

ALFRED

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 1979

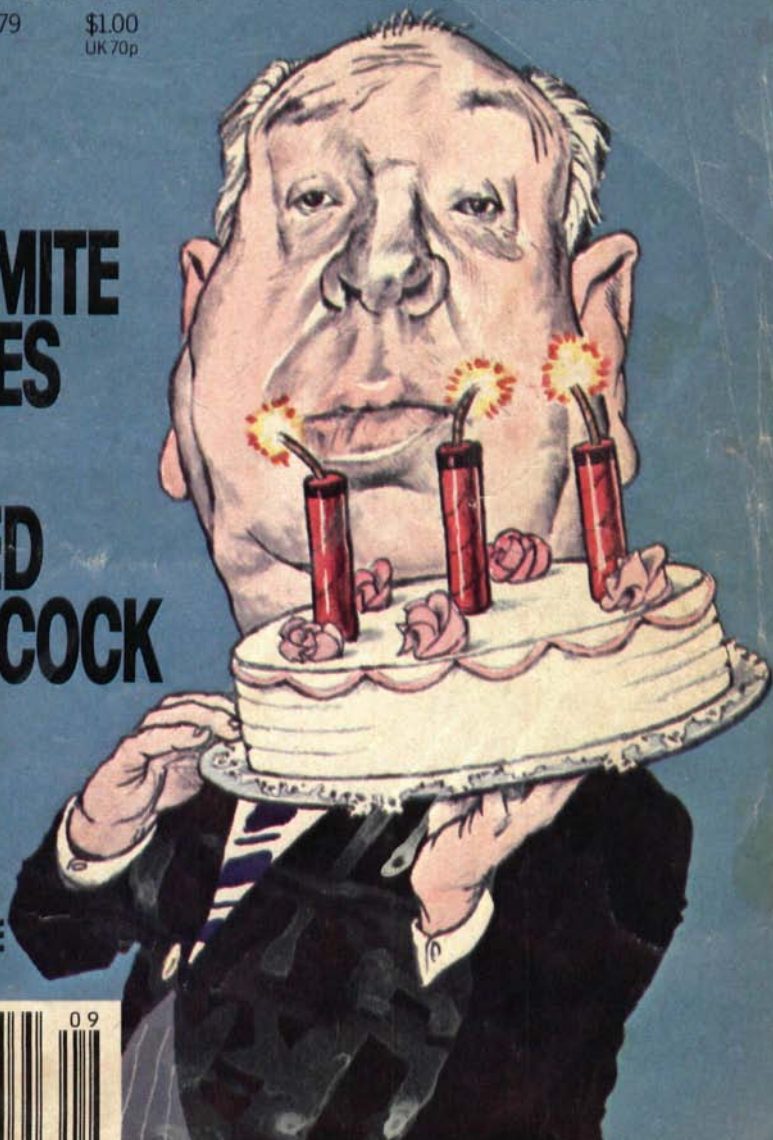
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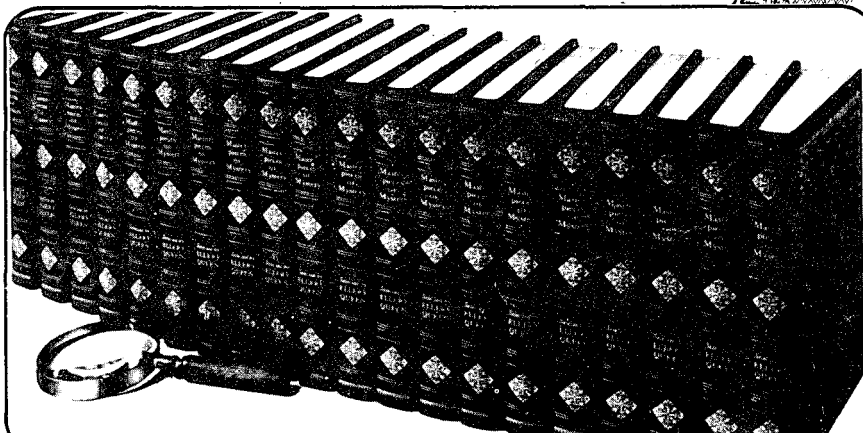
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September 1979



Dear Reader:

Summer will soon be over and it will be time to get back to serious business so this month's issue will show you how some people deal with their jobs. Business pressures almost cause the owner of a fish-food factory to crack in Robert Twohy's "Twang!" A man engaged in the lucrative trade of hit man has some notions of a mid-life career switch in "Duffy's Last Contract" by William Bankier.

Kathryn Gottlieb's "The Letter Carrier" loves his job, but his dedication brings tragic results. You'll meet a lady with an interesting avocation in Jean Darling's "Farewell Performance," and another with a curious hobby in "Swan Song" by Olga Marx. "The Hawk Shops for Justice" is S. S. Rafferty's second story about a doctor/detective in Old New York, and two criminals go after "Easy Change" in the story by Percy Spurlark Parker.

Hobbies are a great relief from overwork but no matter how hard you work this month, don't take up a hobby like that of the hero in "Hangfire" by L. F. James.

Good reading.

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The Bishop had a little favor to ask of Stroganov . . .

A BISHOP IN THE BALLET



by
CARYL BRAHMS

Evening in Santa Fé, with the distant snow mountains rose-tipped in the sunset and the Ballet Stroganov making a guest appearance at the Opera House. It was the off season.

Vladimir Stroganov was sitting in the Presidential Box, a carnation resplendent in his buttonhole, his bald dome shining with enthusiasm, beaming at the spectacle his company was presenting. Beside him sat the Bishop of Chihuahua, an unlikely companion, all things considered.

On stage a gaggle of swans were doing their somewhat bleary best.

In the Stage Box Madame Arenskaya, the Ballet Stroganov's spirited Maitresse de Ballet, was being restrained with difficulty from hurling a shoe at the simpering Prince, currently a young-well, middle-aged-Master Eyelashes with a receding hairline, who had bought himself into the Stroganov company and bribed his way into a few leading rôles, though he was in no way ready for the honor in Madame Arenskaya's frequently expressed opinion.

Stroganov glowed at the Bishop. "My company is perfection, no?"

"No," said the Bishop, deciding for once not to hide the truth under a biretta.

Fortunately, the headlong Stroganov had not stopped talking to listen to him. "Wait only till you see our *Giselle*—the mad scene," he specified, and ticked it off on one podgy finger. "Our *Boutique Fantasque*—" he continued ticking off should-be masterpieces "—our *Oiseau de Feu*, our *Sylphides*—" he ticked twice "—our—our—" he sought for a ballet to clinch his argument "—our *No Holds Barred*. A Nevajno work, *bien moderne*, the scene it is a boxing ring in—" he paused for dramatic effect "—Outer Space."

"You have run out of fingers," observed the Bishop coldly.

"Me," announced Stroganov, "I envy you who are seeing the fabled Ballet Stroganov for the first time. What rapture awaits you!"

"This is rapture?" The Bishop of Chihuahua did not sound convinced. He gazed, disbelieving, at the middle-aged young Master Eyelashes who at that moment was surrounded by, but alas not lost in, a group of depressed swans.

"That one," said Stroganov dispassionately, "is a geese. But he is rich, so each time Arenskaya give him sack, he give me bribe—" he rubbed his hands "—so me, I take him back."

In the Stage Box Arenskaya was turning to her companion, an antique General who had attached himself to the company, in what capacity no one could say.

"Heneral," she ordered, "oblige me, *mon cher*. Go to my dressing room and bring me my pearls I have borrowed—Scheherazade," she explained, "without my pearls I am non-stop nude."

"Aie!" said the General, alarmed, and creaked away.

Freed from his restraining presence, Arenskaya removed a shoe in readiness.

The curtain fell, but rose again immediately lest the audience should take it seriously. The ballet itself was at an end, and now the real business of the evening began—the bows and the bouquets. First the Corps de Ballet scampered on with not a hibiscus among them. Then four soloists lined up and advanced to what the great Fokine once designated “The Tootsies,” each soloiste clasping to her non-existent bosom the flowers sent by Mamoushka, husband, or self. From the crimson-and-gold splendors of the Presidential Box, Stroganov applauded vigorously. “You do not clap for my children?” he asked the Bishop incredulously.

The Bishop, recalled from whatever holy theme he had been pondering, clapped obediently, but Stroganov could tell that the episcopal heart was not in it. He was right. The Bishop had been wondering how to get a receptacle full of white heroin tablets through the inquisitive British Customs. He was no common or garden bishop. He was a common or garden pusher.

Now it was the turn of the Swan Princess—gin would not melt in her mouth, but a great many carbohydrates had. She stepped forward clasping her flowers to her stomach, of which, currently, there was no lack. The Bishop answered to his cue and clapped loudly. Stroganov grabbed the holy hands.

“Me, I do not applaud this one,” he protested. “She has the Mamoushka money-conscious! Already now she has eye on Presidential Box—*this* box,” he could not resist boasting. “So me, I sit on the hands.” He demonstrated.

By now it was the turn of the middle-aged young Master Eyelashes with the receding hairline to bound on boyishly. He bowed to the Presidential Box, bowed to the audience, and bounded off into the wings. “That one,” said Stroganov admiringly, “is a bounder. The pity is, he does not dance so good; Arenskaya is right; but do not tell her so for it is bad for her character.”

“Ah!” said the Bishop. He placed his fingertips together and surveyed the stage over the tops of his rimless spectacles as the bounder bounded back on. Once again he bowed to the Gallery, to the Family Circle, to the Grand Tier, to the Stalls, and finally—a grave mistake—to the Stage Box.

“Now,” breathed Madame Arenskaya. She hurled.

The brouhaha had all but subsided. Vladimir Stroganov, mopping his

A BISHOP IN THE BALLET

brow, bobbed up from behind the Bishop, where he had been hiding from the wrath which, born optimist, he hoped was not to come.

"Quick, little Father," he implored, "we make the getaway damnquick and lock ourselves in our office before they start the cry and hue. The tequila and soda awaits us there. We have the little sozzle before the rich one with the eyelashes comes to demand his bribes back. And later, when all is over and the little mothers are marching their little daughters straight back to their little hotels—for the morals in my company are very strict, you understand—we risk backstage together." The Bishop blinked. "We take the rich one with the eyelashes and the tide-out hairline to supper to console him. Arenskaya we do not take; always she demand the gypsy music and always it end in tears."

"But—" said the Bishop. He fumbled for his indigestion capsules.

"You go pale, little Father, but the rich one will pay. I offer him another spectacular role so he pays now and later I take the role away and he give me spectacular bribe to get it back again. There are," he added happily, "always ways."

"Ho-hum," said the Bishop.

"But for now it is the tiptoe through the tulips—you get me?"

The Bishop did. The tiptoe was mother's milk to a pusher. Together the ill-assorted couple crept out. Once they gained the corridor, a shrill voice brought them to a halt. It was Arenskaya, one shoe on, the other in the incensed grasp of the Eyelash one, in hysterics, in his dressing room.

"Vladimir!" she shrilled, "you go at once to his dressing room and you demand back my shoe I have borrowed from Dyrakova who is away and do not know she lend—she dance *La Folle de Chaillot*, chez the Beryl Grey, a long woman. But she come back to us tomorrow."

"*La Folle de Chaillot* will not have the look-in when Dyrakova find out you have borrow again," opined Stroganov. "When Dyrakova go mad she have a *grandeur* unmatched."

"Me, I am no joke at the going mad," Arenskaya boasted to the un-introduced Bishop. "*Tiens!* I like your shirt—purple suit you." She turned her back on Stroganov. "*Alors?*" she urged. She placed her hands on her hips like Zizi Jeanmaire in *Carmen*. She tossed her bright red head and waited. Stroganov read the signs.

"Why throw, my darlink?" He pointed to the slipper. "Why you not think first?"

"But this I do," said the aggrieved Arenskaya, "I think there is the dancer world-wide-worst. I think I throw Dyakova's shoe at him, and then, *mon cher*, I throw." She turned for sympathy to the Bishop, and jerked her crimson curls in the direction of the Pass Door. "Go, Vladimir, go at once—at once—or else . . ." She propped herself against the Bishop to take off Dyakova's other shoe and shook it at Stroganov. "Or else . . ."

"Do not impatient yourself, my darlink. We go at once, my new chum and me. Hand in foot we go together."

"Ah, *bon!*" Arenskaya said. She relaxed.

Up in his office Stroganov was his own man again. He motioned the Bishop to the armchair and poured tequila with a lavish hand. He himself sat on the revolving chair behind the desk. He spun around on it—sheer swank—and when he had come to rest, they toasted each other. "Should auld acquaintance be forgot," intoned the Bishop.

"This they will never let you do." Stroganov shook his realistic head. "Or they are after you for the free seat, or they are after you for the money you owe them."

"Then," the Bishop suggested, "we will drink to *new* friends."

"New friends!" said Stroganov enthusiastically.

They drank.

"There is a little matter I would like to discuss." The Bishop looked around furtively—for a Bishop, that is.

"You can confide in me," said Stroganov. "My office it is sacrosanct. No one comes here and if they do I kick them out damnquick."

"Ho-hum," said the Bishop. He polished his rimless spectacles.

Should any reader ask himself how Stroganov and the Bishop became "the chums bosom," the answer is easy.

Both had been gazing wistfully at the windows of the local Tiffany's. Stroganov was immediately attracted by the bright shade of pink that passes for purple in a Bishop. Remember that it was out of season at Santa Fé. Barons and Bishops were hard to come by. If only he could capture this one and seat him beside himself in the Presidential Box it would dress his house, which badly needed it. As to the pusher, he was looking for a credulous individual to carry his heroin through Customs for him, and Stroganov fitted the bill. Was not his dispatch case much labeled with the names of faraway lands?

The enstomached gentlemen wasted the next two hours cautiously stalking one another. Finally thirst put an end to caution, and they found themselves sitting side by side at a little table outside the Taverna in the Plaza.

For a time they conversed amiably on the cost of living, the cost of lemon tea, the cost of politicians, the cost. Then Stroganov popped the question. "You come to my box at the ballet tonight? I give you card." He scribbled.

The pusher whistled a happy tune. The Mexican heroin was as good as in the Chelsea bag.

Back at the office the Bishop was putting his head as close to Stroganov's bald dome as the latter's revolving chair permitted. Next to his ballet, his revolving chair was the pride of Stroganov's life. He took it everywhere with him.

"My friend," the Bishop was intoning, "I have not known you long as time goes, but there is something about you that inspires confidence."

"My chair?" Stroganov gave it a twirl. "In me," he announced when it came to rest, "you can have the confidence absolute."

"You see—" the Bishop lowered his voice "—it is, ah, a family affair, and in my position—"

"I am the soul of discretion," announced Stroganov. "I do not even tell the Eyelash one with the money to make the mouth water in the letter from his wife with the oil well in Texas—which remind me!" He leaped up from his seat and studied the calendar on the wall. "This month she is late already. But no matter; he has much jewelry she give him." The Bishop blinked. "And so, little Father, you can count on the secrecy absolute. We are cozy here, no? No one dare to come to my sanctum to disturb me." He returned to his chair and twirled.

"Sit still like a good chap," said the Bishop, "and listen attentively. Back home in Chelsea, England, I have an aged grandmother."

"No kidding?" asked Stroganov, looking pointedly at the Bishop's white locks.

The Bishop blushed and cleared his throat.

"And this aged one, she is in the trouble financial?" asked Stroganov, from out of a wealth of experience.

"The trouble physical," said the pusher. Stroganov's misplaced English was getting to him. "If my old grandmother does not get his fix—I mean,

the medicament I shall give you for her—”

“She *gerfut*?”

“She *gerfut*,” agreed the Bishop.

“Then why you not take it to her damnquick?” Stroganov demanded, reasonably enough.

“I have duties—ecclesiastical duties—to perform in Mexico,” his new friend explained. “Perhaps you would be a—” The pusher hesitated. From out of his small store of Bible stories learned at the Borstal chaplain’s knee, he produced, “‘Good Samaritan’ and take this package to Chelsea. There a—colleague of mine will relieve you of your trust and convey it to my ancient grandmother.”

“*Bien sûr*,” Stroganov beamed. “Before everything, me, I am the Samaritan good—for the moment,” he added with unusual caution.

The Bishop had recourse to his indigestion tablet. “You come to my box—the Presidential Box—” urged Stroganov “—tomorrow night, and you give me your little grandmother’s medicaments.”

“And you do not tell a living soul?”

“Not a syllable to a sturgeon,” swore Stroganov. He took off in his revolving chair.

The door burst open. It was Arenskaya.

“Sit still, Vladimir,” she commanded.

Stroganov frowned. “What you do in my sanctum, old chum?”

“I—I—I—” Arenskaya stuttered. She reared her head like a good Russian goose.

“You—you—you—” the greatly daring Stroganov mimicked her. “In future, you knock. Then I call out ‘Go away!’ And you vamoose damnquick. I am busy here with my new chum and the matter confidential about his ancient grandmother.”

“Ho-hum!” The Bishop cast a warning look at Stroganov, but on that one it was lost, for already he was in full if broken spate.

“The little Father entrust me with the medicaments for his ancient grandmamoushka, and I have give my word—the word of a Stroganov, woman—not to tell a living creature, and not you, it is certain, that I take the packet to England and give it to—and give it to— To whom do I give it?” he inquired of the sweating Bishop, who was quite bereft of words.

There was a sharp knock at the door. “Go away!” called Stroganov. He twirled. Relentlessly the door opened and in came an irate Mamoushka trailing her hesitant daughter, that night’s Swan Princess.

"Sit still, Stroganov," she said. "We have come to plead our stomach." She pointed to her daughter's protruding abdomen and patted her own for emphasis. "We are *enceinte*," she added unnecessarily.

Arenskaya took in the stomach at a glance. "She is right, Vladimir," she concurred, "she is *enceinte*, and this is why she keep leaving my *Classe de Perfection* and locking herself in the loo, where she bring up."

"We need money," said Mamoushka.

"The advance generous," suggested Arenskaya, evilly paying Stroganov out for some ancient injury—she had forgotten which.

"On whose side you are?" he asked hotly. Then, at bay, he turned on Mamoushka and daughter. "You go away. It is out of hours and, me, I am busy with the Bishop. I have to write myself a note to remind me what to do with the medicament for the little grandmother. It is the errand of mercy, you understand, and also the matter confidential, so, me, I don't tell no one." He looked at the apoplectic pusher and winked.

There was a knock at the door. It was the middle-aged young Master Eyelashes. But the assembled company could not know this.

"Stay out!" they called as one. "Go away!" they added. "And don't come back no more!" screeched Arenskaya solo.

The Eyelash one blinked. He decided to bivouac outside Stroganov's office for the night, if necessary. "We Eyelashes," he reminded himself, "we Eyelashes hang on by ourselves."

For the next week the little grandmother of the Bishop was the name on the lips of everyone remotely concerned with the Stroganov company and even some quite unconnected with it. But it was not until after the Bishop called at the Box Office to collect the pass to Stroganov's box ("the Presidential Box," pointed out the Box Office manager, bowing with touching respect—"and how, my Lord, is the health of the little grandmother these days?") that he remonstrated with Stroganov again.

Up in his office, Stroganov was in full spate. "But I tell you," he was shouting into the telephone, "I pay the creditors all, all, all—but not my tailor. The ancient little grandmum of my new chum, the Bishop, has for me the gratitude immense, or will have, when I give the fellow in Chelsea the capsules which keep her ticking."

"Vladimir!" said the Bishop, shocked, for the friendship had flowered into Christian names. "You gave me your word that you would not tell a soul!"

Stroganov nodded violently. "It is the matter undisclosablè," he told the telephone. "My lips are sealed and you must say nothing to no one, and especially not to my tailor—*entendu*? *Eh bien, mon cher Esteban, au revoir.*" He put down the phone and gave his chair a twirl. "And now, old chum," he said, "what is new?"

"You promised, Vladimir! You promised you would not disclose a syllable!"

"To a sturgeon. This, Francesco, I remember. And I have only told a fat little pigeon in the second row, who is my new love personal, and—and the Master Eyelash one, instead of the rise he covet.

"And the Manager Bank, him I tell for sure, and the Company Physiotherapist—that one, he pommel it out of me."

The phone rang. Stroganov applied himself to it and in a babble of Bishops, new chums, grandmamoushkas, capsules, and *gerfuts* told the disembodied inquirer all—or as near all as made no difference.

The Bishop looked at the ceiling. It remained oblivious.

"But who were you telling on the telephone, Vladimir?"

"Poof!" Stroganov dismissed the disembodied voice. "That one was my very old friend from the British Customs, so we have nothing to fear."

The Bishop seemed to be having breathing trouble. Stroganov appeared not to notice this. From his desk he picked up a bill. It was one of many. He glared at it. "My tailor," he observed, "is the disgust. He demand small fortune and besides his suit it do not fit, for the food in the Americas South it is very rich with oil and olives, and me, I like good blowout very much and—well, see for yourself, Francesco—the suit across the stomach do not meet."

He breathed out. A button popped.

Sir Arbuthnot Chiddingfold, continent to continent, as he boasted to the disinterested operator.

"'Allo-'allo! 'Allo-'allo-'allo?" Stroganov was jiggling the instrument so no croak from the other end could thread its way to him. "Is that you, *mon cher*? I wish you to write to the manager of my London bank in Cheapside—cheap, I ask you!—to say if he do not stop pursuing me with his boring demands I will cancel my overdraft. And to my tailor that I cannot be bothered with his silly bills and—and to the little grandmother of the Bishop of Chihuahua—"

At this point Sir Arbuthnot slammed down the receiver, causing Stro-

ganov to erupt into a storm of " 'Allo, 'allos" and jiggling at the end of which he took a refreshing twirl in his chair. The enemies had been silenced, or soon would be. All was much better in the best of all possible worlds.

A glazed look passed over the Bishop's eyes. It was just such a look as might be found in a cod's eye on the fishmonger's cold marble slab. Should he kill off his little grandmamoushka forthwith and scotch the danger that surely must be lurking in the future? And yet—the pusher thought of the money there was in the capsules. The Bishop thought of the Santa Fé jail. Beneath the petunia robe the Bishop and the pusher engaged in a man-to-man struggle. Greed won the day.

And what of the middle-aged young Master Eyelashes? Well, actually he was on the Balletto-osteopath's couch. The Balletto-osteopath, no mean judge of ballet, was pommeling.

"That's for your Prince Igor—"

"Ouch!"

"And that's for your Florizel."

"Ouch!"

"And *this* is for *Sylphides*."

"Ouch!"

The Balletto-osteopath executed an involved and particularly painful jointshaker.

"And this?" asked the victim, "it is for *Giselle*, no doubt?"

"No doubt at all," said the Balletto-osteopath. He went on pommeling.

That night the company seemed inspired, at least to Stroganov. "They 'ave dedicated this performance to the little grandmum," he explained to the dozing Bishop.

From swan to swan, gosling to gosling, soloist to soloist, and even the semi-dormant Benno, the Prince's friend, the word was whispered. "The tablets for the antique grandmamoushka. How happy she will be when she has them safe in her hands. Nothing shall befall it, we have sworn," vowed the swans, "to the last drake."

There was a thud. The semi-dormant Benno had failed to catch that night's ballerina, a Yugoslavian dancer. She picked herself up from the stage. She could be seen to be swearing in good round Armenian oaths.

The ballet went on. . .

Time passed. Nothing out of the ordinary at Heathrow Airport that afternoon. Just the usual mix of overheated travelers, Japanese, American, Indian, African, and the poor British, plus a racing-round of everyone's kids. No, nothing out of the ordinary.

Yet who was this bald-headed old buffer at the Customs Bench using his arms like a protesting windmill, trying to snatch back a tin from the Customs Officer who had opened it. "But it is the medicaments for the Bishop's grandmamoushka!" Stroganov was shouting. "This is so!" said his whole company and one elderly Russian General, grouped round him.

"Without her medicaments she *gerfut*," Stroganov persisted.

"She *gerfut*," agreed his indignant company.

"So you oblige us, and tell no one," Stroganov urged, "for the Bishop he not forgive you if it transpires."

But the Customs people were adamant.

"*Non! Non!* I tell you *non!* I do not smuggle for the money. I have no need. Or shall have when the pocket money for the Eyelash one shall arrive from the rich wife in Dallas."

"Nonetheless," said the Customs. They could be adamant too.

Somewhere, unbeknown to Stroganov, sweating in the held-up-and-cursing-about-it queue, a Bishop was feeling very, very sick. He fumbled for his tin of indigestion tablets. He swallowed one. It had the most extraordinary effect. He could have sworn he was floating.

Three hours had passed. "But you do not understand," Stroganov was shouting to the plainclothes detective at Bow Street Police Station. "First I demand my man-of-law. He is for the moment in New York, so you get on the telephone damnquick."

"But," said Inspector Lawless, paling, "New York—that's in America."

"*Precisement*," Stroganov agreed. "We will speak continent to continent—at expense of police." He pounced. He jiggled. "'Allo, 'allo, 'allo, 'allo," he began expectantly.

But this time Detective Lawless pounced too, and attempted to snatch. "Oh, no, you don't." The detective tugged. Stroganov held on. Then suddenly he bethought him of another ploy and let go. "Get me Inspective Detector Quill," he commanded.

Detective Inspector Lawless blanched again. "Quill? Adam Quill?"

"Damnquick," said Stroganov purposefully.

Detective Lawless mopped his brow. Clearly he was out of his depth.

"But Mr. Quill—I mean, he's the Assistant Commissioner."

"Ah, bon," Stroganov beamed. "Then he assist me, you will see."

At that moment a Presence made itself felt. Commissioner Quill, suitably bebuttoned and tailored, had emerged from some glorious inner office to see what the brouhaha was about. Overjoyed, Stroganov threw his arms around him and kissed him on both cheeks. Inspector Lawless could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Monsieur Quill," cried Stroganov, "my old chum investigative detector!" He hugged the aggrandized but unresisting Quill. "You tell this policeman it is all the fault of the little grandmum of the Bishop one."

"You heard, Lawless," the Assistant Commissioner barked. "Release Stroggy—Mr. Stroganov."

"Damnquick," said Stroganov.

"Exactly," said Commissioner Quill.

"And we go at once to your office and have the whisky and soda and the smoked-salmon sandwiches appetizing while I tell you about the antique grandmamoushka, the Bishop, and the capsules entrusted to me. Without them our grandmamoushka she *gerfut*."

"This way," said the Assistant Commissioner weakly.

And that is how it came about that certain clients in Chelsea paid an all-time high for bicarbonate of soda.

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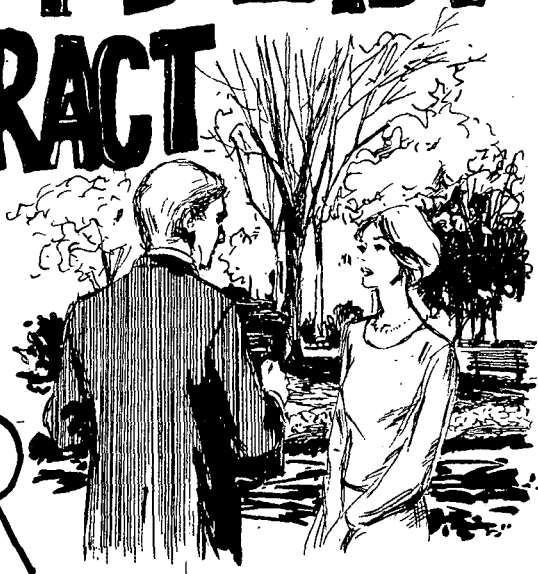
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Killing a woman didn't bother Duffy . . .

DUFFY'S LAST CONTRACT

by
WILLIAM
BANKIER



Duffy sat at the bar in the pub on Charing Cross Road drinking vodka and lemonade. He would have to stop soon. In half an hour he was due at the hotel on Park Lane to meet Miss Groves. She would point out Timberman's wife and then Duffy would be expected to do what he was being paid for. It was more money than he had seen in years and he needed it, so he had better stay sober enough to aim and pull the trigger.

The buxom girl behind the bar responded to the lift of his head. She

took his empty glass and pushed it up twice under the spigot on the vodka dispenser. He paid for the double and when she brought his change he said, "Don't serve me any more, please."

He expected this to surprise her. It was a request Duffy used frequently in bars where he was a stranger. He felt it gave him glamour, put him in a class almost with the mythical hero he'd read about years ago in school, the one who had himself tied to the mast so he wouldn't jump overboard and swim to the island where the magic women were singing. Duffy, too, required help with a temptation that would otherwise overcome him.

Heads were raised along the bar and he felt satisfaction. "Don't serve me any more, please," he repeated to the girl, and placed the palm of his hand over the glass.

Miss Groves kept him waiting at the hotel. He called her on the house phone and she told him to wait down the street; she didn't want them to be seen together by the hotel staff. She asked what he was wearing so she'd know him. He described his blue summer suit and brown shoes and for some reason went on to tell her about his grey hair. Something in her voice made him feel sure he looked all wrong. He hung up the phone and made his escape, catching a disturbing glimpse of himself in a brightly lit mirror.

Down the road was a large red mailbox. He stood beside it. Across a street full of traffic, the grass and trees of Hyde Park stretched away as far as he could see.

For a few minutes, Duffy thought about his hair. He was the only one of all his brothers and sisters who had gone grey. In his thirties, during a brief period of prosperity, he had been proud of it. He had called it premature and a clever boy at the salon had put a rinse in it and styled it, so that with a summer tan he'd turned heads on the street. Now, with fifty approaching, he couldn't call it premature any more. It was just dead hair and his last haircut had been self-inflicted.

Duffy watched the movement of people through the hotel doorway. He had no idea what Miss Groves looked like. The name sounded like a dried-up schoolteacher in a rusty dress. From what Duffy gathered from Norris Timberman, she was the former nurse who had helped look after his baby daughter when his wife was not well.

After eyeballing a number of women walking by, Duffy decided it was

like waiting for a kettle to boil. It would never happen unless he ignored it. So he turned his attention to the speeding traffic, the square black taxis, the tall red buses, the oddly shaped vans with company names on them that looked intriguing.

"Mr. Duffy?"

He turned and was surprised by the voluptuous woman looking up at him. He could not imagine her to be anything but an expensive hustler. On this street crowded with tourists dressed in the next thing to beach clothes, she was outfitted in pale-grey silk and chiffon, silvered toenails gleaming through sheer grey stockings, a broad-brimmed hat, eyes hidden behind huge dark glasses, full lips set in a businesslike line.

"Miss Groves?"

"Are you ready? I mean have you got everything?"

Now he knew her type exactly. Bossy, demanding, unwilling to give anybody credit for anything. A schoolteacher after all. He put his hand on the gun in his pocket. "Do you want me to take it out and show it to you?" He enjoyed the way this tightened her mouth even further.

"Just do as I say. I've established where she takes the girl every afternoon. They'll be there now. I'll lead you into the park and point her out. Then I'll have to go. She'd know me. It'll be up to you after that."

"What about the rest of the money?"

"When you've done the job, meet me back here." She looked at the mailbox. "This is a good place. I'll have some letters for posting. I'll hand an envelope to you." She raised an arm and looked at a strip of silver on her wrist. "Say at four o'clock."

The park was crowded on this summer afternoon. It made the best setting for what he had to do. No problems with breaking and entering or with the victim altering a routine, heading down a wrong street. There would be just the pop of a silenced handgun fired through a paper bag—half the people in sight were dipping into bags for fruit or sandwiches—then Duffy would simply keep on walking across the grass and away. A bonus was the fact that there would be people around to look after the child. And the child, as Norris Timberman had pointed out, was what this murder was all about.

Duffy walked close beside Miss Groves. He did not like her but he could appreciate her expensive perfume.

Duffy said, "There's something I don't understand."

"What is it?"

"I guess you're here to take the girl back to Montreal. But won't that connect Timberman to the killing?"

"I'm not even here. Once it's over the police will get in touch with Norris and he'll fly over to collect his daughter."

There was something in Duffy's silence that made the overdressed woman look up at him. "She's brought this on herself," she said. "All she had to do was be reasonable, let him share the child with her, half and half. But instead she got on a plane. Typical female spite. She'll let the man go by default—she couldn't care less about him or his money—but she knows he lives for that little girl, so she's decided to deny him that one thing. Only nobody denies Norris Timberman anything he really wants."

They found mother and daughter well inside the park at a bench near a chestnut tree. Dozens of deck chairs scattered around the grass were occupied by people reading or dozing. In the distance, rowboats moved slowly on the pewter surface of the Serpentine. Bulbous sculptures by Henry Moore gleamed in open spaces between the trees.

"She's the one in the white slacks and the red blouse. The one knitting."

Duffy glanced at the middle-aged woman with smooth black hair cut medium length, average good looks; and a preoccupied expression. As with Miss Groves, he was surprised by the appearance of Timberman's wife although now that he had seen her he couldn't have said what he was expecting.

"Where's the little girl?" he asked.

"On the other side of the path. Blonde hair, blue outfit."

Miss Groves went away quickly and Duffy was on his own. There was an empty deck chair not far from the bench. He went to it and sat down and began eating the cherries he had bought from a fruit vendor on his way into the park. When the bag was empty he would put the gun inside and get the job done.

His chair was partly in shade, partly in sun. There was a pleasant breeze in the park and no traffic noise. It was easy for Duffy to let his mind wander and still keep an eye on Mrs. Timberman and her daughter. It suited him now to swell on the crime he was about to commit. Duffy knew from being told in church that killing somebody was the worst thing a man could do, but he'd never been able to get hold of that restriction

and really feel it. He knew that death came to everybody and that, properly enacted, the event lasted less than a second, caused no pain, and then was nothing.

To Duffy, an example of worse behavior was to spend a whole year applying the name "Crater Face" to a high-school student who suffered from acne. Duffy remembered the pain slowly diminishing in that boy's eyes as the weeks passed and his feelings hardened. Such cruelty had to be worse than pulling a trigger and causing somebody's experience to switch off a few years prematurely.

Norris Timberman's way of life was far meaner, Duffy thought, than his own. The eldest son of Matthias Timberman, he was a pillar of the Montreal business community. He gave money to the church and officiated at important functions, but within his own family he was a monster. He had spoken openly about this to Duffy as they sat in an obscure East End bar making arrangements. In the way they understood their own motives, they were brothers under the skin.

"I can't use legal methods to get my daughter back," the millionaire said. "If I take that route, she'll sue for divorce and she's promised to describe my habits to the court. We have a couple of tabloids in this city that would love to get their hands on that." He went on drunkenly to describe some of the activities he arranged in the downstairs soundproof room of the big house in Upper Westmount, and the way he'd made his wife take part. Duffy was interested but not particularly shocked. What people could think of, people did.

As for himself, accepting a contract to kill a woman didn't bother him. He'd made his bones when he was seventeen, a few months after finishing school, as the result of an argument after which Duffy could not tolerate the existence of the other boy. He held the boy's head under the surface of a lake for several minutes. He got away with it because the authorities didn't want to believe such an angelic-looking young lad could murder. But word got around in the right places that he was a young man with the talent, and soon he was called upon.

All the Duffys looked like angels. There were twelve children in the family, one mother, and no father—he was expelled for drinking and brutality by the strong-bodied, iron-willed Maureen Duffy shortly after her last child was born. They lived on welfare money supplemented eventually by the wages of the older children. Duffy himself was eleven

and coming off a satisfying childhood before he realized they were poor. Each child looked after the next one down and, as far as he could remember, there was very little hostility in the house. They all loved and respected each other, doing only what was right and fair. Otherwise, perhaps, they would not have survived.

This experience was what persuaded Duffy that heredity is far more important than environment in how people turn out. If not, all his brothers would have been thieves and all his sisters whores. A family with no money and a brutal father, then no father at all, living in crowded conditions—how could they turn out any other way? Yet here they were: two schoolteachers, a shoe salesman, a grocer, a cab driver, three young mothers, a priest in training—the large Duffy face with the clear blue eyes and a perfect smile was scattered all around the community.

Duffy himself was the only exception. But his willingness to commit murder for pay had nothing to do with revenge against his father or a grudge against society. It was simply a jungle instinct retained in him while inhibited in most people by some evolutionary adjustment.

Mrs. Timberman called to her daughter, who was wandering too far in the direction of the water, and the girl responded to her mother's instructions to play closer to the bench. Duffy ate cherries and watched.

His responsibility in the family had been Tessie, the sister below him in age. He took his duty seriously—he prevented her from going on the big swings when she was too small to reach the ground and once ran across the road to kick hell out of a dog that barked at her and made her cry. They were a hardy family, the Duffys, their illnesses never worse than mumps or jaundice. That was why it shocked him so much when Tessie began spending most of her time in bed, then was taken to the hospital and never came out. At the time he had felt responsible, as if he had dropped the ball and the others, though nothing was said, were looking at him with disapproval. Even when he was told about the inevitability of leukemia, he never got over thinking he should have done something differently.

The breeze turned colder. The sun was lower and he was now in shade. He got up, moved his chair, and sat down again. There were only a few cherries left. He ate one, looked at his watch, and saw it was half past three. Miss Groves would be at the mailbox in half an hour with the rest of the money.

Duffy thought of Morgan, who had nominated him for this job. Morgan, as always, was acting out of self-interest. Duffy owed him a lot of money and he knew he stood little chance of getting it back with Duffy so far over the hill. Even Morgan's customary threat of kneecapping was pointless because you couldn't get wine from an empty bottle. So when Morgan heard of this lucrative hit, he recommended Duffy for it on the understanding that most of the fee would be paid to him.

Duffy felt pressure against his knee. He focused his eyes on a smooth blonde head and the plump wrist balanced against him. Her mouth was rimmed with orange, evidence of the ice lolly she had been eating. Her eyes were on the paper bag. He took out one of the last three cherries and held it by the stem. She stared at the plump, ruby fruit, but did not reach for it.

"Would you like a cherry?"

"If my mother says I can have it, then I'll be back in a minute." She spoke meticulously in a high little voice, enunciating every word. She turned and ran to the bench and spoke to her mother, pointing back at Duffy. The knitting needles slowed and stopped and the dark head turned his way. Duffy smiled and shrugged and held up the cherry.

The girl ran back and said, "My mother says I can have the cherry but I must be very careful of the pit inside."

"That's right. Your mother is right." He gave the child the cherry and took one for himself. They ate them, watching each other, Duffy providing a good example by taking bites so the pit never entered his mouth. There was one cherry left. He gave this to the little girl, showing her the inside of the empty bag. "All gone."

She ran away. Then she ran back and put a grubby hand on either of his knees. "Thank you," she said, leaning in and swinging one leg far back, then she fled again.

Duffy reached into his pocket and took hold of the gun. With a quick movement he transferred it to the empty bag and folded the paper around it. He sat for a while figuring out what he was going to do.

All his life he had done the right thing. The killings were always right—people under contract had it coming. Even Morgan's demand for the money he was owed—that was right too. So you went ahead and did what you had to do and if you were diligent and had any luck life would work itself out.

Duffy got up out of the chair and walked across to the bench. There

were a number of people in the area but they were not looking at him. The little girl was venturing too close to a tough-looking boxer dog. Duffy stopped and waited, poised, till the dog ran after its master. Then he walked on and took up a position behind the bench. Looking down, he saw the knitting needles moving in her hands. The gun felt heavy in the paper bag. She looked up and half turned. "Oh, it's you," she said. "I hope my daughter wasn't bothering you."

"No. I liked that," Duffy said. "Listen, your husband is trying to get rid of you."

"What?"

"Just listen. He wants the girl back and that means getting rid of you. I know a bit about your husband. He's not the person to bring up a little girl."

The woman's face was white. "I'm getting the police." She began folding up her knitting.

"No, there's no point in that. He isn't even in England. Leave it to me. I'm going to take care of it if I can. You just stay close to your little girl."

Duffy met Miss Groves at the mailbox at four-fifteen. She said, "Did you do it?"

"Everything's under control," he said. He couldn't bring himself to lie directly. He held out his hand, and after a moment's hesitation she handed him a fat brown envelope. He tucked it into his pocket. "Now," he said, "I've got to speak to Timberman."

"Forget it. He doesn't want to hear from you again."

"Yes, he does. I didn't kill her."

She looked at him now in a different way. Below the dark glasses he saw the first signs of respect. "You bastard. You want more money."

"We'll phone from your room."

The trans-Atlantic line was good. Timberman could have been on a phone in the next room. "We agreed on a price," he said.

"Five thousand isn't enough. I need ten. Ten or nothing happens." There was no reply. "And bring it yourself, Norris. Don't send some guy to waste me. You come alone with another five thousand, we'll meet, and we'll wrap everything-up."

Duffy established the time and the location for the meeting, then he left Miss Groves and went looking for a drink. . . .

Two days later, after too much alcohol and a night without enough sleep, he sat at the bar in a new pub he'd discovered that morning. It was the quiet hour he liked best before the lunchtime drinkers came in. Timberman would show. Duffy was sure of that. And he would pay the five thousand. The money meant nothing to Timberman, but it would allow Duffy to pay off Morgan in full—wipe the slate clean, which was a good way to leave things.

He raised his empty glass to the barmaid. "Double vodka," he said, and she took the glass away. The important thing was that he stay sober enough to be able, once he had the money, to put the cash in the paper bag and take hold of the gun all in one movement. Timberman would be sitting, Duffy would be on his feet. One bullet in Timberman's head and he would be away. Then all he needed was enough time to fly home and pay Morgan. After that events would take their course.

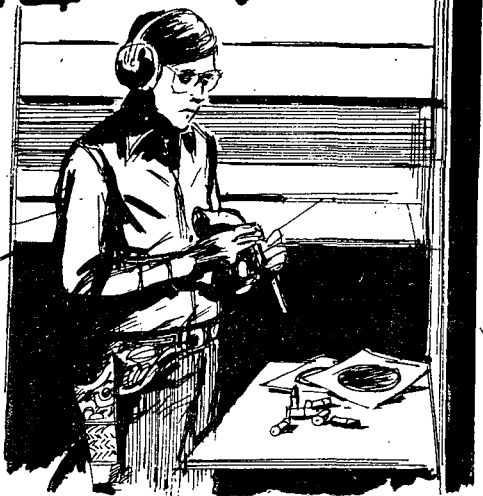
The girl brought his drink. As she set it down Duffy said, "Don't serve me any more, please," and felt his little glow as heads turned along the bar.



June objected to her husband's new hobby . . .

HANGFIRE

by
**L.F.
JAMES**



Hugh Tucker buckled on his custom-tooled leather holster and inserted his Colt Trooper Mark III revolver—unloaded, of course, as the range regulations required. He slipped on his Bausch & Lomb impact-resistant shooting glasses and placed a pair of earmuff-type noise abaters over his head. Picking up a box of cartridges and a sheaf of paper targets, he walked over to the soundproof door to the firing line and placed his hand on the knob.

He looked back over his shoulder, trying to catch the range officer's eye, but at the moment Sidney "Tex" Barrie had eyes only for June, Hugh's wife. They sat together behind the accessories counter with its ammo wallets and cleaning kits and cans of WD-40, drinking coffee from styrofoam cups and smoking cigarettes.

It had all started innocently enough, Hugh remembered. June had nagged him for a long time when he'd announced he intended to take up target shooting as a hobby.

"What's the fun of blasting holes in a paper target?" she had wanted to know. "You men are always having to prove your masculinity or something. And the expense! Guns, ammunition, dues to your club—and those exorbitant license fees to the police department! I'd like to see what would happen if I took up such an expensive hobby!" June's pastime was needlepoint.

But Hugh had been adamant, and on the day some six months later when he brought home his newly licensed and registered revolver June had fired one last salvo. "God help you, Hugh Tucker, if that weapon ever causes an accident!"

Then, her fury spent, she had seemed to accept his new pastime. And when increasing interest in the sport had led Hugh to begin spending more time at the range, June had surprised him by insisting on coming with him.

"Lord knows we spend little enough time together as it is. I can do my needlepoint there just as well as here, and keep an eye on you at the same time." She made that last statement with a twinkle in her eye, for Hugh had assured her that the range had few if any female patrons and that the time he spent there need cause her no jealousy.

Hugh gave up trying to catch Sidney's eye and called him. "Tex!" His voice sounded distant to him, muffled by the ear protectors. The range officer looked up—with some annoyance, it seemed—and saw Hugh waiting. He reached beneath the counter and pressed a button. Hugh heard the buzz of the electric lock and swung the door to the firing line open.

June's interest hadn't remained innocent for long. Tex had the boring job of sitting around making sure nothing went wrong, selling an occasional 75-cent box of gun-cleaning patches to a patron, and now and then offering some coaching or advice to a novice. June hadn't done much needlework—not after the first few times anyway. First Tex had offered her coffee and cigarettes, commenting on how tedious it must be for her

to wait around while her husband practiced his marksmanship; then offering more and more conversation, until finally she was sitting behind the counter with him as if she owned the place. She finally stopped even bothering to bring her needlepoint.

Hugh let the heavy door swing shut behind him and moved to the firing point directly opposite. It was the only booth that couldn't be seen from the lounge and business area of the range; most of the other firing points were clearly visible through the thick double-glass windows that ran along the wall behind the firing line, but the heavy soundproof door hid this one. It was vacant, and Hugh set his ammo and targets down on the waist-high shelf. Most shooters avoided this booth, claiming the light wasn't very good and that traffic through the door behind them distracted their aim.

If it had just been the way June hung onto Tex's words, the way Tex looked into June's eyes, ignoring everyone else, Hugh wouldn't have minded so much. He could stand competition, he told himself. Both Hugh and June were attractive people and, while they had no children, their ten-year marriage had been fruitful in many other ways. They shared many interests. They had fun together. At least they *had*.

Hugh took the Colt from his holster and, pressing back the catch, he let the cylinder swing out to the left. He placed the gun in his left hand and with his right opened the cardboard box of cartridges and spilled some out onto the shelf. The shaking fingers of his right hand found the cartridges one by one, inserting them into the chambers as the fingers of his left hand rotated the cylinder. The Trooper was a .357 magnum, but it accepted the .38 Special ammunition that Hugh was loading as well. Thirty-eight Specials were heavy enough, he thought.

It had hurt to see the change that had come over Tex. When Hugh had first joined the club, the range officer had been friendly and helpful—he had made Hugh feel at home, had patiently guided him through the intricacies of applying for a pistol permit and coached him in marksmanship and firearms safety with an air pistol during the long wait for the license to be granted. When Hugh had finally gotten his permit and pistol-purchase authorization from the police, Tex had seemed almost as happy and excited as Hugh himself. He had helped Hugh choose the proper gun and had taught him how to load and fire it, how to control the recoil for the highest degree of accuracy, and how to clean and care

for it. But then June had started coming to the range and things had changed. Now Tex rarely spoke to Hugh.

Hugh finished loading the revolver and carefully closed the cylinder. He transferred the gun to his right hand, then suddenly leaned forward with the heels of both hands on the counter in front of him. He was tired-worn out.

Faintly, through the cushioning of his ear protectors, he could hear the shooters around him firing, the explosions like small firecrackers far away. Then, during a quiet period, he could hear the cranking of the target carriers as they ferried a new target out or brought in a used one.

It was when Hugh had started calling June at home from the office and getting no answer that he had begun to worry. Tex-Sidney-worked the evening shift at the range and had his days free, while Hugh worked nine to five. At first Hugh had tried to put his suspicions out of his mind, sure they were foolish. But he had felt compelled to know. One day he left for work as usual, stopped in at a gas station to call in sick, and, doubling back, had staked out his own home.

Someone a few booths down from Hugh was firing a rifle. Hugh could hear the *pop-pop* of the shells, so different from the *bang* of a pistol or a revolver. There was a haze over his eyes, from fatigue or sadness, as he cocked his revolver and raised it at arm's length, then quickly lowered it without firing and pressed the button at the side of his booth to summon the range officer. The regulations were prominently posted at every booth-the range officer must be summoned immediately in the event of a malfunction or misfire. He could imagine Sidney's annoyance when he heard the bell, could picture him checking the illuminated board on the side wall to see which booth had rung, then excusing himself from June's side and letting himself onto the firing line with his key.

Hugh turned to face the door, his revolver, still cocked, held loosely at waist level. He braced his right hand with his left. Sidney entered, closed the door behind him, and turned to face Hugh with a question on his lips.

Hugh shot him squarely in the heart. The sound of the shot was indistinguishable from the din of shots at the other firing points.

Hugh staggered back, and braced himself against the counter in his booth. He ripped off his ear protectors and began screaming for help. It seemed to take forever but gradually the sound of firing stopped and a

crowd of shooters congregated in the booth and Hugh tried incoherently to explain what had happened.

"It was a misfire! I rang for the officer. I started to show him the gun. Oh, God—it was so stupid! I should never have pointed it at him! It was a hangfire! It went off in my hand!"

One of the other men had knelt beside Tex's body. "I think he's gone," he said. "Somebody call an ambulance."

There had been a steady pounding on the door for the last few moments, and now someone opened it. June stood outside. She looked at Tex, dead on the floor, then looked at Hugh. Her face went white and one of the men helped her out to a chair.

But she didn't scream, Hugh noticed. She didn't cry.

He sat on the ground next to Tex's body and refused the urgings of his clubmates to drink some coffee or to come outside. He thought about how it used to be, how Tex had taught him gunmanship.

"Now, misfires are few and far between," Tex had said. "But they can happen, even with the better ammunition we have today. No big problem if they do. But never discount the possibility of a hangfire." And Tex had gone on to explain the difference, how a bullet might not fire due to some fault in workmanship or manufacture—and that was a misfire—but sometimes there was a delayed explosion—a hangfire—and the gun would go off several minutes after the trigger was pulled.

Hangfire. The word was being murmured around the range now as the men waited for the police.

It had taken June ten years to go off with another man. Hugh wondered if he could get her back again. If the police bought his accident story, he'd get the chance to do it. But did June buy the story? She and Tex had been discreet. June was the only living soul besides Hugh now who could tell the police about her affair with Tex. Without that knowledge there would be no motive, and they'd have to buy his hangfire story.

The police took a long time getting his statement. He had to tell it again and again as each successively higher-ranked officer appeared on the scene—how he had come for target practice, loaded his gun, and had a misfire on the very first shot, how he'd rung for the range officer like the rules said to, how he'd shown the gun to Tex, and how it had gone off.

Hangfire.

They had taken Tex's body away in an ambulance, and now June was looking at him, listening to him tell the police his tale. He remembered how it had been ten years ago on their wedding day. *That* June would never have had an affair.

The policemen were closing their notebooks. "Officer," June said. Her voice was startling after her long silence. "Officer." She didn't look at Hugh. "I'm sure you've noticed it. Why isn't there a paper target on my husband's carrier?"



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H9H031

Bill Lasker had been on the route for seven years . . .

THE LETTER CARRIER

by
**KATHRYN
GOTTLIEB**



To celebrate his seventh anniversary Bill Lasker bought himself the biggest and best-looking Red Delicious he had ever invested in. He stuck an apple in his mail sack every day, but this apple was really something. It cost thirty-five cents.

It was not a family anniversary he was celebrating. Bill Lasker had no wife, no family, and, for that matter, no friends. For seven years to the day he had been delivering the mail along Route West in the little sub-

urban town of Folsom, New Jersey, a day to be marked. The weather blessed him—a bright October sun, a cloudless sky, and, gliding past his ears, the many-colored autumn leaves.

He had been, as always, first man out, as soon as the sorted mail had come up in the truck to the Folsom substation. He wanted to put the little Main Street commercial section behind him before people began to arrive at the shops and offices along the way. Otherwise it was Good morning, How are you? Nice day! (or How do you like this rotten weather?). Enough to drive a man crazy.

He kept a fast, steady pace through the crowded uphill residential streets beyond: a section of no particular interest. It was out beyond the end of Hightop Road that his own world began. There, in the narrow neck of woodland that slashed his route in two, lay his own private estate, and in the winding, pleasant streets beyond lived those he thought of as his family, although he had spoken not a word to any of them.

He covered the early part of his route in record time, pressing forward to reach his kingdom in the woods—a brook, rocks, solitude. There he would rest, read, and eat that magnificent apple. Then, luck permitting, he would catch another glimpse of the young woman who had moved into 119 Folsom Road three weeks before.

One-nineteen Folsom was the only rental house in the neighborhood. It was painted a drab bluish grey and had the look of a place where people know they are not going to stay. No one had ever put in a garden there. She—he still didn't know her name—had moved into the dismal place alone. There was no man about the place when he passed by on Saturday mornings. On that day husbands were usually in evidence, putting up the storm sash or raking the leaves.

He had first glimpsed the new occupant of 119 as a dim figure moving across the rooms beyond the then uncurtained windows. A slender back, a drift of dark hair to her waist, a sense of quick and vital movement, and that was all. Beauty. He had been dropping a flyer from the local Shop-Mart into her box when he had caught that fleeting vision, and he had not seen her since. In three weeks she had received no mail. Plainly, she had left no forwarding address. He had concluded that she was, so to speak, on the run.

Marching down Hightop, he saw Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Parker chatting away on the sidewalk in front of 93—waiting there to trap him with questions. It was meanness to begrudge them the brilliant day, but

Mrs. Parker would say good morning and Mrs. Campbell would demand his opinion of the weather. His response, he knew, would be a jerky nod, flaming ears, and a burst of speed. And it was.

The old ladies watched his progress down to the cul-de-sac end of the road. Mrs. Parker spoke first. "What a handsome head of hair that young man has! My Joey had a mop of fair hair like that before he began to go grey."

"He's not what I'd call a young fellow," said Mrs. Campbell. "He must be close to forty."

"Half my age. I like to think that's young."

Mrs. Campbell grunted. "Have you ever seen him smile? Has he ever said good morning? When I say good morning I want good morning back!"

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Parker. "Maybe he has trouble at home."

Bill Lasker's path through the woods was leafstrewn and quiet. From time to time little animals scuttled across it, quaking at his thunderous approach. "Hey there," he called out to them softly. Chipmunks were easy to talk to. He thought, smiling, of the others, the night animals fast asleep in their burrows; garbage pail raiders. Under the trees grew clutching brambles and shrubs whose names he didn't know, and ferns in all the puddled spots. Through the neck of woods ran a curving brook in a stony bed—in the spring, and after rainstorms, a noisy torrent. The foot-path crossed the brook by means of two planks laid side by side that tilted under his feet. Someday he'd go into the water—if any—mailbag and all!

Once across the makeshift bridge, he left the path and followed his own beaten track along the far side of the brook, deeper into the woods. There, out of sight of the path, he made himself comfortable on a kind of rocky sofa, where a boulder supported his back and a flat slab of stone made a seat at a convenient height above the ground. The autumn had been dry, and that morning there was no water running in the bed of the brook, which was filled instead with a river of yellow leaves. Bill Lasker stared down into it from his rocky perch. How pretty it was!

He reached into the depths of his mailbag, drew out his anniversary apple, and polished it on his sleeve. He then emptied the pouch and set the mail snugly down on the rock beside him; letters for Ramsay and Oak and Folsom Road, and Harrison to its junction with Main. His interest in the affairs of their recipients—on whom, when they met, he turned that unconsciously forbidding gaze—was benign and, until now, unflagging.

He picked up a handful of mail, took a bite of his apple, and read.

He scanned all postcards, picture and message; studied the—return addresses on envelopes; and peered into those that were unsealed without disturbing their contents. And—lucky day!—slipped the Kolgers' *Playboy* carefully out of its wrapper, looked it over, and slid it carefully back. An overdue notice (purple) winked at him through its glassine-fronted envelope: the Second National wanted its money from the his-and-her Jaguars on Ramsay Place.

For the Wildes, next house after the spendthrift Jags, there was a nice postcard of Westminster Abbey from Jennifer Wilde, who was studying in England. Fabulous, she wrote. Good. She was a nice kid—always used to wave at him and never, never spoke. He was sorry for the Groleys, whose kid never sent them a line. Be fair, Bill told himself; maybe he calls up. But that wasn't what he called keeping in touch.

As he leafed through the mail he replaced it in neat order in the sack at his side.

The corner of Ramsay and Oak supported the Organization To Revive Prohibition. He went on hastily past their monthly newsletter. (His beer!)

Mrs. Wigram, on Oak, would lurk behind her draperies in vain, darting out to the box as soon as he reached the sidewalk. There was still no check from Mr. Wigram, who lived in Tucson, Arizona. Short of money, poor lady. Which could not be said of her neighbors, into whose mailbasket he dropped little showers of dividend checks. It would be nice to play God sometime and do a little rearranging.

What would his own life be, he wondered, deprived of this route, these people, his place in the woods? How people stood to be shuttled around, like those families that whipped in and out of 119 Folsom, he simply couldn't imagine. What chance was there, in only a year or two, to get acquainted with a place? Here the bumpy tree roots and sidewalks and cobblestone curbing were as well known to him as the stairs in his house. He could have delivered the mail blindfolded. His route; his home. They'd never take it away from him. He was a steady and devoted worker; he showed up in the worst weather, ready to protect his mailbag with his life.

And so on that brilliant day he celebrated his anniversary. The apple was a treat, the *Playboy* another; but later, passing 119 Folsom, he caught no glimpse of its new occupant.

Three days later, he did.

He was walking past the orphaned-looking house, wondering if he would ever catch sight of her again, when she sprang to her feet on the far side of the hedge that bordered the sidewalk. She was clutching a garden trowel and her face was streaked with earth. She looked as pretty as a picture.

"Good morning!" she said.

The miracle shocked an answer out of him. "Good morning!"

"I've been putting tulip bulbs in," she said. "You don't think it's too late in the season, do you?"

"Of course not—they'll do fine." Her eyes were as blue as the sky; *today's* sky. "My mother never put bulbs in until the real cold weather. She—" But there he stopped. Long years ago she had told him, laughing, that she was punishing herself for her extravagance. Someday he might be able to tell that to this extraordinary young woman, who now shrugged her shoulders in a mock-guilty gesture and said, "I mustn't keep you from your appointed rounds, must I?"

Over so soon. "I guess not."

She gave him a little wave of the trowel and sank back to her knees. He marched down the street, his heart pounding. She was the prettiest woman he had ever seen, and the kindest. Had he not *spoken* to her?

And speak to her he did, day after day, as he plodded up and down the streets of that familiar route. True, he had yet to see her again, but the conversation, once begun, went on and on in his head. You know, he told her, there's nobody around here would believe the way you and I were talking about those tulip bulbs. And it's the God's truth, I'm not the local chatterbox. But I don't mean to be unfriendly—you know what I mean? She always knew what he meant, of course. Never any doubt of that.

And I'll tell you another fact—he was at the moment dropping Mrs. Wigram's check into her box—nobody would believe what a talkative kid I was at one time. One door past the Wigrams' he stopped still—the name of his mother's favorite tulips had just popped into his head. General de Wet! And the day they had planted those bulbs—it must have been November, cold enough to burn your ears off. Imagine remembering General de Wet, bright orange, after all these years. That girl at 119 must have opened some magic door in his head.

A week passed and he caught no further glimpse of her. On Tuesday, and then again on Thursday, there was the sight of her car in the driveway

to console him—she was *there*—but when the driveway stood empty his heart flapped in panic. Suppose she had gone away? Nonsense. She had to go down to the Shop-Mart sometimes, didn't she? Or the bank, or the library—or maybe she'd taken some kind of a job. People didn't just stay shut up in their houses day in and day out. Still—he frowned, thinking about it—she still hadn't gotten any mail. Nothing personal, that is. He had put a soap sample in her basket and more flyers from Shop-Mart, all addressed to Occupant.

Occupant. He still didn't know her name.

The conversation went on in his head, confiding. When I first started to get really quiet, he told her, was after my mother died and I got sent to live with my Aunt Ethel. You're probably wondering about my father. He wasn't dead or anything like that, he just wasn't around. I hardly remember him. Aunt Ethel was really my mother's aunt. She seemed like a hundred years old to me then and I'll tell you the truth, the poor old lady didn't know what hit her, getting this thirteen-year-old boy dumped in her lap. She was a real old maid, if you'll pardon the expression, and just the sound of my footsteps crashing around in her house must have been enough to drive her crazy, let alone the sound of my voice.

At that point he was climbing the steps to Mrs. Parker's porch, and he turned off the conversation until he was back on the sidewalk again. I have to admit it, there was no reason for that woman to love me. I was kind of a homely kid and I never could think of the right things to say. So after a while I just shut up. My mother and me, we used to talk about stuff and make jokes together, and I was *somebody* in our house. I could change a faucet washer before I was ten, and I mean so it didn't leak or shriek when you turned the water on. But with Aunt Ethel the talk just went out of me.

On the next day the fine weather broke, and the postcards began. Bill Lasker woke to an overcast sky—the exact color of the house at 119—and a smell of rain on its way. Seated on his rock in the woods, dampness beading his hair, he pulled the mail out of the sack, looking for 119 Folsom. His interest in all the others—on Ramsay, on Oak, all along—belonged to a time that no longer existed. And there, sandwiched between bundles of mail for 117 and 121, he found a picture postcard of Los Angeles, view side up. Sorter's error. It was a nighttime view from someplace high up—a

lot of black and little dots of lights. He stared at it like a man in a trance, and then he turned it over.

Mrs. Jean LaBarre. He repeated the syllables like a man reciting a poem. Jean. Jean. Jean LaBarre. He read the message, and read it again. "Found you!" it said. The writing was ugly; a triumphant scrawl that almost filled the message space. "Found you," he said aloud. What would be the proper tone of voice? *Found you!* The card had been mailed from Los Angeles. It was unsigned.

Her car was not in the driveway when he slipped the card into the box.

Two days later he found another postcard addressed to her. It had been mailed from Flagstaff, Arizona, and held a one-word message: "Closer." No signature.

Closer? It was a good thing, Bill Lasker told himself, that she was hearing from somebody after all this time; it was no kind of a good thing for her to be living alone and apart from people—his kind of life. But what kind of a friend wrote cards like this? He leaned back against his rock and closed his eyes. A picture came into his head clear as day: a man driving a car with California plates, headed for Folsom, New Jersey, face a blank, character and intentions unknown.

The next card was postmarked Albuquerque. Bill Lasker read it and it slipped from his hands, like a leaf, onto the ground. "My darling." Damned fool! Damned fool! That let him out, didn't it? Mr. California Plates and Mrs. Jean LaBarre were none of his business. They had had a lover's quarrel. Lovers quarreled and made up. He picked up the card, replaced the mail, and got to his feet. The sack weighed a ton. He felt old and hollowed out. All the same, on his way home in the late afternoon he stopped at Pringle's Stationery and bought a road atlas of the U.S.A. He looked for Albuquerque and found it; east of Las Vegas. "Closer."

On Sunday he sat home and watched TV and drank beer and the day was a thousand years long. Monday there was nothing in the mail. On Tuesday a card arrived from Amarillo, and it was different from the others. The message was so long that, though the writing was very small, it reached the bottom of the card and then continued, curling up and around twice, crowding the address space illegally. "Oh my darling," he read. "Each day draws me nearer to you and my heart is renewed with gladness. Soon we will join hands and you will believe with me that we never should have parted. Oh my love, why did you leave me? Whom God

hath joined together! Joined together! But I will not repeat it. I patiently explained to you His holy command and I know in my heart that you repent. It is that knowledge that draws me to you—I love you, I forgive you. Oh my Jean, never again—” At that point the message began its long tail-curl around its own body and Bill Lasker stopped reading and looked away from the card. Not three feet away a chipmunk sat at the farthest edge of the slab of stone and stared back at him. “I don’t know,” said Bill. The chipmunk ran away. He looked at the card again. The man was out of his mind. Or was he? Maybe he was just very religious. Bill shut his eyes. He could see the car bouncing down the dusty desert roads.

He would knock on her door, put the card in her hands, and say, “If you’re in trouble, Mrs. LaBarre, I’ll protect you from this man—” and he heard her voice, shocked, angry: “You’ve been reading my mail!” And then God knows what. They’d take him off the route—no, they’d fire him—and then he’d sit alone in his room day after day until he was as crazy as the man in Amarillo.

He jumped to his feet and threw his half-eaten apple in the direction of the chipmunk. He had time. Texas was far away. But of course the man was traveling ahead of the cards. Never mind. He’d work something out.

For three days there was no message, and then two cards arrived together, both posted from Colorado—some town named Trinidad. One card read “Jean.”; the other, “Zigzag.” That night, frowning over his atlas, he found Trinidad—small print, small town. “Zigzag” described it: the place was north and west of Amarillo. And then, for days, there was silence. Maybe California Plates had given up and was heading back to L.A.

On a day of pouring rain he delivered half a ton of shampoo samples, one in every box: to Mrs. Campbell, *no hair*; to the Prohibitions. “Drink it!” The very next day, Jean LaBarre was outside on her lawn, facing away from him, grubbing the leaves out from under the decrepit shrubs in front of the house. Today of all days there were no samples, no flyers, no postcard. Could he hand her somebody else’s mail? He stared at the long slender back and the shining dark hair, then trudged on down the road. “I’ve been reading your mail.” How could he say it? For the rest of that day he even stopped talking to her in his mind. The situation was impossible.

The week ended. Sunday passed. On Monday morning, under a sky as hard and grey as any November would bring, Bill found another card in his hands. The fellow was back in Amarillo, and he sounded just as ordinary as the guy next door. "Damn this car. Broke down again. Half the time I don't know where I am!" She wasn't home for him to put the card into her hands, and she wasn't home two days later when a card came from St. Louis. That tiny handwriting again, the message curling around and around. This one he read to the end. The ending was obscene. His hands shook when he put the card into her mailbox. If her car had been standing in the driveway he would have rung the bell and told her everything—that he'd read every word. Let the sky fall on his head! "You'd better get out of here," he'd say. "I'm telling you, you've got to get out!" And then a voice whispered in the back of his head, You do and she'll get out, all right—out of your life.

The next day, when he was just two doors past her house, she backed the car out of the driveway and shot off down the street, waving a friendly hand as she passed. He waved back vigorously and continued to confide in her, tramping down the sidewalk, everything that went on in his head. He complained in a good-humored way about the old ladies who sprang conversation traps on him. I deliver their mail, he said. Do I have to give weather reports too? He smiled at her, and the Jean in his head smiled back. He told her the plots of the programs he watched every evening, and she agreed with his opinions, absolutely. "Dumb stuff!" "Isn't it though? Why on earth do we watch it?"

Two days after the ugly message from St. Louis a card arrived from someplace he couldn't make out in Kentucky. "I don't know what comes over me," wrote the man who never signed his name. "But don't be afraid of me ever again. *Please*. Don't run away from me. You are my only friend."

Oh, you're safe, he told the card. She's not running. Runners don't plant gardens. She'd be right there to face him when he came knocking on her door. But which man would stand on her doorstep—the pathetic pleader of Someplace, Kentucky, or the madman of St. Louis? Oh, God help me, thought Bill, what can I do? Talk to the guys at the post office? But he never talked to them. They'd think he was the crazy one.

For the first time in his life he wished a man dead.

He still went each day to his woodland place. The weather had turned cold, with the bite of winter in it, but he was sturdy, and indifferent to

the change of season. He looked at no mail but hers. Out of habit he continued to carry an apple in his mail sack but, distracted, half the time he forgot to eat it. On a day of pallid sunshine he found the next message in his hands. "Soon." The postmark was Akron, Ohio. Akron! The man might *be* here!

He stepped along Ramsay Place at a pace that left him gasping. The mail sack weighed at his shoulders and every damned house on the block had mail. The same on Oak, where he had to slow down; the pain cut right across his shoulders. When he reached the top of Folsom Road he stared in terror down the sloping street to her house. Peace and quiet. No one on the sidewalk; no strange cars.

He went on at a human pace and got his breath back. Her car was not in the driveway.

It wasn't until he had rounded the downhill corner and got halfway down Harrison to Main that he spotted the car parked in front of the empty lot past 168. Dark plates; out-of-state plates—Jersey is black on cream. It was a beat-up Chevy, he saw, coming abreast of it, and the plates were yellow on navy blue. California. The driver was sitting in the car. Passing, Bill glimpsed an oil-stained khaki sleeve. The man's hands rested on the wheel, holding something—some piece of paper, too small to be a map. Big hands, a long arm: more than that he couldn't have seen without stooping to peer into the window. He forced himself on, one foot in front of the other, up one walk and down the next. He wanted the strength to turn back but the habit of his route, of his perpetual silence, held him in its grip. What would he say? How could he say it? Jersey was full of out-of-state plates, and that empty lot was For Sale. The man could be some stranger looking at the lot to buy it.

He finished his route and went home.

That night he slept badly. He dreamed of a man at the wheel of a car. The man had no face but spoke to him all the same. "You wanted me to drive into a ditch," he said. His voice was reproachful. "But you don't get what you want in this world. Don't you know that?"

The last postcard came the next day. A picture of the Folsom War Memorial, a Folsom postmark. It was addressed to Mrs. Jean LaBarre. There was no message.

He fled from his place in the woods, the mailbag jouncing against his hip. He delivered the mail on Ramsay and Oak at a run, groaning for

breath, pushing at a task he hadn't the strength to abandon. He rounded the corner of Oak to the top of Folsom Road.

"No," he said aloud.

A knot of people had gathered out on the sidewalk in front of her house.

"No." All the way down the hill he delivered the mail. "No!" The word tolled in his head like a bell. When at last he stood in front of 119 Mrs. Parker from 93 Hightop looked at him and spoke. "That poor young woman." Her lips were trembling. "Poor child! She was beaten to death last night.

"A package came from United Parcel this morning and the driver found the door open and—" the old voice faltered "—they found blood just inside the door. She must have struggled to get away. Poor child! They say she was only twenty-five."

He was standing like a man turned to stone.

"Are you all right?" asked Mrs. Parker. "Are you feeling all right?" She was looking at him anxiously.

"Yes," he said. "Thank you." He moved to go on, and then he saw the stranger standing at the edge of the crowd, staring at the house. A tall man, young, with a deeply tanned and rather coarse complexion, and sun-bleached hair cut very short. He was wearing the khaki shirt with the oil stain on the sleeve. Bill Lasker moved on, stuffing mail into every box—*Time*, *Newsweek*, dunning letters, love letters, hate letters—he didn't know what was in his hands. What was the use of any of it? Why did anyone want it? Rubbish. Heartbreak. Trouble. Sorrow.

When he turned the corner into Harrison, he saw the Chevy with the California plates. It was parked in front of the empty lot, just as it had been yesterday; as though it were yesterday. He threw his mail sack to the ground and ran up the street. At the end, at Main, he thrust himself into a telephone booth and dialed the police; reported the watching stranger, the waiting car.

He had expected a reprimand for a task abandoned, a mailbag thrown God-knows-where, but instead he found himself congratulated for his quick thinking and fast response. The California driver, a man named Frank LaBarre, had been picked up at once for questioning. He had admitted readily to the murder of Jean LaBarre, who had once been his wife. It was something, he stated, that he had had to do.

The abandoned mailbag was retrieved, its contents apparently intact.

The letter carrier received his commendation without response. He asked to be transferred to another route. The request was refused. He was the hero of the neighborhood.

Kept from his little kingdom in the woods by the deep snows of winter, he did not return to it in the beautiful days of spring. He took no apples with him in his mail sack, and never read the mail any more.

Late in April the tulips bloomed inside the hedge at 119. When he saw them he cried like a child.



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H9H015

Going on a job with Easy was asking for trouble . . .

EASY CHANGE

by
**PERCY
SPURLARK
PARKER**



"It'll be a breeze," Easy said. "No sweat at all. What d'ya say, Frank?"

Easy had just outlined a little job for us, ripping off some old guy who'd moved into a storefront this afternoon on Wells just above North Avenue.

The joint had been empty for nearly a year. The previous tenants ran a novelty shop up front and had a small apartment in back. The show windows were painted over from the inside. Easy said he hadn't noticed any effort being made to get the paint off, but the old man had put up

a mailbox. Marshall was the name Easy got off the mailbox—Art Marshall.

Easy was good at getting useless information. He cased a clothing store for me and some of the boys once and got the time the place opened and closed, how many people worked there, the identity of the last person to leave, and even the lunch schedules, but he overlooked the couple of German shepherds the owner turned loose in the place at night. That job was a bust from the start.

That's how he'd got tagged Easy Change. He was always trying to make some easy dough. But because of his foul-ups, if he got anything at all it was usually just a little change. Going on a job with him was asking for trouble. What kept him going was the one time he'd got lucky. He'd been in front of the right bank and grabbed the right purse and had come up with nearly nine hundred bucks.

Easy shifted from foot to foot. His thin jacket hung loose over his bony shoulders. His beard didn't look quite as ragged as usual. He'd probably copped a pair of scissors from somewhere and whacked away at it. With all that brain power at work, it was a wonder he hadn't cut his throat.

"Hey, Frank," he said. "Us two can handle that old fossil."

"I'm not worried about taking care of this Art Marshall of yours, Easy. It's you that's got me thinking, man. You come up scoring zeros an awful lot."

"Just bad luck, Frank—that's all. It's bound to change. Like the bank deal. Something like that'll happen again. All these old people keep their money where they can get to it fast. Since this Marshall just moved in today, he hasn't had a chance to find a good hiding place. He's probably got hundreds, maybe even thousands, stashed away in an old sock or something."

"It would have to be a pretty big sock."

Easy's smile was partially lost in his beard. "Sock or shopping bag, man—it's gotta be there."

"And if it isn't?"

"The movers took in a portable color TV. We'll hock that if we don't get anything else."

Every ounce of street smarts told me to pat Easy on the back and send him on his way. It wasn't ripping off some old man that bothered me—I'd done that before. Old people are about the safest targets. If they put up any resistance at all, it's never anywhere near enough. It was just going in on one of Easy's setups that gave me the bad vibes.

It wasn't going to work and I knew it. But I kept thinking about the nine hundred bucks Easy had stumbled across. He was just dumb enough to do it again. If he hit the jackpot with this old man and I'd cut myself out of the deal, who would be the dummy then?

"O.K., Easy, I'm in—but so help me, if this turns out to be another botched-up job I'll—"

"Hey, Frank!" Easy held up his hand, his skinny head tilting slightly. "Trust me."

It was close to 3:00 P.M. as Easy and me walked down North Avenue toward Wells. Easy was running off at the mouth about Marshall having Art on the mailbox instead of Arthur. And he was wondering when he got to be that old would people stop calling him Easy and use Ernest.

The night was clear but Easy and me had been traveling the alleys so much we could find our way if the moon took a vacation. We reached the back of Marshall's place and Easy pulled out a thick-bladed hunting knife and started working on the kitchen window. Success or failure—I couldn't think of any point in between we might reach. We were either going to score heavy or it was going to be the biggest foul-up ever. With Easy, the chance of a foul-up took the strong odds.

I was about to call the whole thing off when Easy got the window open and slipped inside. I still felt like turning around and leaving him there, but the thought of Easy getting lucky again guided me through the window behind him. There weren't many things in our way—a table and chair, a few boxes. We made it to the bedroom without tripping over anything.

I hit the light switch as Easy rushed the bed. He grabbed the old man by his pajama collar and put the knife close to his face. "We want your money, Pops. Where is it?"

"Please—" Marshall said. He was older than I'd expected, in his seventies at least, and skinnier than Easy, with thin grey hair pasted to his skull. His eyes seem to bulge at the knife Easy was holding. "I don't have any money."

"Don't lie to me or I'll ram this knife—"

"No, please don't hurt me! Over there!"

He was pointing to a trunk in the middle of the floor, and I began to feel a little lightness inside of me. Easy had done it again. He'd actually been right.

Easy dragged the old man out of bed and pushed him toward the trunk, looking over at me and smiling. I knew he was thinking of getting back and telling the guys how we'd scored. They would have to treat him different now. They might even start calling him Ernest.

The old man screamed and swirled, kicking at Easy's knife hand. The knife went flying and another kick sent Easy crashing into a wall. I backed into the bedroom door, reached for the knob, heard the old man scream again, and turned in time to see his foot closing in on my face.

The thought that kept pounding in my head was that I should never have gone along with Easy. I learned what a really dumb mistake it had been when the cops led me out to the squad car and I got a look at the mailbox the old man had put up when he moved in. It didn't read Art Marshall like Easy had told me. The damn thing said "Martial Arts, Inc."



The Hawk solves another murder in Old New York . . .

THE HAWK SHOPS FOR JUSTICE

by
**S.S.
RAFFERTY**



Mrs. Fenley came into her chilly kitchen that November morning with the warmth of sleep clinging to her ample body under her quilted robe. She turned up the wall gas jet, bathing the dark room in white light, and got hurriedly to work.

She lifted the right front lid on the coal stove and drove the poker deep into the dying embers of the night fire, bringing them to working order, then quickly she brought her own organizational skills into play.

She dared not make pork chops, eggs, and hash browns, much as she would have liked to serve her husband his favorite breakfast. But this was Thursday, and in light of their early-morning amour, such special treatment would be in bad taste—hussified. French toast and sausages would be more appropriate.

She turned the latchkey in the back-hall lock, opened the door, and went out to the icebox. Automatically, she tapped the drip-water pan beneath the box with her slippered toes. It would need emptying by noon. Thank God for the coming cold weather when she could use the window box for perishables. She went back to the kitchen with the eggs and sausages, scooping up the bottle of milk and the newspaper at the doorsill.

She had the frying pans ready and the milk and eggs well whipped (no confectioner's sugar—her husband would bellow), and put her palm over the heating stove lids, hoping she wouldn't have to go back to the hall for kindling. She held her palm in place and slowly intoned "M-i-n-n-e-a-p-o-l-i-s-M-i-n-n-e-s-o-t-a." Perfect heat. First, the water for his shave. He needed more than a quart since he'd shaved off his mutton chops. At first she had been furious, because a metropolitan captain of detectives should look distinguished. But now, five days after he'd cut his elegant facial hair down to his old cavalryman's wallaroo, she was getting used to it. He was a bit greyer, but still bore traces of the rakish major of the New York Hussars and well-remembered hero of Gettysburg. She hoped that the wallaroo was not a middle-aged man's foolish effort to till new meadows—but if so, better here than you-know-where-and-gone-to-hell.

The water was at the simmer now, and she gingerly shifted it to the back lids of the stove. Efficiently, she ladled some hot water into the smaller frying pan, put five chubby pork links into it, and set it on the hot cast iron. Four more ladles of water went into the coffee boiler. The bread was cut and quick-staling in the oven. Tess Fenley's day was well begun.

She took her usual morning glance at the newspaper and saw that her neighbor Nellie Fulsome's day would not be beginning at all. Here, in the warmth of her own kitchen, now filling with the rich smell of bread and sausages, she read about a lurid murder not two blocks away. Well, she mused, there's no telling what goes on behind closed doors or who you're rubbing shoulders with at Krensby's Meat Market. Strange,

though—why would a woman planning a tryst be serving her lover knackwurst and sauerkraut?

"Well, Madonna," Fenley said as he gaily flourished the last bit of sausage on his fork, "good to the last oink."

Oh, he was frisky as a week-old pony, all right, and had been since he got up. He even hummed while he shaved, which was unusual. "Madonna" was his saucy way of teasing her; all because, years ago, she had unabashedly confided to him that she found Italians slightly naughty.

"Tell Krensbey he's putting a heavy fist to the allspice. I get suspicious when butchers overspice. It means they're hiding something. Meats get at the turning point and they say to themselves, I've got to protect my investment, and out comes the allspice, the cloves, the ginger, and what-all, as if they could fool the taste in your mouth without making you sick as—"

"John Fenley!" his wife snapped, thumping the table. "I'll not have talk of stomach distress at my table." She was not a queasy person, but she felt she must curb his jauntiness. To be sure, it was her own fault this morning. Calling him Juan—no, Juanito mine—had been a mite too passionate.

She looked into his roguish eyes with concentrated sternness. "You had best finish your coffee now."

"I'm sorry, my dear. That was a bit out of line."

Now that he was curbed, she could smile. "It's only a man's way, dear, but best left at headquarters. It's turning crisp, and I want you to wear your Chesterfield today. And don't you start scowling, John Fenley—I'm not going to have you sniffing—"

She was interrupted by the high shrill whistle of the downstairs call pipe. Fenley started up from his chair and was commanded to sit by his wife, who went to the speaking tube, took it from its cradle, and in a sweetly falsetto voice said, "Yes? Who is it? Oh, yes, Sergeant, come right up. He hasn't left yet."

"Sergeant Sykes is on his way up," she said, scampering to the bedroom, where Fenley was tying his tie. Then, to his amazement, she said, "It's probably about the Fulsome murder. Take your Chesterfield now."

Before he had a chance to wonder what murder she was talking about, a knock came at the front-hall door. Fenley walked from the kitchen through the dining room (used only for company), and across the parlor

(used only on Sundays) to the foyer. Why wouldn't Tess Fenley enjoy the reputation of a crackerjack housekeeper? They practically lived in the kitchen.

Sykes was a plainclothesman, no more than twenty-four, the youngest sergeant detective on the force. But Fenley didn't begrudge him his gold shield—at least he wasn't some alderman's nephew. Sykes had won his laurels in a daring shoot-up on Mott Street, leaving three plug-uglies dead in the gutter and two others in the hospital, an action which had decimated Mother Mendelbaum's notorious gang. The youngster was a handy shot, but Fenley wondered how good a detective he was.

"Come into the kitchen," Fenley said over his shoulder. "It's warmer. I thought you were on night tour."

"I am," the sergeant replied, taking the proffered chair but refusing coffee. He pointed to the newspaper Mrs. Fenley had left on the table. "I see you've read the bulletin about the Fulsome woman."

"No, I haven't—I'm running a little late this morning." He picked up the sheet and scanned the front page. It was a few simple sentences set in bold type to give it importance.

WOMAN FOUND SLAIN

The body of a woman identified as Mrs. Nellie Fulsome was found in her Dock Street flat by a foot patrolman at an early hour today. Reports indicate that she had been murdered with a kitchen knife. Sergeant Dan Sykes of the Metropolitan Detectives is investigating.

"I suppose Inspector Rourke assumes I know her because she lives in the neighborhood, but I don't," Fenley said. He took his old turnip from his waistcoat pocket and checked the time. "Well, the day tour will be taking over soon. Inspector Moran is the watch commander this month. Does he want me on it?"

Sykes had a queer look on his face when the two ranking inspectors of the bureau were mentioned.

"Not exactly, sir. I mean, neither Rourke nor Moran know about the case yet. You see, last night was the Tammany Smoker, and—"

The young sergeant had no need to say another word. The Tammany Smoker was the social event of the year—probably more important than a commissioner's wake to a career-minded policeman.

"Which leaves you as the entire bureau," said Fenley.

"I figured the shindig would break up around four or so, so I sealed the Fulsome flat, put a uniformed man on the door, and started telling lies to the reporters. Then, an hour ago, a desk sergeant over at the one-six told me you never go to the smoker, so here I am."

It was well known that Fenley was not interested in politics. His captaincy had been a direct appointment from the mayor when he came back from the war. He might never make inspector or chief inspector, but no one could take his rank away either.

"And the shindig is still rolling along, at seven-thirty in the morning?" Fenley shook his head in disgust.

"Actually, it's sailing along, sir. You see, some aldermen chartered the Albany night boat to take the lieutenant governor back to the capital in style, and everyone went with them."

"Drunk as lords, no doubt. Well, you don't have to worry about the reporters. Every publisher and editor in the city is on that jaunt, and they have wives too."

"Oh—so you know about the girls from the Gaiety?"

"Probably the combined chorus lines of every gin mill, beer hall, and jump shop in town. Well—" the captain sighed "—it looks like you and I are the whole shooting match, Sergeant. But even if we nab someone, we won't be able to arraign him. All the judges must be on their way up the Hudson too. I just hope the Fire Department wasn't invited along. I'll get my jacket and we'll get over there."

"Another thing, Captain, sir. Before I found out that you never go to the smoker, I took the liberty of sending a telegram to the Hawk. I hope I did right."

Fenley stopped en route to the bedroom and turned.

"You'd better never let Dr. Phipps hear you call him the Hawk. Or me either."

"Sorry, sir." Sykes was contrite, but a bit bewildered. "But the newspapers all call him that, and wasn't there a bunch of penny dreadfuls about him a while back?"

"For your information, Sergeant, Dr. Amos Phipps is an alienist who serves as special consultant to the bureau. All that 'Hawk of Vengeance' business is pure bushwah."

"Alienist?"

"A doctor of the mind—a doctor for crazy people, to be blunt. As I think

of it, he could round up quite a few patients on the Albany night boat."

When Fenley entered the bedroom, he surprised his wife adjusting her corset. "Oh, John!" she cried and sprang for her robe, which she held in front of her. "You should knock."

Despite twenty-one years of marriage, Fenley rarely saw Tess in her underthings. Her quick coverup had not been quick enough, however, and for a scant moment he had glimpsed her deliciously plump thighs and brimming cleavage. Lascivious as the thought was, he could picture her on a French postcard.

"Sorry, my dear. I need my jacket."

"And your Chesterfield. It's in the foyer closet. Take the mothballs out of the pockets, mind."

"Yes, dear," Fenley said, slipping on his suit jacket and realizing with disgust that he would smell of camphor all day. He took his revolver from the top bureau drawer and his bullets from the bottom drawer, loaded the weapon, and slipped it into his back right-hand pocket. He looped the twisters through his back belt loop and the leather-covered blackjack in his back left-hand pocket.

"Carrying all that just ruins your clothes, John."

"It stops people from putting bullet holes in the material, my dear."

This was a daily ritual, and he waited for her regular comment on plainclothes officers having no clothing allowance as the uniformed men did. But "It's the Fulsome murder, isn't it?" she asked, combing her waist-length auburn hair at the vanity.

"Yes. Did you know her, Tess?"

"Well, hardly, John. Not *that* kind of woman. But she shops at Mr. Krensby's."

"What do you mean by 'that kind of woman'?"

"Oh, she *looks* respectable enough. She's around thirty-five or so. Her clothes are fashionable but cheaply made, although her boots are of good quality."

"Well, why 'that kind of woman'?"

"She has a lover, you goose."

"Now how could you possibly know that? Meat-market gossip, no doubt."

Tess Fenley's face looked positively hurt. "John, you know I don't gossip. But she has a lover, all right—though he didn't do it. The husband did."

Fenley stared at her.

"Why are you looking at me as if I were a ninny? I know because of the way she buys her meat. On Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, she buys what every smart shopper does—the cheaper cuts. You know: shoulder clod for pot roast, lamb shanks, liver, hocks. But on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the sky's the limit. Rack of lamb at forty-five cents a pound, and three-quarters of it fat and bone. Steak, but not flank or round. Oh, no—filet mignon she calls it—and at fifty cents the pound it *ought* to have a fancy French name. *You* could eat four of them."

"I see," Fenley said, trying to suppress an amused smile. "Very interesting. But you say her husband did it. Assuming, of course, that she's married."

"John Fenley," she pouted, "I think you're handing me taffy. She wears a wedding ring! And her husband *was* home last night, because she bought knackwurst and kraut. Would she feed *that* to her lover?"

He did not dare remind her that she had just fed hers French toast and sausages. He walked over and kissed her cheek. "Goodbye, my dear. You've been very helpful."

When he reached the door, he looked back at her before the mirror. She swiveled half round toward him. "Have a good day, John." She hesitated and added softly, "And be careful." When he was outside and had closed the door, he heard the muffled yet quite explicit: "And don't forget your Chesterfield."

On their way downstairs, Fenley asked Sykes, "Are you married?"

"Yes, sir," he said, "eight months now."

"What did you have for supper last night?"

"Veal cutlets. Mary does them up special with a cream sauce. Why do you ask, Captain?"

"Just curious. But don't get used to it. You'll be on pot roast and lamb shanks before long."

As Fenley and Sykes briskly approached the brownstone on Dock Street, a hack reined up to the curb and Dr. Amos Phipps alighted. He was a blond, clean-shaven man who looked far younger than his thirty-eight years. At least to Sykes's thinking—and despite Fenley's warning—the man did look like a hawk. Phipps and Sykes were introduced and the alienist said to Fenley, "Is there something baffling about this affair?"

"I just came into it myself, Doctor. We had a manpower shortage last

night. Let's take a look." He had started up the stairs to the front door when Sykes's voice stopped him.

"The entrance is around the corner in the side alley over this way, sir. The landlady says the flat used to be a doctor's office. There's no entry from the main house."

Sykes's reference to the side entrance as an alley showed either a dire lack of observation or a natural frugality with words. It was actually a charming patio garden, closed off from the street by an iron fence and filigreed gate. A slate walk led up to a small stoop attached to the side of the building.

A boyish-faced officer came to attention on the porch. He was obviously a supernumerary snatched up in Sykes's nervous attempt to cover all the bases like a New York Metropolitan's shortstop in a depleted-manpower crisis. He betrayed his newness to the force by saluting the sergeant and totally ignoring the presence of a ranking captain.

"Donovan's inside, sir."

"Right, Calder," Sykes said, and turned to Fenley: "He's the beat man who found the body."

"I know Donovan," the captain assured him as he opened the small glass door on the kerosene porch lamp and felt the wick. "Dry as a bone," he told Phipps.

"I would expect as much. That post lamp on the patio probably is too," Phipps conjectured. They exchanged knowing glances. Sykes looked confused.

"Shall I have Calder check it, Captain?"

"Er-uh—" the supernumerary stammered "—it's Callper, not Calder, sir."

"Well, check it anyway," Sykes snapped, and followed the captain and the doctor into the house. Fenley made a mental note to give the sergeant a lecture on the importance of getting names straight when commanding men.

There was no foyer, and they found themselves standing in a small front parlor which was modestly but tastefully furnished.

"That you, Callper?" a voice came from the back of the house. "For God's sake, don't touch anything!" Suddenly, another uniformed figure appeared in the doorway—a massive red-haired Irishman, whose very presence in the neighborhood should have been a strong deterrent to crime. "Captain Fenley, sir! I didn't know you were on this case!"

"'Lo, Donovan," Fenley said. "This is Doctor Phipps." He emphasized the "Doctor" as a warning that he didn't want any slips about the Hawk. Donovan was an old hand, and got the message. Fenley looked at the notebook in the patrolman's hamlike fist. "Making your report, I see. Well, let's have it."

"Right, sir. Around four this morning, I was making my next to last turn in this block when I noted that there were lights on here. Mrs. Fulsome never had the lamps lit that late, so I decided to have a look-see. The door was ajar and I entered and found her in the kitchen back there, with a kitchen knife in her back, poor woman. I warned her about not lighting that patio and porch at night, sir, when she first moved in. I even offered to maintain the lamps myself, but she'd have none of it. Attracted bugs, she said."

Fenley nodded his head in understanding. No good patrolman likes dark corners and cul-de-sacs that would afford cover for culprits on his beat.

"She moved in here a year ago last summer. Came from Savannah, she said, but she wasn't a Southerner in her talk. The landlady wanted to rent to another doctor, but those fellows are all moving uptown to Park Avenue. The landlady says Mrs. Fulsome wanted the place so much she paid a five-dollar-a-month premium. She said her husband was a sailor and had just started making New York his home port. She was a nice, respectable woman, quite attractive. Her lamps were always out by ten sharp, and she kept to herself. There's ten dollars and change in her purse, and the place doesn't look disturbed—so robbery seems unlikely."

"We'll see the body now, Donovan," Fenley said. The patrolman was starting to usurp the detective's role, and had to be cut off.

The body of Mrs. Nellie Fulsome lay sprawled near the sink, the hilt of the knife protruding grotesquely from her back. While Phipps made his examination, Fenley toured the tidy kitchen. There was nothing disarranged but on the cold stove was an iron Dutch oven that made the captain curious. When he opened the lid, his eyes went wide with amazement. "Well, I'll be damned," he muttered, "knackwurst and kraut."

Phipps got up from his task and cocked his head at Fenley's remark whereupon the captain told the doctor about his wife's kitchen-table deductions.

"Don't discount them," said Phipps. "The female is quite a perceptive animal, regardless of species. This woman died last night around eight

or nine, by the way. The knife was put in with some force and either by luck or expertise the blade was inserted sideways, missing the ribs and piercing the vital organs."

"Well, let's get started," Fenley ordered: "Donovan, is that a bedroom off the kitchen?"

"Yes, sir, and the bed's not been slept in."

"Well, give it a thorough search."

The patrolman's broad Irish face beamed at being given a detective's assignment. Fenley went on: "Sykes, you take the parlor. I'll tackle the kitchen."

Phipps had opened the cupboard doors and was scanning the contents of the shelves. "Well, your wife was right about the fine food on Tuesdays and Thursdays." He held in his hands a house-accounts notebook, which was as universal in New York kitchens as matches—and as indispensable. Woe be unto the housewife who couldn't report to the penny where the household money had gone.

"She was quite a bookkeeper. Just as your wife reported, her Tuesday and Thursday purchases were rich foods, while the rest of the week she bought plain fare. And I'm serious about her having some knowledge of bookkeeping. Note the way she makes her 2's—little ticks like flying birds—and the continental 7 with the crossbar."

"Probably a working girl before her marriage," Fenley decided, and then something caught his eye and he smiled. "I swear this Mrs. Beeton must be a millionaire! The women all buy her book." He took down the stout volume entitled *Beeton's Book of Household Management*. "My Tess has a copy, and it wasn't cheap. Husbands think wives buy it as a cookbook, but that's nonsense. Any properly trained woman knows how to cook before she's fourteen. No, they buy it because Mrs. Beeton includes a lot of English-gentry lah-di-dah about how to run a manor house. The duties of the footman, the valet, the nursemaid, the between maid. What rot!"

"Hey, Captain!" Donovan called from the bedroom.

When the men entered, they found the patrolman standing before an open closet holding a man's silk dressing gown in his hands. "I found this on a hook behind her things. This Fulsome's a big fellow."

Phipps took the dressing gown and examined it, including the pockets. "How tall are you, Officer?"

"Six-two and a half on the mark, sir," was the proud reply. "Third

largest man on the force, and Municipal Police Force heavyweight champion six years running."

"Would you kindly slip this on?"

"Glad to oblige, Doctor. That's more elegant than the one I wear in the ring. Not that I'm knocking it—bright green, mine is, and a present from the Monsignor Leary Chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians."

Phipps wasn't listening. He was on his hands and knees in the closet. Not finding what he sought, he got back to his feet and surveyed the bedchamber—a small lady's vanity, a mahogany commode, a chest of drawers, a brass bed with a simple coverlet on the eiderdown, a bedside table on which were a kerosene lamp and a tray with a carafe, a glass, and a small tin of Epsom salts.

"Of course," Phipps said to himself as he crossed the room, peered under the left side of the bed, and came up with a pair of slippers.

Fenley glared at Donovan, who was admiring himself in the vanity glass. "Don't you look under the beds when you're told to search a room?"

Donovan gave him a hangdog look, almost as if he had just lost his title.

"No mind," Phipps interceded. "Put these on, Officer, if you please."

The cowed giant sat on the vanity chair, removed his mammoth brogans, and pulled the slippers on.

"Well, stand up," Fenley commanded curtly. Donovan flopped the over-large slippers on his feet and said, "I guess this fellow is a big brawny boy."

"Yes. We know quite a bit about him now," Phipps said, lifting the lid on the Epsom-salts tin.

"Now, I did notice that," Donovan said defensively. "Only my missus won't let me soak my feet in the bedroom."

"Right you are, Officer," Phipps said, striding from the room. Back in the kitchen, he hurriedly but carefully went through the staples on the cupboard shelves. Then he did something that appalled even Fenley's hardened senses and absolutely mortified Donovan. The doctor unlaced the woman's boots, removed them with some difficulty owing to the rigor mortis, put his hand under her skirt, and rolled down her hose, exposing her feet.

Sykes, having finished his work in the front parlor, walked in to find the doctor caressing the feet of the corpse. "Slim, smooth, and well pedicured," he was saying, getting to his feet. There was the toot of a whistle out on the street.

Phipps cocked his head.

"That's the postman," Fenley assured him. "Police whistles shrill."

"I know, damn it. Get him in here."

The interview with the confused postman was quick, concise, and highly satisfying to Phipps. Mrs. Fulsome had never received a letter, either foreign-stamped or domestic, in her fifteen months of residence. When the man was dismissed, Phipps plopped into a parlor chair.

"Well, we have it—thanks to Mrs. Fenley."

"I'll be damned." Fenley caressed the curled ends of his wallaroo. "She did have a lover. Now if the husband was in port—"

"Nonsense! There never was a seagoing husband. The absence of male attire, except for nightclothes, and the postman's report point to a fiction on Mrs. Fulsome's part. I am confident that when Sergeant Sykes checks the roster at the Captain of the Port's office he will find no Captain Fulsome." He snorted. "He'd have to be a ship's master to afford this rent."

"Let's arrange the facts, gentlemen. We appear to have a back-street affair, as the novels call them, on our hands. An out-of-the-way isolated flat for which a premium price is paid, with lamps that are never lit in the courtyard to insure secret entry and exit. Voilà! Mrs. Fenley's suspicions of a lover are correct. With your permission, Captain, while Sykes is off to check those records at Church Street, we will have Officer Donovan take the household-accounts book and check with the local merchants to prove that those purchases were made on the dates listed. Special care should be given to the wine merchant, Donovan."

"You mean you think she was sharpening the Johnny," Donovan asked, "and he done her in?"

Phipps ignored the question. "On your way to the Port Captain, Sergeant Sykes, you will send a wire to the sheriff at Yonkers and ask for the following help. Did a local bookkeeper named Nellie Fulsome, or at least Nellie something—people rarely change their first names when living incognito—live there prior to July twelfth of last year, and under what circumstances did she leave? Also, what prominent citizen is well over six-foot-two, a known gourmand, and a very proper husband. And ask them to check local wine provisioners for a list of homes that purchase Château Beauchamp champagne and local doctors for a patient of the same physical proportions who suffers from *torpor recti*."

"Huh?" Sykes said, looking up from his notepad.

"Chronic constipation. Either he has *torpor recti* or he's a drug taker. Now off with you both."

When the men had left, Fenley gave the doctor a wary look. "Yonkers? Constipation? Drugs?"

"Well, I'm not fully convinced about the drug use, but we know that the Epsom salts were not used as a foot bath, as Donovan surmised. The small tin suggests it was used as a cathartic. The absence of a larger package in the cupboard and the healthy condition of the woman's feet show she had no need for foot baths. The size of the robe and slippers gives us a big man with adequately large feet to carry his body weight without foot strain—a blessing not bestowed on poor Donovan—the last thing he should be is a foot patrolman.

"So we have a cathartic not kept in a cupboard or medicine chest but ever ready at his bedside—his side, remember the slippers—suggesting regular use, possibly daily. A chronic condition of this sort is due to the loss of regularity of the intestines, and drug taking is one possible cause."

"The rest makes sense, but why Yonkers?"

"It was no great deduction. That meticulous bookkeeping shows an entry for train fare from Yonkers. It's the first entry in the book."

"So you believe she was murdered by an opiate-maddened lover?"

"That's the part that perplexes me. He had to be in a high state of agitation to kill and leave items behind that would damn him. The account book was kept for his perusal. But damme—" Phipps squinted and searched his mind—"the rich and abundant diet tends to cancel out drug use. Those poor souls have little appetite save for the needle."

"She may come from Yonkers, but that doesn't prove he does."

"No, but it's likely, since she rented this place and created the marriage illusion just two days after the train-ticket entry."

"Well, maybe Yonkers will turn something up."

The doctor sneered slightly at Fenley's suggestion of hope. "If our quarry is as rich as I think he is, he's also prominent, and you can rely on the Yonkers sheriff to throw a provincial cloak of secrecy about the man. No—we'll have to smoke him out ourselves."

"The robe and slippers, of course."

"Right you are. Captain, we will now shop for justice. The items are of excellent quality, available in no more than ten or eleven Fifth Avenue shops. Certainly not obtainable in Yonkers."

They were about to leave when Phipps stopped, went to the kitchen sink, and closely examined the wooden drainboard.

"Some new idea?" Fenley asked.

"No,—an old one. It's the first thing I noticed. There is an impression on one finger of Mrs. Fulsome's left hand showing that a ring with a wide band was worn until quite recently. Some women take off their rings when washing dishes, but I see none here."

Fenley chuckled.

"I can see you're a bachelor, Doctor. Women may take off their jewelry to wash, but never a wedding band."

It was almost on the stroke of ten that evening when the Yonkers sheriff reluctantly allowed Fenley and Phipps an interview. He was a beefy, rustic man who wore his brace of horse pistols reversed in the manner of Bill Cody. He read the warrant Fenley had handed him with disdain.

"Now this I take as a slap in the face, Fenley. Telling a State Supreme Court justice that there was no response from Yonkers to your telegram query. I ain't got an army of detectives up here, you know."

"Look, Livingston, I don't give a hoot in hell what you think or what your local problems are. I don't have an army of detectives either. It took us six hours of talking to fancy store clerks to get a line on Tobias van der Zee, and that's a warrant that you are going to serve—"

Livingston's face, still sunburned even now in the late fall, softened. "You're not understanding my problem, Captain Fenley. Colonel van der Zee is a mighty powerful man in these parts. Just because some clerk says he bought a robe and slippers in a fancy Fifth Avenue shop like the deposition says here, that don't prove nothin'. Hell, man, he headed his own brigade during the War. He owns the tanyards, the emporium, and half the countryside. If I go out there to the hill and serve him this thing—" he held up the warrant as he would a puff adder "—and it don't hold up, I'm going to be on the spot."

"You know I can get a writ of mandamus from a local judge," Fenley threatened.

"Now take it easy, gentlemen," the sheriff said soothingly. "You're not down in New York now. All this mandamus business is just going to complicate things. It seems to me we should go out and have a nice civil talk with the Colonel. Real nice, with no warrant flashing about. We'll present the facts as you have them and hear his side of it. I mean, you

don't burst into a man's home, slap the twisters on him, and accuse him of killing some light-o'-love in front of his own wife. Mrs. van der Zee ain't exactly no light under no bushel herself. I believe that if this here judge who's so ready and willing to issue warrants knew that the Colonel is married to the daughter of the Undersecretary of State down in Washington, he wouldn't've been so quick to pick up his pen. And no shrinking-violet garden-variety lady neither. She served as a nurse during the insurrection. You got to understand, Captain Fenley, that I got a situation—

There was a knock at the door, which opened without permission. A deputy entered the room quickly and placed a paper on the sheriff's desk. Livingston picked it up with an annoyed grimace and said to the man, "This had better be damned important." He read it and looked at his guests in dismay.

"Holy jumped-up Jehovah!" he breathed. "Colonel van der Zee has committed suicide."

As the police wagon lumbered into the outskirts of town, Sheriff Livingston was still in a state of shock. "Good Lord A'mighty—" he whistled through his teeth "—what's the world coming to? No sense keeping you fellas in the dark. It's all bound to come out in the wash. Nellie Fulsome was the bookkeeper out at the colonel's tanyards, and right there was his first mistake. That ain't no place for a woman. There was some gossip concerning her and the colonel, and then suddenly she was gone, bag and baggage. I thought the town had heard the last of her."

The lights were ablaze in every window of the Hill—a large baronial stone mansion harking back to the days of the Dutch patroons. The two greys of the police wagon came to a halt at the front steps, the horses snorting cantankerously in the crisp night air.

Footmen, subservient to Livingston's orders, led them up the sweeping staircase into the huge masculine bedchamber where war memorabilia adorned the walls. The valet, a very proper man in livery, who had opened the oak door to the sheriff's knock, spoke with a note of somber finality in his high thin voice. "He's gone."

A bearded man in a frock coat turned from the bed in surprise. "Why, Sheriff," he stammered, "this is most ungainly, sir."

"Sorry, Dr. Barnaby. Has the colonel truly passed on?"

"Most appalling. Prussic acid, as you can see from the vial on the

secretaire. There's a note. In deference to the widow, I think you should withdraw."

"There's nothing I'd rather do, but these gents from the city insisted. This is Captain Fenley of the Metropolitan Detectives, and Dr. Phipps."

Dr. Barnaby took off his pince-nez and nodded acknowledgment to Phipps, ignoring Fenley completely. "I have no idea what your visit implies, Doctor, but if you are in the police employ, I can assure you that this is—" he pointed to the clothed body on the bed like a bishop showing a holy relic "—an unfortunate circumstance needing no public intrusion."

"May I see the note?" Phipps's words were polite, but his tone insisted. "Suit yourself, Doctor."

Phipps read the note.

Dearest Anita:

With great thought and anguish, I must take my leave of you. I can no longer contain this thing. You are well provided for, and the shame will pass.

Tobias

Phipps looked up from the note and stared at Dr. Barnaby for a second. Then he picked up the glass from the secretaire and smelled it. "Prussic acid."

"As I told you, Doctor," Barnaby grated.

Phipps was roaming about the room. He stopped at the bedside table and picked up a tin of Epsom salts. The action was not lost on Fenley, who perked up.

"*Torpor recti*, Doctor?" Phipps asked his irate colleague.

"I can see no reason to divulge a doctor-patient confidence, sir. It's against the law to commit suicide, to be sure, but he is beyond arrest. Let the man be."

Fenley touched Phipps's arm and said softly, "I think he's right. He cheated the hangman, but why disgrace the family any further?"

"But Colonel van der Zee expected disgrace—or shame, as he puts it—in his suicide note. This is his handwriting?" Phipps asked the valet, who nodded.

"What are you suggesting, sir?" Dr. Barnaby was enraged.

"I'm merely tying up some loose strings. First: why would a gallant military man with a room full of pistols choose a painful death by prussic acid?"

"Come now, Phipps," Fenley scolded. "Expiation for his sin."

"He'll get enough of that on the other side."

"I still don't know why the New York police are interested in a Yonkers suicide," Barnaby said to the sheriff.

"Well, these fellas do have a case *and* a warrant, Dr. Barnaby," Livingston said slyly, "but maybe we can work out a discreation for the colonel or, better still, for the missus."

Phipps was doing strange things. First, he opened the commode chamber. Then he went to the bed table and picked up the Epsom salts. He brought the tin to the secretaire, took some of the salts in his hand, and dipped a dollop of ink from the well onto the crystals. Then, as he had at Mrs. Fulsome's, he went to the corpse, stripped it of shoes and hose, and caressed its feet.

"Well," he said with an air of hopelessness, "that settles that. Come, Captain, Sheriff, and—" He looked at the valet.

"Filburson, sir."

"Yes. Would you step into the hall a moment?"

Leaving Dr. Barnaby behind with a look of relief on his face, the four men stood in the upstairs hall.

"Your mistress is where?"

"In the study, I believe, sir."

"Now see here, Doctor," the sheriff charged. "I thought you were going to leave this be."

"Just making sure the poor woman is out of earshot, Sheriff. Tell me truthfully, Filburson—your employer took frequent business trips?"

"Yes, sir—about twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

"And you would pack for him, of course, the night before departure."

"I didn't pack at all, sir. He took a clean shirt in his business satchel."

"I thought as much." Phipps looked at Livingston and said in earnest, "Sheriff, I suggest you take this man into custody immediately. Take him in and book him for double murder right now. We will follow after I clear up a point with Dr. Barnaby. You've made quite a catch, Livingston."

When a confused Livingston had taken his man away, Phipps motioned to Fenley to follow him downstairs. "I hope that valet doesn't sue for false arrest," the captain said.

"Well, *you* didn't arrest him."

Mrs. Anita van der Zee was a stout woman with a plain face and nervous hands. The hands gave quite a start when the men entered the study unannounced.

"Mrs. Anita van der Zee?" Phipps said with authority.

"Yes. Who are *you*?"

"We are from the New York Municipal Police Force, Madam, with a warrant for your arrest. The warrant, Fenley."

Fenley handed over the warrant for Colonel Tobias van der Zee.

"Before I serve this, I'm giving you a chance to confess to the murder of one Nellie Fulsome and that of your husband."

"Are you insane? My husband committed suicide not one hour ago, and I don't know any woman named Fulsome."

"Madam, you have been a most careless woman. There are depositions here from three different witnesses who saw you enter Mrs. Fulsome's house at about nine o'clock last night."

"Mrs. Fulsome, indeed! That tramp was never—"

"Not in name, but in spirit. Is that why you took the ring? A very stupid blunder. You left his clothes there to implicate him, yet you took the ring. Most symbolic—and foolish."

"Clothes!" she gasped.

"As I suspected, you didn't know about them. But your husband wouldn't take the ring and leave the rest."

"You said witnesses. I hope you know what you're about, sir. I have relatives in high places. That's absurd! Witnesses! How could witnesses identify a woman they've never seen?"

"Another mishap in your program, Madam. To your misfortune, Donovan, the famous Irish artist, observed you. Having the trained eye of the portraitist, he drew you down to the last detail. Armed with the drawing, we will eventually find the conductor of the train you took to New York, which will close the circle. Come, Mrs. van der Zee, it's useless. You had the Fulsome woman thrown out of town, and your husband was cleverly contrite. His frequent visits to the city made you suspicious. You followed him and later presented an ultimatum, which he refused.

"Early today, you discovered the farewell note he was preparing, and your plan took form: double revenge. The 'shame' mentioned in the note

was about a divorce, not a suicide, but it fit your purpose. You went to New York and killed the girl, and then killed your husband, making it look like a suicide, either from his remorse for his adultery, if he were tracked down, or for some mild disorder that Dr. Barnaby would innocently trump up to save the family name."

She was visibly shaken under Phipps's attack, but resolutely righteous.

"And how could I induce my husband to take prussic acid?"

"By not inducing it at all. Your husband was a constant user of Epsom salts, probably at the same time each day. You merely replaced the Epsom salts with oxalic acid—or do you call it salt of lemons?—a deadly poison that looks disarmingly like Epsom salts. My ink test proves it so. Once he was into his death convulsions, you put the vial of poison on the secretaire along with the note, and called the most blundering doctor I have ever met to witness your triumph."

Mrs. van der Zee was slipping to the floor when Fenley caught her.

Mrs. Fenley was in a mood. Here John had turned up at one in the morning with that dreadfully aloof Dr. Phipps and her with only four pork chops in the icebox. While they sipped sherry in the front parlor, Tess busied herself in the kitchen. John was getting above his buttons, bringing a guest home at this hour, and her in her wrapper. Well, no use to tear about it. She had cream and some bacon and the green tomatoes, so that would take twenty minutes, and while the pork chops fried she'd dress. She vowed she was going to start putting some saltpeter in John's food to thin out his blood. She went into the bedroom, dreading her corset.

Fenley was positively jubilant as he came across the parlor to refill Phipps's glass. "By golly, Doctor, you're pretty handy in the lying department. We really would have been in the soup if you hadn't cracked her with the warrant switch. That yokel sheriff is going to be madder than Hob when he finds out we've got her booked on her own confession down here."

"It was a chance that had to be taken. Yonkers would have covered it up about the suicide evidence."

"I admit I missed the point about her being a nurse during the war. I guess that's where she learned about oxalic acid, eh?"

"Not necessarily, Captain. Her knowledge of bayonet wounds and sim-

ple anatomy explain the sideways thrust of the knife. I'm afraid we have dear old Mrs. Beeton to thank for the oxalic-acid idea. Mrs. van der Zee had a copy in the study."

He got up from his chair and went to the bookcase. "As your wife does here." He flipped through the pages of the thick volume. "Mrs. Beeton on medicine—listen—item 2652, page 1082, in the chapter on The Doctor, God help us. 'This poison may be taken by mistake for Epsom salts, which it is a good deal like.' I'll skip ahead: 'Its very acid test will show that a drop of ink in the oxalic acid will always turn brown where the Epsom salts will not.' Simple enough for her vengeance. Put the farewell note and prussic acid on the secretaire after he was dead, and call the trusting and gullible Dr. Barnaby. You see? Mrs. Beeton has put a murder manual into the hands of every housewife in Britain and America. My, that smells delicious. Pork chops and bacon!"

"Now that is a treat, Doctor. My wife makes the best Dutch pork chops you ever ate."

"If we but dare, Fenley, if we but dare. It's one in the morning and the good woman has been torn from her slumber to slave at a stove. We'd never know."

"Go on, Doctor." Fenley smiled. "My Tess is a lambkin."

Phipps sat down again and sipped sherry. "So, my good man, was Anita van der Zee, once. But what choice do we have? Shall we chance it?"

"John!" Tess Finley's company falsetto called to them from the kitchen. "We're almost ready, dear. Won't you and the doctor take your places at the dining-room table?"



An overheard fragment of conversation changed Judy's life . . .

TAINTED MONEY

by
DONALD
OLSON



When Judy Freed married Rory Allenbeck she truly believed her love was the magic that would stabilize the wilder instincts that were responsible for the acts of delinquency that had marked his somewhat tardy development into manhood. And for a while he did seem content in his new role of husband and lover—until that part of his nature which had always been far too susceptible to fantasy grew tired of the boring factory job in the neighboring town of Ryeslip and once more he grew restless.

He would arrive home tense and moody, and Judy soon realized that her handsome, adorable Rory was chronically infected with the turmoil of discontent.

Like any town of its size, Ryeslip had its quota of malcontents and it was inevitable that Rory would get to know them. That was how he met Luke Peabody, a young hoodlum with a spotty background and grandiose ambitions whose sole claim to fame was that he graced the FBI's wanted list. Not most wanted, just wanted.

Whenever Rory brought Luke home with him to supper, Judy would try her best to appear amiable, but though she knew nothing about Luke's criminal status she was sharp enough to know a bad apple no matter how shiny it might look.

"I thought he was real polite," Rory would say later, dismayed by Judy's assessment of Luke.

"Polite! You think that's all that matters? It's character that counts!"

Rory would turn it into a joke. "Oh, Luke's a character all right. But he's the only pal I got at the plant."

Other danger signals began flashing. There were nights when Rory stayed out until the early hours—playing pinochle, he said—then was too tired to go to work. He developed the habit of vanishing into the basement with papers he claimed were blueprints of a new shop layout. Even more worrisome, he had violent shifts of mood, periods of dull-eyed vacancy alternating with periods of hectic buoyancy.

We connect, Judy thought sadly, but somehow we don't relate. All she wanted was a simple, normal life, but she knew this would always be out of reach until Rory was content to settle down.

He loved her, there was no doubt of that. His affection for her was the steadiest thing about him. They made love frequently, but seldom did they communicate in a way that reassured Judy about his maturity. Lately he'd begun talking about vague opportunities in Nevada, Florida, and southern California.

"Darling, we can't afford to move right now," she would remind him. "We're too deeply in debt." For like a greedy child, Rory had no sense of restraint when it came to buying whatever struck his fancy. Without Judy's paycheck from her job at the telephone company, they would have been hard pressed to keep afloat.

To all her pleas and admonitions Rory would smile knowingly and hint mysteriously of imminent windfalls. . .

On a rainy October night two days before their first wedding anniversary, the local office of the Calloway Lumber Company was burglarized. A watchman was critically wounded and one of the burglars was shot dead by the police. The other one escaped with \$26,000 from the safe.

The dead burglar was quickly identified as Luke Peabody.

It took the police somewhat longer to run a make on the other one—Rory Allenbeck.

Now at this point the story of what happened to Judy and Rory Allenbeck takes what would surely be considered a turn for the implausible by anyone ignorant of just how powerful a force can reside in the heart of a romantic young woman, even in this day and age. Judy loved Rory Allenbeck. She adored him. She couldn't help herself. So when Rory slipped through the back door that October night and told her what he'd done and that the police were sure to nail him, and when he thrust upon her a satchel crammed with money, she didn't carry on. Her first reaction, to be honest, was to cry and regard the satchel with loathing, yet her love and compassion outweighed all other emotions, and when Rory held her in his arms and begged her not to let anyone take the money away from her and pretend she knew nothing about it, she agreed.

"I know I'm rotten, honey," Rory said. "I'll always be poison to you. I wish I could be what you want me to be. I tried, honest to God I did, but I'm not like other guys—I can't hack routine. Please, hon, keep the money. It's insured, so nobody's gonna lose out. And someday when I get out of this mess it'll be what we need to make a fresh start. Do it for us, Judy. Do it and I swear nothing like this will ever happen again."

So impassioned a plea might have moved Judy to do something that was morally detestable to her, but what actually caused her to yield was Rory's argument that if the money was not traced to him he stood a chance of being convicted of something less grave than grand larceny.

As it turned out, this made no difference at all. If anything, it worked against him, and he was sent up for fifteen years.

At this stage Judy Allenbeck could have done one of three things: divorced Rory and made a new life for herself; withdrawn into nunlike solitude and mourned away the years until his release; or reneged on her promise and returned the money in the hope of having Rory's sentence lightened. But she was too much in love to do the first, too practical to do the second, and too afraid of losing Rory to do the third.

She knew Rory would always be a dreamer and that he had now merely exchanged one dream for another. Before he had dreamed of robbing the lumber company and sailing away to the tropics; now he dreamed of doing easy time and coming out with a twenty-six-grand stake awaiting him. If Judy returned that money she might regain her self-respect, but she would lose Rory.

For several months Judy continued to do her work at the telephone company with uncommon efficiency. She never went out except for her biweekly visits to the public library. But she was obsessed with the danger of keeping the stolen money hidden in the house. She regretted her promise to Rory, but she hadn't the will to break it, especially since all he would talk about when she went to visit him was the wonderful life they would have together with it when he got out. She didn't dare put the money in a bank—not even in a safe-deposit box—for the mere possession of it had instilled in her a paranoid fear that the authorities were keeping an eye on her.

And then it happened. While processing a long-distance call from Manhattan to a local attorney, she overheard a fragment of conversation.

"Buy Autobearing, Harry," a man said. "The merger's been approved."

There was no reason for these words to have held any significance for Judy, yet the subconscious mind is a dark and convoluted area. Judy's father had suffered such a beating in the stock market that he had died in virtual poverty, and Judy's decision to act upon the advice of that overheard voice might have been prompted by a subconscious desire to rid herself of the ill-fated money without actually breaking her promise to Rory. She would not return the money—she would lose it. It would no longer be a burden. For of course she *would* lose it. Her father's experience had taught her that the stock market was a losing game for the amateur.

The mechanics of investing the money presented a few problems, the name Allenbeck being notorious in Ryeslip. She took the precaution, therefore, of disguising her appearance with glasses and a blonde wig, and it was as "Hazel Street" that she made her first visit to the brokerage office. To her relief, the young man who interviewed her asked very few personal questions and was more than happy to handle her investment in two thousand shares of Autobearing Common.

She drove home with a feeling of infinite relief. Rory would be furious when he heard that she had lost the money, of course, but he wouldn't

be able to accuse her of having broken her promise. For days thereafter she scanned *The Wall Street Journal* for news that she'd been wiped out—as any reckless, uninformed speculator, she truly believed, must be.

But she wasn't. It soon transpired that the anonymous tipster had known what he was talking about. Autobearing merged with Magnitape on terms highly advantageous to Autobearing stockholders, and less than a month later Magnitape voted a three-for-one stock split. Its value per share skyrocketed.

Judy never told Rory what she had done with the money. Nor did she tell him, when it came time for his parole hearing, that her original investment had more than quadrupled, and that "Hazel Street" had liquidated her holdings and rented a safe-deposit box in the First National Bank of Ryeslip, where she had deposited \$116,000 in cash. Neither did she tell him that on the eve of his parole hearing the district attorney had received \$26,000 in cash with an unsigned note stating that the money was being returned at the behest of Rory Allenbeck, as proof of his rehabilitation.

Parole was granted and Judy was there to greet Rory when he walked through the prison gates.

Back at the house he showered and shaved and put on the new clothes she'd bought him, laughing at the loose way they fit and declaring that she'd soon fatten him up if she cooked many meals like the one she had prepared for him.

She smiled at him across the candlelit table. "Rory, darling, there's something I must tell you."

He reached for another helping of roast beef, his eyes twinkling. "About the money, right?"

She was stunned. "You know about it?"

"You might have known they'd tell me. Listen, sweetheart." He reached across the table for her hand, his tone acquiring a warmth and earnestness that made him seem like a totally different person. "You must have guessed my feelings. If you hadn't put the money back I would have. I was planning to tell them about it at my parole hearing but you beat me to it. Judy, I learned my lesson up there. Lots of guys don't. The slammer's full of guys just waitin' to get out so they can pull another job, make another mistake. Well, not me. That money was nothin' but bad luck for me. It was tainted. No good could ever come of it. If we'd used

it to start a business, that business would have flopped.

"Oh, Judy, now we can start with a clean slate! We're older and wiser, and we have the best years of our lives ahead of us. I'm not mad because you gave that money back, I'm proud of you for it. I feel as if a curse has been lifted from us."

Needless to say, Rory's reaction left Judy dumb with wonder and in a state of utter consternation. That Rory might have changed for the better during his confinement had somehow never occurred to her—and for this she was deeply ashamed.

And he was right about the money. It *was* tainted. She had been acting out a fantasy more unreal than any that had ever deluded Rory. And if that measly twenty-six thousand was tainted, what of the fortune in "Hazel Street's" safe-deposit box? She felt sick at how close she'd come to destroying this wonderful reunion. Rory had gone to jail believing her to be a person of stainless character and moral rectitude. What would he think if she told him how she had used that stolen money?

She leaned forward. "Rory, do you honestly mean that?"

"Yes!" he said earnestly.

"You're really glad I gave the money back?"

"Honey, I'll prove to you just how glad I am. But first you've got to let me finish this terrific meal."

She tried to match Rory's exuberance during the remainder of the evening, but she was full of conflict. She would have to scrap all her hopes and plans and replace them with a more modest vision of their future. This was not easy, having served a sentence as long as Rory's, difficult years of emotional deprivation and loneliness. She could hardly be blamed for feeling somewhat wistful as she saw her dreams of herself and Rory living the good life on a California patio disappear.

Once or twice that night she thought of testing Rory by confessing what she'd done and telling him about the fortune she had saved for them. But she decided it wouldn't be just telling him, it would be tempting him. And suppose the poor darling were to succumb to the temptation—could any lasting happiness grow out of that tainted money and Rory's discovery of her own moral duplicity? *Yes!* cried a voice within her heart. *No!* screamed another, more reasonable voice.

Rory was full of sensible plans. He still wanted his own business, but now he was prepared to work for it. And there was no pressing need for money; Judy still had her job at the telephone company. Rory traveled

into Ryeslip every day looking for work, but it wasn't easy to find. He was regarded with the distrust that confronts every ex-con who ever tried to go straight. And eventually his optimism began to wear thin.

"Rory, darling," Judy ventured one evening, "are you wishing I hadn't given back that money?"

His look implied a mild but unmistakable rebuke. "Not on your life," he declared. "This kind of bad luck I can handle. I didn't expect life to be easy when I got out, and at least my conscience is clear about that damned money."

She sighed.

Some days later he came up with a not unexpected idea. "Look, hon, it's pretty clear that Ryeslip isn't going to forgive and forget. What do you say we pull up stakes and head out west? Nobody out there knows anything about me."

Judy greeted this proposal with more enthusiasm than Rory had expected. And once it was made and she had accepted it, the plans and fantasies that had been lurking in her subconscious rose to the surface.

"We must look up Uncle Fred," she heard herself saying, and she realized how often lately she had been rehearsing this speech in her mind.

"Uncle who?"

She giggled. "Uncle Fred—my mother's brother who went out west when he was just a kid."

"You never mentioned any Uncle-Fred."

"He was sort of a black sheep. No one's heard from him in years. He might be dead by now."

She felt confident that Rory, visionary that he was, would swallow the discovery that this legendary Uncle Fred had left her a fortune, which would come to light when she made inquiries about him in California. Besides, she could think of no other way to explain that huge sum of money—which she had no intention of leaving behind.

As the day of their departure drew near, Rory grew nervous and excited and tried not to show it, just as Judy was trying not to let him see how jumpy she was. He was gone from the house occasionally, but never long enough for her to become "Hazel Street" and go into Ryeslip to withdraw the money. She had given notice at the telephone company and by the time she actually quit she was almost a nervous wreck. It was not until the morning they were to leave that she found her chance. Rory

was going to take the car into the garage to have it serviced. He told her he would be back within a couple of hours, and she promised to be ready to leave.

He always kissed her before leaving the house and now, as his lips brushed hers, a sudden attack of conscience moved her to cling to him.

"Rory, there's something I want to tell you—"

"What is it?"

"I—" But the steadiness of his gaze disconcerted her and she was suddenly afraid of losing his trust by speaking the truth. Better, she thought, to stick to the Uncle Fred plan.

"Come on, honey, what is it— Time's getting short."

"It's not important," she said. "I was just going to ask you if you're absolutely sure you want to make this move."

"I'm sure," he said quickly, glancing at his watch.

"It may be tough at first," she reminded him. "You may not find a job right away."

He grinned broadly and gave her another kiss. "Don't worry about a thing, hon. Our luck's about to change."

The minute he was out of the house she unlocked the bureau drawer where she kept her "Hazel Street" outfit, wig, and makeup. In fifteen minutes she was in a taxi on her way to Ryeslip, loathing herself for what she was doing yet knowing she had no choice. She was cheating on Rory and the awareness filled her with self-contempt. Rory had found his conscience in a prison cell—she had lost hers in a stockbroker's office. She could only hope that some good might come out of her actions.

She did falter once, just as she was crossing the bank lobby toward the safe-deposit department. She stopped and tried to will herself to turn around, but the effort failed. She was soon alone in the vault; removing the cash from the box and stuffing it into the valise she'd brought with her.

Emerging from the vault she saw a line of people backed against one of the walls, yet she thought nothing about it until she caught sight of a man with a stocking over his head and a gun in his hand.

He waved it at her and she stopped. "Come on, sister. Hand over the goodies and join the others over there."

Judy didn't move.

"You heard me, blonde. Gimme the bag."

He was a hefty brute with a gutter-bred voice and Judy knew she should be terrified, but what she felt was rage. She thought of the ten years she had waited for Rory, the years of hard work and loneliness. She thought of Rory priming their old car to get them to California. She thought of the ocean and the sun and Uncle Fred and her "inheritance," and suddenly all her common sense vanished and she swung the bag furiously at the gunman's revolver.

Everything happened at once as the gunman fell backward, his weapon skidding across the floor. A masked accomplice sprang into sight from behind a pillar and sent a bullet crashing into Judy's heart and a bank guard snatched up his own gun from the floor and shot the weapon out of the accomplice's hand.

When the police arrived seconds later they found a blonde woman lying dead on the floor, one of the gunmen wounded and bleeding from the hand, and the other cowering under the guard's revolver.

The policeman who reached down and pulled the stocking mask off the bleeding gunman's head had taken part in the lumber-company-robbery investigation ten years before. He recognized Rory Allenbeck.

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Was it possible Aunt Letty was really a jewel thief? . . .

SWAN SONG

by OLGA MARX



“Just breezed through Customs, didn’t you?” said Christopher as he walked his Aunt Letty through Kennedy Airport. Helping her into his car, he caught a whiff of that hundred-dollar-an-ounce perfume that had been so much a part of his childhood. Another whiff and he saw Ten Acres where he had been taken after the accident that had killed his parents.

He had been five. “My sister Diana’s child, my wee nephew.” The

phrase had always made him wince. Later he wondered how he would have fared had he not had his mother's violet eyes and auburn hair, to be shown off along with the Bergère armchairs, the Sarouk rugs, and the fleet of decorative swans, black with vermilion bills, mirrored in the crystal lake.

"That's because I'm wearing everything," Aunt Letty was saying. "My Chanel suit, Hermes scarf, custom-made shoes—and I brought these." She touched the feathery tops of a sheaf she carried. "They don't mind reeds," she added. "Only fruit, and things with earth."

As always, he felt lulled by the sweet, slightly husky voice which had told him outlandish stories instead of giving him the help he needed with his homework. When he'd wanted her to hear him recite the capitals of South American countries, she'd pooh-poohed the very notion.

"It's so boring, Chris dear. Now I'll tell you something about Colombia that's fun. About chickens in Bogotá! That's a capital," she said triumphantly. She'd told him that quite good-sized emeralds were often found in the gizzards of those chickens. The finder could keep them, but had to report it to the mayor or someone. Then they'd trace where the chickens had come from and examine the earth where the birds had scratched. "Because you see, Chris, emeralds are mined in Colombia and there used to be a lot of factories where they were cut and the scraps just dumped. Nobody cared about slivers and small chunks—and that's where the chickens came in." And Chris was charmed and wondered uneasily what Miss Dudley, his geography teacher, would make of this extraneous information and what good it would ever do him.

The car was purring along the Sound.

"You didn't buy any jewelry?"

Her hesitation was so slight that no one but Chris, who knew her so well, would have noticed.

"Not really. For one thing, I wouldn't rush into an expensive purchase without consulting you, dear boy. After all, what better advice could I have than from Christopher Hunt, buyer for Marnier's? Besides, if you make a big purchase, jewelers are required to notify Customs, and then there's all that fuss. Anyway, you know I never wear anything but the Rajah." She touched the green stone on a thin platinum chain. Everybody had heard the tale of how the Maharajah of Boroda had given it to her grandfather in gratitude for tutoring the Rajah's son for Oxford. Aunt

Letty always wore it, even when swimming. "I do have something, though . . ."

The car had come to a standstill at a toll bridge. There was a line ahead. He glanced at her and whistled softly to himself. He knew that look of hers—glazed, almost as if hypnotized. He'd seen it when they'd stopped in front of the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London, and again in the *Galérie Apollon* in the Louvre, where she'd pointed out to him two diamonds—the magnificent white *Régent*, and, next to it, smaller but of a pink that made his heart ache with its loveliness, the magical *Hortensia*.

"Something," Aunt Letty said dreamily, as he edged forward. "I'll show it to you after tea, dear boy."

The flight hadn't tired her. Aunt Letty was never tired. She poked her head out the window as they entered the drive to Ten Acres. It was early March; the bare trees hung with shreds of sun—the lake shone with it. "Stop, Chris! I must say hello to my swans!" She was out, running on high-heeled green-lizard shoes. He followed her. "Oh, the white one's there. I can't stand him. He ruins the ensemble."

"Is his foot O.K. now?" Chris asked.

"Oh, quite. I considered it my duty to doctor it when the flock left him behind last Fall. I just hope he takes off one of these days."

"Poor fellow. He's in the minority. The black contingent doesn't seem to take to him."

As if the white swan had caught the note of kindness, he swam ashore and took an awkward step toward Chris.

"Nothing to eat, old boy," Chris said apologetically. "I'll save you something from tea."

"A crumpet is good after three weeks of brioches." Aunt Letty patted the crumbs from the corners of her mouth. "And now, Chris, *now* . . ."

Her luggage and handbag were in her bedroom. Whatever it was must be on her person. But where? She got up and walked to the small table where the maid had placed the reeds—something like sea oats—in a tall vase. Carefully Aunt Letty selected one more thickly fringed than the rest, held it up, and shook it playfully at his ear. He heard something rattle. "Hold out your hand." Mechanically he held out his hand. Her eyes never stopped smiling at him as she broke the reed. Something smooth and cool and utterly wonderful dropped into his palm. It was a pearl, large and oval and pink, as ravishingly pink as the *Hortensia*.

"Where—where did you ever—?"

"It was a bargain. People in Antibes—bad luck at gambling in Monaco. They're selling the family jewels privately. It's very hush-hush."

Gently he weighed it in his cupped palm. "Fifty to sixty grains," he murmured. "About ten millimeters. But why the comedy with the reed? You could have stashed it anywhere. And why, by the way, didn't it fall out? Wasn't that a terrible risk?"

Aunt Letty looked delighted. "Not at all, dear boy, not at all. It was an experiment. Just for fun. I popped it into that hollow stem and sealed it in with a bit of candle wax."

"Very neat. You'd make a good smuggler." Had he said "you'd *make*?" Suddenly his mind was very clear and his heart thudded a little louder. Shouldn't he have said "you *are*?"

He thought of the precious stones she laid out on her bedside table every night. She claimed they made her feel less alone. "All acquired before I knew my very own nephew was going into the jewelry business."

"Acquired." But how? The reed performance in itself was not that of a beginner. She had never talked about where those stones had come from. Aside from what she had bought through Christopher, only the provenance of the Rajah was beyond question. Was Aunt Letty—*could* Aunt Letty be a jewel thief?

A week later he was sure she was. He was in his office and Dory, who did the publicity for Marnier's, had stopped by with a letter.

"Max asked me to give it to you since I was coming this way," she said.

He took the letter carelessly and glanced at the address in the upper left-hand corner. "Mind if I have a quick look at this?"

"Go ahead, if it'll get that worried look off your face." She kissed her forefinger and laid it lightly on his lips.

He smiled and opened the letter. It was from the Sûreté in Paris, and contained the description of a pendant stolen from the Marquise de Montclair at a party in Antibes—a single pearl, oval, pink, sixty grains, ten millimeters. Beyond all doubt the pearl he had held in his hand.

He read the letter again and dropped it on his desk. How long had this been going on? How many stolen gems were stashed in Aunt Letty's wall safe? Who had pried them from their settings? That must be why she'd taken that jewelry-making course at Cooper Union and set up a workshop on the top floor of her house at Ten Acres. "To make trinkets

for my friends," she'd said. The tiepin he was wearing was one she'd made for him—a quite lovely fire opal. "I've had it for ages," she had said. "Time it glowed out into the world again." Time—time for the brouhaha about a theft to have died down. She had to be stopped at once.

"So the cat's out of the bag," Aunt Letty said serenely when he confronted her with the sheet from the Sûreté. "In a way I'm glad. It's been so dull having to keep it all to myself. I've so wanted to be able to tell someone how clever I am." She gave him her impish grin, but his face remained stern. The grin changed to a watery smile, the smile to tears. Aunt Letty always cried when things didn't go her way. "Chris dear, that teachery look isn't like you. It was a game. Don't you see?"

"Stealing isn't a game. God knows you have enough money to buy yourself whatever you like."

"Not really. Some stones just aren't on the market. Like that pearl, like stones I've seen in museums, in temples—in India. And then it's sort of nice not having money enter into it. I pretend someone gave me this lovely thing or that. It almost makes me feel loved."

Maudlin, Chris thought. Maudlin and pathetic. Hadn't anyone ever loved her?

"Look here, Aunt Letty. I'm going to make a list of your stones. Whatever matches with our back files of letters from insurance companies will have to be returned—anonymously, of course. It's quite common."

"Oh, dear! At least don't be so grim and businesslike. Now that it's all over, can't I tell you just one little trick of mine? It was with a ruby. I hid it in one of those big shiny buttons they have on blazers. The top of one once fell off and when I screwed it back I noticed a snug little hollow inside and tucked that handy fact away for future use."

With an effort Chris wiped the fascinated expression from his face.

The list was made and the stones returned. Aunt Letty, subdued and contrite, arranged plum sprays in a Ming bowl, fed her swans, and told Chris to skip his regular visits for a while. Which he did, joyfully. And then, just when he and Dory were planning a trip to South Carolina, the phone call came.

It started out harmlessly enough. The bulbs at Ten Acres were at their peak, or going to be that very weekend and so Aunt Letty was giving a garden party. Chris positively must come—and on Friday night, because

they needed to plan.

Plan for what? Chris wondered angrily. Aunt Letty could give a party with her left hand since her right held the wherewithal for sophisticated food and the extra help involved, including the detectives who unobtrusively graced every party in that exclusive area.

"I really can't be there this time, Aunt Letty. I'm sorry. You'll do fine. Your parties are always perfect."

"But, Chris, you don't understand. Something's happened. I can't . . . I just can't face it alone." There was no mistaking the ring of true despair.

"I'll have to go," he told Dory.

Aunt Letty, in a silvery frock which set off the Rajah perfectly, fluttered about him fondly but uneasily. The party was organized. She showed him a list of the guests, pretended to need his approval for some minor arrangement, and suddenly hid her little leathery face in her ringless hands and wept. He put his arm round her in the gesture called for.

"Don't, don't, dear boy. I've been very naughty. But you'll help me, won't you? I have no one but you, you know. I didn't want to bother you again, but . . ."

He recoiled. "Tell me at once."

She looked frightened. "I've taken jewelry."

"From whom? In God's name, from whom?"

"The neighbors. Who else is there here?"

"Tell me. As briefly as you can."

"Well, the first time it really wasn't my fault. I was visiting Cecily and she insisted on showing me the latest old brass Tim bought—such dreary stuff—and the phone rang. I put down a hideous candlestick and picked up a small mortar. Something rattled inside. I looked, and there was one of Cecily's diamond earrings. It must have come loose, and she just chucked it in and forgot about it. Before I even knew what I was doing, I'd knotted it into the end of my scarf."

There had been five thefts in all.

"And I was really happy to have something for my bedside table after you took away so many of my lovelies! People are so careless. They leave rings in bathrooms, pins on the bureaus of done-over guest rooms they just *must* show to all sorts of people. The terrible thing is that they've become suspicious. They're careless but they're not fools, and so—comparing notes—they've started connecting their losses with *my* visits—with *me*!"

Chris shook his head helplessly.

"If only I'd kept to Antibes or Scheveningen or St. Moritz—all those nice places you go to for a short time and you never see anybody again."

"Looks like you'll have to leave Ten Acres," he said bleakly.

"You do jump to such pessimistic conclusions. And take off that horrible look. Would I have sent for you if I hadn't thought of a way? A sure way?"

She took a deep breath. One of her dramatic pauses. "Go on," he used to urge her when she stopped just before the frog turned into a prince. "Go on," he urged her now.

"Suppose something were stolen from me myself," she said softly. "Something really valuable that everyone knew about—why, then they'd think there was a real jewel thief about, and I, a fellow sufferer, would be in the clear."

Try as he might, he could not conceal a start of admiration. She gloated. "And what do you want stolen from you?" he managed to say coolly. "And who do you want to steal it so everyone will know about it? Because if you just *say* it was stolen—"

"Have you no faith in me? Didn't I tell you I've thought it all out? The Rajah must be stolen—everyone has seen it on me—and it must be stolen by you!"

A clap of thunder couldn't have brought him to his feet as instantly. He towered over her, scowling. "You, my dear Aunt Letty," he said in a voice like sleet on a windowpane, "are nuts."

"Do sit down. Next thing you'll be striding up and down. Must you move in clichés? Now just listen quietly and you'll see."

She outlined her plan. The theft would take place at the garden party. "Everyone come and look at this forsythia," she would call. "It's pure gold from top to bottom." As they clustered around she'd offer to cut a few sprays for old Mrs. Davis, chosen because she had poor vision. Chris would be asked to fetch the clippers. This would insure his standing right beside her as she bent to cut a sturdy stem. The Rajah's chain would catch on a twig. "It doesn't matter if it does or not," she explained. "The catch will be loose. I've seen to that."

She would let the Rajah drop onto the grass together with the clippers. This would allow Chris to stoop unostentatiously and pick up both. Then she would wait for a sign from him to tell her the stone was safe.

"Come with a canapé and nibble at it. That'll be the sign." She'd clutch at her breast, look wildly around, and cry, "It's gone! My emerald! I

dropped it, or else somebody's—The catch was loose. Oh, please, everybody be careful where you walk. It might be right under—unless somebody's—"

"And that's all there is to it," she ended complacently. "While you go about answering questions, calming people, you'll have plenty of time to hide the stone—not *on* you, of course; you'll insist on being searched along with the rest—but somewhere where you can retrieve it later."

"And when is all this supposed to happen?"

"Oh, give them a chance to enjoy my grey caviar and Strasbourg pâté—around a quarter past five."

I'm memorizing details! I'm actually discussing it with her, Chris thought miserably. He thought of Dory's clear eyes. No, Dory wouldn't be censorious. She'd probably laugh. He grew angry at the absurdity of it all, angry at himself, most of all angry with Aunt Letty.

"And how about me? Have you given one thought as to how I'd feel, partaking of this shocking, dishonest nonsense?"

"Oh, there you go again: Don't you see the funny side of it? No? Well, at least let me show my appreciation when it's over and done with. A trip to Egypt? A Mercedes, the latest model? A—"

He brushed it aside.

"My feelings have nothing to do with money."

"Almost everything has," she said. Except love—it strayed through her mind. You can't buy it and you can't force it. I once wanted someone so much, and he took one look at my ugly face and made straight for Diana with those violet eyes. And then they both died. And I got Chris. Only you never really have anybody—

"Well, Chris." She pulled herself up briskly. "Surely I can do something for you."

"You can set me free. I don't want to have to worry about what you'll do next. You must promise me never to take anything that isn't yours again. To let me live my own life."

He was looking directly at her. But he doesn't see me, she thought. There's something soft in his eyes, and that's not there for me. Is it a dream? A girl? Yes, there must be a girl. Abruptly her mood changed. She saw children running over the lawns at Ten Acres. A playground, perhaps, behind the kitchen garden. There would be children, and they'd love her.

"I promise, Chris," she said. . . .

Even the weather adjusted to Aunt Letty's party. The mid-April day opened the young leaves and shook bird song from the boughs. The black swans sailed with lifted wings, the white one paddled restlessly. Chris was up early, reconnoitering. With the keen glance that divined the bubbles in a synthetic stone even before he spotted them with his jeweler's lens he examined the lawn, the shrubs, the flower beds. Plenty of hiding places. Still, it might be hard to get rid of the stone unobtrusively, to hide it where he could bank on finding it again. How about that slab of granite by the lake? He couldn't miss it later. It glistened with mica. And there was a good, deep crack in it.

Like all Aunt Letty's parties it went off as if rehearsed—the chattering arrivals, the incredibly velvet turf where a boy, hired for the occasion, whisked into a dustpan cigarette butts and dropped canapés. Waiters saw to the refreshments. And then Aunt Letty summoned everyone to look at her golden bush. He brought the clippers . . .

The effect of her performance was exactly as she had predicted: confusion, condolence for the loss of the Rajah, everyone wanting to be searched, and—no doubt of it!—pleasurably excited. For here at last was a party where something had happened, something to talk, phone, or write letters about. Conjectures and suspicions buzzed about. Someone suggested that one of the detectives might be dishonest. Mrs. Davis suspected the boy with the dustpan. Mrs. Dalton, who had been to school in France, thought a bird might have made away with the jewel. There was something like that in a story by Maupassant.

His hand in his pocket holding the Rajah, Chris headed quickly for the granite slab. A couple of guests were standing in front of it, talking. Between them he caught sight of the stone. Someone was sitting on it—Cecily of the diamond earrings. She'd draped herself all over the thing like a model waiting to be photographed. His mouth went dry. He walked and didn't know he was walking. He stood at the edge of the lake. The white swan waddled up to him.

"Where did you stash the Rajah?" Aunt Letty whispered when they were alone at last. "I was watching you, and I didn't see you do anything at all."

"I'd picked the crack in the rock down by the lake, but when I got to it your friend Cecily was sitting on it."

"What on earth did you do?"

"I can tell you I had a few very nasty moments, and then the white swan—bless him!—came right up to me. So I fed it to him."

"You what?"

"I fed it to the swan. I still had a goose-liver canapé in my hand. You know how you hold onto things without realizing it. So I pressed the Rajah into it and the swan guzzled it. I hated doing it to him—he's so fond of me."

"And how are you going to retrieve it?"

"That's why I said I hated doing it. We'll have to do away with him, of course."

"I don't mind that. But shouldn't it be quite soon, before—"

"Don't be so squeamish. Before he excretes it, you mean? But he won't, you know."

"Why not?"

"You ask me that! You were the one who told me about those chickens in Bogotá, and later I had a chance to check on that. Fowls can't digest big stones. They stay in the gizzard."

"Chris, you're a genius." Her mind was racing ahead. "We'll get up at dawn before the servants are up. Ether, perhaps? That'll be the least messy. A plastic bag just popped over his head, and then we'll tote him up here. You know I don't let anyone even dust my workshop."

Again she had it all worked out. He felt exhausted, but she'd already whisked downstairs and he heard her answering the phone in a bright, fresh voice. "No, nothing yet, darling. We hope by tomorrow. Yes, the caterer said he'd sent one man who'd never worked for him before and that he didn't report back. It's so sweet of you, dear. Of course I feel dreadful, just as you did when you lost that earring. It's the one piece of jewelry I always wore!"

At dawn they met on the terrace. A wind was up and the trees were full of bird chatter.

"It's the starlings!" Aunt Letty cried. "They're back! They're migratory birds, you know. I know all about birds. Sometime I'll tell your children all about them."

"My what?"

"Oh, never mind. Don't stand there gawking. Let's get it over with. I want my stone back." She put her hand to her breast where the emerald had always rested. Hadn't she realized she could never wear it again?

Pensively she walked beside him. "They're just waking." She took his hand and started running, then stopped so suddenly it almost threw him off balance. "Chris! Look!"

The mist above the water wavered in the light. A number of black figures stood out against the gilded clouds. But there, floating like a white island . . . Chris squeezed his eyes shut and tore them open again. It was still there—floating, moving, a mass of white swans.

"It's the flock! They've come to fetch him. They came overnight, just like the starlings!"

Her hand in his had gone very cold.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Letty. Everything—everything can still be wonderful," he said lamely.

She wasn't listening. "Look, look!"

The white swans had separated with small, chattering sounds. Suddenly they took off. Wide-winged and strong, they sailed into the morning sky.

"There it goes," Aunt Letty said. "You know, in a way I'm glad. I wouldn't have wanted the Rajah buried with me, and I certainly wouldn't have wanted anyone else to— Why, Chris!" It had just dawned on her. "I couldn't have worn it myself again! Not after yesterday." She laughed.

He caught her mood. He felt relaxed and happy. He almost told her about Dory, but decided to tease her a little instead. "And to think that the one stone of absolutely blameless provenance has taken itself off! Whatever would the Maharajah have said to that?"

"The who? Oh, the Maharajah! Nonsense, dear boy. The Maharajah of Boroda didn't hand out that kind of stone. It hails from an Indian temple. I was with a group, and I'd been foresighted enough to have a horrible toothache. So I went in with a fat poultice bandaged to my right cheek. And then, somehow, an emerald disappeared from the forehead of one of those unattractive deities. No, Chris, I'm not going to let you in on *all* my methods. Anyway, I kept falling behind the rest. I stumbled once or twice in that dim light. Of course, everyone was searched, and I made no objections. I just endured it with my hand to my swollen cheek. They all felt so sorry for me."


The October issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale September 13.

What was the syndicate hit man doing in town? . . .

KILLER IN TOWN

by

**CARROLL
MAYERS**



I've always been a summer man; the warm, lazy days of late June, July, and most of August have a special appeal for me. I say "most of August" because I don't include the first two weeks. That's when my workload doubles. I'm not complaining. But as Sheriff Jeremy Dale's chief (and only) deputy in Surf City, these weeks usually keep me hopping.

First of all, that's when the Sheriff visits his widowed sister on the West Coast. Secondly, that's when the summer-semester kids swarm

down from State University. And thirdly, that's when Floyd Edmonds comes to town.

From the point of resultant responsibility, the first reason is self-explanatory. But I'd better expound a bit on the other two, especially the year I delivered my annual speech to the second reason, only to become more involved than ever with the third one on the same day.

I made the speech at Pete's Place, an oasis favored by the college crowd. Not that they usually cause much trouble—but when they let off steam after academic pressure and whatever there are always a few beach beer-blast busts, pot-smoking parties (which it is the Sheriff's policy to overlook unless too blatant), some hot-rodding around town, and general hell-raising. Some of the local citizenry considered it incumbent on the Sheriff's Office to control such exuberance—hence, my declamation.

"As always, we're glad to have you here," I'd said. "Enjoy your holidays. But use a little restraint. Leave the town standing for next year." The last had brought a laugh, which I'd expected, and on which I capitalized by turning serious. "You can appreciate the position of our office. Respect us and we'll respect you. It's as simple as that."

As usual, the kids took it well. There was even a spate of applause.

I was feeling pretty good as I returned to the office that afternoon. I anticipated some trouble, of course, but nothing I couldn't handle. Then Mr. Edmonds showed up and chased all such air and lightness out of my head.

Floyd Edmonds is a widower, a retired clothing salesman from Connecticut who drives down to Surf City every August for a two-week vacation. And he has a hobby—he's a rabid crime buff. He reads all the true-detective magazines and watches every TV cop show he can to learn "police procedure."

This is where my personal involvement with the man comes in. He haunts the Sheriff's Office for the length of his stay, checking and memorizing details of lawbreakers' flyers. He's convinced that eventually he'll be instrumental in the apprehension of such a figure.

Neither Sheriff Dale nor I can dissuade him. "You'll see," he keeps telling us. "Someday one of these fellows will cross my path—either down here or up home. And I'll recognize him, maybe get a nice reward."

So, on the afternoon when it started, I found Mr. Edmonds' ancient Chevy parked in front of the office. The man himself was inside the office,

his lean angular length perched expectantly on the edge of a chair, his sharp blue eyes dancing with suppressed excitement behind their thick lenses.

"Ed, it's happened!" he cried. "I've recognized Monk Lewis!"

I frowned. "Monk Lewis?"

"The syndicate hitman. The one they call The Eliminator. I saw him coming out of the Surf Hotel this noon. He's wearing dark glasses but I still recognized him!"

Initially, I hadn't placed the name. Now I did. Lewis was indeed a professional killer for the crime combine. Indicted at least four times, he had yet to be convicted. His last trial six months ago had resulted in a hung jury.

I settled behind my desk. "Granted you're right, sir," I said, "what do you expect me to do?"

"Do? Why, arrest him, of course."

"On what charge? Staying at the Surf Hotel?"

"But the man's a killer! Surely—" —

"Mr. Edmonds," I said simply, "that may be true. But until he breaks the law here and gives me some specific reason, I've no cause to arrest him."

"You shouldn't need a reason to take a professional murderer off the streets!"

I shook my head. "You know better than that, sir."

Mr. Edmonds did know better. The trouble was, he wouldn't accept it. He got up from his chair and bent over my desk in his urgency. He kept fuming at me about my duty for ten minutes. When he finally left, I felt exhausted.

And frustrated. Because despite everything I'd said to Mr. Edmonds I didn't like the idea of a man like Monk Lewis walking around our town—if it actually *was* Lewis. I seized on that point. Mr. Edmonds' identification could be faulty. The man in question might be merely another vacationer. Before I worked myself up any further, that factor had to be confirmed—personally.

It didn't take long. A trip to the library and a review of old newspaper files provided several photos of Monk Lewis leaving the courtroom at his last trial. With the man's dark features clearly in mind, I went on a brief stakeout at the Surf Hotel and spotted those same features on a chunky

individual leaving the hotel coffee shop. Monk Lewis still sported the dark glasses, but there was no longer any doubt as to his identity.

That evening a TV newscast provided the topper. In two days, State Senator Alan English would be leaving the capital for a brief vacation in Surf City.

That was when it all pulled together—at least to my conviction. The Senator was presently heading a statewide anti-crime commission which already had subpoenaed numerous underworld figures in a sweeping investigation.

I snapped off the TV, my pulse racing. In the back of my mind, logic clamored that the syndicate would not consider an assassination in a place like our town, hundreds of miles from their metropolitan base. A hard-to-trace rifle shot from a tall building; the killer's anonymity in a bustling crowd; snarled traffic to facilitate an escape—wasn't that much more likely?

But logic couldn't override actuality. Monk Lewis, syndicate "eliminator," was in town—and Senator English would arrive in two days. The only inference—and result—that I could draw made my skin crawl.

I hardly slept at all that night and had no stomach for breakfast. With Sheriff Dale out of town, the full responsibility for Alan English's safety was mine. But what could I do? Attach myself like a leech to the Senator the moment he arrived, hoping to be able to thwart any attempt Monk Lewis might make? Or should I call in the state police and let them take over?

Again logic rejected my individual protection as futile, and a multiple guard still questionable. Sheer numbers didn't necessarily guarantee invulnerability; in any wild, free-shooting spree, a multiple tragedy could result.

But I had to do something. I finally decided to get in touch with Senator English and persuade him to cancel his visit to Surf City.

I felt a little better as I went down to the office. I decided that mid-morning would be the most likely time to catch the Senator, and while I delayed my call Floyd Edmonds showed up again.

Clearly, the old gentleman had decided not to be discouraged by my rebuff the day before. Without preamble, he blurted, "Did you see the news last night, Ed? Senator English is coming here in two days! And that syndicate killer is already here!"

I didn't favor a further round. "I saw the news, sir," I said, "and I'll handle it."

"I don't think you can—alone."

"I don't intend to."

He hung on. "Damn it, I'd like to hear something more than that. I'm leaving here tonight, going back home. I'd like to think—"

I said, "I'm going to alert the Senator himself."

"That's all?" He regarded me in disbelief. "Suppose English still decides to come down here? Even with a bodyguard? Monk Lewis is a professional—" Mr. Edmonds broke off, realizing I would listen to no additional argument. After a long moment, he drew a breath. "All right. I've warned you. There's nothing else I can do."

I said, "I appreciate how you feel, sir."

Edmonds wasn't listening. He stalked out of the office and piled into his car. The vintage sedan rocketed away like one of the college crowd's souped-up jalopies.

I waited until 10:30, then placed my call to the capital. A battery of aides and secretaries shielded English. Even in my official capacity I had trouble getting through. Finally, though, the Senator came on the line.

I identified myself again and launched into an immediate explanation for my call. English heard me out. Then he said, "You're satisfied the man's actually Lewis?"

"I am."

"I don't like to cancel specific plans, Deputy."

"No, sir."

"Nor crawl under fire."

"I appreciate that also, Senator," I said. "But discretion *can* be the better part of valor."

There was a silence, then English said, "I'm confident I could arrange ample security. On the other hand, I dislike putting you or your community in an awkward position." He paused and said, "I'm very grateful for your concern. I'll phone and let you know my decision tomorrow."

So that was that. I'd done all I could. Then I reconsidered. Maybe not quite all. I decided my self-respect dictated one final step. I went to the Surf Hotel and gave the desk clerk a description. He recognized it as "Mr. Petry" at once. Three minutes later I was in the designated room.

"I'll come right to the point, Lewis," I said bluntly. "This may sound

like TV dialogue, but our town doesn't want you here. I suggest you leave. Today."

The man before me was heavy-set and dark-complexioned, wearing tan slacks and a green sport shirt. A typical vacationer—no dark glasses indoors though. He laughed, taking in my uniform and badge, and said, "You come on pretty strong, fella, but you're off base. The name is Petry. Jim Petry—from Cincinnati."

"The name's Monk Lewis from Capital City," I said, "and I've just talked with Senator English." I smiled at him. "Mission scrubbed."

His dark eyes narrowed. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure," I said. I moved to the door, then looked back at him with a steady gaze. "Today," I repeated, then turned and left.

Kid stuff? Largely. But I'd wanted to kindle some doubt, throw the man off stride. Pending Alan English's decision, any uncertainty in the killer's mind could only be a plus.

As it developed, the Senator came down on schedule and stayed for a week without incident. Because Monk Lewis himself was eliminated the night of the same day I'd threatened him: struck and killed by one or more of those university hell-raisers hot-rodding without lights. Two witnesses saw Lewis tossed twenty feet as he crossed the street.

Naturally, I quizzed the college crowd and made dozens of checks. Nobody could—or would—tell me anything. Officially, the investigation is still open here. Actually, after a week I didn't press it—and neither did Sheriff Dale upon his return.

The Sheriff and I were musing about the affair this morning. He told me he understood a strong security detail had been assigned to Alan English until his committee completed its work, to thwart any further attempt by a possible successor to Monk Lewis. Then he flipped an envelope across the desk.

"That came in the mail this morning," he said.

The envelope was addressed to the Sheriff's Office, Surf City. There was no letter or note inside—only an invoice from a garage in Connecticut charging one Floyd Edmonds for the replacement of a broken headlight.

"What do you think we should do about that?" Sheriff Dale asked me.

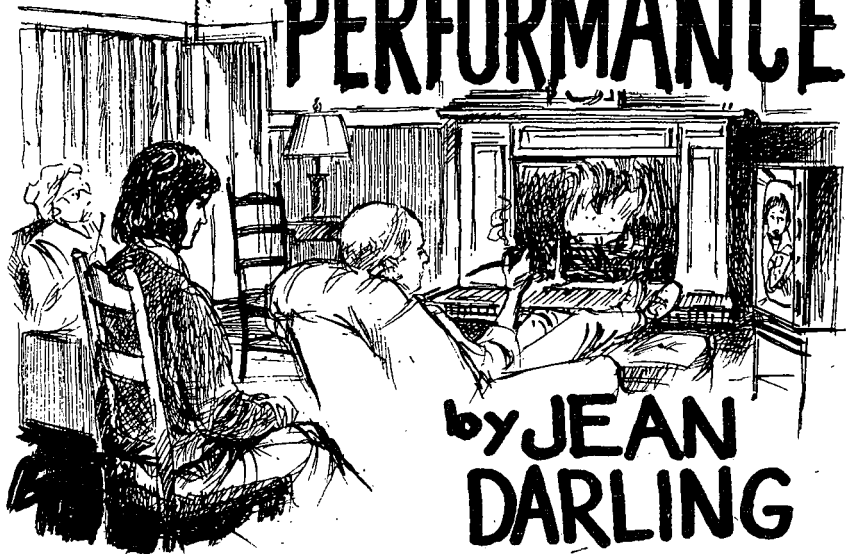
I met his quizzical look. "I think this office should pay it."

He smiled as he refolded the invoice. "I agree," he said.

By the way, Floyd Edmonds never came down to Surf City again.

Mr. Fogarty, they all agreed, was not a gentleman . . .

FAREWELL PERFORMANCE



By June 26th the Seaview Guest House had ingested its complement of summer regulars, dwindled now by death to only five: Mrs. Ward, 68; Miss Peebles, 77; Mr. Daly, 83; Miss Grant, who lied about her age; and the baby, plump little Mrs. Joyce, 66. Each was settled singly into a first-floor room, the upper story being reserved for chance birds of passage, the overnight bed-and-breakfast guests deposited in Dun Laoghaire by the Holyhead ferry.

Occasionally one of these would contemplate a longer stay, but breakfast encircled by the aged, seated with their backs to the wall like gunfighters in a B Western, presented an all too vivid glimpse into the future. And as soon as the last bite was decently swallowed they would flee bag and baggage back to the land of the living.

But one such bird of passage, unlike the others, seemed to feel no distress at being confronted with his own mortality. He moved into Number Eight at the head of the stairs on the top floor of the crumbling relic of Victorian splendor.

Spending time in lodgings that catered to elderly people on fixed incomes was not exactly pleasing to John Fogarty, but it was inexpensive and after a long and costly illness he needed a cheap haven in which to regain his strength. So, unpacking in precise and orderly fashion, he sank down his summer roots, much to the disgust of the regular residents.

At mealtimes, hostile lash-hidden eyes met this threat of permanent invasion. In the evenings, ranks closed around the fire and the television in the fluorescent glow of the shabby lounge. Ignoring the chill in the atmosphere, Mr. Fogarty devoured the food and later, while all eyes were glued to *Coronation Street*, he folded his six-foot-three onto a hard wooden chair to read the evening paper, secure in the knowledge that the overstuffed monstrosity in front of the fire would comfort his bony bottom in the not-too-distant future.

Strong of will, John Fogarty had bulled his way through life regardless of consequences—but in the well padded occupant of the chair he coveted he met his match.

Mrs. Ward, or—to give her the full complement of names under which she sailed—Nora Barnes Madden Corelli Mannheim Hughes Ward, was a roost ruler of the first water and brooked no interference. So when John Fogarty complained to the Manageress about Nora Ward's radio it was like a declaration of war. This small transistor, at top volume, accompanied the lady wherever she went—including the dining room. At every meal the residents' wonky ears were filled with assorted disasters, wars, strikes, and whatever else the newscaster was given to read. Mrs. Ward's hearing was perfect. She just liked her news loud. John Fogarty's hearing was no less perfect, but he detested noise of any sort. He was not going to have his every meal ruined without at least lodging a complaint.

Meekly, the Manageress broached the subject to Mrs. Ward. "Sure an' would it make that much difference if you turned it down a bit so?

The poor gentleman has been that ill, you know."

"Has anyone else said a word about my radio?" Mrs. Ward asked, fully aware that none of the others would dare to censure her in any way.

"Now, now, Nora, you know I'd never complain, no matter what," Mrs. Joyce said in passing.

"No, Fanny, but you certainly stick your nose in everybody else's business," Nora addressed the rounded rump disappearing up the stairs. "You'll be sorry one day if you don't stop it." In answer, Fanny Joyce slammed the door to her room, and Mrs. Ward turned back to the Manageress. "If Mr. Fogarty is all that ill he should have his meals sent up to his room and you can tell him I said so."

There was no need to say anything to John Fogarty. He had overheard the whole conversation while finishing his toast and marmalade. And having no intention of spending the rest of his stay at the Seaview eating behind closed doors, he decided upon a plan of action. From then on his own portable would attend all meals.

At first Mrs. Ward was stunned. She stared open-mouthed, unable to believe it, when John Fogarty's radio blared in opposition to hers. But in less than a moment she regained control and turned her own volume up louder. Mr. Fogarty followed suit. And so it went—first one and then the other—until the dining room bulged with noise. The next meal was the same, as was the next, and the next after that. Mr. Fogarty kept his hands over his ears when they weren't delivering food to his mouth, and the senile Mr. Daly, entering into the spirit of things, jammed his thumbs into his ears and waggled his fingers at anyone who happened to catch his eye while the ladies tittered behind modest hands. This was the most fun the Seaview residents had had in years and each mealtime approached to avid anticipation. Not even the arrival of a covey of overnights silenced hostilities. The little radios fairly danced upon the tabletops.

One morning, three days after the war of sound began, Nora Ward yielded. Her hand gripped the small knob and turned. After a moment Mr. Fogarty's finger too pressed a button. A sudden deafening silence hung like cotton around the other residents' ears as they watched the battlers with bright little eyes. Nothing happened. There was no flareup, no mention was made of past antagonism, yet by tacit agreement both radios lay quiet beside their owners' plates.

After a few days, with no further developments on the Ward-Fogarty front, the residents lapsed into their usual routine. Mrs. Joyce picked up

her knitting where she had left off and lost her glasses everywhere she went. The Misses Peebles and Grant donned assorted sweaters and embarked on long walks, inhaling the sea air in great lung-boggling gulps. Mr. Daly clung close to the fire, mumbling about the past, spittle bubbling in the corners of his mouth. And Mrs. Ward and her radio disturbed the peace everywhere—except in the dining room. All was exactly as it had been every summer year in and year out. It would probably have remained that way if Mr. Fogarty had chosen to keep a low profile. But, dazzled by success, he pressed his luck:

One evening, when peace had reigned for almost a week, the residents straggled in for their nightly dose of cathode rays to find John Fogarty seated in Nora Ward's chair. He was watching a *Lucy* rerun, his legs extended to the fire, puffing contentedly on a pipe.

"It's Nora's chair you're sitting in so," Mrs. Joyce said in her baby voice.

"It's nobody's chair," Fogarty said without shifting his eyes from the TV. "This is a residents' lounge. I'm a resident, and I'm lounging."

"Oh, but not in Nora's chair," chimed in Miss Grant.

"It's not right, you know. You shouldn't sit in Nora's chair," Phoebe Peebles said, eyes fixed on the door.

"Come away, girls." Fanny Joyce tugged at Miss Grant's sleeve. "Mr. Fogarty is not a gentleman."

The ladies perched on their chairs to await developments.

The doorknob turned, and three necks stretched in unison. But it was only Mr. Daly shuffling in in his bunion-holed slippers.

Five minutes passed before Nora Ward arrived. Without breaking her stride, she dragged a straight-backed chair across the threadbare rug to where she had a clear view of the television set. She buttoned up her cardigan and sat down.

There was no fuss, no argument, not a single ripple on the sea—at least outwardly. Inside, Nora was seething. Not one of my husbands gave me the provocation you have, my man, Nora thought, looking at the bald spot on the back of John Fogarty's head, yet they were all neatly dispatched—when the time came.

Nora was not overly religious but one thing she believed fervently: marriage was made to last until death. She didn't believe in divorce and the probable loss of income should she wish to remarry—and she always

had remarried within a few months of being widowed. But all that frivolity was twenty years in the past. Her last bereavement had attracted too much attention, with a lengthy investigation and scareheads splashed across the newspapers. Eventually the case was abandoned due to lack of evidence, but her close brush with the California gas chamber had put the wind up her. Since all her husbands had been rich, finances were no worry, so Nora retired from the marriage stakes.

Now, with blank eyes turned toward *Hawaii Five-O*, a tingle of excitement ran up her spine. Why not? she thought. Why not have another go—a kind of farewell performance? Ireland was virgin territory—she had always been careful to shed encumbrances far from home ground—but this was Dun Laoghaire, a tourist trap, a kind of catch-all for those in transit, not really Ireland, and far away from her home county. Various methods, tried and true, were readily available in the false bottom of her vanity case on top of the chest of drawers in her room. Beneath jars of expensive creams, unguents, and tonics, all guaranteed to preserve everlasting youth, lurked a veritable pharmacopoeia of expurgents plus a slim diary in which was recorded a moment-by-moment description of each demise.

Mentally, Nora thumbed through the pages, settling at last upon marzipan, the ideal conveyer of potassium cyanide in its most palatable form. Her eyes again found Fogarty's bald spot, which now took on the shape of a scarlet almond-paste strawberry, insides scooped out, blended, and restored with stem in place. Yes, she thought, a gentle smile curving her lips, I'll do it.

Mr. Fogarty, turning at that precise moment, was struck by how pretty Nora Ward still was despite being a year or two his senior. Her complexion was clear, her hair dark and lustrous, her figure womanly—unlike so many modern girls who preferred the asexual look. He smiled at her, and Nora's smile widened in return as she envisioned his bared teeth closing on the reinforced strawberry.

But "the best-laid plans of mice and men" and all that. In delivering the morning tea a few days later, the maid discovered Fanny Joyce's body. The harassed, overworked local doctor, duly summoned, signed the death certificate—heart failure—with scarcely a glance at the corpse. And at a designated time the Seaview residents trooped off for a day's outing to Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery.

"I told you to stop sticking your nose into everybody's business," Nora whispered, dropping a rose on the descending coffin which contained Mrs. Joyce (who in turn contained the marzipan strawberry).

Nora was quite right in her accusation. Fanny had seen her giving Mr. Fogarty the almond-paste peace offering and, as soon as Nora had rounded the top of the stairs, had zeroed in on the man, squealing, "Oooh, I just love marzipan fruit, especially the roundy ones." She had snatched up two and popped one into her mouth, taking the strawberry up to her room to be eaten at leisure.

The next attempt to remove John Fogarty was made the first week in August, Horse Show Week, when even the Seaview was crammed with tourists. This time the wire-across-the-stairs method was used. A few late evenings spent with one eye glued to her partially open door gained Nora the knowledge that Mr. Fogarty regularly made a trip to the bathroom on the landing between floors at two in the morning. Unfortunately, Fogarty's bladder was not on schedule on the night in question so a middle-aged tourist tripped to her death instead. Before the woman's screech had died away, Nora had nipped over her body and up the stairs to retrieve the length of six-pound nylon fishing line.

As the woman was an American tourist, an inquest was held. The high heels and trailing negligee she had been wearing at the time of the accident made the verdict of death by misadventure a foregone conclusion, and the American was duly boxed to be returned to her place of origin.

Two failures, one coming upon the other, unsettled Nora and shook her confidence. Then there was the everyday problem of Mr. Fogarty being nice to her ever since the night of the marzipan peace offering. It made things awkward. She began to worry that she'd lost her touch, and often left behind her transistor and wandered about in silence.

Without her noisy companion, she became more attractive to John Fogarty, particularly after his checkup at St. Vincent's Hospital, where the doctor had warned him against any unnecessary strain or worry. By taking things easy, a good few years stretched before him—but too much exertion could make him go out like a candle. There was the problem of finances to be considered. Most of his savings were gone and, unless he took some drastic action, he would be broke before Christmas.

It was at this point he began subtly to question Nora. He found out

approximately how much money she had and the number of houses she owned in various countries, all contributing their rent to aid in her upkeep. All considered, she was a very wealthy woman, which deepened the puzzle of why she stayed at the Seaview.

"My parents brought me here when I was small," she told him. "It was lovely then, all flocked wallpaper and Persian rugs and crystal chandeliers, and when I first came back twenty years ago every room was full of friends. But in the past five years or so everyone has begun to die."

They had taken the train to Bray and were sitting on the Esplanade watching the strong-hearted bathe in the cold September water.

"You have no family?" he asked.

"No—I never had any children and my parents are dead." She laughed. "I know it's unbelievable—an Irishwoman without a relative in every nook and cranny. What about you?"

"I'm alone too," he said. They remained on the bench until train time, the conversation at a standstill.

The next Sunday they caught a bus for Powerscourt in Enniskerry, Wicklow. There, in the formal gardens, Fogarty popped the question.

"Perhaps we should get married," he said, squinting at a carved privet.

Nora made no reply, but her mind raced with the possibilities this turn of events presented. If she said yes, a whole new page could be written in her diary of husbands—it wasn't as though it was forever. She said yes.

They decided to be married at a registry office in London, staying on afterwards to shop and see the shows, then go off on a honeymoon. They made no mention of their plans at the Seaview. The Misses Peebles and Grant wouldn't have been particularly interested, and Mr. Daly had gone to a nursing home. So when the season drew to an end the first week in October they shared a cab to the ferry dock.

They passed the time on the ferry to Holyhead poring over travel brochures. Nora plumped for the Far East—in the back of her head she recalled hearing about some kind of poisonous fish that was a delicacy in Japan. Fogarty favored the Greek Islands, going on and on about following in the footsteps of Odysseus until, at last, Nora agreed, suggesting that they also visit Greece proper, especially the precipitous parts. And so they sat hand in hand as the *St. Columba* glided over an unusually calm and moonlit Irish Sea, she thanking goodness that her farewell performance really was going to happen, he wondering if she could swim.

It was Hisp's third attack in less than a month . . .

TWANG!

by
**ROBERT
TWOHY**



I got to work that Wednesday and I felt better. Rotten, but better.

Miss Flidd said, "Good morning, Mr. Hisp." Her wrinkled old eyes looked concerned. "Are you sure you're well enough to come to work?"

"Lots of work to do, Miss Flidd."

"You look terrible. I mean your face looks like somebody drained the blood out of it."

"Yes, but my stomach feels better."

"This is the third attack in less than a month. You've always had such good health before this."

"Well, there's been a lot of business pressure."

"We've always had business pressure. For sixty-three years, since your dear father opened this factory, we've had business pressure."

That was true. Pressure's the name of the fish-food game. We're the third largest worm-and-insect development and rendering plant in the West, in terms of floor footage. Our neon sign, HISP'S FISH FOOD; has been reported visible from Splivert Mountain, which is eighteen miles toward the coast.

Miss Fidelia Flidd is my Executive Secretary, and has been since I took over as Board Chairman and President twenty-one years ago. She was inefficient in her best years and for the past ten years she hasn't had the least idea what she's supposed to be doing. But she was my father's true beloved and I remember her as the cutest secretary I ever saw—what the young folks today call "foxy"—and she had a silvery laugh and a way of looking sideways at my stern and dignified father that made him go completely to pieces. The years have passed and she's not what she used to be and I have to employ a special secretary whose duty is to straighten out the mess Miss Flidd makes of everything, but as long as I'm in charge of Hisp's Fish Food she'll have a job, because it makes me glad to remember that happy, witless look my father got every time she batted her eyes at him.

I never knew my mother. She ran away with a worm pathologist when I was seven months old. After that I had a lot of stepmothers but I never got to know them either. My father got married eleven times. He never married Miss Flidd and that was proof he really loved her. As he told me once, "I hate women at breakfast." He thought too much of Miss Flidd to put her in a position where he'd see her at breakfast. He wanted the thing they had together to go on, which it did, while his wives came and went. And so she has job security with me no matter how much she messes things up. She said, "You should go to see Dr. Trivett."

I hung my two-tone gabardine jacket on the rack. "I called his office early this morning, but he's at a medical conference. But I feel much better today. When I saw him two weeks ago he said it was just nerves."

"I have a young cousin here in town who's a doctor, and he specializes in helping people with nerve problems. He's said to be very good. Different, but good."

"Different?" I *was* feeling rotten. Better, but rotten. The attack two nights before had been much worse than the previous two. If my nerves were causing my terrible stomach pains, I didn't want it to go on—not if it could be got better. Trivett is the best stomach man in town, but he's strictly organs, he doesn't deal with the psychological. And two weeks ago when he took all kinds of samples and ran tests and found nothing, I was convinced my problem wasn't physical. I asked Miss Flidd, "Is this cousin of yours a psychiatrist?"

"I guess so—but not the kind that puts you down on a couch and makes you talk about the awful things that happened when you were four. Rhunk thinks that lots of nerve ailments have situational causes."

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know. But he clears up your problem in one visit or tells you to get out."

That was kind of intriguing—a psychiatrist who washes his hands of a problem he can't solve instead of mulling it over for six or eight years. I *did* have a problem, for sure. Three stomach attacks in less than a month, and I dreaded the next one. I doubted I could survive another if it turned out to be as bad as yesterday's. What could I lose by a one-shot visit to this healer?

"What did you say his name is? Hunk?"

"Rhunk. Rhadamanthus Rhunk III. Rhadamanthus isn't his real name, and he's not really the Third, but he thought it looked nice on a card."

"Is he really good?"

"Some people think so. Others hate him. It depends on whether you've got a problem he can help you with."

"If he can see me today—and if the price isn't too outrageous—I think I'd like an appointment."

I sat down at my desk and watched as she dialed.

She said, "Hello? This is Fidelia Flidd. Your cousin, yes. I called because the gentleman I work for has this bad stomach and I thought—how much do you charge for a visit?"

She frowned and turned to me. "Twenty-five dollars?"

I nodded. Trivett, an old friend from grade school, charges me seventy-five dollars for asking how I feel—and five dollars a word thereafter.

"All right," she said. "Can he have an appointment today? . . . Good. He'll be right over. The address is—" She wrote it on a slip of paper. "His name is Mr. Hisp. Goodbye." She hung up.

I got up and put on my cardigan. "That's the quickest doctor's appointment I ever heard of."

She handed me the address. "I hope he can help you. Like I said, a lot of people hate him."

"Why, Miss Flidd?"

"It's just the way he is. All the Rhunks are that way."

"If he can help me with my stomach, I can stand hating him." It was true. And besides, the price was right.

I left the office, heading for Rhunk.

I stopped at a drugstore and called Mascarine. This being Wednesday, her day off, she'd be home, playing with her guppies.

She works at a fashionable dress shop downtown, modeling high-style underwear for upper-class ladies in our town. I know my wife has seen her there, because Leona goes there to buy foundation garments. Of course, she doesn't know Mascarine—all Mascarine is to her is another pretty figure. Leona has no idea what's been going on between Mascarine and me for the past six months.

Mascarine said, "How do oo feel, Wambchop?" She has this little speech kink, and when you first hear her you think she's demented, but as you get to know her you realize how sweet and distinctive it is.

I said, "Terrible, but I'm better. I'm on my way to a doctor right now."

"Dr. Twivett?"

"No, a new doctor. I won't be over this evening because Leona will be back from her three days at the seashore, but I'll sneak around the first chance I get."

"Aw wight. I wuv oo."

I assured her I loved her too and left the drugstore, thinking what an astonishing difference there is between a woman of twenty-two and a woman of fifty to whom you've been married for twenty-six years.

I never took after my father—I don't hate women at breakfast, and I seem to lack his energy. Leona and I have gotten along all right through the years, not using up much energy—talking some, sitting around mostly, then going to sleep. We've gotten in a lot of sleep. I thought it was a good enough marriage, and I always had the fish-food plant to turn to for excitement.

Then I met Mascarine.

She came in to the office one morning. Miss Flidd happened to be out.

I looked up from my desk and saw this small, neat, dark-haired young person with bright green eyes and an extraordinary shape, and something happened that very moment in the region of my heart.

She murmured, "I would wike a thevven-thent packet of guppy gwain."

At that time her charming little speech kink was new to me, and I couldn't understand her. But I understood what was happening in my heart. I said, "Would you repeat that?"

"Guppy gwain, pweeze."

"Ah, guppy grain. Yes, we manufacture the world's finest. But we're not a retail store, Miss—we manufacture in wholesale lots only. I'm afraid our smallest unit of guppy grain is six hundred pounds."

"Oh, but I have just two dear widdle guppies. I couldn't possibly use six hundwed pounds. Just a thevven-thent packet, pweeze."

I was very busy that morning preparing a report to make by telephone to our procurement center in Fortaleza, Brazil, detailing upgraded specifications for our insect buyers. But suddenly it all fell out of my mind. It could wait. Everything could wait as long as she looked at me with those bright and glowing eyes.

I laid down my dictaphone, got an envelope from my desk, and rose. "I'll show you the way to the guppy-grain bins."

"Fank you. You are vewwy kind." She laid seven cents in my hand.

I gave her the envelope, led her through the plant to the guppy-grain section, and stood watching as with exquisite care and infinite patience she selected, one by one, the quality grains she desired for the nurture and satisfaction of her two merry little guppies.

I had never observed anything more touching and adorable.

By the time she filled the envelope it was lunchtime, and I took her to lunch.

That was how it all started between us. It had been the most wonderful six months of my life.

Except for the three stomach attacks, the last of which—two nights ago—had been by far the most violent. That was why I was now climbing aboard the bus to visit Dr. Rhunk; whose cousin, Miss Flidd, had told me he was different.

It was a droopy building in a stagnant part of town, and the directory in the lobby said that Dr. Rhadamanthus Rhunk III was in 417. I went up in the elevator, opened the door, and went in, expecting some kind

of waiting room but finding instead a sparse office. A little man with ragged brown hair wearing an undistinguished brown sweater with a hole in the shoulder was hunched forward over a newspaper spread out on a desk. His big nose took up most of the space of his face, and it was hard to guess his age—somewhere between thirty and sixty.

The room was dull green and there was a small grimy window. Some dusty and cobwebbed photos and a diploma were taped onto the walls.

Squinty-eyes didn't look up from the newspaper. A hand flopped at me. "Sit down."

"Are you Dr. Rhunk?"

"Uh-huh. Sit down."

I sat down in a dull green kitchen chair in front of the desk.

He read on a while, then said, "It makes you think twice about losing your gallstones."

"What was that?"

He shoved the paper aside so it fell off the desk. He leaned forward, folded his hands under his meager chin, and fixed his squinty eyes on me. "Who are you?"

"L. Sprague Hisp. Your cousin called you about me. I have a nerve thing, and it seems to come out in severe stomach pains. It's happened three times in the past month, and two nights ago was the worst. I've been to Dr. Trivett—you know him, of course—and—"

"Why do I know him?"

I blinked at that. "Because he's the best-known internist in the city."

"Who has the bellyache—you or him?"

I began to see how Dr. Rhunk could be hateful. But I was here and I might as well push a little further. All I could lose was twenty-five dollars.

"Dr. Trivett says there's nothing physically wrong with me. So it must be my nerves. I've been under a lot of business pressure lately, and everything seems to come to a head in my stomach. The first attack was mild, the second one was bad, and two nights ago it was terrible."

He rubbed his big nose and muttered, "And Trivett says you're O.K. Do you believe him?"

"Of course I believe him! He's the best internist in the city! He got an award for developing a new speed stroke with the stomach pump! It's no credit to *you* that you've never heard of him!"

His mean little eyes were steady on me. "I'm not that hot for credit."

I took out two tens and a five and threw them on the desk. He pocketed them. I said, "He's only the most renowned man in your profession in the city."

"What are you, his publicist?"

"No, his friend! And he's been my doctor for years, and my wife's doctor, and everybody I know's doctor—"

"O.K., O.K." He suddenly jerked his eyes up toward the ceiling. "You know what I just heard?"

"No."

"I heard a twang."

"A twang?"

"Uh-huh. When I hear that twang, it usually means something is starting to take shape. You're married, huh? Got children?"

"No."

"Insured?"

"Of course."

His eyes shot up. "There's that twang again."

"I don't understand this talk about twangs."

"I don't either. I don't usually hear them so soon—often not at all. Where was I? You said you're insured?"

"Naturally. Who isn't?"

"Me. But let's stick to you—you're the one with the bellyache. This is something new, huh? A month ago was the first attack?"

"That's right. And two weeks later, the second. Then two nights ago, the third."

"And you were in good health before?"

"Excellent health." I found myself answering promptly—almost obediently. He was hateful, but when he got down to business he seemed to know what he was doing.

"O.K. Do you drink a lot?"

"No, I'm not a drinker."

"You mean you don't drink?"

"I mean drinking's never been a problem for me."

"That means you drink. How much?"

"Very little, actually."

"How much, actually?"

"No more than any normal social drinker."

"I know a social drinker who drinks a pint and he's still not social. So

he drinks another pint—then he's social. Then he drinks *another* pint, and then he's his normal social self—unconscious."

I said coldly, "What do your friends have to do with me?"

He grinned. "You got a point. O.K., back to you. What's your idea of social drinking?"

"I might have a highball or two before dinner."

"Or three, or five. Do you drink before breakfast?"

"What is this? What are you trying to make me out? I never had a drink before breakfast in my life!"

"Never?" A palsy, evil grin.

"Uh . . ." Who was he to disconcert me, make me feel guilty? I glared back at him. "Never!" I said fiercely.

He murmured, "I'm glad I don't have a drinking problem like you don't have a drinking problem."

"I didn't come here to talk about drinking!"

"I guess you didn't."

"Drinking has nothing to do with my stomach pains! I've been drinking the same way for twenty years—"

"O.K., don't get hysterical. I'll leave off your drinking habits, except to ask *what* you drink."

I was proud to tell him. "Only the finest Scotch."

"O.K., let's move on to eating. What did you eat two nights ago?"

"Dr. Trivett went into all this."

"Yeah, but he hasn't sent me his notes. What'd you eat?"

"Beef stroganoff."

"In a restaurant?"

"No, at a friend's house."

"She fix it?"

"What? Who?"

"The friend."

I didn't like this. "I don't know that that's any of your business."

"I don't either. She your girl friend? Twang."

"What's that twang?"

"It's a twang. Tell me about her."

I breathed hard a few moments. He said, "Why don't you want to talk about her? Is she a beast or something?"

I said through my teeth, "Did anybody ever punch you in the nose?"

"Uh-huh. But I've learned to read signs and to move fast. I read you

as a non-puncher. If I'm wrong, I can still move fast. Tell me about her."

"She doesn't have a thing to do with this. We had beef stroganoff, I got sick—what are you getting at? Are you suggesting a connection between the stroganoff and my stomach pains?"

He shrugged.

"Are you trying to make out that this nerve thing is food poisoning?"

"Maybe. One kind or another. Twang."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're panting again. Try to stop panting, it doesn't help. So you had beef stroganoff fixed by your girl friend and got sick. That was two nights ago. And you've been sick three times the past month. The other two times, what'd you eat?"

"Not beef stroganoff. Two weeks ago we had spaghetti—"

"You and the girl friend? At her place? She ever get sick?"

"Yes! I mean no! I mean yes at her place—no she never got sick!" I glared at him. "What are you getting at?"

"I'm just doping along, following the twangs. So all three times you got sick it was after dinner at your girl friend's place? Maybe you should take her out to dinner."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Maybe her best talent isn't cooking. What's her name?"

"Her name doesn't figure in this."

"Sometimes you can read a lot into names. If somebody's called Petunia or Prunella it can mean something. Or Bubbles, or Lucrezia—that isn't her name, is it?"

"Of course not. It's Mascarine."

"What kind of a name is that?"

"Classic French, I believe."

"Made up, more likely. Is she a showgirl?" The little weasel had a way of getting at facts.

"She used to be."

"What was she? Stripper? Bubble dancer? Bird dancer?"

"What's a bird dancer?"

"That's a girl who starts out her dance with a bunch of birds changing all over her. Then they fly away." He folded his fingers, looked over my head, and murmured, "Things are shaping up nice. O.K., this girl of yours, Tondelayo—"

"Mascarine!"

"Does she soak up a lot of Scotch too?"

"She doesn't drink Scotch at all. She drinks only papaya juice."

He looked up, fingering his ear. "That's interesting."

"Is it? Why?"

"How would I know? I got a twang, that's all. So she used to be a showgirl. What does she do now? Does she have a job, or just lie around her apartment, thinking up little things to spice up your meals?"

"She works. She's a lingerie model, except on Wednesdays." Something was coming to me. "I'm remembering something—the first time I got sick wasn't at her place, it was at home. Dinner with my wife—I remember what it was. Roast lamb."

"Plus four or five Scotch highballs beforehand—"

"No more than two—three at the most. But the point is that that dinner had nothing to do with Mascarine. So your innuendo about her spicing my food, all this hinting—what you've really been getting at is that Mascarine might have slipped something into my food!"

The squinty eyes strained open as far as they could, which wasn't far, in a look of astonishment. "Did I say that?"

"No, but it's obvious the direction your mind is taking."

"Why would she slip anything into your food? What motive would she have for doing that?"

"None! She didn't! And there's your proof—the first time I got sick was at dinner with my wife! So Mascarine has done nothing to my food, and my food has nothing to do with my stomach pains. It's all been fantasizing by you—trying to act like a big shot."

His voice was suddenly solemn. "You could be right." He frowned, hung his head, shook it, and stared at his hands, folded on the desk in front of him. "Too bad. It *did* make a nifty package. Ah, well, reality does have a way of messing up the best creations. So your first bellyache happened at home, and the other two at Ton—"

"If you say 'Tondelayo' again I'm going to punch you in the nose."

"I doubt it, because I move too fast. But I will not say 'Tondelayo' again, I promise." After a few seconds he went on. "At the former bird dancer's apartment—hmm." His head jerked up and his squinty eyes, which had had something like a humble look, were snappy again. "Did you hear that?"

"What?"

"That twang—it's still with us. O.K. First bellyache at home, next two

at the bird girl's. You know, that almost makes sense."

"What does?"

"It does, if you have a key to the bird girl's place."

"A key? Yes, I have a key. Why?"

"You keep it on your key ring, I bet." I nodded. "Sure. You wouldn't keep it in your shoe. Twang. Things are taking shape. Did you say earlier in this rambling account that the first bellyache was mild?"

"Yes. I took the day off, lay around in bed, and felt fine the next day."

"Uh-huh. Did your wife stay home that day?"

"She was around. She did her usual routines, went out shopping, to the cleaners, this and that—just a routine day."

"That figures. You say Trivett is her doctor too?"

"Yes. He's been a family friend for years."

"That's nice." He smiled at his knuckles on the desk, as if they had good news for him.

I said, "What are you getting at now?"

"I think it's nice that a middle-aged wife whose husband is playing around has a nice old family friend to take up the slack."

"What!" I had never known a more odious person. "That's the rottenest thing you've said yet! Are you hinting that—"

"Not me. I'm just intrigued by the shape this mess is taking. Did you go to Trivett after the first bellyache?"

"No, I didn't feel that bad. It was just a moderate stomach pain."

"Just enough to lay you up in bed for the day." He looked fondly at his knuckles. "You went to Trivett after the second attack?" I nodded.

"O.K. Did you go to him after the big bellyache two nights ago?"

"No. I spent all day yesterday on Mascarine's sofa, too sick to go home."

"Where was your wife?"

"Out of town. She's off at the seashore. She's coming home today."

"Why didn't your girl friend call the doctor?"

"She did, but—"

He raised his hand. "Don't tell me—let me guess. Dr. Trivett was off at a medical conference."

The rotten little rat! I had to grant it. He had a way of knowing things.

I said, "How did you know that?"

"I make lucky guesses when the twang is right." He patted one hand with the other, nodded at them in a self-satisfied way, and murmured, "Your wife knows nothing about your girl friend?"

"How could she? I've never mentioned Mascarine."

"Right. So how could your wife know? A subtle, sophisticated man of the world like you—how could she possibly know? Let's talk about the second bellyache, after the spaghetti feed at the girl friend's. You went to Trivett the next day?"

"No. I called him, but he was detained at a symposium somewhere. But the following morning bright and early I got a full checkup at his office and the word that there was nothing wrong with me—it was a case of business pressure."

"Your wife was out of town that time too?"

"Yes. She was off attending a high-school reunion in Sachoo City. She was back by the time I got home from Trivett's office."

"Good, good." He fondled his hands. "It'd be sloppy to have her wandering around somewhere. Now everybody's accounted for at the time of the second bellyache. That's nice. I like it when things are neat."

"What are you talking about?"

"Let's talk about Scotch. When you go to Tondelayo's for dinner and such, do you always lug along your own bottle of Scotch?"

Something he had just said annoyed me—but everything he said annoyed me and I couldn't fix on the particular thing. "No, damn it! I'm not the type of person who walks around with a bottle in my pocket! Mascarine—" and now I flashed on the particular annoyance in his last remark. "You said 'Tondelayo'!"

He nodded meekly. "And after I gave my word. That's my wayward tongue for you—it has a way of thumbing its nose at my most solemn promises. But forget that. You were saying you don't go staggering over to her apartment clutching a bottle. Do you keep your bottle there?"

"I give her money and she buys Scotch for me, and papaya juice for herself. We have a drink or two before dinner, and when the Scotch runs low she buys another bottle. What does that have to do with anything?"

"It depends. This whole cozy little package may mean nothing at all, and your bellyaches may be nerves, or because you drink ten times as much as you let on instead of only five times—but—"

He pushed his chair back, put his poorly shod feet on the desk, and leaned back so far I hoped he'd go over backwards on his head but he didn't. He stretched his arms, folded his hands in front of his face, twiddled his fingers, and looked at them with affection. "Sometimes my insights scare me. I knew from the beginning what shape this case was

going to take. One thing has led to another, twang twang twang, like little silver bells."

I just looked at him. He gazed back at me with his squinty eyes. "Your looks helped a lot. You've got that kind of silly, confused face, like a goose dressed up in a fancy cardigan. If ever I saw a poor dumb creature wandering in complete ignorance to the slaughter, it's you."

I know when I'm being insulted. I thought of telling him I'd punch him in the nose but, tilted back, he was too far away.

"A middle-aged marblehead with lots of money and a hot little number on the side—and he thinks his wife knows nothing about it. She's probably known from the beginning."

"That's ridiculous! If she knows about it, why hasn't she said anything?"

"Why should she? It's fine by her. She's got her own playmate and her own ambitions. They talk it over and decide that it's just dandy, your girl is just what they need—a patsy right to hand, ready to order for the cops after you come down with a fatal bellyache."

He gave me his evil grin. "Who's better at arranging fatal bellyaches than a guy who knows all about stomachs, who can get hold of just the stuff to cause them?"

For a moment I was speechless. Then I yelled, "You're playing the big shot again! There's no reason in the world . . . Dr. Trivett has been my friend from childhood! My wife has been nothing but faithful and true, and she doesn't have much energy. Why would they—"

"Why not? You have money, insurance policies, a business, and a girl friend ready-made to take the heat! So they figure: slip the goose a fatal dose at his girl's place. How can she get out of it with the goose laid out stone dead on her bed?"

"But—but—" I was aware I was being insulted, but I was too dizzy from all he was saying to bother with that. "How could they hope Mascarine would be blamed? You said yourself she has no motive!"

"When a sugar daddy's corpse is found on a girl's bed, who cares about motive? That's what Trivett and your wife would figure. A love affair has built-in motives—passion, jealousy, general hot stuff. All they had to do was fix it so you were found dead there, then they could sit back and relax. Everything would fall on top of your bird girl . . . twang twang twang."

"Cut out that twanging!"

"I can't. The twang is the heart of it. Cut out the twang and all you've

got left is a bellyache that may be just from nerves. You have to follow the twang where it leads. It leads me to think about your first mild bellyache at home. Why so mild? Because they just wanted to lay you up for the day—so you wouldn't be needing your keys."

"What about my keys?"

"They wanted to get at your key ring. They knew you had a key to your girl's place. By this time they knew a lot about you and her. He'd probably followed you. You wouldn't have caught on, your brain being on the damp side. So he knows where she lives, where and when she works, that she buys Scotch for you, that she doesn't drink Scotch—"

"How could he possibly know all that?"

"How should I know? He probably followed her to the liquor store, maybe talked about her to the liquor-store man. All he needs now is a way to get into her apartment when she's out. So he has your wife slip a mild dose into your Scotch bottle at home, and as you lie in bed the next day your wife gets your key ring, has a duplicate made—"

"I have seventeen keys on my ring! How would my wife know which one is Mascarine's?"

"I don't know. Maybe she duplicates all seventeen. Then she returns your keys to your pants, gives the dupes to the doctor, and it's just a matter of him going over to the girl friend's place when she's out and trying the keys till he hits the right one, then slipping inside and finding your bottle of Scotch."

"You're saying Dr. Trivett poisoned my Scotch at Mascarine's?"

"Why shouldn't he?"

"What kind of poison did he use?"

"Whatever it was, he didn't use enough that night of the spaghetti feed. But you went to *him* to be checked out—which figured. He's your family doctor, your old buddy, you wouldn't go anywhere else. He tells you it's nothing physical, just nerves. Would he lie to you? Certainly not, you say. So he's happy to try again, this time increasing the dosage. And he and your wife have split town, as they did the time before, so they'll be off the scene. This time they're sure you're going to be found dead."

I spotted a flaw in the little reptile's reasoning and pounced on it. "But I *wasn't* found dead!"

"No, but you can't knock him for that—poisoning can be tricky. Look at Rasputin. They fed him everything but dynamite and it still wouldn't take. He was a boozier too."

I said, "This is all just fantasizing, showing off."

"You want evidence? Take the bottle of Scotch to an analyst—that is, if you haven't drunk it all."

"I haven't."

"That's what *you* say. You probably swilled it down without even knowing."

"That's a lie!" Picking up the phone, I debated throwing it at his head—but it seemed like he was reading my thoughts—he looked alert and quivery, ready to move in any direction. I decided he wasn't kidding, he probably *had* learned to move fast. If not, with a nature like his, he'd have been killed long ago.

Instead of throwing the phone at him, I dialed. When her sweet "Yiss?" sounded, I said, "Mascarine, how much is left in the bottle of Scotch?"

"What, Wambchop?"

"Look at the bottle of Scotch and tell me how much is in it."

"Aw wight."

I glared at Rhunk and he stroked his knuckles and smiled until Mascarine got back on the phone and said, "There's pwenty weft."

I snarled at Rhunk, "There's plenty left."

He nodded. "Good. Tell her not to drink any of it."

"I told you already—she doesn't drink Scotch!"

"Nobody does until the first time they do. Even *you* didn't."

"Oo are oo talking to?" asked Mascarine.

"She'd feel lousy," said Rhunk, "if she took a shot of it, and liked it, then died before she could drink any more."

I said to Mascarine, "Don't drink any Scotch."

"Oo'are oo talking to?"

"Somebody named Rhunk. A psychiatrist."

"Ah.. Yiss. A sykyatwiss." She knew what a psychiatrist was. She was far from stupid. She just had that individual way of speaking.

"Who's a psychiatrist?" asked Rhunk.

"What are oo doing wif a sykyatwiss?" asked Mascarine.

"Aren't you a psychiatrist?" I asked Rhunk.

"Who said I was?"

Mascarine said, "I don't understand. Why does a sykyatwiss want me not to dwink any Scotch that I never dwink anyway?"

I said, "I'm not sure he's a psychiatrist."

"You can be sure," said Rhunk. "I'm not."

I asked him, "Then what am I doing here?"

"You had a stomach problem."

"I still have."

"Maybe, maybe not. Depends on what shows in the bottle of Scotch."

"Miss Flidd led me to believe you were a psychia--"

"The Flidds were always mixed up."

"Oo is dis man?" cried Mascarine.

"He's not a psychiatrist."

"But oo is he?"

"I'll try to find out. Who are you?" I asked Rhunk.

"A consultant. I solve nerve problems."

"But the directory in the lobby says you're a doctor."

"Once a doctor, always a doctor--unless defrocked. I've never been defrocked."

"He's never been defrocked," I told Mascarine.

"Defwocked?"

"There's my diploma," said Rhunk, waving at the wall.

"I saw it, but it's so blurred and cobwebby I can't make it out."

"It's authentic enough. I earned it twenty-three years ago. DVM."

"He's a vet," I told Mascarine. "A dog doctor."

"I haven't practiced in twenty-one years," said Rhunk. "I've been too busy solving problems."

She asked, "Why is a dog doctor telling me not to dwink any Scotch?"

"Maybe I'd better let him tell you," I said, and gave him the phone.

He said, "The reason I'm telling you not to drink any Scotch is because it's probably poisoned. Note that I said 'probably'--I'm not leaving myself open to charges of defamation. If it's poisoned, it might not kill you or it might--but the important thing is that we want to keep what's in the bottle so that Hisp can take it to a lab and have it analyzed."

He listened a while, then scowled and handed the phone back to me. "Some kid's on the line."

I said, "Hello, Mascarine."

"What was the sykyatwiss talking about, Wambchop?"

"I don't know. Just don't drink the Scotch."

"Dis has been a vewwy stwange conversation."

I agreed, and hung up.

Rhunk said, "Get that bottle and take it to an analyst. If poison shows in it, you'll know why you've been getting bellyaches."

I got up from the kitchen chair and started to the door. Then it came to me what he had just said. I stopped. "If poison shows . . . what do you mean, *if*?"

"If means maybe yes, maybe no."

"But you've talked like you have no doubt about it!"

"I don't—about the way it *should* be. I took the information you gave me, put it together, and worked it out. This is the slickest solution you could ask for. Neat, no loose ends, everybody accounted for. But that's no guarantee it's what *really* happened."

"You mean this could all be a fantasy? No poison in the Scotch? My pains the result of business pressures after all?"

"Or too much boozing. Get the bottle analyzed and you'll know more."

As I went out the door, he called after me, "You've done your small part to assist in the creation of a masterpiece of logic."

I called back, "Bah!" and went to the elevator.

I went back to the plant. Miss Flidd was scurrying around with her hair spiky and her eyes frantic, slamming file drawers and looking for things nobody had wanted for years. She gave up panting and slamming to ask, "Did Rhunk help you?"

"I hate him."

"Yes, many people do. It's the way of the Rhunks. Your wife called. I told her where you had gone."

She turned, grabbed an armload of files from a drawer, and flung them around, crying, "I have to find the master copy of the Von Fong-Slidgestein prospectus. Where the hell is it?" She seldom swears, only when truly frantic. Tracking down that prospectus must have been one of the crowning achievements of her career back in the days when she had all her marbles. It was nice that at age eighty-two she could relive that time of glory.

I went to Mascarine's. She was asleep, stretched out on the sofa, pink and pretty, and the two roguish guppies were frolicking frivolously about in their tank. It was a pleasant scene, but there was work to be done. I got the bottle of Scotch and went out to find an analyst.

Just past midnight I called Rhunk at his office. It never occurred to me that he wouldn't be there. Where else would he be? A creature like

him wouldn't have a residence like a normal person; he probably slept under his desk.

His voice said, "Yeah?"

"I had the Scotch analyzed. It's loaded with arsenic. I called Dr. Trivett's office, but they said he's gone to an emergency seminar in Argentina. My wife is gone too. She left a note asking me to keep up the insurance premiums."

There was silence. I went on, "I asked around Mascarine's apartment building, and a couple of people there said they had seen another man letting himself into her apartment. They figured he was just some other man she knew. The way they described him, it was Dr. Trivett. And the man at the corner liquor store said that about a month and a half ago he was selling a bottle of Scotch to Mascarine, and she was telling him how it was for somebody else, she only drank papaya juice. Another customer was in there, and he seemed to be listening, and he was kind of smiling and nodding and stroking his chin in a sinister way. It could have been Trivett. So it was all exactly like you said."

"Oh."

"You sound disappointed."

"Not disappointed. It just kind of takes the edge off when a beautiful creation like that turns out to be merely a copy of reality. Makes me feel more like a bricklayer than an artist. Ah, well. What'd you call for?"

"To tell you you were right—and that you're an obnoxious reptile."

"O.K. Take care of your stomach, and say hi to Tondelayo."

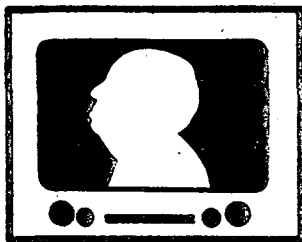
I hung up, and turned from the phone to the bed. There she lay, pink and smiling.

I went over. "Hi."

"Hi, Wambchop."

It was wonderful to know I was healthy—and that Leona was in Argentina.





CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

The Silent Partner starts out as well as any caper/crime film ought to. A mild, passive bank clerk (Elliott Gould) somehow learns that his establishment is about to be robbed. Seizing the moment, he hides away money everyone later thinks is part of the loot taken. Everyone, that is, except the robber himself, an unpredictable, twisted personality with a penchant for disguises (Christopher Plummer, contributing once again a thoughtful, good performance). He tracks down the clerk and chillingly warns him he now has "a silent partner." So starts a wickedly inventive cat-and-mouse thriller, with some sharp turns and some shocking surprises, made all the more pleasing because the film is not a standard Hollywood chaser but the product of a country relatively new to movie production: Canada.

There has been a flurry of mystery-movie activity in Canada, especially Toronto, the setting of *The Silent Partner*; hardly any of these films ever make their way into the United States. *The Clown Murders* turns a tycoon's prank into a night of terror. In *Between Friends* three hapless youths plot the robbery of a payroll. *Find the Lady* jovially has two bungling but vigilant police detectives track a kidnapped heiress (the wrong girl, it turns out) into hilariously sordid underworld haunts. The investigative *Panic*, in which a woman suspects a Montreal super-plant of industrial pollution, predates *The China Syndrome*. *A Man Called Intrepid*, that distinguished television miniseries about a real-life World War II spy king, was an Anglo-Canadian co-production. Similarly, Canadian TV's *Every Person Is Guilty*, in which a writer is pitted against

the Official Secrets Act, was a powerful, sinister thriller. But most interesting of all, however, is the news that a Canadian screen version of Ross Macdonald's *The Three Roads* will shortly be released.

The Three Roads is one of Macdonald's earliest novels (1948) and, unusual for him, it is written in the third person. "Which makes the book more filmable," producer Jerome Simon told COS in Toronto recently. In the story, an amnesiac veteran flees a mental hospital into a maze of murder. The movie, retitled *Double Negative*, has Michael Sarrazin, his mind cracked because he has been tortured by terrorists, discover his wife has been killed and, in solving her death, find the missing pieces in his own past. The postwar plot has been updated to the present and the setting changed from San Diego to Toronto, but this does not bother Simon unduly. After all, Paul Newman's sequel to *Harper*, *The Drowning Pool*, was switched from Los Angeles to New Orleans, and Ross Macdonald himself—whom one thinks of as synonymous with Southern California—called the relocation "refreshing." And, as Macdonald grew up mostly in Canada, *Double Negative* (also starring Susan Clark and Anthony Perkins) may yet capture his spirit if not his original setting.

Angela Lansbury is jubilant over the Tony award for her role of Mrs. Lovett, the meatpie-baking accomplice of villainous *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (more throat-slashings on stage than in any other musical in Broadway history!). Her association with our genre goes back to two of her earliest film roles: the maid in *Gaslight* and the pathetic suicide in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (both 1944). She also has been seen menacing an elderly recluse in *Kind Lady* (1957) and was chilling as the evil mother in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). Recently she has been moving back into melodrama full steam. Her contribution to *Death on the Nile* is outstanding—an eccentric novelist whose tipsy shipboard ramblings ("The old Nile's a bit choppy tonight") cause her to be witness to murder and, later, a victim. She is quite the best thing in the forthcoming remake of *The Lady Vanishes*—though as the disappearing Miss Froy (Dame May Whitty in the original) she is in less than half of the film. (The two leading characters in the Hitchcock source—an ordinary young woman and a bohemian folklorist—have been changed in this version into an American heiress and a *Life* photographer!)

Now she has been cast as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple by EMI, the producers of *Murder on the Orient Express* and *Death on the Nile*, whose

next project will be *The Mirror Crack'd*. (Warners had an eye on the book last year for Helen Hayes, but could not come to terms with the Christie estate.) Unlike Miss Hayes and Margaret Rutherford, who played Miss Marple in four films and a cameo, Lansbury may be a trifle young for the role—she is not yet in her mid-fifties.

H.G. Wells was indignant. "He comes into my home masquerading as an old friend and a legitimate physician, drinks my claret, devours the hors d'oeuvres, picks my brain, and uses my time machine!" The villain is Jack the Ripper—revealed as a pal of Wells's—who has just stolen his new time-travel device to zip into the San Francisco of 1979! Wells follows in pursuit, beginning *Time After Time*, a high-spirited new thriller directed by Nick Meyer from his own screenplay, based on the book by Karl Alexander.

Meyer certainly knows the Victorian settings which begin the film, having created *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*, in which Sherlock Holmes met Freud. He also co-wrote the teleplay, *The Night That Panicked America*, which documented the impact of the 1938 broadcast of H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*. He presents the young novelist-historian-futurist as being quite confused and dismayed by the fast modern pace and liberal instincts of the California city, however, while Jack falls right into step: "This is *my* world, Wells! I belong here and you don't! You're a misfit and a relic of the past!"

Buoyed up by the casual violence around him, Jack proposes to keep right on killing, while Wells—out to stop him—is terrified by street traffic, discos, the police, and the twentieth-century woman with whom he falls in love and who very likely will be the Ripper's next victim. It's all enjoyable—although you may not be satisfied with why, when Wells, as he must eventually, returns to continue his life in 1893, the prolific author does not reveal to his world that he has seen the future and it nearly works.

Billy Wilder's *Fedora*—about the secret of a mysteriously ageless actress—is a richly old-fashioned melodrama which reminds us that, although respected primarily for his bitter comedies, the writer-director has made significant contributions to our genre. In his Beverly Hills office Wilder recently discussed with COS his mystery films: "Once in a while I like to make one."

He was most expansive about *Double Indemnity* (1944). He had read the James M. Cain novel as a three-part serial in *Liberty* magazine, but could not get the author to do a screenplay as Cain was busy elsewhere in Hollywood. So Wilder began a collaboration with Raymond Chandler. It was a difficult union. Chandler was older, stern, disapproving, had never before worked on a motion picture, and had never collaborated before. Worse, he had trouble comprehending the visual demands of screenwriting. But his dialogue was right up to the mark, setting mood and character with a single telling line. Wilder knew he was working with a man who "had a touch of genius."

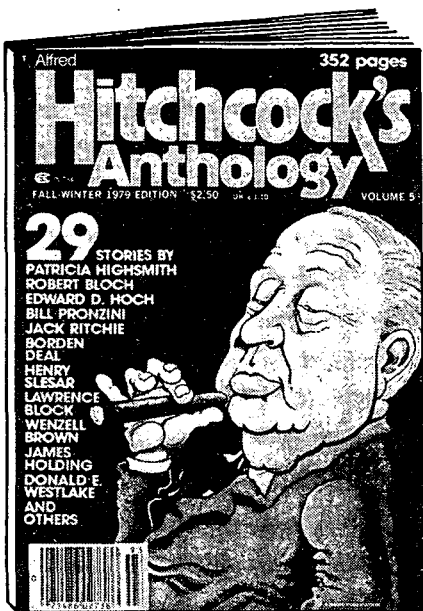
Although the core of *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957) is Agatha Christie's, the life in the characters is all Wilder's. He is particularly pleased that Christie once commented that of all the screen versions of her work *Witness* was the most satisfying and made the best use of her material. (This was before *Murder on the Orient Express*, which also pleased her.) Charles Laughton's role as the barrister who faces heart surgery yet still struggles to save his client—and in the end accepts yet another client—is one of Wilder's favorites.

Wilder has for most of his life been a Sherlock Holmes enthusiast, and waited for years to do *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970). As it was, he acknowledges the film may have been a little premature—the flood of Holmesian interest began only afterwards, and United Artists with little faith cut a half hour from the finished movie. As this is an intimate glimpse at a very vulnerable Holmes within a record of several new adventures, the dropping of two whole cases as well as some motivation—there are flashbacks to Holmes's schooldays gone as well—does the film almost mortal damage (though it is still very viewable). There are rumors of one complete print existing in London, but this does not concern Wilder. "I never look back." He does not rescreen his old triumphs; he prefers to work in the present.

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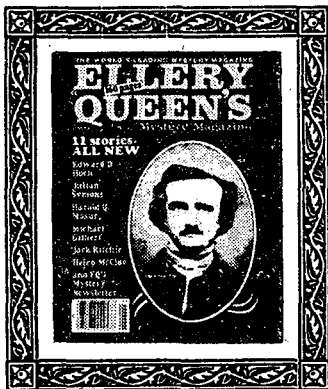
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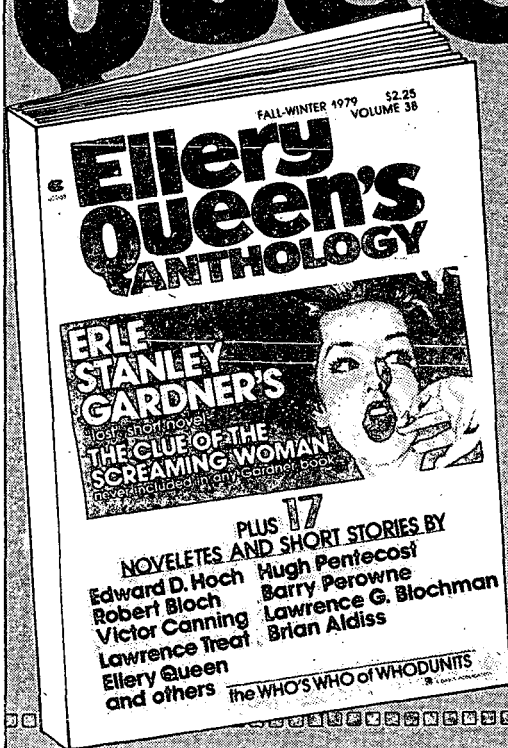
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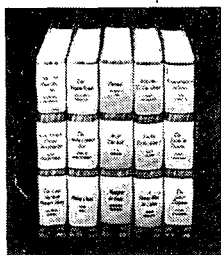
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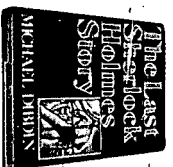
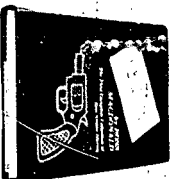
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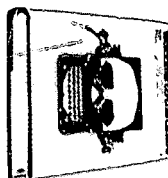
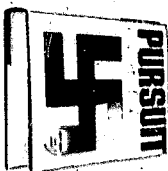
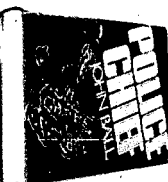
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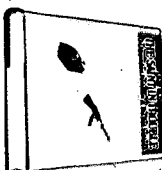
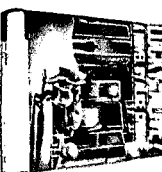
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