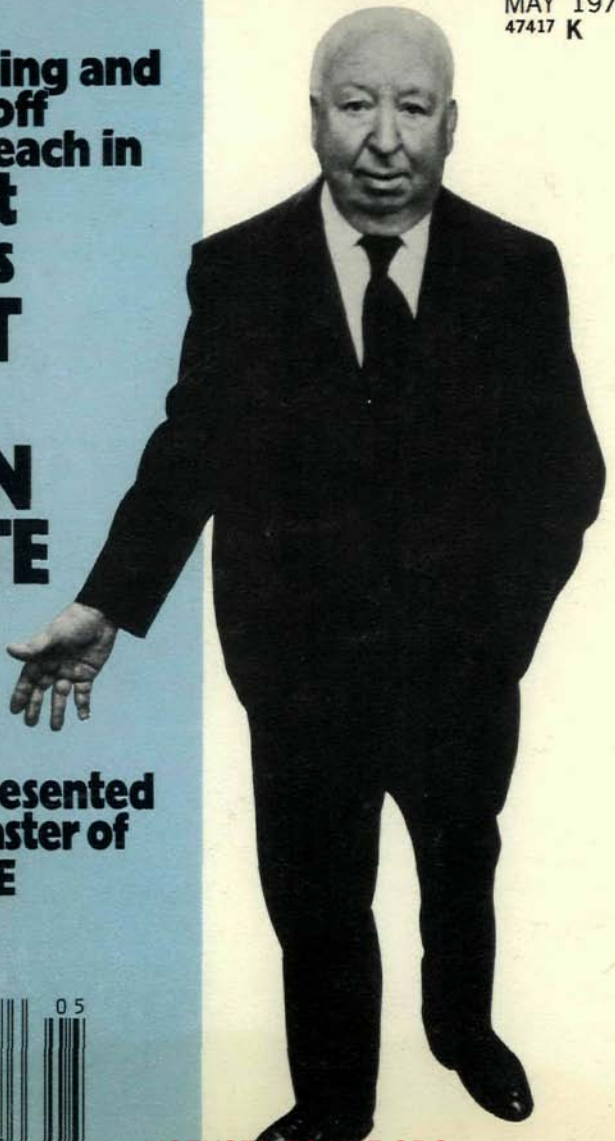
ALFRED

HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY 1978 75¢
47417 K UK 55p

Kidnapping and murder off Miami Beach in Robert Colby's PAINT THE TOWN WHITE



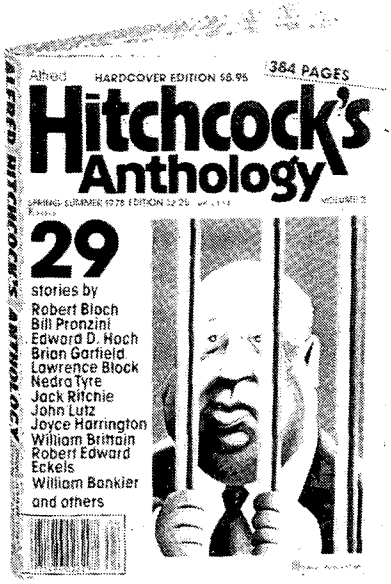
NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

05

29 tales from the master of—

It's here!

- only the second time ever published!
- you save $6.20 off hardcover price



Alfred Hitchcock's Anthology #2

✓ the most dastardly plots ✓ the wittiest of contrivances ✓ the most suspicious of circumstances ✓ the strangest of fiction ✓ the direst of schemes —a collection rife with the rogues and roguishness you've come to expect from the Master of Suspense

— — — (EXTRA COUPON ON PAGE 46) — — —

RETURN TO:

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S ANTHOLOGY
229 Park Ave. So.
NY, NY 10003

☐ **Enclosed is $2.25 plus 50¢ postage & handling (total $2.75) for ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S ANTHOLOGY #2 (paperback).**

name

address

AHMM58

city

state zip

SUSPENSE

VOLUME 23, NO. 5 MAY 1978

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE MAY 16

NOVELETTE

SHORT STORIES

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 23, No. 5, May, 1978. 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. 06835. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices.

May 1978

Dear Reader:

Here we are, advancing quickly into the wonderful month of May. A good month for spring cleaning.

This month our contributors seem to have been bitten by the spring-cleaning bug. For instance, Robert Colby is painting the town white and Barry N. Malzberg is airing out an apartment. Other stories feature different kinds of housekeeping—such as Jeffry Scott's tale of a London police mop-up and William Bankier's disgruntled street-light cleaner. Thieves have their own unique methods for cleaning out houses and muggers for cleaning out pocket linings, as you will see.

If you have a similar impulse to tidy up, why don't you put it aside for a while and enjoy this month's issue?

Good reading.

Alfred Hitchcock

Joel Davis, President & Publisher
Eleanor Sullivan, Editor

Sally Smith	Associate Editor
Victor C. Stabile	Vice President & Treasurer
Leonard F. Pinto	Vice President & General Manager
Constance DiRienzo	Exec. Sec., Rts. & Perm. Mgr.
Barbara Bazyn	Editorial Assistant
Susan Calderella	Editorial Assistant
Jim Cappello	Advertising Manager
Carl Bartee	Production Director
Don Gabree	Newsstand Circulation Director
R. V. Enlow	Subscription Circulation Director
Eugene S. Slawson	Subscription Circulation Manager
Irving Bernstein	Art Director

Everybody knows that cameras don't lie . . .

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

by HENRY T. PARRY

Hendricks welcomed the chill of the photography shop after the ninety-five-degree temperature outside, remembering the suffocating heat of his motel room two nights before when the air-conditioning had failed.

"I'm calling for some film I left. Color slides. The special overnight service. The name is Hendricks."

The girl behind the counter looked at him with a cautious curiosity

and tapped a bell near the cash register. The man who had been idly riffling through a photography magazine at the front of the shop came back and stood beside Hendricks, flipping open a wallet to display a police badge.

"I'm Detective Ryan. I want to ask you some questions."

"Yes, of course, but I can't imagine—"

"You step in the back room, we'll show you."

A projector had been set up which Ryan loaded with slides from a box marked with Hendricks' name.

"Did you take this picture, Mr. Hendricks?"

The screen showed ore boats being unloaded at a dock, with a steel plant in the background.

"Yes, I did. But what's wrong with that?"

"And this one?"

The picture showed a sidewalk superintendent's view of an excavation for a large building, with steel-webbed columns awaiting concrete.

"And that one too," Hendricks said.

"Just let me run through the rest of these quickly so you can identify all of them as your pictures."

Ryan quickly flashed on and off the screen a series of pictures of places around the city, uninspired views such as any tourist might snap. When he had exhibited the nineteenth picture, he said, "This was a twenty-picture roll of film, do you agree?"

Before Hendricks could speak, the proprietor broke in.

"Yes, it was. I developed it myself because he wanted it done overnight. I told him it would cost him."

The proprietor was a watery-eyed man with an indeterminate smile who seemed to be figuratively standing on tiptoe to help Ryan. It was clear to Hendricks that this man had alerted the police, and it was equally clear that he had enjoyed doing it.

"Look at number twenty," Ryan said.

The screen showed a double exposure. The left side of the slide was an upward shot of the facade of a tall building. The exposure on the right side of the slide showed the face of a man staring in terror out of the driver's window of a car at a revolver held a foot from his head. The arm holding the gun was cut off at the wrist by the edge of the film.

"And that one. Is that yours? I don't mean the building."

"No, it isn't. I never saw anything like that, so how could I have taken a picture of it?"

"You admit the other pictures on the roll are yours. That other exposure, the one on the left, can you identify that?"

"Yes, it's the Delancy Building. It's well known as one of the first skyscraper designs in town. And I don't deny that I took it. But the other exposure, the one on the right, absolutely not."

"When did you take the picture of the building?"

"Yesterday morning. I had been walking around the city. I'm not much of a photographer—" the proprietor smirked "—and my camera is fairly old."

"Well, if you didn't take the one on the right, who did?"

"I can't explain it. That camera wasn't out of my possession all day yesterday." He paused. "Well, actually it was for an hour or so yesterday afternoon. When I came back from the city, I found that the air-conditioning in my room at the motel was just beginning to work and my room was still quite hot. So I went to the restaurant, where it was cool. I left my camera in my room, on the table by the window."

"Did you lock the door?"

"Yes."

"How about the cleaning people?" Ryan asked. "Couldn't they have come in?"

"They could but I doubt that they did. The room was all done up when I came back from the city. I stayed in the restaurant about an hour, maybe less. When I came back to the room, I took the film out of the camera and brought it over here to be developed. I wanted overnight service because I don't know how long I'll be here."

Anticipating Ryan's questions, Hendricks explained that he was staying at the Homeways Motel at the airport, waiting for a company plane to take him to his next job, which was on a pipeline in the far North. The plane was also supposed to bring equipment parts to the job but the factory was late in delivery. Each day when he called his office back East he was told that the parts had not yet arrived and he would have to wait. He had already spent a week at the airport motel.

"You can verify all this with my home office if you want," he said. "Ask for Arthur Krusen. But I want to know if you're preferring charges against me. If so, for what?"

"No. We don't know if there's been a crime committed, outside of

the weapon threat, and we've had no complaint on that. There hasn't been any homicide reported nor any missing person, at least not adult male. Take a look at these blow-ups."

They studied an enlargement of the gun-pointing scene. The proprietor, in an excess of zeal, had printed four. Hendricks shook his head.

"I never saw the man before. But I'm pretty sure that the picture was taken at my motel. Look in the background and you can see parking slots and a row of identical doors and windows. They're the same as those across the parking space from my window. This picture was taken just outside my room or from the window of my room. The man's car is parked in the slot right in front of my window and door."

"Your film, your camera, your room, your parking space, but you don't know anything about it."

"That's right. I don't know anything about it."

"O.K., Mister. I haven't got any more questions. I'm going to keep this slide though."

Hendricks shrugged, paid the proprietor, and left, taking an enlargement with him.

Back in his room at the motel, he pulled aside the curtain, raised the venetian blind, and sat down at the table before the window to study the enlargement, comparing the real scene with the photograph. Directly across the narrow parking lot from the car in the picture he could discern the blurry outlines of a car parked in the slot before the motel room opposite. The other parking slots on that side were empty. It might be possible, he thought, to enlarge the picture sufficiently to make out the numbers on the license plate in the hope that the owner may have witnessed the gun incident.

On the other hand, why should he bother? Even if the license number could be made out, it would be necessary to have Detective Ryan find out who the owner was. He doubted that Ryan would welcome interference. He recalled that when he had registered at the motel seven monotonous days ago, the registration form had a space for showing a car license number. It was then that he realized that he did not need the license number; the identity of the person who occupied the room opposite his on the day of the incident could be obtained by checking the number on the motel-room door and then checking the registration cards. The chance that the occupant of the room had wit-

nessed the incident was small, but the puzzle the double exposure presented was a challenge and at least more absorbing than the paperbacks the airport had to offer. And, as Detective Ryan had pointed out, it was his camera and his film that had recorded what might yet turn out to be a murder.

The reluctance of the motel manager to permit Hendricks to examine the registrations vanished when he saw the enlargement and heard of the police's interest in the picture. He pressed a button on the intercom.

"Evelyn, who was in fifty-four on—" He looked at Hendricks.

"The eighteenth."

"The eighteenth. I'll hold. Oh, you've still got them there. Good." He wrote on a pad of paper. "Thanks." He hung up.

"That room across from you was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. William Goodman of Mandan. That's a little town downstate."

From his room Hendricks called information and was given the telephone number of William Goodman in Mandan. He dialed the number, and a man at the other end uttered an uncertain "Hello," cleared his throat, and repeated, "Hello."

"Mr. Goodman?"

"Speaking."

"Mr. Goodman, my name is Hendricks and I'm calling from the Homeways Motel at the city airport—"

"Oh, you're calling about the taillight. I'm awfully sorry about that."

"Taillight?"

"Yes. I was backing out of my space at the motel and I bumped into the car that was parked opposite mine. They don't give you too much parking space between the wings of these motels."

"Well, what I wanted to ask was—"

"Nothing makes me madder than people who bang into you in a lot or somewhere and then just drive off without making good on the damage they've done. Seeing's you're calling me, you must have got my note about sending me a bill."

Hendricks reached for the enlargement. It showed a folded white paper tucked under the windshield wiper. "What I'm calling about, Mr. Goodman, is this." Hendricks related the picture incident, after which there was silence at the other end of the wire.

Then Goodman said,

"No, I didn't see anything like that. All I saw was this white car parked there." Hendricks verified this against the picture. "It was about three-thirty, four o'clock. I did write down his license number though, just in case. Just a minute, I got it here somewhere."

Hendricks wrote down the number and waited while Mr. Goodman related their conversation to someone he addressed as "Mother," presumably Mrs. Goodman.

"She can't tell any more than I've just told you."

Hendricks sensed a cooling in Mr. Goodman's urge to impart information, based, he suspected, on advice from Mrs. Goodman that he should not get mixed up in anything involving guns and the big city.

It was good advice he should apply to himself, Hendricks thought after he had hung up. But he looked for the hundredth time at the tasteless furniture, the massive lamps, the mass-produced flower prints, and the generally plastic milieu—identical from Tacoma to Tampa—and sought out Evelyn at the registration desk.

"That man's face is familiar," she said when he showed her the picture, "but I see so many people. I think he might have stayed here a couple of times."

"I have the license number of his car. I thought if you'd let me examine the registration cards I might find somebody who registered with that number."

Evelyn led him to a room behind the desk and produced a carton packed with registration cards.

"Help yourself."

Hendricks flipped through the cards, concentrating on the "Vehicle Registration No." line. He had gone through several hundred without success when Evelyn looked in on him.

"It just occurs to me," she said, "that the cards at the top are the oldest. They were dumped in there from another box. You want more recent cards, try the bottom layer."

He dredged out several handfuls from the bottom and resumed his search. He found the first card with the right registration number with a date of April of the current year. The name shown was Mr. and Mrs. Al Johnson, 3727 Midland Avenue, in the city. Remembering Evelyn's impression of having seen the man several times, he continued his search and found four more, running from May to July. But apparently

the man had not registered on the day he was threatened with the gun. He had given the same address each time, but the name varied: Mr. and Mrs. Al Howard, Mr. and Mrs. Al Moser, Mr. and Mrs. Al Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Al Brown. Al's imagination, Hendricks noted, was limited.

He knew he should turn his findings over to Ryan and go back to his walks around the city and the reading of espionage thrillers. But he also knew that any information he offered to Ryan, indeed any indication that he had conducted an investigation on his own, would likely be greeted with the contemptuous impatience of the professional who finds an amateur bungling around on his turf. He put the cards in his pocket and went out into the heat, looking for the car rental agency. As Ryan had said, no crime had been reported. Which was not the same, he thought, as no crime having been committed.

He found that 3727 Midland Avenue was a chromium and glass citadel surrounded by used cars. He parked in the rear, regarding himself fortunate to have found a place in the shade, and pushed through the imposing glass doors into a reception area. The receptionist, whose make-up and hair-do had a ceramic quality, waved him to a chair and continued her conversation on the telephone. He could see two salesmen looking out of the huge windows of the salesroom at the sea of cars. In the center of the floor a glittering vehicle revolved slowly on a turntable, its dark tinted windshield giving it a look of hooded menace. Opposite him on the wall were three plaques, testifying that their recipients had satisfactorily completed a course in complete sales service to the customer. One of the recipients was named Al Olson.

"Is Al around?" Hendricks asked the receptionist when she hung up.

"No, Mr. Olson isn't in."

"Well, I wanted to get here to see him earlier in the day but I couldn't make it."

"It wouldn't have made any difference. Al hasn't been in for a couple of days. Could I have him call you when he comes in?"

"No. I guess I could come back. He said he could give me a pretty good deal."

"One of our other salesmen would be only too glad to—"

"No thanks. Al said I should be sure to ask for him."

"Yeah, I bet he did."

When Hendricks returned to his car, he found the shade shared by an elderly man who slowly polished the hood of a car.

"Excuse me, sir," Hendricks said, "could you tell me how to get in touch with Al Olson?"

The man straightened up and regarded Hendricks with a wide-eyed stare. His hesitancy made Hendricks think he might be hard of hearing. He had hollows beneath his cheekbones and the hand that slid his steel-rimmed glasses up on his nose was seamed with black scars. Hendricks remembered that he had seen such hands when he worked on a conveyor job at a mine in the hills. Nor was the cough that preceded the man's reply unfamiliar.

"I ain't seen him around for a couple of days. Far's I'm concerned, I wouldn't care if I never seen him again."

"I wonder if you'd be willing to answer some questions about him. Maybe you'd accept this—as a present, of course."

The old man did not look at the bill which Hendricks extended.

"Somebody comes looking for somebody, it ain't to tell him good news or to carry him some money. It's always something bad. I'd be glad to help anybody who's bringing some bad news to Al Olson."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know. Seems to me you might look it up in the telephone book."

Strike one, thought Hendricks.

"But if you want to know something about Al Olson, you talk to Sarah Ann Collfield. Tell her Uncle Harley Collfield sent you. She'll tell you about the real Al Olson. She knows Mrs. Olson some too. All I say now is that when he can't sell one of these jalopies, he goes back inside and says it's because I don't keep them polished real good. You should see some of the wrecks I got to make look good."

"Sarah Ann Collfield, where does she live?"

"At 1414 Collins Street. It's on the west side. Here's how you can get there."

When he had sketched out the route and given it to Hendricks, the old man said, "This ain't a fitting way for a man to make a living. It ain't real man's work."

Looking at the undergrowth of cars around them and thinking of the installment payments they had once represented, Hendricks agreed.

The signs on Collins Street read Blue Grass Bar, Clinch River Inn (a dark narrow lunchroom), Cumberland Tavern. Country music keened from a juke box. The small well-built houses were grey and rundown, with an occasional well-kept structure accenting the deterioration of the others. The porches displayed disemboweled sofas, refrigerators, and litters of cans and bottles. But even the present low estate of the houses did not convey to Hendricks the impression of hardness and brutality that prevailed at the used-car lot. The porch at 1414, Hendricks noted as he climbed the steps, was uncluttered, its floor painted a shipshape grey, the railing lined with geraniums that were growing from coffee cans decorated with decals. Each side of the double front door held an oval of plate glass. Behind one of the inserts a woman stood with her arms folded, watching with stolid caution as Hendricks approached. When she stepped outside, locking the door behind her, Hendricks was struck by the gravity and composure of her face, as if here was a person who bore within herself a strength and integrity that enabled her to remain untouched by the indignities of her daily life. She was dark-faced—about forty, Hendricks guessed—with grey streaks in her dark hair, and she wore a plain white uniform, suggesting to him that she might be a waitress about to go on duty.

"My name is John Hendricks. If you're Sarah Ann Collfield, Uncle Harley Collfield said to say he sent me."

"You some kin of Uncle Harley's?" Her face relaxed slightly.

"No. I'm just looking for some information about a man named Al Olson. Uncle Harley said you could give me some."

The woman looked at him searchingly, weighing the advisability of talking to a stranger. Hendricks waited silently. When she spoke, it was a stronger motive than Uncle Harley's recommendation that moved her.

"I can tell you about Al Olson." Her thin lips were set in a vindictive line. "He got my boy Jack indicted. He asked Uncle Harley if he knew someone who would deliver a truck to Motor City for him. He said he sold it to a man up there. Uncle Harley got Jack to do it. Olson paid Jack a hundred dollars and Jack was glad to get it because he's in his third year of night school at Tech. The truck was empty, Olson said. When Jack pulled up in front of this address in Motor City, the Feds were waiting for him. The truck was full of parts that had been stripped from stolen cars. They arrested Jack for transporting them across

the state line. There was no way they could tie it back to Olson because the truck was stolen too. Olson said he didn't know anything about it. Uncle Harley went nearly out of his head. He wanted to get out his revolver and shoot Olson right off but I cooled him down. We got enough trouble."

"Have you seen Olson recently?"

"No. I never did see him. I hope I never do. Look what he's done to us, Mister. My husband died when Jack was four years old, two years after we came up here. I worked hard to send him to school and so did he. It ain't easy, bringing up a boy in this city."

She threw a bitter look at the street. "I got to go now. I'm on the four-to-ten shift at the Gold Rooster."

"Uncle Harley mentioned that you knew Mrs. Olson."

"I don't rightly know her. I went out to her house once because I wanted to ask Olson to tell the truth about Jack. She said she hadn't seen him in two years."

When Hendricks showed her the picture, she studied it carefully and handed it back.

"I never seen that man in my life. Look, I got to go."

"Can I drop you somewhere?"

"Thank you very kindly but I get a bus at the end of the street. It drops me on Midland right in front of the restaurant."

"Could you give me Olson's home address? I can't find it in the city phone directory."

"I don't know where he lives. You might check Mrs. Olson. She lives in Owenston. That's the first suburb north of here. It's got a different directory."

He watched her walk along the street with a long purposeful stride and thought that for herself she was strong and resilient enough to withstand the Olsons of this world, vulnerable only at one point—her son, who was under indictment.

The next morning he called his home office and received what had become the routine explanation. The parts had not been delivered from the factory and he should sit tight. Any day now. He dialed the agency where Olson worked and was told that he had not come in yet and no, they could not give out his home address. In the lobby he found the telephone directory for Owenston and looked up Olson's ad-

dress. An A. Olson was listed and he called the number but received no answer. He decided to go out and look.

When Hendricks saw the modest tree-shaded street he was fairly certain that Olson did not live on it, feeling that someone of Olson's probable propensities would live in a glittering high-rise replete with a swimming pool and lounging sun-tanned blondes. As he went up the walk to the front door he noted a car in the open garage, a car far too humble to be owned by the Olson he pictured. He noted too the precise array of garden tools hanging on the spotless white wall of the garage. Receiving no answer to his ring he went around the garage to the back of the house where a six-foot chain-link fence, screened by a privet hedge, surrounded a small immaculate lawn, bordered by masses of flowers. Looking at the display Hendricks realized how little he knew of gardening, having vaguely assumed that all flowers were approximately the same. But here it was obvious even to him that they were planted with careful attention to height and color, with the back row having the tallest plants and the rows in front having plants in descending order of height. Since most of his working life had been devoted to the development of plans that others would execute, he was aware of the care that had gone into the planning and maintenance of this secluded retreat. It was obviously the work of a person capable of meticulous attention, someone with the patience to await results, a person determined to retain privacy, as evidenced by the padlock on the wire gate.

He was vaguely conscious that something disturbed the order of planting where the flower bed at the left approached the gate and was trying to analyze the cause when a voice behind him said:

"Is there something you wanted?"

Turning quickly, he saw a big woman in a straw hat standing behind him with a trowel in her hand. In her other hand she carried a key ring. She had approached silently and seemed unconcerned at finding a strange man scrutinizing her garden. As if to demonstrate her self-possession, she moved toward him. Hendricks stepped back but was brought up against the locked gate. Illogically, he felt cornered and experienced as well the guilty emotion of one surprised in trespassing on private property.

"Excuse my coming around the back like this, but there was no answer when I rang the front bell."

The woman said nothing.

"I'm looking for Al Olson. Does he live here?"

"He hasn't lived here for two years. I'm Mrs. Olson."

"Do you know where I could reach him?"

"At the Midland Agency, I guess. That's where he works."

"They say that he hasn't been in."

"Well, I can't say where he lives. He moves around quite a bit, I understand. This address is still listed in the phone book but he doesn't live here."

Hendricks explained the incident of the double exposure and showed her the enlargement.

"It's not too clear, but I'm certain that the man in that picture isn't Al. Where was the picture taken?"

"Outside my room at the Homeways Motel at the Airport. Al Olson's car was parked there that day."

"That's quite likely. Al frequently rented a room at the Homeways for his activities. Those activities resulted in our divorce. He had a whole string of girls, including one who used to fly down from Motor City for weekends."

"Did you know if your husband was in the business of selling parts that were stripped from stolen cars?"

"No, I can't say that I knew it."

"Do you know Sarah Ann Collfield?"

"No. Wait, yes, I've met her. She came here looking for Al. It was something about her son being tricked into transporting stolen parts. She said Al had tricked him into it."

"Do you think that what she accuses Olson of is true?"

Her gaze moved beyond Hendricks and swept slowly over the ranks of flowers in the garden behind him. When she looked at him again she seemed to have made a decision.

"I don't know if that particular thing she said Al got her son into is true. I think Al is too slick to deal in stolen parts in such a way that it could be traced back to him. But as for tricking a kid into it, yes, I'd say that he was capable of that. When he lived here, the phone was ringing all the time, people complaining about the cars he had sold them. There were other calls too, but Al was always careful that I didn't learn anything about them. Some of them were from girl friends and some of them weren't."

"Have there been any calls lately?"

"No." She shifted her stance slightly, as if to indicate that there had been enough questions. "Look, I appreciate your position but I don't see how it involves me. And if Al hasn't been reported dead, injured, or missing I don't see how they can do anything to you."

"I hope you're right. Well, thank you for answering my questions. By the way, you have a very attractive garden. It must have taken a lot of planning and work."

"It does. But it takes my mind off my—difficulties."

"Tell me, I notice that you have those tall yellow flowers—"

"They're marigolds."

"Then the shorter flowers in the next to the back row—"

"Those are zinnias. You always hope they won't get too tall."

"And the shortest ones are in the front row. Is that done for the effect or to get the sun, or what?"

"It's to get the sun. You don't want the tall ones shading the shorter ones. And it's a pleasing arrangement too, of course. But you plant by height."

"And that brown material spread around under the flowers. What's that?"

"A wood-chip mulch. Normally I use peat moss over most of the garden but I ran short. Here near the gate I used wood chips. The purpose is the same, to keep weeds down and moisture in."

"Thank you. You can see that I'm quite ignorant."

Mrs. Olson smiled thinly and waved her trowel in a parting gesture. Hendricks said goodbye and walked past her down the driveway. Mrs. Olson, ignoring his departure, unlocked the gate to her garden, slammed it shut behind her, and locked it.

The heat rose in shimmering waves from the asphalt of the parking area as Hendricks let himself into his motel room. The air-conditioning, as if to compensate for its failure, was in a manic phase, lowering the temperature of the room to a sub-Arctic sixty degrees. Hendricks examined the thermostat setting and as he did so it occurred to him that if the air-conditioning had been out of order a few nights ago and was now running, someone may have come into his room in connection with the repair, someone who may have used the camera. He called the manager.

"It's possible, I suppose," the manager said, "but I don't see why a repairman would find it necessary to enter your room. It's a centralized system. Let me ask Evelyn if she gave out a passkey.

"No, she didn't," he said when he came back on the line. "The T. and D. Repair Company sent a man. He's the same one who always comes out here. He was here on the day your camera was used for that picture but I don't see any connection."

"What about the maid who takes care of this wing?"

"I've already asked her about it. She says she did your room around ten that morning. She went off duty at three, which I believe is before you got back. She's a reliable person. I'm sure she's telling the truth."

Hendricks obtained the address of the T. and D. Repair Company from the manager, listened to his oblique comments—the point of which was that Hendricks was looking for trouble. Hendricks agreed with him, and hung up. He braced himself for a return to the heat of the afternoon and for what would probably be a futile interview with the repairman.

The front office of the T. and D. Repair Company consisted of a grimy space that was separated from the repair area by a half partition, behind which someone was operating an electric drill. Leaning against the cigarette-scarred countertop was a man of shriveled proportions who eyed Hendricks resentfully.

"We only do big jobs here, no home conditioner repairs," he said before Hendricks could state the purpose of his visit. "And we're gonna close right away."

"Maybe you can help me out. I'm in a little trouble—no, not trouble—but there's something I may have to explain to the police."

At the world "police" the man seemed to be gathering himself to switch from a posture of resistance to one of grudging cooperation. Hendricks wondered if he had done time. The noise of the drill behind the partition ceased.

"Can you put me in touch with the man who repaired the air-conditioning at the Homeways Motel on the eighteenth?"

"That's me. I do a lot of work out there. They got a system that—"

"Was it necessary for you to go into any of the rooms?"

"Yeah, sure. The failure was in the compressor in that one wing. I fix the central unit and then I check the thermostats in the rooms on that system to see if they're working."

"How did you get into the rooms? Did you get a passkey from the desk?"

"Nah. I got it fixed with Mickey out there—he's the maintenance man—to let me use his passkey. He don't say nothin', I don't say nothin'."

"Did you go into Room 27?"

The repairman's eyes shifted away as he debated his answer.

"Look, Mister, I don't have to tell you nothin'. You know that. Now don't go tellin' me there's somethin' missin'."

"Did you happen to notice a camera on the table by the window?"

"I ain't tellin' you nothin', Mister. Look, it's time for us to close—"

"All right, Delbert. Tell the man what he wants to know. Did you lift anything out of that motel?"

A tall woman, wearing a mechanic's coverall and a long-billed red cap that perched precariously on a foundation of hair curlers, came around the partition. In her presence Delbert seemed to shrink.

"Did you take this man's camera after you promised me you'd never touch anything on the job again?"

"No, I didn't."

"It's not that," Hendricks said. "The police have got a picture that was taken with my camera. They'd like to know more about it. Here, take a look."

The woman studied the enlargement carefully, her face showing apprehension. Delbert barely glanced at it, as if refusing to acknowledge its existence.

"Well, why don't you tell them then?" Delbert sneered. "If the picture came from your camera, you musta took it. Just because I was in the room going about my legitimate business, it don't mean I know anything about your picture."

The woman handed the picture back to Hendricks and turned to Delbert, looming over the little man.

"O.K., Delbert, are you going to tell us what you did in that room?"

"Aw, Terry, I don't want to get involved—I don't want to be called as no witness."

"Delbert, tell the man."

"O.K., O.K.! I saw this camera on the table when I was in checking the thermostat. I thought it wouldn't hurt if I kind of picked it up and looked it over. I looked through the viewfinder this way and that inside

the room, then I wanted to aim it at something farther away so I poked it through the slats of the blind. This time when I looked through the viewfinder I see this guy sitting in a car right outside with a gun about a foot from his head. This babe—"

"It was a woman holding the gun?"

"Yeah! I pushed all kinds of things on the camera and finally I heard it click. I done my part. Let somebody else find out what happened. I don't want to get involved."

"You better not," the woman said. "They get ahold of you, you'll be inside for a hundred years."

"This woman holding the gun, what did she look like?" Hendricks asked.

Delbert tossed his head. "She was, you know, a dame."

"Was she young, old, tall, short?"

"She was maybe forty, and kind of clumsy-looking. About as tall as Terry here."

"Did you hear a shot?"

"No. Anyways, I got out of there fast."

"Would you know her if you saw her again?"

"I sure would. Anytime you see somebody with a gun in their hand and that kind of determined look on their face, you ain't likely to forget it. And was that guy ever scared. Like anybody would be."

"Had you ever seen either of them before?"

"No, and I hope I never see them again."

The phone rang in the back of the shop and Delbert, with a show of relief, went back to answer it.

"Delbert used to have this little problem," the tall woman said. "Things kind of followed him home when he went on a job. Sometimes it was a coathanger or a box of tissues. But sometimes it was a camera or typewriter. I know I shouldn't send him out to that kind of place but he's good with the big equipment and if he didn't work here where I can keep an eye on him, what would happen to him? After all, it's not as if I wasn't married to him."

"Do you think you might have him meet me at the Gold Rooster restaurant? It's out on Midland Avenue. Tell him to come about nine-thirty or quarter to ten. You might come with him."

"He'll be there, I'll see to that. But I can't come." She patted her curlers. "It's my night for bowling."

Back in his car Hendricks pondered the circumstance that would give a man of Delbert's tendencies access to motel rooms and on the stranger circumstance of the marriage bond. He felt that Delbert had told the truth about what he had seen, and that Mrs. Delbert would see that he got to the Gold Rooster. As to whether he should tell what he'd learned to Detective Ryan, Hendricks decided to postpone decision. There was little to tell beyond the fact that the holder of the gun was a woman.

"I'll have a double bourbon," Delbert announced as he climbed onto the bar stool.

The bar of the Gold Rooster was in front of the dining room where a half dozen patrons still lingered over dinner. At a long table in the back of the room the off-duty waitresses were sitting down to eat. Sarah Ann Collfield sat at a table for two, which she shared with a woman whose back was to the front of the room and who was dressed for the street. She wasn't eating dinner as far as Hendricks could determine.

"See that waitress who's sitting at the last table along the right-hand wall? Is she the woman you saw holding the gun?"

"You think I'm an eagle or somethin'?" Delbert said. "I can't tell from here."

"All right. Go back into one of the telephone booths at the end of the room and look from there."

"Those booths are behind her. I can't tell nothin' from behind."

"Well, take a good look at her when you walk past. Then try it from the booth."

"There ain't no way I can tell—"

Hendricks picked up a bill from the change the bartender put before him and pushed it in front of Delbert, wondering why it had taken him so long to determine the reason for Delbert's lack of cooperation. With a casual gesture Delbert slid his hand over the money and it disappeared into his shirt pocket. He tossed off his straight bourbon with no change in expression, climbed down from the bar stool, walked slowly past the table where Sarah Ann Collfield sat, glanced indifferently at the two women, and entered the telephone booth. Hendricks could see his shrunken face through the glass panels and suddenly felt an aversion toward his part in spying on this dignified resourceful woman.

Delbert came back, studiously avoiding looking at the two women as he passed their table. He ordered another double.

"Well?"

"Yeah. That's them all right. They was both of them there."

"Both?"

"Yeah. Both. The waitress was the one holding the gun. That other dame that's sitting back there with her right now was standin' on the other side of the car."

"Do you know her, the other woman?"

"No. But I'm sure of both of them, especially the one with the gun. Once you seen—"

"I think we better leave," Hendricks said. "I don't want them to see me."

Hendricks accompanied Delbert to his car and watched to be sure that he drove away. He positioned his car near the lighted canopy that covered the restaurant steps and waited. After ten minutes the two women descended and stood for a few moments, then parted. The woman with Sarah Ann Collfield was Mrs. Olson.

Back in his motel room Hendricks tried to make some pattern out of what he had learned. Somehow these two had trapped Olson in his car at the motel parking lot and—what? There was no evidence that anything had happened to this sleazy dealer in stolen parts.

He got up and went to the window, pulled the curtains apart, and raised the venetian blind. Out there, six feet or so in front of his window, Sarah Ann Collfield had pointed a gun at the head of a man who might be Al Olson. To her left, Mrs. Olson had stood, possibly to block the man's escape from the right front door of the car, possibly about to get in beside him to tell him where to drive while Sarah Ann in the back seat held the cold muzzle of her gun against his neck for encouragement. All supposition based on Delbert's lightweight testimony.

He stared at the lighted pavement that extended from a fringe of shrubbery under the window back under his rented car. In fiction, here was where reexamination would disclose a previously overlooked clue that would solve the mystery of the missing Al Olson. But the pavement was freshly swept and even the earth under the discouraged shrubbery was miraculously free of discarded tissues and paper cups. He tugged the curtain shut and the entire assemblage collapsed on his

head. He grasped the metal rod to which the curtain was attached, a long slender shaft with fake spearheads at each end, and, balancing it in frustration, raised it in an impulse to drive the false point into the flower print on the wall. Then he slowly lowered the rod and stood thinking, swathed in the curtain folds.

He cut the curtain cords, coiled them and laid them aside, slid the fake spear out of the curtain rings, and folded one panel of the curtain into a compact package. Changing into his darkest clothes, he picked up a flashlight, the cord, rod, and curtain and headed for the rented car.

In Owenston he parked several streets away from Mrs. Olson's house, took off his shoes, and gingerly walked through the tree-shaded darkness to her address. The houses on both sides of the street were dark and still. He turned into Mrs. Olson's driveway, passed her car, and approached the padlocked gate of the garden.

Reaching up, he felt the sharp points of the clipped stiff wire that formed the top edge of the fence. Behind the garage were two plastic trash cans, one of which he found to be empty and the other half full. Spreading out the motel curtain, he carefully lifted out the trash handful by handful and laid it on the curtain, then upended the empty can in front of the gate. He took the plastic cover of one can and bent it down over the wire points at the top of the gate, forming a crude saddle, which he lashed down with the curtain cord. He tied the cover of the other can immediately adjacent and, bending over them carefully, eased down the second trash can so that it stood upended within the gate.

As he picked up the spear-like curtain rod to place it within the fence, it slipped from his hand and rasped against the fence, tottered momentarily on its end, and was about to clatter down the driveway when he caught it with a sweep of his hand. Placing it within the fence, he swung himself up from the top of the trash can and balanced precariously on the top of the gate, shuddering to think what would happen if his weight should drive the sharp wire points through the plastic covers. But they held and he let himself down to the top of the can inside the fence and from there to the ground.

He flashed his light briefly on the flower bed to the left of the gate, picked up the rod, and probed downward as deeply as he could into the soil of the garden, bringing all his weight to bear. He encountered

only the gradually increasing resistance of the soil as he prodded along the border of the bed. He began again, prodding in a line two feet farther back from his original probes, and after a few thrusts felt the point meet a brief resistance and then a slight release as though some plastic substance, such as a trash bag, had been punctured. The sensation of release was followed by a firm obstruction. He repeated his probing for several feet along the row, meeting each time the same degree of resistance at the same depth. Moving another foot farther back, he repeated the operation until he had unmistakably outlined a substantial mass huddled under the flowers.

He scattered the wood-chip mulch over his footprints and probe holes and rubbed over the grass of the adjoining lawn to be sure he had left no trace. Putting the spear on the other side of the fence, he climbed back over, retrieved the trash cans, and emptied the trash from the curtain back into one of the cans. Placing both cans in the exact position in which he had found them, he untied the can covers from the fence and replaced them on the cans. He made his way down the driveway, past the silent house, and back through the sleeping neighborhood to his car.

When he entered his motel room—still walking in his socks—he found a note from the switchboard operator thrust under the door.

"A Mr. Krusen from your company called to say that your plane will pick you up at seven this morning."

As the plane hurried northward over the unending forests and nameless lakes, Hendricks read over the paragraphs he had written.

> Sarah Ann Collfield and Mrs. Olson met when Sarah Ann went to the Olson house to plead with Olson to exonerate her son. She found an embittered deserted wife who hated Olson as much as she did. The injuries they had suffered at the hands of the same man formed a bond between them, a relationship that developed into a conspiracy to do away with him. They kidnapped Olson at gunpoint, as partially shown in the double exposure, and forced him to drive to the Olson house where he was killed. They buried him in Mrs. Olson's garden, on the left side near the gate.
>
> The only known witness to the gun-pointing incident is a

man named Delbert who is a repairman for T: and D. Repair.

He signed the letter and, as he wrote Detective Ryan's name on the envelope, realized that he didn't have a precise address. He considered the problem for a moment and then addressed the letter to the city police department. Then he turned to the second letter.

Dear Mrs. Olson:

It is presumptuous of one who knows nothing of gardening to direct your attention to one or two details about your garden. However:

First, you pointed out that the tallest plants are placed in the back row, then the next tallest in front, and so forth. For example, in your garden the tall marigolds are in the back row, preceded by zinnias. This pattern holds good for your entire garden except in that part of the flower bed to the left of the gate where something has interfered with this sequence. For a length of five or six feet zinnias appear in the back row and marigolds in the next row in front. Since this arrangement is so out of keeping with the precision displayed in the rest of your garden, it suggests that you may have been assisted in planting—or is it transplanting?—by an over-zealous helper, possibly a well-meaning friend, and that the work may have been done hurriedly, possibly in the dark.

The other point is the nature of the soil in your flower beds. Someone—it may have been Detective Ryan of the Homicide Squad but probably not—thinks garden soil should be friable and loose. If an impartial examiner—say Detective Ryan again—were to probe in your garden, especially at the end near the gate where the rearrangement I have mentioned occurs, he would find a large unbroken clod about six feet long. As you said—one plants by height.

He signed the letter and addressed it to Mrs. Olson, whose address was fresh in his mind. The pilot would mail both letters on his return trip. He consoled himself by thinking that he had done his best in the time allowed him. But he was not entirely displeased by the probability as to which letter would be delivered first.

Somehow, some way, Brown must go . . .

INSIDE OUT

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

I've got to start stacking the corpses in the bedroom now.

The living room, alas, is all filled. It was bound to happen sooner or later. Still, it's a shock to realize that the day of inevitability has come. There is simply no room any more. Floor to ceiling in four rows the bodies are stacked except for the little space in the corner I've left for my chair and footrest. Even the television set is gone. It was hard to sacrifice the television set but business is business. I put it at the foot

of my bed, dreading the time when I'd have to start putting the bodies where I slept. But I must face up to reality and the living room is finished. *Fini. Kaput.* Used up. Cheerlessly I accept my fate. If I am to go on murdering I will have to bring the bodies, as the abbess said to the bishop, into the boudoir. And I am, of course, going to go on murdering.

When I do away with Brown the superintendent tonight, therefore, his corpse will go in the far corner beside the dresser. Virgin territory to be exploited—not that there is any sexual undertone to this matter. None whatsoever. It is what it is. It is not a metaphor. It is not a symbol. It is the pure sad business of murder.

Brown rolls the emptied garbage cans across the lobby, filling my rooms with a sound from hell. He also refuses to clean the steps more than once a week. Time and again I have asked him to desist from the one and do the other, but the man is obdurate. He pretends not to know English. He pretends he doesn't hear me. He pretends he has other duties. This morning I saw four disgusting orange peels on the third-floor landing, already turning brown. There is no way that a man of my disposition can deal with this any more, but I'm not able to move out. For one thing, what would I do with my bodies? It would be such a job to transport them all.

Therefore Brown, or what is left of him, will repose in the bedroom tonight. *Au boudoir.*

The murders are fictive, of course. I am not actually a mass murderer. These are imaginary murders, imagined corpses that have slowly filled these quarters since I began my difficult adjustment about a year ago. Abusive peddlers, disgusting street persons, noxious fellow employees in the Division. In my mind I act out intricate murders, in my body I pantomime the matter of conveying the corpses here, in my heart all of the dead stay here with me, mild in their state. It is a fantasy that enables me to go on with this disgusting urban existence; if I could not banish those who offend me I would be unable to go on. It is of course a perilous coupling, this fantasy, since I might plunge over the fine line someday and actually believe I've done away with these people, but it is the only way I can continue in circumstantial balance.

Giving the fantasy credence, however, demands discipline and a good deal of scut work. It is with regret that I have given up all of my

living room except for the chair and footrest, but also out of simple respect for will. If I were not to make reasonable sacrifices in order to propitiate this accord it would be meaningless. One cannot play the violin well without years of painful work with wrists and hands acquiring technique. One cannot be a proper employee of the Division without studying its dismal and boring procedures. One cannot be an imaginary mass murderer without taking responsibility for the imaginary bodies.

The derelict who wipes my windshield with a dirty rag at the bridge exit is still there, of course, although I murdered him six months ago. This morning he cursed me when I gave him only fifteen cents through the cautiously opened window. His rag hardly infiltrated my vision, his cursing fell upon a benign and smiling countenance. How could I tell him, after all, "You no longer exist. Since I did away with you half a year ago your real activities in the real world have made no impression upon me. Your rag is a blur, your curses a song. I drove a sharp knife between your sixth and seventh ribs in this very street before witnesses, threw your body into the trunk, and conveyed it bloodless to my apartment where it now reposes. The essential you lies sandwiched in my apartment between the waitress from the Forum Diner who spilt a glass of ice water in my lap and the medical social worker from the Division who said I had no grasp at all of schizophrenia. I possess you, do you understand that?"

No, I don't think he would understand that. This miserable creature, along with the waitress, the medical social worker, and many others, cannot appreciate the metaphysics of the situation.

I did away with Brown in his apartment two hours ago. "Mr. Brown," I said when he opened the door, "I can't take this any more. You're totally irresponsible. It's not only the orange peels, the hide-and-seek when the toilet will not flush, and the terrible smells of disinfectant when you occasionally wash the lobby. That would be enough, but it's your insolence that degrades my spirit. You do not accept the fact that I am a human being who has a right to simple services. By ignoring my needs you ignore my humanity." I shot him in the left temple with the delicate .22 I use for extreme cases. The radio was playing Haydn's Symphony 101 in D Major loudly as I dragged him

out of there, closing the door firmly behind. I would not have suspected that he had a taste for classical music, but this doesn't mitigate his situation. He now lies at the foot of my bed. Now and then he seems to sigh in the perfectitude of his perfect peace.

The medical social worker commented today during a conference upon my abstracted attitude and twice she tapped me on the hand to bring me back to attention. I know she feels I'm exceedingly neurotic and not a diligent caseworker, but how could I possibly explain to her that the reason my attention lapses during these conferences is that she was smothered several weeks ago and has not drawn a breath, even in my apartment, since?

Brown's corpse is curiously odorous. This is a new phenomenon. I am a committed housekeeper and can't abide smells of any kind in my apartment (other than pipe and coffee, of course), and my corpses are aseptic. Brown's, however, is not. It is progressively foul and disturbed my sleep last night. Heavy sprays of household antiseptics don't seem to work. The apartment was even worse when I came home tonight.

I knew it was a mistake opening up the bedroom for disposal, but what choice did I have? There is simply no room left outside of here and I refuse to have corpses in the bathroom. There are, after all, limits. I'll just have to do the best I can. After a while either I'll get used to it or the smell will go away.

I should get rid of Brown's body—the smell is impossible now—but I am reluctant to do so. It would set a dangerous precedent, it would break a pattern. If I were to dispose of his body he would not then be symbolically dead, and if I did it with him might I not then be tempted to do it with one of the others? Or with succeeding victims? My project would become totally self-defeating—I would have accomplished nothing.

It has of course occurred to me to call the real Brown to help me dispose of the body of the imaginary Brown, but I won't do that either. It would be a nice irony but one he would not understand. I will either have to do the job myself or hold on.

Besides, I have not seen the foul man here in days. . .

It's all too much. I couldn't deal with it any more and accordingly dragged Brown's body to the landing for pickup tomorrow morning. That should solve the problem, although I'm concerned at the rupture of my pattern and also by the curious weight of his body as I lumbered with it, fireman-carry fashion, to the stairwell. He's the most unusually corporeal of all my victims. Even in imaginary death he seems capable, typically, of giving me real difficulties.

Two policemen at the door in full uniform, with grim expressions, demand entrance to the apartment. Behind them I can see a circle of some tenants from the building.

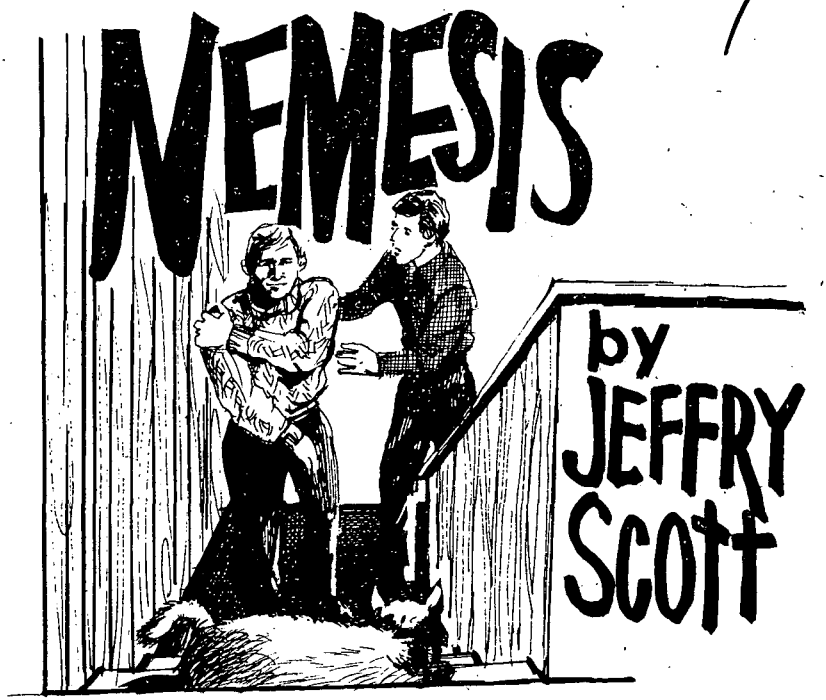
I seem to be in some kind of difficulty.

At my very first opportunity during this interview I intend to distract the police and kill them—put an end to this harassment—but I have a feeling that won't work.

I should never have abandoned the living room as a disposal unit. That was my only mistake. I should have begun disposing of old corpses as they were replaced by the new. It would have been sufficient.

But it's too late now, the police say.

Parton had a good reason for liking cats . . .



A gasp—a muffled skidding rattle of shoeleather on carpeted wood—an ominous thump. I gathered that Detective Superintendent Freddie Parton had come down the steep stairs of my weekend cottage a great deal faster than he had ascended them.

By the time I reached the hall he had picked himself up and was rubbing an elbow. "Ruddy silly place to leave a cat," he commented, surprisingly mildly.

Taj, the old Persian to whom I belong, lay full length across the second step from the top, where Superintendent Parton had been inconsiderate enough to fall over him.

"That's cats for you," said Parton. And I had not been mistaken—his tone held a measure of wry affection. "Always where they shouldn't be—in fact, being where they shouldn't be is the whole joy of it."

Now this was odd, decidedly out of character. Freddie Parton is only months away from retirement, thinning on top, and thick around the middle, but he's still a tough nut. His nose has the slightest confiding slant towards one cauliflower ear and his eyebrows are mangy from scar tissue. He would seem a veteran of fairground boxing booths but in truth all the injuries were inflicted on the same night, when he was a probationer Constable. A homeless woman was trapped in the elevator shaft of a derelict office building after taking shelter in the place.

Young Parton, agile as a monkey in those days, couldn't wait for the arrival of the fire brigade with special hoists and ladders—the woman seemed certain to get killed within seconds rather than minutes—so he rescued her and then, the lady being deranged, she kicked him in the mouth as he scrambled out after her, causing him to fall the best part of twenty feet before his tunic snagged on a projecting brick, slamming his head against the wall.

Don't mistake this for a digression—my point is that while Parton is not half as bad as his vaguely thuggish exterior suggests, neither is he the sort of fellow to coo over domestic animals.

Catching my amused look he grumbled, "You're thinking I'm a sentimental twit. Not a bit of it. A cat—um—allowed me to arrest Slimy Baker. I've always felt kindly about 'em since then."

The important thing was to show only polite interest, if that. I made Parton the kind of tea he relished when he was a rawish Detective-Constable and I was a houseman at St. Cross Hospital—hot, strong, in a mug rather than a fiddly cup, and with several CCs of Scotch replacing the sugar. Here's the story he told me over the second mug concerning the Baker's Dozen, Slimy of that ilk, and a nameless nondescript cat deserving to be called Nemesis.

Pietro hadn't lived in England for many years, but that wasn't why Detective-Sergeant Parton was frowning and cupping a spadelike hand to his ear. Nobody speaks very distinctly with a wired jaw.

Parton could make sense of the agonized whisper though. The dark eyes visible in a slot of bandages, more bitter than angry and more ashamed than both, augmented the words. "You try for best . . . I appreciate. No good, alla same. My face smash. My back, my arms, *not* smash. Keep it that way, is sense. I trip onna curb."

"Your funeral," Parton grunted, almost as bitter and angry as the man in the hospital bed. He chewed on something invisible and sour. "Well, you're a full citizen now, mate. You'll pay your dues—what is it, ten quid a week?—from now to Doomsday."

The little Italian whimpered, for he had tried to shrug. Six weeks before, he had gone into business as a barber, converting an old shop near the station and finding ample passing trade. He was desperately careful with his money, planning on a salon before too long, and that did not suit Slimy Baker.

"Baker's Dozen" is a cosy, homely phrase meaning thirteen, but whenever he heard it Freddie Parton's entrails twitched. There weren't thirteen villains in Simon Arthur Baker's firm, of course. That was just oblique criminal humor acknowledging that Slimy Baker ran the nastiest extortion operation to pollute North London in living memory.

"I don't like it either," said Inspector Arch when Parton returned from St. Cross Hospital. "Baker's sucking untaxable money out of this manor like a kid with an orange. But the victims never testify and he's got his mob sewn up tighter than a Scotsman's purse. Don't quote me, son, but this is where we follow standard procedure."

Sergeant Parton looked blank. Arch gestured defeatedly. "Wait for a miracle," he translated. Miracles weren't at all Freddie Parton's speed, but after nearly a year's frustrating and nearly obsessive toil, he came to see Inspector Arch's point of view.

The trouble was Sergeant Parton's patch, the defeated quadrangle whose long sides are Great Northern Prospect and Queen Victoria's Canal, which was an area packed with small traders who preferred their arms and legs in good working order. These traders discovered that selling stolen or dubious goods ensured a profit, and this made them ideal sheep for the Baker's Dozen to shear.

Then again, consider the Dozen, which boiled down to Slimy Baker, his cousin and soulmate Ben Sigsby, and a constantly changing supporting cast of the slowest-witted migratory roughs.

In Parton's elegant aphorism: "Honor among thieves is a load of old rope—they'd inform on their mothers to dodge a three-month stretch, most of 'em. Not to mention pulling terrible strokes on colleagues, for money. Take the so-called Great Train Robbers. Ran for their lives after the big tickle. Not from us, neither—from their own kind, half the time."

By chance or design Slimy Baker avoided risks of betrayal from within. Temporary employees never lingered long enough to learn anything. Ben Sigsby, who knew everything, had been brought up by Baker's mother as her own. He and Slimy were closer than brothers, let alone the normal run of criminal confederates.

Baker was tall and hollow-cheeked, with the darkly brooding air that often masks a practical joker. On him, it masked nothing as harmless. Ben Sigsby, a couple of years younger and a head shorter, was plump and jolly—on the surface and perhaps to the depth of a cigarette paper beneath—and tended to scurry along at Slimy's coattails like the White Rabbit in *Alice*.

They used to tip their hats when driving past Sergeant Parton. It made him grind his teeth.

After a year and a half, Sergeant Parton fell into a state of mind he had sworn to defy. He started to regard the Baker's Dozen as if it were a terminal disease—evil, yet somehow inevitable and outside his influence. He kept an eye on them, he knew that they could be cracked—just as a cure could be found for cancer or cystic fibrosis.

"Heard the latest?" Lenny the crippled newspaper seller inquired rhetorically. "Ben Sigsby's getting hitched." The wizened veteran with the First War campaign ribbons on his raincoat glanced up and down the street before risking his joke. "We always reckoned he'd marry Slimy."

Sergeant Parton paused with the evening paper only half opened. Lenny offered a spark of hope. Slimy and Ben had been a double act all their lives. Might marriage be an exploitable wedge?

"Who's the unlucky girl?" he asked.

"Ann from the off-license shop," said Lenny. When Parton couldn't place the girl, the newspaper seller added gently, "Ann Quilcy, that is."

Lenny snorted with amusement as Sergeant Parton's face fell. The

Quilcy clan was a London legend. Quilcys had been breaking the law long before Sir Robert Peel launched Parton's side of the business. As a weak link introduced by marriage, Miss Quilcy was a non-starter.

Parton managed to be passing by when the wedding party emerged from the parish church. Ann Quilcy turned out to be a strapping open-faced lass with masses of fair hair and hardly any chin. Freddie Parton wondered how much human pain and misery had gone into the purchase of her wedding dress, the hired Rolls Royce, and the rest of the nonsense. The full morning suit with grey topper looked splendid on Slimy Baker, while poor pudgy Ben appeared to be a waiter with delusions of social grandeur.

Soon enough, Parton discovered that he had been too pessimistic about Ann Quilcy's implications for the Baker's Dozen.

First proof came when four of the Dozen's willing but dim frighteners were instructed to "see to" a grudging tribute-payer at "the grocery shop on the corner of Tulliman Street."

Having two ends, a street is quite likely to possess four corners. Tulliman Street was no exception, and there were two different groceries on two of the corners. Slimy Baker had been in an abstracted mood when issuing his orders, and the hired hands took him at his word.

They entered the first grocery shop they encountered, which by the iron law governing such matters, was the wrong one. "Ju know wha we gonner do tur yoo?" demanded their leader and spokesman. The young man in the soiled white coat passed a hand across his chin, lips twitching with what they took to be panic but was in fact amusement.

"Tell me," he invited. Then his other hand flashed up from beneath the counter. Up, and down. The Dozen's spokesman had planted a paw on the counter. Now he screamed and fainted, leaving four fingers on top of the mahogany slab, for the good and sufficient reason that the young proprietor had severed them with a case-opener.

"Heard the latest, Sarge? Slimy Baker sent his herbs to do over Big Jack Covington's shop. Comes of hiring outsiders—local lads wouldn't never have offended Big Jack like that."

"Yes, I heard," Parton replied wearily. He had been hearing nothing else for hours. When Big Jack Covington wasn't conducting one of his yearly robberies with violence—alleged to net him never less than

£50,000 per tickle—he often enjoyed playing shopkeeper at his widowed grandmother's store.

Inspector Arch and Sergeant Parton had just been round there, fruitlessly. Big Jack was flanked by a neat man with a briefcase, his solicitor. There was a new scar on the polished woodwork of the counter, and some of the splinters were pink.

The solicitor got in first. "One of my client's customers was foolish enough to touch the bacon slicer. No question of negligence on our part. As you can see, he must have leaned right across the counter to reach it."

Measuring distances dreamily, grey old Arch murmured, "I've always wanted to meet a feller with arms eight feet long." Big Jack Covington guffawed.

The solicitor flushed. "If you question the injured man and his, er, companions, I'm sure they will confirm the incident."

Inspector Arch ignored him, speaking directly to Covington. "I don't mind you hounds having a go at each other. But a gang war—I won't have that. Innocent people get hurt, people worth ten of rubbish like you, Jack. You want bother with your competitors, hire Wembley Stadium or a raft in the middle of the Channel. Do it here, anywhere on my manor, and I'll take action that'll astonish you."

Nobody smiled at the oddly prim threat. They knew that Arch meant exactly what he said.

Big Jack opened his mouth, the solicitor begged him to stay silent, and Big Jack swore at him and told Arch, "Nothing like that, Mr. A. I think it must of been mistaken identity. That, or somebody's calendar went wrong and they thought it was April Fool's Day."

Lenny the newspaper seller was providing the real explanation. "Ever since Ben Sigsby got married, Slimy hasn't known what day it is. Fretting, see. That's how there was the muddle with Big Jack—the boys were supposed to spank that black feller in the other shop. They say Slimy was sweating bullets until he convinced Big Jack it was a genuine mistake."

A glance up and down the street. Lenny leaned closer. "She's made Ben buy 'em a house up at Queendale. What's more, Slimy can't drop in when he likes. Got to wait for an invite, she reckons. All those Quilcy women are tartars."

Queendale was as far as one could retreat from Slimy Baker's center of operations without leaving the district. A staid suburban oasis with a golf course, detached houses, and the breed of neighbors who phone to complain if a resident's car parks on the grass verges instead of the driveway.

Lenny's tortoise head went into its left-right, pre-confiding motion. "Another thing, she's on at Ben to jack it all in and retire. Wants 'em to live down Bournemouth, Torquay, somewhere by the seaside with a bit of class." Lenny rarely stirred from his pitch outside the Merry Brewer and was believed to sleep in the tarpaulin hutch from which he sold papers, but he was uncannily well informed.

"Slimy will never stand for that," Parton predicted. "She wants to watch out, does Mrs. Sigsby, or the boys will be seeing to her."

"Leave off," scoffed Lenny. "Ben worships that girl, thinks the sun shines out of her left nostril. If Slimy so much as raised his voice to her, Ben'd kill him. Don't you get it, Sarge? Slimy's in such a state because Ben has been—you know, loyal—all their lives. Now Ben's got a new boss and it's just about crucifying ole Slimy."

"Good," said Parton. Slimy Baker without his henchman would be that much more vulnerable. If the new Mrs. Sigsby had her way it would not be the end of the Baker's Dozen, but might well signal the beginning of that desirable event.

Lenny was shaking his head in a superior way. "Slimy won't let it happen, Sarge."

"But you just said he daren't put pressure on the woman."

"Granted, but Slimy's a ladies' man," Lenny pointed out cryptically. "You'd never think it, the way he carries on, but that chap can charm birds out of trees when he puts his mind to it." The old boy's expression changed. "Talk of the devil." He became very busy checking his pile of newspapers, back suddenly turned to the policeman.

Slimy Baker's red Jaguar had just pulled up outside the Merry Brewer, two extra-wide tires on the pavement. The gangster headed for the saloon bar, never noticing Parton. As he did so, a scruffy black cat crossed his path.

Slimy checked in mid-stride, galvanized, and launched a vicious kick. The cat behaved like a rugby football international wing threequarter, evading the toe with a single nervy serpentine undulation before streaking to shelter under the Jaguar. Slimy forged into the

pub, his very back radiating curses.

"What was that all about?" Sergeant Parton wanted to know.

"Cats—he's allergic," Lenny replied. He sounded bored, this was stale information. "Bring him out in bumps and blisters, they do." He brightened suddenly. "Talk about a laugh . . . First thing Ben's missus did, after the honeymoon, was get a cat."

Nothing of great import occurred on the Baker's Dozen front, apart from the normal combat activity of squeezing money from traders, for the next half year. Then events moved in a rush.

One drizzly morning Parton was called to Inspector Arch's office. "Ann Sigsby, Ben's missus, has been found dead," Arch announced. "Up at that new house of theirs in Queendale. Just for your information—the Yard's handling it—but I know you've got a thing about the Baker's Dozen."

Sergeant Parton scratched his head, thinking back. "So Slimy Baker did it, after all."

Inspector Arch had the face of a stone angel, much blurred by weather. Not a vain man, he did pride himself on never being surprised. But his poached-egg eyes widened a trifle. "What in the world makes you think Slimy did it? Looks like a break-in. Mrs. Sigsby always spent Wednesday mornings having her hair done. Today she didn't go. Some herb thought it was a good time to turn the house over, found her there, and panicked. That's what it looks like anyway."

Swiftly Parton filled in the background of friction over Ben Sigsby's future. Five minutes afterwards, Arch replaced the phone. "George Bentick is in charge of the inquiry and I've fixed it for you to sit in. But watch your step, Freddie—those Murder Squad blokes don't like smart alecs who think they know better."

The Sigsbys' home at Queendale was a stark 1930's cube with a built-in garage under the fourth bedroom. An elderly woman, headscarf bumped and ridged by the curlers hidden beneath, was leaving as Parton pulled up.

He recognized Lenny, the newspaper seller's sister, and suddenly understood the source of certain knowledge. She stopped when he tapped the car window, glad to gossip.

Yes, she'd been Mrs. Sigsby's charlady ever since the couple got married—she knew Ann Quilcy well. "I found her," Mrs. Toms ex-

plained. "Always had her hair done Wednesdays, see. I'd come here at midday, tidy round as usual, then have a bite to eat ready for her when she got back around two o'clock, poor soul."

Sergeant Parton broke the narrative with what struck Mrs. Toms as an irrelevant, possibly teasing question. "Helene's High Fashion," she answered.

"Fine," said Parton and, instead of going in, reversed out of the drive and spent ten minutes in a public phone box before returning. Mrs. Toms had gone by then—to brief her brother, no doubt—and he had a chance to examine the house.

The garage doors opened smoothly to disclose a naked brick box the depth of the house, with a garden hose and tools ranged on hooks to one side. A smaller single door at the far end allowed a smudgy glimpse of lawns and shrubs through the panes in its upper half. Burglary cases had given Parton a sound idea of the layout of such places. You could, for instance, drive into the garage and then walk through the far door and find yourself on a patio leading to the rear entrance.

The Sigsbys' house did not have another one opposite, across the avenue. The homes in Queendale were spaced to avoid the drawback of having one's neighbors looking straight in from their sitting-room windows.

Parton spent time in the garage before entering the house. There was a fair amount of sump oil on its floor, but no tire marks, no obligingly dropped cigarette end of distinctive type, no monogrammed handkerchief.

Detective Superintendent Bentick shook him by the hand. "She's in there. We're assuming for the while that she died around breakfast time—there's a cup in the sink and she was still in a negligee."

Seeing a reservation in the newcomer's eyes, Bentick smiled rather patronizingly. "The pathologist should pin it down better when he gets at her. Just an assumption, from her dress, and the fact that she had this regular hair appointment at 10:30 A.M. on Wednesdays."

Sergeant Parton cleared his throat. "Word in private, sir?" Bentick, frowning now, lumbered from the sitting room to the hall, leaving his team out of earshot.

"I checked on that appointment, sir. It wasn't for 10:30, hadn't been for months. Mrs. Sigsby had taken to turning up at midday, having a

quick service, and getting the full treatment on Fridays. That was the day she really made a meal of it, spent the whole morning there."

Bentick swore, not quite under his breath. "We'd have found that when we checked," he snapped. But he was a generous man at heart. "Still, time's of the essence and you saved us some. Changed the day, eh? A cover-up, and she was wearing that sexy negligee—"

"I'm sure there was a lover, sir," Parton agreed. "Or somebody who talked her into seeing him on the sly, in circumstances that could be made to look like they'd been having an affair." For the second time that morning he laid out the background.

Superintendent Bentick's associate, a scholarly Cockney Detective-Inspector, had joined them by then. "Let me get this straight," he said. "The wife was breaking up Baker and Sigsby's long-standing partnership, right? So Baker tries to win his mate back by having it off with the feller's wife?"

Put that way, it sounded crazy. Parton said, "Sigsby thought the world of the girl, sir. I reckon Baker seduced her, or tried to, and then planned to pick the right moment to tell Ben."

"Is there a right moment?" Bentick scoffed.

But the Cockney scholar was thinking it through. He'd worked out of the Great Northern Prospect nick in his time, and knew the leading actors. "He's a cunning sod, that Slimy. It might have worked. Big conscience-stricken confession scene. Reckoning Mrs. S. led him on and that. Can't keep it from his old mate, et cetera. Knowing Ben and Slimy, there might be ructions, but it'd end with Ben giving his old woman the elbow, divorcing her, and making it up with Slimy."

"Well, Ben Sigsby's driving back from Southend, where Baker sent him first thing this morning," Superintendent Bentick conceded. "Baker *could* have been getting hubby out of the way while he tried a bit of hanky panky on the side with wifie. But it's all thin—women's magazine stuff, A loves B who is married to C. And we're dealing with villains, and a break-in that went sour.

"Come to that, we don't know the woman was murdered yet. She's lying there on the deck in the kitchen with this surprised look on her face and the back door's off the latch, but it could be natural causes."

Parton and the scholarly Inspector tried not to look at each other. The Skipper was just being silly now. Parton found himself with the man's beefy arm across his shoulders, being propelled out.

"You've been a great help, lad. Nothing like having your card marked in advance by a local. Give my regards to Steve Arch, mind."

Fuming but also resigned, Sergeant Parton heard the front door slammed on his heels. He watched a tiny black cat with three white socks and a white-smeared front limp out from the shrubs beside the garage. It wore a fancy blue-leather collar and he recalled the pet Mrs. Sigsby had acquired as a veiled insult to her rival, Slimy Baker.

Despite its game leg, the cat leaped nimbly and landed on the hood of Parton's car and curled up on the bodywork, evidently liking the mild warmth of engine-heated metal.

"Cheeky devil," Parton muttered. Now the paintwork, already filmy from the early morning drizzle, was pocked with paw marks. He eyed them absently, twirling his ignition keys. Almost as good as fingerprints in their way—three collections of pad-imprints and the fourth misshapen outline of the crippled foot.

Of course, if Slimy Baker *had* wooed his cousin's wife into clandestine meetings, she would turn the cat out of doors before his arrival. "If only you could talk," Parton addressed the cat. "I bet *you* saw him roll up in his Jag, all right." Superintendent Bentick had mentioned that interviews with neighbors had failed to find any witness to intruders or visitors earlier that day.

But then Slimy would have taken care not to be seen. From Parton's intuitive knowledge of his plan, Slimy would want to break the news of Mrs. Sigsby's unfaithfulness in his own time, in his own way.

So she would be encouraged to open the garage doors again after Ben's departure. Then Slimy would drive in, pull the doors shut, and sneak in by the patio and the kitchen door. All over in less than a minute.

Parton lifted the little cat down and received a plaintive mew. What the hell . . . It might be theft, but Parton doubted whether Ben Sigsby would have attention to spare for a cat when he got home. And Parton knew of a motherly woman with a back garden even larger than her heart. The cat curled up trustingly on the passenger seat and when Parton had left it with his landlady, he went back to St. Cross nick, where he spent the remainder of the day willing himself not to interfere or ask questions about a certain murder case. Just before six that evening he was back in Arch's office.

"Well, it was a beautiful dream." Inspector Arch's thin mouth tucked

down at the corners. "Just had George Bentick on the blower. The pathologist is certain it was natural causes. Mrs. Sigsby died of heart failure. So we can forget about it being down to Slimy Baker. Wishful thinking, I suppose."

"Maybe not."

"Do your ears need washing out?" Arch asked, mock solicitous.

Sergeant Parton's will power had failed him some ninety minutes earlier, and he had made discreet checks around the Queendale neighborhood. Thus he could say, "For the last two months a red Jaguar has been seen around there. Always on Wednesday mornings."

Slimy Baker lived and worked from a large Victorian house within hearing of the Junction, its grounds a scrapyard. Parking in the lee of a moldering double-decker red bus, Inspector Arch fretted, "This is crazy. Even if he went there he didn't kill her, so what's the point?"

"Put it another way, sir. What have we got to lose?"

"A pension, probably. If I wasn't a widower with only myself to worry about I'd have no part of it."

Sergeant Parton gestured to a sheet-iron lean-to at the side of the house. A long boxy Austin Cambridge saloon—Ben Sigsby's car—had been run in under the roof. Beyond it was the red gleam of Slimy's Jaguar. Parton muttered, "Give me two minutes, sir. We don't even have to go in. I'll probably stroll back, and we'll just drive away again."

But after less than thirty seconds he emerged from the lean-to and started hammering at Slimy Baker's front door. Inspector Arch groaned, popped an indigestion tablet into his mouth, and joined the Sergeant.

"No, you can't come in. It's no wonder they call you lot The Filth," Slimy Baker raged. "Don't you know Ben lost his wife today?"

"Let them in, Simon. It might be about Ann." Ben Sigsby had suffered no dramatic change, but there was a weird, almost physical alteration in the man who appeared in the doorway behind Baker. The closest Parton could define it was that Ben's skin had the wrinkled appearance of a party balloon that had been inflated too long and had started to blemish and pucker, although still retaining air.

Baker scowled and gave way. They sat in the downstairs room overlooking the scrapyard. Either Inspector Arch's voice held genuine compassion or he was a masterly actor. "First off, Ben, you'll have

been told this already but there's no harm in stressing it—your Ann can't have felt a thing. Over in a moment. It's a shame we can't all go that way when the time comes."

Ben nodded mechanically, double chin wobbling, eyes polished by unshed tears. "She was no age, though, Mr. Arch. When I left, she was getting ready to dress up and go off for her hair-do, same as always."

"Ah," said Arch. Slimy Baker looked up abruptly.

Inspector Arch steepled his fingers and spoke towards the ceiling. "We're very concerned about that, Ben. Something funny was going on and you've a right to know. Your Ann, she didn't have a 10:30 appointment—she dropped that a long time ago. I'm not pulling strokes, Ben. Ring the salon yourself. She'd fixed up an hour or more every Wednesday morning, when you thought she was in one place—and she and another party knew damned well she was elsewhere, with the charwoman told not to show her face before midday. I don't know what it signifies, but it came up during the investigation and it seemed right to let you know."

Slimy Baker lunged across the table with its faded crimson plush covering and bobbled hem. But Arch was an old 'un and canny with it. Out of sight, his feet had splayed to brace the table legs. He shoved with all his might and the table surged away from him. Baker grunted and collapsed back into the chair. Instantly, he twisted in it to face Ben. "They're geeing you up, mate—trying to get at us."

And with a kind of deadly, somnambulent, leaden leisure, he said to Inspector Arch, "You old whore's get, I'll have you before you retire. I will."

Ben Sigsby blinked several times, a tear rolling down the furrow between his cheek and squashy nose. "What's the good of that? What's that got to do with it, Simon?"

Baker blasphemed savagely and slapped a palm to his forehead. "Everything, you dozy great pudding! They want us getting at each other. You're not thinking straight, you're shattered, so they move in. Bloody ghouls! No respect! Spinning daft yarns about Ann having a feller on the side!"

There was a moment when they all stared at each other, blood thumping and singing in various eardrums.

"No," said Parton. "No, Slimy, we never said any such thing."

Standing up and looking down at his boss, Sergeant Parton seemed to feel contempt for Inspector Arch.

"Don't torture the poor bleeder, sir. If you haven't the guts, I'll do it. Ben, Slimy's been sniffing round Ann all these weeks behind your back. His car's been seen time after time. Tell you what. He knows your garage better than what you do, son. That Jag of his, it could drive in there on its own he's been there so often."

Ben Sigsby spluttered a laugh. "Leave off, Simon's only ever visited our place the once. Ann doesn't—didn't like . . . Not you, Sime, she didn't mind you, but she didn't want me bringing, like, work home with me."

Arch coughed and made a meaningless gesture. "Yes, well, better to leave it that way. She's gone, rest her soul, and there's no more to be said." But Ben was playing Sergeant Parton's remarks over in his head and plainly he felt there was more to be said.

Slimy Baker's cheeks sucked in so hard bones whitened the flesh. "Ben, on the Bible, on my mother's life, I never—" He stopped.

"Like you said," he began again, "Ann didn't want me round your place. Fair enough. I never went there. *Never.*"

Parton sniggered, hoping that he hadn't overdone the noise. "You were there this morning—chances are you saw her die."

Slimy slapped his shoulder. "Lies! I haven't stirred from this place all day! My car never left the garage. They were going good, Benny, had you going too, then they mucked it up."

He sounded so sincere, so relieved at pouncing on a proven untruth, that Arch felt a split-second's doubt, a conviction of failure. He looked at Sergeant Parton. Who said, "Know that little cat Ann bought, Ben? Ever noticed the way it jumps up on cars?"

Ben sniffed hard, wiping his nose obliviously on his sleeve. "Yeah . . . does it? Could be. Gets everywhere . . . keeps Ann in fits, the way it goes running up the curtains. Oh Gawd, she's *dead.*"

Slimy held him, rocking him.

"O.K., Benny, O.K. It'll be all right. You'll see. Muck off, coppers, you've had your fun. Filth, Benny, that's all they are. The Filth, with their filthy lies."

Sergeant Parton raised his voice. "O.K., Ben, stop it—that's better. The cat jumps up on cars when they're parked on the drive at your house or in the garage. All right. I want you to take this torch and

shine it on the hood of Slimy's Jag. You'll see that cat's paw marks all over it. The car he never drove to your house this morning, after he'd got you out of the way."

Casually, Inspector Arch interposed himself between the cousins. Ben was still fiddling with the torch when he saw Slimy's face. He put the torch down, fussing to set it level with the edge of the table. That was all.

Slimy said, "Listen, Ben. Just listen. There were reasons. Not for these coppers to hear. Later. I was there, but I never touched her. Never laid a finger on her."

Ben Sigsby digested the confession, and Arch gave him time to weigh and measure it.

Arch stepped away from between them. "He could be telling the truth, Ben. I doubt whether he hit her or anything. You'll never know, he lies so much it's impossible to tell. For what it's worth, I think he simply upset your Ann. They can't handle decent women, his sort. He upset her, she collapsed, and he went on his way rejoicing, as they say."

They were playing the man like a musical instrument now. Arch and Parton weren't proud of it—it was just the only way of doing something they had needed to achieve for many years.

Slimy made to speak and Parton drove an elbow back like a piston and stamped his heel down. The elbow jarred against Baker's breastbone and the heel bit on his tender instep.

Ben Sigsby's eyelids fluttered and he frowned, as a music lover might while filtering out the racket of a falling chair during a concert.

Sergeant Parton said, "Anyway, Ben, it's none of our business. We shouldn't have come. I mean, work it out. Ann's death is down to natural causes at the moment. You can try to get Slimy dragged in at the inquest, but what's the point? He'll hire the best legal cover in the land. And what's the most that'll be down to him? Manslaughter."

"No chance," Arch contradicted. "Never manslaughter. He can't be touched."

Ben Sigsby smiled. The smile made Slimy Baker shout, "No, Benny, no—I'll kill you, you stupid bastard." And tried to, on the spot, until Parton restrained him.

"Can't be touched?" Sigsby was gulping and sniffing, the query emerging in a breathy yelp signaling his hysterical rage. "Can't be

touched? Get your bloody notebooks out, coppers, we'll see who can't be touched!"

It was a hit, a very palpable hit. Ben Sigsby's statement was taken at St. Cross nick and its writing down lasted until dawn. The subsequent trials at the Old Bailey involved 21 defendants—the migratory thugs unlocked from Ben's remarkable memory as well as Slimy himself—and the total sentences were well over a century. The biggest share went to Simon Arthur Baker, which was only fair, that being his accustomed portion.

But that night the trials were for the future. Freddie Parton was bone-weary, aware that the morrow would bring forth more Slimy Bakers and Baker's Dozens in new guises.

Bloodshot and emotionally drained, he walked home and fed the cat.

Laughing at Neil Savage was a popular pastime in Baytown . . .

LORENZO THE INVENTOR

by WILLIAM BANKIER

It would be wrong to say the people of Baytown appreciated Neil Savage. There had been a time when they were proud of him because it looked like he was going to fulfill the promise of an eccentric local family. That was when he came back from college and started a weekly newspaper in competition with *The Herald*, but energy and brains are at a disadvantage in a long-term war against money. Soon Neil's stake was used up and the *Baytown Banner* folded.

Then he began inventing things like a collapsible lawn fence that could be taken in and hung on the garage wall in the winter (this one made him a few dollars) and a bar of soap with a wax button on it to lift it slightly so it would not go mushy in its own wet. For some reason, this one made people laugh.

For a few years, laughing at Neil Savage was a popular pastime in Baytown. His water-divining activities were a joke and so were his experiments with mild electric shock as a cure for cancer. They called him "Lorenzo the Inventor" and stood back smiling to watch him stride down Front Street with his bicycle clips still on his ankles. What could you expect, the opinion went, from a chap whose father gambled away the bus company's money and then hung himself from an apple tree near the golf course, and whose mother had not been out of the house in seventeen years and now stood for hours behind the screen door of the old duplex on Milford Street, chain-smoking cigarettes.

Then Savage went through a period lasting almost a decade in which he was no longer funny but became a pest. It was his talking on the street that put people off. He would range up and down the main drag, in and out of shops, crossing the road in dangerous places, and always talking. No one ever caught what he was saying, probably because no one wanted to listen so closely as to risk becoming involved. But there went old Neil, eyes glittering, mouth twisted in a sarcastic smile while he used one hand to indicate the street and its inhabitants as a display worth the attention of some unseen observer. Most of the time he was repeating one simple statement over and over again. "They don't know," he would say. "They don't know."

As the Baytown generations got married, and had children and raised them, Neil Savage began to retreat into the background of town life. He was still around but he had stopped his parading and scolding. Now he spent most of his time sitting on a bench facing the market square, absorbing the sunshine and an occasional swallow of Niagara Peninsula wine from an uncapped bottle in a brown paper bag. Not that Savage was a wino, although given time he might become one.

From his fair-weather station on the bench, Savage could see across the square the headquarters of his two historical enemies. The red brick building with the neon sign on it housed the editorial offices of *The Baytown Herald*, prosperous as ever after his arrogant attack upon its circulation almost thirty years ago. The limestone building with the

flags was City Hall and in here were the people who accepted his ideas for improving Baytown and then sat on them or ate them, but in any case never did anything with them.

His most recent free suggestion had been put forward last spring during Clean-Up Week. Savage wanted there to be a designated litter bin (unknown to the public) which would be watched by a town employee. A certain time of day would be the Magic Minute and the person dropping some litter into the bin closest to that time would be given ten dollars and have his picture in the paper. Every day a different litter bin would pay off and, thus bribed, the population would become fanatically tidy.

This idea vanished like all the others and Savage was so sure it was a good one that he stopped coming up with ideas altogether. Now he sat on his bench with the flat taste of wine in his mouth and stared at the Mayor's window. When he got tired of that he shifted his gaze to the Editor's window.

And so another autumn afternoon would turn into evening, punctuated by the pop of the streetlights automatically coming on as the natural light faded. Then Neil Savage would leave his bench and head home, first pausing to drop his empty wine bottle into a litter bin.

Milford Street was a ten-minute walk up the East Hill, past the terraced lawn of St. Thomas's Church where Savage remembered hearing his father perform as tenor soloist in the choir. His mother was still coming out then, wearing a white mesh hat and sitting in a pew with Neil and his big brother Arthur and their sister May. Now Arthur was buried somewhere beyond the beach at Dieppe, May was cleverly established in Vancouver with her husband, and mother was a dim shape on the porch behind the screen door with her cigarette glowing on, off, on, off.

This material was all part of Neil Savage's life, so it couldn't have happened that long ago, could it? Yet it seemed sepia-toned and stiffly posed in his mind like photographs in an album from the last century.

His mother opened the door and let Savage into the house. They ate supper facing each other across the kitchen table, sitting round-shouldered and chewing solemnly in silence. After the meal, Savage went to his room, closed the door, lay on the bed, and played a series of tunes on his tonette. He was good on the little plastic instrument.

He had been given it for Christmas when he was eleven and had played it almost every day since. His program consisted of songs that sprang to mind—old English folk melodies like "Cherry Ripe" and "The Ash Grove," then dance tunes from his youth—"I'll Be Around" and "Sentimental Journey."

His mother was outside the bedroom door. "If you're about done, it's time for *Kojak*."

"Even if I'm not done, it's still time for it." She had her way of expressing things and Savage had his way of teasing her by taking her literally. He came downstairs and they sat in the dark in front of the television set and watched the New York detective sardonically, lovingly, working his way through another case. A bomber was causing explosions; nobody was getting killed but the whole city was frightened.

At the end of the show, during the commercials before the news, Mrs. Savage said, "I could never live in New York."

"You don't even live in Baytown."

"Oh, hush up."

"You live in this house and it might as well be on the moon." He was always ready to sound mad these days but he couldn't help it.

"I'll go out of this house when they carry me out," she said.

"That's right, let's have some Irish misery to end the day."

She had opened a new pack of cigarettes and the crumpled cellophane lay in the ashtray standing by the arm of her chair. Now she used a match to ignite it. It crackled up in flames a foot high and they both watched as it blazed and died, inches from the dusty chintz curtains.

The return of Arnie Pearson was an important event in Neil Savage's life. Neil hardly recognized him, which was not surprising since Arnie's family had moved and taken him with them when he was ten, over forty years ago. But even after all that time, Savage could remember the strange sleepy feeling that had come over him in the classroom when he looked at Arnie Pearson, at his smooth handsome face and his shiny leather windbreaker with the collar turned up. It was love of a sort he suspected now, happening at a time when his feelings were not yet focused, not set. And now, retired from service in the Army, Pearson had chosen Baytown as the place where he wanted to settle down.

They met accidentally outside the liquor store and soon confirmed that they were friends from childhood. Savage took Arnie to his bench, gave him some wine, and asked some questions. It seemed Arnie had experienced a happy war in the Ordnance Corps at Kingston, learning all there was to know about explosives and fuses. In 1945, instead of accepting his discharge, he signed up permanently. Unfortunately, Arnie admitted, he suffered a couple of nervous breakdowns which had him confined for weeks at a time in the Ontario Hospital. The corps had been good about the absences but promotion was out of the question and this year, under official pressure to save money by reducing strength, they used Pearson's spotty record as an excuse for putting him to pasture early.

"Not so bad," Savage said. "You get a nice Canadian Government check every month." His own income was from odd jobs done in the neighborhood and for City Hall plus a small social-security payment.

"Not so good," Arnie replied. "Pension for my rank is peanuts." Pearson gave his friend a controlled smile. "That's why I felt justified in taking home a few souvenirs when I left."

"Like what?"

"Like a supply of plastic and some detonators." He accepted another swig of wine.

"Plastic?"

"Plastic explosive. It's handy stuff. You can shape it and stick it anywhere you want. But with a detonator in . . ."

In Savage's confused mind a few bits and pieces began to come together. They were not yet an idea. "Why explosives?" he asked.

"You never know. I may need money one day. People with money usually keep it inside something solid. With plastic, I can get into anything solid."

It was that time of year called Indian summer, the most beautiful weather on earth. You could inflict upon the residents of Baytown a whole year of blizzards and tornados and they would still stay put for these two weeks of pale sunshine with the haze of burning leaves in the air and a clear hint of frost as the sun went down. World Series weather is what some people call it because it always seems to arrive with the annual battle between the National and American Leagues.

CBAY, the local radio station, liked to open its windows and mount a couple of speakers facing the street so that passersby could keep in

touch with the game. It was Savage's habit to quit the market square during the Series and to occupy a bench at the bus stop opposite the radio station. This year, he brought Arnie Pearson with him and, in deference to tradition, they supplemented their wine with a large bag of peanuts in the shell.

The leisurely pace of baseball gave them time to talk and they remembered a lot that week about their growing years. Savage reminded Arnie of the time they darted in front of a milk wagon and Arnie fell. The horse had reared and come down on his thigh. He spent a few days in bed and afterwards displayed a magnificent bruise in the shape of a horseshoe. How lucky could you get!

Pearson recalled the occasion in the schoolyard when an angry father arrived to challenge Mr. Wallace, the stern master of Grade 7. He had put his hands on one of the boys who lived in the Baytown slums near the waterfront, a group known as "wharf-rats." Now here was the wharf-rat's father, a short man in sooty clothes, circling Mr. Wallace in his rimless glasses and pin-striped suit. There was a scuffle, a punch, and then Mr. Wallace was on his backside on the playground. Reminded of the event now, Savage felt again the wave of sadness that had overcome him at the time.

On the radio, Pete Rose had just trampled another catcher foolish enough to squat in the way of home plate and the crowd was bellowing. Savage reached for the wine but stopped when a car pulled up and Alderman Apps put his head out of the window. This was the executive who had done nothing with Savage's idea about litter bins.

"Afternoon, Alderman," he said with his sweet insolent smile. "If you're not too busy one of these days, Neil, you might check in with Public Works. Make yourself a few dollars. That is, if you can spare the time."

"Should be able to do it soon. The way the Reds are going, it'll be a short Series."

The Alderman cast a heavy glance at the paper bag shaped like a bottle. "How's your head for heights?"

"Not bad. Why?"

"It's cleaning the street lights. Means going up in the cherry-picker crane."

When the car drove away, Savage found it difficult to get his mind back on the ball game or on the reminiscences he had been sharing

with Arnie. Suddenly the bits and pieces in his mind had become one. It was a terrifying idea, but he knew there was no way of getting rid of it short of doing it.

He disclosed the plan to Arnie on the afternoon of the final game as the light was beginning to fade. To his surprise, Arnie needed no persuasion. He was quite willing to make the devices even though it meant using up much of his precious plastic.

The two men worked it this way. Savage reported to Public Works on the Monday following the Series and went out with the cherry-picker crane, standing in the basket on the end of the extending beam while an operator in the cab below raised him to a position below the street lamp to be cleaned. Here, he unfastened the transparent cover and gave everything a thorough washing inside and out.

In the afternoon, Arnie wandered by and went up in the basket with his friend, ostensibly to chat while Savage worked. But what he did was note the lamp fitting to determine what he would need from the electric shop. Thus informed, he was able to go home and get to work.

Something about the project caused Neil Savage to straighten out in the ensuing days. He gave up the wine, began to shave every day, and set aside the blue woolen cap he had been wearing summer and winter for the past three years. He began to look, in short, like a man of this world.

His mother noticed the change in him and asked what was going on. He told her about his present job and found himself going on about it. "I'm making the streets brighter," he told her. "Cleaning up the city."

That night as she sank into the nervous half dream that had passed for sleep since her husband left her alone, Mrs. Savage thought about Neil and worried about how little she was doing for him. But what could she do at this late date apart from showing some interest in what he was doing?

Arnie wanted to deliver the devices on Thursday evening but Savage said no. Nobody had come into his house in years apart from the man who read the electric meter and his mother kept out of sight whenever that happened. So he went round to Arnie's and picked up the package. Arnie showed him the simple way to attach the fitting so that when the street lights were switched on, up they would go.

"You're sure you won't still be in the crane when somebody pulls the

switch?" Pearson asked.

"No chance. It's automatic," Savage reassured him. "They all switch on at sunset."

Arnie had one more question. "Look, when these things go, there's going to be a lot of concussion and some shrapnel from the lamp standards. Any people in the street . . ."

"Don't worry. I'm calling in a warning as soon as it's done. I won't say where the explosive is, I'll just say clear the block. All I want is some debris. If they like litter in the streets, I'll give them litter."

After lunch on Friday Savage suggested to his driver that they do Front Street. So they went there and, in the six lamps over the main block of the street, Savage installed the plastic bombs. By three o'clock he suggested they call it a day, went back to City Hall, and collected his money. Then, with a fair sum of cash in his pocket, he went into the Coronet Hotel beverage room and began drinking draft beer.

As he drank, Savage fell into his habit of conducting angry conversations in his mind. He had one with the Mayor, one with Alderman Apps, and one with the Editor of *The Herald.* Sometimes the arguments merged and he was involved with all three as the voices raged and yammered inside his head. He was dimly aware of people entering the beverage room, glancing at him and then sitting as far away as possible. He was also aware that there was something he was supposed to do, but he couldn't remember what. At four-thirty, with seven glasses of beer in his belly, he began to feel tired. He was out of practice, not having had a drink in over a week, and he wasn't used to working so hard. What he needed was a nap before supper.

Savage got up and left the Coronet, crossed the market square, and began steaming up the hill, swinging his arms shoulder high, hearing in his head the blare of the Baytown High School Band playing "Sons of the Brave." When he reached the house there was no sign of his mother.

"Mum?"

No answer. She must be lying down herself. Savage lay on the sofa and turned his cheek to the battered cushion. He slept, fitfully.

His eyes could not have been closed long. When he opened them the light in the room had changed. The afternoon was waning and the motes of dust in the almost-horizontal shaft of sunlight seemed to be

boiling. For a while, he watched them. There was something he was supposed to do—what was it? He had finished working, putting in the plastic. Then he had got paid, went for a beer . . .

He got up and walked to the kitchen. There was a note on the table, a piece of paper towel torn from the roll with a message on it in large letters:

Neil dear—
Wanted to see your good work. Gone down to Front Street for when the lights come on.

Love, Mother

Savage froze as a series of explosions sounded in the distance. He looked outside at the natural light still filling the yard. Of course! The house was on the East Hill, getting the last of the sunlight, while downtown it was already dusk and the automatic switch had reacted, turning on the street lights!

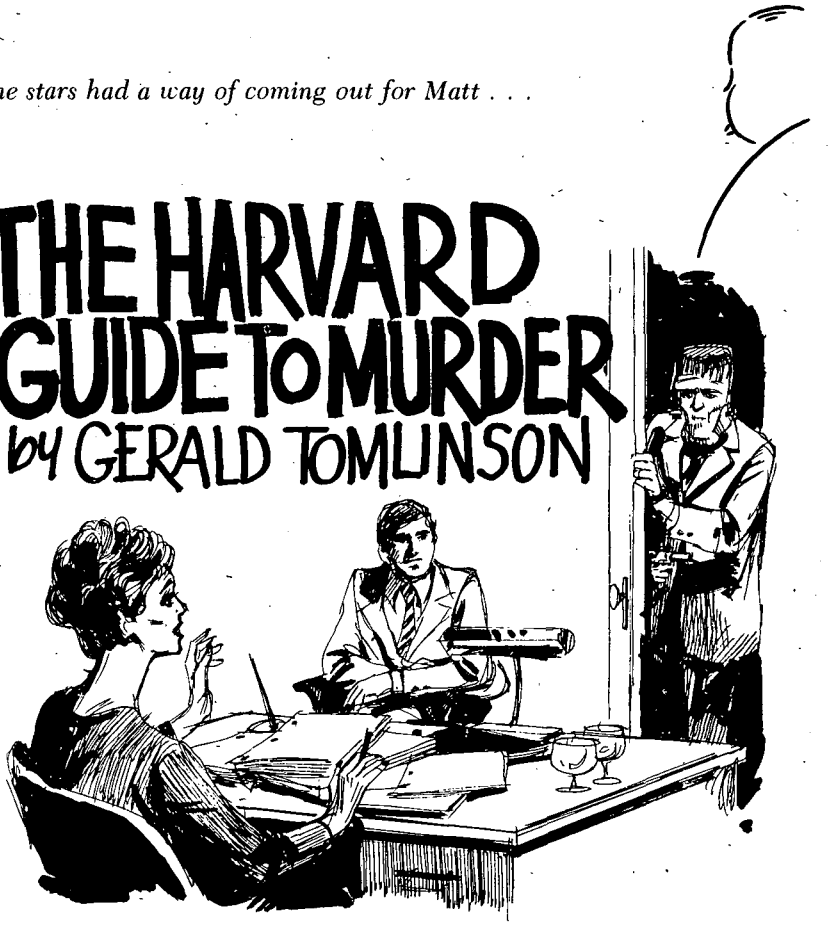
Now he remembered what he had forgotten to do. For one crazy moment, Savage thought of going to the telephone and calling in the warning to City Hall. Then his mind made an adjustment, shifting responsibility for what had just taken place to Alderman Apps and the rest of them. By their thoughtless treatment of him, they had forced him to retaliate.

He left the empty house and began to run through the gathering darkness toward the sound of the sirens. And as he ran, he reminded himself that even now the score was not necessarily even. If anything had happened to his mother, he would still owe them.

The stars had a way of coming out for Matt . . .

THE HARVARD GUIDE TO MURDER

by GERALD TOMLINSON



The rosewood-paneled elevator climbed smoothly to the penthouse floor of the Grenoble, a high-rise apartment house on Fifth Avenue near the Hotel Pierre.

I wiped the toes of my patent-leather shoes on the back of my trousers, stepped out of the elevator, crossed the carpet of the penthouse lobby, and nudged a button. The doorbell rang behind a bone-white slab that could have served as the entrance to a mausoleum. I waited,

my foot tapping a noiseless tattoo on the deep gold pile. Beyond the thermal windows, wet snowflakes blurred down toward the riffraff on the street.

After a minute or two Arnold Hunter, he of the book-publishing Hunters, opened the door. For many years Hunter had been a powerful presence in the higher councils of the Association of American Publishers. Once he was a man of distinction and handsome but now his wavy dark hair had gone to grey frizz, his patrician face had gone to puffiness, and his Scotch-pampered belly had gone to pot.

" 'Lo, A.H.," I said with easy familiarity. "Matt Coleridge of World-Wide. I hear you're looking to hire a peeper."

The publisher waved a highball glass vaguely toward the dim depths of his roost. "Your hearing's O.K. Come on in. I've got trouble."

"We're all of us born of woman, A.H. We're of few days and full of trouble. That's Job's complaint, chapter fourteen, verse one. What's yours?"

He smiled, a tight distant smile.

I stepped into a large room walled with books and luxuriously couched with leather. Animal-skin rugs looked up from the parquet floor, lifeless but tangible insults to conservationists like yours truly—the good guys who fire a gun only in anger and only at the most dangerous game.

Hunter's highball glass pointed me toward a safari chair. I followed his aim and sat down.

"What's up?" I inquired. "Dillon-Hunter common stock dying on the Amex?"

"Not exactly," he said. "A self-help editor dying in my Third Avenue office building, on the eighth floor."

I studied the wattles under his chin before responding. "Natural causes?"

"He was shot—early this morning."

My eyes met his in a red-veined exchange. "I was pretty well shot last night myself," I said.

I can't recommend that line unreservedly. It registered zip on the laugh meter.

"He was murdered, Coleridge." The publisher's voice had a cutting edge. "My editor, Victor Gould, was murdered."

"Oh, I get it. Murdered. Bullets, not booze. I see. That calls for a

glass of Kool-Aid, I guess."

He scowled. "Forgive me." His courtliness, instinctive for a gentleman of the literary persuasion, fit him like a codpiece. "I assume you could use a drink." His highball glass motioned me toward a mahogany-topped bar. "My treat, Coleridge."

"With generosity like that," I said, pouring myself a water glass full of Tennessee sipping whiskey, "you could endow Vanderbilt."

Hunter's mouth became a narrow gash, his bloodshot eyes glittered pink, and he sucked air in through his nose. After a long pause he went on.

"Vic Gould handled our self-improvement books. Mail-order classics like *How To Make Three Million Dollars Raising Orchids in Your Spare Time.* Vic was responsible for signing and editing fifteen titles a year. A good man. Imaginative, ambitious."

"And dead."

"Two .25-caliber slugs through his head, sometime between eight and nine this morning. He was killed at his desk."

"No heater in the sweatshop?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"No gun lying around the office? No .25?"

"No gun."

"Who found him?"

"Rona Fox, a literary agent. She came in early to discuss a manuscript she sent him a few days ago."

"Miss Fox called the *flics,* did she?"

"No. She phoned our board chairman, Red Dillon, alias Caesar Imperator. He's the biggest noise in the industry right now. A financial wizard, a functional illiterate but a creative writer of balance sheets. She reached him at his home in Scarsdale. He called me here. I called the police."

I set my whiskey on a window seat. "You also called the World-Wide Detective Agency. My secretary, Sara, was out yesterday, so you got the answering service. Here I am. I'm not sure I see why you need a gumshoe."

"Look, Coleridge, a murder in the Dillon-Hunter Building is a personal affront to me. It's bad for business, bad for the Hunter name. I want the killer caught."

He fished a checkbook out of his chalk-striped blue blazer, and in a

nonce he had me—my time and services anyway. We shook hands on it and I left.

Fifth Avenue can be a posh street in its April finery, but it was bleak now with blackening slush and the grey half-light of January. I sauntered out of the Grenoble, off the two-inch-nap carpet, and into the old routine.

Rona Fox, I learned, was one of the lesser literary agents in New York City. She had a listing in *Literary Market Place*, in *Writer's Market*, and in the phone book, but she seldom if ever had a listing where it counted, on the *Times'* best-seller scoreboard. Since boffos are the name of the game in the book-publishing sweepstakes, and since you can't rent Park Avenue office space with a stable of country-jake scribblers, Rona's office was tucked away on the second floor of a second-rate brownstone on Second Avenue.

It was noon when I reached her office. Her secretary had gone to lunch, and Rona Fox herself emerged from a small cubicle, a woman of above-average height and eye-catching symmetry. She was dressed in a tight black dress that revealed enough curves to shut down an East Side construction site for the time it took her to pass by. Her upswept brown hair crowned a narrow, white oval face, and her glowing hazel eyes looked up from under.

"Hello," she said in a throaty voice. "What can I do for you?"

I turned that over in my mind. I thought of a few fancy verbal feints and thrusts, but went for the payoff punch.

"Vic Gould, the Dillon-Hunter editor, stopped a couple of bullets early this morning," I said. "He flagged them down with his head. One-two in the cranium. Know why?"

She looked reflective. "I'm the person who found his body, Mr.—"

"Coleridge. Matt Coleridge."

"Of course. You're a private detective, aren't you? Come in."

I went in and sat down in a molded plastic chair. Her office held nothing that caught my eye except a miniature bar on a wall shelf behind the desk.

I made myself at home. "I'll take brandy."

She nodded absently, treated us both to a snifter of Courvoisier. "I can't imagine why it happened, Mr. Coleridge."

"Neither can I, Rona. But Vic Gould's as stiff as a frozen turkey.

Somebody around town knows why. Maybe it's you, despite the stall. Let's talk about it. They tell me you were his agent."

She tapped the desk with a slender forefinger and sipped her cognac. "Mr. Gould is—was—an editor. I'm an authors' agent. I didn't represent Vic on a commission basis—he couldn't write his way out of a sixth-grade essay contest. I sold manuscripts to him. Or tried to."

"Uh-huh. They tell me you were on your way to talk to him about a manuscript this morning."

She found a gold butt-case in her purse, lit a cigarillo with a Zippo flamethrower. "That's right. Frank Faro's proposal. An outline. One chapter's been written."

That slowed me down for a minute. "Frank Faro? Not the bunco artist from Los Angeles? Not the little weasel-faced womanizer they call Ace-Deuce Faro?"

She plumed smoke toward the cheap suspended ceiling. "Why not?"

"You're telling me that Ace-Deuce Faro, the L.A. con-artist and skirt chaser, can also sling ink? I'd give him credit if he could write his own name."

"He's written a couple of how-to-do-it books. His latest one was called *Ten Magic Keys to Personal Success Through the Incredible Power of Lovetechnics.*"

"No fooling. What's his latest project?"

"A ghostwriting job. Strictly anonymous. The book's on a touchy subject. He doesn't want title-page credit."

"What's the subject?"

"Murder."

"That figures. Murder's got to be a touchier subject than bunco. Who's the author of record?"

"A man named Moses Harvard."

I almost dropped my brandy snifter.

"In real life that's Sleepout Moe Harvard," I advised her. "A big hog-bellied slob, one of the Syndicate's bag men. He's from L.A. too. *O tempora, O mores!* Ace-Deuce Faro and Sleepout Moe Harvard, the new American literary team. Those two birds have known each other for a long time, ever since they were penny-ante swindlers on Pershing Square. They've both served time in the cage."

Rona Fox's hazel eyes kindled fire. "I realize they're ex-convicts. And I don't care. They've submitted an exciting proposal. They're

going to write about how to commit a perfect murder."

I said, "I doubt if those two bimbos could tell you how to commit a perfect gas-station heist. They're losers."

Rona pouted. "The book isn't about their personal experiences, Mr. Coleridge. They're using case histories in it. Mr. Harvard served twenty-four years in San Quentin. Over the years he met and talked with ten men, each of whom had committed a perfect murder."

"And then went to the slammer for it," I muttered. "Talk about perfection."

"Oh, no. The ten men we're talking about went to San Quentin for other crimes, not for murder. For safecracking, forgery, grand larceny, embezzlement. Mr. Harvard, who did all the research, drew them out about their methods. Yardbird talk, he calls it. He found his ten perfect murders and gradually built up the details of the cases. When he got out last year, he looked up Mr. Faro and suggested they collaborate. Mr. Faro was enthusiastic. They wanted to call the book *How To Kill Just About Anybody—and Get Away With It!*"

I swigged some more of the Courvoisier and said nothing.

"It *was* a weak title," she said. "I submitted the idea to Dillon-Hunter as *The Harvard Guide to Murder*. They liked it. But then—" she faltered. "This morning—"

"This morning," I helped her out, "you found your editor Vic Gould with blood dripping out of his ear."

She covered her face and sobbed.

"Where's the proposal now?" I inquired. "Still at Dillon-Hunter?"

She pointed toward a pile of manuscripts on a card table behind her. "I brought it back with me," she said. "I figured the Dillon-Hunter prospects were kaput."

"As cold as Vic Gould's carcass," I agreed.

She looked out at me from below streaked blue mascara. Suddenly her hazel eyes widened. Her nostrils flared.

I've never been one for the old superstitions. I've never worried about thirteenth-floor rooms, never hesitated to smash a mirror, never panicked over drawing a dead man's hand at poker—never sat with my back to the wall, the way Wild Bill Hickok used to. I'm a fatalist.

In Rona Fox's office I had taken a seat with my back to the doorway. It was a mistake.

I jerked my head around to see what had shaken Rona up.

A sap crashed down on my skull. Stars danced. I slid off toward the floor. The upended floor followed me down. My brains caught the 5:47 to Brewster, but the office lights stayed lit.

When I peered up from my vantage point on the brown nylon carpet, I caught sight of a tall masked lout with a metallic grey object clutched in his hand. An efficient-looking .25 automatic.

When I say the stranger was masked, I don't mean he'd ever pass for the Lone Ranger. This guy's mask was one of those realistic rubber jobs that can represent anyone from Dracula to Ignatz Mouse. This one represented Dr. Frankenstein's classic creation, complete with stitched gashes and electrodes.

The Monster's disposition hadn't improved much over the years. Before I could yell "Flambeaux for the townspeople!" his .25-caliber gat had gone off twice, and Rona Fox, aspiring literary agent, had two crimson dots on her forehead.

I tried to get up.

The Monster crossed to the desk, ignoring Rona's lifeless shape. He rampaged through the stacks of typewriter paper like Boris Karloff on a late-reel binge. Finally he grabbed a sheaf of papers and aimed his skyscraper form my way.

I groaned.

He put away his pistol and came up with the sap.

I tried to say something, but the Monster wasn't in the mood for chitchat. This time the stars were a rushing galaxy. The lights died. I slept the sleep of the stupid.

When I woke up the Monster had decamped on an ice raft or something. Rona Fox would never decamp from her Second Avenue office.

I rubbed my throbbing forehead and tried to sort out my thoughts. It wasn't easy. There were now a pair of deaths—Vic Gould's and Rona Fox's—and the future for a couple of the living didn't look all that great.

Somebody didn't want to see *The Harvard Guide to Murder* published. And that somebody packed a .25-caliber roscoe and a very tough leather sap. Who?

There were ten good prospects. Any one of the ten cons or ex-cons whose technique for a perfect murder was scheduled to be revealed to the world by Ace-Deuce Faro and Sleepout Moe Harvard, via

Dillon-Hunter, book publishers to the trade.

Who were these ten successful triggers? I had no way of knowing. In fact, with Vic Gould and Rona Fox getting set to push up daisies, there might be only two living people other than the killer who did know.

Ace-Deuce Faro was one.

Sleepout Moe Harvard was the other.

I'm no pessimist, but it looked to me as if this caper could turn out to be curtains for three. Or four. A lot depended on how fast I tracked the action.

The action was no longer in Manhattan.

It was on the Coast.

After checking out the duo's last known addresses with one of my contacts at the local cop shop, I caught United's red-eye flight to L.A.

I'd left Sara, my secretary, with instructions to run background checks on the principals in the case, including Arnold Hunter and Red Dillon.

The flight passed uneventfully. Most of the passengers watched a first-run Mel Brooks movie while I caught up on my Chaucer. Along toward morning I fell asleep.

Groggy, unshaven, popping extra-strength pain relievers like Tic Tacs, I phoned my office from the L.A. airport and talked briefly to Sara. Then I tried phoning Faro and Harvard. Ace-Deuce had a suite at the Viscount Hotel. Sleepout Moe lived in one of those Hollywood-type villas on Coldwater Canyon Drive. Both were new addresses. These two stir-wise grifters were doing all right for themselves.

No one answered at Ace-Deuce's suite at the Viscount, but out on Coldwater Canyon Drive a soft feminine voice greeted me after the third ring. "Yes?"

"I'm trying to get a line on Moses Harvard."

"Moses Harvard? Moses?" She giggled.

"Sleepout Moe."

"Oh, you must mean Moby Dick! Why didn't you say so?" She sounded pleasantly snowed, although you can't tell for sure over the phone. "The Great White Whale is surfacing in the pool right now. Hang on. Who shall I say is calling?"

"Coleridge."

"The poet?"

"The private eye."

"Oh." Her voice showed disappointment. "I'll get him."

"Don't bother. Tell him I'm on my way from L.A. International. I should be there in half an hour."

The weather in Shakytown has it all over that in Fun City in the middle of January. A blinding sun lit up the San Diego Freeway—warmed and cheered it as I pointed my rented LTD north in the general direction of the Santa Monica Mountains. The sky shimmered blue and gold as I turned east at Santa Monica Boulevard, north at Coldwater Canyon Drive, and wended my way through Beverly Hills. A few minutes later I rolled the Ford within sight of a high wrought-iron gate leading to the recently acquired Moses Harvard estate.

A pushbutton opened the gate. A brick driveway led to a fourteen-room mansion of gleaming Indiana limestone and Italian marble.

I killed the Ford's engine and approached the carved oak door under the portico. The doors swung open and Sleepout Moe Harvard, white of visage and splendidly got up in a scarlet dressing gown, greeted me in person. He stationed his bulk beneath a marble frieze of Aphrodite and beside a slim nodding Italian beauty whose vice appeared to be coke and whose name proved to be Laura.

Moe waved her away with a suggestion she go home for a bit and guided me in that splay-footed duck waddle of his to a small study, the walls of which were lined with green damask. A bronze clock stood on a mantel of purple breccia marble. The hands read nine-thirty. Too late for an eye-opener, too early for a liquid lunch. I yawned.

Sleepout Moe Harvard settled his red threads behind a Louis XV desk. I sat down in a chair facing him. He rubbed his tub contentedly before letting his rabbit-pink orbs search mine.

"What gives, Coleridge?" Before I could answer, he grunted, leaned forward, and poured two double shots of bourbon from a gilded decanter on the desk.

I took one and belted it down. It tasted like battery acid.

I said, "You're in big trouble, Moe. This book you and Ace-Deuce Faro have been writing—it's lethal. The editor's been murdered. The agent's been murdered. I figure you and Ace-Deuce are next."

Harvard, resting his thick white fingers on the desk, looked thoughtful. "Funny thing," he said. "Nobody who's still alive knows about that book except Red Dillon, Arnold Hunter, Ace-Deuce, and me.

And, of course, you. Dillon and Hunter put up the half-millon-dollar advance."

"Uh-huh. So who put up the smoking Betsy? Who's the hit man?"

"You figure it out," he said, his hand shaking as he lowered his glass to the desk. "I'll give you a hint. The five hundred grand that me and Ace-Deuce got—that wasn't your usual advance against royalties. The book was never going to be published." He smiled again, darkly. "Ah, you're beginning to see the picture, are you?"

"Sort of, Moe."

"It was a cash payoff. But how in hell did that twerp Gould get his mitts on the proposal? The manuscript was supposed to have been shredded. Rona knew that. She'd agreed to do it. You know what I think? I think Vic Gould and Rona Fox decided to pull a double-cross on Dillon-Hunter. They decided to publish the book on their own. They figured me and Ace-Deuce would go along."

I studied his moon-white face. "Let me get this straight," I said. "The half million dollars you and Ace-Deuce got from Dillon-Hunter was blackmail money, not an advance against royalties. The proposal was a hot item. Your agent promised to shred it after the five hundred big ones were in the bag. You got the dough, but she didn't follow through. Is that the jist of it?"

"That's the jist of it, Coleridge. One of the ten killers in my book is a very big name. He wasn't about to see *The Harvard Guide to Murder* show up in bookstores across the country. It would ruin him. He'd done too well, risen too high since his two-year stint for embezzlement twenty-five years back. He had to nix the book. And he could. All he had to do was—"

Two shots stopped Moe Harvard's sentence. They also stopped Moe Harvard's pump. He half rose, gurgled, then toppled over like Humpty Dumpty.

Once again I'd been sitting with my back to the door. Maybe Wild Bill Hickok had something at that.

I whirled in time to see the old familiar sap falling. Above it the rubber face of the Monster came into view. It was the same tall hombre I'd seen on Second Avenue. And still selective: bullets for some, bludgeons for others.

His blow caught my left ear. Hard, but not hard enough to send me to the Land of Nod.

Scrambling toward the door, bleary-eyed but conscious, I reached out and grabbed the Monster around the knees. The .25 jutted toward me from his left hand. My right arm sprang up to deflect it.

Another shot went off. The .25-caliber pill took out a Ming vase on the desk. Pieces of the broken vase joined the corpse of Moe Harvard on the Persian carpet.

Suddenly the Monster raised the automatic above his head. He brought it down on my right temple. Once again the stars came out. I felt myself staggering, tried to hold on.

Another clout.

I woke up a couple of hours later and tottered to my feet. Sleepout Moe Harvard's unseeing eyes watched the ceiling. My own half-focused eyes scanned the room. No one was around but me and the dead slob. I stumbled to his desk telephone, took a jotted-down note from my wallet, and dialed Ace-Deuce Faro's number.

This time I got an answer. A sob. A snuffled "I'm sorry." A long pause and then a soft little nymphet voice, English-accented, whimpered, "Mr. Faro is— He's—"

"Gone west."

"Oh, no. He's—"

"Cashed in his chips."

"Blimey, no. I mean, Mr. Faro is—"

"Dead. Iced. Cold meat. He's leaking plasma through two bullet holes."

A gasp. "Yes! It's horrible. The bedroom's a mess. Mr. Faro's been shot. It was Frankenstein! I couldn't believe it when I saw the bloody beggar walk in. The police are coming soon. I've got to get dressed. Are you a policeman?"

I'd been a cop once, but under the circumstances I didn't take credit for it.

I recradled the phone, mumbled my apologies to the grounded white blimp at my feet, lurched out to the portico, ralphed up my airline snack, slid into the LTD, and laid rubber for Inglewood and the L.A. airport.

Coincidence is a funny thing. When the novelists try to use it they run into heavy criticism. Truth may be stranger than fiction, as the

poet says, but it's a big mistake to lard fiction with too many gobs of well-rendered fact.

Still, it's a verifiable fact that Red Dillon, of the Scarsdale and book-publishing Dillons, boarded Flight 6 out of L.A. that afternoon. I was two steps behind him, and we were both ticketed on the same airplane. Not only that, but since I recognized Caesar Imperator from his wirephoto and television appearances, I asked the lad with the seating stickers for the seat adjoining his. Fortunately for me Dillon was winging it tourist class.

Inside the hollow tube he settled his towering frame in seat 19A. I dropped down beside him in 19B.

For those who have never seen a full-figure photo of Red Dillon, I can report that he measured about as high as an elephant's eye, roughly the same height as Dr. Frankenstein's wandering unnatural baby. Dillon had the nose of a toucan and the jaw of a sperm whale. His movements had the swagger of a carny barker and the unflappable confidence of a Wall Street mover-and-shaker.

" 'Lo, R.D.," I purred. "Matt Coleridge of the Apple. We've met."

"Not a chance," he said.

"Sure we did," I said heartily. "At a couple of costume parties. One in New York, one in L.A. You must remember."

His gimlet eyes flickered. "Talk sense, Wordsworth. Or better yet, shut up."

"Coleridge," I straightened him out. "Matt Coleridge of the World-Wide Detective Agency. I'm working for you and A.H. on the Vic Gould fandango."

"Not for me," he snapped. "You're not working for me. Arnold may have signed you on after six or seven Scotches."

He dismissed further thought of his partner, then pretended rapt attention as the flight attendants demonstrated how to sniff oxygen in case the airline maintenance crew had let a gremlin slip aboard.

I watched the Golden State receding below us. We were at thirty thousand feet and still climbing when I tried the gum-beating routine with Red Dillon again.

"Say, R.D.," I asked in my best wheedling tone, "what are the chances of *The Harvard Guide to Murder* surviving all this gunplay?"

He eyed me with infinite weariness. "I'm not aware of that title. Is it a book?"

"Aw, come on, Caesar. There was a hot proposal for this how-to-do-it murder tome on Vic Gould's agenda when he was shot. The proposal was sitting on Rona Fox's card table when you barged in wearing your Halloween mask. The project existed. The authors were Moses Harvard and Frank Faro. Where's the .25?"

At that point a pert black flight attendant clattered up with the booze cart. She left a New York State champagne split with Dillon and two Old Granddads with me.

Dillon took a sip of Great Western brut, pursed his lips. "My understanding of *The Harvard Guide to Murder,*" he said slowly, "is that it tells the reader how to commit a perfect murder. It's a how-to manual based on ten case histories. Apparently one of those ten killers took it in his head to suppress the book. His way of doing it was to murder Gould, Fox, Harvard, and Faro. Correct?"

I said, "You're the expert."

"Precisely. And there's your answer." He sounded as matter-of-fact as Walter Cronkite reporting a humdrum international crisis. "The killer won't be caught. He knows how to commit murder and get away with it."

"Where's the Harvard-Faro proposal?"

"It's no use, Coleridge. Save yourself a lot of time. Save me a pile of money. The killer is home free."

"Maybe."

"Believe me. Why don't you just settle back and finish your hooch?"

I slugged down one of the Granddad miniatures neat.

"You know, R.D., you're pretty cocky for a honcho who's been punching holes in human targets for the last day and a half."

He shook his head, reached down between his jackknifed legs, and brought up a magazine from his attaché case. Without another word, he started to read.

As he began to read, I began to think.

Arnold Hunter had signed me up for this sleigh ride. I'd bet dollars to doughnuts he knew that his senior partner, the financial wizard of Searsdale, was the one who'd get flushed down the drain when I started snooping. The old corporate dagger-in-the-back gambit. My guess was that Arnold Hunter intended to kiss off Red Dillon, a.k.a. Caesar Imperator, and take over himself as main squeeze in the Third Avenue publishing operation.

When I asked Dillon the whereabouts of the .25 automatic I wasn't just cracking wise. Sara's background check on Red Dillon had turned up an embezzlement rap back in 1953. One of the state's witnesses, a mouse-grey accountant named Connor Hicks, caught two .25-caliber slugs in the ticker two days before the trial. One of the slugs looked like modern sculpture, but the other was hardly bent out of shape at all. The ballistics boys stored that bullet for twenty-five years. All they needed was a second slug for comparison.

Yesterday they got it.

A microscope and a few microphotos would put Red Dillon in the hot seat. But he didn't know that yet. He was sitting beside me at the moment, drinking champagne, looking smug. He might as well be dead.

I said, "Say, R.D., I'll bet you're carrying that cute little pistol in your attaché case. Right? How did you get it past the airport x-rays?"

He tilted his beak my way and said nothing.

"That .25-caliber toy is going to sink you."

He snorted. "You think so?"

"The ballistics boys say yea. They say the gun that killed Connor Hicks back in '53 is the same gun that chilled Vic Gould."

Red Dillon stared at me a long time.

"Maybe you should have picked a different artillery piece," I told him gently. "I'll bet by now there's an all-points bulletin out for your arrest. I wouldn't be surprised if we're met at the airport."

His mouth worked, but his vocal cords wouldn't back up the effort.

"I'll carry your attaché case off the plane," I said. "If you'll permit me, of course."

Dillon summoned the flight attendant and ordered champagne for two. It arrived quickly. The old publisher's face was ashen but composed. He said, "Coleridge, you're a sharp shamus."

We touched plastic cups in a meaningless toast. His eyes glowed like embers, and his voice had taken on the timbre of coffin oak. "I killed Connor Hicks."

"Yeah, I know."

"I killed Vic Gould and Rona Fox."

"Yeah. Plus Sleepout Moe Harvard and Ace-Deuce Faro."

He sighed as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. "And I've got one more killing to go."

Instinctively my hand went for my empty shoulder holster.

"No," he said wearily. "Not you. I expect you to walk off this airplane alive. Alive and alone. Leave the attaché case with me."

I turned that over in my mind. The man had killed five times and he still carried a deadly weapon. But you get to be a good judge of motivation when you've been sniffing out the secrets of punks and killers for nearly thirty years. As a student of the streets, I know the face of despair almost as well as I know my own face in the mirror. Red Dillon was a beaten man. He'd murdered to avoid exposure, to avoid disgrace, and any more murders could serve no purpose. Exposure was at hand. Dillon wanted out.

At 11:58, two minutes before midnight, the silvery Boeing from L.A. swooped down between two long rows of runway lights at Kennedy. The landing was rough, bouncy. The plane taxied toward the terminal. No further words passed between Red Dillon and me.

I let the always impatient New Yorkers push their way past us toward the exit door. I watched Red Dillon closely. He had no spark left. He spent his last few minutes examining the frayed blue fabric on the seat in front of him.

When the other passengers had left the aircraft, I got up slowly. He sat as still as a graveyard. His face was stone.

"Rotten flight," he said stiffly. "Goodbye."

He never left his seat, never intended to.

I walked without haste past the smiling flight attendant stationed outside the cockpit. Most commercial smiles, having been bought and paid for, are pasted on, but hers seemed real. A girl who enjoyed life, she probably conceded the fact of death in a philosophical way. She saw it as an abstraction, far off, an unfortunate flaw in the scheme of things.

I got halfway through the square tunnel to terra firma before I heard the shot.

Small-caliber.

Muffled.

And this time only one.

All she wanted was to put the ghost of Angel Baby to rest . . .

ANGEL BABY

by JEAN DARLING

From October to March she kept the red curtains drawn across her drafty window both night and day. But this year even the proximity of June had not relaxed winter's hold. In the center of the cluttered room a ceiling bulb shed light on the woman hunched at the table typing a story about five white poodles. Every now and again she was shaken by shivers the tiny flame of the gas fire was unable to hold at bay. Inflation had driven the luxury of warmth beyond the means gained from

writing children's stories and more than a decade separated her from Social Security.

It was called a garden flat—a euphemism for rising damp. Mildew crept across the wallpaper. Moths, mosquitos, and spiders crowded the corners. There was a small kitchen, but the bathroom, one flight up, was a community affair shared by seven other flats. A pay phone clung precariously to the wall outside under a dim light.

There was, however, one good thing about the garden flat. It had its own front door. In the days when the house was new this door had led into the kitchens. The Georgian elegance above, exclusive to Regency dandies and their ladies, was reached by a short flight of wide stone steps, at the top of which stood a mahogany portal now called The Hall Door.

A sound on the metal mat outside the door set the woman's heart pounding. She leaned forward, squinting through the narrow crack between the red curtains. Two men were looking at the square of white cardboard thumbtacked above the enameled knocker. It read: WORKING—PLEASE USE HALL DOOR. She had put it there in desperation. The house above was in a continual state of flux. Tenants came and went with such regularity, flat-seekers were drawn to the easy access of the lower door like bears to honey, interrupting with foolish questions and frightening her. There had been a series of robberies before she came. The boarded-over window in her outer door was a dramatic reminder to keep the locks fastened. The sign put an end to the bother; now most people cursed their way up to the upper door as the two men were doing.

She watched until the men reappeared. They stopped halfway along the gravel path, undecided. Their voices, drifting through the window, were not loud but the language of their hands conveyed their anxiety to make contact with the garden flat. Then, the hardy man who lived in the room behind hers without heat or light bumbled through the gate toward the men. She leaned away from the window.

Moments later footsteps clumped in the hall overhead. A murmur of voices sounded in the ear she now pressed against the inner door, "Angela Janis . . ." The name leapt from the jumble of monotone. Then she heard, "Angel Baby," and again, "Angela Janis." She opened the door and climbed the stairs towards the stranger at the telephone

copying the number from the dial into a spiral notebook.

As soon as he was within touching distance, she regretted having left the safety of her room and began a stealthy retreat. She had almost reached her door when her neighbor shouted, "There she is!" Angela looked up into the three faces grouped at the head of the stairs.

"Angela Janis?" the tall man asked.

She nodded.

"Noel Connors from the *Press*," he said, strangling her hand.

"Joe Lynch, photographer," said his camera-laden companion, looking as though he doubted she had ever heard of Hollywood, let alone been a star.

She had to admit she must look a bit odd with her hair in a knot, skewered in place by a knitting needle, and her body encased in layers of sweaters.

"Look, if you're not busy, we'd like an interview." Connors covered the space between The Hall Door and the head of the stairs.

She held them at bay. "If you'll give me a minute to fix my hair, I'll be right out," she said. "I'm sorry, but I'm working, you see. I never let anyone in when I'm working."

"That'll be grand, of course," Connors said. "We'll wait in the car."

Oh, God, she thought, why did I go and say that about fixing my hair? Was it so long since a reporter had asked for an interview that she'd forgotten how to behave? She fluttered about the flat, fluffing out her short blonde wig, lavishing her mouth with color, glueing on black eyelashes.

As she came through the gate ten minutes later clutching a fur remnant of her Broadway days around her shoulders, Lynch opened the back door of the car with a mock bow. Then they were speeding past the cinema, over the railroad tracks, past the row of shops.

"Where are you taking me?" she cried.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Janis," Connors explained from the driver's seat, "is Jurys Hotel all right with you?"

While he parked the car in the sprawling parking lot, Lynch waved Angela toward a backdrop of trees and flashed a roll of film.

"I'll be leaving you now," he said as soon as he was done and she was left on the path outside Jurys with Connors.

"The paper doesn't give me an expense account," he said. "Will cof-

fee do?"

He guided her past the lobby checkpoint where everybody was being searched as a result of a recent rash of bombings, away from the Dubliner Bar and into the Coffee Dock.

His accent wasn't Ulster, she decided. It was softer—more like Donegal or Leitrim. "Have you been down here long?" she asked, spooning sugar into her coffee.

"From Donegal?" Like all Irishmen he was surprised that an American ear could separate the counties. "I went to University here in Dublin—Trinity."

"Not very long ago, I'll bet. How did you find me?" Connors slid a paper across the table. It was a "Where-Are-They-Now" type of press release from a Bristol-based news agency. The heading read: "Whatever Happened to Angel Baby?" and went on to ask if the middle-aged spinster, Angela Janis, author of the Poodle-Doo stories for children, was the Early Thirties darling of Hollywood, Angel Baby. There followed a list of credits.

Angela looked up. "This doesn't explain how you got my address."

"No. —Nice pictures," he said, indicating the paintings of sailing ships that decorated the coffee shop. "I like ships. Spent three years in the Navy."

"Irish Navy?"

"English," he smiled. "Do you like the sea?"

"I'd spend the rest of my life aboard ship if I could. But you're not going to sidetrack me as easily as that, Mr. Connors. I'd like to know how you found me—please."

After a moment he shrugged. "An Irish girl I know works for the magazine that prints your Poodle-Doos. She gave me your address over the phone."

"They're not supposed to give out personal information!" She felt betrayed. "If you'd written to me in care of the publisher the letter would have been forwarded to me."

"But you might not have answered or somebody could have beat me to you."

Angela relaxed. She admired enterprise even when it caught her at a disadvantage. "Well, what do you want to know?" she asked.

"Sure, that's up to you, I hadn't heard of you until the editor—" He shrugged.

At least he has the grace to look embarrassed, she thought, then launched into an abridged account of her life, from her movie debut at a few months old, through her Angel Baby days as a star of the Silver Screen. She listed her Broadway credits and described the years in television, winding up with the Poodle-Doos and how she came to be in Dublin. Not the truth, of course.

How could she admit to having been stranded in a strange country for being over forty? Which was what it all boiled down to. The fading pop group, Seven Cumma Leven had hired her sight unseen to open the second half of their concert with a twenty-minute singing stint, hoping a name would bolster their waning popularity. Angela's career had hit a snag and she had hopped a plane for Brussels where the show was to open.

Everything went wrong from the first rehearsal. Her material was out of place in a pop show and she wasn't well known in Europe. It was a case of the blind leading the blind, which led practically nobody to the box office. One night in Limerick, the guitar-playing manager had slammed into her dressing room. He had been drinking.

"Fraud! Hollywood star!" he had yelled, throwing her photographs on the makeup shelf. "Those pictures are a hundred years old. They look no more like you than the man in the moon!" He ran his hands through his unkempt shoulder-length hair. "God! When the agent suggested the beautiful Angela Janis, we thought you'd pull us to the top again, but you're too damn old! Look at yourself in the mirror!" He turned her around so that she was facing her mirror. "You were our insurance against empty houses and look at these receipts—the house isn't even half full!"

Angela looked at her eyes in the mirror, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. "Of course the pictures are flattering—all professional pictures are flattering. But I'm not old."

The show went to Cork, then to Dublin, where after a week of indifferent houses the rest of the booking was cancelled. The group left unannounced to find greener pastures across the Irish Sea, taking her percentage of the box office receipts. Stunned and hurt, Angela found herself without friends or shelter, a long way from home.

When at last the world could be faced again, there was no helping hand from the theater. Seven Cumma Leven, besides absconding with

money belonging to the theater management, had left a string of creditors from Cork to Drogheda. As theatrical enterprise in Ireland is as interlocked as a Tennessee mountain family, Angela was tarred with the same brush as Seven Cumma Leven and she stayed tarred. The Irish, for all their many good qualities, are blessed with long memories.

Being an alien made it impossible for her to get a work permit for any job outside the theater, so she worked from hand to mouth—odd jobs, sewing, cleaning. It was enough to keep body and soul together, but not enough to buy passage home. Of course, she could have SOS'd Equity or the Screen Actors' Guild, begging bowl in hand. In her mind's eye she saw the glad hand turn to claw, the smile change to that smug glee at another's misfortune. She recalled too well her years as a has-been and had no desire for a repeat performance.

"Miss Janis!" Connors called her back to the present.

"Oh, I'm sorry—where was I? Oh, yes. Like I said, I was with a pop group called Seven Cumma Leven in 1969; when they moved on, I stayed."

"Just like that?" He didn't believe her.

"Just like that." She didn't really care.

They spent another half hour or so discussing her years as a child star. Connors found much of it difficult to believe—the pampering, the overprotected environment, the problems that interfered as she tried to make her own way in a world no longer interested in Angel Baby, the child star.

They left the coffee shop and he drove her back to the garden flat, leaving her flushed at being unexpectedly back in the limelight after so long.

And then she was back behind the red curtains—alone with the feeble fire and the unshaded bulb. But her heart sang. The world had found her again! The pendulum was on the upswing. Soon she could forget the menial jobs and enforced retirement and the loneliness. Connors had said the story would come out Thursday or Friday. That left her almost a week to prepare.

She plunged into a flurry of activity—yoga, stretching, bending, dieting, vocalizing, assessing herself physically—eyes good, complexion clear

and virtually unlined, hair dull (the wig would take care of that), neck firm, breasts good. A girdle would pull things together below the waist. On stage she could pass for late thirties; off, in the mid-forties. Of course, having been Angel Baby dated her but there was nothing she could do about that.

And it was talent that counted, she reminded herself. The days passed, hazy with dreams, the nights in sleepless anticipation of being accepted into the fold once more. The five little poodles, each one smaller than the other, languished mid-sentence.

Thursday came, and Friday—nothing. Perhaps Sunday, she thought. A call to Noel Connors would set her mind at ease, but she refused to seem anxious; luck ran away from those who were anxious and showed it. No, it would be best to wait.

On Monday the article appeared. ANGEL BABY LOOKS BACK A HALF CENTURY screamed above a shot of Angela with Jurys' trees sprouting behind her curly wig, next to a photograph of her baby self. Space-wise, it surpassed her dreams. Column after column tumbled down the page—Angel Baby this, Angel Baby that—without a single mention of Broadway or television. It was as though her life had been sawed off at age seven.

It wasn't that Noel Connors had been unkind. It was obvious that he liked and admired her. But he was a young man and anybody over thirty fell beyond his comprehension. Be that as it may, the writeup would do more harm than good, consigning her as it did to the relic heap.

For hours she huddled numbly on the sofa, the newspaper on the floor at her feet until toward evening a steady knocking and a shout of "Telephone!" sent her up the stairs.

"Angela Janis?" An unfamiliar voice came through the receiver.

"Yes."

"I imagine your phone has been ringing all day," the voice gushed.

"No. Why?"

"The article, silly girl! It was marvelous! This is Gemma Madigan, remember me? From the embassy?"

Angela remembered a woman to whom she'd poured out her past one lonely afternoon when she'd gone to the American Embassy to read the New York papers.

"When you told me you were a child star I didn't pay much atten-

tion, but, my dear, you were famous. —Hello? Hello?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Suppose so! Silly girl, you don't have to be modest with me. If you don't blow your own horn nobody else will! Now let me tell you why I called. I have two tickets for Terry Gallagher's Forum for next Sunday. You know Terry, the theater critic? But of course you do, silly me. Now if you'll give me your address I can pick you up at seven sharp on Sunday. His show goes on at eight. But of course being in the business, you're probably glued to the box—"

"No, I haven't seen the program. I don't have a set."

"Oh! You poor thing!" Gemma sounded genuinely appalled. "Well—anyway, I'll be there on the dot of seven and after the show we'll drop in at the Merrion for a drink."

The soft mist falling when she left the flat on Sunday turned to a deluge by the time a little green car drew up at a quarter past seven.

"Sorry I'm late," Gemma told her, reaching across to make sure the passenger door was locked. Twenty minutes later they were at the tail end of a line being channeled past a long-haired ticket taker and toothy hand-pumping Terry Gallagher. Then Gemma had Angela by the arm and was thrusting her bodily at the critic.

"You know Angel Baby, the famous child star!" she exclaimed.

Gallagher mouthed the regulation "Nice of you to come," no more, and the smile turned to the next in line. Angela fled across the floodlit set. Colliding with the corner of a desk, stumbling over cables, she sought the anonymity of the audience, hoping the ground would swallow her. God, how she hated Angel Baby.

A moment later Gemma dropped into the seat beside her, wearing an expression Angela had come to know well in childhood. One glance at her face stripped away decades to the time in her life when each failed audition was Armageddon and she was a gangling girl pleading to be forgiven for not getting a part. She fought an almost irresistible urge to clasp her hands together and cry, "I'll try harder next time, Mama." And above Terry Gallagher's fanfare she could hear her mother's words, "If there is a next time."

The applause rose and fell with the floor man's arms. Terry Gallagher bounded on camera, hands locked overhead prizefighter style. "Nice of you to come!" he shouted.

When the ordeal was over and she had escaped alive into the little green car, no mention was made of the Merrion or of the promised drink. Angel Baby had failed to attract the spotlight to Gemma Madigan.

"You don't mind if I drop you here," Gemma said, braking abruptly. "I'll be in touch." The door slammed behind Angela and the car pulled away, leaving her alone by the gates of the Royal Dublin Society, a good ten-minute walk from home.

Two weeks crept by with no further reaction to the piece, but Angela continued her yoga and vocalizing. Like a snowball rolling downhill, it was impossible for her to stop. June brought two letters that were warm and friendly, but no job offers. In August her editor wrote for more Poodle-Doo stories. And then it was September.

Besides devoting its last two weeks to the Dublin Theatre Festival, September ushered in bitterness and resentment. Every slight of her lifetime, real or imagined, marched before the magnifying glass of her memory. As the month wore on, her activity faltered and drew to a halt—and all of her frustration began to center on the person of Terry Gallagher. It wouldn't have killed him to be kind to an actress down on her luck. It would have been so easy for him to have given her a mention that Sunday. How pleased she would have been, how grateful if he had just said, "Hello, Angela." But no, he'd chosen to clutch all the attention to himself. Someday soon he'd be a has-been, snubbed and discarded, Angela told herself one minute, rebuking herself the next that until he went to his grave, he would be able to continue treating actors any way he wished.

During the six days before the Festival began, Angela completed and mailed three Poodle-Doo stories. Her suitcases were packed, locked, and stacked away, ready to be moved. She gave a week's notice on the flat. She searched through her trunk for a gown and accessories. The choice fell on a white chiffon with ostrich feathers at throat and hem, elbow-length gloves, silver slippers, and the little fur.

The first night of the Festival she stood near the Gate Theatre in street clothes watching the audience move up the steps into the elegant little playhouse. When the last stragglers had disappeared into the foyer, she crossed North Frederick Street to catch a bus home.

The next two evenings she spent outside the Abbey and Olympia Theatres. Seven evenings remained.

On the fifth night a musical comedy was scheduled to open at the Gaiety. Angela arrived early in her white chiffon gown to take a position beside one of the pillars along the façade of the theater. Traffic threaded between the curbs lined solidly with cars, many with Northern license plates. How easy it would be for a bomber to park one with a trunk crammed with gelignite, Angela thought. Then she saw him coming, moving quickly toward her from Grafton Street—alone, as on the preceding evenings.

The slender sharpness in her hand felt cold as she stepped in front of him. Now that he was before her, purpose wavered. She couldn't deny anyone the "one more chance" she had always sought, but seldom found.

"Hello, Terry," she said, smiling.

His teeth flashed, "Hello, um—Angel Baby," he said, stepping around her.

If there had been any real doubts, his perfunctory manner and not remembering her proper name dispelled them. Like a single-toothed snake the side of her small fist struck the V of flesh showing above his black velvet tie.

Gallagher's mouth opened in surprise. The fingers of his right hand traced the cross of the silver hilt now set beneath his chin. Gently spilling blood onto the whiteness of his embroidered shirt, he sank slowly to his knees, his eyes now focused finally on Angela. At last, Angela Janis had Terry Gallagher's complete and undivided attention.

The man on the phone wanted to steal the horses . . .

THE DESPERATE THEFT

by STEPHEN WASYLYK

As Hoke Beckett finished his second cup of coffee and reached for his luncheon check, he heard his name. He looked up to see Maxine beckoning.

"Call for you, Hoke," she said, handing him the phone at the restaurant's reservations desk. "Larry Gitlow at the radio station."

Beckett held the phone to his ear. "I'm listening, Larry."

"Since I'm sure you never listen to our talk program, you'd better

come over here," said Gitlow. "I have a tape any detective-lieutenant would be interested in. If the man was serious, you have only a few hours to keep him from committing a crime."

"What kind of crime?"

"Hearing is believing," said Gitlow. "Come over and listen to the tape."

Beckett swung into the local FM station's parking lot twenty minutes later and pulled up before the low red-brick building.

The phone-in talk show was Gitlow's latest innovation in his constant battle to keep the small station competitive with the larger ones covering Meridian County, and he had an erudite college type named Si Youngblood taking the calls and handling the discussions and gripes. Youngblood was good. He had an instinctive sense of when to be sympathetic and when to be insulting, and the midday program had become very popular.

Beckett found Gitlow behind his desk—a rack-shouldered young man with long sideburns, bright eyes, a halo of curly dark hair, and a long nose—his shirt sleeves were rolled up and his collar was open.

"You know we tape all calls, Hoke, and broadcast with a six-second delay so we can delete language that's out of line. We didn't cut this one because we had no reason. Youngblood took the call at twelve-forty-five. I made a copy from our master. Listen."

He punched a button on a small cassette-tape player on his desk.

Youngblood's voice was clear.

"Si Youngblood here. What's on your mind today?"

The other man's voice was a bit thick and muffled, as if he had neglected to speak directly into the mouthpiece. There was a hollow sound in the background.

"You've been talking about doing the things you want to do, right, Youngblood?"

Youngblood: "More or less, friend. All of us have things we'd like to do and intend to do, but for one reason or the other we put them off. Maybe we lack the nerve, the proper incentive, or the money. Be that as it may, we've been saying that we all ought to just sit down one day and say, hey, I'm going to do it."

Voice: "Yeah, well, I think you're right. If you're going to do something, do it. None of us is getting any younger, and the next thing you know, bang, you wake up dead and you never did it at all."

Youngblood: "That's one way to look at it. What little thing do you intend to do?"

Voice: "Steal the horses."

(Pause)

Youngblood: "I don't think I heard you right, friend."

Voice: "I'm going to steal the horses. I've always wanted them so I'm going to do it."

Youngblood: "What horses are those, friend?"

Voice: "They're beautiful. I guess they're just about the most beautiful horses I've ever seen."

Youngblood: "When do you intend to do this, friend?"

Voice: "Tonight. Listen, Youngblood, I've got to go."

Youngblood: "Wait, you can't . . . "

A click and a pause and then Youngblood's voice: "Well, people, I never did expect to hear from a horse rustler . . . "

Gitlow turned off the player and looked at Beckett. "Well?"

Beckett shook his head. "I have no idea of what he was talking about. I don't suppose you have any way to tell where the call came from?"

"Only that it was local, but that covers a lot of real estate."

"So it could be the immediate vicinity."

Gitlow smiled. "I know what you're driving at. I wondered where a man could find horses to steal in this community and then it came to me. The Meridian Horse Show. It opened today. We've been carrying the announcements all week."

Beckett nodded. "If the man wants beautiful horses, he'll find them there. I suppose I'll have to look into it." He held out his hand. "I'll need that tape."

Gitlow handed him the cassette. "I must tell you, Hoke, Youngblood draws a lot of far-out calls. My opinion is we turned up another flake."

"Maybe," said Beckett. "But he's made the threat and I can't just walk away from it."

Beckett drove back to the Municipal Building slowly. Steal the horses, the man had said. But how? You couldn't just pick up a horse and run with it. Nor could you simply leap astride and gallop off down the highway with police cars in pursuit. You *could* load a horse into a van, which would conceal it, and then tow it away. But, Beckett

thought, the man had plainly said *horses*. How could anyone steal more than one horse at a horse show? If it was to *be* at the show?

Perhaps the man wasn't talking about real horses.

But then what other kind were there?

Beckett grinned. There were sawhorses. But sawhorses were neither beautiful nor valuable enough to steal.

He parked behind the Municipal Building, entered the back door, and made his way down the corridor to the marble-floored lobby at the front of the building.

Just inside the door was a small newsstand. Arms folded, a stocky middle-aged man in a plaid shirt and red baseball cap leaned against the counter.

He straightened when he saw Beckett approach. "Anything I can do for you, Hoke?"

"A copy of the *Meridian Weekly*, Manny."

Beckett flipped to the entertainment section and found the ad for the horse show, listing the schedule of events in one column, the other attractions alongside, then closed the paper and reached into his pocket for a coin.

Manny was leaning against the magazine rack behind him, his arms folded, staring blankly ahead.

Beckett frowned. That wasn't like Manny.

"Hey," he said. "Stop worrying. Just because Commissioner Powers entered that resolution to eliminate the newsstand because he thinks it's undignified in the lobby of the Municipal Building doesn't mean it'll pass."

Manny shrugged. "I guess it don't matter, Hoke. Anything else I can get for you?"

"A couple of packs of spearmint gum and your usual smile."

He paid Manny and started up the stairs. The news dealer lived straight and worked hard, which should have guaranteed something of a good life, but Manny had always been dogged by luck that might have made another man wake up screaming during the night. Maybe Manny did that, but behind the newsstand during the day he was one of the most pleasant people Beckett had ever known.

He bypassed his office and went into the one marked CAPTAIN TOLLEY.

Tolley was tall and bald, his angular face as smooth as when he had

been a patrolman twenty-five years before.

Beckett placed the gum on his desk. "For your granddaughter."

Tolley smiled. "She already has a six months' supply, thanks to you."

Beckett held up the tape cassette Gitlow had given him. "Let's go down to the lab. I'd like you to hear this and I want Nicholson, the mad scientist, to wave his magic wand over it."

"Is it important?"

"Well, it isn't the latest release by The Lavender Long Johns."

They took the elevator to the basement and walked down the dingy corridor.

"How does Nicholson stand it down here?" asked Tolley.

Beckett grinned. "He likes it. He would like it even better if the maintenance people let the cobwebs alone."

Nicholson was young, tall, and thin, with thick spectacles and long hair. Beckett had always had the feeling he'd cut his teeth on a test tube because his father headed the chemistry department at the university. Beckett handed him the cassette. "Play this."

Nicholson stared at him. "How did you know I had a player?"

"Because the mice came to me and complained that you listen to classical music all day. We have political mice. They prefer patriotic music."

Nicholson shook his head, pulled a small player from his desk drawer, and slid the cassette into place.

When it was finished, Tolley asked, "He's going to steal *horses?*"

"That's what he said."

"The horse show?"

"It seems likely." Beckett showed him the ad in the paper. "It mentions a pair of matched bays."

"How could anyone steal a pair of horses at a horse show?"

"I don't know but we'd better beef up security there tonight." Beckett motioned to Nicholson. "Take that tape and see what more it will tell you."

"Anything in particular you want to know?"

"The man's name and address would be nice, but I'll settle for whatever you get."

"I'll have to take it into the city-police sound lab."

"Go," said Beckett. "And call me as soon as you have anything

worthwhile."

Beckett and Tolley walked back toward the elevator and Tolley pressed the button. "Spocker will handle it. I can't get excited about someone threatening to steal some horses. It sounds too weird to be true, but even if it is I need you more for a budget committee meeting. You have a way of convincing those commissioners."

"If you remember, the last time I threatened to bust one of them in the nose," said Beckett.

Tolley grinned. "Exactly what I mean, and we *did* get the money for Nicholson's lab, didn't we?"

They came out of the meeting at six and made their way through the deserted halls to the third-floor detective headquarters.

A round-faced, heavy-set detective, massaging a foot propped on his open desk drawer, a plastic cup of coffee in his other hand, was talking to Rozinski and Keller, the two detectives who manned the second shift.

Limping slightly, he followed Beckett and Tolley into Beckett's office.

"What happened to your foot, Spocker?" asked Tolley.

"One of those damned horses stepped on my toe," said Spocker. "I think he broke it."

"You should have gone to the hospital," said Tolley.

"I wanted to report to you first. I talked to everybody about the phone call and I think they're still laughing. They all said such a thing was impossible. No stranger could come in there and steal a horse—there's no way they could get away with it. So I told them it didn't have to be a stranger, it could be someone who worked there. They still laughed. The guy in charge said it had to be some kind of joke. So where do we go from here?"

"I'll tell you where we go," said Tolley. "We go home after I tell the dispatcher to have the place patrolled all night."

Spocker limped to the door after him. "I'm going to the hospital."

"How could you let such a dumb thing happen?" asked Beckett.

"It wasn't my fault. The horse hates cops."

"How did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"His name. It's Voleur, which means thief in French." Spocker sighed. "I tell you, Hoke, they come at us from all directions."

Beckett waved him out.

He glanced at his watch. Nicholson hadn't called yet but that wasn't unusual. The lab man forgot time when he became involved.

Beckett decided to wait. He had nowhere to go and nothing to do other than have dinner and return to his empty apartment. Ever since his wife died, he found himself spending more and more time in the office, and he told himself more than once he should put a stop to it. But waiting for Nicholson's call was legitimate and not an excuse.

It was almost seven when Nicholson came through the door, a portable tape player in one hand and several reels of tape in the other.

"I'm glad you're here," he said. "It's easier to demonstrate than explain." He placed the recorder and the reels on the desk. "I borrowed this because of the higher fidelity. We took the original tape and separated the sounds as well as we could with filters." He held up the reels. "Listen to these."

Behind the distorted speaking voice of the caller, the first one consisted of a dull hollow roar, punctuated by heavy regular thuds and clicks, some rapid, some slow, all beginning softly, rising in volume, then fading. At the high end of the register Beckett could hear voices.

"That was the background noise," said Nicholson. "We eliminated the announcer's segments, spliced the remaining bits together, and duplicated them several times to get a pattern. What does it sound like to you?"

"A big room with a lot of people walking by," said Beckett.

Nicholson nodded. "That's what we thought. A bus terminal or the lobby of a building or a department store. One thing is certain—the man called from a public phone. Either he didn't close the door or it was one of those clamshell types."

He replaced the reel with another. "Now this one."

The sounds were higher-pitched now, the background voices occasionally intelligible. Beckett leaned forward.

"*After lunch—*"

"*So I said to her—*"

A woman's voice, very clear: "*I hope he lets us out early.*"

Individual voices. Snatches of conversations that didn't fit together.

Beckett shrugged. "Makes no sense to me. The call came in at twelve-forty-five."

Nicholson extracted a roll of paper from his coat pocket. "Here's something we *can* use. This is the man's voiceprint. If you ever locate a suspect, we can get a positive identification."

Beckett glanced at the jagged lines. If he ever located a suspect. If anything happened tonight that would cause him to go looking for one.

He came from behind the desk wearily, telling himself he really hadn't expected Nicholson to perform a miracle. "Let's lock it up in the lab and go home. All we can do now is wait."

Neither the old Charlie Chan film on the late show nor the uneasy feeling was enough to keep Beckett from falling asleep in his easy chair. The film had ended and the empty television screen was flickering when the shrill ring of the phone brought him up through several layers of sleep.

He reached for the receiver and winced as he flexed his cramped muscles.

Tolley's voice was grim. "The man stole the horses just as he said, but they weren't real horses at all. They were a couple of valuable pieces out of the art collection at the Carew mansion."

"I should have thought of that," said Beckett.

"So should I," said Tolley. "And we both should have given the whole thing a lot more attention, because he killed Mrs. Carew to get them. Meet me there fast."

Beckett parked alongside the police cruiser in front of the turreted stone mansion that stood on the highest point in Meridian County. It had been built by Foxworth Carew, who had made money when men were allowed to keep it and had passed it on to Mrs. Billingham Carew, his granddaughter, who had reigned as the queen of Meridian County society.

As he closed his door, Tolley's car pulled in beside his, and further down the long driveway an ambulance and another car were drawing up. They ran up the broad steps and were met at the door by a uniformed patrolman who led them into an enormous entrance hall, through a large room, and down a long carpeted hall to a room at the end of the house. As he walked, Beckett felt a sense of intrusion, thinking wryly that the cost of the grand piano alone would have paid the rent on his apartment for two years.

The patrolman stopped and motioned them into the room. A luxurious red rug covered the floor. One wall was lined with books that framed a huge stone fireplace, before which deep soft leather furniture was grouped. Placed diagonally in one corner was a large walnut desk that gave the person sitting at it a magnificent view of the rolling countryside through French doors. The wall opposite the desk was covered by paintings, each individually lighted, and a row of museum-like glass cases occupied the center of the room.

The top of one of the cases lay broken on the floor. A few feet from it was the body of a grey-haired woman dressed in a full-length pink satin robe. Beyond her outstretched hand was a revolver.

The other patrolman was standing awkwardly before a couple seated on the sofa. The man was bald, his face thin, his nose aquiline. The woman was easily twenty years his junior. Both were in dressing gowns. Standing alongside the fireplace were an elderly couple and a young woman.

Tolley indicated the body on the floor. "Mrs. Carew?"

The patrolman nodded. "They told me she often had trouble sleeping and would come down here to read for a while. She would generally fall asleep in one of the chairs. Either she was asleep when the guy broke in through that door over there or she walked in on him after he was already here. Her son, Mr. Carew, heard a shot and came running down. He found her and called us."

Beckett pointed at the empty case. "The horses?"

The patrolman nodded. "A couple of bronze statues. Mr. Carew says they're worth a fortune."

Beckett walked to the open French door. One pane of glass had been broken so that a hand thrust inside could unlatch the lock. He stepped through onto a small patio edged with shrubbery. The night was cool and clear, the distant lights from the valley pinpricks of brightness.

They're beautiful. I've always wanted them, the man had said.

Whatever they were, he had wanted them bad enough to kill for them. That bit of madness hadn't come across in the phone call.

The horses, Mrs. Carew's son explained, were a pair of bronze sculptures about a foot long and ten inches high. His father had acquired them on a trip to China fifty or sixty years earlier. Perhaps

nineteen hundred years ago the horses had been so prized among the rich and powerful of the Eastern Han Dynasty that they were usually interred with their owners. They were considered priceless.

Beckett and Tolley had nothing to work with. There were no prints on either the broken glass or the gun, which had belonged to Mrs. Carew. It was one of several in the house, and Mrs. Carew had been quite capable of handling any of them.

At breakfast at Maxine's, Tolley said, "The big question is how the man knew about the horses. Any fool would know that there would be plenty worth stealing in that house, which incidentally has no security whatsoever—I'm surprised someone hasn't taken a truck up there and emptied the place long ago. But he went there specifically for the horses."

"He had to have seen them sometime," said Beckett. "They caught his eye and he fell in love with them."

Tolley grimaced. "Do you know what that means? Hundreds of people who have been in that house have to be checked out—friends of the Carews, servants, tradespeople, maintenance men."

"We can cut that down a little. Eliminate the friends. They're not the type to listen to Youngblood's talk show, much less call him up. It's possible, of course, but not likely. Also, I don't think we have to go back too far." Beckett grinned. "Time has a way of dulling desire. The man saw those horses fairly recently. Let's send Spocker out there to make a list of people who might have been in that room within the last year. I'll stay with the one thing we have, the tapes that Nicholson made."

Nicholson gave Beckett a pair of earphones. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the sounds. After what might have been the fifteenth or twentieth time he ran the tape, he heard a word buried deep in the background—a ghost of a word, slurred and faint. By itself it meant nothing, but placed within the context of the other words it made sense.

He removed the earphones and turned to Nicholson. "I'm going out and call you on the phone. Record it. You have twenty minutes to get set up."

At twelve-forty-five, Beckett dialed, requested Nicholson's extension,

and asked, "Are you recording?"

"Yes," said Nicholson.

"I'm going to hold the phone out to give you a minute or two of background. Then I want you to compare it to that on the Youngblood call."

When he brought the phone back to his ear, he asked, "Enough?"

Nicholson's voice held an edge of excitement. "I think you may have it. Where are you?"

"None of your business," said Beckett. He hung up and looked around. The lobby of the Municipal Building was crowded with people flowing toward the various accesses to the interior. Beckett joined the stream mounting the staircase and went down the hall to Tolley's office.

Tolley set aside a sheaf of papers. "Any luck with the tapes?"

Beckett nodded. "The call came from the lobby here."

Tolley's eyes narrowed. "Are you sure?"

"Sure enough. I caught the word 'jury' on the tape. There's only one likely place where that word is part of an ordinary conversation because a great part of our lunchtime crowd is made up of jurors from the courtrooms on the second floor. Someone also said, 'I hope he lets us out early,' which is something the presiding judge has been known to do when a jury pool is no longer required for the day."

Tolley scrubbed at his chin. "It's possible—but a great many people pass through that lobby every day."

"Wait. It struck me as odd that the call came from a public phone. Where are people when they listen to Youngblood? At home, at work, in cars. At home or at work, they have easy access to a phone. That would seem to leave only a driver who would have to stop at a public phone. But chances are it would be alongside a curb somewhere. The call would be more likely to be made by someone already here, someone in this building who listens to the radio and has easy access to the public phones in the lobby. The only people in that lobby all day long are the guard at the information desk and Manny at the newsstand. The guard doesn't have a radio, Manny does. He keeps it under the counter, turned low. I've heard it."

Tolley came around the corner of his desk, moving fast. "Let's go talk to him."

"He isn't there," said Beckett. "That retired friend of his, Wilson, is

taking care of the stand."

"Then we talk to Wilson," Tolley said.

Wilson was slight and bony, his eyes a young blue in his old face.

"Manny's on vacation," he said. "He came to me yesterday and said he wasn't feeling well and had to take a rest. He asked me to handle the stand. It was short notice, but it isn't as if I have anything else to do."

"Where did he go?" asked Beckett.

"He didn't say. You know Manny, he keeps a lot to himself. He said something about it was time the dice rolled his way, so I figure he went to Las Vegas. We talked a lot about going there."

Beckett and Tolley walked back to Tolley's office.

"I'll have the Las Vegas police check," said Tolley. "If he's there, they can pick him up for questioning. Wherever he is, I have an idea he sold those horses to finance the trip."

"Maybe," said Beckett thoughtfully.

The Las Vegas police couldn't find him, nor did any of the airline flights leaving that morning have a record of him. By evening, Beckett drove to the small apartment building where Manny and Wilson lived in separate apartments. The superintendent let him into Manny's apartment.

Manny lived in two small, poorly furnished rooms. Incongruous against one faded wall was a white plastic etagere, its shelves loaded with small china figurines, none of them expensive, some so badly rendered they were almost grotesque. Beckett went through the bedroom closet and found one out-of-style suit, a limp sport coat, and several pairs of slacks. On the floor was a battered suitcase.

He found a prescription bottle when he examined the bathroom. Empty, it was standing on the sink, and Beckett recognized the trade name typed on the label as a pain killer. The prescription had been issued by the Meridian County hospital.

Beckett drove there.

They told him Manny was on the sixth floor.

The middle-aged nurse at the station on six flicked her eyes over his I.D. without interest. "You can't see him without the permission of his doctor."

Beckett pushed the phone toward her. "Then get the doctor."

She spun out the numbers and handed him the phone. "Dr. Scoleri."

Beckett introduced himself and explained his mission. A deep voice at the other end of the wire said, "I can't permit you to upset him. He's scheduled for major surgery in the morning."

"What major surgery?"

"He has a brain tumor. Tests we made today confirmed our diagnosis."

"What are his chances?"

There was a pause. "Perhaps fifty-fifty, but even if he survives, there's a strong possibility he will lose his sight."

Beckett felt a little sick. Manny's luck, he thought.

"Listen to me," he said. "A woman is dead and it appears he killed her. I don't like to force the issue, but I must talk to him or we may never know how it happened."

There was another pause. "Let me speak to the nurse."

The nurse listened, said "Yes, doctor," and hung up.

"You may talk to him for five minutes," she said.

She led Beckett down the hall and pushed open a door.

Manny was lying on the bed, his eyes closed.

"Hello, Manny," said Beckett.

Manny opened his eyes and smiled. "It didn't take you long, Hoke."

"I'd just like to know why you did it."

Manny sighed. "A man can't go through life without a touch of beauty, Hoke."

Beckett said nothing.

"You know what my life has been, Hoke. One thing after another so that I never had an extra dollar. It seemed that the older I got, the less I had. I always wanted so many things—a nice home, car, clothes. But I could never afford any of them and I tried to live with that. I did the best I could with what I had." He paused. "Did you see my collection?"

Beckett thought of the figurines. "Very nice."

Manny's voice was low. "I always thought so, but when this tumor thing turned up I saw it for what it was. Junk. I got a little mad, Hoke. God, I thought, to live a whole life and have nothing to show for it except junk. Why couldn't I have just one thing that was beautiful and

valuable and that no one else had?

"I saw the horses last summer. The Municipal Building was closed because it was a holiday and a man I knew wanted me to help him reset some flagstones at the Carew house. The doors were open and I stepped inside and looked around." His voice became a whisper. "They were the most beautiful things I'd ever seen, Hoke, and I couldn't forget them. And then yesterday Youngblood was talking about doing things you'd like to do and I thought, why not?"

"Where are the horses now?" asked Beckett.

Manny gestured toward the closet.

Beckett opened the door and found a small heavy canvas bag. He placed it on the table by the foot of Manny's bed and zipped it open, pulled out two bronze horses, and stood them alongside the bag. Even in the dim light of the hospital room, their magnificent artistry was evident. Each with a foreleg lifted, heads held high, backs arched, and tails plumed, they stood proudly, covered with the patina of age—the crowning achievement of an unknown Chinese artist nineteen hundred years before.

Manny's voice was husky. "Aren't they beautiful, Hoke?" He waved a hand. "Take them back where they belong, but tell Mrs. Carew I'm not sorry I stole them."

Beckett stared at him. "Mrs. Carew is dead. She was shot last night. We thought that you . . . "

Manny sat up slowly, horror in his eyes. "*Me!*" He shook his head. "Not me, Hoke! I couldn't do anything like that! When I broke into that room I thought all I had to do was lift off the top of the case, take the horses, and run, but I couldn't get the damned top loose. I was working at it and sweating when I heard someone coming. I hid behind a desk in the corner. Mrs. Carew came in. She didn't notice the broken window. She took a book and sat down in one of the those big chairs. When she stopped turning pages, I realized she'd fallen asleep, and I started to sneak out, but I thought I'd try once more. And the top of the case came loose this time. I stood it up against the leg of the case, took the horses, and started out. My foot hit the glass top, knocked it over, and it broke. I heard her say, 'Who's there?' but by that time I was through the door." He passed a trembling hand across his upper lip. "I didn't kill her, Hoke!"

The nurse returned. "You'll have to leave."

Beckett cleared his throat. "Manny, I'm going to send Nicholson and Tolley over with a tape recorder. You tell them what you told me, but don't worry about a thing. Whoever killed Mrs. Carew is sitting around feeling very nervous. I'll see to it that whoever it is sweats a good deal more before I break the news. In the meantime, I can't think of a better place for these horses than here with you."

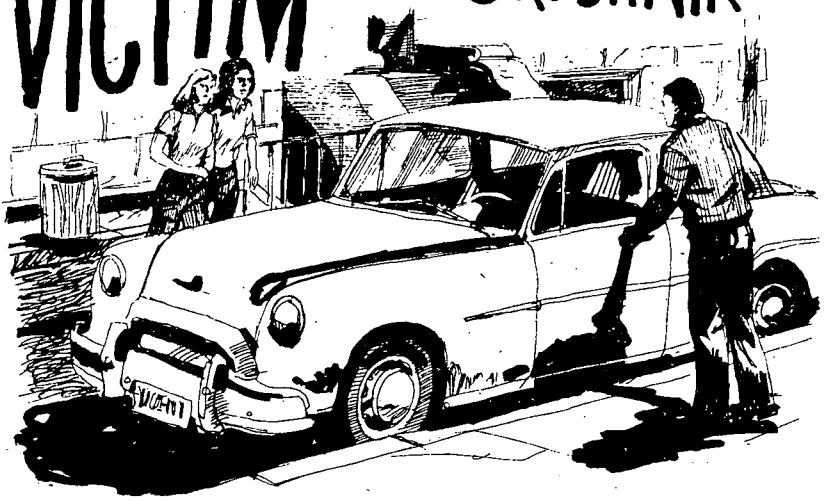
On the steps of the hospital, Beckett paused and looked up at the Carew mansion, a small pattern of lights in the darkness. Someone there had seen an opportunity, taken it, and killed Mrs. Carew.

As Spocker had said, they came at you from all directions.

They were tough girls looking for a ride . . .

THE EXPERT VICTIM

by A.F. ORESHNIK



It was almost nine in the evening when he left the building. It had been dark for some time and pedestrian traffic was light. He waited for a few cars to pass, then crossed the street to where his ancient car was parked.

He didn't notice the two young women until one of them spoke. "Mister?" she said.

He was unlocking the driver's-side door. He looked at her over the

roof of his rusty sedan. She was about twenty, he guessed, and blonde. She stood about five-foot-four. Behind her was a slender black girl about the same age and four or five inches taller. Both wore faded jeans and white blouses.

"Yes?" he said, pausing with his hand on the door handle.

"Can you give us a lift?"

"Where you headed?" he asked.

"Santa Monica and La Brea," the blonde said.

He was planning to stop at a supermarket on the corner of Sunset and La Brea on his way home. Their destination was only a few blocks out of his way. "Sure," he said. "Hop in."

He got in and reached across the seat to unlock the other door. The girls had a muffled conversation about who would sit where, then they both got into the front seat with the blonde in the middle. Her arms were bare. High above her left elbow he saw a tiny tattoo of a butterfly.

The world was certainly changing fast. He could remember how his parents had screamed when, at age seventeen, he had come home with a tattoo on his arm. Now, apparently, it was O.K. for girls to wear them.

He put the car into gear and pulled into traffic. After a couple of blocks, he turned onto a side street where he could make better time. He had hardly turned the corner into the dark tree-lined tunnel when the blonde girl said, "Pull over!"

He braked and pulled to the curb. The blonde was holding an ugly hunting knife with both hands, the point twelve inches from his throat. "Give us your money," she said.

He was too surprised to be afraid. He had never thought of himself as a mugging victim. Other people, sure, but not him.

"Give us your money," the blonde said again.

"If I had any money, do you think I'd be driving this bucket of bolts?" he asked. "Hell, I just got out of the joint. You two just got out yourselves, right?"

The girls exchanged glances. "How'd you know that?" the black girl demanded.

"That's where most salt-and-pepper partnerships get started," he said. "Except for the Army, prison or a reformatory are about the only places the races are forced to trust each other. Sometimes. This is the

first time you tried something like this, isn't it?"

"What makes you think that?" the blonde wanted to know.

"Because you don't know what you're doing," he said.

"What do you know about it?" the black girl asked.

"Everything," he answered. "I'm an expert." He nodded to the blonde. "Take the way you hold that knife," he said. "It's a foot away from me. You should hold it against my throat or with the point digging into my side. And one of you should have gotten into the back seat. A sucker is less likely to try something if someone is out of sight behind him."

The blonde lowered the knife. "That makes sense," she said.

"You bet it does," he told her. "And a couple of other things—"

"Yeah," the black girl cut in.

"You two aren't dressed for a mugging."

"How do you mean?" the blonde girl asked.

"Your clothes are too light. What if you had to use that knife? If you're close enough to use a knife, you're close enough to get blood all over yourself. You should wear dark colors that will hide bloodstains in case someone is stupid."

"What else?" the black girl asked. "You said a *couple* of other things."

"That's right. The other thing is, you're after money, not conversation. And you want to get it as soon as you can. So don't let a sucker start to talk. As soon as you get your knife against him, tell him not to say so much as a word or you'll cut his head off or rip out his guts. Paint a real messy picture in his head. Tell him to give you his wallet and not say a word or you'll turn him into a piece of dead meat. If you do it right, he'll be too scared to try to talk, too scared to delay you, too scared to do anything but give you his money. And he'll be too scared to notice that your mouth is as dry as his is."

The black girl had opened the car door and was getting out. The blonde slid across the seat to follow her. She had put the knife out of sight into her handbag.

"What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Change our clothes," the blonde said.

He nodded. "Stay out of trouble," he said.

"Yeah, you too. Don't pick up any more hitchhikers," the blonde replied.

He pulled away as soon as she slammed the door. After stopping at the supermarket, as originally planned, he drove home. He was whistling when he let himself into his apartment.

His wife called from the kitchenette, "You sound like you had a good day. Did you get much writing done?"

"I finished the chapter that was giving me trouble," he called back.

She came into the living room and handed him a drink. "The one with the mugging in it? The one you didn't think was convincing enough?"

He tasted the drink and smiled in appreciation. "I think it's convincing enough now," he said. "In fact, I'm sure of it."

Brock's vacation became a busman's holiday . . .

PAINT THE TOWN WHITE

by ROBERT COLBY

It was soon after dawn when the 747 slid into Miami International and taxied toward the terminal. Brock had awakened only minutes before, recalling pieces of a violent dream he'd had during the flight. He was being taken out to sea in a fast boat. It was deep night and he was lying in the cockpit aft, heavily chained from head to foot, the chain fastened to a sizeable anchor that was intended to insure his permanent repose at the bottom of the ocean.

When the boat slowed in the trough of towering swells, men whose vengeful faces were vaguely familiar lifted him high above the rail and heaved him overboard. In a swath of moonlight he saw the roiling water rush toward him. And then he was awake, peering out at the dawn-pale city as the jet sank over it for the landing.

Moving down the aisle in the surge of alighting passengers, Brock wondered if the dream was portentous. Probably not, he decided, since on this trip he didn't plan to involve himself in any hazardous venture. He was just going to laze around the beach at Seahaven, north of Miami, and take life as it came.

At the exit door a blonde stewardess said her mechanical farewells: "I hope you had a pleasant flight—please fly with us again. . ."

It had been 14 degrees up North when he left, pedestrians wrapped to the ears and bending into a frigid wind that watered their eyes and snapped their breath away in frosty plumes. But here it was nudging 80 and people were wearing summer clothes. A warm breeze, fragrant with tropic scents, embraced him as he left the plane.

After a leisurely breakfast at the terminal, Brock rented a small inconspicuous sedan and drove along the coast to Seahaven. A city whose population swelled to above 100,000 in the winter season, it was hemmed by miles of broad pristine beaches. Bleached almost as white as the snows up North, these acres of sand were sprinkled with tall coconut palms and the sun-loved bodies of bronzed bathers sprawled at the edge of the turquoise Atlantic.

After miles of hotels and public beaches, Brock came to a residential area and braked to read a sign attached to a redwood fence surrounding a two-story house resembling a Swiss chalet:

FOR RENT. TOP FLOOR OF HOUSE. ATTRACTIVELY FURNISHED.
2 BEDROOMS. OCEAN VIEW, FINE BEACH. INQUIRE WITHIN.

It was an immaculate little house, painted a soft yellow and ringed with shrubs and flowers. He went up the walk and pressed the bell. A woman in her late twenties answered the door. She wore an aqua pants suit and had tawny hair that fell to her shoulders. Her fragile face had the even mocha tan of long exposure, though the bridge of her nose was peeling. She would have been very pretty if she didn't look so wretched—her grey-green eyes were pink-rimmed and puffy, as if from a too-late night or too many tears.

"What is it?" she said wearily.

"I read your sign," he answered.

She almost came to life. "You're interested in renting for the winter season?"

He shook his head. "My work requires a great deal of travel and I only have time for a brief vacation."

"I'd prefer to rent for the season."

"I'll pay a month in advance, whether I use it or not. Could I take a look at it?"

She compressed her lips, shifted her weight. "Well—I'm slightly disorganized just now—it's so early in the morning."

He shrugged. "Some other time perhaps." He turned to leave.

"Wait," she said, "I'll get the keys."

She returned in seconds and led the way up an outside staircase. Sorting keys on a ring, she paused before a door of paneled wood. "Are you alone?" she asked him.

"Quite alone."

"It's a large apartment for a bachelor to handle," she said.

He grinned. "I'm a veteran housekeeper and I like plenty of room."

She opened the door and they entered a living room with easy chairs, an immense sectional sofa with a table of polished driftwood, a fireplace, and a bar. The room was crowned by a cathedral ceiling and encased on three sides by walls of glass. There was a sweeping view of the coast, the ocean so near and encompassing Brock felt almost as if he were adrift on it.

He opened a sliding glass door, stepped out to a broad deck, and was greeted by the unearthly sound of the sea. An L-shaped set of stairs descended from the deck to the sand.

Brock inhaled a deep breath of briny air, let it go with a sigh of delight, and said, "It's charming, just right for me. I'll take it."

She shot him a puzzled glance. "But you haven't seen the bedrooms or the kitchen."

"A kitchen is a kitchen. And I only need one bedroom if the bed is large and comfortable—"

"The beds are king-sized and extremely comfortable," she told him. "Both rooms face the ocean. But for just a month the apartment would be more expensive—a thousand dollars and a five-hundred-dollar deposit against damage to the furniture."

"Done," he said. "Make out a receipt and I'll give you the fifteen

hundred in cash. What's your name? Mine's Brock."

"Iris Guthrie," she answered, and studied him with a small frown of uncertainty. "Perhaps I should know a little something about you, Mr. Brock."

"All right," he agreed.

"I live below this apartment and I'm a widow," she explained. "I have to be discriminating about choosing a tenant."

"I tread lightly and I don't toss wild parties," he replied.

"I'm sure you don't." The fragment of a smile warmed her face but did not relieve the moody lament in her eyes. "May I ask what sort of business you're in?"

"If you must have a label for me you might say that I'm a tax collector. There's a tax on evil, and I'm the devil's own collector."

She snorted. "You're joking."

"If you say so." He gazed at her steadily. "I hunt people who are engaged in larcenous activities, to put it nicely. I take pleasure and profit from making them pay an appropriate penalty for their crimes."

She nodded. "You're a secret investigator for the government. Is that it?"

"I'm a free-lance operator, an agent at large," he said. "I'm afraid that's all I can tell you."

"Are you good at your job?"

"Why should that matter to you?" He watched her closely.

She hesitated. "I have a reason but for now I just want to know if you're good at what you do—hunting criminals?"

"Without false modesty—I'm the best." He beamed but she turned from him and gazed out across the water where a blue-and-white fishing boat dipped over the waves, churning seaward.

"Three weeks ago," she said, "on a lovely day like this, my husband Troy went fishing a few miles offshore with his lawyer. That was the last time I ever saw him. There was a gasoline fire and the boat exploded. Nothing was left but a few charred pieces of debris."

"Rough for you, Iris. I'm sorry."

She sighed. "I've been a regular basket case. Last night I dreamed that Troy was caught in the wreckage down on the bottom, his body swaying in the current. Sharks came and began to tear him apart and—it was dreadful! I woke up screaming—"

He nodded. "Strange. I had a dream on the plane that I was taken

out to sea at night in a boat and hurled overboard."

Her eyes widened. "That dream could be a sign. You know, there's something about you. You didn't arrive here on a flying saucer, did you?"

He smiled.

She was thoughtful. "Listen, you can have this place for as long as you like and it won't cost you a cent if you'll investigate and find out what happened to my husband and Darrell Fraker, his lawyer. I think they were murdered."

"Why do you think that?"

She brought cigarettes from her purse and offered him one. He declined but gave her a light. They settled into lounge chairs.

"All right," she said. "From the beginning. Troy had a forty percent interest in a discount store—one of those places where you can buy almost anything at just a little above cost. He and his partner, Steve Kroll, even had a car lot where you could buy used cars way under market price. Both are still operating and Steve Kroll has it all now.

"Business was good and Troy had a fine income—he was able to buy this place and a cabin cruiser without batting an eye. So I was surprised a couple of months ago when he told me he wasn't getting along with Steve and had decided to sell out his interest for $750,000."

She sighed. "When I pressed him for the reason, he said Kroll was buying most of the merchandise for the store from a crooked outfit and though Troy hadn't been able to discover who was supplying the stuff he was certain most of the stuff was stolen. He said Steve knew it but didn't care because he was getting it for a fraction of what he had been paying legitimate suppliers."

"That's a new one," Brock mused, "pushing hot merchandise over the counters of a discount store. It must be mighty profitable. O.K., let's nail the rest of it down. Did Troy unload his forty percent to Kroll for three quarters of a million?"

"Yes, and it wasn't a bad settlement because there was no real estate involved—the building is leased. Anyway, on the very day that Troy went out on the boat and never came back, he and Darrell Fraker went to Kroll's office at the store and closed the deal. Troy signed the papers after Darrell approved them; the signing was witnessed by a notary public."

"What happened to the money?"

She shook her head. "I don't know."

"You don't know? Who does?"

"Nobody who's telling. Because Troy didn't trust Kroll he insisted that the money be paid in cash. It was delivered to the store by armored truck and turned over to Troy in the presence of witnesses—the accountant for the store and the security chief. Accompanied by a store guard, Troy and Darrell carried the bills in two suitcases to Troy's car."

"Incredible," said Brock. "A cashier's check would have been as good as cash and much safer. It makes no sense at all that your husband would risk carrying all that green. So what happened after they drove off with the money?"

She shrugged. "I would have thought they would've taken the money to the bank, but it was never deposited and the police haven't been able to trace it. Wild as it seems, Troy must have gone directly to the boat with $750,000 in cash."

Brock considered. "Did he mention that he was demanding cash from Kroll?"

"No. He just said they were meeting to close the deal and then he planned to take Darrell out fishing."

Brock stood and crossed to the deck railing, gazing absently at a freighter steaming south along the coast. "The most obvious answer is that somebody knew your husband had the cash. He was robbed and murdered for it and his lawyer got hit because he was a witness."

"I think that's exactly the way it was," said Iris. "The police are investigating that theory, but so far there isn't a single clue. According to their reasoning, Troy and Darrell took the money aboard the boat and when they were a few miles offshore someone who had been hiding below shot them both dead, then set fire to the cruiser and took off with the cash in the outboard Troy kept on deck as a lifeboat."

"Maybe," said Brock, "but unless your husband was running for his life with his lawyer in tow, I don't think he'd take that kind of money out to sea with him. Do you have a legal right to that seven hundred and fifty grand?"

"Oh, yes, absolutely. Troy left me everything in his will."

"You have to understand, Iris, I have no official authority to nose around in this business. My success, not to mention my hide, depends on strict secrecy."

"I won't say a word to anyone," she said earnestly. "But if you want

some help, a fellow by the name of Cort Comar, who was Troy's best friend, is a captain in the National Guard. He's offered to round up a couple of his toughest buddies from the Guard and turn Kroll every way but loose until he gets some answers. It would only take a phone call."

"We'll see," Brock said. "I prefer to work alone. And if I've given the impression that I'm a shining knight who risks life and limb for fair maidens in distress let me hasten to destroy that illusion. Like your Uncle Sam, I always collect my tax off the top."

"Oh?" said Iris.

"However," Brock continued, "this tropic air has gone to my head, and I'm in a generous mood. So should I recover the seven hundred and fifty grand for you, I'll take just a little more than ten percent off the top. Shall we say a hundred thousand?"

After a moment Iris said, "It sounds fair enough. I actually never expected to see a dime of that money."

"Neither did I." Brock grinned.

That same afternoon, following directions Iris had given him, Brock found Universal Discount Sales in a shopping center at the northwest edge of town. Although immense in area, the squat two-story building was extremely plain, drab as an Army PX. Adjacent to the store there was a used-car lot of considerable size, displaying the banner: Universal Discount Auto Sales.

Brock spent an hour browsing the store and the car lot. All the items on the first floor of Universal Discount were new—from refrigerators and TV sets to clothing and jewelry—while the second floor contained a limitless variety of used merchandise. The prices were remarkably low, especially for used articles in excellent condition. On the lot next door, late-model used cars could be purchased for well below average. And if even half the number of customers milling around in the store and on the lot were buying, business was booming.

Brock noted that Steve Kroll had his office on the second floor in the rear. He did not investigate the corridors of the inner sanctum, preferring to remain among the crowd of anonymous patrons. When he became thoroughly familiar with the layout and operation of the store, he went to the parking space where his rented black sedan sat in easy view of a private slot boldly lettered: STEPHEN P. KROLL, PRES. The

slot was occupied by a glistening white Thunderbird with a red-leather interior and more extras than an epic movie, including a radio-phone with its antenna sprouting from the rear deck.

With these affluent advertisements of himself, Stephen P. Kroll would be an easy man to tail, night or day.

Wearing a natty blue-grey business suit, Kroll sauntered toward the white T-bird shortly after 1:00 P.M., a dark-haired young woman at his side. Brock adjusted his binoculars and pulled Kroll in for close inspection. He was a stocky fortyish man with sharp black eyes and a bleak rough-cut face. His pretty companion had coal-black hair and a golden tan.

Brock followed them to a French restaurant, a dark leather-cushioned place where the silky-voiced waiters had expensive accents.

Universal closed at nine but Steve Kroll and his lady friend departed at seven. They led Brock, in Kroll's Thunderbird, to a beachside apartment building of considerable elevation and distinction. Here, the young woman gave Kroll a breezy wave and disappeared through the glass doors of the building. Brock fixed the address in his memory and drove at a cautious distance behind Kroll to an even grander, still more towering high-rise at the southern extreme of the coast. There, Kroll was swallowed up as he whisked the T-Bird down a ramp into a subterranean garage.

Parking in front, Brock entered the building and studied the roster of tenants. There were two penthouse apartments; Kroll had penthouse "A" on the top floor. Obeying a hunch, Brock stayed in his car to keep watch. It was a long wait. The hours limped past, climbing painfully toward midnight. But he was patient, for some of his best collections had been made after midnight.

At less than a minute past 1:00 A.M., a police car with a uniformed driver and two men in plainclothes drove up and braked a couple of spaces beyond where Brock was slumped in his seat. Shortly after, Steve Kroll, in casual clothes and carrying an attaché case, came down the steps from the building. As he drew near, a lean, tall, militant man who had been sitting in the back seat climbed out.

"Hello, Captain," Kroll said with a nod. "This is almost like being under arrest."

"All right, let's go," the captain said briskly. "You ride in back with the chief."

He bent into the front seat beside the driver and Kroll took his place next to a lumpy figure behind a cigar. When they drove off Brock was not far behind.

After a fast ride south along the main highway, they sped west, then turned into an area of wrecking yards, warehouses, and assorted minor-league manufacturing plants, all asleep in a grimy huddle along the narrow gloomy streets. Here Brock was forced to delay until the police car rounded a corner. Then he blacked his lights and chased through the darkness until he had the cruiser in view again. When after a series of turns it pulled up before what seemed an acre of unilluminated warehouse, he braked in the driveway of an auto junker, cut his motor, and took off on foot.

He moved silently, ducking into a doorway, then lingering in a pool of darkness at the corner of the warehouse. Now he could see their silhouettes as they slouched in the car, conversing inaudibly, chuckling as they passed a bottle of liquor.

An armed guard in a tan uniform stepped around the far side of the warehouse and beamed a powerful flash at the police car. Instantly the captain leaned out the front window and growled, "Kill that damn light, stupid!"

The flash winked off and the guard approached. "I'm sorry, Captain," he apologized. "I didn't know it was you, sir."

"All right, Arnie," the captain said. "As long as we're here you can go inside and take a break. Have some coffee."

"Thanks, Captain, I could use it." Arnie waved a salute and moved to a door near the center of the building. As he opened it a shaft of light fell from within. Then he disappeared and it was dark again.

Some five minutes later a monstrous tractor-trailer rumbled up, followed by another. Both rigs pulled in at the warehouse, the first briefly sounding an air horn. A huge door immediately rolled back and the trucks thundered through, the door sliding home again.

As if on cue the four men in the squad car climbed out, the tall captain unlocked the warehouse door, and they entered.

Brock quickly circled the building. It was wood-frame and windowless. Pausing, he reached for a pocket kit of tools and with a miniature brace and bit hand-drilled a small hole in the wall, then another beside

it. In the first opening he placed a tiny viewing gadget with a wide-angle lens, in the second a minuscule battery-powered listening device. Plugging the sound amplifier into his ear, he pressed his eye to the wide-angle peeper.

It was a vast room brilliantly lighted by fluorescents. Ringed about it were large open bins containing a jackpot of merchandise, including various large appliances—TV, stereo, and radio sets, typewriters, cameras, rifles, shotguns, and handguns. There were racks of clothing, several of them lush minks and sables. Well, thought Brock, most of the winter vacationers would be returning to the deep-freeze up North.

In the foreground was a wide section displaying bicycles, motorcycles, and several costly automobiles, used but gleaming with fresh paint. Standing beside them in easy range for viewing and listening were Steve Kroll, the captain of police, and his chief—the lumpy, cigar-chewing man from the back seat. In the nearest corner the uniformed driver of the patrol car and the warehouse guard, Arnie, sipped coffee and chewed doughnuts.

The two tractor-trailers had been halted in the middle of the barren cement floor and were being unloaded by half a dozen husky men in coveralls who transported the plethora of prize items to their bins on forklifts and dollies.

The captain cocked a finger at three shiny cars. "Those sweethearts are the same you picked out a couple of weeks ago. A Mercedes, a Porsche, and a Caddy, none of 'em more'n a year old. How about it, Steve? You like the job we did on those babies?"

Kroll shook his head. "Fantastic," he said with a smile of admiration. "The people who own them couldn't recognize them."

"No way at all," said the chief around his cigar.

"You got the papers on these wagons?" Kroll asked.

"Right here, Steve." The chief brought an envelope from his pocket and passed it to Kroll. "We gave our boy at the DMV a new set of numbers we got from matching wrecks and he shot the phony registrations right back to us." The chief plucked the cigar from his mouth, studied it, and looked up sharply at Kroll. "You got the cash?"

Kroll tucked the envelope with the registrations into a pocket and opened the attaché case he was carrying. Fingering the packets of bills inside he said, "Cash-and-carry, Chief, right?"

The chief cracked a grin. "After you select the goods you want from the shipment we're unloading, Steve, I'll add up the score and you can pay us off. We got mink and sable you wouldn't believe, snatched from an outfit in Jersey, the hoods tell me." He began to walk off, Kroll and the captain at his heels. "And we got a big tray of rings Benny remounted—diamonds and emeralds and—" His voice faded and Brock could no longer hear him.

When the transaction had been completed, the chief figured the tally and Kroll gave him a great stack of bills. Everyone shook hands and a bottle of Scotch was produced. Heavy slugs were poured into paper cups and after they had been emptied, the warehouse door rolled back and one of the trucks departed, laden with the stolen goods purchased by Kroll. Just behind, driven by the muscle boys in coveralls, were the three hot cars.

Trailing well behind, Brock was not surprised to see the caravan pull in at Universal Discount Sales. He watched through his binoculars as the truck unloaded behind the store and the trio of autos were driven onto the used-car lot.

Iris was up when he got there, lights glowing downstairs. Apparently she heard him, for in a minute she was at his door, dressed in lounging pajamas.

"I know it's late," she said, "but I can't sleep—may I come in?"

He was hungry and thirsty and they fixed sandwiches and tall glasses of gin and tonic. She asked him what he had been up to—and he told her, sparing no detail. They sat out on the deck. A breeze stirred gently and the moon reflected a mellow light.

"Don't you think it's strange," she said, "that the bodies of my husband and his lawyer were never found? Not even a trace."

"The ocean is miles deep in places out there, Iris."

"I know. But isn't it possible that Troy is still alive, that he and Darrell Fraker are being held somewhere?"

He put down his glass and sat for a moment peering into her face. "Honey, I doubt it. I know you want to keep hoping he's alive but—"

"Then you don't think I'll ever see him again?" she said.

He reached for her hand. "I think it's best to be prepared for the worst."

She closed her eyes. "I'm so awfully tired," she said.

"Perhaps you should try to get some sleep." He kissed her. "Come on—a different bed may help."

In the morning she kissed him sweetly, gratefully, and got up to make breakfast. Afterwards, as they walked along the beach he told her, "The game of cops and robbers may get a bit heavy from here on, and I think the next play will call for a couple of extras with a little muscle and a lot of guts. So if you want to arrange it I could use that good buddy of Troy's—the one who's a captain in the National Guard—I can't remember his name."

"Cort Comar. He's not short on muscle, he has guts and a half, and his pals in the Guard would follow him anywhere. He lives on a boat he and Troy once owned together and sailed all over the Caribbean. He loved Troy and swears he'll strangle whoever may have murdered him with his bare hands."

"Good. But if he's that eager he might go off on a personal vendetta before I'm set to move. So let *me* tell him about Kroll and the cops. You just say that I'm digging for the truth about your husband's disappearance and may need his help."

Cort Comar's fifty-footer was tied up at the Seahaven Marina and Brock was to meet him there at five-thirty. The boat was an old-timer in immaculate condition. White with green trim, broad of beam, and sturdy of construction, it appeared rugged and dependable rather than sleek and fast.

Dressed in fading whites and a weather-seasoned yachting cap, Comar was waiting on the afterdeck when Brock arrived. He grinned a welcome and beckoned Brock aboard. A big chesty man with pleasant features, he had a welter of black hair and a moustache. A reader of eyes, Brock decided Comar was one of those good-natured fun-loving men that other men attach themselves to because he was a cool cat who would be mighty dangerous in a fight.

Once he was up the ladder and on the gleaming teak deck Cort pumped his hand and they fell into facing chairs.

"The only big ears on this old chugger are mine," said Cort with a grin, "so I thought it would be a good spot to rap in private. Do you want a drink? We've got about anything you can name below."

"Thanks," said Brock. "Maybe later."

Comar stretched his long legs. "Iris has great faith in you, says you chase bad boys for the government, undercover investigations and the like."

"Iris has a lively imagination."

Cort flashed a smile. "She warned me not to expect a straight answer as to the nature of your work. Well, I'm sure it's pretty sensitive stuff."

Amused, Brock nodded solemnly. "Highly secret, I'm afraid." He wondered how Cort would react if he told him the truth.

"I understand your position and I'm not about to pry," Cort said. "It's only important for me to know that you're a pro who can call the shots. Then I'm ready to jump."

"In my game," Brock said truthfully, "you have to be a battle-wise veteran to live for very long."

"Now you're talking my language, friend. Hey, what do I call you?"

"Just Brock. Though I've been called a lot of other names."

Cort laughed. "Just Brock, huh? And probably that's not your real handle."

"Probably."

Cort's smile flickered and went out. "O.K., let's get down to business. I want to nail the one who got Troy so bad I can almost taste his blood. Have you got any leads?"

"I've turned up leads you wouldn't believe, Cort, and they all point to Steve Kroll. But I still don't have the answers."

Cort bent toward him, his eyes bright with anger. "It *had* to be Kroll," he said. "I never could buy that story the cops gave the papers about somebody hiding on Troy's boat. Well, go ahead and give me the scoop."

Brock ran it down for him and Cort said, "Man, I've seen plenty in my day, but that's one for the books—cops fencing for the crooks, then selling the loot to Kroll. Poor damn customers at the store buying hot stuff with their hard-earned!" He shook his head woefully.

"Sure," said Brock, "but the fact that Kroll is pushing hot goods across his counters doesn't necessarily mean that he killed Troy and his lawyer."

Cort snorted. "You've gotta be kidding! Come on. If Kroll didn't do it himself, he arranged to have it done." His eyes were fierce. "There's only one thing to do. We'll grab Kroll and break his bones until he tells us exactly what he or his goons did to Troy. Then we'll haul him

into Miami and find an honest cop."

"I like it," said Brock. "All except the part about breaking his bones. Let me handle it. I think we can scare the truth out of him without breaking anything that might be hard to put back together if we're wrong. Does Kroll know you personally?"

"No. But I'm dying to meet him." Cort grinned savagely.

"We can pose as FBI agents," Brock said. "I've got some phony credentials we can flash. People under the gun are too scared to examine them closely. All they see is the badge."

"I'll bet your credentials aren't phony," Cort said.

Brock smiled. "Those hot cars were swiped in Jersey and when you bring stolen wheels across state lines it's a federal rap under FBI jurisdiction. If we faked a raid on that warehouse we could sweat the cops and the hoods for the truth if we can't get it from Kroll."

"That's a great idea—but if you didn't get the drop on those hoods they'd kill you without so much as a second thought. And you'd need plenty of hardware because those guys are armed to the teeth."

"Shotguns would be best," said Brock. "Nobody likes to argue with those babies. Can you get them?"

Cort nodded. "No problem. A sergeant in my outfit who's in charge of ordnance can round up some repeaters."

"Can you trust him to keep his mouth shut?"

"Positively. He'd cut his arm off and eat it if I told him to."

"Can you get him to join us? I'll need another man."

"You've got him," said Cort. "You want five more, I can get them too."

"Just one," said Brock. "Less chance of a leak. First though let's see if we can lay our hands on Kroll." He glanced at his watch. "I'll call the store and see if he's still there. We could follow him home and corner him there."

"There's a phone there by the wheel." Cort stood and went with Brock to the phone. Brock got the number from information and dialed it. He asked for Kroll and was switched to a secretary. The secretary said Mr. Kroll had left for the day. Brock asked to speak with his dark-haired associate—the attractive woman he had met through Mr. Kroll—he had forgotten her name.

"That would be Miss Trevino, Mr. Kroll's accountant. I'm sorry but she left with Mr. Kroll."

Brock rang off and said, "That means Kroll is probably either somewhere with her or at home. I'll try at home and wrong-number him if he's there." He got the number from information and dialed. There was no answer. Information gave him the only listing they had for Trevino—Terry Trevino—and he dialed her. She answered, he asked for Mike, she told him curtly he had the wrong number, and he apologized and hung up.

"Well, what now?" said Cort.

"We go over to Terry Trevino's. Kroll could be there with her. If not, since she's both his accountant and his girl friend, she'll know where he is. And maybe a lot more if we come on like the FBI and squeeze her a bit. She might even have a clue to the missing cash."

"Let's go then," said Cort. "I'm ready."

Brock smiled. "In that garb you'll never pass for an FBI agent. Put on a suit and a tie, something conservative—like mine."

When Cort returned in a brown suit and olive-green tie, he was strapping an Army colt .45 in a GI holster beneath his coat. "You carrying, Brock?" he said.

"Yeah, but nothing that heavy." He reached in a pocket and handed Cort a small wallet containing the faked badge and ID of an FBI agent. "I just happen to have this with me," he said. "Flash it from a distance. If they want to take a good look they can study mine, it's flawless."

Cort opened the wallet, gave it a smiling glance, then tucked it away. "You do the interrogating, I'll supply the muscle."

"Come on, let's go," said Brock. "We'll take my car—it's so plain it's nearly invisible in traffic."

In less than ten minutes they were standing outside Terry Trevino's apartment on the eleventh floor of the beachside high-rise Brock had seen her enter. Brock jabbed the bell, chimes sounded inside, and in a few seconds the door swung open.

Terry Trevino appraised them, her beautiful dark eyes guarded. "Yes," she said, "what is it?"

Both men produced their bogus credentials, Brock holding his close for her inspection.

"FBI," he said. "I'm Inspector Brock and this is Special Agent Frank McCabe." It was the name on Cort's ID. "We'd like to speak

with you and Mr. Kroll for a minute, please, Miss Trevino."

"I can't imagine what you'd want with me," she said stiffly, although her eyes were frightened. "And Mr. Kroll isn't here."

Brock closed his ID case and put it away. "Do you know where we might locate Mr. Kroll?" he asked.

"I don't have any idea. I'm his accountant, not his keeper."

Brock nodded. "Then we'll talk with you, Miss Trevino. May we come in?"

"No, you may not," she said.

"I'm afraid you don't have a choice," said Brock. "We have a warrant for your arrest." Pushing her gently but firmly inside, he followed her into the room, Cort at his heels.

"On what possible charge do you have a warrant for my arrest?" she demanded.

Brock glanced about the small, extravagantly furnished living room. "If you'll sit down and compose yourself, Miss Trevino, I'll recite the charges against you. There are quite a few."

With a sigh of anger she sank into a chair, plucked a pack of cigarettes from the table beside her, and lit one with a trembling hand.

Brock crossed to a window and peered down at the beach. The sun had faded and twilight shadowed the water. "Frank," he said, "take a fast look around—check the bedroom."

"Right, Inspector." Cort went off.

"I assure you," said Terry, "Mr. Kroll is not hiding under my bed."

Brock made no answer but waited in cool silence until Cort returned to tell him, "Nothing, all in order." Cort placed himself close to Terry's chair. Towering above her, his expression was stern, accusing. Brock took a position opposite him.

"Now, Miss Trevino," he began, "we have a warrant for your arrest charging you with suspicion of conspiracy to commit murder on two counts in the deaths of Troy Guthrie and his lawyer, Darrell Fraker. You are also charged as an accomplice to grand theft in the matter of $750,000 taken from Troy Guthrie in robbery. And you are further charged with aiding and abetting Stephen Kroll in the purchase and sale of merchandise stolen by a ring of burglars and car thieves operating across state lines—a federal offense—the loot from these thefts being fenced by the chief of police of Seahaven, his captain, and other police officers."

"That's a lie!" Terry exploded. "I had no part in the killing of those men!"

"If you're innocent," said Brock, "you'll have a chance to prove it at your trial. Meanwhile, since you won't be allowed to make bail on a charge of murder, you'll be held in jail for a period of weeks, if not months, until your case comes up on the docket."

Terry began to rub her hands together nervously. "I deny all those charges." She started to cry softly. "Maybe I did know a little of what was going on, but I had no part in it myself, and I have nothing more to say."

"We're obviously not going to get any cooperation from this woman," Cort snapped. "Our people are waiting for your order regarding the warehouse, and time is running out. Let's take her in."

Brock nodded. "Any information she might have given us we can sweat from Kroll and the others when we pick them up."

As Cort watched him with barely contained surprise, Brock reached under his jacket and produced a pair of handcuffs from his belt.

"Extend your wrists, please, Miss Trevino," he said.

"Oh, please!" she cried. "I'm no criminal. I saw things and heard things, but I didn't report them because I didn't trust the police here—I was afraid for my life."

Brock pretended to consider. "Miss Trevino," he said, "if you're willing to answer truthfully the questions I put to you now, I believe I can get you immunity from prosecution."

She hesitated and Cort said, "Come on, speak up, Miss Trevino! We're in a hurry!"

Chewing her lip, she slowly nodded. "All right."

"The seven hundred and fifty thousand," said Brock. "Was it actually delivered to Kroll's office by armored truck?"

"Yes, it was."

"Why did Kroll pay Troy in cash?"

"Because Troy called Steve a crook and said his check would probably bounce. Steve used it as an excuse. He wanted to be able to show a receipt for cash after—"

"After Troy Guthrie and his lawyer were murdered," Brock finished.

Her eyes wavered. "I don't know they were murdered."

"They were murdered!" Cort boomed. "We know it and you know it!"

"You were there in the office," said Brock. "You notarized the legal papers terminating the partnership, that's a matter of record. What happened after the cash was paid over to Guthrie?"

She looked up. "Well—the chief of security for the store was also there. He and Steve pulled guns and forced Guthrie and Fraker into a big vault we have in the office where we keep records, cash, and other valuables. Later, long after the store closed, they were taken off somewhere, Steve told me. He said Troy had discovered that some of the goods in the store were stolen and he and his lawyer had threatened to take it up with the district attorney the minute the partnership was dissolved."

"What happened to the cash?" Brock asked her.

Terry pressed at the tears from her eyes. "It was in two suitcases Steve brought up from luggage. He was afraid to chance putting the money back in the bank until the heat was off, so he stowed the cases in the vault. They're still there."

Restraining a grin of pure joy, Brock nodded solemnly. "Who has the combination?"

Terry reached for a cigarette. "Steve," she said. "And he has a bad memory so it's tricky. He has the numbers engraved inside the band of a large diamond ring he never takes off."

"My, my," Brock said, "what an insidious scheme. So where is our boy Kroll now?"

"I don't know."

"Of course you know!" Cort barked. "You're lovers, aren't you?"

She made a sour face and took an anxious puff from her cigarette. "I'm not the only woman in his life—and I only went along with what he did because I was afraid of him, afraid he might kill me if I talked."

"If you still feel any loyalty to him," Brock said, "you're as vile as he is."

"All right," she said, "I couldn't care less if you arrest him. He's at the warehouse with the others. They're looking over a truckload of liquor that was hijacked. The store has a big cut-rate liquor department."

Brock exchanged glances with Cort. "Get on the horn, Frank," he said. "Have our man meet us out front. Twenty minutes if possible. Give him this number and tell him to phone here when he's about to leave."

Cort went off and in a moment there was the sound of the bedroom door closing.

"Will there be shooting?" Terry asked.

"We'll try to avoid it," Brock said and left it at that.

In a few minutes Cort returned and said, "We're in luck, Inspector. Our man was just going out the door. He'll stop for the weapons and call us in ten or fifteen minutes."

"Very good," said Brock. He turned to Terry. "Miss Trevino, you will come with us and remain in the car. I expect we'll be able to persuade Mr. Kroll to part with the combination to the vault, if not his ring. The store is open until nine, and there should be plenty of time for you to take us up to the office so we can get that cash that rightfully belongs to Troy Guthrie's widow. Can we get to the office together without attracting any undue attention?"

She nodded. "Yes. After five the office is closed and I have a key. We can go up the back stairs."

They sat for a space in tense silence. Then the phone rang and Cort bolted to answer it. In seconds he returned to report, "Our man will be here in five minutes. He'll pull up behind our car and transfer the weapons to our trunk."

Brock stood. "All right, let's go down and watch for him."

It was dark when they reached the street. As the three sat waiting in Brock's rental, Cort said, "Jake has been fully apprised of the situation, Inspector."

"Good," said Brock.

In another minute headlights loomed up behind them. Brock and Cort climbed out, and Brock opened the trunk. The headlights winked off and a man approached with a large canvas case. As he joined them and came under the glow of a street lamp, Brock saw that he was a young stocky blond with a freckled face. There was about him a kind of wide-eyed innocence that Brock found disturbing. But faces could be deceptive and Cort wouldn't choose a greenhorn to do the work of a seasoned trooper.

"Jake," said Cort with a wink, "this is Inspector Brock."

"Hi, Inspector," Jake said and shook Brock's hand with a crushing grip.

Brock suppressed a wince and said, "Hi. Let's see the hardware."

Jake set the case in the trunk and zipped it open, removing three identical pump-action repeating 12-gauge shotguns. Brock inspected the guns quickly. They seemed in excellent condition and all were loaded. With a nod of approval he locked them into the trunk and told Jake, "After we reach the area of the warehouse we'll first take out the guard; then we'll check the opposition inside and confer on strategy."

They climbed into the black sedan without introducing Terry to Jake and drove all the way in silence, Brock cutting the lights as they neared the warehouse and parking a block from it on a side street. There he told Terry he was sorry and gently cuffed her to a wall post, got the shotguns, and, keeping one for himself, stole away with his two companions.

The guard, Arnie, was standing in front of the warehouse dragging on a cigarette. Watching him from the shadows of the adjacent wrecking yard, Cort removed his shoes and held his .45 Colt by the barrel, ready to spring. In a short time Arnie mashed the cigarette butt under his heel and came toward them to begin his circuit.

Cort followed him soundlessly, tiptoeing up behind him as he sauntered along unaware. At the last instant he turned, even as Cort slammed the gun down on his head with such force that Brock winced and murmured, "Goodbye, Arnie, you've gone to other places, other dreams."

Bending over the fallen guard, Cort snatched his weapon from its holster, put it in a side pocket of his jacket, and hurried back. Crowding his out-sized feet into his shoes he said in a low voice, "I didn't mean to put him down so hard, but he startled me."

Jake gave Cort his shotgun and Brock stepped toward the warehouse, signaling them to follow. On the far side, about where he had observed the action within on the first occasion, Brock drilled his tiny holes, inserted his peep-and-listen devices, stuck the plug in his ear, and pressed his eye to the lens.

There were five men in the room. Two, probably minor hoods from the ring of thieves, were prying open cases of the liquor that had been unloaded at the center of the cement floor. Examining the bottles they were lifting from the cases were the police chief, the captain, and Steve Kroll. Kroll's voice could be heard distinctly as he said, "This is a royal pain. Checking every damn bottle could take all night. I'll tell you what, I'm gonna pick one at random and open it. If the taste

matches the label, you guys have got a deal."

Kroll circled around the cases, paused at one, stooped, and selected a bottle. As he began to uncap it, Brock turned away. "Take a look," he said to Cort. "We've bagged Kroll and the cops."

The big man fingered the plug into his ear, bent toward the lens, and said, "Which one is Kroll?"

"Burgundy shirt, holding the bottle," Brock answered.

Cort spent nearly a minute viewing the scene, then Jake took his turn, and Brock said, "When we go in I'll shout for them to freeze and you boys be ready. We're in a good position because they're all bunched together and we can lay three guns on them. Unless someone makes a move don't fire a single shot—we want to take them alive so they'll be able to sing us a little song. Oh, hey, I forgot about the warehouse key—the guard has it. Cort, you ask him for it politely and meet us in front."

"Sure," said Cort, "politely," and dashed away.

When they were grouped at the door, Brock opened it slowly and silently with the key Cort had delivered to him. The five men were standing together, passing the bottle that Kroll had opened. They didn't look up until Brock, shoulder-to-shoulder with Cort and Jake, their shotguns aimed, bellowed, "FBI—freeze or die!"

For a jolting heartbeat or two, the five men were a petrified tableau. Then the mammoth captain, who stood at the rear of the empty truck, snaked a hand inside, whipped out a submachine gun, and got off a badly aimed burst before a hail of shotgun pellets ripped him down.

During this diversion Kroll had begun to scuttle around the side of the truck for cover. Cort Comar scalped him with the first shot and utterly destroyed him with the second. Clutching his revolver, the police chief was trying awkwardly to take a prone position behind the crates of liquor when Jake shot him dead. The two hoods were racing for the cab of the truck when Brock, Cort, and Jake, firing almost in unison, changed their minds—permanently.

In the vast silence that followed, the three men exchanged glances and Brock said, "This wasn't exactly what I had in mind, gentlemen."

They walked to where Kroll lay by the truck and Cort kneeled, pried a brilliant diamond ring from his finger, and passed it to Brock, who wiped the blood from it and turned it over to examine the inside with a small magnifying glass that was habitually attached to his key chain.

The combination numbers of the vault were there, and he undid the key chain and added the ring.

Back at the car, as Brock removed the cuffs from Terry's wrists she said tensely, "I heard shooting—what happened?"

"Kroll and the cops winged a few rounds at us," Brock told her. "But we managed to convince them to surrender. The men I had staked out around the warehouse took them into custody."

"Oh," she said. "Well—it's over and I'm glad."

They drove in silence to the discount store. There, at Terry's direction, Brock pulled into Kroll's slot in the executive parking section. "I don't think it would be wise," Terry said, "for all of us to go there together. One of the guards might spot us and ask questions."

"I'll go with you," said Brock.

"Inspector," said Cort Comar, "if you don't need us for any further duties tonight we could grab a cab to Jake's car."

Brock thought about it. "No," he said, "I think you'd both better hang in for a bit. I don't expect trouble, but we should be prepared for it. If we don't come out in a reasonable time, or if you hear shots, hop in on the double—and bring the Uzi."

Cort nodded. "Right, Inspector."

Brock and Terry climbed out. Terry led the way to the employees' entrance and they went in. Near the entrance there was a flight of stairs and a sign warning: EXECUTIVE AND OFFICE PERSONNEL ONLY. ALL OTHERS FORBIDDEN.

They saw no one and mounted to the dimly lit halls above. Terry halted, the keys in her hand, before a solid-looking door marked: STEPHEN P. KROLL, PRESIDENT. There were double locks on the door—one a dead bolt. Terry opened both and they entered. She turned on a light and closed the door. It was a large windowless office pretentiously furnished. There was a door to the right of Kroll's massive desk. Terry opened it with a key, found the light switch, and they stepped into a room containing only filing cabinets and the great vault with its imposing steel door.

Terry dropped the keys into her purse and said, "Do you have the combination?"

"I have the ring," said Brock, and removed it from the chain.

Terry's brows lifted. "He gave you the ring?"

"Not very willingly." Brock passed her the diamond and his magnifying glass.

Abruptly, with a deep frown and troubled eyes, she looked up at Brock. "There's blood on the ring!" she gasped. "Was he hurt?"

Brock hesitated, nodded gravely. "Yes, Terry, he was. I didn't want to tell you, but—"

"You killed him, didn't you?"

"Not personally, no. He tried to run and one of the others shot him."

She turned away and leaned her head against the vault.

Brock placed a comforting arm around her shoulder. "I'm sorry, Terry."

She turned, her face squeezed into tight lines of control. "Naturally, I'm shocked," she said thickly. "But that's all—you understand?"

"I think so."

"All right, then let's get on with it. I'll read the numbers, you spin the dial."

He agreed and in a minute, when she read him the final turn, he tried the handle and it gave.

"Wait," she said. "May I keep this ring?"

He considered. The ring would be a marvelous item in his collection. When he looked at it, it would tell him a wild improbable story. But then he shrugged and said, "Yes, Terry, you can keep the ring."

"Thank you," she said.

As Brock took hold of the handle and turned it, he wondered if by some miracle . . . But when he swung the door back there was nobody in the vault, dead or alive—just fat record books on shelves, metal drawers with locks, and, in a corner, two brown suitcases.

"Do you have the keys to these metal drawers?" he asked Terry.

She shook her head. "No, and he never told me where he kept them."

Brock lugged the cases out to Kroll's desk and lifted their lids. Ben Franklin winked at him from row upon orderly green row of hundreds.

Brock shut the cases and carried them with him as Terry led him back down the stairs and uneventfully out to the lot. Certainly, he thought, the devil's luck had not deserted him tonight.

But when they reached the car he wasn't so sure. If not his luck, his

fellow-combatants, Cort and Jake, had deserted him, for what reason he could not imagine. But no matter—he would like to have congratulated them on their valor and graced their palms with a little of the green that was their share, but he was sure they had their reasons for leaving.

He tossed the cases onto the back seat and was opening the front door to admit Terry when from the shadows behind the car stepped Cort Comar cradling the Uzi submachine gun and Jake leveling one of the shotguns.

"You didn't really think," said Cort, "that we would run off and leave you with the burden of those heavy suitcases, did you—Inspector?"

"By all means," said Jake with the boyish face and ancient eyes, "let us give you and the little lady a helping hand with these menial tasks, my leader."

Brock sighed. "I suppose you planned it this way all along—right, Comar?"

He nodded. "Of course I did. Though if I was sure Kroll had the cash tucked away I would have cooled him for it long ago. Now if you'll turn around and put your paws on the roof, we'll frisk you for dangerous hardware that might delay our departure."

Brock obeyed, but intuition whispered a warning and he ducked. His timing was a little off, however, and his next impression was of a continuous rising and falling, a seesaw motion that sickened his belly—and a sound of rushing water.

Even before he opened and focused his eyes, he knew what to anticipate. He was seated in the stern of Cort Comar's boat, his back resting against the transom. His arms were pinned and his chest tightly encircled by a bulky wrap-around device much like a straightjacket, heavy in back as if he'd been strapped into a full field pack, GI issue.

He knew they were well out to sea; he could not find the shore in any direction. The beautiful night was an affront to people who were not free to enjoy it. The whole play, he thought, was weirdly similiar to the dream he'd had on the plane.

But though the characters were different he had not the least problem identifying them. Jake was at the helm, alternately puffing a cigarette and taking generous slugs from a bottle. Facing him a few feet away in chairs close together were Cort Comar and Terry Trevino.

Cort had peeled off his jacket and draped it across the back of his chair. Relaxed, his expression amiable, he was chatting easily with Terry, who was not quite as much at ease, her feet rope-tied to the support of the chair, her manacled hands in her lap.

Brock shut his eyes and listened intently to the conversation. "He thought I was his close buddy," Cort was saying, "and so did Iris Guthrie. So Troy damn near swallowed his molars when I turned out to be Kroll's hit man. I'd been running all kinds of goodies for him for damn near a year—stuff we picked up from freighters we met out at sea. Anyway, Kroll promised me twenty-five grand for the pair of them, and gave me five out front, but stiffed me for the rest. Well—no bad feelings, Steve ole buddy!"

He roared his barroom laugh and went on. "Me and Jake, we fired Troy's cruiser first, then late that night we took him and Fraker out into deep water and blew them to bits—and man, I mean bits! Jake is a demolitions expert and he designed this far-out contraption ole buddy Brock there is wearin' right now. The way it works, you toss a guy overboard and it's a life-preserver—keeps him afloat—saves him with one hand, kills him with the other."

Again he laughed outrageously. "Attached to that gismo is a waterproof pack containing a very high explosive with a timer. You set it for three minutes and race off a distance to watch the show in safety. So the sucker stays afloat and gets the full force of the blast instead of having it confined under water. Three minutes and va-va-voom!—your evidence goes flying."

"My God!" Terry moaned. "Do I have to sit here and watch it happen?"

"No, baby, you can close your little eyes and hold your little ears. And don't think we're gonna do anything like that to you. No, ma'am. Jake and me, we don't hurt pretty girls, we treat 'em right. Especially if they're cooperative. Know what I mean?"

Suddenly he straightened. "Hey, Jake! This is far enough! Idle the motors and let her drift, then come aft and we'll give the Inspector a send-off!"

Abruptly the motors slowed to idle, the boat eased around into the trough of the swells and began a rolling drift. In a minute Brock heard them approach across the deck and bend above him. "O.K.," Jake said. "Let's turn him over and set the timer."

As they grabbed hold of him and heaved him onto his belly, Brock thought, Maybe the devil had a timer on my luck too. I can almost hear him laughing.

"There," Jake said, "she's set. All I need to do is poke the button when we get him to the rail."

Then they were lifting him and he was thinking, Maybe it's a dream, and when it blows I'll wake up.

In that very second he heard the shots. They kept coming and he kept sinking with Comar and Jake as they sagged toward the deck. And then, rudely, he was dumped. And maneuvering so that he could look forward, he saw Terry drop the revolver from her manacled hand and bend and begin to work furiously at the ropes on her legs.

When she had freed herself and Brock as well, removing the lethal jacket, she told him, "I saw the grip of the revolver in the pocket of Comar's jacket on the back of his chair and I just barely managed to reach it in time."

Brock grinned. "That's the pistol he took from the guard he killed at the warehouse. He either forgot it or never believed you could reach it with your wrists in those cuffs. Need I tell you how grateful I am?"

"No. But let me tell you how grateful I am that you're not an Inspector for the FBI." She smiled. "You're a strange man, Brock, and I don't know what you're all about. But you're very kind in a peculiar sort of way."

He left town with his hundred grand two days later. The thing with Iris Guthrie was getting too heavy. Soon she'd be sleeping in his bed for real and then he'd never want to leave.

He had his stuff in the rental and he was behind the wheel with the motor running when Iris bent down to the window to say, "Don't go, Brock! I'm so lonely and lost and I need you!"

"I'll be back," he lied, gently patting her cheek. Then he kissed her and drove away. In his rearview mirror her eyes followed him until he was out of sight.

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.

AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

TWENTY Car saver formulas. Helpful hints to save you many dollars in repair bills. $1.00 Roy Enterprises—110 New York Ave. Dept. D5, Bklyn. 11216.

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.

FREE CATALOGUES, hardbacks, paperbacks. Search Service, Detective Mystery Booksearch, Box 15460, Orlando, Florida, 32808.

BOOK Readers and Collectors! Send titles wanted to: S&S Books, 80 North Wilder, A-25, St. Paul, MN 55104.

FREE Catalogs—Discount Paperbacks—Gambling Systems. Destiny, Box 366-R, Roundlake, IL 60073.

BETTER BOOK GETTER—Search Service. Out-of-print hardcovers, paperbacks. Mystery magazine caatlogue, 25¢. Richard Chalfin, 47 W. 71 St., N.Y., NY 10023 Apt. IF—Dept. EQ.

BOOK reveals confidence and power to succeed. 164 pages—$3.50. Ab-les Company, 1617 Piper Ave., N. Las Vegas, NV 89030.

A BI-MONTHLY SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE by Isaac Asimov. Send $5.95 for 6 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimovs' Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1855 G.P.O., New York, NY 1001.

FREE List! Used hardcover mystery detective fiction. Bill Dunn, 251 Baldwin Avenue, Meriden, CT 06450.

ATTENTION Mystery lovers. All original book of wordsearch puzzles. Mystery themes like Weapons, Great Detectives. ONLY $2.00. Hours of challenging fun. Puzzles, Box 290 PS, Las Vegas, NV 89101.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

NEW Book, "100 Ways Men, Women, Make Money From Home." 164 pages, 25 chapters includes mail-order operation. Free Details. Cooke Limited, Publishers, 58-U Madsen, Beconsfield, Que. H9W 4T7.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! EARN BIG MONEY addressing envelopes. Genuine offer 10¢. Lindco, 3636-DA, Peterson, Chicago 60659.

$30.00 HUNDRED Stuffing Our Circulars into Stamped Addressed Envelopes. Immediate Earnings. Beginners Kit $2.00. COLOSSI, 1433-61 Street, DC-4, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

1000% PROFIT Bronzing Baby Shoes. Free Literature. NBC, Box 1904-DG, Sebring, FL 33870.

GUARANTEED $178.00 WEEKLY. Work one hour daily. Free Brochure. FAS, Box 13703, San Antonio, TX 78213.

HOW TO RECRUIT COMMISSION SALESPEOPLE! Free details! Success publications, 35 Interlachen Place, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

$350 Weekly Mailing Letters. Free Deails. Bronxville House, Box 311-D, Bronxville, NY 10708.

BUMPER Sticker Printing Device. Cheap, Simple, Portable. Free Details. Bumper, POB 22791(TW), Tampa, FL 33622.

$60 HUNDRED ADDRESSING envelopes. Guaranteed earnings! D'Aloisio 30-B Gladys Ave. #7, Mt. View, CA 94043.

$3000.00 MONTHLY. Start immediately. Stuff envelopes at home. Information, end self-addressed stamped envelope. Village, Box 2285-DFE, Irwindale CA 91793.

DON'T FOOL AROUND! $500 Weekly possible mailing our circulars. Send stamped envelope. Emdeeco, Box 302H Azusa, CA 91702.

HOME business opportunities/money making ideas galore! Write: American, Box 724, Taylors, SC 29687.

MAIL-ORDER BOOK DEALERS WANTED! Free Details! Books, P.O. Box 395 B, Excelsior, MN 55331.

Classified Continued

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

TURN your spare time into pleasure and profit. *Build your own turning lathe from old car* parts. Complete illustrated instructions $2.80. Free supplement of money making projects included. Satisfaction Guaranteed or your money back. *Lindsay North*, Box 251, Oroville, WA 98844.

$60,000/Hundred Addressing Envelopes: *Details with Membership Application Form*: S. Hampton, 490 Schoolway, Redwood Valley, CA 95470.

MAKE $100 A DAY! How would you like to receive 100 letters a day, each containing $1.00? It's easy; Will send you this plan with directions—plus six money-making formulas for only $1. D'Aloisio, 30 Gladys Ave. No. 7 Mountain View, CA 94043.

OPPORTUNITY! Earn at home! Good business. Free booklet! Fay's 484E N. Main, Kalispell, MT 59901.

$1500 MONTHLY SPARETIME. GUARANTEED. Details: Glad, Box 5368-JIC, Lighthouse Point, FL 33064.

MAILORDER – 400% PROFIT – SELLING "MONEYMAKING" Information!! Complete Setup. M/L Box 68011, Seattle, WA 98188.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

SAVE MONEY! 5 Wholesale catalogs $3.00. World Import Directory $3.00. Surplus Directory $2.00. All (8) books for $10.00. Winchester Enterprises, Inc. 2807 SS. Hargrave Street, Philadelphia, PA 19136.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES BY MAIL! Bachelors, Masters, PhD.s. . . . Free revealing details. Counseling, Box 389-AH-5, Tustin, CA 92686.

COLLEGE degree by mail, via resume. Education, 256D South Robertson, Beverly Hills, CA 90211.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

GIFTS THAT PLEASE FREE CATALOGS. J. & M.Gifts, J, 12108 Justine, Calumet Park, IL 60643.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

JEEPS $60.00, typewriters $4.00, 'HOW TO MAKE MONEY ON GOVERNMENT SURPLUS' tells how and where to buy in your area for your own use or for resale. Send $2.40. The Mail Sack, 600 Welch Blvd., Flint, MI 48503.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Fascinating Hypnosis Information! Startling! DLMH, Box 487 Anaheim, CA 92805.

JEWELRY

S.S. Turquoise Indian Jewelry at the lowest prices available anywhere. Free brochure, B & W Turquoise Company, P.O. Box 1230-U, Las Vegas, NV 89101, 702-386-5060.

MAILORDER OPPORTUNITIES

EARN money mailing circulars. Join cooperative income program. Details. Cado, P.O. Box 533E, Absecon, NJ 08201.

MISCELLANEOUS

METRIC CHART CONVERTS inches, feet, miles, ounces, pounds, pints, gallons, FARENHEIT to METRIC EQUIVALENT. Send addressed envelope and one dollar; Famous brands, Box 789, LaPorte, TX 77571.

MANUFACTURER Wanted For The Most Economical Heating Stove Ever Invented. Stan Badzgon, 227 Emerson, Winnipeg, Canada R2G 1E8.

AMAZE FRIENDS. Read fortune cards. Reading instruction booklet, $1.00. Chere Brough, P.O. Box 537, Bigfork, MT 59911.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$250.00 profit/thousand possible—stuffing-mailing envelopes. Offer: Rush stamped addressed envelope: Universal-ADVS X16180 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

$300.00 WEEKLY, Mailing Circulars. Write: McGUIRE, Box 144, Tacoma, WA 98412.

$30.00 HUNDRED STUFFING our circulars into stamped addressed envelopes. Beginner's Kit $2.00 Mustachi, P.O. Box 46D4, Brooklyn, NY 11219.

MAKE Big Money with amazing tropical seed business. *Marks Enterprises, 5515 Ranchero* Lane, Dallas, TX 75236.

$500/thousand stuffing envelopes. Free details.. *Rush self stamped envelope. H. Mognet Co.*, Box 449D, Warren, Ohio 44482.

$180.00 WEEKLY Mailing Circulars. Start *Immediately. Everready, 422D Clermont Ave.*, Brooklyn, New York 11238.

FANTASTIC Profits: Mailing Circulars. Free Samples. Grahamco, DPBX 99371, Tacoma, WA 98499.

LOOKING FOR INCOME SECURITY? Unlimited earnings possible selling books and information by mail. No experience work from home—tested program—free details—stamp appreciated. Austin Security, 50 Madison Avenue, 1st Floor, Bridgeport, CT 06604.

$350 weekly mailing letters. Free details. Karmchell, 628-FD Cherry Ave., Albany, GA 31705.

Classified Continued

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

THOUSANDS of dollars made monthly by commission mailers. Free Details—Send stamped envelope, Wellman 601, S. Lincoln, Denver, CO 80209.

BE A WINNER, NOT A LOSER. Free list of low cost books. Stewart Kent, Box 3812A, Laramie, WY 82070.

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.

ENVELOPE stuffing secrets guaranteed! Free! Wayne, Box 644ZD, Ottawa, KS 66067.

$2,000 monthly possible stuffing envelopes! Send stamped self-addressed envelopes! Craft, Box 2230 D, Oceanside CA 02054.

EARN CASH MAILING CIRCULARS. Free details, Earl Allen 9825 Rose 18, Bellflower CA 90706.

GUARANTEED MONEY MAKING PROGRAM. NO ENVELOPE STUFFING, NO chain letters. John Young, 1711 Douglas Street, Lake Worth, FL 33460.

GET Loans, Mortgages & Credit Fast. Borrow without co-signers, red-tape, collateral. Details $2.00. Chicago Printing Service, P.O. Box 21521, Chicago 60621.

$500.00/thousand possible stuffing envelopes! Rush stamped, addressed envelope. Gilligan House, West Kingston, RI 02892.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

MAKE $$$$$! Easily! Honestly! SASE. CJS, Box 250, Jamesville, NC 27846.

$180 Weekly mailing circulars. No Gimmicks. Write: Leister, Box 22346-D, S.F., CA 94122.

OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

FREE fantastic bargains. Drop a card to Oak "N" Ledge, 6, Greene, RI 02827.

CASH FOR BOXTOP LABELS. Information 15¢. Refund Bulletin, Box 503-D, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701.

PERSONAL

BECOME a legally Ordained Minister. Credentials $4.00 offering. United Church of the Apostles, Chapel 181313, 246 East Granada Avenue, Lindenhurst, NY 11757.

HOW To Please And Keep Your Mate. Powerful Booklet, $3.95. R.E.A.C.H. Inc. 2138 East 75th Street, Chicago 60649.

RUBBER STAMPS

RUBBER stamps made. Three lines $3.75. Rubber Stamps, B1337-E5, Waldo, AR 71770.

SALESMEN—DISTRIBUTORS

JEANS—100% cotton, flare bottom. Sizes 28-38; S, M, L, sample $10.00, plus $1.50 shipping and handling. Master Charge and Visa accepted, NuWest, P.O. Box 13038, El Paso, TX 79912.

15 BRAND NEW MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1

Worth $118.25 in Publishers' Editions!

Travis McGee
One Fearful Yellow Eye by John D. MacDonald. Summoned by a beautiful young widow, McGee tries to find who stole her late husband's estate...and digs up some deadly surprises. (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

Hammond Innes
The Big Footprints by Hammond Innes. Britain's master of suspense pits a ruthless hunter against a champion of wild elephants in an exotic East African game park. (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

Inspector Maigret
Maigret and the Spinster by Georges Simenon. An eccentric old maid insists someone moves her furniture around at night. Maigret laughs. Then events take a sinister turn. (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

Velda Johnston
The Etruscan Smile by Velda Johnston. Samantha flies to Italy in search of her mysteriously vanished sister. She finds an archeologist, an ancient Etruscan statue...and terror. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

Sheriff Chick Charleston
The Genuine Article by A. B. Guthrie, Jr. Who killed cattle baron Frank Grimsley? The colorful cow-town sleuth of **Wild Pitch** is back in a tale of solid detection and suspense. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

Lillian O'Donnell
After-Shock by Lillian O'Donnell. Ms. Mici Anhalt, social worker, interviews the pregnant wife of a slain society hairdresser...and a "routine" case turns into a nightmare. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

Inspector Ghote
Filmi, Filmi, Inspector Ghote by H. R. F. Keating. The plucky little Bombay detective tackles the murder of a movie star whom the entire Indian film colony wanted to see dead. (Publ. Ed. $5.95)

Dick Francis
In the Frame by Dick Francis. His cousin's wife is brutally murdered by an unknown intruder and Todd—a painter of horses—tries to help. Suddenly he becomes the chief suspect! (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

The Dortmunder Gang
Nobody's Perfect by Donald E. Westlake. This time those heroes of the Hot Rock caper run amok in the Transatlantic jet set—exposing forgers, counterfeiters, phonies and an unexpected killer. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

John Ball
Police Chief by John Ball. After years as cop in a crime-ridden big city, Jack Tallon becomes police chief of a quiet small town. Then a series of vicious rape-murders erupts. (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

Mignon G. Eberhart
Family Fortune by Mignon G. Eberhart. Her newest spine-tingler. A border-state family is divided by the Civil War and an inheritance that leads to murder. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

Inspector Hemricks
The Tenth Life by Richard Lockridge. A cat has nine lives, so the saying goes. Hemricks meets one with ten...it leads him into a den of perilous intrigue and murder. (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

Owen Sela
An Exchange of Eagles by Owen Sela. In 1940, two Intelligence men stumble on a certain secret weapon that could turn World War II into Armageddon...unless **they** destory it! (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

Patrick Dawlish
Elope to Death by John Creasey as Gordon Ashe. A mother fears her heiress daughter has eloped with a maniac. Dawlish pursues them—to the edge of a Mediterranean cliff. (Publ. Ed. $6.95)

Brian Garfield
Recoil by Brian Garfield. When Fred Mathieson happens to witness a mob boss's crime, the mob decides to rub him out...with his whole family. A tale of explosive suspense. (Publ. Ed. $8.95)

These 15 best-selling thrillers are yours for only $1.00. The books cost $118.25 in the original publishers' editions—but to introduce you to The Detective Book Club, we'll send you all of these superb mysteries in five handsome hardbound triple volumes (shown in the coupon on the next page) for only $1.00.

You'll get the latest Mignon G. Eberhart best-seller Family Fortune, Dick Francis' In The Frame, plus 13 others! As a member, there's no minimum number of books you must buy. You may reject any volume before or after receiving it. And you may cancel your membership at any time, without penalty or hurt feelings.

SAVINGS UP TO $5.00 ON EVERY MYSTERY YOU READ.

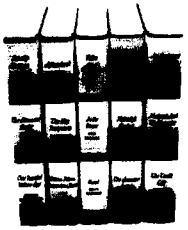
When you accept a club selection, you get three unabridged detective novels in one hard-cover triple volume for only $4.39. That's up to $5 less than one mystery costs in the publisher's original edition.

The club's editors select the best from some 400 mystery books each year. Selections include new thrillers by the authors of your first 15 books, plus Len Deighton, Ross Macdonald, and many more.

Mail the coupon now to get your fifteen brand-new mysteries for $1. The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, New York 11576.

15 BRAND NEW MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1

SEE DETAILS ON PRECEEDING PAGE—THEN MAIL COUPON!



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 _____

8-TY

City _____

37-59-8A

State _____ Zip _____

Note: Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Ontario, offer slightly different in Canada.