.

"Come on in, Julian. Glad to see you." Hugh Biggerstaff had taken off his jacket and rolled up his shirt sleeves two turns, just like one of the fellows. Curly black hair spilled across his unlined forehead. "What can I do for you?"

Julian's throat tightened, and his voice squeaked out with even less authority than usual. "Um, I was just wondering if you've found someone to fill the opening in Sales yet."

"No, actually we haven't firmed up the decision. Why, is it causing some problem in Accounting?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. It's, well, it's . . ." Julian had to stop and clear his throat. "I was thinking that I'd like to be considered for the position."

"You?" That was all, just the single questioning syllable.

"Ah . . . yes."

The young vice-president stared intently at Julian, who fought down the impulse to look away. Hugh Biggerstaff put a lot of stock in eye contact.

"Julian, do you have any kind of sales experience?"

"No, but I learn quickly. And I'm a diligent worker."

"I'm sure of that. I checked your record when the home office first sent me out here, and I've watched your work since. I don't mind telling you, Julian, you're one of DSI's most valued employees."

"Thank you."

"In fact, I'd really hate to have the job of replacing you. You may not know this, Julian, but men who can handle the kind of work you do are hard to find. I couldn't take some kid fresh out of business school and put him at your desk. No way. The Sales job, heck, I could find a dozen men to fit that, but to replace a first-class Accounting man . . . well, that's another story."

"Are you saying I'm not right for the Sales job?"

"No, I'm saying the Sales job is not right for you. I came up through Sales myself, and I can tell you it's not all long lunches and expense accounts. There's a lot of being nice to people you can't stand, and a lot of forcing yourself to be pushy and aggressive when you're not that way at all. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Good, good, I'm glad that's settled. Come around any time, Julian. We don't get together nearly enough, you and I." The vice-president shifted slightly in his chair, indicating that the interview was over.

"Thank you," Julian said, and backed out of the office.

Back at his own desk Julian let his fingers dance across the keys of his calculator. He hummed along with the clicking of the machine. His obligation was fulfilled, he had kept his promise and asked for the job. It was not his fault that the company found him more valuable here in Accounting.

He thought of Margaret, and his fingers stopped their dance. He rubbed at the renewed irritation under his arm. If only she would understand that things had worked out for the best.

Margaret understood nothing of the kind. That evening she made Julian repeat the entire conversation with Hugh Biggerstaff as nearly word for word as he could remember it.

"So you just thanked him and walked out," she said when Julian had finished his recitation. "You didn't even argue your case. Couldn't you see he was testing you to find out if you're forceful enough for the job? Don't you know you've got to pound on a desk sometimes to make people

pay attention to you? Hugh Biggerstaff didn't get where he is by mumbling thank you, you can bet on that. He's a desk pounder."

The same theme was repeated with little variation for the remainder of the week and through the weekend. The next Monday morning when Julian stood shirtless before the mirror he saw that the rash under his arm had congealed into a lump; no bigger than an orange seed, but a definite lump. It no longer itched, and it was not painful. It was just . . . there—and growing.

Tuesday morning the lump was visibly larger—the size of a bean. By Wednesday it was as big as the end of his thumb, and Julian was frightened.

That afternoon he called his physician, Dr. Aaron Volney. The doctor was busy attending an A.M.A. luncheon, but his receptionist made an appointment for Julian the following morning.

When Julian awoke Wednesday the lump was as big as a walnut.

"Hurry up or you'll be late for work," Margaret said.

"I'm not going to work this morning. I'm going in to see Dr. Volney."

"Did the company give you time off?"

"They gave me time off."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I just want the doctor to look at something."

"Pick up a quart of buttermilk on your way home."

At the age of fifty-three Dr. Volney was tanned and youthful, with a spring in his step and a twinkle in his eye, a model of good health for his patients to envy. Golf, tennis, boating, and leisurely vacations kept him that way.

"Well, well, Julian," the doctor beamed, "what brings you around between annual checkups? Looks like it wouldn't hurt you to put on a little weight. A lot of my other patients would like to hear that, I'll bet, ha-ha."

"I have this lump under my arm," Julian said. "It started last week. First there was a rash, then a lump. It's getting bigger."

"Well, let's get the old shirt off and have a look-see, shall we?"

Julian fumbled with the buttons.

"Now, don't get yourself all upset," the doctor said. "This could be any of a hundred different things. It doesn't have to be what you're worrying about."

"I wasn't worrying about anything in particular."

"Of course you were. These days the whole world is cancer-conscious. I'm not saying that's bad, mind you. It's just that

people tend to get frightened to death over nothing."

Julian stripped off his shirt and undershirt and laid them aside. He raised his left arm to show Dr. Volney the swelling. The doctor touched the lump with his fingers and prodded the flesh around it.

"Have you been under a mental strain lately?"

"There was a problem at work."

The doctor was pleased. "There you are, it's just as I thought. This sort of thing is often caused by nothing more than a temporary nervous condition."

"But it's growing."

"Or it might be caused by some minor glandular disturbance."

"But, Doctor, isn't it just possible that I've got—"

"Cancer? Sure, there's always that chance, but don't start shopping for a burial plot until we find out for sure, ha-ha. I'll just hack off a piece and we'll send it out to the lab."

Dr. Volney selected a gleaming scalpel from his instrument case and drew it lightly over the lump under Julian's arm. He wiped the small scraping of flesh onto one glass slide and sealed it with another, then returned to his desk with a smile of professional reassurance.

"I'm going to give you a prescription for a light sedative, something to help you relax. Call me on Friday. And give my best to Norma."

"Margaret," Julian said.

"Of course."

By Friday the lump had doubled in size. There still was no pain, but Julian could feel the thing with every movement of his left arm. He called Dr. Volney four times, but each time reached an answering service. The answering service could not locate the doctor.

Julian spent much of the weekend locked in the bathroom, staring into the mirror at the growth under his arm. The original lump now had its own tiny lumps—five of them. The foreign thing on his body horrified and fascinated him. Sometimes he fancied he could see it growing.

On Monday Julian finally got through to Dr. Volney. "I tried to get you all day Friday, Doctor."

"Yes, sorry, but I was tied up in court all day testifying for an old classmate. Some trumped-up malpractice suit. You wouldn't believe the way some people try to take advantage of us."

"Doctor, about the lump under my arm . . ."

"I've got good news for you about that. The results of the

biopsy were negative. It's nothing."

"But the thing is still growing," Julian said. "It has little ones."

"Julian, you do *not* have cancer."

"I don't care what I have, the thing is ugly and getting uglier. I want it removed."

"As you wish." The doctor sighed. "I'll make the arrangements for you to have surgery at Queen of Mercy sometime next week. Check back with me in a few days."

The days passed and Julian did not check back with the doctor. At the end of the week Dr. Volney called him.

"I have you all set up, Julian. You'll sign into the hospital Sunday evening. I'll be in to see you Monday morning before you go to surgery."

"I changed my mind," Julian said.

"What's that?"

"I don't want any surgery. I'm all right."

"Of course you want surgery. I've made all the arrangements."

"Send me a bill," Julian said, and broke the connection before Dr. Volney could reply.

As soon as he hung up the phone Julian went back into the bathroom and locked the door. He pulled off his shirt and stared at what was growing under his arm. He recognized the thing now. It had assumed enough of a shape so anyone could tell what it was—a hand; a tiny baby hand.

Julian was not going to let Dr. Volney and his friends get a look at it. They would treat him like some kind of freak. He could imagine the sensation it would make. Those tabloids they sell in supermarkets would love it: *MAN GROWS THIRD HAND*. Julian leaned his forehead against the cool glass of the mirror and cried like a child.

In the following weeks the hand grew rapidly. In less than a month it matched the hand of a four-year-old child. After seven weeks the new hand was as large as Julian's own. There the resemblance stopped. The new hand was smooth and devoid of features. No nails, no lines, no knuckles, it looked rather like a rubber glove blown full of air. It was tough and resilient to the touch, and slightly cooler than body temperature.

The thing was also growing an arm. When the hand reached full size, a rubbery, tubelike appendage began to push it out from Julian's side.

As first the hand, then the arm grew, Julian had to make some changes in his life-style to prevent detection. The first thing he did when the thing became

really noticeable was to stop sleeping with Margaret. The adjustment was not overly difficult, since both of them had long before ceased to enjoy sharing a bed. Margaret readily accepted Julian's plea of insomnia, and he moved to the livingroom sofa.

He began wearing larger jackets to work, and kept them on all day. At home he would change immediately into a loose-fitting robe, which he wore until Margaret went to bed.

As time passed, familiarity with his new appendage made it appear less hideous to Julian. He began to experience a sensual pleasure in examining the hand and touching it. Holding the inert fleshy thing between his own two hands gratified him in a way he could not fully understand. He had a notion that somehow this made up for the son that Margaret would never give him.

Then the hand came to life.

For some time Julian had been aware of its developing sense of touch. He enjoyed placing various objects on the smooth palm. The feel of the different surfaces registered on his brain in an entirely new way. It became like a game as Julian introduced the hand to new textures and temperatures. Then one day it moved. Julian was delighted to find that by concentrating his will he could make the hand obey simple commands. After a few days of practice the fingers could bend individually and grasp objects, and the hand could move about on its flexible tube of an arm. Soon it was as adroit as Julian's original hands. He began to feel a paternal pride in its accomplishments.

The first indication that the hand had begun to act on its own came when Julian found small articles from the office unaccountably turning up in his pockets at night: a roll of stamps, a stapler, a plastic tape dispenser. Julian's first shocked reaction was to return the things the following morning. Then he asked himself, why should I? Everybody else in the office stole whatever they could get away with. Why not? Datatron Systems, Inc. had plenty of money.

Julian put the stolen items away in a desk drawer, then sat down and wrote several personal letters, using the office stamps. The experience was exhilarating.

His attitude toward the hand became that of an indulgent parent toward a mischievous son. Although he was amused by the hand's little escapades, Julian resolved to exert more control over its behavior.

The hand seemed content to

obey him until one morning a week later on the elevator. The car stopped at the lobby, and the usual flock of secretaries got on. Julian moved as always to the rear of the car as the girls crowded in. Somewhere between the fifth and sixth floor the girl directly in front of him gasped and arched her back in surprise. Julian looked down and was aghast to see the hand protruding from beneath his jacket and fondling the girl in a way Julian himself would never have dared. Although he concentrated mightily to pull the hand away, it stayed where it was, sending the most delightful touch sensations back to his brain.

Deliberately the girl turned and speared Julian with her eyes. Only then did the hand let go and slip back out of sight. All Julian could manage was an apologetic shrug. The girl, a well-built brunette whom Julian had admired from a distance, lifted one expressive eyebrow and turned away.

For the rest of the day Julian kept his left arm pressed to his side to be sure the hand stayed under his jacket. His unusual posture drew some curious looks, but the hand remained hidden.

On the way home he stopped at a drugstore and bought a rolled bandage and a spool of adhesive tape. The next morning before leaving for work he wound the bandage around his upper body, binding the hand to his side, and made it fast with adhesive tape. It was not a comfortable arrangement, but Julian could no longer risk leaving the hand free.

Riding up in the elevator that morning he prayed that the brunette would not be among the girls who got on his car.

She was, of course.

He was too tall to lose himself among the other passengers, and to his acute embarrassment he found himself once again immediately behind the girl. He prayed that she would not turn around.

She did, of course. Julian was astonished to see that she was smiling.

"Hi," she said.

"Uh, hello."

"You're Julian Dunbar, and you work on the twelfth floor for DSI."

"How did you know?"

"I've known for a long time. I was curious about you and I asked somebody who you were. Aren't you curious about me?"

"Very much."

"I'm Tina Cross. I've worked on the sixth floor for months, and I was beginning to wonder if you'd ever speak to me." The girl laughed softly. "Well, you didn't exactly *speak*, but you did make

contact—you did get in touch."

Julian could scarcely believe this was happening to him. He groped for something to say to the girl.

She said it for him. "I'm through work at five o'clock."

"So am I," Julian managed. "Will you have a drink with me after work?"

"I'd love it. Meet me in the lobby."

Julian spent the day in an agony of anticipation. This adventure was completely outside his experience. He even forgot about the discomfort of having the hand bound to his side. Before leaving, he went into the men's room to make sure the thing was still secure. It would never do to have it flop out on his first date with Tina.

The drink after work stretched into several drinks. Julian found himself talking and laughing freely with a girl for the first time in years. He remembered, however, to keep his right side toward Tina. He did not want her to brush accidentally against the bulge under his left arm.

Later, when he took Tina home to her apartment, he kissed her. It was a short kiss, and light, but it promised that this was only the beginning.

The hand remained the only obstacle in the way of a satisfactory relationship. Although he had grown used to the thing, Julian could guess at the disgust it would arouse in others. To his immense relief, the problem was easily solved after all.

In the first place, Tina offered no objection to keeping the bedroom totally dark for their intimacies. She even found it amusing that he chose to wear a soft, loose-fitting shirt at all times. For his part, Julian became quite adept at moving his body just far enough so Tina's caressing hand would not encounter the thing taped on his side. With these minor adjustments, Julian gave himself over fully to the pleasure of the affair.

At home he no longer bothered to alibi his absences. Margaret complained bitterly at first but, confronted by Julian's new indifference, soon lapsed into puzzled silence. The situation might have continued indefinitely had not Julian failed one night to lock the bathroom door.

He had left Tina earlier than usual, and was standing naked in front of the mirror letting the hand move about, free of its constricting bandage. Without warning, the door burst open and Margaret faced him, hands planted on her bony hips.

"What are you doing in here so long, washing off the smell of your girlfriend? Oh, yes, I found out who she is and where she works. Right there in the same building. Very handy for you, I must say. It has been up to now, anyway. Tomorrow I'm paying a little visit to Miss Tina Cross, and I think things will change pretty sud—"

The speech died in Margaret's mouth as Julian turned to face her. Her eyes fastened in horror on the thing growing from his side. The hand rose on its tubular arm and stretched toward her like a fleshy snake.

When Julian regained control, the body of his wife lay half in and half out of the bathroom. Her upturned face was dark and swollen like an eggplant. The hand hung limp and heavy at his side. Julian stared down at it. How could he ever have accepted this monstrosity as a part of himself? It was clear now what he must do, what he should have done long ago.

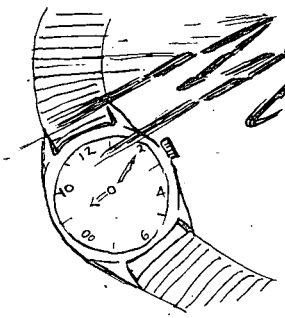
Stepping over the corpse, he walked into the kitchen. From a wooden rack screwed into the wall he selected the heaviest of a set of carving knives. He honed the blade in the electric knife sharpener and tested the edge against his thumb. Satisfied, he spread newspapers across the table-top and sat close in a chair.

He took hold of the hand and pulled it out across the newspapers. It lay docile in his grasp. Julian pulled in deep lungfuls of oxygen, trying to slow the hammering of his heart. He poised the knife in front of his face, his fingers gripping the bone handle. It had to be done in a single blow. He would never have the courage to hack at it a second time. Slowly he brought the edge of the blade against the rubbery skin at the point where the arm grew from his side.

The hand jumped in his grasp.

. . . the deaths were labeled double homicide by detectives. Dunbar apparently tried to fight off the attacker with a kitchen knife, wounding himself in the attempt. A massive search is underway for the assailant, described by police as immensely powerful, based on evidence that he strangled the victims using only one hand.

As tension mounts, so may the consequences, in one's mind, become more unpredictable and dangerous.



Minutes of Terror

by Donald Honig

Mel Gifford's house was the last one on the dirt road, which ran nearly a mile in from the highway before becoming a dead end. There were only two other houses along the road and then Gifford's, and beyond that nothing but the pine forest, slowly elevating itself along the mountain slope, rising higher and higher, cresting at two thousand feet. There were ski trails on the other side of the mountain and when the Vermont winter drained the sky of color and spilled its snows, the area became a bustling ski resort.

Now it was November, one of the two transitional seasons (the other occurred in April); the fall foliage was gone and the snows had not yet come. Gifford called it the quiet season. There were no tourists on the roads or in the woods, and things were quieter in town too. Certainly there were fewer people coming into the bank. Many of the local businessmen took their vacations this time of year, just before the onset of the ski season.

"I wish my business were seasonal," Gifford said that morning after the alarm had brought him jarringly awake. He sat up in bed and with dull eyes faced the dim

gray morning. Helen had barely moved. He looked at her inert bulk under the covers. No one ever looked graceful lying under covers.

"I said—" he began again.

"I heard you," she said, talking into her pillow.

"I wouldn't mind a month's vacation right now. Hadley left for Florida yesterday, for a month."

Hadley owned the next house down the road. The third house, the one nearest the road, had been rented as a ski lodge for the winter; the owners had already vacated and the new people had not arrived yet. So both houses were empty.

"A whole month," Gifford said, yawning. "He was in the bank the other day to say good-bye. Said he was going to turn off the gas, the electricity, the phone and pack up and go. The lucky stiff."

"You'd better get up," Helen said, "and wake the kids."

Gifford got out of bed and stood by the window. He gazed listlessly for a moment and then, as he turned away, he thought he saw something move among the pine trees. He turned back and stood at the window again, squinting.

"I think I saw a deer," he said.

"Must be a crazy one," Helen said drearily. "Doesn't know the hunting season's started, I guess."

He continued to peer out at the woods, hoping to catch sight of whatever it was that had moved, but all he saw was the extraordinary stillness of the pine in the windless gray light. After several minutes, he said, "I *think* I saw a deer."

"Mel," his wife said, still talking into her pillow, "please wake up the kids. You've got to take them to school."

"And open up the bank and sit behind my desk and smile at everybody. Look, I think I saw a deer and if I did, then it's the most exciting thing that's happened to me in six months."

"Don't be bitter, darling."

"Who's bitter?" he muttered, leaving the window.

He put on his bathrobe and walked across the hall, first to Jennifer's room. He opened her door and paused, listening to the seven-year-old snoring lightly. Then he walked to the bed, gazed for a moment at the sleeping face, the dark hair sprawled over the pillow. Gently he put his hand on her shoulder and shook her. A querulous look crossed her sleeping face as she began to turn.

"Good morning, Jennifer," he said.

Her eyes opened, searched sleepily for a moment, then found

him standing there by her bed.

"Get up, sweetheart," he whispered.

She stretched and yawned.

"Okay?" he asked.

"Okay."

Then he went to Billy's room. The towheaded eight-year-old was already up.

"I was dreaming, Dad," he said when Gifford walked in.

"Tell me about it later. First, get dressed."

Gifford returned to the bedroom window and peered out again, a puzzled frown on his face. Helen was fully awake now, lying in bed watching him.

"I thought I saw a deer," Gifford said, studying the pine forest with gravely thoughtful eyes. The night shadows seemed to be lingering among the poised, graceful trees. Nothing was moving.

"Maybe it was a hunter," Helen said.

"The woods are posted."

"Since when has that stopped them?"

"Well," Gifford said, "they'd better keep away from here."

After he had washed and shaved and dressed, he sat down to breakfast with his family. Billy and Jennifer yawned, and toyed uninterestedly with their food. Gifford noted it but said nothing; there was a general ennui in the house this morning which was catching.

While Helen helped the children into their coats, Gifford stood at the hall mirror, gazing at himself in a rather detached way. He was thirty-eight and he supposed he looked it. His brown hair had begun to thin. Soft, passive lines were appearing around his mouth. His brown eyes were cool, unreadable; good eyes for a banker to have; good eyes for listening. He thought he was getting a bit flabby, though he did not really want to admit it. He'd ski again this winter, maybe do some hiking. Tone up those muscles.

He put on his topcoat, opened the door and went outside. He stood on the porch feeling the cool, fresh morning air on his face, then headed for the garage, hoping he wouldn't have any trouble starting the car this morning.

As he approached the garage—the door was open—he turned and looked over his shoulder one more time at the pine forest. Had he seen a deer or not? So he was not looking at the garage and did not see the man step from inside it and stand in the doorway. When Gifford finally did turn back and found himself being confronted by the stranger, they were about ten feet apart. He stopped dead in his tracks.

The man was much younger than Gifford, perhaps in his mid-twenties, but there was a lot of hard experience etched into his face, into the calculating steadiness of his gaze, and in the almost contemptuous nonchalance with which he stood. He was wearing a plaid jacket which was two-thirds unzipped, and one hand was concealed inside, at once calmly and menacingly.

"Who are you?" Gifford asked. "What are you doing in there?"

"Just relax, Mr. Gifford," the man said, the tone of his voice suggesting he was giving some very good advice. "You just keep your head and do as you're asked and nobody is going to get hurt."

"I want to know what you were doing in my garage."

"We were waiting for you."

"We?" Gifford said.

The second man appeared then, stepping out of the garage. This one was older, perhaps Gifford's age, with that same steady gaze that wasn't necessarily hostile or threatening, that was simply there to be observed, noted. He was wearing a trench coat and a small felt fedora and he looked almost European. He was holding a small revolver in his hand, pointed at Gifford.

"Get into the house," he ordered.

"Why?" Gifford asked, making a conscious effort not to look at the gun, as if refusing to acknowledge it, its primacy.

"Because I tell you to," the older man said impatiently.

"My family is in there."

"We know that. And the best way you can help them is to do exactly as we say, with a minimum of fuss and talk."

"There isn't much money in the house," Gifford said. "But whatever there is, you're welcome to."

"Just get in the house," the older one repeated, putting the gun in his coat pocket but keeping his hand on it.

Gifford turned and, followed by the two men, walked back to the house. The door was still open. He could hear Helen talking to the children.

When she heard his footsteps on the porch, she said, "Don't tell me the car won't start."

When he walked inside, followed by the two men, Helen took one look and moved the children around behind her. She didn't have to be told that this was trouble. It was written on her husband's face.

"It's all right, Helen," Gifford said. "They haven't explained themselves yet, but it's all right."

Helen turned to the children and said, "These are friends of

your Daddy's. Say hello to them."

Shyly, the children nodded to the men.

"Now take off your coats and go upstairs to your rooms," Helen told them. "We'll call you when it's time to go."

Slowly, uncertainly, with backward looks, the children went upstairs. The two men smiled pleasantly at them.

When the children were gone, the older one said, "Well done, Mrs. Gifford. Now, if this kind of cooperation is maintained everything is going to be just fine."

"What do you want?" Helen asked.

"Sit down, both of you," the older one ordered. "It's very simple, really. All cut-and-dried, from point A to point Z."

The Giffords sat down on the livingroom sofa. While the younger man lounged in the doorway, his hand still inside his

jacket, an expressionless, uncompromising look on his face, the older one stood before the Giffords.

"I'm going to drive into town with you, Mr. Gifford," he said. "My partner is going to remain here, to oversee your wife and children, as a sort of guarantee for your cooperation until our return."

"You mean you're going to hold them hostage," Gifford said angrily.

"Well, yes. I know you don't like it, but it's the best way, all around, believe me. Now, here's what's going to happen. Instead of opening your bank at nine o'clock, as you normally do, you're going to open a bit earlier today, before your staff gets in."

"And you're going to clean it out," Gifford said. "Well, you've overlooked one thing: there's a time lock on the vault. It doesn't open until nine o'clock and there's not a damn thing I can do about it."

The gunman stared sternly at Gifford for a moment, then began to laugh softly. "We know that, Mr. Gifford," he said. "Look, if it makes you feel any better, we're not amateurs. We know about these things. We've been studying you and your bank and the habits and procedures of all concerned. We've been here nearly a week, and the fact that you haven't noticed us tells you something about our expertise."

"You're not perfect," Gifford said. "I saw you in there yesterday at closing time."

The gunman laughed again, a short, mirthless chuckle. "So we're not perfect," he said, "but don't let that reduce your confidence in us. There's nothing like a small-town bank. You're very trusting people here. You don't lock up all of your cash at night. Your tellers leave their cash drawers full. That's what we want."

Gifford looked at the floor. The man was right. It was not recommended practice, but out of old habits the tellers did leave their cash in their drawers overnight as crime was virtually nonexistent here. Bank robbers or other serious criminals all seemed so remote.

When Gifford looked up at the gunman there was resentment in his eyes, as if his trust had been betrayed.

"Now," the older man said, looking at his watch, "it's exactly seven-thirty. The drive into town is forty minutes, which means we arrive at the bank at eight-ten. It shouldn't take us more than fifteen minutes to do what we have to do. So it's then eight-twenty-

five. With the drive back, we should be returning here at a few minutes after nine."

"That's if he doesn't make trouble," the other gunman added.

"Don't worry, Alf," the older one said, smiling at Gifford. "He won't make any trouble. He knows what's at stake, don't you, Mr. Gifford?"

Gifford said nothing.

"Because," the gunman went on, "if we're not back here on time, and let's allow a few minutes for delays, then his family will be in deep trouble. If we're not back by, say, nine-twenty, Alf will safely assume that someone tried to upset our plans."

"And then what?" Gifford asked. "What happens then?"

The gunman smiled, shrugged, and said, "Who can tell—with Alf's temper?"

The implied threat infuriated Gifford; the very idea that anyone would think of harming his family almost deranged his thinking for a moment and he had to suppress the impulse to leap at these men.

"All right," the older gunman said curtly, "let's get moving. For you and your family, Mr. Gifford, the clock has begun to tick."

Gifford did not, would not, get up until the revolver had reappeared. Gesturing with it, the gunman brought Gifford to his feet and followed him outside.

"We'll take your car, Mr. Gifford," the man said as they went down the porch steps.

So for the second time that morning Gifford headed for his garage. This time he went in with his companion, got into his car and backed out. As he turned to head down the driveway Gifford took a last, longing look back at his house. It suddenly had an aspect of closed, cold inaccessibility. It provoked in Gifford one single, driving resolve: to get this over as quickly as possible and get back to his family. He had no intention of trying to play the hero. They could take the money and be damned.

As he drove toward the highway he passed the two empty houses and for the first time realized how isolated he was back there. He passed the gunmen's car along the side of the road and knew that no one would see it, no one would pass who might be curious enough to question its presence.

When they got to the highway Gifford pressed down hard on the accelerator and headed for town.

"Please observe the speed limit, Mr. Gifford," the gunman said. "We don't want to break the law," he added with a sardonic chuckle.

They drove in silence after that. Occasionally they exchanged glances, and when they did, the gunman nodded politely and showed a faint, whimsical smile.

As they neared town, Gifford broke the silence. "Won't it look strange to people," he said, "you walking into the bank with me?"

"No. The people here don't have suspicious minds. No reason for them to."

"Suppose some of my staff show up early?"

"Have they ever?"

"No," Gifford said glumly. "But what happens when they arrive and the bank is closed?"

"I can tell you what will happen. They'll call your home, where your wife, with Alf standing right next to her, will tell them you overslept and are on your way in."

"But if someone has already seen me there, entering and leaving . . ."

"We'll let them puzzle it out, Mr. Gifford. By the time they begin to become overly-curious it won't matter anymore. Alf and I will be well on our way."

When they reached the bank, Gifford was told to park in the alley adjacent. They got out of the car and, without being seen by anyone, entered the bank. The blinds were drawn, concealing the bank's interior from the street.

"Eight-ten on the button," the gunman said with a note of quiet satisfaction in his voice.

Gifford suddenly whirled and confronted him and, in an unnaturally loud voice, asked, "What happens to my family if we don't get back there on time?"

As if annoyed or perhaps alarmed by this sudden belligerence, the gunman drew his revolver.

"I'm asking you a question, damn you!" Gifford shouted, taking a step toward the other, and as he did the gunman lifted the revolver to eye level and pointed it coldly and directly at Gifford.

"Get on with it, Mr. Gifford," he said testily. "If you have your family's well-being at heart you won't tempt the fates by wasting time. Now, you have the keys to those cash drawers, so get on with it."

Gifford got his keys and began unlocking the drawers. The gunman went with him to the tellers' stations, holding a canvas bag which he had pulled from his pocket, and watched Gifford go from drawer to drawer filling it. The gunman had figured fifteen minutes in the bank; it took less than ten.

"All right, Mr. Gifford," the gunman said when all the drawers

had been emptied, "now comes the delicate part—walking out of here carrying an obviously stuffed bag. I might add that with the money now in my possession my outlook on things becomes a bit obsessed. The idea of a large sum of money is one thing, the possession of it is another. If anyone challenges us I'm prepared to use this gun—on you or them. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Gifford said.

"So give me your car keys. In the event I have to shoot you dead I'll have to leave in your car."

Frightened now, Gifford handed him the keys. The gunman seemed tense, even angry, as if the mere thought of having to relinquish the money was intolerable.

They opened the door and walked outside. The sidewalk was empty, for which Gifford was grateful, for he had taken quite seriously the man's threats. They walked around to the alley and got into the car, Gifford in the driver's seat. The keys were returned to him.

"Now head back."

"What time is it?" Gifford asked, then looked at his watch. It was eight-twenty.

"Time is no problem, Mr. Gifford. Just get moving."

Gifford backed out of the alley. Several people passing on the sidewalk seemed to take no notice. In this small, insular New England town they were so conditioned to minding their business that they seemed to feel it was an intrusion even to glance at someone. Gifford damned their aloofness now. If any one of them had any brains they would notice that something was amiss here and call the police—except that the police in this town consisted of two middle-aged men who were totally inadequate to cope with a situation like this.

As they drove back along the highway, Gifford began having some disturbing thoughts. What would happen after they returned? Would the two gunmen simply take the money and leave? The more Gifford thought about it the more his doubts began to grow. At best, they would tie up the family, so as to have ample time in which to get away; and the worst—but Gifford didn't want to think about that.

Grimly silent, Gifford sped along the highway, anxious to get back, to be with his family, to face together whatever happened.

They passed few cars on the highway; there was only the constant passing on either side of the road of the endless evergreen. Between the monotony of the drive

and the consuming depths of his thoughts, Gifford was paying only mechanical attention to what he was doing, to the extent that it was the gunman who had to point out that they were nearing the side road.

"The turnoff is coming up," he said, noting that there had been no deceleration to allow for the turn.

His voice barely penetrated Gifford's reverie and, with an uncomprehending expression, he turned his head to look at the man.

"The turn is coming," the gunman yelled, pointing ahead with his finger.

Instinctively, without thinking, without braking or even decompressing the accelerator, Gifford suddenly swung the wheel, but the car was going too fast, the angle too sharp. There was a shuddering and a skidding as the car bounded off the highway onto the dirt road; the trees seemed to be flashing through every window, swooping and abrupt, as if doing some wild dance around the car. Unable to make its turn, the car made a screeching sound and plunged off the dirt road. It bolted furiously through the roadside brush, ran over some scrub pine and came suddenly and barbarously to a stop with a sickening thud against an enormous boulder that had been cast from the mountaintop in another age.

Gifford remembered his head hitting against the window. He thought he had been knocked unconscious then, yet he remembered the car flattening the scrub pine and then the boulder looming up like something rising from the undersea. He also remembered the jolting and unceremonious stop to which they had come, but it was all vague and unreal, ill-recorded by memory.

He was lying against the door, aware of a dull aching in his head, his thoughts unable for the moment to emerge coherently from under the pain. He blinked several times before he was able to understand what it was he was seeing. The hood had been thrown into the air by the impact of the crash and hung now like the open jaw of some voracious bird of prey. He could not immediately remember where he was, what had happened. Then he turned and saw his companion, and he remembered.

The gunman looked as though he had been hurled against the door with great fury; he seemed crushed and crumpled. His face, in profile, wore an expression of shocked anger, made the more fu-

rious by a copious flow of blood. His hat was gone and his hair looked as though it had been about to leave his head and then stopped.

Gifford gazed at him with simple, uncomplicated curiosity, until the realization had set fully in—the man was dead.

Then Gifford remembered all the rest of it and a shock of terror rushed through him. He looked at his watch: it was ten minutes after nine. He turned around and stared with building panic at the road, then undid his seat belt and opened the door and got out. He walked around behind the smashed and seething car to the other door and opened it. The gunman, who had not been using his seat belt, tumbled softly to the ground. Gifford reached down and took the revolver out of the man's pocket.

He glanced again at his watch. There was still time. Alf was expecting them back by nine-twenty and there would surely be allowed some margin for delay, but how much? He thought about the possibility of going back to the highway and hailing a car but that would consume time.

Another thought occurred: take the bag of money to the house, tell Alf what had happened and perhaps he would go. The idea was appealing, except that Alf might suspect a trick, might suspect that Gifford was trying to trap him, and in that situation there was no telling what the man might do.

Then, under the pressure of elapsing time, with the determination to help his family, Gifford disdained all further thought and speculation and began to run toward his house, revolver in hand. He passed his neighbors' empty houses. A fleeting thought to break in and telephone the state police had to be rejected; the telephones in both houses had been disconnected.

What am I going to do? Gifford kept asking himself. He couldn't simply burst in there, gun or no gun. There was no telling what Alf's frame of mind was, nor what it would become. Doubtless an awful tension had been building in that house during the past hour. The young gunman had to be getting more and more concerned and nervous, and consequently unpredictable and dangerous.

Gifford stopped in the middle of the road, panting. He lifted his hand and covered his eyes for a moment. Get out of the road, he told himself. Alf would almost certainly be watching the road.

So he began approaching the house in a roundabout way,

through the pine forest, moving slowly, cautiously. When the side of the house came into view he lay down on the pine needles, trying to formulate some plan, some kind of assault that held a reasonable chance of success. *Think*, he told himself. *Think. Think.*

He could enter through a basement window, carefully and quietly, and work his way upstairs and take Alf by surprise—but the least sound, with his wife and children sitting in front of a gun . . . He closed his eyes for a moment. Were the basement windows locked? He hadn't checked them in months; there was never reason to, in this "crime-free" environment. If they were locked, how could he get in without breaking one? There was no telling what the least sound might provoke in Alf's mind.

He should have gone back to the highway and summoned help, he realized now. This was foolhardy. He had no experience at this sort of thing. He was jeopardizing his family.

Then, as he lay there agonizing over his situation, a shot suddenly rang out, shattering the pristine silence of the pine forest. Gifford instinctively pressed himself tensely to the ground, his eyes glaring. He looked at his watch: ten minutes after nine.

Only ten minutes after nine?

With his eyes widening in terror he studied the face of the watch. The sweep hand was still. The watch had stopped, probably during the accident. But when? How long ago? How long had he been unconscious in the car?

Now the echo of the shot began to reverberate through him. What was happening in the house?

Without waiting to shape another thought, suddenly seized and impelled by an uncontrollable terror, he got to his feet and began running at breakneck speed for the house, pointing the gun out ahead of him. He crashed through the underbrush and out onto the road, running faster and faster, driven forward by the single, maniacal thought of getting the man who was inside the house, unmindful of his own safety, unencumbered by any idea of stealth or strategy. That was all gone now, replaced by the primitive urge to protect his family.

He ran across the front lawn, took the porch steps in two bounds and burst through the front door. He ran through the hallway—and was suddenly confronted by Alf. The gunman was in the act of running from the livingroom to the hallway, his gun swung out from his body.

Without stopping, Gifford fired,

his finger suddenly frozen on the trigger. The revolver's recoil made him shudder and stagger as a fury of motion was enacted before him. The running Alf was struck several times in mid-flight and now his animation became spastic and grotesque as one after the other the bullets struck him. He slammed into the wall, then arched back, spun in a half circle and dropped to the floor.

Gifford raced into the livingroom where he found his startled wife standing, her clasped hands covering her mouth.

"Where are the children?" Gifford demanded.

Helen gasped, her fixed eyes upon the smoking revolver in her husband's hand.

"Where are they?" Gifford shouted.

"Upstairs," she said in a small, strained voice that sounded like a gasp.

"Are they all right? Are you all right?"

"Yes-yes-yes," Helen said, trembling.

Then she ran to him as Gifford let the gun fall to the floor and he threw his arms around her.

"I heard a shot . . ." he said, wracked by unspent tension.

"He was getting more and more restless and nervous," Helen said. "It was terrible."

"He didn't harm any of you, did he?"

"No."

"But what was he shooting at?" Gifford asked.

"He said he saw something moving in the trees. He thought it was the police. But I saw it. It was only a deer . . . but he didn't believe me."

She looked once at Alf's inert, bloody, bullet-torn body, then closed her eyes and pressed her forehead against Gifford's chest.

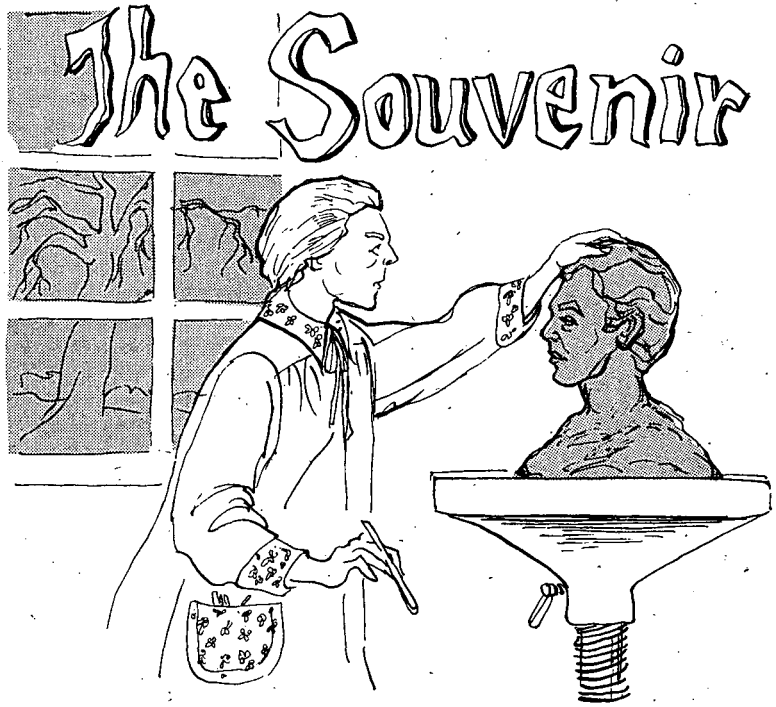
"A deer?" Gifford said softly. "That's what he shot at?"

"What happened?" Helen asked. "Are you all right? Are you all right?"

Gifford sighed and shook his head. "Not yet. Give me a little time," he said, closing his eyes as he heard his children calling from upstairs.

There are times, if one hearkens to ancient philosophers, when one should not put a sickle in another man's corn.

The Souvenir



It was my custom to stay on for a week or two at The Buckeye after the season ended; it was then that I did my best work and in my spare time I would help Margit, my landlady, prepare the ancient rooming house for winter. Her grandmother and aged aunt, with whom she had passed a dull, migratory existence for many years, opening the place in Glen Avon in May, closing it after Labor Day and journeying to St. Petersburg for the winter months, had both died down there within weeks of each other two years before, but

Margit still practiced the same ritual; she was like a bird who finds its cage is open at last but can't decide where to go or even if its wings will work.

I happened to be alone in the house, trying to finish the last chapter of my novel and so deeply absorbed I jumped a bit when the bell rang, and when I

went down to open the door I found an attractive but doomed-looking woman with blue eyes and cinnamon-colored hair peering through the screen. A foreign sports car was parked at the curb.

"I'm looking for Miss Fanchon. I'm Helen Maier."

The name didn't register at first. I told her Margit had gone for a walk but should be back at any minute.

"I was told the Fillmore—is that its name?—is the only hotel still open. Maybe I ought to go around there and see about a room for the night. I've been driving for hours."

She gave a sudden cry as she followed me into the parlor and I put out my hand, thinking she might have twisted her ankle on the little step-down. Her face was sickly pale and when I saw the direction of her gaze I knew at once who she was.

"Good heavens, how stupid of me! You must be Paul's wife."

She kept staring at that piece of sculpture on the mantel.

"Who's the artist?" she asked faintly.

"Margit—Miss Fanchon." Then, idiotically trying to dispel the awkwardness of the moment, I added, "The head in the middle—that's mine." I always had to tell people because, in truth, it only vaguely resembled me. Margit always said I had the sort of face to which only Rodin could do justice.

Mrs. Maier's next question was obvious. "And the woman's? Could that be—her?"

"Juliette Bardo. Yes."

She studied the head with the

feigned indifference of a gallery visitor. "I might have known she'd be stunning." She asked me if I'd known Paul and I said yes, fairly well, as well as one gets to know fellow lodgers in a rooming house during a short summer season.

"Please sit down," I told her. "Or would you rather wait in another room? I shouldn't have brought you in here."

She was already more composed. "Don't apologize. I'd known for years that my husband had *feet* of clay. He played first violin in that orchestra for fifteen years. I played second fiddle in his life for twelve. This Juliette Bardo person was simply the latest of a long string. It never bothered me that much, really. I'm not a romantic schoolgirl. Paul always came back to me when the season ended. He was always mine for those long winter months." She read my expression and quickly laughed. "Don't get the wrong idea. I'm not tracking him down. I've been spending the summer at Lake Placid and on my way south thought it might be fun to see this place. I never came up when Paul was with the symphony all those summers. He never urged me to. Naturally. But I must say I was shocked when I got his letter. Formal as a letter of resignation—which of course is what it was. And typewritten at that! Saying he'd fallen in love with this Juliette Bardo and was going away with her to start a new life. Oh, it was a masterpiece of cruelty, that letter. Wish now I'd never burned it. So, I just suddenly took it into my noggin to see the place where this great romance flowered."

She surveyed the tacky-looking parlor with the sort of disappointed frown one might see on the face of an avid Shakespearean at his first glimpse of Vérona.

She said, in reply to my question, that she hadn't heard a word from Paul since that letter. "I suppose he was too ashamed. He's never even tried to claim any of the money. He can't be playing with any well-known orchestra. I would have heard. But then I suppose they're living in Love Land, where material worries are unimportant. You knew her, too, I assume?"

I nodded but didn't feel it necessary to tell her that I'd thought Juliette Bardo to be a rather sweet young creature. Not innocent—she was an actress of sorts and had been around—but not tawdry, either. Exactly the sort of girl who would run off with a handsome dark-eyed violinist.

"Were you here when they left?" she wanted to know, and once again I wondered if she were

not secretly in pursuit of the pair. Well, I certainly couldn't give her any clues to their destination. Margit had asked me to take some clothes to the dry cleaners in the city for her that day. When I'd got back she'd broken the news to me that the couple had run off.

I told her this, and she looked at her watch with a frown. "I'm hungry and tired. And frankly, this place gives me the willies. I suppose it's the sort of atmosphere only a writer—or musician—could appreciate." She stood up and wrapped her fur stole around her shoulders. "Tell Miss Fanchon I was here, will you? If she doesn't mind, I think I'll drop back later this evening." Then, glancing back, "Maybe I could get her to sell me those heads. Think what a joy it would be to smash them against a brick wall!"

I laughed. "If she thought you'd do that she'd never let you have them. They're the best things she's ever done."

I suppose I owned the worst—that head of the busboy Adonis she'd been working on the first year I knew her—her maiden effort.

Glen Avon, if you've never been there, is rather like Tanglewood or Chautauqua or that place in Vermont where my old college professor used to dry out while lecturing on the Metaphysical Poets. It has a miniature Panorama of the Holy Land, a shaded plaza, an amphitheater where Glenn Miller *and* Toscanini had performed—it was that sort of place, something for everyone, and picturesque enough for the most demanding: quaintly narrow streets of eccentric-looking hotels and rooming houses huddled together in a vast leafy gloom which would abruptly end as you emerged from the shadow of the rambling Fillmore Hotel onto a greensward stretching between the bathing beach and the bell tower, and bordering one of the prettiest lakes in the Adirondacks.

Its eight-week midsummer season was crammed with a potpourri of operas, concerts, plays, lectures, and art classes, and then after Labor Day, when it all came to an end, its population would dwindle to a relative handful. I liked it best then, when its atmosphere was curiously mellow, as if ghostly strains of music still floated upon the quiet air, and a gentle autumnal haze would settle over the lake, and the Westminster chimes from the bell tower would echo among the narrow empty streets with an unearthly resonance, and I would look up from my work with that pleasant feeling of sheltered, isolated cozi-

ness reminiscent of college days on a deserted summer campus.

This place to which I'd been coming for the past four summers was the typical frame rooming house in the center of the grounds, damp and umbrageous, in thickets of lily of the valley and spidery rhododendrons, with a painted sign, *The Buckeye,* nailed over the front door, and a buckeye tree planted beside the porch, because Margit's Auntie Belle and Nanna had come from Ohio in the antediluvian past.

My landlady herself, the spinster survivor of those two formidable dragons, was "an overgrown, clumsy, young-old woman with a plain, intense, kindly face which looked as radiantly sallow as a cloistered Carmelite's, and as ignorant of the more robust emotions,"—which is how I described her in a story I tried to write about her the first season I was here—a story I never finished, incidentally, because its main character seemed to resist my attempts to involve her in any sort of dramatic situation.

While the two female dragons were still alive I would occasionally come upon Margit sitting alone on one of the benches near the bell tower, watching the sailboats or the sunset, and we would exchange the shiest of hellos. Then one day I'd seen her at the Plaza Art Festival where, with others in the beginners' modeling class, she was trying her best to reconstruct in clay on a wire armature the head of a model, but it was pathetically clear to me as I watched her that she would never succeed, not from any specific lack of talent but because she was trying to get more than was there. The handsome youth the class was using as a model was all blue eyes and jawline, whereas Margit was trying to make something spiritual out of him, and I'd felt like stopping behind her and whispering in her ear: "Forget it, my dear. Apollo *has* no soul."

Instead, I'd waited till the rest of the class and spectators had dispersed, leaving her gazing sadly at the result of her wasted efforts, and I'd felt sorry for her and impulsively declared I wanted to buy it. She blinked at me. "Whatever for? It's hideous." I badgered her until she gave in, although she insisted on making me a present of it. It still sits here on my desk. Hideous, yes, but with a singular kind of honesty about it which makes it rather precious to me. In its way, I think it superior to those heads of Paul and Juliette, which seem to me too cheaply attractive, too spiritless.

Helen Maier drove off toward

the Fillmore and I returned to Chapter Fifteen. I heard Margit come in about a half hour later and when I went down she was laying out the tea things. Auntie Belle and Nanna had been staunchly British and this habit of afternoon tea was one of their legacies Margit had not abandoned. Her tenants during the season found it rather endearing, and so did I.

My news surprised her. "Paul's *wife*? How very odd. Whatever brought *her* here?"

"She said she was on her way home from Lake Placid and decided to look the place over. Although, between you and me and the buckeye tree, I think it's more of a sentimental pilgrimage than she lets on."

"What do you mean?"

"Or else she's actually trying to track him down. Maybe that's why she wants to see you."

Margit looked scornful. "Well, land sakes, *I* can't tell her anything. If she thinks I played Friar Lawrence to *that* Juliette and her Romeo I'll soon set her straight. I can't tell her a thing she doesn't already know. Her husband was a charming man, but a philandering cheat. That's all I can tell her."

I sat down at the table and she poured the tea. "Your aunt and grandmother were such strict old ladies, I've often wondered why they allowed him to live here."

"Oh, he was smooth as syrup and sweet as honey, you know that. Could worm his way into any woman's good graces—without half trying."

I detected the faintest shadow of a blush and it occurred to me to wonder if Margit herself hadn't had romantic yearnings toward the passionate fiddler. Now, with Auntie Belle and Nanna dead and Paul no doubt far away, I felt bold enough to tease her about it. "I may be wrong, but I seem to recall his flirting with you, as well."

She responded with such a frank and painful blush I quickly backed off. "But then, that was probably my writer's diseased imagination."

She became unexpectedly thoughtful, sipping her tea with a musing, distant look, and then she put the cup down and looked at me with an expression which was brave almost to defiance.

"If you weren't going to Europe next summer I'd be quite willing to have you think so—that it was just your imagination, I mean."

Her face began to shine with an unaccustomed excitement, and once more she blushed.

I was intrigued. "You mean it

wasn't only my imagination?"

"Well," this time she was tremulously coy, "not entirely, maybe."

I thought she was going to lose her nerve and pass it off as a joke, but I was wrong.

"You won't ever come back here, will you? I mean, after your summer in Europe. You'll go to other places. You won't ever come back here."

There was no point in lying. "No, I suppose not. But then, who can tell? I'm very fond of this place."

She continued to shake her head. "You won't ever come back. I can tell. The way you look at everything. You're storing it all up, aren't you?"

I admired her perceptiveness. "You should have taken up writing instead of sculpture."

"You said once you'd write a story about Auntie Belle and Nanna. Remember? My, but weren't they flattered? And you listened so patiently to their tales and reminiscences . . . You will write about them someday, won't you?"

"It's very likely."

The next thing she said caught me off guard. "I wish you'd write a story about me someday."

This may not look in print as touchingly wistful as it sounded. She sat across from me, this awkward-looking, soft-eyed, no longer young woman, and she was so painfully sincere it was embarrassing.

"Oh," I said, "I no doubt shall."

She lowered her eyes and shook her head. "No. I'm not the sort of person stories are written about. My life is too dull."

I couldn't help thinking about that story I'd tried to write about her and couldn't. Presently she looked up and gave me a slow, almost provocative smile. "If I tell you something—something I would never in my life tell another soul—will you promise to write a story about me?"

Still thinking of that one paragraph that had led nowhere, and trying not to look as guilty as I felt, I nodded.

"And you must promise never to tell anyone. I mean, in a story, that's different. No one will know it's me. You can change my name and appearance and all that."

"Of course."

She drew her chair in closer to the table. "Well, to tell the truth, Paul did flirt with me. When I'd bring up his towels and things. It was all in fun, of course. I knew he didn't mean anything by it, but how Auntie Belle and Nanna did tease me about it. Then one evening we ran into each other on

the plaza and he took me to the Refectory and bought me an ice cream cone. And walked me home. I went to every one of the concerts that season. And the rehearsals. I'd sit way up there in the amphitheater behind the orchestra where he couldn't see me. But he knew I was there. He always knew . . . Want your tea warmed up?" She said this very crisply and I could tell she needed a moment to discharge the emotion in her voice—or to get her story straight in her head. I was almost sure she was making it all up.

"Then one night just a few days before the season ended, after the last concert, I waited for him and he walked home with me. He held my hand and we took a roundabout way along the shore. He kissed me by the bell tower. That night, after everybody was asleep and the house was quiet, he came to my room."

Curiously, she said this without blushing. "I can't believe Auntie Belle and Nanna really found out. They couldn't have. But there was something in the way they looked at me the next morning . . . but they didn't say anything and the season ended and Paul went home. To his wife, I suppose, although none of us knew he even had a wife then. I honestly didn't expect to see him again, you know."

She sipped her tea with a mildly sour expression, as if she found the beverage—or the memory—bitter. "I think I hoped that he wouldn't come back to The Buckeye. But, miracle of miracles, he did. I guess I thought it was a sign from heaven. I behaved foolishly, though I tried to be discreet, of course, and implored him to be. That's why it surprised me now when you said you thought he'd flirted with me. It was a wonderful summer . . . I was older than any of those sweet young things who used to hang around Paul, mooning over his Haydn and Bach; so cool; so resilient. *I* had no resilience left, and that's why I ought to have known better. But it was now-or-never time for me, and I knew it. Age comes so suddenly when there's been nothing to gauge your progress by. Life is just a landscape without figures. No growing children, no aging husband, no fellow workers, no friends. Auntie Belle and Nanna? Don't be funny. They were always old, far back as I can remember. Walking mummies. Two mummies and a zombie, that was us!"

She emptied her cup and folded her hands in her lap. "But it was all an act. He would have been kinder if he'd broken into the

house and—attacked me. Then sneaked off. But the concerts, the after-dark walks along the lake, our special bench behind the bell tower, that funny little tearoom where they were always short of forks, the trip around the lake that night on the *Gadfly*, the mist along the banks and the moonlight on the water. It all meant . . . nothing!

"That winter both Auntie Belle and Nanna died—so unexpectedly. I would have come unraveled if I hadn't had Paul to think about. Paul . . . and the summer to come. I was almost sure he wouldn't return."

The more she said now the uneasier I became, because the conviction kept growing on me that it was all make-believe, wishful thinking.

"But he did come," I was forced to prompt her.

"Oh, he came. Yes, indeed, he came. He was shocked to hear about Auntie Belle and Nanna, and for a while he was nice enough to me. But you remember we had a new roomer that season—dear Juliette. I began to notice how they looked at each other when they thought I wasn't looking. Then as time went on they grew reckless, brazen. Well, I don't have to tell you. You were right here. You remember. Oh, yes, they made no bones about their feelings for each other. You can imagine how *I* felt. People couldn't help remarking how nervous and moody I was—but you all thought it was because of Auntie Belle and Nanna. Well, now you know the truth. Finally, I just couldn't take it any longer. We had it out, Paul and I. And that's when he told me."

She flicked a hanky out of her sleeve and dabbed at her eyes, a gesture that seemed too consciously theatrical. "The reason he'd come back to The Buckeye, you see, after that first season, was that Auntie Belle and Nanna had told him he could stay here *rent free*! As long as he was *nice* to *me*! Yes. God's truth. And that's only part of it. They paid him! Actually gave him *money*. And he'd taken it! That's the kind of man he was. Those two sweet, ridiculous old ninnies had *bribed* him to be nice to me. They were actually going to try to *buy* me a husband."

My astonishment seemed to please her immensely. "There! Isn't that a story for you?"

A story—that is to say, fiction—was what I felt sure it was, but I merely said, "Is that all? That's the end?"

"Ah, well . . . you can supply whatever ending you please. I

leave that entirely up to you. They ran away together when the season ended. You can say they lived happily ever after, I don't care."

"Did Juliette know about you and Paul?"

"Of course. I had to tell her. I felt it was my duty. I wanted her to know what sort of wretch she was involved with. But it did no good. She was too moonstruck to care."

I'm not saying that I believed the *entire* story to be a lie. I was sure she was fond of Paul Maier, and I'm sure he did flirt with her in a mild, half-joking manner; and though I supposed it was not inconceivable the two old ladies might have been capable of such a stratagem to get a man for their spinster niece, I couldn't see Paul Maier being a party to it. He hadn't struck me as being that depraved a character. I felt sure that that part, and the part about his going to bed with Margit, was pure fantasy. The story was far more interesting and dramatic the way she told it, of course, but I hadn't a shred of what the courts call "hard evidence" to back it up.

That evening, true to her word, Helen Maier called at The Buckeye again. Margit greeted her warmly. I went to my room and did some more work and when I went back downstairs the visitor was just leaving.

"That head you did of Paul," she was saying to Margit, "may I buy it from you?"

Margit smiled, a very generous smile. "No. But you're welcome to it as a gift."

Helen Maier regarded it dryly, once it was in her hands. "As I told your friend here, I always knew my husband had *feet* of clay. This will be a most appropriate souvenir of our marriage."

"Take the other one, too, if you'd like it."

"No, thanks. I think it's time the lovers were separated."

I believe she half-hoped there might be some voodoo-like significance attached to this transaction, that by removing Paul's effigy from the company of his paramour's she was magically effecting some faraway separation of their two bodies.

When she had gone Margit looked at me with wry satisfaction. "I can see what you're thinking. No, I didn't tell her any of what I told you. That's *our* secret. You can send her a copy of your story—if you ever write it, that is."

The next morning we were standing on the porch of that prim-looking white frame house,

the porch that was shaded by morning glories on one side and by the buckeye tree on the other, and we, too, were saying goodbye.

"I ought to have a souvenir, too," I said. "May I have the other head? Juliette's?"

Her eyes twinkled. "Let's trade. Give me back the one I did of you. Don't pretend. You never did like it. And you can have hers."

As we made the exchange she said, "There. Now you own my first and my last artistic efforts. As well as my worst and my best."

I never saw her again, and I didn't think I ever would get around to writing that story about her. I suppose I might even have forgotten about Margit altogether if I hadn't had those two heads to remind me of her. The one of the young Adonis, though artistically regrettable, makes a splendid paperweight; Juliette's I used as a bookend, which my friends admired very much, praising the sculptor's superb plastic sense and assuming he must have been someone of renown. I would merely smile and keep the secret to myself.

Then one day as I was reaching for a book I accidentally dislodged the head, which toppled from the shelf and shattered on the hardwood floor. When I knelt to examine it more closely I discovered why it was so nearly perfect a replica of Juliette's head, for the clay was not molded around the conventional armature but instead adhered to an actual human skull—a skull which could only have been Juliette's.

Then I understood why Margit had sent me away on some errand the night Paul and Juliette had "run away together," and why she had said she was going to stay on a while longer than usual at the end of that season, telling me she had some "loose ends that must be tidied up."

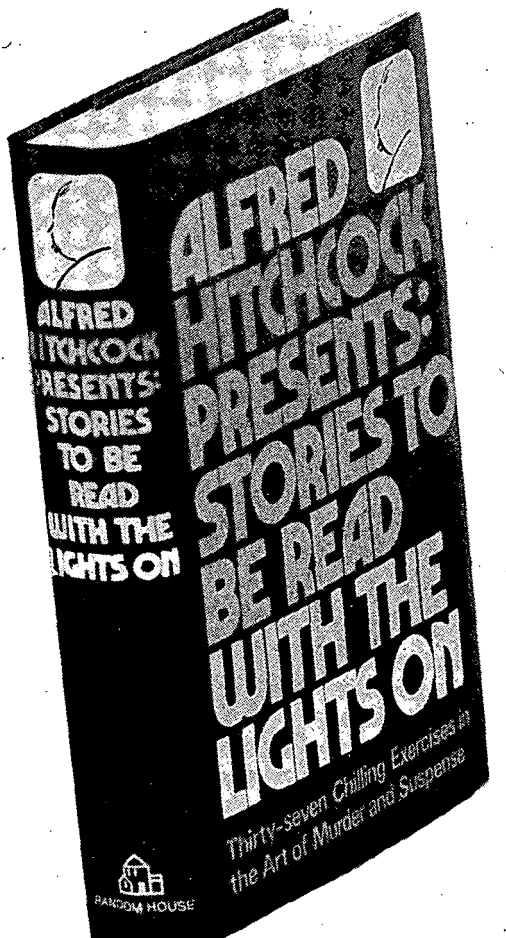
As a man, I was quite naturally horrified by this discovery, but as an artist I must admit I couldn't have been more pleased, for now at last I could sit down and finish writing that story about Margit.

I had my hard evidence.

NEW **NEW** **NEW**

BIG

MONEY SAVING OFFER

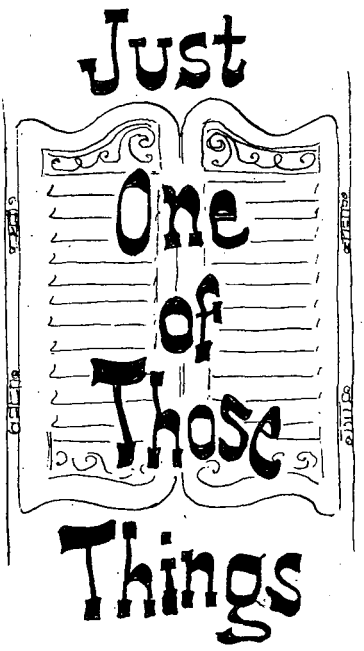


~~$16.95~~

$9.98

For details please see other side

One may learn, with patience, that there are vicissitudes in all things.



When my ship was in the yard last year for dry-docking and annual inspection, I dropped into Bronson's Tavern after a long, difficult day with the Coast Guard inspectors. It had turned dark and frosty, and I felt like a stiff bracer. The tavern was just up the street from the shipyard gates, on my way home, and the bright lights and sense of warmth within drew me inside. To my surprise, Jerry Beaver was the barkeep, in the usual white shirt and bow tie. Jerry was chief steward on one of my old ships in my second-mate days. He had married and quit the sea. I hadn't seen him in nearly five years.

We shook hands across the bar. Jerry is tall and thin, a bit palish, and was always cheerful, but that evening he seemed unable to hold a smile for long.

"Where are you now, Mr. Deghart?" he asked.

"The *Angona*—chief mate," I told him. "She's over in the yard for her annual. How's the world been treating you, Jerry?"

He shrugged. "Just so-so," he said dolefully.

I heard a yelp behind me and

by Patrick O'Keeffe

looked around. I'd noticed the dog when I came in, a black-and-brown German shepherd lying at the feet of a man sitting alone at a corner table. The dog was just slinking under the table, as if to get out of the way. The man had shifted his chair and so I concluded that he'd perhaps accidentally trodden on an outstretched paw. Jerry disillusioned me.

"The SPCA should be given a line on that brute," he said between his teeth.

"You mean he hit the dog?" I asked.

"Kicked it to make it move. He does that all the time. Also, that dog is half-starved. You can see that for yourself."

I glanced around again. From what little of the dog showed beneath the table, I could see that it was thinner than a whippet. The man had opened the evening newspaper and started reading it, a half-empty highball glass on the blue, checkered tablecloth. I took him to be about thirty, and couldn't say I was charmed by his bloated-looking red face.

"You should have him heaved out on his ear," I growled to Jerry.

"Not me! I'm in debt to him right up to here." Jerry touched his lined forehead.

"Things haven't been going too well with you then, I presume."

Jerry sighed. "Wife cracked up in a car smash, hospital bills, private nurses, mortgage payments—you know how it is."

I knew how it was except for the car smash. Jerry gave me a look and moved toward the other end of the bar, which was unoccupied. Sensing that he was seeking a sympathetic ear, I picked up my bourbon and chaser and followed him, beyond the hearing of a couple of hard-hatted yard bosses in coveralls, arguing local politics.

As I set down the glasses, Jerry resumed: "That louse with the dog is one of our regulars. Toule is his name. I got to telling him my troubles one evening. He said not to worry. He'd help me out, seeing I had a steady job with the tavern and my credit was good. How much did I need?"

Jerry breathed deeply. "He was a checker then. I found out the hard way he's also a small-time loan shark on the side. Does his business all out of his head, no records, but never slips up on a figure or a payment date. No need to worry!" Jerry said bitterly. "That's all I've been doing ever since. I got behind with the payments—wife needed another expensive operation. I've already paid more in interest than I borrowed, and no end in sight. It's

keep on paying, or else. Toule's got plenty of friends among the dockside goons."

"Too bad you didn't go to a finance company," I said sympathetically.

"I was thinking about it, but Toule talked me out of it. Said they'd give me a good rooking." Jerry gave a short sardonic laugh and then turned grim. "He'd better not push me too hard," he went on, lowering his voice. "I hear things around here. I've learned that Toule's in the cargo-theft racket. You know what I mean."

I knew quite well—cargo checkers scheming with truck drivers to fix loading figures on shipments to local distributors and sharing in the proceeds of the stolen loot.

"You can bet I wouldn't be around much longer if I squealed on Toule's little racket, but maybe if I sit tight, I won't have to worry about the weekly payments. A guy was in here a few days ago nosing around for information on Toule. He sounded like he might be a Waterfront Commission investigator, or maybe FBI."

"What's Toule hanging around in here for now?"

"There's a ship working late over at pier 6. That's the one Toule used to work on. He was laid off after a bad heart attack on the pier. One of the new heart-case ambulances got there in

time. He's still running the racket with his checker buddies. I heard that the ship's got a big consignment of color television sets for a local dealer." Jerry shrugged significantly. "So, who knows?"

Jerry left me to attend to a customer signaling from the other end of the bar. I looked around again at Toule. He had put down the newspaper to light a big cigar, perhaps an expensive one, though he was inexpensively dressed in a wool-lined jacket and khaki pants and a tweed hat; he wore no big flashy rings, perhaps as a precaution against attracting waterfront muggers.

While I was looking his way, a man came in and went over to him. As he approached the table, the dog bristled, but relaxed when his master spoke to the newcomer, who looked to me to be a checker, pens and pencils clipped to the breast pocket showing behind his open leather Windbreaker. The two men exchanged a few words, and the newcomer went out again.

When Jerry returned and leaned on the bar opposite me, I remarked, "Toule's dog seems ready to protect him in spite of the kickings."

"He told me that's his way of letting it know who its master is, and by going easy on its food, not letting anyone else feed it, the dog gets to know who his food comes from and will protect him. He bought the dog from a guard-dog trainer about a year ago, when the muggings got worse. It paid off a few weeks ago. A couple of muggers went for Toule on his way back to his apartment, which is only a few blocks from here. The dog knocked one of 'em down and stood over him, ready to tear out his throat if he made a move."

"It's amazing," I said, "how a dog will remain faithful to a man regardless of how much he ill-treats it."

"I think, though," demurred Jerry, "there's a point where a dog'll turn on him. It looks to me like Toule's getting pretty close to it. Not that I'll dab my eyes if it ever happens to him."

I saw Jerry two or three times again before the ship moved back across the harbor to her loading pier, but I didn't see him after that until six months later, when the *Angona* went over to the yard for bottom scraping. On my way home the first evening, I looked in Bronson's Tavern, wondering if Jerry Beaver were still there, and if his loan shark was still around. Jerry was there, all right, and he waved to me when he saw me looking along the bar from the

doorway. He jerked his head in the direction of the far end, where we could talk privately, and I went inside.

"I heard your ship was coming over to the yard," Jerry said, "and I was hoping you'd look me up. How's tricks?" Jerry sounded like his old cheerful self.

"No complaints, Jerry." It was a warm summer evening, and I ordered a cold beer. I looked around. "I don't see your checker friend. The FBI catch up with him?"

Jerry shook his head. "You won't see *him* around anymore. He's six feet under, thanks to the dog."

I was startled. "You mean the dog finally—"

Jerry hurried along to a customer who had just entered and seemed impatient to be served. He left me with a vision of the German shepherd sinking its teeth into Toule's throat. I was as impatient as the customer until Jerry came back.

"What happened, Jerry?"

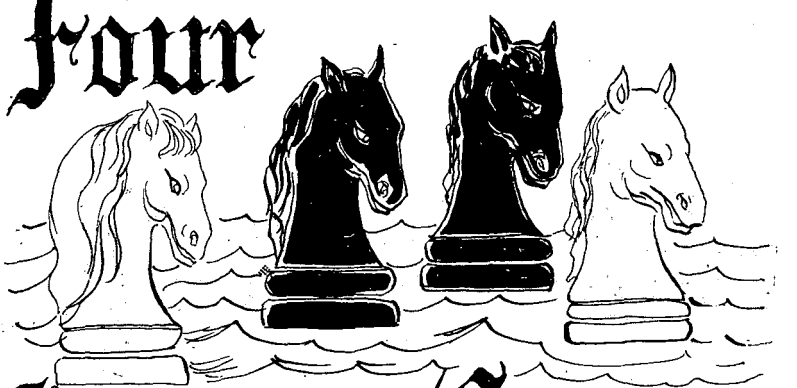
"Toule was in here one night when a ship was working late over at pier 6. He was pretty well loaded by the time he got up to leave. He dropped before he got as far as the door. There weren't many customers then. Some of 'em went to help him up, thinking he was just drunk, but the dog wouldn't let 'em anywhere near him. Snarled and showed his teeth. They tried to coax the dog away. I finally phoned the police. They showed up with a tranquilizer gun, then called the special ambulance when they saw it was a heart case. The medics said they got here just too late."

Glancing along the bar to see if he were wanted, Jerry said, "So now I'm taking home my full pay every week. I was asked why I didn't phone right away for the special ambulance, seeing I knew he had heart trouble. I told them it was just one of those things."

As Jerry finished, he gave me a long look. I looked back at him and then picked up my drink without saying anything. I knew just which one of those things it was.

A true champion does not allow his enthusiasm to be dampened when playing out the end game.

Four Knights Game



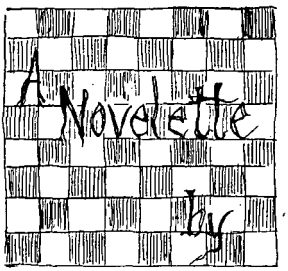
Giving a simultaneous chess exhibition against 50 players was nothing new for Douglas Franklin. A prodigy as a child, an international grand master at 18, Douglas had spent the last 10 of his 29 years wringing out a living doing what he loved best: playing chess. He had been around the world a half dozen times. He had little money, a small walk-up flat in New York City, an unbroken string of invitations to all the major international tournaments, and he called that freedom.

Like most grand masters, Douglas was accustomed to playing simultaneous exhibitions in a kind of trance. Not that he didn't know what was happening on the boards; but he relied on his prodigious skills, natural instincts and vast experience to sustain him through the long hours as he

moved around the inner circle formed by the players' tables, working to obtain an advantage in the openings, then allowing each game to take its course, to play *him.*

This exhibition was different. The girl was a distraction.

She was good, Douglas now realized; too good to be a casual weekend player like the majority of participants on the "Chess Cruise" he had been hired to host. He had underestimated her and chosen a line of attack that was



quick and powerful, but ultimately inferior. She had withstood the attack, and Douglas now found himself in *zugzwang,* where all the moves available to him were bad ones.

Sensing a game of unusual interest, a number of spectators had crowded around the girl's board. Armand Zoltan, the ship's owner, had positioned his huge bulk directly behind the girl's chair and was staring over her shoulder at the score sheet she had been keeping. Zoltan's eyes were large and black, like two pieces of coal shoved into the puffy dough of his face. His gaze momentarily flicked upward as Douglas approached. Then he turned his attention back to the score sheet.

There was one other man who appeared more interested in the record of moves than in the actual position on the board. He had slipped between two of the tables and was standing inside the circle, studying the piece of paper by the girl's hand. He was tall and thin, with pale, almost yellow eyes that seemed to blink in spasms. A bald pate was sparsely covered with a few strands of hair combed from one side to the other and plastered down with hair lotion. His suit was obviously well-tailored but failed to disguise the fact that he needed a bath. He smelled of spicy after-shave and sweat.

Douglas touched the man on the shoulder. "Excuse me, I need some room." The man stared hard at Douglas for a few moments, then moved quickly back.

Douglas lighted a cigarette and pretended to study the position on the board in front of him. He

knew the position was hopeless; what he was really interested in was the girl. If she were nervous, she didn't show it. She was cool and poised, despite the crush of onlookers and Zoltan breathing down her neck. She had a high forehead framed by silky, raven-black hair; cold, penetrating green eyes that seemed to reveal little were contradicted by a full, sensual mouth.

The score sheet had no name on it.

Douglas tipped over his king in the traditional gesture of defeat. "I resign," he said easily.

There was scattered applause, quickly stilled by the angry shushing of the other players.

"Thank you," the girl said quietly. She rose and began to fold her score sheet.

Douglas gently touched her arm. "May I ask who just beat me?"

The girl smiled and extended her hand. "My name is Anne Pickford." Her grip was firm, like her game. She spoke with a pronounced British accent.

"You play a fine game, Anne. Do you mind if I borrow your score sheet? I'd like to look it over."

Anne laughed as she handed him the paper. "If you like. But my guess is that you know every move that was made. The line you used was refuted three years ago in Copenhagen. You were the one who refuted it, against Barslov."

Douglas grinned and slipped the sheet into his pocket. Many of the spectators had moved on to the other boards, but Douglas was aware that the man with the yellow eyes was standing close by, watching them. Douglas leaned closer. "Actually, I was looking for an excuse to ask you to have a drink with me."

"Why must you have an excuse, Mr. Franklin? Where's your natural grand-master egomania?"

"It's badly bruised at the moment. Eight o'clock in the upper lounge?"

"Fine."

The girl nodded curtly, then turned and walked away. Douglas waited until she had disappeared from sight out on the deck, then moved on to the next board. He studied it for a moment, then reached down and moved a bishop. "Checkmate," he said cheerfully.

"Pickford," Douglas said. "There was an English grand master, Samuel Pickford."

Anne smiled and sipped her drink. "My father. He taught me how to play."

Douglas tapped the score sheet in his pocket. "Of course. It really was a beautifully played Sicilian."

Anne shrugged. "We both know you'd beat me easily in a match."

Douglas' glass was empty. He looked inquiringly at the girl, who shook her head. He ordered another Scotch for himself, then leaned back and studied her.

"Why haven't I heard of you? Judging from the way you play, I'd say you were at least an expert. Considering the state of women's chess, I'd think you'd be in international competition."

Something moved deep in the girl's eyes, a dark, silent laughter that Douglas found disconcerting.

"I find my own game more interesting," Anne said quietly.

"Really? What game would that be?"

"I'm a journalist." Her eyes were veiled again. "Actually, this is a working trip for me."

"You're not here as a player?"

"No. I'm afraid I sneaked into the exhibition."

"I'm glad you did."

"I was in Barcelona when I heard about this junket to Glasgow for the Interzonal elimination. Obviously, chess is very chic now and I thought there might be a good story in the cruise. I was right. Here I am in the middle of the ocean, having drinks with the infamous Douglas Franklin . . ."

Douglas laughed. "Infamous?"

"Well, perhaps that's overstating the case. But it's true that most serious players resent you, and non-chess players admire or envy you. For the same reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Take the Glasgow Interzonal. You won't be playing in it because you never bothered to try to qualify. Instead, you're hosting a boatload of *patzers* on their way to sit in the audience. Who else but Douglas Franklin would win his share of major tournaments every year, then turn his back on the chance to play for the world championship? The chess Establishment thinks you're irresponsible."

"What do you think?"

"I think you're having a lot of fun. You're waiting for your wanderlust to burn itself out. When you want the world championship enough, you'll go after it."

Douglas shrugged. He felt it was time to change the subject.

A steward arrived with his drink. As Douglas pushed back his chair to give the man room he noticed two men watching them from a table in a far corner of the lounge. One was Zoltan, and the other was the man with the yellow eyes.

Douglas waited for the steward

to leave, then pulled his chair back close to the table. "Let's see how good a journalist you are," he said quietly. "The two men at the corner table—the fat one's Armand Zoltan, right?"

Again, something moved in Anne's eyes. She glanced quickly over his shoulder, then back into his face. She seemed puzzled. "Yes. He owns this ship. But didn't he hire you?"

Douglas shook his head. "I was hired by the travel agency, booking the cruise. Who's the guy with him?"

"I don't know." Her voice cracked almost imperceptibly and she quickly swallowed some water. "Why do you ask?"

"Just curious. They seemed to take a special interest in our game this afternoon. Maybe they think it's still going on."

Anne paled and her eyes shifted slightly out of focus, as if she were looking at something ugly and menacing far in the distance, beyond the confines of the ship.

Douglas tried to bring her back. "Does Zoltan play chess?"

"A Four Knights Game," Anne said absently.

"I must have missed a move. How's that again?"

Anne's eyes came back into focus and she smiled disarmingly. Whatever she had been looking at was gone, sunk in the depths of the ocean, or her mind. "Nothing," she said easily. "I was just talking to myself." She stifled a yawn that could have been feigned. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm very tired."

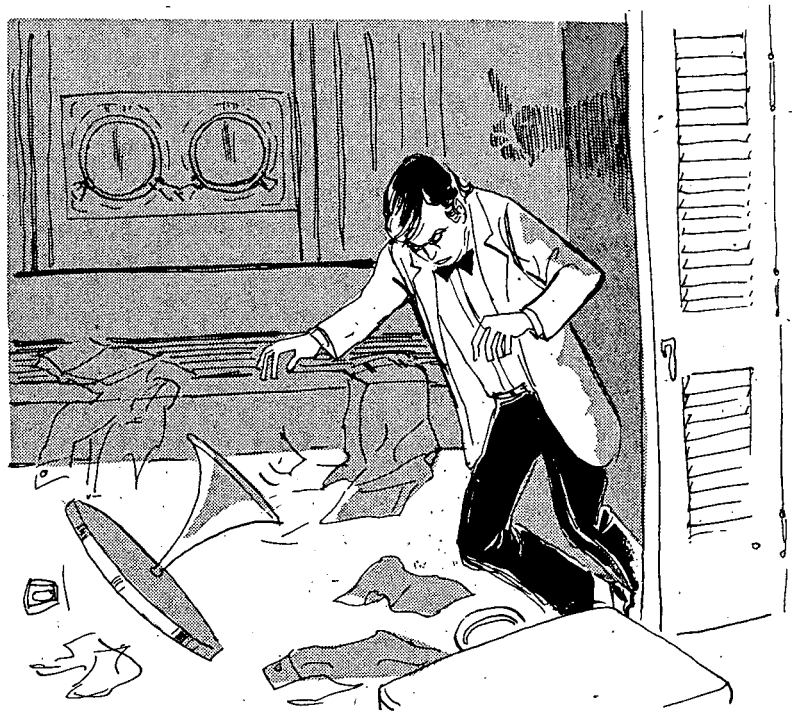
Douglas summoned the steward and signed his check, then escorted Anne out of the lounge. Zoltan and the yellow-eyed man had already left.

Anne chatted pleasantly on the way back to her cabin, but Douglas could sense that something in her had changed. She was distracted, and he had become nothing more than a shadow at her side that talked. This bothered him, and he tried unsuccessfully to break down the barrier that the mention of a man's name had erected.

Douglas' mind rapidly shifted to other things when he reached his own cabin. He was positive he had locked it before leaving, but the louvered door swung open at his touch.

He stepped inside and switched on the light, then froze. His berth had been torn apart, thoroughly and professionally. His suitcases had been opened and their linings torn out; his clothes and personal possessions were strewn over the floor.

In the air was the faint but un-



mistakable odor of the man with the yellow eyes.

Douglas sensed rather than heard a movement behind him. He had just started to turn when something hard and heavy smashed into the base of his skull. What started out as a terrible, rending pain ended as a warm wave sloshing back and forth inside his brain. He didn't even remember falling.

"Hello, Douglas," the girl said. "You look terrible."

"I had a rough night." Douglas gently touched the back of a head that felt like it was filled with broken glass. "I got mugged."

"Really?"

"Really. And the man who did it was the same man who was with Zoltan in the lounge last night."

Anne's eyes narrowed. "How do you know that?" She tried to adopt a casual tone, but her voice was tight and had a sharp edge to it.

"I smelled him," Douglas said evenly.

"Did you report it to the cap-

tain? I suppose you've done that."

"Sure. He was properly upset. Said he'd look into it."

"Was anything taken?"

"That's why I called you. You see, I don't have that much to begin with, and it was all there when I woke up. I double checked. It wasn't until I took off my jacket that I realized what was missing. It was the score sheet you gave me. That's what the man was after."

Anne paled and quickly looked away. "You could have lost it." Her voice was strangely muffled, as though damped by some intense emotion held tightly under rein.

"I didn't lose it."

Anne quickly regained control of herself. The face that she now presented to Douglas was totally expressionless, the green eyes cold and distant. Suddenly, without warning, she laughed. "Is *that* what you wanted to talk to me about?"

Douglas felt his face grow hot. He'd realized before he called Anne that he would risk sounding foolish, and she was not making things easier for him. Still, he felt sure that whoever had sapped him had known exactly what he wanted to find. If the score sheet had been taken, there was a reason.

"I know it sounds strange," Douglas said tightly. "That's the point. I thought you might have some idea why somebody would want to steal that particular score sheet."

"Please leave me alone," Anne said coldly. "I've heard some stupid lines before, but this tops all." Her eyes flashed. "Really, Douglas, you're such a child. Is this another game? Must you make everything into a game?"

"What is it, Anne? What's wrong?"

"Stick to your chess; that's obviously what you do best. You've already begun to bore me." She punctuated the last sentence by slamming the cabin door in his face.

Douglas stared at the closed door for a few moments, then turned and walked slowly back the way he had come. When he reached his cabin he found Armand Zoltan and the ship's doctor waiting for him. The room had been straightened; his clothes had been neatly folded and packed in two new, expensive-looking suitcases. There was a large basket of fruit and a bottle of Scotch on the table beside his bed.

The doctor, a thin, reedy man with a chronic case of dandruff, sat stiffly on a chair at the opposite end of the room, a huge,

leather medical bag propped on his knees. He smiled nervously as Douglas entered.

Zoltan rose from his chair and gestured expansively around the room. "Mr. Franklin!" Zoltan's smile did not touch his eyes. "I hope you will now find everything in order. I wished to take the liberty of coming personally to apologize for this terrible incident. The man you described to Captain Barker is under close surveillance." Zoltan took a check from his pocket, signed it with a flourish, then held it out to Douglas. "I trust this will be sufficient compensation for the suffering and inconvenience you've been caused."

"Nothing was stolen," Douglas said evenly, but it suddenly struck him as odd that Zoltan should be on this particular ship. From various newspaper accounts Douglas knew that Zoltan was a multimillionaire, with a large fleet of ships trafficking on the oceans of the world. What was he doing on a five-day cruise from Spain to Scotland? It was unlikely that he had even had anything to do with the decision to book a boatload of chess players. That type of mundane business affair was usually taken care of by mundane business managers. Zoltan should be on his island hideaway, counting his money. What was he doing here?

"Please take the check anyway," Zoltan insisted. "You've proven yourself to be a most valuable part of this cruise, without a doubt underpaid. Accept this as a token of my appreciation."

Douglas took the check and shoved it into his pocket without looking at it.

"I've brought Dr. Macklin with me to examine you," Zoltan continued. "We want to make absolutely certain that you're all right."

"All I've got is a headache," Douglas said. "It'll pass." He suddenly wanted to escape from Zoltan, the cabin, the questions. He glanced at his watch. "I have a class on chess openings in twenty minutes," he continued. "I want to make sure I earn my keep."

"As you wish, Mr. Franklin. The captain, the crew and myself are at your disposal. Please let me know if there's anything you require."

Douglas started for the door, then stopped and turned. "By the way," he said, watching Zoltan's face, "I'm going to be discussing the Four Knights Game. What do you think of that opening, Mr. Zoltan?"

Zoltan looked puzzled. Finally he shrugged. "I'm aware that it's a very old opening, and not particularly aggressive. But I'm cer-

tainly no expert by any means."

If the question meant anything else to Zoltan, he had managed to disguise it well. Once again Douglas felt foolish, a participant in a shadow game that might exist only in his mind. He excused himself and walked out of the cabin.

Douglas' class was well attended, his lecture and demonstration enthusiastically received. Still, he found his mind constantly returning to Anne Pickford, for reasons that he could not fully explain to himself. Probably it was pride; he was not used to having doors slammed in his face.

Douglas finished with the class at one, then went to the dining lounge. He had hoped to catch sight of Anne, perhaps try to speak to her again. She wasn't there.

After lunch he went to the girl's cabin, knocked repeatedly on the door, but got no answer. He tried the door and found it locked.

Douglas had no responsibilities for the afternoon so he set out to look for Anne. He started on the upper deck. It was a calm, clear day at sea and the European coastline could be seen far in the distance, off the starboard bow. A number of passengers were sunning themselves or playing chess. Douglas strolled casually among the players, greeting familiar faces, occasionally stopping to answer questions or give advice. All the while he kept looking for the girl. There was no sign of her.

Next, Douglas traversed the lower deck, swimming pool, cocktail lounges, and any other place he could think of where the girl might be. By five o'clock his head was splitting and he went back to his cabin to take a nap. He arose in an hour, showered and dressed for dinner. He ate and stayed in the dining lounge until it closed, nursing coffee, watching the doors. Anne did not appear. He went to her cabin; there was still no answer to his knock.

Douglas felt a cold chill pass through his body. Once again he searched through all the areas of the ship that were open to passengers. Then he headed for the ship's bridge.

"I think you're missing a passenger," he reported.

The deck officer stared at him. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I said I think one of your passengers may be in trouble. Her name is Anne Pickford. If she's on the ship, I can't find her."

The officer, a Greek of moderate build and deep-set, soulful eyes, shook his head. "It is possible that you simply missed this

person, sir. The *Argo* is a large ship."

"It's also possible that she fell overboard. I think you'd better call the captain."

The officer hesitated a moment, then said, "As you wish, sir."

Captain Barker arrived a few minutes later, with Zoltan. There was no question as to who was in charge, and who would do the talking. Barker's face was flushed with interrupted sleep, and his coat was only half-buttoned. His eyes darted nervously about the room and refused to meet Douglas' gaze.

Zoltan stepped forward and took Douglas' elbow solicitously. "Mr. Franklin, how are you feeling?"

Douglas eased himself out of the other man's grip. The expression on Zoltan's face was imponderable. "It's one of your passengers I'm worried about," Douglas said tightly. "Miss Pickford is not in her cabin. I've been—"

Zoltan made an impatient gesture with his hand. The folds of flesh on his face rearranged themselves into something that might have been a leer. "You have a taste for the finer things in life, Mr. Franklin—Douglas, if I may call you that—but you needn't concern yourself about Miss Pickford. She's in good hands."

"Is that right. Whose hands?"

"Miss Pickford took ill quite unexpectedly this morning. Dr. Macklin examined her in her cabin and diagnosed her illness as acute appendicitis. As you may know, appendicitis can often strike without warning. Dr. Macklin thought it best that she be hospitalized immediately. As luck would have it, there was a British patrol boat in the area. Our request for assistance was immediately granted. By now Miss Pickford is undoubtedly in an English hospital."

"I didn't see any patrol boat."

"Of course not. I believe you were giving a demonstration-lecture at the time. In fact, I hope none of the other passengers saw it. We try to keep these unpleasant matters as unobtrusive as possible. The sight of a woman being carried off on a stretcher would be, at best, unpleasant. Before you know it there would be rumors of food poisoning, or something like that. The cruise would be ruined for many passengers. Miss Pickford was transferred from the loading platform at the bow of the ship. Are there any other questions, Douglas?"

There were many other questions, but Douglas decided he would keep them to himself. If Zoltan were telling the truth, ev-

erything was fine; if he were lying, nothing could be gained by arousing his suspicions.

"No," Douglas said, fixing his gaze on Zoltan's chest, "I'm glad you acted quickly."

"You are a good person to have on board, Douglas," Zoltan said with a wide grin that could have meant anything. "Most people would not notice the absence of a casual acquaintance. Such concern is to your credit. Now I suggest we all go back to bed and leave the deck officer to his duties. Good night, Mr. Franklin . . . Douglas."

There was a note of finality to Zoltan's voice, and Douglas knew he was being dismissed. He nodded curtly and left the bridge. As he stood near the rail in the moonlight, smoking a cigarette, he stared at the red lettering on the door leading to the lower levels of the ship: NO ADMITTANCE. AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. If Zoltan had lied and Anne was still on the ship, that was where she must be. It was the only place he had not looked.

The thought that he was actually considering going through the door bothered Douglas—perhaps the blow on the head had transformed him into an idiot. At best, if he were caught below, he would have compromised himself and his job. At worst, assuming Zoltan was involved in some criminal activity, he might never reach Glasgow. The sea was the ultimate garbage dump, and a ship at sea was a world unto itself, with no place to run and no place to hide; and it was obvious that Zoltan was the final arbiter of the law on the *Argo*. An outside observer might be fascinated by Zoltan's story of how he disappeared, but Douglas had no interest in allowing such a situation to develop. Money was power and power was often more potent than truth. There was no doubt in Douglas' mind that Zoltan had a number of high-voltage connections. One person had already disappeared, and Zoltan was evidently not distressed by that.

Had Anne actually disappeared? *Why* would Zoltan lie?

Douglas mentally reviewed the reasons for his uneasiness: a bump on the head during the course of a robbery that wasn't a robbery; Zoltan's acquaintance with the yellow-eyed man who had hit him; a vague reference to a chess opening that Zoltan hardly knew. Finally, there was the girl's strange behavior. Beneath Anne's cold exterior there had been fear—he was sure of it.

Douglas flipped the cigarette into the wet darkness beyond the

railing. He glanced around to make sure he was unobserved, then slipped through the hatchway, closing the steel door quietly behind him.

He found himself at the top of a steep, narrow stairway that was only faintly illuminated by a string of naked, low-wattage electric bulbs. The steps led down to a narrow corridor lined on both sides with cabins. The corridor was empty. Douglas removed his shoes and moved past the cabins, which he assumed held sleeping crew members. He reached the opposite end of the corridor and tried the door there. It was open. He passed through the door, closed it behind him, then put on his shoes.

The corridor beyond the crew's quarters was wider, lined on the right with recessed steel doors on which the word *Cargo* had been stenciled. At the opposite end of the corridor, fifty yards away, was another door.

Douglas tried the first cargo hold. It was locked, as were all the others. Frustrated, he tried the door at the end of the corridor. It, too, was locked. He cursed softly to himself as he realized that he had maneuvered himself into a *cul de sac.*

He turned and started back the way he had come. He froze when he heard the footsteps. They were echoing off the metal floor beyond the closed door leading to the crew's quarters, and they were coming toward him.

Douglas was abreast of the second, recessed steel door. The recess wasn't very deep, but it was the only conceivable hiding place. He flattened himself against the steel plate, and heard the door at the end of the corridor open and close, and the footsteps resume. He peered around the edge of the recess.

The footsteps belonged to the man with the yellow eyes. He was in his shirt sleeves, and the shoulder holster he wore was stuffed with a large, ugly, blue-steel automatic.

Douglas braced, ready to kick out at the man's groin as he came abreast. Then the footsteps stopped. Douglas again looked around the corner of the recess in time to see the yellow-eyed man turn a key in the lock of the first door, open it and pass through. He left the door open behind him. Douglas waited thirty seconds, then slipped down the corridor and looked in the open door.

The cargo hold was large and brightly lit, with two doors at the opposite side. One of the doors was open, revealing a corridor, and Douglas assumed that was

where the yellow-eyed man had gone. The right side of the hold was filled with large wooden crates stacked neatly in piles of four.

Douglas entered the hold, darting across the concrete floor and ducking behind one of the piles of crates. A few moments later he heard the sound of footsteps again. The yellow-eyed man emerged from one of the corridors, walked quickly across the cargo hold and exited through the steel door. The door closed behind him with an ominous click.

Douglas stepped out from his hiding place and examined the crates. There were no markings on them, and each was circled by a tight, metal band. There was a large pair of wire clippers hanging on the wall. He took down the clippers and cut through one of the bands. The band snapped with a loud, singing crack that reverberated throughout the closed confines of the hold. Douglas ducked behind the crates again, his heart hammering in his chest, but the silence returned. He waited a few more minutes to make sure no one was coming, then used the handle of the clippers to pry back four of the plywood slats.

The crate was filled with machine pistols; a protective coating of light oil glistened on the black metal. Douglas picked up one of the guns, wiped off the oil with his handkerchief and examined it. The serial number on the frame had been carefully filed off.

The pistol felt heavy and alien in his hand. He searched through the crate for ammunition but couldn't find any. It was just as well—he wouldn't know what to do with a loaded gun.

He replaced the pistol in the crate, found a tarpaulin and threw it over the broken band and slats. Then he crossed the hold and moved down the passageway from where the yellow-eyed man had come. The corridor was about fifty feet long. At the end it branched off at right angles to form another corridor. There were small, glassed-in office cubicles on either side.

He found the girl in the last cubicle on the left. She was lying on a cracked leather couch, tightly bound. There was a wide strip of adhesive tape over her mouth. Her eyes widened when she saw him.

Douglas suddenly realized that he was trembling; his clothes were pasted to his body, and he could smell his own fear in his nostrils. He took a deep breath, then went to the top of the T formed by the intersecting corridors and glanced

around the corner. There was no one there.

To the left and right were steel ladders leading up to hatch covers. Douglas quickly climbed one of the ladders and tested the wheel gear on the bottom of the cover. It turned easily. Douglas breathed a sigh of relief at the discovery that there was another way out from below decks without going back through the cargo hold and crew's quarters. If they could manage to get back to the passengers' section, Zoltan just might be forced into a sort of Mexican standoff. He climbed back down the ladder and slipped into the office.

Anne's breath exploded in an urgent whisper as Douglas stripped the tape from her mouth. "Douglas! Zoltan will kill you if he finds you here! Get out!"

Douglas laughed shortly. "That's a strange request. What's he going to do to you if I leave you here?"

The girl said nothing.

Douglas knelt beside her and examined the ropes. They were thin, and the knots had been tied by an expert. There was blood on the girl's wrists and ankles where the rope had cut into the flesh. He searched through the cubicle but could find nothing sharp to cut the ropes so he went to work on the knots with his fingers.

"Who are you?" Douglas asked quietly.

"I'm a British agent," Anne said after a pause.

Douglas smiled wryly. "That's your game?"

"That's my game."

"Well, it certainly isn't very ladylike."

Anne smiled. "Don't talk like a male chauvinist pig, Douglas."

"Chauvinist, hell. None of my opponents has ever tried to tie me up."

"It adds a different dimension," Anne said dryly.

"You like to play word games, too," Douglas said seriously. "The Four Knights Game you referred to: that's the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, right?"

Anne winced but did not cry out as Douglas pulled the ropes free from her wrists. Her hands and feet were swollen and inflamed. "Death, war, pestilence and famine," she said through clenched teeth. "Zoltan deals in death: drugs, guns, adulterated medicine. If the price is right, he'll smuggle anything in or out of any country in the world."

"I've seen the guns. Where are they going?"

"Northern Ireland. Special delivery to the terrorists. My job was to notify my superiors when and where the drop was to be

made. I had a portable transmitter, but they found it."

"I don't suppose you can explain to me how I got involved in all this."

"Somehow, Zoltan found out about my cover and mission, but he didn't dare move against me until he could be sure I was working alone. My playing in the exhibition aroused his suspicions. He became even more suspicious when he saw I was beating you, and that you wanted my score sheet. He thought you might be a contact, and the score sheet might contain some sort of code. That's why Hawkins—"

"Hawkins. He's the one who's allergic to soap?"

Anne nodded. "You might say Hawkins is the executive director of the seamier side of Zoltan's business enterprises. In any case, they realized they'd made a mistake when they examined the score sheet. They tried to cover up, but by then you'd already talked to me. They knew I'd make the connection, and that's when they moved in."

Douglas finished removing the ropes. Anne eased her legs over the side of the couch and tried to stand. The blood drained from her face.

"Can you walk?"

"Just give me a minute to get the circulation back." She bent over and started to massage the muscles in her legs. "I acted toward you the way I did because I didn't want you involved," Anne said quietly, without looking at Douglas. "I must say, I'm glad you're so persistent. It must be that grand-master egomania."

The odor hit Douglas' nostrils a split second before he heard the words.

"You should have minded your own business, sonny."

The voice and smell belonged to the man with the yellow eyes, the one Anne had called Hawkins. Douglas spun and crouched. Hawkins was standing in the doorway, his legs braced. His lips were drawn taut as a bowstring in a strange, cruel smile. The pistol in his hand was aimed at Douglas' head.

"Checkmate, sonny," Hawkins said, and pulled the trigger.

However, Douglas was already moving, warned by his sensitivity to other people's moods. He knew that Hawkins intended summarily to execute him and that he had little to lose by trying to fight back. He ducked low and drove for the man's legs.

Douglas' speed saved him. The sudden movement caught Hawkins by surprise, throwing off his aim. The bullet smashed into Douglas'

wrist, shattering the bone. Numbed by the effects of a massive surge of adrenaline, Douglas barely felt the pain as he hurled himself through the air and hit Hawkins at the knees. Douglas hit the floor hard. Hawkins crumpled over the top of him.

"Run, Anne!" Douglas heard himself shouting. "Get out of here! There's a hatch cover around the corner!"

"Douglas—"

"Run!"

He was vaguely aware of a lithe body hurtling through the air over his head, then the sound of footsteps turning the corner. A few seconds later there was the sound of a steel hatch cover clanging shut.

He was not dead yet. Douglas interpreted that as meaning that Hawkins had lost control of his gun. The yellow-eyed man's breath was coming in short gasps, and he was moaning with pain.

Douglas started to wiggle out from beneath the other man's body. It was then that the pain hit him, exploding in his wrist and coursing through his body like bolts of electricity. He cried out and clutched at his wrist. The fingers of his right hand were immediately enveloped in a warm, sticky fluid.

Hawkins rolled off of him. Douglas lifted his head and almost vomited with terror as he saw the gun lying on the floor a few feet away. There was no way he could get to it before Hawkins.

Hawkins took a step toward the gun, then screamed in pain, clutching his right knee as he slumped to the floor. He then began crawling across the floor toward the gun.

Douglas pushed himself to his feet with his good right arm. His head swam with pain, and for a moment he was afraid he would pass out. Then it cleared enough for him to see that Hawkins had the gun. Douglas wheeled and ran out through the door at the same time as a loud explosion thundered in his ears and a bullet smashed into the wood paneling beside his head.

Douglas sprinted around the corner, let go of his wrist and pulled himself up the ladder to the right. He managed to turn the wheel gear, then, bracing his legs on the rungs of the ladder, pushed against the hatch cover with his shoulder. The steel cover was jammed.

He started to climb down, intending to try the other cover. He froze when he saw Hawkins suddenly emerge from around the corner. The man was staggering, clutching his ruined knee with one

hand. His eyes were clouded with pain and hate.

For the second time Douglas pulled himself up the ladder and pushed against the hatch cover with his shoulder. His head was filled with a sound like crashing surf—the sound of terror.

Hawkins leaned against the wall, lifted his gun and fired, but the pressure on his shattered knee ruined his aim. The bullet bit into the metal inches from Douglas' left side, then whined off down the corridor.

The hatch cover suddenly burst open. Douglas scrambled up through the opening as a second bullet whined through the air beneath him. He slammed the hatch cover shut, then lay on his back, gasping for air, drinking in the cold, wet sea breeze.

He would have given anything to be able to lie there, not moving, and wait for them to come and get him. There seemed no sense in resisting; Anne and he had not really gotten away, but had merely escaped into a larger pen. They were still trapped on a ship at sea.

The thought of the girl brought him to his feet. He was not ready to die yet, and he would not be a grand master if he had not learned to play out some end games that were apparently lost.

He looked around him and immediately saw that he had made a tactical error—he had come out the wrong hatch. He was on a narrow walkway, blocked off from the passenger section by a steel bulwark.

Hawkins' voice, fogged by pain and rage, came out of the darkness above him. "You should have taken the trouble to learn the layout of the ship, sonny. You came up the hard way—*I* took the freight elevator." There was a pause filled with hoarse, heavy breathing, then, "You're going to have a lot of company in a few minutes, sonny. But I'm going to take care of you personally."

Douglas pressed flat against the bulkhead. To his left, separated from him by twenty yards of moonlit walkway, were dark, undefined shapes in the open storage area at the stern of the ship. *Twenty yards.*

"Where's the girl?" Douglas asked.

"We'll find her," Hawkins said. The voice seemed closer, almost directly above Douglas.

Douglas tensed, clutching his injured wrist to his side. "You can't afford to do a lot of shooting, Hawkins. It'll wake the passengers."

The answer was a soft, spitting sound, like the cough of a cat.

The wood on the walkway to Douglas' left splintered.

"End of the line, sonny."

Douglas pushed off the bulkhead and dashed toward the black shapes at the stern. Bullets whined in the air like angry steel bees. Finally he dove through the air, landed heavily on an oil drum and rolled off on the other side. His wrist felt as if it were bathed in molten metal, and he bit off the scream that formed at the back of his throat.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, the pain subsided. Douglas lifted his head slightly and looked around him. He was on the edge of a forest of oil drums that had been loaded on pallets and lashed onto the deck. He lowered his head and crawled backward, deeper into the tangle of steel drums.

Somewhere in the darkness in front of him a door opened and closed. Then he heard the curious, shuffling footsteps of a man dragging one foot behind him. The drums could explode from the impact of a bullet, Douglas realized. Hawkins knew that too. The yellow-eyed man would be very careful, wait for a sure shot at close range.

Douglas turned as far as he could without making noise and desperately searched for something with which to defend himself. His knee brushed painfully against something—a chain. Douglas' mouth went dry. He reached down and caressed the thick, rusted links with his fingers.

The chain was heavy, perhaps too heavy for him to use in his weakened condition. Still, it was the only weapon he had. One end was anchored firmly beneath a wooden pallet, probably having become lodged, then abandoned, during the course of loading. He estimated the loose end to be about eight feet long.

Douglas peered over the top of a barrel. Hawkins was about fifteen feet away, moving carefully, the gunmetal extension of his hand glinting in the moonlight. Douglas sank back down to the deck. It was only a matter of time before Hawkins or one of the other men moving out in the dark found him, and the longer he waited the weaker he would be. He would be executed, shot like a helpless, wounded animal. His left arm had begun to smolder with a white heat. He could wait no longer if he hoped to take Hawkins with him.

Douglas kicked at the nearest barrel. The drum produced a dull, thudding sound. The shuffling footsteps stopped, then started again, coming directly toward

him: twelve paces, ten paces . . .

"Where the hell are you, you stinking—"

Douglas gripped the chain in the center with his right hand and sprang to his feet, shifting his weight and pulling on the chain with all his strength. The steel links clanged against the drums, skipped free and described a wide, whistling arc. The end of the chain caught Hawkins in the center of the forehead. There was a sound like the popping of a knuckle and the yellow-eyed man fell to his knees, then crumpled onto the deck.

Douglas leaped from behind his barricade, intending to search for Hawkins' gun. Out of the corner of his eye he saw two crewmen, guns drawn, converging on his position. He ducked down, frantically groping in the dark for the gun.

"Douglas!"

Douglas glanced up at the sound of Anne's voice. He could see the girl standing at the railing on the upper deck, silhouetted by the moonlight. She was frantically waving her arms and could not see the man coming up behind her.

"Anne!" Douglas yelled. "Behind you!"

He didn't see what happened next. He ducked down behind a barrel as a bullet ricocheted off steel. He heard Anne call out his name again; he looked up in time to see her body hurtling down. The sound of her body hitting the water floated up to him through the darkness.

Douglas reacted instinctively, although he probably would have done the same thing if he'd had time to think about it—he would be no worse off in the water than he was on the ship. Bending low, using the barrels as a shield, Douglas raced for the side of the ship, then leaped over the rail, aiming for the area where he had seen Anne fall.

His own fall seemed interminable, and when it finally ended he wished it hadn't. The water came up to meet him like a slab of concrete and once more pain shot through his wrist, blinding him, tearing the breath from his lungs. The icy cold of the water kept him conscious, but his strength was gone; the water was closing over his head and his lungs burned. In a moment, he knew, he would end it all, open his mouth and suck in the water.

Someone was yanking at his hair, pulling him up. Douglas kicked the last few inches to the surface, drinking in great drafts of air. Anne was supporting him in the water.

"Hey," Douglas sputtered at last, "I was supposed to rescue *you*."

Anne smiled. "I didn't want you to rescue me, I just wanted you to follow me."

Douglas shook his head. "I can't swim. My wrist is broken."

"Can you float?"

Douglas slowly lay on his back in the water, resting his left wrist on his chest. "Uh, I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but I'm not sure this is a solution. It's cold out here."

Anne glanced toward the east. The sun was just breaking over the horizon. "If you can hold out for an hour or so, we'll be eating breakfast on a British destroyer."

"How'd you manage that?"

"By being unladylike toward a very surprised radio operator. That's why I had to leave you down there with Hawkins. Duty, and all that. Besides, I thought you'd be able to handle him."

"Thanks a lot. What about Zoltan?"

"Well, I suspect he's going to have to take a big loss on this particular shipment. That ship will be a lot lighter by the time it pulls into Glasgow. By the way, did I thank you for saving my life?"

"I don't think you had time. Did I thank you for saving mine?"

"We can properly thank each other later."

Douglas smiled. "Are you any good at blindfold chess?"

"Pawn to king four."

Douglas thought for a moment, then said: "Pawn to queen bishop four."

Why not subscribe to

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

ONE YEAR	12 issues	$9.00
TWO YEARS	24 issues	$16.00
THREE YEARS	36 issues	$20.00

Make check payable to and mail to →

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine
784 U.S. 1, Suite 6
North Palm Beach, Florida 33408

213

I am a subscriber,
extend my subscription:—12 ☐ 24 ☐ 36 ☐ issues
This is a new order for:—12 ☐ 24 ☐ 36 ☐ issues
My remittance of $..... is attached*

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

*FLORIDA RESIDENTS ADD 4% SALES TAX

IMPORTANT: FILL IN YOUR ZIP CODE

Save on Back Issues

Now that you have come to the last page of your Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine we hope that you can't wait until the next issue is published. So THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER:

While they last, we will send you postpaid FIVE RECENT BACK ISSUES for $2.00. All five issues will be in MINT FRESH, A-ONE CONDITION. *PLEASE USE THE ORDER COUPON BELOW.*

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
784 U.S. 1, Suite 6, North Palm Beach, Fla. 33408

213

Please send me your special back issue offer of five recent issues for which I enclose $2.00

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

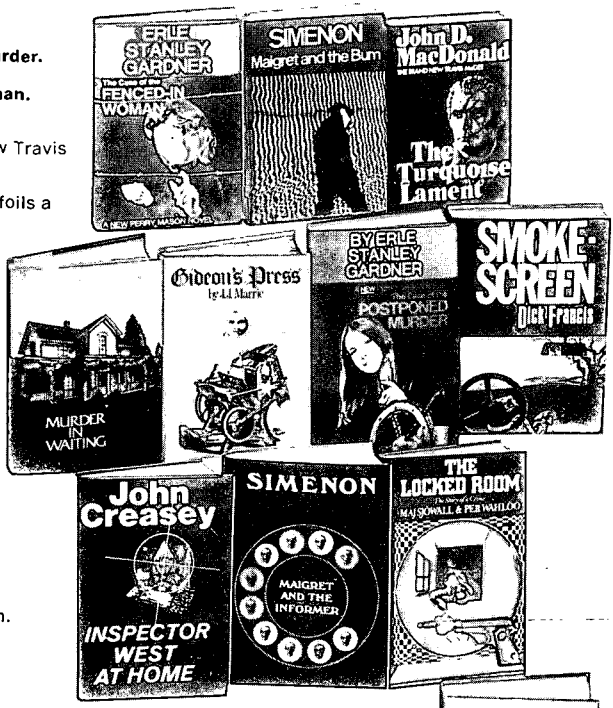
IMPORTANT: FILL IN YOUR ZIP CODE

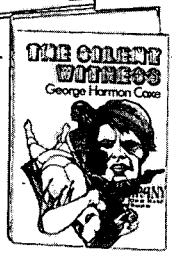
Make checks payable to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.

11 BRAND-NEW MYSTERIES FOR $1.

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER
His newest Perry Masons:
1. The Case of the Postponed Murder. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
2. The Case of the Fenced-In Woman. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
JOHN D. MACDONALD
3. The Turquoise Lament. The new Travis McGee thriller. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
J. J. MARRIC
4. Gideon's Press. Scotland Yard foils a plot. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)
GEORGES SIMENON
His two latest:
5. Maigret and The Bum. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
6. Maigret and the Informer. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
MIGNON EBERHART
7. Murder in Waiting. A Senator's dark secret. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)
DICK FRANCIS
8. Smokescreen. Murder at the race track. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
JOHN CREASEY
9. Inspector West at Home. (Publ. Ed. $4.95)
GEORGE HARMON COXE
10. The Silent Witness. A private eye tangles with two corpses and police. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)
SJOWALL and WAHLOO
11. The Locked Room. New from the famous Swedish mystery team. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

The Detective Book Club,
Roslyn, New York 11576





Please enroll me as a member and send at once the 4 double-volumes and 1 triple-volume shown on the other side, containing 11 mysteries. I enclose *no money now.* I may examine my introductory books for one week, then will either accept all 5 volumes for the special new-member price of only $1 (plus postage and handling) or return them and owe nothing. As a member, I will receive free the Club's monthly *Preview* which describes my next selections, but I am not obligated to accept them; I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book at the Club's expense for full credit. For each monthly 3-in-1 selection I keep, I will send you only $3.89 (plus postage and handling). I may cancel my membership at any time.

4-SJ

Mr.
Ms. } _____
(please print plainly)

Address _____

41-4A

City, State _____ Zip _____

(See other side for further details.)

Just published! Bookstore price $62.45!

11 BRAND-NEW MYSTERIES FOR $1.

For $1, enjoy 11 big thrillers including the two newest Perry Masons. Plus the latest adventures of Travis McGee, Gideon of Scotland Yard, Inspector Maigret. Plus top-drawer mysteries by Mignon Eberhart, Dick Francis and John Creasey.

These 11 mysteries in the publishers' original editions cost $62.45. But you get all 11 full-length novels in 5 handsome hardbound volumes, for only $1—while they last.

We would like to send you these 11 great mysteries to prove to you that The Detective Book Club gives more and asks less of you than any other club.

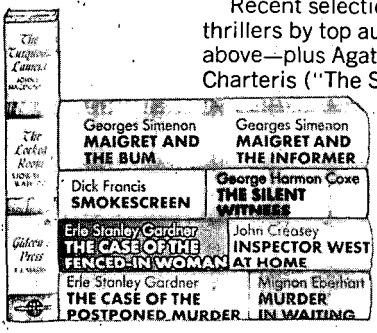
You'll pay no membership fee. There is no minimum number of books you must buy. You get free the Club's *Preview* which describes each month's selections. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it. And you may cancel at any time.

When you *do* accept a Club selection, you get three complete and unabridged detective novels in one handsome, hardbound triple-volume (like the one shown on this page) for only $3.89. That's *less than you'd have to pay for any one* of these novels in a bookstore.

The Club's editors select the best from more than 300 mystery books published each year. Their choices are so outstanding that many mystery writers are members, too.

Recent selections have included new thrillers by top authors like those featured above—plus Agatha Christie, Leslie Charteris ("The Saint"), Ellery Queen, Ross Macdonald, H.R.F. Keating, Ed McBain, Rae Foley, and others.

Return the postpaid card below to get your 11 mysteries for $1. The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576.



First Class
Permit No. 7
Roslyn, N.Y.

Business Reply Mail
No postage stamp necessary
if mailed in the United States
Postage Will Be Paid By

The Detective Book Club
Roslyn, New York 11576

(See other side for further details.)