

ALFRED

# HITCHCOCK'S

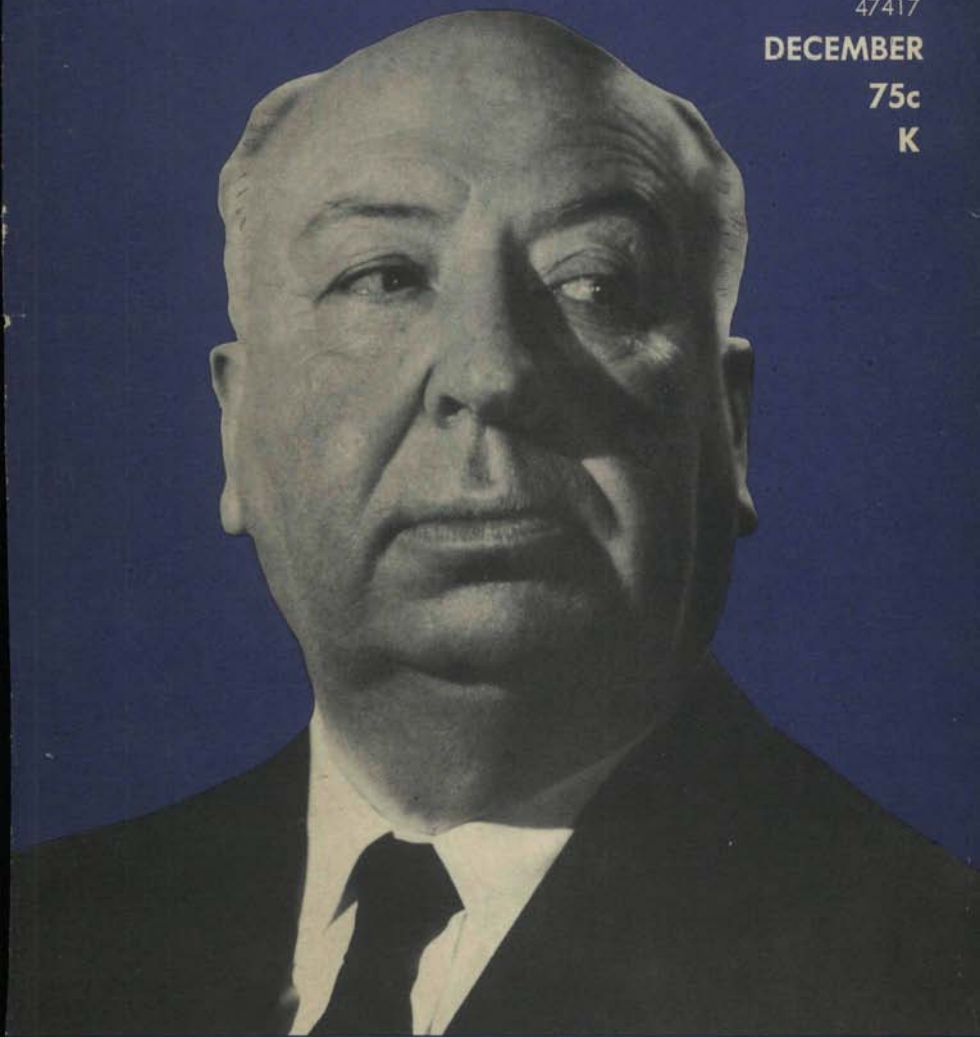
## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

47417

DECEMBER

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NEW stories presented by the MASTER OF SUSPENSE



Dear Reader:

Contrary to some appropriate titles listed opposite, this issue is not necessarily devoted to the gastronomical delights of Thanksgiving feasting. Rather, it is the latest monthly installment in my program to stamp out boredom. After all, who can yawn in the face of murder?

However, it so happens that one cannot help being reminded of turkey and trimmings with such titles as *Bag of Bones* by Frank Sisk, though the origin of the bones to which the author refers is considerably less innocent than a festive holiday table.

If the art of carving eludes you, take heart. A mere bird will be a problem no more after a study of Michael Kinneman's novelette, *Have a Nice Day*. Though it should prove a handy how-to manual, you may get more in-depth instruction than you expected.

At any rate, from first to last herein, you are virtually guaranteed

Good reading.

*Alfred Hitchcock*

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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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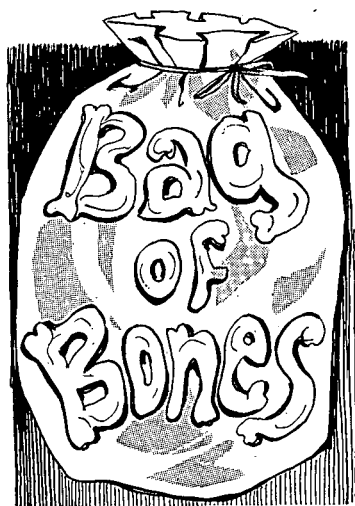
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*One learns from Plutarch that where the lion's skin will not reach, you must patch it out with the fox's.*



**A**pril rain fell almost continually for three days and three nights. The river marking the city's western limits grew savagely turgid. It writhed between the sloping concrete embankments that had been erected a generation ago in the aftermath of a devastating flood. It rolled out into the flatlands south of the city proper where, unconstrained, it sent forth swift rivulets which chewed twisting courses through the spongy earth.

One of these rivulets, nibbling passingly at higher ground, tore a chunk of moss from an edge of land belonging to *Harold's Antiques & Used Car Parts* and, in so doing, uncovered partly a plastic bag containing an assortment of human bones.

The first person to see this bag was a sixteen-year-old boy named Sparky Spearman. He was sloshing around a far end of Harold's muddy property a few hours after the rain had stopped. The time, later ascertained by the police, was approximately 9:15 p.m. Sparky was carrying a flashlight. He was searching for the wreck of a Shelby with a radiator grille almost as good as new. A friend had told him about it.

Ten minutes after he'd begun working his way through the close-packed heaps of automotive carcasses, Sparky spotted the plastic bag at the end of his flashlight beam. Its upper half shimmered eerily in the gouged earth at the lip of a runnel where the receding water ran. Sparky moved closer. Pretty soon he was close enough

to see through the plastic's transparent dampness the ghostly outline of a naked mandible with a few teeth still in place. Turning away, he quickly followed the flashlight beam toward a sagging clapboard fence and slipped through a well-known hole in it.

At home Sparky confided what he'd seen to his older brother. The brother dropped it casually into a conversation the next morning with a kid whose father worked for the Sanitation Department. The kid somehow passed it on to

his old man. The old man promptly phoned a cousin who was a cop and bucking for sergeant. A preliminary report reached Homicide that afternoon, eventually settling on the littered desk of Captain Thomas McFate a few minutes before 3:00 o'clock.

McFate read the two stark paragraphs.

H. L. Tunucci, traffic officer, was not an expert typist but the message came across. The first paragraph related how the writer, while off duty at home, received a phone call from "a concerned citizen" by the name of A. F. Pinella, such-and-such an address, who said he had information from "a young juvenile" that a bag of bones, possibly human, was half buried in a junk yard at 1555 South Artery. The second paragraph stated that the undersigned thereupon "took prompt action" and drove to the aforementioned address. There in the presence of the property owner, namely Harold W. Horton, said bag of bones was soon discovered and the undersigned concluded that at least some of the bones were "remains of humane beeng." He then summoned assistance in form of a squad car and left the driver on guard at the scene while he himself went to headquarters to notify "the revelant authority."



McFate's memory was faintly tickled by the South Artery address. He rang for Lieutenant Bergeron.

"What do you remember about a junk yard on South Artery?" he asked.

"It's an eyesore, if that's what you mean."

"Something to do with a case. A few years back."

"I'll have to check the records."

"You do that. Meanwhile, put Patrolman Tunucci in the driver's seat of my car. I want him to take me for a ride."

"Nice day for it."

"At least it's stopped raining. One more thing, Lieutenant. See if Doc Zachary's free. This little trip is right up his alley."

Michael Zachary, an assistant medical examiner, was walking down the corridor just as McFate was leaving his office. He was a tall thin man in his early thirties, face startlingly pale against the blackness of a Vandyke.

"What's cooking, Tom?" he asked, smiling.

"A bag of bones."

"Sounds dreadful."

"You'll be busy for days."

"You lead, I'll follow."

McFate's unmarked car was waiting at the side door, a rugged, dark-faced man at the wheel.

"Tunucci?" McFate asked,

climbing in the car beside him.

"Right, sir. Sorry I'm outa uniform but it's my day off."

"Do you know Doc Zachary?"

"Just by sight, sir." Tunucci turned to grin amiably at the assistant medical examiner who was sliding onto the back seat. "Glad to make your acquaintance, Doc."

"Likewise," Zachary replied.

"Head for South Artery," McFate said. "That brief report of yours stirred my curiosity."

Structurally, *Harold's Antiques & Used Car Parts* seemed to represent a series of afterthoughts, none of them much good. The original building was stucco, dirty yellow, with a slate roof, grimy bay windows on either side of the doorway, wide striations of age zigzagging upward from the crumbling foundation. Attached to the left side of this edifice was a windowless Quonset hut rashed with rust. From the right ran a cinder-block compartment topped with a tin roof sketchily covered with tarpaper, and extending beyond this was a chain-link enclosure that might have been a dog run. There was no dog to be seen.

This ill-conceived assemblage sprawled on a corner of flat and treeless land, possibly three acres in all, that was bordered along its South Artery frontage by a falling-down fence of mismatched

and unpainted slats held together precariously by disintegrating strands of wire. The fence failed to shield what it was supposed to—probably one of the world's worst accumulations of junk. Scrapped vehicles, from panel trucks to baby buggies, crowded around stoves, refrigerators, filing cabinets, steamer trunks, portable latrines, parking-meter heads and oddments of pipe and elbow chalky red with corrosion. Growing amid this mess of useless metal were plumed intervals of tough ragweed and witchgrass.

Consciously observing all of it, McFate thought, *Why, sure. I stopped here a couple of years ago. With Hanson of the Missing Persons detail. How in hell could I forget this landscape?*

He'd met Sergeant Hanson late one morning at the Police Academy where both were participants in a seminar. Earlier he'd sent his car to the municipal garage for a wash job and was about to phone for it when Hanson offered him a lift. They were traveling along South Artery. Coming to this very spot, Hanson had pulled in and stopped. He explained that Harold's wife had been missing for two weeks and that the prescribed routine of tracing her had developed nothing. He just wanted to check with Harold in case the old

boy had received some late word from the old girl.

As McFate recalled, Harold had no word.

Tunucci brought the car close to the stucco section of the place. Already parked there were a blue convertible and a black police cruiser. A teen-ager lounged against the convertible's hood. Two men stood side by side near the Quonset hut, not conversing, simply watching the new arrivals.

Trailed by Zachary and Tunucci, McFate approached the two silent watchers, his practiced eyes sizing them up.

He'd never seen Harold W. Horton before (on that visit with Hanson he'd remained in the car), but the odds favored the scrawny one with the thick gray beard, the stained black turtleneck sweater and the dirty white ducks. The other man, blondish and plump, sported a Fu Manchu moustache and a plaid madras jacket with notched lapels, which gave him the look of a middle-aged baker trying to get it together on his day off.

"Where's the officer in charge here?" McFate asked.

"The cop?" Plump baker talking. "He's hanging out in the lot there. Way over where you can see like a hunk of an old bulldozer. Where my kid found them

bones." He pointed to the boy.

"Your kid?"

"Spearman's the name—Arthur Spearman." The plump baker offered McFate a hand like rising dough. "That's Sparky there, near my car." He pointed again to the boy resting against the convertible's hood. "He didn't mean no harm, chief. He's got this old car, see—a Shelby, see—and it won't run or nothing, see—but he's kinda making it into a hobby, see—finding parts and all."

"We're here to see what he found in a plastic bag," McFate said, turning his attention to the scrawny man. "Are you the proprietor of this—this establishment?"

"Who? Me? Yes. I guess so."

"Aren't you sure?" McFate asked in a flat voice.

"Well, sure I'm sure, mate." The scrawny man began to scratch himself through the black sweater. "It's just that I ain't been officially open for quite a spell." On the back of the scratching hand was a red tattoo. Not much larger than a postage stamp, it somewhat resembled a boxed X in the game of tic-tac-toe, with the letter M on either side of it. "I been kinda taking it easy, you might say."

"That's nice, Mr. Horton. You are Mr. Horton, aren't you?"

"Nobody else, Officer," he said.

"And you're not open for business?"

"Not officially, like I said. I don't advertise, you might say. I'm here myself, though; pretty much of the time I'm here myself. So if somebody comes by looking for some used part, I usually let 'em look around."

"Must be like looking for a tack in a slag heap," McFate said. "Do you actually have antiques here?"

"Not no more. Junk is all. Antiques was never my end anyway."

"Whose end was it?"

"The old lady's."

"Your wife?"

"Well, yes."

"Didn't you report her missing a few years back?"

"That's a fact," Horton said, continuing to scratch. "And she ain't turned up yet either."

McFate's eyes narrowed. "About these bones discovered on your property. Don't they make you wonder a little?"

"They did at first, mate. Until I seen the bag this morning. Little bitty bag, like you might line a ten-gallon can with. Emma was a big woman. She wouldn't fit in no bag that size. They's dog bones, if you ask me."

"Do you own a dog?"

"Not no more."



"Did it die?" McFate queried.

"Ran away."

"Recently?"

"No. Quite a spell ago. I was mighty fond of that dog, too. Then one day it just took off and never come back."

"Could it have been at the time of your wife's disappearance?"

"No, not then. But not long af-



ter. A few weeks after, come to think of it."

McFate turned to Zachary. "Well, Doc, shall we take a look?"

"I'm always ready, Tom."

"All right then, Mr. Horton. Lead the way."

Scratching his lower back now, Horton shrugged and started off into no-man's-land. His gait was markedly gimpy, the left leg appearing to have little articulation at the knee. McFate walked slightly behind him, with Zachary and Tunucci at his heels. Spearman and son brought up the rear.

As they proceeded in anything but a straight line to the point where "a hunk of old bulldozer" stood, weaving their way around dented fenders, stepping over twisted axles, McFate began to notice something that puzzled him at first: depressed patches of ground here and there which were weedless and looked damper than the areas surrounding them. He counted eight such areas before the party reached the uniformed patrolman who was standing guard over what the April rain had partly uncovered. The patrolman, who was *sitting* actually on an overturned sink, greeted McFate by dropping a cigarette and getting quickly to his feet.

"At ease, Officer," McFate said. "Where's the—"

"Right there," yelled Sparky Spearman. "Near the rear wheel of that '61 Chevy."

McFate marveled that anyone could tell a '61 Chevy from a '28 Hupmobile in this shambles, but his eyes followed the direction of Sparky's pointing finger. There it was.

He walked over to it, Zachary at his side.

About half the plastic bag was still buried in the soggy earth. Zachary got down on his haunches and studied it for less than ten seconds.

"Well, Michael?" McFate said. Straightening up, Zachary said, "They're definitely not dog bones. The skull is human."

"We'll need a shovel," McFate said, facing the others.

"I got one back at the shop," Horton said, scratching away at his gray whiskers.

"I'll get it," Sparky Spearman offered.

"Just inside the front door," Horton told him.

Bergeron intercepted McFate on the way to his office. "I found a file on that junk yard. The Missing Persons detail worked a complaint from there nearly two years ago. You've got a memory like a computer, Captain."

"Now and then. Bring the file along, Lieutenant, and we'll go over it together."

Inside the office McFate slumped into the swivel chair behind his desk and said, "Emma Horton, the missing Emma Horton, may well have been found today. Is there a physical description of her in that file?"

"More than that," Bergeron said. "There's a pretty good photo. A full-faced portrait. Ten years old but—"

"Age won't make much difference. Skulls don't change conformation. And that's the main

part of our package—a skull."

"I see. Well, here's what Missing Persons accumulated." Bergeron opened a manila folder. "Harold W. Horton reported his wife Emma missing on the 24th of March. Two years ago. Her age at the time was fifty-one. Height, 5'6". Weight, 165—"

"He said she was big."

"—brown hair tinged with gray, blue eyes, straight nose, partial denture in right lower jaw, large mole on upper right arm—"

"That mole's purely academic if it's Emma we brought back today."

"I suppose so. Continuing, Harold claims the last time he saw his wife was on the morning of March 21st. They parted company at 9:00 o'clock. He left her mind-ing their place of business while he drove to New Haven to meet a train. His brother was due in on the 10:25 from New York. But the brother apparently didn't show. Harold says he hung around the station for two more hours, until the next train arrived from New York. His brother didn't get off that one either, so Harold gave up and drove back here again, reaching his place of business at 2:30 or so."

"Does that report mention a dog?"

"Your old clairvoyance is still

operative, I see. Yes, in this next paragraph."

"What about the dog?"

"Horton makes a big point about how wildly it was behaving when he drove up to the South Artery location. It was snarling and growling and leaping up against the fence that penned it in. The animal was a pretty good watchdog, according to Horton—a mixture of German shepherd and husky. Normally it slept most of the day, growing alert only when darkness came. Even then it seldom barked except when it heard somebody trespassing out among the junk, and it never growled or snarled or carried on like that."

"I see."

"That's why Horton suspected something was wrong as soon as he drove up. Then he found the front door of the shop wide-open, although it was a cold March day, around fifteen above. His wife was not inside the shop. He went to the living quarters at the back—a kitchen, a bedroom, a bath. No Emma. No signs of a struggle. No written message to explain her absence."

"That was on the 21st."

"Correct."

"Does he explain why he waited until the 24th to report her missing?"

"In a way. He sort of talked

himself into believing that the old lady—that's how they quote him in this report—that the old lady went off with somebody to pick up a few antiques. She was a sharpie about getting there the firstest with the leastest—this is another direct quote, Captain—whenever she learned that some simple old party was sitting unsuspectingly in a rocker worth a lot of money on the right market. She made a lot of buys low that way and sold high."

"What about the wide-open door in freezing weather?"

"He was asked about that. He said he figured Emma might not have closed it tight when she was leaving and that a draft had pushed it open."

"Didn't they ever lock it?"

"Horton said no to that question. He pointed out that either his wife or he was always somewhere around. And then there was the dog."

"All right. So that accounts for the 21st. What did he do when he woke up on the 22nd and found his wife still missing?"

"He got drunk."

"Celebrating her absence. Is that it?"

"Just about. Seems the old lady was kind of a teetotaler. Hated to see him spend a red cent on booze. So he thought he might as

well take advantage of the situation and tie on a good one before she returned. Apparently the bottle occupied him all of the 22nd and most of the 23rd. On the 24th he sobered up and came down here with his hangover."

McFate opened the top drawer of his desk and began to rummage through it. "What about friendly enemies, suspicious-looking prowlers?"

"In that section of town, particularly around a junk yard, everybody is a potential prowler. Like the kid that found the bones while looking for something else. From what I read here, the Hortons were short of friends, including friendly enemies. Nobody really knew them very well, although they seem to have been in business there for ten or twelve years. Their clientele—this is a Missing Persons word for it—was largely transient, tourists with time to kill and curiosity to satisfy. Some people can't resist junk, particularly if it's called antique."

"I have a cousin like that," McFate said, taking a red crayonlike pencil from the desk drawer.

Bergeron was still consulting the file. "The nearest business to Horton's is a combination gas station and car wash. Benny's Wash-o-rama. That's a quarter of a mile

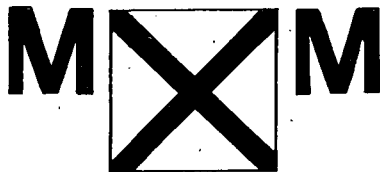
down the road. Benny Tomkins, the proprietor, was interviewed. He said he knew the Hortons to say hello to, that's all. Sometimes they bought gas at his place—a buck's worth. Benny described them as penny pinchers. If you could believe idle gossip, they were rich misers who buried their money around the junk yard to avoid payment of taxes. So says Benny."

"Somebody believed that idle gossip." McFate placed a sheet of unlined white paper on the desk blotter and reached for a ruler. "I counted at least eight spots out there where somebody had been digging holes in the ground and then covering them up." With the red pencil and the ruler he drafted a symbol on the paper.

Bergeron watched in silence.

"What do you make of this, Lieutenant?" McFate asked, proffering his handiwork.

For perhaps thirty seconds Bergeron studied the following drawing:



"Well, it's neat, sir," he said, passing the sheet of paper back to

McFate. "I'd have to say that."

"It doesn't tell you something?"

"No. Is it supposed to?"

"I'm beginning to think so. It's a tattoo that Horton wears on the back of his right hand."

"Pardon me, boss. But how come you didn't ask him outright what it meant?"

"At the time I attached little significance to it."

"And now you do?"

"I'm curious."

"Do you believe old Harold may have done his wife in?"

"We don't know yet that what we've found out there is part of his wife. You better get that photo of Emma and her physical description over to Doc Zachary."

"Right away, sir."

"And this sketch of mine, Lieutenant. Post it on the bulletin board with a request for identification. We'll see if we've got any *real* detectives working in this division."

The following day, a few minutes before noon, Michael Zachary phoned McFate.

"If you'll buy me lunch," he said, "I'll bring you up to date on that parcel of bones."

"I can think of a less grisly subject to munch a hamburger over, Doc. But all right. You're on."

"I'll meet you in five minutes across the street at Mabel's Inn."

The two men ordered hot sausage grinders, a specialty at Mabel's, and schooners of beer. When the beer was served Zachary lighted a cigarette, stroked his Vandyke and said, "There wasn't much of Emma in that plastic bag, Tom. There's more of her somewhere else. You better get digging."

"Thanks for the useless advice, Mike," McFate replied. "At nine this morning I obtained a court order. Fifteen minutes later two of my men were off to South Artery with picks and shovels."

"Good."

"Routine, my dear sawbones. You're sure that what you've already got belongs to Emma Horton?"

"Positive. Want to see my reconstruction?"

"If you can flash it before the grinders arrive."

Smiling happily, Zachary zipped open the briefcase that he'd carried in with him and pulled out a sheaf of glossy prints and several sheets of typewritten paper. "First of all the skull as is," he said, placing a black-and-white print faceup on the checked tablecloth. "Note the vault sutures—those delicate little lines."

"Noted."

"They indicate to the practiced eye—mine, in this case—that this

skull belonged to a person between fifty and fifty-five years old."

"Well, that brackets Emma Horton's age. She was fifty-one when she disappeared. What more have you got?"

"A number of things. That partial denture mentioned in the file you sent over. We found that."

"In the right lower jaw?"

"Not quite. It had drifted out into the general assemblage of bones. But when we tried it for size it was a perfect fit. Then there was the description of her hair—brown tinged with gray. I recovered a few strands. Under the microscope that was the color. But the most conclusive evidence that we've found of the missing woman is contained in these two blowups. Take a look." Zachary handed over a print and a transparency.

McFate glanced at the print first. It was an enlargement of the full-faced photo which had been part of the Missing Persons file—Emma Horton as she appeared ten years before she vanished. The transparency depicted the skull again but this time at the same full-faced angle as the photo.

"Superimpose the transparency over the photo," Zachary said.

"All right."

"Align the skeletal orifices—

eyes, nose, mouth—with their opposite numbers on the photo."

"Done."

"What do you see now?"

"A pretty good match."

"A *perfect* match. If I had my calipers here I'd show you."

"Do your calipers tell you how she died?"

"She was stabbed."

"How do you know that, Doc?"

"Some of the bones in that plastic bag were part of a rib cage—all of the left and some of the right. There was a nick in the sternum as big as my thumb, a clean angular nick."

"I think I better have another talk with Harold Horton," McFate said.

Just then the hot sausage grinders arrived.

Back at the office, McFate was notified by the switchboard operator that the commissioner was holding a staff meeting in the conference room at 2:00 o'clock.

*For a discussion of paper clips*, McFate thought as he rang for Bergeron. When the lieutenant appeared he updated him on the Horton case and gave him several facts to check out with Sergeant Hanson, whose Missing Persons detail had started the investigation two years ago.

"By the way," Bergeron said, "our diggers down on South Ar-

tery called in a while ago. They've unearthed another bag of bones."

"I'm not surprised."

"The contents may surprise you some."

"Try me."

"Most of the skeleton of a big dog."

"I'm still not surprised. But now there are two more question marks in this case."

"Like what, sir?"

"Did Harold Horton kill his own dog? And if so, why?"

"Shall we ask him about it?"

"Yes. Radio our diggers to drop their shovels and haul Horton in here. No charges yet. We simply want to have a chat."

The commissioner's meeting lasted until 3:40 and never once touched the subject of paper clips. Returning to his own office, McFate stopped at Bergeron's desk and asked where he was keeping Horton.

"We're not keeping him anywhere, Captain. We haven't picked him up yet."

"Why the hell not?"

"We can't find him."

"Wasn't he there this morning when the men served the search warrant?"

"Yes, he was there then. A little worse for wear, they said. Been

dipping the beak. But after he read the warrant and told them to go ahead, he got into his car and drove off."

"What kind of a car?"

"A piece of junk, the way our men describe it."

"I mean the model, the make, the year."

"I know what you mean, Captain, but I'm afraid our men didn't take much notice."

"Digging holes may be what they're really cut out for. Well, let's get the license-plate number from Motor Vehicles."

"I've already been up that avenue, sir. No success."

McFate deadpanned in on Bergeron for a long moment. "Don't tell me Motor Vehicles' computers have conked out."

"No, but their records don't show any car registered this year in the name of Harold Horton. Nor for last year either."

"Then he's driving around on illegal plates. Let's pick him up on that. Did you have a chance to talk to Hanson?"

"No, sir. It's his day off and nobody answered his home phone."

"Is he due back tomorrow?"

"At eight."

"Thank God for something."

What was later regarded by McFate as the critical break in

the case occurred the next morning just as he was pouring a second cup of black coffee into a white mug with *No. 1* designated on it in flaking gold letters. It started with a respectful knock on the office door.

"Come in," McFate called out.

A young detective named Wimmer entered and said, "It's about that item on the bulletin board, sir."

"What item?"

"The flag drawing, sir."

"So that's what it is. Pull up a chair, Wimmer, and have a cup of coffee."

"I've already had mine, sir. Thanks just the same."

"What kind of a flag drawing, Wimmer?"

"Well, sir, being a former seaman, a yeoman in the Navy, I got to know what all the flags and pennants mean aboard blue-water ships. That drawing on the bulletin board is the flag design in Morse code for either the letter M or V."

"Either?"

"White on black would make it the double-dash flag, sir, which is the M symbol, but if it's supposed to be red on white—"

"It's supposed to be just the way I sketched it, Wimmer—red on white."

"Then it's the V flag, sir—corre-

sponding to three dots and a dash in Morse code."

"V as in victory," McFate mused, taking a thoughtful sip of coffee.

"V as in Victor, sir," Wimmer said politely. "There's the civilian way and the Navy way. A as in Affirm, B as in Baker, C as in Cast, D as in Dog, and so forth."

"What do you think the M on either side of it means? Marilyn Monroe?"

"No, sir. I think it stands for Merchant Marine."

"I think you're right, Wimmer. Thanks. I'll call on you again."

As the detective was leaving, somewhat nonplussed by the interview, McFate reached for the phone directory and flipped to the yellow pages, coming to a stop under the heading *Hotel & Motel Reservations*. For five minutes he pored narrow-eyed through the fine-printed columns, pausing during this time to make three separate notations on a scratch pad. Then he closed the directory and picked up the phone.

Ten minutes later McFate summoned Lieutenant Bergeron into his presence. He began by saying, "I don't suppose our diligent division has found Horton yet?"

Bergeron shrugged. "Not yet, Captain."

"I wonder why not."



"Beats me. A bearded old drunk in a broken-down jalopy. With illegal plates. Or maybe none at all. He should stick out like a sore thumb. But we'll catch up with him before the day's out."

"Try the Seafarer's Hostel at 53 Front Street. That's where the old boy's sleeping it off."

Bergeron nearly gaped. "How do you know that, sir?"

"I simply figured a seaman on a bender would gravitate toward a salty atmosphere."

"Seaman?"

"This man Horton served a trick in the Merchant Marine—a long trick, I believe. Let's see now." McFate consulted his watch. "Arrange to have Sergeant Hanson here in thirty minutes. Tell him we're holding a little reunion."

McFate was concluding a phone conversation when Hanson entered the office. Motioning the sergeant to a chair, he continued to listen for several more seconds, then said, "Thank you, Mr. Hamilton. You've given me all that I needed. Call on me sometime." He hung up, a sardonic grin widening his mouth. "That was New York. International Union of Able Seamen."

Hanson nodded solemnly.

"When a seaman is no longer able-bodied he's beached with a

small pension," McFate went on.

"I see," Hanson said, frowning his brow.

"However, there's nothing in the file on the Emma Horton case to indicate that her husband Harold was in any way disabled."

Hanson's eyebrows rose. "Pardon me, Captain, but I don't think I follow you."

"Let's review. About two weeks after Harold Horton reported the disappearance of his wife you personally called on him to see if there were any new developments. I know this to be a fact because I sat in your car while you went inside. I didn't see Harold myself but I saw his dog taking it easy in the pen alongside the whatever-ya-call-it. Remember?"

"Yes, I remember that day."

"Do you remember anything else? Anything *different* about Harold?"

"I don't think so. I'd met him two weeks earlier in my office when he filed the complaint. He looked the same to me. Unkempt, unshaven. What are you driving at, Captain?"

"Describe him from memory, Sergeant."

"Well, he was a skinny character. About 5'11". Heavy gray beard. Bloodshot eyes. Wore the kind of clothes you'd expect—cor-

duroy jacket as I recall, blue jeans, brown work shoes."

"Did you notice a tattoo?"

"No."

"Did he walk with a limp?"

"No."

"All right. The file shows you checked back with Harold Horton on two more occasions, once on the—" McFate took up the scratch pad and read from it "—on the 7th of May and again on the 12th of June."

"If those dates are from the file they're accurate."

"It was still the same Harold Horton?"

"Why—a—yes, sir. As far as I know."

"What about his dog, Hanson?"

"His dog? *What* about his dog? What's his dog got to do with anything, Captain?"

"Not a thing if it was still there. But if it were *not* there—this big creature mentioned in the complaint as behaving savagely on the day of Emma's disappearance—if it *weren't* in its pen during these later interviews, I should think it would be noticed by an experienced investigator."

"I don't know anything about the dog," Hanson said, a pink flush touching his cheeks. "And now that I think it over, sir, those last two interviews were conducted by one of my men."

"Which one of them was it?"

"Conroy, I think. Yes, I'm sure. We assigned Conroy to the follow-ups to give him a little field training."

"That explains it, then."

"What do you mean?"

"When you go over your records, Hanson, you'll probably discover that your rookie Conroy went out and interviewed a man he'd never seen before."

"I suppose it's possible."

"It's damned probable, Hanson."

"With all due respect, sir, I still don't see what—"

The phone rang and McFate lifted the receiver and identified himself. He listened for a minute, nodding all the while, and then said, "Thanks, Doc. You're a pathological wonder, no offense meant." As he hung up, his slate-gray eyes gazed at Hanson. "That was Doc Zachary."

"I guess he's positively identified Emma Horton, hasn't he?"

"He's done more than that." McFate paused, then began again in measured tone. "He's just finished a preliminary examination of a second bag of bones, something my men dug up in the junk yard yesterday. He says he now has in front of him skeletal parts of man's best friend. I'll take bets it's the Horton dog."

"Well . . ." Hanson muttered.

"Get this, Hanson. Zachary further informs me that in with what's left of the dog he's found three bones belonging to a dog's best friend—the ilium, the ischium and the pubis. In other words, bones identifiable as part of a man."

"I'm following you slowly, Captain."

"Take a guess. Whose bones are they?"

"Not Horton's." Hanson shook off the silliness of the idea. "You don't mean Horton's, do you?"

"I do mean Horton's."

"Who in hell killed him?"

"The same pathetic character who killed his wife, who butchered the dog."

Hanson was listening as if mesmerized.

"They were all killed by a man who'd spent most of his life at sea, an on-and-off-the-beach bum, to judge from what I got earlier from the union records. This sad salt never was anything but an able-bodied seaman, and not a very able one at that, and then twenty-six months ago his left knee was crushed in an accident with a winch chain and he was beached for good, with a small disability pension. His name is Victor Horton and he's Harold's younger brother—slightly younger,

that is," McFate informed him.

"The one Harold went to meet at the New Haven depot, the one who never showed up?" Hanson was puzzled.

"That's the one. I don't know how his mind functioned on that occasion. Stupidly devious, no doubt. We'll soon find out. Anyway, it's my guess he lured Harold to the train with the idea Emma would go along too. I think Victor wanted the South Artery place all to himself for a few hours."

"Why in all hell would he want that?"

"Assuming he'd paid occasional visits here while on leave, I believe it likely that he heard rumors of treasure buried around the place. Now, lame of leg and pensioned off, Victor decided he could use a little of the stuff. Emma foiled his rumdum scheme by not going with Harold to New Haven. We can fill in the details later but the hard fact is he killed her and then cut her at least in half and buried her in two separate bags. We'll soon find that second bag."

"And then he ran off?"

"Obviously. He wasn't there to welcome Harold. But just as obviously he did eventually come back. Probably a day or two after your last chat with Harold. Dur-

ing that fraternal visit, though details aren't yet to hand, all hell broke loose and Harold also ended up dead."

"And then the dog?"

"And then the dog. Victor had to kill the dog in self-defense, I imagine. At any rate, with the place all to himself now, he began a sporadic search for the buried treasure and he was still digging away up till a few days ago. I can show you the refilled holes to prove it."

"But how did he pass himself off as Harold?"

"Hanson, you've got guts to ask a question like that. He passed himself off as Harold to your rookie with no trouble."

"But as you pointed out, sir, Conroy had never seen the real Harold Horton."

"Who actually ever had? Let me tell you something sad, Hanson. The word for thousands of guys like Horton is nondescript. Show me a scrawny guy of fifty, with a set of gray whiskers and dirty old clothes—show me a guy like that against a background of

urban rot—and you're showing me a guy whom nobody looks at too closely. Except maybe a friend or a relative. And the Hortons had no friends, from what I've gathered, and Victor lost his last relative when he killed his brother. Who the hell ever looks twice at people like that?"

"It's still hard to believe nobody noticed the difference," Hanson said.

"I'll show you." McFate picked up the phone and got Bergeron. "Lieutenant, have you got our old salt in custody now? Good. Trot him in here."

Two minutes later, with Bergeron at his back, Victor Horton stood framed in the doorway. His bleary eyes were filmed with tears. The matted beard was stiffened with spittle. The tattooed hand, palsied now, still raked at the eternal itch under the ripe turtleneck sweater. He was not much better than a bag of bones himself.

"Yes," Hanson said softly in a compassionate voice, "yes, I see what you mean."



*A club, a discerning observer may perceive, is not necessarily a social organization, nor a playing card, nor a wooden weapon.*

# Fat Man's Club



Joey Loodens and the chief of police played their game of chess under a circus poster. AL G. BARNES BIG 4 RING WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS, the poster proclaimed; THE GREATEST AND COSTLIEST COLLECTION OF RARE AND LITTLE KNOWN WILD ANIMALS IN THE WORLD. A reticulated python flicked his pink tongue over Joey's shoulder; a polar bear stalked the chief.

"Joey?" Chief Westermann grunted. "Maybe I should hold a mirror under the man's nose to see if he's breathing."

The old clown ran the palm of his hand back from his eyebrows

to the nape of his neck, skin-on-skin all the way. "We're playing chess, Chief," he said, "not handball."

A buzzer sounded at the hotel room door. "That must be Bill, with our supper," Westermann said.

"You let him in. I'm too hungry to stand up," Loodens said.

The policeman got up from the table. "When I bet you a grand you couldn't stick here in your

room till you'd lost one hundred pounds, I didn't promise you a rose garden."

"I'd rather have that hundred pounds cut off me with whips than face another diet," Loodens said. "Three weeks on lettuce and lemon juice, and I've lost twelve lousy pounds."

"But you do look thinner," Chief Westermann said.

"Thanks."

"In the face."

"Thanks a lot."

The door buzzed again, long and hard. "OK!" Westermann stalked across the room and opened the door.

"Good evening, Chief." The young man who wheeled in the steam cart wore his blond hair clipped short, and had on a maroon jacket with the hotel's crest embroidered on the breast pocket. His stainless-steel wagon rolled through an incense of sauerkraut; corned-beef steam puffed from one of the four pots set into its top. "Shouldn't you be out solving the murder, instead of up here playing second-rate chess?" Bill asked.

"Third-rate," Westermann said. "What's to solve about the murder, anyway? We know just what the fellow looks like. All we require is his name and address. So I propose to eat supper while ev-

ery police jurisdiction this side of the Yukon labors to find the man for us."

Bill parked his cart by the foot of the bed. "We're doing a gas-station business down at the stand, Boss," he told Loodens. "Can't get enough of those little bags of cashew nuts, or the orange-colored peanut-butter-cracker sandwiches. The Corn Growers Association guys can't leave 'em alone. I bet this turns into a new shortage, like coat hangers."

"What I'm short on is food," Loodens growled.

"Feed you in a minute, Mr. Loodens." Bill picked up the chessboard and moved it to the top of the bureau, beside the portrait of a black-haired teen-age girl. He gazed at the photo for a moment, then glanced at the two little armies on the chessboard. "Cripes," he said.

"I only play for the exercise," Loodens explained.

"I got a dog that can play better chess than you two," Bill said. He nudged the white bishop, who'd been jarred in the move, back to the center of his diocese.

Joey Loodens tugged a red bandanna handkerchief from under his right flank and mopped his forehead. "Hot tonight," he said. He stared at the steam cart and munched an empty mouth.

"What we eating, Bill?" Westermann asked.

"A veritable Vesuvius of voluptuous victuals," the young man announced. He pulled open the double doors at the bottom of his steam cart to flip from the shelves inside two warmed dinner plates, a pair of red-checked napkins folded into nurses' caps, oval place mats, and two trios of silverware. On the butcher block that topped half his cart, Bill lathered two pie-sized slices of rye bread with horseradish-mustard. "Corned beef," he said, introducing the beet-colored slivers he was spearing up from one of the steam pots, stacking layer on layer till no more would stay on the stack. "We'll be wanting sauerkraut, won't we?"

"Please," Loodens whispered. "Oh, please."

"Yeah, pile on the kraut," the policeman said.

Bill tossed a mound of steaming, caraway-shot sauerkraut onto the sandwich, topped it off with the second slab of rye, cut the structure into two giant handfuls with his ten-inch chef's knife, and slapped both triangles onto one plate. Westermann reached for it. "Hold on." Bill opened another pot to spoon out a jeweler's display of emerald peas, pearled here and there with perfect tiny on-

ions. "And we mustn't forget our baked potato and sour cream," he said, producing these necessities from his cart. "And our honest Dutch beer," he added, reaching to get a chill-bedewed bottle, an opener, and a slender lager glass. All: plate, glass, and bottle, went to Chief Westermann's side of the table.

Joey Loodens fisted his hands on his side. "Where the hell's my rabbit food?" he demanded.

"Appetite makes the best sauce, Mr. Loodens," Bill said. "I've got for you three hundred and ten of the tastiest calories ever you set tooth to." He stabbed his serving fork into a pot to fish up a pink block as big as a pack of cards. "One hundred and ninety calories of porterhouse steak," he said. "Protein." He pinched open a cardboard container and poured milk into a glass. "This skim milk is ninety," he said. "Vitamins and calcium. Yum." He scooped a hill-ock of sauerkraut down next to the steak. "Twenty-five calories. Vitamin C and roughage." Two two-inch twigs of celery framed the meat. "Five there. Just for fun." A floral tribute of parsley was laid across the bit of beef. "No charge," Bill said.

Joey Loodens kicked the parsley bouquet aside with an impatient swipe of the side of his knife. He

centered the morsel of meat on his plate. Resting his huge arms on the edge of the table, he shaved from the beef a curl so thin that the tines of his fork could be seen through it as he raised it to his mouth. Loodens chewed with concentration. Then he pointed his empty fork toward Chief Westermann's plate, where sour cream was being energetically stirred into the entrails of the baked potato. "That is pure cholesterol," Loodens observed. "Greatest killer since the Black Death, cholesterol."

Bill was reinforcing a sandwich of his own with girders of kosher dill. "Don't fret, Mr. Loodens," he said. "I'd say you've lost a good five pounds already."

"Twelve, idiot!"

"So stick with it, Boss," Bill advised. "That other eighty-eight pounds will just melt away like a New Year's resolution; and the Chief will have to pay you one thousand dollars."

"That comes to ten dollars a pound, and will be the hardest money anyone ever made," Loodens said. "I'd make an easier buck selling my internal organs off, one by one, to a transplant surgeon." He picked up his desert—the two thin celery sticks—and propped them into the corners of his mouth. "Laugh,

clown," he said, as clearly as could be expected. He squinted his eyes, stood, slapped his belly. Joey strutted around the room with high knee action, his jacket flapping loose, his toes tracing little circles in the air at the high end of each step, absurdly a clown again. He turned with a gasp of fear, his face twisted around his celery-grin, his terror telegraphed by quivering elbows, hunched shoulders. Then, half-a-step backward, he caught a coconut-custard pie in the face. Mop it off, scooping both hands. Indignation. Blood-chilling threats.

Bill was roaring, and the chief grinned. "I'd love to see you in your putty nose, Joey," he said.

Loodens chomped the celery sticks and sat to finish his glass of milk. "I don't need makeup nowadays," he said. He glowered down at his belly. "I grew my makeup, and now I've got to live with it."

"Cigar?" Bill veed two in his hand. "Go ahead, Boss. No calories."

Loodens grabbed one. "Sprinkle a little oil and vinegar on this weed, and I'd chew it up for what calories it's got," he said. He read the cigar band. "Boy, you're incinerating my profits."

"What's two bucks, when you're twelve pounds on your way to winning a thousand-dollar bet?"



Bill asked Loodens logically.

Loodens puffed the cigar alight. "I'm like a flagpole sitter up here in my room; I'm in town, but out of it. Guy gets murdered, I didn't even hear about it for almost a day. If I'd been down at my newsstand, I'd have heard about it before you did, Chief."

Westermann leaned forward to bathe his cigar tip in the match flame that Bill, after carefully allowing the chemical head to burn clean, held out for him. "Thanks," the chief said. "The only news we have, Joey, is that the mysterious stranger is still out on the street."

"But you know what he looks like," Bill said.

"Sure," Westermann said. "Ten minutes after the cleaning woman found Al Fry dead in his office, we had a description of the man who'd gone there to have a check OK'd. He was the same guy who'd registered here at the hotel the night before. I talked to enough people who'd seen him that I was even able to put an Identi-Kit portrait together. Here's a picture of the results." Westermann pulled a photo from the inside pocket of his uniform jacket. It looked like a line drawing of a man in his sixties. He had black hair, a thin scar on his right cheek, thin lips. "Know him, Joey?"

Loodens blotted his face with the big red handkerchief. "Got a good head of hair, lucky fellow," he said. "Nope, he's a stranger to me. Did you see him when he checked in, Chief?"

"Only casually," Westermann said. "He was writing down his phony name at the registration desk while I sat working in Town Office across the hall. Bill was working the newsstand."

"And working pretty hard," Bill said. "I'd just been down to the bus station to pick up magazines and papers, so the stand had been on honor system for about an hour; folks dropped their change in a saucer when they bought anything."

"Safe enough, when we've always got a policeman right across the hall, looking over every customer's shoulder," Loodens said.

"When I got back, I cut the wires on the papers, counted the magazines, racked up stuff. When you're working at the newsstand, Mr. Loodens, you know you don't have time to gawk at every dude that walks through the lobby."

"All I get time for is once a week to read the 'Final Curtain' column in *Amusement Business*, to see what friends have made the trip to Showman's Rest," Joey said.

Westermann took back the pic-

ture. "His scar was nothing spectacular. Those sideburns are pretty conservative, like he was trying to be hip for the hip and still look neat enough to please us squares. Maybe he's a salesman."

"What did he put down on the hotel register?" Loodens asked.

"Gave his address as Chicago. Wrote his name as Adam Namon."

"'Adam' might be a joke for 'A Damn,'" Bill suggested.

"Sure. And 'Namon' backwards is Noman. A Damned No Man. Figured it out two minutes after I had it on the wire to everywhere," Westermann said.

"I've used older jokes than that in my clown act," Joey Loodens said.

"So this Adam Namon checks in Monday evening," Westermann said.

"Today is Thursday," Bill volunteered.

"Thanks," Loodens said. "Up here on my perch, I kind of lose track of the calendar."

"Namon went upstairs, left his suitcase, then took a cab out to the Constellation Club to play the wheel. Witnesses say he carried a briefcase. When he tried to cash a three-hundred-dollar personal check to buy chips, the cashier sent him up to Al Fry's office. By the time Namon/Noman came

back here to the hotel, Fry's head was a total wreck. Fry was dead, then Namon went invisible."

"He must have sneaked down the fire escape," Bill said.

"The fire escape is almost as public as the elevators or the main stairway," Westermann said. "It runs past the window outside Town Office, behind my desk. And if I'm not in the office, one of the other policemen always is."

"The Corn Growers Association people were up and down the stairs all night, drunk and sober and trying to sneak in girls," Bill said. "Our man could just have mingled with the throng and surged out the front door, scarfing a cashew nut."

"Not impossible," Westermann admitted. "Anyway, he left behind a suitcase full of last week's *Chicago Tribunes* and an empty briefcase. Those articles of luggage are being sniffed over for clues at the state police lab. And Al Fry's funeral is tomorrow. Noman's tire-iron job was so artistic that the lid will be on the box at the ceremony."

"His family will have to hire folks to come," Loodens said.

"I should have run Fry out of town ten years ago," Westermann said. "I could have got him for running a gambling house, but nobody takes gambling statutes seri-

ously in a state that pays its schoolteachers with the profits of a lottery."

"Or in a town where the chief of police bets on a suet derby," Joey Loodens said.

"So who's perfect?" Westermann said. "Maybe I could have hooked Fry for being a loan shark, but none of the little fishes ever swam up to me to complain. I know from an informant that this new heroin—brown stuff comes up here from Durango; they call it Mexican mud—was piped into our town through the Constellation Club. And that it flowed on to our Consolidated High School, where it blanked some eyes and scarred some arms and killed one or two of our younger citizens."

"I say we should take up a collection to buy Adam Namon a thank-you gift," Bill said. "Like a village in India might do, to reward the hunter who'd shot their neighborhood's man-eating tiger."

"The presentation ceremony might give us some problems," Westermann said. "First of all, we need a recipient." He laid his spent cigar aside. "I'll get a lead on him, sooner or later. My guess is that Namon's girlfriend mainlined an overdose and died. Or that his daughter drowned in Al Fry's imported Mexican mud." The chief looked across the table

at Joey Loodens, whose face was veiled in strands of cigar smoke.

"Maybe he'd just lost more money than he could afford," Loodens suggested. "Maybe he got mad when Al Fry said that he wouldn't accept that three-hundred-dollar check of his."

"So he took out the tire iron he always carried in his briefcase and made his point," Westermann said. "Maybe." He nodded toward the photo on the bureau. "Your Patty died of hepatitis, Joey," he said. "The bug rode into her system on a heroin needle."

"Look, Chief, you know I'd tire-iron Al Fry with a song in my heart," Loodens said, "but you and me have got this gentleman's bet that I stay right here till I'm svelte, or I pay off."

"On a tonnage basis, I'd wager I owe you that thousand dollars right now," Chief Westermann said. "What do you weigh this minute, Joey?"

"Two hundred fifty-three pounds of charm," Loodens said. "Marked down from two-sixty-five."

"You're about six feet tall," Westermann mused. "Give you black hair, sideburns . . ."

Loodens ran his palm back over his pate. "Would you could," he said.

"Mr. Loodens couldn't have

walked downstairs," Bill said. "He'd have to go right past the registration desk, past me at the cigar stand, past the window in Town Office where a policeman always sits. He'd never have got away with it, even if he wanted to. Everyone hereabouts knows about your bet."

"It wasn't a bet," Westermann said. "It was an alibi. And I know that Joey didn't walk downstairs, Bill. He rode down the elevator, inside your steam cart, after you'd wheeled it up with his Monday supper."

Joey Loodens stood, big as a two-door refrigerator, round as a silo. "Me? Inside that dinky little cart?" He laughed.

"When I came up to visit you today, Joey, I'd been thinking," Westermann said. "Reminiscing about the clowns I used to see when I was a kid, back when circuses played under a big top. I remembered seeing that little car buzzing round the center ring, a miniature Austin, I think it was, the Volkswagen of its day, hardly bigger than a toy. The little car braked in front of the stands, and a clown got out, wearing a flowerpot hat. Then another, carrying an open pink parasol. And six midget clowns with baseball bats and hockey sticks and tennis rackets and a medicine ball the size of

a year-old elephant. One last clown unfolded himself from the tiny car, then, and pulled on a rope he held in his hand, and out after him trotted a little brown donkey with a pompon on its head. Always wondered how you fellows managed that gag."

"Trade secret," Joey Loodens said. "I had to swear the Oath of the Pad Room never to reveal the mysteries of clowndom."

"I thought about you getting into Bill's steam cart," Westermann went on. "Big as you are, any engineer would look at the problem and say the hell with it. Take the shelves out, a man weighing an eighth of a ton still couldn't fold himself so small. But what if that man weighed, say, one-sixty-five, and used to be a white-face clown, which is to say a pretty supple fellow. For him, a cinch." Westermann poked his hand across the table into Loodens' middle. "Unhitch your belly harness, my friend, and we'll go downstairs to sign you in as Adam Namon, killer of Al Fry."

Joey thumbed a curved plastic plate from one side of his mouth, then from the other. "That's better," he said, his face suddenly thin. "Let me change into something a little cooler, and I'll come along."

Loodens disappeared into the

bathroom. Three minutes later he was out, half the man he had been. He carried by its straps a garment like a bushel basket hung on suspenders. "This thing was like having a mattress strapped to me," he said. "And I thought I'd burn up from the foam rubber wrapped around my arms and legs."

"Funny," Westermann said. "It's as hard to look fat when you're lean as the other way round. You'd lost a hundred pounds before you conned me into our bet, hadn't you? But you'd kept your figure padded out to size. Inside was Mr. Adam Namon, eager to bang in Al Fry's head; outside, fat cheerful Joey Loodens. Monday evening, Bill wheeled up this cart. You peeled off your counterfeit blubber, stuck on a makeup scar, picked up your briefcase with the tire iron, and climbed in. You rode down to the kitchen, unfolded, and came out front to register as Adam Namon, of Chicago. With his identity established, Namon went out to the Constellation Club, got in to see Fry, and battered him to death. Then he came back here, upstairs to this room, hung on the belly harness. The wig and the colloid scar went down the john. Fat

Joey was back on board, back on his diet. Thin Adam was thin air."

"I took Patty Loodens to the Junior Prom, did you know that, Chief Westermann?" Bill asked. "Three months later she was dead. I asked Mr. Loodens to let me use that tire iron on Al Fry, but he said that was his privilege. I got to be his chauffeur."

"And you supplied the mystery-man's name," Westermann said.

"Any time I've got to spend for helping kill Al Fry, I'll consider it an investment," Bill said.

Joey Loodens pulled his billfold from the hip pocket of his slim slacks. "I won't weasel on the bet, Chief," he said. He pulled out a thin sheaf of bills and handed them to Westermann. "You win."

Chief Westermann fanned the ten one-hundred-dollar bills and handed them back. "Wave this little bouquet around, Joey. Its perfume will attract the attention of some good criminal lawyer." He took out his own wallet and snapped out a single bill. "And add this to it," he said. "Please don't think I'm conceding the bet, Joey. You left the room, so I won. This grand of mine is just a contribution from a citizen of our village to help reward the hunter who killed our tiger."

*As Sophocles observed: Heaven ne'er helps the man who will not act.*



Steffi walked to the window of the little motel room, gazed petulantly out at a broad suburban boulevard and said, "I don't care if there is a quarter-million-dollars' worth of Treasury bills in your pocket. This is a disaster. We're down to our last fifty cents in actual, spendable cash, and I'm hungry."

"Dear," Frank replied in what he hoped was a reassuring tone, "all we've got to do is hang tough a little while longer."

A lean, balding man in his late forties, Frank was disturbed by

Steffi's immature reaction to their problems, but didn't want to argue with her. The fact that this nubile, golden-haired, nineteen-year-old had agreed to flee with him and share his newly stolen fortune was a miracle he did not wish to risk undoing. She was the realization of all the erotic dreams of his lonely bachelorhood.

"As soon as the banks open tomorrow," he went on, "we'll make up for this. I'll sell one of the bills, we'll go to the finest restaurant in Chicago and—"

"No!" Angrily, Steffi turned. "I wanna eat *now*. And I don't mean another candy bar from a vending machine. I mean a real, hot meal."

To himself, Frank had to admit it had been a comedy of errors ever since he'd walked out of the trust department of the Dallas bank that had employed him as a cashier, the stolen T-bills in his pocket. The fortune consisted of 10 pieces of paper in a thick bank envelope, each worth \$25,000 and as hard to trace as currency, provided you knew how to negotiate

them—and Frank did. Stealing them had really been Steffi's idea, but with the promise of Steffi's charms and a quarter-million-dollars as the payoff, Frank had been easy to convince.

The main thing had been to avoid easy-to-trace, commercial modes of travel while getting far from Dallas before trying to pass any of the bills, but the used car he'd bought for their back-roads getaway had broken down in Missouri, taking several days and nearly all of their cash for repairs; and because of the delay, they had arrived in the Chicago area on a bank holiday.

"I don't suppose," Steffi continued, "you'd finally use a credit card, just once. So we wouldn't starve to death."

"No way. When the charge reached the computer, the bank's investigators would come straight here."

"Well, what about eating a meal in a restaurant? And then sneaking out without paying?"

"That's stupid. We'd risk being arrested for petty larceny. Besides,

if the police found these bills on me it would be the end of us."

"Then you'd better think of *something*." She peered out the window again, clapped her hands and said, "Hey, I've got it. Let's go to a funeral!"

"Stop joking."

"It's no joke. Come here."

Over her shoulder, he gazed out. There was a funeral home across the street. The parking lot was filling with cars.

"It's a *big* funeral," she said. "Must be at least thirty or forty cars already."

"So what?"

"During the Depression, I had an uncle who became a family legend. He died before I was born, but they still talk about him. He lost his job but always ate well. He'd read obituaries and pick out a funeral to go to, one where a lot of people might show up. Usually, after the services the family invited the mourners to a big meal. So almost every day my uncle went to a big funeral and ate a fancy lunch for nothing."

Dubious, Frank shook his head. "Ridiculous. Sooner or later, we'd have to talk to someone. Members of the family, maybe. They'd realize right away that we didn't know the dead person."

"No, they wouldn't. If the funeral's big enough, nobody might

by James  
Michael  
Ullman

ever talk to us. Even if they did, by reading the obituary we could learn enough about the dead person to get by. Every big funeral has an obituary in the newspaper."

"Steffi, I don't think . . ."

Steffi, enthused now, her mind made up, threw her arms around him, kissed him impulsively, pushed herself away and pirouetted to the closet, where she reached for her best dress.

"Come on, lover," she called happily. "Put on a suit, shirt and tie. We're gonna go to a big funeral and *eat*."

The organist was already playing in the chapel as Frank and Steffi walked into the funeral home. However, a few people still hovered in the parlor, talking in low tones.

A signboard at the chapel entrance read: HERBERT J. BROWN.

Frank unfolded the obituary page from a newspaper stolen from the motel office, scanned it and said, "Here we are. There's even a short news story. He drowned last Friday. Fell off a yacht in Montrose Harbor. He owned a restaurant, the Blue Ox, which he founded in 1949. He's a Chicago native and in World War II was a Marine hero on Guadal-

canal—one medal after another."

"Good," Steffi said. "You were in that war too. If anyone asks, say you're an old war buddy."

"I wasn't a Marine on Guadalcanal. I was a Navy typist in Philadelphia."

"Well, you must have heard enough war talk to fake it. What about his family? My uncle always tried to learn who the close relatives were, so he could avoid them if he could."

"He's survived by a wife, Arlene, and two brothers, Philip and John. No children, apparently."

"The wife's the important one. We want to avoid her if we can." Frowning, Steffi added, "But are they gonna *eat* afterward? If they aren't, we're wasting our time. We'll have to find some other funeral."

"How should I know?"

"You ask. And while you're at it, learn who the wife is, so we'll know who to avoid."

Near the entrance to the chapel, a fat, middle-aged man in a dark-blue suit was standing with a topcoat over his arm.

Nervously, Frank approached him and in a near-whisper asked, "Excuse me. You a member of the family?"

"No," the man whispered back. "Just a neighbor."

"Well, we drove in from out of



town. Is the family planning a lunch, or anything? We haven't had a bite all day, and—"

"Oh, yes," the fat man assured him. "They said there'll be a lunch at his brother's home. Everyone's invited."

"Good. I've never met his wife." Frank's gaze swung into the chapel. Most rows were packed, but there were just three people in the front row: two men, and one woman in black, all with their heads bowed. "Where is she?"

"She's the woman in the front row."

"How did it happen?" It occurred to Frank that as a supposed out-of-towner, he should ask the obvious questions. "All we know is what we read in the papers. That he fell off a boat and drowned."

"I really don't know the circumstances. I—excuse me." A plump woman had just waddled out of the ladies' room. "My wife," the fat man went on apologetically. "The services are starting. We'd better go in."

The service was mercifully brief. Afterward, the mourners filed past the casket paying their last respects. Frank felt self-conscious at first but quickly gained confidence.

Suitably grim, he paused at the

casket. Brown had been overweight, with craggy features marred by a bulbous nose and flabby jowls. No doubt the old war hero had partaken heavily of his restaurant's food and drink over the years.

On the way out, Frank also studied the family group from the front row: the two men, leaner and younger than the man in the casket, but with the same craggy cast of countenance; the woman, dark-haired and surprisingly young and attractive, her bleak gaze fixed on the floor.

An hour later, the cemetery services over, Frank parked on a suburban street lined with other cars. They had waited until most of the other mourners had already arrived at the brother's home, a large, ranch-style dwelling on a big corner lot.

"Remember," Frank said. "If anyone asks, I'm Bob Adams. We live in Milwaukee. You're my niece. It's not that I'm ashamed to introduce you as my wife. But because of our ages and the fact that we don't want to call attention to ourselves—"

"Never mind the details." Steffi opened the car door. "We've gone over the story often enough. Anyhow, I'll let you do all the talking."

The front door was unlocked,

but as they crossed a vestibule they found the way to the livingroom blocked. Their backs to them, the three family principals were talking to some mourners.

"What'll we do?" Frank wondered.

"Just say something to the widow," Steffi advised, "and keep going. She'll be too busy for us anyhow."

"But suppose—"

"Go on. It'll be all right."

Frank cleared his throat and said, "Mrs. Brown?"

She turned. "Yes?"

"You don't know me, but I met your husband during the war. This is my niece. We live in Milwaukee now, but when I still lived in Chicago we'd drop in at the restaurant lots of times. Herb always took special care of us. I don't imagine he ever mentioned me, but we thought a lot of him and we—"

"Well—it's so good of you to come this far," she said. "Just make yourself at home."

"Thank you."

They slipped past her into the livingroom, which was packed with mourners, and waited solemnly in a corner. The food, a catered luncheon, was being laid out in the dining room. Two uniformed men hurried back and forth from the kitchen, bringing

more tempting dishes to the table.

"Look there," Steffi whispered. "Antipasto, roast beef, turkey, ham, sausage, cheese—Frank, when do we start?"

"Not yet," he cautioned. "Let someone else go first. We don't want to be too obvious."

They waited a few minutes more.

Finally, a couple strolled into the dining room, picked up plates and silverware and headed for the buffet.

"Okay," Frank said. "Now we'll—"

Behind them, a man said, "Excuse me, folks." It was one of Brown's brothers. He extended a hand and added, "We owe you some special hospitality for coming all this way. From Milwaukee, I understand. I'm Phil Brown."

Frank stammered an introduction.

"We don't want to impose," Frank continued. "We just—"

"It's no imposition. I insist." Brown put large hands on their shoulders, steered them through the crowd and down a corridor to a den, where two men waited.

"My brother John," Brown announced. "And my neighbor, Gus. Boys, this is Don Adams and his niece. Don was in the war with Herb. He drove here from Milwaukee."

They shook hands all around.

Gus, a burly, red-faced man, asked, "What business you in, Don?"

"Sales," Frank replied vaguely. "Cars, until last week. But the market got so slow that I was laid off."

"Yeah, things are tough here too. We had layoffs right in this suburb. Join us in a drink?"

"Thanks, but—"

"Oh, come on." Gus virtually pushed Frank onto a sofa. A worried expression on her face, Steffi settled beside Frank. "What'll it be?"

"Well—bourbon, please. And water."

"Just a root beer," Steffi said cautiously.

Gus went to a bar, fixed drinks and brought them back.

Frank began to sense that something might be terribly wrong. Slowly, he sipped his drink and tried to gather his wits.

Phil asked, "Where'd you serve with Herb? On Guadalcanal?"

"No," Frank said, deciding to be as truthful as possible. "I was in the Navy. But I met Herb during the war, when we were both on leave. And when I heard about his opening a restaurant, I dropped in and he remembered me. It was never a close friendship, but over the years—"

"To hell with this," brother John said, speaking for the first time. His fists clenched, John took a step toward Frank. "Let's stop playing games with these creeps."

"What do you mean?" Frank asked.

"He means," Phil put in, moving up behind Frank, "that we think you're lying. That you never saw Herb in that restaurant in your life."

"If I didn't know your brother," Frank countered indignantly, "what would I be doing at his funeral?"

"I'll give you a reason," Gus said, leaning down and pushing his face right up to Frank's. "It's that you and this girl are thieves. You go to funerals to get inside fine homes and steal anything small and valuable that isn't nailed down. Either that, or to case the joint for a burglary later."

Frank was genuinely outraged. "Me? Take advantage of a family's grief to steal? I wouldn't do anything like that!"

"Wouldn't you? In addition to being Phil's neighbor, I'm the police chief here. This isn't the first time I've met vultures like you."

"I can assure you—"

"Good. If you haven't stolen anything, you won't mind my looking through your pockets, will

you. Especially that inside jacket pocket, where you've got something thick . . ."

Frank tried to squirm away, but with the drink in one hand and Phil suddenly looming behind him, pinning his shoulders to the sofa, he didn't have a chance.

His head spinning, the realization dawning that his world was collapsing, he sank back and closed his eyes as Gus said, "Hey, look! Treasury bills, in an envelope from a Texas bank! They must be either stolen or counterfeit. We caught an even bigger fish than I thought."

Steffi said, "Treasury bills? Honest, I didn't know. I knew he worked at a bank, but when he practically forced me to leave Dallas with him—I mean, I was virtually kidnapped—he didn't say anything about stealing *Treasury* bills. All he said he had in that envelope were his life savings, in E Bonds . . ."

A few minutes later, a police car pulled discreetly into an alley behind the house. Frank, Steffi and the chief climbed into the back.

Watching from the house, Phil Brown turned to the woman in black and said, "Can you imagine? With so many people here we've never met before, we'd never

have noticed them if he hadn't assumed you were Herb's wife, rather than my wife. But anyone who ever saw Herb at the restaurant saw his wife, too."

"I'll say," Phil's wife replied. "She was always at his side, helping him run the place. Until she got so fed up with his drinking and girl-chasing that she left him. In fact, she still hates him so much she wouldn't even come to his funeral."

Back in the dining room, a portly, middle-aged couple approached the buffet table.

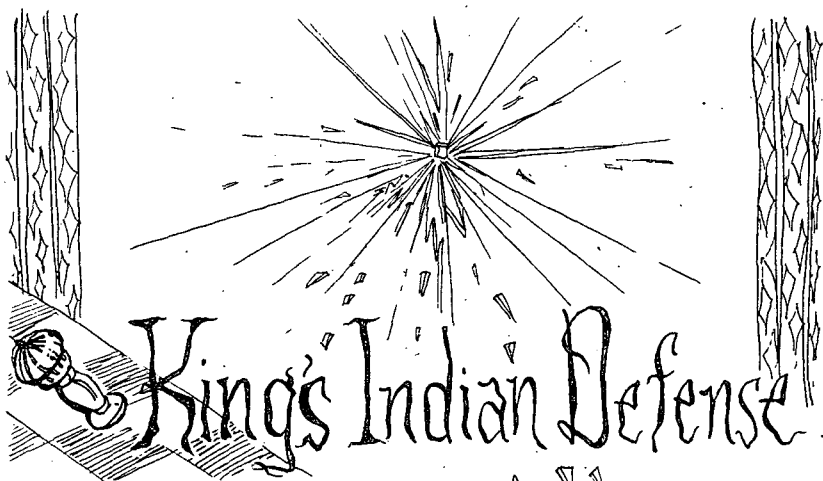
"Those people I saw you talking to before the services," the woman said, loading her plate with roast beef, turkey, mashed potatoes and macaroni salad, "what was that all about?"

"The guy wanted to know if there'd be a lunch," the man replied, piling food onto his own plate. "And he asked me to point out the widow."

"But how *could* you? We never heard of this family until this morning, when we read the obituary."

"What's the difference *who* I pointed out? Just load up. Like I told you, when you're out of work like I am you'll find the best free meals in town are at a big funeral."

*Even a second-rate tournament has a chance of turning into a national event.*



**H**e was staring out the window when it happened. There was a soft pop like someone cracking a knuckle. Then the huge pane of glass exploded in slow motion, spider-webbing out from the hole where the bullet had entered, then slowly falling apart in a cascade of glass shards. When it was finished there was a clear view of the hotel across 34th Street. A blast of cold night air carried with it the sounds of traffic from around the corner on Broadway, seven stories below. Someone screamed.

by  
**George C. Chesbro**

Someone else was grabbing at him, pulling him across the table. It was Ristock. The gray-haired man's eyes were wide, his lips trembling, his face contorted with the terrible effort to speak. Douglas Franklin put his ear close to the man's mouth, but there were no words. He could hear a faint bubbling sound coming from somewhere deep inside the man's chest. Then he saw the blood.

"Get down!" Douglas yelled. "Everybody on the floor! Somebody's shooting!"

Ristock coughed red. Douglas leaped across the table, dragging the other man to the floor with him, instinctively shielding him with his body long after Ristock was past defending. The gray-haired man's eyes had begun to glaze.

"Douglas Franklin," the policeman intoned, laboriously writing the name in a stained, green notebook. Suddenly he looked up. "The Douglas Franklin?"

It took Douglas a moment to pick through the nightmare sounds in his mind and focus on the man's words. Finally he nodded and said, "Whatever that means." The blood on the front of his shirt had dried and caked. Some of it had soaked through to his skin and he could feel it crackle when he moved. The policeman didn't seem to notice.

"I play a little chess myself," the policeman said with a touch of pride. The pride hardened into suspicion. "What are you doing here?"

"I live in New York."

"I know that. And anybody who plays chess knows that you're one of the best in the world. What's a big chess gun like you

doing playing in a second-rate, local tournament?"

"I like to eat," Douglas said wearily, "and my sister appreciates it when I can manage to pay my share of the rent. I play chess for a living. Any tournament with prize money is a good enough tournament for me." He didn't add that he had just come off a disastrous performance at a Grand Master Invitational in Copenhagen. He'd felt tired and stale. He'd entered this tournament for practice and in an attempt to regain his confidence. It had been a mistake: he could burn his clothes, but he knew that the carnage stains in his mind would not be so easily removed.

"It still seems like easy pickings," the policeman persisted.

"If you say so. But if you check the pairing sheets you'll see there were five other grand masters and sixteen senior masters. That isn't what I call 'easy pickings.'"

"You were playing with this Ristock when he got shot, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"You want to tell me what happened?"

Douglas gestured down at his bloodstained shirt. "Look," he said thickly, "I'm not thinking too clearly right now. Can't this wait until tomorrow?"

The policeman leaned back in his chair and squinted. Hard, brown eyes glinted behind half-closed lids. His potbelly and bald head gave him the appearance of a dyspeptic, blue Buddha. "We've got two dead men on our hands, Mr. Franklin—"

"Two?"

"The one that died under you out in the playing hall and another one across the street in the hotel room where the shot must have come from."

"Murder-suicide?"

"Maybe, maybe not. In any case, that's our problem. Contrary to public opinion, we really do care about finding out. If you're feeling a little rocky, consider the fact that you'd be a dead man if the sniper had missed Ristock. No tomorrows." He paused, leaned forward on the desk. "I'd like you to tell me what you remember while it's still fresh in your mind."

Coffee appeared from somewhere and Douglas was offered a container. He shook his head. He did not want the policeman to see that his hands were trembling.

"Tonight was the first round of a five-round tournament," Douglas began slowly. "I was paired with Ristock."

"Why you?"

"Luck of the draw. It was a first-round pairing."

"All right, go on," he urged.

"There's not much more to say. I was looking out the window when it happened. I saw the window break. There was a lot of noise and confusion. The next thing I knew Ristock was grabbing at me. There was . . . blood on him, so I knew he'd been shot. I yelled a warning and took Ristock down to the floor with me. It didn't do any good. He was already dead."

"How many shots?"

"Just the one."

"You say he was grabbing at you. Did he say anything?"

"No. He looked like he was trying to speak, but there weren't any words. It may have been just a reflex action."

The policeman nodded and wrote something in his notebook. "What else happened?"

"That's it. Somebody must have gotten to a phone because the police arrived about ten minutes later."

The policeman gazed out the window and drummed his fingers on the desk. Finally he looked back at Douglas. "All right, Mr. Franklin," he said, "let's go through it one more time and see if there's anything you missed."

A half hour later Douglas emerged from the small, impromptu interrogation room into

the vast playing hall which was empty now except for a knot of detectives and police photographers huddled around the draped body in the center of the room. He'd been offered a ride home, but he preferred to walk, then ride the subway. He needed some air, and the impersonal embrace of the city of rock that was Manhattan, to clear his mind. He wanted to stop shaking.

The two men flanked him as he reached the head of the mezzanine stairs. They were both the same height, well-dressed, with short haircuts. The man on Douglas' left had blond hair and pale, milky-blue eyes. The second man was darker, the flesh on his face puckered by old scars.

The blond man said, "Douglas Franklin?"

"That's right."

The blond man produced a thin wallet which he flipped open to reveal a shield and card. "F.B.I.," he said. "I'm Special Agent Tompkins and this is Special Agent Burns. We'd like to talk to you."

Douglas sighed. "Look, I'm pretty strung out right now."

"We appreciate the fact that you've been through a lot this evening," Tompkins said in a flat, accentless voice. "But we think you may have some valuable in-

formation. Would you give us a few moments of your time?"

"What do you want to know?"

"First, what you told the police."

"Why don't you ask them?"

Douglas made no effort to hide his annoyance. He gestured behind him. "The man I talked to is a police sergeant by the name of Olsen. You'll find him in the small room across the playing hall."

"Uh, this is a sensitive matter of national security, Mr. Franklin," Burns said quietly. "We'd just as soon the police didn't know of our interest, at least for the time being. Will you talk to us?"

"Of course," Douglas said resignedly. "Look, I'm sorry if I seem—"

"Don't apologize," Tompkins said, steering Douglas into an empty banquet hall off the mezzanine. "You must be bone-tired. I promise you this won't take long." He indicated a chair at the end of a table near the door. Douglas sat down and the two men took seats across from him.

"Now," Burns said, leaning forward and folding thick, knotted hands on the table, "would you tell us what you told the police?"

"There isn't that much to tell," Douglas said wearily. "I was playing my first-round game with this man, Ristock. Somebody shot him



through the window. The police told me there's another dead man in the hotel room where the shot came from. That's all I know."

Tompkins seemed to be studying Burns' hands as he asked, "What did Ristock say to you?"

"Nothing. He never had a chance. That's what I told the police."

"You talked to the police a long time."

"That's because they had me repeat the same story a half dozen times."

Burns squinted. "It looked like Ristock was whispering something in your ear."

Douglas shook his head. "He may have been trying to, but he wasn't able. I told the police I thought it was a reflex action. I think he died almost instantly."

Both men nodded almost imperceptibly. Their faces revealed nothing, but it seemed to Douglas that there was a trace of anxiety in Tompkins' voice when he spoke again.

"Did Ristock say anything to you *before* he was shot?"

"We introduced ourselves at the beginning, but we didn't talk during the game."

Douglas watched the two men exchange glances. He suddenly realized he was no longer trembling; his fear had been replaced by an

intense curiosity about the case.

"Mr. Franklin," Burns said, "did Ristock do anything unusual during the course of your game?"

"I don't know what you mean."

The two men leaned back in their chairs and went into a whispered argument. Tompkins seemed to win. He came up talking.

"I'm going to give you some background information," the blond man said very softly. "It is to be treated with the utmost confidence, not to be repeated to anyone. I think the reason for sharing this with you will become plain. When you discover who—and what—Ristock was, you will realize why this matter is of the utmost importance to the government. Also, I hope it will help you to focus in on anything *odd* Ristock might have done or said that would be relevant."

Burns got up and moved toward the door. He leaned against the jamb, crossed his arms over his chest and stared out across the room. His dark eyes were opaque, unblinking.

"Ristock was a member of the Russian delegation to the United Nations," Tompkins continued. "He was also our man."

"A spy?"

"Yes. His occupation was an ideal cover. From time to time he

was able to obtain important documents—or copies. He would bring these to New York in his diplomatic pouch, then make arrangements to turn them over to his contacts.”

Douglas suddenly felt pressure and a ringing in his ears, as if he were ascending in an airplane. He swallowed hard. “The man in the hotel room?”

“Precisely.” Tompkins bit off the word. “That man was Ristock’s contact. Obviously, the Russians penetrated the cover and killed both of them. They couldn’t have picked a worse time as far as we’re concerned. This time Ristock was bringing the records of a secret policy meeting in which the Kremlin’s real attitudes and aims in the SALT talks were discussed. Of course, such information would be invaluable to us in our negotiations—or it could cause us to break off negotiations altogether if it were discovered we were being taken for a ride. Ristock was the only man, as far as we know, who knew where he had hidden those documents. And you were the last person to see him alive.”

Tompkins paused and pressed the tips of his fingers together. “Now, Mr. Franklin, in the light of what I’ve told you, can you think of anything at all Ristock

might have done that could be interpreted as an attempt to relay information?”

Douglas closed his eyes and put his hands to his temples, trying to reconstruct in his mind the man, his actions, the game. Finally he opened his eyes and shook his head. “I’m sorry. I just can’t think of anything. I never pay that much attention to my opponents, only to their moves.”

Tompkins rose abruptly and extended his hand. “Thank you, Mr. Franklin,” he said flatly. “We appreciate your trying to help.”

Douglas stood up and shook the hand. His legs felt rubbery. “I’m sorry I didn’t have anything to tell you.”

Burns came over, scribbled a telephone number on a piece of paper which he handed to Douglas. “Maybe something will come back to you after a night’s sleep,” the dark man said. “If you think of anything, you can reach us at that number.”

Douglas folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket. He shook hands with Burns, then walked slowly out of the room.

He was halfway down the stairs when he remembered. He hesitated, then turned around and went back to the room.

Both men were standing where he had left them. Tompkins was

speaking softly into a walkie-talkie. Burns spotted him first. He seemed startled. He nudged Tompkins and the blond man put down the walkie-talkie.

"There is something," Douglas said hesitantly. "You asked me if I remembered anything *odd* about the man or the game. I don't know how important it is."

"You let us be the judge of that," Burns said. There was tension in his voice.

"I happened to glance at Ristock's score sheet about ten moves into the game. He'd labeled the opening a King's Indian Defense. It wasn't."

Burns shook his head. "You'll have to explain that."

"In chess, certain sequences of opening moves are labeled. This is done for easy reference when you're analyzing. We were playing the London Variation of a Ruy Lopez. Any tournament player of even mediocre skill would have known it wasn't a King's Indian. Still, that's what Ristock called it. I didn't think anything of it at the moment because Ristock was unrated and I didn't know how good he was. Still, it did seem odd . . ."

"Ristock was an excellent chess player," Burns said, almost to himself. His eyes were moist and hot. They suddenly focused on

Douglas. "You have not shared this information with anybody?"

"No. I told you I just thought of it. Does it mean anything to you?"

"Perhaps," Burns said distantly. "Thank you again, Mr. Franklin."

Twice Douglas had spotted the tall man in boots, jeans, dungaree jacket and wide-brimmed, black leather hat; once in the men's room early in the evening and again, briefly, in the lobby on his way out of the hotel.

Douglas considered, this one time too many. He saw no one now, yet he felt certain he was being watched. He paused outside the hotel entrance and glanced at his watch: it was past three o'clock in the morning. He turned left and headed down 34th, away from Broadway.

He stopped suddenly beneath a street light and listened. A second set of footsteps stopped somewhere in the darkness across the street. Douglas fought against the surge of panic beating against the inside of his chest. He forced himself to take a deep breath, pull out a cigarette, light it . . .

The sound could have been a truck backfiring, but Douglas, his nerves stretched taut by fear and exhaustion, instinctively knew it wasn't. He flinched, wrapping his

arms around his body and ducking his head. The slight, quick movement saved his life as the slug tore harmlessly through the nylon material of his Windbreaker, missing his ribs by a fraction of an inch. The bullet caromed off the base of the lamppost and ricocheted across the street, skittering into the darkness.

on the first ring, fortunately. "Mandy?"

"Douglas!" She sounded wide-awake. "How did you do? Or is that an insulting question?"

Douglas swallowed hard. "Did you listen to the news tonight?"

"Are you kidding?"

"That means you were out with Bob."



A voice shouted from that same darkness: "*Franklin!*"

Douglas broke into a dead run.

His sister answered the phone

"We just got in," she said. "Is Bob still there?"

"Yes. I was just going to whip up some bacon and eggs. Come on home and join us."

"Listen, Mandy," Douglas said, trying to keep his voice as casual as possible, "I want you to do exactly as I say, and I don't have time to explain. Have Bob get you out of there right away. Go to a hotel. The Motor Inn is near there. I'll call you in the morning."

"Douglas, what's the matter?"

"Somebody's trying to kill me."

There was a pause on the other end of the line, then a giggle. "I get it—the punch line is that you ran into a poor loser."

"Mandy, I'm not joking," Douglas said quietly. "Whoever it is knows who I am and will probably know where I live. I don't want you there if they show up looking for me."

"*You are serious.*" Mandy's voice was trembling.

"Get out, Mandy. I'll call you in the morning."

He hung up, put another dime in the slot of the pay phone and dialed the number on the paper Burns had given him.

A woman answered. Her voice was deep and throaty. "Four-nine-seven-seven."

"Let me speak to Tompkins or Burns."

"Who is this?"

"Douglas Franklin. I was told I could reach them at this number," he told her.

There was a long silence on the other end, then, "Go to your apartment, Mr. Franklin. Agents Burns and Tompkins will meet you there."

"No. Somebody's trying to kill me. They could be waiting for me there. Also, I had a tail. I think I lost him, but I can't be sure," Douglas protested.

Again there was a long pause. "All right," the woman said at last. "Go to the pay phone on Central Park West, across from the Doring Hotel. The phone will ring in exactly one-half hour. Pick it up. Someone will give you instructions." There was a sharp click and the line went dead.

Douglas hung up, then stepped out into the street to hail a taxi.

The drunk staggered down the sidewalk and collapsed on the bench in the darkness a few feet away from where Douglas was sitting. The drunk pulled the latest in an apparently endless string of nightcaps from a bottle in a brown paper bag, then lay down, cushioning his head on his arm. He immediately began to snore.

Douglas ignored the drunk, concentrating all his attention on the glowing tube of light that was the phone booth, ten yards away. If everything went on schedule, the phone would ring in exactly three

minutes. Now, just to wait it out.

Behind him, a lion's roar came from the direction of the zoo in the jungle that was nighttime Central Park.

Except for an occasional nocturnal taxi, Central Park West was empty. Across the way, on the upper floor of the hotel, a stoned couple danced languorously in front of an open window, totally oblivious to anyone who might be watching. Music from a stereo drifted out into the night on a boardwalk of yellow light. As Douglas watched, the man drew the woman even closer and began to nibble on her ear. Douglas looked away. He felt like a voyeur watching moon-lovers through a telescope.

Through a telescope. Or binoculars. Or a telescopic rifle sight.

Burns had said: *"It looked like Ristock was whispering something in your ear."*

Amid the confusion and chaos in the playing hall after the shot, there was no way anyone could have seen Ristock's grasping hands, his moving lips—not unless they were watching, looking for it.

The telephone began to ring.

Douglas stayed where he was, beyond the outer edge of the circle of light surrounding the booth. The phone continued to

ring but he remained still.

The drunk rolled over, cursed, then suddenly lurched to his feet before Douglas could stop him.

"Answerphone," the drunk mumbled. "Sumbody godda answer damnphone."

There was no time to shout a warning, and Douglas knew it would be impossible to distinguish between drunks and chess players from a darkened room high up in the hotel across the street.

The drunk was reaching for the door handle when Douglas clipped him at the knees. They toppled together to the sidewalk as three shots rang out and the glass in the booth cascaded over them in a shower of razor-sharp crystals.

"... Damn phone cumpny ... musta' been my wife callin'."

Satisfied that a proper identification had been made, Douglas rolled back into the darkness, then leaped to his feet and raced north, keeping close to the low brick wall that separated the sidewalk from the edge of Central Park. He stopped when he saw the man racing across the street ahead of him at the intersection. It was Burns, and he was carrying an automatic pistol.

Douglas started back the other way, then stopped again when he saw Tompkins cutting off that es-

cape route. Douglas spun and dove headfirst into the inky green on the opposite side of the wall.

Now there were four of them: Tompkins, Burns, and two others. He caught a brief glimpse of them standing on the sidewalk just below his hiding place. Tompkins issued some instructions and the men fanned out, disappearing into the night.

Douglas inched back farther into the grove of trees and sat down on the ground. He pulled his knees up to his chest and rested his forehead on them. He had a sudden vision of all four men getting mugged and he found it outrageously funny; hilarious: four Russian agents brought down by New York muggers. That would be too much, he thought. Too much. He wanted to laugh.

He bit hard into his knuckles to try to stop the hysteria building within him. Then again, he told himself, it was only a matter of time before they found him, so why not laugh? He was a dead man anyway.

"Franklin!" The shout came from somewhere in the darkness a hundred yards to his right. It was the same voice he had heard on the street. "My name is Jason—C.I.A.! Sit tight! I'm going to try to get you out of here!"

Douglas opened his mouth to

yell. The sound stuck in his throat, cut off by another sound—the soft *chug* of a silenced automatic pistol a few feet to his left.

He considered staying where he was only for a moment. There were four of them, all armed, and only one Jason. Jason was going to need some help.

Douglas took a deep breath, held it, and crab-walked backward very slowly. His right hand came down on a large, smooth rock. He wrapped his fingers around it and came up to his feet in a crouch. He paused a few seconds, listening. There was nothing but silence all around him. He moved around in a circle, allowing a few seconds between every step, straining in the darkness to make certain he did not step on a dry twig or loose gravel. He kept moving until he was above and behind the position where the shot had been fired. Then he squatted and peered into the darkness.

Tompkins was there, his pistol still pointed in the direction from which Jason had shouted.

Douglas started to inch forward, then froze. Tompkins, his senses honed by years of training, started, then began to twist around, his gun at the ready. Douglas had only one option and he exercised it; he brought back his arm and hurled the heavy

rock forcefully through the air.

The rock hit Tompkins in the forehead. He spun on one foot, then toppled to the ground.

Douglas raced forward, his hands balled into fists, and dropped down beside the fallen man. Tompkins was unconscious. There was a sizable dent in his forehead, and his blond locks were stained red. Douglas picked up the automatic pistol. "I got one of them!" he shouted. "And I've got a gun!"

"Keep moving!" was Jason's answering shout. He had moved a hundred and eighty degrees from where he had been and was now somewhere behind Douglas on the steep slope.

"King's Indian Defense!" Douglas shouted again. "That's what Ristock wanted you to know! King's Indian Defense!"

Suddenly the protective night around him was filled with the angry whine of bullets. Douglas grunted and leaped forward, baling up as he hit the ground and rolled to the bottom of the slope. He came up hard against the bole of a tree, jumped to his feet and sprinted across the sidewalk into another grove of trees. A bullet thunked into the trunk of a tree, near his head.

A second later there were two loud reports from the hill behind

him and a man screamed shrilly.

"*Coming toward you, Franklin!*" Jason yelled.

Burns emerged from the trees at a dead run. Suddenly realizing that he was in the open, Burns dug his heels into the ground and threw himself backwards, at the same time firing wildly at the open space around him. Douglas wiped a stream of sweat from his eyes, then slowly brought up the gun and aimed, steadying his arm against the trunk of the tree.

"Don't move, Burns! Just stay right there." He almost added, *please*. He didn't want to pull the trigger, didn't want to kill.

Burns' answer was a fusillade of gunfire.

Douglas closed his eyes, swallowed, then opened his eyes and pulled the trigger three times. Burns' body jerked backwards, jackknifed in the air, then rolled the rest of the way down the hill and lay still on the sidewalk.

There was a long silence, then, "It's Jason! Don't shoot! I'm coming down!"

"There's another one!"

"I got him earlier. With my hands."

The man in the black leather hat emerged from the trees. He stopped to give a cursory glance at Burns' body, then kept coming to the middle of the sidewalk.



Douglas stood up. Satisfied that his legs still worked, he walked out to meet Jason.

Jason's smile never reached his eyes. "Mr. Franklin, I presume. Thanks for the assistance."

"I left another one up on the hill," Douglas said tightly. "He's unconscious."

"I found him," Jason said evenly. Again, the slight smile.

Douglas sighed. "What the hell is this all about? What does a King's Indian Defense *mean* to you people?"

Jason thought for a moment, then gave a curt nod. "I guess you've earned the right. You feel up to a helicopter ride?"

Dawn caught and flashed on the rotor blades of the helicopter as the machine slowly lifted off its pad atop the Pan Am Building. The pilot guided the craft through a graceful half-turn, then headed toward the East River.

"King's Indian Defense," the pilot said. "Jason says you gave it to us, so he wants you to see what it is."

The pilot gave Douglas a folded map, then banked sharply over the East River and headed north on a route parallel to the East Side Drive. "Ristock never knew who his contact was," the burly man continued. "That was part of

what made the whole system so effective. He wanted it that way. With no personal contact to be made, he was able to move freely, with the appearance of absolute innocence."

"But his cover was still blown from this end?"

"No system is absolutely perfect. They uncovered his contact, then followed him for six months. He led them to the chess tournaments—and Ristock."

"What if there wasn't a drop to be made?"

"Then Ristock wouldn't label the game. His contact had only to look over Ristock's shoulder to know whether or not there was a drop and, if there was, where to find it. That's what the map is for."

Douglas unfolded and studied the map he had been given. It might have been a novelty chess board sold in some Times Square souvenir shop: the island of Manhattan had been divided up into sixty-four squares, each numbered.

"Sixty-four squares," Douglas said. "Sixty-four possible drop points."

"That's right," the pilot said. "And there are specific, secure areas in each one of the numbered squares."

"A particular opening stood for a square."

"Right. As you know, there are more than 80 openings listed in Modern Chess Openings. We only needed 64."

"Why didn't you just check out all 64?"

"We could, and would have. But there were other factors."

"Like what?"

"For one thing, we wanted the killers."

Douglas shifted in his seat. They were passing over square 13—designated on the map as "Sicilian Defense."

"They had identification," Douglas said.

The pilot shrugged. "I.D.'s are a dime a dozen."

"What if I'd-pressed them on it?"

"They'd have probably killed you on the spot."

"The story they told me was the truth, then?"

"Sure. And it worked. It jogged your memory, didn't it?"

"Except that they changed the cast of characters."

"That's right. Burns and Tompkins—as you knew them—were in-

side the hotel directing traffic. They were in touch with the other two snipers across the way by walkie-talkie. You were scheduled to be checked off after you told them about the King's Indian business. They didn't know what it meant, but they were sure it was the key and they didn't want you giving it to anybody else. They didn't know we'd have eventually found the documents anyway."

"Why the hell didn't *you* pick me up?"

"We couldn't be sure at the beginning you weren't one of them."

"Me?"

"Sure. Why not? A globe-trotting chess grand master: a perfect cover for a spy. Of course Jason knew you, weren't in on it when they tried to kill you on the street. That's when Jason yelled at you. You ran."

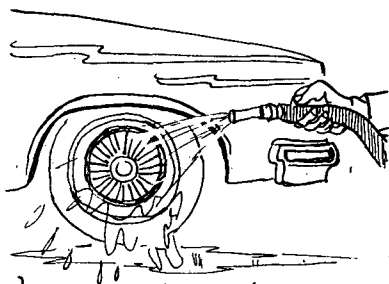
"I wasn't in the mood for conversation."

"Well, it's a damn good thing you play chess better than you run, since you ran right back into them."



*A few new connections may ease things considerably for women and horses.*

# When the Sheriff Walked



by Jack Ritchie

Joey Lee is—or was—about five-foot-ten, had short brown hair, a small scar right under the left earlobe, and weighed a hefty one hundred and seventy pounds.”

Hefty? I regarded one hundred and seventy pounds as lightweight.

The counterman continued. “But I suppose L.K. gave you a snapshot?”

“No,” I said. “And I don’t even know who L.K. is.”

He smiled wisely. “Joey Lee’s father, L.K. Williams.”

So Joey Lee’s last name was really Williams? I had thought it was Lee.

The counterman refilled my mug of coffee. “L.K. has this New South Cafe in Cumberland. That’s about sixty miles due east, where Joey Lee originally come from.”

He looked up as the door behind me opened, quickly wiped the counter and moved away.

The sheriff of Staceyville was a small, immaculately uniformed man wearing a white hat. He took the stool next to me. “I hear you been asking a lot of questions, especially about Joey Lee.”

I put down my coffee. “I have not asked anyone at all about Joey Lee. On the contrary, ever since I set foot in this town, people have been asking me.”

He regarded me stonily. "You wouldn't be one of them private-eye investigators?"

"Do I look like a private investigator?"

"Nowadays you can't tell. They run from Mannix to Cannon. Just what is your line, Mister?"

I have a tendency to bristle when harassed. "I am an admiralty lawyer."

He was not at all convinced. "We got no water around here except for Lake Jubal A. Early and that's only twenty-six acres when it rains. Why did you come here, Mister?"

"I consider that my personal business and nothing short of a court order will unseal my lips. Am I the only stranger who's ever stopped in this delightful town?"

"Just about. For the last two years, anyway. Ever since Amtrak took away our daily train we been pretty isolated." He seemed to give that some dark thought and then frowned. "The situation don't make much difference to the men; but the women complain a lot."

He studied me for another moment, then turned and went back out into the night.

The counterman returned. "I guess I was the last person to see Joey Lee alive. Except maybe for . . ." He glanced significantly in the direction the sheriff had taken.

"Are you telling me that Joey Lee is dead?"

He shrugged elaborately. "There are some of us who think so. Joey Lee disappeared one week ago and there's nothing to show for it except the mud on the patrol car tires."

Mud on the patrol car tires? I was about to ask about that, but he continued.

"When a thing like this happens, it splits the town in two." He mulled that over. "Come to think of it, when *anything* happens, it splits the town in two. Anyway, half the people are in favor of keeping this thing quiet and local and the other half would like to bring it out into the open."

"Why don't they?"

"The sheriff's got a rotten temper and you hate to cross him. Especially in something like this." He leaned a bit closer. "You got a badge?"

I closed my eyes. "I am an admiralty lawyer."

He chuckled. "Just what is an admiralty lawyer supposed to do?"

"At present I am representing the last living survivor of the *Lady Diana* ship disaster of 1893."

"Of 1893? You mean it's been dragging through court for eighty-one years?"

I smiled. "My dear fellow, if you knew anything at all about law, especially admiralty law, you would know that these things cannot be rushed." I glanced at my watch. It was nearly nine. "Am I being optimistic when I ask if there is a hotel in this town?"

"The Beauregard. Got lots of room these days. Rafe Covert owns it and he's a cousin of the sheriff, so don't let him give you the Ulysses S. Grant room. It's number 222."

I went back to where I'd parked my car and carried my suitcase the half block to the Beauregard. When I entered the lobby I had the distinct impression that everyone there knew about me, or thought he did.

The man behind the desk seemed a touch hostile as he watched me sign the register. He took a key off the board. "Your room number is 222."

I smiled generously. "I am psychologically allergic to the number 222. It is a long story and someday when I have more time, I will tell it to you. Another room, please."

Reluctantly he produced another tagged key.

My room appeared quite clean and comfortable. I turned on the TV set for half an hour and then went to bed.

In the morning, just as I finished dressing, there came a knock at my door.

I found a small, elderly woman in maid's uniform with sheets and pillowcases draped over her arm. "I come to change the bed linen."

She began stripping the bed. "I'll bet L.K. hired you."

"L.K. Williams?"

She nodded. "Do you think Joey Lee is still alive?"

"Why does everybody think that Joey Lee is dead?"

She slipped a pillow into a fresh pillowcase. "We're all concerned citizens—or at least half of us are—but we got to be careful what we say in front of the sheriff and his relatives. I guess I was the last person to see Joey Lee alive."

"I thought that distinction belonged to the counterman at the Staceyville Cafe?"

She sniffed. "Alex saw Joey Lee last at nine-thirty Monday night. I saw Joey Lee *and* the sheriff at nine-forty-five. Right behind the jailhouse. And they were arguing."

"About what?"

"I couldn't rightly make that out. They stopped when they saw me and didn't go to it again until I was well past. How do you like our town?"

"Charming."

She unfolded a sheet. "Staceyville is heaven for men and dogs,

but hell on women and horses. Ever since they took away our train, we women have been cut off from the world."

"Can't any of you drive automobiles?"

"We're mostly a one-car-per-family town. Have you ever tried to pry the car away from your husband just to take an innocent shopping trip to Montgomery?"

"Then you are isolated and desperate?"

"We got TV and the library's open Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, so that takes care of culture. But we're people who are isolated. If you don't get out and meet new people now and then you get provincial and inward-turning in your thoughts for the day."

When she was gone, I went to the window and looked down at Main Street. According to the information I'd gathered, Staceyville had—among other things—two drugstores, four cafe-restaurants, five churches, two doctors, three dentists, and one chiropractor.

There was another knock at the door.

This time I found a large young man, blue-jeaned and T-shirted. I gauged his age at the senior level in high school.

He glared at me menacingly. "Mister, I'd advise you to take the

first bus leaving Staceyville."

"Staceyville doesn't have a bus."

He flushed slightly. "I mean take your car. Anyway, leave town."

"Why?"

He flexed a conspicuous *biceps brachii*. "Because I say so."

I showed teeth. "I warn you, I have a brown belt in karate." Actually, however, I cannot distinguish a karate chop from a hi-bachi casserole.

He hesitated. "I got a white belt myself. My coach in Phys Ed says I'm pretty good."

I chuckled menacingly. "You must be aware that people with white belts simply do not mess around with people who possess the superior brown belts, except if they are heavily insured. Just what rash impulse brought you here?"

He shifted nervously from one foot to the other. "The sheriff is my uncle and he's been good to me, like at Christmas and birthdays. So I thought maybe I could help him out in his hour of need—no matter what he's done—by leaning on you a little."

"Did he send you here?"

"No. He doesn't know anything about it."

I shook my head sadly. "My dear young man, in your career of television viewing, have you ever

seen any detective frightened out of town by threats or even by violence itself?"

He frowned in retrospect. "Now that I come to think of it . . ." He eyed his wristwatch with sudden discovery. "Gee, just look at that time. I got to get moving or I'll be late for chemistry class." He picked up a stack of books he had evidently deposited beside the door before knocking and quickly disappeared down the stairs.

I went out to the nearest restaurant for breakfast.

The waitress serving me had the name Billie Gee embroidered over her uniform pocket. She smiled. "Good morning, Mr. Collins."

I had never seen her before in my life.

She winked. "We don't see many admiralty lawyers around here."

"And I doubt that you will in the future."

"How do you like our town?"

"Interesting."

She shrugged. "It's heaven for men and dogs, but hell on women and horses."

I stared at her. "Do you have many horses around here?"

"Well, no. That was just an expression. But we got lots of women."

I glanced out of the window. The sheriff had parked his patrol

car across the street and now he stood beside it, ostentatiously inspecting his shotgun.

"The sheriff just loves hunting," Billie Gee said.

"What does he hunt?"

"Rabbits, mostly."

The sheriff noticed a dust mote on his otherwise spotless car and dusted it off with a handkerchief.

"The town lets the sheriff use the car for his own personal use too," Billie Gee said. "He takes real good care of it and he's never far from it." She smiled slyly. "Except for last Tuesday when he walked."

She took my order and departed.

When I finished eating and left the restaurant, the sheriff stopped me. "Who hired you?"

"How does L.K. Williams sound?"

"Don't give me that. It was somebody in town, wasn't it? Or maybe they formed a committee?" He glared down at three preschool children who gingerly sidled past him. "I know what everybody in town's thinking. But not a single one of them has got the guts to come right out and say it."

"Say what?"

"Never mind. I just don't want no outside interference."

I went on to the drugstore

a short distance down the street.

The proprietor scowled at me. "I'm not answering any of your questions. You'll get nothing out of me."

Another one of the sheriff's relatives?

"I just came in for some cigars."

He regarded me coldly. "All right. I'll tell you this and no more. Ask Randolph." He moved to the rear of the store.

"What about my cigars?"

He disappeared into a back room.

I sighed and bought cigars at the town's second drugstore where the clerk was friendly. I walked back down Main Street, past the courthouse square which featured a Civil War cannon, pointed north.

I went back up to my hotel room.

A chubby, beard-stubbed man sat on my bed. His suit was considerably off-white and his Panama somewhat crushed.

He ventured a smile. "The door was unlocked, so I just walked in when nobody answered my knock. Besides, I didn't want to be seen here by anybody. You never know who you can trust."

"Just who the devil are you?"

"I'm Randolph Wister." He ran his tongue over his lips. "You

don't happen to have a little drink around?"

"No. But I assume you have looked?"

He nodded. "I just thought you might have something on you."

"Sorry."

He philosophically accepted the situation. "You pay for valuable information, don't you?"

"I suppose you're going to tell me that you were the last person to see Joey Lee alive?"

"No. That was Mrs. Whittaker over at the hotel. But I seen something else."

I checked the contents of my suitcase. Nothing seemed to be missing.

"I was in the jailhouse Tuesday night," Randolph said. "That sort of thing happens now and then. Anyway, the sheriff put me in a cell to sleep it off."

I closed the suitcase and locked it.

Randolph continued. "I woke around seven Wednesday morning when I heard this water running just outside in back of the jailhouse. I looked out of my cell window and there was the sheriff washing his car down with a hose."

"He's never washed his car before?"

"I mean there was *mud* on the patrol car tires. Dried mud. How



could he get mud on his tires when we haven't had any rain around here in two weeks?"

Randolph tried the glass of water on the night table. "On Monday night at nine-forty-five, Mrs. Whittaker saw the sheriff and Joey Lee arguing. That's the last anybody saw of Joey Lee. And then early Wednesday morning, the sheriff cleans mud off the tires of the patrol car."

"You seem to have skipped over Tuesday entirely."

"On Tuesday the sheriff was in town all day. Walking."

"Why should that be so significant?"

"When the sheriff arrested me on Tuesday night, he *walked* me to the jailhouse. When I asked him why I didn't get a ride like always, he just got mad and told me to shut up."

He put down the empty glass. "When I got out of jail I heard that Joey Lee was missing. I also heard that nobody saw the patrol car all day Tuesday. The sheriff was in town all right, but he tended to all of his business on foot. And when anybody asked him about the car, he'd get testy and say that it was in the garage being repaired. But there's only two garages in town and neither one of them did any work on the sheriff's car on Tuesday. Now why

would the sheriff lie about something like that unless he had something to hide?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Suppose that on Monday night the sheriff killed Joey Lee during that argument. Right off he didn't know what to do with the body, so he hid it in the trunk of the patrol car and left the car parked in his garage all day Tuesday while he was thinking it over. And then Tuesday night he got rid of the body. Now if I were looking for a body, the shores of Lake Jubal A. Early might be a good place to start. The water's receding because of the dry spell and the shores are muddy."

"If that is what you people suspect, why hasn't any one of you gone to the state authorities?"

"I guess everybody was waiting for somebody else to do something and nobody did. I suppose L.K. hired you?"

I picked up my suitcase. "No."

He frowned. "You leaving town?"

"Yes." I smiled, opened the door, and left.

On the way back to my car, I met the sheriff again. His eyes went to my suitcase. "You leaving town?"

"Yes. I've enjoyed your hospitality, but the time has come for me to move on. I have accom-

plished what I came here for."

I left him standing there, mouth slightly open.

I drove out of Staceyville, spent some time in both Newcourt and Portertown, and reached Cumberland by three in the afternoon. My eyes took in the shops and stores and the window of the L.K. Williams Cafe.

I hesitated a moment, then parked and went inside. At this time of the day I was the only patron. I took one of the empty booths along the wall.

The waitress who came to take my order was a tall woman who seemed to be nursing a tragedy. She dabbed at red-rimmed eyes.

She stood about five-foot ten, had short brown hair, and a small scar below her left earlobe. I estimated she weighed a hefty one hundred and seventy pounds.

Yes, hefty.

A sudden, incredible thought came to me. "Are *you* Joey Lee Williams?"

She seemed a bit surprised at the recognition. "Joey is for Josephine. Like in Joey Heatherton, the famous actress whom I admire from afar. Williams is my maiden name, but I'm married now. Do I know you?"

"You've got all of Staceyville in a dither," I said. "Nobody knows what happened to you."

The mention of Staceyville brought forth new tears. When she managed to control herself, she was in a mood to talk. "It all started just because I took the car to Montgomery for a little shopping."

"That doesn't seem like such a heinous crime to me."

"To me either and I don't know why Clyde got so excited about it. After all, he has the town's permission to use the car for personal transportation too."

"Who's Clyde?"

"My husband. The sheriff in Staceyville."

I blinked. "You took the patrol car to Montgomery on a shopping trip?"

"Clyde hasn't chased anybody with it in months and I didn't think it would make any big difference if I borrowed it for just one day. But I couldn't make Clyde see it my way and we had a big argument."

"On Monday night? Behind the jailhouse?"

She nodded. "So Tuesday morning when Clyde was still asleep, I took the keys and just took off. I wore one of Clyde's caps and a dark coat and nobody thought anything of it, especially in Montgomery where they got women's lib."

She dabbed at her nose. "On

the way home I had carburetor trouble and then I got stuck for a while in the mud on a town road in Autauga County. And what with one thing and another, I didn't get back home until well after midnight. Clyde was simply furious."

The memory was quite painful to her. "The things Clyde said relative to my intelligence were just awful. So I just phoned Daddy and he came and got me at three in the morning."

"Your husband *knows* you are here?"

She nodded. "And he hasn't phoned even once to apologize."

Obviously the sheriff was a prideful man who chose not to confide in anyone that his wife had, in effect, stolen the patrol car, gone to Montgomery on a shopping trip, and then left him.

He must have been aware that the town knew his wife was gone, but did he know that half of it—if not really all of the town—suspected that he had killed her?

I sighed. "Have you ever thought of doing the big thing by phoning your husband and telling him that you forgive him?"

She seemed to need only the slightest encouragement. "Do you

really think I ought to call him?"

"Of course. And besides, you can always hang up if he gets nasty again."

"I'll do it," she said emphatically. She left me abruptly and went to the public phone booth at the end of the room.

I watched as she got her number. She used her handkerchief profusely as she spoke, but from her general expression it appeared that she would soon be back in Staceyville with Clyde—a husband forgiving, if not forgetting.

I am not an admiralty lawyer. Neither am I a detective, private or otherwise.

I work for the South Central Bus Line and it is my job to survey possible new bus routes, especially in those areas no longer serviced by railroads.

Another waitress appeared to take my order. "How do you like Cumberlanddale?" she asked.

"Amusing."

She sighed. "It's heaven for men and dogs, but hell on women and horses. I haven't been to Montgomery in three months."

I made a note that in addition to Staceyville, Newcourt, and Portertown, I might just as well add Cumberlanddale to the new route.

*Easy come, easy go, sayeth a sage, and how right he is.*



**W**ith trembling hands, Vivian Chindale turned the catch on the ponderous door of the old mansion, locking out the world. It had been very gracious of Daniel Stapp to bring her home after the ceremony, and the proper thing would have been to invite him in for a cup of tea; but she just couldn't—not today. For a while, at least, she had to be alone.

Leaning heavily on her cane, she made her way along the entrance hall and into the livingroom. There she lowered her tired body into a chair, twisting

gnarled fingers together in her lap. Somehow, she knew, she'd have to begin getting used to the idea that Lila was gone. Less than an hour

*by*  
*William Brittain*

ago the minister had said the prayer and sprinkled the first bit of earth onto the coffin. Cancer, the doctor had said, and it had wasted Lila's body so fast—so very fast.

Vivian wondered how she'd manage now, living alone with only the servants for company. Thank heaven she'd given them all a week's holiday. It wouldn't do for them to see her like this.

Eighty-two wonderful years they'd had together, living in this same house the entire time. There had been moments, of course, when one or the other of them had wanted to move out. For a while, long ago, Lila had thought herself deeply in love with the Marlowe boy and had even considered running away with him to New York, over Father's strong objections, but then Billy Marlowe had taken a bullet in the chest at some European place called Belleau Wood while helping President Wilson make the world safe for democracy. Vivian, of course, had been the one to offer the words of comfort to her sister. Father was too busy managing the business.

Vivian had never been quite sure just what the business was, but it must have made considerable money. When Father had died, just days after the election

of Mr. Hoover, Orville Stapp, the family lawyer, had told them they'd never in their lives need to worry about money. He'd taken full charge until his retirement, when he'd passed on the running of the estate to his son Daniel.

Vivian reminded herself sternly that Lila was now dead. No more would she sit in the old chair near the fire, crocheting daintily on pillowcases and handkerchiefs as she babbled on about her favorite subject: reincarnation. Unlike Vivian, who had vague ideas of a heaven peopled with winged humans plucking at golden harps, Lila had been convinced that in some way she would return in a new form to another life on earth.

"According to the people of India," she'd said one evening, "if I've lived a good life I may return as a cow. Oh dear, Vivian, can you imagine me as a cow, munching grass in a field somewhere? How ridiculous I'd feel. But even that would be better than a snake."

"Oh? Why not a snake?" Vivian had asked.

"Only sinners return as snakes," was the tight-lipped reply. "No, a snake will never do. I think if I have any choice in the matter, I'll come back as a dog. Oh, not a big hunting dog. Just a little lap dog, to be petted and cosseted all my

days. Perhaps if I go first, you'll find me in a store somewhere, Vivian, and buy me."

Such talk had upset Vivian. She tried without success to change the subject, but Lila had just rambled on.

"No matter what form I return in, I'll get word to you," she'd promised. "But it's too bad you don't believe in reincarnation too, Little Sister. You see, only those who believe have any chance for another life."

Rain began to patter gently against the windows. It was as if even the heavens were crying for the dead Lila. Stiffly Vivian rose from her chair to check that rain wasn't coming in anywhere.

Everywhere in the house there were reminders of her sister: the huge portrait in the study, the piano that only Lila had ever been able to master, the framed samplers that Lila had delighted in stitching.

It was in the front hallway that Vivian first heard the sound—a soft tapping. Birdlike, she cocked her head, trying to locate its source.

The front door, that was all. Somebody was at the front door. Vivian was annoyed. Couldn't the caller have any respect for the black funeral wreath that hung there?

She hobbled to the door and turned back the catch. "Yes?" she said, peering into the gloom. Then she caught her breath as the figure staggered past her and stood in groggy silence, dripping water onto the rug.

It was a girl, a pretty young thing, not more than twenty-five. She wore a cheap coat, soggy with water, and drops fell from the drenched hair of her bare head.

Vivian slammed the door against the rising wind and rain. She turned about to face the unwelcome visitor.

"Who—who are you?" she asked in a rasping voice. "I've gone through enough today. I'll have to ask you to leave my house."

Tears welled up in the girl's eyes. "Oh, Vivian, I thought you'd know. But then, how could you?"

"Know? Know what?"

"It's me, Vivian. Lila. I've come back, Little Sister."

Vivian could feel the blood pounding in her ears. Blindly she staggered toward the livingroom and collapsed into a chair. For several moments she sat breathing heavily, her eyes closed. When she opened them, the girl was standing in the doorway, regarding her with sad, gentle eyes.

"It's a trick of some kind, isn't it?" said Vivian desperately. "It's

got to be a trick. I just know it."

The girl shook her head. "I—I feel so strange," she said. "And I know the doubts you must be having. Can't we talk about this, Vivian?"

"Why, yes. Yes, I suppose so. Come in and sit down. But don't think for a minute you've got me fooled."

"I'm not trying to fool anyone. But perhaps I'd better stay here until I'm dry. Water makes such bad spots on the floor. I thought you'd never forgive me the time I tipped my drinking glass over in there."

Vivian stifled a scream. How could she have known that? "There's dry clothing in the pantry," she croaked. "A uniform of the maid's that ought to fit. Just go out through—"

"I know where it is, Little Sister," the girl replied.

Twenty minutes later the girl, now wearing the maid's green uniform, was curled up in a chair massaging her bare feet and looking at Vivian, who was sipping at a small glass of brandy.

"You want money," said Vivian. "That's it, isn't it? You're here after my money, Miss . . . whatever your name is. Well it won't do you a bit of good. I keep very little cash in the house. Ten dollars is the best I can manage."

She began fishing into the depths of her sewing bag. "But it's worth that just to get you out of the house."

The girl shook her head. "I don't want your money," she said in a soft voice. "And I'll leave right now if that's what you want, Vivian. But while I was alive—the other time—I always said I'd get word to you about where—and what—I was."

"What proof do you have that you're really Lila?" Vivian asked harshly.

"None. But if you do intend to cast me out, Little Sister, I must have more than ten dollars. Please. Fifty, at least."

"There's no other cash in the house."

"Of course there is. The wall safe in the study. There's always at least a hundred dollars in there for emergencies."

Vivian gulped the last of her brandy. "How did you know that?" she asked slowly.

"If you just believe what I say, you'll understand how I knew," was the answer.

Vivian's eyes glittered. "Come with me," she said, gripping her cane and getting to her feet. "I'm going to prove once and for all just what a faker you are."

The girl followed as Vivian led the way to the study. "The safe's

behind the Currier and Ives print," she said. "Is that the proof you're looking for?"

"Not quite. The safe opens with a key. Lila—my dead sister—would know where the key's hidden. But you don't, do you?"

Without a word the girl turned to the bookcase on her left. From the second shelf she removed a copy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Holding the volume by its spine, she shook it.

A flat metal key fell softly to the rug. The girl stooped and picked it up. Then she walked to the far side of the room and swung back the lithograph on its hinged frame, exposing the round door of the safe. Deftly she inserted the key and turned it. The door swung wide.

The girl reached into the safe and removed a small bundle of bills. "Why, there's almost two hundred dollars here," she said, riffling through them. "You should be more careful, Little Sister. This is far too much to keep around where people might steal it. We'd better turn it over to Daniel as soon as possible."

Behind the girl there was a soft moan. She spun about to see Vivian Chindale collapsing onto the soft rug of the study, unconscious.

Vivian wasn't really sure she

approved of the interior of Daniel Stapp's law office. The furniture was all polished plastic and chrome tubing. The painted walls were bare except for two plaques for civic betterment which hung near the door and a Mondriaan painting behind the desk. Vivian would have greatly preferred well-rubbed oak and horsehair cushions, a few plants perhaps; and a Winslow Homer watercolor in place of that framed monstrosity Daniel liked so much.

Worse yet, Daniel seemed to be silently laughing at her, which upset her.

"So this girl—whoever she is—really has you convinced she's your dead sister?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

"No, Daniel," she replied. "Of course not. I spoke about it to Reverend Quint last Sunday, and he says the whole thing is ridiculous."

"And yet it's been almost a week now, and she's still living with you."

"That's why I came to you. Of course I'm not convinced the girl is Lila. I'm confused about the whole thing. But I can't just throw her out as long as there's a possibility—no matter how slight—that some miracle has happened. That my sister has managed in some way to return to me."



Daniel leaned across the desk and took Vivian's trembling hand between his. "First of all," he said, "I want to assure you of one thing. The girl is not your sister come back from the grave in a new form. You can send her packing whenever you wish with no pangs of conscience at all."

"But then why would she do



I'M BACK, LITTLE SISTER

such a very cruel thing to me?"

"You're a rich lady, Vivian. Right now your estate is worth nearly two million dollars. People have done a lot stranger things to get their hands on that kind of money."

"She—she called me 'Little Sister,' just the way Lila used to." Vivian took a lace handkerchief from her purse and dabbed at her eyes. "She remembered how water would stain the livingroom floor. And Daniel, she knew where the key to the safe was. She knew! Oh, the whole thing has my head spinning."

"Now listen to me," said Daniel comfortingly. "First of all, Lila's interest in reincarnation wasn't exactly a secret between the two of you. It would have been easy for some outsider to find out about that and decide to put it to use. As for the other things, perhaps you talked about them somewhere and were overheard."

"No, Daniel. I'd have remembered. And I'm really not out of the house that often."

"Okay. But there's a maid, a cook and a gardener who work for you. One of them might have accidentally let something slip to one of their friends."

"Yes, I suppose. But she's so convincing about the whole thing."

"Con artists make their living by being convincing, Vivian. But I still can't fathom what the girl's after."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, if this phony Lila had just wanted the two hundred dollars from the safe, she could have taken it while you were unconscious that first evening. As for the rest of your holdings, right now they're under my control. Of course I'd do anything you instruct me to. But if I find you're about to give her a large amount of money, I'm going to do everything in my power to keep you from making a fool of yourself. She must know that. So what's her game? I just don't get it."

"Unless . . ."

"Unless what, Vivian?"

"Oh, Daniel, the past week has been such a happy time. It's been so long since there's been any laughter in that old house. Lila—that girl—gathers fresh flowers for the breakfast table each morning, did you know that? And every evening after supper she plays the piano for me just as Lila used to. A week ago, when Lila passed on, I had nothing to look forward to but my own death. Now I want to live. I've even been able to give up using the sleeping pills the doctor prescribed. I can sleep like a babe without them, feeling that

Lila has come back. I find myself resenting the fact that the servants will be returning from their holiday tomorrow. It's been so wonderful, just the two of us being together. I wish it could last forever."

"Uh-huh. Your head says the girl's a fake, but your heart wants to believe in her. Vivian, tell me a little bit about this reincarnation business. Your sister must have discussed it with you."

"Oh, yes. It was one of her favorite topics. According to what she'd read, no identity of a true believer in reincarnation ever really dies. It simply enters another form. It could be any living thing: an animal, an insect, or even a plant, I suppose. I never paid much attention to her when she talked about it. That used to make her very sad."

"Sad? Why?"

"Because she was certain that she'd return in another life and I wouldn't. She tried to make me believe, so that we could be together throughout eternity, she said. But it sounded like so much rubbish to me. I preferred the heaven Reverend Quint talked about each Sunday."

"I see. And how long had Lila been interested in the subject?"

"Oh, ever so many years. Since shortly after Father died."

Daniel gazed at the ceiling for several moments. "Tell me something," he said finally. "How are you going to explain the girl's presence to the servants when they get back?"

"It's odd you should ask, Daniel, because Lila brought that same thing up just the other evening. So we devised a plan. I'm to explain to them that the girl's name is Julie Marquis. She's the daughter of a friend of mine, come to pay an extended visit. That ought to keep the help from gossiping."

Daniel jotted something down on his desk pad. "Can you get me a photograph of the girl?" he asked.

"I suppose so," replied Vivian. "Why?"

"I've got a little plan. There's one more thing. See if you can get a glass or some other smooth object that she's touched. Use a handkerchief when you handle it. Let me know when you've got these things, and I'll send a messenger around to pick them up. A sample of the girl's handwriting would come in handy, too."

"You—you want to have her investigated, don't you?" Vivian asked.

"Well, you want to find out if she's really your dead sister, don't you?" asked Daniel.

"I don't know," Vivian said. "I don't really know whether I want to find out the truth."

A week later Daniel Stapp paid a call on Vivian Chindale. He had another man with him. The second man was bulky and be-whiskered, and a ragged mane of white hair surmounted a forehead that reminded Vivian of the dome of St. Peter's.

"This is Professor Belmacher," Daniel told her by way of introduction. "Karl Belmacher. He's from the university."

"Why, yes, of course," smiled Vivian. "My sister often spoke of your work before she . . . I mean . . ." She paused, embarrassed. "Won't you both come in?"

"If you've heard of me," said Belmacher, shucking off his coat and handing it to the maid, "you know my field is parapsychology. In layman's terms, the supernatural. Telekinesis, precognition, telepathy—that sort of thing."

"I'm afraid I don't understand those terms," said Vivian, ushering them into the livingroom.

Belmacher lowered himself onto the sofa with a contented sigh. "Telekinesis," he said, "is moving objects by pure mental power. I have a subject—a student—who can consistently make dice come up seven nearly twice as often as

the odds give him. As part of his master's program he's going to Reno to try and break the bank at a casino there. A proven telekinetic. Of course we have some cheats, too."

"Cheats?" Vivian glanced nervously toward the rear of the house. "What kind of cheats?"

"In the field of precognition—ability to see into the future—we use regular playing cards. The subject tries to predict the value and suit of each card before it's exposed. One of our young ladies had remarkable success. But we found it wasn't clairvoyance. She simply had a superb memory. Knowing the cards she'd seen, she had a pretty good idea of the ones left in the pack."

"How unusual," said Vivian. "Can I offer you some coffee, Professor?"

Belmacher shook his head. "Stimulants numb the senses," he explained. "What I came for is to get a look at this sister of yours. We've had a few suspected cases of reincarnation reported to us, but nothing like this. She sounds too good to be true."

"That's why I brought Professor Belmacher," Daniel said. "I felt he'd be able to convince you—one way or the other—about Lila."

"Then I assume your investigation of her turned up nothing?"

Vivian asked Daniel archly.

Daniel shook his head. "FBI, local police, credit bureaus—everywhere. And not a lead. From what I could find out, Julie Marquis or any girl of her description or with those fingerprints never existed until she showed up on your doorstep the day of the funeral."

"Unlike Mr. Stapp," Belmacher said, "I believe it's quite possible that the girl—Lila—really is the sister you laid to rest. Where is she, by the way?"

"Out in back." Vivian called to the maid. "Will you ask Miss Marquis to come into the livingroom, please?"

"And while you're at it," rumbled Belmacher, "tell all the help they can have the rest of the day off. We'd like to be alone."

The girl pulled off gardening gloves as she entered the livingroom. She sat in a leather chair and brushed a lock of hair from her eyes. "Good morning, Daniel," she said coldly. "Still trying to evict me from my own house?"

Through clenched teeth, Daniel introduced Belmacher.

"I hope your antagonism doesn't extend to me," Belmacher said pleasantly. "I'm here purely in the interests of scientific investigation."

"Another test?" The girl looked

tiredly at Vivian. "Oh, I'm so sick of all this. Perhaps, Vivian, I should just leave. I could begin a life of my own somewhere. Then it would all be over."

"No!" Vivian said sharply. "Tell us about the test, Professor Belmacher."

"Miss Chindale, I have none of the powers I test others for at the university. I can't see into the future, nor read minds or any of that. But there is one thing. Quite by accident, one of my assistants found that I could detect an aura."

"I beg your pardon," Vivian said in confusion.

"It seems that in any parapsychological experiment, the successful subject emits an aura. Oh, it's hard to describe, but I can detect it simply by touching the subject's skin. It's—I really don't know. A pressure against the fingertips perhaps, or a tingling sensation. But during an experiment I can tell which subjects will be successful."

"Now, what I want to do is this: Mr. Stapp will ask the young lady a single question. He assures me that nobody except the real Lila will know the answer. While you, Lila, consider your reply, I will press the tips of my fingers against your forehead. If you answer correctly—and if I sense the

aura—I will be happy to stake my full reputation on the fact that you are the real Lila Chindale."

The girl considered Belmacher's words. "Very well," she said.

Belmacher moved behind the girl's chair. Bending over her, he placed the tips of all ten fingers against her skin, just above her eyes. "The question, Daniel," he said as Vivian looked on, wide-eyed.

"About two years ago, after doing some shopping, Lila Chindale stopped off at my office," Daniel said in a low voice. "It was her birthday, and she wanted me to take her to lunch. If you are Lila, I'm sure you haven't forgotten that day."

The girl nodded.

"There was a single flower on the table," Daniel went on. "I took it from the vase and presented it to Lila. Then I said something to her. When I finished, she was crying. She said she'd never heard anything as beautiful in her life. She told me she'd never forget that moment and that it was too precious to share—even with her sister. As for myself, I've never brought up the incident to anyone. It was very personal between Lila and me."

"I remember, Daniel," the girl said, her eyes glistening. "I remember that day so well."

"Oh?" Daniel went on. "Then perhaps you'd tell us now what it was I said to Lila."

The silence in the room was an almost tangible thing. Vivian looked from the girl to Daniel and back again. She herself didn't know whether she wanted the girl to pass Daniel's test or fail it.

The girl began to speak in a hushed voice: "They are not long, the days of wine and roses."

A guttural sound came from deep in Daniel Stapp's throat. The girl seemed not to hear as she went on.

"Out of a misty dream our path emerges for a while, then closes within a dream."

Suddenly Belmacher's hands spread wide. "The aural!" he cried. "It was there. More distinct than I've ever felt it before. It's authentic. The first proven case of reincarnation."

"Nobody could know that answer!" Daniel screeched. "Nobody who's alive. In the name of heaven, who—or what—are you?"

"I'm Lila, Daniel," was the reply. It was punctuated by the slamming of the front door as the lawyer rushed from the house.

It was a jovial group that was gathered in Daniel Stapp's law office. Daniel himself was sitting at

his desk, fingertips pressed against its surface, roaring with laughter.

"It's the aural!" he hooted. "The aura is there! It's really Lila Chindale!" He wiped his streaming eyes, poured whiskey from a glass decanter, and then looked at the man across from him. "Hell, Belmacher, you almost had me believing you."

"Yes, I was rather good, wasn't I?" Belmacher stroked a hand lovingly across his beard. "But let's not forget the little lady here. Ah, Julie, the stage-lost great actress the day you decided that crime could pay if approached in the proper manner. How fortunate for Daniel that you were available when he needed you."

The girl simpered prettily. "I'm just glad Danny Boy never really made that investigation," she said. "My police rap sheet reads like *War and Peace*."

"But you really snowed Vivian," Daniel said, "and that's what counted. As long as I remained skeptical of you, she never suspected I was the one feeding you all the information. And yet who really has any secrets from their family lawyer? And, Karl, the fact that you're really doing studies in parapsychology at the university didn't hurt either."

"Yes, well, I'm glad this little caper is almost over," said Bel-

macher. "My university salary is getting way behind my gambling debts. But tell me, Daniel, what made you dream up this scheme in the first place?"

"It was a talk I had with the Chindales' doctor a few weeks before Lila's funeral," the lawyer answered. "Vivian's developed an aneurysm in one of the blood vessels leading to her brain. When that pops, she'll die. She only has a few months to live—a year maybe, if she's lucky. Since I've dipped into the Chindale estate for almost two hundred G's to pay off some bad investments, I had to do something to keep myself out of prison."

"I still don't quite understand," Julie said. "How does Vivian's being convinced that I'm her sister get you off the hook?"

Daniel smiled and tapped his forehead sagely. "I saw Vivian yesterday," he announced. "With a little discreet guidance from me concerning her affairs, she now feels she wants to change her will. She's leaving everything to her sister. But the beneficiary of the will isn't called Lila Chindale. After all, legally, Lila is dead. No, the one who gets the whole thing is named in the will as Julie Marquis."

"Me?" squeaked the girl. "You mean I—I'll inherit everything?"

Daniel nodded. "That is, of course, if you can keep up the act until Vivian's death. After that, there'll be nobody to ask any embarrassing questions. Just don't forget later that Karl and I have to come in for our share. Otherwise—well, there are a few things I know about you that the police rap sheet didn't cover."

"Two million dollars split three ways," muttered Belmacher. "How delightful."

Daniel glanced at the clock on his desk. "We're going to have to break up this little party," he said. "I've got to drop by and see Vivian to make sure the new will I've drawn up meets with her approval. Julie, I'd rather you stayed downtown until after I've left her. Do some shopping. And get something to take the smell of booze off your breath. Lila never drank."

Three times Daniel Stapp rang the bell of the Chindale mansion. No answer. He knocked. Nothing. Finally he tried the knob. It turned, and the door opened slowly inward.

"Vivian!" he called. "Vivian, it's me, Daniel."

The silence was eerie. Treading softly, he walked along the entrance hall. Thursday, the servants' day off; well, perhaps Vivian was asleep. Through the door

on his right he glanced into the livingroom. Yes, there she was on the couch, with one arm outstretched, almost touching the floor.

Then Daniel saw the glass on the table, half-filled with water. Next to it was a small plastic bottle, the kind in which druggists put prescriptions.

He tiptoed into the livingroom and picked up the bottle. "Seconal," read the label. "One only at night when necessary for sleep." The container was large enough for at least thirty capsules.

It was empty.

Swiftly Daniel checked Vivian's pulse and respiration. She was dead.

He found the note on the pillow beneath Vivian's head.

*To My Dear Sister Lila,*

*I was so unsure that day you first entered the house after the funeral. Were you my sister or weren't you?*

*But now I'm convinced. You are my sister, and miraculously you have returned to me. Dear Daniel. If not for him, I might never have*

*known who you really were, Lila.*

*You believed, Lila, and that belief is what has brought you back to me. I've seen you each day, gay, lively, youthful—all the things I can never again be.*

*And yet, why not? Because now I believe, too. But to prove that what I believe is true, I must die. Not much of a sacrifice for one as old as I. In fact, no sacrifice at all.*

*The pills are beginning to work now. I feel very sleepy. But don't be sad, Lila, for I'm not gone forever. Like you, I shall come back. And then, again and again, we will relive the youthful days that can never again be taken from us. Please tell Daniel and Professor Belmacher how happy I am that they have made this great adventure of ours possible.*

The signature was little more than a wavy scrawl across the page.

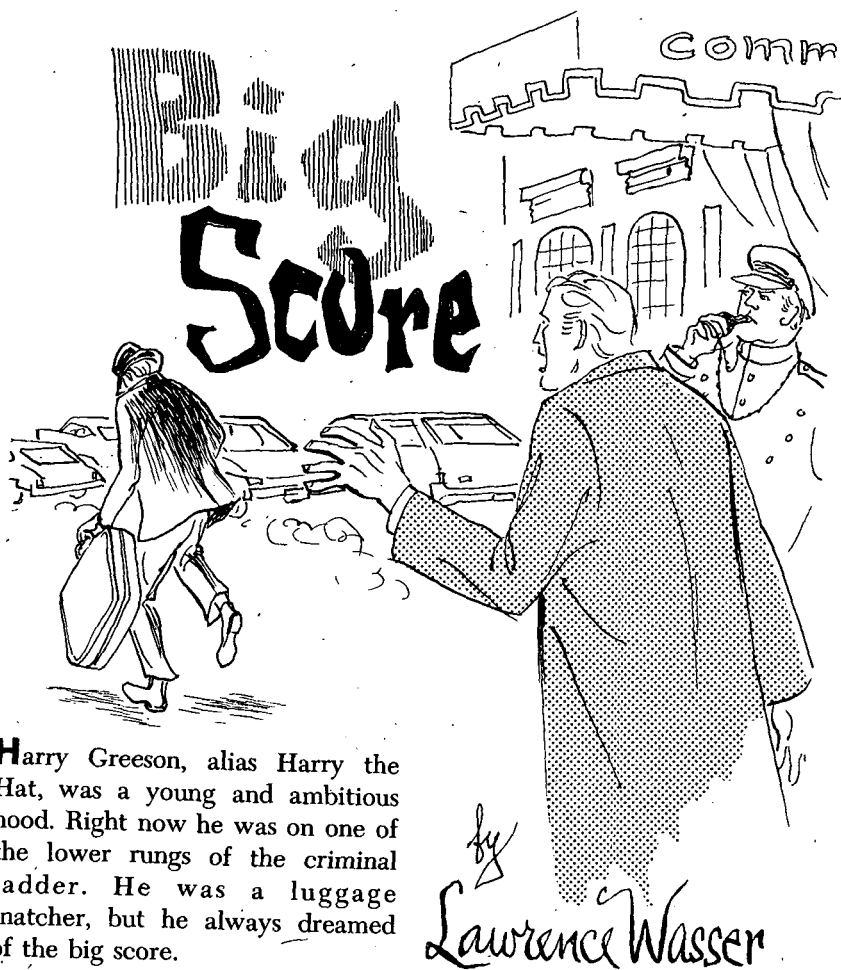
Daniel slumped into a chair, opened his briefcase, and took out the unsigned will.

He had no idea what his next move would be.





*When one gets more than expected, he may find the challenge irresistible.*



**H**arry Greeson, alias Harry the Hat, was a young and ambitious hood. Right now he was on one of the lower rungs of the criminal ladder. He was a luggage snatcher, but he always dreamed of the big score.

Harry was slouching near the

*by*  
**Lawrence Wasser**

long row of grimy phone booths in Grand Central Station's main waiting room, puffing nonchalantly on a cigarette as he tried to blend in with the other loiterers. He'd been there for over half an hour without spotting a single potential.

Two cigarettes later a live one passed by and Harry instinctively sized up the well-cut English topcoat and the alligator two-suiter as the mark approached the nearest empty phone booth.

Harry the Hat dropped his butt and got ready to go to work. The mark pushed the booth door open and sat down—but he had taken his bag inside with him. Harry stopped dead in his stalk.

"Doesn't that creep know that a mark always leaves his bag outside the booth when he makes a phone call?" Harry muttered. (He often spoke aloud to himself. It was one of his less obnoxious habits.)

Maybe this citizen was one of those untrusting souls who kept his eyeballs glued to his property at all times. If that were the case then he'd pick up the gauntlet. The idea of tapping off a real careful dude presented an irresistible challenge to Harry's ego.

He wasted four more cigarettes while the mark made one phone call after another.

"What the hell is that guy

doing? Calling up the whole damn world?"

The mark finally hung up and came out of the booth. Harry's shifty eyes scanned the big room, warily alert for the railroad dicks who patrolled the area. There wasn't one in sight.

The mark moved off and Harry was right behind him. He left the station by the 42nd Street exit and walked the short distance to the Commodore Hotel where he slipped a bill into the doorman's big mitt. The doorman tipped his cap and blew a shrill blast on his whistle.

A cab driven by a woman wearing a red baseball cap screechingly U-turned and pulled up in front of the hotel, and Harry was right there waiting for his chance.

The doorman took the bag from the mark, who hesitated the barest fraction of a second before letting it go. They walked to the cab and the doorman put the bag down and opened the cab door. Harry tensed.

The mark climbed into the cab and turned to get his bag—but Harry had beaten him to it and was now running down 42nd Street like a deer with a spear in his ear.

The mark jumped out of the cab yelling obscene threats and

the ever-alert doorman began blowing a series of distress calls on his whistle.

Harry dodged the heavy traffic at Lexington Avenue and ducked into the Chrysler Building. Running straight through the lobby he exited on 43rd Street and raced to Third Avenue where he clawed his way onto an uptown bus just as the doors were closing.

He was still sweating when he unlocked the police lock and opened the door to his room. Like most thieves, he had an almost paranoiac fear of being robbed and had had the jimmy-proof lock installed at his own expense.

Tossing the bag on the unkempt bed he opened his boy scout knife and pried open the locks on the suitcase. He beamed when he saw the two stylishly cut single-breasteds right on top. He placed these neatly on the bed. Three wash-and-wear shirts joined the "keep" pile after he'd checked the collar size and silently thanked the mark for having a neck as scrawny as his. Next to be added were a pair of pearl cuff links, a jade stud set and two silk ties.

Then, in quick order he assembled the discards: four Belgian linen handkerchiefs, two decks of pinochl  cards, shower clogs, a packet of delicately scented letters and six pairs of size twelve socks.

All this he dropped into the wastebasket alongside his bed. That left just one more item of interest in the bag—a box of expensive cigars.

Now, there were few things Harry enjoyed more than a good cigar, and right here he had fifty of the best.

He opened the cedar box, took out one of the foot-longers, sniffed it lovingly, bit off the end and lit up. He pushed the loot on the bed to one side and lay back on the pillow and fogged the cracked ceiling with clouds of pure-white smoke.

"This is one hell of a good cigar," he said, "and I'm going to smoke the damn thing right down to the nose-burning end," and that's what he did.

It turned out to be the luckiest thing he'd ever done, because when he got down to the last inch, a diamond miraculously dropped out of the fine white ash and landed on his chest.

"Holy cow! What's this?"

He picked it up and promptly dropped it like a hot diamond. Which of course it was—literally and every other way. After licking his fingers he picked it up again and held it to the light.

"I'll be damned if it don't look real, too!" he said.

He was off the bed like a shot

and scrounged around in the bottom drawer of his dresser until he found an old-fashioned imitation pearl stickpin. Taking another cigar from the box, he stuck it with the pin at various spots until he struck something hard. Digging carefully so as not to damage the cigar beyond smokability, he dug out another gem just a little bit smaller than the first one.

For the next half hour he gingerly probed the remaining cigars, and when he was done he had fifty diamonds, all real as far as he could tell, and ranging in weight from two to six carats.

"So this is why that dude played the bag so close to the vest," he said.

He looked at the treasure on his bed and spent a few heady moments thinking of how all this sudden wealth was going to raise his standard of living way out of sight. His mind cartwheeled. He'd finally accomplished the thing that every small-time crook constantly dreams about but seldom realizes. The big score!

His smile disappeared fast when he heard footsteps coming up the stairs. He slid quietly off the bed and tiptoed to the door and put his ear against it. The footsteps passed his door and then slowly thumped up the stairs to the floor above.

He waited until he heard the door upstairs open and close. Then he went back to the dresser and took out a chamois bag from the top drawer and dumped out all the assorted junk jewelry he'd collected over the years and never got around to throwing away. Scooping up the diamonds, he put them into the chamois bag and pulled the string tight. He went into the bathroom and lifted the water tank cover and dropped the bag of diamonds into the algae-discolored water.

However, he was still worried. Until now diamonds were just a red suit in a deck of cards, but even his inexperienced eye tabulated the worth of his haul in the neighborhood of one hundred thousand dollars! He had to get rid of the gems fast. He couldn't risk the possibility of his room being broken into while he was away, and he sure wasn't going to carry anything that valuable around town with him. He grabbed the phone and dialed Long Coat Arnie's number.

"Yeah?" was the response on the other end.

"Hi, Long Coat. This is Harry."

"Harry who?"

"Harry the Hat."

"What do you want?"

"I got something big this time."

"How big do you call big?"

"I got diamonds this time."

"You got what?"

"Diamonds. Fifty of them."

"Are they real?"

"If they wasn't, why would they be hidden inside fifty cigars? And good cigars too."

"That sounds real enough. Look, Harry, I'll level with you. Goods like that is too rich for my thin blood. I'd advise you to dump the stuff right quick. It smells like part of a big-time smuggling operation—or worse. And those guys have got big organizations with long arms. That guy whose bag you heisted—I assume that's how you got the stuff—"

"How else?"

"Well, that guy is up the creek in a leaky rowboat and with holes in his bailing can. And he'll do anything to get those stones back. Does he have a line on you?"

"No way. I got away clean."

"You're lucky. Listen, I'm sorry I can't help you. But the next time you get a bagful of the usual—seventeen jewel wrist-watches, class rings, good clean suits and other stuff like that—look me up and I'll give you the top price like I always do."

"Sure, Long Coat. Thanks anyway."

There was one thing about the phone conversation that stuck in

Harry's mind after he'd hung up. It was what Long Coat had said about the mark doing anything to get the stones back.

Harry wondered how much he would pay cashwise to get them back—but he didn't wonder about how long he'd be able to keep the payoff. He was sure the mark wasn't going to let him just walk away clean after the exchange was made.

He pondered this problem for many brain-racked hours and finally came up with a foolproof plan.

He hastily dug out the packet of letters from the wastebasket. They were all addressed to a Leland J. Redfield in care of all the top hotels around the country: Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Kansas City—and New York! The St. Regis Hotel.

He got the number from information and called the St. Regis.

"I want to talk to Mr. Redfield. I think he's staying at your hotel."

"Is that Leland J. Redfield?"

"That's the one."

The phone rang twice before it was picked up.

"Yes?" The voice was soft and guarded.

"Mr. Redfield?" Harry said.

"That's right."

"I'm the guy who snatched your bag."

"Why, you—you crummy little—!"

"Easy there, Redfield. That won't get the stones back. I'm ready to trade. You want them back, don't you?"

"What's the deal?"

"I want twenty gees. In fives, tens and twenties."

There was a slight pause. "Okay. I can get it for you by tomorrow morning."

"Somehow I figured you'd have no trouble coming up with it."

"You want to deal here or do you want me to come up to your place?" Redfield asked.

"What do you think I am? A meatball? No, dice on both places. We'll make the trade on the street. On 51st Street between Third Avenue and Lex, tomorrow at one p.m."

"Isn't there a police station on that block?"

"That's right."

"Is that smart?"

"It is from where I stand. Now, there's a couple of other things. Make sure you come alone and that you have the money on you. I'll check it out first before I turn over the stones. What I lack in the smarts I make up for in the carefuls."

"I don't like it," Redfield said glumly.

"Like it or forget it."

"I'd rather like it. Okay. I'll

bring the money and you'd better bring the stones. I don't work alone and my associates will be very unhappy if there's any kind of double cross."

"Double cross? Me? No way. All I want is my twenty gees and to get away clean."

The next day, at precisely one o'clock, they met across the street from the precinct station house.

Redfield didn't seem too concerned about the proximity of the police station. He was only interested in the bag of diamonds Harry held in his left hand, and Harry held on to it firmly until Redfield placed the envelope in his right hand. It took another two minutes of careful inspection before both of them were satisfied. Then Redfield walked briskly toward the corner of 51st Street and Lexington Avenue and joined two men waiting in a black sedan.

Harry waited to see if the car would drive off, but it remained at the curb with its engine running.

Harry smiled. It figured. Nobody wants to kiss good-bye to twenty thou without getting kissed back just a little.

He crossed the street and deliberately stopped in the doorway of the police station. He turned and noted with satisfaction that the black car had driven past and was

now making a fast left turn onto Third Avenue.

So far he was batting two for two. Now he was ready for number three.

He entered the police station and approached the desk. He'd show the big boys they weren't dealing with some dumb punk. He chuckled silently. What safer place was there than a police station to stash a big score until it cooled off?

The desk sergeant looked down at him. "Yeah?"

Harry placed the bulging envelope on the desk. "I just found this on the bus."

"Take it down to the transit authority lost and found. It's someplace down on Jay Street," the desk sergeant said disinterestedly.

"Look inside," Harry insisted.

The sergeant opened the envelope and gave Harry a long hard look. He took the bills out and began riffling through the stacks.

"Is it true that if nobody claims the money in six months, then it belongs to me all legal and tight?" Harry asked.

The cop looked up slowly. "That's true—under normal circumstances."

Every muscle in Harry's body started to tense. "What do you mean—under normal circumstances? What's wrong?"

"These bills are counterfeit," the cop said.

"Count—? That can't be! I checked them real close."

"Oh, I admit they'll pass close inspection. They're so good I probably would have been fooled too, except for one thing. Here—take a look for yourself."

He handed Harry a stack of tens.

Harry strained his eyes and rechecked every detail on the top bill.

"It still looks good to me," he insisted.

"Look at the serial number."

Harry looked. "Okay. So what?"

"Now check the numbers on the rest of the bills."

Harry checked and felt his knees go suddenly mushy. The serial numbers on all the bills were exactly the same.



*One may have to skip a page or two of the book if he wants to reach the conclusion without delay.*

# Justice Drags



It used to be said of Mike Hagen that whenever Justice appeared to be dragging her feet, he would never hesitate to take even grave risks in her behalf. Yet no one had ever been able to file departmental charges against him, and no evidence in a case involving Mike

Hagen had ever been successfully challenged as unlawfully obtained. The main reason, perhaps, was that he kept a closed mouth on his extralegal exploits.

When Hagen resigned from the Police Department to become Chief of Security for the



Bornholdt Lines, he believed that such activities would be at an end. Then came the ship payroll-car holdup. According to the account given to Hagen by Korn, the driver, the delivery began routinely around two-thirty. The purser came out of the line's West Side office building with the briefcase, Jim Roberts at his side, and got into the waiting company limousine. The purser settled next to Korn, the briefcase between his feet, while Roberts eased into the end of the front seat, pulling the door shut and leaving the window down. Korn then headed the big car out into the traffic and along the customary route to the North River pier. It was a mild spring afternoon, with the sun breaking through the clouds following the recent shower.

The trip passed without undue incident until the car rolled to a halt at the Stop sign on the end of the one-way street, where it was to make a right turn. While

Korn waited for a break in the cross traffic, a man standing at the curb suddenly darted to the side of the car. According to vague descriptions provided by Korn and the purser, he was of medium height and build, wearing a dark-blue raincoat and hat, and dark sunglasses. He drew a small revolver from his left-hand raincoat pocket and jabbed it against Roberts' neck.

"The briefcase!" he snapped at the purser.

All three inside the car momentarily froze. Then the purser, a stout, middle-aged man, nervously lifted the briefcase into the hand reaching for it across the rigid Roberts. The holdup man swung it out through the window and down to his side.

"Drive straight ahead when it's clear," he snapped at Korn, doubtless to aid his getaway.

The holdup man kept the gun pressed against Roberts' neck, leaning through the window and thus making the gun inconspicuous to the two or three pedestrians crossing in front of the car, should one happen to glance his way.

With the first break in the traffic, Korn shifted to the gas pedal. The holdup man stepped back as the car began moving. In the same moment, Roberts twisted as



if to draw his gun. The other gun spat flame, and Roberts slumped. Korn, horror-stricken, jammed his foot down on the brake. The purser, tossing a shocked glance through the rear window, caught a glimpse of the dark-coated figure racing back up the side street, to the curious stares of a few passersby.

The port purser telephoned news of the robbery to Mike Hagen in his pier-side office.

About an hour later, well after five o'clock, Detective Knute Nielsen telephoned and found Hagen still at his desk. Before Hagen had resigned, he and Nielsen had often made an efficient team in Homicide, although Nielsen was sometimes uneasy about some of Hagen's methods of getting evidence, such as picking the lock of a suspect's office.

"Sorry to have to tell you this, Mike," Nielsen said dolefully. "Jim Roberts died soon after he was rushed to the hospital."

"Oh, no!" moaned Hagen, a hefty man with a square face and solid jaw, speckled black hair bespeaking his fifty years. Jim Roberts was married to Hagen's favorite niece, Peggy, and the young couple had shared his home since his wife died three years ago. Peggy was expecting, and already on leave of absence as secretary

to the Freight Department manager.

"Mike," Nielsen went on, "it looks like an inside job. The gunman must have known about the payroll car and the route, when it would get to the Stop sign."

"The route's always the same," Hagen said bleakly. "When a ship arrives early in the morning, like today, the purser takes his payroll over to the office, and after his figures have been checked by the payroll bureau, he picks up the money from the cashier and starts back to the ship, usually soon after the lunch hour."

"So a heister knowing the setup would simply have to hang around the Stop sign till the car showed up."

"That's about it. We never expected any trouble along the route, only outside the office or the pier. So the escort is usually relaxed on the way."

"Today's heister fooled you, Mike. He may have been from any of the departments connected with the payroll and free to roam around this afternoon. I'm going to start with the pursers. Maybe you could find out for me who in that department was off work today."

"No problem. The port purser will have gone home by now, so I'll call you in the morning on it."

"Fine. According to the purser on today's trip, he was carrying around twenty-five thousand dollars, in separate envelopes, not in bundles of bills, and the briefcase has the name of the steamship company and the ship in gold letters on it."

"That's right. The voyage pay-off of each officer and crew member is put into a small brown envelope, with his name and the amount typed on it."

"Your heister will get rid of that briefcase fast. The envelopes, too. Where they're found might provide a good lead."

Hagen telephoned the port purser first thing next morning. "The police want a list of all in your department who were off work yesterday."

"Mike," the port purser said heatedly, "my men don't go around robbing and shooting like gangsters, if that's what they've got in mind."

"Maybe you picked up a bad apple sometime. Anyway, it's routine, and the police have to start somewhere."

"Okay, then," growled the port purser. "All my office staff were in the office yesterday afternoon. I can vouch for that. And that includes two pursers waiting for their ships to come back."

"Any still on vacation?"

"Three, and they're out of town."

"Have you let anyone go recently?"

"I let one man go a few weeks back. He made a relief trip."

"Where is he now?"

"He might be in town. He left as a forwarding address the Mayhew Hotel. Colfax is his name."

"The Mayhew is no waterfront fleabag. Why did you let him go?"

"He came to me for a job after the Grebe Line laid up their passenger ships. I thought him a good man to take on, a purser from regular passenger ships, not twelve-passenger freighters like ours. He filed an application. A couple of days later, a purser fell sick close to a Saturday-noon sailing. I didn't have another man available at such short notice, so I assigned Colfax. When his ship arrived back, my assistant made one of his routine spot checks. Colfax was over a hundred dollars short in his cash."

"That was why you let him out?"

"I'd already decided he wasn't for us. I'd checked with the Grebe Line while he was away. They rated him a smart, efficient purser, but a compulsive gambler and racetrack fan. He'd got worse, even going out to the races when he should have been at work

aboard ship. Also, he'd taken to high living—best hotels and restaurants. The Grebe Line would have eventually eased him out if their passenger ships had been kept in service. Colfax explained his shortage to me by saying he'd lost over five hundred dollars in the casino during the Bahamas northbound call, and dipped into his office cash for part of it. He intended replacing it after he drew his voyage payoff. He hadn't expected a spot check of his cash."

Hagen promptly telephoned the information to Nielsen. The detective called him back within a few minutes. "Colfax is still staying at the Mayhew, room 707. He's there now, so I'm going over to talk to him." Nielsen paused. "Mike, you've got a deep personal interest in this case, so maybe you'd like to be in on it. I'll meet you in the lobby in twenty minutes. Okay?"

It was a sunny morning with vacant taxis plentiful, and Hagen was able to make it to the Mayhew in less than fifteen minutes. Nielsen, lean and light-haired, with a round serious face, was chatting with the bell captain. He crushed out his cigar butt in an urn and led Hagen to a waiting self-service elevator.

Colfax responded at once to the knock on his door. Hagen noted

that his height and build corresponded with the description given by Korn and the purser. He appeared to be around thirty, with a narrow, not unhandsome face, long sideburns, and ginger hair shaped in mod style.

He nodded to Hagen in surprised recognition, perhaps having seen him around the pier during his brief tenure with the Bornholdt Lines. "Hi, Mr. Hagen!" He eyed Nielsen curiously.

"Police officer," Nielsen said. "May we come in?"

Colfax opened the door wide. "I was just getting ready to go out to Aqueduct." He was dressed in a gray topcoat and purple slacks, with tan shoes.

"I won't keep you long," Nielsen said, as Colfax closed the door. "A man was shot and killed yesterday afternoon in a payroll robbery. I'm making a few inquiries."

"So that's what brought you here." Colfax looked at Hagen. "I read about it this morning. I'm sorry about Roberts. I didn't know he was related to you till I saw it in the paper."

"Was he your payroll escort after you came back from your trip with the Bornholdt Lines?"

"No, it was another guy, with a black moustache."

"A different driver, too," remarked Hagen to the detective.

"Would you mind telling me where you spent yesterday afternoon?" Nielsen asked.

Colfax looked shocked. "You mean you think I did the robbery and shot Roberts?"

"Anyone with knowledge of the payroll setup will be questioned. It's routine."

Colfax seemed relieved. "Well, if that's all this is about, then I don't need to worry. I was out at the track all yesterday afternoon—Aqueduct."

"Alone?"

Colfax nodded. "Some days I take a chick along, but not yesterday."

"Anything to show for it—stubs, parking-lot ticket?"

"I usually throw 'em away. Also, I went by subway—the Aqueduct Special. I did happen to remark to the desk clerk I was going out to watch the ponies, in case someone came looking for me."

"Who'd be likely to come looking for you?"

"Well, I've got two or three applications in with shipping companies for a berth aboard ship or ashore in the office."

"Do you mind if I take a look around?"

"Sure, go ahead. Maybe I ought

to ask about a search warrant or whatever, but I've got nothing to hide. Be my guest."

Hagen stood watching while the detective opened and shut drawers in the bureau. When Nielsen opened the closet door, Hagen saw a dark-blue raincoat hanging up beside blue-and-white ship uniforms, and on the shelf above them a dark hat. Closing the door again, Nielsen looked into the bathroom, and then went to the desk and glanced in the drawers. He rummaged through the torn paper in the metal wastebasket, finally turning back to Colfax.

"Do you own a car?"

Colfax smiled. "A getaway car? I'm in the clear there, too. I own a sports job, but it hasn't been out of the garage since I came back from my last voyage. I keep it in the Seward Garage."

"I won't detain you any longer, Mr. Colfax," Nielsen said pleasantly. "Thank you for your cooperation. I wish you lots of luck at Aqueduct this afternoon."

"And I hope you have more luck with the next man you question," Colfax responded, smiling again.

As Hagen and the detective walked silently along the carpeted corridor after leaving room 707, Nielsen remarked, "A weak alibi, a dark-blue raincoat and dark hat,



a pair of dark specs in the desk drawer, and no torn-up pay envelopes in the wastebasket."

"And a ship's officer usually has a blue raincoat to wear with his blue uniform," added Hagen. "And his voice wouldn't be recognized in the car."

"Not to mention that dark glasses have become fashionable," grunted Nielsen. "It was plain I wasn't going to find money or a gun when he gave me that bit about a search warrant. There's lots of cause for speculation, though. Gambling debts run up,

with high living while out of a job, a cheap Saturday night special easily obtained and then disposed of down a street sewer. Yet, if he pulled the heist, where did he stash the green stuff, and did he hide it for safety or because he expected he might be questioned?"

"If he expected it, he put on a pretty good act of looking surprised. He seems pretty well self-possessed, acquired no doubt from having to deal with all kinds of passengers. I think, though, if you'd bored into him, you might've got somewhere."

"And have some lawyer say I forced him to confess," growled Nielsen. "I left him thinking he's in the clear, hoping he gets careless, if he's the heister."

As they turned the corner toward the elevators, they almost collided with Gregson, head of the hotel security staff, a tall man whose dapper appearance was more that of an assistant manager. Both Nielsen currently, and Hagen during his official days, had had dealings with Gregson concerning crimes involving the hotel.

"I was just on my way down to see you," Nielsen said.

"Something affecting the Mayhew?" Gregson looked anxious.

"I talked to your guest in room 707 about the ship-payroll robbery

yesterday. One man was killed."

"I saw the item in the *Times* this morning, but didn't get past the headline at the time." Gregson glanced at Hagen. "One of your ships, Mike?"

Hagen nodded. "And my niece's husband slain," he added grimly.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Gregson said solemnly. "Can I be of any help?" he asked Nielsen.

"You could get me a rundown on Colfax, particularly his movements of yesterday, and if he rented a hotel safe-deposit box. Also get his room maid to watch out for a briefcase with the Bornholdt Lines' name on it and torn-up pay envelopes in his wastebasket."

Hagen neither heard from nor saw Nielsen again until the detective attended the funeral service for Jim Roberts three days later. Taking shelter from the gusty March wind in a recess outside the church, Nielsen gave him a hurried briefing.

"No trace of the briefcase or the envelopes, and no witnesses to the heist. A dry cleaner saw a man in a dark raincoat and dark glasses dash past his store with a briefcase. The man ran around the next corner. He could have ducked down the subway or hopped aboard a bus. He could have been Colfax. He could also

have been someone tipped off for the job by someone in the know. Maybe I'd better go to work on that angle."

"Knute, Colfax is still your best bet. Any more on him?"

"Nothing to nail him down with. He left the hotel right after lunch time the day of the heist. The night clerk saw him come in late that evening and remembered he wasn't carrying a briefcase, but was wearing his dark-blue raincoat. No sunglasses, though."

"No longer any need to mask the face," commented Hagen. "What about a safe-deposit box?"

"Colfax didn't rent one of the hotel's, nor in the bank around the corner, where he's got a checking account with only a few dollars left in it. I've tailed him to see if he made any daily trips to a public locker in nearby Grand Central or elsewhere, to put in fresh quarters if he'd rented one. No luck. His car's held in the garage for back rent. He goes out to Aqueduct afternoons, Yonkers Raceway evenings."

"No signs of instant prosperity, then?"

"Not a dime's worth. Either he's making out on racetrack winnings or borrowing."

"He may have checked the briefcase someplace with no time limit, and is biding his time,

waiting for things to cool, Knute."

"Just imagine having to phone hundreds of places to find out if someone had checked a briefcase with a Bornholdt Lines name on it," Nielsen said cheerlessly.

Hagen burned with a helpless rage toward the man who had shattered his niece's happiness and brought tragedy into his life. He was now spending most of his evenings trying to console his grieving and bitter niece. "It doesn't seem right," Peggy had moaned, "that Jim's murderer should go unpunished and enjoy all that money he stole. I'm losing faith in justice."

"Give Nielsen time," Hagen had murmured. He wasn't optimistic. Nielsen was a smart detective, but overcautious, keeping strictly to the book, never skipping even a page. Hagen yearned to be back in his old job and taking an active role in the case.

What appeared to be a break in the case developed late in the afternoon two weeks after the funeral. The switchboard operator over in the main office called Hagen. "Mr. Hagen, there's a clergyman wants to report finding one of the line's briefcases. Should I put him through to you?"

"Right away," snapped Hagen and, after a moment, "Michael Hagen speaking."



The response came in a foreign accent. "Good morning, Mr. Hagen. I'm Karl Mehner, curate. I found a briefcase with the name of a ship and your company on it. I've got it here in the rectory for you, if you wish to send someone to pick it up."

"Gladly. Where did you find it, might I ask?"

"Behind the wireless operators' monument in Battery Park. I rested on a bench beside the monument a short while during a stroll last evening, and I noticed the briefcase as I was about to leave. It is in very good condition, and apparently mislaid or forgotten, and not something thrown away as worn."

"It was empty?"

"Yes. I took the liberty of opening it, should there be anything of great value inside to be safeguarded."

"Thank you very much, Reverend. I'll send a man for it at once."

The clergyman then gave the address of a downtown church near the Battery. Apparently the heister had checked the briefcase somewhere in the vicinity; he had finally withdrawn it, removed the envelopes, and discarded it in the park. But where in that neighborhood could the briefcase have been stashed? Suddenly it struck

Hagen—the Seamen's Institute! The building was across the street from Battery Park. He'd been in the place more than once in connection with his new job. Seamen were allowed to check baggage there for months at a stretch.

Hagen telephoned the Institute immediately and asked for the baggage room. "I'm calling from the Bornholdt Lines. Could you tell me if a man named Colfax checked a briefcase with you recently?"

The baggageman said he would look up the log and to hold the line. After a minute or so, he replied, "A Richard Colfax checked a suitcase, not a briefcase, on March 6th and withdrew it March 25th."

"Thanks a lot," Hagen said, and laid down the telephone. He was in no doubt whatever now as to who was the heister; March 6th was the date of the holdup. After pulling it, Colfax must have had a suitcase parked somewhere, perhaps even bought one, put the briefcase inside to hide the names on it, and then checked the suitcase at the Seamen's Institute. He had withdrawn it last evening, taken it across the street to a quiet spot in the park and, behind the monument, had emptied the envelopes into the suitcase; the lengthy and risky process of re-

moving the money from the envelopes could best be done in the privacy of his hotel room. He'd had no fear that the abandoned briefcase could be traced to him.

All that, however, was pure speculation, not evidence. Yet if true, it meant that only the envelopes remained as possibilities for incriminating Colfax. Swift action was perhaps needed to prevent them from being destroyed. After deliberating on what form it might have to take, Hagen telephoned Nielsen. "Anything further on Colfax?"

"No sign of the briefcase, but the envelopes might start showing up soon," replied the detective, sounding elated. "I haven't been back to interrogate him again, hoping he'd think the heat was off him and he'd get the money out of stash. It seems to have paid off. Gregson told me Colfax bought a camel's-hair topcoat and an English suit in the hotel lobby men's store this forenoon. Last night he had dinner with all the trimmings, including vintage wines, in the hotel dining room, with the kind of cutie that doesn't come in cereal boxes. He's reserved a table for two again this evening."

"Knute, without the briefcase, your only hope of pinning the heist on Colfax is with the enve-

lopes. He may get rid of them all in one lot somewhere outside the hotel, if he hasn't already done so."

"Then I'd be stymied."

"Knute," Hagen said pointedly, "you might get a jump ahead of him if you went in there now."

"Now wait a minute, Mike, I'm playing this straight, no funny business. I don't have enough evidence for a search warrant, and he'd be sure to ask for one the second time around, but if the envelopes show up in the wastebasket, I can arrest him for possession of stolen property and search all I want to."

"Okay!" sighed Hagen. "I wish you luck with them."

After hanging up, Hagen pondered for several moments, and then picked up the telephone again. In the course of what appeared to be a sociable and disinterested chat with Gregson at the Mayhew, he learned that Gregson would be in the hotel all that evening. As a result of the chat, Hagen decided to pick up the briefcase himself; the fewer who knew about it, the better.

Next morning Hagen had scarcely settled at his desk in the pier-side office when Nielsen called him. "Mike," he said excitedly, "I got a lucky break on Colfax. A thief picked his door lock

last night and ransacked the room while he was at dinner—drawers pulled out and the contents strewn around, along with the cutie's wrap and hat. Colfax took one look after opening the door and then charged down to the desk. Gregson and one of his men went up there right away. And guess what?"

"Quit being cute."

"Gregson spotted the briefcase in a drawer. The drawer was half open and empty except for the briefcase. He said Colfax looked as though he was seeing a ghost when he picked it up. Gregson phoned me at once. I found the green stuff in a suitcase locked up in the closet. The thief must have known the money was somewhere in the room, but wasn't able to pick the closet-door lock."

"He could have used a key for the other one," suggested Hagen. "What about the envelopes?"

"All still in the suitcase with the money, including the ones he'd already emptied. You were right, Mike. He was going to get rid of them all in one lot today.

He ignored the rights piece and freely gave me the story. That guy's got plenty of self-possession, all right. It was just what we'd figured—driven desperate by gambling debts, a chance to buy a cheap gun, tossed onto a garbage truck after the job."

"Where did he stash the briefcase?"

"The Seamen's Institute, down by the Battery, inside a suitcase. He checked it out a couple of days ago, and switched the envelopes to the suitcase behind a monument over in a quiet spot in the park. He said his mistake was leaving the briefcase there instead of dropping it into the river a little farther along, and said he had to hand it to me for doing such a neat job in switching it back to him. I told him he'd gone nuts."

Nielsen paused, and his tone became suspicious. "Mike, I got to thinking over what he said. You wouldn't happen to know anything about it, would you?"

"Knut, you know I wouldn't," said Hagen, and hung up.



*There are times, as Cervantes noted, when one had best not stir the rice, though it sticks to the pot.*



# Get the Message

by Gil Stern

Once again Davida Gentry was on the phone. Her high-pitched but melodic voice filtered through the instrument. Ormond, her balding but ruggedly handsome husband, sat uneasily in his lounge chair. Night after night Davida held court over the phone. It was to the sewing-circle group, the literary club, the church group and then, of course, her own personal calls, especially to Heather Calloway who must talk on the phone to Davida practically every hour.

Ormond rustled his newspaper and cringed as his wife kept up her chatter. "Yes, Heather, I spoke to the others and they think what we're doing is right. I'll call Emily and get her opinion, then I'll get back to you."

This was Ormond's chance. The phone was back on the hook and Davida caught her breath as she

changed positions in her chair by the phone.

"For heaven's sake," Ormond said while rising from his chair, "enough. How many times do we have to fight about this? You're on the phone every minute, every evening."

"Are we going through this again?" she said as she began to push the buttons on the phone. Her long fingers moved without hesitation, hitting all the right numbers. "You have *other* interests, but I'm busy during the day and at night I love my phone."

Ormond's rugged complexion

reddened even more and just as he was prepared to answer her, Davida's harsh voice changed to the high-pitched, melodic syncopation, her telephone voice. "Emily? Davida. Listen, I was just talking with Heather and we were . . ."

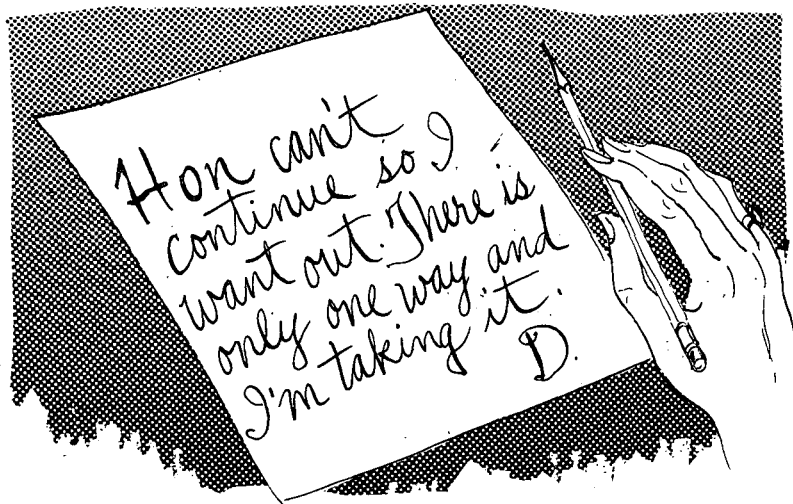
Ormond turned, threw the paper down, felt his pockets for one of his thin cigars but found none to vent his anger. "I'm going out," he said, mostly to himself rather than Davida, knowing full well she was busily speaking over Mr. Bell's invention.

It hadn't always been this way, or had it? It seemed so long ago and yet it was really just the last few months that a communications gap had come between them. Ormond had reached the

"life begins at" stage a few years ago and he attempted to do just that. He had an affair, then another. It was this second affair that got him into trouble and formed a permanent disconnection between Davida and himself.

It was stupid to have gotten caught. He'd told Davida he was going to a sales meeting in New York for the weekend. Instead, he doubled back from the airport and went to the Skyline Motel. His luck that Heather Calloway saw him and phoned Davida, who rushed to the motel.

There could have been quite a scene there, under the circumstances. Fortunately, Davida had acquired a standing in the community, a scandal was out of the question, as was a divorce. The



only question was, what could be done?

The answer was, nothing. She had Ormond's number now. She would be Mrs. Ormond Gentry in name only. If he wanted to have affairs, that was his business. She had her own life and, as her analyst stated: "Keep your life as full and as active as possible. Being depressed is what happens to people who have time to think."

Davida charged into her charity work, and found the phone an excellent means of avoiding Ormond each evening.

It wasn't the cost that bothered Ormond; it was the constant talk over that phone from minute to minute, hour to hour. Of course he had his escape, a new romance with a buxom waitress at the coffee shop in his building. The affair and the incessant talking gave Ormond a deep yearning to be free of Davida.

Ormond walked slowly at first but subconsciously speeded his pace as he walked through the chilling night toward the drugstore at least eight blocks away. The ideal thing, he mused, was to get rid of Davida and in a manner that would leave him free, unencumbered of alimony, of tarnishing his good business name as a stockbroker.

He passed a phone booth and

out of a masochistic feeling rather than curiosity, he eased into the booth and dialed his number. *Buzz*, busy signal, and then Ormond knew he had to cut her off completely . . . and he had a plan.

The following night, Davida Gentry had finished with one phone conversation and was ready to call her friend Heather Calloway when the phone rang. She picked it up, half-expecting to hear the confident low-key voice of Heather on the other end, so she was startled when it was a quiet, almost whispered man's voice.

"Ormond Gentry, please," the man hummed into the phone.

"Ormond stepped out but should be right back. Can I take a message?"

"Yes," he wheezed.

Davida grabbed a pencil and took one sheet from the note pad beside the phone on the table.

"I'm in one of your husband's investments so please write down every word, do you understand? It is very important."

"Of course," she answered. She always wrote down every word her husband's customers called in. What with all those strange initials and funny-sounding names of companies on the stock market, she had to be precise.

"Okay, put this down . . . Hon can't continue."

"What's that again?"

"Hon, spelled H as in Henry, O as in Oscar, N as in Nancy."

"I have it," she said. "Go ahead."

"Hon can't continue so I want out. There is only one way and I'm taking it. Sign that with my initial, D as in dog. Do you have it?"

"Yes," Davida said, "Hon can't continue so I want out. There is only one way and I'm taking it. D. Is that right?"

There was a click on the other end. Davida looked at the note, then placed it on the table.

The police lieutenant, an elderly man named McGoon, stated it first and the coroner agreed: "It's odd for a woman to take her own life with a gun. Drugs, sleeping pills, poison, a slashed wrist, but a gun is extremely rare."

"She never liked taking pills, couldn't swallow 'em," Ormond said as he sat staring down at the floor. "She liked guns, made me buy her one a few years back when there were a lot of burglaries in the area."

"Was she depressed?" the lieutenant asked.

"At times. She went to an analyst. The doc told her to get out

more, do a lot of charity work in order not to be depressed, but no matter how hard she tried she just couldn't shake it. I guess it got the best of her."

"Another thing is this note," McGoon said. "Why write it on regular paper? Why not some fancy stationery? Most women suicides do."

Ormond looked up. "She was out of her stationery." That was the first honest statement Ormond made and it almost made him smile.

"But in pencil? Don't tell me she was out of ink?" McGoon stared at the note.

The only thing it had been necessary for Ormond to do with the note that Davida took so dutifully over the phone was to place a comma between *Hon* and *can't*. Strange, Ormond reflected, how a person will write down almost anything when a person is asked to over the phone. Put a gun to Davida's head and she would never have written that note, Ormond knew.

Suddenly there was a commotion in the hallway. Heather Calloway had pushed her way through two policemen.

"He did it," she yelled. "Davida didn't take her life. The note was a phone message."

Ormond got to his feet shakily.

How could she know? Ormond wondered.

"Are you sure?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yes! I called Davida to tell her I had to rush over to my ailing aunt's home, and she told me about a man whispering a message for Ormond. She thought it a strange message and asked me about it. Here." She shoved a paper at McGoon's face.

McGoon looked at the scribble that Heather had brought and then looked at the note left by Davida. "Identical," he said, "except for the comma between *Hon* and *can't*."

"Yes. I'd repeated the words to myself and when I got to my aunt's house I suddenly realized what the message could really be if there were a comma in it. I

tried calling Davida to warn her but I knew it was too late."

"How'd you know that?"

"There was no answer and there was no busy signal. That was so unlike Davida," Heather answered.

Ormond slumped back on his couch. So, he had not gotten back to the house in time from the phone call he made at the booth down the block. Davida had once more used the phone to work against him. She was able to talk one last time with Heather.

The judge gave Ormond life. Just as well that the judge hadn't given him the death penalty, Ormond reasoned. He would hate to think that as he headed to the chair only one phone call—the governor's—could save him.

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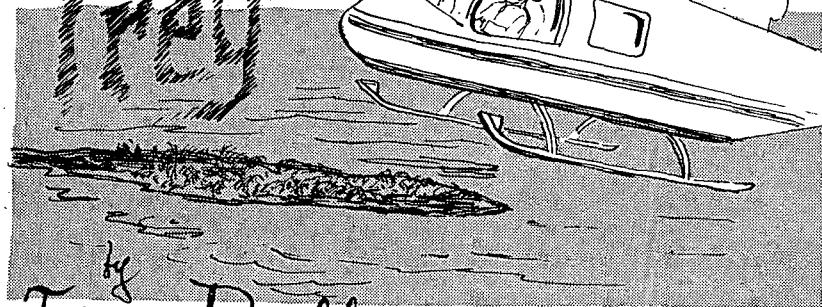
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*Bagging the wrong tiger may change only the manner of the pursuit.*

# The Ultimate

# Préy



by  
Talmage Powell

You'll understand why I can't pinpoint the location of the Island. It's one of those hundreds of pieces broken from the mainland mass along the perimeter of the Gulf of Mexico from eastern Texas around to western Florida.

Countless such islands remain as they were created, semitropical mangrove jungles swarming with poisonous life, separated from the

throes of civilization by narrow bays, sounds, bayous. These islands run to a type and therefore have much in common.

Developers have swarmed onto countless other Gulf Coast islands, bulldozing the jungle, pumping, dredging, filling, spreading lawns and domestic palms, laying out streets, marinas, golf courses, sites for homes, schools, and expensive condominiums. Dedicated to the Beautiful Life, these islands also have much in common.

The one I'm talking about,

however, is used for a purpose that makes it unique among all islands.

I first viewed the Island from a low-flying helicopter on a hot, sultry day. It looked so peaceful and inviting, swimming toward us on a blue-green, sparkling Gulf. In shape, it was a finger lying on the serene sea, four or five miles long and a couple of miles wide.

The northern end had been plushly prepared for people. Amid acres of lawn and tropical gardens, a modernistic home of glass and redwood threw its three large, adjacent wings into the sunshine. The lawn sloped to a snowy white beach and marina where a seaworthy cruiser and a small schooner with furled sails bobbed.

South of the house were spread the huge kidney-shaped swimming pool, doubles tennis courts, a landing strip with parked Cessna, and, tucked to one side, a couple of small cement-block buildings that I guessed housed the pumps, generators and other necessities to keep the estate going.

The man-made paradise occupied only the northern quarter of the Island. Less than a mile south of the house the jungle crouched, a thick green tangle creating its own twilight; timeless and self-renewing, it seemed to brood with endless patience, awaiting the

time when it would reclaim the small part that people had carved from it.

LaFarge, the sheriff, was flying the chopper, and so far he'd merely grunted every time I asked him where he was taking me and why.

Conscious of the weight of the handcuffs about my wrists, I studied his swarthy, big-boned, cruel profile. A flicker in his dark, heavy-browed eyes and gathering of muscle tension in his bullish body warned me that the Island was our destination.

LaFarge's town, Ogathalla, was an unimportant dot on the map, a crossroads cluster of weathered buildings in piny woods country, little more than a posted speed limit and main street traffic light to halt the big Kawasaki I was riding cross-country.

Before the light changed, a dusty red-and-white cruiser with constabulary markings and blue-flashing blinker quartered in front of the cycle. The big, indistinct image behind the steering wheel leaned in my direction and thumbed me toward the curb.

Obediently, I walked the wheels over, straddling the seat.

The man I was to know as LaFarge got out of the cruiser and padded toward me. He studied me

closely, my rather skinny face and denim-clothed frame, the curl of sandy hair below the crash helmet, the eyes behind light amber glasses, the leather-strap sandals on dusty bare feet, the blanket roll secured behind the cycle's seat.

"What's your name, jimbo?"

"Rogers, Officer."

"Where you headed?"

"Down the coast."

"Where down the coast, jimbo?"

"Tampa, maybe. Sarasota. Fort Myers. Just someplace to work and spend the winter in the sun."

"Where you from?"

"El Paso," I said.

"Before that?"

"Phoenix. L.A. Vegas."

"You got people?" he asked, his dark, intent eyes making the question important.

"People?"

"Kinfolk," he snapped. "Someone who can vouch for you."

I slipped off the riding glasses and looked at him, frowning. "Why do I need someone to vouch for me?"

"The welcome mat ain't out for motorcycle bums in Ogathalla, jimbo."

"I'm not exactly a motorcycle bum, Officer. I've got money. I pay my way."

He kicked the front tire almost

gently with his toe. "Just rambling around, seeing the country, enjoying your freedom, working when you have to?"

"Something like that." But it went deeper. It went back to hard questions that crystallized in my mind about the time I was one of the last of the soldier boys debarking from Vietnam. Simply framed questions without ready answers . . . who I am . . . where is truth among the falsehoods . . . what this business of living is all about . . . what to do with my life . . .

I was trying to settle a lot of things in my mind, but I doubted that the thug in uniform would understand, even if he were interested. So I said, "You've summed it up exactly, Officer."

"We'll see. We'll sure look into you." He moved with a short side step. "Now get off the wheels, jimbo. Our local pokey is just a short walk down the street."

I stood in dumb surprise. The look on my face gave him a short laugh. "Busting the speed limit as you rolled into town will do for a starter," he said. "You want to add a charge of resisting arrest?"

The urge flared in me to flatten him and kick the Kawa to life.

He read it in my eyes and dropped his hand to his gun. "Do it," he invited softly. "I step on your kind, with my heel. Do it—

and I'll take you before the others even have a chance."

His reference to the others made no more sense than the rest of the situation, but I sensed clearly his sadism, and I hadn't survived to this point in time to give a prehistoric sheriff quick excuses to get his kicks.

The rest of the day was spent in a six-by-eight cell in the Oga-thalla jail. The cells next to me in the decrepit old building were empty, leaving me suspended in sweltering heat and the after-smells of ten thousand previous tenants.

I wasn't yet in the grip of real gut-fear. I figured LaFarge for a bored bully shoring up his tough, big-man self-image. He'd picked me up on a pretext, but he could only go so far. This was still the U. S. of A.

I couldn't see any other angle. I came from nowhere, was going nowhere. I had traveling bread; enough, I hoped, to satisfy LaFarge and a crooked magistrate in a kangaroo court.

I finally slept in a pool of soured sweat and the stink of the lumpy bunk.

After daybreak the next morning LaFarge came to the cell, grinned at me through the barred door, and slipped a tin plate through the slot at the bottom of

the door. "Breakfast, Rogers."

I gripped the bars, white-knuckled. "I want a lawyer."

"Jimbo," he drawled, "you're old enough for your druthers not to hurt you. Relax and enjoy Oga-thalla hospitality while you can."

He didn't seem to mind the things I yelled at him as he went away.

He returned in late afternoon with another tin plate of swill. After the vacuity of the day the sound of any other human footstep was welcome—almost.

"Can't we be reasonable, Sheriff?" I asked, ignoring the food.

"Sure. I'm the most reasonable man in the county."

"Then what's the charge against me?"

"Ain't decided yet, jimbo. I'm looking into you like you never been looked into before. I may be a hick sheriff, but I got a long-distance phone and a badge and a title, and before I'm through I can tell you if you've ever spit on Times Square."

I didn't have anything to say for a moment, and while I stood there looking at him through the space between the bars the first worms began crawling through my guts.

"Sheriff," I said, wetting my lips, "I do have some rights."

"Here, jimbo? Who says?"

"You can't keep me here forever."

"Who says? You got anybody to come fetch you out?"

The sun gradually slipped off in its habitual way, and nightfall came as a heavy and unwelcome shadow. The questions that had bothered me for so many months had a particular sharpness there in the darkness of LaFarge's jail, but I wouldn't let myself think too hard about anything, including the hours ahead and the idea of LaFarge having the last word.

I stood at the single small barred window listening to the nightly din of the nearby swamp. LaFarge couldn't have secured me more to his liking if he'd put me in a tomb, although I knew, bitterly, that stockade inmates I'd heard about in Vietnam could have cracked this cruddy, weather-rotted cell without much trouble.

I turned finally and sat down on the edge of the bunk, head in my hands. After a while, I stretched out on my back, feeling the sag of the bunk, listening to it creak every time I drew a breath. It seemed about ready to fall apart . . . and with that thought, my eyes snapped open.

I sat up quickly, whipped the grimy pad to the foot of the bunk. The springs and braces and fram-

ing stood out in the moonglow. My hands explored and tested the framework. A diagonal corner brace, a flat piece of old metal about an inch wide and twelve inches long, seemed to be hanging on only with the help of its rust. The rust showered off in grainy flecks as I took hold of the brace and twisted it back and forth.

The job was harder than it looked. The edges of metal rasped my palms to rawness. The effort and humid heat of the night oozed a sticky sweat out of my skin, but I had plenty of time. Patiently I twisted the brace back and forth, gripping it hard and putting muscle into it. At last, when the moon had shifted shadows about on the floor, I felt—or imagined—the brace yielding a little further.

Then the rivet at one end slipped out of its rust-eaten hole, and with the direct leverage that this gave me, I yanked the other end free. A pulse lifted through my chest as I gripped the end of the brace and took a couple of practice swings with it at an imaginary LaFarge hovering in the darkness.

He came to the cell two hours later than usual the next morning.

"We'll talk a little today before you have breakfast, jimbo." While he fitted the key in the lock, he

looked in at me as if to note how I was making out. I was slightly ripe by this time, wrinkled, grimy, bearded, a few pounds having melted from a frame that couldn't afford the loss. LaFarge grinned with satisfaction at what he saw, and the metal weapon felt a few degrees warmer against my forearm where it was concealed by my sleeve.

LaFarge pushed the door open, and as he was wriggling the key from the balky old lock, the metal strap slipped down into my hand.

LaFarge glanced down at the lock, and I moved. He jerked about, glimpsing the metal strap slashing at him. Fear broke his knees and welded him to the door. The reflex saved him. The metal strap missed his head, glanced from his shoulder. Still clutching the door, he threw himself blindly away from me. The metal strap smashed against the edge of the moving door, and before I could balance and swing a third time, LaFarge was outside the cell, the lock snicking, the door a barrier between us.

A moment passed while we faced each other. LaFarge was rubbing his shoulder, but if it hurt, he didn't seem to mind.

"You've made it personal now, Rogers," he said softly. "I'm going to enjoy taking you to the others.

Enjoy it real personal, believe it."

I looked at the piece of metal in my hand, useless now. I opened my fingers and watched the strap hit the dirty cement floor with a small explosion of grit.

Finally, I looked up and saw the bars banded over the image of LaFarge's face. "Who are these others? What's this all about? Why me, LaFarge?"

"Because you were in the right place at the right time, jimbo."

"This is crazy!"

"Can you think of many things in this world that ain't?" He slipped the handcuffs from his belt. "Cool it while you can, jimbo. I won't take any more chances with you. Now then, you just stick your hands out here . . . both hands through the same opening between bars so's I don't hook you to the door . . . and we'll fit the bracelets. Then the two of us will march the little distance to the helipad behind the jail and take a little trip in the Department chopper. You'd be surprised at the crime in this bayou country: poachers, moonshiners, thieves and killers. Chopper's the only way to chase some of them down."

The ride wasn't as short as LaFarge had promised. He flew us due south until the shoreline of the Gulf was below. Then we fol-



lowed the coast eastward. We whirled over a traffic-clogged expressway, bisected the wake of a tanker steaming perhaps from Iran to the busy port just below the horizon to our rear.

Streaming along far beneath us were Gulf-front homes with private docks, pink-and-white resort hotels claiming miles of cake-icing beaches, little white sails cavorting offshore.

Then the interstate veered north through a wilderness of pinyon woods and cypress trees dripping Spanish moss, and we veered south with the curve of a shoreline that lost all traces of people.

In eight to ten minutes, LaFarge put the shoreline to our tail, and a scattering of small wilderness islands slid beneath the Plexiglas bubble. None of these interested LaFarge. Then the finger, one-quarter pure plush and three-quarters raw jungle, came into view, and the chopper began to drop.

As we whirled closer to the estate, three people came out of the west wing of the palatial home and started jogging southward across the lawn.

"On their way to meet us," LaFarge said.

"The others?"

"The others, jimbo." LaFarge gave a short laugh. "Ten grand to

me every time I bring them a tiger, jimbo. Helps a poor country sheriff make ends meet, though I don't find a special nobody on a motorcycle every day who meets the purely rigid requirements. Make you feel any better, knowing you're worth ten thousand dollars?"

LaFarge had settled the copter a considerable distance from the house, not more than a hundred yards from where the jungle began.

As LaFarge prodded me out with his gun, the three men who'd trotted from the house came to a halt, semicircled about me and looked me over.

They were all young, very close to my own age, dressed in khaki shorts, bush jackets, and laced boots. Each carried a carbine, lightweight brush guns, in the crook of his right arm.

I had a vague feeling of having seen them before, of knowing them from some time or place, which seemed impossible.

The man on my right was very tall and thin, with muscles like wire, a gaunt face, a corrugated skull that was already totally bald, though he was only in his middle-twenties.

Facing me most directly was a heavyweight whose dark face and build reminded me of LaFarge.

On his flank, the third member of the party was tall, broad-shouldered, round-faced, with ash-blond hair done in the wildest Afro style I'd ever seen.

"Rogers," LaFarge said, "meet the Quixote Hunt Club. Hepperling the bald. McMurdy with the beef. And Convers, the panther here with the big blossom of white hair."

I knew, hearing the names, why they hadn't seemed total strangers. I—along with millions—had met them at a distance in newscasts and Sunday supplements.

Hepperling meant sugar millions; McMurdy, shipping; Convers, oil. The three were the latest stems on family trees that in all branches meant a good slice of a billion dollars in economic wealth and power. For each of them the coming of age had meant trust funds, allowances, and inheritances the rest of us wouldn't risk dreaming about. The three might have pooled their resources and bought themselves a small, undeveloped country rather than a mere island.

As Quixotes, they'd frequently made headlines; crashing a plane and disappearing in Alaska for a week after a Kodiak hunt, going after jaguar in restricted tribal grounds in South America, creating an international incident when Kenyan authorities had arrested

them for poaching bull elephants, and they'd taken pains to insult the Kenyan government before a bank of international television news cameras.

LaFarge was saying, "Rogers is completely safe, fellows. No family ties, no close friends. Nobody to ask the first question about his disappearance."

"We know." McMurdy dismissed LaFarge as a human being. "We always make our own inquiries when you have a prospect in custody, and we've the agents and the means."

LaFarge endured McMurdy's insulting tone like a well-trained hound.

McMurdy studied me head to toe. "You seem to come from a tough-luck line, Rogers. Father walked out when you were six or seven—never seen or heard from him since. Mother remarried—a real stinker. Both of them killed in a car crash when you were hardly out of high school. Worked your way through a couple years of college, then the Army taps you. Off for Vietnam. Rough time over there. MIA for a while. Wounded once. Finally hung up dockside, one of the last to leave."

"I didn't have much to come back to," I said.

"But you survived," Hepperling said. "You seem to survive any-

thing. That's a good omen. That should make it good."

"Let's hope so," Convers said. "We haven't had a good island hunt in months now."

I think I'd suspected the truth when they'd first ringed the grounded chopper with their carbines, but now as it was coming closer to me with every passing second, I still couldn't believe it. I wouldn't believe it. Then I looked at them, at the jungle, and back at them—and I had to believe it.

Convers bobbed his woolly white mane toward the jungle. "You'll be given a canteen of water and some field rations before you go in there, Rogers. How much life you buy for yourself is up to you, your wits and strength."

I was unable to move.

Hepperling said, "You do understand, Rogers?"

"Sure." The word was a husky whisper. "You guys have hunted everything, everywhere, until you've run all the way out of normal pleasure. So now, when you have the chance and can arrange it, here on this island . . . you hunt the prime game of all."

"How afraid are you, Rogers?" Convers asked as if the subject really interested him.

"If I wallowed on my knees would it help?"

"Last time the prey almost went nuts before dashing off into the jungle," Hepperling said, "screaming that we were crazy, not for real."

"Oh, you're for real," I said. "In twenty-seven years of living I've discovered that anything can be for real on this planet. Adolph Hitler. Scientists who talk about dedication, and devote their lives to thinking up bigger bombs and deadlier germs. Charles Manson. The Mafia! I don't doubt that you three are rather mildly real, compared to some of the things that go on."

I walked a few steps from the chopper and stood looking at the jungle. Then I sat down on the green coolness of the grass. "Only I'm for real, too, fellows. And you've left me just one thing. You've stripped me down to this one real thing. I won't do it. The hunt is off."

They came stalking toward me, their shadows flowing across me.

"That's the whole point of it," I said. "Without the point, there is nothing in it for you. Without fleeing prey trying to hang onto a few more hours of life there in the jungle, you've lost the point, and it's no dice. You've got the wrong tiger this time."

"LaFarge," McMurdy ordered in a quiet tone.

LaFarge came around to stand close in front of me. He pulled out his gun. "You want it right here, Rogers?"

"No," I said, "I don't want it anywhere for years and years yet. But you're betting against an enemy with nothing to lose, LaFarge. No matter what you do, the hunt is off. And I don't believe you'll be paid for this one or trusted in the future."

He fired the gun almost in my face. The flash blinded me. I felt the bullet nip the hair on my crown.

I pushed back the need to be sick all over the place. "You'll have to do better than that, LaFarge."

He put the gun to my temple and slowly eased back the hammer.

"That's the surest way of guaranteeing no hunt, LaFarge."

Taking a step back, he ventured a glance at the faces of his young employers. He didn't like the way they were looking at him. He didn't enjoy what he felt as they measured him. He wasn't liking any of it at all.

He coupled my name with a curse. "On your feet, Rogers. I'll make you run! Hit for the jungle!"

He exploded his booted foot directly at my face. He didn't have nearly the coordination or

quickness of a Viet Cong. My handcuffed hands met the driving ankle. I flipped him hard, onto his back, and before he could catch the next breath, I'd wrung the gun from him and spun to face the others.

"Hold it!" I ordered.

Not a carbine moved. They had brains as well as loot. They knew they could have taken me—but not safely.

It was one of those crossroads moments in life for me, not because of anything outside myself, but because of the thought coming full-blown to my mind. I thought about the gig I'd had from the moment of birth. It seemed that the time was overdue for a putting of things in balance for a fellow named Rogers. The big, basic questions didn't bug me any longer. I was certain, right then, of the direction my life would take. I let a grin build on my lips.

In response, the first edge of tension eased from the Quixotes. They slipped glances from me to each other. Actually, there was a lot more rapport between the Quixotes and myself than between any of us and LaFarge.

"Fellows," I said, "being a country sheriff in mean bayou territory is risky business. If LaFarge turned up in some back bayou

shot to death, no one would figure it any way except that he'd cornered one mean moonshiner or poacher too many."

I eased the snout of the gun in LaFarge's direction: "Into the jungle, big man."

"You're nuts, Rogers . . . Fellows, you tell this character—" His words broke off as he looked at them. He couldn't take his eyes from their faces. He took a backward step . . . then another . . . and whatever it was that he'd substituted for nerve all of his life died inside of him. He broke and ran, disappearing quickly into the jungle.

McMurdy was standing closest to me. Carefully, I turned the police pistol around and handed it to him butt first.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I think the hunt resumes. And don't forget to get the keys to the handcuffs when you've tracked him down."

That's how my association with the Quixotes began. Now I draw twenty-five grand a year, plus expenses. I travel the plushiest resorts. I drive a twelve-thousand-

dollar sports car. I buy the finest food and wines and wear a hand-tailored wardrobe.

Not surprisingly, I practically have to fight off the chicks. I usually pick the best-looking and healthiest of the crop of empty-headed dropouts and runaways from good, substantial homes. They're easiest to con, and once on the Island it's too late for them to come to their senses and realize they're facing something entirely different from the romantic and exciting weekend they've been promised. They're among the runaways who every year are simply not found. None is ever traceable to the Island. I see to that.

Girls . . . the ultimate prey. The Quixotes thought the suggestion was the greatest when I hit them with it. I coupled the idea with the offer to act as their agent, roaming the country, recruiting the prey, and bringing them to the Island. I've proven my absolute reliability, and the Quixotes respect my advice.

Summing up the brand-new life, I guess you could say I owe LaFarge a vote of thanks.



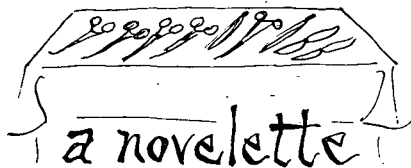
*The pronouncement of a prolonged life is a dictum to be feted—usually.*

# Have a Nice Day

It was Monday evening, and behind her left shoulder the sun was setting over the Golden Gate. The top was down on the convertible and the air smelled clear, like it did at sea, where Karen had spent the weekend. The sailing race had been to Monterey and her father's boat had done well.

The driver was tall, about fifteen in heels, and her slim waist and narrow hips made her shoulders appear wider than they were. Long graceful legs stretched out to the pedals, and her bare arms grasped the wheel like a racing driver—straight out from the shoulders. Blonde hair, braided down each side, accentuated her Swedish-German heritage. She was not pretty; she was extremely beautiful.

It was two years to the day since she had arrived in this country from Germany. She was here



on a student's visa to study medicine; to be a surgeon like her father and his father before him.

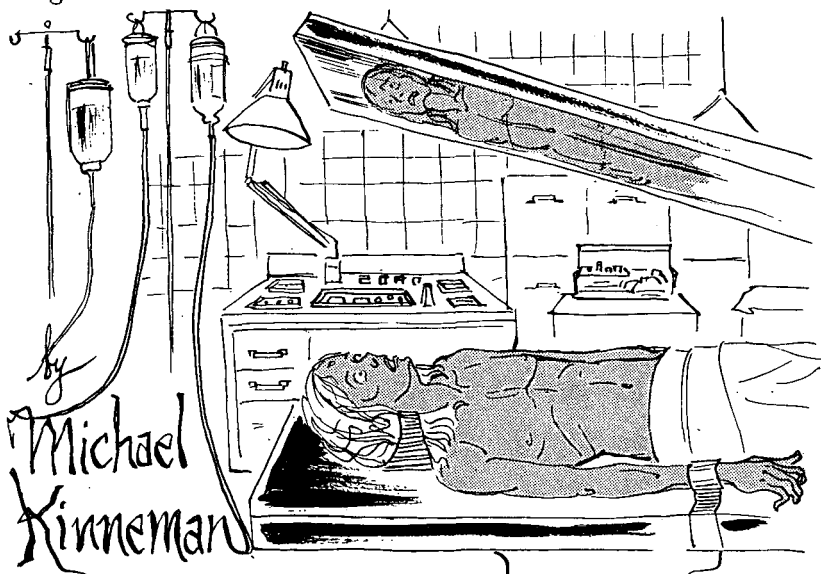
Karen never knew her mother, and had been raised by her father's sister. She had wanted for nothing and grew up in the European tradition as applied to girls from very old, wealthy families. Her father had come to Germany twice a year, every year until she finished her undergraduate work. Karen was smiling now, remembering a time on the North Sea and how frightened she had been riding out her first full gale. She had been fifteen at the time, she was now twenty-one. Karen slowed down and stopped for a light; she was back in Berkeley.

Back to school tomorrow, she reflected . . . It had been a nice weekend.

A few more minutes and she pulled into the parking lot behind her sorority house. Taking an overnight bag from the seat beside her, she opened the door and got out, closing the car door on her way around the back of the convertible.

Karen Greta von Schrader did not get to the foot of the house

as it touched the ground, to confirm the fact before it would lift off again. His arms, hanging limply from his shoulders, moved but slightly in the same direction and together, as though his back-curved fingers were actually around something physical. His eyes stared straight ahead, fastened on something just inside his head. Robert Strom was thinking about Evil and the devious ways in which it worked in the world;



stairs until Friday. She arrived there neatly wrapped in paper and tied with string; that is, only part of her arrived—her head.

He walked with a loping stride, a motion that allowed each foot,

upon men in particular . . . through women. How easy they made Satan's work, how treacherously simple. The "beautiful" ones, with faces, bodies—Robert crossed himself in midstride—forged in Hell and paid for soul by soul,

yes, they were here on earth. They did not fool Robert, oh no, not for a minute. "Respectable women," "good girls"—Hah! These were the truly rotten ones. They could wreck a man's life, corrupt his soul, damn him through lust to a life of wretchedness.

Robert's pace quickened as he thought about these things, his breathing grew heavy, his fingers clenched and straightened as he moved along. Lois . . . he remembered Lois of his high school days; a tall brunette, long straight hair framed a beautiful face, and that body . . . Robert stopped, stood as if transfixed to the spot, hearing nothing, oblivious to everything but the scene behind his eyes. Lois was lying on the ground, naked, black-haired, beautiful; eyes wide and frightened, reflecting the moonlight, light which made the white tape on her mouth look blue; her body, undulating, trying to break the tape that bound her ankles together, her hands behind her back.

An "A" student, member of the school swimming team, Lois had had many friends. "She was one of the most graceful girls I have ever taught," her coach had said. "She had no enemies. Everybody loved her—this is impossible—it just couldn't have happened."

She had been found in ten

pieces, each neatly wrapped in newspaper and tied with string, and each piece at the base of a different tree on the large campus lawn. Robert was moving again, remembering that lawn: Lois lying there on the grass . . . "studying" . . . a skirt no decent woman would wear, reading her damned books. No she wasn't . . . she knew what she was doing . . . she knew every minute what she was doing . . . yes she did . . . she knew. That she couldn't see him, didn't know that he was watching her, made no difference, he reasoned. Anybody could have been on the lawn near her, could have been lured into her trap, baited by that awful body, and the result would have been the same—another lost soul.

Robert did not smoke, and in the twenty-two years that he had been alive, liquor had never crossed his lips but . . . he did like drugs . . . they helped him talk with God. Robert was smiling now, reflecting on an extremely subtle joke. The Lord had talked to Robert, yes He had. He had given him his "mission": "Rid the world of these creatures of Satan," He had told Robert. Yes. It had been while in high school that the Lord had put a book on parapsychology in his hand. "Telepathy is not only possible, it is a



fact of life. People can project thoughts, and these thoughts can be received. Often, the people receiving them are not aware of what is happening; they just 'have a feeling' about something or other." It had been then that Robert had his flash of insight. "Every soul has a will that is free to choose between Good and Evil."

Why couldn't people put these pieces together as he had? It is obvious to anyone who thinks about it; this is an inroad of Satan—those bodies, projecting a promise of pleasure—the many who were taken in this way. Robert was walking quickly, relaxed, hands open and swinging freely. There had been seven others since Lois, and the newspapers no longer called him "butcher." No, his work was much neater now—especially that last one, that German girl—that was excellent work, excellent.

Robert was a block from his destination; he was going to church. He did not quite make it.

This was not an ordinary table in the middle of this, a not ordinary room. Opposite sets of walls viewed each other from a distance of forty feet, and a white-tiled floor was covered from the world by a soundproofed ceiling eight feet above. The circulating air,

pleasantly warm, played little tunes composed and orchestrated by the conditioning system, and conducted by the grates high on the walls. The audience—part of the audience—was a soft green light over a wide double door, glowering in rapt attention, taking in every soft note.

The low scream was raucous; its varied pitch and intensity cacophonous, playing across the ceiling, down the walls, spilling over cabinets and onto the floor. It scuttled, frightened, back to its creator who gasped it into himself only to send forth another, again and again. The table was occupied.

Wrist and ankle clamps fastened the arms at the sides and spread the legs apart. The head was supported by a neck-block. Long, flowing almost-blond hair lay on narrow shoulders, exposing to the overhead light an oval, acne-pitted face. Pinpoints, geometrically in the center of two terrified blue watery eyes, focused on nothing, and tears meandered, drop merging into drop, downward across a long, quivering mouth. Directly overhead was a mirror, adjusted now so he could have a clear view of himself from the neck to the middle of the thighs, sufficiently clear so that he could observe the heartbeat against the

wall of his chest, covered now with sweat. To the right of his head, eye-level height, stood a group of tables arranged in a quarter-circle and covered with trays containing surgical instruments. Directly behind him stood a row of plasma stands, each holding an inverted bottle with a narrow-diameter plastic hose falling away from its mouth and terminating in a needle. The hoses were clamped off and the needles lay in alcohol-soaked cotton. Next to these stood a console, the function of which was to pump, oxygenate and recycle blood. On the left side of the table, about midway toward the foot, was an instrument cabinet, a rack-and-panel affair, which contained basically two instruments: an electroencephalograph (EEG), an instrument that detected and recorded brain waves, and an electrocardiograph (EKG), which, in this case, recorded blood pressure and heartbeat, and presented both on an oscilloscopic readout. These instruments were on and in the stand-by mode.

The opening of a door caused a turn of the head to the left. Measured footsteps advanced into the light, bearing their owner beside the table. The horizontal figure trembled violently, pulling up on the wrist clamps until the hands

and feet were white from the tourniquet effect he created in trying to pull them loose. A dry tongue tried to lick the inside of lips he had almost bitten through, and from deep inside, high sighs were surfacing, searching for an exit.

"You will hurt yourself doing that sort of thing, Robert. It is Robert, isn't it?" The voice was soft, pleasant and well-modulated. The articulation of his words bespoke of many seminars, delivered with quiet confidence, without hurry. As he spoke, a long, well-defined hand forceped a gauze sponge from a container and applied it to Robert's mouth, wiping the bloody froth from the lips with short, professional strokes. Dropping the sponge into a disposal beneath the table, he stepped back. He was a tall man, almost fifty-five, and slender. His bearing was that of one accustomed to quiet power, unchallenged. Salt-and-pepper hair, cut in the Caesar style, partially framed a weathered face, tan and remarkable for its definition. A long scar lowered slightly one side of his upper lip; not a disfigurement, but something that gave him a permanent laconic smile. The eyes—green, gold—it was difficult to tell as they were always changing, a visual display

of the brain that worked behind them.

He had left Germany when he was twenty-four to enter Hopkins as a graduate student in neurosurgery, a year after his wife had died giving birth to their daughter. The intervening years had been good to him, bringing both fame and honors for his neurosurgical skills and as a research scientist. He succeeded in surgical cases that others had given up as hopeless, and he was known for his ability to teach what he knew, which was considerable. This room, its facilities and small "workrooms" that punctuated its walls, was his laboratory. Here he did his research and practiced new surgical techniques. The cadavers came from the county hospital—"John Does" who died in the wards—or from donors who gave their remains to science. Some very significant contributions to medical science had come from here.

He spoke now, matter-of-factly, as though Robert were going to assist him. "I had best get scrubbed, Robert. We have much to do in the next few hours . . . much to do." He then turned and walked to the end of the room where there was a small but adequate change room and shower. He entered and closed the door.

Robert followed him with his ears, and when the door closed, though it was softly, started as if reacting to an explosion. Who was this man? What am I doing here? These and many other questions scrambled through his head as he tried to calm himself, tried to focus his eyes, tried to think . . . He, Robert, had been walking to church. He taught Bible School in the social room on Friday evenings. That was right. He had been walking, and he was just a block away when this black sedan had pulled up beside him.

"Pardon me, young man, but I seem to be lost. Could you tell me how to get to Ashby Avenue?" Robert had come over to the curb, and was about to lean in the open side window when the door opened and the man, this man—oh, yes, now, this same guy—said, "Here, if you would show me on this map." The map lay on the seat, near the driver. Robert had just time to sit on the edge of the seat when the needle hit. His last waking moment contained the image of this man's face, without expression, and that strange smile terminating in a scar.

Robert's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a shower. Scrubbing up? Was he a doctor? Robert wondered. Looking about himself with more calmness now,

this idea was reinforced by what he saw. Tension was building in him again; then his eyes found the instrument table and what was on it. "No, no, noooo!" he screamed, and then just kept screaming, drowning out the shower, the click-clucks coming from the instrumentation, even himself.

Robert awoke. He felt calm, comfortable in fact, as if he were lying on a pad of air, floating. He was aware of everything about him, but did not seem to care. Even the startling fact that he did not care did not bother his mental equilibrium. He was looking at a man's back, a man who was turning dials and flipping switches on some instrument faces. The man turned to look at the table. Seeing that Robert was awake, he made a last adjustment to one of the instruments and came over to him.

"Well, I see you're back with us." This was said pleasantly, as though Robert had just come out of the recovery room after surgery. "You should be feeling no pain, as they say. I have given you something to make life a bit more livable."

Robert looked at this man. Now he remembered; he was the man in the sedan, but this knowledge did not excite him now. Who was he? Converting this thought to

words, he asked, "Who are you?" Robert's words were sluggishly spoken; he sounded drunk.

"I am a doctor of medicine," and after a moment's hesitation, "you can call me 'Kurt,' for now." Then, while looking over at the instrument panels, he said, "And you are Robert; Robert Strom, I believe."

Robert nodded his head and wondered how he knew that. They had never met to his knowledge; he hadn't even seen him before today. Was it still *today*?

Kurt moved around to the other side of the table and was adjusting the console. It was about five feet high and as wide, with a large glass window on the face of it. Inside, it was like a fountain, the liquid falling past the front glass window. From somewhere in the system came a muffled clump-clump, like a circulating pump at work. *That's certainly a pretty fountain*, Robert thought; *has an off-red color to it*. Something was trying to get out of his memory where he could look at it . . . What?

The doctor turned to Robert, laughed silently at the question knitting itself across his brows. "It is a mechanical heart. It purifies and recirculates whole blood. We can add things like oxygen, for instance, depending upon the case

at hand." Satisfied that the machine was working properly, he went behind Robert's head to the bottles hanging there. Two of them were metering out the desired amount of fluid into the table's occupant. Kurt made some notes on a pad, threw the pad on a desk nearby and came around in front of the table at Robert's feet.

"You have type O blood, Rh positive. Your heart is in excellent condition, very strong. Lungs and respiratory functions normal." This was delivered in much the same manner he used when describing a ward patient, making the rounds with a group of interns on Monday morning. Clasp ing his hands in front of him, Kurt smiled and said, "So, for what we have to accomplish here, you should pull through nicely."

Robert was trying to put all this together, but his mind would not cooperate. His body felt as if he were high on something good, but his brain felt as if it belonged to someone else and was completely neutral; disinterested in him other than to record information: *How did I get here?* he wondered. *I know how I got here, don't I?* His mind would not yield the information. All this equipment—Robert's eyes took him on another tour of the table and the area surrounding it—all this was for something and

that something had to do with him. The thought that he should be frightened crossed his consciousness but he could not dredge up the emotion; it was like a foreign reaction to him. For one fleeting moment it came to him, what was wrong. He had no emotions. They were gone, he felt like a robot; subjective and objective were one and the same, all was just data, hence he could not react to, only categorize and store information.

Kurt was watching closely and, as if to read his thoughts, said, "We can do some wondrous things with pharmaceuticals these days; put a person into just about any mood we choose, or remove his emotions completely." Without changing position or expression, Kurt continued, "Would you move your leg for me? Either one will do."

Robert thought to move his right, then left, leg. Nothing happened. He considered that there was something wrong—that his legs would not move, but that was all—considered it.

"Tell me if you feel this, please." Something bright flashed in the doctor's hand as he moved to various parts of Robert's lower anatomy.

Robert could not tell if he were being touched or not; he felt abso-

lutely nothing. "No," he said, "I feel nothing." His tone was flat and monotonic, diction slurred.

"We are about ready to begin." Saying this, Kurt moved back to the instruments, made some adjustments, went over to the desk and made some more notes on the pad, then came back to stand beside Robert. Reaching into a container, he brought out some gloves, which he proceeded to put on while Robert watched. "These are autopsy gloves, Robert; a little heavier than regular surgical gloves, but they still allow enough sensitivity in the fingers to get the job done. It is very important," Kurt continued, "that you understand everything that we do here."

It struck Robert that there was something very final in the way this was said, not that it mattered.

"My full name is Kurt Schrader, Robert; Dr. Kurt Carl von Schrader. Does that mean anything to you? My daughter's name was Karen Schrader."

Robert had the name *Karen* in his memory. Yes—Karen Schrader—she was in a garage and that garage was in Berkeley. Robert said, "Yes" and it came out "yesh," followed by a nod of the head.

"That's good," Kurt said. "It keeps everything in context, as it

were." He moved toward the instrument table as he was speaking and picked up a hypodermic. Taking a small bottle in his left hand, he inserted the tip of the needle into the bottle. Without looking at Robert he said, "I am going to give you a local; I do not want the system to compensate for physical pain." Withdrawing the needle, he set the hypo down on the instrument table, then made an adjustment to the mirror. "There," he said, "you should be able to follow things nicely now." He reached over, picked up the syringe in his right hand, point up, and removed the air from within by pushing a couple of small drops out the end, like a water pistol. Satisfied, he turned. "I don't want you to be confused so I shall use lay terms when describing the goings-on." Kurt raised his eyebrows as if to answer himself that it was understood. Reaching with his left hand, he tightened slightly a lever behind Robert's head.

It registered on Robert's consciousness that his head had a clamp on it. He felt a slight prick as the needle went in just below his Adam's apple, and then felt it probing from side to side. He could see what was happening in the mirror; watch the flesh become very white as the injection

took effect. He then heard inside his head, rather than felt, the needle go through the trachea. The needle came out, went in above the hyoid bone, on through the windpipe again.

Presently, Kurt stood erect and backed off, putting the syringe back on the tray. "Just so," he said. "That should take hold in a few minutes and we can proceed. From here on in I will have to listen to instruments and other things, so there will be little need for sounds that may come out of you. You had your 'say' earlier, although I am sure you do not remember that. So, there is little that you might have to say that is not predictable." Kurt went to the instrument cabinet where he sharpened the trace on the EKG oscilloscope readout, then came back to the table.

Waiting for the injection to take hold, he thought back to the night the police had contacted him to identify Karen. Afterward he returned to San Francisco and canceled all appointments and surgery for a week. He then took his boat to sea for three days. There he cried, cursed the world, threatened, sulked . . . ran the whole gamut of emotional reactions; ran himself out, like a wild animal fighting a cage. When it was all

out, when he was through feeling sorry for himself, had accepted the fact that Karen was irretrievably gone, he headed the boat home. He started thinking rationally again. He remembered a conversation he'd had with Karen about her lower-division physiology class; she had taught the anatomy-lab section as a teaching assistant. She had believed one of the best ways to learn was to teach; it also gave her an opportunity to perfect her own skill by doing demonstrations.

The conversation had drifted through various members of the class; how some of them had emotional difficulties with cadavers that would prevent learning; others were "born with a knife in their hand;" a running critique.

"There is one fellow, though, that makes me feel paranoid. He keeps watching me like . . . well, I can best describe his expression by saying I feel as if he sees me on the table, naked and spread out, instead of the cadaver." She had looked puzzled, seeing this in her mind, and had involuntarily shuddered. "When he has the knife in his hand he cuts like he is caressing the section, his hand moves that slowly. Have you ever seen anyone work like that, Dad?" Kurt said that he had not, and had asked who he was; what he was

majoring in. "Biology, I think . . . His name is Robert, Robert Strom."

Karen had been partly dismembered; there had been no evidence of dirt, grass, leaves, that sort of thing, on any of the remains. This suggested that the person responsible had had a place to work. That had been the beginning. From there it had not been difficult to find Robert or where he lived. It was a place on the outskirts of Alameda, a small cottage and separate garage, with vacant lots on both sides, near the Bay. The school records indicated he lived somewhere else.

Using a tire iron to snap the lock on the garage, Kurt had found it. The smell of the place almost made him nauseous, in spite of the operating air-conditioner that was crudely installed through one of the walls. On a plywood table in the center of the garage lay what was left of Karen, what the police had not found. Capillaries in her neck and upper chest had ruptured, indicating she had been alive through part of the dissection. For how long, God only knew. Kurt had gone outside into clean air and been sick.

After picking up Robert, he had phoned the police on his way to San Francisco, using the phone in the car. "Yes, that's right. What?

Just a hunch; something I remembered my daughter telling me. That's right. Thank you. Yes, I can be reached at the hospital in San Francisco, or they will know where I am. Hope you find him . . . good-bye." He had driven straight to his home and into the garage.

Under sodium pentothal, Robert, with a little help, had told him everything. Kurt learned about God, evil, telepathy, women, the devil and sexual fantasies—everything he needed to establish Robert as an animal; an intelligent psychopath.

Kurt noted the injected area was now completely white, and this observation brought his thoughts back to the work at hand. "We can begin," he said, and picked up one of several scalpels on a tray. Balancing it between forefinger and thumb, he took a final look at the EKG and, satisfied with what he saw, made an incision vertically down from the hyoid bone, stopping about the middle of the thyroid cartilage. He then took from the table a small retractor and a cautery. Expanding the opening he had made, he cauterized the capillaries, as he would not be suturing. He stepped back so that Robert might have an unobstructed



view. "We have 'opened.' You are looking at muscle. You have seen muscle before, haven't you, Robert?" This was said instructionally, without malice, matter-of-factly. "We will now separate that muscle and expose the fatty tissue beneath." Kurt made another incision, repositioned the retractor, and backed away. "That is fatty tissue."

Robert's face was still expressionless, only the eyes moving, from mirror, to Kurt's face, back to the mirror.

Kurt moved in again, incised the fat, and through to about the vocal fold. He placed the scalpel in a disinfectant tray, picked up curved scissors and another small retractor and opened the area to view. "Those are your vocal cords. If you made an *ee* sound, then an *ahh* sound, you can see them contract and dilate."

Robert obeyed, but still looked blank.

Kurt went in with the scissors. "There," his wrist rotated one hundred eighty degrees, "and there. Done," he said. He removed the retractors after first aspirating the area, wiped up with sponge, and looked at Robert. "You will have no need to speak again, Robert, so you can think of it as having the load on your system lightened by one function."

Kurt moved behind Robert and inspected the EEG electrodes that were placed in Robert's head. "I don't know that you have noticed, but we have shaved you while you were 'sleeping.' Your skull is 'smooth as a baby's bottom,' as they say." Kurt allowed himself a small chuckle. He continued to examine electrode leads, that they were securely inserted, rightly placed. Moving to the instruments, he made more adjustments, watching the readouts as he worked. Without looking at Robert, he said, "We will keep track of what's happening inside with brain waves. Do you understand what brain waves are? No matter, I will give you an explanation later, when you can appreciate what you are listening to."

Satisfied that the equipment was properly indicating, Kurt came to Robert's side once again. "Two conditions obtain. One, you must remain in this semidrugged condition because we cannot have the body—the brain really—compensating for what you observe. Two, it is imperative that the information—that is, what you observe—be in your memory.

"Am I confusing you? Permit me an analogue: it is like being hypnotized. The brain records everything that transpires, but will

only *remember* if it is told to do so. Then it will bring to consciousness everything in vivid detail." Kurt was covering Robert from the neck to the abdomen, removing the ankle clamps, and talking as he moved about. "Nothing that you observe will be really *new* to you, Robert; the technique will be different, that is all. Rather than explain what I will be doing at a given time, I shall merely point up differences."

Kurt repositioned the mirror, so that Robert could see his own abdomen and thighs. "That should do it," he said, and moved back to the instrument table. His manner became more attentive, as if he were in a surgical amphitheater, about to lecture through a demonstration. Scalpel in hand, he made a long incision on the inside of Robert's upper thigh. "For some reason of your own," Kurt said, "you began by dismembering, rather than killing the victim first. I could tell that from the tape on the mouth, and the broken capillaries in the face."

Separating some muscle, retracting, Kurt was at the femoral artery, which he tied off, then severed. "Instead of sawing through the bone, if you begin here . . ." Kurt made a semicircular incision just below the pelvic wing. At the apex of the

semicircular arch he made another cut, vertically, down toward the knee on the outside of the thigh. Using the cautery, he removed the two newly-created flaps. "There, you see? Just beneath that muscle layer lie tendons, and the hip joint; a ball-and-socket affair. By incising the muscle, so . . ." Kurt, in three sure lateral moves, exposed the tendons covering the joint. "And as the joint itself provides an excellent landmark, we cut around the base of this bulge; do you see that, Robert? Much neater, not so messy." This was said as if admonishing, gently, a small child. "Now, we have this vein to clamp off, sever and a nerve to cut."

Kurt proceeded to accomplish these tasks swiftly, precisely. Depositing the scalpel in the disinfectant tray, he picked a large knife from the table and, talking to Robert directly, said, "This is an autopsy knife; used for heavy muscle where we do not have to consider putting something back, or the cosmetic aftereffects on the patient."

Bending once more to the task at hand, he continued to lecture. "We now separate the ligaments, freeing the ball and socket. Then, we sever the large thigh muscles—and there you have it." He cauterized here and there, and pulled

the leg to the end of the table. "I cannot take the time to separate the lower leg and foot, as much as it would be very instructional. It is best that we use what time we have for more important things—keeping you alive, for instance." Kurt picked up the severed leg and removed it to another table, one with wheels. Returning, he said, "You will forgive me if I do not wrap your leg in paper and tie it neatly with string. Why did you not use tape? Interesting quirk." Kurt moved to the instrument table again. "We had best get on with it while that block is holding." He looked toward the instruments and, satisfied that all was as it should be, proceeded to remove the other leg.

"The reason for this dissection is really not as you might think, if you could think and put thoughts together at this stage; it is not vengeance for what you did to Karen. You will live—technically live—because of Karen, that much is true; but because you must 'disappear,' these parts will be incinerated. That you are allowed to watch is for another reason, which you will know about when the time comes. You will survive, Robert, do you understand that? You . . . will . . . survive." This was said in almost a monotone, as

if to plant the idea hypnotically. "I have to put in another block, for your arms." Loosening the clamp, Kurt turned Robert's head to one side. Taking a syringe from the table, he went in between the lower cervical vertebrae. Robert's arms "jumped," as he felt a twinge of pain, then nothing. Repositioning Robert's head, then the mirror, Kurt came over to the right side of the table. "I will not begin at the wrist, as you did, nor the elbow, which was your next step. We shall remove the whole arm, in the interest of saving time. I shall spare you the lecture, as you will be able to see for yourself what is happening."

Working swiftly, surely, Kurt tied off and severed the brachial artery, tied off and severed the vein, cauterizing both, then severing the nerve high on its trunk. He looked over at the EEG, was satisfied. He then cut tendons, releasing muscles, was at the joint and finished in less than five minutes. "There, Robert, now the other and we are temporarily finished." As Kurt spoke he noticed that Robert's eyes were beginning to look more intelligent, and the alpha rhythms on the EEG were becoming more active. The drugs were wearing off, Kurt realized; best finish up.

The left arm joined the right on

the table with wheels. Kurt positioned the mirror so that Robert could see himself from head to genitals. "Normally, in an amputation situation there would be laps of tissue over those joints, and sutured such that in time all would be closed and tidy."

Robert's eyes were beginning to search the mirror, all corners of it, digesting everything that he saw.

Kurt, looking at the instrumentation, observed much activity on the EEG readout, and that the heartbeat had picked up. Robert was coming around. "You will remember all of this later, Robert, but for now you are going to sleep for a while." A needle on a hose leading back to one of the inverted jugs was put in Robert's neck, and his eyes closed. Someone had pulled the plug.

For the next two hours, Kurt worked swiftly, methodically, to accomplish what he had to do. Robert's blood supply was transferred to the machine, which now acted as his heart, and his breathing was automated. This gave Kurt the time and security he needed for the more delicate work. Presently he stopped, straightened up, took a deep breath and sighed. Going over to the "mechanical heart," he opened a bypass to a smaller duplicate of the big machine. The

two were now working as one. Returning to Robert, he made another transfer, looked to the EKG, EEG to see that the maneuver was successful, then backed off, removing his gloves and throwing them in the disposal. Kurt walked slowly toward a panel on the wall. Reaching up to a dial, he turned it to HIGH, then walked to the table with wheels. Pushing it to the panel door, which he opened wide, he positioned the table close to the edge of the opening, grasped a handle on the tabletop and lifted. A lot of Robert disappeared into the maw of the incinerator. All that remained was to move Robert to his "room." This he did. Robert would do well through the night, Kurt thought as he showered. He would waken him in the morning. Right now, Dr. Kurt Carl von Schrader needed some sleep.

Kurt awoke much refreshed and observed it would be an overcast day. The high clouds were almost every shade of gray, and their pattern was pleasant to look upon. The curtains on his open window were ruffled by a slight breeze . . . comfortable weather. He got out of bed, turned on the FM, stretched, and went into the shower.

Dressed and shaved, he made himself some coffee and raisin

toast, which was his usual breakfast when at home; that is, "usual" except for weekends, when Karen had stayed with him. She'd insisted he eat breakfast, with a capital "B." "What you eat would not keep a bird alive, Dad. You must eat."

Kurt could hear her voice speaking softly in German, which they did when alone together. *My beautiful Karen*, he thought, his jaw muscles tight, and his eyes misty, far away. Kurt shook his head; snapped it actually, throwing these thoughts from his head. Pouring his coffee and putting the dark toast on a plate, he sat down at the table. The boat would be sold, of course. He would get something else, something double-ended for cruising, something without her laughter in it, where he would not see her everywhere he looked on board. Kurt shook his head again. "Dammit!" Looking at his watch, he noted it was time to get on with the program. He finished his coffee and toast, and went downstairs, through the laboratory, and opening the door to Robert's "room," went inside, closing it after him.

The room was relatively small. There was air-conditioning and it was well lighted. Instrumentation was paneled into the walls on three sides. The fourth, except for

the entrance, was lined with cabinets that held surgical supplies. In the center of the room was a small, square platform which held Robert. In front of this was a writing table, or work area, and a stool. Kurt looked at Robert—the eyes were closed, and the face was twitching slightly, occasionally, around the corners of the mouth. Looking over the instruments, Kurt nodded his head slowly, totally engrossed in his thinking. Picking a notebook off the tabletop, taking a pencil from his pocket, he began making notes as he walked from instrument to instrument, periodically checking one of the plastic hoses or electrical leads that terminated in Robert.

All was going beautifully. Opening a cabinet door, Kurt removed a small syringe as his fingers walked carefully across the faces of some little bottles on the shelf above, finally selecting one. The plunger was on a mark that indicated 4 cc's when he removed the needle and replaced the bottle. Closing the door, he turned and spilled residual air from the syringe. Giving Robert a passing glance, he inserted the needle into one of the slender plastic hoses that fed into the "resident" on the platform. Presently, eyelids began to flutter, reminding Kurt of but-

terfly wings. Slowly, they came to full open. Kurt noted these eyes were not bloodshot; slightly glazed, but clear. He made an entry in the book, speaking as he wrote. "We have done very well, Robert, extremely well, everything considered. You should be able to understand me about now." Kurt looked toward the electroencephalograph; Robert was indeed awake. "There are just a few more checks to be made, then we can talk," Kurt said. Then correcting himself, "That is, you can listen." Taking a pen from his pocket he held it up in front of Robert's eyes. The light reflected from the satin-chrome body. "If you would follow this, please." The pen crossed over to the left, then doubled back to the right, slowly, a steady lateral motion. The eyes followed in a series of small jerks, but they did follow the pen. "Excellent." Kurt made a note of this in the book, reached over and took a penlight from the shelf. "Now, if you will just look straight ahead." Switching it on, he pointed it at the pupils of Robert's eyes, first one, then the other. "That's good, very good." Kurt watched the pupils contract and dilate; the dilation was not normal because Robert was still partially medicated, but a dilation nonetheless.

"We have one more test to do, one more." Saying this more to himself than to Robert, Kurt reached over and flipped the switch on an oscillator, turned the dial to 400Hz, flipped another switch and a low tone filled the room. "There." Kurt adjusted the gain to his satisfaction and switched off the tone, but not the oscillator. "Robert," Kurt said, "when you hear that tone again, I want you to blink your eye—either one—for me; would you do that? And each time you hear it, do you understand?" Kurt looked at the EEG and observed new activity. *Good*, he thought.

Looking intently at Robert, he switched on the tone for about two seconds, then switched it off. Presently Robert's eyes fluttered, then jerkily, one after the other, they blinked, then remained open. Kurt repeated the test, with the same results. He wrote extensively in the notebook, looking from time to time at instrument panels. Kurt put down the pencil, closed the book, and turned to Robert. "We will talk, Robert, and as the medication wears off, you will be able to appreciate the subtleties better." Resting easily on his elbows, hands crossed in front of him, he continued: "You are taking the place of a 'John Doe' from county hospital, who has been dis-

posed of . . . now. The police are busy searching for Robert Strom, 'who has taken off for somewhere,' they say. You are going to be my permanent 'guest,' as it were; we are going to work together, you and I." Kurt, through the instrument readouts, watched this information register on Robert's consciousness. "I want you to recall what has occurred here up until now. Would you do that for me, Robert?" Kurt got up from the stool and moved from sight.

Robert was thinking, remembering. All he could hear was the mechanical heart and the click-cluck of the instruments, and a faint buzzing in his ears. *Oh, yes . . . this lunatic has taken my arms off, my legs . . . no, oh, no. My voice, he took my voice too. This can't be happening. I'm on a trip, that's it; a bad trip, sure, that's it.*

Robert was feeling itchy in his forearm, and his left ankle hurt. That was it, those damn drugs. He wanted to scratch his leg, but couldn't reach it. What are those cabinets doing over there? His scalp was itching, tingling, like bugs were walking through it. What is that smell? Antiseptic. Thoughts would not completely jell, too many paradoxes. If it was a trip—it has got to be—he was still on it. Robert closed his eyes.

Those colors, that was it . . . LSD, he was on a bad one. Colors swirled behind his eyelids, expanding, contracting, running away to leave cold, buzzing, blackness. Robert opened his eyes to see Kurt sitting in front of him.

"That is enough for now, Robert, I have given you more 'medication,' just enough to calm you down for a while." Kurt was writing again, not looking at Robert. "It is important for you to understand there is something personal in all this; my choosing you for this work. If this were, say, Russia, you would have the status of 'criminal volunteer.' Some things they have found in this way have resulted in definite benefits to medical science, particularly with regard to brain damage that would otherwise be fatal to the victim. Your part in our work will be to confirm or refute some 'intelligent guesses' that have been made lately by myself and others doing brain research." Kurt stopped writing and looked at Robert. "In my works as a surgeon, I see death in many forms. Sometimes it is not pleasant. We become insulated to some extent by remaining as objective as possible most of the time. I rationalized Karen's death as an unfortunate accident, and I think of you as a fortuitous 'gift,' something that re-

quires no more thought than a laboratory cadaver." Kurt smiled to himself, a reflective smile. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away . . . Blessed be the name of the Lord. That's what you would say, wouldn't you, Robert?"

Looking at the instrument panels, Kurt was writing again. "I have to be in surgery in a few hours, so before I leave I am going to allow you to see yourself. You may observe how things stand and confirm a few thoughts of your own. I'm sure you have some wonderment; and as you contemplate what you see, realize that you can be kept alive indefinitely. No matter what you see or think or feel, you cannot go into shock; cannot destroy yourself. You will be kept alive; Robert . . . for a very long time." Kurt said these last words in a flat, final tone of voice, as he closed the notebook and pushed it to one side of the table.

Rising, he made the rounds of the instrumentation, adjusted flow-rates on several of the inverted bottles and, satisfied that all was working properly, moved in front of Robert. "You will appreciate what you are looking at in about . . ." looking at his watch, ". . . two minutes, when that shot

should wear completely off." Moving slowly to a corner of the room, Kurt wheeled a mirror in front of Robert, placing it so that he could see himself from just above his head, to . . .

Robert screamed; no sound was heard, not even in his head, but he screamed. Facing him was a head—*My merciful, good God—just a head*. He looked at two wide, glazed eyes in a gray face; a face that had a tongue hanging out of it like some dumb dog. Fine wires ran into small holes in a bare scalp, giving him a medusa-like appearance. On each side of his head, he could see the forward end of a clamp, suspending him to a lattice-like structure on a pedestal in the middle of the floor. His neck was a focal point for a maze of plastic tubes that, connected to him, ran down and off to somewhere. All he was, was a *head*—a hideous, gray, living head. Robert silently screamed again.

Kurt, watching the brain waves play out on the tape, could swear he was watching an epileptic seizure, a fit—but of course he knew better. "Have a nice day, Robert. Have a nice day."

Kurt closed the door quietly behind him as he left for the hospital.



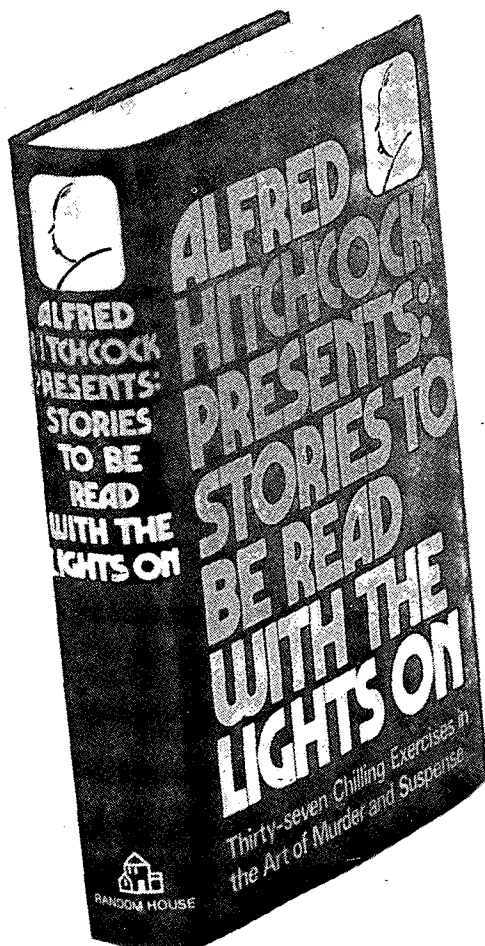
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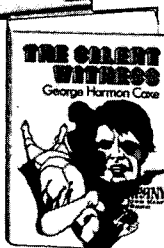
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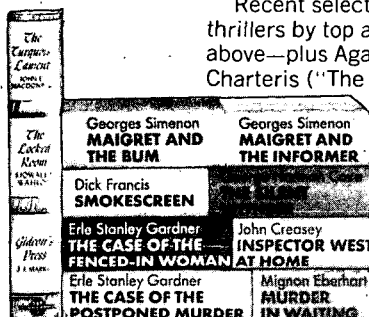
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