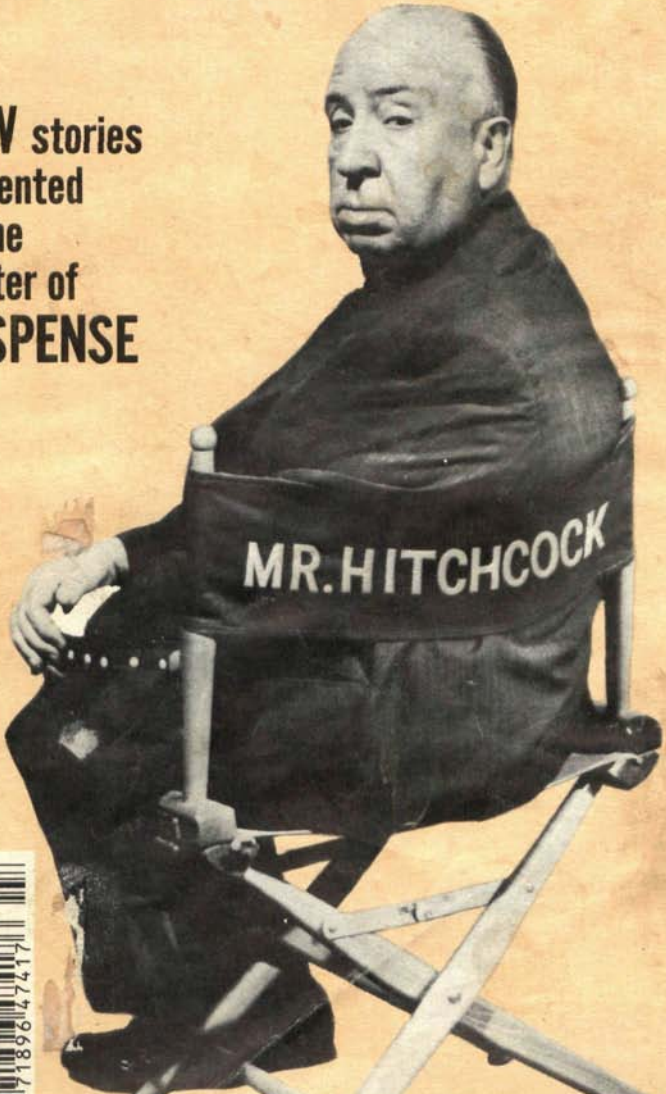
ALFRED

HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY 1977
75¢ UK55p
47417 K

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



71866474177

VOLUME 22, NO. 7 JULY 1977

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE JULY 14

NOVELETTE

SHORT STORIES

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 22, No. 7, July 1977. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 75 cents a copy. Annual subscription $9.00 in the United States and in U.S. possessions. In Canada and all other countries $10.10. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2640, Greenwich, Ct. 06830. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices.

Boredom was the real enemy . . .

LAUGHING CHAZ

by William Bankier

Boredom. The creative department of an advertising agency can be brain deep in it at times. The place may hum with tension when a life-or-death presentation is due to happen. But too often there is no work in hand and then those acute minds turn in on themselves.

Peter Allison sat with his feet on the window ledge looking down over the center of Montreal. He counted seven construction cranes on as many sites hauling up the readymix concrete and the pre-stressed

facing slabs. The city was trying to become a northern version of New York.

He turned to watch his friend Charlie Grover, busy at his drawing board with scissors and glue pot and a copy of an old magazine. "What's happening?" he asked. He was starting to think of Alfonso's even though it was barely half past three.

Now that Allison no longer had Eloise to go home to, his evenings seemed to begin and end with Alfonso's, the pungent smell of air-conditioned smoke, the giant martinis, the hazy euphoria that usually turned into a heavy-headed nausea, and, through it all, the husky sound of Bella's teasing voice crooning some romantic lyric.

"What's happening?" Charlie said. "I'll tell you what's happening, Peter baby. You won't give me a headline so I'm making my own."

"Here's a headline. Allison and Grover do no work for the second week in a row."

"Don't knock it, Pete. They're still paying us."

"Last time I looked."

"We're laughing, aren't we, Pete?" Cut and paste. Cut and paste.

"We're laughing, Chaz."

Grover showed Allison his little project half an hour later. It was one of those traditional ransom notes from films and fiction, all mismatched letters in uneven rows.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE YOUR WIFE AND CHILD
ALIVE, GET 20,000 DOLLARS READY
AND AWAIT OUR CALL.

"What's this in aid of?" Allison asked.

"Charlie Grover," he said. "Come on down to Alfonso's and I'll tell you how it works."

They took the express elevator nineteen floors to the lower concourse and fell into Alfonso's. Three account executives sat in evil conclave around a corner table, all shiny shoes and flat eyes. The writer and the artist waved and headed for a distant table. "Why should they think we like them?" Charlie said.

It was too early for Bella's music. The tiny stand was dim and deserted, her phallic microphone lying on a high stool beside the cocktail drum she played when she wasn't singing. Allison ordered and paid for a couple of Atlantic Oceans, Alfonso's special martini that comes in a giant bowl. They sipped and relaxed. Charlie kicked off his patent-

leather loafers and flexed his socks.

"It's what it looks like," he said. "A ransom note. I'm going to mail it to myself and then I'm going to show it to Monty Parkhurst and get the money from him."

"Why would Monty give you 20,000 dollars to give to kidnappers?"

"Because he loves me. And for him, it's peanuts."

True on both counts. The Parkhurst clothing empire was one of the agency's larger clients and Monty had so much money he had been able to put up half the price of Montreal's new major-league baseball franchise three years ago. Twenty thousand, if not exactly peanuts, would be no more than cashews.

And he certainly loved Charlie Grover. In fact, Grover's value to the agency was mostly in his relationships with clients. Disorganized, late for meetings, interrupting business with countless mysterious phone calls, pockets full of messages he fished out and scanned with vacant blue eyes, the hectic, battered Chaz was more welcome than anyone else. When he walked into an office, the breath of life came with him.

"How about coming up to the ballpark for the Pittsburgh opener?" Monty would say to Chaz, approaching him with a handkerchief to dab from his lip a white crust of digestive medicine Charlie had chuga-lugged from the bottle in his desk before heading into the conference room. It was the gesture of a mother tending her child in his highchair.

"Hey," Charlie would reply, his voice resonant with appreciation, "very nice. And for afters, there's a new topless bar on upper St. Lawrence. You'll be my guest."

Parkhurst would politely invite the rest of the account group to his private box and many would accept. But like as not, he and Charlie would end up together, massively drunk at the shoddy bar, surrounded by girls as Charlie always seemed to be, checking in and out of hourly rooms upstairs, and then, at four in the morning, punching and being punched by some merchant seaman flushed from the back of a taxi.

In such an evening there would be the basis of luncheon talk for weeks to come and the bond between Charlie Grover and Monty Parkhurst would be drawn even tighter.

"Were we laughing, Monty?"

"We were laughing, Chaz."

While Charlie went out to the concourse to mail the note in an en-

velope he had typed awkwardly on Allison's machine, the writer ordered two more drinks and paid with cash left by his friend. Typically, Charlie was gone a long time. Wherever he went, he became involved. He would be chatting now with the clerk in the tobacco shop, making a sudden telephone call, darting back up in the elevator to the office to repay a five-dollar loan he owed the receptionist.

When he did return, it was with Bella Stone on his arm. As usual, she made Allison's heart turn over. The shaggy blonde head, that ivory skin, those pale sensuous lips and great shadowy eyes . . .

Her arm around his shoulder, his around her waist, they stood together in a casual intimacy Peter Allison had never been able to achieve. With Chaz, it had the relaxed spontaneity of a young boy frolicking on the grass. "My new discovery," he said. "She's going to audition and, if she does well, I've promised her a job."

"And if that works out," Bella said, "he may even let me sing."

They laughed and kissed, more than a passing contact. Past them, Allison saw Dom Alfonso in his office doorway, watching, saw an expression on his face of muted irritation.

The place became crowded as the offices closed upstairs and less adventurous workers came in and began to catch up with the early birds. Happy hour saw a free drink served with each one paid for and Allison felt his peak of elation approaching. It was the old illusion: Charlie was beautiful and so was he and something fine could be done with their lives if they could simply make the proper plans.

The trio began to play, a sensuous Latin beat, and a pencil spot illuminated Bella's golden head. Behind the surge of conversation, her sweet voice whispered of love and a second chance.

The big thing about these times was the ease of conversation with Charlie. And the pure fun of it. They found amusement in everything and they felt a very deep sense of intimacy about the things they told each other. Charlie's brother had died years earlier, the victim of a brain hemorrhage, and now Chaz was recalling his discussion with the undertaker as to the ways of covering the dead man's surgically shaven head. A wig was out, so this left a discreet bandage. The question was how much forehead should it cover.

"So without thinking," Chaz said, "I took out my felt pen and on the back of a cigarette pack I started doing this." He used his pen on a bar mat to sketch a smooth egg shape and began roughing a line of band-

age across it. "Like the undertaker was the client and I was laying out an ad for him."

Peter got the picture of Chaz working over his dead brother and soon they were laughing until they cried.

They were interrupted by Dom Alfonso who brought them a couple of drinks, one in each hand, and set them on the table.

"Hustling for tips now, Dom?" Charlie said.

Alfonso lowered himself into the padded armchair facing their upholstered bench. It received his blocky torso like a sheath. Beautifully manicured, his fat hands lay side by side on the table before them; he might have been about to play a piano.

"On the house," he said, and they thanked him.

"Something else I wanted to tell you, Chaz." His eyes met Allison's, acknowledging that his annoyance had been witnessed earlier. "Don't make passes at Bella. You're a good customer, but don't come in here and do that."

"You said it yourself," Charlie replied. "I'm a good customer. If you're going to turn salty, I can take myself and a whole lot of other people out of here."

"What I said still goes."

Charlie's good mood was gone. "I could take Bella with me too, for that matter. Maybe that's the answer."

Alfonso stood up. "You've got a nice wife and kid in Beaconsfield. Why not keep it that way?"

And that was the end of the party for that night.

Allison could not believe it when Charlie actually laid his homemade ransom note on Monty Parkhurst. It was a small creative meeting in the client's office. Usually the account executive liked to be around but Parkhurst was one of those enlightened operators who realized he got the best result when he dealt directly with the men who made the ads. Grover was obviously not himself this morning. His eyes kept wandering to the window and his pencil fluttered between his fingers like a hummingbird's wings.

"What are you smoking these days, Chaz?" Parkhurst said eventually. "You're all strung out."

Charlie did a few seconds of the man making up his mind. Then he said, "I think I better show you. I've been going crazy since this came

yesterday." He took out the note, dogeared and wrinkled now, and handed it to Monty.

If Allison was going to speak up, now was the time. All he had to do was say, "Come on, Chaz, it isn't April Fool's Day," and the game would have been over. But he said nothing. Fascinated by Charlie Grover's monumental nerve, he allowed himself to become accessory before the fact.

The con was a marvel of simplicity. Parkhurst believed the note, backed as it was by Charlie's chalky face. His wife and son were gone as of yesterday. The note had been delivered. No, the police had not been told. And must not be. There had been a vicious telephone call last night which included a few terrified words from Samantha, pleading a quick rescue. Charlie wanted only to pay and get them back. But twenty thousand was out of reach.

Then Monty Parkhurst came through. He asked for a few hours to get the cash. Chaz fumbled and stuttered his thanks but managed to specify used bills in small denominations.

They left the Parkhurst building, walked a few blocks, and went into a tavern. "You're going to give back the money," Allison said. "This is an exercise, isn't it?"

"Like hell. I'm going to keep it." Charlie's Irish eyes were smiling.

"But it won't work. What if Parkhurst should happen to call your home now and Samantha answers?"

"She won't. She's away for a day trip."

"But you'll have to tell her what you've done. Once she's returned, the police will have to interview her. She'll have to make up a kidnapping."

"Don't worry," Charlie said. "I'll brief her."

Secretly, Monty Parkhurst raised the $20,000 by midafternoon, called Charlie over, and handed it to him in a sweater box, the kind his famous Glendora garments came in. Charlie gave him in exchange a solid handshake and a long look from tortured eyes; he was beginning to believe it himself.

Samantha was due back from her visit that afternoon. Charlie took an early train home, threw the box of money casually on the settee, played on the back lawn with three-year-old Donnie, and then made drinks for himself and Samantha after she put supper in the oven.

She sat beside him on the settee, looking at the Glendora box. "Did

Parkhurst give you something from the new line?"

"Take a look."

She did, and fell silent.

"Twenty-thousand dollars in unmarked bills," he enunciated clearly. Then it took a lot of explaining before he could get her to understand. When she did, and realized further that she would have to tell a story to the police, she drew the line.

"That's crazy, Charlie. I wasn't kidnapped and there's no way I can say I was."

"Sure you can. You were put to sleep. You woke up blindfolded. You heard noises, voices, airplanes going over . . . "

"And Donnie?"

"He was taken too. They looked after him well." Charlie went to the phone. "I'll go over it with you while we wait for the cops."

Samantha sat bolt upright. Red hair, smart pants suit, the face of an army recruiting poster, a very together person. She had to be to function as Charlie Grover's wife. "You aren't calling the police!"

"I have to. And Monty Parkhurst. He'll be wondering how his money worked."

Monty came over, arriving almost simultaneously with the investigating officers. They were not happy about this payment of funds to kidnappers without a word to the law. They asked a lot of questions, heard Mrs. Grover's desperate story, heard it again, and then went away looking thoughtful. There did not seem to be much in it for them, and they certainly had other things to do.

Parkhurst sensed that Charlie wanted to be alone with his wife. He refused a second drink and left soon after the police, feeling rather triumphant at having been able to save the situation for somebody he admired as much as old Chaz.

In bed that night, her cool back turned to her husband's, Samantha said into the dark, "You've really gone too far this time."

Charlie murmured, "Awfully sleepy, love. If you don't mind."

"I think you've gone crazy." Samantha turned onto her back, her eyes open. "But as long as we have the money, what are we going to do with it?"

"Not we. Me." Charlie's mouth was distorted against the pillow, his words slurred. "I've got plans for that money."

Samantha lay awake for quite some time after that. . .

Charlie told Bella Stone his plans for the money a few nights later when he performed one of his all-night stands. He had telephoned home at five-thirty to say the campaign was late and there was no way he would get the last train. Samantha had heard this before and didn't even put down the phone. She just pressed the cradle down with the fingers holding her freshly lit cigarette, let it up again, and dialed a friend.

Now Charlie had closed Alfonso's and was signing Bella and himself into a shabby rooming house on lower Drummond Street. She clung to his arm and said, "We'll have to stop meeting like this." They laughed like children as Charlie paid the night manager for the room and gave him five for himself. He was an old grizzled Gaspé farmer, driven from his rocky land where winter lasted eight months to work for the easy city money.

In the room Bella said, "I'm not kidding about us meeting, Chaz. Dom sounded very mean about you the other night."

"That's too bad, because Dom is going to have to get along without you for a month or so." As usual, Charlie's shoes were the first things off. His left big toe showed white through a hole. "Dig these designy socks," he said.

"Get along without me?"

"Because you and I are going to take an extended vacation in England. I bought the tickets today, an Air-Canada excursion. Haven't we talked about seeing London?"

Bella sounded a little tense. "Where would you get money like that?"

"You'd be amazed." And feeling positively immortal, Charlie told Bella all about his spur-of-the-moment crazy scheme and how it had paid off. "But you have to promise not to tell anybody about it."

"I promise."

Charlie threw back the blankets like a magician unveiling his greatest illusion and said, "You have to promise not to tell anybody about this either."

Later, Bella's mood became troubled again. "Dom isn't going to like the idea of me going away with you. He could hurt me too." But her companion was sodden and asleep. "Charlie?"

There were a couple of arguments with Samantha about the twenty

thousand dollars. At one point she threatened to call the police and blow the whistle. "You do that and I'll probably end up in jail," Charlie said. "Even if they let me off that, I could never work for Parkhurst again. So goodbye agency, and there goes your meal ticket."

To shut her up, he gave her a hundred dollars. She received it white-lipped, the red hair dragged back from her face as if she were in a wind tunnel.

A few days later, when Charlie was alone in his office, the phone call came from Samantha. She sounded panicky. "Charlie, a man just phoned. They've got Donnie. They've kidnapped him."

"What?"

"They took him out of nursery school with some sort of note. Now they want $20,000. He says they won't wait. He knows you've got it."

"How do they know that?"

"I don't know! But you're to bring them the money while I go to a phone booth near the shopping center and wait for Donnie." She gave Charlie the specific instructions while he fought back a scream of frustration. He knew he was being had. But who by? It could be Samantha herself. She could easily stage this caper with the complicity of a friend. But who?

Charlie had his instructions. "When does all this happen?"

"At eight o'clock this evening. Have you got the money there?"

It was locked in his private filing cabinet. "You don't think I'd leave it home with you."

The time was four-thirty. Charlie walked down the hall to Peter Allison's office to tell him this latest twist.

"Mr. Allison hasn't been in all afternoon," the copy typist said.

That was interesting. Old Pete! Was he getting together with Samantha to stage this creaky extortion plot on him? He wouldn't put it past them. In the Monopoly games Pete was always a sucker for Sam, selling her Connecticut Avenue despite Charlie's warning that it would give her a set with hotels to follow.

Back in his office, Charlie rummaged around and found an empty Glendora sweater box left over from a presentation. Then he locked his door and set to work cutting up paper.

At eight o'clock, following instructions, he took a taxi to the remote intersection in Montreal north. The streetlight near the phone booth was not working and, as Charlie approached, glass crunched underfoot.

That was a nice touch. If it was Pete, he was going all the way.

The man who stepped from the booth was in dark shadow. His features appeared to be squashed by pantyhose drawn over his head. Charlie said, "Wearing those things can be habit-forming." If it had been Peter, that should have gotten a laugh. Maybe it wasn't Peter. Maybe Sam had another friend. Funny, that had never occurred to him before. Now *he* felt like laughing.

The man said, "Show me the money."

Charlie opened the garment box. Dimly, the packs of bills could be seen rank on rank. Charlie closed the box and drew it back. "I want to hear my son's voice on the phone. With my wife."

The man said, "O.K., that's in the deal."

Charlie said, "This money goes back in the cab." He trotted back to the waiting taxi and threw the box onto the back seat. When he got back to the booth, the disguised man held out the telephone.

"Hi, Dad!" Donnie seemed to be enjoying himself.

"Hello, Donnie. Are you all right?"

"Hi, Dad!"

Then Samantha came on. "Oh, thank God. He's all right, Charlie, they didn't hurt him. Did you pay the money?"

"Don't worry. I took care of it." He said he was coming home soon and hung up the phone. "O.K., I'll give you the money." He signalled and the taxi pulled ahead. He opened the back door, took the alternative box, the one stuffed with scrap paper, and set it on the pavement. He got in and said, "Back downtown," slamming the door hard. As the cab pulled away, the man was leaning down to pick up the box.

Charlie did not go home directly. He stopped in at the Mount Royal and found the Expo's game on the big color television. The game went ten innings and he must have had seven drinks. He fell asleep on the last train home.

At the house, he had trouble finding his key. Once inside, he had trouble finding his wife and son. At last he found them, on the floor in the basement, with one bullet hole each in their heads.

There was so much to tell the police now that he ended up not telling them anything. They took him downtown and talked to him for a long time that night and again the next day. But Charlie blanked it all out of his mind and they finally gave up. Murder by person or per-

sons unknown.

A week of seclusion over the time of the funeral and then Charlie was back at work. He confronted Dom Alfonso just once, not in the club but on windswept Dorchester Boulevard as the club owner got out of a car. He held the brim of his hat and squinted at Charlie who, as usual, was all loose ends, topcoat and jacket both unbuttoned, tie flapping across his shoulder.

"I warned you to lay off," Alfonso said.

"I could have mentioned you to the cops," Charlie told him. "I still may."

"That would be your worst idea."

The car door was still open. Somebody else was waiting to get out. It was Bella. She climbed out and stood close to Alfonso, shivering, looking very naked for a woman wrapped in furs.

Alfonso said, "I was trying to be fair to you, Charlie. You were going to go travelling with Bella on your twenty thousand. I figured if I lifted your money, you'd have to call off the trip and everything would stay cool. But you got tricky with the box of paper, made me look stupid. You left me no choice."

"For the sake of argument," Charlie said, "you could have called me in and warned me off. You had that choice."

"Since when did you ever listen to a warning?"

It was true. The game was only fun if it was loose and dangerous. Boredom was the real disaster, Charlie thought, as he surveyed the wreckage of his life.

Peter Allison was with Charlie Grover on that final evening. They were sipping Atlantic Oceans and listening to Bella sing when they saw Alfonso leave the club with a crisp little woman from a few decades ago. It had to be his wife. What happened later must have been spontaneous because Charlie could not have known Bella would suddenly be off the leash.

She finished her final set and then came to have a closing drink. Allison felt cold to her now because he knew it was her telling Dom about Charlie's plans for her that had led to the kidnapping and the killing. She could have gone or not gone on the trip; she didn't have to say she'd been invited.

Allison was not surprised to see Charlie as affectionate as ever. If

they'd untie his hands, Charlie would put an arm around the hangman. "You are witnessing one of the all-time great reconciliations," he said, his forehead touching her cheek. "Bella and I have done those things which we ought not to have done. But we forgive each other."

The tears in Bella's eyes were real.

Allison read about the accident in the paper next morning. The automobile belonging to the club singer and driven by her adman friend struck the concrete pylon beside Highway 401 at a speed of around 70 miles an hour. There were no skid marks; the brake had not been touched. Bella Stone died instantly. Miraculously, Charlie Grover lived into the afternoon.

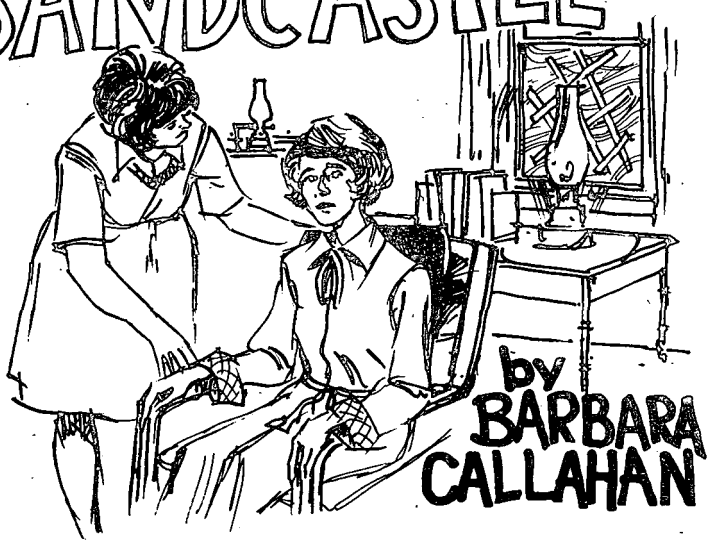
Allison stood by his bed looking down at the bandaged figure that could have been anybody. But he spoke just once, eyes half opening, and it could only have been Charlie.

"Are we laughing, Pete?"

Allison never knew whether the words got through or not, but he said what was expected of him. "We're laughing, Chaz."

Her need to speak was more terrifying than the storm . . .

TWO IN A SANDCASTLE



by BARBARA CALLAHAN

Aunt Hope and I shall always live by the sea. The sea has a heartbeat that we can hear at night in our cottage when the surfers are gone and the squealing children are in bed. This afternoon I sat by Aunt Hope's wheelchair, holding her hand and drying the tears that slipped down her cheeks. Aunt Hope cried more than usual today because our friend the sea is being ravished by a hurricane. The announcer speaking from the small transistor radio on the window sill has told us over

and over to evacuate, but I told him "never." Leave the sea that has never asked us any questions? Leave the sea that has shared with us its cosmic heartbeat? Never.

The Civil Defense workers who formed a door-to-door committee urging residents of the three blocks nearest the sea to leave were angry with me. "That old lady will have a heart attack from fright," they told me, wagging their fingers at Aunt Hope, who clawed at her wispy hair, embarrassed to have strangers staring at her disarray. I didn't have time to brush her hair this morning because I was busy taping the windows, taking down the clothes in the yard, and storing the trash cans under the house.

"She wants to go with us," they told me. "Her lips are moving. She's trying to tell us to take her away from here."

"That's not what she's trying to tell you," I said, closing the door hard, pushing them off the threshold they had violated with their unsolicited presence.

"Don't think we'll come back later and risk our lives for you, fat girl," one of them shouted.

I quickly turned to Aunt Hope, whose face had clouded with pain. She always suffers whenever anyone makes unkind remarks about my appearance. But I'm nineteen years old now and I can withstand unkindness from people I care nothing about. As long as I have Aunt Hope with me, I can survive anything. She helped me survive Father, who called me Piggy from the time I began to toddle.

"Hush now, Edward, don't call her that," she told him—her brother—so many times.

"But she is very pink and very greedy and very fat," he answered. "She is a pig."

Aunt Hope's face would redden and she would ask me to leave the room and fetch something for her—a handkerchief or her glasses, some hastily trumped-up need to shoo me away from hearing distance of the lecture she was to deliver to Father. But I always stood outside, listening. "You're a good man, Edward, most of the time, but when you drink the resentment you feel for the child surfaces. You blame her for her mother's death."

"And so I should," Father would say. "The greedy little child stole the life of the only person I ever loved."

"That's not true, Edward. Lillian's heart was weak and couldn't stand

the strain of labor."

"Oh, then you're saying that *I* killed her. It was *she* who wanted to take the risk of childbearing."

"Oh, Edward, *you* didn't kill Lillian. Perhaps deep down in your subconscious you think you did and you project the responsibility you feel for her death onto the child."

Father would pound his fist on the table and shout, "That's enough of your idiotic Freudian nonsense, Hope! I'll hear no more of it!" And he would leave the playroom, never noticing me huddled against the wall, and walk crookedly through the living room to the cabinet that held the bottles. I would go back into the room after a few minutes and tell Aunt Hope I couldn't find the object she had sent me for. She'd smile and say she didn't need it after all and put me on her lap to sing a song about a little girl and her aunt who lived in a sandcastle with many turrets upon which they stood to invite their friends the starfish to tea.

When I was eight years old, Aunt Hope planned a beautiful birthday party for me. She baked a sandcastle cake and covered it with mocha icing. It had little towers with flags in them. She made paper hats in the shape of starfish for the neighborhood children she had invited. Although the children never played with me, they promised to come because I told them about the starfish hats and the sandcastle cake. I was so happy as Aunt Hope helped me into the green velvet dress she had made. As she tied a matching green bow in my hair, she kissed me and told me how pretty I looked.

"Pretty!" snorted my father, coming into the room. "You call that child pretty? Well, Aunt Hope springs eternal in her support for all the ugly piglings." And he laughed the way he always did whenever he joked about Aunt Hope's name and tossed a package at me that landed on the floor. I was so afraid it had broken that I ripped off the birthday paper like a starving person unwrapping a package of meat.

"See how greedy she is," Father said to Aunt Hope as he pulled the silver container from his pocket and put it to his lips.

After I dug through the tissue paper, I pulled out my gift. It was a large pink piggy bank with beady eyes and a painted-on smile. On its head was glued a green velvet bow like the one Aunt Hope had made for me.

"I picked up a scrap of the material you've been laboring on for days, Hope, old girl, and I had the clerk in the store put it on the pig. Any resemblance to anyone we know, living or dead, is purely coincidental."

I thanked Father for the gift and Aunt Hope began to cry. I ran to her and squeezed her hard because she liked to be hugged and I wanted to make her stop crying. Her crying always upset Father very much. He grabbed the bank from me and ran downstairs. A minute later I heard the front door slam. Aunt Hope blew her nose and put her arm around me. Together we went down to the dining room where we saw the huge pig squashed into the sandcastle cake on the table. The cake's towers were crumbled and its little flags were sticking into the pig's body, but he was still smiling that painted-on smile.

When the children came, Aunt Hope served them coffee cake in the living room. They were outraged because they had been promised sandcastle cake and soon tore off their starfish hats and went home.

We moved here two years ago after Father died. Aunt Hope helped me paint the house. I did the high parts and climbed out on the roof to paint the two turrets. I put a flag in each of them. We painted the house a blended color that looked like mocha icing.

"We're living in a sandcastle, Aunt Hope, and the sea is kind to sandcastles set far enough back so they don't intrude on the exercises she does on the beach. The sea will never knock down our sandcastle!"

"Will knock the sandcastle down today," I heard a voice say.

Startled, I turned to Aunt Hope. Since her stroke last year she hasn't spoken very often. She tries hard but only occasionally do sentences escape from her lips, sentences without subjects to their verbs. I shut off the radio and the references to the hurricane that were upsetting her.

"Don't worry, Aunt Hope. The sea is simply shaking out the starfish in order to deliver them to us for the tea party we've always wanted to have."

To soothe her, I brushed her fine white hair. And I sang to her, "The starfish are coming, da-dum, da-dum, the starfish are coming, da-dum, da-dum . . ."

I painted her fingernails a lovely shade of pink and put cold cream on her face before applying a light liquid makeup. I keep Aunt Hope

so nice. She looks like a fragile china doll sitting in her wheelchair. Her face is still young, but her once lovely auburn hair blanched overnight from the shock of Father's death. She would be beautiful if her eyes stopped monitoring every angle of the room, and I wish her lips would stop moving in that silent litany that I have lipread so often, "Killed her father, a terrible sin."

I used to take Aunt Hope for rides on the promenade next to the sea. We'd settle down next to the railing to look at the waves performing acrobatic tricks until one day Aunt Hope's eyes strayed to a couple close to us and her lips formed that litany, "Killed her father, a terrible sin." The man said, "I beg your pardon, Ma'am, but I didn't hear you."

I reached into my pocket and pulled out a handkerchief which I dabbed at Aunt Hope's mouth as if I were wiping sea-spray from her face, so that only I could hear the muffled phrase. Smiling at the man, I shrugged my shoulders to indicate the futility of his trying to understand. Now we no longer visit the promenade.

Today Aunt Hope refused to drink the tea I brought her. The hurricane winds whipping at our sandcastle are upsetting her terribly. I considered moving her over to the window where she could watch the awesome majesty of the sea in its battle against the winds but the beach is covered with water, so to distract her from the storm I searched the transistor stations for some soft music for her, but only rock music as frenzied as the winds invaded the room.

Quickly, I shut off the radio, afraid that the tempo of the music would remind Aunt Hope of the evening she and I were dancing in the living room where I was showing her the crazy new dance I had learned at my senior prom. Dressed in my gown and exhilarated from the wonderful time I had had with my date, Bob Carey, I gyrated around the floor with Aunt Hope. The music and our laughter prevented us from hearing Father enter the room. Flushed and staggering, he bowed low before saying the words that lacerated the beautiful mood of the evening.

"Well, well! Little Piggy went to the prom tonight! Little Piggy looks like a sausage wrapped too tightly in pink casing."

"Be quiet, Edward," said Aunt Hope.

"Little Piggy likes to dance with her silly old-maid aunt. Well, let me tell you something about your silly aunt, something that will stop

you from thinking she's so wonderful."

"Stop it, Edward," Aunt Hope pleaded. "Let me help you to bed." She took his arm but he pushed her away.

"Sweet, loving Aunt Hope is a conniving woman, Piggy," he continued. "I met Bob Carey, Sr., at the club tonight and he told me that Aunt Hope went to his son and told him how much you wanted to go to the prom. His son didn't want to take you. Who would? But Aunt Hope fixed that. She paid for the prom tickets, the tux, and the flowers, and tossed in twenty bucks besides. Bob Carey, Jr., is a gigolo."

"No," I screamed. "That's not true, Aunt Hope, is it?"

Aunt Hope, pale and trembling, didn't answer.

Father laughed. "Silence is assent, dear daughter." Then he dropped into the wing chair next to the fireplace and within seconds fell asleep. As he lay there snoring, Aunt Hope went to him, clenched her tiny fists, and groaned, "*He's* the pig for abusing you all these years. *He's* the pig—"

I pulled her away from him. "You gave me a lovely senior prom," I said. "It's him I can't forgive. He didn't have to tell me."

I picked up a vase from the coffee table and raised it over his head. Before I could come down with it, Aunt Hope lifted it from my hand and led me upstairs, away from him. She helped me off with my gown and tucked me into bed. I never loved Aunt Hope more in my life and I never hated Father more. After she left the room, I lay awake for a long time.

Father died that night. A fall downstairs killed him.

With our inheritance from Father, we bought this sandcastle. We'll never leave it. Aunt Hope loves it here but tonight her eyes travel back and forth, back and forth, like two pilgrims on an aborted quest. I sat next to her and stroked her hands and hummed to her. Each time the winds struck the sandcastle, she stiffened more and guttural noises rolled around in her throat.

"Don't worry, Aunt Hope. Our sandcastle is strong. It will survive the storm."

When the lights went out, I lit the kerosene lamp and sat it next to her. I wrapped a shawl around her shoulders and, as I did, I heard words from her mouth that chilled my heart.

"Piggy, Piggy, Piggy," she choked.

I lifted the lamp and held it close to her face. Her voice had fled but her lips continued to move and I read what they said: "Piggy, Piggy, Piggy." For a moment her eyes stopped roaming and looked at me.

Aunt Hope hated me! At that moment, she hated me! I sank down to the floor, too hurt to weep.

The stroke, that was it! The stroke had crept into her heart and had shoved love from its depths. The illness was as treacherous as the winds and rains that shattered our kitchen window, forcing me to get up and cover the jagged gap with an old shower curtain.

As I taped the curtain to the window frame, I tried to dismiss Aunt Hope's cruel epithets from my mind but I couldn't because I had to face the truth. She was telling me how greedy I was to want to be with her always. During the two years since Father's death, she has desperately wanted to tell someone about his fall but I have never permitted her to. This troubled evening which she thinks might be her last on earth has increased the intensity of her desire to speak to someone about it. She thought that withholding the truth about the night he died was a terrible sin. She was trying to tell the truth to the Civil Defense workers when they came this afternoon; she craves absolution for her silence during the year when she could have spoken about it.

From the kitchen window I saw lights in a church two blocks away. My spirits rose. Since the rectory sat three blocks from the beach, the priest might not have been evacuated. He could be home, waiting out the storm. If I asked him to quiet the storm in Aunt Hope's heart, he would. Aunt Hope could say her litany to a priest. That would be perfect for her and perfect for me—she could relate the awful truth without fear of its ever being revealed. We could still be together always, Aunt Hope and I. Why hadn't I thought of it before?

As I struggled down the dark, windy streets, I prayed that Aunt Hope's voice would not fail her when the priest came. When I knocked at the rectory door, Father Dwyer answered. I told him that a terrified woman wanted to confess to him. He nodded and went for his coat. A slightly built man in his fifties, he followed closely behind me as I beamed a flashlight over the sidewalk ahead of us. In spite of the buffeting winds he entered the sandcastle right behind me. As he took off his coat and put a white stole around his neck, Aunt Hope cried out, "Killed her father, a terrible sin!" Although I knew Aunt Hope could say no more, I went into the dining room to give her privacy with

Father Dwyer.

When I could no longer hear the hum of the priest's words of forgiveness, I went back into the room and offered to lead him back to the rectory. He told me to stay with Aunt Hope. Before he left he put his hands on my shoulders and said, "If you ever want to talk to me, day or night, I'll be available." Puzzled, I closed the door behind him and went to sit by Aunt Hope who looked so peaceful with her eyes closed and her lips stilled. I thought about the priest's invitation to me and then I laughed and hugged my knees. He thought I had something to tell him about Father's death but I have nothing to say now that Aunt Hope is rid of the truth's malignant influence.

In the oppressively silent hours after the prom and the scene with Father, I could not sleep so I got up to go downstairs for a glass of milk. As I entered the hallway, the grandfather's clock struck three. Startled, I stood still for a moment a few feet from the staircase. I heard Father climbing the steps. The thudding noises when he fell sounded like an out-of-control toboggan hitting the icy banks of a run. Then I heard moaning. Then I heard nothing. In the darkness I bumped into Aunt Hope. The dim hall light illumined her chalky face. She wanted to go downstairs but I wouldn't let her. And I wouldn't let her make a phone call to the police. I took the phone from her and dialed the ambulance service.

"My father, an alcoholic, just fell down the steps," I told the dispatcher.

I thought time would become Aunt Hope's friend and blot away her need to talk about that evening but time instead became an incessant bill collector, dunning and dunning, until last year in the sandcastle she put on her coat and told me she was going to the police station. I couldn't let her do that so I told her about a phone call I had had from Father's doctor a month before he died. The doctor had asked for Aunt Hope and I had pretended to be her. He told me that Father had at best six months to live. At that time I didn't tell Aunt Hope because I didn't want her wearing herself out caring and worrying about him. After his fall, I didn't tell her because I never wanted to discuss Father again.

I thought knowing about the doctor's phone call, that he had only a short time to live anyway, would soothe her terrible need to reveal the

truth, but it didn't. She became flushed and agitated. That night she had a stroke.

Now I regret that I didn't allow her to tell someone the truth after her stroke, but I was afraid the authorities would separate us and put her in a hospital. Aunt Hope belongs in a sandcastle. Our sandcastle. The winds have quieted down now and the sandcastle has survived as I knew it would. Neither the ruthlessness of the winds nor the ruthlessness of the truth has prevailed against us.

"The storm is over, Aunt Hope! Tomorrow we'll go outside and see all the starfish the sea has brought to us."

Aunt Hope doesn't try to acknowledge what I've said. She's so peaceful. She sits with her eyes closed. She must be dreaming about the starfish we're going to see. I'm so glad I let her talk to Father Dwyer. I'm so glad he gave absolution to the small figure with outstretched arms who darted to the staircase as Father reached the top step. I'm so glad that no one knows that the subject of the recurring sentence "Killed her father, a terrible sin," was "I"—not "She."

You never know whom you'll meet in an elevator . . .

CONVERSATION BETWEEN FLOORS

by JEFFRY SCOTT

It was less an elevator than a vertically moveable room.

Except, of course, that the room wasn't moving.

"More haste, less speed," said Gadyard, not quite under his breath. The tone was light enough, wryly relishing the cliché, but his steady grey eyes held a shadow of concern.

Trish Bellmire did not hear the comment, for she was still enchanted by the elevator. Her perfume filled the timber-panelled, lushly car-

peted cube. She had tried to dress down for the interview, yet the subdued clothes had something of the air of fancy dress—Trish was irredeemably attractive, even with her hair strained back and wearing a boxy suit and clumpy shoes.

"It's a little palace," she confided to Gadyard in a husky, Cockney-tinged whisper. "It's a wonder they don't get squatters moving in. This lift's a lot better than the grotty little bed-sitter I've got at the moment."

Gadyard smiled abstractedly.

"I did try to warn you." Leaning against his savagely furled umbrella, the young man grimaced at Gadyard. His accent was almost a parody of top drawer talk. But he was apologetic rather than patronizing. And he *had* made a keep-back gesture when Gadyard and Trish had pelted into the elevator, heads down after braving the rain.

"Warn us?" Trish widened her eyes at the young man, who looked down at his glossy black shoes and made no reply.

"This lift you admire so much isn't much use as a lift," Gadyard explained drily. "We seem to be stuck."

"It was acting up earlier today, and I mentioned it to the hall porter," said the young man. He cleared his throat. "Bit of a black mark for the Craemore Tower, this."

Gadyard knew what he meant. Few people knew of the Craemore Building, for it bore no nameplate, merely an austere bronze number at street level, smaller than a visiting card. The tenants were wealthy people who approved of keeping a low profile.

But in all the years he had been coming here, Gadyard had found that the place ran like a clock. As the young man had said, a lift that broke down was not the Craemore Tower's style.

Trish stirred restlessly. "What happens now? Isn't there a phone or something?"

The young man, noticing a silver thread on his sleeve, flushed and made haste to brush it away. He jerked a thumb at the wall behind him. "I have tried the phone—it's dead. Power's gone, I suppose."

"But the light's still on," Gadyard mused.

"That's a point." The young man shrugged helplessly. "So we wait, eh?"

He seemed subtly alarmed when Trish addressed him. "Have you a cigarette?"

"I don't smoke. Sorry." He looked away again. Snubbed, Trish pulled a face. Gadyard smoked a pipe. In any case, he suspected that she wouldn't have started the day without at least one pack in her purse. But Trish could no more resist flirting with a man than a flower could prevent opening itself to the sun.

Seamed and battered, Roy Gadyard's face became heavy with thought. It was late to discover reservations, but his plan of placing Trish Bellmire as receptionist with an industrial consultant with whom he had gone to school suddenly seemed outrageous.

And then he grinned to himself. Trish was a bit of a chameleon. Already, after moments in company with the Old Etonian, the East End flavor of her accent had submerged and her vowels were broadening. If she did flirt in her new job, she would do it discreetly, in the spirit of the Craemore Building. Ashamed of his doubts, he patted her shoulder.

"Are you O.K., Gad?" she murmured. Standing for long periods was bad for his game leg.

"I'll live," he growled. Sympathy was dangerously attractive stuff, addictive in the end. He couldn't afford to become involved with any of his clients, and that went double for a woman as warm and wayward as Trish Bellmire. Deliberately he turned his mind to safer matters. The problem of the lift . . .

In the corner, the young man had taken refuge behind the *Financial Times*, turning it into a pink paper screen. A transparent screen, in a way, since the lighting in the elevator was too subdued to read the small print of the share prices in which he pretended to be absorbed.

Odd, thought Gadyard. The young fellow seemed heterosexual, but in close proximity to a gorgeous and encouraging girl he was acting in a positively monkish manner. "Oughtn't we to keep pressing the alarm button or whatever it is?" Gadyard suggested.

The newspaper rustled. "I have pressed it. They know what's up." Reluctantly the paper screen came down. The young man looked at his watch. "It will only be a few minutes more I daresay."

Gadyard caught sight of a headline: "ARABS BUY ANOTHER BRITISH GIANT." Outside the Craemore Building he had noticed a vast Mercedes flying the pennon of one of the Gulf states. So the place had an Arab tenant—the chauffeur had been chatting to a Craemore commissionaire as if to an old acquaintance.

"Lucky none of us suffer from claustro-whatsit," Trish offered. "We could be here for hours."

Taking a deep breath, Gadyard addressed the raised-again paper screen. "Or we could get moving right now."

Trish frowned and stared at him. "We what?" The young man came out of hiding. "I beg your pardon?"

"There's still time for you to call it quits," Gadyard told him steadily. Physical authority—he was a big man, broad at the shoulders—was backed by his air of quiet understanding. "Forgive me, but the tie and the haircut don't match. And you're awfully pale. We've been having a good summer with lots of sunshine. You're the first person I've seen today without a tan."

The young man's mouth opened. But Trish was ahead of him. "I don't know about all that, Gad. But he's a hound, all right, a villain. One of the lads."

Her smile, and the soft eyes, robbed her accusation of offense. "Own up, you bought that tie at a shop. The nearest you've been to Eton is Windsor races. Look, mate, I've been in the escort business, I've mixed with all kinds. Even when you talk posh, you're trying too hard."

Again he made to speak, and she struck first. "Give up, luv. I've been a villain myself, know what I mean? Takes one to know one, they say. You sussed me out the minute you saw me. And it works both ways."

"Listen," the young man snarled, accent peeling away in a single word. He didn't complete the sentence. The newspaper was flung away. His right hand slipped inside his jacket.

Gadyard pointed at him. "Don't make it worse, son. If anything except your hand comes out of that pocket, I'll do my level best to stop you. Shooting, in a place like this? You'll be caught before you rewire the control box and get this lift started. Anyway, you're running out of time. Pretty soon they'll winch us down by hand."

The young man's hand did emerge empty, and faltered.

"No, they won't winch us down just yet," Gadyard contradicted himself, thoughtfully. "You've fixed the indicator panel downstairs, yes? There's another lift. People will just think this one's a long time coming and take the other."

"You'd better do what he says, mate," Trish advised. "He's a nice

bloke, but dead stubborn."

Gadyard waved the testimonial aside. "You were supposed to be in here on your own, we took you unawares. So you've been seen, we'll be able to pick you out from photographs. It's over, son. Luckily for you, that means nothing has happened, right?"

"Fairy tales," the young man sneered. "I'm just stuck in the lift, same as you."

"Not quite." Gadyard stooped awkwardly and retrieved something from the floor. "When you mucked about with the wiring, this little scrap got caught on your sleeve. You cut the wire, stripped the end, and connected it differently. There's the little bit of insulation you stripped off."

Three pairs of eyes found a tiny crimson tube on the carpet beside the young man's feet. "And the pliers are in your jacket pocket," Gadyard continued. "They make the jacket sag. A real city gent wouldn't spoil the hang of his suiting that way."

Trish caught Gadyard's arm. "What's it all about then?"

Gadyard shook his head. "Now we start guessing. But there's an Arab living here, and they're notorious for carrying small fortunes in cash and jewelry. I think our friend here knows that some tenant always uses this elevator. He's waiting for the lift to be called from a certain floor, then he'll go up and rob the man. Probably he intended to leave the victim in the lift stranded between floors while he walked down the stairs to a fire exit."

Trish snapped her fingers and, forgetting her earlier ploy, produced a cigarette and lit it. "Of course! He kept looking at the indicator panel, but he'd just told us it was dead."

Gadyard nodded. "My guess is that he's fixed things so that the panel only lights up when the lift is called from the vital floor. Then he'll start the lift and collect his target."

As if on cue, the figure 22 glowed into life on the panel above the doors. The young man sighed. "Forget it," said Gadyard. "It's over."

The young man turned to the control panel, flicking a small screwdriver from his breast pocket with the offhand, automatic skill of an Apache unsheathing his dagger. The lift trembled—

And started going down, away from the 22nd floor.

When it neared the lobby, the young man told Gadyard: "I dunno who you are, mister. I haven't got a gun, not even a cosh. I didn't

want bother—I was just trying to bluff you. I could have handled that punter on 22, see. He's littler than me, and old. But you try to stop me or give me away and—"

The elevator stopped, doors sighing open. Said Gadyard: "You haven't done anything to be stopped for, apart from a little damage to the lift. And you've put that right. You're a clever lad, but you're not hard enough to be a good villain. Try something else—electronics, maybe."

Hastily Gadyard scrawled his telephone number on the back of an old envelope and thrust it at the boy. "Phone me if you want help getting a job. You know now you can trust me."

Obviously aching to run, the young man went out of the Craemore Building and vanished among the city traffic. Gadyard smiled. "He's forgotten his umbrella."

Trish Bellmire towed him out of the lift. "Umbrella! You might have got yourself killed, silly old fool. For all you knew, he did have a gun. And how d'you know he wasn't working with a team?"

"Come on, dear, you observed him. You pegged him as a villain. Couldn't you peg him as a lone wolf—and a nervy, ready-to-see-reason wolf at that?" Gadyard was gently reproving. "When a man's just out of prison, he hates the idea of going back. He always hates the idea, naturally, but most of all when he's fresh out on the street."

Trish's nose wrinkled. "Maybe. I still say you took a diabolical risk. I don't get it, Gad. I hear you used to be a right tough nut when you were in the Met police."

"So?"

"So you let him go. Some copper!"

"I'm not a policeman any more," Gadyard reminded her, "I'm a probation officer. Both jobs are supposed to be about crime prevention, in theory, anyway."

The humor of the situation tickled the back of his mind. Here he was reasoning out his motives with a former prostitute and heroin addict. He started and looked at his watch.

"Never mind the chat, young lady. Arriving a quarter-hour late for your job interview is a rotten start to a new life. Come on!" He started to enter the lift, but Trish pulled him away.

"We'll take the other one, thanks. That bloke wasn't any good as a villain—what makes you think he was much better as a lift mechanic?"

The phrase "pure as the driven snow" does not apply . . .

SNOW FROM the SOUTH

by Robert Edward Eckels

It had been a bad day from the start. Freedlund had been riding me even more than usual to get everything wrapped up before we left for the conference, and the staff seemed to be conspiring to insure that there would be plenty to wrap up. So when the call came from my wife I was even more off guard than usual. Although what she had to say would have been like a kick below the belt under any circumstances: our six-year-old had been attacked by an adult on his way

home from school.

"Now don't panic," Marge said. "He's all right. Really. And maybe 'attacked' isn't the right word. What happened, as far as I can make out anyway, is that Tom was just walking along when this man picked him up and dumped him down in the nearest mud puddle."

"That's crazy," I said. "Why would anybody do a thing like that?"

"I don't know," she said. "At first I thought it might be something he was making up to cover himself for goofing around and falling in on his own. But while Tom's imagination gets pretty wild at times, he doesn't lie. Besides, there were other kids around and they all say the same thing. This car just pulled up to the curb behind them, a man got out, headed straight for Tom to dump him in the puddle, and then ran back to the car and drove off."

"Did they get the license number?" I said.

"No. They're just kids and they were all excited and upset. One of them did have the presence of mind to run down to Mrs. Rousseau. She isn't supposed to leave her crossing, but she could hear Tom screaming so she left one of the older kids there with strict orders not to let anybody cross until she got back. When she got to Tom he was still in the middle of the puddle bawling his head off but otherwise O.K."

"Thank God for that anyway," I said.

"Yes," Marge said. An odd note entered her voice. "Mrs. Rousseau thinks we should call the police," she said.

I hesitated. "What do *you* think?"

"I don't know. This whole thing has got me so upset I don't know what to think."

I looked down at my watch. "Look," I said, "I'm not going to be any good here the rest of the afternoon. Why don't I catch the early train and we can talk about it when I get home?"

"That would be great," she said, "if you can."

"I can," I said and waited until she had hung up before putting the phone down myself. It was forty-five minutes before I could catch the train. I never felt more helpless in my life.

I didn't expect Marge to meet me but as I crossed the tracks behind the departing commuter train the familiar green Pontiac swooped down to a stop at the foot of the hill, then swung left to meet me.

Marge was alone in the car. "Where are the boys?" I asked.

"Watching TV," she said. "They're O.K." It was less than a five-minute run from our house to the commuter station, short enough to leave the boys on their own. Ordinarily. "I locked the doors."

I nodded. "How's Tom doing?"

"Pretty good." She accented the "pretty." "He's still a little shaky, but otherwise O.K."

"And you?"

She summoned up a wry smile. "Same thing," she said, braking briefly, then swinging left to circle back the way she had come. "I spoke to the police," she added.

"What did they have to say? Anything?"

"Lots," she said. "But what it all boils down to is that they'll have a squad car drive by the school every now and then. It doesn't seem like much, but I guess there's not much else they can do—and it just might scare the man off if he thought he might get caught."

"Let's hope so anyway," I said.

Both boys were in the family room watching Batman reruns and when I stuck my head in I got the usual perfunctory "hi." A few minutes later, though, Tom came out to the kitchen to chat while I browsed through the paper. This wasn't unusual. He was a little more restrained and quieter than usual, but otherwise he seemed to be bearing up well.

After supper I took Tom and Jim outside to enjoy the last of the sunshine just as on any other day. We were shooting baskets—or rather I was shooting baskets and they were heaving the ball in the general direction of the backboard—when Marge came out to tell me I had a phone call.

"Mr. Richards?" The voice was strange but familiar: a salesman's voice. "My name is Christiansen, and I regret disturbing you like this but I felt it important that I speak to you. About what happened to your son this afternoon."

"Why? What do you know about that?"

"Only what I heard, Mr. Richards. And, please, don't be alarmed. I'm not a reporter or anything like that. I'm a parent like yourself. And like you, I'm sure, a concerned parent. The thing is, I'm afraid what happened today wasn't an isolated incident. Something very similar

was done to my little girl three weeks ago. And there have been other occurrences as well. Up to now the incidents have been relatively harmless. Whether they will continue to be is something I don't care to speculate about—or gamble on. So I've invited some people—concerned parents like us—to meet at my home this evening to consider the problem and what is to be done about it. I'd like very much for you to join us."

I hesitated, then shook my head. "I'm sorry," I said, "but I really don't know what such a group could hope to accomplish."

"Nor do I, Mr. Richards," Christiansen said. "But even if we fail, we've lost nothing. And who knows? Perhaps a group mind *is* more than just the sum of its parts."

"Perhaps it is," I said. I looked up. Marge had come into the room and stood frowning at me. Christiansen's voice rolled on persistently, and finally I agreed. "All right," I said. "I'll come. But only to the meeting. I'm not committing myself to anything else."

"Nor are any of us, Mr. Richards," Christiansen said. "The address is 165 North Wells. Shall we say nine?"

"I'll be there," I said and rang off.

"What was that all about?" Marge asked.

I sighed. "I think I've just been invited to join a vigilante group," I said. I couldn't have been more wrong.

165 North Wells was a raw new house on a street of raw new houses. Construction debris littered the packed-yellow-dirt yard. No lights showed. And a quick glance through one of the blank windows confirmed that I'd been brought on a fool's errand. The house was vacant. I could imagine Christiansen sitting in a bar somewhere, laughing his sick head off. But as I turned back to my car, a shadow stirred and resolved itself into a bulky man slouching near it, his hands thrust deep into his topcoat pockets.

"I'm afraid I have to apologize again, Mr. Richards," he said. "For the inconvenience."

There was no mistaking the voice; it was Christiansen. He was an older man than I'd expected—mid-fiftyish—with a pale jowly face and small eyes that regarded me with only half-veiled amusement.

"Look, Christiansen," I said angrily, "just what kind of a joke is this anyway?"

A faint smile tugged at his lips. "No joke, Mr. Richards," he said. "Quite the opposite, in fact." He took his hand from his pocket and showed me the gun it held. "Shall we get in the car?" he said.

There was no choice. I got behind the wheel. He slid into the back seat behind me, leaning forward so that the gun was scant inches from the nape of my neck. "There's no need to worry, Mr. Richards," he said. "We're just going to take a little ride. But safety first. Your seat belt, please. The shoulder strap too if you don't mind."

Again there was no choice. I snapped the belt and shoulder strap on and was as effectively constrained as if I'd been in a straitjacket.

"I think we're ready now," Christiansen said. "Shall we go?"

I put the car in gear and pulled away from the curb. There were only a few houses beyond 165. Then the street darkened and narrowed. Christiansen leaned back and sighed. "I seem to keep apologizing to you, Mr. Richards," he said, "which I'm sure you find very tiresome. Let me just add, though, that I regret very much what happened to your son this afternoon. It was, shall we say, a small demonstration of how vulnerable he is—or perhaps how vulnerable you are through him. I trust you understand my point."

When I didn't answer, he nudged my shoulder with the gun. "I understand you," I said. "What do you want?"

"Only a small service, Mr. Richards. You're going down to the Bahamas next week. What could be simpler than for you to make a small side-trip while you're there to pick up a package for me and bring it back when you return?"

"What kind of a package?" I said, but I already knew the answer. Nothing legal; nothing you could find any possible rationalization for.

"Snow," Christiansen said. "Snow from the south." He laughed at his own conceit. "Not that it makes any difference. Because unless you perform this service, your little boy is going to be very badly hurt. There isn't a thing you can do to prevent it, unless you do exactly as I say. Believe me, Mr. Richards, I don't like this any more than you do. But, unfortunately, the very qualities that make you an ideal courier also make it unlikely that you would respond favorably to an offer of money. So it boils down to a matter of incentive."

"You son of a bitch," I said.

"I prefer to think of myself as a man doing what he has to do. But be that as it may, don't think for a minute that I won't do as I say. I will,

and I think I proved this afternoon that I can.

"You can stop here," he added.

I braked and he got out of the car. "Let me leave you with one last thought," he said, looking down at me from outside, his hand and the gun back in his pocket. "Maybe I am bluffing. You can find out very easily simply by calling me. But what if you're wrong? What then, eh?" The half smile turned even more rueful. "The smart gambler always plays the odds so that he stands to win more than he can possibly lose. Think about that, Mr. Richards, and act accordingly." He nodded down the road. "That's all," he said. "You may go now."

I drove off.

Twenty yards down the road, rage reasserted itself. I braked hard and wrenched off the safety harness. But when I looked back, he was already gone.

Marge looked up curiously as I came in. "You're early," she said. Then she saw my face. "What's wrong? Did something happen at the meeting?"

"There was no meeting," I said. I went past her to the cabinet where we kept the bourbon, splashed some in a glass, and drank it neat. It might as well have been water.

"Well, for Pete's sake," Marge said. She rose and came over to me. "I've never seen you like this. What *is* it?"

I opened my mouth. I wanted to tell her, but the words wouldn't come. Finally I blurted it out, badly.

"Oh, my God!" she said. "My baby!"

I reached out for her. "It's all right," I said.

"No, it isn't. You can't let this happen, Frank," she said. "I don't care what he wants you to do, you do it! You keep my baby safe!"

"You don't know what you're saying," I said. "You don't mean that."

"Don't I?" Her face was unyielding. Then suddenly her shoulders sagged. "Oh, God," she said. "What are we going to do?"

I didn't have a good answer. I just looked at her. Finally I did the one thing that seemed least likely to be a blueprint for disaster. I called the police.

I had no experience to draw on—only what I'd read or seen. I expected a team of detectives. All they sent, though, was one uniformed

officer who took down the facts as I related them again and then left, his only advice to call immediately if Christiansen attempted to contact me again. Under the circumstances I suppose it was all he could do, but now there was a tight knot in the pit of my stomach that hadn't been there before. What if Christiansen was right?

When I went downstairs next morning Marge was already in the kitchen, brooding over a cup of coffee. She looked haggard and worn.

"I didn't sleep last night," she said. "Every time I closed my eyes—" She broke off, looking up fearfully as a solid thump came from overhead—followed quickly by the sudden rush of feet toward the bathroom. She managed a wry smile. "Is this what it's going to be like from now on?"

"It won't last," I said.

"It better not," she said. "Because if it does, I won't."

It was a long morning at the office. Then shortly before noon a Lieutenant Guiscard called. He had some pictures he'd like me to look at. Could I stop down at police headquarters sometime that afternoon?

Oh, God, could I!

Guiscard sat with his elbows on the scarred wooden table and watched patiently as I went through the photos. He was a tall man with a lean, bony face, deep-set eyes, and a bitter mouth. The photos were mug shots, standard front and side views taken in harsh light with a fixed camera. None was familiar and I passed them back to Guiscard with a shake of my head.

Guiscard shrugged philosophically. "It was just a thought," he said. "We had the State Criminal Investigation Department run the name Christiansen through R and I to see what they'd come up with. Sometimes it pays off." He tossed the photos back on the table. "Do you have any idea how he happened to pick on you?" he said.

"I hadn't really thought about it," I said. "He said I'd be an ideal courier. I guess I was just unlucky enough to meet his requirements."

"Sure," Guiscard said. "But first he'd have to know that you were going out of the country and all the rest of it. How would he have found out?"

I shrugged again. "The trip's no secret," I said. "A lot of people knew. It was even written up in the paper."

"It isn't a pleasure trip then?"

"No, it's a conference of quality-control experts. My boss is presenting a paper on quality control in service industries. I'm going along primarily to hold his coat."

"Sounds like a pretty good deal."

"That's one way of looking at it."

"It's the way a lot of people would," Guiscard said, "and maybe one of them wants to spoil it for you. Somebody at the office maybe who might feel you'd beaten him out of a soft trip."

"No," I said.

"You're sure?"

"No," I said again. "I'm not sure of anything except what happened last night. If I knew more I'd tell you. But right now I don't need questions. I need answers."

On Monday some position papers Freedlund had given me had been moved out onto the middle of my desk where I couldn't possibly overlook them. Equally conspicuous was a pile of report material missing from its usual place.

"Mr. Hartley took it Friday afternoon," Paula said. She was a thin, fox-faced girl and my secretary for the past year and a half. "He said Mr. Freedlund didn't want it delayed and you were going to be tied up getting ready for the conference."

"I see," I said. I sat down at the desk and looked dispiritedly at Freedlund's papers.

"You want coffee?" Paula said sympathetically.

"Please."

It was impossible to concentrate, though, and shortly after eleven I gave it up and left early for lunch. Usually I ate in the building, but so did Freedlund and all the others, and today I wanted to get away. Absorbed in my thoughts, I walked two blocks before I realized I was being followed.

I was too startled to hide my reaction. The man smiled wryly and lengthened his stride to catch up with me. "It's all right, Mr. Richards," he said, taking my arm and keeping me moving. He wasn't a big man, but he carried himself with an air of quiet assurance that brooked no nonsense. "My name's Lovejoy," he said. "I'm a federal narcotics agent, and I think it's time we had a long talk." . . .

"When you come right down to it," Lovejoy said, "it's really kind of a clever idea. He gets a courier nobody would suspect. You run all the risks and he reaps all the benefits."

"I'm glad you find it so admirable," I said. We sat across from each other in a small bar and I had just explained the whole thing to him a third time.

Lovejoy smiled faintly. "Hardly that," he said. "But give the devil his due. He won't enjoy it long now that we know what he's up to. It's just a matter of giving him enough rope, then picking him up and putting him away for good." He leaned back and looked at me curiously. "You look like you don't believe me," he said.

"I want to," I said. "But what if you can't find him?"

Lovejoy smiled again. "I've already found him, Mr. Richards," he said. "I've had him under telephone surveillance for over a month now, just waiting for him to make a move. How else do you think I found you?"

"I assumed the police—Guiscard—"

Lovejoy shook his head. "No," he said, "Christiansen is my baby, and he's going to stay that way until the last nail is in his coffin. I've seen too many fish slip away because the wrong person found out too soon. You don't have to worry, though. It won't be long now."

"What do you want me to do?" I said.

"Nothing until you hear from me; then you can testify at the trial." He looked at me shrewdly. "No problem, is there?"

"Problem?" I smiled. "It'll be a pleasure."

I called Marge from the office as soon as I got back.

"I can't believe it," she said. "Is it really over?"

"It will be soon," I said.

She started to cry.

"Hey," I said.

"I know. It's no way to react. It's just such a relief though."

As it turned out, our relief was premature. Lovejoy called that evening just as we were sitting down to supper. "We lost him," he said.

"What do you mean? You had him under surveillance!"

"By telephone," Lovejoy said. "We had a tap, that's all. He never used the phone much during the day, and nobody thought anything was wrong. But when we went to close in tonight, he was gone."

I felt the weight settle back on my shoulders. "So we're back where

we started," I said.

"Not really," Lovejoy said. "We may not know where he is, but he knows where you are, and there's one time when he has to surface—when he picks up the package you bring back. And that's when we'll be waiting."

"No. I'm no hero. I'm not playing any games with him or you or anybody."

"I don't blame you," Lovejoy said, "but what choice do you have?"

I told myself it wasn't true—that Christiansen might have been scared off for good and that I'd never hear from him again. But two days later I received a package and a note in the mail. Inside the package was $10,000 in neatly banded bills. The note was short and simple:

"It's a lot of money, Mr. Richards, but ours is a cash-and-carry business and I know you won't cheat me. The man's name is Lazarus, and you needn't worry about meeting him. He'll know you."

There was no signature, but then there didn't need to be. And as soon as I could I called Lovejoy at the number he had given me.

"Well, Mr. Richards?" he said.

"You said it yourself," I said. "What choice do I have?"

Marge took it almost too calmly. Perhaps that was a good sign, perhaps not. All I knew was that I couldn't leave her alone behind me, and that Saturday I saw her and the boys off to her sister's in Michigan, driving along behind them until we were well clear of the city and I was sure no one else was following. The next morning I flew out to the Bahamas. It was a direct flight, and except for Freedlund there was no one on board I recognized. Four hours later, though, I found Lovejoy waiting for me on the ground in Nassau.

"You didn't think we'd leave you to do it alone, did you?" he said.

Frankly, I'd stopped thinking long before. Which was almost fatal.

Christiansen's note had said Lazarus would know me. How I didn't know, but meeting him was easier than I'd anticipated. Pinned to my reservation card at the hotel was an envelope with a message inside: "Victoria Gardens 3 o'clock tomorrow." It was unsigned and all the clerk could tell me was that it had been delivered by messenger earlier that afternoon.

"He's not wasting any time," Lovejoy said. "Well, so what? The sooner this is over the better."

The gardens were on the main island—New Providence—and on Lovejoy's advice I had the cab drop me at Rawson Square and I walked the last few blocks alone. I almost missed the gardens the first time. They were set slightly above street level and screened off by wrought-iron railings rising out of a low concrete retaining wall. A chunk had broken out of the wall in one place. It might have been recent, because the rubble lay in a neat pile at the base. The real problem was the gardens themselves. They were dry and drought-ruined. Given a free hand, I might have turned around then and there, but there was Christiansen waiting back in the States. And my family. I pushed open the gate and went inside.

The park was deserted except for a small round-faced man seated on a stone bench. He rose and walked away as I approached, but not so fast that I didn't overtake him easily.

"You're late, Mr. Richards," he said.

"It couldn't be helped."

"Everything can be helped," he said. "Did you bring the money?"

When I nodded, he held out his hand. I hesitated, but his face was set like a spoiled child's. I shrugged and handed over the envelope with Christiansen's money. He ripped it open and counted rapidly. Then, apparently satisfied, he stuffed it in his pocket and walked back past me to the bench, reaching down behind it and bringing up a cheap briefcase which he tossed to me. Inside was a clear plastic bag filled with white powder and tied at the top.

Lovejoy was waiting anxiously in my room when I got back to the hotel.

"Well?"

"So far so good," I said and handed him the package.

He hefted it, feeling the weight. "A lot of dreams," he said, "and a lot of money."

"How much?"

"On the street, after it's been cut, close to a million." He looked at me quizzically. "Tempted?"

"No."

"Good boy. You'd be surprised how many 'honest' people would be. But then that's what keeps people like me in business. Greed." He hefted the package once more, then untied it and dipped two fingers in for a taste. His face changed as they touched his lips.

"What's the matter?"

Lovejoy swallowed. "It's sugar!" he said. "The son of a bitch deceived you!"

It took a minute, but then the absurdity of it all hit me and I began to laugh.

"You think it's funny, do you?" Lovejoy said.

"Isn't it?"

"No," Lovejoy said. "Damn it, why didn't you check?"

"It never occurred to me."

"It— God, you are an amateur, aren't you?"

I stopped laughing. "I never pretended to be anything else," I said.

I held Lovejoy's eyes for a long moment. Finally he sighed. "No, you didn't," he said. "Well, it's done. The thing now is to have a long talk with Mr. Lazarus, pointing out the error of his ways."

"He could be anywhere," I said.

"Not really," Lovejoy said. He was calmer now, back in control. "Think about it for a minute. If you'd pulled off a coup like this, what would you do?"

"Get out of town as fast as I could."

"Which in this case," Lovejoy said, "means get off the island. So a three o'clock meeting probably means a four-thirty or five o'clock flight."

I looked at the clock. It was already past four. Lovejoy smiled grimly. "Don't worry," he said. "There's always a way." He picked up the phone and dialed rapidly. "Has the plane left yet?" he said into the receiver. "The one with the bomb on board?"

There was a massive traffic jam-up in front of the airport but a uniformed policeman on guard at the entrance when we got there waved us in without a second glance when Lovejoy flashed his ticket envelope.

The building was crowded but not so jammed we couldn't move and I soon spotted Lazarus seated alone on a suitcase and holding a smaller attaché case on his lap. He smiled when he recognized me.

"Something wrong, Mr. Richards?" he said.

"You know there is," I said.

"Of course," he said. "But I have this policy: no exchanges. And no refunds."

"Make an exception this time," Lovejoy said. He had come up behind Lazarus and pressed his knee into the other's back between the shoulder blades.

Lazarus stopped smiling. "Don't be foolish," he said. "You aren't going to do anything here."

"Why not?" Lovejoy said. "Nobody'd notice until you started to fall and then it'd be too late."

Lazarus hesitated, trying to judge whether Lovejoy's threat was real. Finally he rose, clutching the briefcase to his chest. "Not here," he said. "The washroom." Without waiting for a reply he started off across the floor. It was my turn to hesitate now, but Lovejoy simply picked up the suitcase and went after him. Finally I followed.

Lazarus led us on past the main washroom and down to a smaller one on a side corridor. He went in first and as soon as the door started to close behind him he whirled and swung the attaché case in a vicious arc at Lovejoy's head. Lovejoy was ready for him. Even before Lazarus had started to turn, he had brought the suitcase up and now he shoved it hard into Lazarus's chest. Caught off-balance and hampered by his own ruined swing, Lazarus went down.

"Block the door," Lovejoy said, and as I put my back against it he reached down to pick up Lazarus's attaché case. Inside was Christiansen's $10,000, still in its original envelope.

"Where's the stuff?" he said.

"They didn't send it," Lazarus said from against the wall, looking up obliquely at Lovejoy.

"Let's see," Lovejoy said. He bent down, caught Lazarus by the lapels, and hauled him roughly erect. "Strip," he said.

Lazarus hesitated.

"You heard me," Lovejoy said.

Reluctantly, Lazarus pulled out his shirttails and unstrapped a pouched belt from around his waist. Lovejoy snatched it away from him. "Going to work a little deal for yourself, were you?" he said.

Lazarus didn't say anything. Lovejoy opened one of the pouches to taste the contents. Then, satisfied that he had what he was supposed to have, he folded the belt neatly to fit into the attaché case and started

toward the door.

"Wait!" Lazarus protested. "You can't keep them both!"

Lovejoy smiled grimly. "Your bosses won't like that, will they?" he said. "Too bad." He went on out the door. I followed, but not before I got one last glimpse of Lazarus's face. It was pale and full of hate.

Halfway back to the hotel I began to tremble.

"What's the matter?" Lovejoy said.

"I told you I'm no hero," I said.

"You did all right," he said. He slapped me on the shoulder. "Besides, the worst is over. All you have to do now is take it back into the States."

I spent the next two days attending conference sessions with only the pouched belt around my waist to remind me that I had come to the island for any other purpose. That all changed abruptly Wednesday evening. Freedlund had read his paper at the conference that afternoon and I went up to my room later than usual. The delay may have saved my life.

The room had been ripped apart—and by an expert hand. Lazarus trying to get his own back. It took me a minute to take it in. Then I reached for the phone. It had been knocked off its stand, but it still worked and, trembling slightly, I dialed Lovejoy's number.

The girl at the switchboard said that he had left a message for me that he had gone on an errand and would be back by six. I hung up the phone and surveyed the damage. It didn't take me long to decide what to do. The conference had two more days to run and there would be hell to pay when they found me gone, but I hadn't lied when I told Lovejoy I was no hero.

I pulled out the smaller of my two bags and threw what clothes I could into it. Riding the elevator down to the poolside entrance and leaving unobserved, I wondered if Lovejoy had been kidnapped and if I was playing into Lazarus's hands. If I reached home all right I would call the F.B.I. I caught a cab at the corner and at the airport had no trouble exchanging my ticket for the next flight out.

Everything had happened so fast I hadn't really had a chance to psych myself up for customs, but somehow I carried it off. Or rather

the inspector did. He poked around the edges of my suitcase but his attention was clearly centered on the bearded youth behind me. He passed me on through just as Christiansen had said he would, and I carried the package unimpeded out to the garage where my car was parked.

This time of evening there wasn't much traffic on the expressway and I made good time driving home. The familiar street was vaguely comforting, but the house seemed strange. It was too quiet and empty and I went from room to room, opening them up, before I went to phone the F.B.I.

Before I made the call, the phone rang.

I stopped in my tracks. Freedlund? A neighbor who had seen the lights? Lovejoy? I reached for the receiver.

Lovejoy. "What are you doing there, Richards?" he said. "Why did you bolt like that?"

I explained it to him—the possibility he had been kidnapped, that he himself was being trapped. "Where are you calling from?"

"The island airport. I'm getting a flight back in twenty minutes. Did everything go all right through customs?"

"Fine," I said.

"Good. Then it's just a matter of waiting for Christiansen to contact you. When he does, you know what to do."

"Call you."

"That's right," he said. "Stall for a meeting until I've had time to get back. We'll take care of the rest."

I put the phone down and went back to opening up the house. After a drink and a sandwich, I decided to search the house for a hiding place for the belt, which was becoming an intolerable burden.

After considering every corner of the house, I settled on the attic as the best place. I got up on a chair to drop the belt down into the insulation filling the space between the rafters, where once the grey fluff was smoothed back in place it would be as safe as on the bottom of the ocean.

As I was finishing, the phone rang. I looked at my watch. It might be Lovejoy reporting in. I went downstairs to answer it.

"Welcome home, Mr. Richards," Christiansen said.

"It's a shame to pull you away from your family again so soon," he

continued, "but I think you'll agree that the sooner we conclude our business the better. You do have the package, don't you?"

"Just tell me where you want me to bring it," I said.

"Public places are always the best for private transactions," Christiansen said. "So shall we say the bus station? Just pick out a locker. Put the package in it and leave. As you go out, you'll notice a line of phone booths just inside the Randolph Street entrance. Go into the one with an out-of-order sign on it, pretend to make a call, and drop the key on the floor as you leave. If I decide everything is all right, I'll pick it up later."

"And if you don't?"

"For your son's sake, Mr. Richards," he said, "you'd better hope I do." And with that he hung up on me. I stood for a long time holding the dead phone in my hand. Something was hammering at the back of my mind, something that bothered me, and when I realized what it was I broke the connection and dialed the two calls I had to make.

I hadn't ridden a bus since I was in service, but the station hadn't changed. Even the people looked the same: exhausted, and too preoccupied with their own business to notice anyone else. Which, of course, was why Christiansen had picked it.

It took me a moment or two to get my bearings. But then I spotted Lovejoy nursing a cup of coffee at the quick-lunch counter. From where he sat he had a good view of both the entrance and the line of phone booths, and he gave me an almost imperceptible nod as I went past. There were rows of lockers. I picked one at random, then went back to the phone booth and sat for a moment thinking of nothing in particular before dropping the key and going out as directed.

My car was parked two blocks down in a "No Parking" zone. I got in and waited, trying to keep my mind as blank as it had been in the phone booth. It didn't work. Finally, about thirty minutes later, a police car came up from behind and pulled to a stop in front of me. Guiscard got out and walked back to slide in beside me.

"You sure believe in living dangerously," he said.

I shrugged, looking up at the parking sign. "I figured if I got a ticket, you'd fix it for me."

"I meant your two friends back there," Guiscard said. "They play for keeps."

"What happened?"

"Just what we figured. As soon as you left, Lovejoy went over to the booth to pick up the key. Then Christiansen joined him and the two of them went over together to open the locker. That's when we picked them up. Lovejoy tried to put up a fight."

"I almost wish Christiansen had too," I said.

Guiscard shook his head. "He's not the type," he said. "Right now he's spilling his guts, figuring that we've got him one way or the other and if he can't work a deal at least his lawyer can claim cooperation. Anyway, it was the two of them together from the start." He looked at me soberly. "You know," he said, "you could have saved yourself a hell of a lot of trouble if you'd checked Lovejoy out with us when he first contacted you."

"I know," I said. "The trouble is I was desperate for help and when Lovejoy came along offering it, I bit like a hungry fish. It wasn't until Christiansen called so soon after I got back that I began to have any doubts. I wasn't due back until Friday; so how did he know I'd gotten home two days early? He couldn't have been tipped off from Nassau because no one knew I was leaving. A phone tap would have tipped him off about Lovejoy's involvement. And if he'd been watching the house, he would have known Marge and the boys weren't there and he never would have made that remark about pulling me away from my family.

"Somebody had to have told him and the only one I'd told was Lovejoy. And once I'd started to wonder, there were other things Lovejoy had done that didn't quite fit either. Why, for example, was it so important we get the real package? Christiansen would show up as long as he *thought* I was bringing it back, and that was the important thing. In any case, I decided I needed some insurance."

"So then you called us," Guiscard said. He shrugged. "Better late than never, I guess."

"That's right," I said. "Which reminds me. I have to make a phone call. It's almost tomorrow in Michigan, but, as you say, better late than never."

It was an old news story that needed a creative touch, and he was no mere journalist . . .

THE CLARA LONG CASE

by **Jon L. Breen**

Harry Denton was asleep over his typewriter when the phone rang. He groggily picked it up at the end of the fourth ring.

"Yeah?"

"Harry? Did I wake you up? This is Gene."

"No, that's O.K., Gene. What's up? Did the book go?"

"Uh, no, Harry, they didn't want it, but that's O.K. I'll send it out again. I'll keep you posted. What I called about . . ."

"The TV treatment? Did you get a bite on that?"

"You know these television people, Harry. They don't want anything new—you're just too original, Harry, that's all. But I'll keep plugging away. What I really called about . . ."

"I think my career is at what's called a low ebb, Gene. I need some kind of breakthrough, obviously. But I've got this new idea . . ." He reached across his desk for a manila folder full of newspaper clippings.

"O.K., pal," Gene said, "let's hear your great idea first."

"The Clara Long case, Gene. An article about the Clara Long case, twenty years later."

"The Clara Long case? What's that?"

"You remember, the actress who was murdered. They never found out who did it. I'll do it first as an article for *Esquire* or *Playboy,* then maybe a book . . ."

"*Esquire* or *Playboy?* I'd set my sights a little lower than that, if I were you. Who ever heard of the Clara Long case? Not me certainly . . ."

"You weren't out here in '57. It was a big deal. Like William Desmond Taylor or Thelma Todd."

"Those made the East Coast papers too. Look, work on it on the side if you want to, but if you really want some bread, listen to what I've got for you. I was thinking it might be a good time for us—that is, you—to re-enter the paperback-original field. The chief editor of Apex Books is out here, and I showed him a copy of *Bullets, My Love* . . ."

"You what? I thought I burned every copy of that piece of . . ."

"Hear me out. He liked it. He's looking for pros to do this new series of theirs, The Pulverizer, and he thinks you could do the job. It would tide you over till some of this other stuff comes through—as we know it will, Harry. Want to give it a try?"

"Who is The Pulverizer?"

"He's a former policeman whose wife was killed by gangsters. So he quits the force and . . ."

". . . vows to clean up the mob. Yeah, I know, book after book, page after page of wiping people out with machine guns and brass knuckles and whatever other weapons are handy. I want no part of it, Gene. It's a step back. I wrote *Bullets, My Love* in 1953, and I've come too far since then to go back now. I am a book writer, a movie writer, a magazine writer. I am not a paperback writer. That is not my image of

myself. So you tell Mr. Apex to forget it, sell that other stuff, and let me work on the Clara Long case. All right?"

Gene sighed loudly. "Typical writer. You don't know what's good for you. I got other clients will be glad to write The Pulverizer. But I guess they're businessmen, not artists, by which I mean they have to eat. Well, so long, Harry. Don't try to trap the murderer all by yourself."

Harry put down the phone and poured himself a drink from a bottle in convenient reach of his desk. No, I don't have to eat anything. But I sure have to keep myself in this stuff.

He glanced at his watch and yawned. Nine-thirty. Just about late enough to start telephoning. He debated shaving first. He always felt better talking to people on the phone with a fresh shave. Stupid really. He'd just call.

In the manila folder with the yellowing clippings on the Clara Long case was a list of names and phone numbers. Harry knew enough about the case already not to need the interviews, but it was important to present various viewpoints and theories; there was no telling what one of them might give him. Most of the people involved in the case were still alive. He'd get what he could on the phone and maybe talk to some of them in person, though he was increasingly reluctant to leave his typewriter and the familiar four walls of his apartment to go out and interview people. He was basically a creative type, not a journalist. But the Clara Long case needed an artist's touch. Capote could do things with it.

First the policeman. William Horn, formerly of the homicide squad, now retired.

"Sure, I remember the case. We never did find out who killed her. She was smothered with a pillow. A spurned lover, I guess. Her next-door neighbor found the body."

"Mrs. Karnes."

"Yeah, that's right. Old biddy. I wonder if she's still alive—must be a hundred if she is. Anything else you want to know, Mr. Denton? I mean, if you have the press reports you know as much as I could tell you."

"It doesn't all get in the papers."

Horn chuckled. "Maybe not. But I doubt I can remember more than what did. It wasn't that interesting a case."

"You never solved it."

"No, we never did."

"Would you describe it as the perfect crime?"

A guffaw this time. "Mister, there are far too many unsolved murders for a policeman to be going on about the perfect crime. I never would have said this when I was in uniform, but a hell of a lot of people get away with murder, and they don't have to be too smart either. They just have to get the breaks, that's all. I don't know what the perfect crime is, but it would have to be a lot tougher than this one."

"Did you investigate people she knew?"

"Well, yes, that was standard police procedure. She slept around, had lots of boy friends. We talked to everyone we could find. I don't think we ever made contact with the one who did it, and that's why he's still walking around loose."

"Any big names among the people you talked to?"

"Did you find any in the press reports?"

"No."

"Well, we made no effort to keep any big shot's name out of the papers. The people we talked to that really had anything to do with Clara Long were on the fringes of Hollywood, just like she was. Extras, technicians, PR flacks. No big fish."

"But I thought Clara Long was a star."

"That's not my department. Today everybody's a star, and you're nobody if you're not a superstar. I'm just a retired cop."

After hanging up, Harry reflected that, while Horn had showed no reluctance to talk, neither had he showed any inclination to tell very much or be very helpful. How much was he hiding?

Next he called the girl's agent, Phil Brady.

"She was sweet, really. A nice kid. It was a shame. She could have been very, very big. Nobody remembers her now."

"Died on the brink of stardom," Harry suggested.

"Well, that's putting it a bit strong even for a press agent. Maybe on the brink of starletdom. I got her a couple of speaking parts and people were noticing. There is no doubt whatever in my mind she would have been very, very big. Very, very big indeed. But now nobody remembers."

"Do you know who killed her?"

"No, I don't know. I was curious for a long time, but now I don't really care. She was a sweet kid, but she could be a real bitch, if you know what I mean. The guy that killed her could have had a very good reason—I mean, not a reason really, not a reasonable reason, but she could have driven him sort of nuts. Very, very easily. She drove me sort of nuts sometimes, and I was old enough to be her father. The poor guy that did it may well be a useful citizen today."

"Doesn't that possibility intrigue you at all, Mr. Brady? Don't you wonder what he goes through, knowing what he did, knowing he may be found out? And he might have killed somebody else too. He may still kill somebody else."

"I doubt it. Anyway, good luck with your article. I don't see any purpose to it, but you gotta make bread like the rest of us."

"Mr. Brady . . ."

"No, I gotta go. When you get to be a senior citizen, you don't have much time to sit around and talk on telephones, like in the old days. Too much going on. When I gave up flacking, I made a couple of vows. One was never to talk on the telephone again. I broke it for you because of your interest in Clara. My other vow was never to read the damned trade papers again, and that one I'll never break. Goodbye, Mr. Denton. Believe me, there's not much future in that article."

The next subject, Mrs. Karnes, was even more emphatic.

"You're just digging into things that are buried and forgotten. It isn't right. I'll have nothing to do with it."

"Wait, Mrs. Karnes, please . . . Don't hang up."

"It isn't right. Let the poor woman rest."

"And what about her murderer? Should I let him rest?"

"They never caught up with him, did they?"

"No."

"I know who did it. I've always known."

"Why didn't you tell the police?"

"I did, but it didn't help much. I didn't know his name. But I know it was the boy friend."

"Which boy friend? I understand there were many."

"There was really only one. I never saw him, but did she talk him up. She loved him, but he scared her sometimes, she said. He was really jealous, and as you have found out she was a friendly girl. But

there was really just this one guy. She said he was a great talent, said he'd be another Fitzgerald."

"Barry Fitzgerald?"

"No, the other one. Scott."

"I see. Were any of the men she talked about well known? I mean stars or producers or directors?"

"No, no. She may have known some, but she didn't talk about them if she did."

After thanking Mrs. Karnes, Harry hung up. He couldn't understand the apathy, the lack of interest even among people who should have been deeply involved. To him it seemed a classic American case, a story that could turn his career around after all the frustrations—all the books remaindered, the treatments accepted and scripts rejected, the options dropped.

The Clara Long case had all the elements . . .

Enough telephoning for now. He had all he needed in the manila folder and in his head anyway. Missing details could be filled in later.

Buttressed by another drink, he faced the typewriter and searched for an opening sentence that would grab an editor, grab the reader, send him on his way.

After a moment, he began to type.

"Murdering Clara Long was the only thing I ever did that was really a success . . ."

As Byron himself said, "All farewells should be sudden . . ."

MR. MORBY'S MURDER METHOD

by S.S. RAFFERTY

When Mrs. Ashton Morby gave birth to her first and only child in 1915, she was in a poetic phase of her short but comfortable life and named the boy Byron, much to his father's distress. However, any latent fears the elder Morby might have had about his son growing up to be a pale, wan romantic were unfounded, for Byron grew to maturity with uncommon virility without ever being affected by a single line of verse. Not that he was never exposed to poetry—one could hardly

get through Groton and Yale without some effete instructor or other trotting out the muse now and again—but Byron remained unscathed. In fact, few people called him Byron after his dramatic interception in the Yale-Harvard game of '36. In reporting the feat, Grantland Rice called him "Big By" Morby and it stuck with him even on Wall Street, until the war came along and replaced gridiron heroics with the battlefield variety. Byron Morby at war served well, but without distinction, and attained the respectable rank of Major.

In a sense, it was regrettable that Byron had not read the works of his namesake because he could have described succinctly the situation in which he found himself in his forty-sixth year.

You see, Byron Morby had both a wife and a mistress. Of course, there is nothing uncommon in such an arrangement, except that he loved each woman with tender and equal passion. In the words of Lord Byron, he had "all that's best of dark and bright." The dark was the raven-haired Lydia Morby, his stunningly beautiful wife of twelve years. The bright was embodied in Daisy Chalmers, a deliciously blonde and self-sufficient woman. Lydia was ensconced in a lovely ten-room, center-hall colonial in Greenwich, which she managed with skill and taste; Daisy was conveniently located in a sumptuous apartment, complete with a terraced view of Central Park and things westward.

Both women were, incidentally, the same age, and both showered Byron with devoted attention. They were equally excellent lovers, cooks, and supportive helpmates.

Since the market closed at 3 P.M., Byron had his own daily version of *cinq à sept* with Daisy and the rest of the evening with Lydia. Since Lydia did not care for skiing, Daisy accompanied Byron on his annual two weeks at Vail, and in no way begrudged him the month of August, when he took Lydia to Europe. In fact, Daisy used her time away from Byron to productive advantage. She was busily engaged in the translation of the works of Raoul Fountaine, an eighteenth-century French logician of great merit and little notoriety.

And so, for three years, Byron Morby enjoyed the best of light and dark, and was likely to continue to do so, until he developed a high-blood-pressure problem that threw a monkey wrench into the works. He discovered he had hypertension during a routine annual check-up.

"Me, tense?" he jeered at Dr. Charles Cuthgordy. "Chuck, I'm the

most relaxed man on the eastern seaboard."

Chuck Cuthgordy, along with being a hell of a fine Park Avenue physician, was a close friend of Byron's. They were a conversation piece among old Ivy League hands, since it was Charles "the Chucker" Cuthgordy's forward pass that Byron Morby had intercepted back in '36.

"It's not necessarily nerves, By. Hypertension is the tension on the walls of the arteries. We really don't know what causes it, but millions of people are walking around with it. We can control it very effectively these days with medication. A couple of pills a day, and you'll be firing on all fours."

Byron sat on the edge of the examining table and stared into space glumly. He had suddenly, brutally and irrevocably, realized his own mortality. Dr. Cuthgordy sensed his friend's dejection and smiled reassuringly. "Otherwise, you're as healthy as a first-string halfback, pal."

"But why me, Chuck? I live clean. I get plenty of exercise, eat sensibly, and use hootch intelligently. Why me?"

"I told you we don't know the causal factors. It could be a combination of organic and psychological. Have you been under any stress lately? Are you undergoing any upheavals in your life?"

"Upheavals? No, no upheavals. Everything is jake with me."

"Well," Chuck said, "don't worry it. Worry is more dangerous than hypertension. Hell, we're beginning to have reason to believe that worry predisposes people to disease."

"Psychosomatic stuff, huh?"

"Not really. The body-mind relationship is a complex and subtle thing. Some researchers have developed the theory that when the mind-body has to adapt to disruptive situations, its resistance is lowered to future diseases. There are several rating scales which give a numerical value to certain events in life. I've even worked out one of my own, based on my own observations. Let's say a guy loses his job. I'd rate that around 15 on my scale. Then say two weeks later the guy's father dies. That's good for a solid 10 points. Now if things keep piling up over a year's time on the fellow, his score can zoom up to a 60 or a 70, which puts him in a disease-prone situation."

"Sounds far-fetched, Chuck."

"Hell it is, By. Bio-statistics are very helpful diagnostic tools. I see people in this office day in and day out who are literally getting sick

because life is changing too fast for them."

Byron stood up in his socks and said, "Chuck, this blood-pressure thing doesn't inhibit my—ah—exercise? I mean, I don't have to cut down on strenuous activity?"

Chuck chuckled. "If you're talking about sex, no. You just keep Lydia happy, old boy." The chuckle turned into a sardonic laugh. "But remember those sudden changes building up. More men die while making love to some bimbo than they do with their wives."

It was as if Byron Morby had just swallowed a piece of ice that chilled his esophagus and froze his chest. Of course, Chuck Cuthgordy was kidding, because he knew nothing of Daisy, but the gist of the statement thrust into him like a spear. Daisy was certainly no bimbo, but she was extra-marital and that was what Chuck had meant. In jest, of course, but true all the same.

A morose Byron Morby sat that afternoon in a darkened cocktail lounge on Third Avenue brooding into a martini. In his pocket was a prescription for pills; in his heart was the pathos of his predicament; in his mind was the fear of early death.

How many times had he opened his *Times* in the morning to read how someone or other keeled over dead? "BROKER DEAD AT 43"—"AD EXECUTIVE, 50, HEART VICTIM." He sipped the martini, which now tasted like witch hazel. Byron Morby told himself that he had to survive, one way or another.

Another man would simply tell himself to get rid of Daisy, but that was easier said than done. He loved Daisy. He was comfortable with her. But he was equally so with Lydia. Why, he asked himself in torment, couldn't he go home every night to a nag? Why couldn't he be having an affair with some cheap little thing, some easily bought-off tramp?

But Daisy would never be bought off. She was deeply in love with him. So was Lydia. Thus the dilemma of Byron Morby. If he left Daisy to the solitude of her lush apartment, she would sour. Turn so acidic that she would raise cain, even to the point of exposing him to Malcolm Kittery Smith, the staid head of Byron's brokerage firm.

By the same token, Lydia, lovely Lydia, would never give him a divorce—and even if she did her wounded ego would reduce his life to an economic wasteland. It was truly remarkable how much alike the

two women were. Loyal, loving, and eminently fair and understanding when attended to, but dangerously headstrong and punitive when rejected. He had painted himself into a formidable corner. Perhaps Lord Byron had put it more lyrically when standing on the Bridge of Sighs in Venice. The poet's eye saw that he was amid a prison and a palace at the same time. Morby's problem was, which woman was the palace and which the prison? More to the point, which one had to go, and how? There, with his bitter martini and his burning sense of survival, Byron Morby was unconsciously plotting a murder. Eventually, the grimness of his thoughts rose to the surface. To save his own life, he had to take another's, but the decision was an awesome task. Beyond the problem of the victim's designation was the one of method and, of course, how to get away with it.

For several days, the problem plagued Byron. He considered all the aspects of How to Murder and was amazed at the cornucopia of tools and techniques available. But no matter which method he selected there was always the gnawing question: which victim?

His ingrained sportsmanship made him wish that the two women could decide the issue for themselves. He certainly wasn't going to make a choice on the flip of a coin or any element of chance.

The solution came to him one afternoon as he was taking one of his three daily pills.

His mind clicked back to Chuck's dissertation on the body's predisposition to future disease on the basis of changes in daily life. He was convinced that his own high blood pressure was due to the strain of loving two women. If he triggered changes in both Lydia's and Daisy's lives, and built the points on Chuck's scale to a high score, one or the other would eventually come down with some dread disease and die off. If he applied the pressure equally between the ladies, it would be like an athletic contest. Yes, that was it, let the better (or healthier) woman win!

He cornered Chuck at the country club over the weekend and got his best friend to send him a copy of his rating scale. As an excuse for the request, he said he planned to use it in testing new employees.

"Well, By, don't let it serve as your only criterion," Chuch warned him.

When the list arrived, Byron was initially disappointed. Most of the highest-rated changes were out of his reach. Divorce, death of a wife

or husband, and retirement were all unattainable. But as he went down the rating scale, he saw that by careful planning and selection he could make his goal. He decided to go for a quick 18 points to get the ball rolling. Yes, change in income was a solid starting place. Not that there would be any real change in Byron's income, but the women wouldn't know that.

"How are you feeling, babycakes?" Byron asked Daisy a week later.

"If you mean how do I feel about giving up a beautiful apartment and moving into this dingy efficiency, I can't say I'm ecstatic, By, but what could you do, darling, with the stock market going crazy? Look, if *she* can give up her Mercedes and country club and maid to help you out, I guess I can stand up to it."

"I know you're disappointed, honey, but I meant how's your health?"

"My *health*? I feel fine, darling, as long as I have time with you."

Of course, the market was doing just fine, and in any case a piddling 18-point change wouldn't bring on a really dread illness in either of his loves. He knew that the system was too subtle to produce immediate results, but he had hoped for a headache or two.

His next step was double-barreled and good for a cumulative 20 points. Each was worth 10 points—a change in diet and an increase in arguments.

"Honestly, Byron," Lydia said with mild annoyance, "this health-food kick you're on is exasperating. Good Lord, groats for breakfast? Soyburgers for dinner! If you like it, fine, eat it, but why do you insist I do?"

"For your health, my dear," he answered obliquely, "and don't snap at me."

"Who's snapping? Byron, I can appreciate your having business problems, but you're so argumentative these days. We've had ten arguments since we were married and all of them have been in the past week and a half."

"Don't be picky, Lydia. And pass the blackstrap molasses, please."

The diet and argument regimen was slightly different with Daisy since she *was* a health-food addict.

"By, I'm sick of arguing about it," she said in defeat. "All right, if you want me to eat steaks and chops and gooey cakes, I will. I'll get as

big as a house. If you'll keep on loving me I'll eat anything you want, but you've got the freezer overstocked now and you're still dragging in bags of groceries."

"Don't be picky, Daisy," he scolded and moved on to a criticism of her hair style.

At the end of the first month he had added another 15 points to the score by instigating several other changes on Chuck's chart. He had put 53 equally stressful points against each of them, but how could he know what disease might be infiltrating their weakened systems? Let the better woman win, he kept telling himself. He kept scanning the list to devise new surprises.

"But, Byron, you know I hate skiing," Lydia said as he unfolded his latest point-raiser, "so why should I go to Vail with you? I never have before."

"That's precisely why, Lydia. You never have. Don't you care to please me?"

"Of course I do, dear. I love you."

She went to Vail and skied, hating every minute of it, thus adding 12 precious points in the "change of recreation" category. Daisy also reached a score of 65 because she *couldn't* go to Vail. Instead, Byron insisted she take modern-dance lessons, which she detested, but suffered only because of her love for Byron, who told her the lessons would improve her posture, which was admittedly a little slumped lately, due to the weight she had gained on her diet of chops and steaks and gooey cakes. . .

"Now let me understand this," Chuck Cuthgordy said at the 19th-hole lounge. "You have two fellows up for the same job and both have a score of 65? By, I wouldn't hire either of them."

"Well, let's say I have to make a choice."

"Some choice! Both guys have a high propensity to illness. But underscore 'propensity.' One of them may have more emotional stamina than the other."

"But there's no way to tell which one?"

The doctor shrugged his once-powerful quarterback's shoulders.

"I'm a doctor, not God. Their psychological makeup, their drives, all that factors in, you know. By the way, my wife tells me Lydia is a little out of sorts. Something about not going to Europe this year."

"Out of sorts? Really? Has she been to see you professionally?" There was a flicker of hope in his voice.

"Oh, no. Look, I understand things are tight in the market and you've had to cut back. I think Lydia understands. She loves you too much not to."

So it went, into the third month of Byron's campaign. He upped the scores by 16 whole points by faking sexual difficulties. As much as it hurt his virile pride, he felt he had to make some sacrifices.

"Darling, don't brood about it," Lydia soothed him. "Lots of men your age go through temporary problems. It will pass."

Daisy was less analytical. "I've grown fat and ugly, haven't I, By? It's my fault that you can't . . ."

"No, *no*, babycakes. I love plump women. Men my age go through temporary problems, that's all."

"You're just being kind. You are so kind and loving, By."

He felt bad about Daisy's attitude because he saw it as a tipping of the scales in Lydia's favor. But he steeled himself from the thought. He had played fair. Let the better woman win and he would make it up to the victor. In the meantime, he was making up for his self-designed libidinous difficulties with a young lady in the firm's arbitrage department. For some ridiculous reason, probably parental wishful thinking, her name was Chastity. She called him Boola-Boola By and used the words "super" and "intense" a lot. Along with relieving the Yale interceptor's drives, she took up some of the time formerly spent with Daisy and Lydia.

Byron was a bit heartened by the news that Daisy had developed a duodenal ulcer, while Lydia was valiantly bucking up under a barrage of migraine headaches. At every chance, he pursued the attack.

"Don't be so picky, Lydia. . ."

"You're not eating good red meat, Daisy, that's your problem . . ."

On it went, into the fifth and then the sixth month. Progressing nicely, Byron thought, very nicely indeed. Lydia had lost twenty pounds, Daisy had gained forty. Lydia now took strong sedatives, Daisy had become fond of beer and pretzels.

His affection for both women had not wavered one iota. Byron Morby, however, wished the contest would be decided. One or the other, he told himself. He wanted to be fair. Eminently sportsmanlike.

"Boola, what's the matter?" Chastity asked one night in the dim light of a mid-Manhattan hotel room.

Byron's lips were mouthing words. "Pain . . . chest . . . ambulance."

Chastity slipped quickly into her things and beat it back to Jackson Heights where her mother asked her over coffee and crullers, "How's the accounting class coming along?"

Byron Morby's funeral was heavily attended by the class of '36 of both Yale and Harvard. Dr. Charles Cuthgordy gave a spirited eulogy which was reprinted in the *Yale Alumni Magazine* and, much to Chastity's concern, posted on the bulletin board at the firm. The part where it said that "Big By had intercepted his last pass" she had interpreted personally as a slur on herself.

"Strange," Charles Cuthgordy said to his wife after the funeral. "I should have gotten the clue when he asked for the stress scale. He was rating himself, poor chap, and by God he proved that the analytical method works. Lydia tells me that he had business reverses, and then the change in diet, and the arguments—stress building up until pop!"

"What stress, Chuck?" his wife asked.

He explained it to her.

"Heavens, I hope I don't have those things coming up in my life," she said apprehensively.

"You've got nothing to worry about, my pet. My charts apply to men only. Women undergo stress too, but not to the same degree."

"We're stronger emotionally, you mean."

"I think so. Just a while back I had this woman patient who had been through hell for the previous several months. Ulcers, overweight, loaded with cholesterol from a diet of steaks and chops. . . ."

"And gooey cakes too, I'll bet."

"Absolutely. Do you know she did it for love? Which I can't quite understand."

"Chuck dear, you *are* poetic."

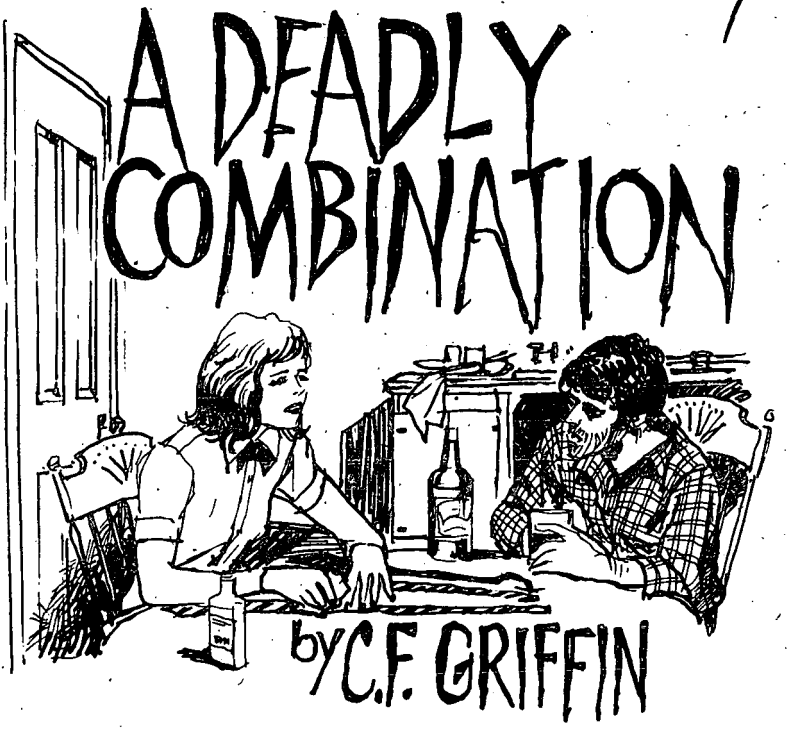
"Poetic? Me?"

"Lord Byron said it. In her first passion, woman loves her lover. In all others, all she loves is love."

"Well, thanks be I was your first and only lover, my dear."

"Yes, dear, you are," she said through an impenetrable smile that would defy the best chart or scheme ever devised.

The college kids who came into the diner asked the darnedest questions . . .



The hamburger patty popped and sizzled on the square metal grill. Marcy turned it over. The last customer had left the lunchroom.

Pete said, "I've seen cows burned worse'n that and lived."

She remembered to chuckle. The joke was neither new nor particularly funny, but Pete meant it affectionately and his feelings would be hurt if she did not laugh.

She put the meat on a bun, added dill pickle slices, drew herself a

mug of coffee from the tall chrome urn, and set the plate and coffee on the long shiny lunchcounter. Then she walked around to sit on a stool in front of it to eat. Pete's Place was restful with all the customers gone, the gaudy thumping jukebox silent and the searing fluorescents turned off.

The cash register clanged and rang. Pete scooped out change and she could hear the fast rhythmic rattle of the coins falling into the canvas bank bag, his rapid counting whisper.

He looked like an old child. His face had an unfinished look. He was shaped like a fat baby, big gut and small neat hands. His feet were smaller than hers.

She caught sight of herself in the mirror behind the blenders. Her hair was falling in her face. She pushed at it ineffectually. No matter what she tried to do with it, after eight hours here it was stringy and limp, all the carefully put-in curls gone.

She wished she could afford a permanent. But why bother? Bill called her a dishwater blonde, and that summed it up. She hoped Bill would be asleep when she got home. With any luck he would be.

Outside the front windows snow blew in the wind, colored red and green alternately by the flashing neon sign. A police car cruised slowly past in the frozen street.

Pete zipped the bank bag and slapped it noisily on the countertop. "We did good tonight. Tired, Marcy?"

"Some." Her feet ached and the backs of her calves were stiff with fatigue, but it took his question to remind her, she was so used to it. "I got a lot of tips."

Pete filled a mug with coffee and came to sit two stools away. He spooned sugar, stirred, and drank, then added more sugar.

"This stuff's awful," he said. "No wonder the customers bitch."

"It's O.K. up till around eleven," she said.

"Yeh." He chuckled. "Remember the time that college kid we had cleaning up left a rag in the urn? Boy, oh boy!"

Marcy smiled, remembering. Pete sipped at his coffee.

"I kinda like these kids that come in here, but they sure do ask the darnedest questions. You know what one of them asked me tonight? Real serious too . . . 'What do you wanna do with your life?' Now what kinda question is that?"

"Kinda funny," she agreed. But she felt as if somebody had dropped

an ice cube down her back.

"What's the matter?"

"Goose walked over my grave."

Pete reached around the glassed-in pie display and got himself a wedge of peach cream pie.

What did she want to do with her life? Work her tail off every night for nickles and dimes and occasional quarters?

This wasn't a bad job, though, and Pete was a real nice man to work for. He was kind and honest—everyone liked him. He never seemed sad. He was always the jolly fat man, and he went out of his way to cheer her up when she felt low.

Pete was watching something behind the counter. She followed his gaze. A large cockroach was walking on the cutting board as if it owned it.

"I'm gonna have to get the exterminator again," Pete said resignedly. "When they won't wait till I've gone home, there's too many of them."

The roach stopped and waved its long slender feelers in their direction. "It sure is a big one," Marcy said.

"A real granddaddy. One of those college kids calls 'em waterbugs." Pete laughed. "Guess that's what his old lady told him. Waterbugs!"

"College kids don't know everything."

"You're right about that." He waved his hand at the roach, which flattened a moment, then continued its inspection of the cutting board. "I ought to squash him," Pete grumbled. But he wouldn't bring himself to kill it, Marcy knew. He seemed uncomfortable about swatting flies in summer.

But college kids knew a lot about a lot of things, she reflected. She wished she hadn't quit high school to get married. And to a bastard like Bill too. But he hadn't been like that back then. He'd been fun, not mean at all. And he'd looked like a movie star. They had laughed and kissed and danced all night. Why had he changed? Because he didn't get on a pro football team? It had begun then. He wasn't the kind of man who could work all day and be cheerful at night, who could get along without applause.

What did she want to do with her life? Leave for work feeling pretty good and then at midnight hang around drinking coffee, afraid to go home, hoping an extra five minutes would give Bill time to be asleep enough so her coming in wouldn't wake him?

She was through eating, and her cup was empty. If she hung around too long, and Bill was awake, he would be mad at her. He had even accused her of having a thing for Pete.

Pete was starting a second piece of peach pie. He had whipped cream on his upper lip. He smiled, revealing even spotted teeth, the color of old piano keys. "It's real cold out, below zero," he said. "Can I drop you off?"

"No thanks, it's not far."

"No trouble."

"I know, but it isn't far." If Bill saw her come home in a car he'd be mad. He'd start in again saying nasty things about Pete. He might even make her quit this job the way he had the last one. If she was going to have to work her feet off, she wanted to do it in a decent place like this where the tips were steady and the boss was kind.

She could ask Pete to let her off at the corner, but she was ashamed to admit how scared she was, and she couldn't explain to anyone how Bill acted. The way Bill ran around and then had the gall to be jealous of her, when she never looked at another man. The way he'd almost killed her that time she tried to run away.

She washed and put away her plate and mug, got into her coat and buttoned it up to the neck. She would have to sew the third button back on tomorrow. Lucky she'd found it. She felt for it. It was still in the pocket. She got her purse from under the cash register.

"G'night, Pete."

"Yeh, good night. Take it easy."

The wind was icy, blowing stinging snow into her face. She pulled her headscarf further forward, but it wasn't much help. The wind searched through the thin fabric of her coat with penetrating fingers. Shivering, teeth chattering, she began to run, seeing her awkward shadow cast ahead of her by the streetlights, watching it get smaller and fall behind, only to be replaced by a new shadow a little further on.

She turned into Elm Street and went up the worn wooden steps onto the gingerbread porch with its fancy posts and rotted railings. The light was on in the kitchen. She could see it down the carpetless passageway that always seemed twice as long when Bill was at the other end of it.

"Well, if it ain't Birdlegs in person," he said, looking at her with hard blue eyes. He was scowling and he had a bottle and a thick tumbler in front of him. If he was drinking Scotch, it had to be stolen.

He saw her look at it, though she had glanced away quickly. "You shut up!" he said, "And shut the goddamned door!"

She closed the kitchen door behind her. She could not say that she had thought he wanted the door open because she had found it that way, or that she had not said a word about the Scotch, but his unfairness hurt her. She wished she wasn't so meek.

"Do you see this?"

She looked at the three neckties on the yellow oilcloth in front of him. She nodded, afraid, remembering now that it was too late that he had told her to clean them. He had wanted the spots taken out of his jacket too, and she had forgotten.

"Well, ain'tcha gonna say anything?"

"I'll do it now." She hated the sound of her voice, the whine in it.

She got carbon tetrachloride down from the cabinet and a piece of clean rag from the drawer. Before sitting down, she hung her coat away in the corner closet. The kitchen was stuffy and hot. She could feel sweat beading her forehead. The label on the bottle said something about not using in a confined space. "Let me open the door," she said.

"What for, stupid? It's too damn cold in here already."

She began dabbing at the grease spots on the maroon tie.

"And do a good job, I'm goin' out tomorrow."

Did he have to rub it in? Why did he always have to let her know when he had a new girl friend? The tiny kitchen was too hot and the cleaning fluid smelled bad. "Come on, Bill, let me open the door a little way—this stuff really stinks."

"I *told you.*" He sounded dangerous. She could see his meaty shoulders bunching under the faded plaid of his flannel shirt.

She took a quick look at the Scotch as she bent over the tie. Half empty. He was drunk enough to hit her for nothing at all.

She rubbed industriously at the spots, trying to hurry to get it over with. The steam radiator hissed. Outside the wind whined around the house. Bill poured himself another drink. She could hear him swallowing. Her feet hurt and her head was beginning to ache. "This one's finished. Let me do the others tomorrow."

"I *told you.*" His fists were clenched on the shiny oilcloth. He stared at her angrily. His jaw was dark with stubble and she could see the tuft of dark hair curling over the neck of his white T-shirt.

He lifted his hand and she flinched, but he only slopped more whisky into his glass. Suddenly he threw back his head and laughed until the veins stood out on his neck. Wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, he said, "You sure are the gutless wonder."

He lifted his hand as if to hit her, and she could not keep from flinching again. When he raised his arm she got a whiff of sweat, sour and goatish. Her cringing made him laugh again.

She poured more cleaning fluid on the rag and worked on the blue striped tie. The tetrachloride smelled poisonous. What was it she had overheard one time at Pete's? Some college kids talking about perfect crimes. She had not paid much attention. Something about carbon tet being a poison, which was the reason for the warning on the bottle. It wouldn't blow up, but it could make you sick if you breathed too much—and if you were drinking alcohol at the same time it could kill you dead. She had not understood it all, but from what the kids had said the combination wrecked your liver.

She felt sick and quivery and her head was pounding. She poured the fluid liberally on the rag and bent over the dark green tie, scrubbing. Outside the trees thrashed in the wind. Steam knocked in the pipes and the old house creaked in the cold.

She heard the movement of his arm on the table. The heavy tumbler fell on the floor and rolled along the worn linoleum. She did not look up. His head slowly settled and rested on the table at the edge of her vision. She finished the last tie and lined it up next to the others.

His profile was clear and strong. He was still handsome, but he was no longer the boy she had fallen in love with a dozen childless years ago. She watched her hands soak the rag in the last of the tetrachloride from the bottle and lay it down beside the ties close to his nose.

She felt exhausted and empty. She could not stop staring at him, remembering how they had danced all night under coins of colored light, laughing and joking. She reached toward the rag, then did not touch it. That had been a long time ago. Now her feet hurt from working, not dancing. Worse, she was tired of being afraid.

"What do you want to do with your life?"

She did not know, but she was sure of what she did not want to do with it.

She got up from the table and went back out into the passageway and upstairs to bed, carefully closing the door behind her.

Of course it was genuine. What was the question? . . .

THE Ginseng Root

by

Lawrence Treat

I shouldn't have. Not after Gwen and I had decided to settle down and get married. Raise a family. Buy a home. Be respectable members of a community.

"Just think of it," she said delightedly. "We'll even pay taxes!"

That's one of the things I love about her. When she does something, she does it all the way. No compromises, no halfway measures. I'm sure she had regrets, as did I, but the break had to be clean.

"If you can sell a share in the Howard Hughes estate," she said, and I had, plenty of times, "then you can sell anything. Even insurance."

I was horrified at the idea. "Not insurance," I said firmly. "I'll sell carpets or cars or houses, but not insurance. Never."

I made the rounds and, while I had no trouble lining up sales jobs, they all demanded a lot of training. And experienced salesmen had the best customers lined up, so where would I start? At the bottom.

Not me. I've made a good living out of abandoned gold mines and sunken treasures and wild ginseng roots, and I have my pride. I've always said you have to find the right sucker, or else you're in trouble. And the same thing goes for a boss. Find the right one, or else forget it. So I had two things in mind that afternoon: get a job and sell the root. With the proceeds of the latter a wedding present for Gwen. My price was ten thousand. I'd done it before and I'd do it again.

I had the ginseng root with me packed up in a jar, just in case, but I hadn't tried to peddle it. I was taking no chances of getting pulled in on a fraud count. Gwen and I had agreed to stay out of the rackets, and I was keeping my word—at least until I had a sure thing.

I'd drawn blanks at my first few calls, and I crossed the street and walked into the lobby of the rather antiquated five-story structure squeezed in between a pair of mammoth office buildings. It had no uniformed attendant; no marble walls, and no expensive décor. Just a creaky old elevator and a smallish office directory with about a dozen names, one of them reading Singer & Bolton, Importers. Room 200.

The name intrigued me. Importers. The sign didn't say what they imported, but I had visions of Indian teakwood and Brazilian sapphires and Patagonian sealskin. My imagination soared and my mind said, Why not? I had a feeling this was for me.

The elevator was on one of the upper floors, so I walked up to the second, opened the door, and knew I was home. The place looked like one of those old-fashioned firms with generations of comfort and money behind them. I saw portraits of the founder and his wife, some wooden filing cabinets dating back to the turn of the century, and a bookkeeper to match. But a thousand-dollar copier and a computer showed that the business was a going concern. And to balance that ancient bookkeeper, a trim efficient secretary with a trim efficient figure was typing away at a great rate.

As I came in, the bookkeeper was saying, "Yes, Mr. Bolton." And

Bolton was roaring out, "And for once, don't get it mixed up! Understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Bolton."

Bolton was perfect for me. I could tell at once. He had too much of an ego ever to go to the police and admit he'd been conned. I decided he was a real sweetheart of a guy. Irascible, misanthropic. Bitter, stingy, selfish. Mean and miserly, unloved and unloving, and he had money.

He went storming into his office, but through an open doorway I caught a glimpse of a second office and a frail worried little man who presumably was Singer. I had him tagged too. Punctiliously honest, anchored in the past, willing to let his partner handle everything so long as he could dream along in his own familiar rut.

After witnessing the little tableau, I stated my business to the secretary. She smiled and said, "Of course. You'll want to see Mr. Bolton." And she ushered me into a large airy room that had open windows and not a comfortable chair in sight. Bolton, sitting at his desk, had cooled off and was almost courteous to me.

"Mr. Jennings?" he said in a gravelly voice. "What can I do for you?"

"It's the other way around," I said. "What can I do for you?"

He recognized the ploy, and for an instant I was afraid he was going to pick me up with one hand and heave me out. And he almost could have, with that breadth of shoulder and those massive arms that almost burst through his jacket. But some instinct, some basic belief that he could always manage to get something out of anybody held him back.

"Yes?" he said. "I'd like to hear."

I've pulled the ginseng trick often enough, and I think I do it pretty well. Panax ginseng is an ancient and illustrious item in the Chinese pharmacopoeia. The best of it grows wild, in remote parts of Manchuria and Korea and the Soviet Far East. For some reason the domesticated Panax is vastly inferior to the wild, of which only a few roots are found per year. The best are about twenty years old, but hundred-year roots have been found and are universally sought after.

"You can buy plenty of ginseng powder," I said, warming up to my subject, "and unscrupulous dealers will tell you that it comes from the real thing, which is the wild root called Panax ginseng C.A. Meyer, after a Russian botanist. You can buy the American variety by the ton,

but genuine ginseng like this—" here I opened my bag and took out the jar with the ginseng root. It had the usual bifurcation that made it look like the legs of a man, which is how it came to be named. Ginseng—man. Gwen and I had done a little doctoring to make the resemblance more obvious, and we'd worked on the color and scent and attached a dozen or so extra rootlets. We knew our business, and we'd always been conscientious about it.

I uncorked the jar and let Bolton sniff at the full aromatic odor. "Quite something, isn't it?" I said. "I wouldn't dare tell you how I got hold of this. I wouldn't sell it—it's priceless, and Chinese emperors a couple of thousand years ago had special ginseng gatherers who spent their entire lives up in the mountains looking for the stuff."

"I've heard of it," Bolton said.

"Then you know its value," I said. "It's pretty well conceded to be an aphrodisiac, but it's a great life-prolonger too, and modern science is studying it. This particular root—" I closed the jar and put it on Bolton's desk "—comes from the Sikhote Alin range. The people there use it regularly. Their average life span is well over a hundred and fifty years and not a single person there ever has a wrinkle. But I guess I'm boring you."

Bolton picked up the jar and studied it, and I knew he was hooked. "Beautiful," he said. "But if you didn't come here to sell me this—why then?"

"Suppose I told you I'd expected to sell you some insurance?"

"Waste of time," he said, still staring spellbound at the root. "Why bother with insurance when you have this?" He put the jar down on the desk and confronted me. "How much?"

I was growing suspicious. I'd made my pitch and he'd gone along a little too easily.

I was unsure of myself and I walked over to the window and made as if I was thinking about the price, but in reality I was trying to guess what his game was. He wanted that ginseng, and yet I was convinced that he didn't believe it would give him renewed potency and another ten years of life. So what was he really after?

A lot of people would have dropped the whole business right there and played it safe, but not me. Nobody has ever tricked me yet. I've walked out of quite a few deals when I felt I was on shaky ground, but I couldn't fault myself on this one. I hadn't even tried to make a sell.

I'd talked, maybe too enthusiastically, but I could deny my words, and who would believe Bolton? That voice of his would inspire confidence in neither police nor jury, so I felt reasonably safe. Besides, I was about to retire. If I didn't pull this one off, I might fade away into a kind of tired respectability. I needed the memory of a last, successful coup.

I turned away from the window and faced Bolton. "Actually," I said, "I hadn't expected to sell this root, because I'll never get another one like it. It's sheer luck that I got hold of this one, when not more than two or three roots are found a year—wild roots, that is—in all of the Far East. And millions of people are in the market for them."

"How much?" Bolton said again.

"Ten thousand."

"And you guarantee that this is the wild root, and at least twenty years old?"

"Absolutely."

"Then it's a deal," he said, and took out his checkbook.

I figured I'd take a taxi straight to the bank and get that check deposited within the hour, or even cashed if I could manage it, but I gave no impression of anxiety. I watched him make out the check and sign it. When he handed it to me, I looked at the amount and noted that he'd signed his right name. Andrew Bolton. I put the check in my pocket.

"I'm sure you won't regret this."

"I know I won't," he said, and that gravelly voice of his got even uglier than it had been before. "Because I have you cold, and I can prosecute you for fraud. The penalty is what? Two years? Three?"

"It's your word against mine," I said.

"Not exactly," he said. "I have it on tape. Care to hear?"

"Very much so," I said.

While I listened to it and realized how damning the evidence was, I wondered whether I could jump him and get hold of the tape. But I'd never gone in for violence, and when I did I wasn't going to tangle with a powerhouse who had football shoulders and baseball hands.

"You have something in mind?" I said. "You're not talking about prosecuting just for the fun of it, are you?"

"No," he said in a low voice, like static on a distant radio. "Sit down and I'll tell you who you're going to murder and exactly how you're going to do it."

"Not me," I said. My mouth went dry. "You're talking to the wrong man. I wouldn't go in for that, not for any amount of money." But I sat down.

"Rather go to prison?" he said.

I nodded. "Definitely."

"I thought so," he said, leaning forward and speaking confidentially. "So now I'll get to the real point. You're going to reenact the scene we just went through, and I'll tape it. You come in, you're trying to sell me something. Ginseng root, if you like, but you can make it anything. Make it legitimate. Don't say anything that will make you liable for fraud, but keep one thing in mind—the date is next Sunday, the fourteenth. Make that clear. Allude to it. Pin it down. Sunday, the fourteenth. And if you look more closely at the check I just gave you, that's the date on it."

"I don't understand what you're getting at," I said.

"You don't have to. Just do it. Mention the Jets-Patriots game, which is scheduled for next Sunday afternoon. Say that you want to get home in time to see it. When I make out the check, I'll ask you the date and you'll say the fourteenth. Understand?"

"Is that all I do?"

"Not quite. Be here next Sunday at two. Just walk in. The doors will be unlocked, and you'll stay here until I get back."

"With the tape you just made?"

His gravelly voice was almost pleasant. "Why not?" he said.

"You leave me no choice," I remarked.

"I didn't intend to."

Next Sunday afternoon, true to Bolton's assurance, the downstairs door was unlocked. I climbed the flight of stairs to the Singer & Bolton office and walked inside. The rows of filing cabinets were locked. I peeked into Singer's office and was struck with the strange and rare atmosphere of the Far East. The paneled walls seemed the right background for those jade statuettes and the samurai dagger. A piece of old brocade framed behind glass hung in a shadowy corner of the room and grotesque figures carved in exotic woods leered at me from two walls.

His work area, however, was more mundane. A picture of a middle-aged woman, probably his wife, stood on his desk between what I

judged to be pictures of his two sons. Nice and domestic, and the pile of invoices stacked on his blotter and waiting for his perusal didn't attract me. There was no hint here of anything that could even vaguely point to the possibility of crime.

I left the room and walked into Bolton's office, which was as impersonal as a dollar bill. The only object not strictly business was my jar with the ginseng root, planted solidly in the center of the desk.

I looked under it and found the tape recorder that he'd trapped me with. It was on a hidden shelf in the kneehole area, and it was actuated by a foot pedal.

I sat down in Bolton's chair and waited. I was staring at the wall clock that said five after two, and I was wondering what was going to happen when I heard heavy footsteps coming up the stairs.

So the trap was about to close in on me. I'd already guessed that Bolton planned to use me to establish an alibi. I intended to back him up until the pressure was on, at which time I'd retract and change my story. I had it all figured out and I felt confident enough. But now it hit me that he was setting me up for something far more serious. Murder, he'd said the other day, and I had a nasty feeling that I was being involved in a homicide. Then the office door swung open and a uniformed cop strode in. He stopped short when he saw me.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I had an appointment with Mr. Bolton."

"How'd you get in?"

"He let me in."

"Yeah?" And from the way the cop spoke, I realized I'd said the wrong thing. "Yeah?" he said. "Where is he?"

"He stepped out for a while. I guess he's in the lavatory."

"Where's that?"

"I don't know."

"I guess I'll wait here until he gets back."

"He may have gone outside. He said something about getting a paper. Some errand or other."

"I can wait."

"You don't have to," I said. "It's no crime to sit here, is it?"

"The door was open downstairs. How do you explain that?"

"Bolton left it open for me. He said he might be late, he didn't want me to wait outside, it might rain or something."

"I don't see no rain."

"Look," I said. "What do you want me to do?"

He took a pad out of his pocket. "Just give me your name and address so I can check it out with Mr. Bolton when he gets back. Then you'd better beat it."

"Why?" I said. "I'm not trespassing, am I?"

"How do I know?"

I finally had him on the defensive, and I said, "Look—I'm here, you can see I'm merely waiting. If you make me leave, Andy Bolton's going to have your neck. You know what kind of a guy he is, don't you?"

"Yeah, but how'd you break in?"

"I didn't. I just told you he left the door open for me. I was waiting here peacefully for Andy to get back." I repeated the "Andy," making him seem to be a good friend of mine, and I had a pretty strong feeling that he'd crack down hard on any patrolman who stepped over the line. "Andy'll be here in a little while," I said, "and you'll look like a fool if you kicked me out. I'm here on a business deal, and a big one too."

"Maybe. But how do I know—"

"What do you lose if you just walk out of here and lock the door? And check back whenever you want to?"

"Yeah," he said, "but—"

"Exactly," I said. "And he'll be glad to know you check up on his office."

The officer took his cap off, scratched his head, and replaced his cap. "Well, just doing my duty," he said. "I'll stop by later on." And he trudged out.

Good or bad? I wondered. Was I lucky or unlucky? My presence here was established, but what was the significance of that?

I thought about my check, deposited on Friday, postdated to today. I thought about Bolton, and then I went into Singer's office and started rummaging around and studying every single piece of paper I found. And what I discovered left me stunned.

Apparently Singer and Bolton, partners, weren't talking to each other. Instead, they communicated through office memos. I suppose Bolton had managed to dispose of most of them, but there was one that had been caught in a crack at the bottom of a drawer, and there was another, a torn and crumpled scrap of paper with a memo scrawled on

the back of a charity appeal. The upshot of those two memos was clear—Bolton had been embezzling company funds to the tune of fifty thousand dollars, and Singer was threatening to prosecute.

It was easy to put things together. Bolton planned to kill his partner, and I was Bolton's alibi. I was to swear he'd been in his office today at the exact time that Singer was to be killed. The tape would back me up, or I'd back up the tape. Call it either way.

And the cop who'd seen me here alone? I'd told him that Bolton had stepped out for a few moments, and that ended the alibi, or at least put a pretty big dent in it. But my presence here implied that I'd tried to set up the alibi, and that made me an accomplice in the Singer murder.

My immediate job was clear, to warn Singer that Bolton was planning to murder him. I could only hope that I wasn't too late, and I felt a chill settle in my stomach as I looked up Singer's phone number. My hands were shaky as I dialed it.

I thought of the pictures of Singer's family that I'd seen in his office, and I wondered who'd answer the phone and exactly how I'd warn Singer when I got hold of him.

"Mr. Singer," I'd say, "this is a friend. I have reason to believe that your partner intends to kill you this afternoon."

Would Singer believe me? And if not, how could I convince him?

The phone broke off in the middle of its second ring. The voice that spoke to me over the wire was flat, matter-of-fact. "Hello?" it said.

"Is Mr. Singer there?" I asked.

"Who's calling?"

I hung up, because I'd been talking to a cop.

When you've had enough experience with the police, you become sensitized to them. You can spot them by dress and by gesture. You recognize some subtlety of voice, low-key aggressive, giving away nothing. Even over the telephone wire, that tone was unmistakable.

I tried to figure out where I stood. I didn't know whether Bolton was in custody, but I did know he had a tape that could hook me into a conspiracy to commit murder. Technically I was an accomplice. Where the tape was and whether the police had it were questions I had to answer, and couldn't.

I stared at my ginseng root in the jar on the desk. The police would be interested in it. They'd analyze it and find out that Gwen and I had

doctored up a common, domestic root so that we could pass it off as the wild root of Asia. Panax quinquefolius into Panax ginseng C. A. Meyer, to use the scientific terms.

I picked up the jar, put it under my arm, and started out. I got as far as the door when I heard footsteps tramping up the stairs. I swung around, put the jar back on the desk, and sat down. A few moments later a tired old man walked in, followed by a pair of sporty-looking detectives.

The tired old man seemed to get about twenty years younger when he saw me sitting there. I was his pigeon, and he was going to enjoy taking me apart.

He started off by identifying himself. "I'm Kendall, Homicide," he said. "Who are you?"

"Just a friend of Bolton's," I said. "I had a business appointment and I've been waiting for him. Why? Did something happen?"

Kendall was smart. He'd been seeing through suspects for twenty or thirty years, and he saw clear through me right now. He barely turned, and he motioned with his head to the pair of detectives who'd followed him.

"Out," he said. He waited for the door to close before he spoke to me. He rested his hands on the back of the chair and swayed slowly, trying to rock out his tiredness. "Something happened all right," he said. "What do you think it was?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm not clairvoyant and I'm not good at guessing, so tell me. What happened?"

"Bolton got shot," he said.

"Bolton?" I exclaimed, and wished to hell I'd kept my mouth shut.

"Bolton. Who did you think it was?"

"I don't know, and I don't speculate." But I was speculating all over the place. Bolton shot. By Singer? And did Kendall know about the tape?

He was too cagey to give anything away. He pointed to the jar and said, "What's that?"

"Ginseng root. Bolton's an importer. Or was."

"You think he's dead?"

"You just said so."

"I said he'd been shot. What makes you think he's dead?"

"The way you behave," I said sweetly. "It's written all over you. You

said you were a homicide detective. You're investigating a homicide, so I infer that Bolton is dead."

"You're pretty good at inferring. Now infer who shot him."

"I don't know," I said. I was up against a pretty shrewd operator and I figured the closer I stayed to the truth, the better off I'd be. It's the details that trip you, so I decided to come clean on details.

"I don't know," I said, "but I can guess. You see, when Bolton didn't show up I thought his partner might know why, so I called Singer's house. A cop's tone of voice is pretty obvious, and a cop answered the phone. So if Bolton was shot and if the police are at Singer's, my guess is that Singer shot him."

"You ought to be a detective," Kendall said. "Now tell me about that." And he pointed to the ginseng jar.

Again I did some quick thinking. I had a check for ten thousand signed by Bolton and deposited in my account, and that check was not going to clear with Bolton dead. And while Kendall might or might not have the tape, he'd certainly look into my bank account and find the check, so I might as well tell him about it.

"Know anything about ginseng?" I asked. Kendall shrugged, but his eyes lit up and I could tell he knew a lot about ginseng and maybe even believed in it. I put my hand on the jar. "This," I said, "is an item for which Bolton paid ten thousand dollars. And it's worth a lot more."

Kendall laughed nervously. "That?" he said. "Are you trying to con me? Why would anybody pay more than a couple of bucks for it?"

I warmed up to my subject and gave Kendall the background and romance of ginseng. I told him how Koreans farm it and how American ginseng is grown every year in the Appalachians and shipped all over the world.

"By the ton," I said. "You can get it in candy and chewing gum and chicken essence and eye cream and even liqueurs, with the root curled in the bottom. But this is something else again. This is the real stuff, the Panax ginseng, the kind the Russians insured in a recent agricultural show for twenty-five thousand rubles, which is between thirty and forty thousand bucks, and you can look that up. So there it is. Bolton paid ten grand for it, and maybe he got killed for it."

"Nuts," Kendall said. "He got killed by his partner over a business matter. Bolton was embezzling, and Singer claims Bolton came to

Singer's house intending to kill him, and they had a fight over a gun and Singer managed to get it. He claims he shot in self-defense."

"That little guy grabbed a gun from Bolton?"

"The gun was in a drawer, and Singer says Bolton knew it was there and planned to use it, so Singer grabbed it first. Know anything about that? Know what Bolton's plans were?"

"No," I said, although I could give evidence as to Bolton's intentions, which would possibly justify Singer's action and which would also make me liable to a felony charge.

"Well," Kendall said, and he picked up the jar, pulled out the stopper, and sniffed. "I wouldn't pay a penny for stuff like this," he said. But I could tell he was excited and had some idea of the rarity and the value of the wild root and it was obvious that he hated to cork the jar again.

"You know," he said, "the Chinese go way back in time. Thousands of years. And there are a lot of things they know. You take acupuncture, for instance. I know a guy, he couldn't get out of bed for a whole year, and then he had acupuncture, and you know what? He got married and he's got a kid already. Acupuncture? Ginseng? If it's cheap enough, what can you lose by trying?"

I got the idea, clear and loud. "I have a check for ten grand," I said.

"No good. Bank won't honor it."

"How much could I come down from ten grand?" I said. "Five? One?"

Kendall took a tape out of his pocket and put it on the desk. Then he shoved the tape towards me and pulled the ginseng jar towards himself until the two objects were even.

"Maybe the stuff would pep me up," he said, "and maybe not, but the only way to find out is to try it."

I didn't say anything. After a few seconds he took out his wallet, inspected it carefully, and, finally, with a kind of sigh as if he was hurting all over, he selected a ten-dollar bill and put it on the table.

"They say Bolton was a pretty mean guy," he remarked. "They say that when he got anything on a guy, he squeezed. When I think of all the poor suckers he put the heat on, my heart bleeds."

I wasn't sure how to take that, but I reached forward and slid the tape to my side of the desk. Then I picked up the tape and stuck it in my pocket. Kendall kept looking at me as if it was my move, but I

didn't trust him, I wanted to be sure.

"What the hell are you hanging around for?" Kendall said abruptly. "You had an appointment with Bolton. He's dead now. Expect him to show up?"

"Of course not. I just thought—"

"I'll do the thinking, so why don't you just shut up and beat it?"

He kept glaring at me, and I think he was scared that I'd change my mind, give him his ten bucks back, and walk off with the ginseng jar, to leave him wondering whether the ginseng wouldn't have restored him and taken a few years off his life.

"About Singer," I said, but he cut me off, and he practically read my mind.

"Don't get noble," he said. "A little guy like Singer and a big guy like Bolton—it's self-defense on the face of it."

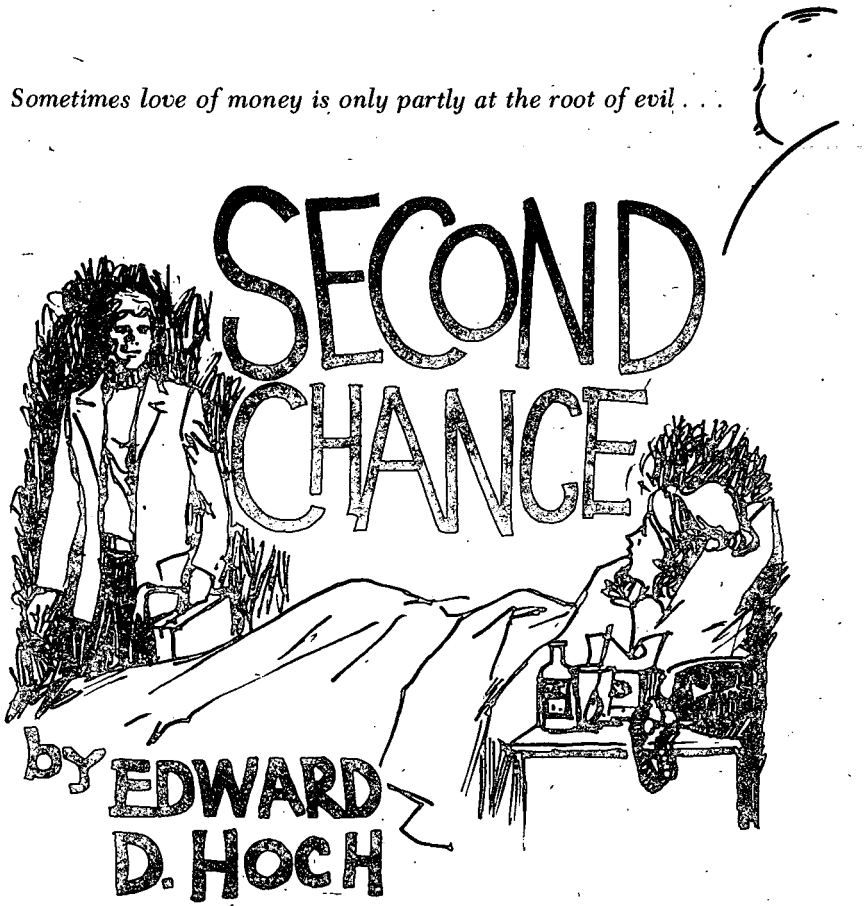
I looked at the ten-dollar bill. I could leave it there and make him feel cheap, except who wants to make a homicide cop look cheap? Particularly when he can crack down on you.

I suppose it would have made him feel good if I'd said thanks, but I didn't. I picked up the ten-dollar bill and once I was out in the open air I felt fine. Because how many times can you sell a ten-thousand-dollar ginseng root for ten dollars and feel good?

Except, of course, that it wasn't wild ginseng. I figured this one might be worth about fifty dollars.

Plus the jar.

Sometimes love of money is only partly at the root of evil . . .



Their meeting was one of those bizarre things that happen only in real life. Carol Rome was home from her assembly-line job at Revco with the beginning of an autumn cold, running just enough of a fever to prefer the quiet warmth of her apartment to the constant chatter of her co-workers. She'd heard the door buzzer sound once but decided to ignore it. What was the point of being sick in bed if you had to get up and answer the door?

She had almost drifted back into sleep when she became aware of some scrapings at the apartment door. Then, with a loud snap that brought her fully awake, the door sprang open. Through the bedroom door she saw a tall, dark-haired young man enter quietly and close the jimmied door behind him. He looked to be in his late twenties, not much older than Carol herself, and he carried a black attaché case in one hand. The iron crowbar in his other hand had no doubt come out of it.

The telephone was next to the bed and Carol considered the possibility of dialing for help before he became aware of her. She was just reaching for the phone when he glanced into the bedroom and saw her.

"Well—what have we here?"

"Get out or I'll scream," she said.

He merely smiled, and she was all too aware that he was still holding the crowbar. "You wouldn't do that," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you." His face relaxed into a grin. "That is, not unless you'd like me to."

"Get out!" she repeated.

"You should get a stronger lock on that door. In this old building they're awfully easy to pop open."

She was becoming really afraid now, perhaps because he wasn't. "Look, my purse is on the dresser. There's about twenty dollars in it. That's all I've got."

He continued grinning at her, making no move toward the purse. "You're sort of cute-looking, you know. What're you doing home in bed in the middle of the day? Are you sick?"

"Yes."

"Too bad. I buzzed first. If you'd answered the door I'd have said I was an insurance claims adjuster looking for somebody else. That's why I'm dressed up, with the attaché case and all. I wouldn't have come in if I'd known you were home." The grin widened. "But I'm glad I did."

She took a deep breath and lunged for the telephone.

He was faster. He dropped the crowbar and grabbed her, pulling her half out of the bed until they tumbled together to the floor in a tangle of sheets and blankets.

His name was Tony Loder and he'd been ripping off apartments for

the past two years. He didn't need the money for a drug habit, he was quick to inform her. He just liked it better than working for a living.

"Aren't you afraid I'll call the cops?" she asked, rising to get a cigarette from her purse.

"I guess you'd have done that already if you were going to."

"Yes," she agreed. "I guess I would have."

"What about you? How come you're living alone?"

"My former roommate moved in with a guy from the plant. Besides, I like living alone." She sneezed and reached for a Kleenex. "I hope you don't catch my cold."

"I don't worry about colds." He was staring at her with the same intensity as when he'd first discovered her in the bed. "Do you have a man around?"

"Not right now. I was married once, five years ago."

"What happened?"

"He was dull. He wanted to buy a house in the suburbs and raise kids. I don't think I could live like that. As soon as I realized it I got out."

"What do you do at this plant? Anything connected with money? Are you in the bookkeeping department?"

Carol laughed. "Sorry. I'm on an assembly line with twenty-three other girls. We run wire-wrap machines. Do you know what they are?"

"I don't want to know. It sounds too much like work."

"I'll bet you do as much work breaking into places as I do working on the line."

"It'd be a lot easier if I had a partner, that's for sure."

"How come?"

He shrugged. "I could do different things. I wouldn't have to jimmy doors for a living."

He left her after an hour or so, promising to phone. And he did, the following evening. She began seeing him almost every night. There was something exciting about having a burglar for a lover, something that kept her emotions charged all during the day. It was a life worlds apart from the dull, plodding existence she'd known during her brief marriage to Roy. Listening to Tony's exploits, she was like a child hearing fairy tales for the very first time.

"I almost bought it today," he'd say, rubbing the back of her neck as he sipped the martini she'd prepared for him. "An old lady came home

too soon and caught me in her house. I'd phoned to tell her I was from the social-security office and she had to come down about some mix-up. Old ladies living alone always swallow that one. But after she left the house it started to drizzle and she came back for her umbrella."

"What'd you do? You didn't hurt her, did you?"

"I had to give her a shove on my way out and she fell down, but she wasn't hurt bad. I could hear her screaming at me all the way down the block."

In the morning paper Carol read that the elderly woman had suffered a broken hip in the fall, and for a moment she felt sick. That evening she confronted Tony.

"It wouldn't have happened if I had a lookout to honk the horn when the old lady came back. I didn't *want* to hurt her!"

She believed him and calmed down a little. "A lookout?"

"How about it, babe? You could do it."

"*Me?*"

"Why not?"

"No, thanks! I'm not going to end up in prison with you! I like my freedom too much."

She was cool to him the rest of the evening and he said no more about it.

When he phoned the following evening she told him she was sick and refused to see him. She spent a long time thinking about the old woman with the broken hip and even considered sending flowers to the hospital. But in the end she did nothing, and a few days later she saw Tony Loder again. Nothing more was said about the old woman or his need for a lookout, and he no longer told her his detailed stories of the day's activities. She was almost afraid to hear them now.

Around the end of October, half the girls on her production line were laid off, including Carol. Standing in line at the unemployment office she thought about the bleak Christmas season ahead, and about Tony's offer. It meant money, and more than that it meant excitement. It meant being with Tony and sharing in a kind of excitement she'd dreamed of but never really experienced.

That night she asked him, "Do you still want a partner?"

The first few times were easy.

She sat in the car across the street from the house he was hitting,

waiting to tap the horn if anyone approached.

No one did, and for doing nothing he gave her a quarter of his take. It amounted to $595 the first week—more than she'd earned in a month on the production line.

Once during the second week Carol honked the horn when a homeowner returned unexpectedly from a shopping trip. Then she circled the block and picked Tony up. He was out of breath but smiling. "Got some jewelry that looks good," he told her. "A good haul."

"Sometime I want to go in with you, Tony. Into the house with you."

"Huh?"

"I mean it! I get bored sitting in the car."

He thought about that. "Maybe we'll try it sometime."

His voice lacked conviction but that night she pestered him until he agreed. The following morning they tried an apartment house together, going back to his old crowbar routine. She worked well at his side, but the haul was far less than in private homes.

"Let me try one on my own," she said that night.

"It's too dangerous. You're not ready."

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be. Were you ready the first time you went into a house alone?"

"That was different."

"Why? Because you're a man and I'm a woman?"

He had no answer to that. The next morning they cruised the suburbs until they found a corner house with a woman in the front yard raking leaves. "Pull into the side street and drop me off," Carol said. "She'll have the door unlocked and her purse just sitting around somewhere."

"What if someone's home?"

She shook her head. "Her husband's at work and the kids are at school. Wait down the block for me till I signal you."

"All right, but just take cash. No credit cards. That way if you're grabbed coming out it's your word against hers."

She got out of the car halfway down the block and walked back toward the corner house, feeling the bright November sunshine on her face. She was wearing slacks and a sweater, and her hands were empty. The money, if she found any, would go into her panties.

The woman was still in the front yard raking leaves, with the corner

of the house shielding Carol's approach. The side door was unlocked as she'd expected, and she entered quietly. It was even easier than she expected—a big black purse sat in plain view on the kitchen table. She crossed quickly to it and removed the wallet inside, sliding out the bills and returning the wallet to the purse. She moved to the living room doorway to check on the woman through the front window, and had an unexpected bit of luck. There was a man's worn wallet on top of the television set. She pulled the bills from it and added them to the others.

Only then did she realize the wallet meant there was probably a man in the house.

She started back through the kitchen and was just going out the door when an attractive red-haired man appeared, coming up the steps from the basement. "What are you doing here?" he demanded.

She fought down the urge to panic and run. He could easily overtake her, or get the license number of Tony's car. "Is this the place that's giving away the free kittens?" she asked calmly.

"Kittens? We don't have any kittens here."

She edged toward the door. "I know it's one of these houses."

"There are no new kittens in the neighborhood. How come you opened the door?"

Carol ignored his question. "Is that your wife raking leaves? Maybe she knows about them." She hurried outside and down the steps, walking purposefully toward the front yard.

The woman was still raking and she didn't even look in their direction as Tony pulled up and Carol jumped into the car. "My God, there was a man in the house! Let's get out of here!"

"Is he after you?"

"He will be as soon as he checks his wallet. I told him I was looking for free kittens."

Tony chuckled and patted her knee. "You're learning fast." He turned the car down another side street to make certain they weren't being followed. "How much did you get?"

She thumbed quickly through the bills. "Forty-five from her purse and fifty-three from his wallet. Not bad for a few minutes' work."

"From now on you get half of everything," he decided. "You're a full partner."

His words made her feel good, made her feel that maybe she'd

found her place in life at last.

With the coming of winter they moved their operations downtown to the office buildings. "I don't like leaving footprints in the snow," Tony said.

Large offices occupying whole floors were the best, because Carol could walk through them during lunch hours virtually unnoticed. Mostly she looked for cash in purses or desk drawers. If anyone questioned her, she always said she was there for a job interview. Once Tony dressed as a repairman and walked off with an IBM typewriter, but both agreed that was too risky to try again. "We've got to stick to cash," he decided. "Typewriters are too clumsy if someone starts chasing you."

But after a few weeks of it Carol said, "I'm tired of going through desk drawers for dimes and quarters. Let's go south for the winter, where there isn't any snow to show footprints."

They didn't go far south but they did go to New York. They found an apartment in the West Village and contacted some friends of Tony. "You'll like Sam and Basil," he assured Carol. "They're brothers. I met them in prison."

Somehow the words stunned Carol. "You never told me you were in prison."

"You never asked. It's no big secret."

"What were you in for?"

"Breaking and entering. I only served seven months."

"Here in New York?"

"Yeah. Three years ago. And I haven't been arrested since, in case you're wondering. That was just bad luck."

She said no more about it, but after meeting Sam and Basil Briggs in a Second Avenue bar she was filled with further misgivings. Sam was the older of the brothers, a burly blond-haired man of about Tony's age. Both he and the slim, dark-haired Basil seemed hyped up, full of unnatural energy. "Are they on heroin?" she asked Tony when they were alone for a moment.

"No, of course not! Maybe they took a little speed or something."

"I don't like it."

"Just stay cool."

Basil went off to make a phone call and Sam Briggs returned to the

table alone. He ran his eyes over the turtleneck sweater Carol was wearing and asked Tony, "How about it? Want to make some money?"

"Sure. Doing what?"

"A little work in midtown."

"Not the park."

"No, no—what do you take us for? Hell, I'd be afraid to go in the park at night myself! I was thinking of Madison Avenue. The classy area."

Tony glanced at Carol. "We've been working as a team."

"You can still work as a team. She can finger our targets."

"What is all this?" Carol asked. The bar had grown suddenly noisy and they had to lean their heads together to be heard.

"Most guys get hit when they're all alone, on some side street at two in the morning," Sam explained, eyeing her sweater again as he spoke. "But I got a spot picked out right on Madison. We hit middle-aged guys walking with their wives earlier in the evening—nine, ten o'clock."

"Hit them?" Carol asked.

"Roll them, take their wallets. And their wives' purses. We're gone before they know what happened!"

"Aren't there a lot of people on Madison Avenue at that time of night?"

"Not as many as you'd think. I got a perfect corner picked out—there's an empty restaurant there and when the offices close down it's fairly dim."

"What do I have to do?"

"Go halfway down the block, pretending to windowshop or wait for a date, and watch for a likely prospect. If a couple come by talking, listen to what they're saying. If they sound right, just point your finger and we do the rest."

Carol was silent for a moment. "There won't be knives or anything, will there?"

"Hell, no! What do you take us for?"

She turned to Tony. "Do you want me to?"

"We've got to live on something."

"All right," she decided. "Let's do it."

Two nights later, on an evening when the weather had turned un-

usually mild, Carol and Tony met the Briggs brothers at the corner of Madison and 59th. Carol was wearing a knit cap to hide her hair and a matching scarf to muffle the lower part of her face.

"It's just after nine," Sam Briggs told her. "Look for couples with shopping bags, maybe coming from Bloomingdale's, tourists heading back to their hotels. If the man has both hands full it's easiest for us."

The three men hovered near the corner, glancing into the empty restaurant as if surprised to find it closed. Carol walked up the block toward Park Avenue, letting one man pass who was carrying only a newspaper. She'd been strolling back and forth about five minutes when she spotted a couple crossing Park in her direction. The man, stocky and middle-aged, carried a shopping bag in his left hand and a briefcase in his right. The woman, obviously his wife, carried a tote bag along with her purse.

Carol followed discreetly along behind them, listening to their conversation until she was certain they weren't police decoys. About fifty feet from the corner, she signaled a finger at them. When the couple reached Tony and the Briggs brothers at the corner, Sam Briggs walked up to the man and asked for a match. Before the man and woman realized what was happening, Sam punched the man in the face, knocking him backward into Basil's arms. Tony grabbed the woman as she started to scream and yanked the purse from her hand. Basil had pinned the man's arms while Sam went for his wallet.

Then, throwing the man to the sidewalk, they scattered in opposite directions. Carol, walking quickly back to Park Avenue, ducked into the lobby of a hotel and pretended to use the pay phone near the door.

The whole thing had taken less than a minute.

They tried it again three nights later in almost the same location. This time the man tried to fight back and Sam Briggs gave him a vicious punch in the stomach. The first time they'd gotten $214 plus some credit cards they'd promptly discarded. The second time they realized less—only $67 from the man and $16 from the woman.

"Everybody carries credit cards now," Sam Briggs complained later over drinks in his Village apartment. "What good are credit cards to us? By the next day the computer knows they're stolen."

"Let's go after something big," his younger brother suggested.

"Like what—a bank?"

"Count me out," Carol said, afraid they might be serious. "I'm having nothing to do with guns."

She went to the kitchen to make some coffee and she could hear Tony speaking in a low tone while she was gone. Later back at their own place, he started in on her. "You got this big thing about guns and knives, but sometimes they can actually *prevent* violence."

"Oh yeah? How?"

"Remember that first time you went into a house alone? Remember how the man came up from the basement and surprised you? Suppose he hadn't believed your story about the kittens. Suppose he'd grabbed you and you'd picked up a kitchen knife to defend yourself. You might have killed him. But if you'd been carrying a weapon he wouldn't have grabbed you in the first place."

"I don't buy that sort of logic, Tony."

"Look, you saw Sam Briggs punch that guy tonight. You're part of it! Suppose there's some internal bleeding and the guy dies. The simple act of carrying a gun or knife isn't all that much worse than what we're doing already."

"It's worse in the eyes of the law."

He sighed and tried again. "Look, Carol, Sam and Basil have an idea that can make us a lot of money all at once. We won't have to go around mugging people on street corners. The thing is foolproof, but we need you to hold a gun on two people for about ten minutes."

"In a bank?"

"No, not in a bank. This is far safer than a bank."

"Why can't you do it without me?"

"We need a woman to get in the place before they're suspicious."

"Where?"

"I want Sam to tell you. It's his plan."

"I don't like that man, Tony. I don't like the way he looks at me."

"Oh, Sam's all right. He's a little rough at times."

"He's a criminal!"

"We're all criminals, Carol," Tony reminded her.

She took a deep breath. "I've never thought of myself as one," she admitted. "Maybe because I've never been arrested."

"How about it? One big job and we can live like normal people for a change."

"Maybe I don't want to live like a normal person, Tony. I guess I've

always been bored by normal people. I was married to one once, and it bored the hell out of me."

He put his arms around her. "How about it? One big job? I promise it won't be boring. You'll never be bored with me."

"One big job . . ." She remembered them saying that in the movies, and they always walked into a police trap. But this wasn't the movies, and she knew she'd go along with whatever they wanted of her. She'd go along with it because Tony Loder had made her feel like a real person and not just a cog in some insensitive machine.

The plan was simple.

Sir Herbert Miles, the wealthy and successful British actor, maintained a luxury apartment with his wife on Central Park South. They were going to rob him of cash and jewelry, using Carol to penetrate the elaborate security precautions in the building's lobby. "You see," Sam Briggs explained, sketching a rough diagram on a sheet of paper, "they have a guard at a desk just inside the door. He monitors the elevators and hallways with a bank of closed-circuit TV screens. And nobody gets by him unless they're a resident or a guest who's expected."

"Then how do I get by?"

"There's a night elevator operator as added security, and from eleven o'clock on he sells the following morning's newspapers. All you do is walk through the revolving doors about eleven-fifteen and ask the man on the desk if you can buy a copy of *The Times*. He'll say sure and send you back to the elevator operator. That's when you take out your gun and cover them both. Make them lie on the floor. We come through the door, take the elevator up to the penthouse, and rob Miles and his wife. In ten minutes we're back downstairs. You stay in the lobby the whole time."

"Why can't we just tie up the two guards and leave them?"

"Because another resident might come in and find them while we're all upstairs. This way if anyone else arrives you cover them with the gun too."

"I couldn't bring myself to shoot anyone."

"You don't have to shoot anyone. Just hold the gun and they'll behave. Nobody wants to get shot."

Sam gave her a .38 revolver of the sort detectives carried on televi-

sion. It held five bullets and he showed her how to load and fire it. "That's all you need," he said.

"Will you all have guns too?"

"Sure, but nobody'll need to use them."

That night, in bed with Tony, she started to tremble and he held her tight. "It's going to be all right," he whispered reassuringly.

She was a long way from the assembly line at Revco.

The uniformed guard glanced up from his newspaper as she entered. Behind him a half-dozen TV screens flickered their closed-circuit images. "Can I help you, Ma'am?"

"Someone said you sold tomorrow's *Times* here."

He nodded and motioned around the corner. "The elevator man has some."

She walked down two steps and saw the second uniformed man already folding a paper to hand it to her. The gun came out of her purse. "Not a sound!" she warned.

The man behind the desk turned toward her and she shifted the pistol to bring him into range. "You too—get down here and lie on the floor! Quickly!"

"This building is robbery-proof, girlie. You won't get away with it."

"We'll see. Both of you stay down there. Don't even lift your heads or I'll shoot!"

As soon as they saw the empty desk, Tony and the Briggs brothers came through the revolving door. They were wearing stocking masks, and she wasn't too happy about being bare-faced. Still, the knit cap and scarf helped hide her features. "Ten minutes," Tony said as he went by her.

She watched the floor numbers as the elevator rose, keeping the gun steady on the two guards. "Who are they after?" the elevator man asked.

"Shut up!"

Eight long minutes later she saw the elevator start down from the top floor. No one else had entered the lobby and she was thankful for that. When the elevator stopped, Sam Briggs was the first one off, carrying a bulging plastic trash bag in one hand. The other two were behind him. "Let's go!" he told her.

"Don't follow us," she warned the two guards. "Stay on the floor!"

Then, as she backed toward the door, she asked Tony, "How'd it go?"

"Great! No trouble."

Basil had left the car on one of the secondary roads in Central Park, with a phony television press card on the windshield in case anyone got curious. They broke onto Central Park South, running across toward the low park wall. Carol was in the middle of the street when she heard a shouted command.

"Police! Stop or we'll shoot!"

At the same instant she saw the police cars, realized both ends of the street were blocked off. "The guard must have pushed a silent alarm," Tony gasped at her side. "Forget the car and run for it!"

She heard a shot and turned to see Basil with his gun out. Then there were three more shots close together and he spun around and went down in the street.

She kept running, afraid to look back.

There were more shots, and the stone wall of the park was before her. She went over it fast, her legs scraping against the rough stone. Tony was somewhere behind her and she turned to look for him.

"Run!" he screamed at her. "Run!"

She saw the blood on his face, saw him reaching out for her as he ran toward the wall, then his whole body shuddered and he went down hard.

She ran on, deep into the park, until the breath was torn from her lungs in pulse-pounding gasps and she sank to the frozen earth and started to cry.

God! Oh, God!

Tony was hit, probably dead. And the others too.

After a long time she picked herself up and after walking for what seemed hours she managed to reach Fifth Avenue, at 66th Street. She hailed a taxi and took it downtown, getting out a block from the apartment in case the police tried to trace her later. She circled the block twice on foot, mingling with the late strollers, until she felt it was safe to go in. Then she collapsed onto the bed and pulled the blankets tight around her, trying not to think.

She must have lain there an hour or longer before she heard a gentle knock on the door. Her first thought was the police, but they'd have been less timid. She got up and listened at the door. The knocking

came again and she could hear breathing on the other side of the door. "Who is it?" she asked softly.

"Me!"

"Tony!" She threw off the bolt and opened the door.

It was Sam Briggs. "Let me in!"

"I—"

He pushed her aside and closed the door after him. "I thought they got you too."

"No."

"Basil and Tony are both dead. The cops were right on my tail but I lost them in the park."

"You can't stay here," she said. "I want to be alone."

"Come on! There's only the two of us left now. Tony's dead!"

She turned away from him. "What about the money?"

"I dropped the bag when I was running. I had to save my skin!"

She didn't know whether to believe him, but it didn't really matter. "You'll have to go," she repeated. "You can't stay here."

"I'm afraid to go back to my place. They'll be looking for me."

"I'm sorry."

"To hell with you! I'm staying!"

She walked casually over to her coat and slipped the pistol from the pocket. Pointing it at him, she said, "Get out, Sam."

His eyes widened. "Hell, Carol, we're partners! I always liked you, from the first time I saw you."

"I was Tony's partner, not yours. Get out!" The gun was steady in her hand.

He smiled. "You wouldn't use that."

"Wouldn't I?" In that instant she wanted to. She wanted to squeeze the trigger and wipe the smile off his face for good. He had caused Tony's death and now he was standing grinning at her.

But he was right about the gun. She wanted to use it, but she couldn't.

"You can sleep on the couch," she told him. "Just for tonight." She went into the bedroom and closed the door, taking the gun with her.

In the morning he was still asleep as she dressed quickly and left the apartment. She bought a paper at the corner store and read about the robbery: "ACTOR'S PENTHOUSE ROBBED AT GUNPOINT—POLICE SLAY TWO FLEEING SCENE." The dead were identified as Tony Loder and

Basil Briggs, both exconvicts.

She put the paper down.

So that was Tony's epitaph, after all the things he'd been. Not lover, nor dreamer, nor even thief. Only exconvict.

She started reading again. The police were seeking Sam Briggs, brother of the slain man, and an unidentified woman, who were believed to have fled with an estimated $80,000 in cash and jewelry.

So Sam had lied about dropping the bag. He had it stashed somewhere, probably in a locker at the bus station.

She thought about going back to the apartment and confronting him, pointing the gun at him again and demanding a share for her and Tony.

But Tony was dead, and she'd shown Sam last night that she wouldn't use the gun.

She went to a phone booth and dialed the police. When a gruff voice answered she said, "You're looking for Sam Briggs in connection with last night's robbery. If you hurry you can find him at this address."

After that she took the subway to the Port Authority Terminal on Eighth Avenue and caught the next bus home.

They were hiring again at Revco and they took her back without question. She had her old spot on the assembly line, with many of the same girls, and when they asked where she'd been she only smiled and said, "Around."

She learned from the New York papers that Sam Briggs had been arrested and the loot recovered. The unidentified woman wasn't mentioned. Even if Sam had given them her name, he didn't know where she came from. After a month she stopped worrying about being found. Instead, she felt that by some miracle she had been given a second chance.

For a time she was happy at work, and she thought of Tony only at night. But with the coming of spring, boredom set in once again. The routine of the assembly line began to get her down. She tried going out drinking with the other women on Friday nights but it didn't help. There was nothing in their bickering conversations or the half-hungry glances of their male friends to interest Carol.

One morning in May she phoned in sick, then dressed in a dark sweater and jeans and went out for a drive.

She parked near an apartment house in a better section of town and walked through the unguarded lobby. An inner door had to be opened with a key or by a buzzer from one of the apartments. She pressed three or four numbers until someone buzzed the door open, then took the elevator to the third floor. Tony had told her once never to go up too high, in case she had to run down the fire stairs.

She used the knocker on a door chosen at random and nobody answered. Taking a plastic credit card from the pocket of her jeans, she used it on the bolt the way Tony had shown her. She was lucky. There was no chain, no Fox lock. In a moment she was inside the apartment.

It was tastefully furnished in a masculine manner, with an expensive TV-stereo combination and a few original paintings. She saw a desk and crossed to it.

"Hello there," a male voice said.

She whirled around, tensed on the balls of her feet, and saw a man standing there in his robe. His dark hair was beginning to go grey, but his face still had a boyish quality. He was smiling at her. "This is my first encounter with a real live burglar. Are they all as pretty as you?"

"I'm no burglar," she said, talking fast. "I must have gotten the wrong apartment." She turned and started for the door.

"Not just yet!"

"What?"

"I want you to stay a bit, talk to me."

She was reminded of that day last year when she'd been home in bed. "Are you sick?"

"Only unemployed. I lost my job last month. It's sort of lonely being unemployed. I'd find it interesting to talk with a burglar. Maybe I can pick up a few pointers."

She moved a step closer. "Are you going to call the police?"

"I'd have done that already if I was going to."

"Yes," she agreed. "I suppose you would have."

She sat down in a chair facing him.

"Tell me what it's like breaking into apartments. Is it exciting? Can you actually make money at it?"

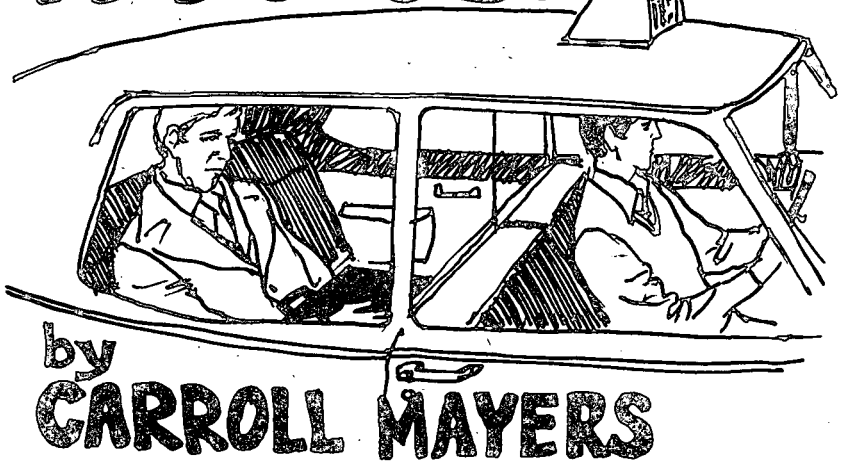
"It's like nothing else in the world," she said.

He smiled again and suddenly she knew that this was her real second chance, now, with this man whose name she didn't even know.

And maybe this time it wouldn't end the same way.

Life can change in a minute, especially if you're an opportunist . . .

THICKER THAN BLOOD



by CARROLL MAYERS

Sure, I know how it is, friend: you're just passing through, but you're wondering why anyone in his right mind would choose to live in a place like this. Well, let's have another drink and I'll tell you the story.

Actually, the man you should talk to is my Uncle Oscar. He was the dispatcher who sent me to make the pickup that started it all.

I'd been hacking in River City for three years. Uncle Oscar got me the job. Sometimes I got restless, wished I could take off for some-

where with no responsibilities (Uncle Oscar had an itch like that too, so I guess it runs in the family), but on the whole I liked the life. I wasn't tied to a desk or a bench. I was out in the open all day, and I got to meet and talk with some interesting people.

Not that all of them were talkers. Leon Maltby—I learned his name later—certainly wasn't.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Like I said, Uncle Oscar was the dispatcher that day. Around two-thirty in the afternoon when I buzzed him on the two-way, he told me to go to the Hotel Harrold, that there was a guy there who wanted to be taken to the airport.

The pickup was Maltby. He was an average-looking character in his late thirties with a sort of harried expression. Grey suit and topcoat, no hat. He carried a traveling bag and an attaché case. He tossed the bag in ahead of him rather carelessly, but he hung onto the case, cradling it on his knees as he settled down.

Meeting the public every day, you get to size up people fast. I put Maltby down as a loner, particularly because he showed no inclination to expound on the conversational gambits I tried. After a couple of minutes I gave up and concentrated on my driving.

That was why the crash was no worse than it was, I suppose. Because watching traffic closely, I spotted this joker at the last second, in my side mirror. Wheeling a blue sports job, he zoomed ahead of me just before a cross street, running a red light. I jammed on my brakes and jerked the wheel hard. I managed to miss ramming the idiot, but I did lose some control. I struck another hack on my right and a heavy sedan drove into my rear, shoving me into the cross-street traffic, where a panel truck crunched into my left front fender. Another cab piled into the truck—

There was a grand foul-up after that, with the intersection blocked, cars stalled, horns blaring. Drivers craned their necks and climbed out of their cars. Pedestrians crowded around.

I was shaken up. Hands plucked at me and eased me from behind the wheel. Was I all right? I thought so, although my head was spinning some.

Then somebody shouted if there was a doctor in the crowd and my heart tilted. I made out they were lifting Maltby from my cab and he wasn't moving. Not at all.

It got truly hectic then. Fortunately, a doctor did happen to be on

the scene and he tended to Maltby briefly before an ambulance somebody must have phoned for screamed up. Right behind the ambulance came a police car. The officers were more interested in me than in Maltby, but there had been witnesses to that sports-car joker running the red light and their accounts, plus the doctor stating that Maltby appeared only to have been knocked unconscious when he'd been jolted off the cushions and struck his head as I slammed on the brakes, helped me.

The outcome was I got a ticket for reckless driving and a court summons a week hence, pending the end result of Maltby's blackout.

My hack was banged up but operable. As soon as traffic cleared, I drove to a side street and got on the two-way with Uncle Oscar.

"You O.K., Sammy?" he wanted to know.

"I'm all right," I told him. "Just a few bruises."

"How about your passenger?"

"The ambulance took him to Mercy Hospital. He shouldn't be in any danger, according to a doctor in the crowd."

"What about the cab?"

"Not too good, but I can drive it," I said.

"All right," Uncle Oscar said. "Call it a day and come in."

I'd driven three blocks and was rounding a corner when I heard a sliding noise behind me. Curious, I stopped and investigated. It was Maltby's attaché case, skittering around on the floorboards. Loading him into the ambulance, the attendants had collected his traveling bag, but in the overall to-do the case had been overlooked.

It was no big deal, of course. The public is always leaving stuff behind in cabs. I'd had everything from umbrellas to false teeth to a carton of frozen TV dinners.

I picked up the case, thinking I'd turn it in at the hospital. I saw one of the catches was sprung and, trying to snap it shut, the second one popped loose and the whole case flopped open.

Maltby had had a damned good reason for hanging onto the case so diligently. Money. Neat banded packets of cash, fifties and hundreds. A hasty riffle of the packets told me I was holding between fifty and seventy-five thousand dollars.

My head was spinning again and an offbeat angle was coming into focus fast. Not only the way Maltby had hung onto that case, but the harried look he'd worn.

I knew then. Maltby was a wrongo. An absconding bank clerk. Or an embezzling loan-company employee. Maybe even a collector or bookkeeper for the syndicate. Whatever, he was lamming with a nice bundle. He was sweating over the caper, yes, but he was going ahead with it. From out of town, doubtless, he'd stopped over at the Harrold, manufacturing a vanishing trail, and had intended to take another flight to God-knew-where.

And I knew something else, something that suddenly hit me like a pile driver. Fifty to seventy-five grand was no enormous fortune, but with a little frugal living somewhere off trail it could see a fellow through the rest of his days. Especially a fellow who got restless and tired of routine every so often.

But then, just as fast, misgivings flooded me. Could I really carry it off? I wasn't overly smart, I hadn't been around like Uncle Oscar—

Uncle Oscar! That was it. He had a getaway itch too; he was family, he had gotten me this job in the first place, and he was smart. The amount in the attaché case could do for two as well as one in the environs I pictured.

Sure, we'd be taking a risk. But not much. Even if Maltby blew the whistle—which didn't seem too likely considering his circumstances—any one of a dozen people could have lifted the case unnoticed in all the hullabaloo at the accident. I'd be suspected myself. But if Uncle Oscar and I sat tight for a spell, nothing could be proved. Of course, I realized I wouldn't truly go ahead unless Uncle Oscar threw in with me, but I was pretty certain he would. That dispatcher job wasn't all that great.

I drove to the company garage, then went into the office with the attaché case. Uncle Oscar was at the dispatcher's desk. At the moment, nobody else was around.

"You positive you're all right?" Uncle Oscar wanted to know.

I assured him I was. Then I got right with it. I opened the case and told him my big idea.

Uncle Oscar didn't say anything for several moments, just sat there, fingers drumming the desk. "I don't know," he said finally. "There's sure to be a thorough investigation."

"We can be all set for that."

He nodded, his eyes half closed. Then he inhaled deeply. "O.K., Sammy," he told me, "we'll play it through. I've got to finish my trick;

I can't chance hiding that case anywhere around here. You take it with you."

He paused. "Tomorrow's your day off but you'd better come in later in the morning and make out a report for the company covering the accident."

Nothing else happened the rest of the day, but a TV newscast that evening added some data. Apparently Maltby's condition was more serious than the doctor had suspected. He'd in fact suffered a pretty bad concussion and had regained consciousness to speak briefly only once. But that once told me I'd really been mistaken in sizing him up as a wrongo.

Actually, the man was an investigator for an insurance company. He'd helped nab a couple of heisters who'd scored at a mortgage company in a neighboring state and had been flying back to his home office with the recovered cash when he'd been taken violently airsick in a thunderstorm. He'd decided to leave the plane during a stopover in our city and rest up overnight in a hotel. (His illness accounted for that harried look I'd noticed.)

I'd planned to sleep late on my day off, but the phone woke me shortly after nine.

It was Uncle Oscar.

"A police lieutenant was just here asking for you," he informed me. "He's on his way over there now. I wanted to let you know so you'd be ready for him."

"Thanks, Uncle Oscar," I said. "I'll handle it O.K."

"I know you will. And Sammy—"

"Yes?"

"He's probably making an initial routine investigation and won't have a search warrant. But he may play it cool, casually ease open a drawer or two, look over your closet. Just make sure that attaché case's buried."

"It is," I said. "I've got it in the bottom drawer of my dresser, under a stack of shirts."

"Good," Uncle Oscar said. "After he leaves, come in for your report. I told the manager you'd write one up."

The police lieutenant gave me no trouble. Sure, I could appreciate how concerned both the authorities and the insurance company were about recovering the money. Sure, I'd like to help, but everything had

happened fast during the accident's aftermath and I simply hadn't noticed anybody acting suspiciously around my cab—

That was it. A few general personal questions and the lieutenant thanked me for my time. He didn't try any of the cool tactics Uncle Oscar had cautioned me he might.

Thinking back later, I wasn't exactly certain when the notion hit me. Somewhere, say, between when I slicked up a bit to drive over to the company to make my report and the time I actually got behind the wheel. At first I shrugged it off. It was impossible and I was stupid even to consider it. But the possibility nagged and finally I yielded. When I left my rooming house, I drove down the block a way, parked and waited.

Ten minutes later, jackpot! Uncle Oscar drove up to my address and quickly went inside. Another five minutes and he came out—carrying the attaché case.

Certainly, he was family. And blood is thicker than water. But sometimes money can be thicker than blood. At least, that's how Uncle Oscar had it figured with the money—*all* the money, no split—the wherewithal to really scratch that itch common to both of us.

That was why Uncle Oscar had acted to cross me. Maybe he'd even cooked up his ploy the day before, right after he'd seen all the money.

Whatever, there'd been no necessity for him to phone and warn me the police were coming to question me. We'd covered that contingency the day before when we'd both agreed I'd be able to handle it. Rather, he'd phoned for two reasons: first, to casually elicit from me where I'd hidden the attaché case and thereby waste no time locating it when he came and told my landlady, who knew him, that I'd asked him to stop by my room and pick up the case I'd "forgotten." And second, to subtly insure I'd be absent by reminding me to come in and make my report as soon as the lieutenant left.

Well, I hated like the devil to do it, but I had to. I blew the whistle, phoned the police an anonymous tip. They collared Uncle Oscar, attaché case and all, at the airport.

Another drink, eh, friend? and don't worry about the tab. I'm not hurting. I don't suppose there's a sleepier town in all Mexico than this one. I can stretch forty thousand for years.

That's right: forty grand. Initially, I'd believed I couldn't go ahead

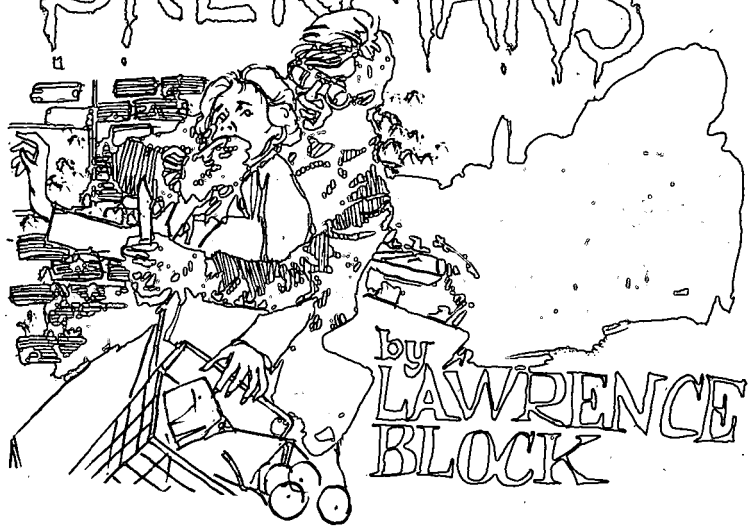
without Uncle Oscar. But once I suspected his script, I took that much out of the attaché case and repacketed the rest so it would look like more in case he made a quick check.

I decided on the sacrifice to buy time, let me get to the bus terminal, and start losing myself. If for a few hours the police thought they'd recovered all the money, they wouldn't have any reason to try to locate me. Uncle Oscar would tell them differently, sure, once he got his own oar in, but meanwhile I should gain that time. And I did.

Oh, bartender . . .

What wild young scamp fashioned this *quiet game?* . . .

COLLECTING ACKERMANS



by LAWRENCE BLOCK

On an otherwise unremarkable October afternoon, Florence Ackerman's doorbell sounded. Miss Ackerman, who had been watching a game show on television and clucking at the mental lethargy of the panelists, walked over to the intercom control and demanded to know who was there.

"Western Union," a male voice announced.

Miss Ackerman repeated the clucking sound she had most recently

aimed at the panelists. She clucked at people who lost their keys and rang other tenants' bells in order to gain admittance to the building. She clucked at would-be muggers and rapists who might pass themselves off as messengers or deliverymen for an opportunity to lurk in the hallways and stairwell. Once this building had had a doorman, but the new landlord had curtailed services, aiming to reduce his overhead and antagonize long-standing tenants at the same time.

"Telegram for Miz Ackerman," the voice added.

Was it indeed a telegram? It was possible, Miss Ackerman acknowledged. People were forever dying and other people were apt to communicate such data by means of a telegram. It was easier to buzz whoever it was inside than to brood about it. The door to her own apartment would remain locked, and the other tenants could look out for themselves. Florence Ackerman had been looking out for herself for most of her life and the rest of the planet could do the same.

She pressed the buzzer, then went to the door and put her eye to the peephole. She was a small birdlike woman and she had to rise up on her toes to see through the peephole. He was a youngish man and he wore a large pair of mirrored sunglasses. Besides obscuring much of his face, the sunglasses kept Miss Ackerman from noticing much about the rest of his appearance. Her attention was inescapably drawn to the twin images of her own peephole reflected in the lenses.

The young man, unaware that he was being watched, rapped on the door with his knuckles. "Telegram," he said.

"Slide it under the door."

"You have to sign for it."

"That's ridiculous," Miss Ackerman said. "I don't have to sign for a telegram. As a matter of fact, they're generally phoned in these days."

"This one you got to sign for."

Miss Ackerman's face, by no means dull to begin with, sharpened. She who had been the scourge of several generations of fourth-grade pupils was not to be intimidated by a pair of mirrored sunglasses. "Slide it under the door," she demanded. "Then I'll open the door and sign your book." If there was indeed anything to be slid beneath the door, she thought.

"I can't."

"Oh?"

"It's a singin' telegram."

"And you're to sing it to me?"

"Yeah."

"Then sing it."

"Lady, are you kiddin'? I'm gonna sing a telegram through a closed door? Forget it."

Miss Ackerman made the clucking noise again. "I don't believe you have a telegram for me," she said. "Western Union suspended their singing-telegram service some time ago. I remember reading an article to that effect in the newspaper." She did not bother to add that the likelihood of anyone's ever sending a singing telegram to her was several degrees below infinitesimal.

"All I know is I'm supposed to sing this, but if you don't want to open the door—"

"I wouldn't dream of opening the door."

"Then the hell with you, Miz Ackerman. No disrespect intended, but I'll just tell 'em I sang it to you and who cares what you say."

"You're not even a good liar, young man. I'm calling the police. I advise you to be well out of the neighborhood by the time they arrive."

"You know what you can do," the young woman said, but in apparent contradiction to his words he went on to tell Miss Ackerman what she could do.

People who say "I'm calling the police" hardly ever do. Miss Ackerman did think of calling her local precinct but decided it would be a waste of time. In all likelihood the young man, whatever his game, was already on his way, never to return. And Miss Ackerman recalled a time two years previously, just a few months after her retirement, when she returned from an afternoon chamber-music concert to find her apartment burglarized and several hundred dollars' worth of articles missing. She had called the police, naively assuming there was a point to such a course of action, and she'd only managed to spend several hours of her time making out reports and listing serial numbers, and a sympathetic detective had as much as told her nothing would come of the effort.

Actually, calling the police wouldn't really have done her any good this time either.

Miss Ackerman returned to her chair and, without too much diffi-

culty, picked up the threads of the game show. She did not for a moment wonder who might have sent her a singing telegram, knowing with cool certainty that no one had done so, that there had been no telegram, that the young man had intended rape or robbery or some other unpleasantness that would have made her life substantially worse than it already was. That robbers and rapists abounded was no news to Miss Ackerman. She had lived all her life in New York and took in her stride the possibility of such mistreatment, even as residents of California take in their stride the possibility of an earthquake, even as farmers on the Vesuvian slopes acknowledge that it is in the nature of volcanoes periodically to erupt. Miss Ackerman sat in her chair, leaving it to make a cup of tea, returning to it with teacup in hand, and concentrated on her television program.

The following afternoon, as she wheeled her little cart of groceries around the corner, a pair of wiry hands seized her without ceremony and yanked her into the narrow passageway between a pair of brick buildings. A gloved hand covered her mouth, the fingers digging into her cheek.

A voice at her ear sang: "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you—" Then she felt a sharp pain in her chest. Then she felt nothing, ever.

"Retired schoolteacher," Freitag said. "On her way home with her groceries. Hell of a thing, huh? Knifed for what she had in her purse, and what could she have, anyway? Living on Social Security and a pension and the way inflation eats you up nowadays she wouldn't of had much on her. Why stick a knife in a little old lady like her, huh? He didn't have to kill her."

"Maybe she screamed," Ken Poolings suggested. "And he got panicky."

"Nobody heard a scream. Not that it proves anything either way." They were back at the station house and Jack Freitag was drinking lukewarm coffee out of a Styrofoam container. Except for the Styrofoam the beverage would have been utterly tasteless. "Ackerman. Ackerman. It's hell the way these parasites prey on old folks. It's the judges who have to answer for it. *They* put the creeps back on the street. What they ought to do is kill the bastards but that's not humane. Sticking a knife in a little old lady, *that's* humane. *Ackerman.* Why does that

name do something to me?"

"She was a teacher. Maybe you were in one of her classes."

Freitag shook his head. "I grew up in Chelsea. West 24th Street. Miss Ackerman taught all her life here in Washington Heights just three blocks from the place where she lived. And she didn't even have to leave the neighborhood to get herself killed. Ackerman. Oh, I know what it was! Remember three or maybe it was four days ago this guy in the West Village? Brought some other guy home with him and got himself killed for his troubles? They found him all tied up with things carved in him. It was all over page three of the *Daily News*. *His* name was Ackerman."

"Which one?"

"The dead one. They didn't pick up the guy who did it yet. I don't know if they got a make or not."

"Does it make any difference?"

"Not to me it don't." Freitag finished his coffee, threw the empty container at the metal wastebasket, then watched as it circled the rim and fell on the floor. "The Knicks stink this year," he said. "But you don't care about basketball, do you?"

"Hockey's my game."

"Hockey," Freitag said. "Well, the Rangers stink too. Only they stink on ice." He leaned back in his chair and laughed at his own wit and stopped thinking of two murder victims who both happened to be named Ackerman.

Mildred Ackerman lay on her back. Her skin was slick with perspiration, her limbs heavy with spent passion. The man who was lying beside her stirred, placed a hand upon her flesh and began to stroke her. "Oh, Bill," she said. "That feels so nice. I love the way you touch me."

The man went on stroking her.

"You have the nicest touch. Firm but gentle. I sensed that about you when I saw you." She opened her eyes, turned to face him. "Do you believe in intuition, Bill? I do. I think it's possible to know a great deal about someone just on the basis of your intuitive feelings."

"And what did you sense about me?"

"That you would be strong but gentle. That we'd be very good together. It was good for you, wasn't it?"

"Couldn't you tell?"

Millie giggled.

"So you're divorced," he said.

"Uh-huh. You? I'll bet you're married, aren't you? It doesn't bother ıe if you are."

"I'm not. How long ago were you divorced?"

"It's almost five years now. It'll be exactly five years in January. 'hat's since we split, but then it was another six months before the livorce went through. Why?"

"And Ackerman was your husband's name?"

"Yeah. Wallace Ackerman."

"No kids?"

"No, I wanted to but he didn't."

"A lot of women take their maiden names back after a divorce."

She laughed aloud. "They don't have a maiden name like I did. You vouldn't believe the name I was born with."

"Try me."

"Plonk. Millie Plonk. I think I married Wally just to get rid of it. Mildred's bad enough, but Plonk! Forget it. I don't think you told me /our last name."

"Didn't I?" The hand moved distractingly over Millie's abdomen. 'So you decided to go on being an Ackerman, huh?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Mmm," the man said. "This is a nice place you got here. Been liv- ng here long?"

"Ever since the divorce. It's a little small."

"But you have a terrific view."

"Oh, sure, eighteen flights up, it's got to be a pretty decent view."

"It bothers some people to live that high up in the air."

"It never bothered me."

"Eighteen floors," the man said. "If a person went out that window here wouldn't be much left of her, would there?"

"Don't talk like that."

"You couldn't have an autopsy, could you? They couldn't determine vhether you were alive or dead when you went out the window."

"Come on, Bill—that's creepy."

"Does your ex-husband live in New York?"

"Wally? I think I heard something about him moving out to the West Coast, but to be honest I don't know if he's alive or dead."

"Hmmm."

"And who cares? You ask the damnedest questions, Bill."

"Do I?"

"Uh-huh. But you got the nicest hands in the world. And your eyes you've got beautiful eyes. I guess you've heard that before."

"Not really."

"Well, how could most people tell? Those crazy glasses you wear, person tries to look into your eyes and she's looking into a couple o mirrors. It's a sin having such beautiful eyes and hiding them."

"Eighteen floors, that's quite a drop."

"Huh?"

"Nothing," he said. "Just thinking out loud."

Freitag looked up when his partner entered the room. "You look little green in the face," he said. "Something the matter?"

"Oh, I was just looking at the *Post* and there's this story that' enough to make you sick. This guy out in Sheepshead Bay, and he's policeman too."

"What are you talking about?"

Poolings shrugged. "It's nothing that doesn't happen every couple o months. This policeman, he was depressed or he had a fight with hi wife or something, I don't know what. So he shot her dead. They ha two kids—a boy and a girl—and he shot them to death in their sleep and then he went and ate his gun. Blew his brains out."

Freitag leaned back and shut his eyes. "Was this somebody yo knew?"

"No. He was a Transit Authority cop."

"Anybody spends all his time in the subways, it has to take its to sooner or later."

"I guess."

Freitag plucked a cigarette from the pack in his shirt pocket, tappe it on the top of his desk, held it between his thumb and forefinge frowned at it, and returned it to the pack. He was trying to cut back t a pack a day and was not having much success. "Maybe he was tryin to quit smoking," he suggested. "Maybe it was making him nervou and he just couldn't stand it any more."

"That seems a little farfetched, doesn't it?"

"Does it?" Freitag got the cigarette out again, put it in his mout

lit it. "It don't sound all that farfetched to me. What was this guy's name, anyway?"

"The TA cop? Hell, I don't know. Why?"

"I might know him. I know a lot of Transit cops."

"It's in the *Post*. Bluestein's reading it."

"It doesn't matter. There's a ton of Transit cops and I don't know that many of them. Anyway, the ones I know aren't crazy."

"I didn't notice his name," Poolings said. "Let me just go take a look. Maybe *I* know him, as far as that goes."

Poolings went out, returning moments later with a troubled look on his face. Freitag looked questioningly at him.

"Rudy Ackerman," he said.

"Nobody I know. Hey."

"Yeah, right. Another Ackerman."

"That's three Ackermans, Ken."

"It's six Ackermans if you count the wife and kids."

"Yeah, but three incidents. I mean it's no coincidence that this TA cop and his wife and kids all had the same last name, but when you add in the schoolteacher and the guy in the Village, then you got a coincidence."

"It's a common name."

"Is it? How common, Ken?" Freitag leaned forward, stubbed out his cigarette, picked up a Manhattan telephone directory and flipped it open. "Ackerman, Ackerman," he said, turning pages. "Here we are. Yeah, you're right, it's common. There's close to two columns of Ackermans in Manhattan alone. And then there's some that spell it with two n's. I wonder."

"You wonder what?"

"If there's a connection."

Poolings sat on the edge of Freitag's desk. "How could there be a connection?"

"Damned if I know."

"There couldn't, Jack."

"An old schoolteacher gets stabbed by a mugger in Washington Heights. A faggot picks up the wrong kind of rough trade and gets tied up and tortured to death. And a TA cop goes berserk and kills his wife and kids and himself. No connection."

"Except for them all having the same last name."

"Yeah. And the two of us just happened to notice that because we investigated the one killing and read about the other two."

"Right."

"So maybe nobody else even knows that there were three homicides involving Ackermans. Maybe you and me are the only people in the city who happened to notice this little coincidence."

"So?"

"So maybe there's something we didn't notice," Freitag said. He got to his feet. "Maybe there have been more than three. Maybe if we pull a printout of deaths over the past few weeks we're going to find Ackermans scattered all over it."

"Are you serious, Jack?"

"If there's just the three it don't prove a thing, right? I mean, it's a common name and you got lots of people dying violently in New York City. When you have eight million people in a city it's no big surprise that you average three or four murders a day. The rate's not even so high compared to other cities. With three or four homicides a day, well, when you got three Ackermans over a couple of weeks, that's not too crazy all by itself, right?"

"Right."

"Suppose it turns out there's more than three."

"You've got a hunch, Jack. Haven't you?"

Freitag nodded. "That's what I got all right. A hunch. Let's just see if I'm nuts or not. Let's find out."

"A fifth of Courvoisier, V.S.O.P." Mel Ackerman used a stepladder to reach the bottle. "Here we are, sir. Will there be anything else?"

"All the money in the register," the man said.

Ackerman's heart turned over. He saw the gun in the man's hand and his own hands trembled so violently that he almost dropped the bottle of cognac. "Jesus," he said. "Could you point that somewhere else?" he said. "I get very nervous."

"The money," the man said.

"Yeah, right. I wish you guys would pick on somebody else once in a while. This makes the fourth time I been held up in the past two years. Listen, I'm insured, I don't care about the money, just be careful with the gun, huh? There's not much money in the register but you're welcome to every penny I got." He punched the No Sale key

and scooped up bills, emptying all of the compartments. Beneath the removable tray he had several hundred dollars in large bills, but he didn't intend to call them to the robber's attention. Sometimes a gunman made you take out the tray and hand over everything. Other times the man would take what you gave him and be anxious to get the hell out. Mel Ackerman didn't much care either way. Just so he got out of this alive, just so the maniac would take the money and leave without firing his gun.

"Four times in two years," Ackerman said, talking as he emptied the register, taking note of the holdup man's physical appearance as he did so. Tall but not too tall, young, probably still in his twenties. White. Good build. No beard, no moustache. Big mirrored sunglasses that hid a lot of his face.

"Here we go," Ackerman said, handing over the bills. "No muss, no fuss. You want me to lie down behind the counter while you go on your way?"

"What for?"

"Beats me. The last guy that held me up had me do it. Maybe he got the idea from a television program or something. Don't forget the brandy."

"I don't drink."

"You just come to liquor stores to rob 'em, huh?" Mel was beginning to relax now. "This is the only way we get your business, is that right?"

"I've never held up a liquor store before."

"So you had to start with me? To what do I owe the honor?"

"Your name."

"My name?"

"You're Melvin Ackerman, aren't you?"

"So?"

"So this is what you get," the man said, and shot Mel Ackerman three times in the chest.

"It's crazy," Freitag said. "What it is is crazy. Twenty-two people named Ackerman died in the past month. Listen to this. Arnold Ackerman, 56 years of age, lived in Flushing. Jumped or fell in front of the E train."

"Or was pushed."

"Or was pushed," Freitag agreed. "Wilma Ackerman, 62 years old,

lived in Flatbush. Heart attack. Mildred Ackerman, 36, East 87th Street, fell from an eighteenth-story window. Rudolph Ackerman, that's the Transit Authority cop, killed his wife and kids and shot himself. Florence Ackerman was stabbed, Samuel Ackerman fell down a flight of stairs, Lucy Ackerman took an overdose of sleeping pills, Walter P. Ackerman was electrocuted when a radio fell in the bathtub with him, Melvin Ackerman's the one who just got shot in a holdup. "It's unbelievable. And it's completely crazy."

"Some of the deaths must be natural," Poolings said. "Here's one. Sarah Ackerman, 78 years old, spent two months as a terminal cancer patient at St. Vincent's and finally died last week. Now that has to be coincidental."

"Uh-huh. Unless somebody slipped onto the ward and held a pillow over her face because he didn't happen to like her last name."

"That seems pretty farfetched, Jack."

"Farfetched? Is it any more farfetched than the rest of it? Is it any crazier than the way all these other Ackermans got it? Some nut case is running around killing people who have nothing in common but their last names. There's no way they're related, you know. Some of the Ackermans are Jewish and some are gentiles. It's one of those names that can be either. Hell, this guy Wilson Ackerman was black. So it's not somebody with a grudge against a particular family. It's somebody who has a thing about the name. But why?"

"Maybe somebody's collecting Ambroses," Poolings suggested.

"Huh? Where'd you get Ambrose?"

"It's something I read once," Poolings said. "This writer Charles Fort used to write about freaky things that happen, and one thing he wrote was that a guy named Ambrose had walked around the corner and disappeared, and the writer Ambrose Bierce had disappeared in Mexico, and he said maybe somebody was collecting Ambroses."

"That's ridiculous."

"Yeah. But what I meant—"

"Maybe somebody's collecting Ackermans."

"Right."

"Killing them. Killing everybody with that last name and doing it differently each time. Every mass murderer I ever heard of had a murder method he was nuts about and used it over and over, but this guy never does it the same way twice. We got what is it, twenty-two

deaths here? Even if some of them just happened, there's no question that at least fifteen out of twenty-two have to be the work of this nut. He's going to a lot of trouble to keep this operation of his from looking like what it is. Most of these killings look like suicide or accidental deaths, and the others were set up to look like isolated homicides in the course of a robbery or whatever. That's how he managed to knock off this many Ackermans before anybody suspected anything. Ken, what gets me is the question of why. Why is he doing this?"

"He must be crazy."

"Of course he's crazy, but being crazy don't mean you don't have reasons for what you do. It's just that they're crazy reasons. What kind of reason could he have?"

"Revenge."

"Against all the Ackermans in the world?"

Poolings shrugged. "What else? Maybe somebody named Ackerman did him dirty once upon a time and he wants to get even with them all. I don't see what difference it makes as far as catching him is concerned, and once we catch him the easiest way to find out the reason is to ask him."

"*If* we catch him."

"Sooner or later we'll catch him, Jack."

"Either that or the city'll run out of Ackermans. Maybe *his* name is Ackerman."

"How do you figure that?"

"Getting even with his father, hating himself, *I* don't know. You want to start looking somewhere, it's got to be easier to start with people named Ackerman than with people not named Ackerman."

"Even so, there's a hell of a lot of Ackermans. It's going to be some job checking them all out. There's got to be a few hundred in the five boroughs, plus God knows how many who don't have telephones. And if the guy we're looking for is a drifter living in a dump of a hotel somewhere there's no way to find him—and that's if he's even using his name in the first place, which he probably isn't considering the way he feels about the name."

Freitag lit a cigarette. "Maybe he *likes* the name," he said. "Maybe he wants to be the only one left with it."

"You really think we should check all the Ackermans?"

"Well, the job gets easier every day, Ken. 'Cause every day there's

fewer Ackermans to check on."

"God."

"Yeah."

"Do we just do this ourselves, Jack?"

"I don't see how we can. We better take it upstairs and let the brass figure out what to do with it. You know what's gonna happen."

"What?"

"It's gonna get in the papers."

"Oh, God."

"Yeah." Freitag drew on his cigarette, coughed, cursed, and took another drag anyway. "At which point all the Ackermans left in the city start panicking, and so does everybody else, and don't ask me what our crazy man does because I don't have any idea. Well, it'll be somebody else's worry." He got to his feet. "And that's what we need—for it to be somebody else's worry. Let's take this to the lieutenant right now and let him figure out what to do with it."

The pink rubber ball came bouncing crazily down the driveway toward the street. The street was a quiet suburban cul-de-sac in a recently developed neighborhood on Staten Island. The house was a three-bedroom expandable colonial ranchette. The driveway was concrete, with the footprints of a largish dog evident in two of its squares. The small boy who came bouncing crazily after the rubber ball was towheaded, azure-eyed, and—when a rangy young man emerged from behind the barberry hedge and speared the ball one-handed—amazed.

"Gotcha," the man said, and flipped the ball underhand to the small boy, who missed it, but picked it up on the second bounce.

"Hi," the boy said.

"Hi yourself."

"Thanks," the boy said. "It was gonna go in the street."

"It sure looked that way,"

"I'm not supposed to go in the street. On account of the cars."

"Makes sense."

"But sometimes the dumb old ball goes in the street anyhow, and then what am I supposed to do?"

"It's a problem," the man agreed, reaching over to rumple the boy's hair. "How old are you?"

"Five and a half."

"That's a good age."

"Goin' on six."

"A logical assumption."

"Those are funny glasses you got on."

"These?" The man took them off, looked at them for a moment, then put them on. "Mirrors," he said.

"Yeah, I know. They're funny."

"What's your name?"

"Mark."

"I bet I know your last name."

"What is it?"

"I bet it's Ackerman."

The boy wrinkled up his face in a frown. "How'd you know? Aw, I bet you know my daddy."

"We're old friends. Is he home?"

"Of course not. He's workin'."

"I should have guessed as much. What else would Hale Ackerman be doing on such a beautiful sunshiny day, hm? How about your mommy? Is she home?"

"Yeah. She's watchin' the TV."

"And you're playing in the driveway."

"Yeah."

The man rumpled the boy's hair again. Pitching his voice theatrically low, he said, "It's a tough business, son, but that doesn't mean it's a *heartless* business. Keep that in mind."

"Huh?"

"Nothing. A pleasure meeting you, Mark my lad. Tell your parents they're lucky to have you. Luckier than they'll ever have to know."

"Whatcha mean?"

"Nothing," the man said agreeably. "Now I have to walk all the way back to the ferry slip and take the dumb old boat all the way back to Manhattan. Then I have to go to—" he consulted a slip of paper from his pocket "—Seaman Avenue way the hell up in Washington Heights. Let's just hope *they* don't turn out to have a charming kid."

"You're funny."

"You bet."

"Police protection," the lieutenant was saying. He was a beefy man

with an abundance of jaw. He had not been born looking particularly happy, and years of police work had drawn deep lines of disappointment around his eyes and mouth. "That's the first step, but how do you even go about offering it? There's a couple of hundred people named Ackerman in the five boroughs and one's as likely to be a target as the next one. And we don't know who the hell we're protecting them *from*. We don't know if this is one maniac or a platoon of them. Meaning we have to take every dead Ackerman on this list and backtrack, looking for some common element, which since we haven't been looking for it all along we're about as likely to find it as a virgin on Eighth Avenue. Twenty-two years ago I could have gone with the police or the fire department and I couldn't make up my mind. You know what I did? I tossed a goddamn coin. It had to come up heads."

"As far as protecting these people—"

"As far as protecting them, how do you do that without letting out the story? And when the story gets in the papers, suppose you're a guy named Ackerman and you find out some moron just declared war on your last name?"

"I suppose you get out of town."

"Maybe you get out of town, and maybe you have a heart attack, and maybe you call the mayor's office and yell a lot, and maybe you sit in your apartment with a loaded gun and shoot the mailman when he does something you figure is suspicious. And maybe if you're some *other* lunatic you read the story and you go out and join in the Ackerman hunt yourself. Or if you're another kind of lunatic which we're all of us familiar with you call up the police and confess. Just to give the cops something to do."

A cop groaned. "Yeah," the lieutenant said. "That about sums it up. So the one thing you don't want is for this to get in the papers."

"But it's too late for that," said a voice from the doorway. And a uniformed patrolman entered the office holding a fresh copy of the New York *Post*. "Either somebody told them or they went and put two and two together themselves."

"I could have been a fireman," the lieutenant said. "I would have got to slide down the pole and wear one of those hats and everything, but instead the goddamn coin had to come up heads."

The young man paid the cashier and carried his tray of food across

the lunchroom to a long table at the rear where a half dozen people were sitting. The young man joined them, ate his macaroni and cheese, sipped his coffee, and listened as they discussed the Ackerman murders.

"I think it's a cult thing," one girl was saying. "They have this sort of thing all the time out in California, like surfing and est and all those West Coast trips. In order to be a member you have to kill somebody named Ackerman."

"That's a theory," a bearded young man said. "Personally, I'd guess the whole business is more logically motivated than that. It looks to me like a chain murder."

Someone wanted to know what that was.

"A chain murder," the bearded man said. "Our murderer has a strong motive to kill a certain individual whose name happens to be Ackerman. Only problem is his motive is so strong that he'd be suspected immediately. So instead he kills a whole slew of Ackermans and the one particular victim he has a reason to kill is no more than one face in the crowd. So his motive gets lost in the shuffle."

"Too logical," a young woman objected. "Besides, all these murders had different methods and a lot of them were disguised so as not to look like murders at all. A chain murderer wouldn't want to operate that way, would he?"

"He might. If he was clever—"

"But he'd be too clever for his own good, don't you think? No, I think he had a grudge against one Ackerman and decided to exterminate the whole tribe."

The conversation went on in this fashion, with the young man who was eating macaroni and cheese contributing nothing at all to it. Gradually it trailed off and so did the people at the table, until only the young man and the girl next to whom he'd seated himself remained. She took a sip of coffee, lit a cigarette, and smiled at him.

"You didn't say anything," she said, "about the Ackerman murders."

"No," he agreed. "You all certainly had some interesting ideas."

"What do you think?"

"I think I'm happy my name isn't Ackerman."

"What is it?"

"Bill. Bill Trenholme."

"I'm Emily Kuystendahl."

"Emily," he said. "Pretty name."

"Thank you. What *do* you think? Really?"

"Really?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well," he said, "I don't think much of any of the theories. Chain murders and cult homicide and all the rest of it. I have a theory of my own, but of course that's all it is—a theory."

"I'd like to hear it."

"You would?"

"Definitely."

He smiled and she smiled in reply. "Well," he said, after a moment, "first of all, I think it's just one guy. Not a group of killers. From the way it's timed. And because he keeps changing the murder method, I think he wanted to keep what he was doing undiscovered as long as possible."

"That makes sense. But why?"

"I think it was a source of fun for him."

"A source of fun?"

The man nodded. "This is just hypothesis, remember," he said. "But let's suppose he just killed a person once for the sheer hell of it. To find out what it felt like, say. To enlarge his area of personal experience. Can you accept that hypothetically?"

"I guess so. Sure."

"O.K. Now suppose further that he liked it, got some kind of a kick out of it. Otherwise he wouldn't have wanted to continue. There are certainly precedents for that. Not all the homicidal maniacs down through history have been driven men. Some if them just got a kick out of it, so they kept right on doing it."

"That gives me the shivers."

"It's a frightening concept," he agreed. "But let's suppose that the first person this clown killed was named Ackerman, and that he wanted to go on killing people. And he wanted to make a game out of it, so he—"

"A game!"

"Sure, why not? He could just keep on with it, having his jollies and seeing how long it would take for the police and the press to figure out what was going on. There are a lot of Ackermans. It's a common name but not so common that a pattern wouldn't begin to emerge sooner or

ater. Think how many Smiths there are in New York, for instance. I lon't suppose police in the different boroughs coordinate their ac-ivities very closely, or that the Bureau of Vital Statistics bothers to ıote if a lot of fatalities have the same last name, so it's a question of ıow long it would take for the pattern to be noticed. Well, it has now, ınd what's the score? Twenty-seven?"

"That's what the paper said, I think."

"It's quite a total when you stop and think of it. And there may have ɔeen a few Ackermans not accounted for. A body or two in the river, or instance."

"You make it sound—"

"Yes?"

"I don't know. It gives me the willies to think about it. Will he just ɛeep on now? Until they catch him?"

"You think they'll catch him?"

"Well, sooner or later, won't they? The Ackermans will be careful ıow and the police will have stakeouts. Don't you think they'll catch ıim?"

The young man thought it over. "I'm sure they'll catch him," he aid, "*if* he keeps it up."

"You mean he might stop?"

"I would. If I were him, I'd leave the rest of the world's Ackermans lone from here on in."

"Because it would be too dangerous?"

"Because it wouldn't be any fun any more."

"Fun!"

"Oh, come on," he said, smiling. "Once you get past the evilness of , which I grant you is overwhelming, can't you see how it could be ın? Try not to think of the killer as cruel. Think of him as someone ɛsponding to a challenge. Now that the police and the newspapers and ıe Ackermans themselves know what's going on, it's not a game any ıore. The game is over and if he were to go on with it he'd just be ɔnducting a personal war of extermination. And if he doesn't really ave any genuine grudge against Ackermans, well, I say he'd let them one."

She looked at him and her eyes were thoughtful. "Then he might st stop altogether."

"Sure."

"And get away with it?"

"I suppose. Unless they pick him up for killing somebody else." Her eyes widened and he grinned. "Well, Emily, you can't expect him to stop this new hobby of his entirely, can you? Not if he's been having so much fun at it? I don't think killers like that ever stop, not once it gets in their blood. They don't stop until the long arm of the law catches up with them."

"The way you said that."

"Pardon me?"

" 'The long arm of the law.' As if it's sort of a joke."

"Well, when you think of how this character operated, he does make the law look like something of a joke, doesn't he?"

"I guess he does."

He smiled, got to his feet. "It's getting close in here. Which way are you headed? I'll walk you home."

"Well, I have to go uptown—"

"Then that's the way I'm headed."

"And if I had to go downtown?"

"Then I'd have urgent business in that direction, Emily."

On the street she said,

"But what do you suppose he'll do? Assuming you're right that he'll stop killing Ackermans but he'll go on killing. Will he just pick out innocent victims at random?"

"Not if he's a compulsive type, and he certainly looks like one to me. Now, I guess he'll just pick out another whole category of people."

"Another last name? Just sifting through the telephone directory and seeing what strikes his fancy? That's a terrifying idea. I'll tell you something, I'm glad my name's not such a common one. There aren't enough Kuystendahls in the world to make it very interesting for him."

"Or Trenholmes. But there are plenty of Emilys, aren't there?"

"Huh?"

"Well, he doesn't have to pick his next victims by last name. In fact he'd probably avoid that because the police would pick up on something like that in a minute after this business with the Ackermans. He could establish some other kind of category. Men with beards, say Oldsmobile owners."

"Oh, my God."

"People wearing brown shoes. Bourbon drinkers. Or, uh, girls named Emily."

"That's not funny, Bill."

"Well, no reason why the name would have to be Emily. *Any* first name—*that's the whole point, the random nature of it.* He could pick guys named Bill, as far as that goes. Either way it would probably take the police awhile to tip to it, don't you think?"

"I don't know."

"Are you upset, Emily?"

"Not upset exactly."

"You certainly don't have anything to worry about," he said, and slipped an arm protectively around her waist. "I'll take good care of you, Emily."

"Oh, will you?"

"Count on it."

They walked together in silence for awhile and after a few moments she relaxed in his embrace. As they waited for a light to change he said, "Collecting Emilys."

"Pardon?"

"Just talking to myself," he said. "Nothing important."

Classified
MARKET PLACE

The rate per word for Classified Ads is $1.00 each insertion, minimum ad $15.00—payable in advance. Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. Space reservations close 1st of 3rd month preceding COVER date. Send order & remittance to R. S. Wayner, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10003.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

HOMEWORKERS! Stuff envelopes, make big money. Free details. Partridge, Buckfield Lane, Greenwich, CT 06830.

CIRCULAR mailers make $$$. So can you. Write: Lee, 1605 Santa Clara Dr. #8, Roseville, CA 95678.

$200 WEEKLY mailing circulars. Samples 25¢. Grahamco DPBX 99371, Tacoma, WA 98499.

GUARANTEED $3000.00 MONTHLY! Immediate income mailing circulars from your home. No experience necessary. Details. Send $1.00 stamped self addressed envelope. G. E. Enterprises, Box 29 Mobile Manor, Knob Noster, MO 65336.

ATHLETIC EQUIPMENT & BODY BUILDING

CAN colds be prevented by vitamin C? Your benefit: good health through case histories, charts. Details free. PRETTY THINGS & KNICKNACKS 400 E. 33rd J503 Chicago, IL 60616.

AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors in a complete, reliable publishing program: publicity, advertising, promotion, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. IOG, 84 Fifth Avenue, New York 10011.

BLUEPRINTS PATTERNS & PLANS

NEW CRAFT PRINT CATALOG — Choose from over 100 great easy-to-build plans. Send $1.50 (completely refunded with your first order). BOAT BUILDER, (CP Div.) — 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

LARGE Catalog Free! Mystery-suspense books. Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 186, So. Laguna, CA 92677.

TALES OF MYSTERY AND HORROR. Unusual privately-printed manuscript. $2.00. Beltane, Box 1055, Phila., PA 19105.

FICTION! MYSTERIES! FREE CATALOG. Select from over 7,000 good used novels. Chadde, Box 45MH-AH, Grand Marais, MN 55604.

BOOK Readers and Collectors! Send titles wanted to: S&S Books, 80 North Wilder, E-50, St. Paul, MN 55104.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$30.00 HUNDRED Stuffing Our Circulars into Stamped Addressed Envelopes. Immediate Earnings. Beginners Kit $2.00. COLOSSI, 1433-61 Street, DC-6, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

HOMEWORK! BIG MONEY addressing, mailing envelopes. Exciting offer 10¢. Linco Services, 3636 Peterson, Chicago, 60659.

1000% PROFIT Bronzing Baby Shoes. Free Literature. NBC, Box 1904-DG, Sebring, FL 33870.

"MAKE $70,000 annually doing nothing. $15,000 guaranteed. Free details. Write: Dept. 7-11, RRI, 1817 North Hills Blvd., Knoxville, TN 37917.

FREE BOOK "20042 Unique, Proven Enterprises." Fabulous "Unknowns"! Work home! Haylings, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

MAKE MONEY WITH YOUR camera! Sell photographs. Send for details. Keystone Dept. 1538-CBO7Y Orange St., Berwick, PA 18603.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE 100 LETTERS A DAY. EACH CONTAINING $2.00? WILL SEND COPY OF PLANS PLUS 6 FORMULAS FOR $2.00. RUSH $2.00 TO MELCOLE INC., P.O. BOX 64733, 5920 UNIVERSITY, DALLAS, TX 75206.

LIFETIME Opportunity for mechanically inclined individuals. Operate Successful Manufacturing Business. Mark, 92-L Brighton 11th Brooklyn, NY 11235.

$3000.00 MONTHLY. Immediate income. Stuff envelopes at home. Information, send self-addressed stamped envelope. Cottage, Box 730-DFG, Baldwin Park, CA 91706.

$100 Day from $242 Machine. Brochure. Sample Product $1.00. Write, Coffman, 1973M Glenhaven, Abilene, Texas 79603.

AMAZING profits stuffing envelopes. Free details. Betza, R-2-Box 102, Perryopolis, PA 15473.

GUARANTEED $178.00 WEEKLY. Work one hour daily. Free Brochure. FAS, Box 13703, San Antonio, TX 78213.

NEW! Stuff our circulars for profit. Free details. Sunray, Box 778, Kaneohe, HI 96744.

EARN $500/Thousand stuffing envelopes at home! Free supplies! Rush stamped envelope. R. M. Sims Co., Box 06614, Detroit, MI 48206.

MAKE $1,000 per month mailing letters. Free details. Tate, Box 443-DP, Morehead City, NC 28557.

400% profit. Sell books by mail. Write: Foster, Box 3563 Birmingham, AL 35211.

GUARANTEED weekly income. Make huge profits on hundreds of unique gift items. $2.00 brings giant product catalog, refunded with

BUY IT WHOLESALE

UNIQUE books — new products! Catalog 25¢ (Refundable). Gargiul, Box 2009-D, Syracuse, New York 13220.

DETECTIVES

POLICE SECURITY INVESTIGATIVE schematics and equipment listings. Quimtronix, Box 548-DV, Seattle, WA 98111.

DO IT YOURSELF

FACTS about insulation. Save 100's on fuel and cooling bills. Send $3.50 for booklet on how to insulate ceiling, walls and floors of new construction or older homes. Mail to Geary, Wholesale Supply, MR1, Rt. 1, Box 95, Bloomfield, MO 63825.

MAKE YOUR OWN WILL. Complete Kit. Send $1.98. Margaret Emory, 410C Haven Lake Avenue, Milford, Delaware 19663.

SAVE $ on utilities, vans, homes. Solar Reflective film turns window glass into 2-way mirror. Reflects heat, glare 80%,. provides privacy, easily applied. Water activated, any width and length. Silver, gold, gray, bronze. $1. per sq. ft. Send M.O. or C.O.D. Tracy Co., P.O. Box 28328, San Antonio, TX 78228.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

BLACKJACK Breakthrough—"Counting tens the easy way," Details $1. Marloe, Box 403, Junction City, Oregon 97448.

COLLEGE Degress by mail, via Resume, Education, 256-D, South Robertson, Beverly Hills, CA 90211.

INFORMATIVE BOOKLET—"How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad. Send $1.50 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

FIRST new calculus in 300 years. Send stamped-addressed envelope. Calculus, Box 240; Rockport, Mass. 01966.

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors, Masters, PhD.s. . . . Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-AH-77, Tustin, CA 92686.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

SEND $5 for Handbag. Free catalog. Reingeitelbaum, 1165 East 54 Street, P.O. Box 30 Ryder St. Sta. Brooklyn, NY 11234.

LOW PRICED specialty items. GREAT as party favors, gifts etc. FREE details. CATALOG SALES, 7831 224th Northeast, Redmond, WA 98052.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487 Anaheim, CA 92805.

MISCELLANEOUS

SOLAR ENERGY. For you? Free details. Box 5367-AH, Austin, TX 78763.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

FREE "1001 ODDS"! $10,000-$100,000 actually made at home! Never get over it! Publico, Carlsbad, CA 92008.

$3 Hourly stuffing envelopes. Easy work, Details free. Feldco, Box 228 Ryder, Brooklyn 11234.

$10.00 PROFIT on every $15.00 Sale. WRITE: PJ Mailorder 1593 Dufferin St., Toronto, Ontario M6H 3L5.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write A Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send $1.50 (includes postage) to R. S. Wayner, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003.

$500.00 WEEKLY! IMMEDIATE, Guaranteed home income stuffing envelopes. FREE Supplies! Send 25¢. Stamp. Profits, B725-DP7, Belen, NM 87002.

$1000 MONTHLY POSSIBLE, mailing commission letters. Information—Free! OPPORTUNITIES Box 721D, Lynbrook, NY 11563.

$1,000.00 MONTHLY possible stuffing envelopes. National, P.O. Box 343, Randallstown, Maryland 21133.

AMAZING profits stuffing envelopes. Free details. Anthony, 459 Cove Rd., Pennsauken, NJ 08110.

SAVE MONEY ON TOP QUALITY GIFTS! Wide selection of informative and improving books—50% off! Ideas how to become rich, easy ways without experience, etc. Satisfaction guaranteed, write for free catalog. Kovaks Variety Gifts, 1658 West 37th Street, Dept. 315 Chicago, IL 60609.

ASTRONOMICAL earnings! Stuff envelopes. Send 25¢. Details. L. M. Ross, 375 Ross Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406.

BIG, sparetime income. Mailing. Fiesta, Box 2882-DP, Springfield, IL 62708.

$30.00 HUNDRED STUFFING our circulars into stamped addressed envelopes. Beginner's Kit $2.00. Mustachi, P.O. Box 46D7, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

COLLECT names for us. We pay $1.00 each. Instructions, $2.00. Pacific, Box 657, Aberdeen, WA 98520.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$250.00◊ profit/thousand possible—stuffing-mailing envelopes. Offer: Rush stamped addressed envelope: Universal-ADVS X16180 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

BIG $$$$ mailing letters. Free details, Shields, 18635 Groverdale, Covina, CA 91722.

STUFF ENVELOPES $250 per thousand. Free supplies. Rush stamped addressed envelope. L/L Enterprises, Box 226-D, Danville, AL 35619.

$500.00 PROFIT Stuffing 1,000 envelopes. 25 Cents Details: Canapro Enterprises, Box 215C. Station "H," Montreal, Que., Canada.

I make $52,000 yearly mailing letters. Anyone can. Free proof. Sandco-DP, Ceres, CA 95307.

$1,000 MONTHLY possible stuffing envelopes. Free details. Upward, 15901 Lombardy, Turlock, CA 95380.

STUFFING envelopes, free supplies. Send stamped envelope McClaskey IO-7, 6897 Oakhills, Grove City, OH 43123.

$500/Thousand stuffing envelopes. Free Supplies. Proven-Guaranteed! Send 50¢ Stamped addressed envelope. H & H Enterprises, Box 10 Black Oak, Arkansas.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Identity, Box 315-DC, Royal Oak, MI 48068.

JAPANESE introduction! Girl's photographs, descriptions, brochure, details. $1.00. INTER-PACIFIC, Box 304-SC, Birmingham, MI 48012.

"ALONE? Neith can arrange for you to get married. Neith, 5605 Campbell, Valparaiso, IN 46383."

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, descriptions, questionnaire, Etc. Japan International, Box 156-AA, Carnelian Bay, CA 95711.

BEAUTIFUL Mexican-Oriental girls Needing American Boy-Friends. Free Details, "actual" photos. World, Box 3876-DC, San Diego, CA 92103.

DATES GALORE! Meet singles-anywhere. Call DATELINE, toll-free (800) 451-3245.

PLEASE Be sure to include your zip code when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

LATIN AMERICAN GIRLS appreciate their men. Let us introduce you to a dark-eyed, unspoiled beauty. Complete application package and photo selection $2.00: Maria Garcia, Box 80801D, San Diego, Calif. 92138.

BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN GIRLS! Friendship, marriage. Photos information free! "Latins," Box 1716-DE, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

ADULT Pleasure Products—over 600 items! Giant catalog $1.00. Clifton's D-1068, Saugus, CA 91351.

1000 LADIES PHOTOS matrimonial catalog $5.00. Intercontact Publishing, Box 737, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33302.

500 Ladies, 350 Men Photos Matrimonial Catalog, $1.00 Contactpartner: Box 12, Toronto, Canada M4A 2M8.

ADULT PRODUCTS. Giant Catalog. $1.00 (Refundable). Trader Jack, 1045 Tabor Ave., Fairfield, CA 94533.

PHOTOGRAPHY—PHOTO FINISHING & SUPPLIES

SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS!!!! Make your own S&M Densitometer. Send $3.00 for details, drawings and instructions. A must for successful photography in your darkroom. Order direct: S&M Instruments, Dept. AH7 229 Park Ave. South, N.Y. NY 10003.

PROFITABLE OCCUPATIONS

$70,000 ANNUALLY, doing nothing, $15,000 guaranteed. Free details. Dept.-7, Imageneering, POB 6061-A, Knoxville, TN 37917.

RADIO-TV

FANTASTIC old radio programs on tape. Reels, cassettes, 8-track. Free introductory catalog. Radio Memories, Box 2297, Newport News, VA 23602.

SONGWRITERS

HOW TO write needed hit songs. Write "Songs," 15915 E. Main, Suite C, La Puente, CA 91792.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

UNLIMITED Earnings with Fantastic Money making methods. Free details: J and A Promotions, P.O. Box 32531, Decatur, GA 30032.

SURPLUS EQUIPMENT

GIANT Bargain Packed Canadian Surplus Catalogs $1.00. Etco Electronics-DG, Box 741, Montreal "A."

WANTED TO BUY

WE PAY CASH for cancelled checks. List $1.00. Don, 1054 Garvin, Louisville, KY 40203

15 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1

Worth $113.25 in Publishers' Editions!

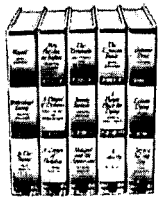
Searching for mysteries that tingle your nerve ends and tickle your little grey cells?

Your search is over. You have a home in The Detective Book Club.

The club's editors read some 400 new detective novels a year, saving only the finest mystery fare for our members.

This assures you of getting the cream of new mysteries... and you start your membership with fifteen top mysteries ...all fifteen for only $1.00 in the five handsome hard-bound triple volumes shown below. Membership information is in post-paid card. Mail it today!

The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576



Please enroll me as a member and send me at once my five triple-volumes shown here, containing fifteen mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for one week, then will either accept all five volumes for the special new member price of only $1, plus postage and handling, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the club's monthly Preview which describes my next selections but I am not obligated to accept them. I will always have at least ten days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book at the club's expense for full credit. For each monthly triple-volume I keep, I will send you only $4.39, plus postage and handling. I understand I may cancel my membership at any time.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, ROSLYN, N.Y. 11576

Name _____

Street _____

7-MR

City _____

18-55-7C

State _____ Zip _____

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Ontario, offer slightly different in Canada.

MAIL THIS POSTAGE-FREE CARD TODAY