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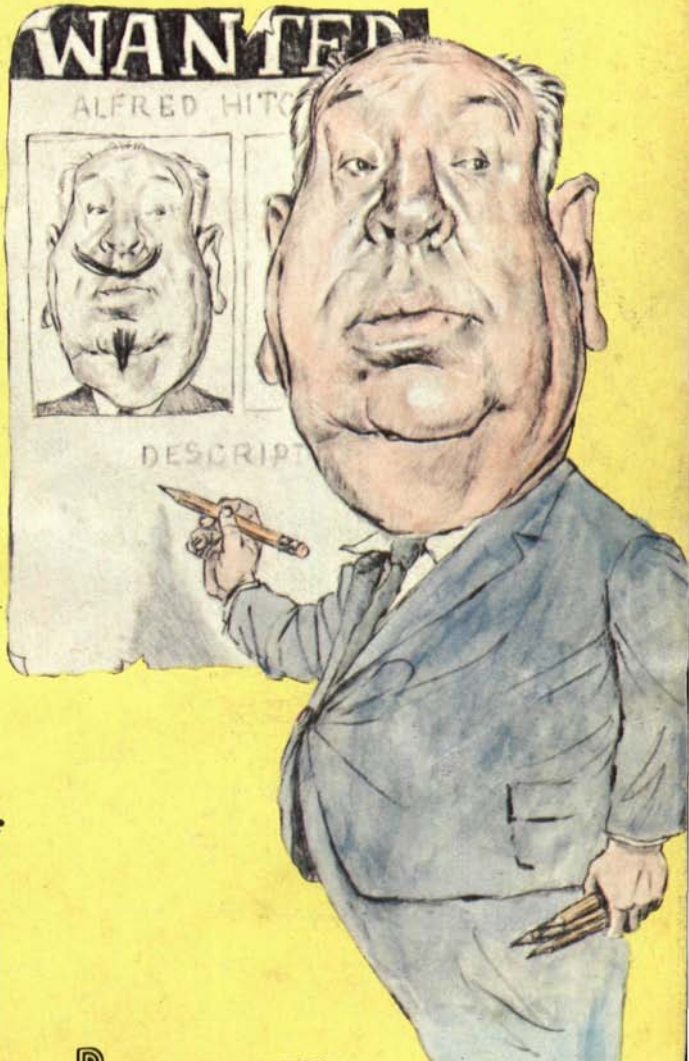


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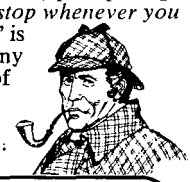

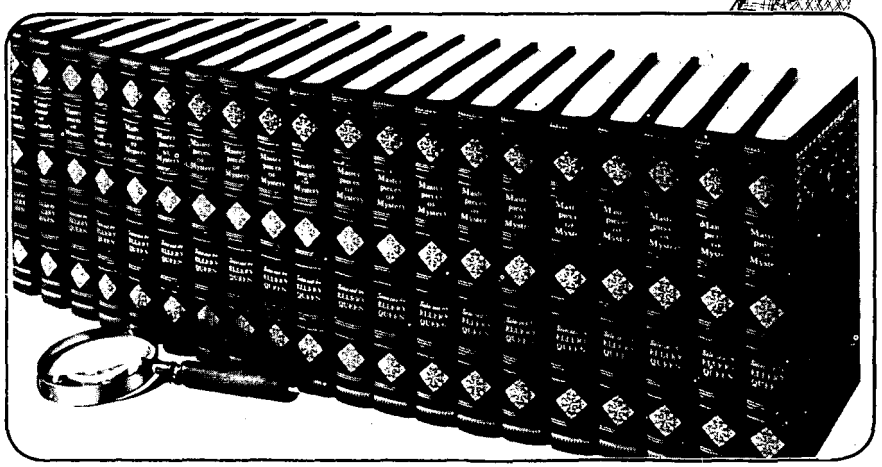

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VOLUME 23, NO. 11 NOVEMBER 1978

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE NOV. 16

## NOVELETTE



## SHORT STORIES



**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE** Vol. 23, No. 11, Nov., 1978. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.00 a copy. Annual subscription $11.00 in the U.S.A. and possessions; $13.00 elsewhere. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017, (212) 949-9190. 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. 


November 1978

Dear Reader:

Most people these days are concerned about health, nutrition, ecology, and education. In this issue, you will find stories reflecting these themes.

A young woman tries to save the woodland from greedy developers in Kathryn Gottlieb's mood-filled "Call Michael." Ernest Savage's story, "The Man in the Lake," touches on the efforts of environmentalists to preserve the area around Lake Tahoe. Barry N. Malzberg's hero in "Backing Up" mourns the passing of the old traditions, and "Running" by Ron Goulart proves that exercise may not always be as beneficial to the health as one might wish.

As for education, there are Jerry Jacobson's novelette about murder in a traditional boys' school and William Bankier's story of a young man who learns a rather unconventional lesson while working his way through college.

And lest you wonder why we mentioned nutrition, consider "Cardula's Revenge" by Jack Ritchie. It deals with nutrition of a sort.

Good reading.

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*It was her inheritance and she would protect it at all costs . . .*

# CALL MICHAEL

by KATHRYN GOTTLIEB

The pretty girl with the light brown hair stood embattled at the edge of the broad grassy terrace. For minutes she stared down at the crisp golden leaves that whirled around her ankles in the brisk October breeze. Then she looked up stony-faced at Daniel Giffert and said, "I'm not afraid of them and I will not be driven away from here. That's that."

The two of them had walked their argument up and down the ter-

race for the better part of an hour, Daniel hammering, the girl resisting. They were engaged to be married, loved one another, and were on the verge of quarreling.

"Please, Cathy," he said. "I can't keep an eye on you when I'm in Venezuela."

"Catch your plane. What can they do to me?"

"They're rough, tough, and nasty and you've got what they want. I don't know what they'll do. Will you at least come down off the mountain and stay with someone? Even in a motel? You're alone up here and you're in their way, a bunch of speculators like that. They haven't exactly got a good reputation."

She shook her head and gestured widely—at the oaks, some flaming russet and some gold, some still decked out in leathery green leaves; at the tall pines higher up on the mountain, climbing in dark patches to the ridge; at the slender birches. "The squirrels depend on me." She was smiling. "And the deer and the foxes and the chipmunks and the skunks. I'll stay and keep an eye on things. You'll soon be home."

"I think," said Daniel, "you love the chipmunks more than you love me."

"I love you both. And I'm not going to desert either one of you. Now leave me," she said firmly. "You'll miss your plane."

In the end he left, but first he took a package from the back seat of his car and put it in her hands. It was the size and shape of a shoebox, well wrapped in brown paper, sealed with tape, and heavy. "It's a present," he said. "Open it when I've gone."

She watched his car travel the long switchback track to the main road, first disappearing beneath the bright screen of foliage, then appearing further down, and then gone again in the direction of the village center. She waited, sitting on the low stone wall that ringed the lower terrace until he had been gone for some minutes, and then she rose and walked purposefully, no longer smiling, into the house.

The Munning house, set on its thirty mountainside acres above the growing suburban town in the valley, was of the style that has come to be known as Queen Anne: a large and substantial structure of clapboard and shingles, towered and turreted, and decorated with porches and balustered promenades at every level, the whole entertaining mass topped by a steeply pitched and many-angled roof of cedar shingles.

Having entered the house, the young woman closed the door and

stood still, her hand on the knob, for a minute or two, in the attitude of someone who is listening very carefully and is prepared for flight. Then, apparently satisfied at the unbroken silence, she moved into the small round room just to the right of the entrance hall. She set down Daniel's present on a heavy library table, picked up a heavy poker from beside the fireplace, and moved swiftly down the corridor to the cellar door, which she opened quietly. Again, she stood listening. At the foot of the steep flight of wooden steps the cellar stretched large and empty of partitions except for a plank wall marking off the old coal bin, and a little laundry room.

Taking a basket of washing into the laundry room that morning something out of place in the center of the main cellar floor had caught her eye, an object conspicuous in the empty and very clean space. She had walked over to investigate and found a sheet of crumpled newspaper covered by a piling up of twigs. Over it all were two sections of split log, crossed. The skin had crept on her arms and she had fled up the stairs crying, "Who's there! Who is it! What do you want!" before she had slammed the door shut and locked it.

But no one had answered; and she knew, of course, what was wanted. The voice on the telephone, calling in the middle of the night one week ago, had said it plainly. "Take the money and get out."

"It's not a question of money," she had answered, but by then there was no one on the other end to listen. "I won't," she had said to the dead phone. But she was badly frightened.

She hadn't told Daniel about the telephone call, nor had she mentioned the little stage set of a bonfire, for then there would have been no staying there when he was gone. Nor did she tell him that some time in the past week someone had gotten into the house—with all those windows, porches, parapets, and turrets it could not have been too difficult—and had slept the night in one of the disused bedrooms on the third floor at the northern end of the house. Or had arranged a sheet and crumpled blanket as to make it appear so. In that case, too, she had felt her skin creep and revulsion almost impel her out of the house. *Had* someone spent the night there while she slept? Oh, God, she whispered. No, I don't want to believe that. But still she had said nothing to Daniel so that whatever happened to her would be her fault.

Later in the morning, to strengthen her resolve, she unrolled the

large familiar sheaf of development plans and studied them once more. The plans detailed the construction of four broad-based high-rise apartment towers in the New Brutalitarian style. Ramps, roadways, parking areas, and tiered garages plastered themselves over the remaining acres.

She had been offered a staggeringly high price for the land. The representative of the developers who had approached her, a small well-dressed man, very tanned, had looked first astonished at her refusal, then resigned. He smiled at her. "You'll change your mind," he said. "I know you will." He departed amiably, and at the door he said, "You know, you may not want to stay. You never know."

She told Daniel of her determination to preserve the land. The state, she had learned, would buy it for a reasonable price provided the town undertook to share the cost. It would be saved then, she said, forever, for everybody. Any further pressure from the developers was something she would cope with herself when the time came. It was her land, her property, her inheritance and values that were at stake. Civic groups had begun to show an interest in the preservation of the wooded slopes. It was only a question of time, persistence, fortitude.

And now Daniel's firm had sent him down to Caracas. For three weeks she must hold the fort alone. So, poker in hand, she explored the cellar and walked from room to room in the empty house, her footsteps echoing in the long corridors. Tomorrow, she promised herself, she would get a dog.

Across the valley, Michael, who used no other name, was resting from his labors. He was a short man with regular, almost handsome features and a shock of prematurely white hair. Because the old man who worked for him had walked off the job that afternoon, Michael had been forced to do the grounds cleanup on the Walker place without help. He was angry, sweating, and felt cold, as he so often did lately. He found a place in the sun on the gently upsweeping lawn, sat down, and lit a cigarette.

Mrs. Walker and her daughter were resting too, stretched out in lounge chairs on the terrace below him next to the house, both barelegged in the bright October sun. While Michael rested he stared at them, his face wearing its usual expression of longing and contempt. When he had smoked the cigarette down to a stub he held the glowing

end to the patch of grass between his feet and watched a little circle of flame catch in the dry cuttings and slowly widen. When it had expanded to touch the soles of his shoes he wiped out the ring of fire with a palm-down, sweeping motion of his hand, then got to his feet and went back to work.

Two miles away, at the southern end and bottom of the valley, Henry Simpson was nearing the end of his long march home. To give Mr. Michael his due, he had offered to drive the old man home, but Henry had refused, stating—not quite expecting to be believed—that the long walk would ease the pain in his back. Michael had shrugged and let him go, his light eyes expressionless.

Like the Munning house, the Simpson place was set apart from the main body of the town, but there the resemblance ended. The Simpson house was tiny and it stood low down at the edge of the swampy area. The Simpsons were black, and had lived in that same place for more than forty years, Addie having come there as a bride. Henry's family had been the first of their race to settle in the town.

While Daniel and Cathy had been talking on the terrace of the house on the mountainside, Addie had been ironing in her kitchen with the board drawn up close to the window for light, and so that she could look up from time to time to the mountain slope she loved, all kindled with red and gold at this time of year and changing from minute to minute as the cloud shadows swept eastward, scudding before a brisk wind.

At approximately the time that Daniel was bringing Cathy the package from his car, Addie detached the iron cord, folded the last of Henry's shirts, and stepped out onto the little porch to take a sampling of the bright afternoon. She was dismayed to see her husband walking up the path from the road. It was the middle of the afternoon! What could be the matter? She hurried down the path to meet him.

He held up a hand to her, so that she stopped and waited for him to walk up to her, and then they walked side by side into the little kitchen and sat down at the table.

"Are you all right?" she said. "Are you sick? Don't tell me he didn't have work for you this time of year."

"Plenty of work," said the old man. "I quit."

"Oh, Lord," she said. Her round dark face was a mask of love and

worry. "Did something bad happen?"

"I told him I was sick," said Henry. "But it wasn't true. I'm not going back."

Addie nodded her head. "That Mr. Michael," she said. "He frightens me. He always did frighten me. Did he do something? What did he do?"

"Nothing. He didn't do nothing. But—" he lowered his voice, looked all around as though someone listening might be hiding in a corner "—we was going out on the jobs, the usual—clean up the Walker lady's property and all like that—and I went back into the shed to get something to brace up the leaf bags. I couldn't find anything right off so I looked underneath that tarpolion he keeps back in a corner of the place, and there I see twelve, maybe fifteen big cans of gasoline all lined up underneath. He had it in those khaki-color water carriers you get down at the Army Surplus. You could smell it a mile, but I opened up a couple just to make sure, and then I closed them and covered them up again. And I went out and said, 'Mr. Michael, I've got to go home. I got a bad pain.' He didn't like it one bit."

"Are you going to tell the police?"

"What for? What am I going to tell them? Are they going to listen to an old colored fellow like me? They'll tell me I better mind my own business. And besides, Mr. Michael been good to me, I don't want to hurt him. Tell you the truth, I don't know what to do. But I know there's something wrong there and I don't want no part."

"He's got funny eyes, that Michael," said his wife. "He's got no color in them, like water. He look at you, you can't tell whether he love or hate you. I never trust that man."

"I *do* got a pain now."

"Don't worry." She put her hand over his. "It was the right thing to do. A man ain't got a conscience, he's nobody. We'll get along O.K. You do the right thing in this world, then God look after us in the next."

"It's the meanwhile," said her husband.

"I can iron professional. I done it before."

"Why do you suppose he lined up fifteen gasoline cans?"

"The police is right," said Addie firmly. "That's not your business." But they were both very quiet for the rest of the afternoon, and the old man ate little of his supper. Addie watched him, shaking her head.

"You had a very bad day," she said to him. "I'll tell you what, you go lie down now and I'm just going to take some of this nice apple pie up to old Cissie Gates. See, I got it right here on a plate. I'll be right back. You rest yourself."

"Figure this one out," said Police Sergeant Brimmer, who was on the desk. "That was some old colored lady, black lady, just called in. I quote: 'Mr. Michael's got gasoline cans under a *polion*.' " He glared at his notes, glared at the men. "That's what it says here. A *polion*. What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Joe LaVarca shifted his position on the radiator; the wind was hitting the building and the pipes were beginning to heat up. "Napoleon," he said. "That was a very short Frenchman. Who's the colored black lady?"

"I told you," said Brimmer. "She didn't give me a name. 'Scuse me, I got to go now,' she says to me. She sounded like Scarlett O'Hara with her teeth out. And who's Mr. Michael?"

LaVarca pitched his empty coffee container into the wastebasket across the room. "I could of used some Danish with that. There's nobody in town named Michaels that I know of. Check the phone book."

"I did already," said Brimmer. "No Michaels." He raised his voice and shouted out to Rosenman from the Public Works Department, who was bantering around with somebody out in the corridor, "Hey, Rosie! You know any Michaels family in town?"

"Why would she call in anyway?" asked LaVarca. "If we picked up everybody that stores a can of gas in this town, there wouldn't be nobody left."

"Maybe she figures Mr. Michael's going to burn down the town," said Brimmer. "Maybe it's an insurance deal. *Rosie*!"

Rosie strolled in. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"You people in the public works know of any family named Michael? Or Michaels?"

"No. Have you got a first name?"

"Maybe Michael is a first name," said Brimmer. "This old lady called him Mr. Michael."

"Well," said Rosenman, "there's 'Call Michael'."

"How do you mean, 'Call Michael'?"

"You must have seen the truck around. An old blue panel truck?

This Michael's a little guy who does estate maintenance. You know the stuff—cleanup jobs, grass-cutting, hedges, that kind of work. He's got these big gold letters on the truck: 'Call Michael'."

"Some old colored lady work for him?"

Rosenman shrugged. "He usually has an old colored guy with him. He drives the truck sometimes."

"What's the old man's name?"

"No idea at all."

"What's Michael's last name?"

"I couldn't tell you. Maybe he's just Michael. Like Cher. You got a problem?"

"We had a call come in. Where does this Michael live?"

"He's got an old busted-down farmhouse out on Centerville Road, just this side of Route Forty."

"You guys better get out there," said Brimmer. "Rosie, will you go along and show them where it is?"

"If I gotta. But let's get there and get back. It's getting really windy." He shivered. "I think I'm catching cold."

"Winter's coming," said LaVarca.

The house on Centerville Road was dark. "Try the doors," said Turner.

"Tsk," said Rosie.

"Locked," said LaVarca.

"Saved," said Rosie.

Turner suggested a look back in the shed. The three men walked up the thinly graveled driveway behind the house. The shed doors stood open and the blue truck was gone. LaVarca flashed his light around the walls. Rows of shelves held a neat array of small tools, paint cans, cans of tree paint, various containers of chemicals. Digging and raking tools were lined up on pegs and small power tools stood neatly ranged across the back.

"Neat," said LaVarca. "Very neat."

"There's your 'polion," said Rosie suddenly. "Over there in the corner. Folded up on the floor."

"Well, if that's it there's nothing under it now."

Turner strode to the back of the shed, picked up a corner of the tarpaulin, and sniffed. "This has been around gasoline," he said.

"Well, it's gone now," said LaVarca. "So who knows what it was all about? There's nothing here any more. What do you say, let's go?" But he stood in the doorway, frowning. "What kind of a truck, Rosie?"

"Blue stakeside van, medium size. I don't know what make. Like I said, it says 'Call Michael'."

"Let's do that," said LaVarca. "Get on the air, Bill, and see if any of our boys can pick him up."

Addie came back from taking the pie to Cissie Gates and her telephone.

"You been everywhere he goes," she said to Henry. "Now you think. Where you been?"

"Noplace he'd be taking gasoline to."

"Gotta be someplace."

"Maybe somebody called him up."

"Ordered it over the phone?"

"Why not?"

"It don't make sense. Somebody want to talk to him face to face when they're concerning a job like burning down someplace."

"Is that what we're talking about, Addie?"

"Looks like it, don't it?"

Henry sighed. "I hate to think it. I hate to think it about that man."

"You think it all right or you wouldn't walk home on him."

"Mrs. Burg's we been to this week. And the Lampson place. And we did a cleanup, a one-time cleanup on a little place belongs to some people name Miller out near Pleasantville. And then we did all the factories where he takes out the rubbish like the paint place and the broom factory. You know the rest of them, Addie—we been there a million times and I know I told you about them. Nothing strange about any of them."

"Nothing different about a single one of them?"

He shook his head. "Everything exactly as usual. The only thing different was we ran out that track on top of the ridge to the water tower and then come back again."

"Why ever for?"

"He said he wanted to look at the trees. And it was might pretty up there too. Those oak trees are just beautiful this year, just as pretty as a picture. He stopped the truck up there and just looked at those

trees."

"Well, I can't hate him for that," said Addie. "I step outside this door and I look up at those hills and my heart lifts up, just like it says."

"So who needs insurance money?" said Rosie when they were back in the car.

"The lumber yard?" asked Turner.

"Not at the current prices they get," said LaVarca. "No way."

"Beers'," said Rosie. "They been doing lousy ever since the shopping center opened."

But LaVarca sprang to Beers' defense. "Don't be crazy. Old man Beers would never get mixed up in a thing like that. Anyway, business kind of came back. You go in there now, they're pretty busy most of the time. Beers isn't dumb. He gives credit. No, don't look at Beers."

"Well, where else?" asked Rosie.

Turner pursed his lips.

"How," he said, "about the Munning place up on the ridge? Doreen says she's late with her taxes again."

"Oh, what's the matter with you?" said Rosie. "That girl? She'll pay up. She always does. Besides, she don't have to burn it down. She's got an offer on it, like a half a million. In addition to which, she don't have to hire anybody to do the job. If she wants to burn it, she only needs to light one match."

"So who?" said LaVarca.

"How about Vesey's paint place?" asked Turner. "Joe's really in trouble. Do you know they had a whole month's shipments come back? The stuff isn't any good, or the wrong color or something, or you couldn't mix it."

"Joe Vesey's not about to burn his place down," said LaVarca.

"He could use the money," said Turner. "And who's going to ask questions about a fire in a paint factory? One cigarette butt is all it would take."

"I'm telling you he wouldn't do it," said LaVarca.

"Who else, then?" asked Turner.

"I don't know," said Rosie.

"No idea," said LaVarca.

"I think we better take a run out by the paint factory," said Turner.

"That Michael, he ever stop to admire a fine sunset?" said Addie.

"No time I can recall."

"He ever say what a nice sun*rise*?"

"Not in my recollection. Now don't you think you want to get to sleep?"

"I guess," said Addie.

She woke at midnight, crying out.

"Oh, my Lord, what is it?" said Henry, struggling up. "Are you sick?"

"Oh my, oh my," she said. She was sitting bolt upright in the bed. "I dreamt I saw my mountain burning. Oh! Now you go back to sleep. I'm going to get me a drink of milk. Go on now, go to sleep."

"You mean you goin' to take another piece of pie to Cissie's telephone." He swung his feet out of bed. "That floor's cold." He reached down and picked up a shoe. "I'm comin' with you and don't you fight me. We'll call them up proper this time."

"I guess I ought to mind but I don't," said his wife. "Come along."

Their footsteps were loud on the little porch in the silence of the night. The air was sweet and cool and a brisk little wind rattled the branches of the old maple tree by the steps.

"That mountain look fine, just fine," said Addie, staring off to the east. She chuckled. "Pretty soon that moon be up there so high he can see the winter comin'."

"We better get along to Cissie," said Henry. "Gotta use that telephone."

She pulled her sweater tight around her. "Rats coming up out of the swamp again," she said. "They do every year this time."

"I'll take care of them later," said the old man. "That'll be no problem." He took her arm. "We better hurry now."

Cathy Munning woke from a frightening dream of footsteps approaching down the empty corridors, of a man's voice saying, "I'm restless, I can't sleep up there any more," and at the same time crooning over a little bundle of sticks on the cellar floor. The voice asked, "Did you ever play flaming jackstraws?" and she woke up panting with fear.

She crouched at the edge of her bed, listening. There was no sound but the wind moving in the tree tops and blowing the fallen leaves over the ground. She pulled on a raincoat over her pajamas and went

out onto the terrace. There she seated herself on the low stone wall that rimmed off the lawn and gazed up the hill to the ridge line.

The night was beautiful. The full moon had not got up over the mountain yet but the light of its coming cut out everything in silhouette against the skyline: the jagged line of the woods to her left, the bare straight line of the rocky saddle almost straight up above her and in line with the house, the woods to the right again, and the geometric shape of the water tower far to her right.

Some nights cars ran along the trail out to the tower and she could glimpse the lights appearing and disappearing among the trees, shining through like a signal where the dirt road crossed the rock saddle. Sometimes it would be the police car chasing lovers, sometimes lovers. One time, she remembered, smiling, there had been a cop and his sixteen-year-old lady friend. Daniel had heard of that episode—beaucoup trouble, and a change of career for at least one of the parties involved.

Too wide awake now to go back into the house, she watched the ridge line brighten against the sky as the moon rose behind it, thinking for a few blessed minutes of nothing at all. And then a shadow, a small block of darkness, moved across the flat rock saddle. Somebody up there was running without lights.

Her telephone, when she got to it, was dead. She seized hold of Daniel's shoebox present, a Colt .22 target pistol, and loaded it with trembling fingers. Then she began the long climb up the twisting path behind the house, moving as quickly and quietly as she could. Under the trees the night was black and once, and then again, she stumbled.

Michael drove the truck as far as the water tower, turned around on the little loop of dirt track there, and ran back until he was in a position directly above the house. Running without lights was easy. The moon was brilliant and the trees on the ridge line thinly spaced and scrubbier than those bulking up in the dense growth below. After a moment's thought he ran the truck along another hundred yards, then stopped. There was no point in taking a chance on getting cut off.

The wind was brisk and unpredictable on the ridge, with the downdraft fighting against the steady wind from the west. He had to plan carefully now in order to reach the truck ahead of the action.

There was some risk, but not too much if he was careful.

He lifted down the gasoline cans out of the back of the truck and set them on the ground near the head of the path running down the slope to the house. The moonlight was beginning to shine on the rooftop maybe a couple of hundred feet downslope. Michael unscrewed a cap, lifted the can, and looked around him. Oaks. Pines. Pines were best. He picked out a tall one with a medium-sized trunk, walked over to the bole of it, and tipped the can. The sharp active smell of the gasoline rose up over the tarry fragrance of the tree.

The second canful he spattered at the base of a second pine further downhill, just off the path and on a line diagonal to the slope—let the westerly wind push the fire ahead of it, burn out the western face of the mountain. Keep it from going over the ridge if possible. We have no interest in that side, he had been told by the man he had never seen. They just wanted the Munning property destroyed.

Moving fast, dumping, dribbling fuel in a line from one tree to the next, soaking the splendid fallen leaves, he ran up and down the mountain slope, carrying full cans, returning empties. He was a slender man, light on his feet, moonlight shining on the fine mane of white hair that fell forward from time to time over his eyes so that he had to brush it back now and again with his gasoline-smelling hand.

He had poured out most of the fifteen cans, less spendthrift with it now, dribbling a trail downward toward the house and to the south of it, when Cathy came face to face with him and commanded him to stop. They were facing each other at a distance of thirty feet.

"My dear girl, you can't fire that gun," said Michael in his light, rather charming voice. "You'll start off the gasoline."

"Then you'll die," said Cathy.

"*You* are the one who'll die," said Michael. "I know where I've laid the trail."

The police car raced down to the end of the valley and stopped in front of the little white house just long enough for the old man to climb into the back seat, then swept around again and headed up the mountain. They were halfway across the ridge on the track to the water tank when LaVarca yelled to Turner to stop. Turner braked. "Cut the engine," said LaVarca urgently. "This place is loaded."

"Christ, smell that," said Turner. The bright sharp smell of raw

gasoline flooded into the car on the back of the wind. "How the hell do we get out of here when the place goes up? Maybe I better turn the car around."

"Better not," said Rosie. "One spark is all it would take." He was in the back seat next to the old man and crouched forward, looking intently out the window. "Down there," he said. "Somebody's carrying a light. Would your Mister Michael carry a light on a job like this?"

"Maybe somebody's got a light on him," said Henry.

"Who?"

"*No* idea. You let me go down there now. He's way off the path. I know these woods from when I was a small boy. All these little animals up here were my good friends—I'll tell you fact—I had no other." Rosenman made way for him, and he got out of the car, moving with the slowness of age. "Don't you follow me down. I'm about to do this alone."

"No way," said LaVarca. "We're going down right behind you. You sure you can do this?"

"I'm certain. But I don't want you firing off them guns no matter what. This whole mountain going to blaze up you do."

"We won't fire."

An eternity seemed to pass while the men groped their way downslope behind the old man, heading toward the circle of light below. The sky had filmed over with cloud and they stumbled and slid in the darkness. "I can't see," whispered LaVarca.

"That's good," said the old man. "There's rain coming up behind those clouds. Hear the wind roaring in the trees! I pray God."

"At least he won't hear us," said Turner. "Michael." He said the name as though it tasted bad in his mouth. They stopped just out of range of the light. "Somebody's got a light on him, all right." He addressed the old man. "Are you close enough here?"

"I reckon so."

"Call him."

"Mr. Michael!"

"Louder."

"*Mr. Michael!*"

The figure in the beam of light whirled around to face them, white hair glinting. "Henry? Henry?" Incredulous. "What the hell are you doing up here? Are you crazy?"

"I come up here to call you from your deed. Come walk out of the woods with me."

"Is that the police with you?"

LaVarca flicked the switch on his torch and flashed it briefly on the others and himself. "Who's holding the light down there?"

"Cathy Munning!" she called out. "Don't use your guns. Please."

"Surrender yourself, Michael," called Turner.

He was answered with an obscenity, and then Michael shouted, "I'll give you thirty seconds to get out of here!"

"Give us your matches—throw them here!"

"I have a job to do," said Michael, his voice loud, firm, reasonable. "You call Michael, you get what you pay for. You can leave or you can stay. There's no way you can stop me."

"All right," said LaVarca, turning to the old man. "It's up to you."

"I am truly sorry for what I have to do," said Henry. The gnarled fingers exerted their strength, the forked stick in his hand bent back with the resilience of young wood. The stone, propelled from the ancient weapon, climbed the air at killing speed.

*Running gave Len a sense of accomplishment . . .*

# RUNNING

by RON GOULART

He hadn't been thinking about killing or death. He rarely did any more.

Len Burtin was jogging through the clean spring morning, feeling happy and content. Or as close to those states as he was likely to get. This year his income would hit, with any luck, $100,000. He was pretty certain, as his thirty-sixth birthday approached, he'd be marrying again. There'd be no trouble this time, Len was confident of that.

He came running down Maple Lane, his jogging shoes slapping at the dirt pleasantly. For the past three months he'd been into running and he was fairly certain he'd stick with it. The exhilaration, the satisfaction of accomplishing something alone, appealed to Len. When Maple Lane ended he turned right, as he did most mornings, onto Old Quarry Road.

There were very few houses in this part of Brimstone, Connecticut, only slanting fields, rambling grey rock fences, and a multitude of newly green trees. He'd been running about fifteen minutes now and had covered nearly a mile, and he was hardly winded. The more he ran, the easier it got.

He paid little attention to the footfalls behind him. Another Sunday-morning jogger, probably, although he didn't usually encounter any fellow runners hereabouts. It didn't much matter because most running people are loners. You didn't have to worry, if you encountered one, about getting involved in any sort of extended conversation. Maybe he'd get a good-morning grunt, or maybe no words at all—only a thumbs-up sign and a quick grin.

"Barney Lensford," said a voice almost at his side.

Len managed to keep running, to keep his feet slapping at the hard dirt of the narrow hill road. But nobody was supposed to know that name, it was dead and gone—as dead and gone as his wife.

"Coincidence," continued the voice, "running into you like this."

Len turned his head and saw a lanky grinning man jogging beside him. "Beg pardon, you must be mist—"

"Barney, come on." Kevin Larch's grin widened. "A moustache and a nose job don't fool me." Larch was three years younger than Len, lean and tanned. He wore a sleeveless sweatshirt and scarlet shorts. A sweatband with an Indian design circled his forehead, cutting into his long straw-blond hair. "I always knew you'd come around to my way of thinking eventually. Running is terrific, isn't it?"

Finally Len said, "Yeah."

The two men, side by side, jogged along the warming road, passing in and out of sunshine and shadow.

"Have you kept track of me?" Larch asked after a moment.

"Some. I didn't know you were in Connecticut."

"I travel all around the country now. Didn't you see the piece on me in *Sports Illustrated*?"

"I missed it."

Larch laughed. "I'll bet you did see it. It always did gall you to think I was getting attention when you weren't. When we were friends out in—"

"Neighbors," corrected Len. "We were never exactly friends, Kevin."

Larch's mouth maintained a grin, but his eyes turned sad. "I was your friend, a friend of both you and Dayna."

Len found he was starting to have a little difficulty with his breathing. He wouldn't stop running though. "Did you trail me here to Brimstone?"

Breathing evenly and with ease, Larch replied, "Not exactly, Barney, although I knew you were here. My basic reason for being in Connecticut is to promote *Jog*."

"What's that?"

Another laugh. "I never thought you were as good an actor as you did," Larch said. "You've damn well heard of my book. It's been number one on *The New York Times* list for three-and-a-half months. And I happen to know you have *The Times* delivered to your very impressive home on Tammany Lane each and every day. Imagine you owning a home like that—'saltbox' is what they call it, isn't it? It must be worth $200,000, at least."

"You know where I live?"

"I must, judging by what I'm saying." Larch continued to grin as he ran effortlessly up the increasing incline. "You don't have to worry, Barney, the authorities don't know what I know. And since I'm separated from Evie, well, there's been nobody to confide in. Evie and I split up a year and a half ago, right after I got my advance to do *Jog*. I got $40,000 in front. My publisher believed in me from the start."

"Why?" Getting words out was becoming difficult. His lungs felt as though they were filling with gritty dust.

"Why give me so much? Because they knew, as I tried to tell you when we were neighbors out in San Fernando, that running is the wave of—"

"I mean why did you track me down?"

"This meeting is a complete accident. Really." A bigger grin. "Actually, I happen to be on Old Quarry Road this morning because I happen to be—"

"How did you," asked Len, striving to make his voice come out normal, "find out I was—"

"You never have given me much credit for intelligence, Barney. Back in California when I was only a second-rate sportswriter for the *Woodland Hills Alert* and you were an aspiring actor living off your wife's—"

"We don't. . .have to go into. . .the details of. . ."

"How many months have you been running?"

"Quite a few, a long time."

"You don't sound like it," said Larch. "Oh, I know you've been running this route for at least a month, but I'd be surprised if you've been jogging much longer than that. You haven't even learned to breathe yet or—"

"How did. . .you know I. . .come this way. . .every morning?"

"I asked questions," Larch grinned. "I'm a reporter, remember? Sometimes, you know, when you run you get the notion you're invisible. I've got a whole chapter on that in *Jog*, all the out-of-body stuff too. They ran part of that in *Vogue*. Can you imagine, me in *Vogue*? The point being, people actually do notice you. When I hit this part of Connecticut last week to promote *Jog* and arrange my usual series of interviews—"

"I don't. . .understand. . ." Every breath seemed to burn its way through him. He had to suck in air through his mouth, gasping. "Nobody knew I—"

"But Kev Larch knows. Old stupid Kev who had all those goofy ideas about running six years ago, back when you murdered your wife."

"I didn't murder. . .Dayna." Each time his foot hit the road pain zigzagged up his leg. "You know that. It was. . .an accident. But I knew. . .no one would. . ."

"You smashed in her skull with a brick, Barney." The grin was gone from Larch's face.

"We had a quarrel. She. . .fell against the. . .bookcase," said Len. "You remember all those. . .bricks-and-boards cases Dayna insisted . . .on setting up in the. . .damn living room. The case fell apart. . .I grabbed up a brick. . .angry. Mad about. . .all the things she was. . .accusing me of."

"All of which were true."

"O.K. . .so I was seeing. . .other women." He had to concentrate on not stumbling. "But that's how you get. . .anywhere. . .in any business. . .Contacts. . ."

"Sure, the more contacts you sleep with, the further you get in show business," said Larch. "Is that how you got into doing commercials in New York?"

"So that's how. . .you got to me. But I. . .my looks are different. . .my name. And I've never been on camera. I do voice-over stuff. . .character voices. . .dubbing."

"You always had a lovely voice," said Larch, the grin returning. "Evie often commented on it. You slept with her, too, didn't you?"

"Your wife. . .no. I. . .never did that."

"It doesn't matter. Do you want to stop for a minute and catch your breath?"

"No. I can run. . .as long and as far. . .as anybody."

Nodding, Larch kicked up the pace slightly. His chest rose and fell evenly, his bare legs pumped up and down with easy regularity. "Funny thing," he said. "I recognized your voice first on a dog-food commercial. You were the voice of a hard-to-please St. Bernard. I knew you at once, Barney."

"I didn't think. . .anyone would. . .spot my voice." It was difficult to keep up with Larch. "After I had my face changed. . .in Mexico. . .I stayed out of sight for a couple years."

"Living off Dayna's money," Larch said. "That store of cash she insisted on keeping in the house—$50,000, wasn't it?"

"Not. . .that much."

"But enough to finance you until you got going as a voice man. You just couldn't keep away from acting."

"What else. . .did I know? I figured. . .if no one saw me. . .I'd be O.K. I didn't know. . .anyone in the East. It took a while to. . .get anything. . .but then my luck. . .turned. I've been doing. . .pretty well."

"About $100,000 a year. Yeah, that is pretty well, Barney. Pretty damn well."

"I don't make anything near. . .that much."

"I *know* what you earn. I have friends in New York TV." Larch took the crest of the hill with ease. "You must have seen the four minutes on me on the local CBS news last week about my Mini Marathon in

Westchester. Whenever I come into an area to promote—"

"You want something." The road sloped gently down now. On their left dropped rocky fields. The going was a bit easier, although Len felt raw and dry.

"What could I possibly want, Barney? I have most everything—fame, fortune. I don't happen to have a wife at the moment, but I have an assortment of attractive lady friends. You wouldn't think running attracts groupies, but it does," said Larch, chuckling. "You never had a very high opinion of me out in California, but I *knew* I was a front runner. I'm good, and when I get the chance I run at the head of the pack."

"You found me. You worked it so you'd cross. . .my path out here in the middle. . .of nowhere."

"Barney, it's pure coincidence. Didn't I explain that my real reason for being here this morning is—"

"What do you want?"

Larch ran in silence for nearly half a minute. "Well, I'm earning roughly $200,000 this year," he said finally. "I tell you, though, an extra $50,000 each and every year wouldn't be bad. Holding my Mini Marathons all over America is expensive, even though my publishers and the various local—"

"Blackmail," said Len. "You cheap grinning bastard! Trying to blackmail me! You come on. . .like some kind of Hindu saint but all you really—"

"Hold it, Barney. Let's not have any pot-and-kettle trade-offs, huh? Blackmailing may not be a clean-cut profession, but it's quite a few notches below murder. You murdered your wife and ran out before the cops could get hold of you. I only—"

"Look, you're famous now, right?" The running wasn't quite as tough now. "You don't need extra dough really. Why not let me alone, forget this?"

"Oh, but there's one other thing," said the smiling runner. "I'm not like you. When I was married I never fooled around. I did, though, have feelings about ladies other than my wife. One of the women I was especially fond of was Dayna. Yeah, I thought your wife was a very special person. And you, you stupid arrogant bastard, you smashed her skull in so you could skip out with her cash."

"I told you. . .I never intended—"

"Do I give a damn what you intended? You killed someone I was very fond of. That hurt me, so now I'm going to hurt you—financially, psychologically, any way I can."

"It's idiotic to —" Len tripped and went sprawling in the road. His right hand was scraped and his ribs were smacked by a large stone that had rolled down into the roadway.

Just like the other time. He didn't know what he was going to do until he found the stone in his hand.

Larch had halted and come back to help him.

Len struck him with the rock. He hit Larch many times, even after he was stretched out on the road dead.

It's all right, it's all right, Len told himself, gradually pulling himself up and away from the body. I can make it look like an accident. Drag him over there, toss him down the hillside, arrange it so. . .

He heard the new footfalls then—the slap of running shoes on the morning road—more than one pair, several pairs, all running along this road toward him.

Len turned and there they were.

The rhythm of their running broke. One runner, then another, halting, exclaiming, realizing what they were seeing.

They cautiously approached Len, who stood with the bloody rock still in his hand.

They wore fresh new T-shirts. Emblazoned across the front of each was *Kev Larch's Mini Marathon.*

As Kevin Larch had said, he'd always known he was a front runner.

*Consider the squirrel, Marwood said . . .*

# CLOSE CALLS

by JOHN LUTZ

She wasn't supposed to die. She had no life insurance, no liquid assets to speak of, no really solid reason to be dead. Yet there she lay, looking, Graham Hopper thought, rather smug about the whole thing. It was so like her.

And here was Graham, now a widower—middle-aged and getting older by the minute—with little cash, very dim prospects, and a voracious mortgage payment. The future seemed an abyss.

His wife Adelle had done this to him—Adelle, along with Martin Marwood. It was their fault that Graham was about to attend a funeral that should never be taking place.

It was one of the most miserable affairs Graham had ever endured. The preacher was garrulous. A chilling light rain fell throughout and the mourners were forced to stand about the grave in a virtual swamp. It took Graham hours to shake his depression.

Then he went directly to see Martin Marwood at Close Calls, Incorporated.

Close Calls was on the sixteenth floor of the Belmont Building downtown. Ostensibly it was a telephone-solicitation company that did seasonal work, but Graham knew better. Close Calls had been very discreetly recommended to him three months ago by a very close friend. Some friend!

At the sixteenth floor, Graham stepped from the nervous elevator and walked down a long grey hall lined with office doors. From behind some of the doors came the rhythmic clatter of electric typewriters. Near the end of the hall Graham saw the wood door with its frosted glass panel on which was lettered CLOSE CALLS, INC. WE COMMUNICATE. Graham cursed under his breath as he entered.

There was no one in the small plainly-furnished anteroom. Graham pressed a button as directed by a hand-printed sign, a buzzer sounded, and after a moment Marwood himself opened the door to his inner office and peered out.

Marwood was a small man, neatly if flashily dressed in a muted plaid blue suit that must have been tailor-made. He had a professionally cheerful, blunt-featured face, a receding hairline, and deep-set electric dark eyes. "Hey," he said, grinning as if nothing were wrong, "Mr. Hopper."

"You bet your business," Graham said.

Marwood appeared puzzled. "I don't follow."

"You muffed it," Graham said with controlled anger. "You killed my wife as dead as the Edsel."

"Oh, that," Marwood said. "Come into the office and we'll talk about it."

He led the way into his large office, plainly furnished as if for efficiency like the anteroom. No high overhead here, the office seemed to

say—more for your dollar. Marwood sat behind a cluttered steel desk and motioned Graham toward a high-backed padded chair nearby. Graham shook his head and remained standing. The faded green walls of the office were restful, their framed dime-store prints perfectly aligned. A window air-conditioner emitted a soothing hum. Graham refused to be soothed.

"Now what's this about your wife?" Marwood asked, making a neat pink tent with his fingers.

"My wife is dead."

Marwood appeared perplexed, and then his potatoish features expressed comprehension. "Say, that's right, Graham—may I call you Graham?—I remember reading the operative's report yesterday. Your wife stepped directly into the path of a speeding car. A hit-and-run, I'm afraid."

Graham felt the room becoming warmer. "But the car was supposed to barely miss her," he said in exasperation. "That's the service Close Calls is supposed to render. Adelle was to be badly shaken so she'd think hard about dying and transfer some of her assets into my name and take out a large life insurance policy. As it stands, I can't touch the business, and Adelle had no insurance. You've reduced me to poverty."

"Hey, Graham, I'm sorry." Marwood began to doodle with a gold pen on a small writing pad. Graham saw that he was sketching intricate little mazes. "But you're not exactly poverty-stricken," Marwood said. "In cases like these, Close Calls does refund half the fee."

"Half?"

"That's five thousand dollars, Graham. Nothing to scorn."

"But nothing to what I've lost!" Graham almost shouted. "Lost because of your incompetence!"

"Don't say incompetence," Marwood implored in a hurt tone. "Ninety-nine percent of our clients are more than satisfied. You are unfortunately one of the other one percent. Hey, nothing is perfect. I assure you I feel as badly about your wife as you do."

"But you profited from her death. I lost."

"Consider the squirrel," Marwood said.

Graham was dumbfounded. "Squirrel?"

"Yes. Have you ever noticed what happens when a squirrel runs out into the street and finds itself in the path of an oncoming car? The

squirrel freezes, Graham, then usually it runs away from the car. But occasionally it darts directly beneath the car's wheels. It's a reflex action, a sort of death wish. Well, people are sometimes like squirrels. People are unpredictable. That's what happened, Graham. Your wife froze, then ran the wrong way, directly into the path of the car that was supposed to barely miss her. There are off-days in this business when things like that happen, which is the reason we have certain built-in safeguards."

"Safeguards?"

"Sure, Graham. Like recordings of all conversations that take place in this office. I mean, hey, let's be candid, guy, you can't very well go to the police. You're implicated, guilty of second degree murder." Marwood was sketching rows of barred windows on the pad.

Graham sighed deeply, and stood in the center of the office with his hands in his pockets. "I'm not a stupid man, Marwood. I've taken all this into consideration."

Marwood touched the point of the gold pen to his chin. "Have you?"

"We're both guilty of murder. And you have a profitable business to lose. I'd say the police are out of this entirely."

Marwood smiled and began to doodle again, crossing out the bars on the windows. "I'm glad you realize that, Graham."

"And I understand what you mean about one accident occurring out of a hundred successful close calls. That's inevitable."

Marwood's smile stretched even wider. "It's nice to know you've been listening to me."

"And you can keep my entire fee, for all I care. In my position—which is bankruptcy—the money would simply be devoured by my creditors anyway."

"Vultures," Marwood agreed, but a glint of uneasiness had kindled in his dark eyes.

"All that's left for me, really," Graham said, "is revenge. Or, to be more specific, poetic justice."

Marwood had stopped smiling, but he was still confident. "You should know, Graham, that upon my death certain records will immediately be brought to light. It's another necessary safeguard."

Graham shrugged. "Oh, I'm prepared to place my fate in the hands of chance—both of our fates, in fact."

Marwood began to doodle frantically. "I don't follow."

"One time out of a hundred," Graham reiterated, "something goes wrong. But is it going to be the first time, or the hundredth?"

"There's no way to know," Marwood said, deftly marking out a neat pattern of question marks.

Graham removed the gun from his pocket.

Marwood glanced up just in time to see the flash of the muzzle. He was too stunned to scream as the gun roared and the bullet went snapping past his right ear with a sound like a cracking whip. He lifted a hand to his head incredulously, turned, and stared, horrified at the ugly bullet-hole in the green plaster behind his desk. If he had happened to incline his head to the right a fraction of an inch at the moment of the shot. . .

"One," Graham said simply, replacing the gun in his pocket. "Think about the next ninety-nine. Consider the squirrel."

He walked to the door and opened it, then, before leaving, he turned.

"Take care," he said to Marwood.

*Why were these small-time hoodlums suddenly so rich? . . .*

# THE OBSESSION OF OFFICER O'ROURKE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Officer Michael O'Rourke was directing traffic at his usual downtown corner one warm April morning when his obsession was born. It began the instant he saw Sam Dresdon drive by in a new white Cadillac. Dresdon was a two-bit hoodlum who'd confessed to a grocery-store robbery two years ago and drawn a five-year sentence. With parole and such it wasn't too soon for him to be back on the streets, but it certainly seemed too soon for him to be driving a $12,000 automobile.

That was the beginning.

About ten days later he was eating a hamburger in a fast-food place that gave discounts to policemen when he noticed another ex-convict drive up in a powder-blue foreign sports car that probably cost even more than a Cadillac. The man's name was Chris Cohen and Michael O'Rourke knew him well enough to speak to.

"Hello there, Chris. Good to see you out on the street again."

"Well, Mike! You know, after a couple of years in the slammer I'm even glad to see you."

They shook hands and O'Rourke invited Cohen to join him. "Have a seat."

"Won't your sergeant get nervous seeing you with an ex-con?"

"The hell with him. Tell me about yourself. Where'd you get the car?"

"I bought it—with some money I had saved up."

"Did you pull a bank job we never knew about?" O'Rourke asked, keeping it light.

"Nothin' like that. I was making pretty good money before I went away."

"Then why would you want to knock over a little tailor shop on Smith Street? That's not your style."

"I don't know. I guess I had a couple of drinks too many that day."

"And then you walked in and confessed to it, did you?"

"Sure. I figured it would go easier on me if I did."

O'Rourke finished his hamburger. "You know an ex-con named Sam Dresdon?"

"No. Why do you ask? Was he at Attica?"

"I guess not."

"Then I don't know him. Never heard the name."

"He's got a new car too."

"Like mine?"

"No, a Cadillac."

It was a coincidence and nothing more. O'Rourke thought nothing about it until a few weeks later when he and his wife Maggie were enjoying one of their infrequent Sunday dinners out at a lakeshore restaurant that was just opening for the late-spring and summer business. A dock extended out from the restaurant, and in the summer a number

of boats would be moored there while the owners and their friends took time out for dinner or a few beers.

Michael O'Rourke was studying one of the crafts, a cabin cruiser nearest to shore, when he said, more to himself than to Maggie, "Isn't that Frank Lamont out there?"

"I don't know any Frank Lamont."

"No, of course you don't. He's been in jail the last few years. I wonder if that could be his boat."

"If it is, jail's more profitable than I thought."

"I'll be right back."

He trotted down to the dock and accosted Lamont. "Is this your boat? It's a beauty!"

"Yeah, it's mine." Frank Lamont eyed him strangely. "Don't I know you?"

"Michael O'Rourke."

"O'Rourke. Aren't you a cop?"

"When I'm on duty, but I'm not today." He continued gazing at the cabin cruiser. "How much does something like this run?"

"It was probably thirty grand when it was new. This one's used and I got a good price on it."

Michael wondered where Frank Lamont could have gotten even half that amount. Trying to remember what he'd been in prison for, he could only recall it was some sort of armed robbery. A shopkeeper had been hit over the head with a pistol butt.

Back inside at the table with Maggie, he thought about it. "You know, that's three ex-cons I've seen in the last month with expensive cars or boats. Where are they getting the money?"

Maggie shook her head. "You're just a traffic cop, Michael. You're not Sherlock Holmes."

"Well, there's something behind it. Maybe they're all part of a gang or something."

"Oh, Michael!"

But Monday was his regular day off, and he spent it down at the detective bureau talking to Sergeant Fenner about it. Fenner, a stocky detective who smoked cheap cigars and looked like a fugitive from a TV-cop show, was unimpressed. "Guys with names like Dresdon and Cohen and Lamont, you think they're part of the Mafia? You got to be kidding!"

"I didn't say Mafia, Sergeant! I said organized crime. There's something connecting them, I'm sure of it. All I want is to look through their case files."

Finally, more to humor him than anything else, Fenner dug out three thick folders from the storeroom and dumped them in O'Rourke's lap. "Here you are, kid. Go to it!"

Michael spent the next hour reading everything in the files. Though the crimes had occurred over a two-year period, there were remarkable similarities about them. Each case had involved the armed robbery of a small shop—a grocery store, a tailor shop, and a liquor store. And in each case the bandit's face had been covered or partly covered, making identification difficult. The weapon had always been a gun, a revolver in two cases and a Luger in the third. The gun had never been fired, though the liquor-store owner had been hit over the head with the Luger.

But the most amazing coincidence was that the robber had confessed in each case.

Frank Lamont was being questioned about some betting slips found in his car when he blurted out his involvement in the crime. Chris Cohen had come down to headquarters with his lawyer to confess. Dresdon had been questioned in the case and released, but later confessed. All three men had prior criminal records of a minor nature, mostly involving gambling arrests. The judges had been lenient in sentencing them, and all had served between two and three years.

Now they were out. And apparently well-off financially.

Sergeant Fenner came back into the office and listened to what Michael had found. "We get a lot of confessions all the time," he said. "There's nothing wrong with confessions; they save the taxpayer the expense of a trial."

"The victims never identified any of them."

"Well, they were wearing scarves or ski masks over their faces. They fit the descriptions in a general way."

"Only because all three men are about the same average height and build. Hell, I'd fit that description in a general way too."

"Do you think they'd be stupid enough to confess to something they didn't do?"

O'Rourke thought about it. "Maybe."

Sergeant Fenner shook his head. "You're hopeless!"

"Look, Sergeant, are there any more robbery cases like these?"

"Sure, hundreds every year in a city this size. And most of them are unsolved. That's why we don't turn our back on confessions."

"I don't care about the unsolved ones. I want to look at the files on closed cases, all the armed-robbery cases for the past five years."

"Wow, you really have flipped out. Go back to directing traffic, kid."

"Come on, Sergeant. I'm giving up my day off for this."

Fenner frowned. "You're obsessed if you ask me," he said. But he showed O'Rourke the file drawers in the storeroom where the closed robbery cases were kept.

Working quickly, Michael sorted the folders into stacks, setting aside any involving the armed robbery of a storekeeper where the robber had later confessed.

Over a five-year period, there were eight such cases. He eliminated three because they were the work of the same man—a burly gunman who'd been arrested at the scene of one robbery and confessed to the others. A fourth case turned out to be a fake, with the store owner confessing he'd taken the money himself to collect the insurance.

But that still left him with four armed robberies almost exactly like the three he'd already checked. A movie box office, a shoe store, and two more small grocery-stores. In each the bandit had been masked and the gun was described as either a snub-nosed revolver or a Luger-type automatic.

The confessions likewise had come out of the blue. The men were petty criminals, generally without families or separated from their wives. Two of them were still in prison and one had moved to Florida after his release. The fourth was a man named Max Clovis, and O'Rourke decided to look him up.

Clovis ran a hi-fi store in a suburban shopping-center. He seemed to be doing a brisk business when O'Rourke arrived. "You want to talk to me?" he asked. "What about?"

O'Rourke gave him a quick glimpse of his badge. If the man thought he was a detective, so much the better. "About that robbery you pulled off a few years back."

"I served my time for that. I'm straight now."

"How long have you been out?"

"Eighteen months."

"How long have you had the store?"

"Over a year."

"You opened it right after you got out?"

Max Clovis shrugged nervously. "Yeah, I guess so, a few months." He shifted O'Rourke away from the customers. "Say, what's all this about? I served my time and I'm clean now."

"I've found seven cases like yours in this city during the past five years. A small armed robbery by a masked man, a confession, a couple of years in jail, and then a sudden influx of money. Where'd you get the backing for this shop, Max?"

"I saved up for it. I had a little money from an uncle who died when I was a kid."

"If you had this much money why'd you bother robbing a shoe store for thirty-six dollars?"

"Hell, I don't know! It just happened."

"What's the real story, Max?"

"There isn't any. Now get out of here and stop bothering me!"

Michael O'Rourke went home to Maggie, feeling depressed.

"I *know* there's some connection," he insisted to her. "I've stumbled onto something big."

She shook her head. "Don't let it become an obsession with you, darling."

"Obsession! That's what Sergeant Fenner said too. The trouble is, the detective division is so happy to get a confession and close a case they don't bother checking into it very closely."

"Why should they?" she argued. "Who'd confess to something they didn't do? Unless they were crazy?"

"These guys sure aren't crazy, with their cars and boats and hi-fi shops."

"Then why would they confess?"

"For money, maybe."

"You mean they'd go to prison for two or three years for something they didn't do for money?"

"I don't know," O'Rourke admitted. "Maybe they would."

He lay awake for a long time that night thinking about it.

For several days he didn't mention his obsession to Maggie, nor did he bring it up again when he met Sergeant Fenner at headquarters.

But it was always in the back of his mind. Finally, toward the end of May, he was just finishing his downtown shift when he spotted Sam Dresdon on the street.

O'Rourke fell into step beside him. "Hello, Sam. How's the new car running?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, it's fine. You're O'Rourke, aren't you? The traffic cop on the corner?"

"That's right. I remember when you went up for that grocery store robbery."

"Yeah."

"I saw you driving the white Cadillac one day last month. Sharp-looking car."

"I like it."

"It must have cost you a bundle."

Dresdon was growing nervous. "Well, I'll see you around," he said, starting to turn at the corner.

O'Rourke gripped his elbow. "How was prison, Sam? As bad as they say?"

"It was O.K. Look, I've got to be going."

"I was surprised to hear you confessed to that grocery store job. I had you figured for bigger things than that."

"Yeah, well—"

"To risk a prison sentence for a few dollars"—Michael kept a firm grip on the man's elbow—"and then to confess it."

"My lawyer advised me to."

"Your lawyer? Who was that?"

Sam turned a pained expression toward O'Rourke. "Look, I can't talk any more. Give me a break, huh?"

O'Rourke released him and watched him scurry away. He would have bet a thousand dollars that Sam Dresdon never had the guts to hold up a grocery store in his life.

So where did that leave him?

Back with his crazy obsession.

Seven robberies over a period of five years. Seven confessions. Had someone paid them? Someone they now feared?

The following day Michael O'Rourke was summoned to headquarters. Sergeant Fenner was waiting for him in the detective bureau, puff-

ing on one of his cheap cigars. "What are you trying to do, O'Rourke? Sam Dresdon's lawyer was on the phone this morning, complaining that you've been harassing his client."

"I only talked to him."

"About that crazy idea of yours?"

"Sergeant, I'm convinced those men were innocent—all seven of them."

"And they were paid to confess to a crime they didn't commit?"

"Exactly."

"Why?"

O'Rourke had worked that out too. "There was a certain similarity to the crimes—the type of store, the general description of the bandit, the masked face, and the gun, which was always a revolver or a Luger. If they'd all remained open on the books, sooner or later some smart detective would have noticed the pattern."

"A smart detective like you, O'Rourke?"

"I'm just a traffic cop, Sergeant."

"Remember that." Fenner chewed on the cigar. "And no more of this business or I'll go to the chief about you."

"Could I ask you one thing, Sergeant?"

"What?"

"Who was the lawyer who complained?"

"Krassey. He's in the Tower Building, with the firm of Pride and Ridgeway."

"Krassey," O'Rourke repeated. "Pride and Ridgeway. Sergeant, could I have another look at those seven files?"

"No, you couldn't. Go on, get out of here!"

There was no arguing with him. And yet, as O'Rourke walked across the parking lot to his car, he had the feeling a lawyer named Krassey had represented at least two or three of the confessed bandits. And the firm of Pride and Ridgeway had been mentioned in the files too. He couldn't be certain without another look, but it was possible that every one of those seven men had been represented by Krassey or some other partner of the Pride and Ridgeway firm.

They were worried about him now, so this was no time to stop. He decided to pay a call on Mr. Krassey.

His shift ended at four that day and he had time to change into his

civilian clothes and reach the law office before it closed at five. The receptionist was uncertain as to Krassey's availability, but when she phoned the inner office the lawyer agreed to see him. O'Rourke walked across the plush reception area into an office that seemed like part of a movie set. The lawyer, Krassey, was a small man completely dwarfed by his surroundings.

"You're Officer Michael O'Rourke?" he asked, pulling a yellow legal pad within reach.

"That's right, sir. As you know, I've been interested in some of your clients."

The lawyer pursed his lips. "Who besides Dresdon?"

"Chris Cohen, Frank Lamont, Max Clovis, Jim—"

"Those aren't my clients."

"I believe this firm represented them," O'Rourke said, taking a chance. "Seven in all, and all confessed to holdups over the past five years."

"Even if it's true, what's so strange about that? Pride and Ridgeway is the leading law firm in the city. We probably represent the accused in close to half the criminal cases that come to trial."

"None of these came to trial," O'Rourke pointed out.

The lawyer waved away the words. "There's nothing unusual in our representing these men. What is unusual is for you to be making such a fuss about it. Just what do you think happened, young man?"

"I think they were paid—and paid very well—to confess to those crimes. The idea was to prevent a pattern of unsolved robberies that would have the police looking for one man as the bandit."

"That's an interesting, if highly imaginative, theory. You should be a fiction writer rather than a police officer."

"Since the robberies netted very little cash and these men are being paid a great deal of money, the person paying them has to be extremely wealthy, the sort who might have the town's largest law firm representing him. With all the criminal cases you handle, finding a fall guy who needed the money would be easy."

Krassey sighed and stood up. "I assume you're here on your own time, Officer, since you're not in uniform and not attached to the detective bureau. I'd suggest you get out of here unless you want me to report this to your superiors."

"I'm going, don't worry. I just wanted you to know. And you can go ahead and report me. I don't suppose I can get the name of your client

out of you, but maybe they could."

"Get out!"

O'Rourke left. It was not a good day for reasonable conversation.

That evening he tried to tell Maggie about it, but she resisted. "Michael, don't you see how this business is preying on your mind? It's all you've talked about for weeks. Can't you forget about it?"

He tried to.

In the days that followed, he consigned it to a dark corner of his mind where it was safely out of sight. Fenner said nothing more to him, so he assumed there'd been no more complaints filed against him. Apparently Krassey had decided to let the matter die.

It was exactly one week after his meeting with Krassey that a car hit Michael O'Rourke as he was directing traffic.

He awakened in the emergency room at City General with Maggie bending over him. Seeing the tears in her eyes he said, "Stop crying, I'm still alive."

"Michael, they phoned me—"

He was aware of a terrible headache but not much else. Maggie faded from view and was replaced by a white-coated doctor. "How are you feeling, Officer?"

"I could be better. What's the damage?"

"You're a lucky fellow. The car hit you and flipped you over on your head, but its wheels missed you. You've got some bad bruises and probably a mild concussion, but that's all. We want to keep you overnight just to be sure, but you'll probably be home tomorrow."

O'Rourke closed his eyes and rested. When he opened them again his head felt a little better and Sergeant Fenner was standing by the bed. "You've got a hard head, kid. You'll be O.K."

"Did you get the guy who hit me?"

"Oh, sure. He stopped right away—claimed he didn't see you, but he can tell that to the judge."

"I sure never saw him. Who is he?"

"Just a young fellow in his twenties. No criminal record or even a traffic offense. He'll have a good lawyer in court, though. His dad's Ridgeway of Pride and Ridgeway."

O'Rourke sat up. "What's the name of the man who hit me?"

"I told you, he's Ridgeway's son"—Fenner consulted his notebook—"Steven Ridgeway."

"It was deliberate, Sergeant. He tried to kill me."

"What?"

"He's the one who's been robbing these places! His father is covering up for him, hiring petty criminals to confess to the crimes and take a couple of years in prison in return for a big payoff when they get out. I think it's happened at least seven times in the past five years."

"Kid, you're off your rocker. Nobody would go to prison for someone else's crime."

"They would if the pay was good enough. If it was something like fifty thousand dollars for two years of their time. Ridgeway is a millionaire with income from family investments in addition to his law firm. It would be worth that much to keep his son out of prison."

"And you think the son keeps on robbing these places?"

"Damn right! He's a psychopath. He probably robs for the thrill of it and then tells Dad about it just to see him sweat. Maybe he's trying to break old Ridgeway by making him pay off all these people."

"I still don't buy it."

"Not even after he hit me with his car? A week ago I went up to Pride and Ridgeway to see one of their senior partners."

"Krassey."

"Right, the man who represented several of those confessed stickup men. He obviously recruited them to keep Ridgeway's name out of it. I suppose he told Ridgeway or his son that I was snooping around and the son decided to take matters into his own hands. The idea of killing a police officer in broad daylight would be even more exciting than robbing a liquor store."

"We could never prove it. His father's lawyers would laugh the D.A. out of court."

"But don't you see? This isn't just a theory or an obsession any longer. It's a fact that can be proved."

"How?"

"By getting one of those seven convicts to talk."

"If what you suspect is true, they're probably being paid over a period of years to insure their silence. Besides, they probably don't even know who bribed them, only that the money comes through Krassey or some other partner in the firm."

O'Rourke sighed and rested his head back on the pillow. "At least you believe me now, don't you, Sergeant?"

"To tell you the truth, Michael, I don't know what to believe. Maybe you're onto something, but it would be hell to prove."

"*I'll* prove it if I have to tail Steven Ridgeway day and night!"

"How are you going to do that? Not on the city's time!"

"I'll have sick leave coming for this so-called accident. I'll do it on my own time."

Sergeant Fenner shook his head sadly. "You're just getting yourself in deeper. Why not forget about it?"

"I can't," O'Rourke said. "Not after this."

A few days later, feeling well enough to be out alone, Michael had his first look at the man who'd tried to kill him.

Steven Ridgeway lived in his parents' sprawling colonial home in the city's wealthiest suburb. He seemed to have no regular employment and never left the house before early afternoon. Three afternoons a week he took a course in economics at a nearby community college, where he was several years older than the majority of the students. As near as O'Rourke could tell, he had no girl friends, though he would occasionally chat with some young women after class.

After a full week of following him, O'Rourke was no closer to knowing Steven Ridgeway than that. He seemed average in every respect. His height and build were average, his looks would not provoke a second glance, and he had no unusual habits. He drove a moderately priced Buick that still had a slightly dented fender from its recent "accident."

Their only conversation came on the third day of Michael's surveillance when Ridgeway confronted him outside a bar where he had stopped for a drink.

"You're Officer O'Rourke, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"Are you following me?"

"I figure it's better to be behind you than in front of you, especially when you're driving."

Something flickered in Ridgeway's eyes. "Yeah, well, I'm sorry about that accident. Glad you weren't hurt."

He turned and walked away.

It was during the second week that the lawyer, Krassey, phoned O'Rourke at home and made an appointment to see him that evening. Maggie had gone to visit her mother and O'Rourke was alone when Krassey arrived a bit after eight.

"It's good to see you up and around, Officer."

"No thanks to Ridgeway's son."

Krassey sat down and opened his briefcase. "I'll come right to the point. You haven't pressed any damage claim as yet, but Mr. Ridgeway has asked me to act in his son's behalf. If you will sign away any and all future claims we are prepared to offer you fifty thousand dollars in cash."

O'Rourke accepted the document that Krassey passed him and studied it. Finally he asked, "Is this how much the others got?"

"Others?"

"Lamont and Max Clovis and the others who went to prison. You think it's fair that I should receive as much as they did?"

"I won't discuss it any further, Officer O'Rourke. Are you declining our offer?"

"It's a bribe."

"No, it's an out-of-court settlement for your accident." He held out a pen for O'Rourke to sign the paper.

"No way. Go peddle your bribes somewhere else. Tell Ridgeway to save the money for the next time his son knocks over a grocery store."

"You're a very unreasonable man, Officer O'Rourke."

Michael leaned forward. "Let me tell you something, Krassey. I haven't been a cop very long. I'm not any older than Steven Ridgeway. But I'm not going to rest until I see him behind bars."

Krassey returned the document to his briefcase and zipped it shut. "Then I have no more to say."

O'Rourke saw the lawyer out of the house, then he went into the kitchen and poured himself a stiff drink.

When Maggie came home he told her what had happened. "Maybe you should have taken the money," she said.

"Do you really think that?"

She bent over and kissed him. "No, of course not. It's just that with the house payments and everything—"

"Maggie, this man is dangerous. He tried to kill me, and sooner or later he'll succeed in killing someone. He's got to be put away no mat-

ter how many men his father is willing to bribe."

"Are you certain you're right, Michael? Isn't there still a chance you could be wrong?"

"One chance in a hundred maybe."

"If there's even the slightest doubt in your mind, shouldn't he be given the benefit of it?"

"You want me to leave him alone?"

She shook her head, not knowing what to say. "I want it to be like it was with us," she said, "before this obsession of yours began."

The next day he was out again, following Steven Ridgeway. Only one more week remained before he'd be back on duty, and time was growing short. Ridgeway knew he was being followed, of course, but if O'Rourke had read him right that wouldn't matter. Since money wasn't his motive, there could only be two reasons for his repeated armed robberies—either they were simply thrill crimes or they were done in the hope of apprehension, in the hope of somehow punishing his father. Whichever the motive, Ridgeway might feel all the more impelled to act with a policeman on his tail.

And so O'Rourke continued to follow him.

When Ridgeway entered a drug store one night on his way home from class, O'Rourke entered too and stood near the door with his hand on the service revolver beneath his jacket.

Nothing happened. Ridgeway bought a pack of cigarettes and left without a glance in O'Rourke's direction.

Two nights before he was to report back to duty, O'Rourke followed Ridgeway into a discount liquor store in a large suburban shopping center. It was just a few minutes before nine o'clock closing and Ridgeway had entered suddenly after making a phone call from a booth in front of the store.

O'Rourke watched him as he picked up a fifth of Scotch and moved toward the cashier. His hand went inside the raincoat he was wearing and O'Rourke's hand reached into his own jacket for the gun.

"Hold it, Mister," a voice said over his shoulder. He turned and stared at two police officers who'd come in behind him.

Before he could speak, one grabbed his arms while the other reached into his jacket for the gun. "Wait a minute!" he protested. "Don't you know me? I'm Michael O'Rourke of the traffic squad!"

"We got a report of a man with a gun."

"Check my wallet for my ID!"

One of the men did, and the other nodded. "Yeah, I've seen you around. Are you the guy who got hit by the car?"

"That's me. Now give me back my revolver."

"What are you doing here?"

"I—" Michael remembered Steven Ridgeway and turned, scanning the store for him. "Damn! He's gone! Who called about me?"

"The dispatcher took it at headquarters. We were right across the street when we got it on our radio."

Michael remembered Ridgeway's phone call from the booth out in front. Ridgeway had wanted to give him the slip, and that could only mean one thing. "Come on!" he yelled, not waiting for his revolver.

He ran along the line of shops. Many of them were already closed and he had no way of knowing in which direction Ridgeway had gone.

He only knew it was now. He was certain it was now.

He was almost to the end of the shopping center when he saw the lights of the bowling alley and remembered that was where Ridgeway had parked his car with its dented fender. When O'Rourke came closer and saw the license plates were carefully smeared with mud he knew he was right.

He'd been right all along.

He burst through the door of the bowling alley and saw the familiar raincoated figure, saw the head turn toward him, saw the garishly knitted ski mask that obscured the features. And then he saw the Luger come up fast, spitting fire.

He felt the bullet smash into his left shoulder, spinning him back through the doors.

Then suddenly Sergeant Fenner was there with the two policemen firing back. It was over in seconds.

Michael pressed a handkerchief against his shoulder and tried to block the flow of blood. Sitting on the floor in the doorway, he watched Fenner pull the ski mask from Steven Ridgeway's dead face.

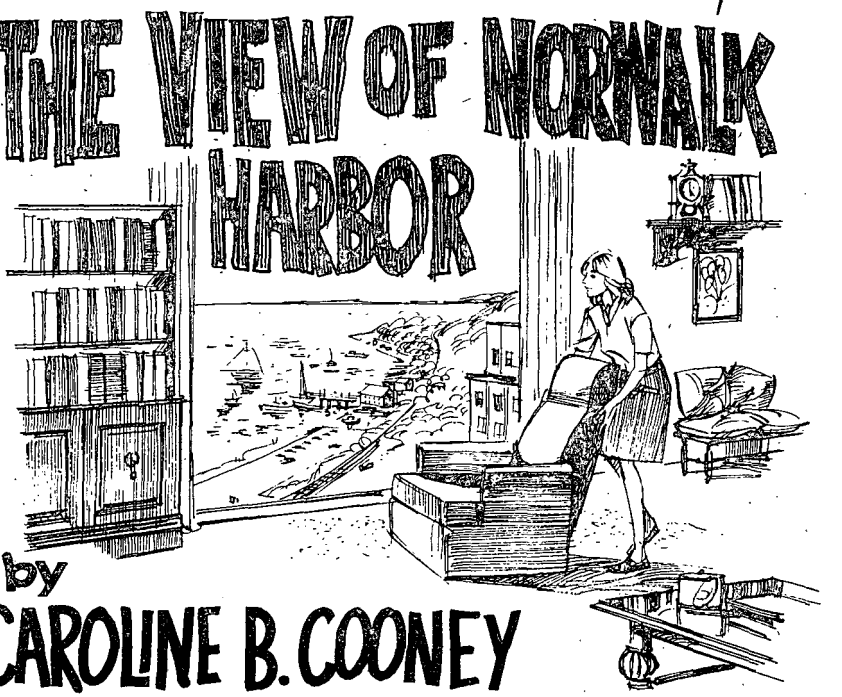
"This time his father's money won't be any help," Fenner said.

"How'd you get here so quick?" O'Rourke asked.

Sergeant Fenner bent to help him with the wound. "I've been following you, kid. The damn case got to be an obsession with me too."

*Moving furniture around purged Jennie . . .*

# THE VIEW OF NORWALK HARBOR



by

## CAROLINE B. COONEY

"Will you," said Garth, spitting the words out between his teeth, "will you, Jennie, consider the possibility of once—just once—*leaving the furniture alone?*"

"Garth, darling, I'm so sorry you scraped your shin, I—"

"Scraped my shin! I practically decapitated my leg! And you did it on purpose."

"I didn't do it on purpose, Garth. The traffic flow is better with the

coffee table shifted like that. It isn't my fault you didn't bother to turn the light on before you walked through the room."

"This is an obstacle course you're running, maybe? In my own home, without a lamp and a map, I'm an open risk for injury."

"Garth, I said I was sorry. Let me see your leg. Look, the skin isn't even torn. Anyhow, there's no such thing as a decapitated leg. You could amputate a leg, but—"

"Jennie, shut up."

She closed her mouth, ending the flow of words, starting a flow of tears. But she didn't allow Garth to see them. She got unsteadily to her feet and went into the kitchen to warm up his late dinner. They never conversed any more, although she tried, she tried hard. She couldn't understand what had turned Garth against her, unless it was the twins.

He hadn't wanted a child to start with and he had regarded two at a time as the height of unfairness. That they were both screaming scrawny things with every conceivable kind of body rash Garth regarded as the ultimate insult.

Jennie had laughed when he accused her of burning the lasagne on purpose (she had taken one of the twins to the doctor for an earache and forgotten the oven was on) or when he accused her of leaving a dirty diaper in the toilet on purpose (she personally thought one out of three dozen a day for seventeen months was an excellent record), but she drew the line when he told her she had had twins on purpose. But when she started to remind him that it took two to tango, he had said, "Jennie, shut up," and that was when he began working late. Every night. All week. So that when the twins finally went to bed and she had a moment's rest, she had no adult company to share the silence with.

That was when she turned to furniture arranging.

Jennie would have been hard pressed to define the satisfaction it gave her to rearrange a room. One morning she would decide that the room would look much more welcoming if the couch faced the south-window wall instead of the fireplace, and if she switched the two bookcases and had them flanking the piano instead of standing opposite like sentinels, and if she moved the oil painting to the bedroom and hung the embroidery in its place.

As for the exertion involved in moving the furniture, by applying

proper body-dynamics principles she was neither tired nor strained, but rather strangely purged. When she vacuumed the newly exposed bits of carpet and dusted the reoriented surfaces of furniture, she felt clean and soothed.

Garth hated it. It was the only relaxation she had—besides her view (oh, how she cherished her view)—the only indulgence she allowed herself, and Garth fought it every step of the way. "You do it on purpose to infuriate me!" he would shout.

"But I don't. Truly I don't. The room looks better this way, Garth. Come sit with me on the loveseat, darling."

"Loveseats are for lovers. I suppose we don't have any cold beer either, do we?"

"Where have you been?" stormed Garth. "I got home at five-thirty, the way you're always begging me to, and what do I find? The house an incredible mess, furniture all over the place, front door wide open, and nobody home."

"I'm sorry, Garth," said Jennie. She struggled with the twins. Garth did not help her.

"What happened to Kate?" he demanded.

"Oh, Garth, it was so awful. I was moving furniture and you know how I usually have the little bench up against the wall with the pillows stacked on it, and you know how Kate and Alec like to hurl themselves at the pillows, the way you hurl yourself on the recliner—they love copying you, you know—and—"

"Will you get to the *point*? My daughter has stitches on her chin and you babble on about furniture arrangements!"

"That *is* the point, Garth," she said. She was almost weeping, trying to get the children in their highchairs, trying to think of something to feed them quickly, before Kate began crying again. "It was all my fault, Garth. I moved the bench and when Kate decided to play Daddy and hurl herself at the pillows there was no wall there and she vaulted right through the pillows and went chin first into the corner of the stereo cabinet. It was awful!"

Jennie gave up trying to think of anything involved and hot and nutritious, and filled two bowls with cornflakes. "There was blood everywhere; she was cut right down to the bone. It hurt her so much and it was all my fault. And at the doctor's they have this dreadful board

with canvas wrapping, and they strapped her down in it so she wouldn't wiggle, and they put in four stitches without even giving her a painkiller first." She poured milk on the cereal and found some applesauce to dollop into two more bowls. Alec promptly overturned his and it splattered on his father's foot.

Garth jerked his shoe back too late and stared at the applesauce dripping off his black shoelaces. "I swear to God, Jennie, you do this sort of thing on purpose."

She was too drained to answer him.

He jerked open the refrigerator door. "There's no cold beer, Jennie. This is the second time this week. Why do you think I work so hard anyway? Just to support you in luxury? It's really getting to me, Jennie, it really is."

"But, Garth—" she began.

"You and your 'But, Garths.' You do it on purpose to wreck my day. I'm going out for dinner."

There were only four rooms in the apartment, but they were huge and Jennie didn't really want any more space to keep clean. The kitchen was a narrow orange-and-white alley with room for two high chairs in the corner designed for a dinette. Off the kitchen was the L-shaped living room, with the tip of the L an entry, the angle the dining area, and the longer length a pleasant sunny rectangle that looked down over the city.

The building was at the very edge of a precipitous hill, which worried her whenever she took the twins outdoors, but luckily they were content for now to stay in the fenced playground. The view through the floor-to-ceiling window was her heart's delight and when the twins napped she fixed herself a formal tea tray, using the tiny, squared, china tea service that her mother bought when the *Queen Mary's* appointments were sold. She would sit staring out the window at the busy railroad tracks and the harbor full of pleasure boats, the smoke billowing out of the power plant that somehow evaded pollution standards, the children playing on the blacktop of the elementary school. She loved it. She knew it intimately.

Now, with Garth gone and the twins in bed, she inspected the living room and again felt the need to change things. She dusted and transferred an ashtray. She exchanged an arrangement of dried flowers for a

stack of magazines. But it wasn't enough. It didn't satisfy her.

She stared out at the beautiful view. Garth wanted to move. He was sick of cheaply built high rises, he said. There were garden-style condominiums in Stamford he wanted to live in. Where she would have sliding glass doors that looked out on a scrap of grass that faced their neighbor's scrap of grass and sliding glass doors. Jennie didn't think she could bear it. All right, said Garth, there were those condominiums in Greenwich. Where she could stare at an intersection of the Post Road and listen to the Connecticut Thruway.

"You're dragging your feet on purpose," said Garth when she objected. "I swear to God, Jennie, you calculate everything to upset me."

She drank her tea. It had gotten cold. Below her a train exchanged passengers. Seagulls swirled through the power-plant smoke and a police car pulled up in front of an old tenement at the foot of her precipice.

She decided to switch shelf decorations. On the narrow shelf over the sofa she put the big handsome old clock Garth had bought at auction last fall. The pewter plate and dish that had been there she wrapped in tissue to store. When she got them out again in a few months they would seem delightfully fresh to her.

The balance of the room seemed off balance, so she moved the couch a few feet, backed the recliner up a little, and adjusted the coffee table. There. It was much better.

It was inevitable that Garth should come home late, in the dark, try to fling himself in the recliner, and crash instead into the shelf.

"Jennie!" he bellowed.

She stumbled out of bed, the crash resounding in her sleep-drugged ears.

"Oh, Garth," she said tearfully, "the clock is ruined."

He turned on the lights. The clock lay in pieces on the floor. Glass was everywhere. The thin bar of the pendulum had snapped off and one of the weights had chipped the edge of the coffee table. Garth located the recliner, hurled himself into it with his usual force, and yelled with rage when it slammed against the wall. "Jennie, you put it too close to the wall again. How many times do I have to beg you to leave the furniture alone. The clock is broken and you did it *on purpose!*"

"But Garth, I didn't, truly I didn't! I'm sorry!"

For weeks she didn't move any furniture. Alec and Kate entered a climbing stage, had a bout of diarrhea, and outgrew their shoes as soon as she bought them.

They were too grubby for Garth to tolerate. "Call me up when they're five or six," he said, "then I'll be willing to associate with them." He never came home before nine or ten at night and always left before they were awake. Jennie's days merged into an endless series of diapers and runny noses.

Her only solace was her bank of high, wide windows. She stared into Norwalk Harbor, cherishing it, telling herself the twins would grow into pleasant little people before she knew it, Garth would grow out of his foul moods and everything would be fine once more.

"I've put a binder on that condominium," said Garth. "No more rent checks. No more money down the drain."

Jennie stared at him. "Which one?"

"The one in Greenwich. I got a ground-floor unit cheap. No one wants the view." He hurled himself into his recliner and sloshed some beer around in his mouth.

"What's the view?" she said.

"Parking lot," Garth said. He closed his eyes and grinned and slept with the beer can still in his fist.

When the sun came up the next morning Jennie went to her windows. Shafts of light glistened on the deep black-blue waters of Long Island Sound. An early commuter train was filling up. Tiny threads of cloud decorated a pale-blue sky.

Garth had already left. The twins were not up.

Absently she picked up his beer can and put it in the wastebasket. A view of a parking lot. She found herself wanting to smash something of Garth's, or even Garth himself, and was appalled at the violence of her emotions. Her hands were trembling. She grasped a mug of coffee to still them but it didn't help.

She found herself vacuuming then, shifting furniture, moving books, changing wall hangings. The anger dissipated. She felt cleansed, as always, by the newness of the room. She got out the Windex and sprayed the fingerprints between her and her view of Norwalk Harbor. She was done before the twins woke up.

Garth came home early for a change, shouting as soon as he came in the door, "I got the mortgage. We're ready to roll. You can start packing tomorrow. Move all the furniture you want. For once I don't care."

She stood numbly in the kitchen, poised in front of the opened refrigerator, reaching for his cold beer. He had arranged a move and not even asked her. Her only pleasure was her view and he was taking it away. Not even caring. *Doing it on purpose.*

She leaned against the slick whiteness of the appliance and wept. In their highchairs the twins banged their spoons and sent a shower of peas across the linoleum.

She started to carry the beer in to Garth and was just in time to see him hurl himself into the recliner. But she had put it too close to the windows. The velocity of his heavy body sent the chair through the glass and together Garth and his recliner hurtled down the precipice to the driveway of the tenement far below.

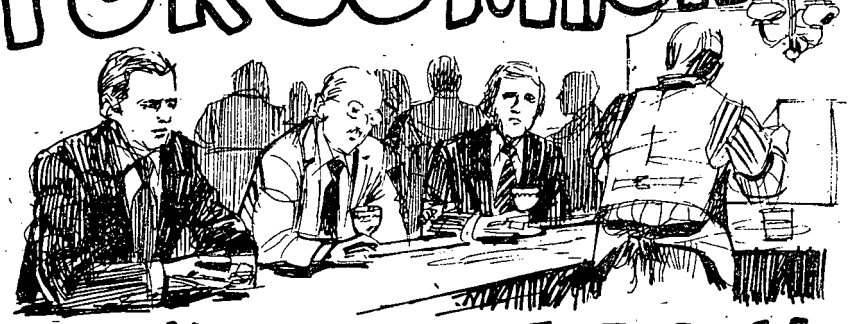
Jennie walked uncertainly over to the jagged opening of the window. Already Norwalk Harbor was reacting. People had seen and were collecting. A train emptying six o'clock commuters seemed to pause longer than usual.

We won't move to the condominium after all, she thought. How clever of me. And I didn't even do it on purpose.

She put the beer back in the refrigerator, cleaned some potato from Kate's ear, filled the kettle with water for her tea, and dialed for an ambulance.

*Plainclothes detecting isn't all damsels in distress and car chases . . .*

# TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT



by CHARLES PETERSON

You may find it hard to believe, but the life of a plainclothes detective isn't all damsels in distress, hundred-mile-an-hour automobile chases, and lollipops. Mostly it's a kind of low-class Cinderella story, with someone like me, Mike Temple, plodding from door to door to find out who the shoe—or, in my case, the handcuff—fits.

Today, for instance, I'd spent most of my time trying to learn who had found it expedient, the day before yesterday, to strangle a woman

named Lizzie Kvasnic in her Dexter Avenue fourplex. The most likely candidate, an itchy, red-faced gentleman friend named Gregory Matlock, who could have made things easy by confessing, declined to do so on the not unreasonable grounds that at the crucial time he had been in a business meeting miles away. Even more irritating, he had witnesses to back his alibi.

It appeared I was in for some lengthy sessions of "routine investigation" in the days ahead, and in the words of the P. G. Wodehouse character, "if not actually disgruntled, I was far from being gruntled" when I stopped at the Koz-E-Nite Motel's cocktail lounge on the way home to my bachelor pad.

The lounge hasn't a great deal to recommend it. Its decor is Relentless Nostalgia, with chandeliers resembling gaslights, a lot of stained-glass windows and other Victorian gimcrackery hanging on the walls, along with gold-framed photographs of John L. Sullivan in a belligerent pose and a chorus girl from *The Black Crook* in a coy one, and replicas of brass spittoons now serving as pretzel and popcorn containers.

However, one of its more modern touches is a bartender named Jerry, whom I used to know back in high school and who has the ability to sense when I feel like talking, whereupon we gab a good deal about Ye Olden Days—and when I don't feel like talking, whereupon he switches off the vocal cords and polishes glassware with a fierce concentration.

Tonight he saw me coming and had my regular on the bar even before I pulled up a stool next to a smallish gent with a toothbrush moustache who was drinking something pink, like a frappéed flamingo, as was the man next to him. To each his own, I thought, as long as I can drink my amber thing in peace.

And peace it was, up to a point. I was on my second amber thing and sufficiently unwound to banter with Jerry when somebody at the end of the bar knocked over a bottle and a glass with a crash. There was a moment or two of frantic activity as people moved glassware and pretzels and laps away from a flood tide of beer, then all settled down once more as Jerry applied mopping-up operations.

"Carelessness!" murmured the smallish gent at my right, his toothbrush moustache quivering in disapproval. I examined him more carefully. Spare-framed, mid-fifties, hair thinning on top, eyes of quite a startling blue peering from behind steel-rimmed specs, he looked like

the sort who would have got gold stars for penmanship exercises back in grade school.

"There's much too much carelessness these days!" he amplified. "If only people would be more careful," he added, driving the point home, "there wouldn't be all this carelessness. And this is a particularly careless town in my opinion!"

Stung by this gross calumny directed at the town of my birth, I asked him to explain, and this led to a brief exchange of personal data that revealed him as one Eustace L. Comfort of Kansas City.

"I'm a public-opinion sampler for the TransAmerica and Greater Kansas City Research Company," he said. "I'm here this week doing some benchmark interviews for a very highly regarded detergent manufacturer whose name," he added *sotto voce* with a glance over his shoulder, "you would recognize immediately were I at liberty to mention it. But I'm not. At liberty. To mention it."

"I understand," I said. "But what does this have to do with carelessness?"

"Ah!" Someone had evidently popped for another round, for Eustace lifted another pink thing and sipped before replying. "Twice in the past two days I've come *that* close to having a Very Serious Accident—very serious, indeed—due to someone's carelessness. A couple of days ago, after finishing my afternoon's interviews, I was strolling around your downtown area and stopped to watch them working on that construction project—you know the one?"

I nodded. There's only one construction project going on downtown, and at the moment it's mostly a big hole in the ground with power shovels scooping out a foundation and six-by-six trucks rolling in and out with loads of dirt.

"And," Eustace continued, "just as one of those big trucks was coming up the ramp, I found myself flat on the ground, directly in its path!"

"You slipped?"

"I did *not* slip! Someone in the crowd jostled me, and I tripped over part of the curbing. Some fool woman screamed and someone else had the presence of mind to grab my coat collar and haul me out of the way or I would be a mere statistic by now. A pretty flat statistic," he concluded with a shudder, taking another restorative swig. "The truck driver was terribly upset. So was the foreman. They kept asking if I

was all right and shouldn't I go to the hospital for X-rays and all that, and they wrote down names and addresses of witnesses, even though I told them I was uninjured and had no intention of making an issue of the matter."

"Well," I said, "I'm sure that was all pretty nerve-wracking, but it doesn't seem to suggest an epidemic of carelessness."

"Ah!" said Eustace again. "But then there was yesterday! I got back early, around three o'clock, to start collating some of my data. Soon I was completely engrossed, seated at the desk in my room, so I have no idea how long I'd been at it, when all at once there was the sound of breaking glass and something struck the wall a few feet over my head. It was a stray bullet."

"A bullet? You're sure?"

"I wasn't at the time," Eustace admitted. "I called the desk at once to complain and the manager came up and looked. Then he got all excited and called the police and *they* came and looked. They said it was a bullet, and were rather upset with me because I had meanwhile slid the window closed—it's one of those floor-length sliding affairs—so they couldn't tell whether the bullet came from somewhere across the courtyard or from one of those high-rise apartments up the block. Eventually they decided that someone must have been fooling around with a rifle and it went off. Carelessness, you see!"

I was about to make some pertinent comment when the man next to Eustace, who up to now had taken no part in the conversation but appeared to be devoting himself conscientiously to the business of getting smashed, suddenly uttered a loud moan, clutched at his stomach, and toppled to the floor.

There was a moment of frozen silence followed by instant pandemonium. People leaped in all directions. Most leaped backwards and Jerry leaped over the bar. I leaped to the man's aid, with pages from the *First-Aid Manual for Heart Attacks* flipping through my mind, and pushed aside some well-intentioned soul who was evidently feeling for a pulse, though how he expected to detect one with his gloves on I couldn't imagine.

"Jeez!" muttered Jerry. "I didn't think he had *that* much to drink!"

"He hasn't." I couldn't take the time to look up from what I was doing. "Better call an ambulance, Jerry, but I don't think it'll do any good. I think this guy's dead!"

Eustace was back in the Koz-E-Nite Lounge the following evening—this time seated alone in a booth—when I dropped in. He hailed me like a long-lost brother.

"Good evening, Mr. Temple. Won't you join me?"

"Hi, Eustace. I don't mind if I do."

The waitress took my order and another for Eustace. He gave me an appraising look.

"You don't look like a policeman," he remarked. Most people say this in an accusatory way, I've noticed, and I credited Eustace with two points for merely stating it as a fact.

"One of the impressions a plainclothesman tries to convey," I replied, "is that he's not a policeman. The more I resemble a piece of scenery the better, in most cases."

"You don't talk like a policeman either."

"I know," I sighed. "My captain says the same thing. He claims I sound like a graduate student in English Lit and that I'm giving the stereotype a bad name. I keep trying to talk out of the side of my mouth through a cigar, but it's a strain. How did your interviews go on Prentice Street today?"

He blinked. "How did you know I was on Prentice Street?"

"You see? You didn't notice me, did you? Elementary, my dear Eustace. I was following up a lead on a murder case I'm on—maybe you saw something about it in the paper?"

Eustace shook his head. "I'm afraid I rarely bother with local papers when I'm away from home. There's too much nonessential information."

"Oh," I said. "Well, I saw you coming out of one of the apartment buildings along there. Are you still surveying for that detergent?"

The little man nodded. "I'll have another half day at most, then it's back to Kansas City."

"No more of those 'accidents' today, I hope?"

He said not, and rapped on the tabletop for luck—a futile gesture, since it was made entirely of plastic disguised as walnut. "Which reminds me. What happened to that unfortunate gentleman who had the heart attack here last night?"

"D.O.A.," I said. I toyed with a swizzle stick, then added, "And it wasn't a heart attack."

"It wasn't?"

"The medical examiner says he was poisoned."

Eustace's eyes widened behind his spectacles. "My word! Did he take it himself, do you think?"

"No telling. We're trying to check it out. Unfortunately, he was one of these loners it's hard to get a line on. He wasn't registered here at the motel and apparently just wandered into the lounge by chance."

There was a brief pause, then Eustace sighed. "You must lead an exciting kind of life."

"Damsels in distress, car chases, and lollipops," I said lightly. Then, noting his puzzled look, I added in a more serious tone, "Actually, it's pretty much routine, much like any other job. I wouldn't be surprised if you had some rather out-of-the-ordinary experiences in your own line sometimes."

"Once in a while." Eustace's eyes twinkled. "You're always getting unexpected answers to interview questions, for one thing. Like the man who told me he switched brands of coffee when they changed the shape of the can for his old brand. It seems they no longer were as good for soaking paint brushes. And one time I was doing a television survey, I got to this one house and found the only viewer was a beagle named Sidney. He was watching a Public Broadcasting film on tree farming. As it happened, I didn't have any box to check for beagles, so the call was a waste of time.

"But I've never had anything that quite matched the interview a friend of mine named Bert had once with a young lady who spent the whole session in a yoga headstand without wearing a stitch of clothing. Bert retired shortly afterward," Eustace said somewhat wistfully. "He claimed he had no further worlds to conquer."

"Don't people object to answering a lot of questions? They usually do in my line."

"No. In fact, lots of times my big problem is turning them off. It's really astonishing what people will tell you once they get started. And how anxious they are to get started sometimes. The other day I rang a doorbell and found there was some kind of domestic quarrel going on, but this woman answered the door anyway and got through four or five questions before her husband yanked her away, literally, and slammed the door."

"You should've got him started too. Maybe they'd both have forgotten what they were fighting about."

"I didn't really see him at all," Eustace said. "Just a hand reaching around the door. And not even a hand, come to think of it, because he was wearing some kind of glove."

"What did you do then?"

He shrugged. "I tried the other three apartments, but no one was at home in any of them, so I went on to the next building and struck out there too. By that time I figured the afternoon was pretty well shot, so I just rambled around your downtown for a while. That was when I had that run-in with the truck."

I found myself growing interested in Eustace's research techniques, never having given much thought to how these surveys operated, so we ended up having dinner and regaling each other with tales of our respective occupational hazards.

After dinner we adjourned to his new room—the motel management had insisted on moving him out of the other while that broken window was being replaced—and he showed how his interview schedules were made up, how the answers were correlated, why the questions were framed the way they were, with significant questions tucked away among some of no importance, how they were "weighted" to help cancel out possible bias, and so on. (I even learned the name of his detergent-manufacturer client, but wild horses will never drag it out of me.)

Then I took him for a tour of Headquarters, and although it doesn't quite rank with Scotland Yard's famous Black Museum he seemed to find it impressive. We parted around midnight amid a couple of nightcaps and many protestations of mutual esteem, and I didn't think about Eustace again until almost three o'clock in the morning.

That was when there was a soft click at the motel-room door and a tall shadowy figure came tiptoeing into the room, carrying a knife about a yard long, which he proceeded to insert several times with great vigor and determination into the recumbent figure in the bed.

He was still flailing away when I emerged from the bathroom, flicked on the lights, and said, "That's enough, Mr. Matlock. You're under arrest for the murder of Lizzie Kvasnic, and if you'll kindly drop the knife I'll read this statement of your rights."

Mr. Gregory Matlock fainted dead away.

He was, of course, the gentleman friend of Lizzie, whose alibi had been so agreeably upheld by his business associates. I suspected that

once I could prove he'd been placed at the murder scene by another witness, they'd discover they were mistaken about the exact time. And in any case, Mr. Matlock was so unnerved when he came to that he would have confessed to having engineered the disappearance of the *Marie Celeste,* let alone a couple of murders.

"How—?" he gargled, as we rode down to the station.

"I guess maybe you tried too hard, Mr. Matlock," I said. "One near miss to Eustace Comfort might have been brushed off; two made an odd coincidence; but a third—striking down a man sitting right next to him at a bar and who happened to be drinking the same concoction—well, that was a little too much to swallow, if you'll pardon the expression.

"It started me thinking how easily one could create a diversion by knocking over a bottle and glass, and how naturally he might then order a make-up round for everyone. And slip a little something into the one he thought was Mr. Comfort's. I couldn't help wondering if someone weren't trying to get rid of Eustace, only I couldn't think why, seeing that he was a stranger in town and due to leave shortly. So I decided to tail him the next day and, lo and behold, there *you* were, tailing him too!

"But it wasn't until Eustace dropped the information about the quarreling couple and the man wearing 'some kind of glove' that I understood why. Because you told me at our first interview that you always wore gloves to hide and protect a severe case of psoriasis. And you wanted Eustace shut up before he remembered the odd circumstance of someone wearing gloves while presumably at home indulging in a fight with his 'wife'."

Matlock nodded. "I couldn't understand why he wasn't already knocking at your door as soon as he read the papers."

"You couldn't know that Eustace never bothers with the local papers when he's traveling, so he knew nothing at all about the murder. Lizzie Kvasnic was just another name in his report, which I was delighted to see when I got him to show it to me this evening. Then I knew why he was a marked man. And just in case you might try once more before he left town, I'd suggested earlier to the motel manager that he find another room for Eustace on some pretext so I could wait in his. I thought it prudent to leave a few pillows in the bed."

"So I noticed," said Gregory Matlock sourly.

What with my hyperactive early morning and the need to catch up on some sleep, it was early afternoon when I stopped at the Koz-E-Nite's coffee shop for a sandwich and cup of coffee, and that was where Eustace found me and chirped a genial hello.

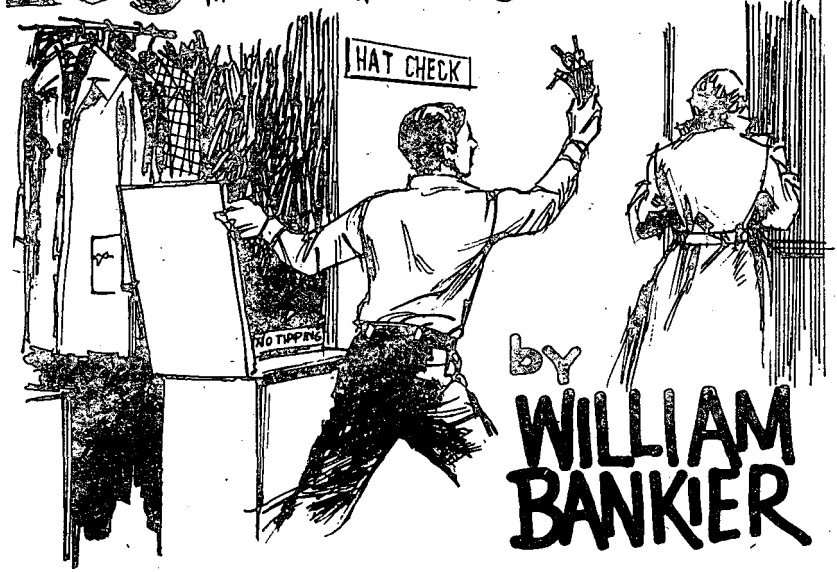
"I see you made the papers!" he said, sitting down opposite. "I told you I never look at local papers as a rule, but when I see a friend's photograph on the front page I can't help making an exception. You've apparently solved that murder case you were working on."

"Two murder cases, as a matter of fact," I corrected him. "A man knocked off his girl friend, then accidentally killed a perfect stranger while trying to silence a key witness."

Eustace gave me a quizzical look. "My, my! And you told me what an uneventful sort of career you led as a plainclothes detective. Well," he continued, signaling for a cup of coffee, "I've just about finished here. A few more interviews this afternoon and I'll be off on the 4:35 plane. And all I can say is I'm glad *my* job doesn't get me involved in murders and things."

*The quality of Andrew's honesty was a little strained . . .*

# LOST AND FOUND




by WILLIAM BANKIER

My job was to sell postcard reproductions of the gallery's masterpieces to the visitors. Andrew's job was to take their coats and umbrellas and store them in the checkroom. From where I did my job, I could see him doing his job.

I was brand new, a student employed for the summer, and it took a few weeks for me to identify the rip-off that Andrew was working. The first time I saw it, I thought he was being an honest man. A gaggle of

customers had just left my counter and I was free to notice the action across the annex where his operations were located. Andrew had raised his hinged shelf and was darting into the foyer.

"Sir! Wait! This must have dropped out of your pocket." He handed a leather key case to the astonished patron.

"Good Lord, all my keys! I'd have been in trouble without them."

"I'm glad I caught you then."

The visitor reached into the pocket of his cashmere jacket and took out a bill. "Here."

Andrew made a brief pass at the sign that said NO TIPPING. "We aren't really allowed—" he began.

"Nonsense. Honesty must be rewarded," the man said, and Andrew humbly accepted the bill, which looked to me like a five.

Our shifts did not always coincide, but three days later I saw a similar episode. This time it was a well-dressed lady who claimed an overloaded wicker satchel from the checkroom. As she moved to the doorway, Andrew rushed from his lair carrying a glittering cigarette lighter.

"Madam, this must have fallen from your basket!"

"Oh, my, thank you ever so much."

"Not at all. I'm glad I saw it in time."

"My husband gave me this. I couldn't go home without it."

"Then I'm doubly pleased I was able to render such a valuable service." Andrew actually bowed and rubbed his hands together, and suddenly I realized he was milking it. Sure enough, she took the hint at last and found him some money in her purse.

I saw two more such incidents before I decided this was Andrew's event and that he was making it happen. Of course, it was no business of mine. But one evening after closing, I was sitting in the bar next door, a place called Mona's Leisure, when Andrew came in, saw me, and crossed the room.

"Mind if I sit down?"

"Help yourself." I sensed he had come looking for me, and I was right. After one drink and some baseball talk, he spoke.

"I guess you've noticed my little franchise."

"Franchise?"

"The lost and found. Come on, you've never turned your head away

fast enough. It's an invention of mine; I lose something from a prosperous coat or bag and then find it just as the visitor walks away. Well, what do they expect us to do, the miserable wages they pay us? And no tips allowed."

Us? I didn't appreciate the way he seemed to be including me in his dishonesty. I was living on my pay alone, small as it was, while trying to accumulate next year's college fees. Then it was as if he had read my mind because he said,

"I suppose you want your cut."

"What cut?"

"For keeping quiet and not telling the directors."

"Forget it," I said. The idea that I would accept a payoff for concealing his tawdry scheme was repugnant to me.

"Does that mean you'll be telling?"

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm not a thief but I'm not a squealer either."

By the end of my summer employment, with the autumn term only a week away, I had witnessed quite a few occasions upon which Andrew's well-organized honesty had received a reward. Undoubtedly there had been many others I had not seen. He had returned wallets, cameras, a valuable book, many sets of car keys, and always he was given folding money. I estimated his annual ill-gottens to be in the neighborhood of a thousand, tax free, which is a very nice neighborhood.

Anyway, my final afternoon as a paid employee was a Saturday and the postcard display was fairly busy. But I had time to observe a plain woman in a cloth coat and flat shoes who came in and spoke to Andrew. I heard her ask, "Did you get to the bank?" He nodded and fished an envelope from his inside pocket and gave it to her.

Customers wanted to be served so I looked away and the next thing I knew, there was Andrew's woman facing me with a couple of cards she wanted to purchase. I handled the transaction, gathering from her a vague-eyed air of befuddlement. This was confirmed when, after her departure, I found the envelope on the counter. No doubt of it, it was the one Andrew had given her.

I turned my back and tucked it out of sight. The flap was unsealed. It was a sheaf of tens looking like well over two hundred dollars. It disappeared into my pocket like a rabbit into a poacher's coat.

She came to see Andrew a few minutes later, her face grey as ash. Their discussion was hoarse and brief. Then the two of them approached me where I had busied myself at the cash register.

"This is my wife," Andrew said. "She thinks she left an envelope on the counter about ten minutes ago."

"I remember her," I said. And then, with my eyes wide open, I put myself into Andrew's league. "But she didn't leave anything. If she had, I'd have noticed it."

Andrew gave me about five seconds with both eyes but I managed to hold on—it was my last afternoon and then I'd be gone forever. As for the loser he was married to, I avoided looking at her. Whatever was going on behind that face, I didn't want to know, especially since the cards she had bought were Holbeins and he is my favorite too.

So I went out of the gallery that evening with enough money to pay for half of next year's education. And as a bonus, I had even been taught a little something about myself.

*Cardula settles an old account . . .*

# CARDULA'S REVENGE

by Jack Ritchie

"It's that beast Van Jelsing again," Nadia said.

I raised an eyebrow. "By this time that man must certainly be in his hundreds."

She shook her head. "The original Van Jelsing is dead. This is his grandson, Professor Van Jelsing the Third. But he, too, shares the family obsession."

"Is he after anyone in particular this time?"

"I don't think so. Ostensibly he is here in America on a lecture tour, peddling his favorite subject. But no doubt he will also be sniffing around. Just having him in the neighborhood sends shivers up and down my spine."

Nadia's eyes appraised my office, the furniture of which consisted of a desk, two chairs, a filing cabinet, and one typewriter. She was not very impressed. "My friends told me that you were now a private detective."

I nodded. "One must live. Everything I brought over from the old country eventually had to be pawned."

Nadia's smile was rather self-satisfied. "I invested everything I had in Xerox, at the very beginning. Now I live in Wurthington Hills."

Nadia had raven-black hair, an eye-catching pale complexion, and wore obviously expensive clothes. "Do you remember Yvette of Strasbourg?"

"Certainly. In the old days she was frequently a weekend guest at the castle. She is a most talented pipe organist. What a magnificent left hand she has."

Nadia made a correction. "Had. Yvette will never play again."

"Van Jelsing?"

"Yes. And have you ever met little Nicco?"

"Of course, the world's leading authority on archaic Latin. It was his natal tongue, you know. Not little Nicco too?"

"Van Jelsing got to him in a wine-storage cavern just outside of Florence." Her thin strong fingers moved convulsively. "I would like to snap Van Jelsing's neck. Crack! Just like that."

And, given the opportunity, she could do it too. I myself have the strength of twenty. And she, perhaps that of thirteen or fourteen.

"Something has got to be done about that man," Nadia said. "But none of us can get near him. He always wears that damn collar around his neck."

Ah, yes. The Van Jelsing leather collar with its numerous cruciform inlays. It is worn under the shirt, and as long as a Van Jelsing, or anyone else for that matter, wears it, he is impregnable—as far as we are concerned.

"Somehow he's got to be caught when he's not wearing that collar," Nadia said. "And that is why I am here. I ask you to take this mission and I am willing to pay you handsomely."

I pondered. "Where is Van Jelsing now?"

"He's staying at Mamie Bellingham's place while he does a series of lectures at the university. Mamie has invited me over to meet him, of course, but I wouldn't *dream* of getting within a mile of that man."

"Mamie Bellingham?"

"Yes, she is my *dearest* friend. We are practically like sisters. I am jealous only of her ability to tan."

"Nadia," I said, "do you suppose you could wrangle me an invitation to her home?"

"As a matter of fact, she is having a bash over there this Saturday in Van Jelsing's honor. You won't need an invitation because there will be hundreds of people there and Mamie cannot possibly know them all. Just drop in. I am certain no one will try to evict you."

When Nadia was gone, I resumed thinking.

Even when hidden from the eye, the Van Jelsing collar still seemed to provide its wearer with a protective force field. I had, at one time while in a confrontation with Van Jelsing *grand-père*, considered attacking him at some non-traditional point, even going so far as to try the tip of a finger. However, I found that I could not approach within ten feet of him without acute discomfort.

Ah, well, I would just have to wait patiently and seize any opportunity should it present itself.

Early Saturday evening I dropped into a novelty store and purchased a false moustache—a rather formidable Hussar type—on the assumption that while Van Jelsing the Third had never seen me in the flesh, he might still recognize me from old portraits.

I had received directions from Nadia on how to find Mamie Bellingham's estate, and, as I approached the general area, I had no trouble in being specific. The Bellingham house was quite thoroughly lit up.

Once down in the garden, I straightened my tie and proceeded toward the house. When I entered the sizeable drawing room, I saw a circle gathered about someone to the far side of the room.

I heard a voice expounding.

"They have, during the course of the centuries, developed a certain ecological restraint. They no longer completely drain their victims, thereby encouraging overcrowding in their ranks and competition for the available food supply. Instead they now merely stop for a sip here

and a sip there until their need is fulfilled."

One of his audience asked a question. "Why don't their victims raise the alarm?"

"Because the victims are subjected to a hypnotically induced amnesia. They remember nothing of what happened to them. In the morning they wake, feeling perhaps a bit worn and wondering if possibly they are coming down with the Russian flu."

I gradually inched my way forward until I was in a position to get a view of Professor Van Jelsing the Third. He appeared to be the very image of his grandfather, even to the steel-rimmed glasses and the aura of smug pedanticism.

An anxious female voice inquired, "Then they can at this very moment be among us?"

"Yes," Van Jelsing said. He held up a hand to dispel the murmuring. "However, I have a certain sixth sense about their presence and I assure you that there are none of them in this room at the moment."

If this was an example of his sixth sense, I wondered at the condition of his other five.

Van Jelsing smiled complacently. "There are means by which one can distinguish them, and, contrarywise, there are means by which one can undistinguish them."

Very properly, someone asked, "Undistinguish?"

Van Jelsing nodded and pointed a finger directly at me. "You, sir, could not possibly be one of them."

I was a bit taken aback. "And why not, sir?"

"Because you are wearing a moustache. They do not grow moustaches. I don't know why, but they do not."

Another voice spoke up. "If they know that you're hunting them, don't they try to strike back?"

"Ah, yes," Van Jelsing said happily. "They try. But I am invulnerable." He wisked off his string tie in a practiced manner and began to unbutton the top of his shirt.

I averted my eyes, pretending a consuming interest in the condition of my trouser crease.

There was a gasp from Van Jelsing's audience.

"You see," Van Jelsing said. "I wear this collar around my neck at all times. Except when I am taking a shower."

I blinked. Shower?

He closed the door. "However, I never take a shower except during the daylight hours. You will notice that on this collar I have had my protecting symbol artistically reproduced twenty-four times. I do not believe in taking chances by leaving a blind spot anywhere."

Finally allowing a furtive look, I saw that Van Helsing had rebuttoned his shirt.

Professor Van Jelsing the Third now proceeded to introduce the man at his side. "This is my nephew, Henrik Van Jelsing, my protégé. I have chosen him to carry on my work after I am gone. Unfortunately, all of my own children were daughters and none of them chose to follow in my footsteps."

Henrik Van Jelsing was a sturdy individual with straw-colored hair. He had a firm square chin, Holland-blue eyes, and he appeared to be in his early twenties. He nodded modestly. "Originally I was with my father in the gladiola- and tulip-farming business, but the professor convinced my parents that my future lay in other fields. However, in order that I would never forget my roots, on my departure, my mother presented me with a potted gladiola, which I carry always with me in my travels."

I withdrew from the crowd and found myself melancholily regarding the other guests.

One of them seemed a bit familiar.

He was a thin individual with a hairline moustache, rather handsome in a middle-aged way, and there seemed to be the debonair air of the civilized rogue about him.

And now I remembered. It had been Scotland. Lady McDonnely had been celebrating the reappearance of the Loch Ness Monster after a lapse of several years and it was just about time too. The tourist trade had fallen and the locals were beginning to grumble. Yes, it had been quite a large party.

I frowned. But that wasn't the only time I had seen that man. There had also been the Le Mans Grand Prix and the Contessa Stella's pre-race ball.

I studied him. His attention seemed to return periodically to a rather impressively built woman with glaring red hair some dozen feet away.

Yes, I thought, that must be Mamie Bellingham. Nadia had described her to me.

Scotland, Le Mans, and now Mamie Bellingham's mansion?

I further refined the area of his attention. It was not Mamie Bellingham herself who drew his interest, it was the shimmering necklace around her neck.

That was it—the common denominator. A casket of Lady McDonnely's jewelry had been stolen on the night of the Loch Ness ball. It appeared that she had gone to bed drugged, for she slept until noon the next day. When she awakened, she discovered her jewelry missing. And the Contessa Stella. Her blue-white pendant, the Star of Bologna, had also disappeared during the night and she also had apparently been drugged.

I rubbed my chin and then gradually sidled my way toward the man until I was next to him. I didn't know his name, but I said, "Well, well, Mr. Devlin, how nice to see you again."

He regarded me politely. "I'm afraid you have me confused with someone else, sir."

I peered at him for a moment and then admitted my error. "Of course. I'm sorry, I could have sworn I saw you come into my shop with Mamie Bellingham last week when she brought her necklace for repair."

He was faintly interested. "Repair?"

"Yes, the clasp of her necklace was broken and she brought it to me."

"You are a jewelry repairman?"

I chuckled good-naturedly. "Good Jupiter, no. I merely see to these little things to keep my customers happy. I am the junior member of Espanger and Espanger. Perhaps you've heard of us? Last week we sold the Wamberly Sapphire to the Sheik of Imafret. It was one hundred and twelve karats, a beautiful stone."

His estimation of my social value rose. "I see you were able to repair the clasp on Mrs. Bellingham's necklace."

"Unfortunately, no. It was beyond repair and the replacement was of such a distinctive nature that I was forced to send out for it. It hasn't arrived yet."

He stared at Mrs. Bellingham. "What's holding up the necklace? String?"

I laughed lightly. "Oh, *that* necklace. It's just her copy. The original is still waiting in the safe at our establishment."

He snatched a drink from the tray of a passing waiter. "You mean to say that she's wearing paste? That isn't the real necklace?"

"Goodness, no! Isn't it amazing what can be done with plastic combinations these days?"

He downed the drink.

I smiled. "Yes, I *do* try to keep my customers happy by doing these little shopkeeper favors and they learn to depend upon me. I suppose that was why Mrs. Bellingham sent Van Jelsing to me this morning. One of the larger diamonds in his collar had fallen out and he wanted it re-cemented."

Devlin, or whoever he was, looked Van Jelsing's way with growing interest. "I thought all those sparkles were rhinestones. That's the fanciest dog collar I've ever seen."

"The whites are diamonds," I said. "None less than two karats. The blues are sapphires, and the reds, rubies. And, if I'm not mistaken, there is a touch of lapis lazuli here and there."

Having planted the seed, I now left him with something to think about and made my way to the second floor.

I removed my moustache. It had begun to irritate me tremendously and I gingerly touched my upper lip. Yes, it was swollen and very likely red. Was I allergic to moustaches?

I found a place of concealment and proceeded to wait. How long was this party intended to last? I hoped not into the morning hours.

I was rather relieved when toward 1:00 A.M. I saw Van Jelsing and his nephew ascending the thickly carpeted stairs.

Van Jelsing yawned and seemed to be depending upon his nephew for some support. "I don't know when I've felt so sleepy. It could not have been the drinks. I had only two all evening. Perhaps I have still not adjusted to the jet lag."

His nephew guided him to a door, where Van Jelsing turned. "I'll be all right, Henrik. I just need a little sleep. You go back downstairs and enjoy the party."

Van Jelsing disappeared behind his door and his nephew went back downstairs.

I waited.

It was a matter of perhaps half an hour before I saw Devlin moving silently up the stairway. Evidently he did not know which bedroom

was Van Jelsing's, because he tried several doors before he found the right one.

He slipped into the room and in less than a minute he was out again, a smile on his face, patting his right hand jacket pocket.

I waited until he disappeared down the stairs and then descended from my perch. I flexed my fingers. Within the minute they would be around Van Jelsing's neck.

I opened his door and entered the room. I saw two beds. Evidently Van Jelsing and his protégé shared the huge bedroom.

And there lay Professor Van Jelsing, gently snoring. The first two buttons of his pajama top had been undone and his neck was now bereft of the Van Jelsing collar.

My eyes were diverted to the nightstand beside his nephew's bed. It supported a pot containing the sword-shaped leaves and the crimson blossoms of a single gladiola.

I studied it for a full thirty seconds and then I moved it to the chair next to Van Jelsing's bed.

It was some eleven months later when Professor Van Jelsing came to my office again, his face familiarly haggard. "I am a nervous wreck. I just got out of Lisbon by the skin of my teeth. My plane was taxiing down to the runway when I looked out of a window and there was that idiot nephew of mine with his satchel, watching my plane and rubbing his jaw."

He sat down. "That man is absolutely relentless. You would think that since he is a blood relative, he would spare me. Or at least pursue someone else. But no. I am hounded—Dublin, Oslo, Constantinople, Ulan Bator. Nowhere am I safe. I am haunted by visions of Henrik pursuing me, a hammer in one hand and that damn wooden—"

I commiserated. "He does seem to be quite persistent."

Van Jelsing nodded. "I still don't really know how it all happened. All I remember is that I woke in the middle of the night knowing that I had to get the hell out of Mrs. Bellingham's house before daylight and realizing that it was imperative that I find some of my own native soil. Luckily Henrik's stupid gladiola plant was on a chair next to my bed. I filled my tobacco pouch with some of the soil and departed. Even then I think I would have perished if you hadn't accidently bumped into me on the street and taken me in for the day."

He studied me for a moment, as though trying to remember something. "Did you ever wear a moustache?" Then he shrugged. "No. We don't grow moustaches. I don't know why, but we don't." He sighed. "Thank Lucifer, I don't have to transport a bulky box every time I have to move, as it was in the old days. A tobacco pouch under my pillow seems to be sufficient."

I agreed. "Essentially it's the thought that counts."

He wiped his forehead. "I had thought of going down to New Orleans, but I think the high humidity might be bad for my arthritis. I believe I'll try Las Vegas instead."

I approved. "I spent a pleasant six months there several years ago. I had a suite at the Desert Cacti Hotel."

"How are the rates?"

"Quite reasonable."

He looked a bit embarrassed. "What with all this traveling, I seem to have run a little short. You don't suppose that—"

"But of course." I went to my office safe and removed three thousand dollars from the contingency fund Nadia and a few of her wealthy relatives had raised and handed it to Van Jelsing.

He pocketed the money. "I'll pay this back someday."

"I'm certain you will. Do keep in touch."

Two days later I received a phone call from Professor Van Jelsing's nephew. He was in Paris.

"I seem to have lost him again," Henrik said plaintively. "I traced him all the way to the Lisbon airport, but then I wasn't sure whether he was on the night plane to Paris or back in America. I flipped a coin and now I am in Paris, but I do not think he is here."

"He's back in America."

"How can you be certain of that?"

"The Cardula Detective Agency has many contacts. I received a hot tip just this morning that your uncle is now in Las Vegas. You might try the Desert Cacti Hotel."

Henrik was plainly unhappy. "I wish he would hold still. All I am trying to do is put his soul to rest, but he doesn't seem to appreciate it. Frankly, I hate all of this traveling. And it is so expensive."

"Are you perhaps getting low on funds?"

"Well, it is getting to that point again."

"I'll wire you a few thousand."

"That is very kind of you." There was a pause. "Once I have put Uncle to rest, I am giving up this whole business and returning to my gladiolas and tulips."

"But in the meantime, Henrik, hang in there." I smiled. "And good hunting."

*He was deeply committed to saving the lake . . .*

# THE MAN IN THE LAKE

by ERNEST SAVAGE

I have always thought the lake dwarfs the mountains around it. It is such a noble water it should have a more noble frame, more Alpine—a Matterhorn on one side, an Eiger on the other, as accent points. But God listens when you quibble over Tahoe's beauty . . .

It does not invite man's rapacious participation. Its waters are frigid all year round, its beach is of hard-edged stone. An empty beer can within a mile of it is a special abomination, and there must be ten mil-

lion of them by now. It's 1,600 feet deep, but it's already filling with the detritus of man's passing parade, his offal, his stink. Twelve million years in the making, we'll have it beat dead in another century. It cannot take us. Tahoe.

They lived in a 7,000-square-foot house—the two of them, plus a maid. You probably live in 1,400 square feet, you and the wife and four kids. And cat and dog. She had something made of white fur on her lap, but she didn't tell me what it was and I didn't ask. It breathed, but it neither purred nor barked. She was seated on a couch a quarter mile long in front of the windows overlooking the lake. Mrs. Wilson. The maid had put me down in a chair that gave me a view of her against the spread of the lake and its low embracing hills. I'd just spent four hours getting there from San Francisco and I was in one of those moods where the customer is always wrong; but mine generally are, anyway.

A lawyer named Marcus had hired me yesterday morning, Thursday, to come up and help Mrs. Wilson find her missing husband, Bill. The lawyer had asked me to meet him in a dimly-lit bar around the corner from my place on Van Ness Avenue and he'd handed me a thousand dollars in a plain unmarked envelope. Two five-hundred-dollar bills.

When he told me I'd have to come up to Lake Tahoe to do the job, I almost handed it back. I'd caught Mackinaw trout and Kokanee salmon in Tahoe up until fifteen years ago, but I hadn't been back since because there's no way to get there any more without driving through miles of what looks like the condemned side of downtown Reno, and that makes me sick. Tahoe should have been fenced off at the turn of the century.

"Marcus told me Mr. Wilson's been missing since Monday night," I said after the rote preliminaries. Marcus hadn't told me much of anything else except that he was Wilson's lawyer and had been for thirty years.

"Yes," she said. "He left here around seven that evening and hasn't been back since." She was a contralto. In half-silhouette against the window, she looked to be about my age, 45. Maybe in pure sun she'd look older, but she didn't sound it.

"How old is Mr. Wilson?" I said.

Her brows lifted. "Is that germane?"

"Please, Mrs. Wilson." I flipped a hand. "I'll ask a lot of stuff and maybe only ten percent'll be germane—a word I'm not fond of."

"That seems like a low average, Mr. Train. Bill is sixty-seven. Would you prefer 'pertinent'?"

"Where'd he go when he left here?"

"To South Tahoe. He took his boat. Or perhaps 'impertinent'."

"*His* boat?"

"Yes, Mr. Train, *his* boat, his fifty-thousand-dollar cruiser. We're rich, Mr. Train, which I can see offends you. We have *two* boats and four cars, and apartments in San Francisco and at Cap d'Ail on the Côte d'Azur in France, and these spacey little shoes I have on cost ninety-five dollars."

I stared at her. The rich amaze me—they're so damned uncomfortable, even with each other. We don't have the tradition in this country yet; it takes generations to be at ease with ill-gotten gains. "Is that germane, Mrs. Wilson?"

Something twitched across her lips. She put the fur thing on the couch beside her and stood up. "Would you like a drink, Mr. Train?" she said, and began walking toward a bar against the left wall of the big room.

"Yes, scotch," I said. It was only two in the afternoon, but I'm less a clock-watcher than I used to be. She was tall and slender and she moved swiftly and well, and who says I don't like the rich? I just don't like how they get it or what they do with it.

It was better after that. Her husband was a leader of the environmentalists around Tahoe, she told me, the anti-growth people, and they'd been at war with the developers for years now, an increasingly bloody war. She appreciated the irony of his position, she said early on, since his fortune was based on development around the lake, but as you approach the grave, she added in an interesting touch, different lights illuminate your path.

The already complex issues in the dispute were further tangled by the fact that Tahoe is divided almost equally between Nevada and California, as well as split up between five different counties in the two states. There was no clear way out of the mess, she said, but Monday night leaders of the various factions had gathered together in South Tahoe to search for one. The meeting had failed, as they all had, and broken up around 11:30. A cabbie had taken Wilson back to the marina

where he'd moored the boat, and he hadn't been seen since.

"What do the cops think?" I said.

"They suspect foul play, Mr. Train."

"And you don't?"

"I don't *want* to."

"When did you call the cops?"

"Wednesday morning."

"Why so late?"

"I wanted to give him time."

"He's done this before—disappeared?"

"Not for so long."

"When was the last time, and where'd he go?"

"Three or four months ago. He went down to San Francisco."

"The apartment?"

"Yes."

"Have you checked there?"

"Yes, of course. Daily. But there's been no answer. He's not there."

"Do you love him, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Is that germane?"

"You bet."

"If you suspect me of some sort of hugger-mugger in this thing, Mr. Train, don't waste your time. I love him. I love him very much." It rang true.

"How long have you been married?"

"Twenty years."

"Kids?"

"No."

"Do you inherit?"

"Yes, of course."

"A bundle?"

"A bundle, Mr. Train."

"That was an interesting line, Mrs. Wilson, about 'as you approach the grave'."

She shrugged.

"*Is* he approaching the grave—assuming he's not there already?"

"We all are."

"Is he ill, doddering?"

"He could take you, I think. He's got ten, fifteen good years left."

"At which time you'll be what? Fifty-five?"

"I'll be ten or fifteen years older than I am now."

I smiled. She was a good contestant. "Have they found the boat?" I said.

"No."

"Have they looked?"

"Of course they have, and so have I—all day Wednesday and Thursday. I mentioned we have two boats. I toured the whole lake."

"And—?"

"Nothing, of course, or I would have said so."

"Have you looked anywhere else?"

"Like where, for instance? When we find the boat, Mr. Train, we'll know where to look for Bill." She got up from the couch again and took my half-full glass from my hand. Hers was empty. Forty, I thought, having gotten a better look at her face.

"How do *you* feel about growth, or no growth?" I said to her back.

She turned. "I don't want one more bad thing to happen to the lake." Her eyes narrowed. "I'm entirely on Bill's side."

"Who isn't?" I said.

"Hundreds aren't."

"Name one."

"Well, Marcus, for starters. The jolly fat man who hired you."

"Why isn't he?" I said.

"Ask him when you see him next."

"What'll he tell me?"

"He'll tell you that Bill's quixotic stand is costing him thousands. Bill owns property that is blocking a lot of development. He's costing a lot of people thousands. He's breaking a lot of people."

"Would Marcus make those thousands if Mr. Wilson were dead?" I didn't want a hundred suspects, I wanted one.

She started to answer, then thought about it for a moment. "I'm not sure what the arrangements are between them," she said, her voice shaking a little. She turned back to the bar, her hands momentarily up to her eyes.

I heard the big front door open and shut and heard sharp steps clack across the slate-floored entry hall before dying in the thick wool carpeting of the living room. A man entered to my right and walked toward Mrs. Wilson.

"It's in," he said, and then he saw me, half turned, and stared.

"What's in?" I said.

"You are," Mrs. Wilson answered, her voice clear again. The man had a folded newspaper in his hand and Mrs. Wilson took it from him and opened it. "Where?" she said to him.

"Second page, first column on the left."

She scanned a moment before reciting as follows: "'Mrs. William Wilson, wife of the missing Lake Tahoe civic leader, announced late Thursday that she'd hired the distinguished San Francisco private investigator, Sam Train, to assist local authorities in the search for her husband, missing since Monday night.' "

" 'Distinguished'?" I said.

"You'd prefer something else?"

"Almost anything. Look, Mrs. Wilson, Marcus hired me. How come you take the credit?"

"Marcus' secretary phoned yesterday and told Millie he'd hired you and that you'd be up today."

"Millie the maid?"

"Yes. Harley and I"—she indicated the man—"were out on the lake looking for Bill."

"Did you call Marcus back?"

"No. His secretary also said he'd just flown to Hawaii on vacation."

"Did Marcus' secretary suggest that you take the credit—if that's the word?"

"No, but Harley and I thought it would look better coming from us."

"Appearances mean that much to you, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Not normally. But this isn't a normal situation."

I stood up and Mrs. Wilson went through the formality of introductions. Harley Wilson was Bill's nephew. He had one of those porcelain-perfect faces that are half teeth and outrageously handsome, but almost nothing else. His handshake was a carefully calibrated macho squeeze. He probably played a lot of tennis. "A pleasure," he said, lying.

"How come you waited for Marcus to hire a P.I.," I said to her, "if appearances are so important to you in this case?"

"I didn't intend to hire anyone," she said. "I still believe Bill will come back when he's ready."

"On what evidence?"

"Intuition. I have a feeling."

"Yeah," I said. "I've got one too."

It was three o'clock. I took Route 28 to the south end of the lake, where Wilson had last been seen. Without too much trouble I found the local Sheriff's Office and was steered to a plainclothesman named Hanley. I introduced and identified myself and watched his eyes turn cold. A newspaper was open on his desk.

"We don't need help on this thing, Train," he said.

"You mean you've found him?"

"Don't get smart. I mean we will find him."

"Dead or alive?"

"Dead, probably. But we still don't need help."

"Do you mind if I express a thought, Hanley?"

"As long as it's distinguished."

"So you read that, huh? A bad choice of words, as I told the author."

"What's your thought, Train?"

"This: have you found a car that's been lying around here since Monday night?"

"We find two or three a week."

"This would be new, Hanley, and probably a rental. An Impala, maybe. And probably in the marina lot where Wilson moored his boat."

Hanley was silent a moment before he said, "So—?"

"You found one?"

"We found one this morning. An LTD. What made you think we would?"

"Look," I said. "Wilson got aboard his boat Monday night and neither he nor it have been seen since. Do I have that right?"

"Yes."

"O.K., so what are the possibilities? He was either alone, or he wasn't alone. If he was alone, he would have gotten home as expected, unless the boat blew up or something."

"Not likely," Hanley said. "Somebody would have seen it or heard it, or both."

"O.K., so let's assume he wasn't alone. Let's assume somebody was on the boat when Wilson boarded, and if we assume that, we can assume he probably drove to the marina beforehand, since nobody walks

any more. And since the boat disappeared and he was on it, he couldn't come back for his car. What about the LTD?"

"A rental from Sacramento. It was in the marina lot. The contract in the glove compartment said the renter's name was Frank Smith."

"Good ole Frank Smith," I said softly.

"You think that's an alias?"

"I think it's a *nom de guerre*, Hanley."

"Are you being distinguished now?"

"Half of them call themselves Frank Smith for some reason. He's a hired killer, Hanley. Or *was*, as the case may be."

"You think they—what? Killed each other on the boat? And then what? Sank it?"

I didn't answer. I spent a half minute sorting through the possibilities, and there seemed to be a lot of them. "Wilson," I said finally, "is head of the no-growth forces, right? Who's his opposite number?"

"There are lots of 'em."

"Who's the meanest?"

"Well, Phil Enderby maybe. He's a big construction man."

"Has he been questioned about this?"

"No. Why should he be?"

"Who *have* you questioned?"

"Well, nobody yet. We don't have anything to go on yet."

I stared at him. "Do you assume Wilson's dead, Hanley?"

"Well, yes. Probably."

"Do you assume he was murdered?"

"Well, all right. Probably."

"Do you assume he was murdered by a friend, or an enemy?"

"All right, Train, an enemy!"

"Enderby's a friend?"

"No!"

"A friend of yours maybe—"

You say something like that and then watch what happens. County cops are almost always hooked up with the local power factions, one side or the other. It's not necessarily bad, it's just a fact of life, but Hanley was making it look bad. He got red around the eyes and white around the lips. It took him thirty seconds to decide not to spit in my eye, but I spoke first. I said, "Was Enderby at the meeting Monday

night?"

"He was there."

"And he's all busted up over Wilson's disappearance, I suppose."

"He's loving it."

"You've talked to him about it?"

"Every day."

"You're on his side, right?"

"And you're on Wilson's."

"It's my Indian blood," I said, giving myself antecedents I neither have nor deserve. "Me no like the trashing of the Big-Jewel-in-the-Sky, which is what my forefathers called this lake, Hanley. You guys want to line it with neon-lit gunk and fill it with your sewage. You're damn right I'm on Wilson's side!"

"Get out of the county, Train!"

"Spoken in the true western tradition, Sheriff. It'll be a pleasure."

"And stay out," he added, and I almost laughed.

"You bet," I said.

It was six when I got back to Mrs. Wilson's house on the lakeshore road. The sun was just below the Sierra crest in the west, the sugar pines along that serrated ridge haloed in its dying rays. The lake was cobalt blue and serene in the quiet twilight air, and if you squinted you could think long thoughts about the way it once was around there.

Harley opened the door after I'd rung the bell. "Well, Train!" he said genially. "Back so soon?" He was drunk, his eyes luminous with booze. "Come in, sir, come in!" He swept the door wide.

I stayed where I was. "Marcus," I said. "Just how fat is he, Harley?"

"Sir?"

"Mrs. Wilson said Marcus is a jolly fat man."

"He is."

"How fat?"

"Well, fat," Harley said. "Fat." The drink in his hand spilled a little on the slate floor as he illustrated.

"And how jolly, Harley?"

"Less jolly than fat, my dear sir, but he laughs a lot, often at nothing. Such odd questions. I thought you'd met the man."

"It was dark. What's the address of Wilson's apartment in San Francisco?"

"My, such odd questions."

"You don't know it?"

"Of course I know it. It's in Blenheim Towers on Kearny Street."

"Where's Mrs. Wilson?"

"She's on the patio preparing steaks to grill, while Millie prepares the salad—a Caesar, *naturellement*. Perhaps you'd care to join us, *mon vieux*." His arm swept wide again and there was a touch of mine host in the pose I thought premature. He was hard to take on an empty stomach.

"No thanks," I said. "But *bon appétit* anyway."

He gave me a dazzling smile as I turned and walked back up the driveway to my aging Dart.

Blenheim Towers adorns a rise of land near the Bay, an enclave of inscrutable wealth, w/vu. Penile towers, tumescent in their rape of space. I live on Van Ness, which can be described as nowhere, minus one. My view is of bodies in the street.

I must move, I keep telling myself, but I probably won't. There's no running from it.

I brood a lot when I'm home. While moving, I can maintain the illusion of progress, the hope of change. But squatting here in my Laz-E-Boy, watching the eleven o'clock body count, rage rises in my gorge like bad food.

Poor Tahoe, I was thinking. I'd chickened out on that one. Fifteen years ago, while fishing on its crystal-clear waters, I'd seen, forty feet down, a beer can sharply enough to read the label and I'd rowed back to shore for the last time. I should have stayed and fought somehow, but I'd gone away and stayed away. Wilson, at least, was fighting them—or had been.

I got up and turned off the news. It was 11:15.

I took a cab and was there in fifteen minutes. The top of the building was lost in the night air, but the entrance, done in Renaissance style, was well lit and a pleasure to the eye. I told the cabbie to wait and walked through the ornate bronze doors of Blenheim Towers as though it weren't for the first time.

A night porter looked up from a book on his desk, shoved his glasses higher on the bridge of his nose, and said, "Sir?" A gun in a holster was three inches from his right hand and he closed that gap by half,

instinctively. Everybody's armed in this town. Behind him was a wall of mailboxes.

I veered over and stopped in front of his desk and said, "Marcus."

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but we don't have a Marcus here." He was a big man, about my age and size, and he looked competent in his natty blue uniform. But he had subornable eyes—a natural-born doorman.

"Of course," I said, as though it had slipped my mind. "I meant to say 'Wilson'."

"The Wilsons are at their place on Lake Tahoe," he said. "In fact, they're seldom here, sir."

His eyes looked like a minimum of ten dollars, so I pulled twice that much from my wallet and laid it on his desk. "For a pencil and paper," I said.

"Certainly, sir," he said, and produced them from a drawer, the twenty disappearing before my very eyes.

I wrote: "Please call Sam Train as soon as possible," and put down my number. I shoved the paper across to him and he folded it without reading it. "Give it to whoever's there," I said, and he assured me with a winning smile he would. In fact, I thought, he'd probably run it up right now.

The call wakened me at seven the next morning, Saturday. I don't come out of sleep quick as a dog, but I clearly heard this voice say, "Train? This is Marcus. I got your note."

"Marcus," I said, clearing my throat. "You're supposed to be on vacation."

"How do you know I'm not?"

"O.K.," I said, "I don't. I'll be over in an hour."

"Have you had breakfast?"

"A civilized man wouldn't ask that question."

"Are there any? Look, Train, ham, eggs, juice, toast, and coffee. They'll be ready for you when you get here. I told the gunslinger downstairs to pass you through."

"O.K., Mr. Wilson," I said. "But make it an hour and a half. We've got time now."

He'd started out in life as a short-order cook in Denver, he told me

over breakfast, and nobody, he said, could fry eggs the way he could. I told him I'd never considered that one of the higher culinary arts, but they were good, over easy with the yolks done just right.

The protocol was no business talk while eating and that was O.K. with me. From my seat at the table I had a nice view of the Ferry Building and the Bay Bridge beyond, and I don't often get to see the world from this height. He didn't argue when I called him Wilson.

With coffee he lit a cigarette and asked me how I'd worked it out. "And don't tell me it was simple," he said.

"But it was," I said. "Smith parked his car in the marina lot and waited for you on the boat—that's pretty obvious."

"Smith?"

"That's what he called himself—Frank Smith—but it's a popular name amongst hit men. You mean you didn't know his name?"

"No. After I killed him, I just took the money from his wallet because I didn't have much with me and I knew I'd need it. I didn't look for an I.D."

"O.K.," I said. "So yesterday morning the cops found his car in the marina lot, which meant he hadn't been able to get back to it. And the boat had disappeared, which meant, probably, that somebody had sunk it, and since there were only two of you aboard and he was in no shape to pick up his car, it must have been you. Which meant you were alive and well.

"Also, you're neither fat nor particularly jolly, which is how your wife described Marcus."

"Well, I knew I couldn't get away with it for long, Train. I just wanted it to hold up long enough for you to find out who set me up." His eyes darkened. "Who did? A guy named Enderby?"

"Later on that," I said. "How'd you kill him?"

"With these." He held up two meaty, tough-looking hands.

"Tell me how it went."

"Well, I'd just moved out from the marina, maybe a hundred feet into the lake, when I looked behind me for some reason—maybe I didn't like the feel of the boat with the extra weight—and there he was, ten feet away in the bright moonlight, with a gun in his hand."

"And then?"

"I gave it hard left wheel just as he fired and it threw him off his feet. His shot nicked me in the arm, but I didn't even know it until

later. I jumped him and grabbed his neck and banged his head against the deck until he was damn well dead." He pushed to his feet in the anger of recall. "To *bushwhack* a man," he said, as though it were the ultimate sin. He'd led a sheltered life.

"Let me see the wound," I said. He'd been favoring that left arm all morning.

"It's nothing."

"Let me see it," I said, and he took off the robe he was wearing and showed me a nasty-looking rip through the upper bicep of his left arm. It was infected. "I'll get a doctor for that," I said.

"No, he'll report it."

"Not this one." I got up and went over to the desk where the phone was and made a call and came back. "O.K., after you killed him, what? The doctor will be over in twenty minutes. His name's Quinlan and he's qualified. So what happened next?"

"Well, I took the boat out onto the lake and over to the east shore where I own this big stretch of land and I know nobody lives. It's one of the pieces they want me to open for development, but when I die it's going to become a state park. It's in my will.

"Anyway, I took ten five-hundred-dollar bills—can you imagine that?—from this rat's wallet and opened the sea cocks over this spot about a hundred fifty feet deep and let her go. It's about sixty yards to shore from there and I swam it. Then I walked back down the lakeshore road to where there's a phone booth and called this limousine operator I know and offered him a five-hundred-dollar bill—a little wet, maybe—to drive me down here and keep his mouth shut about it."

"That was Monday night?"

"Yes. And I was beat and sore, and mad and confused. I knew what he was, of course, and that somebody'd hired him, but I couldn't figure out who. Anyway, Thursday I got hold of you, and you know the rest. In fact, you know more than I do probably."

"I think I do."

"In fact, you might even think you know who did it, right?"

"I think I do," I said. "But I could be wrong."

"Who is it? Enderby? Phil Enderby?"

"Well, who are the possibilities?" I asked. "You should know that better than I."

"Come on, Train, damn it!"

"Wait. We may have a way to prove it. Did Smith say anything to you before he shot?"

"No, why should he? Wait a minute!" He reconsidered, his brow furrowed. Without knowing it, he began to rub his left elbow. Pain from the infection would be accumulating there.

"What did he say?"

"Well, let me see—He said, 'Are you Mister Bill Wilson?' Yeah, he said, 'Are you Mister Bill Wilson?' "

"What kind of voice? High? Low?"

"Well kind of high, thin and high. Like this." He tried it and then tried it again, a little higher.

"How about this?" I said, and tried it, and then tried it again and again until he said I was close. "Are you Mister Bill Wilson?" I said finally, and he said, "That's it! Right on the money."

"Now let's call this Enderby," I said.

"Is he the one, Train?"

"Somebody described him as being delighted at your continued absence, Wilson. Have you got his number?"

"Yes." He got up and led me to the desk where I'd phoned the doctor and he showed me Enderby's number.

I got him at his office in a couple of minutes and said, right off, "Enderby, I want more money."

"Who doesn't?" he said. "Who is this?" He had a big direct voice.

"Wilson's dead," I said, "and I want more money for the job. Five grand more."

"What makes you think Wilson's dead?" His voice had dropped an octave, a growl.

"Come on," I said. "You hired me to do it and I did it. I want another five thou."

There was a long silence on the line and I looked at Wilson and shook my head. "Who is this?" Enderby said quietly, and I hung up.

"Not Enderby," I said.

"All right, who?"

"You know, don't you?"

"It's Marcus, isn't it, Train? It's just that I didn't want to think so. It's been building a long time."

"Does he win or lose with you dead?"

"He wins—big. I'm blocking him from a lot of fat fees and it's hurting him bad."

"Where is he?"

"In Hawaii. There's some kind of a lawyers' conference he's attending there. That's why I used his name when I hired you. I knew he'd be out of town."

"Who'd you hire to call your wife?"

"A public stenographer. I told her what to say."

"Why did you want her to know?"

"I thought it might ease her worry, Train. I love her and she loves me."

"She's got company, you know."

"You mean Harley?" he grinned. "Dear Harley. Some company. If my brother knew, he'd twirl in his grave."

I let it go. "What time is it," I said, "in Hawaii?"

He glanced at his watch. "Three hours' difference, I think. So wake him up. And when you're through with him, let me have him. To bushwhack a man, for Chrissakes!"

The phone rang and Wilson jumped nervously before answering. It was the man downstairs announcing the arrival of Doc Quinlan. Wilson said to send him up.

"Has that phone rung before?" I asked. "I mean since Tuesday morning?"

"No. Why should it have? Nobody knows I'm here. Look, Train, I'm just uptight, that's all."

I let Quinlan in at the door and made terse introductions before they both went off to the bedroom. I told Wilson I'd call Marcus while he was gone, but I didn't. Why waste the money? Even a fool's money.

I was glad for the time alone. I stood at the window and looked down at the morning traffic in the Bay. It all looked proper and orderly and clean from this expensive height, but there are places in that Bay where if you dip your hand your nails'll fall off. I turned away. You can't just let your mind drift any more; it'll snag on something ugly.

Quinlan looked flushed and happy as he followed Wilson back into the room. He'd cleaned and dressed Wilson's wound, he told me, and had given him a shot and a bottle of pills to take. He was smiling broadly, well pleased with himself.

"How much did you give him?" I asked Wilson acidly. "One of

Smith's bills?"

Wilson shrugged. "So?"

"Damn it! That's too much."

"Hell, Train, it's not mine."

"No? It was to begin with."

I took Quinlan by the arm and led him to the door. "You owe me at least two free ones," I said savagely. "Who the hell do you think you are, DeBakey?"

His shifty, part-time-drunk's eyes glanced around the big elegant room at my back. "No, but he isn't exactly a charity case either, Sam."

"Two free ones," I said as I shoved him out the door.

I was mad at Wilson. I was mad at Wilson for several reasons, but mostly for not knowing how to dispense money with a sense of its value. "How much," I said, "did you give the alligator downstairs last Tuesday morning for not recognizing who you were? Another five C's?"

"I *had* only five-hundred-dollar bills. But, hell—"

"Yeah, I know, you think they're not yours, but you're wrong, Wilson. A week ago they were."

"Do you know what you're saying, Train?"

"Yeah, I'm saying your wife hired the hit man."

"No. Sheila couldn't—"

"She did."

"You can't prove it."

"In a court of law, maybe not, but I can prove it to you, Bill."

He went over and slumped down in a big leather chair and looked every one of his sixty-seven years. The front part of his mind didn't want the truth, but the back part did, or he wouldn't have hired me. "How can you prove it?" he said. He didn't look up.

"You got here early Tuesday morning and you haven't been out of the place since, except to go hire me. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"And the phone hasn't rung since then."

"No," he said, and looked up now.

"That tells it to you, doesn't it, Bill?"

"No! That doesn't tell me a damn thing." He was still fighting it.

"She told me," I said, "that you'd disappear now and again for a day or two. Where would you come—here?"

"If we were up at the lake, yes."

"And she would phone to check?"

"Yes, usually." He straightened in his chair and rubbed his face with the palms of his hands, around the eyes mostly, where the ache had probably begun. He saw it now; he'd probably seen it all along, but those eyes were also staring across the widening gap between his years and hers, between old age and youth.

"You've been here almost five days now," I said, "and she hasn't called. She told me she had for the sake of form, Bill, but she hasn't. She hasn't because she thinks you're at the bottom of the lake. She hired somebody to put you there, so she hasn't called anywhere for you. She figured one of your many enemies would get blamed."

He was silent for a long time.

"Do you want me to phone her," I said, "and make like Frank Smith?"

"No."

"Do you want me to do anything?"

"No, you've earned your money."

"*Nobody* earns a thousand bucks in a day and a half, Wilson."

He didn't answer. He didn't believe that; he'd done it himself countless times probably. But he had a problem: he had a body in a boat to account for, a technical homicide to explain. I thought he could use my help and told him so, but he turned me down. He said he'd take care of it; he said he'd take care of everything. He looked at me. "She gave me twenty good years," he said.

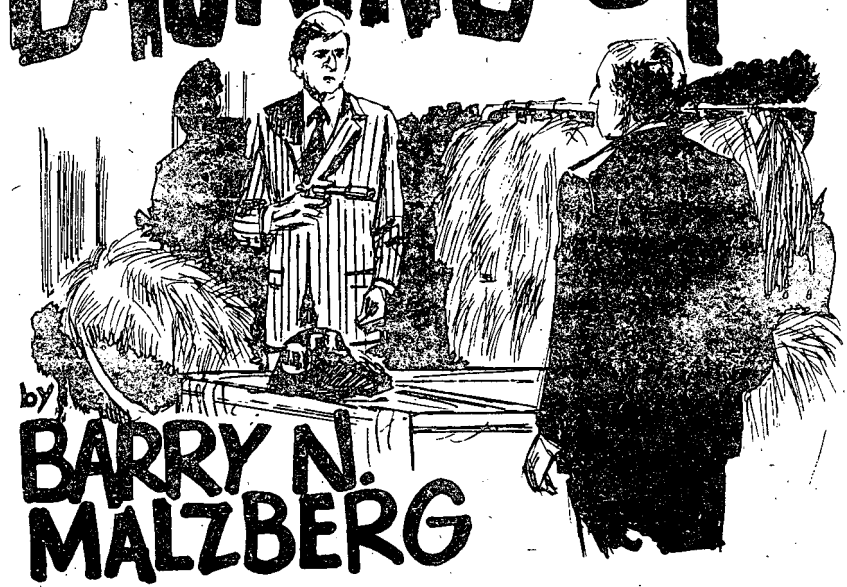
Two weeks later I read in the Saturday morning issue of the *Chronicle* that Wilson, his wife, and nephew had been killed in an automobile crash between Tahoe and Carson City. The road serpentines down a few thousand feet of slope between the lake and the city below and it's a hazardous run. There are a lot of places in its twenty miles where a car can go over the edge and drop a couple of hundred feet into rocks, and that's what the Wilson car had done.

Wilson had been at the wheel, and they said it was accidental.

Maybe they'll name that park after him, I thought. And I hoped so.

*Nothing works quite as it used to . . .*

# BACKING UP



by BARRY N. MALZBERG

So I show him the gun. This is the great leveler, the great persuader. "I must tell you," I say in my mellow voice, "that we have been dissatisfied with the collections for a very long time." The gun is a point forty-five caliber precision job, not that this really matters since it is not the make of guns but their function that interests most laymen. "You are five thousand dollars behind," I add. "Not even allowing for the matter of interest."

He looks at me with calm sad eyes. His name is Brown. I believe that I've got that right, and there's no need to look on the card to check as I'm definitely in the right office. He says, "I told you, I need more time. I'm doing the best I can. Furs is a seasonal business, an erratic business, and this is not our season." It is February, I should point out, although a very mild and springlike February. My forehead in this small room is veritably jeweled with sweat. "Next month," he says, "next month I will have something for you."

"Next month is not sufficient," I say. "My instructions are not to leave without a down payment now. Two thousand dollars is suggested."

"I don't have two thousand dollars," he says. He looks down at the floor, then up at me with curious brightness. "Anyway," he says, "I don't think you have the nerve."

"What?"

"I said I don't think you have the nerve. The guts." He puts his palms flat on the desk, raises himself to military posture. "I don't think you have the guts to blow my head off at high noon on the seventh floor of this building with at least forty people on the same floor right now. The walls are like paper here. Corners are cut in the construction business something awful. The whole place may hear the shot, up to the fortieth story. You wouldn't think of it."

"Don't toy with me, Brown," I say. I focus my mouth into a snarl. "I don't like being toyed with and I have a vile temper, to say nothing of a job to do."

Brown shakes his head. "We all have a job to do," he says, "but I don't think you have the nerve to do yours." He stares at me from his rigid posture. "Go on," he says, "blow my head off. I don't have five thousand dollars. I don't have two thousand dollars. I have nothing to give you so you're just going to have to carry through your threat." His eyes glint disturbingly. He is exactly right about the construction business. Roadways, churches, automobiles—nothing is built the way that it used to be. Corruption and the cutting of corners prevail. Even the silencer on the pistol is flimsy; I don't trust it.

"Come on," he challenges. The position he has taken seems to have given him a sense of release. "Come on, do it. I have nothing to give you."

He is quite right. My orders don't provide for the contingency of de-

fiance. Whether I have the nerve is another issue, but I don't have to consider that now. Reluctantly I lower the pistol. "I'll be back," I say. "Soon. Maybe today. Certainly tomorrow. You can't run. I know where you live—your wife, your children."

Brown's face leers with sudden power. "You won't do it to them either," he says. "You won't do it to anyone. You've lost the fire. You've acquired scruple. You're like all the construction people now, all the contractors. You just want an edge without risk."

"I don't have to take this kind of abuse," I say. I put away the pistol and leave his office quickly. My footsteps clatter in the hallway; the whisk of elevators is audible at fifty paces.

What is the raw material of these modern office buildings? Chewing gum?

Considering the issue of scruple, I make my way crosstown and find in his accustomed place the bartender whose gambling losses are now in excess of fifteen thousand. He is alone behind the counter at this difficult hour of a February afternoon, but his face does not light with pleasure when he sees me. Quite the opposite. "I told you yesterday," he says, "and I told you the day before that too. I don't have it. I need time to get it together. At least a month."

"They don't want to wait a month."

"That's their problem," he says. He dries his hands noisily on a towel. "I have to ask you to leave," he says. "You hanging around here creates the wrong kind of atmosphere. Customers might be disturbed."

"I'll have a rye and soda."

"No," he says, "I don't want to serve you."

I reach my hand into my pocket in a menacing gesture. "Come on," he says, "this business with guns no longer fascinates. I tell you, I don't have it. I have personal problems, medical bills. Maybe by June I can work something out. Right now I can't do a thing."

"You're in no position to make that statement."

He flings the towel down the length of the bar. "Come on," he says, "eighty-six it. I've had enough of this."

Striations and laughter float from the television set—an afternoon celebrity quiz or something. The level of television has deteriorated as much as everything else, I think as I back away from the bar. Nothing works quite as it used to. Nothing can quite be trusted. Quality levels

go down. Strapped gamblers and bankrupt fur manufacturers take a dictatorial position and there seems no way to deal with them. None of this would have gone on five years ago. It is part of urban rot, I think.

"And stay out of here," the bartender says as I go through the door.

Who do these people think they are?

I phone in to tell them that collections have not gone well. They grumble if the message comes direct, but for the fourth day in a row it is the answering service and the answering service, of course, assumes a neutral posture. Sometimes I wonder if the messages are even passed on. Sometimes I wonder if they are out of the office permanently. Sometimes I wonder if I need this job, but then common sense prevails; at my age and stage of life there are few new careers open to me. It is one of the hazards of an overly liberal education; I should have learned a trade.

I take the train north and come in at the usual time. Lydia's face is clamped with tension but at least the children are out for the evening—having dinner with their friends, I am told. "Pour your own drink," Lydia says, "I'm not any servant. I've had a bad day myself." I can see from her expression that it is going to be a difficult evening. We will be up until at least midnight and it will be necessary for me once again to explain to her the meaningfulness of life in the suburbs. Since I no longer believe in that, I will find it tedious and agonizing. "If you want dinner you take me out," Lydia says, "I didn't feel like cooking."

"Restaurant food isn't home cooking."

"We can go to the Major."

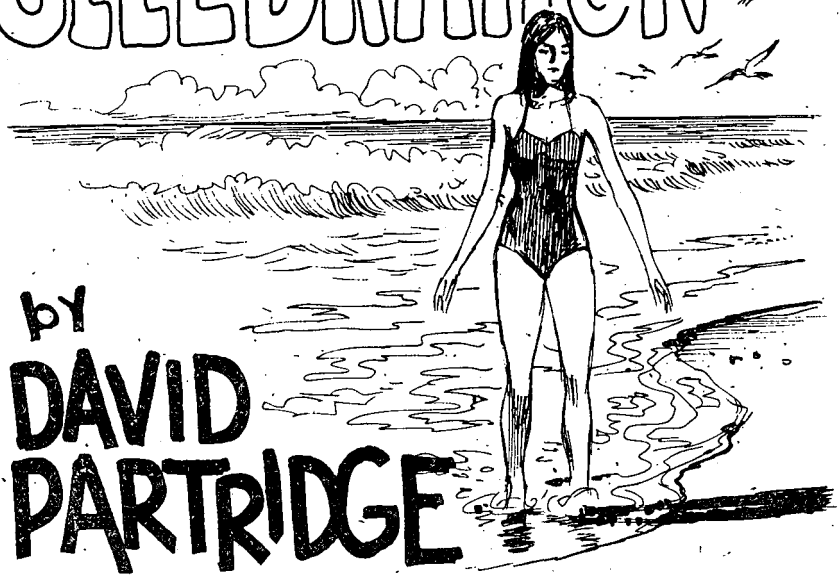
The Major is the local chain motel. "Franchises are no good," I say. "Franchising has destroyed the nation. Everything is the same and nothing is very good."

Her eyes, infinitely weary, look up at me. "I don't want to hear that now," she says. "Please don't start up on that with me now."

Who does the woman think she is, anyway? What has happened to the institution of marriage?

*She walked from her swim as if thousands were watching . . .*

# CELEBRATION



by

## DAVID PARTRIDGE

Quite early, mornings, she would be permitted to go bathing. Just a little dip in the ocean. I don't believe she could swim.

I would watch her. The screen door of the cottage next to ours would close with a bang and seconds later, through a sneaky adjustment of the venetian blinds, I would see her beginning her walk through the deep dry sand down towards the water.

Young as she was, she always seemed to be walking slowly, with

dignity, her long straight legs just barely touching at the knees. Even after her dip—and it could be chilly on those Florida mornings before the sun was properly up—and even in her wet bathing suit, which was barely covered by a flimsy beach jacket, she never ran up the gentle incline of the beach to get back to her house. Instead, she advanced slowly, modestly, as though she were being watched by thousands.

She was a big girl, tall and straight—not a beauty perhaps, but she had a fine long face and straight black hair that was blacker than black when wet, especially against the whiteness of her skin. She was pale, without a trace of suntan, as though she had just that day arrived from the North, when in fact she had been living down here for years, we had been told. People said she'd been practically a prisoner in that house. When I speak of her as a girl, I should probably say woman, because for one thing she was married—she was our neighbor's wife.

It occurred to me one morning that he would surely be watching her too, keeping an eye on her every move and sweeping the beach with his binoculars to make sure that no one in human form was approaching. He himself never went near the water—doctor's orders, as we learned after a while—but, unlike her, he sunned himself all day long, stretched out on the sun deck facing the ocean, with his sunglasses on and his panama hat on his bald head, always a fat bottle of suntan lotion beside him, lying there all by himself, roasting himself like a little porker, a roly-poly suckling pig with a perpetual cigar in his mouth instead of the customary apple.

At any rate, he was visible. He was our next-door neighbor in the flesh, and ordinarily we would have become acquainted. But his presence served the opposite purpose. He was there in the capacity of a watchdog. He managed to glower at us through his black sunglasses, and in the beginning when one of us ventured to say good morning to him, he tossed his cigar out onto the sand and angrily lighted another by way of reply.

In addition to his behavior, he had signs up on the waterfront side of his property, the posts hammered deep into the sand:

NO TRESPASSING
NO LOITERING
PRIVATE!

And on the street side, riveted onto the massive gate, a placard bore the message:

KEEP OUT!

It was always a pleasure to see her for those few short minutes every morning, and there was a bit more to it than just peeping at a handsome young woman with wonderfully long white legs. There was also the element of Forbidden Fruit, and the mystery of her manner, most particularly her manner of walking obediently and modestly and directly down the deserted beach and then returning just as directly, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Altogether, it was a most agreeable subject for speculation.

After a while, naturally, we learned some of the facts in the case. There are not many secrets or unsolved mysteries in that beach community. A couple of hundred cottages and bungalows out there on a sandbar, with the lighthouse on one end, the bridge to the mainland at the other, and a microphone under every mattress, as somebody put it. Everybody knew practically everything about everybody else, and you got the story with some variations, depending on where you happened to be at the moment—in front of the Branch Post Office, on the shuffleboard court, or at Ernestine's Bar & Grill.

What everyone agreed on about our neighbor, that angry little porker with the young wife, was that he had money. One nice old lady from South Carolina said he was rich as cream. Some said he was in the sausage business—the smoked liverwurst king of Iowa—and in addition must be playing the Stock Market. He received *The Wall Street Journal* every morning and a fairly big bill from the telephone company every month with a large number of long-distance calls. That much was absolutely certain, since the chief operator was somebody's sister-in-law.

And it was also an established certainty that he had come down by himself and bought this waterfront cottage and ordered an extra wall built around three sides of it—twelve feet high and solid cement block—to keep out the Peeping Toms, he had said. And then he had brought down his young wife and locked her up in there. That was something like three or four years ago. There was no commotion, no quarrels, no trouble of any kind that you could notice—everything was

just as quiet as a mouse in there all this time, people said.

And what about her? People didn't seem to know what her first name was. Some thought it was Lillian, but they weren't sure. Some thought it might be Lorraine. What they all agreed on was her nice way of speaking, a small voice for such a big girl.

In the beginning, it seems, she had been allowed to go to the beauty parlor by herself. And once or twice when he was laid up, she had gone to the library over in the town across the bridge, ordering Chisholm's taxi to pick her up because she didn't know how to handle her husband's big German car and probably wasn't allowed to touch it anyway. Yes, they all said—those who had spoken to her—she had a real nice way about her, modest and ladylike.

Then there was the big question as to how this romance had started. There were a number of theories, and the one you heard most frequently was that he had gone to the hospital after a slight heart attack or for an operation. Of course he had the best suite there, baskets of lovely flowers from the office, and a fat wife in attendance, the same age as himself. And then this private nurse had made her appearance, this tall girl with the pale-grey eyes and the long placid face—the old, old story, and I didn't believe it for a minute because for one thing she could hardly have been a full-fledged nurse at the time.

But then there was another popular theory to the effect that he was on the road somewhere in the Middle West—Des Moines, Sioux City—right in the heart of his territory, and he stopped at this new hotel and there she was, behind the counter selling cigars. That one seemed to make more sense. It was easy enough to imagine her standing there, tall and cool and inscrutable, and to picture him, short in the leg, paunchy, full of misgivings, and shrewd enough to know at a glance that her price would be marriage.

At any rate, she married him, and before long she found herself practically under lock and key. But, as I say, all seemed peaceful in that house next door. Never a ripple, to all appearances, and never a change in routine.

Every other Friday without fail, they would drive across the bridge into town to see his doctor. But first they would stop at the Main Post Office where he would wait outside in his car, actually letting her out of his sight for a few moments, while she went inside and transacted some business. The business consisted almost always of a parcel, some-

thing she had knitted in her abundance of spare time—a woolen muffler, a pair of mittens, but most frequently a sweater.

That family of hers was a large and hungry family, it seemed, up there in South Dakota. She would ship them delicacies from the local grove—bushels of Temple oranges in season, Duncan grapefruit (none finer than those), and guava jelly in big tins. But sweaters had become her great specialty.

Their first year there, we were told, she had gone in for reading, joining the book clubs and subscribing to various magazines. But then for some reason she had gone all out for knitting, knitting all day long judging by the results. She had half a dozen grown brothers up in South Dakota, and she was apparently determined to do everything in her power to keep them warm.

Every other Friday there would be something new for one of them. And she would always show it to the old lady at the Parcel Post window before wrapping it up. She would wait for a flattering comment on her latest creation—that old lady was the one human being she was allowed to speak to, it seemed—and in due course the sweater would be carefully wrapped up and the shipment would be insured for fifty dollars. Then she would go back out to the big car where the husband would be waiting.

All this was one of the choice topics of conversation at Ernestine's Bar & Grill, which was out on the dunes overlooking miles of beach and famous for its high degree of sophistication—Western Beef, Northern Beer, Local Shrimp As You Like It. And at Ernestine's on a lazy afternoon the regulars liked to talk it over in depth, the situation of this angry little porker and his young wife, who was possibly the best-looking female in town—possibly the best-looking female in the State of Florida. Only nobody really knew for sure how she looked because of the way she was disguised when she was allowed out of the house, hidden from view by oversized sunglasses and an enormous floppy hat of some kind of straw.

None of them apparently knew about the early-morning dip. Not even Fred, the bartender, who generally knew everything. I didn't mention it. In other words, I listened. I would drink my beer, often standing at the big window and looking out at the Atlantic Ocean and the birds. That was how I happened to see her coming our way, down

the beach, on that famous afternoon.

I recognized her from a distance by those wonderful long legs. I couldn't believe my eyes for a moment, but there was no doubt about it. She was coming our way and she was alone. This was headline news, naturally, but I didn't announce it. For one thing, I was busy admiring that outfit of hers—the black shorts and the yellow beach jacket. But no sunglasses. Not this time.

Her long legs just barely touched at the knees as she ploughed through the soft dry sand. She seemed to be advancing straight and true in our direction, and it was a known fact that never before had she been in or anywhere near Ernestine's Bar & Grill. She was approaching, but it was not yet a certainty that she was coming in. She might only be making for that staircase up from the beach, on her way to the beauty parlor down the street, or possibly to the miniature drugstore. It was by no means a certainty, I informed myself as she approached, walking slowly and full of purpose.

But she did come in, and she went straight to the bar.

The regulars at their corner table forgot they were playing cards and just stared. Fred himself, surely the veteran of many a surprise, was dumb in his tracks. He even forgot to put her out, to tell her that folks in bathing suits would not be served in here, as he had told many others many times. Rules of the house, he would say. But in this instance he said no such thing, and I firmly believe he would have served her if she had come in wringing wet.

As it was, he just stood behind the bar and looked at her, as we all did. The slender young woman, who was even taller than expected.

Well, after a moment, when Fred had recovered sufficiently, he again became the smooth smiling bartender and awaited the lady's pleasure. And in a tiny voice, barely audible from my place down the bar, she asked for a cocktail, please. Not any special kind, just a cocktail, as though she knew the word only from hearsay or from her reading.

Fred didn't seem in the least surprised, nor did he ask any questions. He proceeded to mix up something that looked reasonably sweet and easy to take. I saw some grenadine go into it.

She took a little sip and seemed to think it over, then she took another sip, and then brought forth from her straw handbag a king-sized cigarette case that looked like heavy solid gold, and a lighter to

match.

Some sharpshooter down at the other end of the bar wanted to get into the act, naturally. He sprang forward with a light, but he was too late. And when he tried some of that friendly, frothy barroom conversation, she half turned her back on him.

She picked up her drink again, and in that small ladylike voice said to Fred, "Very nice. I've enjoyed it." And then, finishing the drink, she put some bills on the bar.

Fred, obviously, didn't want her to go yet. He said to her, "How about another little cocktail? On the house this time?"

But she said, "Thanks all the same, but one is really all I care for."

Then she added, "I've been hearing about this place on the radio, you know. And I've been wanting to come here for such a long, long time. . ."

That was what she said, and a moment later she walked out.

From the big window, we could see her going back up along the beach, back to that house. But what we didn't know was that her husband was lying dead in there. It seems he had died in his sleep during his little nap after lunch.

But, as the doctor said, why was he lying out there in the blazing heat without his broad-brimmed hat? That midday sun beating down on his bald head! Carelessness, the doctor said. Sunstroke. Nothing but carelessness.

That is what he said.

And if he had any other thoughts on the subject, he never uttered them. Nor did anyone else.

*The pressures at St. Andrews School could provoke murder . . .*

# RITE OF SPRING

BY JERRY JACOBSON

Very likely there was an earthly good reason why someone should be pounding on the door to Shaffer's cottage in Cloisters at six in the morning. And even though Shaffer was still half drugged with sleep, there was no mistaking it for a knock. Boys at St. Andrews University School tended to pound on doors, never quite grasping the distinction that a light rapping was customary and very sufficient for all but the direst emergency. Nevertheless, pounding had been the prevailing

form of entreatment ever since Shaffer came to St. Andrews eight years before and it would in all probability become a tradition that would go unbroken for centuries into the future. A dire emergency to a St. Andrews boy included everything from a lost scarf or sock to a stolen pair of nailclippers to a little friendly jostling in a campus hallway. Ever it would be.

The pounding persisted as Shaffer hunted on the floor for a stray slipper. He opened his door on Thomas Ames, a boarding boy in the Senior School who was a standout on the track team. He was dressed in his maroon warm-up suit and Nike track shoes. Rain, shine, or holocaust, Ames ran an hour every morning. He was dubbed "The Running-Fool" by his fellows, a nickname more of endearment than of malice. He was well liked. His route each day took him down into Chesterton Village and back and then five times around the school's quarter-mile running track. It was a nine-mile jaunt.

"Ames, I warn you," said Shaffer. "This is Saturday morning and we are between terms and I rarely recognize Saturday mornings during Spring Break as part of the day. So suffice it to say this had better be damned good."

Ames looked visibly shaken. His eyes were dancing in their sockets.

"Out the front gate, Mr. Shaffer! About maybe a couple hundred yards down St. Andrews Road! It's a man's body, sir—in the culvert there! Half of him is in the culvert and half in the brush!"

"Is he dead, Ames?"

"I–don't know, sir. I saw him and got scared and just came on back up the hill to the campus. I didn't check."

"Did you recognize him?"

"N–no, sir. His body was face down. I couldn't see his face."

"Well, let's get down there and see what we've got," said Shaffer, turning back to his room to jam on a pair of jeans and some sneakers.

"Do you need *me*, sir?" stammered Ames.

"Ames, somebody's got to show me the spot and you've got all the qualifications. I'm not about to go hiking around that hillside in the dark on a morning I don't recognize as part of the day."

He led Thomas Ames to the rear of Cloisters and the masters' parking lot. It was nearly empty, just four other cars besides his own nine-year-old Volvo. The school had twenty-six men and four women on the

full-time faculty, but only ten of the men lived at Cloisters and most of them had gone home during Spring Break. Chalmers was still there and so were Carl Hammerick and Gary Forrester. Shaffer had glimpsed them moving about the campus grounds, or coming and going at Cloisters, or down in the village shopping or chugging beers. Benson Hunt had driven down to Victoria for a couple of days but Shaffer thought he'd come back for the weekend for some tutorial sessions with a couple of the boarding boys whose grades were faltering.

The road running behind Cloisters passed behind Greer Chapel, the two residence dorms, Science Hall, and President Thaddius' home. Shaffer saw no one about. If the man Thomas Ames had found was dead, his killer wouldn't likely be lurking on the campus grounds. If one of the students was involved there were a hundred circuitous routes back to the campus and from there back to the dorms.

From the front gate of St. Andrews, the narrow roadway set a corkscrew course as it made its ever-widening circle down to Chesterton Village some 1,000 feet below. Shaffer never liked driving it.

Out of the darkness, Shaffer heard the boy say, "Better slow up, sir. It's just around this curve. On the right."

Shaffer applied the brakes of the old Volvo and saw the body, just a shadowy lump, half in and half out of the concrete culvert that had been built to control the runoff of rainwater during storms, which at times in this part of British Columbia could be fierce. Shaffer came to a halt, leaving his lights on, and got out. Thomas Ames wasn't budging an inch.

When Shaffer got to the crumpled form, he saw there was no need to roll the man over for identification. Shaffer knew that brown tweed sportscoat and bulky grey turtleneck sweater from a mile away. Benson Hunt seemed to wear them constantly. Shaffer stooped and felt the side of his neck for a sign of a pulse. There was none. He was dead. The side of his skull had been caved in.

When Shaffer climbed back into the Volvo, Thomas Ames said, "Who is it, sir?"

"Master Hunt."

"*Master Hunt*, sir?" Ames' voice was quivering.

"None other than."

"Did he get hit by a car or something?"

"Or something," said Shaffer.

"What do we do now, sir?"

"We go down to the village and wake up Constable McElroy at the RCMP and tell him what we've found and where."

The RCMP headquarters in Chesterton Village was a three-man post, which consisted of McElroy and his two deputy constables. Shaffer, when they arrived, told Thomas Ames to stay in the car.

Constable McElroy was making coffee. His day shift began at 6:00 A.M. He gave Shaffer a look of astonishment. "Hal? What are you doing up this early on a Saturday? And between terms, as well. Are you sleepwalking?"

"I was rudely awakened by a student, Mac, who is now off my Christmas list."

"What's the problem?"

"We have a dead body," Shaffer told him. "A fellow master, Benson Hunt. His body is in a culvert about halfway up St. Andrews Road."

"Did you discover him, Hal?"

"No, the student did. His name is Thomas Ames. He was out running. He's out in my car."

"Did either of you disturb the scene?"

"I felt Hunt's neck to see if he was still alive."

"But nothing else?"

"Not so much as a twig."

McElroy grunted, perhaps at the ungodliness of the hour or perhaps at the awesome prospect of investigating his first killing. "I suppose I better roust Webster and Ackerman out of their beds," he said as he reached for the telephone.

Shaffer led Constable McElroy back through the dawning village and up St. Andrews Road to the spot where Benson Hunt lay dead. McElroy told Shaffer to take Thomas Ames back to the campus. As soon as it was possible, he would take their statements.

Shortly after noon, he met Shaffer at Cloisters and Shaffer escorted him to Todd Hall, a short walk down the rear drive, where he left Ames and Constable McElroy alone and returned to his cottage.

As he walked he gazed out between the buildings. A knot of boys were playing a skeleton-crew game of soccer and a few others could be seen moving back and forth across the campus in a variety of direc-

tions. Shaffer wondered if one of them was a murderer.

St. Andrews University School had a total enrollment of 375 boys. Roughly three-quarters of them were day boys, students who lived at home and commuted to the academy daily. The remainder were boarding boys. How many of that one hundred had chosen not to go home for Spring Break was hard to tell. When classes were out of session, none of the masters met in sufficient numbers with them to get an accurate head count. Shaffer tried to count up the faces he'd seen in the past four days, coming or going on the campus and at meals. He guessed there were around forty boys who had not gone home for the ten-day vacation. Constable McElroy, he was sure, would want a complete list of the boarding boys who were still residing on the campus.

Shaffer thought about who would want Benson Hunt dead. Hunt had taught senior courses in French and Contemporary American Literature. Shaffer knew Hunt had acquired a kind of notoriety for the fact that he allowed only French to be spoken in his foreign-language course and only college-bound senior boys ranking in the top ten percentile were qualified to take his literature course. Hunt had been somewhat of a maniac for pop quizzes, sprung on his students without any warning. The students said Hunt's courses were like quiz shows without prizes. But surely that wasn't a thing over which a master might be murdered.

And Hunt was certainly not hated. He was respected by his students; not well liked, but not hated. Shaffer could think of fully a dozen masters who might rank above Hunt on a students' hate list. Hunt had been strict and academically demanding, but he had also been fair and had played by the academy's rules to the letter.

Then Shaffer remembered the reason Benson Hunt had returned early from Victoria. He had set up Spring Break tutorials with two of his students. During those sessions had something taken place to cause one or both of the boys to become angered with Hunt?

"You cloistered dons are set up pretty cozily," McElroy commented as Shaffer showed him into his quarters. "Living room with a fireplace, study room, bedroom. Do they give you a kitchen besides?"

"A kitchenette," said Shaffer. "One can move about in it very nicely if one doesn't use a large frying pan or pot."

"Nice all the same. I was expecting more monkish austerity—you

know: table, chair, naked light bulb hanging down from the ceiling, and a small cabinet for the bread and water."

Shaffer laughed. No water, he told McElroy, but there was some wine if he could stomach it, a little Bordeaux from a lesser known commune in the Medoc, but pleasantly drinkable.

"I don't mind if I do," said the constable. "I've never been one to believe in total abstinence on duty. A little wine can keep the head clear and active and can put a witness or a suspect off his guard as well."

Shaffer ducked into the kitchenette and poured out two glasses. Constable McElroy took a sip, pronounced the wine more pleasant than most he had drunk, and took out a small notebook.

"Mr. Shaffer, how well did you know Benson Hunt?" he began.

"Very well," Shaffer told him. "As well as anyone here at the academy, I would say."

"What sort of man was he? I mean, in terms of his personality?"

"He was a strict academician, but completely fair. He demanded excellence, but he knew the capabilities of his students individually and didn't push them beyond their known potential."

McElroy took a sip of wine. "What we've seen tends to point to a killer here at the school. Hunt wasn't struck by a motorist. There were no contusions on his body, only the bashed skull. Was Hunt in the habit of walking to the village, or did he have a car?"

"He had a green Vega. It's in the lot out back. But we all walked to the village on occasion. Could he have been robbed?"

"His wallet was found on his body, with eighty-three dollars in it," McElroy said. "And until the time of death is established, we're a bit handcuffed. His body's been taken to the Coroner's Unit in Victoria. We should know more by five or six o'clock this evening. One puzzling aspect has cropped up though."

"What's that?" asked Shaffer.

"There was a residue of dust of some sort on his jacket and trousers—chalk, lime perhaps. But we found nothing of it at the scene."

"The athletic fields," Shaffer said to McElroy.

"What?"

"During Spring Break, the school's maintenance crew lines the sports field for rugby and soccer. Our Provincial League play begins

when the boys return for the Spring Term. The crew was out lining the field yesterday and the day before."

McElroy put aside his wine glass and stood up. "Take me out to the field," he said.

Baker Field was located behind the athletic field house, a new and so far unnamed facility. Shaffer took Constable McElroy south across the wide grassy quadrangle that also doubled as the cricket field, then between the Administration Building and Science Hall, bringing them out onto a stone walk that led to the field house.

"I never realized the campus was this big," McElroy commented.

"Twenty-three acres," said Shaffer.

"Lots of room for a boy to become lost to suit his own purposes."

"It's a thought," Shaffer admitted.

The athletic field was empty, but freshly lined. McElroy and Shaffer searched for lines that had been obliterated, indicating Benson Hunt might have been killed here and his body dragged across the lines, but there were no obliterations.

"Don't they use some sort of cart to draw these lines?" McElroy asked. "You know, a wheeled cart, with a bin on top filled with lime chalk?"

"Yes," said Shaffer. "They keep it in a shop in the basement of the field house." Shaffer turned and gestured back at the field house, where the open garage door showed power mowers, piles of sprinkler hose, and stacks of fertilizer and grass seed in bags. A man in white coveralls moved back and forth inside. He was badly stoop-shouldered: Horst Alm, the eldest of the school's five workmen.

Alm had something very curious to tell Shaffer and Constable McElroy about the liming cart he had used the previous day. "I forgot to put it back in the shop when I finished liming the field yesterday. When I came to work this morning, it was gone. As you know, Constable, we had that light rain last night. I could see where the cart's wheels made their tracks out to the west there. I followed them into that stand of pines out there about a hundred yards off, you see?"

"Take us out there," said McElroy.

They followed Alm west over hilly ground that led into a thick belt of pine trees. The grass was still slightly wet. Shaffer could clearly make out the double track made by the steel wheels of the lime cart, a

thing consisting of very little weight itself. Shuddering, Shaffer wondered if it hadn't indeed been used to transport a dead body.

The cart tracks snaked through the trees until they came to an abrupt halt where a hillside ran down to the first serpentine curve of St. Andrews Road. The hill sloped at roughly a forty-degree angle, not so steep that a human couldn't descend it without falling and tumbling out of control the rest of the way down to the roadway.

"There are footprints here at the edge," said McElroy, pointing to the grassy ground where a section was matted and chewed.

"This is where I found the lime cart this morning," said Horst Alm. "Who would want to bring a lime cart to the edge of the hillside and then just leave it here? That's not much of a schoolboy prank, not from what I've seen here over the past twenty years. One year some boys hiked all of Master Van Dine's cottage furniture up into the chapel belltower on pulleys. And another time, Headmaster Batesford found his Peugeot in the gymnasium, completely dismantled and laid out on the basketball court, labeled part for part."

"I'm afraid this is no prank," said Constable McElroy. "I think the lime cart was used to transport Benson Hunt's body here to the edge and then dumped down the hill. And I think if we take a straight path down we'll come out at the very spot where Hunt's body was found by your track student this morning, Mr. Shaffer. Let's put the acid test to it." He told Horst Alm he could go back to his regular duties and then he and Shaffer started down the hillside.

The footing was not at all treacherous. The earth was hard-packed and layered with pine needles from trees that spiked the hillside in an intermittent stand. Clumps of barberry bushes sprouted on the hill as well, a few of whose leaves and branches looked recently damaged. Perhaps Benson Hunt's body had been stopped by them and his murderer had to pull the body aside to set it to tumbling again.

Both Shaffer and Constable McElroy used the trees and bushes to halt their downward momentum at intervals until they reached the bottom, a descent Shaffer judged to be fully two hundred yards. They hit a brief flat area, perhaps no wider than twenty yards. Neither man said a word about the two slender trails marking the ground where the pine needles had been pushed aside. The needles had made way for the heels of a pair of man's shoes as his body was dragged by the arms. They came to the short slope of bank, stopped at its edge, and looked

down into the stretch of cement drainage culvert where Benson Hunt's body had been found.

"I hadn't expected to be this lucky," McElroy said. "It appears we don't have a hit-and-run and no one from the village is involved. Our best suspect seems to be someone directly connected with the school or someone who paid it a visit yesterday."

Shaffer asked about the lime cart.

"The use of that cart inclines me to believe one of your students is involved," McElroy said. "The victim was a big man, over six feet and around two hundred pounds. His killer couldn't carry him and so he had to look around for a means to transport him away from the campus. I'll need an accounting of all the students who have stayed here during Spring Break."

"That won't be difficult. Each dorm has a sign-out register. I think you should know Hunt came back a couple of days ago to tutor two senior boys who needed their marks hiked up for college."

"Do you know which boys?"

"No, but there should be some evidence of that in Hunt's cottage."

"Then you'll need his keys," said McElroy.

"Hunt never locked his rooms," said Shaffer. "Hardly any of us do. The honor system is difficult to perpetuate if students encounter locked doors all over the place."

They climbed back up the hill in silence. On the walk back to Cloisters, McElroy said, "Hal, I've got that autopsy report to get and some other matters to juggle. You'd be helping me out a great deal if you could work up that list of students for me and nose around Hunt's rooms for the names of the two boys he was tutoring."

"You've got it."

"I'll call you tonight. The coroner's report will be in from Victoria and it should give us something more substantial to work with. Do you know anything about Hunt's next-of-kin, a relative I can notify about his death?"

"Hunt was divorced about a year ago," Shaffer told him. "I suppose his ex-wife would be the best person to call. I'll look for a phone number for her."

"Good luck. And keep in mind McElroy's Law."

"What's that?"

Constable McElroy issued a wry smile, "The light at the end of the

tunnel nearly always turns out to be the headlight of an on-rushing train."

After McElroy left, Shaffer walked over to the two dormitories, Todd Hall and Usatalo Hall. From tables in the lobbies, he picked up both leather-bound sign-out registers and took them back to his cottage, where he crossed out the names on the registers from his master list of boarding boys. When he was finished, his list showed twenty-two boarding boys remaining on the campus during Spring Break.

Benson Hunt's cottage was numbered A-13, two units removed from the laundry room. Its door was unlocked. Shaffer was not a stranger to Hunt's rooms. He had been to meetings here on two or three occasions and had spent a random evening or two with Hunt chasing after philosophical notions.

The rooms were still furnished in what Shaffer had come to call Early Uncertain. There were canvas-backed director's chairs, a threadbare Moroccan rug, a tapestry-covered couch with eagle-claw legs made of glass, a brutish dining-room table that looked Spanish in some places and Queen Anne in others. Hunt had never been bashful about the hoarding of miscellaneous junk.

Three of the director's chairs were still arranged in a close triangle, suggesting Hunt had tutored both senior boys simultaneously the day before. Hunt's study guides and course texts were in a mound of disarray on the rug next to one of the chairs. Shaffer looked for textbooks or test papers that would tell him the names of the boys, but they had been meticulous at picking up after themselves.

There was a battered secretary across the room, one of the few items of furniture Hunt had managed to salvage from his defunct marriage. Shaffer went over to it. It didn't take him long to find what he was looking for. The day-date desk calendar was still open on the day before, Friday, the last day of Benson Hunt's life.

The small page contained just the single notation: *Tutorials. Jeffery Langlois, Mark Spencer.* 2-4 *p.m. and* 6-8 *p.m.*

Both Langlois and Spencer lived in Usatalo Hall. Spencer's roommate told Shaffer he hadn't seen Spencer since lunch, but he expected him back before two o'clock because he had tutorials with Benson

Hunt. Shaffer didn't mention Hunt's death. The news would spread fast enough without his help.

Shaffer found Jeffery Langlois alone in his room, hunched over a copy of Joyce's *Ulysses* at a study table set at a window which overlooked the quadrangle. "Have you got a minute, Langlois?"

"Sure, Master Shaffer. Do you know anything about Joyce, sir?"

"A little."

"Well, I'm taking Master Hunt's Contemporary American Literature II, so what is he doing making me read Joyce? Isn't Joyce an Irish writer?"

"He is."

"O.K. So why not Hemingway or Faulkner or Sherwood Anderson and some of those guys?"

"You take your college boards in a few weeks, don't you, Langlois?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what I believe Master Hunt had in mind was to give you a sense of literary association. Didn't he suggest you make comparisons with the characters in Homer's *Odyssey*? Joyce's Leopold Bloom with Homer's Ulysses? Joyce's Mr. Deasy with Homer's Nestor?"

"The library only had two copies of the *Odyssey*," Langlois said. "So how am I supposed to make comparisons when some other jerks are hoarding them and won't turn them back in?"

"Calm down, Langlois. I'll lend you my copy."

"Master Hunt wants us to read *The Dubliners* too."

"I'll lend you both," said Shaffer. "But I'm here to talk to you about your tutorials with Master Hunt."

"We've got one at two o'clock. Me and Spencer."

"Well, I think you'd better forget about the tutorials for today," Shaffer said. "Master Hunt isn't on campus."

"Where is he, sir?"

"He's in Victoria," Shaffer said. "You took tutorials with Hunt yesterday, didn't you? A session in the afternoon and a session in the evening?"

"At two o'clock, yes, sir. Me and Mark Spencer."

"And at six o'clock, after supper?"

"No, sir. I mean, we went over to his cottage in Cloisters, but he wasn't there. We went into his rooms and sat around for about fifteen minutes waiting for him to show up, but he didn't. So we just came

back to our rooms."

"Then the last time you saw Master Hunt was at four P.M. when your first tutorial ended?"

"Yes, sir. We left Cloisters a little after four o'clock and Spencer went over to the gym and shot some baskets. Then we went to supper and after supper we came back to the dorms and flaked out until six and then went over to Master Hunt's cottage."

"Did you see Master Hunt in the dining room at supper?"

"No, sir. But he could have come in after we left," said Langlois.

Mark Spencer had, meanwhile, returned to his room. His account of the events of the past twenty-four hours corroborated Jeffery Langlois'. If either boy had been angered at Benson Hunt for some reason, it was being well concealed. But Shaffer knew the deceit of which young schoolboys and all humans are capable. Had one or both of them killed Hunt? They'd gone to shoot baskets in the gymnasium, and it was at the rear of that building that Benson Hunt's body had been dumped into the liming cart and wheeled into the pine grove to be pitched down the hillside.

But what would be their motive? Tutorials? They were dispensed constantly to students who were achieving far below their potential. Shaffer saw the headlight of a train driving directly at him down the tunnel.

At 6:00 P.M. Constable McElroy turned up at Shaffer's door at Cloisters.

"I thought you were going to call me," Shaffer said.

"A couple of things needed my personal attention. You wouldn't still have some of that excellent Bordeaux left, would you?"

Shaffer got them each a glassful.

When they were settled, McElroy said, "The coroner nailed down the time of death at between six and eight P.M. last night. Now that body didn't lie in that culvert for ten hours. Exposed as it was, a pedestrian or a motorist surely would have seen it along the roadway."

"What does that tell us?"

"It tells us," said McElroy, "that Hunt's body remained on the campus grounds for several hours, perhaps until after midnight or early this morning. It was covered or hidden until his killer could decide what to do with it. Panic after an act of murder usually leaves the

murderer in a state of confusion. He's created a dead body out of a human and he's faced with the problems of getting rid of it."

"What else?" Shaffer said.

"The blows delivered to Hunt's skull," said the constable. "The killer seems to have used two murder weapons. The skull shows two distinctly different depressions. One type is rather wide, about four inches, the other perhaps only a half inch or so. The latter were probably the blows that were fatal. It's almost as though Hunt's killer delivered blows with a first weapon and when they didn't seem to be doing the job he seized upon a second weapon."

"They'll all have to be questioned," said McElroy when he'd read Shaffer's report.

"Tedious work," commented Shaffer.

"But sometimes very productive. Stories dovetail or don't, they point to the consistent as well as the inconsistent."

At McElroy's request, Shaffer accompanied him back to the soccer field behind the field house. With dusk, the grounds were peppered with schoolboys returning to their rooms, their after-supper games of tennis, soccer, cricket, or frisbee put up finally for an evening of studies.

The soccer field was empty. Neither Horst Alm nor any of his maintenance staff were about. The shop was locked up for the evening.

"I'm almost certain we're standing at the scene of the killing," said McElroy. "No schoolboy could have dragged a man the size of Benson Hunt any great distance to this spot. And if we can place trust in the coroner's estimation of the time of death, someone would have seen something at that early-evening hour."

"What are we looking for?" asked Shaffer.

Constable McElroy's eyes swept the area behind the field house and came to a stop on a good-sized pile of tarpaulin stacked about ten feet from the maintenance-shop door. "That, perhaps."

"The tarps?"

"Yes. What are they used for, do you know?"

They're used to cover the soccer field," he said. "They come in ten-foot sections that are anchored with bricks or whatever is handy to keep the winds from blowing the works into the next province."

"Let's have a look at them," said McElroy. Shaffer followed him over

to the four-foot stack of canvas. "Just the top one or two sections should tell us something, if there's anything to tell."

They had to look only as deep as the topmost tarpaulin. Three folds down, splotches of rusty red stained the material, splotches still faintly damp to the touch. "Well," said McElroy, "this isn't a picnic blanket and these stains aren't strawberry jam. This is what wrapped Hunt's corpse to keep it concealed here until his killer could sneak back in the darkness and remove it from the scene."

Something Jeffery Langlois had told Shaffer now struck the master as of possible importance. "If you're going to interview those two boys," he said to McElroy, "I suggest you begin with Mark Spencer."

"Why Spencer?"

"Well, the other boy, Jeffery Langlois, told me that Spencer went to the field house after the tutorials were over to shoot baskets. I'm afraid that places him near the scene of the crime around the time Benson Hunt was murdered."

"That doesn't look good for him," said McElroy. "Let's go see what he has to say for himself."

Both boys were in their rooms. Mark Spencer was sitting on his bed trying to mend a sock with a light bulb jammed into it.

"Mark," Constable McElroy said, "where did you go after your tutorials with Master Hunt at Cloisters yesterday afternoon?"

Spencer ceased his mending.

"I told Jeff I was going over to the gym to shoot some baskets. I asked him if he wanted to come along, but Jeff said he wanted to go back to the dorm and do some studying."

Shaffer excused himself, left Spencer's room, and went across the hall and knocked on Langlois' door. Jeffery Langlois answered, dressed in just his shorts. "I figured it must be a master. Nobody else in this place ever knocks on a guy's door. Come on in, sir."

Shaffer could see a pile of books and papers on Langlois' study table. "Burning a little early-evening oil, Langlois?"

"Well, you can really get a jump on the competition this way, Mr. Shaffer. The other guys waste as much time as they can. I want to make the Headmaster's Honor List."

"Are the books I loaned you of any help?"

"Are you kidding me? If you get all the characters matched up, *Ulys-*

*ses* is a breeze. Penelope is Mrs. Bloom, right? And we got Cerberus, he's Joyce's Paddy Dignam. And Tiresias is Leopold Bloom's old man. It's a piece of cake, sir."

"I'm glad they helped," said Shaffer. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

"What's that, sir?"

"After your tutorial yesterday afternoon, Spencer went off to shoot some baskets and you came back to the dorms, is that right?"

"Yes, sir. Spencer's on the varsity B-team and he can shoot the eyes out of a basket. I watched him play when we played Royster Academy, so it doesn't do any good when he tries to hustle me into playing Horse with him. He always wants to play for money or snacks or desserts, but I've got his number."

"Did you do your studying at the table here?" Shaffer asked.

"I always do. That way I can look out the window every so often and see what's happening down on the quadrangle."

"How late did you study?"

"A little after five o'clock, I guess. If you've got a room that looks out over the quadrangle, you don't have to keep looking at your watch to see what time supper is. You just keep an eye on the quad and when everybody down there begins to head for the dining hall, you know it's chow time."

"Think back, Langlois. What can you remember seeing down on the quad yesterday afternoon?"

"Well, let's see. Some guys were kicking a soccer ball around. And Thom Greavy picked a fight with Burleigh Anderson, the tackle on the football team."

"What else?"

"Not much more. Guys were lying around on the grass studying, the usual horseplay. Some kid from the Junior School threw his frisbee up into a tree and couldn't get anyone to hike him up onto a limb so he could climb after it. A few senior guys tried to get up a cricket game, but they didn't have enough players."

"Were you at the study table when they began to break up and head for the dining hall?"

"Yes, sir. Friday is steak night. Man, you should have seen them take off! If you find yourself at the rear of the line on Fridays, you get something that looks like it fell off somebody's shoe."

"And you saw nothing else down on the quadrangle?" Shaffer asked.

"No. Except for Master Hunt."

"What?"

"Yeah. I guess he came out from Cloisters to sort of monitor the activities. He broke up the fight between Greavy and Anderson, as a matter of fact."

"What did you observe of Master Hunt?" asked Shaffer.

"Well, for one thing, he was talking with Mouse Lewis about something or other."

"You mean Cameron Lewis," said Shaffer. He didn't think much of disparaging nicknames and tried to squelch them whenever they came up in the boys' conversation. A St. Andrews boy had enough academic and social pressure to deal with without the additional burden of an ego-diminishing nickname. Cameron Lewis had tested in the genius category, but his slight stature and foolishly large eyeglasses made him the perfect butt for small-people jokes.

"Yes, sir, Cameron," Langlois said. "They talked for about ten minutes. Maybe they were talking about Cameron getting into Amherst. Master Hunt is on the College Admissions Recommendations Board. Cameron's dad is an Amherst graduate and Cameron says if he doesn't get into Amherst he might just as well not go home. Amherst is a family tradition."

Shaffer had forgotten that Hunt had been on the Recommendations Board. It was a six-member panel of masters which, along with Headmaster Batesford, made the crucial decision whether a St. Andrews boy would receive the school's recommendation to the college of his choice. A St. Andrews recommendation was tantamount to acceptance, the lack of it a disaster. As far back as Shaffer could remember, no St. Andrews boy with a recommendation had ever been rejected by the college of his choice. It was a rite of spring nearly every boy endured with high expectation and dread.

"So you watched Master Hunt and Cameron Lewis in discussion for several minutes," said Shaffer. "What happened then?"

"Well, sir, the quadrangle was vacant then. I figured they'd head off for the dining hall like the rest."

"You mean they didn't?"

"No, sir. They started walking in the direction of the field house. They were talking and gesturing and just strolling along. Mouse—I

mean Cameron, sorry, sir—was carrying a cricket bat."

Shaffer's stomach did a turn. "Was that as much as you saw?"

"Yes, sir. I closed up my books and went downstairs for supper."

"You told me before that you didn't see Master Hunt in the dining room."

"No, sir."

"What about Cameron Lewis?"

"I didn't see him at supper either," Langlois said.

"Does Cameron Lewis live here in Usatalo?"

"No, sir. He's in Todd."

Shaffer found Cameron Lewis alone in his room in the adjacent dormitory.

"May I come in, Lewis?"

The boy was lying on his back on his bed. When Shaffer entered the room, Lewis sat up. His face seemed to drop.

"If you've got a few minutes, Lewis, I'd like you to take a little walk with me," Shaffer said.

"A walk, sir? Where to?"

"Just around the campus."

"Well, I really should be studying, Mr. Shaffer."

"Put on your sneakers, Lewis. And you'd better grab a jacket. It's getting a little chilly."

It was only a little after seven o'clock. By now the quadrangle, a rolling green in daylight, was transforming itself into a black pit. Shaffer and Cameron Lewis stood on its lip, next to a set of bleachers.

"Lewis, were you out here on the quadrangle yesterday afternoon just before supper?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm told you spoke with Master Hunt," Shaffer said.

"Yes, sir. Master Hunt is on the Recommendations Board. He wanted to talk to me about my plus-factors. I'm shooting for Amherst, sir, and they place heavy emphasis on a student's plus-factors. Amherst gets over 5,000 applicants and accepts only around 600."

"What happened when Meal Bells rang?" asked Shaffer.

"The usual, sir. Everybody took off like a bullet for the dining hall."

"Did you do the same?"

A gap came in Lewis' response.

"I didn't go right along to supper, no, sir."

"Why not?"

"Master Hunt felt we should talk about my application a little more. An admissions application is very tricky, like grant-writing. You have to put your best foot forward and sort of hide the other from view."

"Did you go back to Cloisters?"

"No, sir."

"The library then?"

"No, not there either."

"Perhaps to Baker Field."

There it was, as clear as handwriting, another response lag.

"I'm waiting for an answer, Lewis," said Shaffer.

"Y–yes, sir. Baker Field. We walked over to Baker Field."

"Fine. Let's head in that direction."

They took virtually the same route Shaffer had taken with Constable McElroy when it became all too clear how Benson Hunt had died. They moved between the Administration Building and Science Hall and then onto the flagstone walk leading to the field house.

The darkness raised Shaffer's already acute sense of isolation. His mind fell on the possibility that Cameron Lewis might be psychotic, that the refined network St. Andrews used in its testing contained holes through which a boy like Cameron Lewis could slip undetected. He was a murderer, of that there was little doubt left in Shaffer's mind. But what was his capacity for killing a second time? Was he concealing a knife or some other small weapon? Shaffer was letting him walk ahead, leading the way. He wasn't going to show his back to Lewis for a split second.

They reached the field house and skirted it to the rear.

"We'll stop here, Lewis."

The boy turned. In the dim light it was impossible to read his expression.

"Lewis, is this where it happened?"

"What, sir?"

"Lewis, you were tested at the Speech and Hearing Clinic in Victoria along with every other junior boy when you entered St. Andrews. I can't believe you've suddenly gone deaf."

A whimpering sound came up from Lewis' throat. "Please don't make me, sir," Cameron Lewis said.

"It's going to come out sooner or later, Lewis. You can make it easy or difficult."

Seconds passed, almost unbearably tense. "Yes, I did it, sir. I killed him."

"Why, Lewis? Was it over your Amherst application?"

"Yes, sir. But it was worse than that."

"Isn't killing someone the worst thing one human can do to another?" Shaffer asked.

"But it *was* worse, sir." Cameron Lewis was shaking and sobbing. "It was my plus-factors, sir. I don't have them. I played on the Junior Bs in soccer, but I didn't follow through with it. And this year I was the first one cut from the varsity cricket team." He paused to gain control. "I'm not a class officer and I didn't get on enough committees. I placed too much emphasis on academics. Sure, I kept up an accumulated A-minus, which got me onto the Headmaster's Academic List. But the plus-factors, I entirely ignored them."

"I can't see what you're driving at, Lewis."

"It was Master Hunt, sir. He told me that all those deficiencies in my plus-factors could be corrected. He said there were ways." Shaffer caught a darkness entering the boy's tone. "No, not corrected, he said they could be *altered.*

"We were standing just about where you and I are standing now, sir. Master Hunt started to tell me stuff about his life. You know, about what it was like for him as a kid growing up, things about his father and why his marriage ended. Mostly about that, about the breakup of his marriage. He began to explain to me why some men get divorced, how some men wage war against their natural inclinations because of society's pressures to conform. But they finally reach a point when they can't hide their true feelings any longer. . ."

Shaffer felt a knot start to grow in his stomach. He had thought he knew Benson Hunt so well. *Qui addit scientiam, addit et laborem.* He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

"Then," continued Cameron Lewis, his voice coming thinner from its dark corner, "Master Hunt said what he really wanted. He told me we could go back to his cottage at Cloisters and no one would ever see or know anything. He said that was what I would have to do, that it was the only way I could get my plus-factors doctored on my application to Amherst. Then he put his hand on my cheek."

Shaffer closed his eyes.

"I–I guess I went sort of crazy then, sir. I couldn't push him away, he was so much bigger than me. I stepped back and he started coming towards me again. That's when I hit him. And then I hit him again. I was so scared, I didn't count the number of times I hit him. I didn't want him to touch me any more and I didn't want to do those things he wanted me to do. Finally, he fell down. I knew he was dead. His whole head was caved in and the blood was everywhere."

Shaffer said, "Lewis, the autopsy shows two types of wounds. Wide wounds and thin wounds. You had your cricket bat with you, didn't you?"

"I had it with me when I was out on the quadrangle, sir. It got turned in my hand when I was hitting him, probably. Some blows with the flat side, some with the edge."

"Master Hunt was too heavy to carry off into the woods," Shaffer concluded. "So you covered his body with one of those field tarps piled against the maintenance-shop wall."

Lewis nodded in the darkness.

"You came back here later, last night sometime, got his body into the lime cart, and wheeled it through the pine grove to the top of the cliff, then dumped the body over the side."

"It wouldn't roll all the way down," said Lewis. "The trees would stop it and I had to climb down and free it. When I got it to the bottom I dragged it to the highway and pushed it over the last ridge into the culvert."

"You should have removed Master Hunt's wallet from his pocket," said Shaffer. "It would have looked like a robbery done by someone in the village."

"I wasn't thinking about anything like that, sir," Lewis said. "I just wanted him as far away from me as possible."

"I understand, Lewis," Shaffer told him. When he placed a comforting hand on the small boy's shoulder, Lewis didn't pull away. "We'll go back to the dorm now and you'll tell Constable McElroy exactly what you've told me."

"Y–yes, sir. I just hope I don't have to tell the story too many more times, sir."

Shaffer knew what the boy meant. There is a limit to the number of times a nightmare can be recalled.

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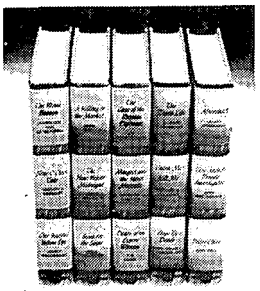

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