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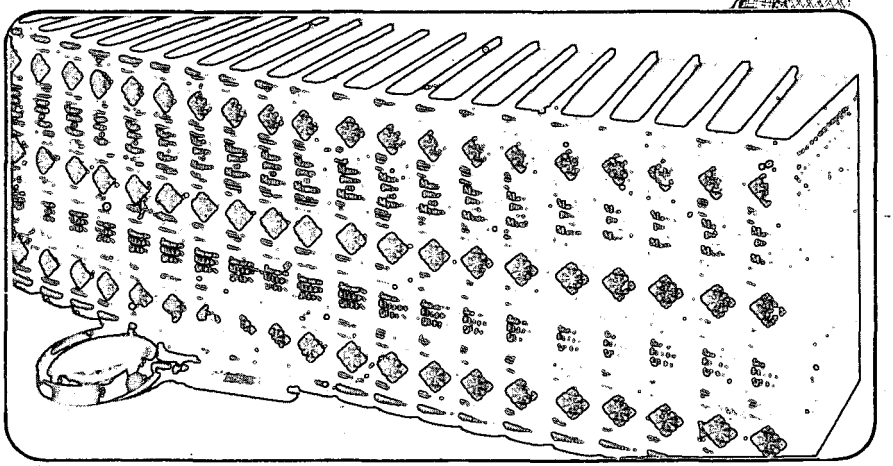

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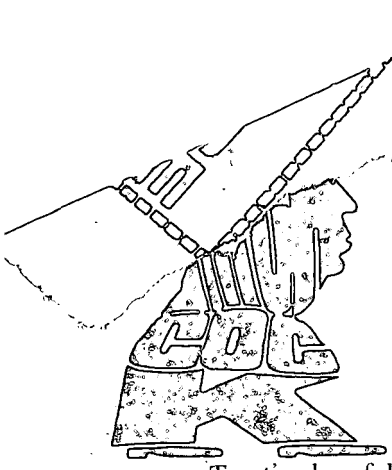

February 1979

Dear Reader:

The title of Lawrence Treat's story on page 72, "A Matter of Digging," might well be the title of this entire issue. Not only do the citizens of Morgan and LePage Counties do a great deal of actual digging in Mr. Treat's cheerful story, but Gerald Tomlinson's "Squaring the Triangle" features a suspicious fellow who does his digging in the darkness of a cemetery at night.

Detection is digging of sorts, and this issue is full of detection of all kinds. Sergeant Jeff Peckinpaugh digs for clues to a murder in "No Hard Evidence" by Ernest Savage. In "Requiem for Three Sharks," T. M. Adams digs into the files of a small-town Nevada newspaper to reveal the facts behind a murder that took place in 1882. And Raffles, Bunny Manders, and Raffles' sister Dinah unearth a few truths while, of all things, on board ship during a transatlantic voyage.

And there is digging of quite another kind, as you will see, in "Final Exam" by Bill Pronzini and Barry N. Malzberg.

Good reading.

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Her death had destroyed his careful plan . . .

NO HARD EVIDENCE

by ERNEST SAVAGE

For years Paul Hoskins had wanted to kill his wife. In fact, he had plotted out a number of detailed scenarios of the event. So when he came downstairs that Tuesday morning and found her dead in her chair at the breakfast table, his joy at her demise was overwhelmed by his fury as a cheated man. *He* had wanted to be the instrument of her death, not some random quirk of a faulty heart.

Myrtle Hoskins had turned forty just a month ago, her squat round

body apparently in good health. Now here she was dead, the wicked cheat.

He felt her left wrist, praying to find a pulse, but failing. "Live so that I may kill you!" he raged huskily, futilely.

Hoskins was an architect. He had married Myrtle Burton sixteen years before because Myrtle's father Henry was head of Burton Associates, the firm for which he aspired to work, and which ultimately he intended to own. It was a marriage of cold strategy for him and of growing horror for her.

In Hoskins' basement workshop was a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver he had found over a year ago in a vacant lot on Main Street in the town of Clausen, where he lived. Through the endless term of his marriage, he'd considered a number of ways of killing her, but since finding the gun, almost as a gift from the gods, *it* was ordained the tool he would use—masculine, violent, certain, and safe. It had become merely a matter of selecting the proper time.

I cannot be denied! he thought savagely. He had needed the catharsis of killing her; his loathing of her was such that nothing short of murder could alleviate it. Besides, there was the matter of the police. They too were figures in his fantasies—outwitting them was the icing on the cake of his dreams, as it were, and now that too was denied him.

Unless . . . His rage cooled slowly as he stood staring at her, his mind fashioning a different picture.

Quickly, he went down the basement stairs to his workshop, dialed open the combination lock on the heavy door, pulled on a pair of work gloves, got the Smith & Wesson from its hiding place, went back upstairs, and shot his wife twice through the chest, savoring in that noisy moment a sense of fulfillment almost as rich as the real thing. He had done her violence, dead or alive, and he felt a great rush of joy.

Then he went swiftly through the house, simulating the actions of a burglar, before returning to the breakfast room. The sun was now streaming through the French door leading to the yard. It was 8:25, and he was cool as ice. Moving methodically, he opened the French door about six inches and with the butt of the gun knocked out the pane of glass nearest the knob, the shards falling entirely within the room. Then he took one last pleased look at Myrtle in her chair, walked across the lawn to the garage sixty feet away, got in his Mar-

quis, and drove slowly down his long winding drive to the road below. There he paused for a moment, looking carefully both ways before throwing the gun out the passenger-side window into the ditch alongside the road. It came to rest satisfactorily under a patch of leaves, the barrel protruding clearly. It wouldn't be hard to find.

And it wasn't. Patrolman David Evans found it a little after two o'clock that afternoon and took it up to the house, where Sergeant Jeffrey Peckinpaugh of the Clausen Police was in charge of the case. Peckinpaugh had been assigned to the case at 12:45 by his immediate superior, Lieutenant Wells. Wells told him not to finish his lunch, to get on out there; or, alternatively, to finish his lunch on the way out there, but to get out there right away. In the seven and a half years Peckinpaugh had been on the Clausen force, Wells had never recognized the existence of a lunch hour, quitting time, or any of the amenities that distinguish the civilian world. There were criminals and there were cops, Wells said, and their dance together was timeless, eternal.

A dry-cleaning delivery man had discovered the body a little after noon. He'd seen it through the open breakfast-room door while approaching the house with two of Hoskins' suits in his hand and had gone back downtown to report it. The suits were still on the lawn where the delivery man had dropped them in his shock.

Detective Third-Grade Luis Escalera had come out to assist Peckinpaugh at 1:15 and brought two uniformed cops with him, Evans and Jones. The three of them were assigned to search the grounds and inquire of the neighbors if anything unusual had been seen or heard.

The Medical Examiner and the photographer-fingerprint man had arrived at 1:30, and at 1:35 the M.E. pronounced the woman dead, shot twice in the chest, through or near the heart. The bullets had not gone through the woman's body, but look, the M.E. said, at how thick she is through the trunk, almost round.

Escalera had said at first that it looked like another of the robbery/murders that had plagued the upper-middle-class Park Plaza district lately, but Peckinpaugh, as usual, had reserved judgment. He knew that most murdered wives were killed by their husbands and vice versa. Besides, there were a number of things about the scene that disturbed him.

At 2:15 the M.E. took Myrtle's body away and the photographer-fingerprint man left half an hour later, taking the gun with him for ballistics. Peckinpaugh had asked the M.E. for the earliest possible autopsy report and was promised one in the morning, barring some bloody ruckus in the Chicano section of town, which had been producing a body a week lately. Escalera and the two patrolmen were still out interrogating the neighbors and Peckinpaugh was alone at 3:15 when the station phoned to say Hoskins had been located by his office—did Peckinpaugh want to talk to him at home first, or at the station?

"Here first," Peckinpaugh said. "I'll bring him down later to identify his wife."

At 4:10 Hoskins drove into his garage and a moment later he approached his house across the lawn. He stopped ten feet or so from the breakfast-room door and picked up his suits, brushing them off carefully. Inside the glass-walled room, Peckinpaugh's stomach tightened.

Hoskins, he decided, had killed his wife.

Hoskins entered the room and looked around casually. "May I ask," he said, "why these clothes were out on the lawn?"

Peckinpaugh explained it to him. "The dry-cleaning man saw your wife's body from there and it unnerved him. He came downtown and told us about it. Then he probably went home and got sick. Dead bodies make some people sick, Mr. Hoskins."

"Pity," Hoskins said. There was a blade of grass on the sleeve of one of the suits, and Hoskins brushed it off. He hung the suits on the knob of a cabinet door and looked around the room, his eyes not necessarily lingering at the chair where his wife had died. "Where was she?" he asked.

"Right there where you looked, Mr. Hoskins. Somebody put a bullet through her head."

Hoskins' face was unrevealing, but he felt a thrill run down his spine. The game was on; but how did this tall young cop know so soon? "At least," he said, "it was merciful."

"That's important to you?"

"Of course."

"You loved her?"

"Well, we'd been married a long time. I was fond of her."

"You benefit from her death?"

"I suppose I do. What was ours becomes mine. In that sense I benefit."

"She has no other heirs? No brothers or sisters?"

"No. That is, there's a brother somewhere, if he's still alive. I've never met him."

"Do you own a gun?"

"No. I never have." Hoskins smiled and Peckinpaugh found it even more difficult to relate this well-dressed, not unhandsome man to the homely corpse that had been his wife. "But," Hoskins said, "shouldn't you be reading me that Miranda thing? This appears to be an interrogation, Sergeant."

"Would you like me to?"

"As you wish. In this game we necessarily play by your rules."

"This is a game?"

"Perhaps that was a bad choice of words." Hoskins sighed and sat down, not in the chair nearest him but in the one his wife had died in. He felt pleased at his choice. "They told me over the phone," he said, "that someone had broken into my house and shot my wife. Are you suggesting that's *not* what happened?"

"Yes. Nobody broke in, Hoskins, but somebody broke out."

"Oh? What makes you think that?"

"The shards of glass are too far into the room. The door was open when the pane was busted. There's no glass at the threshold line as there would have to be if it was done with the door closed."

Hoskins got up and went over to the door and looked down at the bits of glass on the floor. It was true there were none at the threshold and he thought, I should have pushed some over there, or gone out and then broken the glass. But it was hair-splitting at best. He wasn't worried.

Behind him Peckinpaugh said, "What time did you leave this morning?"

Hoskins turned. "Eight-thirty or so—my usual time."

"Without breakfast?"

"Yes. I don't eat breakfast."

"You don't even have coffee?"

"I'm not much of a coffee drinker, Sergeant. If I want some I have it at the office."

"That can be checked," Peckinpaugh said, and Hoskins shrugged. It

had bothered Peckinpaugh that the kitchen was so neat, not a dish or spoon showing, the sink empty. He said, "Was your wife up when you left?"

Hoskins checked an impulse to say no. The game, he saw now, would be well played. It excited him pleasantly. "Yes." He smiled. "She was in the kitchen."

"Doing what?"

"Just standing there, I believe. I only walked through on my way to work. I didn't really notice."

"So some time later," Peckinpaugh said, "the killer came to the door, clearly visible to anyone in this room, busted the glass, opened the door, entered, and your wife just stood there. She didn't go for the phone, or run and hide, she just stood there. Does that make sense, Hoskins?"

Hoskins shrugged again. "Maybe she fainted, Sergeant."

"Oh? In that case, why put a bullet through her head?"

The head again, Hoskins thought. How natural it would be to say, "No, Sergeant, the chest." He had not expected the attack to come on so quickly and from so many sides. But his guard was up now and he felt secure. "Perhaps she didn't faint," he said. "Perhaps she went for him. She was a strange woman, Sergeant."

"She was in the chair when we found her. She was shot in the chair."

"So what do *you* think happened?"

"I think you shot her, Hoskins. I think she was sitting there at the table, maybe half awake, and you shot her. Then you opened the door there a few inches and knocked out the glass—that wasn't too smart—and then I think you went to work. I also think I should read you the Miranda now and you should get yourself a lawyer."

"You can read me the front page of the L.A. *Times* if you want," Hoskins said, "and as for a lawyer, only a guilty man needs one, and I'm not guilty. I did *not* kill my wife!" It was the first sign of emotion he'd shown.

"Sure," Peckinpaugh said, "and nobody dies in a war." He got the Miranda card from his jacket pocket and read it in an impatient voice, twice as fast as Lieutenant Wells would have liked. Wells had told him a hundred times that the Miranda message must be clearly read and clearly understood, not spit out in disgust.

"Does this mean I'm under arrest?" Hoskins asked.

"Not yet. But any time now. It means I don't believe a word you've said."

"You're an obstinate man, Sergeant."

"You shouldn't've picked those suits up off the lawn, Hoskins."

At 9:15 the next morning, Wednesday, Peckinpaugh and Escalera were seated in front of Lieutenant Wells's desk, watching Wells read reports, his bald dome shining like a globe. First the stomach, then the hair, then the teeth, then the nerves—you give it all in police work, Wells had told them many times. Even now, reading silently, his tongue searched the new upper plate in his mouth.

Behind Wells's head, through a large window, Peckinpaugh and Escalera could see, across Eleventh Street, the orange-painted steelwork of the new Clausen Police Force Building slowly taking shape. Ordinarily Wells kept his shade drawn against the sight, but on this bright smog-free day the shade was up. Thirty-five years ago when Wells had joined the Clausen force as a rookie, there had been 15,000 reasonably law-abiding citizens living amidst its orange and avocado groves. Now there were over 80,000 people and each newcomer, Wells said, had brought along his increment of crime, and the trees were nearly all gone. The new police building symbolized all that to Wells, so ordinarily he kept his shade drawn against it. But today, Peckinpaugh mused, he might be weaning himself to the new reality. Peckinpaugh hoped so; Wells had no imagination any more.

Wells finished with the robbery reports he'd been working on since early that morning and stared first at Escalera and then at Peckinpaugh. "So where are we with the Hoskins murder?" he asked.

Peckinpaugh told him in detail about meeting Hoskins at the murder scene yesterday, about bringing him downtown to identify the body, about fingerprinting him, about tape-testing his hands for gunpowder traces (negative), about taking his family history, and so on.

"He admits," Peckinpaugh said, "that he married Myrtle Burton mostly to make points with her father, who died about five years ago. Now, with Myrtle dead, he owns sixty percent of the company, and it's a big one, boss."

"No other beneficiaries?"

"No, from what Hoskins said, and the lawyers confirmed this morn-

ing. Myrtle has a brother somewhere, but Hoskins says he's never even met him. It seems the brother was one of the original hippies. He and his father fought like tigers until finally the old man wrote him out of the family and when he died Myrtle inherited everything."

"Where is the brother?"

"Nobody knows, not even the lawyers. Nobody's heard from him for years."

"The gun?"

"In ballistics now. No fingerprints. It killed Myrtle, but it's not the gun in at least the last two Park Plaza murders. Smitty's checking through the whole list, but I don't think he'll find anything. I think it's Hoskins' gun and I don't think he's our Park Plaza killer. I think he set up his wife's murder to look like a Park Plaza murder."

"You don't like him, do you?" Wells said.

"I don't like him so much, I could paint this entire building with it!"

"Well, don't," Wells growled. "What about the autopsy?"

"Not up yet. It should be on my desk any minute now."

Wells turned to Escalera. "What do you think, Luis?"

Escalera wriggled in his chair as he always did when addressed directly. He generally handled Chicano problems, and was more at home in the barrio. "I doan know," he said softly. "Nobody in the neighborhood heard nothin' or saw nothin', but the houses up there are far apart. I doan like where the gun was found. Why would a guy throw it in a ditch so close by? Nobody saw him we know of, nobody was chasin' him. It doan make sense."

Wells said, "What about that, Peck?"

"I don't know either," Peckinpaugh said. "What I see is Hoskins killing her and then driving off to work as usual. He's cool enough. I see him tossing the gun in the ditch on the way by, but I don't see why."

"You think he's some kind of a damn fool?"

"I don't know what to think he is, boss. All I know is he did it. He shouldn't have picked up those suits off the lawn. But then again, last night when I let him go home, he said—"

"What?" Wells prompted.

"He said if I didn't believe he didn't kill his wife he'd take a lie-detector test. And that doesn't make sense either."

"Did you set one up?"

"No, not yet. I want some more stuff to work with first."

"What good would a test do?" Luis said. "You can't use it in court anyway."

"It would do this much good. It would clear Hoskins and then you guys could follow a trail that might lead somewhere. Jesus Christ, Peckinpaugh, why didn't you tell me about his offer to take the test right off?"

"Because I don't understand it."

"You don't understand it because it will clear him, and you don't want him cleared. No one volunteers to take that test unless he's innocent."

"But he isn't innocent, boss."

"Set it up, Sergeant. Right now!" Wells stood up, turned around and pulled the shade down over his window as the two men left his office.

The autopsy report wasn't on Peckinpaugh's desk when he returned there, but a note from the M.E., Gene McVey, was. The note said McVey would like to see P. at his earl. con. at the morgue.

Escalera, whose desk faced Peckinpaugh's, said maybe he should call L.A. and get a polygraph man out. The Clausen Police, on the rare occasions they needed a polygraph man, borrowed one. Escalera would work on the Hoskins case only until something drew his attention into the barrio, so now he waited for Peckinpaugh to make the decision.

Peckinpaugh said, "O.K., Luis, but not today, huh? Tomorrow morning at the earliest. Tell the boss it was the best we could do. I'm going across the street to see McVey."

The Medical Examiner was in his cluttered little office pecking away at a typewriter. From the doorway, Peckinpaugh said, "This is my earliest convenience, Mac. Is that Hoskins?"

"Yeah." McVey didn't look up.

"When did she die? Could it have been as early as eight-thirty?"

"Maybe. She wasn't wearing a smashed watch, Peck."

"Could you testify in court it was as early as eight-thirty?"

"Quit pushing." McVey looked up. "There wasn't anything in her stomach. She hadn't eaten any breakfast."

"I know that."

"If she'd eaten some breakfast at an established hour, maybe we could pinpoint the time of death, but she hadn't eaten anything for

over twelve hours, at least."

"She died at eight-thirty, Mac, or just before. I'm sure of it."

"At your age I was sure of one or two things myself. But that's not the big problem. The big problem is that she didn't bleed."

"What?"

"One of the bullets missed the heart entirely. The other just nicked it. She should have taken a while to die, unless shock did it, which ain't likely. There should have been a lot of blood in the chest cavity. There wasn't."

"Which means what?"

"I don't know. She was a healthy woman except for her heart. She should have bled. It's a puzzle. That's why I called you over."

"Mac, I know she's dead—all I want's a time. I want eight-thirty or a little before."

"You can't have it. Not from me. What I can give you is a possible at eight-thirty and a little sage advice: doubt everything. I'll have this finished for you in an hour."

Back at his desk, Peckinpaugh found that Luis had gone, but had left a note, one of two waiting for him. The polygraph man, Luis wrote, would be out from L.A. at 10:00 tomorrow morning, Thursday. He himself had been called into the barrio on some problem. The second note was positively depressing. It was from Smitty in ballistics and informed Peckinpaugh that the bullet taken from Myrtle Hoskins' body had been fired from a gun used in the murder of an all-night grocery-store clerk in Clausen a couple of years before.

Peckinpaugh cursed bitterly. He remembered the case clearly. A transient named Baker had held up the store on South Main at 11:30 P.M. He'd taken what money there was in the till and then shot the clerk for the hell of it. On the way out he'd swiped a gallon jug of wine. Two customers inside the store saw the whole thing, and a man in the parking lot outside noted down his license number as he sped away on Main Street. He went north through the heart of town at ninety miles an hour and drove through the white-painted warning fence at the city limits where Main Street narrows from four lanes to two and hit a tree. His car was demolished, but he wasn't hurt. When the black-and-white got there a minute later, he was standing alongside his wrecked car with the top half of the gallon jug hooked through one finger. He didn't resist arrest.

What Peckinpaugh remembered about the case, and liked, was its speed and clarity. Baker was arrested, arraigned, tried, convicted, and sentenced all within six weeks. None of the "law's delay" that had plagued every working cop since Shakespeare coined the phrase.

Baker claimed he'd thrown the gun out the window of his car as he raced through town, and Peckinpaugh, remembering that too, felt a little bit better. The gun had been looked for but not found, and since it had not been essential to the prosecution and since the Clausen Police Force was perennially undermanned, the search had been abandoned.

Somewhere along North Main Street, Peckinpaugh mused, Hoskins had found that gun. Inductive reasoning? He questioned himself. He had a picture in his mind of Hoskins as the killer and he was honest enough with himself to know that anything he found he would jam into the picture whether it fit or not, like an impatient kid with a jigsaw puzzle. Gut reasoning, he thought; and he wouldn't mention it to Wells. Not yet, anyway.

What was Hoskins doing on North Main around that time? Hoskins was an architect, and architects plan buildings. What buildings had gone up there lately in this rapidly growing town? Well, there was, for one, the Clausen Savings & Loan Building, where Peckinpaugh kept his few dollars, and where his future mother-in-law worked. And it was just about where Baker had guessed he'd thrown the gun, and on the right side of the street too.

He reached for the phone. It rang under his hand and his hand jerked before he picked it up. Those nerves Wells was always talking about. It was a reporter from the *Press-Sentinel*. The night before on the front page there'd been a black-bordered bulletin announcing the murder of Myrtle Hoskins, the fifth of the Park Plaza murders, as the paper dubbed them, and stating that Sergeant Jeffrey Peckinpaugh, in charge of the case, had no immediate comment to make.

"And I still don't," Peckinpaugh said in answer to the reporter's question. He could tell the reporter they'd found the murder weapon and identified it as Baker's from a couple of years ago and that would throw some smoke over the scene, but he didn't. Wells would have wanted him to, he knew, but he didn't because he was thinking about tomorrow's polygraph test and he had a small trap in mind for Hoskins. Or for himself, as it might turn out.

He told the reporter to call again the next day and then he phoned

the Savings & Loan, where his future mother-in-law, Martha Johnson, who'd worked there for 25 years was now a vice-president. She asked him first, as she always did, when he was going to make an honest woman out of her daughter and he said as soon as he was earning more than Bonny was. Bonny taught phys. ed. and English at Clausen Central High and made a thousand a year more than he. Her marvelous three months off in the summer hurt even worse.

"Martha darling," he said, with the preliminaries out of the way, "who were the architects of that outrageously expensive building you work in?"

"Burton Associates," she said.

Peckinpaugh felt the jigsaw piece slide easily into place for a change. "Now tell me, dear," he said, "who was the man in charge?"

Again she didn't hesitate with the answer. "Paul Hoskins," she said. Then she added, "Oh!" and Peckinpaugh could almost see the fingers of her hand fly to her mouth. "Was that the Hoskins—Myrtle—last night?"

"Yes," he said. "Was Hoskins in charge from the first, plot plan and all that?"

"Yes, but—"

"Thanks, dear. You're gonna make a hell of a mother-in-law."

Peckinpaugh felt charged with new energy, as usual when something went right. He wanted Hoskins now more than he wanted a decent gun law. Wells would be upstairs with the Chief by this time and Escalera would be off in that foreign country across the freeway all day. He went outside and got in his car.

He went east a mile to the north-south freeway, north five miles to the Los Angeles interchange, west 31 miles to the Long Beach interchange, and south six miles to Berryessa Avenue and the Burton Associates Building. Forty-three miles in 52 minutes. Hoskins had said he'd arrived yesterday at his office at about 9:15, and he'd probably taken the same route.

Hoskins' black Marquis was parked in the corner of the Burton lot nearest the front entrance of the building, the number one spot. Hoskins was boss now, principal owner of the place. He hadn't even taken the day off in a show of mourning, Peckinpaugh thought; a cold-hearted man, psychopathic probably. Peckinpaugh had a quick vision of Hoskins pausing at the foot of his driveway the day before long

enough to toss the gun in the ditch and then—taking off his gloves.

He should have checked the Marquis yesterday, but he hadn't. Now he did. The car was unlocked. Peckinpaugh opened the passenger-side door and pulled down the glove-compartment hatch. He drew a long breath. The gloves were there, on top of some other stuff. He looked up at the glass wall of the building twenty feet away and saw men bent over drafting tables under banks of fluorescent lights.

He closed the Marquis, walked across the parking lot to a phone booth on the corner, and called Wells. It took him five minutes to persuade Wells to get a search warrant issued for the Marquis, but he couldn't persuade the lieutenant to send a man out with it. He'd have to come get it himself if he thought it was all that important, which Wells obviously didn't. Hanging up the phone, Peckinpaugh was in a sweat. The gloves, with their inevitable powder stains, were a vital piece of evidence in his circumstantial case, but he couldn't touch them without the warrant. He got in his car. It was 11:15. It would be one o'clock before he could return and nab the gloves.

He was back by five minutes to one, but the gloves were gone. He slammed the car door and looked angrily up at the building. Nobody was looking back at him, but apparently somebody had been before.

Inside at the desk, the receptionist told him that Mr. Hoskins was in the field at a job site, that he'd left a little before noon and would be back at three. He had gone in one of the company cars, she said. She told Peckinpaugh that Mr. Hoskins had arrived at the office at 9:23 the previous day, which was about his usual time. She said she would certainly see that Mr. Hoskins got the note Peckinpaugh wrote for him.

The note told Hoskins to be at Clausen Police Headquarters at ten in the morning and implied that if he had any sense he'd bring his lawyer with him.

Shortly after noon the next day, Peckinpaugh and the L.A. polygraph man, Roy Weston, were in Wells's office, seated before his desk. Wells was eating his lunch, a small carton of cottage cheese and a milkshake brought in from outside, and soda crackers from a large box he kept in his desk. The shade behind his back was drawn.

"So the bottom line," Wells said, staring bleakly at Peckinpaugh, "is that he didn't do it."

Weston answered. "He certainly didn't kill her, Lieutenant Wells,

but the graph—I must say—is full of ambiguities. I've never seen anything quite like it." He was hungry and trying not to think of Wells's lunch as human food.

"But he found the gun on the Savings & Loan lot," Peckinpaugh said doggedly, "and he shot her with it and threw it out of his car into the ditch—the graph tells us all that." The one bad moment Hoskins had had in the test was when Peckinpaugh gave Weston the series of questions about the gun to ask him. It was the trap he'd had in mind, but it proved nothing, it seemed. Peckinpaugh reached across the desk and took a soda cracker from Wells's box and ate it.

"So what's the answer?" Wells said.

"He shot her but he didn't kill her," Weston said tentatively.

"Rooster eggs!" Wells snorted. "He didn't even bring a lawyer with him. The guy's innocent, that's all! The trouble is, Peckinpaugh, you just plain don't like him."

"That don't hardly half say it, chief." Peckinpaugh brushed a cracker crumb off his pants leg and then retrieved it from the floor and dropped it in Wells's ashtray.

Weston stood up, glancing at his watch. He'd already announced that he had a three o'clock appointment in Azusa, and he wanted a decent lunch before starting over there. The test had taken an hour, the analysis somewhat longer, and they were right back in the starting gate. "If that's all, gentlemen—"

Peckinpaugh walked him out through the squad room and then came back and dropped heavily into his chair, the new idea in his head making no immediate sense.

"Another two hundred and fifty bucks up the stack," Wells said darkly, "and not a dime's worth of heat to warm your hands."

"Boss, look, I think what—"

"Don't call me 'boss', or 'chief', or 'mon general'! The name is Wells and the title is Lieutenant—at least until my next meeting upstairs."

"Boss, that's it!" Peckinpaugh jumped up and slammed a hand on the desk. "What happened is she died and *then* he killed her—and I mean that just the way I said it. He came downstairs Tuesday morning and found her dead in her chair and then he shot her. That's why she didn't bleed. She was already dead! The guy's sick. He'd probably been planning to kill her ever since the honeymoon—living for it, tasting it—and then she double-crossed him. That's why he volunteered so

early on to take a polygraph test, because he knew he'd pass it and leave us standing around talking to ourselves. That's it, boss, we've got it!"

Wells was staring at him coldly, his lunch shoved aside. "What we've got," he said, "is the gun that killed her, and that's all we've got. What we've got, Peckinpaugh, are five unsolved Park Plaza murders, and what *you've* got is the dumbest idea of your entire brilliant career."

"Chief, that's what happened!" Peckinpaugh was adamant—he could see Hoskins shooting his wife in the chair. "That's what he did!"

"No, he didn't." Wells stood up. "You've got no hard evidence that Hoskins did anything but live in the same house with her. Hoskins is off your suspect list, Sergeant, and I want you to announce that to the paper. I want you to tell them we've got the gun identified and I want you to tell them that's all we've got. And that's an order, Peckinpaugh!"

"Yessir," Peckinpaugh said and left the room, still seeing Hoskins perform his sick charade with a sneer on his lips. Hoskins had called him at home Wednesday night to confirm the polygraph appointment and he'd sneered a little then too. It looked as though he'd sneer at them forever now.

Hoskins was feeling well content with himself. It was the first Saturday night in sixteen years he'd been alone in his own house, unhaunted by the silent, accusing presence of his hated wife.

Yes, the final taste in his mouth was savory. He hadn't killed her, but he'd done the next best thing, and the duel with Peckinpaugh had been a sheer joy. It was enough that even just one person knew exactly what he'd done.

The doorbell rang, confirming the sound of what he'd thought was a motorcycle coming up his drive a moment earlier. He went to the front door, turned on the outside light, and opened the little grilled window in the upper panel. There was a murderer out there somewhere, and it paid to be careful these days. A tall, heavily bearded man stared back at him, squinting under the light. Hoskins had never seen him before.

"Paul," the man said, "I'm Charley Burton, your brother-in-law. I'd like to talk to you—it's about Myrtle."

"Myrtle's funeral is Monday," Hoskins said in surprise. "If you—"

"No, I just want to talk. I'll be going back tonight."

Hoskins hesitated a moment before sliding back the bolt. He hadn't thought about the long-lost brother at all, but what difference could it make now? "Come in," he said.

Burton was completely unlike his sister except for the small, pale-blue eyes. He was dressed in soiled denims, pants and jacket—a poor man, Hoskins judged. Perhaps he would give him a few dollars when he left. Hoskins was feeling expansive. He pointed his visitor through the living room and into the den, where he had been sitting with the TV on, a John Wayne film just under way. It was a little after nine.

He turned the TV down just enough to indicate the visit should be brief and regained his chair. "Well," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"Die," Burton said, and Hoskins thought he'd misheard him until he saw the gun in Burton's hand. Burton sat down in a chair facing Hoskins, looking tired, his eyes flat. "You killed my sister and now I'm going to kill you."

"Ridiculous," Hoskins managed to say. "The police—"

"You killed her, Paul," Burton said. "She told me you were going to, and she was right."

"Told you?"

"Wrote me. About six months ago she hired a private dick to find me, and he did. It wasn't too hard."

"Money? You want money?" Hoskins' voice was coming back slowly.

"You'd think of that first, wouldn't you? No, no money, just vengeance. Just an even score."

"I'll give you all the money you want," Hoskins whispered. "Right now."

"No, Paul, that's your drumbeat, not mine. I liked Myrtle. I loved her. She was a year older than me, but all through our teens I kind of took care of her, kept people from picking on her too much. She was ugly, as I don't need to tell you, and you've got no idea what a curse that can be for a girl, to be ugly, unwanted."

Burton's face was stony now. "And then you came along," he said, "and married her, a big good-looking cat like you—I've still got your wedding picture from the paper at home—and I knew the whole thing stunk. The old man wanted you and you wanted the old man, and poor Myrtle came along as part of the package. She told me the things you said to her. She told me the whole miserable story in a letter."

"Charley—I didn't kill her."

"Save that for the man at the pearly gates." Burton's voice was bitter. "She knew you were going to do it a year ago. She found your gun downstairs in that room you never let her go in."

"No!"

"Yeah. She got a locksmith in here one day when you were out of town somewhere, and he worked out the combination for her. The gun and all that porno—heavy, sick stuff. It scared her stiff."

"She was dead when I shot her."

"Yeah, and you'll be dead when I shoot you."

"You don't understand!"

"Oh, yes I do. I've been following the case, Paul. You conned the cops somehow, which doesn't surprise me, but you couldn't con Myrtle and you can't con me."

"How much do you want?"

Burton's smile twitched again. "That's your whole bag, isn't it? Money and power. Just like the old man. You'd lie, steal, marry, even murder for it, wouldn't you? And then squat here in your big empty house and rub your hands in glee. I wouldn't trade your money, Hoskins, for the runtiest tree in my back yard."

"You won't get away with it," Hoskins said. He tried to rise from the chair, but the gun wiggled and he slumped back.

"Why won't I? I get my mail at a Sterling City post office box. I live five miles farther up in the Sierras from there, all by myself. It took me about ten hours to get down here on my bike and it'll take me about ten hours to get back—if I start right away. There was nobody up there to see me leave and there'll be nobody to see me return. *I'll* get away with it.

"Goodbye, Paul," he added, and squeezed the trigger.

The shot was unexpectedly loud in Burton's ears and it alarmed him. He hadn't really thought he could do it, and that he could alarmed him even more than the shot. It was a momentum thing. The speech had carried him along and squeezing the trigger was part of it, like a punctuation mark. He felt as though some tether in him had been cut, some line to life severed.

The sound of gunfire was coming out of the TV and he went over and turned up the volume. Probably all over the neighborhood people were watching the same show. He made himself relax. It had been a clean shot, through the heart. Hoskins was slumped quietly in the

chair, his chin on his chest. The drapes were drawn across the only window in the room. There was no cause to worry, but Burton's hands were shaking now. The uppers he had been taking all day were wearing thin.

He went upstairs, according to plan, and did what Hoskins had done on Tuesday morning, simulated the effects of a burglary. He didn't take anything but a small silver-framed picture of his sister on what had been her bureau. He took it because some artful photographer had made her look almost pretty, and it touched his heart as nothing had in years. Poor Myrt.

In a few minutes he was back downstairs and looked in on Hoskins before leaving. He was the same, except for one thing. The phone that had been on the table alongside his chair was now in his lap, and a tinny voice was saying over and over from the earpiece, "Who is this—who is this?" And then: "Hoskins?"

Burton didn't panic. He was beyond panic. He pressed the joint of his thumb against the right carotid artery in Hoskins' neck and felt nothing. He was truly dead now. The voice in Hoskins' lap ceased and became a buzzing sound. Burton wiped his gun clean of prints and dropped it in the chair where he'd been sitting. There was no way it could be traced to him, but that didn't seem so important any more. Then, impulsively, he wiped the frame of his sister's picture and laid it alongside the gun, face up. It was not part of the plan, but the plan was shot now.

"So long, Sis," he said and went out of the house, got on his bike, and roared away.

Bonny Johnson said to Peckinpaugh, "Who is it, Jeff?" She was curled up on the chintz-covered couch in Peckinpaugh's living room watching the John Wayne movie. Peckinpaugh came slowly back into the room from the front hall where the phone was. His brow was furrowed. "Come on," he said. "I've got to check on something."

They found him just as Burton had left him. They'd come through the open front door and straight into the lighted den. "Dis mus' be de place," Peckinpaugh said softly, and Bonny, a step behind him, said, "He's dead, isn't he?"

Peckinpaugh lifted the phone out of Hoskins' lap by the wires and reassembled it on the table. Then he went into the kitchen and phoned

Wells at home from the wall phone there. Wells said he'd be over in half an hour with a team.

Back in the den, Bonny said in an awed voice, "This is what you do, isn't it, Jeff?" She'd never been with him on the job before. He took her blonde head between his hands and said, "Not most of the time, dear heart, and almost never on a Saturday night."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "Someone needs to be caught for this, doesn't he? It's awful—I never knew. Right in his own home—"

"Sometimes they have it coming," Peckinpaugh said, and turned and saw the gun and picture in the chair facing Hoskins. He squatted down and looked at them carefully. He could see the hasty wipe marks on the frame of the picture. He'd seen the picture upstairs in Myrtle's room on Tuesday.

"Don't touch," he said. He got up and took Bonny's hand and began searching the rest of the house. Upstairs, he got the gut feeling again and wished it would go away. It looked glib to his eye, the evidence of robbery, as it had on Tuesday. As though it had been set up for a TV scene, or for a cop to note down sagely in his little black book. Myrtle's room hadn't been touched except for the picture missing from the bureau top. It all meant something.

Downstairs he stood in front of Hoskins' chair while Bonny went to the kitchen. She asked him if it was all right if she had some water—could she touch a glass?—and he said sure. Gently, he pulled Hoskins' body forward and saw the wet stain of blood in the fabric of the chair. He'd been shot where he sat and that meant something too. Someone he knew had done it; it had surprised him. If it had been a stranger, Hoskins would have been up and running. He'd said just one intelligible word over the phone, "Peck—" and then had come a last rasping breath. Hoskins had called him Wednesday night to confirm the polygraph appointment and to sneer a little; tonight he'd phoned to die out loud. And to tell him who had done it.

"Who did it, Paul?" Peckinpaugh's voice was low and easy. In death all is forgiven. It was Paul now—Paul and Peck. "Who knew you well enough to want to kill you, and to make a shrine out of your wife's picture?"

The answer was obvious, but Peckinpaugh at first rejected it because he knew that Wells would. The brother. Charles, was it? Yeah, Charles.

But how did he know about his sister's death if he'd been beachcombing in Tahiti or somewhere? Did he have a pipeline back to the old hometown? And if so—

Peckinpaugh went to the kitchen and looked up a number in the Clausen phonebook and dialed it. Bonny was sitting in the chair where Myrtle had died, but he didn't tell her that. The broken windowpane in the door had been replaced with a piece of cardboard.

A voice spoke in his ear. There were party sounds in the background. It was his friend and former schoolmate, Ed Munsey, circulation director at the *Press-Sentinel*. "Ed," Peckinpaugh said, "who's on duty at your office right now?"

"Nobody, you sod. It's Saturday night. Come on over, Peck, we're having fun."

"Some other people aren't," Peckinpaugh said. "Ed, look, I want you to go down there and check a name for me."

"No!"

"Yes. It's cop business, Ed, maybe even life-and-death business. It'll take you twenty minutes."

Munsey sighed. "What name?" he asked in a long-suffering tone, and Peckinpaugh told him and gave him Hoskins' number to call back to.

Peckinpaugh sat down at the table with Bonny and told her that, all things considered, he'd rather be a piano player. But she didn't believe it.

Munsey called back at 10:18, twenty minutes or so after Wells and the team had arrived. Bonny had boiled up some instant coffee and she and Peckinpaugh were drinking it when the call came in. Wells and the other men were all over the place, Wells very much in charge. After hanging up, Peckinpaugh called Wells into the kitchen and said, "Boss, I know who did it. Myrtle's brother."

Wells stared at him. "How do you know that?"

"Because he subscribes to the *Press-Sentinel*, and has ever since he left town. He gets it at a P.O. box in Sterling City. I just found out."

"That's evidence?"

"That and some other things, yes." He explained, convincing only Bonny.

"What we should do now," he said, "is ask the Butte County

sheriff's office to intercept Burton at his house, where he's probably going. Sterling City's in Butte County, a name I've always admired."

"You want me to alert the Butte County people because he subscribes to the *paper*?"

"And because he did that thing with his sister's picture."

"No." Wells didn't even consider it. "It's not hard evidence, and I need hard evidence before I involve anybody else in this thing."

But at 11:15 it became academic. An hour and ten minutes earlier, a man on a motorcycle had passed a motorist on the freeway at the north end of town, rammed into the bridge abutment at the Los Angeles interchange, and killed himself instantly. The shaken motorist told the Highway Patrol officer who arrived a few minutes later that the man must have been doing ninety on the bike and drove it smack into the bridge.

He was pronounced dead at the scene by the intern who'd accompanied the Clausen County ambulance that the C.H.P. officer had called, and at 10:40 his remains were taken to the Clausen City morgue. He was identified there as Charles R. Burton of Sterling City, and a worn card in his wallet named Myrtle Hoskins as the person to be notified in case of his death. A Clausen City night-duty detective heard the name, put two and two together, and called Wells at Hoskins' house. Wells, Peckinpaugh, and Bonny came down to the station immediately, Wells leaving orders with the remaining men to do a thorough job of investigating, even though Peckinpaugh opined they'd be plowing a barren field.

"What we've got, chief," he said at the station, "is a natural death—Myrtle's, a murder—Hoskins', and a suicide—Burton's, in that order."

"What we've got," Wells retorted, "is two more Park Plaza murders and a highway accident, in *that* order. We've got no—"

"Yeah, I know," said Peckinpaugh, "hard evidence."

"Connect the gun that killed Hoskins to this Burton character and maybe I'll buy your theory, Sergeant."

Peckinpaugh sighed. His girl was looking tired and out of place in the tacky old male-smelling room.

"Can I do it Monday, boss?"

For a moment Wells genuinely didn't understand that it was Saturday night, to be followed shortly by Sunday. For him the days were a

string of nameless hours, some illumined by sunlight, some not. "O.K.," he said finally, reluctantly.

"I wonder," Bonny said on the way back to Peckinpaugh's house, "how the John Wayne movie came out."

"Wayne lived, the bad guys died," Peckinpaugh said.

"Don't be sure," Bonny said, and Peckinpaugh grinned at her tiredly.

"Yeah, I know," he said. "No hard evidence."

The Kid had a great left-hand snag hook . . .

FINAL EXAM

by BILL PRONZINI AND BARRY N. MALZBERG

For his final exam I take the Kid to Candlestick Park.

It is a bright and brisk fall Sunday, typical football weather in San Francisco. The 49ers are playing the Colts and the game is a sellout—fifty thousand fans, at least half of whom will soon be half drunk on beer and all of whom will be deeply involved with the game and such matters as the point spread. It is an ideal location and the one where I always hold my finals.

"I want to start getting the money right now, Old Man," the Kid says to me after we pass through the turnstiles. He calls me the Old Man and I call him the Kid. This is part of our professional relationship, although I like to think that there are undertones of genuine affection between us. The Kid is my most recent and greatest student and every now and then, watching him operate, I see the 24-year-old me when the world was mine for the taking. But I sometimes suspect he pictures me as being over the hill and himself as the new king of the hill, which is why I am putting him through a final exam. I have had such brash and eager students before and some have not, it has turned out, properly learned their lessons; I am hoping the Kid is not one of these and that I will not be forced to fail him as a result.

I say in answer to his question, "Remember what I've taught you, Kid. No more than two marks pre-game and no more than two during the half-time ceremonies. Save your major operations for the post-game exodus."

"Sure," the Kid says. "Whatever you say."

When we approach the tunnel to our section I nudge him and gesture to where a big man in a grey suit is lounging against the wall pretending to read a program. "See that fellow over there?" I say.

"What about him?"

"His name is Harrahan. He is one of Candlestick's security chiefs and also very difficult on people in our profession. Avoid him and anyone who looks like him—anyone who seems to be an easy mark. Easy-looking marks often turn out to be security officers or undercover cops."

"Right," the Kid says. "Nothing comes easy in this business, right? You always got to work hard for the money."

"Good," I say, and nod my approval.

I steer him away from Harrahan and the tunnel and over toward the crowded concession stands. The Kid eyes a fat man who is paying for a hot dog with money from an equally fat wallet, but I shake my head. The fat man is not a good mark because he is with a fat woman who has eyes like a television camera: they see everything and record it in detail. The Kid looks half annoyed and half disappointed, but says nothing.

After five minutes I select his first mark—a moustachioed gentleman with a preoccupied expression and an expensive camel's-hair coat

folded across one arm. The Kid dips him deftly, so deftly that I almost miss the operation even though I am watching each of the Kid's moves. He has the greatest left-hand snag hook I have ever seen, and in his right thumb and forefinger there is magic. I once saw him lift a lady's pocketbook on a crowded bus while at the same time tipping his hat to a clergyman.

I allow him a second score, from a white-haired man with a hip flask, and give him a fatherly smile after he executes another perfect dip. He grins. "A piece of cake, Old Man," he says. "Let's go count up the swag."

"Patience, Kid," I say. "The game will be starting pretty soon. It's time to take our seats."

We go through our tunnel and come out into the seats near the thirty-yard line, midway up. The 49ers and the Colts are already on the field and the referees are about to reenact the coin flip. The Kid and I sit down, after which I unfold the blanket I am carrying and spread it over our laps. The wind at Candlestick Park is always cool and blustery on fall days and I have to be careful of my rheumatism. It is the rheumatism, of course, which has necessitated my retirement from active service and my new profession as teacher of young hopefuls.

The 49ers lose the coin toss and prepare to kick off to the Colts. While the teams are lining up, the Kid takes out the two wallets he has dipped and opens them under the blanket. His face quirks in disgust. "Forty-six dollars, total," he mutters to me. "Damn lousy take so far."

"Not to worry," I tell him. "We have a long afternoon ahead of us."

"Yeah, I guess so. But hell, Old Man, I want to get the money—the *real* money. That fat dude at the concession stand must have had two, three hundred in his wallet."

I give him a reproachful look. "The most important thing at this point in your career," I say, "is artistry. Haven't I explained that often enough? The act is its own reward; even in a rain forest Jean-Pierre Rampal would still play the flute."

"What's a rain forest?" the Kid says. "Who the hell is Jean-Pierre Rampal?"

Brilliant in many ways, he is ignorant of matters cultural. But this does not bother me; like wine and age, the command of the intellect will develop. Still, I seem to have detected a note of belligerence in

his voice. Belligerence, ofttimes, is a sign of ingratitude; this will have to be watched more carefully as the day progresses.

The game has already begun and I give my attention to the conflict below. The 49ers intercept a pass, cannot move the ball, and settle for a 37-yard field goal. The Colts score a touchdown on a fifty-yard pass play to their wide receiver. The 49ers score a touchdown on a 22-yard pass play to their tight end. The first quarter ends with San Francisco leading 10–7.

The Kid, I have noticed, is uninterested in the game. He fidgets in his seat and his eyes roam the crowd in a restless way. "Relax," I say to him. "Enjoy the contest. Half time will arrive soon enough."

"I don't like football," the Kid says. "I don't give a damn for it. All I want is to get the money."

"That is all any of us want," I agree. "Nevertheless, too much anticipation can lead to mistakes. You're an artist, Kid, and there is no need for an artist to be overeager. The money will be there when the time comes."

"O.K., O.K." But I detect the note of belligerence in his voice again, along with something which sounds like annoyance. This makes me wonder if the Kid is no longer listening to my advice, if he feels he knows more than I do about the business. An unhappy prospect. I have never had such a brilliant student and to have to fail him would depress me a great deal.

Little happens in the second quarter of the game. The Colts manage to make a field goal to tie the score at 10–10 with three minutes remaining, and that is the tally when the teams leave the field for half time. As soon as the gun sounds, the Kid pushes the blanket aside and stands. His eyes are bright and determined and I watch his nimble fingers flex eagerly, as if they are already plucking wallets from the pockets of marks.

"I'm going to work, Old Man," he says.

I have already informed him that on this second part of his final exam—the half-time score, as it were—he will be on his own; I will wait here and he will choose his own marks. I nod. "Remember," I say, "no more than two. And make sure to watch out for—"

"Yeah, yeah, I know," the Kid says shortly. "Watch out for Harrahan and his boys, and watch out for pickings that look too easy. You think

I'm stupid, Old Man? I don't need to be told things a hundred times." He pushes past me and hurries up the stairs to the tunnel.

I sigh, rearrange the blanket, and place my once-great hands beneath it to keep them warm. The half-time ceremonies at 49er games are usually interesting, but today I am unable to enjoy the marching bands and the dancing girls. My mind is occupied with the Kid and how he is doing on his exam.

He is gone for twenty minutes; the teams are already back on the field when he returns. He does not look at me as he slides past, sits down, and sips at a cup of beer.

I say, "All went well?"

"So-so. No sweat with the operations, but this is a goddamn cheap crowd, let me tell you. A hundred and six bucks and that's it."

This makes me frown. "Then you've already made an accounting," I say.

"Yeah. In one of the johns."

"Your instructions were to bring everything straight back here to me—"

"The hell with my instructions. I did it my own way for a change."

I say, tight-lipped, "What else did you do your own way, Kid? How many operations? It wasn't just two, was it?"

"No, and the hell with that too. I told you, it's a cheap crowd. Five scores and barely more than a C-note."

The belligerence is unveiled in his voice now and it is accompanied by a certain contempt. I feel sadness inside me, for there seems to be little doubt that I am going to have to fail the Kid. It is not too late for him to redeem himself—he may yet pass—but in my heart I sense that he is beyond redemption.

Neither of us has anything to say during the second half. I have lost my taste for football and I am not even cheered when the 49ers score a last-second touchdown on a run by O. J. Simpson to win the game 24–23. As before, the Kid is on his feet the instant the gun sounds. I watch him as he moves quickly up the aisle and see he has forgotten or chosen to ignore everything I have taught him. He does not even wait until he is inside the tunnel before he makes his first dip. But he is good, very good, and no one is aware of the operation, least of all the mark.

I follow him through the tunnel and around to the concession area.

He works fast, with utter confidence and utter carelessness: four marks, five, six, seven. Wallets disappear into his pockets, along with a folder of traveler's checks, a money clip, and a digital calendar watch. It is a virtuoso performance, begun and completed within the space of eight minutes, and in one sense I am awed by the artistry of it. But in the last analysis, of course, I feel even more saddened and depressed because, for all its brilliance, it is the performance of a failure.

The Kid has hopelessly failed the exam.

But I determine to give him one last chance. Despite all his shortcomings, I am still impressed by his talents and am not quite able to shed the remnants of my fatherly affection for him. I approach him near the main turnstiles and place my hand on his arm. He tries to shrug me away, scowling, but I say, "We're going to have a talk, Kid, right here and now. If you make a scene, it will only call attention to you."

He accepts the wisdom of that, and allows me to lead him over to one of the concession stands, out of the flow of departing fans. "You've done everything wrong today," I tell him, "ignored everything I tried to teach you. Why, Kid? Why?"

"Because you're an old fool," he says, "you're small potatoes. I want the big money, and I sure as hell can't get it doing things your way."

I wince at this; it hurts to hear him say these things to me. "You could have been caught," I say. "Then neither of us would have gotten the money."

"I'm too good to get caught," he says cockily. "I'm the best there is, Old Man."

"The fact remains that you jeopardized the entire operation. I'm going to have to penalize you for that."

"Penalize? What the hell you talking about?"

"Our arrangement was for an even split of the proceeds," I say. "Instead, I intend to take sixty percent."

His lip curls. "Is that so? Well, I've got another idea. How about if I take a *hundred* percent?"

I look at him sadly. "You'd do that to me, Kid? After all I've done for you?"

"You ain't done nothing for me," he says. "You gave me a few pointers, that's all—maybe smoothed off a couple of rough edges. I been giving you half my scores for three months now and that's plenty. I'm

in the big time now; I'm an artist, just like you said. You want any more money, Old Man, go out and work for it just like I been doing."

"You have to pay your dues in this business," I say. "Don't you understand that? Nothing comes easy, nothing comes free. You've got to pay off, Kid, one way or another. There's plenty of money to be had, more than enough for everybody, but you've got to learn to honor your commitments and make your splits."

"I ain't making no splits with you or anybody else," the Kid says. "Now get out of my way, Old Man. I want to make another score or two while there's still a crowd around."

He shoves past me roughly and heads toward the nearest tunnel, out of which people are still emptying. I shake my head. I had thought that the Kid was different from most, but it was not so—he was my greatest student, but now he is my greatest disappointment. Sad, very sad—but what is to be done? The final exam is over and he has failed, and as his teacher I have no choice except to flunk him out of school.

I drift over to where Harrahan is waiting and watching the Kid from his position by the bathrooms, and I give him the high sign. He nods and moves in quickly, just as the Kid is about to dip an elderly gentleman in sunglasses and straw hat. Harrahan, who is as good at his job as I used to be at mine, has him handcuffed and is leading him away before the Kid quite realizes what has happened.

If only the Kid had listened to me. If only he had listened and if only I could have trusted him from the beginning.

Because then there would not have been any need for a final exam; trust would have superseded such a hard necessity. And because then I would have been able to tell him about my long-standing working arrangement with Harrahan, a humble crook like myself who knows that one must always pay the price—here in Candlestick Park if not to all of the world.

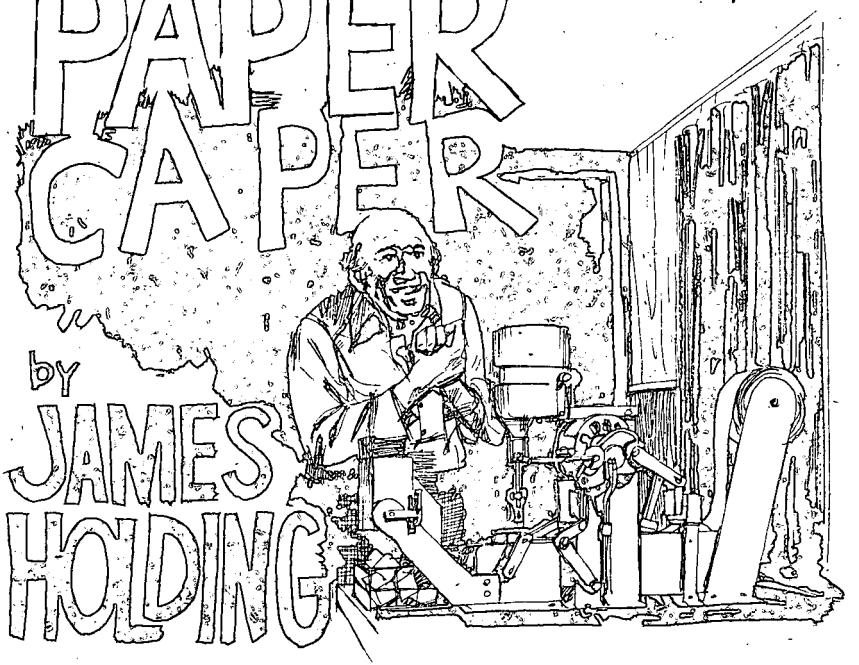
As it is, the Kid will bother me. He had all of the tools, all of the genius; he could have continued my life's work and granted me a kind of immortality.

He will bother me for a long, long time.

Slack had learned that appearances are usually deceptive . . . .

PAPER CAPER

by JAMES HOLDING



Howard Slack had long since given up any hope of becoming a second Philip Marlowe or Sam Spade. As far as he was concerned, the private detective business was strictly a bummer. After eking out a bare living at it for twenty years, his clients usually petty criminals and their women, his detective work the gathering of unsavory evidence to be used for blackmail or divorce, he had no illusions left.

Nevertheless, when Doris Lasswell walked into his shabby office, he

rose from his swivel chair, bowed across his desk toward her, and said politely, "Can I help you, Miss?" He was desperate for business.

The girl was maybe fifteen years old, Slack guessed. And she looked not at all like a potential client. More like a typical sloppy high-school kid with her faded blue jeans, dirty T-shirt, thong sandals, long mouse-colored hair, aggressive chin, and uncertain expression. A typical high-school girl except for one thing: she had a black eye—a beauty, just reaching yellow-and-purple maturity. Definitely not a potential client. But since one of the few things Slack had learned for sure during his sleazy career was that appearances are usually deceptive, he continued to smile warmly at her until Doris said, "Are you Mr. Slack?" She jerked a thumb over her shoulder at the chipped lettering of his name on the office door.

"I'm Slack, yes. What can I do for you?"

She hesitated. "I'm not sure you can do anything for me."

"Neither am I," Slack said, "until you tell me what your problem is. And whether you can pay me for my help. You have any money?"

She shook her head.

Slack sighed. He sat down in his swivel chair and gestured wearily toward the door. "No freebies here, Miss. I'm sorry."

She didn't move.

Slack said, "Do you understand what I'm saying? You got no money, you get no detective. So out. I'm a busy man."

The girl came to a decision of some sort. She swallowed and said, "I think you'll be interested in what I can tell you, Mr. Slack. Even if I have no money to pay you with—yet." She added the last word softly.

Slack felt a small spark of interest begin to glow. "Sit down then. And tell me who you are. And what you think I'll be so interested in."

"I'm Doris Lasswell." She sank bonelessly into the straight chair on the other side of Slack's desk. "And I think I know something about a local crime." When Slack didn't respond, she went on. "If you're a detective, you're supposed to be interested in crimes."

"That's right," said Slack. "But if you already know about this crime, whatever it is, you don't need a private detective, kid. Go tell the cops about it, not me. I've got a living to make."

"I don't want to tell the police."

"Why not?"

"Because if I told the police they wouldn't help me with my prob-

lem. But if I tell you maybe you will."

"What's that mean?"

She swallowed again and gazed rather desperately around his cramped, undusted office. Then she said in a small voice, "Maybe I better tell you about my problem first."

"I can see your problem from here," Slack said. "Your boy friend give you that beautiful shiner?"

She ran a finger tenderly over the swollen discolored flesh around her eye. Her lips pulled down. "Not my boy friend, no. I don't have one. My father."

"Your father? Well, well."

"He's not—not nice to me, Mr. Slack. Not like he used to be. Not like a father at all, really. He has a few drinks down at Casey's Tavern, and—and usually ends up doing something like this to me." She touched her eye again.

"Why?" Slack asked without much interest.

Doris scraped her sandal over the thin place in the rug at her feet. "Well, my mother left us a year ago, and my father was surprised and mad—he still is—and I suppose he tried to take it out on me, you know? Anyway, I've got to get away from him, Mr. Slack. As far as I can. I can't stand living with him any more, he's really impossible." She broke off miserably.

"Never mind," Slack said. "So you want to get away from your old man because he beats you. I can understand that. Now what's this crime you'd rather tell me about than the cops?"

"I think it could involve a lot of money," Doris said slowly, "for someone. A *lot* of money, Mr. Slack. But if I told the police about it, nobody would get any of the money, do you see? So I thought I'd tell you and maybe—" She let the sentence trail off.

"You thought I might latch onto this money and give you enough of it to get away from your father, is that it?"

"Oh, yes," Doris breathed. "*That's* it, Mr. Slack. Exactly. Would you?"

Slack leaned back in his chair. He was impressed despite himself by the girl's earnestness. Yet there had to be a joker in her story somewhere. For this ugly beat-up teenager couldn't possibly know any secret information about a lot of loose money, could she?

"I can't promise anything, Doris," Slack said carefully, "till I know a

little more about the setup."

Her battered face showed relief. "That means you'll help me?"

"Maybe. Tell me about the money."

"Well," she said, "my father and I live in Fernwood Mobile Home Park south of town. Do you know where that is?"

"Sure. Out past the phosphate plant across from an A&P store."

She nodded. "That's where my father works, the phosphate plant. Anyway, our next-door neighbor in Fernwood Park is an old retired man named Landry. He has one of those huge double-size trailers that take up two whole lots and have almost as much room in them as a regular house, you know?"

"Never mind about the trailer," Slack said.

"But that's where I saw the crime, Mr. Slack. So I have to tell you about it."

Slack sighed. "O.K., tell me about it."

"Well, Mr. Landry lives in half of his trailer and uses the other half as a sort of office and laboratory. He was a chemist for a paper company before he retired, and he still likes to fool around with experiments and things, he says. Anyway, he's been real nice to me the few times I've talked to him. He's only lived there for six months or so." She paused. "When I do my homework after school, I sit beside a window in our trailer that faces the window in Mr. Landry's laboratory. His window's usually closed and has thick curtains inside, but last Thursday it was very hot, and Mr. Landry's window was open and the curtains inside were apart a little way and I could see in."

"What did you see?"

"Mr. Landry was in there, running some kind of a machine."

"A machine?"

"Yes, a paper-cutting machine, I guess, with a little spout on top that kept dripping all the time. Anyway, Mr. Landry was cutting up a long narrow roll of paper with his machine into little pieces about an inch square, or maybe two inches. Then, every once in a while, the machine would gather up a bunch of the little squares and stick them together somehow, like in pads, you know?"

Slack was bored. He said impatiently, "This is a crime? For a retired paper maker to be making his own memo pads?"

Doris nodded vigorously. "Wait. After Mr. Landry finished making up a lot of the little pads, there was one square of paper left over. And

Mr. Landry picked it up and held it out in front of him, like he was proposing a toast or something, and then he laughed out loud and said, 'Here's to the machine that will make me rich. Time for a little celebration, Landry, don't you think?' "

Slack looked puzzled. "So he's doped out some kind of machine. That's no crime."

Doris rushed on. "But listen. Do you know what Mr. Landry did to celebrate his new machine?"

Slack shook his head. "What?"

"He *ate* that little square of paper! He put it in his mouth and chewed it up and swallowed it! I *saw* him!"

Slack froze.

Gravely, Doris nodded. "I've seen it at school," she offered by way of explanation. "Some of the kids do it."

Slack drew a deep breath. After a moment he said quietly, "How many other people have you told about this, Doris?"

"Nobody but you."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Then who sent you to me?"

"Nobody. I just decided for myself, because of what I heard about you."

"What was that?"

"That you're crooked. That you falsify reports to clients. That you're connected with the dope traffic. That you'd sell your own grandmother for money!" Doris looked him in the eye.

Slack frowned. "Where'd you hear that?"

"One of my father's friends is a deputy sheriff. He came to our trailer last night to have supper with my father. While they were drinking beer I was cooking their hamburgers in the kitchen, and I heard my father ask him about who would be a good private detective to hire to try to trace my mother and make her come home."

"Oh," said Slack sarcastically. "I get it. This smart-aleck deputy recommended *me*, I suppose. Because I'm crooked and falsify reports and so on?"

Doris regarded him out of her good eye. "No, Mr. Slack," she said. "The deputy told my father any private detective in the yellow pages would be fine *except* you. Because you're crooked and falsify."

Slack held up his hand. "Please."

"You believe me, don't you? I thought that if the deputy was right, that you'd do anything for money, you might be willing to help me if I told you about Mr. Landry."

For a full minute, Slack sat silent. Then he gave Doris a bitter smile. "I'll check out your story, and if you're handing it to me straight I'll try to help you work it out so you'll have enough bread to split from your old man. But if I do, you'll have to help me."

Doris leaned forward eagerly. "Oh, I will!" she said. "I will! Tell me how."

Slack told her.

That was Tuesday. On Friday night, Slack made a long-distance telephone call to New Orleans. "Is Mr. Prince there?" he asked the man who answered the phone. Prince was a former client.

When Prince said hello, Slack said, "Hiya, Ron. This is Howard Slack."

"Slack? The peeper?"

"Right."

"What do *you* want?" It was not a cordial greeting.

"I'd like to ask you a couple of questions, Ron. O.K.?"

"It's your nickel."

"LSD," Slack said. "Is there still a market for it? Or did it go down the tube with the hippies?"

"Are you kidding? Listen, I could sell tapioca pudding at ten bucks an ounce if there was a high in it. Sure there's still a market for LSD. Especially on the Coast. Why? You got some to sell?"

"Well, I could have," Slack answered cautiously. "Packaged in individual doses, neat and convenient."

"What do you mean, packaged?"

"Little squares of paper for each dose, bound into pads of a hundred sheets."

"Neat, all right." Prince laughed. "That way, we could distribute it through stationery stores and Woolworth's if we wanted to. How much of it do you have a line on?"

"I'm not sure yet. But a hell of a lot."

"And you want to know if I'll take it off your hands, right?"

"Right. And at what price."

Slack held his breath until Prince replied, "Depends on the quality, quantity, and how greedy you are."

"The quality's absolutely first class," Slack said at once. With Doris Lasswell acting as lookout while Landry was shopping two days before, Slack had let himself into Landry's trailer with a skeleton key and appropriated one of the pads of paper squares that he had found packed into two large suitcases in Landry's laboratory closet. Had Landry packed them up that way for shipment or delivery? Slack didn't know. But he'd tested the stuff himself—eaten one of the squares from his stolen pad—and had been rewarded with a trip so good that he'd never forget it.

Prince was saying, "How do you know the quality's all that good?"

"I tested it myself, Ron. It's that good, believe me. Super."

"Since when are you an acid head?"

"Since never. Except for experiments years ago—and this one test." He waited. "Ron?"

"Yeah?"

"How much does a dose go for on the street?"

"Since inflation," Prince said, "about three or four bucks."

Slack felt a surge of exultation. There were a couple of thousand pads in Landry's suitcases. With a hundred doses to a pad, at four dollars a dose . . .

Prince said, "But a buck, a buck and a half, is tops for your cut, Slack. I need something and my distributors need something. We do all the work."

"Sure," said Slack, "sure, I understand that." It was still a lot of money.

"So when do you figure to make delivery?" Prince asked.

"Give me a week, O.K.? I'll bring it to you myself."

"O.K., peeper." Prince hung up.

On Sunday night, just as it was getting dark, Doris called Slack at his run-down efficiency apartment on the South Side. She said, "Mr. Slack? He's going to the movies tonight."

"Landry?"

"Yes. The nine o'clock show at the Orpheum."

"How do you know?"

"He told me."

"How come?"

"After dinner tonight, when my father went off to Casey's, I looked over and saw Mr. Landry sitting in a chair behind his trailer. He has a little terrace back there, you know? And he looked pretty lonesome. So I took him over a piece of the chocolate cake I made yesterday and hung around while he ate it. He told me he was going to the movies later to see some science-fiction thing at the Orpheum."

"Did he say the *nine o'clock* show? You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. You told me to watch him and let you know when you could—"

"Yes, and you've done great, Doris. He won't get out of the theater until after eleven, which gives us plenty of time. So tonight's the night. As soon as I fill up with gas, I'll meet you in the A&P parking lot across from your place. O.K.?"

Her voice was shrill with excitement. "It certainly *is* O.K.! I can hardly wait!"

"About half an hour then," he said. Then, amused, "You got your trunks all packed to make your getaway from your old man?"

"I've had my stuff packed for three days," Doris replied seriously. "Only it's not in trunks, just a backpack." She was silent for a few seconds, then said with fervor before she hung up, "Oh, Mr. Slack, I hope I never see my father again after tonight!"

"You won't, baby, you won't," Slack murmured, staring thoughtfully at the wall. He hadn't quite decided yet what he'd do about Doris. A teenaged witness with a big mouth wasn't the safest thing to have running free on your backtrail. But first things first, he thought.

The A&P parking area across from Fernwood Mobile Home Park was dark and deserted on Sunday nights. Slack turned off his headlights as he eased into the lot, reversed his car, and pointed it at the exit ramp before he climbed out and acknowledged Doris's presence. She was seated on the low stone coping that surrounded the lot, her backpack in the shadow at her feet.

She jumped up as he approached her. "Mr. Landry left his house right after I talked to you on the phone," she told him in a conspiratorial whisper.

"Good," said Slack. "Now listen, Doris. I'm going into Landry's to get those suitcases of LSD—it'll take me two trips they're so damn

heavy, but the whole operation shouldn't take more than ten or fifteen minutes before we're on our way to New Orleans. Here." He handed her his car keys. "Have the car trunk open when I get back with the first load, and put your own stuff in the back seat with my bag. O.K.?"

"O.K. But please hurry!"

Slack crossed the road quietly and disappeared inside the gates of Fernwood Park.

Exactly eight minutes later he drove his second-hand Chevrolet out of the A&P lot with two suitcases full of LSD in the trunk and a shivering Doris Lasswell in the passenger seat beside him. "No need to be scared, kid," he said. "I told you it would be a breeze."

"I'm not scared," Doris said. "I'm terribly happy and excited, that's all. Aren't you?"

"Yeah, I guess I am at that." Slack shook his head in disbelief, but his voice held a thread of triumph. "How about us for a couple of operators, Doris? It only takes us a lousy little ten minutes to solve the biggest problems we got. Ten minutes for you to get loose from your old man, ten minutes for me to get rich." He rolled the word on his tongue in the manner of a man tasting a vintage wine. He drove sedately across town at a speed slightly below the posted limit. The Sunday-night traffic was light. After several miles, he turned onto the interstate highway.

Doris, nestled into her seat, maintained a contented silence for thirty miles. Then she murmured, "I'll never be able to thank you for this, Mr. Slack. I can't believe it yet. No more beatings, no more sneaky talk about me by the kids at school, no more listening to the awful things my father says about my mother." She took a deep breath.

"Don't worry about thanking me," Slack said. "Those suitcases in the trunk are thanks enough."

Doris took a comb out of the pocket of her jeans and ran it through her hair. "Is this the way to New Orleans?" she asked in the naive tone of a kid who had never been out of her hometown. And she probably hadn't, Slack thought. He looked at her in the glow of the dashboard light. Now that her black eye was almost healed, she wasn't so ugly.

He said, "This is the shortest way and the quickest. And the quickest is what we want right now. By the time old Landry gets home from the movies, we'll be a hundred miles away."

"Do you think we're safe yet?"

"Safe? How safe can we get? Landry'll never figure out who took his LSD, and your father will never figure out that you ran away with the guy who lifted it. It will be at least twenty-four hours before either of us is missed." He paused, then said abruptly, "Who told you we were going to New Orleans?"

"You did." She looked at him in surprise. "Don't you remember? In the parking lot. *Aren't* we going to New Orleans?"

"Well, yeah, we are." Slack cursed himself for his carelessness. "I don't remember telling you."

Doris laughed. "I helped you steal Mr. Landry's LSD, didn't I? So we're partners, aren't we? So why *shouldn't* you tell me where we're going?"

"No reason. I'm just jumpy, I guess."

"Besides," said Doris, "we have to go *somewhere* to get away from my father and Mr. Landry. New Orleans sounds like a neat place to me."

"Everybody says it's great," said Slack more easily. "I've never been there myself."

She turned and looked at him curiously. "Then what made you decide to go there now, Mr. Slack?"

"Business."

She nodded wisely. "You mean the LSD, don't you? Somebody in New Orleans is going to buy it from us. Isn't that what you mean?"

"Shut up, kid, will you, for a while? How about taking a little nap?"

"O.K.," she agreed readily. "I'll try. But I'm probably too excited to go to sleep."

She leaned back against the headrest, closed her eyes, and remained quiet for fifteen minutes while Slack drove northward on the interstate at a steady fifty-five miles per hour. Then she stirred and sat up.

"I can't sleep, Mr. Slack. I'm sorry. I keep thinking how wonderful you are to be doing all this for me. Getting the LSD away from Mr. Landry, taking me with you to New Orleans to try to sell it. Do you know somebody there who'll buy it?"

"Yeah," said Slack. He had just about decided what he'd have to do with Doris Lasswell.

"Who is it?"

"Who is what?"

"Your connection in New Orleans."

"I told you to shut up," Slack said. "You don't need to know anything about New Orleans. I'll handle that end of it, don't worry."

"I can't help worrying," protested Doris. "I want to know who's going to buy it. We're partners, so I *should* know, shouldn't I? Suppose something happens to you before we get to New Orleans? If I don't know who we're selling to, I couldn't get any money for it! Then I'd have to go back to my—my father—again." She was close to tears.

"Nothing's going to happen to me, for God's sake!" Slack said, showing his exasperation. That was the moment when he decided definitely that he would have to kill Doris Lasswell. "But if it'll make you feel any better, I'll tell you. Our buyer is a guy named Ron Prince who runs a nightclub called The Missing Link in New Orleans. Now are you satisfied?"

Doris nodded vigorously. "Ron Prince. The Missing Link nightclub. I'll remember that. And thanks for trusting me, Mr. Slack. How did you happen to know about Mr. Prince if you've never been to New Orleans?"

"I helped him get a divorce from his first wife when he lived in Florida," Slack said shortly. "Anything else you want to know?"

A genial voice from the back seat of the Chevy said, "I think that's enough, thank you." Something round and hard and hollow and cold was pressed suddenly against the nape of Slack's neck.

Slack's heart jumped in his chest. A glance at his rearview mirror showed him a dark figure kneeling behind his seat, evidently having arisen from a recumbent position on the floor. "Just drive quietly along to the next exit ramp, please, Mr. Slack. And Doris, my dear—" the voice lost its geniality for a moment and the pressure against Slack's neck increased—"if I'm forced to shoot Mr. Slack for misbehaving in any way while we're still in motion, will you please take charge of the steering wheel until we come to a halt?"

After a moment, out of a very dry throat, Slack managed to croak, "Who the hell are you?"

The man in the back seat laughed. "You might say I'm Doris's *first* partner," he replied. "The one before you, Mr. Slack."

"I don't get it."

"My name's Landry. That LSD in the trunk of this car is mine. And

you have just given Doris and me the one bit of information we needed to find a market for it."

Slack gritted his teeth. He risked a glance sideways at Doris in the seat beside him. She was smiling.

Landry went on. "Just keep the car at fifty-five, please. I'm afraid Doris deceived you, Mr. Slack. When she discovered that I was manufacturing pads of LSD papers in my trailer, she came to me at once and tried to blackmail me into helping her escape from her father."

"Before I came to you, Mr. Slack," said Doris helpfully.

"But Doris caught me in an awkward position," Landry continued. "Contrary to what she may have told you, I did not retire from my paper company. I was fired. And thus I had but a tiny pension and very little money. True, I had invented an ingenious machine that automatically measures accurate doses of LSD onto paper, cuts the paper into squares, and binds the squares into pads. But I didn't yet have the foggiest notion of how I was going to market the stuff. If Doris carried out her threat to expose my activities to the police, I would no doubt be charged with conspiracy to manufacture a controlled substance, and perhaps draw a prison term of considerable duration. In which case, I told Doris, she'd probably *never* get away from her brutal father. When I explained all this to her she understood my dilemma at once and offered to wait until I found a buyer for my product. Indeed, she offered to help me do so if she could. And she has redeemed that promise splendidly, has she not? With your help, of course, Mr. Slack."

Doris said suddenly, "There's an exit coming up, Mr. Landry."

"Excellent," said Landry. "Take it, Mr. Slack."

Slack slowed down and edged into the exit lane. He forced himself to keep his voice level when he said, "O.K., Landry, you and the kid here conned me. I admit it. You've got what you want out of me. So what happens now? You don't think Ron Prince will buy from strangers, do you?"

"Why not? If the merchandise is satisfactory, which it is. We'll give it a try anyway."

Slack drove down the exit ramp from the interstate, very conscious of the prodding of the gun in his neck. "Turn east," Landry directed him, "and pull up the first chance you get."

When the Chevy drifted to a halt on the shoulder of the narrow

country road, Slack took his hands off the steering wheel and kept his foot on the brake. He didn't try to turn his head against the urgent pressure of the gun. Doris reached over and switched off the motor.

Slack said, "Listen, Landry, you've got to face the fact that you're a rank amateur in the drug business. And it's a very tough business, believe me. A guy as inexperienced as you are is going to need a professional to help you get anywhere at all."

"A professional like you?"

"Right. For instance, to absorb the production of that machine of yours you'll need a lot of buyers, not just one. I can put you in touch with plenty of them."

"Mr. Prince could probably do that too," Doris ventured.

Slack fought down panic. He ignored Doris and said to Landry, "You and your fancy machine won't last a month in the trade unless you know the ropes. You'll be mixed up with the mob, remember. They'll swallow you in one bite."

"Yes, I suppose that's theoretically possible," Landry agreed. The prospect didn't seem to worry him. "However, you realize, don't you, Mr. Slack, that you have now become merely an embarrassment to us? As you say, we've already got what we wanted out of you."

Slack sat very still in his seat. "So what are you going to do with me?"

"What were *you* going to do with Doris?" Landry's tone had turned as cold as the wind off a glacier. "There's your answer, Slack."

Slack gathered himself for action while Landry went on in an amused way. "You say I'm an amateur, and I guess you have a point, because who but a fumbling amateur would find himself without a gun in a situation like this? Who but an amateur would try to keep a hardened professional like you under control by merely pressing the end of a lead plumbing pipe into his neck?"

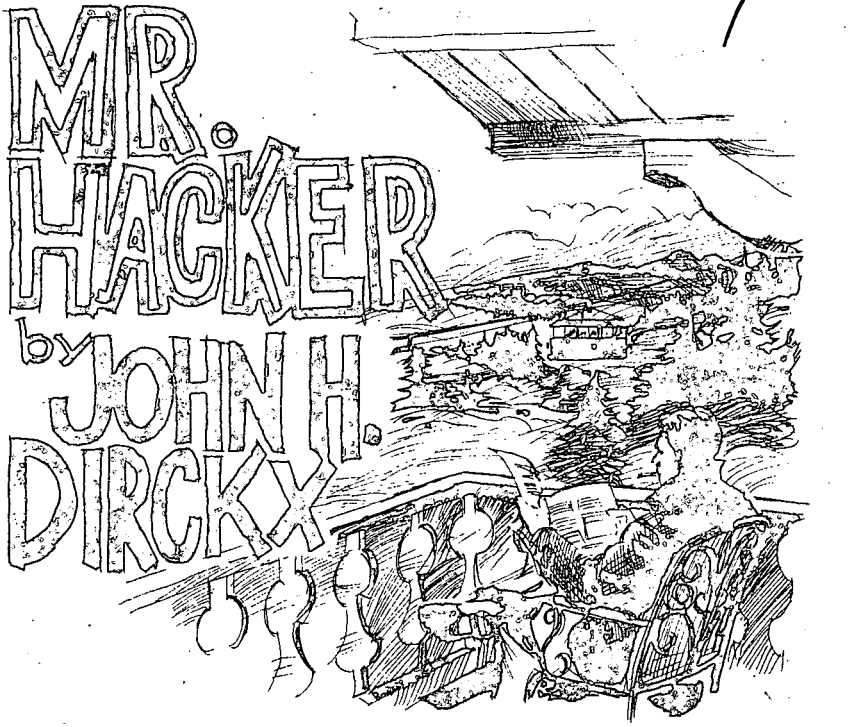
A lead pipe? Slack ducked away from it like a striking snake and twisted savagely about in his seat, reaching over the seat-back for Landry. And he might have managed to seize the old man and render him harmless if Doris, at that moment, hadn't leaned over and wrapped her arms around Slack in a fierce embrace.

Slack's last thought before Landry's lead pipe thudded against his temple with crushing force was that Doris Lasswell richly deserved every black eye her father had ever given her.

Hacker had spent many years in the service of death . . .

MR. HACKER

by JOHN H. DIRCKX



Mr. Hacker stepped out into the covered porch of the Hotel Aveline at Montrouge and lit a cigarette. An opaque grey mist, as clinging as wet gauze, coiled and slunk about the stone pillars. Though he carried a French paper and leafed desultorily through it, Hacker's gaze strayed often to the graveled promenade before the hotel.

The morning sun, just clearing the crest of the mountain some eight hundred meters above Montrouge, bathed the scene in a wan light the

color of sauterne. The ski slopes were deserted, the entrance to the toboggan slides chained up. Not a single human figure moved along the promenade, lined with dark and dripping firs, that swept past the hotel, the bandstand, and the restaurant pavilion to end at the funicular railway.

There was nothing surprising in the absence of tourists and sporting enthusiasts on a morning like this. The skiing was always better, they said, on the Swiss side, and the rain and fog were enough to thwart the most determined of sightseers and the most intrepid of Alpinists. In any event, the season was nearly over, and already the army of guides, gigolos, and other two-legged parasites had begun the annual migration southward. But the most casual observer could not have failed to notice Mr. Hacker's disappointment that as the minutes passed no one emerged from the swirling fog to climb the broad steps of the hotel.

At length Hacker sat down in a wrought-iron chair, turned up his collar, and went back to his paper with renewed indifference. He was traveling just then on a Swiss passport under the name of Otto Christian Radling. In his time he had been a man of many names and many nationalities, and if I have chosen to call him Hacker it is not because he had any more title to that name than to Radling, but because it derived a certain grisly appositeness from his particular line of work. Mr. Hacker was a professional killer, and his favorite weapon was a broad, heavy sheath-knife not unlike a butcher's cleaver.

Hacker sincerely and robustly enjoyed his work. He was so fond of taking human life that he would perhaps have gone about doing so for fun had he not been equally fond of money and the things it could buy. As it was, he was probably the highest-paid political assassin in the world. He often told himself that one may as well hang for a sheep as for a lamb.

Not that there was much danger of his hanging at all. It was his private boast that he had never seen the inside of a jail cell—had never appeared before a magistrate for so much as a traffic offense. Nature had given him so undistinguished and nondescript an appearance that he had never seen the need for dark glasses or false whiskers. Without scars, tattoos, or distinguishing marks, he was the proverbial Caucasian of medium height and build, and he was cosmopolitan enough to blend into any environment and to vanish in any crowd.

To the best of his knowledge, his photograph did not adorn any

Interpol file. The only set of inked fingerprints ever taken had for fifteen years been mouldering somewhere with his other army records, unless (as he fondly hoped) they had succumbed to fire or flood. Once, just once, he had made a slip.

In the period before he began to specialize in political targets, he had carried out a number of what the American newspapers called "gangland killings" or "hits." (It was to a reporter in Detroit that he owed the epithet "Mr. Hacker.") The Chicago police had found a bloody thumbprint at the scene of one of his performances. Though he could never be certain that it was his thumbprint, he thought it likely, and that was enough to keep him on the alert against further mistakes. For a while he had even taken to wearing gloves.

If he could be tied to that murder in Chicago, a dozen others around the world might eventually be laid at his door. He felt sure that there were plenty of witnesses who, though they had found it impossible to describe him from memory, could readily and positively identify him in the flesh. Sometimes that certainty made him a little paranoid. He had a particular horror of misunderstandings and equivocal situations.

With an air of decision he threw away his sixth cigarette and folded up his newspaper. His arrival at Montrouge on the previous evening and his fruitless vigil this morning had been strictly in the line of business. By one of the devious channels through which he dealt with prospective clients, he had agreed to make contact at 9:00 A.M. with a dark, slender man in a plaid ulster. Ten o'clock had now come and gone and no such man had appeared. Hacker thrust his paper down on the seat of his chair and walked into the hotel to pay his bill and collect his single piece of luggage.

Five minutes later he stepped out into the mist and swirling fog and hurried along the track to the funicular railway station. A bus was about to depart, but it would take an hour to reach Plegues, largely because of the mandatory stop at a tourist trap halfway down. Hacker, who preferred direct methods and direct routes, chose to return to the foot of the mountain by the same way he had come up.

The guard in the station office abandoned his stove and his hot chocolate long enough to sell Hacker a ticket and utter one or two perfunctory imprecations against the weather. An empty cable car was just coming down from Janquetine near the summit, moving with maddening slowness through the mist. The measured throb of the pavement

betrayed the operation of a powerful stationary engine in some recess hollowed out of the rock below.

With a raucous *grincement* of brakes the car came to rest opposite the covered platform and the guard dodged out of his box to throw open the door for its lone passenger. Hacker stepped aboard, put his case in the rack, and sat down on an iron seat, cold and hard under a heavy coat of enamel which, like the outside of the car and nearly everything else in sight at Montrouge, was apple green.

Just as the guard was ringing the bell to announce the departure of the car, a young woman in a white raincoat and a black cloche hat of imitation leather dashed up to the barrier and asked for a ticket. She carried only a small handbag and an umbrella. Hacker, who was far more observant of his fellow men than they of him, remembered having seen her dining alone at the table d'hote on the previous evening.

The guard shut them in together and released the brake, the car lurching a meter or two along the track before settling down to its regular sluggish pace. Hacker peered out through the dewy glass. An opaque fog billowed up like steam out of the valley, enshrouding the tracks and concealing everything below. Soon all landmarks had vanished. The station they had just left, nearby peaks, the sun, the sky—all were blotted out by the envelope of grey vapor in which the car floated in silent and almost ethereal isolation.

Happening to glance back at his fellow passenger, who had remained standing at the rear of the car just inside the door, Hacker was momentarily staggered to find himself gazing into the muzzle of a revolver. Here, then, was the explanation of the missed appointment at the hotel. He had been set up, just as he had set up so many others, by a female assassin in the pay of someone he had too often or too severely inconvenienced. Where the police of four continents had failed, this woman, or those behind her, had succeeded.

"Do you remember George Oakenside?" she asked in bad French, and he perceived that she was much younger than he had thought.

"No, I don't believe I do." Here he was not being quite truthful, for he had once played several pleasant rubbers of bridge with Mr. Oakenside at a hotel in São Paulo before making a sudden and drastic rearrangement of that gentleman's circulatory system.

"*C'est drôle.* It's only been eight months since you cut his throat. I remember you perfectly."

"Ah, you mean that American chap last year at São Paulo. A shocking affair, but you're very much mistaken in thinking it was I who killed him. You must be—"

"His daughter Julie. I was heavier then." (She said *plus grande* but he knew she meant stouter, not taller.)

"Yes, I think I remember you now. But what is all this, Julie?" He waved with a stiff and artificial gesture toward the revolver, which was still leveled squarely at him. "Surely you have no intention of killing me?"

"That's exactly what I intend to do," she said, lapsing into English. Her eyes had a hard and triumphant glitter in the half light, and her voice rang flat and metallic. "As much trouble as it took to find you and get you up here, I'm not going to let you get away now."

Hacker grimly pondered the irony of his position. He, who had collected enormous sums for efficiently and discreetly eliminating absolute monarchs and mass murderers, had been hunted down and brought to bay by a mere girl, who now held him at gunpoint, muffled up in a blanket of fog and shut in an iron cage without hope of escape. His many years in the service of death had not effaced from Hacker's soul those two peculiarly human sentiments, the dread of one's own dissolution and the desperate conviction that somehow it will never take place. Now insane hope began to give way to icy terror as he weighed his chances against a determined, vengeful, and armed opponent.

In a quarter of an hour they would be at Plegues. Her time was running out, but so was his. Talking gently, pleadingly, and a bit incoherently, he began inching toward her, his eyes fixed on the unwavering muzzle of the revolver. She perceived his intention at once, raised the weapon, and deliberately fired. In that instant, he ducked and hurled himself at her knees.

The skirmish was brief but decisive. Her shot went wild, drilling a hole in the window. Then he took possession of the revolver and added her to his long list of victims.

Hacker almost never used firearms, considering them too noisy, too easily traced, and, above all, too impersonal. Mechanically, he wiped his fingerprints from the weapon, an antique .38 with ornate scrollwork. This was the first time he had killed in self-defense, and he found the attendant sensations new and not altogether unpleasant. But there was no time now either to savor novel emotions or to congratu-

late himself on a narrow escape. Plegues was coming inexorably closer. He had to get rid of the girl and all evidence that she had ever been in the car—except for the bullet hole and the gunpowder fumes, both of which he counted on the fog to hide.

He had no trouble opening the door from inside the car. Wondering how far the snowy slopes lay below the railway trestle at this point, he tumbled the body down the iron steps. It vanished without a sound, swallowed up instantly in a churning cauldron of fog. Close behind it went the handbag, the umbrella, and finally the revolver. Hacker shut the door, rubbed out one or two flecks of blood on the floor with the sole of his shoe, and sat down to compose himself.

Presently the tile-roofed station at Plegues swam up through the fog to meet him, and the car scraped to a halt. A fair crowd had assembled on the platform. A crew of railway employees were preparing to couple a second car to Hacker's for the return trip up the mountain. It was not, however, a guard in the livery of the railway company who opened the door of the car but a damp and irritable-looking man in a black homburg, whose entire being was stamped with the word "policeman."

As he rolled back the door he peered into the depths of the car and then looked sharply at Hacker.

"Where is the young lady who entered this car at Montrouge?" he asked.

Hacker gave him his blankest stare.

"No lady entered the car at Montrouge," he replied. "As you can see, I came down alone."

"I can see that you *arrived* alone. Perhaps you had better step in here and let me see your papers. I am Commissaire Jacot of the police. One of these gentlemen will attend to your bag." Two colleagues materialized out of the fog and the quartet moved to a deserted corner of the station, where Hacker handed Jacot his passport.

"Traveling for pleasure, I presume, Herr Radling? Now then, about this lady. Where is she, sir?"

"But I tell you, there was no lady."

"Come, come, Herr Radling, that simply won't do. I am perfectly certain that a lady started down from Montrouge in that car with you. I've just had the guard there on the telephone and he described the lady, as well as yourself, in some detail."

He stepped closer and grew confidential. "Did you help her out of the car, sir?"

Hacker swallowed. "Help her—?"

"I don't suggest that you and she had any prior acquaintance. But as it is clear that she has gotten away, I thought you might perhaps have been persuaded to assist in her escape."

"Escape from what?"

Jacot eyed him narrowly. "From the police. This lady is thought to have taken a sheaf of diplomatic papers from one of the guests at the Hotel Aveline. She didn't by any chance give you anything to keep for her?"

"No, certainly not."

"Hmm. We can verify that at headquarters, of course. I shall have to ask you to come along and make a statement regarding the lady's movements."

"As you wish," murmured Hacker, with a show of resignation that he did not feel.

They made the thirty-minute drive to Besançon in silence. There, to his horror and humiliation, Hacker was searched and fingerprinted, then left alone with his thoughts for a very long time.

At last Jacot put in an appearance, looking brisk and businesslike, and laid a dossier on the desk. "It turns out," he said in a faintly apologetic tone, "that this affair of the diplomatic papers was all an unfortunate mistake. The documents were temporarily mislaid—a waiter at the hotel saw the young lady running down the path to the funicular, leaving her luggage behind—*que sais-je? C'est un malentendu, tout simplement.*

"However, the fact remains that the lady vanished from the car." He drummed a quiet tattoo on the dossier before him and looked up expectantly at Hacker.

Hacker had not devoted his long wait exclusively to smoking cigarettes and perspiring. He now spun out a highly circumstantial narration of the lady's abrupt and suicidal exit from the cable car just before it reached Plegues.

"Naturally," he added, with fitting tokens of contrition, "I said nothing at first, not wishing to be detained and perhaps charged with a crime."

"What crime?"

"Why, murder. She jumped headlong from the railway trestle. She can hardly have survived."

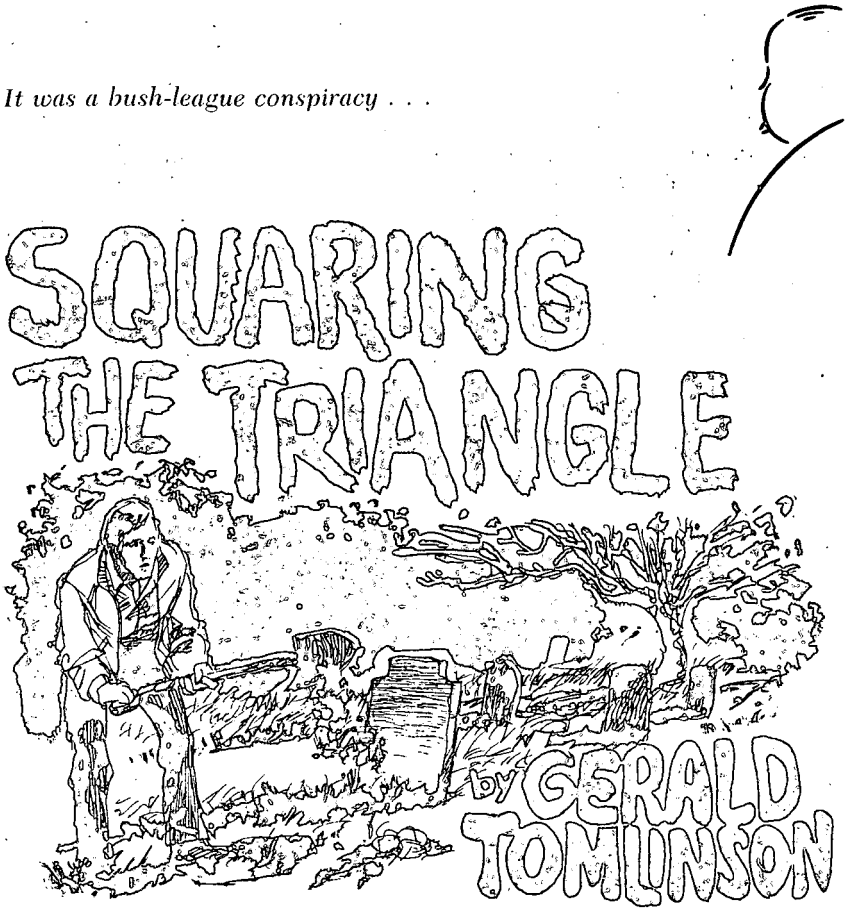
"No, as a matter of fact she did not. Upon arriving here I learned that the young lady had been found dead about a mile above Plegues." He consulted a sheet in the dossier. "Four bullet wounds, two of them through the heart. Rather a thorough job of suicide, wouldn't you say?"

Hacker moved uneasily in his chair but made no reply.

"The weapon has not yet been found, but it will. You see now why it was necessary for you to be searched and fingerprinted." The policeman pondered the last sheet in the dossier, apparently a lengthy telegram.

"Tell me, Herr Radling," he asked, with the superior and slightly amused air of one who already knows the answer, "have you ever been to Chicago?"

It was a bush-league conspiracy . . .



Mrs. Percy Goodman suspected her husband of running around with other women.

This running around: It happens even in conservative upstate towns like Elm City. No one knows that fact better than I do, since I'm an Elm City private detective specializing in divorce.

Mrs. Goodman, learning of my specialty from the yellow pages, paid a visit to my office on the floor above Grodek's Easy Credit Jewelers.

She agreed to my daily fee plus expenses. I was to track her errant husband, Percy, a guy who, judging by his passport photo, had all the sex appeal of a warthog.

As usual, my creditors were only a few snarling leaps behind me, and I needed the fee from Mrs. Goodman a lot more than I needed another dreary stretch of rye and solitaire. With a bitter little smile, she wrote out a check for my retainer, punctuating her pen strokes with the clenched-teeth demand that I learn where, when, and with whom her husband was tripping the light fantastic.

Having no pressing business engagements or affairs d'amour, I began at once.

Percy Goodman's tracks turned out to be mostly tire tracks. Although he claimed to be an Elm City advertising copywriter, he acted more like a self-employed chauffeur. He drove a tan Chrysler station wagon that was roughly the size of my High Street apartment, and for a straying, greying Romeo, he drove it to some very strange places.

Like funeral parlors.

After checking through the back pages of a morning newspaper in Latimer's, a downtown drugstore, he headed for the Morley Funeral Home on Lake Street. Dressed in a charcoal-grey suit, suitable for mourning, he stepped briskly but with grim purpose through the front door. I sailed in after him.

He entered a large room off the hallway, a sweet-scented bower in which rested the pale form of one Kevin Patrick Finn, late of the city's fire brigade. Goodman marched over to Finn's body, studied it carefully, crossed himself, smoothed his hair, stifled a yawn, and left.

He repeated this routine at five more funeral parlors in different parts of the city, after which he stopped at Amy's Diner on Route 17 for a cup of chili, a BLT on toast, and coffee. I joined him, four stools away.

Before I'd finished half my coffee or tasted a single french fry, Goodman seized his check and aimed for the door. I fluttered a couple of dollar bills toward the counter and followed him out.

At first I thought he'd noticed me and was trying to shake my tail. But it wasn't that. Speed was his lifestyle. He was a whirlwind, a tornado, which, for all I know, may go with being in the advertising game, even in a small city. He wasn't a young man—fifty-five at

least—but he did everything at high speed.

Back in the station wagon, he switched from his funeral-parlor trek to a fast-paced buying tour. First he went to a sporting-goods store on Church Street, where he picked up a 30.06 rifle, a red hunting jacket, and a deer-hunting license. Then he drove to a bicycle shop on Grand Central Avenue, where he bought a ten-speed touring bike. He arranged these items neatly in the back of his station wagon.

He needed plenty of space, as it turned out, because at his next stop—a garden center out on Route 347—he bought three fifty-pound bags of topsoil and a long-handled shovel. At four o'clock in the afternoon he ended his strange workday by loading in a 9x12-foot dropcloth and a crowbar from Schirmer's, a paint-and-hardware store in the suburb of Evian Heights.

Curious but dull.

The early evening proved more entertaining. From Evian Heights, Goodman drove north on the old Crombie road to the Highmount Inn, a three-star restaurant perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Tionega Valley, a broad, fertile flood plain. Prosperous dairy farms lay below the restaurant like a patchwork quilt of green and brown. The main dining room was cantilevered in space so that diners with window tables had a panoramic view of the valley and the hills beyond.

Percy Goodman arrived just before 5:00 P.M., parking his car near the rear of the lot, far from the highway. The restaurant was fifteen miles from the Goodman home in Elm City, which Percy seemed to think was far enough for whatever privacy he needed.

I was guessing.

I was right. A woman was waiting for him in the bar. She bore no resemblance to the sour, drawn-faced Mrs. Goodman, but she was no ravishing temptress either. Just a tall blonde, straight-haired and fairly attractive, with a nice smile.

She looked to be in her late twenties. She wore a simple white dress, and when she crossed the room to meet him it was with a matching simplicity, a kind of farm-girl self-consciousness. She had good legs but didn't make a show of it.

Goodman, for his part, murmured "Delia" loud enough for me to hear, kissed her chastely on the cheek, and the two of them were shown to a window table.

I eased myself onto a black upholstered bar stool within sight of the

table. Ordering an expense-account Michelob, I watched and waited.

They clinked Old Fashioned glasses, lit cigarettes, ordered champagne, dined on roast duck, and topped it off with Drambuie and coffee.

I continued to drink beer and chew on a cigar.

Somewhere between the Old Fashioneds and the champagne, I saw Goodman pass his inamorata a small key with a round yellow head—a key to one of the public lockers in the old DL&W train station down the block from Goodman's ad agency. Although his movements had been unguarded up to then, this particular act had an air of stealth. A bush-league conspiracy, I thought—the only kind I see on a day-to-day basis.

Nothing else passed between them that night except some earnest, whispered conversation and later, outside in the parking lot, a long, clinging goodnight kiss. A few moments afterward Delia was gone.

Goodman drove back to Elm City. So did I, keeping my VW well behind his Chrysler in the gathering twilight. I'd debated whether to stick with him or find out the lady's identity. I'd opted to follow Percy.

I figured he'd go home at this point and tell his wife about the client he'd taken to dinner. I was wrong. When he turned west on Harding Street and north on Vine, I knew where he was going. Edgewood Cemetery.

Annoyed but hardly stunned, I kept my dark blue VW two blocks back as Goodman crawled through the stone-pillared gate. It was 8:45 and dark, but with a half moon. Watching him take a slow curve up the hill, I followed him in. The main gate, the only one they used any more, would be closed and locked at 9:00 P.M.

I knew that and so did Percy Goodman. He was a night-comer. Unless he moved a lot faster than I expected him to, the two of us were going to be trapped here for the next twelve hours. The new tools and other items in his station wagon suggested that he had work to do.

I parked near a grey mausoleum with a walled-up door, not knowing exactly where Goodman had gone. It didn't really matter. I knew what he was after. There aren't many things you can do overnight in a graveyard.

If you happen to be trapped in a cemetery you can wander around, of course, and I did. Finally, a little before midnight, I saw the beam

of a flashlight in the new section of the cemetery off Rodda Road. Creeping as close as I needed to, I saw what I expected to see: Goodman up to his knees in a fresh grave, a mound of dirt beside him on a painters' dropcloth. The granite marker nearest me said: ERIC MATHIS, 1884–1933. It was a family plot, I suppose. One of the bodies Goodman had viewed that morning belonged to Philip Mathis.

I made my way back to the VW, a good half mile off, took an old army blanket out of the trunk, and tried to go to sleep in the back seat. It was no use. I'm a big man and the VW is a small car. Besides, the picture of Goodman at work was too vivid. I thrashed around until the light of day, thinking of old horror movies and white-clad nymphs and yellow locker keys. It was a dismal way to make a living, I told myself. Maybe I should learn to write advertising copy.

At a few minutes before nine, groggy and ill-tempered, I took leave of the mausoleum and pulled my car into the small parking lot beside the cemetery's administration building, a Gothic stonepile with mullioned windows. My throat felt scratchy, my body stiff as a cadaver's.

A thin balding man, probably the night watchman, stared out at me from a window of the administration building. He seemed puzzled. When I glared back at him, he disappeared. A few minutes later he came out to unlock the gate. He ignored the out-of-place VW and me.

Five minutes after that, Goodman's tan station wagon rolled down the S-curving asphalt. As soon as it passed through the gate, I pulled out of the parking lot and resumed the chase, glumly reviewing my per diem arrangement with Mrs. Goodman. I'd been on the job for one day. A day's pay for twenty-four hours straight work. I was the quintessential victim of a market economy—underpaid, hungry, gullible, and beat.

Goodman must have been tired too, but I suppose his natural hypertension plus the thought of Delia, his lady in white, kept him going.

I wondered what he had in mind. If it was what it looked like, he wasn't acting all that shrewd. A body full of embalming fluid doesn't make the perfect victim for a hoked-up hunting accident.

I would have been willing to bet there was a corpse in the back of his station wagon. I'd also have bet the corpse was wearing a red hunting jacket with Percy Goodman's deer-hunting license pinned to the back: New York State standard issue. Percy Goodman, or rather his stand-in, was about to depart this vale of tears.

It wouldn't work, I told my dashboard solemnly. Not as a hunting accident. No, not that easily. I flipped on the radio and caught the last verse of a Johnny Cash monologue on the nature of youth and truth, full of platitudes I couldn't buy.

Goodman took the Price Mills cutoff to Route 44, then pointed the wagon west. He stopped for breakfast at a truck-stop diner, Sophia's, in West Frigo.

As I followed him in, I peered into the back of his station wagon. Sure enough, a heavy plaid blanket covered his cargo in the right rear of the wagon. The body of Philip Mathis was still surrounded by dirt, I figured, but now the dirt was in three fifty-pound bags that Goodman had bought to keep the corpse from sliding around. A flowerless hearse.

Sophia's place swarmed with life, mostly low by Percy Goodman's standards. I welcomed the elbow-to-elbow truckers because I needed coffee and cover at least as much as he did.

As I sipped my coffee, it struck me that for all these hours I'd been following Goodman closely, almost entirely by car, and still he wasn't suspicious. One reason was that he never looked in the rear-view mirror. Drivers like that can be a menace on the highway, but they're a pleasure to tail.

Goodman, ever the dynamo, took to the road again within ten minutes.

Route 44 turns into a wilderness trail west of Tyrone, narrow and rutted, visited mainly by hunters and small game. There are a few houses but no villages of any size except Reedsville. The road is lined with evergreens, rock outcroppings, occasional rusty beer cans, and now and then a hunting lodge.

The hills get higher west of Reedsville, and there are places where the road is treacherous, with banks plunging straight down from the edge with no guard rails.

I'd been staying farther and farther back from Goodman's wagon. Since it was October and therefore hunting season, we passed a few cars. Not many, though. In this wilderness, even the unobservant adman would have to notice pretty soon that he was being followed.

Then suddenly I lost him.

There was no one ahead of me. I speeded up—uncertain, irritated. I began taking the curves too fast for safety. No car appeared. The

Chrysler had vanished. Goodman was gone.

After five miles of this futility, I swung around and started back, again at too high a speed for the road, swearing at Goodman, swearing at myself.

At first I found nothing on the road in this direction either. But at last, nearly despairing, I did see something: black smoke rising from a ravine. And then I saw something else: a turnoff from the main road. This turnoff led around a low hill, rejoining the main road a few hundred yards farther on.

I took the turnoff, which proved to be hardly more than a cowpath.

Behind the hill, through scattered underbrush, a car had plunged off the road and plummeted almost straight down for a couple of hundred feet. It lay in a blazing heap at the bottom.

It was no accident. I was sure of that.

The late Philip Mathis, dressed and identified as the hunter Percy Goodman, had left the world for the second and last time.

The real Percy Goodman, traveling under an assumed name, was bicycling back toward civilization.

How do you tail a bicycle when you're driving a car? It's a good question. It's a question for a blue-ribbon PI symposium sometime. I didn't know. I didn't find out.

My eyes were focusing badly. My head was filled with jackhammers. I could have killed Goodman out of pure frustration.

And I did.

Rounding a long, badly banked curve screened by a stand of pine trees I was pushing the VW even harder than I was pushing myself. A pickup truck with a deer slung over the fender forced me to cut sharply to the right. I felt the car shudder. My front wheel caught a rut at the side of the road, hung in it, shimmying, and the back wheel slammed into the same groove.

And there was Percy Goodman, straight as a pine tree, upright in the saddle of his new ten-speed bike. He was on my side of the road, steering away from the pickup. He turned his ugly head instinctively toward me, scowling for just a moment, suddenly seeing cause for alarm. Fear showed, mortal fear, a swift, jolting journey into fear, and he swung the bike as far to the right as he could.

I cut my steering wheel to the left. No go. It was too late. The VW

tried to respond but couldn't. It hung there. Its bumper and front end plowed into Goodman with a stomach-turning crunch, throwing him in the air and back over the top of the car. His feet clacked off the windshield. The bike twisted in front, catching, dragging on the VW's bumper.

The pickup truck never slowed down.

I got out and walked back.

Goodman was a bloody mess. The poor guy was every bit as dead as the embalmed and recently cremated Philip Mathis.

Now there were two Percy Goodmans, both corpses. One here, one back in the ravine. But this one, as I'd guessed, didn't appear to be named Goodman. The papers in his wallet identified him as Arthur A. Simpson of 87 West 11th Street, New York City.

His papers were in order. He was a certified living man, a new man, albeit dead.

My duty was clear. I should report the bicycle accident to the state police, hoping it wouldn't double my insurance payments. I should report the death of Percy Goodman to his widow, my client, hoping she would pay me for two days' work.

That's what I should have done.

But I looked at it this way. I'd fallen right into the middle of a bonanza. As Shakespeare said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men . . ." My tide, I thought, was coming in.

A lot of hard, thoughtful work had been done by the deceased. Goodman was no fool. His plan might very well have worked if I hadn't been on his tail. And it might work just as easily for me.

The smoke would soon die down over Philip Mathis's fiery leavetaking. When his body was discovered, Mathis would be identified as the missing Goodman, exactly as Goodman had planned it. A death certificate would be issued. The widow would receive whatever insurance there was on Percy Goodman's life.

Everyone would be happy. Especially Goodman, relaxing in New York with his new identity and his young lady in white.

But it hadn't worked that way.

The real Percy Goodman lay here in front of me, dead as a mackerel. I could easily dispose of him in the vast surrounding woods. With his wallet gone, he would be nobody at all. With winter on the

way, in the deep snows of the region, he probably wouldn't be found until spring. Time enough.

Time enough, that is, for me to become Arthur A. Simpson of 87 West 11th Street, New York City.

I could be Mr. Simpson for as long as I had to be. Two or three weeks maybe, to get the maximum benefit out of the Simpson identity. No one would be likely to miss me back in Elm City. I'm a bachelor, a loner, and a private detective of uncertain habits.

Arthur A. Simpson had a driver's license, an insurance identification card, a Social Security card, a savings bankbook with a small balance, a checkbook with an even smaller balance, a passport, and six new credit cards. This phantom Mr. Simpson was a winner. I liked him already.

Simpson also had two round-trip airline tickets to Caracas, departing JFK late tomorrow. And for tonight he had a confirmed reservation for two—Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Simpson—at the Valley Vista Inn in Tyrone.

And there was something else.

In my mind's eye I saw a magic yellow locker key. I suspected it was a key to something a lot more profitable than a credit-card binge. I saw it as a key to my future, a key to money—big money.

It had to be. That was the way the story added up. In a locker near Goodman's Elm City office there were stacks and stacks of nice green banknotes in a suitcase.

I pocketed the wallet and papers of Arthur A. Simpson. Then I dragged Goodman's body about a hundred yards into the woods and covered it with yellowed oak leaves, pine needles, and a couple of dead tree branches. Nothing fancy. Just a modest country funeral.

The bicycle, which looked like a twisted modern sculpture, I intended to drop elsewhere. I jammed it into the back of the VW and covered it with the army blanket.

Then I drove back to Tyrone.

The Valley Vista Inn stands at the junction of Route 44 and a north-south Interstate. It looks like a ranch-style house that got out of hand. With its swimming pool, cocktail lounge, restaurant, and color TV in every room it rates one star in the *Mobil Guide*. If the surly oaf at the registration desk had been on duty the day Mobil came by, it wouldn't have rated any.

I signed in for Mr. and Mrs. Simpson. My blonde accomplice hadn't arrived yet, which was O.K. with me. I went to Room 118.

I had no doubt that Mrs. Simpson would bring along the contents of that downtown locker. A suitcase packed with cash—the perfect going-away gift. Goodman didn't strike me as the kind of guy who would begin his new life on a shoestring.

A couple of hours passed—drowsy hours, filled with plans and speculations.

Finally, a little more than half awake, I began to get impatient for Delia to arrive. I paced for ten minutes or so. I found myself acting as nervous as a bridegroom is supposed to act. I stared into the mirror over the desk, frowning. I needed a shave, but even at that I looked as good as Percy Goodman. Better than him, now that he was dead.

Was the whole thing sensible, I wondered? My detective business wasn't worth hooking a detonator to, but it did keep me sitting in front of mahogany bars instead of behind steel ones.

I wanted half a fortune. Maybe a week in Caracas too, but I wouldn't kid myself on that. Mrs. Simpson might want to drop her new, unexpected husband like a blind date with leprosy.

The telephone rang. It was the loudmouth at the desk. "Mr. Simpson," he said impatiently, as if I was bothering him, "when you checked in there was a message for you at the desk. You didn't pick it up. Would you come over and get it when you have a chance?"

I picked it up within thirty seconds.

The envelope was lavender. So was the scent. A little cheap, I thought. Was the lady in white cheap? She hadn't seemed so. The name on the envelope was "Arthur A. Simpson," spelled out in a slanting feminine hand.

I went back to my room before opening it.

Darling Percy, it began. She was using Goodman's pre-caper name.

Please understand my problem. You know how much I love you.

Hm, I thought.

I had looked forward with such excitement to our honeymoon in Caracas and to our new life in the Village.

Past tense. Not so good.

But, dearest, when you talked about taking a little money from your agency I thought you meant only a little *money. Don't you understand?*

No, honey. I don't.

I mean, two hundred thousand dollars! Percy!

My heart bounded and sank in the same instant.

Precious Percy! I cried and cried. With joy. With love. Oh, Percy, how could you take such a risk for me—for us?

It was easy.

It made me think very seriously. About us. About our future.

My doubts about Percy Goodman's romantic judgment were rising like the miasmic scent from the letter.

Everyone needs independence, Percy. You've often said that.

Thank you for a glorious year, darling.

Don't mention it, sweetheart.

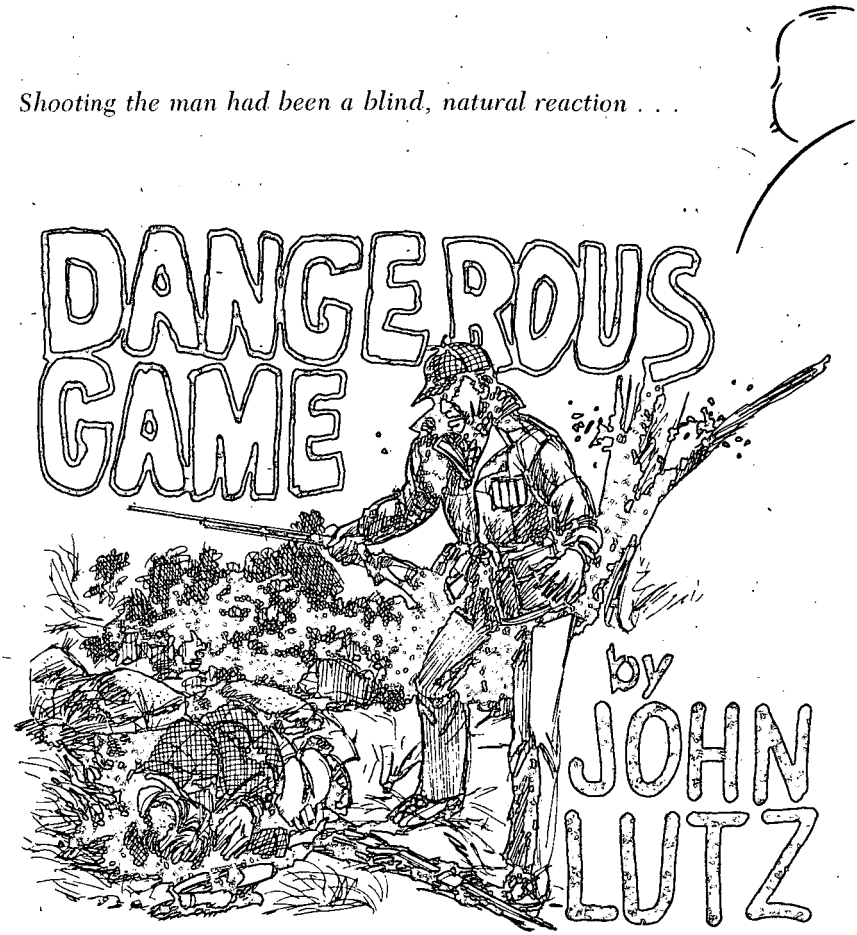
And thank you for a lovely gift to remember you by.

No thanks to me. Chalk it up to fate. I'm just the chump who tried to square the triangle.

Goodbye, Percy. It was wonderful.

Yours,
Delia

Shooting the man had been a blind, natural reaction . . .



I stood watching him bleed. There was nothing else I could do. The man was dead. I'm an excellent shot.

My heart was crashing against my ribs to the wild rhythm that had possessed me. I'd had no choice. The man had shot first. He must have fired at my movement, mistaken me for a deer. It happens all the time during deer season, with the woods full of weekend hunters like myself, trying to slay a deer to satisfy whatever primitive cravings

govern us.

As I stood leaning against the substantial trunk of an oak tree, I began to perspire heavily beneath my thick flannel shirt and down jacket. I'd killed a man, and the fact was sinking in, sapping the strength from my limbs and causing my hands to tremble inside my shooting gloves. A cold wind caused overhead tree branches to rattle like bones, and a few of last autumn's dry leaves flitted like curious brown moths over the body.

I kept telling myself there was no reason for me to feel guilty. It had been spontaneous, beyond thought and motive, a blind, natural reaction. The man had raised his rifle and fired, and the high-caliber bullet snapped like deadly laughter past my ear and slammed into the tree trunk behind me an instant before the deafening crack of the rifle. In that same instant a primeval rage exploded in me and, without thinking, I'd raised my own .30-caliber rifle and my wild shot by chance had struck the man square in the chest.

He was a small man with a moustache. The front of his orange vest darkened to scarlet as he took several steps backward, sat down jerkily, then slumped to lie curled on his side.

Around me the woods were silent but for a sibilant breeze that seemed to admonish me. Now what? The police? Would they understand how it had been, how it had happened in an instant, out of an instinct for survival? That it was an accident that had led to an unfortunate defensive reaction? No coroner's inquest ever arrived at such a conclusion. I could walk away from the body, and perhaps my presence here in the silent woods would never be known. I was at least two miles from the cabin where I was staying for the weekend.

Returning to the cabin seemed the only thing to do. I tucked my Remington deer rifle beneath my arm, took one last look at the eerily still body on the forest floor, and began to walk. A grey squirrel scrambled noisily up a tree and into the high branches, the only witness to my crime.

If I'd stayed in the city where I belonged, this wouldn't have happened. I was a draftsman, not a hunter. I could have put in weekend overtime and made enough money to buy as much meat as a deer would yield—if by some chance I happened to shoot one.

When I reached the cabin I was still trembling. Automatically, I stamped the mud from my boots before entering. The sound was like

thunder on the warped porch planks. I went inside and leaned my rifle against a wall, glad to release the polished wood stock from my grip.

The cabin had been in my wife Lucy's family for three generations. It was small, outfitted with an ancient cast-iron stove that served both to cook and to heat. The fire I'd banked this morning was still going strong, and the cabin was warm. Through the years some modern conveniences had been added to the cabin. There was electricity, a telephone, and, off the single small bedroom, a tiny bathroom with a tiled shower stall.

Without removing my jacket, I walked directly to the cabinet beneath the sink and got out a bottle of bourbon.

After my second drink, I stopped trembling, but was just as aware of the deep trouble I was in. I screwed the cap back onto the bottle and replaced it in the cabinet. Now that I was thinking more clearly, I wanted to talk to Lucy. If I didn't phone the police—and I didn't see how I could and not expect to be tried for manslaughter—she was the one person I could confide in, to relieve some of the pressure that was building in me.

I removed my jacket and went to the phone. Slowly, aware that my hand was now almost unnaturally steady, I dialed my home number.

The phone at the other end of the line rang only once before the receiver was lifted.

Lucy's voice came, urgent, tense, impatient. "Davy?"

After a pause, I hung up and sat very still. Who was Davy?

Unmistakably, I'd heard Lucy's voice, and unmistakably it had been vibrant with expectation. An idea—a preposterous, horrible idea—was unfolding like a poisonous dark blossom in the back of my mind.

I stood up, put my jacket back on, and left the cabin. On the way out, I picked up my rifle so I'd appear to be an ordinary hunter and would attract no suspicion. Beneath low, boiling grey clouds, I backtracked to the body of the man I'd shot.

Nothing had changed at the death site. It was as if I'd never gone to the cabin and returned. The man still lay curled on his side as if experiencing a terrible stomach ache, as unmoving as before.

I didn't want to do it, but I made myself. My fingers probed the hip pocket of his trousers and withdrew his wallet. His identification revealed that his name was David R. Thompson.

I returned the wallet to the pocket and stood up. The woods and the

sky around me began to whirl.

So it hadn't been an accident. David Thompson had attempted to kill me, to make it seem like a hunting mishap during the annual blood mania of deer season.

A dry, wrenching sob that was my own jarred me from my daze. Backing away from the body, I spun around and ran crashing through the woods until I was breathless and had to walk. I returned to the cabin and began to pack.

Lucy seemed surprised to see me. The sound of the front door opening had startled her, and she looked up from where she sat reading a magazine on the sofa. Her blue eyes were wide beneath her dark bangs, the natural hollows under her cheekbones more shadowed than usual. "I thought you planned to stay two more days."

I shrugged. "I didn't so much as see a deer track, so I decided to come home early."

She stood up, came to me, and kissed my cheek. "Why don't you get cleaned up?" she said. "I'll make some lunch."

I nodded, hoisted my overstuffed duffle bag and gun case, and trudged to the bedroom. The house was quiet; both boys were still in school. Outside, silence reigned in the deceptively tranquil suburban wilds.

All the while I stood beneath a warm shower, I never relaxed. What was Lucy thinking? She had tried to kill me once, at least indirectly. Would she try again? I began to understand how a deer must feel during the two weeks of open season.

After I dressed, I found Lucy in the kitchen. She stood at the formica counter by the sink, listening to a saccharine love song on the radio while scraping carrots with a vegetable peeler. I was relieved to see that she wasn't using a knife, and it struck me that I was actually afraid of Lucy. Incongruous, for a six-foot, 180-pound man to be afraid of his diminutive, seemingly gentle wife. But who would have suspected that Lucy harbored such deviousness?

Or had my murder been Thompson's idea? There was little doubt that he had been her lover. I only wondered for how long.

I switched off the graphically descriptive love song on the radio. "While hunting," I said, "I met a man named David Thompson."

Lucy gave no sign of having heard and continued scraping carrots.

"I said I met a man—"

"I know," Lucy interrupted. "Isn't there more to it than that?"

"You tell me."

Her eyes were placid pools of blue with dark, deep centers. "I've never heard of anyone named David Thomas."

"Thompson."

"Thompson."

"Anyway, he was killed in a hunting accident."

"How horrible." Her hand seemed to hesitate with the bright stainless-steel implement. Water from the faucet whirled into the drain. Lucy turned off the water, picked up a long serrated knife, and began slicing buns for hamburgers.

She said nothing more, so I walked into the living room.

I sat in my favorite armchair and tried to reason, but my still-shocked mind seemed incapable of the simplest logic. What was obvious was that I should move out of the house immediately.

A slight noise behind me made me turn.

Lucy was standing staring at me. She'd walked in from the kitchen, still clutching the saw-toothed knife. I noticed for the first time that the knife was sharply pointed.

"Dear—" she said, and moved toward me with a curious smile, bending forward as if to kiss me lightly on the cheek.

Even as I jumped from the chair, my right hand was closing on the heavy glass ashtray on the table beside me.

It was one precise and powerful motion. The ashtray thudded solidly against her skull above her left ear. I struck again, and the knife dropped to the floor. When I glanced down at it, I saw a few drops of blood pattern the carpet. I backed away, and Lucy crumpled limply to the floor, as if whatever life force had held her erect was suddenly switched off. She was as dead as she'd wanted me to be.

I felt detached from mind and body as I stared down at her. Then I replaced the ashtray carefully on the table and sat back down, probably to achieve some semblance of normalcy and because in my horror-stricken state I didn't know what else to do.

Maybe an hour, maybe two, passed before the phone rang. I remember distinctly that it rang five times before I answered it.

The voice on the other end of the line was concise and rapid. "Lucy Graham?"

"I'm her husband. She can't come to the phone right now. Who is this?"

"This is Davy, Mr. Graham. Station D.A.V.Y. And I'm Wild Willy Nigh, filling the air with your music high! Mrs. Graham was notified by mail last week that she was one of our lucky ten finalists, and if she answered the phone with our station's call letters, she and you would have won 562 dollars in our phone-a-fan money plan! As it is, you do receive absolutely free the big new Andy Carnal album . . ."

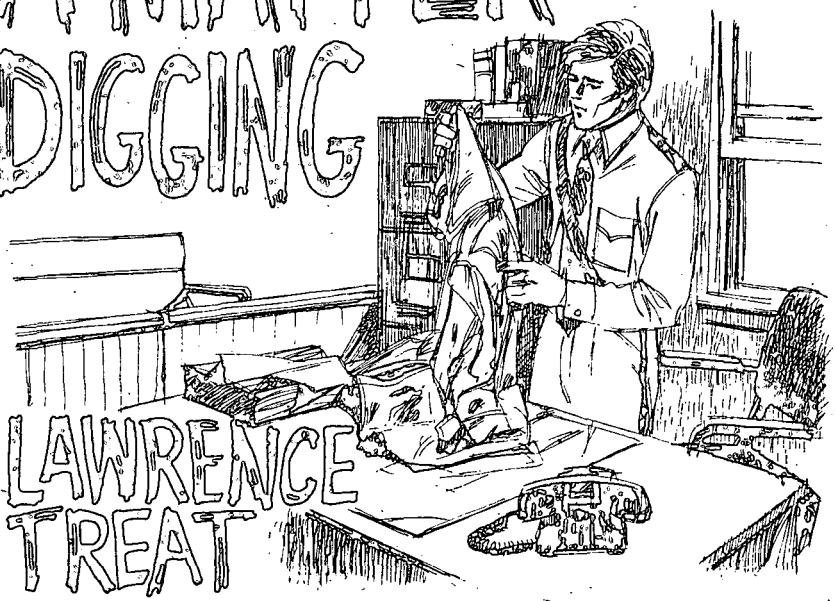
Wild Willy Nigh's voice trailed off in shock as I heard my own voice screaming at him, ranting, blaming him for everything, cursing, threatening.

Fortunately for Nigh, the program was on seven-second delay to prevent obscenities from reaching the air.

Unfortunately for me, the calls are always taped.

Dan and Willy deal with a hundred-year-old bequest . . .

A MATTER OF DIGGING



LAWRENCE TREAT

Bernie Seidel, the volatile little auto salesman, crowed about it to everybody willing to listen there in the Right Side Bar & Grill that evening. Naturally enough, Dan Moorhead, police chief in Morgan County, called him over.

Dan, looking like a contented Churchill, was a foot taller and almost double Bernie's weight, give or take a few pounds, of which Dan had plenty. Bernie trotted over to Dan's booth and perched himself on the

edge of the bench where Willy Wharton, of LePage, usually had to squeeze himself in.

"I found it by accident," Bernie said, still piping hot with the thrill of his discovery. "I was looking through some files in the North Merrick town hall and I found the paper stuck away. They'd forgotten all about it—imagine that! Might as well forget to put the price tag on a new car."

"We'd all be a lot happier if *you* did."

Bernie disregarded the remark and plowed stalwartly on. "I noticed the paper because it wasn't even typed. It was handwritten, and it said they'd buried a time capsule in 1876, to be opened exactly a hundred years later. And they missed the bicentennial! Dan, I couldn't believe it!"

"Did the paper describe the location of the capsule?"

"Under the big boulder behind the Civil War monument. They had no trouble finding it. They simply dug down, and there it was."

"Do you have any idea what was in it?"

"No. They carted it off to the town hall. All that lead—it must have weighed a ton. And Chief Wharton wouldn't let anybody near when they'd opened it. But I was the one who found it, so what did they keep *me* away for?"

Willy Wharton, striding through the doorway, heard the last sentence and answered it briefly. "For safety," he said.

"What wasn't safe about it? What kind of safety? Whose safety?"

"Yours," Willy said. He whisked Bernie out of the way with a wave of his hand, folded himself up in the empty half of the booth, and raised his forefinger for a beer.

"Bernie," he said, "anything cooped up for a hundred years is liable to explode. You wouldn't want to get blown up, would you?"

"What was in it?" Bernie asked, but at the studied lack of response he sagged and his effervescence faded off into nothingness, whereupon the two police chiefs settled down comfortably. With Bernie evaporated and a mug of beer in front of him, Willy leaned forward and spoke.

"Six feet down," he said, "in a box with a lead covering sealed at the joints. It was a neat job, everything preserved like they put it in last week. They worked real careful in those days."

"What was inside?" Dan asked.

Willy, frowning, ticked off the main items. "A piece of a Civil War flag. A straw hat. A sampler reading 'God Bless Our Home.' A wedding invitation dated April seventeenth, 1876, between Minerva Goodwillie and George Battle. Pictures of the town and the mayor."

"Tintypes?"

"No. Photographs. Then some penny postage stamps, uncanceled, a railroad timetable, a dollar bill, and a list of North Merrick taxpayers. Four whole pages of the *LePage County Weekly*, dated July second. They were going to celebrate big—free beer, a parade, a bunch of speeches, and a tug-of-war with Norwich. I wonder who won."

Willy sipped his beer and leaned back with the expression of a man who'd just paid his income tax. Dan, familiar with that look of Willy's and aware of what it meant, said, "And?"

"The stuff was in a shiny tin box inside the lead-covered box."

"And?" Dan said again.

"And something peculiar. A document signed by one John P. Heathering, probably Arch Heathering's great-great-something-or-other." Willy reached into one of his pockets and took out a small pad. "Here's what it said: 'I, John P. Heathering of North Merrick, sorely disappointed by the greed and cupidity of my fellow man, give and bequeath my entire collection to an honest man living in this town one hundred years from now, in the hope that by that time the collection will be worth a million dollars or more. I have buried it under the second step of my porch stairs.' " Willy put the pad back in his pocket. "It was signed."

"What kind of a collection was he talking about?"

"He didn't say."

"Who lives in that house now?"

"There is no house," Willy said. "I looked up the records. The house was moved off the lot in 1889 and put in Amos Schering's lot, where it burned down in 1907. Heathering's lot was sold to the North Woods Development Company in 1912 and incorporated with a lot of other property that got renamed after the flowers and trees. Lots were called Elm and Arbutus, things like that. Then North Woods went bankrupt in 1915 and the property was either sold piece by piece for unpaid taxes or else renumbered and sold off under the Bankruptcy Act. But the new numbers had nothing to do with the old ones. Nice mixup, isn't it?"

"Pandora's box," Dan remarked. And when Willy said, "Huh?" Dan said, "Call it a can of worms then."

Willy ordered another beer.

After the radio had broadcast the news the next morning, the procession started into Willy's office. Eight people claimed they were the only honest men in LePage and that the million-dollar collection belonged to them by right of eminent virtue. Arch Heathering, lineal descendant of John P., blustered in and tried to establish his sole right to the inheritance, which by now was being referred to as a million in cash.

"Anybody knows that the description of the heir is too vague to have any legal standing," Arch said. "An honest man? What's an honest man?"

"Haven't you found out?" Willy said.

"I know none of my help are. That restaurant of mine—they steal me deaf, dumb, and blind. But the point is, nobody can just dig up the money and go home with it. They have to report it and bring it to you. And it's mine, every cent of it."

Emil Schmidt differed. "It's on Lot Eighteen," he said, "which I own. I built that wall behind it. Dug up the stones right on the property, and if the money's on my land it belongs to me."

"What money?" Willy asked.

Emil gaped. "The million. My million. The buried million."

"Oh," Willy said. "Just bring it around, and we'll talk it over."

Armand Oeillet owned Lot Seventeen, and put in his bid. "It's on my property," he said. "I looked it up and I planted those shrubs where the house used to be. That proves it's mine, doesn't it?"

Willy handed him a sheet of ruled paper with half a dozen names on it. "Sign here," Willy said. "It's the list of people who think the collection belongs to them."

Brenda Merino registered her claim with a phone call from her beauty shop. "My late husband had a mortgage on the whole tract," she said vaguely. "He told me so, and he was the most honest person I ever knew."

"I'll make a note of it," Willy said.

"That's nice of you," she said smoothly, and hung up.

Shortly before noon Bernie danced into Willy's office in high excite-

ment. "Willy," he said, "they're going to write me up! I couldn't *get* a better ad! And an AP team is going to interview me, with photographs. They're coming all the way here! They'll put me on the map, and I want you in the picture along with me. I found it, you opened it. That ought to bring in the customers!"

A few minutes later, Emil stamped into the office. "Have you seen my land?" he said. "They're digging it up! They're trespassing! Chief, I want you to order them off my property."

Willy clasped his hands behind his head and considered the matter. "Well," he said, "if it's yours, you're getting some free labor. But if I run them off, who's going to do all the digging?"

"But what if they go off with the money?" Emil said.

"Better go back and watch," Willy said.

"You're right," Emil said. "I'll do that."

After lunch, Willy drove out to the area where the Heathering house was reputed to have been. The road was lined with men, women, and children, all shoveling and building up mounds of earth to various heights. Some people, expecting to find the treasure a mere foot or so below the ground, dug shallow foxholes. Others went deep, and in several places Willy could see nothing but the regular flash of a shovel throwing up spatters of dirt. He went back sorrowfully, beset with gloomy thoughts.

He talked it over with Dan Moorhead that evening at the Right Side Bar & Grill.

"Everybody's having a try at it," Willy said. "You can't buy a shovel in all of LePage."

"Or in Morgan," Dan said. "I wish I was in the shovel business."

"You should have seen 'em," Willy said. "They looked like a ragtail army digging a trench."

"It sounds more like the Klondike gold rush," Dan said. "But I wonder what kind of a guy John P. Heathering was. He had hope—he thought the world would be a better place to live in. But look at it—all the wars we have right now, who can count them up?"

"I hope to hell nobody finds anything," Willy said gloomily. Then he brightened. "Dan, suppose the whole thing is a hoax—it could be, couldn't it?"

"You mean you think John P. Heathering's up there laughing?"

"May be," Willy said. "Only the joke's liable to be on me. The way people are all het up, something's bound to happen."

It was happening right then, although Willy didn't hear about it until the next day when an early morning digger discovered the body.

Willy rushed out to the scene. Carl Jason, a gardener who took care of a large estate, lay huddled up inside a deep hole. His body was partly covered by an old raincoat, and near the rim of the hole lay the bloody shovel that had probably killed him.

While Willy waited for his staff, plus coroner, photographer, state troopers, technicians, and everybody else on the homicide list, he made his preliminary observations.

Jason's head had been severely battered, and there had apparently been some kind of a scuffle at the edge of the hole, but shoeprints had been wiped out, and in any case they would have been almost nonexistent in the soft, sandy soil. The hole itself was a large one, about five feet deep, with a layer of clay starting some three feet down. The clay took impressions clearly, and Willy had hopes that they'd tell him something once the coroner released the body and Willy could climb down and make a detailed examination.

The coroner hadn't had breakfast and was in a nasty mood. "Dead," he said. "Hit over the head. Get him out of here. Give you the details later." And he turned around and stalked back to his car. Willy, listening to the starter groaning endlessly while it fought an unwilling engine, leaned down and picked up the coat.

The back of his neck began to itch, the way it always did when he had a hunch. For no reason that he could pin down, he was convinced that the coat belonged to the killer and would eventually lead to him. The coat, tattered and stained, was double-breasted and bore a label reading, MAC'S FINE CLOTHING, 85 MAIN STREET. The pockets were empty.

He handed it to one of the troopers. "You'd better bring it to your lab and see what they can find out, but I'd like it back." He put his name on a tag and tied it under one of the buttons. "Same thing with the shovel," he said. "It looks new—there's a chance I might be able to trace it."

"You're a real optimist," the trooper said. "I bet a hundred shovels exactly like it got sold this week."

Willy shrugged and said, "Well, let's get to work."

The work consisted of lowering himself down into the hole and scrutinizing the sides. He could see the impressions of a box about two and a half by two by one, which had apparently been buried in the clay soil. A collection. Of what? And what had made John P. Heathering go ahead with this fool idea of his?

Clawing at the clay, hoping to scratch up some kind of a clue, Willy felt bitter and despondent, chiefly because he hated his next chore, which was notifying the widow. As perhaps on a hundred other occasions, he wondered whether he couldn't hand over the job to somebody else. And as always, he knew he couldn't.

Mrs. Jason was a small bouncy woman with a shattering voice, and she took the news as a vindication of her foresight. "I told Jay that the money would be the death of him," she said, "and I reckon I was right. Who killed him?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," Willy said. "Any ideas?"

"Jay," she shouted, as if she had to proclaim her words to the entire world, "had no enemies, and when he didn't get back I thought he'd had an accident. But *murder?*" She almost screamed the word. "It served him right," she said more quietly, "wanting that money when it didn't belong to him."

"There was no car in the area where we found him," Willy said, "so I'm wondering how he got there."

"Somebody called for him. I heard them."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"He must have said something about it, given some hint, mentioned something."

"No," she said decisively. "He didn't say anything, because we weren't talking. We'd had one of our fights over why he always put things off. That man never did anything he didn't have to, and being the man he was I guess he let somebody else dig and then came along and asked for half of whatever they found."

"Did he get into fights often?"

"Jay never fought anybody in his life," she said, "except me."

Willy got nowhere with Jason's widow, nor with anybody else that day. His investigation was strictly routine. Get a list of people who'd

bought shovels recently. Go from house to house and ask if any shovels were missing and who went digging last night and what they had seen. Check with Jason's friends. Did they have any idea who had called for him? And of the people who claimed ownership in the area of the killing, had any of them been out last night?

The answer to the last question was interesting. Emil Schmidt, Armand Oeillet, and Brenda Merino all insisted that, since the hole was on land they owned, they'd been robbed of a million dollars. As for where they'd been at the time of the murder, they had similar alibis.

"Which are no alibis at all," Willy told Dan that evening at the Right Side. "They say they were asleep, Emil next to his big fat wife, Armand next to his skinny one, and Brenda all alone in a little trundle bed in her one-room apartment. A pair of corroborating wives, or maybe just cooperating, while Brenda's on her own. And Arch goes along with the majority, says he and the Mrs. were lovey-dovey all night long."

"What about the coat?" Dan asked.

"The lab's still examining it, and Mac says he hasn't carried that model in more than ten years and hasn't the least idea who could have bought it, but it was one of the best items he ever had. And neither Emil nor Armand are customers of his."

"Which means nothing," Dan said.

Willy agreed. "Right," he said. "But if I knew what was in that box I'd be halfway home. Because the killer certainly beaned Jason in a fight over that treasure, and if the killer ever tried to sell it he'd be in trouble. So what's he going to do?"

"It depends on what that collection was. Stamps? Coins? Jewelry? Could be jade or ivory or scrimshaw or Japanese netsukes. It's peculiar he didn't specify."

"He probably thought everybody knew what he had," Willy said, "so he didn't bother mentioning what it was. The trouble is, everybody went and died." Willy mourned over the fact. "Too bad," he said. "Now if I knew what the collection was, I'd just notify the proper dealers and wait around."

"Dream on," Dan said. "Dream of a cooperative public and a lab that comes up with all the answers. It's an occupational fantasy."

"Yeah," Willy said. He rubbed at his craggy face and stood up. "See you tomorrow," he said, and left.

The next day was one of those times when you relive all the sins you've ever committed and wonder whether you're being punished for them.

It started with the raincoat. Willy called the state lab and was told that the coat had been examined, brushed, and vacuumed, and the gleanings studied under a microscope and analyzed spectrographically. The results were in terms of trace metals, composition of soil particles, and types of blood residue, which matched Carl Jason's blood.

"Thanks," Willy said. "And I'd like to have the coat back. Can you send it up here?"

"We did."

"When?"

"First thing this morning. Trooper Philips brought it."

"I'll see if it's around," Willy said.

It wasn't, and he called back. "Can you find out what your trooper did with it? Somebody must have signed for it."

"Philips is on patrol, but we'll get in touch with him. Just hold on."

A minute later Trooper Philips' report was relayed to Willy. Philips had given the raincoat to Officer Harrison of Willy's staff, and Harrison had signed for it.

Willy felt relieved. No problem—Harrison was one of his most methodical and reliable men. All he had to do was locate him and ask.

Harrison was precise. "I put it on a chair next to Sergeant Blaisdell's desk. Then I got an accident call, emergency seven, and I had to run. I told Blaisdell to hold it for you."

Blaisdell was vague. "Harrison left in a rush and said something about a coat, I didn't get exactly what. I think he put it on a chair. It must have been there when I heard the commotion about a dog in the corridor, and went out to see. The dog looked mean and was snapping at a couple of civilians, and I had a time getting the dog catcher to come and get it. By the time I got back to the desk, I wasn't thinking about the coat, but I guess it was gone. Maybe the janitor was here collecting rubbish and threw it out."

It took half an hour to locate the janitor, who remembered picking up an old coat and throwing it out with the trash.

Willy's neck itched. Quietly, in the controlled voice he used when he was red-hot mad and wanted to show the heat without revealing the

flame, he told Harrison and Blaisdell to locate the garbage truck, get hold of the coat, and bring it to Willy's office.

It arrived about noon, smelling more than slightly of stale fish and rotten oranges. Willy put the coat out on the windowsill and battened it down with the window sash. He gave the coat fifteen or twenty minutes of fresh air, but at the end of ten he had a complicated call from California involving a deposition they wanted him to take. After he'd hung up, he figured he'd have a smell of the raincoat, but before he could even get out of his chair a message came through that he was wanted in court. They were holding up proceedings until he came to identify a document in the Hinton embezzlement case.

He was on the stand for about two minutes, but it was a quarter-hour drive each way and on the trip back he took the river road, which brought him past the Heathering house. It seemed like a good idea to drop in and do a little fishing around with a question or two. He parked in front of the house and went up to the porch, but nobody answered his knock. He yelled, "Anybody home?" but if anybody was, they were too bashful to come to the door, which was unlocked. And that was quite a temptation.

Willy hesitated. It's one thing for an ordinary person to walk into a house when nobody's home—the worst that can happen is a little embarrassment—but it's different when you're a cop and the house belongs to a suspect. It's the sort of thing a smart lawyer can use to knock out any evidence you happen to pick up, and then the whole case is gummed up.

Feeling like a kid debating whether to go into a haunted house and knowing damn well he had to, mostly because he wasn't supposed to, Willy pushed the door open and peeked inside. He saw a room loaded with old-fashioned furniture. The walls were practically solid with prints, including people Willy had read about in history books, starting with George Washington.

Being an admirer of Washington from way back, Willy felt almost at ease, and he stepped inside. Some of the people in the prints were probably Marion Heathering's ancestors, because she made quite a thing of showing off her background. She hadn't exactly come over on the *Mayflower,* but she claimed she'd come over on the first ship that was powered by steam. Maybe she had and maybe she hadn't, but she'd sure been steaming ever since.

Willy, still under the spell of whatever feeling had made him step inside, figured he might as well see the rest of the house, and he went upstairs. There were four bedrooms, and what struck him was that not one of them was set up for two people. There were single beds in every room, which meant that Arch's alibi didn't prove a thing. How could his wife know he'd been asleep in bed all night when he probably wasn't even in the same room with her? And while the alibi hadn't been much in the first place, the fact that Arch had probably lied was worth considering.

Willy was considering it when he heard a car outside. Whether it was Arch or Marion Heathering didn't make much difference. The point was that Willy didn't want to get caught inside the house, so he lit down the stairs two at a time, made it through the kitchen as if he was on a skateboard going downhill, and managed to come strolling from the back of the house just as Arch walked up the path.

Willy carried it off with what Dan would have called aplomb. He stuck his hands in his pockets and pretended to notice Arch for the first time.

"Arch," he called out. "I stopped by and didn't see anybody around, so I took a look at your flowers back there." He motioned with his head. "I was wondering if I could pick a few to bring back to Katie."

Arch didn't mind. "Help yourself," he said. "Gardening's my hobby, and if I say so myself I grow the finest flowers in this end of the county. Anything else on your mind?"

"Yes. I thought you might tell me some more about John P., and that you might want to add something to what you told me yesterday."

"I have nothing to add," Arch said. "And I never met John P."

That was supposed to be funny, but Willy didn't bother forcing a smile. "Any guess about what that collection was?" he asked.

"I don't guess," Arch said.

Willy asked a few more questions that didn't amount to much, and then he took off for headquarters. When he got there, Blaisdell was on the phone and when he saw Willy he made frantic motions and jabbed his finger in the direction of the extension, but by the time Willy picked it up the line was dead.

"What was that about?" Willy asked.

"About Jason. It looks like we got a break in the case. Somebody says he saw a man carry a box from that hole where Jason was killed

and put the box in the trunk of his car. Man says the license plates were X3–18–74, and he followed the car and saw the man unload the trunk in his garage and transfer something from the box to a can in the corner of the garage."

"Did the man give his name?" Willy asked.

Blaisdell shook his head. "But I'll bet whoever it was was talking through a handkerchief. It was a funny kind of muffled voice trying to disguise itself."

"Which means we probably know the guy who phoned," Willy said. "Check back on those plates and let me know."

The answer came ten minutes later.

Archibald Heathering.

Willy went straight back to the Heathering house and found Arch puttering around in his garden. "Have you come back for those flowers?" Arch asked.

Willy shook his head. "Arch, I'd like to have a look in your garage. O.K.?"

"The door's open," Arch said. "Help yourself."

The roll of prints wasn't hard to find. They were tied with a piece of string and had been stuck in a yellow plastic can. Willy looked them over and even he could tell they were first rate, and printed on the kind of paper you don't see these days.

Willy showed the prints to Heathering. "Where did these come from?" Willy asked.

Arch looked blank. "I'll have to ask Marion. They look like her kind of thing."

"Why would she hide them in the garage?"

"It beats me," Arch said. "Women—you can't figure them out, can you?"

He started to laugh, but stifled the impulse at Willy's next question.

"Arch," he said, "the night before last you were seen driving around pretty late. What were you doing?"

"Well," Arch said, "a man can go for a ride without the police coming around asking questions, can't he?"

"Not if a valuable collection of prints that don't belong to him are found in his garage."

"I didn't put them there," Arch said. "Somebody must be trying to frame me."

"Just tell me why you were out driving around that late. What for?"

"Well," Arch said, "a man has a right to a little fun, hasn't he?"

"Who with?"

"She didn't show up."

"Who didn't?"

"Her."

And that was as far as Willy got.

"I could have arrested him," Willy told Dan that evening, "but why make trouble for him unless I'm sure? There's no point in letting Marion Heathering hear how Arch snuck downstairs while she was asleep. That woman would never let him forget it."

"What do you make of this tip you got?"

"Something," Willy said, "and nothing. Here's an informant who waits a whole day before contacting the police. He disguises his voice, won't tell his name, doesn't say why he was out at that time of night, and yet the tip pays off. It sounds like a frame-up, and a pretty good one. Men have been hanged on less evidence than that."

"But Heathering was out," Dan said, "and his story is pretty hard to take. A tryst with a dame who never showed up, and he won't even tell you her name."

Willy stuck his finger on the table and kept moving it around as if he was tracing Arch's itinerary. "Let's assume Arch is guilty. He's just committed a homicide and he's jittery, scared of being seen. He keeps looking in his car mirror to make sure he's not being followed. Would he miss seeing a car behind him? And would he drive into his garage and unload without making sure nobody was around? It won't wash. Arch wouldn't be that dumb. So the question is, who framed him?"

"What about Bernie?" Dan asked.

"Him?" Willy said. "Why him?"

"It looks like your best bet is to find out who owns that coat, and why anybody brought it there."

Willy compressed his lips. "That coat," he said, "has a mind of its own. First it sat down on a chair. Then it took a ride on a garbage truck. Then I stuck it out on my windowsill and my sergeant came in the room and decided it was stuffy so he opened the window and that

coat took off for parts unknown. Blaisdell's trying to trace it and he's a stubborn guy—when he makes a mistake he usually makes up for it."

"You're pretty stubborn yourself," Dan said. "You and your raincoat."

"Dan," Willy said, leaning forward and talking in a voice barely above a whisper, "when you mention that raincoat my neck itches."

"Then scratch it, and think about something else for a change. You have three prime suspects. Tell me about them. What do they do for a living?"

"You've seen Bernie. He's a dapper little salesman, excited about every car he sells—loves all his customers and loses sleep whenever one of them has car trouble."

"He must have chronic insomnia," Dan remarked. "He'd be up and around pretty late, wouldn't he?"

"Might," Willy said.

"How about the others?"

"Arch runs a restaurant, but his real interest is flowers. He's always digging in that garden of his. Emil's a stonemason. Armand's a surveyor. He has a reputation for getting things mixed up—as a result he's not getting much business."

"Would you call him a good shovelman?" Dan asked.

"I guess so. Why not? But—" Willy broke off as he saw what Dan was driving at. "You mean he's used to using shovels and working in the dirt. But he's harmless, and he'd have a shovel around his garage, whereas Brenda, living in an apartment, is not only not likely to have a shovel, but she's the only one likely to hire somebody to do her digging. She'd bring something along to sit on too, so that she wouldn't get dirty. An old coat maybe. But where is it?"

Willy had lunch with Dan the next day. "There was nothing to it," Willy said. "Once I interrogated her, she broke. We found the rest of the prints in her place, and they were pretty valuable. She admitted she'd hired Jason and driven him out and watched him dig. He found the box, and after he hauled it up he wanted a full half of whatever it was worth instead of the five dollars an hour she'd promised him."

"Before he'd even opened it?"

"That's right. And when she refused they had an argument about it and when he bent down to open the box she picked up the shovel and

conked him. Back in town, she spotted Arch. She knew his car, and later on that night she went to his house, slipped inside the garage, and planted those prints in his trash barrel, where he might easily have hidden them himself. She waited a day, then she phoned in the tip in a voice disguised to sound like a man's."

"And the coat?" Dan said.

"It seems someone picked it up off the sidewalk and brought it to the thrift shop, where Blaisdell eventually found it. Dan, all those lab men with their fancy degrees and their expensive equipment missed out on the one simple thing that would have cracked the case."

"Which was?"

"It was a double-breasted coat with button holes on both sides, but the button holes on the right are worn out and the loose buttons are all on the left. Which makes it a woman's coat."

Dan agreed it was a nice point. "But how come you didn't notice it in the first place, when you had it in your hands?"

Willy thought it over and reached his conclusion. "That," he said, "is a good question." And he grinned.

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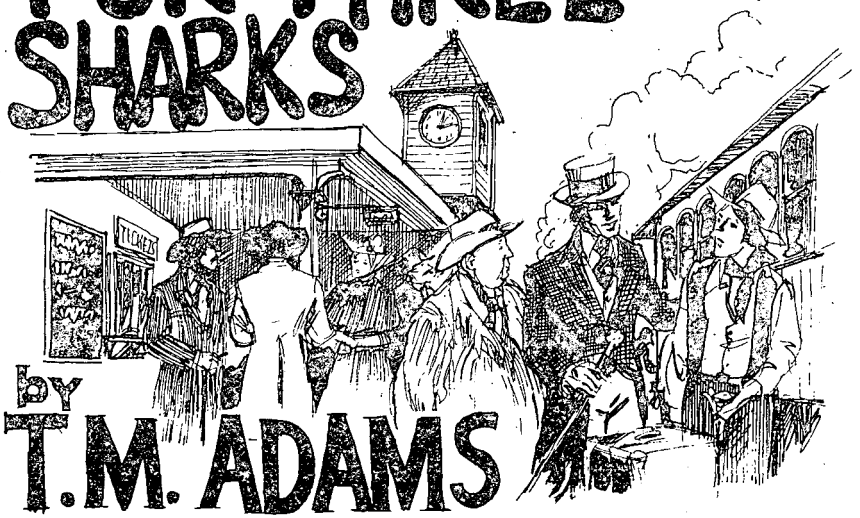
I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

V. C. Stabile
Vice President and Treasurer

A few admonitory words to Youth from Hardluck, Nevada, 1882 . . .

REQUIEM FOR THREE SHARKS



BY T. M. ADAMS

Found among the papers of Hiram Daugherty, editor from 1870 to 1904 of the Hardluck Messenger, *of Hardluck, Nevada. The few revisions of spelling and punctuation are those of Mr. Daugherty.*

Mr. Daugherty's Introduction:

The manuscript enclosed herein is the confession of one Scott Trefoil, who was hanged in Hardluck on May 9, 1882, for the murder of a

dry-goods drummer named Clem Sampson the previous month. Mr. Trefoil, a quiet-spoken man in his early thirties, had come to Hardluck only a few days before the shooting in the company of a "Major" DeWitt, whose subsequent demise was apparently the source of the fatal quarrel between Trefoil and Sampson.

At his trial, Mr. Trefoil declined to defend himself or, indeed, take much interest, save at one point to call the late Sampson "a welsher, a cheat, and an accessory to murder." His main preoccupation in his last few days was the total expenditure of what money he had. After purchasing at some cost an elaborate headstone for DeWitt's grave, he arranged for an unmarked plot for himself, perpendicular to DeWitt's and, as it were, at DeWitt's feet. His remaining funds, minus one dollar, were spent on a lavish meal the night preceding his execution and on the attendance at that meal of two loose women, procured, I regret to say, by the deputy sheriff. The following morning, shortly after completing the confession that follows, he ascended the scaffold. His last dollar went as a tip to the hangman.

I had asked Mr. Trefoil to set down his story, along with whatever religious reflections occurred to him and perhaps a few admonitory words to Youth, as such testaments from notorious murderers are always very popular with the readership. He obliged me, and I considered the result literate enough, despite lapses, but after much internal debate I forbore to print it. It is a moral statement of a kind, I grant, but of *what* kind?

The Confession of Scott Trefoil:

I, Scott Trefoil, being of sound mind and body, wish to attest in my last hours to the existence of a Divine Providence that shapes our destinies and brings harm upon the heads of all who do wrong. That there is no corresponding Power to protect the innocent is the other lesson of my tale, for it is my duty to here set down the true story of the death of Major George Washington DeWitt, the kindest, wisest, and noblest man I have ever known.

Had I more time, I could devote a volume to the superior qualities of my late friend and partner. As it is, I can only attempt to sketch a few representative incidents in his life.

As near as I can remember, it was five years ago that we were in Denver. It was mid-morning. Since ten o'clock the evening before, the

Major had been playing poker at the Long Chute Emporium with a bunch of silver miners up from Custer County. He had about seven hundred dollars in front of him and his opponents looked hard-pressed, but he excused himself for a drink and took me aside.

"Scotty," he said, "get me three hundred."

He was like that. He knew just exactly how the game was going to go, even when he was not dealing. Many's the time when he'd seem to be far ahead but would somehow know there was a rough patch coming up and say to me, "Scotty, get me a hundred," or "five hundred," or, in tough cases, "Scotty, get me a gun." This time it was three hundred dollars.

I walked outside, squinting at the bright sunlight, wondering what I was going to do. Three hundred dollars is a sizeable piece of change, even in a mining town, and it cramped my style considerably to have to raise it in broad daylight. I drifted along and finally fetched up at the railroad station.

In Denver you can see pretty near all the trains there are in Colorado. You have the Denver Pacific coming in from the north, the Kansas Pacific from Ellsworth and Abilene, the Denver and Rio Grande running down to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe in the south, and various spurs off west and south to Boulder, Golden City, and all those other boom towns. So you have trains coming in constantly, five or six times a day and even at night, and the people on them have money. I stood there, twirling my watch chain, waiting for marks.

The train from Pueblo came in and I watched the people getting off, the women lifting their skirts above the dust and the men looking for a drink—and I noticed an interesting thing. There was a big clock on top of the train station and as the men got off most of them set their watches by it. There was nothing unusual about that; I guess local time in a town usually goes by the biggest clock in it. But I had never given the matter any thought before. Just suppose, I thought, I had a nickel for every man who set his watch by that clock.

At this point some hayseed bumped into me, not looking where he was going because he was setting his watch.

"That'll be a nickel, please," I said to him.

"Pardon me?" he said.

"You just set your watch by the company clock, colonel. Now can I

have my nickel, or must I call a constable?"

The hayseed apologized, gave me a nickel, and departed.

I cadged a few more nickels in this manner, more to pass the time and keep my hand in than anything else. As the Major always told me, if you want to land a fish, you have to get your feet wet. A nickel a mark was nothing, of course, but sure enough, those three hundred dollars came in with the tide.

The hayseed had reappeared at my shoulder. "Yes?" I said, wondering if he had tumbled to my game.

"I been watching you," he said, suspicious-like. "Seems to me you don't rightly collect from ever'body."

It was like the sun coming out. I hadn't heard him speak a full sentence before, but now I knew I had myself a live one, a bona fide open-plains yokel of the old school.

"You're right, colonel," I said. "It's my bad leg, I just can't keep up with them all. I'll tell you something, a young fellow like yourself would make out a sight better in my job. I take in only five to ten dollars a day, but there's a good twenty dollars more that escapes me."

"You're talking about thirty-five dollars a day?" the hayseed exclaimed.

"I can see you're quick," I said. "Yes, it's quite an opportunity. But let's not talk about it here in the hot sun."

We retired to a nearby beanery, I remembering to limp, and there I set the mark to talking about himself. A trailhand up until a few days before, he had been paid off in Dodge and had taken it into his head to invest his stake in the mines and make a fortune. He was as green as the watch he'd bought from some peddler on the train.

As a cowboy, he was used to being flat broke most of the year, getting paid off big at the end of a drive, and then blowing it all in town. He suspected mining might be much the same. But the idea of having his fortune doled out to him forever at so many dollars a day, while he did nothing more strenuous than standing around in his new suit looking grand in front of the ladies as they got off the train, had a certain appeal.

So he kept nosing around my "business."

"You own that clock, now, do you?" he asked, and there was still a trace of suspicion in his manner.

"No, no, of course not," I assured him. "Look here, you can read,

can't you?" Before he had time to admit he couldn't, I whipped out a detailed hotel bill the Major and I had failed to settle in San Francisco and held it under his eye. "As you can see," I said, "this is a Clock Correction Franchise from the Denver and Pacific Railroad Company. It authorizes me to collect a fee from every man who sets his watch by the clock in their station, in exchange for which I insure that the clock keeps correct time."

"That's the hard part, is it?" he said.

"Not a bit of it. Every morning I go down to the telegraph office, not a block away from the station, and ask the time. I get that free. Then I carefully set my own watch—a very accurate naval chronometer—to telegraph-corrected time, walk to the station, and hand it over to the station master. He sets the big clock, if it needs it, I tip him a nickel, and that's all. The rest is just a matter of collecting my fees. I think I do pretty well for a man who's been limping ever since Gettysburg." And indeed, I kept up a very good front in those days, with a suit and hat from St. Louis and a silver-headed cane.

The hayseed allowed as how it might not be as hard a job as some, but wasn't it rough on my bad leg? I had only said as much half a dozen times, but I said it again and admitted that if only I could sell the franchise I had a place waiting for me in the Assay Office at Boulder where I could just sit and count money all day.

The hayseed could hardly stay still in his seat by this time. He wondered what the qualifications were for my position. I said there wasn't much to it. A fellow had to be in good health, and of course the Company would expect him to pay a good price for the franchise, just to show he was a gentleman of substance. I said I didn't suppose that a boy like himself could meet my figure, but if he could—no, but I'd forgotten, he had to have a good watch too—

"I've got a watch, remember? I showed it to you," he said, hauling out the brass wonder again. "Bran' new!"

"Why, that's right," I said. "I guess it's just a question of price, then."

I had to ask for seven-fifty to make it look good, but I finally let him have the franchise for three hundred dollars. Funny coincidence—that was very nearly its face value, less a few dollars the hotel had tacked on for breakage and missing silverware.

The point of all this is, a lot of people wouldn't have thought to go to

so much trouble for money when the Major was far ahead of the game and didn't seem to need it. But I swear that the moment I walked in and handed him the roll, he tossed it in the pot. There was nothing but small change left in front of him. He had known he would need it, he had known I would get it somehow—he never did ask me, afterwards, and I never bothered him with details—and he had known he would win the pot and be three thousand ahead at the end of the day. If anyone ever asks you, that is what Genius is.

I don't want to leave the impression that the Major depended heavily on me. He had inner resources, as perhaps the following incident will demonstrate.

Two years ago, on a Mississippi packet to New Orleans, the Major was on deck playing draw poker for more than nominal stakes. It was a beautiful day; the orchestra was playing and the sun was high. I was standing by and fetching drinks, as usual. The Major had been a big winner all morning, but his cards had been slacking off since noon and the game was too public to permit skill to make up the difference.

Betting was brisk, pot limit and table stakes, and the Major was keeping the opening bets high so he could bring to bear the full weight of his earlier winnings later on, as the luck of the draw dictated. He had a decent hand in any case, drawing one card to the three, four, five, and six of diamonds. Since two of the other players were drawing two cards apiece and one was standing pat, either the low straight or the diamond flush might have been in trouble. But if the long-shot straight flush came in against good cards, the already considerable pot might multiply twelvefold before falling to the Major.

At this critical juncture, the dealer erred. He was one of these sticky-fingered fellows who has to reach your card over to you hand-delivery, snapping the last corner down with needless punctilio. Too often, this sort of dealer is feeling for a pinprick mark, but this had been a fairly honest game, for poker. Anyway, this fellow was too clumsy to be cheating. As the Major sat there with his sucking-straight four-flush, admirably concealing his anticipation, this so precise dealer judged his fancy snap wrong. The upper half of the card was exposed to the Major's eyes for some small fraction of a second, then the card flitted off the table, over the rail, and into the river.

The Major shouted, sprang to his feet, pointed at a fleck of blue in the dirty brown river, and said, "Scotty, get me that card!"

I didn't hesitate an instant. I had never jumped from a steamboat before, but at one time or another I'd had reason to give the problem serious thought, and I knew that my first concern had to be getting clear of the paddlewheel, which would joint me like a chicken if I got caught up in it. Accordingly, I ran not to the stern of the boat but to the bow, got up on the rail, and pushed off as hard as I could to the side.

The steamboat passed me as I oriented myself, although there were already cries of "Hold up, man overboard!" The Major was leaning over the rail, bawling directions, and with his help I got a bearing on the card. The exploit would hardly have been possible had we not been in one of those long shallow S-bends where the river is more mud than water and so slow that sometimes straight new channels—chutes, they call them—cut through to bypass. The steamboat had been making way slowly and the card had not been left too far behind. Swimming in that muck had a lot in common with ditch-digging. I was soon exhausted and my suit was ruined, but when the steamboat stopped and I'd been reeled in on a float, I had the card tucked into my pocket.

I handed it to the Major first thing and I'm sure that if my jacket had been dry he would have clapped me on the back, he was that pleased. While the captain and the pilot dressed me down, the Major returned to the card table, announcing that he was raising the last bet—they had started the bets during my recovery—by the sum of the pot. He cursed when he looked down and saw that in the excitement he had put the rest of his hand on the table face-up; it was evident to all players that the card I'd risked my life for must have filled a straight flush, and one by one, with rueful smiles, they folded to the Major's raise.

Just as well, as the Major said later. You can't fill a low diamond straight flush with a nine of hearts, wet *or* dry.

That was a lucrative week—and fortunately too because I came down with pneumonia and we were out of action for a while, the Major looking after me.

I had not always had someone to see to my welfare. Indeed, it is one measure of the Major's great heart that he took me in when he did.

That was during the War of the Secession, at Gettysburg. The Major and I were both in the 20th Infantry, Maine Volunteers, under Colonel

Chamberlain. The Major was not a major at the time; he had been broken all the way down to the ranks during the Mexican War. (I never asked him why, or why he re-enlisted so much later.) I was just a kid, a regimental drummer boy, but I wasn't drumming that day. I was terrified out of my wits, and on top of that I had a freshly killed chicken hidden inside my drum, a little something I'd picked up on the march from Maryland. We were tucked up there on a hill, Little Round Top, whose name we didn't then know. The easternmost extension of the line, we weren't allowed to break or fall back lest the whole Union line be flanked.

As we were in danger of being flanked ourselves, Chamberlain drew part of the line back perpendicular to the rest to guard our left. A few attacks later, with dark coming on and our ammunition gone, he gave the order to fix bayonets, moved that perpendicular edge back around front like swinging a gate, and led everyone in a downhill charge, the last cast of the dice. The Rebs, as exhausted as ourselves, broke and ran and were captured in the hundreds by men with empty rifles.

That's the story everyone knows, but the Major's part in the battle has never been recorded. It was the penultimate moment. The Rebs were coming up the slope and we had no rifle balls with which to meet them. "Fix bayonets!" came the cry, and two hundred men were poised atop the slope of History. From there they went on and down, to the easy capture of those Alabama boys and, farther, to the bloodshed at The Wilderness and Petersburg and Five Forks, to Appomattox, to Glory, or to the death camp at Andersonville. And as the sergeants yelled "Charge!" and we moved from cover, I suddenly felt a hand grasp my shoulder and heard a voice above the tumult—just four words, but to my mind the pivotal speech of the war: "Not *that* way, boy."

The great tide of Destiny had broken against the Major. Chamberlain charged down the hill, but we charged the other way.

I never knew my father, having met him just one time less than my mother did. From the first, the Major took his place. What had caused him to single me out as his protégé I'm not sure, although he once made a comment of sorts about that.

"I took one look at you," he said, "and immediately noticed two things. One, that you had a good head on your shoulders, and two,

that you had a chicken."

The Major raised me. I had been taught to read and write at the orphanage, but the Major taught me grammar, spelling, and the love of literature, mainly by forcing me to keep a journal, and keep it in English. It's true that I still tend to write the language as she is spoken instead of stodging it up and shifting it around to make it look as though I were translating from my native Latin, but otherwise I think I can pass for educated. In addition to French and Spanish, the Major also taught me about whores: to stay away from them, how not to catch anything from them, and what to do when you caught something—three times as much as I'd ever been taught on the subject before.

Most importantly, he taught me to love what he called "the action" for itself, not just for the money it brought in.

"You have to like what you do, as well as what you have," he would say, "or else everything goes sour."

I have very little time left and cannot list all the Major's accomplishments. However, his contributions to the growth and development of the Republic should not go unmentioned. In the late 'sixties and early 'seventies, he was instrumental in forming railroad companies all over the Southwest, and almost all the railroad lines he proposed were later constructed, although people did object to having to raise the money a second time. And I think that the spread of Law and the increasing effectiveness of Enforcement throughout the territories have been in some small part a response to the Major's unflagging efforts.

Unfortunately, poker is performed in the most soul-deadening surroundings of all Man's highest arts. The decades of dark rooms, bad whiskey, and worse cigars finally caught up with the Major, and in the last few months of his life he lost the enthusiasm he used to preach to me. His skill had begun to wane—not the mechanical aspect, for he was as dexterous as ever, but his nearly supernatural ability to "grasp this sorry scheme of things entire" and predict beforehand the ebb and flow in human affairs.

Without this ability, he was nearly rudderless in a poker game. He became just another cheat and, as he had taught me, a cheat is at a disadvantage among players of skill. Instead of bending his full powers of concentration to the hand in play, he would be gathering discards for bottom-dealing, only to see no real money fall on the next stacked hand. Other hands, quite trivial, would seem great crises to him, and

these misapplications of energy were a source of nervous strain. Had I surmised the gravity of the situation, I might have tried to keep him from playing, but I doubt I would have succeeded.

He saw his last game here in Hardluck. It began in the small hours of the morning, May 9th of the present year, continuing through the day and the evening. The Major's luck held through the daylight hours, but he was exceedingly wary of the other strong player in the game. This was a travelling salesman named Sampson, who I thought had the cheeky, no-account look of a welsher. I consoled myself with the thought that this was a no-credit game.

Since his playing had become worse, the Major was increasingly unwilling to have me watch over his shoulder. I contented myself with checking in every hour or so with a weak drink for him. I know now that the Major had invested his heart and soul in this game, but at the time I could detect no extra effort on his part. He always took his poker very seriously.

At eight o'clock in the evening he said he had been having a bad time but was rallying. "The Ohio boy is dealing seconds," he reported. "Sometimes thirds too, but I don't think that's deliberate."

At nine o'clock, he told me that the key to this game was the drummer Sampson. "If I can drive him out," he said, "the rest will be like picking berries."

At ten o'clock, he said that by the grace of God he had prevailed. Sampson had a few hundred left in front of him and the Major was confident that that was the last of his cash. He permitted me to stand by and watch for the next hour. A lot of money changed hands among the small fry and Sampson seined his share of it, but every time he seemed likely to get ahead the Major would bet into him, uncovering and punishing every bluff.

At eleven came the *coup de grâce*. Sampson had worked his way up to a balance of seven hundred dollars and lost it all bluffing with a four-flush against the Major's trifling pair of tens. The Major was happy but weak, clearly played out.

Then the blow fell. Sampson reached into his pocket and produced his wallet. Although he was out of cash, he had a deed of property, and from the comments I heard I gathered that it would be admitted to the game at a valuation of five hundred dollars. I walked out under a dark cloud. There was nothing to stop the Major from winning that five

hundred too, but somehow I knew he wouldn't. He was spent, and he wouldn't admit it by quitting either.

He came back to my hotel room shortly after two in the morning. He had lost all but a few hundred dollars. I had seen him play like a loser once or twice before, but at such times he had always known enough to quit before too much damage was done. Now he worried me. He was all blue in the face and he made little whistling sounds as he breathed.

I took him to his own room and camped out there after putting him to bed. When I could tell he was asleep, I lit a candle and browsed through a penny newspaper I'd bought during the day. Around three, I heard his breathing become very agitated. I thought of calling for a doctor, but the Major hated doctors and I was afraid that the strain of cussing one out would carry him off. He quieted down finally.

I next heard from him at three-thirty. He called out to me in a clear but low voice. He said he'd had a very strange dream. "We were back on the hill, Scotty, only you were all grown up. We were back on the hill and this time we went down with the others, through all the smoke and the noise and the boys falling—but when we got to the bottom, all there was . . . there was a long table and everyone was lined up to it and as we passed by they gave us our mustering-out pay . . . just paid us off . . . that was at Puebla, reinforcements came in and I was mustered out . . . and I said, 'Wait, I have two years' officer's pay before that other,' but they said, 'No, private . . .' 'No,' she said to me, '*tú pecasste . . . tú pecasste,*' she said . . ." Then he said someone's name—a foreign lady's, I think—but it was hard to catch.

At four o'clock he was dead.

I didn't tell anybody. I just went back to my room and slept for fourteen hours. When I woke up, I still had the same feeling. Why this town? What would be the point in burying the Major in this particular town? I couldn't see much point in anything else either. I went to a saloon, ordered a drink, and spent a few hours trying to finish it. Then I chanced to overhear a conversation about the poker game of the night before.

Someone with a sour-grapes voice suggested that the big winner, Sampson, had bought his way back in with a forged deed that wasn't worth a cent. I didn't listen to the argument that followed. I was thinking about that piece of paper Sampson had produced at the last mo-

ment. There was no doubt in my mind that that document, more than anything else, had killed the Major; he had broken his heart against it. Had it been worthless? Had Sampson been attempting to welsh out of five hundred dollars? It was something I had to see to.

I had never killed anyone before, but I had come close on a number of occasions, and had a pretty good idea of how to go about the job. Just a year past, for instance, I had put four bullets into a drunken lawyer who had tried to rob us at gunpoint, and it was only by a miracle that he had survived to run for Governor that fall.

I went back to my room and took a pistol from my valise. It's a real antique, an 1849 Colt .28 pocket pistol with a three-inch barrel and most of the stock removed, which I hereby bequeath to anyone who can still find ammunition for it. It's troublesome to load and it's only single-action, with a trick trigger that doesn't pop down until you've cocked, but I've found it very useful as a sort of five-shot derringer. As usual, I slipped it inside a folded-up newspaper and cut a slit to work the trigger through.

There were only a few hotels in town and Sampson, a travelling man, figured to be in one of them. I found his room at about eleven o'clock that night. He opened the door to my knock.

"Yes?" he said. He had no reason to remember me.

"Mr. Sampson," I said, "people have been dropping remarks about your behavior last night, and I thought perhaps you might like to set the record straight."

He opened the door wider and asked, "Just what are you talking about, old horse?"

"That deed you bought back into the game with last night," I said, poking him in the stomach with my newspaper, as if for emphasis. "Folks are saying it's no good. I'd like to have a look at it."

He gave a little snort, saying, "And I'd like you to go to hell!"

"After you," I said, working the trigger.

He fell inside his room. I followed him in and closed the door. The noise having been louder than I expected, I took his pillow from the bed and used it to muffle the second shot. Goose feathers sprayed everywhere. The newspaper had caught fire; I dropped it to the ground and stamped it out.

I rolled him over and went through his pockets. Aside from a great deal of cash, there was only the one deed. I would have known it was

the same one anyway, from the glimpse I'd gotten the night before. It was a gaudy thing, all gold ink in curlicues, two columns of fine print, and a fancy seal on the bottom—as worthless as its owner.

I just sat there. Something awful had just been revealed to me, and I needed time to think. Someone came looking for Sampson and raised a cry. I could have gotten away—by morning, I probably would have—I know I'd try now, if I could see a way. But it's best as it is. Once things go sour, as the Major taught me, they stay sour. I could never live happily in the world knowing I had killed the Major. And I did. I had killed him five years ago without knowing it, and the proof was the paper in my hand.

It was a Clock Correction Franchise for six towns on the Union Pacific Railroad.

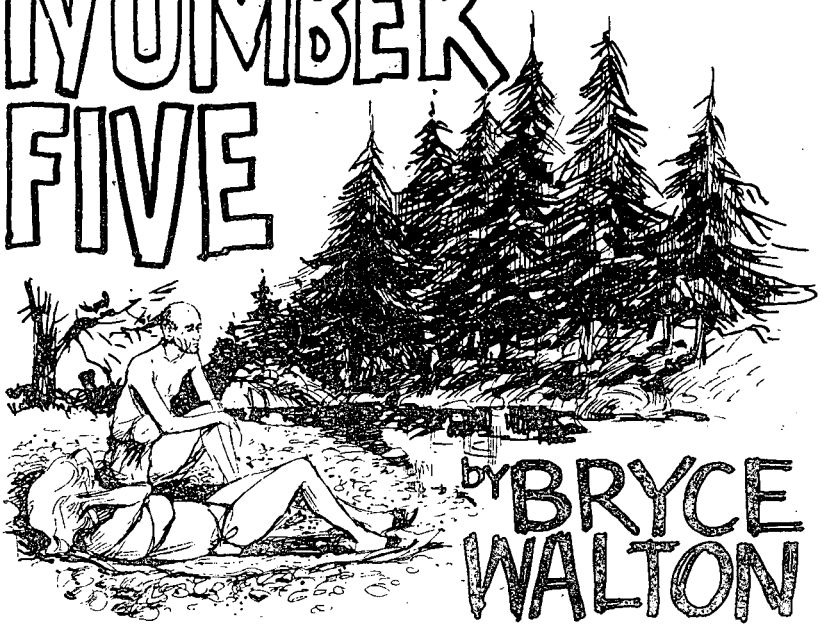
How many like Sampson are there, I wonder, who heard tell of my Denver invention and determined to work it? Very few, I suspect, or the word would be out and the game ruined. Quite likely Sampson was the only such in all the state.

There is a God, then, as in my gloomiest moments I always half suspected. Sampson He took for welshing, me He'll take for killing the Major; but I think the Major himself was just struck down in passing. There was no Divine justice in his death, not unless the psalm-singers and the pew-buyers and the finger-pointers are right and it's their Temperance God who runs things—and I know more about how things run than they do. I've made my peace with Whomever, anyway.

I guess that's all.

She called all of them Putzi . . .

NUMBER FIVE



by BRYCE WALTON

She brought number five up to the cabin early Monday morning in a spanking new Esquire station wagon. Giggle, giggle. The way she always did. Like a girl.

He was even older than the others had been, and not in top condition for his years. Skinny except for a little pot belly, some kind of rheumatism in the neck causing his head to twist forward and a bit to the left. A small bald head and a face grey and puckered up like it had

been in the water too long. But she didn't offer to help him drag the suitcases up under the pine trees onto the porch.

She just stood around gushing about how pretty the High Sierras were in the spring. How far out it was sending her to be there alone with her Putzi. She had called all of them that—her Putzi.

"Are you going to carry me over the threshold?" she said.

He was breathing too hard to say anything. She giggled and kissed him on top of the head. He giggled too, but squeakily, through his nose.

She went to the edge of the porch and leaned on the rail, turning her face up to the sun. She didn't look any older. And she was dressed neatly too, the way she always was—suede boots, tight expensively tailored jeans, red shirt, green leather jacket. She was maybe a little heavier, but still blonde, still nicely tanned by the Miami sun.

When they went inside, I lowered my binoculars. I rolled over on a high rock ledge and let the sun take some of the chill out of me. My hands were shaky. But anyway, here I was. She always told me where she was going on her honeymoon. She made a point of doing that. Just in case of an emergency, she always said. Just wanting to make me jealous, make me hurt.

I waited a while, up where dwarfed pines grew all gnarled and twisted out of cracks in the rocks. A squirrel played around, coming closer and closer to me, wanting to trust me. A porcupine came out from under a rock and looked at me from no more than three feet away. Animals aren't naturally afraid of people. They just learn to be.

Smoke started coming out of the chimney. Three hours later they came out, carrying beach towels. She wore a yellow bikini, he wore baggy sunshorts that came to his knees. His legs were short, hairless, and white, stuck in black shoes with no socks.

They went down a path to the creek behind the cabin. He slipped on the pine needles once, and fell down. She just stood and watched him struggle up and on after her, shuffling and mumbling. She waited in the shade where the creek dropped into a pool. He whinnied like an old horse when she pushed him into the icy water. He crawled right out and lay gasping on the gravel, watching her dive in and swim around and float close in toward him on her back. She hadn't changed. She'd always been a real tease.

She came out and spread her beach towel on the gravel and lay

down where some sun came through the pine branches. He edged over close to her. She pushed him away and told him sharply that she was tired and wanted to nap. He sidled away and watched her. He was shivering.

They went back into the cabin an hour later. At night, when the lights went on, I moseyed down and watched them through the window. It was open an inch at the bottom. I could hear them, and the brush around the window would hide me if they came outside.

She lay on a furry grey couch in front of the rock fireplace. Logs were burning blue and yellow. She wore a red housecoat that didn't hide much. Putzi wore baggy striped blue-and-white flannel pajamas. He put a log on the fire. He coughed. His face was the color of spoiled soup meat, and he had small glassy eyes that made me remember an old discarded toy.

He looked at her and looked at her and finally got himself over to the couch. He looked at her some more and got himself to sit down and drop an arm over her shoulder. She didn't move. Encouraged, he moved his hand.

She sat up abruptly and he almost fell backward onto the shag rug.

He stood up. Blue cords squirmed in his throat.

"I want a cigarette," she said. He gave her a cigarette from a black box on the coffee table. He had trouble making the lighter work, and she jerked it out of his hand and lit her own.

"I want a drink, Putzi. Would you get me a drink?"

"Yes, dear—yes." He cleared his throat nervously after every third word and sniffed loudly. "What would you like?"

"Anything. Bourbon and water. Easy on the water."

He went to the sideboard, made her the drink, and brought it to her. She put it on the coffee table and left it there.

"Fix yourself one," she said.

"I don't take much to the hard stuff," he said, like an apology.

"Better have a bracer, Putzi."

"It ain't so good for me."

Maybe this is it, I thought. It's in the liquor. Otherwise she would be belting it down.

"Don't you even want to have a drink with me, for God's sake?"

"But—"

"Can't we even share a few drinks, Putzi?" She walked to the

sideboard and stood with her back to him so he couldn't see what she was doing. From where I was watching through the window I couldn't see either. I didn't figure I needed to.

She came back with a shot glass of bourbon.

Putzi took it. He didn't knock it back. He sipped at it and bent right over, coughing and choking. The bourbon spilled on the rug. She laughed and pounded his back.

She told him to go in and go to bed. He obeyed, still coughing, and she lay there drinking until the fire went out, about midnight, then turned out the light.

In the morning, Putzi came out on the porch to drink his coffee and squint at the sky. Even if she'd put the stuff in his bourbon he evidently hadn't taken enough of whatever it was. Well, there were plenty of other ways. Plenty of time, too, but she was always impatient.

I wondered what, if anything, she had put into the bourbon. There were a lot of things she could have used. I'd found out about many of them myself.

I had a tarp to roll up in at night. It was warm enough, but I never notice cold much, or heat. I never feel hungry either. I just ate because it was there. I'd picked up canned things down at Morgan Pass when the bus stopped there. I had a spoon, some beans, creamed corn, some other stuff. I had a canteen I could fill up in the creek after dark, but I never got very thirsty either.

I never built a fire. They would see the flame at night, the smoke during the day.

I rolled up in the tarp and looked at the stars. There sure are a lot of them in the High Sierras. I lay there counting them. I never sleep much either.

Maybe she'd smother him in the night. Something like that had happened to Hal Richardson. He hadn't been a bad dude. Neither had Mack Stanton, or that other one with the motorcycle. The one with the motorcycle had been pretty dumb—he couldn't even talk straight—but he had heavy money. All of them had that.

Did she think I was all that stupid? Did she really think I was damn fool enough not to know about them? She had always called me stupid, but did she really think I hadn't figured it all out?

About noon they came out. He was walking stiffly, holding his hand

against his back. He wore a new khaki safari jacket, khaki pants, and hiking boots. " 'Fraid I ain't much up to a long hike this morning." He sneezed and wiped his nose, then the top of his head, with a big blue bandanna.

She walked on ahead. She was wearing black pants and moccasins, a red blouse, and a leather vest with fringes on it. She had a red scarf around her head. She liked red.

"We'll give it a whirl anyway, Putzi. Walking's good for what ails you."

"I ain't used to walking much. The high altitude ain't so good for me either."

"We can't do much about the altitude, can we?" she sniped.

They walked across the creek on flat rocks and into the piney woods. There in the cool shade she saw the mushrooms growing in green moss on the shady side of a fallen log. Then she noticed a lot of other mushrooms growing out of the thick damp pine needles and cottonwood leaves.

Putzi was back about a hundred yards. He couldn't see her. He sat on a rock next to the creek, mopping at his grey face. He stared at the water and looked lost and sad.

I knew how he felt. That was how I first got to wondering about her, when I was alone that way. And she left me alone most of the time. I was always waking up in the dark and she was gone. That was when I began to figure things out. Like old Putzi was sitting there alone trying to figure what he'd gotten mixed up with. Only I had plenty of time, and Putzi didn't.

Oh she's a mean one, Putzi. Maybe you're getting a feel of the meanness, but you won't have time to figure it all out. You don't know she's collecting the mushrooms now—the red speckled ones—in the red scarf. You probably wouldn't suspect that they might be poisonous even if you did see her.

Maybe she's used them before. There was that place in the Main Woods up above Bucks County. That place near Sacramento. That other place on the salt flats out past San Bernadino—

"Do you like mushrooms?" she asked Putzi on the way back.

"I like 'em a lot. I like 'em with thick steaks."

"You'll get these in a thick stew."

While the stew was on, she took him back down to the old swim-

ming hole. This time she skinny-dipped, then lay beside him on her back in the altogether. She urged him to do the same, but he just sat shivering in his shorts and glancing at her out of the corner of his eye.

She laughed and laughed. She thought it was pretty funny even if she didn't think there was anyone there to see it. But I couldn't laugh. That was another thing they thought was odd about me. I never did laugh at anything.

Anyway, now I knew. I've become a real amateur expert on mushrooms. And other things. And while they were still down by the creek, I went in where the cold fireplace was and over to the sideboard and dropped some of my own stuff from an envelope into her bottle of bourbon.

Funny how I felt doing it, and after. I had the feeling that all the world had speeded up, all of time, and I was slowing down. I could hardly breathe. It was like I was surrounded by a rage and hatred that was pressing in, trying to stop me from breathing. I couldn't remember the past. I couldn't think of a future. There was just the big everything now and what I had to do to get free, breathe again. I was caught up in a river, carried along into what I was doing, had-to-do, and nothing-else-I-could-do. No way out, no way out, I kept thinking. Then it was, No *other* way out, no *other* way out . . .

Then it was done and I was out and running under the trees. I ran and ran, down and down, until I couldn't run any more. I couldn't move. I sat and began crying or laughing or both. I felt like that big hawk sailing along on an updraft of wind, not moving his wings, like a kite.

When I went back to the cabin, Putzi was gone. He'd eaten his mushroom stew. She was coming back up the trail to the cabin from the creek, carrying an oak-handled spade over her shoulder. Her face was sweating and flushed, her eyes bright. She put the shovel under the back porch, took off a pair of suede gloves, went into the living room, and poured herself a double shot of bourbon. She knocked that back, poured another double shot, and sat down on the couch and sipped more slowly, relaxing for a few minutes. Until she began to gag.

She dropped the glass on the rug and tried to get up but fell to her knees and grabbed at her throat. She made strangling sounds and tried to crawl toward the kitchen.

And saw me standing there.

She yelled my name. She rolled over onto her back and reached for me, moving her hands in the air like a bird's claws. The big ruby ring flashed on her left hand. "Your father gave me this ring, Bobby," she'd said once. "For Christmas."

Which one? Which one was he?

"Wha—what you doing home now, Bobby?" she asked now.

I laughed. I went out and started walking down toward the main road, still laughing. Home? Keeping me in one school after another. Boarding me out. Leaving me off with relatives I didn't know and who didn't want to know me.

But she didn't hide the truth from me. I figured it out.

And she really thought I was some kind of silly damn fool.

Join Raffles and Company in an Atlantic crossing . . .

RAFFLES AND OPERATION HANDCUFFS

by BARRY PEROWNE

Alone in my Mount Street flat one sweltering July afternoon, I was in a morbid mood. I had not recently heard from A. J. Raffles, and I was reduced to reading again about a matter which had for several days been monopolizing the newspapers. It concerned a man and a young woman for whom a massive police search was in progress.

Born in Michigan, U.S.A., in 1862, now forty-eight years of age, the hunted man was said to have been functioning here in London as a

practitioner of homeopathic medicine. His newspaper photograph showed him to be small of stature, moustached, wearing a frock coat, wing collar, and gold-rimmed glasses.

He looked a very inoffensive person, yet he was alleged to have poisoned his wife, dismembered her body, concealed what was left of it in the cellar of his rented house, 39 Hilldrop Crescent, and decamped in the company of his secretary, who seemed from her photograph to be a young person of pleasing appearance and modest character.

No moralist myself, I could not help thinking it a pity that the remains of the doctor's wife, Belle, had come to light inopportunely. She was stated to have been a third-rate music-hall artiste, prone to alcoholism and extramarital liaisons, and her photograph was that of a florid woman, grossly overdressed.

Intuitively, I knew that her husband must have endured a perfect hell of connubial torment before, in sheer desperation, he had found the courage to commit the act of which he was now accused.

Poor Hawley Harvey Crippen, I thought, and poor Ethel LeNeve.

I could imagine how they must be feeling now—hunted and fearful wherever they were, two against the whole wide world. I could only hope that the small doctor from Michigan and his shy-looking little English secretary would find some refuge where, under new names and in the peace of each other's arms, they could live out their fugitive idyll. But it would require a miracle with all this hue and cry going on for them, and the monstrous unlikelihood of a miracle in this day and age further depressed me. I threw aside the newspapers.

Through my living-room windows, wide open to the sun-shimmer of pleasant Mount Street, drifted the sounds of midsummer London. A hansom jingled by, a distant automobile backfired, a newsboy was hoarsely bawling, and the clock of the church in South Audley Street struck four.

I was about to rouse myself to mix a whisky-and-soda when a word the newsboy was bawling impinged upon my ear and jerked me bolt upright. It was the word "miracle." Tensely, I listened.

"Extry! Extry!" The newsboy was approaching at a run along Mount Street, his shouts growing louder. "Modern miracle! Marconi invention catches Crippen an' LeNeve! Signal by wireless sent from *S.S. Montrose*—'undred-an'-fifty miles at sea, ahtward bahnd! Couple 'oo boarded ship at Antwerp usin' names Robinson an' Son believed an-

swer description Crippen an' LeNeve wiv gal dressed as boy! Extry! Wireless miracle sensation! Read all abaht it!"

The raucous bawling passed on by. It left me paralyzed. I had thought a miracle in this day and age monstrously unlikely. I had forgotten Guglielmo Marconi, Italian genius and Nobel laureate. So also, apparently, had the poor sinners from Hilldrop Crescent. They were now, surely, in danger of becoming the first fugitives ever to be delivered to the hangman by means of Marconi's invention of wireless-telegraphy, thus earning for themselves in criminal history the immortality of the damned.

How could they possibly, now, escape that terrible fate?

I poured myself a half tumbler of whisky, drank it neat, and poured another.

My doorbell rang.

Glass in hand, I listened. The bell did not ring again. I put down the glass, went into my small lobby, and opened the front door. It gave on to the third-floor landing. There was no one there.

I glanced each way along the landing. Nobody. But lying at my threshold was a package.

It appeared to bear no name, no address, no postage stamps. About the size of a medical man's instrument case, it was done up neatly in paper of a decorative pattern and was secured by blue ribbon tied in a perfect bow. I stooped to examine the anonymous package more closely.

"It's not explosive," said a voice.

I straightened up with a jerk.

Two persons of inimitable elegance stepped out, smiling, from a recess along the landing.

"Happy birthday, Bunny!" cried A. J. Raffles and his sister Dinah.

Raffles picked up the package and, handing it to me, said, "A present for you—from Dinah, as you may deduce from the tasteful wrapping."

"Dear Bunny," said Dinah, "many happy returns." She kissed me on the cheek. "Ugh, you've been drinking whisky!"

"And I see," said Raffles as we went into my living room, "that he's poured one out ready for me. How thoughtful! But I'll take a splash of soda in mine." His keen face tanned, a pearl in his cravat, he put his topper on the table and reached for the soda syphon. "You *were* expecting us, of course, Bunny?"

"Actually," I said, "I was beginning to think you'd forgotten what day this is."

"We'd never forget your birthday, Bunny," said Dinah.

With her fair hair and grey eyes, her summery dress, becoming little hat, and pretty parasol, she was a credit to her brother—and well he knew it.

Seven years his junior, she had grown up under the care of guardians far apart from him, due to their parents' early demise, but for quite a while now Raffles had made himself personally responsible, as Dinah's only living relative, for her guidance and advancement in life. She had no suspicion that it was by means of opportunistic criminalities that he had achieved and maintained his celebrity in the world of sport and Society.

For my part, I was in love with Dinah, but I dared not let it show for, as her brother's partner in crime, I was no less subject to its hazards—and I knew that in no circumstances would he tolerate me as a suitor for Dinah. He would kill me first. He had other plans for her.

I could see that she was longing for me to unwrap my present, so I made a big business of doing so. "Whatever can it be?" I marvelled. "Oh! It's an overnight travelling case! Dinah! *Really!* You shouldn't have done it! And my initials on it too—in gold leaf!"

"Open it, Bunny," said Dinah.

I opened the case. It contained a portable typewriter.

"Dinah thinks no journalist should be without a typewriter nowadays," said Raffles, "and I told her I quite agreed with her."

He was amused, knowing that it was only on his advice that I kept up, for the gullible, a pretense of being a freelance journalist, who from natural modesty signed my work with pseudonyms. People often congratulated me on pieces I had not even read, much less written, such people claiming that they were not easily deceived, they recognized my style.

"D'you really think my present will be a help to you, Bunny?" Dinah asked me anxiously.

Recovering from my momentary confusion, I assured her that there was nothing I had needed more, without realizing it, than a typewriter.

"I shan't rest till I've learned how to use it," I promised her. "An inspired gift, Dinah! How extraordinarily kind of you!"

I made bold to return her kiss and, knowing what ladies enjoy of an

afternoon, insisted on making tea for her. I also was able to produce some *petits fours* purchased at Gunter's, the famous Mayfair *patisserie* just around the corner, which Dinah, on sampling, pronounced excellent.

"Quite delicious, Bunny," she said, delighting me by accepting another.

Raffles declined one. "Not with whisky-and-soda," he said, and added casually, "By the way, Bunny, we're sailing for Canada tomorrow."

"Canada?" I said. I was shocked by the news that they were going without me. What might it portend? Ever since the advent of Dinah into Raffles' life, I had had a lurking fear that our confederacy might not endure unchanged. My lips went dry. I moistened them. "How long will you be away?"

"I really don't know," said Raffles.

Dinah seemed to sense my consternation. "Stop teasing Bunny," she said indignantly to her brother. "You go too far!"

"Perhaps," he admitted. He handed me a document. "For Raffles—*and Company*," he said.

I looked at the document. It was a reservation not for two passengers but for three—first class to Montreal on the White Star liner, *Laurentic*.

"Happy birthday, old boy," said Raffles.

I breathed again.

In fact, I was so relieved at not being left behind that it did not occur to me until our second morning at sea to ask Raffles if he had some ulterior purpose in making this voyage to Canada.

"It depends what you mean by 'ulterior,' " Raffles said. We were taking a stroll before breakfast on the *Laurentic*'s topmost deck, where the lifeboats hung in their davits. Dinah was not yet astir, but the sun was up and the sea sparkled.

"My primary purpose," Raffles went on, "has to do with Dinah. I want to get her happily married before my crimes catch up with me and the scandal compromises her prospects in life."

I could not help thinking of Hawley Crippen, whose crime had caught up with him by wireless-telegraphy. There could be no compromise with the hangman. I wondered uneasily what was happening

now to the pitiful fugitives, "Mr. Robinson and Son," on the *S.S. Montrose,* westbound like the *Laurentic* but steaming along somewhere ahead of us.

Raffles was telling me about a man who had been his neighbor in London. "He's inherited a considerable fortune, including a vast ranch in Alberta, where he's now settled. He's invited me to visit him. I cabled asking if I could bring Dinah and yourself, and he replied that he'd be delighted. Bunny, he couldn't be more delighted than I would be if Dinah and he should take a fancy to each other. He's a first-rate fellow, and if Dinah married him she'd be living far away from England—and England is the last place I want her to be if I should someday stand in the dock at the Old Bailey."

We paused at the forward rail of the boat deck. On the open deck below us, where steerage-class passengers were sauntering, children skylarked on the great tarpaulin-covered hatches of the holds. Their childish voices mingled with the hiss of the liner's bows as they clove the summer sea.

"So I booked our passages," said Raffles. "The fares left me low in funds. I went to see our friend and invaluable fence, Ivor Kern, to touch him for a loan. When I told him we'd be sailing on the *Laurentic,* he was interested. Ivor has informers in the London underworld. He has reason to think we may have a fellow passenger here on the *Laurentic* who's getting hastily out of England with a nice little haul of diamonds stolen from a mansion in Grosvenor Square. *We* could do with those diamonds, Bunny. Or would that be," said Raffles, giving me a wicked look, " 'ulterior'?"

Before I could answer, a brazen clangor rang out. On the deck below us a white-jacketed steward had appeared. His hair gleamed like black lacquer in the sunshine as he rang a brass handbell.

"Breakfast call for the steerage passengers," said Raffles. "The man with the diamonds could, of course, be travelling steerage—or in any other class on the ship. All Ivor could tell me is that he thinks the fellow uses the name of Creighton. There's no such name in the *Laurentic*'s passenger list—I've had a look at it in the Purser's office—so if the diamond chap *is* on board, it'll need smart work to spot him. The odds are against it. Still, we must keep our eyes peeled. Strange things happen at sea."

We turned to stroll back along the boat deck.

"Incidentally," Raffles said, "note the sign on the door of that cabin in the superstructure."

I followed his glance. The sign read W/T.

"A symbol," said Raffles, "of the changing times. I realized last year when Marconi's invention was reported as instrumental in saving the lives of passengers on the White Star liner *Republic*, which collided with the steamer *Florida* in a fog near the Ambrose Lightship, that it wouldn't be long before wireless-telegraphy proved to be an extension of the long arm of the law. So I thought it prudent to attend some lectures on the subject of Marconi's invention. I didn't want *us* ever to be caught napping by it." His tone changed. "Ah, there's Dinah! She's made another acquaintance, I see."

Standing at the rail, her graceful dress and the fringe of her raised parasol fluttering in the light breeze, Dinah was chatting with three men, two of them officers. One, bronzed and handsome, wore the striking uniform of the world-famous Canadian Mounted Police; the other, silkily bearded and no less handsome, wore the white jodhpurs and tunic, Sam Browne belt, and immaculate turban of a celebrated Sikh Lancer regiment.

I had already met the two officers, as they had been placed at the same table as ourselves in the dining saloon. Their names were Neil MacDonald and Gopal Singh, and they were returning to their respective homes after taking part in the pageantry at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle associated with the King's birthday celebrations.

The third man, a civilian, Dinah's new acquaintance, I did not know. Of slender build, with a thin mobile face and clever brown eyes, he wore white flannels, a striped blazer, and a Basque beret. He was talking and gesturing with his expressive hands as we approached.

"This ship, the *Laurentic*, Miss Raffles," I heard him saying to Dinah, "normally makes the Atlantic crossing in seven days. The *S.S. Montrose* is much slower. I estimate that we're overtaking her at the rate of three and a half hours a day, so there's every possibility that we shall pass the *Montrose* and reach Quebec a little before her."

"What will happen," Dinah asked, "to those two fugitives when they get to Quebec?"

"They'll be taken into custody, Miss Raffles," said Neil MacDonald.

"By you Mounties, no doubt," said the civilian with a smile. "You're reputed, I believe, always to get your man?"

Just then Raffles and I joined the group and Dinah said, "Oh, here's my brother, with our friend Mr. Manders! Bunny, I want you to meet Mr. Alphonse Courlander. He's a journalist like yourself."

The last person I wanted to meet was a genuine journalist, but Mr. Courlander was very polite, and pretended to know my name.

"Manders of the *Morning Post*, I fancy," he said as we shook hands. "Are you on this Crippen assignment too, Mr. Manders?"

I explained that I was merely on vacation. I felt rather embarrassed. Fortunately, Major Singh suggested that it was time we went down to breakfast. And I resolved, as we went, that hereafter I would keep out of the way of Mr. Alphonse Courlander.

Nevertheless, I was determined to keep my promise to Dinah and please her by mastering the use of the typewriter she had given me. So, with the intention of getting to grips with it in my cabin, I slipped down after breakfast, only to find my cabin-mate still in his bunk. He was not feeling well. A grey-haired, grey-moustached, jaundiced-looking man, his name was Moreton P. Horris. He was a professor of anthropology, and among his baggage, as I had noticed when he unpacked, was a battered Gladstone bag containing gorillas' jawbones and other ossiferous trophies of his world travels. He groaned at me now that he had a touch of malaria, picked up in the Congo.

I could not very well disturb him, in his delicate condition, with my typewriting experiments. So, carrying my typewriter in its case, I went to the writing room. There were people in it. Not unnaturally, they were writing. They were doing it in the obsolescent way, scratching with pens, and I doubted if they would appreciate my doing it among them in the modern but noisier way. I therefore continued my reconnaissance, finally finding a relatively suitable place.

It was up on the boat deck. Between each of the lifeboats was a bollard. I found I could sit on a bollard and place my typewriter on a chock protruding from under a lifeboat. The arrangement was not ideal but neither was it disagreeable, for I was at least in the sunshine and had some degree of seclusion.

The latter proved illusory, for I had not been at work more than half an hour or so, carefully using both my index fingers, when I became aware of prying eyes. I looked out from my nook between the lifeboats. A boy of about twelve years old stood watching me, intrigued.

"Una máquina, señor," he said, indicating the typewriter. *"Maravillosa!"*

He wore shorts and a fisherman's blue jersey and, with his black curls and sun-browned face, he was a sturdy child, evidently Spanish. I admitted in that language, of which I have a fair knowledge, that my typewriter was indeed a machine and marvellous, and asked him if he spoke any English.

"No, señor," he said. *"Es una lástima."*

I agreed that it was a shame he knew no English. He told me that he had lived all his life in Coruña, that his name was Jose-Luis Molina, and that, his mother having died recently, his father, who was the steerage steward in the ship and was constantly at sea, was taking him to Canada to place him in the care of an aunt and uncle who lived in Toronto.

"In Toronto?" I said, speaking Spanish. "Well, Jose-Luis, you'll certainly need a bit of English if you're to get along in Toronto, so I'll give you a start. Pay attention now!"

I pecked out on my typewriter some everyday English words, making him utter them and telling him their Spanish equivalent. Fascinated by the typewriter, he learned fast. But I sensed that he was itching to get his own rather grubby fingers on the fabulous machine, so I let him take my seat on the bollard and, standing over him in my role of pedagogue, I spelled various English words for him to tap out with intense care by means of the keyboard.

We were both enjoying our novel experience when suddenly our sunny nook between the lifeboats was invaded by a thundercloud in the shape of the white-jacketed steward with hair like black lacquer Raffles and I had seen clanging the brass handbell for the steerage passengers' breakfast call.

"Jose-Luis!" he hissed. *"Sin verguenza! Abajo pronto! Anda, anda!"*

Sped on his way by a ringing clip over the ear, Jose-Luis darted off along the boat deck, while the steward apologized to me for the violence of his interruption.

"I'm Alfredo Molina, sir," he said in English, "the boy's father. The lad will get me in trouble, running all over the ship. He belongs in steerage, where I'm the steward. He'd no business molesting you. Please accept my apologies."

An idea flashed into my mind.

"Alfredo," I said, "if I may call you so, Jose-Luis has been telling me about himself. It occurred to me that when he starts school in Toronto among English-speaking Canadian boys he'll be at a grave disadvantage in trying to follow the lessons. As you see from this paper"—I unrolled it from the typewriter—"I've been trying to give him a start in English. Personally, I've little to occupy my time on this Atlantic crossing. As Jose-Luis isn't allowed on the upper decks, I could easily spare an hour or so daily to pop down to the steerage quarters with my typewriting machine and continue his lessons—if you think it might help."

"Sir," said the steward, "*would* you do that?"

"Alfredo," I said warmly, offering him my hand with a frank look, "it would be a pleasure!"

Having thus seized the opportunity to get a closer look at the steerage passengers on the off-chance of spotting anybody among them who might conceivably be the Grosvenor Square diamonds thief, I told Raffles about it that evening before dinner. He congratulated me.

"Quick thinking, Bunny," he said. "Well done!"

"Thank you," I said. "How have *you* got on today?"

He told me that, prowling around, he had noted a few things and people of possible interest to us. "That W/T cabin," he said, "is manned by two operators trained by the Marconi International Marine Communication Company. They keep alternate watch. Whichever one's on duty frequently runs up to the bridge with messages. The messages must be communications from other ships at sea, because—if I understood correctly those lectures I attended—we're now out of range of the Marconi station at Portishead on the Bristol Channel *and* of the Marconi station on Belle Isle, just north of Newfoundland."

"Science," I said, thinking of poor Hawley Crippen and his Ethel. "My God, how it complicates ocean travel nowadays!"

"Anyway," said Raffles, "there's a man in first class here on the *Laurentic* that I'd like to get a look at. His name's Dewhurst. He has a cabin to himself, takes his meals there, and seems never to leave it. I want to find out why. But drink up, Bunny—we'd better go in to dinner."

At our table in the palatial dining saloon, we found our regular dinner companions already there. Dinah was seated between the Mountie officer, Neil MacDonald, and the silkily bearded Sikh Lancer, Major Gopal Singh. Madame Bodsohn, a majestic lady from Luxem-

bourg with a knitting reticule, a black velvet choker, and an elaborate blonde coiffure, sat beside and somewhat overshadowed the scrawny anthropologist, Professor Moreton P. Horris. I noted without pleasure that we had an addition to our table tonight—the journalist, Alphonse Courlander.

"My paper, Miss Raffles," he was saying as Raffles and I, with a bow to the company, took our seats, "would pay a great deal for an exclusive story on Dr. Crippen, Miss LeNeve, and the occurrence in the cellar of 39 Hilldrop Crescent. Such a story would be what's called a 'scoop' or a 'beat.' " He smiled, his eyes lively, his clever hands expressive. "I'm a little uneasy, Miss Raffles, about the presence of your friend Mr. Manders on this ship. Is a newspaperman ever really on vacation?"

"Don't worry, Mr. Courlander," said Dinah, quick to defend me. "Mr. Manders would never steal your story. He's not the kind of man who steals things."

Raffles reached across to pat Dinah's hand affectionately.

"But, Mr. Courlander," said Madame Bodsohn, interminably rolling one of her balls of wool, "I recall a rumor that the notorious Dr. Crippen and Miss LeNeve had taken refuge in the Rue Côte D'Eich, Luxembourg, where I live when I am not visiting my son who's engineering in Canada. Might not this tale that the wretched fugitives are on the S.S. *Montrose* prove just another baseless rumor?"

"Interesting point," said Professor Horris with a clack of his dentures.

"Captain Kendall of the *Montrose,*" said the journalist, "must have felt pretty confident. Otherwise, he wouldn't have transmitted his now world-famous Marconi signal to London—and a further signal, according to the latest news available at the time we sailed. I understand that his suspicion of the 'Robinsons, father and son' was aroused because he chanced to notice that they were holding hands."

"Oh, poor souls," Dinah said, distressed. "How awful to be betrayed by their love for each other, their need for each other's reassurance!"

"As an individual I agree with you, Miss Raffles," said Courlander. "But as a reporter I can't fail to see that the poignancy of the incident adds to the human interest—I might almost say the *glamour*—of this ocean chase. Madame Bodsohn," he went on, "you *do* have a point. Captain Kendall's identification of the 'Robinsons,' confident as he appar-

ently is about it, depends solely on observation. He wouldn't venture to confine them to their cabin, question or examine or in any way interfere with them. If he were to do so, and prove to be mistaken in his identification, he'd have laid himself and the owners of the *Montrose* wide open to a suit for damages."

"He'll just be having a watch kept on the couple, Dinah," said Neil MacDonald.

"So they're walking about on the deck of that ship," said Dinah, "thinking they're safe at sea and that there's some hope for them, and all the time secret Marconi signals are telling the whole world where they are and what they're doing. It's like some grisly cat teasing two mice—it's tragic."

"Crippen and LeNeve should hang," said Professor Horris. " 'Thou shalt not kill.' "

"Doesn't the hangman kill?" Dinah retorted hotly.

"It's his job, Dinah," explained Neil MacDonald. "Somebody has to do it."

"I don't see why," Dinah insisted.

"Quite right, Dinah," said Gopal Singh. "There are better ways of retribution—and redemption."

"Speaking as a widow with two grandchildren," said Madame Bodsohn, stabbing ivory needles into her ball of wool, "I seem to recall, Major Singh, that you have a pleasant custom in India of requiring a man's widow to burn herself to death on her miserable husband's funeral pyre!"

"*Suttee?*" said the Sikh Lancer. "I'm happy to inform you, Madame Bodsohn, that it's no longer practiced."

"Dinah," said Raffles briskly, "you need a glass of champagne to cheer you up. In fact, I think we all do." He beckoned our table steward and pointed out a vintage in the wine list. "Bring four bottles, please."

In some subtle way, difficult to analyze, the conversation had diminished my zeal to identify, if he should be among us on the *Laurentic*, the thief with the Grosvenor Square diamonds. But I had pledged myself and my typewriter to the service of Alfredo Molina and Jose-Luis, so I made my way down, next morning, to the steerage-class section of the ship. I found Alfredo and another steward in the spartan but adequate dining saloon. They had stacked the benches to one side and

were scrubbing the long tables, so I went on through to the open deck where the steerage passengers were sunning themselves—among them a small group of young nuns shepherdessed by a senior of their order who wore gold-rimmed glasses like Hawley Crippen's.

From among the children frolicking on the huge hatches of the for'ard holds, Jose-Luis ran to me eagerly. I commandeered a corner for us on one of the hatches and, letting Jose-Luis take over the typewriter, began the lesson. I soon found that we were encircled by marvelling children. I had become the involuntary Pied Piper of the White Star Line. This was more than I had bargained for. I was in deep waters, for some of the youngsters began making demands—for a go at the typewriter, I imagined—in languages unfamiliar to me.

"Bunny!" I heard a voice call from above.

I looked up. To increase my embarrassment, I saw that the Captain and the Officer of the Watch were leaning out from windows of the towering bridge-cab, taking note of my proceedings. But it was Dinah who had called to me. She was standing at the boat-deck rail with Neil MacDonald and Major Singh. She waved to me, vanished, and presently reappeared at my side. By now contention was growing among the children and their parents were seizing them or admonishing them and other adults were reproaching me for disturbing the peace.

"However did you come to create such a scene, Bunny?" Dinah demanded.

I protested that I had only been trying to teach Jose-Luis some English with the aid of my birthday typewriter.

"Why, Bunny, how kind!" she exclaimed, knowing nothing of my ulterior motive. "What a selfless person you are. Do let me help!"

"Gladly, Dinah," I said. "You can take over my class for a while."

Leaving her to it, I slunk away for'ard along the open deck and, hiding behind the capstan in the bows, lit a cigarette with a trembling hand.

When I ventured to return, I found that Dinah and the nuns had drawn up a roster for the would-be typists, who were standing in a queue to take their turns at the typewriter, with Jose-Luis, the expert, supervising their efforts.

For Dinah and myself, these morning classes on the steerage deck became a regular routine, and our daily arrival was eagerly awaited.

We were popular figures, especially me, the bearer of the typewriter.

Thanks to Dinah and the nuns, especially the senior nun with the gold-rimmed glasses, I had ample opportunity to wander away and take shrewd note of the adult steerage passengers. But any one of at least a dozen or more, as far as I could judge, might well have been Creighton, the Grosvenor Square diamond thief, and I was beginning to think my task was hopeless when one day, well on in the afternoon, a sudden rumor sped through the *Laurentic*.

The talk was to the effect that a smudge of smoke visible on the starboard horizon was made by the ship we had been steadily overtaking at the rate of at least three and a half hours a day—the notorious S.S. *Montrose*.

As I was making my way topside to get a view from the *Laurentic*'s boat deck, I was joined by Alphonse Courlander, dapper in flannels, blazer, and beret.

"A fascinating situation, Manders," he said. "Those fugitives on the *Montrose* think themselves undetected, safe under their cover of 'Robinson and Son,' yet thanks to Signor Marconi the whole world knows who and where they are. Hah, a situation unique in the annals of crime!"

I edged away from his enthusiastic company as we reached the boat deck. In the sunshine, first-class passengers were already lining the starboard rail. I saw the smudge of smoke above a ship we were passing, a westbound ship, barely hull up on the blue horizon—the S.S. *Montrose*, out of Antwerp, for Quebec.

I heard the sound of singing. It came from below, from the open steerage deck on the *Laurentic*. The nuns, evidently knowing of the fugitives on the *Montrose*, were singing a hymn. A hand gripped my arm. Startled, I met Raffles' eyes. He drew me aside.

"Ten minutes ago, Bunny," he said softly, "Mr. Dewhurst left his cabin to come up and take a look, like everybody else, at the *Montrose*. His absence gave me my first chance to nip into his cabin and take a look at his belongings. His name's not Dewhurst."

"He's Creighton?" My heart pounded. "The man with the diamonds?"

"I found no diamonds," Raffles said. "I found a document. It's typewritten. It's headed *Operation Handcuffs*. Take a look at the man. He's the one standing a bit apart, watching the *Montrose* through

binoculars. He keeps mostly to his cabin because his face is well known—it's often in the newspapers. He's a Scotland Yard man, Chief Inspector Dew, in charge of the Hilldrop Crescent case. He's travelling to Quebec with warrants for the arrest of Dr. Hawley Crippen and Miss Ethel LeNeve."

Frail from the steerage deck came the sung plea of the compassionate voices:

"O hear us when we pray to Thee
For those in peril on the sea."

Out of heaven responded a clap of thunder. It was the giant roar of the *Laurentic*'s siren, booming out across the deep a passing salute to the S.S. *Montrose* and a pledge of Nemesis to the two lost souls on board her.

I was watching, my breath held, Chief Inspector Dew. He turned from the rail. Tall, lean of face, with a heavy moustache, he wore a light raincoat and a bowler hat. Putting his binoculars into their case, he walked away along the boat deck.

"He's seen all he wants," I said, my heart heavy. "He'll be waiting for them at Quebec."

"If they get to Quebec," said Raffles.

His tone was so strange that I glanced at him sharply. He was looking at the door of the Marconi W/T cabin in the superstructure. Before I could ask what he meant by his remark, we were joined by Dinah, MacDonald, and Major Singh.

Knowing Raffles as I did, I was worried by his enigmatic remark, and I slept little that night. My cabin-mate, Professor Horris, disturbed me by his tossing and turning. He, too, seemed to have something on his mind. And several times I heard the *Laurentic*'s siren shriek a warning—probably to fishing dories, for we must by now be in the trawling area off the Gaspé Peninsula and approaching the Gulf of the St. Lawrence.

Next day, the pilot came aboard to guide the *Laurentic* on the long haul up the magnificent river. At last we rounded Father Point, off Quebec, and in due course reached our destination, passed through Customs and Immigration—our Mountie friend MacDonald no small help to us in this—and finally set foot on Canadian soil. We booked in,

as did a good many first-class passengers from the ship, at the leading hotel.

After freshening up, I went to Raffles' room. He was pacing up and down, smoking one of his Sullivan cigarettes. His keen face wore a haggard look. I asked him point-blank what he had meant by his remark the day before. For answer, he took from the writing table a sheet of the hotel's notepaper, scribbled some words on it, and handed it to me.

"A Marconigram," he said, "transmitted from the *Laurentic* just a few hours after we passed the *Montrose*."

I looked at the paper.

ROBINSON, S.S. MONTROSE. EMBANKMENT MAN MEETING YOU QUEBEC WITH FUNDS AND GUARANTEE STOP DELISLE

"Who's Delisle?" I asked, bewildered.

"I am," said Raffles.

I stood incredulous as he told me that he had spent a large part of the night concealed in a lifeboat just opposite the W/T cabin on the *Laurentic*'s boat deck. A signal had been received. The Marconi operator had left the cabin, locking the door, and taken the signal up to the bridge.

"It was my chance," said Raffles. "The lock was no problem. I got into the cabin and tapped out that Marconigram. I had the door locked and was out of sight about two seconds before the operator on night listening watch returned."

Raffles put a match to the sheet of paper, burned it, and scrubbed the ash to powder in the ashtray with his forefinger.

"My knowledge of wireless-telegraphy," he said, "is not practical. It's theoretical, derived from those lectures I attended. In practice, I may have fluffed the job. The message may never have gone out. I just don't know. But let's suppose it did go out and was picked up by the *Montrose*. There are two possibilities. Captain Kendall, to whom the *Montrose*'s wireless man would certainly take the message immediately, might merely impound it. Alternatively, puzzled by the message, he might tell his Marconi man to take it to 'Mr. Robinson,' then come back and report on his reaction. Remember, Bunny, Kendall must be looking for every scrap of corroboration he can get of his

identification of 'Robinson' as Hawley Crippen."

"But, Raffles, even if Crippen *should* get to see the message, it's gibberish!"

"Not to a man whose nerves are strung to a high pitch, alert to danger," Raffles said. "Where's Scotland Yard? It's on the Thames Embankment. So: 'Yard man meeting you Quebec—with guarantee.' What's another word for 'guarantee'? Warranty! An odd consonant or vowel often gets accidentally added or omitted in transmission. So: 'Yard man meeting you Quebec with warrant.' "

"Good God!" I said. "But—what's your object?"

"You and I served together briefly in the Army, Bunny. Our colonel took a mortal responsibility upon himself in the case of a subaltern called Parker, who raped a nurse serving with the Field Ambulance. Do you recall what the colonel did?"

"He left Parker alone with a revolver."

"Which Parker used, grateful for the opportunity," Raffles said. "Hawley Crippen has no more defense for his crime than Parker had for his. The small doctor and his Ethel are sailing blindly into a trap. If forewarned, what will they do? Will they seek a chance to slip overboard in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and drown together, holding hands? Or will they go on to the bitter end and hang—separately?"

Raffles turned from me. He poured two whiskies. I knew that he felt profoundly the crushing weight of his responsibility.

"Do you remember," he said, "a poem written by W. E. Henley, the original of Stevenson's 'Long John Silver'? Henley had just been discharged from a charity hospital into a Glasgow fog. He was friendless, penniless, and was using a crutch, having just had a leg amputated. He uttered a shout of defiance to a cruel world, the poem 'Invicta'."

His back to me, Raffles recited almost to himself:

> "It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul."

Raffles turned.

"Drink up, Bunny," he said.

But black-bearded, quarrelsome, indomitable, one-legged old William Henley had been alone in the world. The small doctor from Michigan had his Ethel.

Next evening, as we were at dinner in the hotel—just the three of us—there rose a cry upon the streets.

"Extry! Extry! Crippen and LeNeve! Latest!"

"Oh," Dinah said in a whisper, "what's happened to them now?"

People were leaving the dining room in haste to get papers. I looked at Raffles. He nodded, and I went out to buy a paper. A glance at the headlines was enough. I brought it back to our table.

The story was brief. Accompanied by a large number of journalists—undoubtedly including Alphonse Courlander—Chief Inspector Dew, with Inspector McCarthy of the Quebec Police, had gone out in the pilot boat *Eureka* to meet the *S.S. Montrose*. The journalists were not allowed to board. On the deck of the *Montrose*, Chief Inspector Dew had approached the wanted man and said courteously, "Good morning, Dr. Crippen." Ethel was heard to scream. She fell to the deck unconscious.

In the hotel dining room, we sat silent for some while—as did other diners, many of them also former passengers on the *Laurentic*.

At last Dinah spoke. "That poor girl—dressed as a boy. Just as Madame Bodsohn, at our table on the *Laurentic*, was a man dressed as a woman."

It was a second before I realized the significance of Dinah's remark. I stiffened.

Raffles said very softly, "Why do you think that, Dinah?"

"Well, she was always winding those balls of wool," said Dinah, "but I never saw her do any knitting—not a stitch, purl *or* plain. It made me wonder about her. I had a funny feeling. So one night when I was changing for dinner I thought I'd test her—just for fun. She had a cabin to herself just across the companionway from mine. I put on a shawl over my dress and went and knocked on her door. She called, 'Just a minute!' and eventually she unfastened and opened her door. I asked if she'd mind doing up the hooks-and-eyes at the back of my dress. You know what hooks-and-eyes are?"

"More or less," said Raffles.

" 'Madame Bodsohn' hardly did," Dinah said. "She made such a fum-

ble of it, getting the hooks in the wrong eyes and so on, that—well, I *knew!*"

"Did you now?" said Raffles. "Hm! Dinah, you must have some dessert. Choose from the menu something you're especially fond of—never mind the expense."

"Madame Bodsohn" was registered in the hotel. And that night, in the small hours, when only the hooting of an occasional ship coming up the St. Lawrence was to be heard, Raffles picked the lock of "Madame's" room and silently entered it. I kept watch in the dimly lighted corridor. After scarcely a minute, Raffles reappeared, soundlessly closing the door of the room behind him. He had "Madame's" knitting reticule.

In Raffles' room, we rewound the half-dozen balls of wool, the rewound balls fattening in our hands, the unwinding balls diminishing in size—and disclosing, sure enough, the Grosvenor Square diamonds.

Raffles packed the rewound balls of wool into the reticule and, leaving me to gloat over the sparkle of our swag, was absent for a couple of minutes.

When he returned, I had a couple of whiskies already poured out. He no longer had the knitting reticule, and he reported that "Madame" was sleeping like a babe, his elaborate blonde wig on the dressing table.

We toasted the glittering swag, which Raffles then divided into two equal parts.

"Half for Raffles and Company," he said, "so that we can keep our end up and make a good impression in Alberta. The proceeds of the other half, Bunny, we'll donate anonymously to the defense of poor Crippen and Ethel so that the greatest advocates in England can be briefed on their behalf. Agreed?"

"Absolutely, Raffles," I said.

"They had very bad luck to be the first ever caught through the genius of Marconi," Raffles said, "but I suppose someone had to be first." He gave me a thoughtful look. "All the same, Bunny, I wonder what the devil happened to my Marconigram?"

I thought it unlikely that we would ever know.

In any case, next day the three of us were in one of the great transcontinental trains, equipped with cow-catcher on the locomotive, and roaring west toward the vast spaces of Canada, with its rich wheat-

lands, its far-flung prairies, its majestic Rocky Mountains, and its illimitable future.

NOTE

It may be of interest to remark that Mr. Manders' narrative, recently come to light among his long-hidden memoirs of a criminal life, is the only one found to be typewritten, though very inaccurately.

On the other hand, the events recounted by Mr. Manders appear to be, in the main, consistent with the known facts of the ocean pursuit and sensational arrest of the famous fugitives.

Captain Kendall of the *Montrose*, in the evidence he gave at the trial, made no mention of any Marconigram addressed to "Mr. Robinson." However, monetary contributions, some of them considerable, are known to have been received from anonymous donors for the defense of Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen and Miss Ethel LeNeve.

A brave man in the pinch, the small doctor from Michigan virtually hanged himself in his anxiety to exonerate Ethel from having had any hand whatever in the lugubrious occurrence in the cellar at 39 Hilldrop Crescent. He paid the penalty.

Brilliantly defended by the young advocate Mr. F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead, Lord Chancellor of England), Ethel was acquitted.

Had the present system of jurisprudence, capital punishment abolished, prevailed in England at the time of Hawley Crippen's crime, he would have been sentenced to life imprisonment, paroled after serving twelve years or so, and might be still alive today, though probably disinclined to poison and dismember one woman and run away with another.

After all, there are limits to what a man aged 116 can do.

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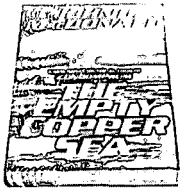

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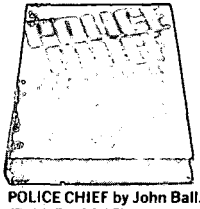

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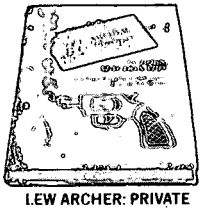

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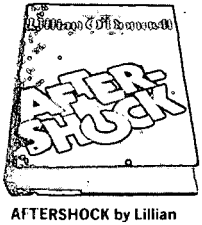

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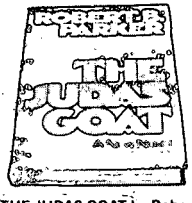

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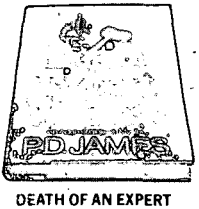

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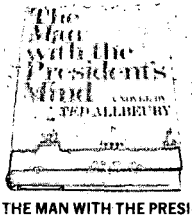

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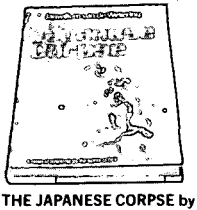

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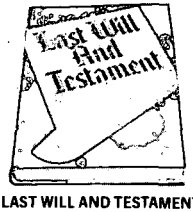

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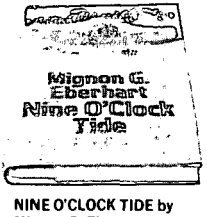

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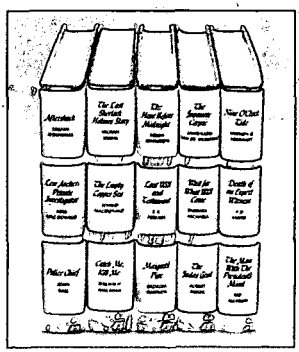

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