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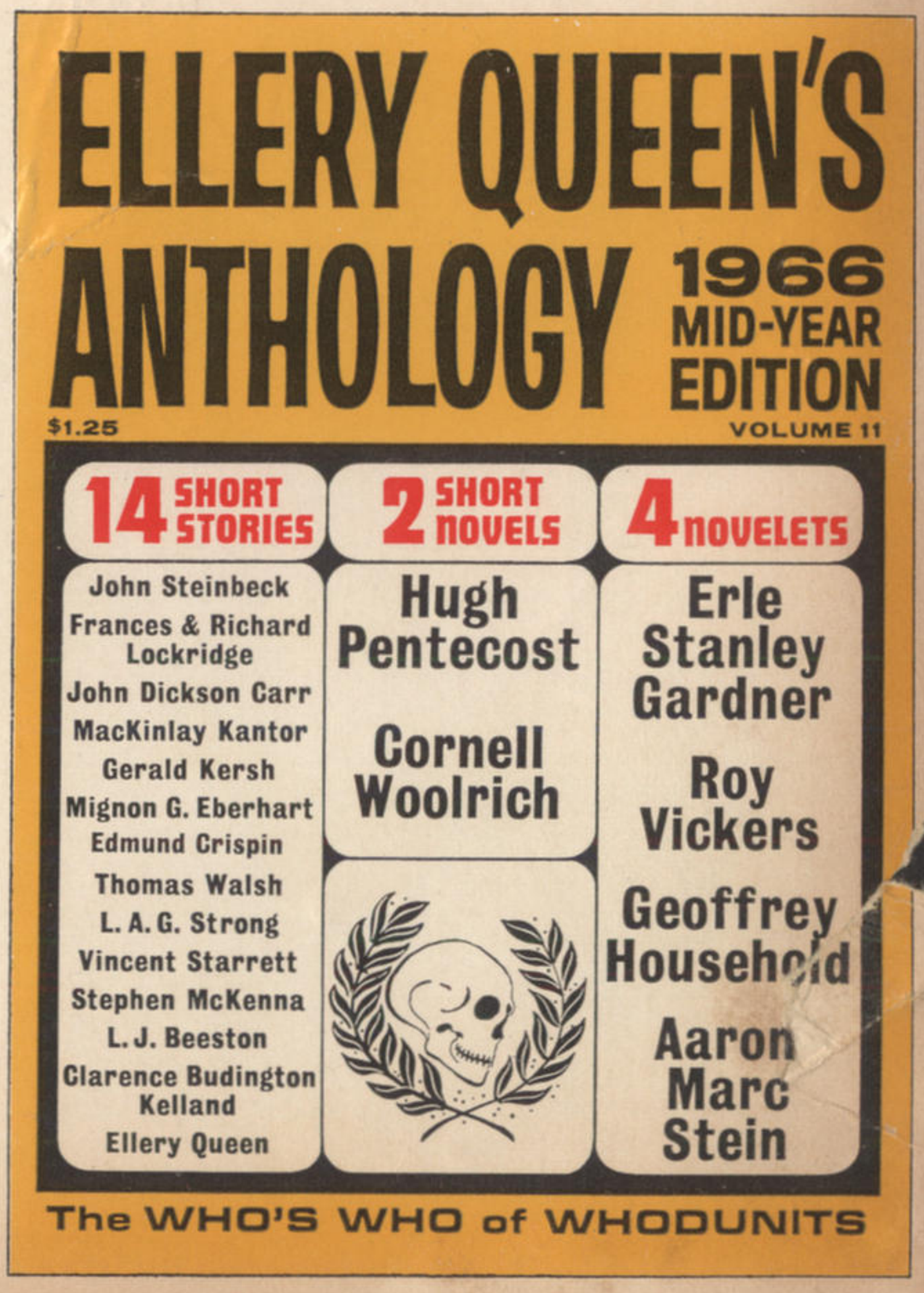

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the *NEWEST* Jericho *detective-adventure* story by

HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho, the huge painter-detective with the bright red beard, was more than a fine artist. He was a fighter in the arena of living-to-the-hilt—a champion of lost causes, a defender of the underdog . . . In this newest adventure Jericho goes after a girl watcher and the trail leads to a discothèque—where the action is, man, where the danger is—danger à go-go . . .

JERICHO AND THE À GO-GO CLUE

by HUGH PENTECOST

JERICHO'S SMILE WAS BRIGHT BUT dangerous.

"I love you," he said to the man with the crooked nose and dark curly hair, "because you are such an ingenious scoundrel. But I wouldn't trust you with a lollipop intended for Mrs. Markowitz's three-year-old granddaughter. You would steal me blind if you had half the chance. But I know you would always tell me the truth."

"What makes you think so?" asked the man with the crooked nose and dark curly hair; he was enjoying the game.

"Because if you didn't you know I'd break off your arm at the socket and beat you to death with it," Jericho said, taking a black curved-stem pipe from the pocket of his tweed jacket and beginning to fill it from a blue tobacco jar on the worktable beside his easel.

"So help me," the dark man said with a little shrug. He looked at an ashtray on a small table beside the big armchair facing the easel. There were four cigarette stubs in the ashtray.

"Let's get serious, Mike," Jericho said.

"So help me," Mike said again.

It was nearly midnight. Fluorescent lights had turned Jericho's studio into daylight. He often painted at night and the lighting was expensive and skillfully placed. It revealed a large two-story room with a huge skylight on the north side. The two regular windows in the room had heavy iron bars over them. The lock on the front door was heavy and not simple.

Jericho was often away from this studio in Jefferson Mews in Greenwich Village, and the iron bars and the special lock were a not unrea-

sonable precaution considering the value of the paintings stacked against the walls. Unlike the work of many living painters, Jericho's paintings were worth a great deal of money—while he was still in the full vigor of his productive years.

Jericho held a lighter to his pipe and stood scowling at the painting on the easel, his bright red beard jutting forward belligerently. He was a huge man, six feet four, with massive shoulders and the tapering waist of a ballet dancer. He looked like a throwback to some ancient Viking explorer. He gestured with his pipestem at the painting.

"What do you think of it?" he asked the dark man.

Mike Guffanti was the general handyman and janitor for the building. His crooked nose had come from an earlier career as a professional fighter. He respected Jericho because he knew Jericho could break him in two without expending much effort.

Mike looked at the painting and moistened his lips. It represented the life-sized figure of a nude girl, her ash-blonde head turned away so that you saw only the line of her jaw. But the rest was all there—the full breasts, the flat stomach, the broad hips, the tapering thighs, the delicate feet with scarlet-painted toes.

"I wouldn't want Bertha to know what it does to me," Mike said. Bertha was Mrs. Guffanti. The truth was, the painting did nothing to Mike. He'd been involved for ten years in a wild and violent love affair with his wife.

"It's no good," Jericho said. "I started to paint it two years ago and it didn't happen."

Mike's smile was a leer. "The lady wouldn't?"

"The lady would but I wouldn't," Jericho said. The memory put an impatient edge on his voice. "I wanted a model. She wanted something else. Interesting girl, though. Vassar graduate. Wanted to be an artist herself. But men were a problem."

"And you passed it up?" Mike asked wonderingly.

"Painting the nude figure is like calesthenics to an artist, Michael. You need to work at it once in a while to keep your painting muscles in shape. I wasn't interested in anything else at the time. But let's get to the point, my horse-stealing friend. You can't get into this apartment through the skylight without smashing it. The skylight is intact. You can't get through the windows without sawing through the iron bars. No one's even touched them. You can't get through the door without forcing the lock. It can't be picked and it hasn't been forced. Check?"

"Check," Mike said, nodding slowly.

"This painting was stacked behind dozens of others. It had worked its way to the back because I haven't looked at it or shown it

to anyone for two years. Now it's there on the easel. And someone sat in that armchair and smoked four cigarettes while he looked at it."

"'He'?" Mike said.

"No lipstick on the four butts."

"You're living in Fogeyville," Mike said. "Most of today's dolls don't wear lipstick."

"An academic point. He or she," Jericho said. "Now, Michael, since no one forced his way in here, this picture lover had to get in here with a key. You, Michael, have a key."

"So help me," Mike said.

"Then hazard an explanation," Jericho said.

"You forgot to lock the door when you went out."

"No. It locks itself and I always —automatically—make sure."

"I give up."

"Mike, if you let anyone in here to look at my pictures—"

"So help me!" Mike said, this time earnestly. Something in Jericho's bright blue eyes suggested danger. Mike glanced at the picture. "The woods are full of girl watchers, John. They go to the foreign films, they buy art magazines, they hang out at the discothèques —just watching. New sport." He chuckled. "That picture would make prize bait."

Something in Jericho's face made it look as if he'd gone far away. Then he hunched his big shoulders.

"Okay, Michael. But if it turns out you've been selling loge seats to these girl watchers, Bertha is going to have to find herself a new boy."

There are small events in the tapestry of the past that we remember from time to time because they were briefly warm and tender, or shocking, or even comic. We tend to forget them entirely until something in the present meshes with the past.

What Jericho thought of as *l'affaire Lauri* had been buried deep in the forgotten fog until he came home that night and found the nude study on his easel and the four cigarette butts in his ashtray. The memory of Lauri Trent had been buried under two years of excitement and violence and life lived to the hilt.

John Jericho was more than a fine artist. His life was dedicated to a search for some basic truth, to be expressed on canvas. But in the process of searching he had become a champion of lost causes, a fighter for the underdog, an enemy of bigotry and prejudice. Wherever there was violence you were apt to find Jericho—in the Congo, in Algiers, in Vietnam, in New York's Harlem, on the campus at Berkeley.

Lauri Trent had been an in-between moment. An artist friend had asked Jericho to lecture to an art class and hold an open forum after the lecture. Jericho had

agreed. Like most teachers, he had been reminded in the process of lecturing of the fundamentals of his craft—fundamentals he had begun to take for granted. He decided he needed to go back to those fundamentals—specifically, back to painting the human figure.

After his lecture that night he put up a notice on the bulletin board at the art school asking for a model. Lauri Trent, ash-blonde and lush, had appeared at Jefferson Mews the next day, asking for the job. He assumed she was a professional model. Nothing in the way she took off her clothes and assumed a pose on the model stand gave him any reason to doubt it.

He had worked in silence on a nude of Lauri with all his tremendous energy, pausing only when he saw lines of fatigue on the girl's face. In the brief rest periods, over coffee and cigarettes, they had talked. Lauri proved to be a surprise. She had been graduated from Vassar. She wanted to be an artist herself. Apparently, modeling was a way to pay the grocer. Her wit was quick and sharp, her conversation amusing and stimulating.

Then, suddenly, in the middle of the third day's work she broke a pose without asking his permission.

"Damn you, aren't you a man at all?" she asked bitingly.

Then it all came boiling out of her.

She didn't need modeling pay. She had no money problems. In fact, she had never modeled before. She had been in the class where Jericho had lectured. He was more man than she'd ever encountered, and she wanted him and set out to get him. Now she'd had enough of waiting for him to see her as a woman, not merely an object to paint. She couldn't understand that when Jericho was concentrating on his work, he would have been unmoved by the Queen of Sheba or Cleopatra.

At the time Jericho was so annoyed with her demands that he sent her packing. Later he thought it would have cost him nothing to have let her down more gently—without so much damage to her pride. He reminded himself to remind himself the next time that there was a kinder way to get rid of an amorous dame than by slapping her on the behind and telling her to grow up.

That had been *l'affaire Lauri*—the whole of it, and almost forgotten until tonight.

Lauri Trent wasn't listed in the phone book. If Jericho had ever had her phone number it was long since hopelessly buried in a mass of scribbled notes and drawings in his desk. He didn't remember her address, but he had walked her home one night during the modeling period and he remembered the small, brick apartment house on Jane Street, only a few blocks away from the Mews.

Jericho had a kind of personal radar system, sensitive to danger no matter how remote. The picture on the easel obviously dug out from the very back of a stack of other paintings, the cigarette stubs, and Mike Guffanti's remarks about girl watchers—all this had produced a feeling of uneasiness. These days the meaningless violence against young women in the city seemed to be a part of each morning's news—part of a dark anarchy that seemed to have taken hold of a new generation.

Jericho walked out into the night and headed for Jane Street.

Lauri Trent's name was in the buzzer plate in the lobby of the little brick house on Jane Street. The clicking sound in the lock began almost the instant Jericho pressed the buzzer. He stepped into the main hall. From the second floor he heard Lauri's throaty voice calling down to ask who it was.

"Jericho."

He thought he could hear the quick intake of breath. Then: "Well! Come on up, Maestro."

Looking at her, framed in the doorway of her apartment, Jericho thought perhaps he had been a fool after all. She was quite a woman. She had on a pleated, rather full green skirt and a white wool top with a very low V-cut. She was wearing a pair of white gloves and carrying a dark-green leather bag.

"Fate deals in seconds," she said. "Another minute and I'd have been gone, Maestro. The discothèque around the corner begins to get interesting about this time of night." Her smile was provocative. "I honestly didn't think it would take you two years to get around to this. Come in."

Jericho hesitated and then went into the apartment. The living room was small, but done in excellent taste. There were several paintings on the walls—Lauri's, he suspected—and one expensively framed reproduction of the head of an agonized Congolese woman that Jericho had done several years before.

"Somehow she seems to represent all the sad and savage people in the world," Lauri said. She was slowly pulling off her white gloves.

"I'm not going to keep you from your discothèque," Jericho said.

A little nerve twitched high up on her pale cheek.

"It hasn't taken me two years to make up my mind about us, baby," Jericho said. "But something happened tonight that relates to you and it disturbs me."

He told her about the visitor to his apartment and the interest in his painting of her.

Her smile was thin. "It was at the very back of all the pictures stacked there?"

He nodded.

"You never looked at it in two years?"

"It was a bad painting," he said.

"Maybe you disturbed me more than I realized at the time."

So much for kindness, he thought.

"What disturbs you now?" she asked. He could see that she was fighting disappointment and anger. Perhaps he shouldn't have come.

"It occurs to me that someone has an unhealthy interest in you," he said. "It could have unpleasant consequences."

"Does all sex have unpleasant connotations for you, Maestro?"

"Oh, nuts!" Jericho said. "One piece of education for you, Lauri. Most men like to make their own passes. I simply thought I should warn you about what happened tonight. I didn't come here to renew something that never existed."

"I suppose I should be flattered that some goon is interested in what I look like without my clothes on," Lauri said.

"I thought you should be warned. There are characters floating around who don't play by any known rules."

"I think it would be nice if you got the hell out of here," Lauri said. "Now."

A heavy mist, typical of a warm October night, had settled over the city as Jericho walked back along Jane Street toward Greenwich Avenue. He was kicking himself mentally for having bothered with Lauri Trent. These young people were tough enough to take care of themselves. Still, his conscience was clear. He had delivered the warning.

Traffic in the village had diminished to an occasional car. A misty halo surrounded the street lights. Jericho had gone about half a block when he heard it—the sound of quick footsteps behind him.

Jericho slowed down.

The steps that followed him also slowed down.

So! There was something in his hunch.

Jericho made the turn onto Greenwich Avenue and instantly flattened himself against the wall of the adjoining shop. Around the corner, under a full head of steam, came his pursuer.

Jericho's huge hand closed over a wrist and wrenched the pursuer to a halt. In the dim glow of the street light he looked into a dark face, twisted with sudden fear. Damp dark hair, long in the current fashion, almost obliterated the forehead.

"What can I do for you?" Jericho asked, dangerously cheerful.

Hate took the place of fear in the young man's face. Lips drew back over very white teeth.

"You damn lecher!" the young man said.

It was so quick that even a prepared Jericho found himself caught off guard. The knife blade was bright, even in the dim light. Jericho twisted to avoid the vicious thrust at his stomach—and his foot

slipped on the wet pavement. To keep from falling he had to release his hold on the young man's wrist.

He heard the ripping of cloth as the knife tore at his jacket, miraculously missing flesh and bone. Jericho swung, backhanded, at the grinning face and had the satisfaction of feeling the solid connection of his fist with the young man's jaw. The knife wielder staggered, but in the seconds it took Jericho to regain his own equilibrium the man was racing away into the fog.

Jericho took three or four quick steps after the man, then stopped. The running figure had disappeared into the gloom and the sound of flying footsteps had been absorbed by the wet darkness. Jericho stood there, automatically feeling the torn left sleeve of his tweed jacket.

It was 100-to-1, Jericho told himself, that the young man with the knife had been the girl watcher who had visited his studio earlier that night. Anger began to boil in Jericho. He headed back toward the brick building on Jane Street where Lauri Trent lived.

He was just approaching when he saw her. She was standing outside the front door of the building, staring intently, first one way and then the other, up and down Jane Street. Jericho paused in the shadows, watching. Then, briskly, Lauri started walking west along Jane Street.

Before Lauri reached her destination Jericho could hear the music. It was a steady rock-and-roll beat. A neon sign came into view—*Charlie à Go-Go*. Lauri walked into the place without hesitation. "The discothèque around the corner begins to get interesting about this time of night," she had told Jericho.

A blast of sweet hot air engulfed Jericho as he walked into *Charlie à Go-Go*. The place was jammed with gyrating young people. A four-piece combo beat out its rhythms on a raised bandstand. High above the stand, in the corners, were two gilt-painted cages in which two scantily clad girls jumped and bounced and ground out the curious patterns of what is called dancing these days. On the floor dozens of couples twisted and turned, arms waving, facing each other but never touching.

There was a bar at the far end of the room and Lauri had gone straight to it. A young man with hair as blond as hers seemed to be waiting for her. The blond heads bent closely together, and the young man seemed unable to keep his hands off Lauri—nor did she seem to mind. You had to get close together in *Charlie à Go-Go* to carry on a conversation over the din of shouting and singing and almost primitive screaming that came from the dancers.

Jericho started to move toward the bar. At first it was almost impossible for him to make any headway. Faces grinned at him; he saw

excitement for something he didn't have to offer. Suddenly there was a kind of pathway for him, and then, as he reached the center of the floor there was a wide circle of empty space.

The noise had not decreased. It was augmented now by rhythmic clapping. Jericho realized he was the center of attention. Everyone was looking at him, jiggling, clapping, but ringing him on all sides.

He glanced at the bar. Lauri's young man had lifted her up onto the bar and had joined her there, sitting. There was a tense kind of ugly hunger on her face as she stared at the big red-bearded man, suddenly alone in the center of the floor.

Jericho turned—and understood.

Half a dozen young men had come in behind him, onto the inner space left vacant by the dancers. They had fanned out in a half moon, edging in toward him a mincing step at a time. In the center of this group Jericho recognized the dark angry face of the young man who had attacked him on Jane Street only a short time ago.

Jericho felt a small satisfaction as he saw a trickle of blood running down from the corner of the young man's mouth. The six open switchblade knives were something else again.

Jericho took a quick look around the room, mildly incredulous. The music went on. The dancers still twisted and clapped. Only the two girls in the raised cages had stopped their gyrations, crowded forward, looking down with a kind of unwholesome eagerness at the drama unfolding on the dance floor.

The half moon closed in tighter on Jericho. He heard a sudden sour note from the bass player in the combo.

Jericho measured distances with the calm of a laboratory technician. He was gambling that the reflexes of the six young men in the contracting semicircle were not trained.

Then Jericho made his move. Somehow people always expect a big man to be slow and clumsy, relying on brute strength. Jericho was in and out like an expert fencer.

He grabbed the end man of the half circle. A quick twist and a knife went slithering across the dance floor. Then Jericho was back in his original position, the man in front of him a shield, one of his arms twisted behind him in an agonizing armlock.

"Quiet!" Jericho shouted, and it was thunder.

The music stopped in mid-bar. The dancers were motionless. There was a shrill scream of excitement from a girl, and then an uneasy silence. Somewhere in the background an exhaust fan hummed steadily, and a glass clinked on the bar.

"Before we talk," Jericho said, sounding irrationally reasonable,

"let me point out where we stand. If anyone thinks of rushing me let me tell you that one hand-edged blow here—just above the Adam's apple—will kill this punk dead as a mackerel. So to get at me you'll have to take his life. Clear?"

And Jericho smiled.

"Now you with the bloody mouth," Jericho said. "I take it you think Lauri Trent is your girl. I take it you were told I was molesting her—had molested her in the past. To prove her point she gave you a key to my studio."

Bloodymouth's hand moved unconsciously to a trouser pocket.

"I remembered after we met on Jane Street that when Lauri was posing for me I had once lent her my key. Lauri had plans for me, so I imagine she had a duplicate made. She gave you that duplicate and you went to my place and looked at the nude study of Lauri I'd painted. And you decided, as she'd told you, that I was a dirty old lecher.

"Now, friend, I'll tell you how it is." Jericho's smile wasn't the least bit reassuring. "It's a game, friend, a nasty little game—with Lauri as the master player. We all play games in life, consciously and unconsciously. A very bright psychiatrist named Dr. Eric Berne has written a book about it, and he's given some amusing titles to the games we play.

"One of them is called, 'Let's You And Him Fight.' It's as old as romance, as old as woman. The woman sets it up so that two men fight for her, with herself as the prize to the winner.

"But there's a variation—Lauri's variation. It might be called, 'Let's You And Him Fight While I Go Off With Number Three.' Take a look over at the bar, friend. That's what it's all about. You are urged to fight me, the old lecher. No matter how it comes out, our clever little Lauri gets rid of you and goes off with chum over there. I kill you, and she's free of you. You kill me and she's free of you—because she'll go to the police, with crocodile tears, telling them how terribly, terribly jealous you are, and you'll spend the rest of your life in the laundry at Sing Sing. And she will have paid me off for the crime of ignoring her charms. You and I, friend, were meant to be the great big suckers in Lauri's charade."

Jericho made a sudden move and the young man he'd been using as a shield went spinning off into the crowd of dancers.

"One last piece of advice, friend," he said. "Don't try to punish Lauri for this. If you did I'd have to tell the cops. Clever Lauri will suffer enough as it is. Let it lay, friend."

Jericho turned his back on the young men and looked at the bar. Lauri sat there, frozen. Suddenly she turned to the blond man.

"Take me out of here," she said, her voice harsh.

"I advise against it, chum," Jericho said. "You may be the next

leading man in Lauri's go-go-around."

The blond young man stared at Lauri as though she were suddenly contagious. Lauri jumped off the bar and ran for the door.

Tension snapped. The trumpet player on the bandstand began to play the cavalry charge. The dancers were suddenly hooting and screeching at the flying Lauri. As she disappeared through the door, the steady beat of the bass player took up the dance rhythms and the dancers were at it again, with something like hysteria. The girls in the cages began once more to gyrate.

Jericho turned to the young man with the cut mouth.

"Buy you a drink?" he suggested.

Another gripping adventure of the Photographer, also known as the Nullifier, in which Manuel Andradas, paid assassin of the Corporation, of the Big Ones, proves himself as unusual a combination of criminal-and-criminologist, as unexpected a merging of malefactor-and-manhunter, as uncommon a fusion of felon-and-ferret, as you have ever encountered—in print, that is. Manuel Andradas is indeed a man to be reckoned with . . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE JEWELER

by JAMES HOLDING

MANUEL ANDRADAS LOOKED AT the name that Rodolfo had written in pencil on the edge of the menu and said with mild disapproval, "It is a woman."

Rodolfo's long lips curled. "Why not? A woman is as easy as a man."

"Easier," Manuel agreed. "But afterwards, they are not as easy to forget."

"Pangs of conscience? Don't make me laugh." Rodolfo grimaced. "Arrange it artistically, as you would a photo. After all, you are a photographer." Rodolfo laughed softly at this witticism, momentarily exposing his rotting teeth.

Manuel said, "How much are the Big Ones willing to pay to have this woman's picture taken?"

Rodolfo shrugged. "Half a million."

"Half a million!" Manuel did not raise his voice but it was violently expressive of anger and disappointment. "Only half a million cruzeiros when inflation squeezes Brazil like a mouse in a snake's gullet? And to nullify a woman?"

"No arguments." Rodolfo, who was Manuel's only contact in Rio with the Corporation, the Big Ones, spread his hands. "That is the price, photographer. The Corporation has given a special discount on this one."

Manuel said stubbornly, "They can lower their selling price if they wish, but the cost remains the same. One million, Rodolfo, eh? Like all my previous assignments?" Andradas prized money above all things. To contemplate losing half a million cruzeiros caused him actual physical pain, a sort of tight, harsh wrenching of the stomach.

"The Big Ones have other agents," Rodolfo said indifferently. "Any of them would be glad to oblige us for half a million."

Manuel knew that was true. With what grace he could muster, therefore, he said, "Well, I happen to be

free now. So I accept the assignment, Rodolfo. Reluctantly, however."

"*Va bem*," Rodolfo said. "Very well." He wrote an address beneath the woman's name on the menu's edge, turned it so Manuel could see it. Manuel committed the name and address to memory automatically. After a moment Rodolfo tore the menu into tiny pieces and dropped the fragments into his jacket pocket.

Manuel felt put upon. "She lives at São Paulo," he said. "You will pay my travel expenses?"

"Of course. As usual."

"Is there a time limit?"

"It must be done between Wednesday morning and Saturday night of this week. Without fail. Extreme care on this point, you understand?"

"Certainly," Manuel replied with dignity. "I am always careful."

Rodolfo looked for a brief moment into the Photographer's muddy eyes and only with great difficulty managed to suppress a shudder. "Yes," he said, "one must admit you are careful." He took a sip of his inky coffee. "This is Sunday. Will you be able to leave for São Paulo at once?"

"Yes. I told you I have no other commitments for the moment. And I like to look over the ground a bit."

"*Bom.* Stay at The Aranhos Hotel."

"I prefer the Esplanda."

"Not this time. The Corporation owns The Aranhos, now. The Big Ones are going legitimate, didn't you know? Making investments in respectable businesses, like our sister organization in North America. So stay at The Aranhos Hotel, Photographer."

Rodolfo showed his teeth again. "That's an order." He finished with ill-concealed contempt, "You will be safer there. And your expense account will be more in keeping with the cut-rate job you are doing."

Manuel's anger made him bold. "I still say half a million is niggardly. Will you ask your principals to reconsider?"

"I'll ask them. But they won't. I happen to know that they've not only given this client a discount, but they are actually doing the job for him on credit."

On credit! Manuel hid his surprise. "Ah," he murmured, "I see." He finished his *cafezinho*. Then the two men rose from their table in the shabby café on Avenida Rio Branco and strolled outside.

When they shook hands at parting, Rodolfo left in Manuel's palm a thick pad of banknotes.

It is a seven-hour bus ride from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo. Manuel could have flown the distance in an hour, but he felt he needed time to think before beginning this assignment. So after a hurried drink of cashew juice at the bus terminal to steady his nerves, he mounted the São Paulo bus, sank into a rear seat, and closing his eyes, fell at once into meditation.

None of the other bus passengers

gave more than a passing glance to this sallow, fine-boned man with the camera case slung over his shoulder. He was quite inconspicuous in appearance except for rather large hands and a disproportionate muscularity of forearm that stretched his coat sleeves as tightly as sausage skins.

His anger at the Big Ones who indifferently offered him—an experienced and reliable man—only half of his usual fee to "nullify" a woman, continued to smolder. Rodolfo's superior airs and his contemptuous certainty that the Photographer would accept a bargain assignment without quibble, rankled. Did the Corporation, then, think that a craftsman as wily and efficient as Manuel Andradas was so easily come by that he could be humiliated with impunity? Manuel's professional pride was hurt.

The bus thundered southward. Outside its windows a beneficent sun shone down on spreading banana plantations, on row after row of coffee trees stretching away as far as the eye could reach. The bus began to climb by easy stages to the high plateau on which São Paulo sits. Drifts of *jaragua* blossoms clothed the hillsides, pink and white blooms growing companionably side by side on the same bushes.

But Manuel saw none of this. He continued to brood with closed eyes, going over and over in his mind his conversation with Rodolfo. He realized that his usual cool detachment toward his work had been seriously weakened. Against all precedent, he had allowed himself to become emotionally involved in a job. His disinclination to nullify the woman in São Paulo, whoever she might be (and at half price!), grew too strong to be ignored.

By the time the bus brought him to São Paulo in late afternoon he had reached a decision.

He registered at The Aranhos Hotel as directed under his own name. After an hour's nap he descended from his room to the hotel dining room and ate a hearty dinner, although the *churrasco*, savory as it was with onions and peppers flavoring the grilled beef, tasted no better than sawdust on Manuel's atrophied taste buds. After dinner he set out to find the address Rodolfo had written on the menu's edge. It turned out to be a large ornate golden-stone mansion set in spacious grounds just off Avenida Paulista.

Manuel nodded when he saw it, and without entering the grounds, returned directly to his hotel, walking slowly and contemplatively like any man taking an innocent post-prandial constitutional.

He stopped to select a magazine at the newspaper counter in the hotel lobby. The girl behind the counter seemed bored; she welcomed his purchase with an animated smile. While choosing his periodical, Manuel idly asked her who lived in the golden-stone house he had just

noticed while taking his after-dinner walk. He described the house and its location.

"That is the home of Senhor and Senhora Montini," she informed him. "It is one of the city's showplaces. Beautiful, is it not?"

"Senhor Montini must be very rich," Manuel offered.

"Millionaires," she answered enviously. "But it is not Senhor Montini who is rich. It is his wife."

"Ah?" said Manuel, investing the syllable with disinterest and pretending to turn away.

The girl spoke eagerly then, trying to hold him. "Senhora Montini is really Consuelo Gonçalves, the owner of our largest jewelry firm. You've heard of Gonçalves Jewelers, haven't you?"

"Vaguely."

"The firm is eight generations old. Senhora Montini is the last of the family. She inherited the entire business. She's clever, too—runs the company like a man. But she's not attractive, you understand. And quite old. Older than her husband. It's no secret in São Paulo that he married her for her millions."

"Is *he* attractive?" Manuel asked lightly.

"Extremely so. But an idler, they say. He sometimes comes here for luncheon. He is very fond of our *camaroes a la Grec*."

"Doesn't he work at all?"

"Not really, they say. Officially, of course, he is the manager of Gonçalves Jewelers."

"A nice life," Manuel said. "Well, good night, Senhorita. Perhaps tomorrow it will be cooler, eh?"

"Perhaps," the girl answered "Good night."

Manuel slept well. When he went down for breakfast, he carried one of his cameras with him, the new Polaroid. He took a cup of coffee at a stall not far from the hotel.

The waiter there directed him to the building which contained the offices and main showrooms of Gonçalves Jewelers—a modern skyscraper on the Triangle, obliquely facing the Banco do Estado.

Manuel entered boldly, rode up four floors in a stainless steel elevator, stepped off into the hushed and expensive atmosphere of the Gonçalves reception room, and asked the receptionist if he might be lucky enough to see Senhor Montini on a matter of advertising. No, no appointment, *perdao*, but perhaps—

While she telephoned, he looked around him at the glass-topped cases displaying jewelry of Gonçalves' manufacture. Ceiling spotlights winked on aquamarines, amethysts, tourmalines, topazes, beryls, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds in hundreds of cunning and attractive settings. The sight quite dazzled Manuel. Quiet-voiced female clerks waited obsequiously on some early customers, most of whom looked to Manuel like North American tourists.

He was received with suspicious

promptness by Senhor Montini—as though, Manuel thought, the jeweler might for some reason be particularly curious this week about strangers from Rio. Manuel was led to a corner office, from the high windows of which he could see in two directions the proliferating steel and concrete of a city gone construction-mad.

Senhor Montini was tall and swarthy with a fine manly mustache and an almost effeminate elegance of dress. As he stood up to greet his visitor, Manuel thought he detected tension and perhaps fear behind Montini's dark eyes, but he couldn't be sure.

Manuel introduced himself as a commercial photographer from Rio who had done work for the jewelry firms of Stern, Amsterdam and Maximino (as indeed he had) and who was taking advantage of an unexpected trip to São Paulo to solicit similar photographic assignments from Gonçalves. If Senhor Montini happened to have the brochures of those firms handy, he said, they would confirm the quality of his work; Manuel had unfortunately neglected to bring with him any actual samples of his own.

Montini listened to this salesman's chatter with what Manuel diagnosed hopefully as relief. "Yes, yes, Senhor," he said brusquely, "but my wife, the proprietress of Gonçalves Jewelers, must be consulted on matters of this kind. You must see her, not me."

"Thank you," Manuel returned. "*Muito obrigado*." He stood up. "You have been most kind. I shall make an appointment with Senhora Montini, then, if I may?"

"Ask the receptionist to check with her secretary," Montini said. "*Até logo*."

"Good day."

Back in the reception room, Manuel arranged an appointment with Senhora Montini for eleven o'clock the next morning. Descending in the elevator, he left the Gonçalves building and crossed the road to a bench in Triangle Park from which he could keep the building entrance under observation. There, for more than an hour, he sat basking comfortably in the sunlight, awaiting the luncheon hour and silently willing Senhor Montini to come out of the building alone.

At last the handsome husband of Consuela Gonçalves Montini appeared—unaccompanied and evidently aimless, for he hesitated perceptibly on the sidewalk before turning toward Avenida Ypiranga.

Only then did Manuel leave his bench, take his Polaroid camera from its case, and stroll unhurriedly after Senhor Montini.

He was prompt for his appointment with Senhora Montini next day. Eleven o'clock found him bowing politely to the former Consuela Gonçalves in her office, which was larger and more richly furnished than her husband's. She was, as the

newspaper girl had told him, unattractive. Her legs were thick and quite bowed; her hair was a faded yellowish gray and carelessly groomed; she was under five feet tall; but the sharp blue eyes that measured him were alive with intelligence, and her smile was unexpectedly warm and beguiling.

"My secretary says you are a photographer from Rio," she greeted him pleasantly. "What do you want?"

Manuel said bluntly, "I want a million cruzeiros, Senhora."

She stared. "Are you mad?"

"Two days ago," said Manuel, "I sat in a café in Rio and heard a man offered half a million cruzeiros to murder you. Surely it is worth twice that amount to save your life?"

Slowly she sat down behind her massive desk. Then, characteristically, she went to the meat of his statement. "You say you heard a man being offered money to murder me? Me? Consuela Gonçalves? You are mistaken, surely."

"No. I saw your full name and address written in pencil on a menu's edge—Senhora Consuela Gonçalves Montini. There is no possible mistake."

She regarded him narrowly with those clear blue eyes for a long minute, then said in a businesslike voice, "Tell me about it."

"I was drinking coffee in a café and happened to overhear a conversation between two men who sat at the next table," Manuel began. "One was a hired assassin, evidently, the other a representative of some organization he called the 'Corporation'." Then Manuel, whose memory was as photographic as his cameras, recounted to Senhora Montini the conversation he himself had had with Rodolfo, word for word.

When he finished, she said incredulously, "If this is true, you should have told the police. Instead, you come here to try to blackmail me?" She stretched out a hand toward the telephone on her desk. "*I* shall call the police immediately. You can tell them this silly story."

Manuel raised his muddy eyes to her blue ones and said quietly, without emphasis, "Wait, Senhora. It is possible you may not, in the end, want the police to know of this."

"Why not, in God's name? It is, after all, a planned murder, if true. *My* murder, furthermore."

Manuel soothed her. "Frantic haste is unnecessary. You can call the police shortly if you wish. But first, let us discuss your danger reasonably. Between us we may be able to deduce who it is who wants you dead."

"You just said it was some corporation. The Big Ones, whoever they are."

"True. But there was a client mentioned, remember? Who could that be? What individual or individuals would want you murdered,

Senhora? And for what reason? This is what you must ask yourself."

"I already have," she said sharply, impatiently. "And the answer is that no one wants me murdered."

"Let us approach it another way, then, if you please. Who would benefit financially from your death, Senhora? You are very rich, *nao?*"

"My husband is the sole beneficiary in my will," she said slowly. "But to suggest that he wishes me murdered is to be not only ridiculous but insulting, Senhor Andradas." Her blue eyes flashed fire at him.

Manuel said apologetically. "He shares in your jewelry business?"

"Some of the income, of course. He owns no stock, however. It is my family's business. Left to me only. But I have no children, so it will go to my husband if I should predecease him." She added wistfully, "I *am* somewhat his elder in years."

"So. He would inherit Gonçalves Jewelers—ownership and management—if you are killed?"

"Yes."

"That is at least a beginning, then," said Manuel. "There are several interesting points in the conversation I have just related to you. Let us consider them in the light of your husband's possible involvement." He held up a peremptory hand as Senhora Montini began indignantly to protest. "First, the Corporation gave this client who wants you killed a 'special discount.' Why?"

She said nothing, her silence a sneer.

Manuel answered his own question. "If the Corporation's client is your husband, Senhora, that discount on your murder price might be significant. A favor done for value received, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose you are murdered. Your husband inherits control of this very lucrative business. He can then do the Corporation a very great favor in return for that discount, don't you see?"

"What favor?"

"He can permit the Corporation to invest in your company—to buy, perhaps, a controlling interest from him. The Corporation representative mentioned quite frankly, you will recall, that the Big Ones are going legitimate these days, investing their dishonest gains in respectable businesses like The Aranhos Hotel. Like Gonçalves Jewelers, too, perhaps. You see?"

"But that's utterly fantastic!"

"Why fantastic? Have *you* ever been willing to sell any of your family-held stock to outsiders?"

"Of course not. But—"

"Then that, also, provides us with a possibility. Let us continue. The Corporation representative told this hired assassin that not only was a discount being allowed on the price of your murder, but that the killing was being done 'on credit.' That struck me as especially significant. It may be the one fact that could

exonerate your husband from all suspicion in this matter."

"You are talking nonsense," Senhora Montini said stoutly. "No suspicion attaches to him anyway." But a faint frown of doubt had appeared on her forehead.

" . . . unless," Manuel went serenely on, "your husband would have difficulty in raising half a million cruzeiros in cash? This I cannot believe. He is, after all, the husband of a very wealthy woman."

She said slowly, "I give him plenty of money for all his needs. Half a million cruzeiros—"

Manuel interrupted. "Does he have any bad habits through which he may dissipate the funds you supply him? Habits which might bring him into the orbit of such an organization as the Big Ones? Does he, for example, use narcotics? Does he—" Manuel hesitated—"does he keep a mistress, perhaps, or chase chorus girls? Does he gamble for large stakes?"

Senhora Montini flushed scarlet. "He never looks at another woman!" she said furiously. More reasonably, she added after a moment, "It is true that he sometimes gets the fever to gamble, however."

"Ah! Then that might explain the Corporation's extending credit to him for your murder. He is momentarily embarrassed for funds, let us say, having lost his ready cash to *them*, the Big Ones, who no doubt control gambling throughout Brazil."

Senhora Montini stood up, pressed her hands against her mouth, and cried in muffled anguish, "Stop it! Stop it! You shall not say such things about my husband—he loves me! My wealth is nothing to him—nothing. It is *me* he loves. That he would hire someone to murder me is too inconceivable to believe! I forbid you to say another word!" She reached for her telephone again.

"One more moment only, please," said Manuel. "Let us work this out for your own sake, Senhora. I assure you solemnly that unless you do, I am convinced you will be very dead before the week is out. The conversation I overheard was no joke. By the way, was your husband himself in Rio last Sunday, by any remote chance?"

"Yes. His mother lives there. He went for a week-end visit. Unfortunately, I could not accompany him." She said this with reluctance.

"Unfortunately is the proper word, Senhora. Let us adduce other evidence."

"What more?" She spoke without confidence now, a thread of desperation audible in her voice.

"Has your husband any plans, perhaps, for being out of the city this week? Or being away from his home and office?" Manuel leaned back in his chair and put his large hands flat on his knees, waiting for her reply with some anxiety.

"Damn you!" she cried. "You're a devil!"

"I am merely trying to save your life, Senhora . . . Well?"

"He has arranged to enter the City Hospital this week for an exhaustive series of tests. He thinks he has an ulcer." Senhora Montini brushed a hand across her eyes before she sank back into her chair and stared at Manuel.

He said in a voice that showed respect and sympathy for her but disguised his own feeling of triumph, "When?"

"He's to go in tomorrow morning —Wednesday—and stay till Saturday evening," she said miserably. "But—but—"

Manuel stood up and approached her. "It is a horrible nightmare to you," he said. "I am aware of that. But you must believe it is true. I did not tell you the sequel to that conversation I overheard in Rio."

"Sequel?"

"Yes. After the two men parted—the assassin and the Corporation man—the Corporation representative came back into the café where I was sitting and was soon joined by another man. Their talk left no doubt that this newcomer was the client who had retained the Corporation to have you murdered. The Corporation man was reporting to him that the matter was all arranged."

With a faint rebirth of hope Senhora Montini asked, "What did this client look like?"

Manuel withdrew a black and white Polaroid print from his inside pocket and held it out to her. "He looked like this. I was so shocked by the whole episode that I decided to get incontrovertible evidence of this client's identity. Being a professional photographer, I had my camera with me. I took the man's picture as he left the café."

Senhora Montini examined the print, which showed her husband, three-quarters face, walking through the door of an unidentifiable café. It was the picture of Montini that Manuel had snapped the day before, not two blocks from the Gonçalves building.

She said in a dull voice, "That is my husband."

"I know it is," Manuel said, trying to sound sympathetic. "I made an excuse to see him here in his office yesterday, to make absolutely sure before I burdened you with this distressing news. But I was already pretty certain. The clues in the conversation I overheard in Rio pointed very strongly to your husband as the culprit."

Senhora Montini appeared dazed. "What can I do?" She stared out of the window. "What in God's name can I do?"

"To save your life will be simple," Manuel answered without hesitation. "Your marriage, too, Senhora, if you still wish it."

"How?"

"Change your will immediately, beyond any possibility of your husband gaining control of this jewelry firm at your death. Leave the stock

to charity, or to your key employees, or to anyone else—but your husband. This will remove his only motive for your murder and make it a senseless killing, do you see?"

"But what shall I tell my husband?"

"The minute the new will is signed and witnessed, tell him what you have done. Show him the new will, and destroy the old one in front of him. Blame your sudden decision to disinherit him on his compulsive gambling. Say that you couldn't bear to think he might gamble away eight generations' growth of your family's business. Assure him that he will still receive his regular allowances from you as long as you live. But afterward, nothing. Above all, do not mention me, or the Corporation, or let him even suspect that you know about this murder plan." Manuel gave this warning the weight of deadly seriousness.

"That's all very well. But what if they kill me anyway?"

"They won't. Your husband will call the whole thing off when he sees your murder would be useless, to him and to the Corporation. He will realize at once that—excuse the frankness, please—he can get more out of you alive than dead. He won't even keep his hospital appointment, in all probability, since he won't need an alibi. I suggest, however, that just to be on the safe side, you enter the hospital yourself for the same period, any excuse will do. Can you do that?"

"I suppose so." Her sturdy independence of spirit was beginning to reassert itself. "I always refused to believe what I knew very well was true," she mused, "that he married me for my money." Her eyes flashed with anger now. "Well, I refuse absolutely to let him *murder* me for it!"

"Bravo!" said Manuel. "Now change your will immediately, eh? And inform your husband of it at once."

Her homely face set hard. "My attorney is in this building. It will be done in half an hour."

Manuel knew he had won. He went toward the door. "I shall leave you to arrange it, then. You have my name and my address in Rio."

She glanced down at his card on her desk. "Yes. A million cruzeiros, is that it? How shall I know if all this actually *is* the truth?"

"There are two ways," Manuel replied matter-of-factly, pausing at the door. "After you have changed your will and informed your husband, have him watched so closely he cannot take a deep breath without your knowing it. Have his every moment noted for the remainder of this day. If he is guilty of what we think, he will call Rio on the telephone or send a telegram there at once. Can you arrange to have that call or telegram moni-

tored, so that you'll know its contents?"

"Probably. Through his secretary, our switchboard operator, his valet, myself—somehow."

"Good. Any message from him to Rio should be a cancellation of your murder. It will be couched in cryptic terms, no doubt, but it will make clear to you that there *was* a murder planned, and that this is not just a mere tissue of clever lies I have told you."

"You said there was another way to prove you truthful?"

"There is. Equally simple. Report this to the police and ask them to unravel the plot, as you wished to do at first. I shall be glad to help all I can. That is a painfully public method of persuading yourself, however, and could prove too late to save your life. I recommend the other method as safer and more private, since it will enable you to avoid becoming a principal in the biggest scandal São Paulo is ever likely to know. Such publicity would be harmful to you—and, of course, to your business."

For a long moment she looked at him as she might have looked at a poisonous snake in the Butantan pit on the city's outskirts. Then she said in a dead voice, "One way or the other, you will hear from me."

"Goodbye, Senhora," he said, opening the door. "One last suggestion. Will you send me the million cruzeiros in diamonds, rather than in cash? Inflation is so trouble-some these days, don't you agree?"

He went out and closed the door, leaving Senhora Montini still standing, a small lost figure behind her large desk.

Later that evening, he received a telegram at his hotel. It said:

PROJECT CANCELED. RETURN RIO SOONEST.

It was signed merely RODOLFO.

"What went wrong?" Manuel asked Rodolfo when they met the following afternoon in a café on Rua do Ouvidor near Rio's flower market. "Why did the Big Ones cancel my São Paulo assignment?"

Rodolfo frowned. "A small mistake was made, Photographer. Somehow the Corporation gave me the wrong name and I passed it on to you. These things happen occasionally, you know."

"With the Big Ones? It has never happened before to my knowledge."

"Well, you don't know everything, of course. This was an understandable error. A simple matter of family confusion."

"Confusion?"

"The name I gave you was a woman's. It should have been a man's. But the same name. We only got the affair straightened out yesterday afternoon."

"Just in time," said Manuel softly. He lifted his right arm and squeezed his fingers into a fist. The muscles of his forearm came up under his coat sleeve like ropes. "By now she would have been gone." Then

he paused in belated surprise, and said, "The same name, do you say? You mean I should attend to the husband instead of the wife?"

"Exactly. That was the mistake."

Manuel drank some of his coffee. "Then I shall return to São Paulo?"

"As soon as possible. The Corporation is anxious to get this irritating business over with."

"*Va bem.* I suppose I can keep your down payment on the woman then, and apply it against the man?"

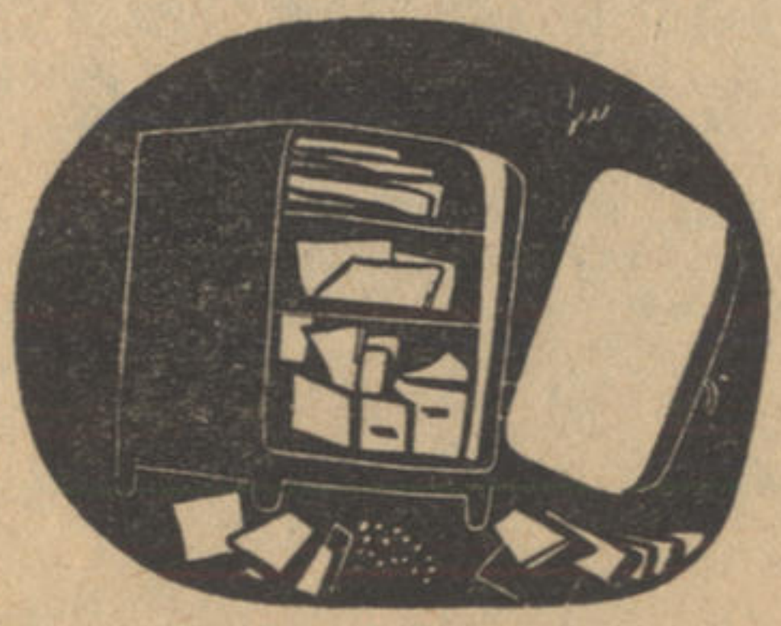
"Yes. And listen to me, Photographer." Rodolfo's yellow teeth showed. "You will get your regular rate for this one. A million."

"A million." Manuel said. "Ah, one million cruzeiros." He thought fleetingly but with immense satisfaction of the small air-mail package from São Paulo that had been delivered to his studio that morning. It had contained four emerald-cut diamonds of impressive size. Senhora Montini had been generous. "That is more like it, Rodolfo. The workman is worthy of his hire, eh?"

Rodolfo nodded.

"Is one permitted to ask," Manuel said with mild sarcasm, "why to nullify the husband is worth a million, when the wife was worth only half that? Have the Big Ones reconsidered my request for adequate payment? Or has your client, who urgently needed credit three days ago, suddenly stumbled on a large fortune in the meanwhile?"

"That," said Rodolfo with the air of a busy man who has no time to answer impertinent questions, "is none of your business."



a *new* Father Crumlish story

Another heart-warming tale of Father Francis Xavier Crumlish and his St. Brigid's parishioners, and of the hand-to-hand battles with the Devil which the good pastor never shrank from, and of the root of all evil which so many misquote and misunderstand . . . for the root of all evil can be more things than one—though always in the guise of Father Crumlish's perpetual adversary . . .

FATHER CRUMLISH AND GOD'S WILL

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

"MY NIECE HAD ANOTHER ONE of her sinking spells," Emma Catt announced in the lugubrious tones of a weatherman advising that a hurricane was about to strike the mainland. Abruptly Father Francis Xavier Crumlish hoisted the sports page to the level of his still-thick, snow-white hair, thus concealing the sudden twinkle in his dark blue eyes.

Not for the world would St. Brigid's pastor have revealed to his housekeeper that he was well aware her niece's "sinking spells" invariably coincided with a film at the neighborhood movie house starring a handsome actor by the name of Cary Grant. Also, he anticipated Emma's next advisory bulletin and he wanted an unobserved moment to consider how he might gracefully decline a plate of cold leftovers.

"I'll have to look in on the poor soul," Emma said, "but I'll fix your supper before I leave."

"Don't trouble yourself," Father Crumlish said finally. "I've been meaning to have a word with Henry Goldfarb and suppertime might be a good time to catch him in."

Well, the priest thought gloomily as he sank back in the worn chair at his battered office desk, maybe it's God's will. For three weeks he'd been putting off the ordeal of facing the owner of Goldfarb's Bargain House, one of the few prosperous business establishments remaining in the parish. Now, bracing his shoulders, he picked up the telephone and dialed. Almost instantly a lilting voice responded with a salutation which never failed to amuse the priest.

"Good Buying! Goldfarb's Bargain House."

"Good afternoon," Father replied

solemnly. "The House of God calling Mr. Henry Goldfarb." There was a momentary flustered pause and a clicking of wires before he heard the familiar jovial voice.

"Father Crumlish?"

"The same."

"Glad to hear your voice, Father. What's on your mind?"

"The Lord's work, Henry. But I need a little lift with the load. Could you spare time for a bite of supper with me?"

"Supper, no," Henry said crisply. "Dinner at 'Mama Mia's' with a good red wine to wash down some antipasto, veal Milanese, and green noodles, yes."

The pastor chuckled. "I'll be living on tea, toast, and bismuth for a week. But the temptation's too much for me. I'll meet you at the restaurant. In about an hour?"

"Make it my office, Father, in case I get hung up here."

"I'll be there, lad."

Replacing the telephone receiver, Father thought once again: yes, maybe it's God's will.

Never once in his more than 40 years in the priesthood had Father Crumlish hesitated to do battle with the Devil. Never once had he hesitated in the performance of his priestly duties. There was only one task that gave him pause: when it became necessary for him to face his parishioners—or worse yet, community businessmen—to plead for money.

He felt a deep sense of guilt, inadequacy, and shame that he was unable to provide the simple material needs, not only for his own parishioners but for all the people in the now bedraggled section of Lake City where St. Brigid's spires groped for a bit of sunlight through the smoke and dust of the dreary waterfront. For the old priest knew only too well that the Devil was never unemployed when there was available to him a despairing heart, a weekened will, or a broken poverty-stricken home.

But now, as the church chimes intoned 5:15 p.m. and he entered Goldfarb's Bargain House, Father's spirits soared. Elbowing his way down a crowded aisle, he recognized familiar faces behind almost every counter and gave thanks that Henry Goldfarb had followed his father's policy of staffing the store with people from the neighborhood.

The priest remembered when Henry, Sr. had opened for business on the same site many years ago, but in a dingy, single, street-level room. Shrewdly, the old man had selected the location because it was close to the freight yards. His first stock, a carload of shirts, was priced so ridiculously low that it sold out almost overnight.

A pity, the pastor thought, that Henry, Sr. hadn't lived to see his Bargain House flourish as it did today under the wise guidance of his son, who had become one of Lake

City's most highly respected business and civic leaders.

Pausing for a word with Mrs. Fitzgerald, who was presiding over a mound of ladies' handbags, Father Crumlish caught sight of another of his parishioners and crossed the aisle to clap a hand on a slight graying man's rounded shoulder.

"Now who could this fine-feathered fellow be?"

Frank Nolan, resplendent in a watchman's uniform, swung around.

"Oh, hi-ya, Father." He grinned sheepishly. "Had to give up that stockroom job." He rubbed a knee-cap. "This bum leg of mine."

Inaudibly the priest sighed. As long as he could remember, Frank Nolan had been using his "bum leg" as an excuse for working as effortlessly and infrequently as possible. And his laziness and indifference had cost him dear, Father knew: a pretty lass, for one thing, and more than a few good jobs.

"But this watchman's spot ain't bad," Frank said, kneading a pallid cheekbone. "'Course the pay's peanuts and I sure could use more do-re-mi. But then, who couldn't, eh, Father?"

"Amen," the pastor replied, thinking of his forthcoming interview.

"Yeah," Frank whined. "So will you tell me how come the Bible says money is the root of all evil?"

"The Bible doesn't say that, Frank," Father Crumlish said, glancing at his watch. "And when I have a little more time I'll straighten you out." With a wave of his hand he turned and headed for the elevator.

Alighting at the third floor, the pastor walked down a corridor of executive offices until he reached a door lettered, *Miss Edwards, Sec'y. to Mr. Goldfarb.* Unhesitatingly he opened it, stepped inside—and immediately regretted his hasty action.

Elaine Edwards, a slim, blonde woman in her mid-thirties, was standing at her desk and glaring resentfully at a tall bespectacled young man whom Father recognized as Goldfarb's Advertising Manager, Marvin Barber.

"You mind your own business, Marve," Elaine was saying in a harsh tone that the priest had never heard her use before. "Or I'll make sure you don't have any business to mind."

"And if you don't keep your mouth shut," Barber retorted heatedly," I'll make sure—" He broke off as Father Crumlish coughed.

What's the Devil up to here, Father wondered as the obviously embarrassed pair greeted him. Young Barber lived in a fashionable section of Lake City, but Father Crumlish knew him well. The priest and Henry Goldfarb served together on several of Lake City's public service committees and whenever the owner of the store was unable to attend, he sent his "right hand," Marvin Barber.

Elaine Edwards, on the other

hand, was a product of one of the all-too-many broken homes in the parish. But, unlike Frank Nolan, she'd had the determination and ambition to attend evening classes at a secretarial school while working in Goldfarb's stockroom. Her present enviable position was her reward.

After a murmured word to the priest, Marvin Barber disappeared behind a connecting door, and Elaine Edwards, striving to regain her usual composure, spoke into an interoffice phone. Within seconds Henry Goldfarb emerged from his office and strode into the room.

"Give me a minute to sign these letters and I'll be right with you," he said, clasping the priest's outstretched hand.

"Take your time, lad."

As Henry applied his signature to the sheaf of papers on Elaine's desk, Father observed him. At fifty, Goldfarb retained the solid springy physique of an athlete. Like many businessmen whose working hours kept them confined indoors, he spent every free moment on the golf course, tennis courts, or ski slopes. The results were evident. Had Father Crumlish used the vernacular of his native Tralee in County Kerry, he would have described Henry Goldfarb as "a fine broth of a boy."

"That does it?" Henry inquired of his secretary as he signed the final paper.

"That does it," Elaine replied coldly, and again the pastor was struck by her uncharacteristic demeanor.

Henry turned to the priest.

"I'll get my car out of the parking lot and we'll be on our way."

"Leave the machine where it is, lad," Father said. "We'll walk."

Seated opposite Father Crumlish at Mama Mia's, Henry drank deeply of a double scotch on the rocks and sighed.

"Just what I needed. Sure you won't join me?"

The priest shook his head. "The wine with the veal will do me fine." He gave the store owner a keen glance. "Something troubling you, lad?"

Henry frowned into his glass. "We have a bad case of itchy fingers at the store. Seems just about every day something's 'missing' in at least one of the departments. Elaine thinks it's just the usual customer losses, but I've got a feeling the thief is on our payroll. And I hate that—someone I've trusted . . ." He glanced up and smiled disarmingly. "But we're here to talk about your troubles, not mine."

Now that the moment had arrived for him to speak, Father Crumlish found himself tongue-tied. Sensing his discomfort, Goldfarb came to his rescue.

"You know what my Dad used to say about you? He said you were a hell of a great guy, a good priest, and a lousy businessman."

Despite his mental misery, Father Crumlish chuckled.

"If you're in a bind, you can count on me."

"It—it's the floor."

"Floor?" Henry said, puzzled.

"I promised faithfully there'd be an indoor basketball court at the new Recreation Center." Father leaned across the table. "But, Heaven help me, Henry, I had no idea that the flooring alone would cost so much!"

Henry gazed solemnly at the pastor for a long moment before he spoke. "Sorry, Father. The only way I could possibly help out is if you give me your personal guarantee that Goldfarb's Bargain House can donate the whole works. Floor, equipment—the works."

The pastor stared.

"Something wrong?" Henry said with a broad smile. "You haven't touched your wine."

"God bless you, Henry," Father Crumlish finally managed to say. Then taking a hasty swallow from his glass, he gave his attention to his veal, hoping to hide the moisture that had sprung to his eyes.

"How do you want your eggs?" Emma inquired. "Boiled? Poached?"

Father shuddered. As he had predicted, last night's repast had rested heavily inside him. "Just a cup of tea will do," he murmured.

Emma eyed him dourly. "I suppose you ate at that Eyetalian place. Stuffed yourself with antypasty, all that garlic, and the Lord only knows what other foreign poison. Really, Reverend, you ought to know better at your age."

Age! Would the woman never stop harping on it, Father thought, his blood beginning to simmer. Why, aside from his present stomach distress, he never felt finer. Well, almost never. True, lately the misery plaguing his bones made kneeling a little harder. And sometimes, in the middle of a sermon, he seemed to run out of breath.

"You need more than tea to keep going," Emma prodded.

Father surrendered. "Then maybe a slice of dry toast."

Emma prepared to propel her battleship-gray hulk out the door, then paused. "Lieutenant Madigan called while you were saying Mass. Said he'd stop by on his way to headquarters."

The pastor frowned. When Lieutenant Thomas Patrick "Big Tom" Madigan of Lake City's police force came calling before nine o'clock in the morning it was no social visit. But before he had a chance to speculate, the sound of a car in the driveway brought the priest to his feet. Moments later he ushered the policeman into the rectory office.

"Looks as if you've been up all night, Tom," Father said, noticing the dark shadows under the big man's eyes and the stubble of whiskers on his jaw.

"I have," Madigan replied tersely.

"And I doubt if I'll hit the sack tonight."

The priest straightened in his chair. "Trouble afoot in the parish?"

"I'd like some information first. Henry Goldfarb says you had dinner together last night."

"We did."

"Says he left you here around eight o'clock and then went to the store parking lot to pick up his car."

"He did. But see here, Tom, what's this all about?"

Madigan brushed a hand over his crisp brown hair. "You know Goldfarb's secretary, Elaine Edwards?"

"I do."

"A store watchman found her in her office around midnight. Somebody cracked her skull."

"God help us!"

"We haven't found the weapon yet, but it was so powerful it took only one blow to kill her."

"When did it happen, Tom?"

"Sometime between seven and nine p.m. is the medical examiner's guess."

"*Requiescat in pace*," the priest murmured.

"For a modern store, Goldfarb's sure had an antique security system," Madigan said. "There's a watch box on each floor where the watchman uses a key to 'punch in' to the Protective Alarm Company when he makes his hourly rounds. Frank Nolan, the guy who found her, noticed a light burning in one of the third-floor executive offices when he made his rounds earlier in the evening. He didn't think anything of it because the 'brass' often worked late. But when he made his last check, just before the one a.m. man came on duty, he realized the light was still burning, so he got curious."

Madigan paused and flipped open a notebook. "Here's what Nolan says: 'I thought maybe Mr. Barber or Mr. Goldfarb had forgotten to turn it off'."

"Surely you don't think Marvin or Henry had anything to do with this, Tom?" Father asked anxiously.

The policeman shrugged noncommittally. "There's a stairway leading to an exit door at the rear of the store which opens out on the parking lot. Most of the employees use the stairs and the door at closing hour—six p.m. It's faster than taking the elevators and plowing through the crowd. All the store doors are self-locking. The theory is that, after six, anybody can get out but nobody can get in. About seven fifteen Nolan was on the mezzanine floor. He heard somebody on the stairs, looked over the railing, and saw Barber go out the exit door. Before nine, when he was about to make his hourly check, Nolan was on the first floor. He heard footsteps again and walked toward the exit door. Before he reached it, he saw Henry Goldfarb go out."

Father was frowning worry lines into his brow as the policeman wearily got to his feet. "Apparently the Edwards woman had no rela-

tives," Madigan said. "But she had friends. And my men are out now with orders to bring them in."

"If I'm needed—"

"I'll call you," Big Tom said quickly. At the door he turned and glanced back at the pastor.

"A lock-in could have figured in this."

"Lock-in, lad?"

"A guy could have been in the store *before* it closed, let himself be locked in, killed the woman, and then slipped out one of the doors when he knew the watchman wasn't around."

"That could be almost anyone in Lake City."

"Yeah," Madigan nodded. "Of course there was one guy who had a key to that rear door and could let himself *in* any hour of the day or night—the guy who owns the joint."

When the chimes struck two o'clock Father's uneasiness got the better of him and he called Madigan.

"Anything new, Tom?"

"We found the lock-in. He admits seeing Elaine but of course he denies killing her."

"Who?"

"A guy named Louie Zudek. Runs a gas station on Canal Street."

Canal Street. He might have known it would be mixed up somehow in this deviltry, the priest thought bitterly. The dark street that twisted along a narrow strip of the waterfront like a poisonous snake, Canal Street was Father's heaviest burden. Many times he'd visited the evil dens lining the street to save a soul, to heal a heart; sometimes to help some poor creature find the courage to live; and sometimes the courage to die.

Father Crumlish braced himself for battle.

"I'll be right along, Tom."

"Hold it, Father," the policeman protested. "You know the regulations. I can't let you—"

"And no young ex-hooligan who wouldn't be wearing a uniform if it weren't for God's help and his pastor's faith is going to shut me out." The priest hung up.

Father Crumlish entered Madigan's office just as Frank Nolan was departing.

"Gee, Father," Nolan said in a shaken voice. "I found her. And may I be struck dead if I ever seen—"

"Come in, Father," Madigan interrupted. The priest closed the door on Nolan's white strained face and seated himself.

"The trouble with that bird is that he didn't see enough," Big Tom grumbled. "We gave him a look at Zudek a while ago and now he thinks maybe he mistook Louie for Barber or Goldfarb." Madigan snorted. "Barber is tall and thin. Goldfarb is tall and husky. Louie Zudek is five-five and almost as wide."

"I'd like a look at the fellow myself," Father said.

"He's on his way in now." As the policeman spoke the door opened and Zudek entered. His round pink face grew pinker as he caught sight of the pastor and Father knew why. Louie was one of the parish "strays." But the priest wasn't thinking about that now. There was only compassion in his heart, for it was obvious that Zudek was in deep personal agony.

Madigan's eyes and voice were icy when he spoke. "You told me you phoned Elaine and asked for a date last night. But she said she had to work. You say you deliberately hid in the store after it closed and when the watchman was out of sight you went up to her office. Now tell me again what happened next."

Zudek breathed deeply. "I stood outside the door for a while because I could hear her talking with some man. When I couldn't hear voices any more, I figured she was alone and then I went in."

"What did you say to her?"

Louie studied his pudgy, grease-stained hands. "I—I just asked her if she had time for a pizza or a beer."

"When she refused, you left," Madigan said. "You crept down the back stairs and about seven o'clock, when the watchman was making rounds in the front of the store, you let yourself out the rear exit door. Right?"

"Yes, sir."

Madigan thumbed through notes on his desk. "We've been talking with some of your pals. And Elaine's. We know you were planning to marry her. You'd made a down payment on a house in the new Lake Road development. Everything was dandy until about eight months ago. Then, all of a sudden, she began to cool it." He leaned back in his chair. "What happened, Louie?"

Zudek wiped his forehead. "We—we had a little argument, that's all. But we were still going to get married. She'd promised—"

God help the poor fellow, Father thought as the man broke down and covered his face with his hands.

Madigan sat unmoved. "I think Elaine had been giving you the brushoff. You wanted to see her last night for a showdown. When she told you it was final, you couldn't take it. So you struck her—"

"I couldn't!" Louie burst out. "I loved her."

"—with something heavy," Big Tom continued coldly. "A tool, maybe. The kind you find around a gas station—"

"Will you quit?" Louie jumped to his feet. "It's true we were washed up. I thought if I could talk to her once more she'd change her mind." He slumped down into his chair. "But it didn't work. Nothing's worked since she got mixed up with that guy. He was poison. Always giving her a bad time. Kept her dangling. Fed her a

line. Big ideas—" His voice trailed away.

"What guy?" Madigan said softly.

"Some big shot at the store. She'd never tell me his name. But I think I recognized the voice of the man I heard her talking with in her office. He buys gas at my station sometimes. His name's Barber."

Father Crumlish knew when to hold his tongue, so he said nothing after Zudek departed. The priest sat brooding while Big Tom picked up his desk phone and gave an order. After a short wait the door opened and Marvin Barber was shown into the office.

Father was startled by his appearance. Usually he was impeccably dressed. But now his suit was rumpled, his shirt collar limp. And behind the horn-rimmed glasses his eyes were bloodshot. Still, his poise was unimpaired as he greeted the pastor, sat down, and waited respectfully for Madigan to speak.

"I've been given a rundown on you," Big Tom said in a cordial tone. "You're thirty-five years old, married, three children, and another one on the way. You're paying off a mortgage on your ranch-type house, and you're a candidate for the Junior Chamber of Commerce 'Man of the Year' Award."

"I didn't know I rated so much attention, Lieutenant."

"What I don't know is why you were quarreling with Elaine Edwards last night."

Barber's composure faltered for a moment. He glanced at the priest. "You mean when Father Crumlish walked in? Everybody's on edge right now, Lieutenant. Haven't you heard it's Goldfarb's Twenty-fifth Anniversary? My department is a madhouse. Ad layouts. TV and radio spot-announcements. Promotion gimmicks for a parade. Name it and we're doing it."

"And you were arguing with Miss Edwards about all this?"

"Not arguing. Discussing."

Madigan's cordiality vanished. "You weren't, by any chance, discussing your personal relationship?"

Barber gave him a stony stare. "We had no personal relationship."

"You say you left the store about seven fifteen last night. Twice, before then, two people overheard you having an argument — ah, discussion, — with Miss Edwards. Now I'm curious to know what you were talking about."

"I've just explained," Barber said carefully. "We're in the midst of the store's biggest promotion and—"

"You can drop that line right now," Big Tom broke in. "You're Goldfarb's Advertising Manager. A big job. Nobody but the boss gives you orders. Now I'm asking you again: what were you two talking about?"

"Don't try to browbeat me, Lieutenant," Barber retorted. "I'm not under oath and I don't intend to answer that question."

"You mean it *was* personal?" Madigan asked quickly.

"Yes." Too late, Barber caught himself. "Well, personal business."

Big Tom was about to speak when his desk phone rang. He picked it up and spoke into it tersely, but Father Crumlish knew from the momentary gleam in the policeman's eye that something was afoot. Moments later, a young police officer entered with an oblong package wrapped in brown paper.

"Put it there," Madigan said, indicating the shelf behind his desk. Then he stood up, turned his back, and examined the contents of the package. Father Crumlish and Barber sat in silence. Presently Big Tom turned around, placed an object on his desk, pointed to it, and addressed Barber.

"Can you tell me what this is, Mr. Barber?"

"Why, sure," Barber replied readily. "That's a T square."

"What's it used for?"

"In my business, to measure layouts. Every ad man uses one."

"It's heavy. Feels like solid steel."

"Usually is." Suddenly Barber's jaw dropped. "What—what are you getting at?"

Madigan sat down. "According to our lab report, this is the weapon that killed Elaine Edwards. It was found on the drawing board in your office. And the initials, M. B., are painted in black on the handle."

Watching Barber's face grow gray with the beginning of fear, the priest felt a tremor in his heart.

"You can't think—" Barber began thickly.

Big Tom cut him off. "I think you had a *very* personal relationship with Elaine. But it got out of bounds. After all, you're a family man. You've got a promising career. If Elaine thought you'd toss all that over for her she was mistaken. But she didn't give up easily. Suppose she threatened to go to your wife? Or to Goldfarb? You'd be washed up. There'd be only one way to play safe, to make sure she'd shut up."

Listening, Father recalled all too vividly the words he'd overheard Barber speak to Elaine; "And if you don't keep your mouth shut I'll make sure—"

"You're crazy," Barber blurted out.

"Yeah." Madigan's voice was as cold and hard as the lethal T square on his desk. "I'm so crazy that I'm thinking of holding you on suspicion of murder."

"But you can't!" Barber got to his feet and began to pace the floor. Finally he turned to Madigan. "Okay, Lieutenant, I'll level with you now. If it's his neck or mine, I guess I have no choice."

Madigan looked at him quizzically. "Whose neck?"

Barber sighed deeply. "Henry Goldfarb's. You've got the pitch, all right—the whole bit. But it wasn't me Elaine had her hooks into. Henry doesn't know that I

knew what was going on. Or that I was trying to get that damned woman off his back."

The fellow must be lying, Father told himself numbly. He must be. Henry Goldfarb a killer? Impossible! Or was it? The pastor knew the frailty of the flesh. Dimly he was aware that Barber had left the room; then, after a moment, he came to a decision.

"You'll be questioning Henry next, I suppose."

Madigan nodded emphatically. "What Barber said makes sense. With everything that Goldfarb had to lose, that girl was probably bleeding him white."

The priest rose to his feet. "I'd like a wee favor, Tom."

The policeman eyed him warily. Sometimes Father's "wee favors" strained Big Tom's resources.

"I want to see Henry first. Alone."

"Can't be done," Madigan said, shaking his head.

"I give you my word, Tom, I'll not repeat anything I've heard here. I simply want to ask him one question."

"That's *my* job."

"My word, Tom."

Madigan sighed. "This keeps up, I'll have to get you a badge, Father. But okay. Ten minutes?"

"With God's help, I'll need less."

Moments later, Father Crumlish walked into a small anteroom and stood face to face with Henry Goldfarb. He was shocked to see that the man was ashen beneath his tan and that his hand, as he lit a cigarette, trembled.

"I'd like to ask you one question, Henry," the priest said. "But it's none of my business, so don't feel obliged to answer."

Henry exhaled. "Go ahead, Father."

"Were you and Elaine Edwards—?" Father didn't even have to finish his inquiry. The stricken expression on Goldfarb's face gave him the answer. In silent misery the priest sat down and waited.

"I don't know what got into me, Father. It—it just happened. Then she began demanding that I get a divorce and marry her. And if I didn't—" He paused and clenched his fists.

"If you didn't, what?"

"She threatened to tell my wife—everybody. I tried to reason with her. Promised her a better job. But she didn't want that."

"Henry," Father said, trying to conceal his anxiety, "did you go into the store after you left me last night?"

"I—I told Madigan that I didn't, that the watchman was mistaken when he said he saw me." He flushed and looked away. "But I did, Father. Elaine said she'd wait in the office until I got back from dinner. I have a key to the rear door, so I just opened it and walked up to the third floor."

He stopped for breath. "When I saw the light burning in her office

I suddenly decided that I just couldn't go over the whole messy deal again. I walked back down the stairs, let myself out, got into my car, and drove home. I was asleep when the police called—"

He halted and gazed earnestly at the priest. "That's the truth, Father."

"I believe you, lad," Father said slowly. "And if you tell the truth to Tom Madigan—"

Goldfarb shook his head firmly. "I'm not going to do that. The only reason I've lied so far was to protect my family—that's all that matters to me now. So I'm going to stick to my story."

The pastor longed to tell him that his story was paper-thin and that Madigan was fast finding loopholes in it. But he'd given his word. There was nothing more he could do now. Except pray.

Father Crumlish sat at his desk staring at the one word he'd written on the top sheet of the yellow pad—*Sermon*. Many times he'd mounted the pulpit to tell his parishioners that St. Brigid's coffers were dangerously low. Many times he'd asked the men to pass up their extra glasses of beer on Saturday nights, the woman to put the price of one of their lipsticks in the collection basket, and the little tykes to sacrifice a candy bar or a soda pop. But this time he couldn't seem to find the words.

Try as he might, he couldn't erase Henry Goldfarb from his thoughts. The priest was certain that Big Tom would probe until he found evidence that Henry was in the store at the time of the murder and the owner had easy access to the deadly T square . . .

Father sighed dismally, visualizing the blazing headlines.

"If that's the same sermon you were writing an hour ago," Emma said as she brought in the mail, "you'd be better off just reading the Gospel."

If only I could, the priest thought.

Emma's curiosity overcame her. "What are you preaching about?"

"Money."

"Well, that shouldn't be hard. Just quote the Bible—money is the root of all evil."

Father glanced up. "Now that's a queer thing," he said slowly. "You're the second person this week who has misquoted the Bible to me."

He picked up a worn volume on his desk and opened it. "This is the oldest Catholic version in English, published in 1582. St. Paul's first Epistle to St. Timothy, chapter six, verse ten, reads: 'For the desire of money is the root of all evil; which some coveting have erred from the Faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.' "

The pastor closed the book and adjusted his bifocals. "You see? It's not money that's the root of all evil. It's the *desire* for it."

He paused, struck by a sudden

thought, and became so engrossed with it that he was unaware of Emma's departure. It was some time before he rose from his chair, left the rectory, and, grim-faced, headed in the direction of Canal Street.

Fifteen minutes later, as he was assailed on every side by detestable sights and sounds, the priest was torn between the emotions of anger and pity. But anger had won out by the time he reached his destination and climbed the flight of sagging stairs leading to Hanratty's Deluxe Billiard Academy.

Opening the door, Father surveyed the scene. A dozen pool players lounged around two battered tables, watching the games in progress. At a desk near a grimy wall, a thin freckle-faced man sat reading a newspaper. Father didn't need his glasses to tell him that the man was the proprietor and the paper was a racing form.

Father Crumlish walked across the tobacco-stained wooden floor to the man's side and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I want a word with you, Hanratty."

Hanratty turned his head, saw the pastor, and clumsily got to his feet. "Why—ah—sure, Father."

The priest gave the man's flushed, uneasy countenance a hard look. "I know about that card game you're running in the back room every chance you think you can get away with it."

"Now wait a minute—"

Father held up a warning hand. "None of your lies, Hanratty. I know that game is for big stakes. I want the name of every heavy loser in the parish."

Hanratty chewed the cigar in his mouth. "How would I know—?"

"You know! And I want every name."

Father stood silent and expressionless as Hanratty sullenly reeled off a list of names. "That's all?" the pastor said when the man's rasping voice came to a halt.

"Yeah. And if this ever gets out, I'll probably have to leave town."

"It might be a good thing for one and all if you did."

Retracing his steps to the street, the priest found a public phone booth and dialed Madigan. Then he turned his back on Canal Street and walked to Goldfarb's Bargain House.

It was past five o'clock when the police car pulled up to the store entrance and Madigan jumped out.

"Now what's this all about, Father?" the Lieutenant asked.

"Let's go in, Tom. I want you to have a look at something."

"What?"

Father Crumlish told him.

Entering the store, Father caught sight of Frank Nolan, in his watchman's uniform, standing by the elevator. He turned to the policeman. "You go along, Tom. I want to have a word with Nolan." He

walked over to the watchman. "You remember the other day, Frank, when you mentioned that money is the root of all evil?"

"Sure, Father," Nolan replied. "You said I was wrong and you'd straighten me out when you had time."

"I have time now." Once more the priest quoted the source and recited: " 'For the desire of money is the root of all evil; which some coveting have erred from the Faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.' "

Nolan's slack mouth formed a wordless O.

"It's *wanting* money that can set a man off on the wrong track," Father said. "Do you see?"

"Yeah, I see," Nolan said. "Well, thanks, Father."

"And speaking of money," Father continued, "I hear you haven't been doing too well in Hanratty's back-room card game."

The watchman was startled. "I—I've lost a little."

"I wouldn't say losing $130 in a single night last week was a small sum, Frank."

"Hey now! Who's been telling tales?"

"Where have you been getting the money, Frank?"

Nolan's thin frame shriveled under the pastor's penetrating gaze. "I—I been winning a lot lately, so I could afford to lose."

"I also hear somebody's been stealing from this store," Father said. "Maybe Elaine Edwards caught the thief. Maybe she tried to protect him by telling the boss they were customer losses. But maybe the thief tried her patience too far and she decided to report him. He'd lose his job and wind up in jail."

Nolan stood, gray and mute, staring at the priest.

"I'll ask you again, Frank. Where have you been getting the money to cover your card losses?"

"Save your breath, Father," Madigan said, suddenly looming at the watchman's side. He placed an authoritative hand on Nolan's arm. "Maybe you can explain a few items we just found in your locker, Frank. A pawn ticket for a watch valued at $98.50. Another for a transistor radio at $35."

"They must have been left by the guy who had the locker before me," Nolan said shakily.

"We also found a wadded-up rag with fresh stains on it. Could be rust. Or blood. You were afraid to take it out with you last night and get rid of it, weren't you, Nolan? Afraid you'd be searched. So you stuffed it in your locker."

Nolan wilted and began to sob. "She made me do it! She was working late one night and she caught me taking a few things. I thought she'd turn me in."

"So you killed her," Madigan said harshly.

"Why, I wouldn't have done it for that," Nolan said in an injured tone. "She was a devil, that woman.

A devil! She made me pay her twenty-five bucks a week. Twenty-five bucks! Even when I told her that sometimes I couldn't even heist that much. Then when she said I'd have to give her *twice* that much—" His voice dissolved in a whimper.

For the desire of money, Father thought sadly, chiding himself for forgetting, this once, that Satan often assumed the form of a female. Dimly he heard Madigan command Nolan to continue.

"I went into her office to try to make a deal with her. She wouldn't even listen to me. Just laughed. I had to leave to make my eight o'clock punch-in. When I went into Mr. Barber's office to check, I saw that measuring gadget he used just sitting there on his drawing board. She was typing in her office and I was so burned up I just grabbed it and—"

"Okay, Frank," Madigan said. "Let's go."

The following afternoon, just as Father Crumlish settled down in his easy chair with the sports page, Emma ushered Big Tom into the room.

"I already owe you one favor, Father," Madigan said. "But I want to ask another. How did you know it was Nolan?"

The pastor rattled his newspaper. "What do you think of our Giants, Tom? Did you ever in your life see anything like that lad Mays?"

Madigan chuckled. "Okay. So you won't talk. But if you would, I'll bet you'd tell me that you knew because the Bible says money is the root of all evil."

Once again the pastor gave a deep, resigned sigh. "I'll take that first favor first, Tom."

"You've got it."

"I know you're short-handed. But I was thinking to myself that if you could spare a man to keep an eye on Hanratty's Deluxe Billiard Academy, the proprietor might just disappear like a wee leprechaun."

Madigan grinned broadly. "Done, Father."

"And now I owe *you* a favor, lad. I've been trying to write a sermon for Sunday and you've just given me the inspiration."

"Huh?"

"I'll be preaching on St. Paul's first Epistle to St. Timothy," Father Crumlish said solemnly. "It would be wise for you to be in the first pew, Tom. And I'll keep an eye on you to make sure you don't miss a word."

'Q'

A most unusual story—fun-poking with a venomed barb, satire with a sharply honed edge—and let the critical chips fall where they may . . . Can murder be a critical essay translated into action? Can homicide be an act of literary criticism?

THE NOVELIST AND THE CRITIC

by ROBERT CENEDELLA

THERE IS WIDESPREAD DISAGREEment as to just what the world lost on that summer night last year when Daniel Dunhaven leaped toward Edmund Grant and cracked poor Grant's skull open with a poker.

We lost Edmund Grant, of course, but some who have read his novels say that was no loss. We lost Daniel Dunhaven, too, for he will probably never write another critical essay. This is not because the struggling quarterlies have closed their pages to his work; on the contrary, both *New Broom* and *Parnassorama* have written to the critic himself as well as to the warden of the prison where he will spend the next 99 years, professing themselves eager to continue publishing Dunhaven's provocative critiques—those same critiques which once caused the poet Alfie Doremus to apostrophize him:

hail, critic!
never a critic more sympathavant-
coollike.
never a critic less contemptobastic,
onliest critic that writes with his
G U T S—

an accolade originally mimeographed in *New Broom*, but given somewhat wider circulation by *The New Yorker* under the caption "Neatest Trick of the Week."

The warden interposed no objection to Dunhaven's writing in prison. In fact, when I interviewed him for an article on *Should Prisoners Be Punitive?* and he discovered I had known both Dunhaven and Grant, the warden told me, wistfully, "I wish Dunhaven would write. It would be splendid public relations for the prison."

But Dunhaven has refused to write anything but regrets to the editors. *A critic* (he said in his letter to *Parnassorama*) *needs booze and cool jazz just as much as a poet or a novelist. What I'd turn into if I wrote criticism here in this antiseptic jail, I'd turn into a square. Regards to all the losers in the Village, all the junkies and the free lovers and the trumpeters who've lost their lip. Forget about me.*

I'm dead. There's nothing to smoke in this place but tobacco.

As I say. I knew both Dunhaven and Grant, though not really well. I had sought them out while preparing a magazine piece called *Are the Beat Also Lost?* I had interviewed Dunhaven about a week before he killed Grant, and I met him again when he came to Grant's one-room apartment—or "pad," as they called it—on the night of the killing. I had never seen Grant until that night, but with the exception of his murderer I was the last to see him alive. The last words the novelist addressed to me were: "Get out, get out, you creep, some other time, got to talk to Danny."

I complied with his request, of course, but not without regret at having our talk terminated thus abruptly. The truth is, I had for weeks been looking forward to chatting with him.

For the reader must surely know that Edmund Grant, as the author of *Shantytown Hamlet*, *Zing!*, *Down Kiwanis*, and several other novels, had achieved a considerable reputation. He was the originator and, indeed, the only practitioner of Dialogic Realism. I can think of no other 20th Century novelist except Ivy Compton-Burnett whose novels consist solely of dialogue; but since Miss Compton-Burnett's dialogue is really a heightened parallel of the consciousness of her characters, Edmund Grant stands magnificently alone as the faithful transcriber of the fragmented quality, the inarticulateness, the downright dullness of common speech.

His devotion to his purpose was of an enviable purity. He never compromised with popular taste. He gave the lazy reader no relief. Who has not yearned, along about page 500 of *Shantytown Hamlet*, for a solid 50 pages of description? Who would not, by that time, gladly skip the dialogue to read about the colors of the sunrise, or to scan an exhaustive catalogue of the furnishings in the room where the characters sprawl talking?

But Edmund Grant's novels give us no sunrise, and indeed, we never discover whether the characters are talking in a room at all, or on a park bench, or while perched in the branches of some tree. They talk. That is all. That is enough, for the art of Edmund Grant is essentially a simple art.

Those who have encountered the dialogue in Grant's novels may be interested in the novelist's own speech patterns. Let me quote from the tape recording I made when I interviewed him:

GRANT: What's with the pencil?
I: It's for taking notes.
GRANT: You got that machine, that tape, that thing there, that tape. That thing. It's going. It's running. What you need notes?
I: Well, as we go along, maybe I'll write a comment or two in the notebook.

GRANT: Hey, you take it for serious, right?

I: Um-hm.

GRANT: I be damned. Well, okay, start noodling.

I: All right. About *Shantytown Hamlet:* I'm wondering whether you deliberately decided to do the *Hamlet* story in a squalid modern setting, or—

GRANT: Hey, what you doing, you reading there, in the notebook there, you got it down there, the question, you reading it off like a trombone player plays for Sammy Kaye or something?

I: No, I'm just looking at my notes.

GRANT: Notes! Notes! What's the matter with write your article like I write my books? What's the matter with improvise, huh?

The perceptive reader will have noticed, I am sure, that though Grant's speech is somewhat more coherent than that of the characters in his novels, his speech rhythms are remarkably similar to theirs. I point this out for the edification of literary historians; but in the present context, such considerations are peripheral, however interesting—for the purpose of this memoir is journalistic, not literary. I am writing to set the record straight.

I am in a position to do this, because when I went to Edmund Grant's apartment, or pad, I took with me, as the reader now knows, my tape recorder. And when the unlocked door opened and Daniel Dunhaven, bloody-eyed and drunken, stood peering at us and roaring, "Got to talk to you, want to talk, got to get things straight, Eddie," my host was in such a hurry to get rid of me that I found myself out of the apartment and down on the dark street, empty-handed.

Upstairs, my tape recorder was taking down everything that was said in that night.

After the murder my machine was, of course, appropriated by the police; but when Dunhaven agreed to cooperate with the prosecution in return for an indictment charging only second-degree murder, there was no need to run off my tape in the courtroom. When the trial was over, it was returned to me.

I played the tape, of course—and it confirmed what I had suspected all along: that the newspapers had been wrong about this case from the moment it broke.

Every paper had seen only one thing in the murder of Edmund Grant: a critic had killed a novelist. It was Murray Kempton, I think, in the *New York Post*, who made the only gentle comment when he said that Dunhaven had been considerably kinder to Grant than Dwight MacDonald had been to James Gould Cozzens; but even this charitable judgment was false.

Other scribes, equally mistaken, were more brutal. Those who have forgotten the journalistic reaction to the murder have but to glance—oh, at the editorial page of the *Daily*

News or at a copy of *Time;* for even now, so many months after the event, there are those who still remember Grant's murder with anti-intellectual glee.

See how the comments have gone on, month after month. First, when the trial opened:

> The formal indictment spoke of homicide, but when merry-eyed, Spade-bearded Daniel Dunhaven went on trial in New York's Court of General Sessions last week, it was for a crime many of us have committed: disgust with Beatnik Grant's Dialogic Realism.

And when Dunhaven was sentenced:

> Though we have often said we favor capital punishment, we're glad Dunhaven didn't get the chair. Maybe before they row him up the river, they could give him a baseball bat and put him in a room with Tennessee Williams, Jack Kerouac, and the writers who fill hours of TV prime time with gore.

In short, everybody assumed, or pretended to assume, that the murder of Edmund Grant was the translation into action of a critical essay, that because Dunhaven was a critic, the homicide was a criticism.

But the truth of the matter—willfully ignored by journalists to whom the facts were easily available—is that Daniel Dunhaven admired Grant's novels and always had.

In the April 1957 issue of *Parnassorama*, Dunhaven wrote: "There's the literary landscape, the sky painted all blue like on a postcard and the smells all sick-sweet like from Bloomingdale's perfume counter—and along comes Eddie Grant, big as a giant, and he tramples on the pretty flowers and he blows out his breath, and all of a sudden there's no more perfume smells, but the stink of booze and sweat smells and dirty-laundry-under-the-bed smells, and what we've got now, we've got no phony postcard any more, but real life, painted by a great artist who knows how to make his readers suffer."

There is a more recent public record of Dunhaven's adulation of Grant. In an issue of *New Broom* which appeared just a month before the murder (though it was dated three months earlier) it was Dunhaven who introduced the excerpt therein reprinted from Grant's *Shantytown Hamlet*.

The excerpt itself begins:

> Ham said, "Hey, mom there." Gertie said, "Well, what?" Ham said, "Afterward, after he got killed dead—and what'd he die, my old man, some virus? But I mean afterward, why Unk?" Gertie said, "You don't think I'm attractive?" Ham said,

"But why Unk? And nobody said what virus." Gertie said, "You don't think Unk's attractive?" Ham said, "Maybe no virus, no germ, no disease there at all." Gertie said, "Unk's taller than your old man was." Ham said, "Maybe the Unk virus." Gertie said, "I'm still pretty." Ham said, "Damn it to hell. I know! And afterward you didn't tell me. Maybe Unk 'ull catch the Ham virus." Gertie said, "Go out and play now." Ham said, "I'm old, you forget I'm old. I grew up last year and you never looked and you never said and you never made marks on the wall with a pencil higher and higher, no, you and Unk said go out and play and thought I'd maybe never miss the pencil marks on the wall and I'd never catch wise to the virus about my father, but I'm old, I'm grown up, I'm a virus, too, and you and Unk just wait. Just wait! Just wait! Just wait!"

Dunhaven, introducing that scene, said, "Powerful! This is the way it always is between a sensitive kid and his mother. You think they talk iambic pentameter? They talk like Eddie Grant puts it down, that's how they talk."

And finally, when I visited Dunhaven in the prison—after the murder, remember—he said to me, "Eddie put down the way people talk when they're off guard, when they're feeling deep. Some guy in the *Saturday Review*, you know, the puzzle magazine, the double-crostics, he said Eddie's people were muddy, he said, and incoherent, he said. Some criticism! What the hell does he think, people are eloquent? The deeper they're feeling the more they talk like Eddie wrote them."

The point is clear, I think. Daniel Dunhaven killed Edmund Grant, not because he disliked Grant's work, but *in spite of the fact that he believed Grant to be a great artist!*

Why, then, did he kill?

We do not have to guess at the answer to that question. I have the tape which tells us why he killed.

I now offer to the world the evidence of that tape, which was still rolling as I left Grant's room on the fatal night. I start my transcript just after my exit:

GRANT: Square. That writer, that magazine guy. Square.
DUNHAVEN: I didn't come about square, Eddie.
GRANT: Tie. Knitted tie. And he takes notes. Hey, have a cup of rum, Danny.
DUNHAVEN: I won't drink your rum. I gotta have it out with you, Eddie.
GRANT: Blue suit, too, that guy. Like a funeral. What's a matter?
DUNHAVEN: The matter is you got a great career you shouldn't ought to ruin.
GRANT: Yeah? Name me who writes a better book. I'll prove to you. Wait a minute. Here it is . . . *New*

Broom. Quote. "Eddie Grant makes the avant-garde look like they're guarding the *derriére*." There.
DUNHAVEN: Eddie, I wrote that.
GRANT: Oh, you did?
DUNHAVEN: Sure. Didn't I always say you're the best writer in the whole wide Village? It's just your next book won't be any good.
GRANT: Why not?
DUNHAVEN: Because you got a girl.
GRANT: Me?
DUNHAVEN: Yeah, you. You got a girl.
GRANT: You mean just because some girl, some twist, some broad there, you won't drink my rum? Take away the sweat socks, the blue jeans, and what's the difference between a girl and a man? Have some rum.
DUNHAVEN: I don't drink with someone that spoils a great career.
GRANT: Anyways, who said I had a girl?
DUNHAVEN: Don't fake, Eddie. I'm talking about Emma.
GRANT: Oh, Emma. Well, yuh, I've seen Emma a few times.
DUNHAVEN: A few times. I introduce her to you at the party Friday, and ever since I can't find her in her pad. Once the door is even locked and there's little noises inside. Tonight I found her and she said she's waiting for you.
GRANT: Oh, yuh, well, thought I'd take the kid to a belly dance or something, and a butterscotch sundae afterward.
DUNHAVEN: Eddie, you're an artist! You can't get mixed up with a girl! Look what happened to the boxer in *Golden Boy!*
GRANT: I'm no critic. I don't read the classics. And what's with you, Danny? I been with girls before. You never minded.
DUNHAVEN: This is Emma.
GRANT: Hey, listen, you like Emma yourself? That it?
DUNHAVEN: Never mind.
GRANT: You like her yourself!
DUNHAVEN: Damnit, when you found her, she was in my lap!
GRANT: So that's it! You like her! All right, wanna know what I thought when I saw her there at the party there, Friday, in your lap there? I thought . . . How can I express it? There must be a word for it. Let's see . . . Beautiful! Yes, that's the word. Beautiful!
DUNHAVEN: I know that.
GRANT: How many times you think beauty comes into a guy's life?
DUNHAVEN: But she's mine! Mine, Eddie! Whose lap was it?
GRANT: If beauty sits in the lap of my best friend, then rises and comes into my arms, all friendly considerations fade in the wonder and the glory of that moment.
DUNHAVEN: Eddie, she's my girl!
GRANT: Your girl? Emma? Never. The secret spot behind her ear quivers damply, and oh, how beautiful are her feet with sandals! Never could you appreciate Emma!
DUNHAVEN: I could not appreciate her? Emma, with her raven tresses? Emma, who each time she walks fourteen steps writes a sonnet?

GRANT: Ah, now I know you, villain!
DUNHAVEN: How am I?
GRANT: Traitorous.
DUNHAVEN: No, I'm just in love.
GRANT: Traducer! Plotting, voicing grave concern
Lest my career expire—when all the while
'Tis only of my Emma that you care!
DUNHAVEN: *My* Emma!
GRANT: Mine!
DUNHAVEN: I saw her first!
GRANT: But I
Spoke tender to her. She herself avowed
No man before me thus bestirred her.
DUNHAVEN: No?
Then ask her, prithee, what befell last month
When I escorted her unto her pad,
And there with gentle words, importunate hands,
Had all my will of her.
GRANT: Aha! But I
Have had my will more lately. Mark you, too:
My will of her is hers of me. We twain
Melt into one. Her hips are fluid locks;
Her mouth is wounded as it wounds mine own;
The ears of Ethiopian Night are split
With her hurt joyful cries and gladsome moans
Commingling with my own. For we are one!
DUNHAVEN: She's mine!
GRANT: Not so. You cannot touch your hand
To her—whilst I romp picnicking upon
Her hillocks and her valleys.
DUNHAVEN: Damn your eyes!
GRANT: She's mine!
DUNHAVEN: *I* love her!
GRANT: Still, I say, she's mine! Watch out!
DUNHAVEN: Watch out yourself, you blackest-hearted friend!
Take that! And that! Your treachery's at an end!
Farewell, my sometime buddy. Now has come
The time when yes, I will drink up your rum!

I have of course omitted the sounds of the attack with the poker, which were clearly recorded on my tape. The reader can imagine those sounds, I think.

And the reader can see, too, what injustice has been done in the public prints to both Grant and Dunhaven. The critic killed for no mere literary reason. No—in jealous rage he took the life of the man he admired because they both loved the same woman.

And now that my tape has revealed the truth to all the world, I trust that the press will henceforth treat Daniel Dunhaven with all the respect it habitually accords to killers motivated by the tenderest of passions.

PYROTECHNICAL PASTICHE

The third "new and hitherto unchronicled adventure of Poe's Dupin" —again respectfully conceived and devotedly executed by the British historian, cryptanalyst, and archeologist, Michael Harrison . . .

You may recall that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, once wrote (the holograph letter is in the Ellery Queen Collection at the University of Texas) that "I omitted to say in my note that I owe much, as you say, to Poe." Now, we do not wish to mislead you—consider those words most carefully—but with curious reverse English it may be that "Poe" now owes much to Doyle. We shall say no more—caveat lector . . .

The world's first detective story was Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (first manuscript title, "The Murders in the Rue Trianon Bas"), which appeared in the April 1841 issue of the Philadelphia periodical called "Graham's Magazine." This issue of EQMM is on sale in the United States (including Philadelphia) during the month of April 1966. Thus we are celebrating the 125th Anniversary of the world's first detective story—and surely it is especially fitting and proper that we mark this important anniversary with another pastiche of Poe's Dupin . . .

THE MAN IN THE BLUE SPECTACLES

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

by MICHAEL HARRISON

I DO NOT THINK THAT I SHOULD EVER HAVE NOTICED THE MAN WHO SAT IN a corner of the Café Procope had Dupin not kept me waiting an hour. I looked around the big room, and to pass the time I wondered with what success I might try my hand at Dupin's favorite intellectual exercise—assessing a man's constitutional, physical, and moral worth from an examination of his mere appearance.

I sought a subject and found one. The man in the corner was sitting alone, drinking coffee, and eating a piece of *pain d'épices,* and wearing a pair of blue spectacles. It was night, in the early Autumn of 18—, and the lamps had been lit in the Café Procope. The illumination was not of the

brightest, for we who frequent the famous old café, founded in the reign of *Le Roi Soleil,* care not for the garish splendor of the new gas-flame amid its glittering prismatic lustres. We do not have even the softer Argand lamps at the *chez Procope;* old-fashioned candles, of good wax and in draught-proof glass chimneys, sit on each table—and these we *Procopéens* find sufficient.

I had become so absorbed in my scrutiny of the man in the blue spectacles that Dupin took me quite unawares.

"You are studying the physiognomy, attitude, clothes, and general manner of the gentleman in the blue spectacles, I observe," said a familiar voice over my shoulder.

"Dupin!" I cried, springing up to greet my friend and shake him warmly by the hand. "I had almost given up all hope of you. Do sit down, and let me order you a negus. Yes, it is true—I was amusing myself by studying the man in the blue spectacles. But how on earth did you know?"

"You were staring very hard in that direction. And only he is to be found in that direction. Unless," Dupin added dryly, "you were examining that ten-year-old calendar hanging from the hat-peg?"

"No. It is true. I was studying that man." The waiter came, and I ordered a negus for Dupin, and another bottle of Chambertin for myself. "It is a fascinating exercise."

"What did you discover? That he is about forty-five years of age?"

"More than that," I said, slightly nettled by Dupin's chaffing manner. "Would you like to hear my conclusions? Of course," I added, "we must remember that the light is dim here, and—"

"That is why he comes to the Café Procope," said Dupin coolly. "I beg your pardon! You were about to tell me what you had surmised about our friend—?"

"I think that he is a scholar—"

"Because the University of Paris is a short walk from here?"

"No. Because his sight is weak. Do you not agree?"

"That his sight is weak? Yes. But I do not think that his sight has diminished through overstudy. In fact, he has not any weakness of the actual vision—of the power to distinguish objects, even in their smallest detail."

"But, Dupin, pray observe the man! See, he has taken his spectacles off. Note how his eyes are screwed up, how tenderly he wipes them with his silk handkerchief—"

"And look, I ask you, at the spectacles themselves. You observe the *Journal des Débats* on which he has placed the blue spectacles? Perceive that there is no refraction of the print as we see it through the blue lenses. The glass is plain, unground. His vision is weak, yes, but only in the sense that

his eyes cannot bear any strong light. What causes a man to suffer discomfort, even from light as dim as we have here?"

"That he customarily spends his time in light even less bright?"

"*Babae!* And where, may I inquire, would a man encounter conditions giving him even less light than the understanding patron allows here?"

I glanced at the man, and away, before I whispered, "In prison?"

Dupin affected to examine the man more closely, but only so as more cruelly to expose my false reasoning.

"He has no prison pallor," Dupin countered. "His wrists are free from the unmistakable scarring that the habitual wearing of handcuffs always produces. Besides, is that a wig he is wearing?"

"Indeed not. That is his own hair, and considering that he is past his middle years, he has kept his hair remarkably well."

"In that case, I am astonished that you should even suggest that he had been in prison—at least, recently. Had he been in prison, his head would have been shaven—his hair would have taken many months to become as long again as we now see it to be. *Ergo,* we have here no jailbird. But," Dupin added musingly, "I wonder what we *do* have?"

"Well," I said cheerfully, "here is someone who may be able to answer you. G—— has just come into the café."

"By appointment. He is very concerned about some forged bonds which appear to be circulating in large quantity. He is bringing me a specimen. Ah, good evening, Monsieur le Préfet. Have you brought the sample?"

"Shush!" said G——, staring about him like a conspirator in a Palais Royal farce. "Walls have ears." He took a sealed packet from inside his coat and "slipped" it to Dupin under cover of the table. I could see that my friend was vastly amused by these juvenile tactics; but he humored G—— to the extent of accepting the packet and putting it straightaway in his own breast pocket.

Marc-Antoine, the surly waiter, now made an appearance. G—— was silent while the man took our order, and not until the waiter had gone back to the bar-counter did G——, with many a sidelong glance, mutter, "I warned the Minister that it would not long be only bonds. If I told you that *mille* banknotes are now being circulated which never saw either the State Printing Works or the Banque de France—"

"I would believe you. Have you a clew to the identity of the forgers?"

"Not one," said G—— gloomily, staring at the man in the blue spectacles.

'What a rum-looking fellow *that* is!" he added. "I wonder what *he* does for a living?"

"Odd, your asking that," Dupin observed, with a glance at me. "Before you came in—indeed, before *I* came in—my friend was practicing his

powers of observation and ratiocination with this 'rum-looking fellow,' as you call him, for a subject."

G—— shrugged impatiently.

"Don't bother your head about an odd-looking customer in the Procope," he said. "You should have seen this place during the Revolution of July—nothing but long-haired poets with their stocks left off and their shirt-collars open *à la Byron*. Why, the difficulty was to find a normal-looking man! Even my assistants had to come here with their hair flowing and no neckcloths—they'd have been spotted else. Well, Dupin, you will let me have your report on you-know-what?"

This last portentous remark was accompanied by what the ladies (though in a vastly different context) call "a meaning look."

When G——, after having cursed both Marc-Antoine and the doorman, had taken his ill-tempered way out of the café, Dupin summoned the waiter, ordered coffee, and said, "Your reasoning was not up to par, as the men of the Bourse say. But I share your curiosity. I, too, would like to know more about the man in the blue spectacles. Shall we proceed to make inquiries?"

Only a few questions elicited the fact that the man in the blue spectacles—his name, Marc-Antoine told us, was Monsieur Lebrun (which was about as informative, in Paris, as telling us that his name was Monsieur X)—was an archaeologist. He was not a friend of Monsieur Jollois, whose workmen were busy digging up the proofs of Paris' Celtic and Roman origins—he was merely a follower in the steps of that indefatigable antiquary.

"They say," Marc-Antoine added, "that Monsieur Lebrun retired some years ago, with a handsome fortune, made in commerce somewhere in the South. Perhaps Marseilles. His sight is bad, but he has such enthusiasm for his hobby that nothing will keep him away from wherever the workmen are digging up some Roman antiquity, such as they recently found in the Rue St. Jacques."

"Which particular aspect of excavation now engages Monsieur Lebrun's cultivated enthusiasm?" Dupin asked.

"I really couldn't say," the waiter answered.

"I am always astonished," I remarked, when the waiter, with a bow, had moved away, "how these fellows always manage to pick up so much information. Now, *how* do you suppose he was able to tell us so much about Monsieur Lebrun?"

"Because Monsieur Lebrun was free with his confidences."

"Why should he be so free?"

"Perhaps," said Dupin, with a smile, "so that Marc-Antoine could answer

our questions. I hardly think that our interest in Monsieur Lebrun has gone unnoticed by that gentleman."

"A sort of hoax, you mean? Then what he told Marc-Antoine, with the intention that it should be passed on to us, is untrue?"

"Not necessarily. But you observe that one piece of information was missing: the focus of Monsieur Lebrun's *present* interest—archaeologically speaking, of course."

"And that is—?"

"I would venture that he is concerned with the Roman ruins revealed by the demolition of some old houses in the Rue Valois. I think that our friend has, indeed, more than a superficial interest in what lies buried beneath our streets. I have here a street map. Ah, yes! The houses must be at the top of the Rue Valois, just where the Rue Beaujolais connects the Rue Valois with the Rue Montpensier—the Palais Royal, of course, lying between. Yes, a most interesting part of Paris—especially to Monsieur Lebrun."

"Why?" I asked, stealing a cautious glance at the blue-spectacled man in the corner, still sipping his coffee and nibbling at his *pain d'épices*. "Why do you think he chooses to come to the Café Procope, when these excavations are taking place on the other side of the Seine?"

"Well, in the first place, every true Parisian is a man of unwavering fidelity so far as a single café is concerned. Some like the Café Riche, some Wattier's. We patronize, habitually, the Café Procope."

"And in the second place?"

"Ah, well, perhaps that involves me. Our friend may come here merely to keep an eye on me. He knows that G—— often comes here to consult me. So he keeps an eye on G——, too."

"Why should he wish to keep an eye on the two of you?"

"Because he knows that, if we are both here, it follows that we cannot be elsewhere. Come, finish your wine—we have a call to make. Where? The Institution for the Gainful Employment of the Able-Bodied Blind. I wish to hire the services of six well-built, strong, and active blind men for one evening's work. There, are you now satisfied? By the way, look at those blue spectacles. Do you not perceive something excessively odd?"

"Odd?" I repeated, puzzled.

"Surely you have become aware," Dupin said patiently, "that the shade of blue is perceptibly darker than it was yesterday?"

"You must think me excessively *crétin*—but why must he progressively darken his glasses?"

"The better to be able to walk—and work—in complete darkness. It is an accomplishment which calls for much skill, and more practice—as the blind men whom we shall hire will undoubtedly confirm."

I do not remember, save in the case of the Murders in the Rue Morgue, ever to have been busier on our detective work than in the few days following our call on the Director of the Blind Institution—a gentleman of much *savoir faire,* who willingly permitted Dupin to talk with, select, and commission six of the most active members of the Institution. These men, some blind from birth, some blinded in one of France's numerous wars, astonished us by an agility not a whit inferior to that of the most active person still possessing his sight.

They, on their part, professed themselves delighted with Dupin's offer of payment and completely willing to put themselves under his orders.

Except for a drive, in a *fiacre*, along the Rue de Rivoli and up the Rue Valois, where we halted for a few moments to see the progress of the excavations (though without descending from our hired conveyance), then along the Rue Beaujolais, down the Rue Montpensier, and so again into the Rue de Rivoli, we did not actually visit the site of the excavations.

"The *Moniteur* reports that the archaeologists and their laborers have found a wonderfully preserved Roman passage—probably a culvert—round-arched and in a perfect state of preservation. It is obvious to me that you have some especial interest in these diggings," I added.

"I am not the only one," said Dupin, with a smile.

"No, of course not. There are the *sçavans* clearing away modern Paris from the older Lutetia—"

"I was not thinking of them. I had other persons in mind. Don't look so glum! I will soon explain what appears to you another of my whims. Ah, yes, we must return to the Procope to see if our friend of the blue spectacles turns up again today—tonight, rather."

"And if he does not?"

"Then we must go in search of him."

I stared at Dupin.

"Go in search of him! Then you know where to find him?"

"Oh, I have a shrewd suspicion where to lay hands on him. Driver, take us to Number 33 Rue Dunôt. No, we eat first, and I shall smoke a bowlful of Latakia in my meerschaum; then we shall begin to look for our friend in the blue spectacles."

We had a light supper, and Dupin certainly kept his promise: the air was blue and thick with the swirls of tobacco-smoke as he pored over what appeared to be large maps, such as are prepared by land surveyors. I mentioned the fact, and Dupin nodded, without raising either his eyes or his head.

"Yes—maps of the sewers of Paris, borrowed from the municipality by

our good friend, G——. The man, I must admit, has his uses—now and then. Ah, as I thought! Yes, yes, of course! A straight line—straight as an arrow."

He looked up at last. "What o'clock is it?" he asked, of no one in particular. He examined the face of the bulbous gilt clock on the chimney-piece. "Half-past eight already, and a dark night, too. Come, let us be off. Wrap yourself up well; take a dark cloak. But first a brief note."

He went over to the little *escritoire* in the corner, took pen and paper, and dashed off a note. He seized the bell-pull and rang for our good Hyacinthe. When the man appeared in the doorway, Dupin said, "Take this note at once, Hyacinthe, to the person to whom it is addressed. Deliver it into his hands—his alone. Now, off you go!"

As for us, Dupin urged me briskly along to the Café Procope, and I was sure he had not expected otherwise when Marc-Antoine informed us that Monsieur with the Blue Spectacles—Monsieur Lebrun—had not arrived.

"No matter. Marc-Antoine, bring us each a *fine à l'eau*. Since we have some time to wait, we may as well make ourselves comfortable."

"For what do we wait?" I asked, as Marc-Antoine hurried away to fulfill our order.

"For the man who wears the blue spectacles."

"Why are you so certain that he will put in an appearance?"

"He has something to do. He cannot do it until he has made certain that I am here. And you, too—for you might be out, spying for me. So there it is—our friend will be here presently."

"And then?"

"He will go on to the next stage of his plot."

"And then?"

"Why, I shall follow him. Come, here is our *fine à l'eau*. You may pledge my success this evening! Ah, I forgot something. Pardon me."

Dupin, having quite mystified me, rose quickly and walked, very briskly indeed, across the large room to a door. The door opened and closed, and I, resigning myself to wait, picked up *Le Soleil Moderne,* a journal of somewhat advanced political views.

I had become quite immersed in this scandalous journal when my attention was recalled by two simultaneous happenings: the Man in the Blue Spectacles took his seat at his accustomed table and Marc-Antoine brought me a folded piece of paper on a tray.

His face expressionless, the waiter said, "I am to tell Monsieur, before he reads the note, that he is *on no account* to express astonishment at its contents, nor to glance in the direction of Monsieur Lebrun. Monsieur will, of course, readily appreciate the source of my instructions."

Who could mistake Dupin's authoritative—and precise—commands? I nodded a dismissal to the waiter, and opened the note. It ran as follows:

> "Someone will be returning to our table in my place. As you value the success of the evening to which you pledged a glass, treat him in all respects as though he were I—and do not fail to comply with whatever my *alter ego* tells you to do. *Esto fidelis!*"

I had hardly come to the end of this extraordinary missive when a gentleman slipped into Dupin's chair; and had I not been warned by the note, I should have cried out in astonishment—so like to the original was this *simulacrum* of my friend.

"Mandois of the Prefecture, at your service, Monsieur! I have often rendered this small service for Monsieur le Chevalier Dupin. It enables him to slip away without the person in whom we are interested being any the wiser."

I could hardly refrain from staring; but I recalled the very exact admonitions of the note.

"Our friend has gone then, Dupin?"

"Yes. We are to follow. When a certain person departs."

"We follow him?"

"No—we just follow. I'll tell you where in due time."

Marc-Antoine brought along a chess-board and a box of chessmen. "This, Monsieur, is what the stage people call 'business.' We must give the impression to a certain person that we are settled in for a long evening at the Procope. I think, between you and me, that we have about half an hour to wait. Our person has important work to do this evening. He won't want to delay it too long."

Mandois, whom I called "Dupin" throughout our two games of chess (in which I defeated him once), was right.

A few minutes over the half hour, the Man in the Blue Spectacles rose, casting a seemingly casual glance in our direction; he appeared to be satisfied that *Dupin* and I were immersed in our game, and then walked without haste through the door.

"We'll give him a few minutes, and then take a *fiacre* to the Bank."

"To the Bank? Which Bank?"

"Why, the Bank of France, of course," said Mandois, with a smile. "We are to meet Monsieur Dupin and the Governors there. Come, sir, your cloak and hat—quickly now!"

That short drive across the Seine to the Banque de France has, in my rec-

ollection, a quality of the dreamlike and the phantasmagorical. Mandois, pressed by me for an explanation, merely smiled, and repeated, parrot-fashion, that all would be made clear in good time.

I was welcomed into the Bank by a servant in livery, who looked remarkably like one of Mandois' colleagues in disguise, and then ushered into a lofty and elegant salon, sumptuously lit by many chandeliers. A number of elderly, well-dressed, and courteous gentlemen received me. Their domestics, without bidding, offered me refreshment. I sank down upon a luxurious divan, and a footman arranged the silken bolster at my elbow.

At last I managed to ask, "I was bidden here, gentleman, to meet my friend, Monsieur Dupin. I seem, rather, to have wandered into some scene from an English romance. Is this not a private apartment in the Banque de France? Will no one explain this mystery to me?"

"We are as much in the dark as you, my dear sir," an elderly man of dignified mien replied. "Monsieur Dupin merely requested that we should assemble here not later than ten o'clock. It is now not far from midnight. I, too, wonder why we are here; though I had a word from the Prefect of Police that he was posting some of his men, in the livery of the Bank, at what he called 'strategic points.' "

We were answered at once. The door was opened by a footman to admit G——, and on his heels came Dupin.

Both men bowed to the assembled bankers, who returned the courtesy somewhat frigidly.

"Gentlemen!" said G——, smiling and "washing" his plump hands, "we owe you—Monsieur Dupin and I—something of an apology, and decidedly an explanation. Monsieur Dupin will give you the latter. I may say, however, that your admirable cooperation tonight has saved, not only the Bank of France, but our financial system generally—"

"Ah, I have it!" cried a man whom I recognized as the Marquis de Fontenay-Belleville, friend and intimate of the English banker, Coutts. "The police—the guards posted—yes, of course—these gentlemen have foiled an attempt to break into the Bank! France is deeply indebted to you!"

Dupin coughed behind his hand.

"Thanks to you, gentlemen," he said, "Monsieur G—— has been enabled, tonight, to capture one of the most dangerous gangs of forgers ever to prey upon our delicate financial system. I trust," he continued, with a slight smile, "that you will not be vexed that Monsieur G—— and I were not able to take you into our confidence. But the truth is, gentlemen, that no attempt to break into the Bank was ever intended by the criminals. It was, however, essential that they believed that *we* believed that to be their intention.

"I expect," said Dupin, "that even those of you gentlemen who have not the slightest interest in archaeology will have read of the discoveries of Roman ruins in the Rue Valois. Roman ruins, in the imagination of the fanciful, always imply extensive subterranean vaults and secret passages. Let us say, gentlemen, that many people might have wondered whether or not it would be possible to break into the adjacent Bank of France through the use of some supposed Roman tunnel—no, no, my dear sir!"—as one of the more elderly of the bankers started up with a cry—"there are no tunnels, and there will be no attempt to break into the Bank. But an ingenious mind saw in the discovery of some ancient ruins a means of deceiving us into *thinking* a raid on the Bank was intended. The plot promised so to engage the attention of Monsieur G—— and your humble servant that we would both be preoccupied with the danger to the Bank. Thus the criminals would be free to carry out their real plan—elsewhere."

"You mean, to perform a robbery elsewhere?" Monsieur de Fontenay-Belleville asked.

"Precisely. To break into my house."

"Your house!"

"The forgers thought that I have papers, given to me by Monsieur G——, which would incriminate them. The fact is, gentlemen, that these criminals staged an elaborate hoax in order to divert our attention from the real object of their interest. With your help, Monsieur G—— staged an even more elaborate hoax—*he pretended to be taken in*. The results you know—three of the gang are now in custody, and we shall have the others tomorrow."

"It was essential," said Dupin, as we drove home to the Rue Dunôt, "that the forgers believe that we had swallowed the bait they had so carefully laid. They are not bad psychologists, these fellows," he said admiringly. "They understand my mental processes quite well—*up to a point*. They were right to think that I should reason from the progressively darker spectacles—aided by the broad hints that Marc-Antoine innocently carried to me—to subterranean, unlighted work of a nefarious character. And from that deduction to the very practical application of such nefarious night-work—the use of a Roman tunnel to break into the Bank of France.

"Yes, indeed. But where their psychological *acumen* failed was in persuading themselves that my reasoning would stop at that point. They could not guess, perhaps, that I should recall Homer's partner—"

"Homer's partner?"

"Why, yes. Do you not recall that we once debated the nature of Homer's partner, the companion of the blind poet—*the man who could see?* Ah, I see that you do remember.

"Well, then: I began to wonder, as I watched Monsieur Lebrun's charade of darker and darker spectacles and screwed-up eyes, what sort of man Homer's partner was—what sort of escapade the man in the blue spectacles would be up to when G—— and I were busy with the mare's nest of an attack on the Bank.

"Let me say that G——, though I have had reason to complain of his uncooperative attitude in the past, played up well to our own pretense. They were watching me, of course, so as to get me out of the way. They knew that G—— would have consulted me about the forgeries—they wished to ransack my private papers, to see what evidence I had, how far I could place them in danger.

"By getting G—— to hand me a packet in the café, I made sure that they would take the first opportunity to pay our apartment a visit. By going through with the charade of posting guards at the Bank, hiring blind men, summoning the Directors—all this, my friend, in case they had a spy *within* the Bank, as well as outside—we caught them off-guard.

"You should recall that maxim of ancient law," added Dupin, with a smile. "Permit me to refresh your memory—*res judicata pro veritate habetur*. We judged the matter to call for the charade that I have just put on—they accepted what I had done as the proof of what I believed."

"They underestimated you, Dupin!"

"Indeed, they did, and were sadly in error. By changing places with the *agent*, Mandois, I gave myself the opportunity to throw the criminals off the scent. I made my way quietly back to the Rue Dunôt, entered by the back door—without being seen—and so made my ascent to our little book-closet *au troisème*. I had not long to wait.

"When the forger-burglars came silently but confidently into the room, I had a pistol in my hand—though I must confess that in my opinion it was the shock of seeing me there, rather than any alarm at seeing my pistol pointing at them, that induced them to surrender so meekly.

"I marched them downstairs. Monsieur G—— and his myrmidons took custody of them. Monsieur G—— will, no doubt, also contrive to take to himself the glory for their apprehension. Ah, well! *C'est la vie.*"

EDITORS' NOTE: The reverse English mentioned in the introduction? Ah, well, did you expect a denouement similar to or exactly like the one in Doyle's *The Red-Headed League?* We did—on our first reading of *The Man in the Blue Spectacles.* Mr. Harrison's bold and ingenious variation took us completely by surprise!

If you like to find a special meaning or message in everything you read, you'll find a connoisseur's choice of morals in this tale of tragedy found in a bottle . . .

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T READ

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

MONTY BRUSHED THE CEMENT powder from his clothing and wiped his brow as he watched the green station wagon come up the long drive toward his house, a cloud of dust in its wake. It lurched past the front of the enormous brick house, missed a tree stump by inches, and screeched to a halt with its rear end at the spot where he had laid out his building materials.

"I brought over some cinder blocks like you asked me to, Monty," said the driver. "I think with what you've got there, we'll have enough."

"Thanks, Ford," Monty answered. "Living way off the main road here, it's hard for me to bring in heavy stuff, especially in that little car of mine. And I appreciate your being willing to help me, too. I'm afraid I haven't had much experience mixing cement and laying blocks."

"The pleasure's all mine," said Ford. "To tell the truth, Monty, I'm kind of glad you asked me. I didn't figure you'd feel very kindly toward me after—well, you know."

Monty was silent for a moment. His eyes glistened with tears. Then he wiped one arm brusquely across his face. "It was an accident, Ford. They said so at the hearing. Being angry at you won't bring Helen back, so forget it. Life's got to go on."

"I'm glad you feel that way," said Ford. "You know how sorry I am about it. Most men wouldn't be as reasonable as you are." He looked at the pile of cinder blocks, the bags of cement, and the mixing trough. "What's the project, Monty?"

Monty pointed to the small windowless room which projected from the back of the house, facing a deep woods in the rear. "I had a man build this for me last week," he said. "I'm going to use it for a darkroom. I was away when he came to lay the blocks, and when I got back, I found he'd put in an extra door just where I don't want it."

He led Ford to a rectangular opening in the rear wall of the room, and they peered into the gloomy interior.

Monty pointed to a wooden door on the opposite side of the room.

"That goes into the house," he said. "But this opening where we're standing shouldn't be here. I'm afraid if I put a door here, I might leave it unlocked, and somebody would open it while I was developing film. So to be on the safe side, I thought I'd wall it up."

"Well, I don't spend all my spare time reading books like you do," said Ford, "but what I don't know about masonry just isn't worth knowing, if I do say so myself."

"Fine, Ford. But how about a drink before we start?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

"Is bourbon okay?"

"Yeah. On the rocks."

Monty went around to the side door of the house and into the kitchen. He returned carrying a half-full bottle, a glass, and a bag of ice cubes. Ford took the bottle by the neck and held it up.

"Connoisseur's Choice. That's my brand. But where did you get it? I didn't know they sold it around here."

"They don't. A man I know brought it when he came out to see me one day."

"Aren't you drinking?"

"No. I did too much of that after Helen's funeral."

Ford half filled the glass, dropped in one ice cube, and gulped down the liquor before it had a chance to cool. "Ah," he sighed, "just the thing to start off an afternoon's work."

"I'll leave the bottle here," said Monty. "Help yourself."

Ford showed Monty how to mix the cement and sand in the trough and supervised the adding of the water. Then, while Monty puddled the mixture with a hoe, Ford snapped a chalk line across the doorway. He laid down a coating of wet cement with his trowel and placed a row of blocks into place, testing each one with a level.

"Got to get 'em straight at the beginning," he said. "Otherwise the whole thing'll be out of line."

The tiers of blocks rose quickly until they were nearly waist high. Ford prepared another batch of cement and then reached for the bottle. He put it to his mouth and tilted it up.

"Man, that's good," he grinned. "I hope it'll last until the job's done."

"There's more where that came from," said Monty, who had walked over to Ford's green station wagon and was now circling it. He stopped by the right-front fender which, in spite of its coating of dust, was obviously newer and shinier than the rest of the car.

"Was that where it hit Helen?" he asked, pointing to the fender.

"Yeah, Monty. They had to put on a new one."

"Isn't it lucky a fender can be replaced that easily," mused Monty, a faraway look in his eyes.

"Look, Monty," said Ford, trying to change the subject, "I'm gonna

need some help getting these blocks into place. I think it'll be easier if one of us stands on each side of the wall."

"Okay, Ford. Why don't you go inside? It'll be cooler in there out of the sun."

"Fine. But this goes with me." He gripped the bottle tightly.

"Be careful going over the wall. Don't knock any of the blocks loose."

"They're solid now. Whoever sold you this cement gave you the quick-setting kind."

Ford climbed into the room, and Monty handed him a pail of cement. Then Monty stared at the man on the other side of the wall for a long moment.

"Ford?"

"Yeah?"

"How did it happen?"

"The accident?"

"Yes. You never told me about it—except for what you said at the hearing."

There was a gurgling sound inside the vault-like room and then the clink of the bottle as it was set down. "It was just after sundown," Ford said. "I was driving along the road in front of your house, and just as I was passing your driveway she suddenly ran out and right in front of the car."

"You couldn't possibly avoid hitting her?"

"You saw where her body was lying, Monty. It was almost in the middle of the road."

"The policeman testified that you'd been drinking."

"I'd had one drink over at Pete's Place. The bartender testified that all I had was one—you remember he said that? I wasn't drunk, Monty—it was just an accident."

"Okay, Ford. I was just asking."

As the afternoon wore on, the wall rose until there were only two more tiers to be set in. Monty passed Ford another pail of cement which Ford nearly dropped. The bottle was now almost empty.

"Ford?" called Monty.

"Yeah, Monty boy? Wha's trouble now?"

"Do you want to finish the wall from out here?"

"Naw. 'S a lot easier with one of us on each side. Blocks slide right inna place. Squish!—in they go."

"Then you'll have to go in through the house when we're finished."

"Fine. I'll meet you inside, an' we'll have a li'l drink. Say, ain't you got no lights in here?"

"No, I haven't got the wiring in yet."

"Oh. Well, gimme 'nother block."

Finally there remained only a single block to be put into place. While Monty rested, Ford finished the bottle and dropped it out through the opening.

"On'y one more block, Monty boy," he mumbled. "Give 'er here, an' I'll finish yer job fer ya."

"Ford?"

"Wha' ya want?"

"The day after the accident I went down to the spot where it happened. It was something to do, that's all."

"So w'at, Monty boy?"

"I found paint on the post that holds our mailbox just *off* the road. It was green paint, Ford. Like what's on your station wagon. And it wasn't there two days earlier when I gave the post a coat of whitewash."

"Wha's that got to do with me?"

"It makes you wonder, though, how paint could have gotten on the post if you were *on* the road the way you said you were. Doesn't it, Ford?"

"An' what would I be doin' with my car off the road by your mailbox?"

"You were drunk, Ford."

"Look, Monty, the bartender at Pete's said I had one drink—jus' one drink. How could I get drunk on jus' one drink?"

"You had a bottle in the car."

"The police searched the car. They din' find no bottle."

"No, but I did. You threw it into that pile of rocks on the far side of the road. But it didn't break, Ford. I found it there the next day."

"Awri', wise guy. Where's the bottle now?"

"It was half full when I found it. You've been drinking out of it all afternoon."

Ford stared through the last opening in the wall at the bottle glinting in the late afternoon sun. He licked his lips as Monty put his face up to the opening.

"You were drunk when you hit Helen, weren't you, Ford?" shouted Monty. "Not from what you had at Pete's but from the bottle you had with you in the car! Helen didn't run out in front of you! You swerved off the road and hit her while she was standing by our mailbox. Then you carried her body to the middle of the road so the police would think it was her fault. And it would have worked if the bottle had shattered when you threw it away. But it didn't, Ford. I found it. And it's Connoisseur's Choice. Your brand!"

Ford was silent for a moment. Then a smirk crossed his face. "Yer gonna have a tough time proving any of that, Monty boy."

Monty smiled gently. "I don't have to prove it, Fordy boy."

"Wha' cha mean by that?"

"Earlier today you said you weren't much of a reader," said Monty. "Don't you ever read books, Ford? Not even an occasional mystery story?"

"Naw. It's a waste of time."

"That's too bad."

"Look, I ain't gonna stan' here an' listen to you no more. I'm goin' home. I din' tell my wife I was comin' up here. Besides, this wall's jus' about finished."

"You're right, Ford. It's just about finished. But you can't get out this way, through the wall.

You're too big to fit through that little opening."

"Did ya forget about the door into the house, Monty boy? Tha's my escape hatch. An' if you locked it, I'll jus' break it down."

"You do that, Ford. You go right through that door. I didn't lock it."

Ford's face left the hole in the wall. There was the sound of a door opening, followed by the slapping of a fist against a brick surface. Then Monty heard Ford's scream.

"It's a phony! The door's a phony! There's nothing behind it but a brick wall!"

"That's right, Ford. I hung the door up yesterday—right against the solid wall of the house."

Ford's face again appeared at the tiny opening. "What do you want from me, Monty?"

"Do you know how long we'd been married?" Monty replied. "Eleven days, Ford. Eleven days we had to plan a future, and then you came along with a bellyful of booze and wiped it all out in a split second and expected to get off scot-free. There are a lot of names for what I want, Ford. Justice—satisfaction—revenge. Take your pick."

Monty took a block and began to put cement on its edges. Ford watched, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly. Then:

"For the love of God, Monty!"

Monty smiled. He walked to the opening, holding the last block in both hands. "Yes," he said, "for the love of God!"

The block slid smoothly into the opening. Monty braced it with a length of board so that it could not be pushed out before the cement set. When the block was immovable, Monty went to Ford's station wagon and slid behind the wheel.

It would take him only ten minutes to drive to the place where he had left his own car the previous day. Even allowing plenty of time to wipe his fingerprints from the station wagon, he ought to be back home in less than an hour.

As he looked again at the small room, now completely sealed, it occurred to him that one day he might be able to make an excellent darkroom of it. Of course it would be a long time before he got around to that.

Monty shook his head sadly. "It's too bad you never developed an interest in mystery stories, Ford," he muttered. "If you'd ever read Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado,* you might have been in a better position to appreciate what was happening to you."

He started the motor, and the station wagon moved gently forward. As he passed the sealed doorway, his eyes glittered coldly.

"In pace requiescat!" he said.

"Q"

THEY DON'T READ DE QUINCEY IN PHILLY OR CINCY

by OGDEN NASH

Consider, friends, George Joseph Smith,
A Briton not to trifle with,
When wives aroused his greed or wrath
He led them firmly to the bath.
Instead of guzzling in the pub,
He drowned his troubles in the tub.

In France, however, thrifty land,
The bathtub must be filled by hand,
And that is why that fabled fiend,
The laziest ever guillotined,
When shedding his prospective brides
In multiple uxoricides
Just combed his beard and shined his hat
And led them to the Landrumat.

Oh why then doth our home-grown spouse
When tired of mate around the house
Just seize on any weapon handy?
A dreary *modus operandi,*
Proof we belittle in our hearts
Fine murder with the other arts.
As connoisseurs have snorted,
Murders, like wines, are best imported.

This is the 298th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Alice's late husband had often accused her of being devoid of a conscience—which infuriated Alice who considered "ethics" and "integrity" utter foolishness . . .

Irma B. Frazier, the author of this ironic little study, is past 50 ("never mind how much," she says, "but I'm under 60"). She was born in Cannonsville, Delaware County, New York. "That beautiful little hamlet is no more—it was a victim of New York City's never-ending thirst for water." For many years Miss Frazier worked as a bookkeeper and office manager, but when ill health forced her to retire, she moved to California to be near her sister. A "bookworm" all her life, she loves opera and baseball and—of course—mystery stories . . .

FRUIT OF THE VINE

by IRMA B. FRAZIER

As Alice moved briskly about her kitchen preparing dinner, she felt a glow of such deep satisfaction with herself and the fruition of her plans that for once she regretted the death of her husband. Just for a few moments she would have liked to have him here to witness the results of her planning and methods. Ellen Fleming had left only a few minutes ago after making it plain that she would be happy to welcome Alice's son Richard as a husband for her daughter Barbara.

Alice had worked hard for this. Not only was Mrs. Fleming the town's richest citizen, but her brother was Richard's employer in the highly successful real estate firm in which Mrs. Fleming's late husband had been senior partner, and in which she still retained a substantial interest.

Richard had been a reluctant swain; he preferred the flamboyant and luscious charms of Millie West, but his mother had finally convinced him that the advantages of wealth and position which Barbara could bring him would have more than compensated for her lack of beauty and for such passing fancies the Millies of this world had to offer.

And thanks to the training Alice had given him, Richard had finally seen things in their proper light. It had taken a great deal of tact and diplomacy on Alice's part. Richard

was spoiled and handsome; Barbara was spoiled and unattractive. No amount of money could alter the fact that her eyes were a washed-out blue and were set too close together, that her figure was dumpy, her disposition sour.

Alice's thoughts turned once more to her own late husband. Since his untimely demise life had been very good for Alice. He had often accused her of being devoid of a conscience. Such accusations seemed ridiculous to Alice and only infuriated her. What he called "ethics" and "integrity" were to her utter foolishness.

It was quite natural under these circumstances that Alice found it necessary to take charge when Richard, a year before, got himself involved with that wretched girl—Jenny what-was-her name? Alice had found that a moderate sum of money would insure silence on the part of the girl and her family. Of course, she got no help from her husband in trying to raise the funds—he had stubbornly maintained that Richard should do the "right thing." But Alice had always been a great believer in life insurance, and had made John feel it was his duty to carry a large policy. True, this had entailed many sacrifices in their way of living since John earned only a modest salary. But to Alice, any sacrifice was worthwhile if it guaranteed the security of her son's future and, no less, her own. In justice to Alice, however, it must be said that only subconsciously did she think of her own future security. Protecting her son had become an obsession with her.

And so with no nonsense such as ethics or conscience to bother her, she had made her decision. She accompanied her husband into the woods in back of their home on a hunting trip. Everything worked out perfectly, just as she had planned it. No one saw her leave with John or return alone, and when the news of the hunting "accident" was broken to her by the police she displayed exactly the right amount of emotion, neither too much nor too little.

According to the coroner's verdict John had fallen over a fence and accidentally discharged his gun into his own body. He was notoriously absent-minded and his apparent carelessness was very much in character. The routine investigation by the life insurance company merely confirmed this verdict. There were no debts and no known circumstances to suggest foul play. Certainly it would have seemed the height of absurdity to suspect Alice. Like Caesar's wife, she was above reproach.

Her recollections were interrupted by the sound of Richard's steps in the hall, She was about to greet him with her wonderful news about the Flemings when she noticed by the dejected expression on his face and the slump of his shoulders that all was not well.

"What is it, Richard?" she asked apprehensively. "Is something wrong?'

"No, nothing," he answered with a shrug, but she was not to be put off and persisted in her questioning until she had the truth from him. Rarely did she become angry with her son but now she had to use all her self-control to prevent an outburst so harsh that it might alienate him.

"How could you, Richard, at such a time as this? Just when you are getting a foothold in a good firm—when you have this opportunity to make a good marriage! I don't see how you could have been so foolish as to get yourself that involved with a little tramp like Millie! Ellen Fleming will never forgive you if you marry Millie at this stage of the game. She can have you discharged from the firm and make no mistake about it, she will!"

A stubborn look came over Richard's face. "If I *don't* marry her, Millie will tell her father and you know what that will mean."

"You sound as if you *want* to marry her!"

"Well, I don't see what else I can do unless you can buy her off—the way you did Jenny."

Alice could have cried with exasperation, but this was no time for tears.

"Richard, I can't afford it. There must be some other way. We'll try to figure this out after dinner."

They ate their dinner in absolute silence. Richard was in no mood for small talk and Alice was lost in thought. She finally spoke when Richard was leaving the table: "I'll see you in the living room as soon as I clear the table."

The very fact that she would give this matter priority over the ritual of careful and immediate dishwashing was an indication of her anxiety. And her son did not have long to wait. As she entered the room it was evident that her normal confidence had returned, a sure sign that her fertile imagination had not failed her in another crisis.

"Richard, how many people know about you and Millie?"

"Nobody, until I told you tonight. She knew her old man would have locked her up if he found out she was meeting me on the sly."

"Then our best course is to bluff her. She can't prove anything and if we get a good lawyer and tell him she is threatening blackmail because of her present condition and the fact that you once dated her openly, I think we can scare her into keeping quiet. With her reputation she wouldn't stand much of a chance in court. You are quite sure nobody ever saw you together?"

"I'm as sure as I can be of anything. We never met in any place except in back of the old Jacobs' farmhouse and nobody has lived there for years."

"Oh, Richard! How did you dare meet there? You know I always

take a short cut through there when I visit your Aunt Kate!"

"That was easy. I was always sure you were safely home before we went there."

"But *anybody* might have come through there and seen you."

"Not since that kid fell in the well. It didn't do any good to cover the well up—somebody always takes off the boards and smashes them. I think you're the only one who goes through there at night. Anyhow, we knew if we stayed close to the well nobody would come near us."

"Then I don't see any reason—" and Alice stopped talking so abruptly that her son looked at her in surprise. "Richard, I want you to listen to me very carefully and I want no interruptions until I have finished what I have to say."

There was such an expression of deadly determination on her face and in her voice that Richard felt actually frightened, as if he were taking orders at the point of a gun.

Calmly and clearly Alice outlined the plan they must follow. That night they would go to the old well and loosen some stones and sod around the edge. Richard would then arrange a rendezvous with Millie for tomorrow night. Just a quick, hard shove at the right time would forever solve the problem of what to do about Millie. If and when her body should eventually be found, there would be no reason at all for Richard to be suspected.

Richard knew he should be shocked, but after the initial fright his only reaction was a certain amount of admiration for his mother's clever strategy combined with a fear that somehow the plan might go awry. He said as much to Alice.

She had expected a long hard fight with him, perhaps his absolute refusal, and her sudden, intense relief was as great as the purring satisfaction she had experienced earlier that day when Ellen Fleming had visited her. "We will not take nearly as much of a chance this way as if we tried to scare her off with a lawyer. If we are careful and plan every detail in advance it is much the safest way. Let me do all the worrying."

The policeman on duty at headquarters was enjoying a quiet evening. He was nearly asleep in his chair when the strident ring of the telephone brought him upright.

"Yes, this is the police. What's that? A missing person? How long has she been missing? We don't usually look for them until they've been gone longer, but under the circumstances we'll come right out."

As Richard hung up the phone, he could not help feeling that he too had planned very carefully—especially since he had not had much time. His first act on returning had been to call Aunt Kate and ask if his mother had left for home. On being told, naturally, that she had

never arrived, he had expressed surprise and anxiety, and immediately notified the police.

After all, he consoled himself, he had not actually committed the act. She had lost her footing and in that fleeting second when he could have saved her, he knew that he did not want to do so. For the moment he preferred Millie and the generous amount of money payable to him as the beneficiary of his mother's life insurance.

It suddenly occurred to him that as soon as he and Millie were married he must take out a large policy on her life. Like his mother, he was a great believer in life insurance.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 299th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a straightforward, hard-hitting, contemporary detective story, reminiscent of the Black Mask tradition, told with the same sharp eye for reportorial detail, but with more restraint, and as a result, with more feeling of verisimilitude . . .

The author, Stephen R. Novak, was 43 when he wrote "Never Overlook an Angle." He had served during World War II in the 102nd Infantry Division in France, Holland, Belgium, and Germany. In 1943 he was graduated from Pace Institute (now Pace College), and in 1947 he received a degree of Bachelor of Business Administration from Lehigh University. He has been a free-lance writer and has had nonfiction published, chiefly in religious periodicals. At the time we accepted "Never Overlook an Angle," Mr. Novak was taking a fiction-writing course at Famous Writers School, Westport, Connecticut.

We can't help wondering if Mr. Novak hasn't, out of his experience in World War II, some stories to tell about war, perhaps even of spies . . .

NEVER OVERLOOK AN ANGLE

by STEPHEN R. NOVAK

IT WAS 4:00 IN THE MORNING AND the purplish overhead lights gave the tollbooth the look of a desert oasis. A low-hanging mist clung like cotton puffs over the cooling ground and shrouded the toll area, its signs and its lights, in fuzzy diffusion. Farther down the parkway, and towering above the haze, were scattered specks of light from Manhattan penthouse apartments.

There were no cars in the toll area at this moment and only one booth was open—the collector was handling both directions of the sparse, early morning traffic.

However, the toll collector was not now at his post. About 50 feet below the booth he was leaning over a dead man lying just to the right of the southbound lane. Off to one side was the toll collector's old six-cylinder Ford.

The dead man's suitcase lay open on the road; it contained a rumpled suit and a pair of old shoes. The collector snapped the case shut and ran back to the tollbooth.

He lifted the phone marked "Di-

rect Line" and dialed one stroke. While waiting for an answer, he lit a cigarette and puffed quickly. He fingered the wooden placard at the window of the booth. The sign bore the name *A. Sandusky*.

He spoke huskily into the phone. "Hello? Sandusky here at the Yonkers tollbooth. Hit and run accident . . . yeah, right at the booth . . . No, he's dead. No, I couldn't stop it—going too fast. Man and woman in gray convertible, top down. Sped right past the booth . . . Ten minutes? Thanks. Right."

He relaxed, dug a thermos bottle from a shelf under the counter, and poured some coffee into the cap.

Officers Pat Bennett and Stan Major cruised slowly south on the parkway toward the tollbooth. Pat Bennett at 38 was an experienced policeman, trained in the value of constant awareness. His companion, Stan Major, barely out of the rookie class, was still subject to impulsive actions. Pat drove as Stan leaned his head back on the seat cushion.

"Boy, what a head!" moaned Stan.

"Can't take it?"

"I was fine till you opened the champagne."

"Hard to believe my little girl's eighteen and engaged to be married," said Pat. "Now I know I'm getting old. My daughter, getting married!"

"Old? Never know it the way you hold your liquor."

"The secret's to nibble while you drink—and stop at the right time."

"I know, I know. Don't rub it in." Stan pressed his palm to an aching head.

"Gotta have full faculties for this job all the time, engagement parties or not."

"So I don't know how to drink."

"Forget it," said Pat.

A sergeant's voice came crisp and clear over the police radio. "Car forty-three. Car number forty-three."

Pat flicked his microphone switch. "Forty-three here."

"Hit and run at Yonkers tollbooth. Investigate. Ambulance on its way."

"Right." Pat switched off his mike. "Clear your head, Stan, we've got work to do."

He gunned the motor, turned on the siren, and set the revolving light spinning its red tentacles. Within ten minutes they were passing the series of 25¢ toll warning signs, now almost totally obscure in the haze.

At the tollbooth the uniformed collector was waiting for them. "Over there," he said, and pointed to the body.

"Come with us," said Pat, "nothin's coming for a while. Ambulance'll be here soon. You new here?"

"Been on the day shift at the Triboro Bridge. Pretty lonely around here."

"Sure is. You see it happen?"

"This car comes tearin' through the gate and I hear a scream and then I see this guy stretched out over there."

"Where'd he come from?" asked Pat.

"Search me."

"Your car?" asked Stan, nodding at the old Ford.

"Yes."

Pat went down to one knee and searched the body. Stan held a pencil poised at his notebook.

"Two keys—handkerchief—half a pack of Marlboros—matchbook—forty cents in change, quarter, dime, and nickel—wallet—let's see, two tens, three ones—no driver's license."

Pat unfolded a sheet of paper tucked into one flap of the wallet. "Well, well! Trenton State Prison—Sam Turkewitz, paroled June 6th. Turkewitz—Turkey—that strikes a note. Stan, call in and see what they've got on him."

"Right!" Stan went to the patrol-car radio.

Pat pulled out his own handkerchief, put the dead man's possessions in it, tied a knot, then stuffed the small bundle in his pocket.

"Hit in the front. Looks like he might've seen it coming. Must've been walkin' along here, heard the car, turned around—but too late."

"I suppose so," said the toll collector.

"And you didn't get the license number?"

"No—going too fast."

"Now, what would a man like Turkey be doing on this parkway at four in the morning? That his suitcase?"

"Yes, sir. Nothing there but old clothes."

Pat opened the suitcase, checked, nodded.

At the patrol car Stan heard the report: "Turkewitz, Sam, five feet five, known as The Turkey, brown hair, brown eyes, armed robbery, Paterson, New Jersey, 1944, two years Trenton State, theft, Hackensack, 1949, one year Bergen County jail, armed robbery, Red Bank, 1952—want any more?"

"What's current?"

"Paroled last week after serving eight years of a ten-year sentence at Trenton. Out on good behavior. More?"

"That's enough. Oh, here's the ambulance."

Two men in white rolled out the stretcher and went to the corpse. "Got all you want?" the attendant asked of Pat.

"I think so."

"An ignominious demise even for our callous generation. Of this at least I am certain, that no one has ever died who was not destined to die some time. Saint Augustine, you know," said the ambulance driver.

The attendant cocked a thumb at his colleague, "A philosopher at four in the morning, no less."

They lifted the body onto the stretcher, rolled it to the ambulance,

got back in, turned the car around, and sped down the parkway.

Stan reported. "A record as long as your arm. Armed robbery, et cetera. Paroled last week after eight years at Trenton for a heist in '57. Paroled for good behavior—that's a laugh! We gonna be here much longer?"

"A few minutes. What gets me is why Turkey should be carrying extra clothes."

"Even he must've changed once in a while," said Stan.

"I don't know about that. He sure wasn't up on the new styles. Well, I guess a lot changes in eight years." Of the toll collector Pat asked, "What time did you come on duty?"

"Half an hour ago."

"And you didn't see this Turkewitz walk past your booth?"

"No, I didn't."

"Show me exactly what you did," said Pat.

The toll collector went over his movements. "I was standin' in the booth here, like this, drinkin' some coffee, when this car comes shootin' through."

"Any cars just before the convertible?"

"A couple on the other side—yeah, two cars. It gets so automatic, you hardly notice after a while."

"How many people in the gray convertible that hit him?"

"Two—man and a woman. Man was driving. Must have been drunk, crazy drunk. When I heard the scream I ran over to the guy. Could see he was dead right off. You know, I can't even remember running?"

"The excitement, I guess," said Stan.

"Was the suitcase in this exact spot when you reached the body?" asked Pat.

"Maybe a little closer to the body. I told you I looked through it."

Pat nodded. "I was just wonderin' exactly where he was when he got hit. Car probably carried him some distance. The position of the suitcase helps."

"Everything helps," added Stan.

"Think they'll get him?" asked the collector.

"The alarm's out. We'll get him all right. Now, after you checked the suitcase, what'd you do?"

"I phoned in."

"How much time would you say elapsed from when the car hit Turkewitz and the time you phoned in?"

"Three, four, five minutes—more like four, I'd say."

"We'd have heard by now if they picked up the convertible near the bridge," speculated Stan.

"Probably turned off the parkway," said Pat.

"It could be almost anywhere in the county by now."

"Tough to find too, without a license number. Too bad you didn't get a glimpse. Couldn't say if they were New York or Jersey plates?"

The toll collector bit his lower lip. "I'm sorry, I really can't say."

The radio beckoned them. "Just got a report from Poughkeepsie," said the sergeant. "Might interest you."

"Shoot," said Pat.

"Poughkeepsie police report armed robbery at an all-night diner about forty miles south of the old highway. Shot up the owner pretty bad. Took twenty-three bucks. Description fits Turkewitz. Looks like you boys wrapped this job up for the upstate police."

"Was Turkewitz carrying a suitcase?"

"Stand by. I'll check."

Stan was perplexed. "How'd he get down here so fast?"

"That's one of our problems, Stan." Pat lit a cigarillo and again studied the suitcase.

"Aren't you being a little finicky, Pat—sorta strainin'?" asked Stan.

"Sometimes the smallest detail gives you the best lead—like in the old jigsaw puzzles. Ever work them?"

"Me? Don't have time."

"That's what the kids and me used to do, before TV. Guess I'm the only one who still goes for them. The tiniest piece is usually the one that shows the whole pattern."

"Looks cut and dried to me. He must've hitched a ride, got off here, then got clipped by this convertible. No?"

"Would you give him a ride this time of night?"

"Not me! But there are lots of big-hearted jerks who lead with their chins."

"I suppose you're right. Just the same, it doesn't figure that a guy like Turkey should get his eternal reward from the front end of a speeding car. His kind usually ends up in the chair, or at the wrong end of a knife or a gun, or in the gutter of Skid Row."

"It's fate," said Stan, "and you can't beat fate."

"When your number's up," said the toll collector, "it's up."

The radio spoke again. "Car forty-three, are you standing by?"

"Here," said Pat.

"Poughkeepsie says Turkewitz was *not* carrying a suitcase."

"Well, what now, Stan? No suitcase. How and when did he get it?"

"Musta had it outside that Poughkeepsie joint he held up."

"Sure. And after he plugs the guy for twenty-three bucks he stops to pick up the suitcase?"

"Hey, Pat. What're ya tryin' to prove?"

"Never overlook an angle."

"I know, but shouldn't we be movin' on?"

"One more look."

Stan shook his head from side to side. "Never-say-die Pat Bennett!"

They were walking to the spot of the accident when lights from a car approached on the southbound lane.

"Customer," said the toll collector.

The motorist slowed to a stop at

the green light over the arched toll-gate. He stuck his hand out with a quarter. The collector gave him change. Pat noticed the woman whisper something to the driver, but he merely shrugged and drove off. Pat finished his study of the roadside and returned to the booth.

He looked at the name plate. "Sandusky, you know you guys all look alike to me, and they shift you around so much."

"You all look alike to me too," said the toll collector.

"Never thought of that."

"Need me any more?"

"No, guess not. One more quick stroll and we'll be going. I got a nervous mind that jumps all the time, and I can't relax till it stops jumping." Pat dug his hands deeply in his pockets and walked the route thoughtfully.

At the site of the accident he searched again for footprints, but found none. He re-examined the blood spots, glanced up and down the highway, then back at the toll-booth. He walked as he imagined Turkey must have, pretended a car was bearing down on him, turned and fell. He got up and dusted his clothes. And he was perplexed.

In the police car Stan pulled his cap over his eyes and grabbed a few moments' rest. The radio called in and ordered their car to proceed immediately to Bronxville, where there was a fire at the Johnson warehouse adjacent to the railroad terminal.

Stan could wait no longer. He pulled Pat by the arm back to the patrol car. "Boy, we'll catch hell if we're the last to get to that fire."

As he was about to get in, Pat etched the scene in his memory bank. The deserted highway, the fluorescent lights, the tollbooth, the haze-enshrouded sign high over the toll booth, with the barely discernible words, *Toll 25¢*. His fingers worked nervously inside his pocket as he jingled a few coins. What was it that bugged him?

At the booth the collector drank some more coffee from the thermos.

Pat opened the door of the car with his left hand. With his right hand he brought out some coins. Suddenly he reached for his gun and pulled his partner to the ground with him. "Down, Stan!"

At the booth the toll collector whipped his gun from its holster and fired at the policemen.

From his prone position Pat was deadly. His first volley of shots ripped through the booth and hit the toll collector. When the limp body fell and hung from the booth entrance, Pat and Stan approached cautiously until they were sure he was dead.

"He had us covered all the time—like we were sitting ducks!"

"But, Pat, how did you know it was the toll collector that killed Turkewitz?"

"Stan, Stan. He *is* Turkewitz! The dead man was Sandusky, the real toll collector."

"What?"

"Sure. You ever know a toll collector to give change of a quarter when the toll's a quarter?"

"He did that?"

"With the car that just went through. But I should've known—the out-of-style clothes in the suitcase. They were really his—Turkey's, I mean. The real toll collector would have to carry his uniform and thermos of coffee, wouldn't he? That's the reason Sandusky carried the suitcase."

"But why did Turkey make such a crazy mistake with the toll? Didn't he see the signs?"

"Oh, he must have seen them all right—I mean with his eyes, but not with his head. Remember, he hasn't been out in eight years, since '57—and tolls were a dime then—and he was thinking the way he did eight years ago."

"But why did he kill the toll collector? Why didn't he just run away?"

"Turkey must have forced his way on the toll collector somewhere up the line, at a traffic light on a side road, or maybe at the diner. Or maybe Sandusky gave him a lift voluntarily. You know, we don't deserve any medals—we never even checked the car. Just took his word for it. Anyway, he must've figured it was a perfect setup. Nobody'd guess. They'd think the dead guy was Turkewitz, and by the time it was checked out, he'd be a long way off in Sandusky's car."

"It sure was a smart move."

"Yeah, real talent gone to waste."

"I'll call the ambulance."

"Funny how things work out. He robs and robs all his life, then for a lousy fifteen cents, society squares things. Come on, let's get on that radio and give 'em the dope. Maybe we can get out of that fire detail."

Those of you who read George Emmett's first and second stories—"Bloehm's Wall" and "A Fine Winter Thirst," published back to back in our September 1965 issue—will remember Mr. Emmett as one of the most promising new talents to appear in EQMM in a long time. Here is this new author's third story, and surely we can expect great things from Mr. Emmett . . .

MILLSTONE ROUND HIS NECK

by GEORGE EMMETT

"AMY, DON'T BULLY ME! I SAID I'M going out and that's that."

Mario Barnes's voice, loud with authority, startled them both. An almost visible bubble of silence formed, hovering fragilely over the dining-room table until Amy pricked it with an accusing forefinger.

Her contralto thunder filled the vacuum.

"You bum! You useless little bum! *Me* bully *you!*" She rose ponderously, upsetting her chair. Her immense bosom, barely supervised by a cotton duster, menaced the whipped-cream pagoda in her dessert dish.

"*Me* bully *you!*" she cried again, pitching it an octave higher this time. "If I could still laugh after three years of playing second fiddle to a rhyming dictionary, I'd laugh! But how can I laugh? Tell me. When I ain't seen a decent paycheck out of you since we been married. How can I laugh, living in the middle of the Himalayas, with a fifty-cents-a-line gigolo poet?"

"These are not the Himalayas," Mario corrected her primly. "They are known as the Catskills. And you liked it well enough when we moved here. Furthermore, you knew how little money there would be in poetry when you married me." He crushed his paper napkin into a wad and stood up from his chair. "I said I'm going out," he repeated firmly, regarding Amy with fresh distaste across the table.

"Over my dead body you're going out!" answered the woman, moving swiftly to the door.

Mario hesitated. Outside, a lone September cricket chirped a reminder of their isolation. The last of their summer neighbors, the Feeneys, had left for New York earlier in the day.

Mario went to the hall closet and took down his hat and jacket. He

put them on with deliberation, as though waiting for his courage to leave the table and join him.

"Mario, I'm warning you!"

He could, of course, outflank her by making a dash through the kitchen to the back door. But that would have been unthinkable. And besides, Amy could counter simply by stepping outside and occupying the car.

No, a firm posture, definitely. Now or never.

He delivered a light tap to the back of his hat, cocking the brim forward to an adventurous angle over his eye. "All right, Jumbo," he said, advancing cautiously toward the door. "Out of my way. I'm not going to sit here all night with a two-ton millstone hanging around my neck."

Amy considered tears, but decided to hold them in reserve. "I don't care how mean you talk to me, Mario," she said, hiding the doorway behind her back. "You ain't going out tonight again on the money Papa left me."

Her husband's assurance wavered. "For the love of God, you act as though I'm never coming back!'

"As if I'd care," Amy sniffed. "It's a question of principle!"

For the first time since he'd left a tooth under a P.S. 29 wash basin, Mario offered his fist in threat. "Now listen, Amy," he said, sorting out her chins with a pale squint, "I'm going out and you're not stopping me."

Her response, a compromise between a circus howitzer and a Manchu gong, made him blink.

"You'd hit me? *Me?*"

Too late he glimpsed the flash of her open right hand. It approached him in a long horizontal arc. Had the maneuver been slower, much slower, it might have passed as a regal gesture of contempt. Instead, the broad palm impacted along the side of his skull with such force that the feather flew out of his hatband.

It was a development which caught him totally unprepared. He felt the floor tilt abruptly to the side. When it reached a plane parallel to the honeysuckle wallpaper he slid off.

"Mario? Mario, Baby, answer me!"

The floor began to right itself. He heard Amy's voice, choked with concern. His head was cradled between clouds of breast.

"For the love of God," he muttered fervently.

Amy began to cry then—soft sponge-wet sobs of relief. Her tears leaked past the fruitbowl prominences of her face and dripped onto the bald spot at the back of his head.

"Oh, Mario, Mario," she whimpered, "why are we always fighting, two people who need each other so much?"

With consciousness came a wave

of nausea, a delayed physical reaction to the force of her blow. His legs, when he tried to use them, seemed paralyzed.

Amy had lowered herself beside him. She was comforting his face with her cheek, her fingertips describing tender parabolas along the growing welt at his temple.

His nausea began to wane. Vaguely he tried to recall why it was that he had wanted to go out in the first place, but the question lost itself unanswered.

Beyond the window the cricket had fallen silent, as though it had become absorbed in the proceedings inside the house.

When at last Mario lifted his head, Amy closed his mouth with kisses.

"You're smothering me," he tried to say.

But she was recalling other moods, now dormant in their lives. "Don't you remember how it used to be?" she reminisced tearfully. "In the beginning?"

He nodded, not remembering. "Was that just your hand you hit me with?"

"In the evenings, after dinner," Amy went on, still focused on the past, "we'd go upstairs, and I'd help you off with your shoes and into your pajamas, and prop you up in bed all nice and comfy, with your new poems and the concertina in your lap . . ."

Her voice trailed off, then returned to the present. "Mario, I ain't really a millstone round your neck, am I?" she asked plaintively.

"No. You're okay, Mama," he lied.

She hugged him again. "You always used to call me Mama. And remember how cranky you got when I first started calling you Baby?"

Mario moved his hand reassuringly toward where his wife's duster surged between the buttons, but she was already helping him to his feet. Still stunned, he permitted himself to be led up the uncarpeted stairs toward their bedroom. Her nostalgia rippled over him like a sonata hummed through a distant bassoon.

". . . the concertina," she was saying. "You don't know how I miss the nights you played the concertina, with the lights out and the stars shining in on the blanket. It was the Italian songs that always got to me here." She touched her heart with her free hand while continuing to support him with the other.

"I must've tripped just as you connected," he mused uncertainly.

"You played so nice that sometimes, lying there, I'd cry, with my eyes closed and biting the pillow so's you wouldn't hear." She took his chin and turned his face to hers. "Do you realize, Baby, how long it's been since you've had the concertina out of the closet?"

Mario nodded, feigning mild empathy to her mood. His head

still throbbed. His spirit had flown. All he wanted now was to go to sleep without further argument. "Maybe I'll play something for you tonight, Mama," he conceded.

Later Amy tucked him in while he sought among the concertina's keys for the chords she liked best.

"Mario, I'm sorry I hit you," she said, looking down at him contritely.

"That's okay, Mama."

"I thought I'd die when your eyes began to roll and you fell down on the floor."

"Forget it, will you?"

"I just want you to know that I didn't mean it, what I said about your not bringing in any money." Her eyes filled with affection. "I think you're the most beautiful poet that ever lived."

"Okay, okay already!"

After a while she crept into bed beside him. The events of the evening seemed to have cleared the air. Not since their honeymoon had she seemed so coy and content.

"I think maybe tomorrow I ought to start on a diet," she suggested, reaching for the lamp switch. "What do you think, Baby?"

"Whatever you think, Mama."

He began to play. The ache in his skull persisted and he had trouble assembling the unpracticed chords. But Amy seemed not to notice. She had turned her head away. An occasional sigh escaped from the pillow pressed against her mouth.

He had completed *Sorrento,* punctuating it with a faintly boastful arpeggio, and was just squeezing the second chorus of *Arrivederci, Roma* into the night air when the thought of killing her fluttered like a fat moth, uninvited, into the vacant globe of his mind. It so unnerved him that he lost track of the music and had to repeat the chorus from the beginning.

It was a while before he trusted himself to think. His feet grew cold under the covers, but he resisted the temptation to warm them on Amy. It was not until her breathing finally lengthened into a series of pff-tchaas, comfortably spaced, that he folded his hands beneath his head to consider the inconceivable.

At 39, he had to admit, his future was largely behind him, dead with the poets of old.

The ladies on our editorial staff loved your last work, Mr. Barnes, but frankly we can't afford to publish book-length ballads these days. At best there's only a small demand for them—there is for snuff boxes too—but we don't think we'd ever sell enough copies to cover our printing costs.

Although there were magazines which paid well for an occasional stanza, it was also true that most of them shared the less generous

view of "Field and Silo Quarterly": *Bard, Byron, or Barnes—fifty cents a line; take it or leave it.* He took it.

Only the greeting card factories consumed his poetic passions in any bulk. And even there his income had been sharply undercut by the growing trend to smart-alecky cards. He detested them, as his tender Italian mother would have, for their punchinello illustrations and punch-line sentiments.

It didn't matter that Amy denied it now; the move, that spring, to the summer place in the Catskills had been her idea.

So we won't have to dip into Papa's capital, she had said.

Papa's capital. Mario would almost have been willing to take an office job if it had meant remaining in their duplex apartment in Greenwich Village instead of moving to this newly winterized shack in the mountains. The fact was, he told himself bitterly, that Amy's weight, rising like a missile industry sales graph, embarrassed her in the city. And fact two: she relished having a poet of her own to dote on until late into the morning. A job would have handicapped his art.

So it wasn't only Papa's capital.

He remembered Amy's father without rancor.

Mr. Duroszka, a big taciturn railroad switchman who had habitually worn his gray-striped overalls and locomotive cap even in retirement, took a quiet pride in Mario's profession. On the day the poet finally married his plump daughter, his father-in-law, in old country style, had dowered him with the deed to the summer place.

Good air in mountains, Mario. It help you think good poems.

After the ceremony the old man had reverted to type, tightfisted but satisfied, to await the arrival of his grandchildren. When a year passed, with Amy swelling evenly all over, Mr. Duroszka's disappointment was keen. The night he died, sitting tall under his locomotive cap in the armchair of his daughter's apartment, he had lectured Mario sternly.

Poet, hah? When I am young, poet always mean man with big fire inside him. You know poems from Ivar Mayorsky? Mario nodded. *You know how many wives had Mayorsky?* Mr. Duroszka held up one finger. *Good husband; poet from the heart. Full with life, our poets. You know how many children had Mayorsky?* He splayed both hands emphatically in front of his face. *Maybe you make too much poems, Mario, not enough*. . . . He conducted a hair-raising charade with his hands.

After his glass of tea Mr. Duroszka had dozed off. It was only when the televised wrestling matches were over, with the flagrant fouls of Heinrich, the Sudeten Strangler, failing to rouse him

that they realized the old Czech was dead.

Shocked as Mario was, Amy's reaction had shocked him more.

At least he went peaceful, she said, dropping the lifeless wrist. She took a deep breath, sucking the tears back into her eyes. *Phone the police, Baby,* she directed him coolly. *Tell them to send an ambulance or something. And don't forget to give the address.*

As Mario left the room, he had glanced back out of the corner of his eye. Amy was moving Mr. Duroszka around, going through the pockets of his overalls.

It was past midnight when the undertaking assistants finally called for the body. After they were gone, Amy went out. An hour later she returned, supporting a large metal toolbox on her hip.

He kept it in the basement, she explained. *Mama and me were never allowed to look.*

Watching her, Mario had sensed with fear a new Amy emerging from the toolbox along with the bank books and the stock certificates. She spent the remainder of the night at the kitchen table, her eyes flicking over securities like the beads of an abacus.

Mr. Duroszka had invested virtually all his savings in telephone shares. Some of the certificates were more than forty years old. As the attorney later explained, these had split, divided, and multiplied according to the peculiar biology of high finance until, in round figures, their worth totaled slightly more than $600,000. That and Papa's old house—monuments to a frugal life. The will, of course, left everything to Amy.

For the funeral Mario composed a moving elegy in iambic pentameter. He was furious to the point of trembling when Amy insisted that he cut the last two lines and insert her own—lines in which she had rhymed *never die* with *that Golden Railroad in the Sky*. He was somewhat mollified when Mr. Duroszka's cronies from the Slovene Brotherhood, some with wet cheeks, crowded around him after the recitation to grip his hand and pat his back in speechless admiration. Still, she had never interfered with his work before . . .

It was late when Mario fell asleep. Twice during the night he awoke, shivering, to reclaim his share of the quilt from Amy's back. Both times the notion to kill her returned, although his head was now perfectly clear. It grew, feeding on the tempo of her pff-tchaas, until it was almost a resolve—a wishbone in his throat that he could neither swallow nor remove.

The summer house was already in his name. No problem there. He could dispose of it quietly through a realtor.

Then there was the money, that appropriately elephantine sum, as intimately close as the figure be-

side him in the bed. And with so much greater potential for delight.

Amy had converted the telephone shares into cash—the stock market gave her heartburn—and had deposited the cash among several California savings banks offering the highest insured interest. She drew the interest at three-month intervals, by mail.

Mario closed his eyes against the gray warning of dawn. He pictured himself tracing Shelley's journey through France to Rome, mailing withdrawal slips along the way.

There was no question, he realized without elation, that he could get away with it. Amy was an only child, and she had no relatives.

Monticello, where he bought most of their groceries, was a mile and a half down the road. The road had been quiet since Labor Day. Despite the crowding resorts nearby, the Catskill landscape was still rugged enough to swallow even Amy without a hiccup of suspicion.

He considered the tavern waitress in Monticello. An admiring pinch, the merest compliment, eliciting a girlish laugh and the sharp rap of her pencil across his knuckles, could scarcely be described as an affair. He was almost grateful now that Amy had altered his plans for the previous evening. There were waitresses along the Mediterranean too. And the climate might benefit his asthma.

Nevertheless, concealing a murder (*murder?*—the word struck him as unduly harsh) was one thing; accomplishing it was another. Could he actually kill? he wondered. He, Mario Barnes, whose anniversary card verses could evoke a tear and a smile from middle-aged gangster and married harlot alike? There was the rub. Could he actually free himself from Amy by an act of cold, physical, unimpassioned, premeditated violence?

At breakfast his teeth chattered uncontrollably. It was as though an aura of ghostliness had begun to accompany Amy's sleepy waddle between the stove and the kitchen table.

"You know something, Baby? You don't look so good today." She filled his coffee cup, glancing worriedly at the purple imprint of her hand just forward of his left ear.

"It could be the flu coming on," he said. His speculations of the night were pursuing each other just inside the perimeter of his head, darting inward from time to time to tapdance wildly on his brain. He had to hold his cup with both hands to keep the coffee from spilling.

"Maybe you should go back to bed," Amy suggested.

"What do you mean, go back to bed," he answered testily. "Just when All Occasion Greeting Cards is low on Easter material?"

Amy sighed, plastering marmalade on her toast.

As the last dew evaporated into the blue morning air he was still pacing the den, struggling fruitlessly to think Easter. He paused to consult his work pad. The single word, *resurrection,* stared back at him.

Dissection? He dismissed the rhyme with a shudder.

Electrical connection? His familiarity with volts and ohms, he had to admit, did not safely qualify him to change a light bulb.

Why, he wondered frustratedly, did the disposal of an Amy always seem so simple, even so whimsical an enterprise on television?

How about one of those soluble gray powders? he pondered. *The kind that homicidal spinsters always seemed to have available in little white envelopes the size of a restaurant sugar packet?*

He sat down at his desk, deeply discouraged, his chin resting bleakly on his fist. No, it would have to be something straightforward, he realized. Something unimaginative. A blow, for example. With a Blunt Instrument. Preferably from behind.

It was only when *bells* summoned *wells* that the creative machinery began to tick in his mind. There was the Feeneys' well, fathoms deep, immemorially dry, and not fifty yards from his front door.

Mr. Feeney had discussed it with him during the summer. What was it his neighbor planned? Of course! He was going to cover the well with a cement slab and surround it with a low fieldstone wall. Above, there was to be a slanted rustic roof. With a wooden bucket, suspended from an old-fashioned windlass. It would make an attractive decoration on the landscape.

From the living room came a blast of grief, interpreted through an ancient spinet. Amy was settling down to *Come Hither the Dawn.* Mario decided to inspect the well. He slipped out quietly through the kitchen.

The Feeneys' property, like his own, sloped down to the road where it was patchily screened by a windbreak of dogwoods. Through the gaps a car passing in daylight would have only a fleeting view of the well site. Any felonious deposit, he decided, would have to be made after dark.

The round steel wellcap was heavy, yet he found that he could lever it up easily once the soil was cleared from its sides. He peered over the edge. Despite the high noon sun the pit seemed to have no bottom. He plumbed it with a stone and was about to try another when he heard the first one crack against dry boulders below.

Satisfied that Mr. Feeney would never miss the few cubic feet Amy would occupy at the bottom, he replaced the steel wellcap and went back to the house. His teeth were

beginning to chatter again, more violently than before.

The stroll, as afternoon shadows began to fill the spaces between the trees, was Amy's suggestion.

Mario fidgeted nervously on the lawn, waiting. It was chilly with the sun going down. Amy was changing out of her cotton duster. More than once he had to return to the house to use the bathroom.

I can't, I can't, I won't be able to!

Then Amy came out, wearing scarlet toreador pants, her face framed by a bright yellow kerchief tied snoodlike around her curls. Lines divided the pants into improbable latitudes and longitudes—a plaid designed by some woman-hating cartographer.

"Do I look a mess?" Amy asked disappointedly when she saw his face.

"Who'll see?" he shrugged. From a rubble of branches he carefully selected a stout walking stick.

They crossed the Feeney property to where the woodpath began.

As they entered among the trees a cricket snickered. A crow called and was answered. The dessicated leaves of autumn rustled in the high branches. Isolated and distinct, the sounds conspired together, producing an effect of extraordinary stillness.

Mario tightened his grip on the heavy walking stick.

Twice he slipped his hand from Amy's and fell slightly behind. The first time it was to tighten a shoelace. She waited for him, eclipsing a substantial portion of the twilight, then turned to continue on as he gave the knot a final tug and straightened up to follow her. The moment was perfect. He raised the heavy branch with both hands, measured carefully between the ears of her kerchief, took a deep breath . . .

It was impossible. Even with his eyes pressed shut at the last moment he couldn't bring himself to do it. He hurried alongside again, and Amy took his arm.

The second time it was Amy who paused. An injured bird was thrashing about in the underbrush. Again he raised the branch over his head as she knelt to examine the creature's throes. And again he failed.

"Oh, kill it, Baby," Amy said.

Mario moved beside his wife. He could feel his stomach churning in protest as he held the branch over the hysterical hazel wings. Several times he dipped it, warming up. The bird began to writhe toward a patch of briar.

"Oh, *I'll* do it," Amy said in disgust, jerking the branch out of his hands.

A sharp *splat*! and the bird was dead. Amy handed the club back to him without a word. It made him feel like a caddy.

They strolled on, climbing with the path until it opened onto a wide fallow pasture that led back around

the hill and served as a rear property line for the string of summer homes.

Mario quietly let the branch fall behind him, overcome by the blood and feathers still clinging to its knouted end. He resigned himself hopelessly to the bone in his throat.

They came to the fence—three rails that split the pasture from base to crest. The bottom rails were nailed firmly in place, but the uppermost rails fitted loosely into notches atop the thick posts. They were almost home.

Mario climbed the fence and let himself down on the other side. Then he lifted the top rail for Amy to pass through—between the top and middle rails. Bracing both hands against the middle rail, Amy tested it for sturdiness. Content that it would not betray her, she heaved one leg of the toreador pants at the space above it. Too low. Not enough room.

"Raise the top one a little higher, Baby."

Mario stepped onto the bottom rail, one arm looped around the post, and lifted the top rail higher.

"This high enough?"

"Yeah, just hold it there a second."

The scissor-shaped opening was now wide enough to admit a sofa. Amy was lining up once more against the middle rail, her head poking through.

It was as he idly compared the rump below him with others he had known that the top rail fell from his fingers. Down it knifed, as certain in its pursuit as a guillotine, down toward the soft white neck in its path. It struck cleanly at her collar. Amy dropped to her knees, her head imprisoned between the middle and top rails.

Mario leaped down into the tall grass beside her, palsied with horror and indecision. After a moment he raised the top rail from her neck. Amy rolled over onto the grass. Her breath began to exhale in short threatening snorts.

He made his decision.

With a strength he'd never known he had, he pulled her over the bottom rail. Then, harnessing himself between Amy's calves and grasping her feet, he took off in a strained gallop toward the Feeney's well. As he ran, perspiring, he heard himself giggle foolishly. *This is it,* he thought, *The Agony of the Long Distance Ricksha Runner.*

She was still unconscious when he pried off the wellcap. The cement lip was narrower than he'd realized, but it seemed hardly the occasion to calculate dimensions.

First he dangled her head and arms over the side. Next, heaving mightily, he helped her bosom in. There was barely enough clearance. Her waist passed the edge nicely—no trouble at all. She seemed about to slide all the way through when her hips stuck, sealing the well like a cork.

Amy chose that instant to revive fully. Her legs flailed the air, her muffled shrieks vibrated the ground at Mario's feet.

He danced around her, urging her hips into the well with feeble nudges.

"Mario, Mario! Somebody's trying to kill me!" He could hear her faintly.

It was quite dark now, but when morning came the bright red legs would be visible from the road, a split wick blazing curiously in a giant Molotov cocktail. It would be fatal to leave her in that position —fatal for him too.

He waited until she subsided, translating his terror into a final burst of courage, then darted in to seize her calves. He began to push and pull and twist, as though operating a posthole augur. She was slipping through. He felt her sinking, inch by inch.

Suddenly she plunged. Her legs kicked straight up, reminding him of a doomed ship's last salute to the surface. But the fleeting thought was interrupted when her nutcracker calves snapped together around his neck, toppling him forward.

His feet left the ground, his head pursued her into the pit.

He had just time enough to marvel at the speed of his descent. It was as though a millstone, a two-ton millstone, was yanking him down by the neck.

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Truman Capote's IN COLD BLOOD (Random, $5.95) is one of the major runaway bestsellers of the 1960's—a fact which, to old-time crime-fanciers, is aggreeable, surprising and puzzling. For this "non-fiction novel," of which its creator says, "I truly don't believe anything like it exists in the history of journalism," is simply (if excellence is ever simple) a very good fact-crime book.

Many murder studies as meaningful and as artistic as Capote's have sold 1% as many copies. By all means climb on the bestselling bandwagon and read this superbly detailed recreation of a horrible and pointless Kansas massacre of 1959; but then please turn to my anthology THE QUALITY OF MURDER (Dutton, 1962) for a long list of suggestions for further reading which you should find fully as rewarding.

★★★★ **THE HANDS OF INNOCENCE, *by Jeffrey Ashford*** (Walker, $3.50)

Search for an escaped child-killer combines solid police procedure with a brilliantly original and terrifying psychological novel. Under the name of Roderic Jeffries, the same author offers an acute study of law, love and murder in DEAD AGAINST THE LAWYERS (Dodd, Mead, $3.50).

★★★★ **HIGHLAND MASQUERADE, *by Mary Elgin*** (Mill-Morrow, $3.95)

Scottish romance of multiple imposture, rich in atmosphere and humor, by a new charmer in the Mary Stewart vein.

★★★★ **THE SILENT COUSIN, *by Elizabeth Fenwick*** (Atheneum, $3.95)

Quiet understated study of degenerating Hudson River aristocracy offers subtle but genuine chills.

★★★ **THE CAPER OF THE GOLDEN BULLS, *by William P. McGivern*** (Dodd, Mead, $4)

Fine free fantasia of felony, involving a retired gentleman-burglar in the theft of holy jewels and a wildly inventive plot.

★★★ **HIDE AND GO SEEK, *by Andrew Garve*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

What innocently seems like a very good "inverted" murder puzzle twists into a surprise plot of delightful originality.

★★★ **THE HARD SELL, *by William Haggard*** (Washburn, $3.75)

Colonel Charles Russell counterchecks industrial rather than political espionage, in an intrigue of admirably finespun intricacy.

The system of stars won't exactly work for Russ Jones Productions' new adaptation of Bram Stoker's DRACULA (Ballantine U2271, 50¢), which might rate from 5 stars to none, depending on your feelings about horror comics. Myself, I found this pictures-and-dialog version of the classic to be faithful, imaginative and exciting.

★★★ **THE RESURRECTION MAN, *by Thomas Walsh*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

Return (or is it?) of a long-vanished judge poses a Pirandello-like problem in identity, developed with subtle penetration and tight suspense.

★★★ **THE BUSY BODY, *by Donald E. Westlake*** (Random, $3.95)

Broad and outrageous farce of gangsters, graves and disappearing corpses, almost as funny as last year's THE FUGITIVE PIGEON.

★★★ **CARNY KILL, *by Robert Edmond Alter*** (Gold Medal d1611, 50¢)

Good solid medium-tough whodunit, told with unusual relish for its background (an imitation Disneyland) and its people.

★★★ **DREAM OF FAIR WOMAN, *by Charlotte Armstrong*** (Coward-McCann, $4.50)

Identity again, this time less as a psychological problem than as a splendidly manipulated shell game: Which blonde is on the bier?

★★★ **THE CASE OF THE INNOCENT VICTIMS, *by John Creasey*** (Scribner's, $3.95)

Inspector West in a real puzzler which ties baby-killings into the corporate business of a carpet firm. In lighter vein, Creasey amuses himself in the Paris underworld in A MASK FOR THE TOFF (Walker, $3.50).

★★★ **THE CAT WHO COULD READ BACKWARDS, *by Lilian Jackson Braun***
(Dutton, $3.95)

Malicious wit on midwest art circles and a magnificently created cat make up for weak technique in EQMM writer's first novel.

Shorter stories: THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, edited by Hans Stefan Santesson (Award A1625k, 50¢), offers 10 stories, chiefly from *Saint Mystery Magazine*—no dazzlers, but reasonably enjoyable reading in the rare short-spy form. A major reprint is Stanley Ellin's brilliant THE BLESSINGTON METHOD (1964; Signet D2805, 50¢), mostly from EQMM.

Q. B. I. : QUEEN'S BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

. . . in which Ellery finds the "needle in the haystack"

KIDNAPING DEPT.: *The Broken T*

by ELLERY QUEEN

SATURDAY, 11:55 P.M.——ANGIE, not happily, turned into her street.

It was one of those dead-end streets on the far east side of midtown Manhattan made up of equal parts of warehouses, garages, renovated pre-1901 apartment buildings, and darkness. Lots of darkness.

Tonight the street wore a more sinister look than usual, which Angie blamed on the second feature she had just seen. The film, in explicit Spectracolor, had been a continuous horror of bile-green creatures pursuing a heroine of stainless steel nerve. How could any girl be so *brave*? Angie thought, cringing as she hurried into her unlit vestibule.

And screamed.

The scream came out a mumbly squawk, because a large spongy hand smelling of after-shave lotion and gun oil had leaped out of the dark and attached itself to her mouth. Two other hands—and that makes a pair of the beasts, the bookkeeping division of Angie's brain recorded automatically—yanked her arms up behind her back and pushed.

"Whoa, bossie," gargled the pusher, still pushing. His breath sprayed sheer garlic.

"Hmmm gggnngle mmmffle," Angie said through the pain, offering to surrender the $9.63 in her purse. But it seemed that was not it at all. For Garlic Breath breathed, "You sure she's the Lawton broad?"; and a light exploded in her eyes and Lilac-and-Gun-Oil's voice replied, "Sure I'm sure. I studied her pitchers in the papers"; whereupon Garlic Breath said with chilling relish, "Then awayyyyy we go!"; and the light went out, leaving Angie in Spectracolor blindness and the horrid knowledge that this was no routine mugging after all.

The gears in her comptometer kept whirring as the pair dragged her out to a purring car, shoved her in headfirst, blindfolded her with something that smelled like a shoeshine rag, threw her on the car floor face down, and then one of them seated himself above her and dug his shoes into strategic sections

of her anatomy as the other got behind the wheel and drove them away.

Angie knew now what it was all about. It had to have something to do with the City Licensing Authority bribery scandal and the trial of the indicted Commissioner scheduled to begin on Monday morning.

She prayed briefly for the inhuman movie heroine's courage—which, being merely human, Angie knew she possessed in merely human quantity. But at the same time—for of such is the kingdom of bookkeepers—she found herself counting.

Sunday, 9:10 A.M.——"How much of a beating did they give the girl?" Ellery asked Inspector Queen as they waited outside the hospital room for the district attorney to come out.

"Not enough to show and more than plenty to make their point," scowled his father. "A real pro work-over, Ellery. Now she's too scared to testify. Maybe you can do something."

According to the Inspector's briefing, CLA clerk-typist-bookkeeper Angela Lawton, 23, blonde, and pretty—upon whose testimony the City of New York was mainly relying for the conviction of the corrupt Commissioner—had been seized the night before by two men, driven blindfolded to an apartment somewhere, scientifically beaten, threatened with the destruction of her prettiness by acid if she testified on Monday, and dumped unconscious on her doorstep in the early hours of Sunday morning, where she was found by a prowl car.

The job had clearly been the work of musclemen in the defendant's behalf; but the girl had not once glimpsed the thugs' faces, and the chances of connecting the assault with the man going on trial seemed approximately zero.

"So there goes the D.A.'s case," said Inspector Queen, "unless we can get her to change her mind. Any luck, Herman?" he asked as the district attorney came out of the hospital room. The D.A. shook his head wanly and plodded away.

"Well, let's try ours," said Ellery, and they went in.

The girl was lying on the hospital bed like a stick.

"Now understand, Miss Lawton, nobody's blaming you one little bit," Ellery said tenderly, taking her hand. "A beating from professionals is a hard argument to top. But suppose we catch those men—make them talk, put them away. Then you'll have nothing to be afraid of, and you can testify. Right?"

The cold little hand tried to withdraw; tenderly, Ellery held on to it. "'It's a big suppose, Mr. Queen. How are you going to catch them? I have no idea where they took me except that—"

"I know, you hurt all over," crooned Ellery as Angie stopped to wince. "Except that what?"

"—that wherever it is, it's across the street from a window with a neon sign in it. The blindfold slipped once while they were slamming me around, and before they could tighten it again I saw the sign flashing on and off in the dark. One neon sign—in the whole city of New York!"

"Pretty big odds," Inspector Queen said, showing his dentures in what he intended as a smile. "By the way, what did the sign say, Miss Lawton? Oh, and what color was it?"

"Pinkish red. And the sign said EAT, in capital letters. How many of *those* do you suppose there are?"

"Hundreds, thousands," Ellery said. "Though neon signs do often become defective, Angie—you don't mind if I call you Angie? Did you happen to notice any imperfections in the letters?"

"There was a break in one of them," said Angie with a faint show of interest. "The T had an unlit gap, sort of. In the middle of the upright."

"E-A-broken T." Ellery beamed. "Across the street, you say. Oh, how about the drive over there? Did they drive fast?"

Angela's lip curled. "Think they'd take a chance on being stopped for a traffic violation? I paid particular attention to *that*. They didn't once exceed the speed limit. You can tell from the way it *feels*—at least, I can."

"I'll bet you can," said Ellery sincerely. "Though it's too bad you can't also tell us how long the drive took—"

"Oh, can't I," snapped Angie. "I know *exactly*. The moment the car started off I began to count in my head. At one-second intervals. I'm good at that—I practice with clocks for kicks. And of course I held up the count while it stopped for lights."

"Of course," Ellery said; his father was speechless. "Did you—er—stop to pay any tolls?"

"No. I didn't hear a single clink."

Ellery cleared his throat. "So you counted seconds. How many, Angie?"

"My count was 417 seconds for the trip. Allowing for error—say, seven minutes' riding time."

Ellery brought Angie's hand, which was quite warm by this time, to his lips reverently. "God bless your little bookkeeping head. There wouldn't be anything else, Angie, would there?"

Angie frowned. "Well, yes. They had my arms tied to the sides of a chair, but I managed to scratch an X on each side with my nails. But what good is that unless you find the room?"

In the corridor Ellery chortled, "What a girl! This ought to be peach pie, dad. Maximum average speed, say, thirty miles an hour—half a mile a minute. Time in motion, seven minutes. Maximum distance, therefore, three and one-half miles—"

"In any direction," his father pointed out dryly, "including circling back. Which means your three and a half miles could wind up in the next block."

"I'm talking maximums, dad. So that apartment has to be *within* three and a half miles of Angie's door. Figure twenty city blocks to the mile, and that's a radius of seventy blocks."

"In other words, anywhere between the East River and the Hudson east and west, and between—say—Houston Street and the Harlem River south and north." The Inspector sounded unimpressed. "And if your little lady's built-in computer happened to be off, it could be anywhere on Manhattan Island. That's a clue, that is."

"At least we know it's in Manhattan, dad—no tolls, Angie said. We also know the apartment faces a diner or cafeteria. And for that pink neon EAT sign to be visible through the apartment window, the apartment is almost certainly on a ground floor. Once we've found such an apartment, it can be positively identified by those X's Angie scratched on the chair. And that's it."

"You make it sound so simple," snorted the old man. "All right, Ellery, I'll put every available man on the streets to locate that diner or cafeteria. But you know what I think? I think this is a pipe dream!"

Sunday, 6:15 P.M.——The Inspector proved a prophet. As the last reports straggled in at headquarters, he said kindly, "Not a single diner or cafeteria in Manhattan with a broken-T EAT sign. So now what, my son?"

"Time," muttered Ellery, wearing a path in the Inspector's floor. "Time! The trial starts in less than sixteen hours . . . A neon sign with a broken letter—"

His father said, "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter?" screamed Ellery. "I'm an idiot is what's the matter! Not fit to carry that girl's penwiper! Dad, here's what you've got to do . . ."

Monday, 5:02 A.M.——So the Inspector did it; and here the Queens stood, on a nondescript Manhattan street in a lightening hour, gazing on a plate-glass window behind which a pinkish red neon sign flashed on and off its 24-hour-a-day message, EAT—with its T broken on the ascender exactly as Angela Lawton had described it.

And following the possible lines of sight across the street, Inspector Queen's men did indeed locate a ground-floor apartment with a view of the EAT sign; and sleeping therein they found a man with hands that smelled of lilac lotion and gun oil, and they showed him the chair with the two scratched-in X's, and the shoe rag with which Angie Lawton had been blindfolded; and this bird was invited to

raise his voice in song, which after some encouragement he did; and by 5:37 A.M., they had also flushed the other bird, Garlic Breath, who was unmistakable.

They drove down to the hospital for a glad-happy-joyous session with Angie; thence to the district attorney's office, where the two birds sang a duet; and it all turned out fine, except for the corrupt public servant.

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

What had Ellery told Inspector Queen to do?

Ellery told Inspector Queen to have his men stop looking for a diner or cafeteria and instead . . . But let Ellery tell it himself:

"Every eating place within the limits of the prescribed area had been covered without turning up a neon sign such as Angie described. Was it possible the sign *didn't* mean what it seemed to say?—that the word was not EAT, but something else?

"According to Angie, the sign had a defective T. Suppose that was not the only defect in the sign? For instance, you're always running across neon signs with entire letters blacked out. Since it had been night-time, Angie would only see the letters that were lit up. Suppose EAT had a letter missing!

"The likeliest place for a missing letter in E-A-T is at the beginning of the word. Run through the alphabet and you'll find that only one letter, under the circumstances, makes sense—M. So I suggested looking for a defective MEAT sign in the window of a butcher shop, which is where they found it!"

magazine BOX SCORE for 1964

In editing his third volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1965 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Anthony Boucher selected 16 stories, of which 14 appeared in magazines (and of these 14 best, 6 were chosen from *EQMM*). Mr. Boucher's Honor Roll listed 113 stories from magazines and 8 stories from books. Here is the box score for the 113 best detective-crime-mystery stories published in all American magazines during 1964:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	50	44.1%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	13	11.5%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
Playboy	6	5.3%
Saturday Evening Post	4	3.5%
Cosmopolitan	3	2.7%
New Yorker	3	2.7%
Argosy	2	1.8%
McCall's	2	1.8%
This Week	2	1.8%
Atlantic	1	.9%
Baker Street Journal	1	.9%
Cavalier	1	.9%
Chase	1	.9%
Horror	1	.9%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	.9%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly 1½ times as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 50 Honor Roll stories in 1964 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

a police procedural *SHORT NOVEL* by

ED McBAIN

We welcome the first appearance in EQMM of an 87th Precinct story by Ed McBain—a short novel of modern police procedure in a big-city murder case, with the "regulars" of the 87th Precinct doing their job—including Steve Carella, Meyer Meyer, and Cotton Hawes . . .

We can't help thinking that changing times have forced mathematical changes in detective-story plots. A full generation ago Ellery Queen wrote THE AMERICAN GUN MYSTERY *in which a man is murdered during a rodeo being performed in a Madison-Square-Garden-type of metropolitan sports arena—murdered in full view of 40,000 eyes. Thirty years later Ed McBain wrote about a man murdered during the broadcast of a live TV program—murdered in full view of 80,000,000 eyes. Yes, everything—the cost of living, the cost of dying—reveals the spiraling of inflation—including the number of eyewitnesses-to-murder in a detective novel! . . . (Any old-timers remember the work of Cortland Fitzsimmons?—especially his 1931 novel titled* SEVENTY THOUSAND WITNESSES—*that is, 140,000 eyes.)*

"Eighty Million Eyes" is one of Ed McBain's most painstaking and interesting short novels—about a murder that baffled and frustrated the detectives of the 87th Precinct, a murder "that seemed to defy all laws of addition and subtraction" . . .

EIGHTY MILLION EYES

by ED McBAIN

THERE WERE DAYS WHEN HE FELT he owned the entire city.

Winter or summer, fall or spring, the season didn't matter. Leaving the Squad Room and coming down the iron-runged stairway and walking past Sergeant Dave Murchison sitting behind the muster desk, and then down the low flat steps outside the precinct, with the green globes flanking the doorway, the numerals 87 painted on each

globe in white, he became suddenly aware of the city.

All at once the city reached across Grover Park to clutch him in a fierce embrace. Without warning she was there waiting for him as he came down those steps—the sound of her, and the aroma of her, and the blinding evening luminosity of her.

He had watched her that afternoon through the grilled windows of the Squad Room. Sitting at his desk, the windows open only a trifle at the bottom, the tart, fresh air of autumn sweeping into the smoky staleness of the office, Steve Carella had watched the lights in the buildings across the park as, one by one, they intimidated the waning afternoon. The sun had been a pale violet stain on the far horizon, blurring behind the knife-edge silhouettes of apartment houses and hotels, office buildings and factories.

And then the sun vanished completely, leaving its metallic glow in the sky for just an instant longer, and the lights came on, one by one, as if a slightly faulty master switch had been thrown somewhere. He had turned back to the report he was working on and forgot the city. Typing in triplicate left little room for romance.

But now, stepping out into the air, the city reached for him again. He was a tall man, deceptively slender, his slim appearance giving no clue to the sinewy power of his arms and chest. His eyes were brown, slanting downward to combine with his high cheekbones to give his face a peculiarly Oriental look. A grin touched that face as he accepted the city, breathed deeply of the magnificent stench of carbon-monoxide fumes, felt his ears jangling to the sound of belching buses and shouting children and peddlers and roller skates, the semisolid *thwunk* of a stickball bat striking a rubber ball.

He took the city's elbow graciously, like a college boy on a prom night, and the grin widened on his face because he knew he owned her: he owned the smell of fallen and decaying leaves in the park across the way, and the magical lights on top of the insurance building that alternately flashed the time and the temperature; he owned jellied apples and Charlotte Russes and sanitation trucks spraying the gutters and a guitar strumming softly somewhere behind a tenement window; he owned the docks and cross streets, the steel, the glass, the concrete, the very air itself.

He hurried home to his wife.

On the North side of the 87th Precinct territory, in a side street off Culver Avenue, in the midst of a slum as rank as a cesspool, there crouched an innocuous-looking brick building which had once served as a furniture loft. It was now magnanimously called a television studio, and it was from this grimy brick building that the Stan

Gifford Show originated every Wednesday night of the year, except during the summer hiatus.

It was incongruous to see all the ivy-league, narrow-tied advertising and television men trotting through a slum almost every day of the week in an attempt to put together Gifford's weekly comedy hour. The neighborhood citizens watched the procession of creators with a jaundiced eye; the show had been on the air for three solid years, and they had grown used to seeing these aliens in their midst. There had never been any trouble between the midtown masterminds and the uptown residents, and there probably never would be. A slum has enough troubles without picking on a network.

Besides, most of the people in the neighborhood liked the Stan Gifford Show and would rush indoors the moment it took to the air. If it took all these nuts to put together the show every week, who were they to complain? It was a good show, and it was free besides.

The good show, and the free one, had been rehearsing since the previous Friday in the loft on North Eleventh, and it was now six forty-five p.m. on Wednesday evening, which meant that in exactly one hour and fifteen minutes a telop would flash in homes across the continent announcing the Stan Gifford Show to follow, and then there would be a station break with commercial, and then the introductory theme music, and then organized bedlam would once again burst forth from approximately 20,000,000 television sets.

The network, gratuitously giving itself the edge in selling prime time to potential sponsors, estimated that in each viewing home there were at least two people, which meant that every Wednesday night at eight p.m., 80,000,000 eyes would draw a bead on the smiling countenance of Stan Gifford as he waved from the screen and said, "Back for more, huh?"

In the hands of a lesser personality this opening remark—even when delivered with a smile—might have caused many viewers to switch to another channel or perhaps to turn off the set completely. But Stan Gifford was charming, intelligent, and born with an intuitive sense of comedy. He knew what was funny and what was not, and he could even turn a bad joke into a good one simply by acknowledging its failure with a dead-panned nod and a slightly contrite look at his adoring fans. He exuded an ease that seemed totally unrehearsed, a calm that could only be natural.

"Where the hell is Art Wetherley?" he shouted frantically at his assistant director, George Cooper.

"Here just a minute ago, Mr. Gifford," the A.D. shouted back, and then instantly yelled for quiet on the set. The moment of quiet achieved, he broke the silence by

shouting, "Art Wetherley! Front and center, on the double!"

Wetherley, a diminutive gag writer who had been taking a smoke on one of the fire escapes, came into the studio, walked over to Gifford and said, "What's up, Stan?"

Gifford was a tall man, with a pronounced widow's peak—he was actually beginning to bald, but he preferred to think of his receding hairline as a pronounced widow's peak—penetrating brown eyes, and a generous mouth. When he smiled, his eyes crinkled up from coast to coast, and he looked like a youthful, beardless Santa Claus about to deliver a bundle of goodies to needy waifs.

But he was not smiling now, and Wetherley had seen the unsmiling Gifford often enough to know that his solemn countenance meant trouble.

"Is this supposed to be a joke?" Gifford asked. He asked the question politely and quietly, but there was enough menace in his voice to blow up an entire city block.

Wetherley, who could be as polite as anyone in television when he wanted to, quietly said, "Which one is that, Stan?"

"This mother-in-law line," Gifford said. "I thought mother-in-law jokes went out with nuclear fission."

"I wish my mother-in-law had gone out with nuclear fission," Wetherley said, and then, instantly realizing that this was not a time for adding one bad joke to another, added, "We can cut it."

"I don't want it cut. I want a substitute for it."

"That's what I meant."

"Then why didn't you say what you meant?" Gifford looked across the studio at the wall clock which was busily ticking off minutes to air time. "You'd better hurry," he said. "Stay away from mothers-in-law and Liz Taylor and astronauts."

"Gee," Wetherley deadpanned, "what does that leave?"

"Some people actually think you're funny—you know that?" Gifford said, and turned and walked away.

The assistant director, who had been standing near one of the booms throughout the entire conversation, sighed and said, "Boy, I hope he calms down."

"I hope he drops dead," Wetherley answered.

Teddy Carella was the most beautiful woman in the world.

"I own the city, do you know that?" Carella said to her.

Teddy raised her eyebrows dubiously and poured more coffee into his cup. He looked up at her and thought *I own the city, and my wife is the most beautiful woman in the world*. He watched as she poured. He said, "You're beautiful," but her head was bent over the coffeepot, and he knew she could

not see his lips, knew she had not "heard" his words.

He reached out suddenly, cupped her chin with his hand, and she turned her head curiously. He said again, "You're beautiful," and this time she watched his lips, and this time she saw the words on his mouth, understood them, and nodded.

And then, as if his voice had thundered into her silent world, as if she had been waiting patiently all day long to unleash a torrent of words, she began moving her fingers rapidly in the deaf-mute alphabet.

He watched her hands as they told him of the day's events. Behind the hands her face formed a backdrop, the intense brown eyes adding meaning to each silent word she delivered, the head of black hair cocking suddenly to one side to emphasize a point, the mouth sometimes moving into a pout or a grimace or a sudden radiant smile.

He watched her hands and her face, interpolating a word or a grunt every now and then, sometimes stopping her when she formed a sentence too quickly, and marveling all the while at the wonderful animation she brought to the telling of the simplest story.

When, in turn, she listened, her eyes watched intently, as if afraid of missing a syllable, her face mirroring whatever was being said. Because she never heard the intonations or subtleties of any voice, her imagination supplied emotional content that sometimes wasn't there at all. She could be moved to tears or laughter by a single innocuous sentence; she was like a child listening to a fairy tale, her mind supplying every fantastic, unspoken detail.

As they did the dishes together, their conversation was a curious blend of toilet training and petty larceny, problems with the butcher and the lineup.

Carella kept his voice low. Volume meant nothing to Teddy, and he knew the twins were asleep in the other room. There was a hushed warmth to that kitchen, as if it gently echoed a city that was curling up for the night.

In ten minutes' time, in 20,000,000 homes, 40,000,000 people would turn 80,000,000 eyes on a smiling Stan Gifford who would look out at the world and say, "Back for more, huh?"

Carella, who didn't ordinarily enjoy watching television, had to admit that he was one of those 40,000,000 hopeless, unwashed addicts who turned to Gifford's channel every Wednesday night. Unconsciously, he kept one eye on the clock as he dried the dishes. For whatever perverse reasons he derived great pleasure from Gifford's taunting opening statement, and he would have felt cheated if he'd tuned in too late to hear it.

His reaction to Gifford surprised

even himself. He found most television a bore. The Westerns were simply clichéd kitchen-sink dramas in levis and Stetsons. The situation comedies were all situation and no comedy. And the detective shows—

In a fit of anger he had once written a letter to one of the networks. He had used official Police Department stationery, and he had tried valiantly and unsuccessfully to disguise the intensity of his feelings, lest he be considered just another crank. The letter had gone on for two closely typed pages.

He'd never mailed it, but neither had he watched a detective show on television again.

He found, too, that Teddy derived little if any pleasure from watching the home screen. She was perfectly capable of reading the lips of a performer when the director designed to show him in a close shot. But whenever an actor turned his back or moved into a long shot she lost the thread of the story and began asking Carella questions. Trying to watch her moving hands and the screen at the same time was an impossible task. He had decided the hell with it.

Except for Stan Gifford.

At three minutes to eight that Wednesday night Carella turned on the television set and then made himself comfortable in an easy chair. Teddy opened a book and began reading. He watched the final moments of the show immediately preceding Gifford's (a fat lady won a refrigerator), and then read the telop stating "Stan Gifford is next," and then watched the station break and commercial (a very handsome, dark-haired man was making love to a cigarette with each ecstatic puff he took).

Then there was a slight pause, and Gifford's theme music started.

"Okay if I turn this light a little lower?" Carella asked. Teddy, her nose buried in her book, did not see him speak. He touched her hand gently and she looked up. "Okay to dim this light?" he asked again, and she nodded just as Gifford's face filled the screen.

The smile broke like thunder over Mandalay.

"Back for more, huh?" Gifford said, and Carella burst out laughing and then turned down the lights. The single lamp behind Teddy's chair cast a warm glow over the room. Directly opposite it, the colder light of the electronic tube threw a bluish rectangle on the floor directly beneath it. Gifford walked to a table, sat, and immediately went into a monologue, his customary manner of opening the show.

"I was talking to Julius the other day," he said, and the line, for some curious reason, brought a laugh from the studio audience as well as Carella. "He's got a persecution complex, I'll swear to it. An absolute paranoiac." Another laugh. "I said to him, 'Look, Julie . . .' I call him Julie because, after all, we've known each other for a long

time. Some people say I'm almost like a son to him. 'Look, Julie,' I said to him, 'what are you getting all upset about? So a lousy soothsayer stops you on the way to the forum and gives you a lot of baloney about the Ides of March? Why do you let this upset you, huh? Julie baby, the people *love* you.'

"Well, he adjusted this little laurel wreath he wears on the back of his head—he's going bald you know, that's why he wears it. It's an awful bother, to tell you the truth, because everybody in town's starting to imitate the style, and those laurel leaves pinch the back of your neck. Besides, you've got to put them in water every night or they begin to wilt. Julie has his made up fresh every day, but he's the boss and he chalks it off to expenses.

"Anyway, he adjusted his wreath the way he always does when he's going to make a speech, like that time he was trying to explain to the Senate why he spent such a long time in Egypt—but that's another story. He adjusted his wreath and started carrying on about Cassius, about how he was looking lean and hungry and all that. I tried to explain that Cassius was dieting again, but Julie wasn't buying it. He turned to me, and he said, 'Brutus, I know you think I'm being foolish, but . . .'"

And that's the way it went. For ten solid minutes Gifford held the stage alone, pausing only to garner his laughs or to deliver his contrite look when a joke fell flat. At the end of the ten minutes he introduced his dance ensemble, who held the stage for another five minutes. He then paraded his first guest, a buxomy Hollywood blonde who sang a torch song and did a skit with him, and before anyone at home realized it, the first half of the show was over. Then station break, commercial.

Carella got a bottle of beer from the refrigerator and settled down to enjoy the remaining half hour.

Gifford came on to introduce a group of folk singers who sang *Greensleeves* and *Scarlet Ribbons,* a most colorful combination. He walked onto the stage again as soon as they were finished, and then went to work in earnest.

His next guest was a male Hollywood personality. The male Hollywood personality seemed to be somewhat at a loss because he could neither sing nor dance nor, according to some critics, even act. But Gifford engaged him in some very high-priced banter for a few minutes and then personally began a commercial while the visitor went off to change his costume for a promised skit.

Gifford finished the commercial and motioned to someone standing just off camera. A stagehand carried a chair into viewing range. Gifford thanked him with a small bow, and then placed the chair in

the center of the enormous, empty stage. He had been on camera for perhaps five minutes now, a relatively short time, and when he sat in the chair and heaved a weary sigh, everyone was a little surprised.

He kept sitting in the chair, saying nothing, doing nothing. There was no music behind him. Carella felt himself beginning to smile because he knew Gifford was about to do one of his pantomimes. He touched Teddy's arm. "The pantomime," he said.

She nodded, put down the book, and turned her eyes toward the screen.

Gifford continued doing nothing. He simply sat there and looked out at the audience. But he seemed to be watching something in the very far distance. The stage was silent as Gifford kept watching this something in the distance, a something that seemed to be getting closer and closer.

Then suddenly Gifford got out of the chair, pulled it aside, and watched the something as it roared past him. He wiped his brow, faced his chair in another direction, and sat again.

Now he leaned forward. It was coming from the other direction. Closer it came, closer, and again Gifford got up, pulled his chair aside at the last possible moment, and watched the imaginary thing speed past him. He sat again, facing another direction.

Carella burst into laughter as Gifford spotted it coming at him once more. This time he got out of the chair with a determined and fierce look on his face. He held the chair in front of him like a lion tamer, defying the something to attack. But again, at the last moment, he pulled out of the way to let the something go by.

It was now on his left. He turned, whipping the chair around. The camera came in for a tight shot of his perplexed and completely helpless face.

Another look crossed that face.

The camera eye was in tight for the closeup and it caught the sudden faintness that flashed across the puzzled features. Gifford seemed to sway for an instant, and then he put one hand to his eyes, as if he weren't seeing too clearly, as if the something rushing from the left had all at once taken on a real dimension. He squeezed his eyes shut tightly and shook his head, then staggered back several paces and dropped the chair, just as the something streaked by him.

It was all part of the act, of course. Everyone knew that. But somehow, Gifford's pantomime had taken on a reality that transcended humor. Somehow, there was real confusion in his eyes as he watched the nameless something begin another charge.

The camera stayed on him in a tight closeup. Gifford looked directly into the camera and there was a pathetically pleading look on

his face. Then contact was made again and the audience began laughing. This was the same sweet and gentle man pursued by a persistent nemesis. This, once more, was comedy.

Carella did not laugh.

Gifford reached down for the chair. The close shot on one camera yielded to a long shot on another camera. His fingers closed around the chair. He righted it, then sat in it weakly, his head drooping. Again the audience howled, but Carella was leaning forward now, watching Gifford with a deadly cold, impersonal, fixed stare.

Gifford clutched his abdomen. His face paled and he seemed in danger of falling out of the chair. And then, all at once, for all the world to see, he became violently ill. The camera was caught unawares for a moment. It lingered on his helpless sickness an instant longer, then cut away.

Carella stared at the screen as the orchestra struck up a sprightly tune.

There were two squad cars and an ambulance parked in the middle of the street when Detective Meyer Meyer pulled up in front of the loft. Five patrolmen were standing before the single entrance to the building, trying valiantly to keep back the crowd of reporters, photographers, and just plain sightseers who thronged the sidewalk. The newspapermen were making most of the noise, shouting some choice Anglo-Saxon phrases at the policemen who refused to budge.

Meyer got out of the car and looked for Patrolman Genero, who had called the Squad Room not five minutes ago. He spotted him almost at once and then elbowed his way through the crowd, squeezing past an old lady who had thrown a bathrobe over her nightgown. "I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, then, shoving a fat man smoking a cigar, "Would you mind getting the hell out of my way?"

He finally reached Genero, who stood guarding the entrance doorway.

"Boy, am I glad to see you!"

"I'm glad to see you, too," Meyer answered. "Did you let anyone get by?"

"Only Gifford's doctor and the people from the hospital."

"Who do I talk to in there?"

"The producer of the show. His name's David Krantz. Meyer, it's bedlam. You'd think God dropped dead."

"Maybe he did," Meyer said patiently, and entered the building.

The promised bedlam started almost at once. There were people on the iron-runged stairways, and people in the corridor, and they all seemed to be saying exactly the same thing.

Meyer cornered a bright-eyed young man wearing thick-lensed

spectacles and said, "Where do I find David Krantz?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Police," Meyer said wearily.

"Oh. He's upstairs. Third floor."

"Thanks," Meyer said patiently.

If there was one virtue Meyer possessed, it was patience. He was grateful for this singular quality to his father, Max Meyer, who had been somewhat startled 38 years ago to learn that his wife was going to have a baby. Max, a practical joker in his own right, thought this was the practical joke supreme—an impending baby when he was already thinking of old-age homes and community burial plots.

He had awaited the birth of his child with mixed emotions. When the baby was born, he promptly pulled the rug out from under him. He decided to name the child Meyer. This, when coupled with the surname Meyer, produced the somewhat redundant, but certainly euphonic Meyer Meyer.

It's not nice to play practical jokes; it's even worse to *be* a practical joke. The young Meyer Meyer, an Orthodox Jew being raised in a predominatingly Gentile neighborhood, learned that his name was a source of unbridled merriment to the kids living on his block. If they needed a reason for beating him up, the name provided a handy excuse. "Meyer Meyer, Jew on fire!" they would shout, and then proceed to send him home in tatters.

Meyer learned patience. Patiently he forgave the vagaries of change-of-life birth. Patiently he forgave his comical father. Patiently he even learned to forgive the little monsters who regularly ganged up on him—but only after he had caught one alone and been allowed to slug it out toe to toe in single-handed and ecstatically victorious combat.

Eventually his father's practical joke was forgotten. Happily it left no scars on Meyer Meyer the man—unless one chose to notice that he was only 37 years old and totally bald.

Patiently he stopped a girl in a black leotard. "I'm looking for David Krantz."

"Straight ahead," the girl answered. "The man with the mustache."

The man with the mustache was in the center of a circle of people standing under a bank of hanging lights. At least five other girls in black leotards, two dozen more in red-spangled dresses, and a variety of men in suits, sweaters, and work clothes, were standing in small clusters around the wide expanse of the studio floor.

Beyond the knot of men surrounding the man with the mustache, Meyer could see a hospital intern in white talking to a tall man in a business suit. He debated looking at the body first, decided it would be best to talk to the head man.

"Mr. Krantz?"

Krantz turned with an economy and swiftness of movement that were a little startling. "Yes, what is it?" He gave an immediate impression of efficient wastelessness in a vast wasteland.

Meyer, who was pretty quick on the draw himself, immediately flipped open his wallet to his shield.

"Detective Meyer, Eighty-seventh Squad," he said. "I understand you're the producer."

"That's right," Krantz answered. "What now?"

"What do you mean, 'What now?'"

"I mean what are the police doing here?" Krantz asked.

"Just a routine check," Meyer said.

"For a man who died of an obvious heart attack?"

"Well, I didn't know you were a doctor, Mr. Krantz."

"I'm not. But any fool . . ."

"Mr. Krantz, it's very hot in here and I've been working all day and I'm tired. Don't start bugging me right off the bat. From what I understand—"

"Here we go," Krantz said to the circle of people around him.

"Here we go *where?*" Meyer said.

"If a maiden lady dies of old age in her own bed, every cop in the city is convinced it's homicide."

"Oh? Who told you that?"

"I used to produce a half-hour mystery show. I know the routine."

"And what's the routine?"

"Look, Detective Meyer, what do you want from me?"

"I want you to cut it out, first of all. I'm trying to ask some pretty simple questions about what seems to be an accidental—"

"*Seems*? See what I mean?" he said to the crowd.

"Yeah, *seems,* Mr. Krantz. And you're making it pretty difficult. Now if you'd like me to get a subpoena for your arrest, we can talk it over at the station house. It's up to you."

"Now you're kidding. You've got no grounds for arresting me."

"Try Section one-eight-five-one of the Penal Law," Meyer said flatly. "'Resisting public officer in the discharge of his duty: a person who, in any case or under any circumstances not otherwise specially provided for, willfully resists, delays, or obstructs a public officer—'"

"All right, all right," Krantz said. "You've made your point."

"Then get rid of your 'yes' men, and let's talk."

The crowd dispersed without a word.

In the distance, Meyer could see the tall man arguing violently with the intern in white. He turned his full attention to Krantz and said, "I thought the show had a studio audience."

"It does."

"Well, where are they?"

"We put them upstairs. Your patrolman said it was all right."

"I want one of your people to take all their names and tell them to go home."

"Can't one of your patrolmen . . ."

"I've got a madhouse in the street outside, and only five men to take care of it. Would you mind helping me, Mr. Krantz?"

"All right, I'll take care of it."

"Thanks. Now, what happened?"

"He died of a heart attack."

"How do you know? Had he ever had one before this?"

"Not that I know of, but . . ."

"Then let's leave that open for the time being—okay? How long was he on stage when he collapsed?"

"I can get that for you. It must have been about ten minutes," Krantz said.

"I'd like the accurate time."

"Somebody was probably keeping a timetable. Hold it a second. George! Hey, George!"

A man wering a cardigan sweater and talking to one of the dancers turned abruptly at the sound of his name. He peered around owlishly for a moment, obviously annoyed, trying to locate the person who'd called him. Krantz raised his hand in signal, and the man picked up a battery-powered megaphone from the seat of the chair beside him and walked toward the two men.

"This is George Cooper, our assistant director," Krantz said. "Detective Meyer."

Cooper extended his hand cautiously. Meyer realized all at once that the scowl on Cooper's face was a perpetual one, a mixed look of terrible inconvenience and unspeakable injury, as if he were a man trying to think in the midst of a revolution.

"How do you do?" he said.

"Mr. Meyer wants to know how long Stan was on camera."

"What do you mean?" Cooper said. "After the folk singers went off?"

"I guess so. Did somebody keep a record?"

"I can time the tape," Cooper said grudgingly. "Do you want me to run it?"

"Please," Meyer said.

"What happened?" Cooper asked. "Is it a heart attack?"

"We don't—"

"What else could it be?" Krantz interrupted.

"Well, I'll run the tape," Cooper said. "You going to be around?"

"I'll be here," Meyer assured him.

Cooper walked away scowling.

"Who's that arguing with the intern over there?" Meyer asked.

"Karl Nelson," Krantz replied. "Stan Gifford's doctor."

"Was he here all night?"

"No. I reached him at home and told him to come over here in a hurry. That was after I'd called the ambulance."

"Get him over here, will you?"

"Sure," Krantz said. He raised his arm and shouted, "Karl?"

Nelson broke away from the intern, turned back to hurl a last word at him, then walked briskly to where Meyer and Krantz were waiting. He was broad as well as tall, with thick, black hair graying at the temples. There was a serious expression on his face as he approached, and a high color in his cheeks.

"That idiot wants to move the body," he said immediately. "I told him I'd report him to the A.M.A. if he did. What do you want, Dave?"

"This is Detective Meyer."

Nelson shook hands briefly and firmly. "Are you getting the medical examiner to perform an autopsy?" he asked.

"Do you think I should, Dr. Nelson?"

"Didn't you see the way Stan died?"

"No. How did he die?"

"It was a heart attack, wasn't it?" Krantz said.

"Don't be ridiculous. Stan's heart was in excellent condition. When I arrived here at about nine o'clock, he was experiencing a wide range of symptoms. Labored respiration, rapid pulse, nausea, vomiting. We tried a stomach pump, but that didn't help at all. He went into convulsion at about nine fifteen. The third convulsion killed him at nine thirty."

"What are you suggesting, Dr. Nelson?" Meyer asked.

"I'm suggesting he was poisoned."

In the phone booth on the third floor landing, Meyer deposited his dime and then dialed the home number of Lieutenant Peter Byrnes. Byrnes himself answered, his voice sounding fuzzy with sleep.

"Pete, this is Meyer."

"What time is it?" Byrnes asked.

"I don't know. Ten thirty, eleven."

"I must have dozed off. Harriet went to a movie. What's the matter?"

"Pete, I'm investigating this Stan Gifford thing, and I thought I ought to—"

"What Stan Gifford thing?"

"The television guy. He dropped dead on the stage tonight, and—"

"What television guy?"

"He's a big comic."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Anyway, his doctor thinks we ought to have an autopsy done right away. Because he had a convulsion, and—"

"Strychnine?" Byrnes asked.

"I doubt it. He was vomiting before he went into convulsion."

"Arsenic?"

"Maybe. I think the autopsy's a good idea, though."

"Go ahead, ask the M.E. to do it."

"Also, I'm going to need some help on this. I've got some more questions to ask here, and I thought we might get somebody over to the hospital right away. To be there when the body arrives. Get a little action from them."

"That's a good idea."

"Yeah, well, Bert's out on a plant and Cotton was just answering a squeal when I left the office. Could you call Steve for me?"

"Sure."

"Okay, that's all. I'll ring you later."

"What time did you say it was?"

Meyer looked at his watch. "Ten forty-five."

"I must have dozed off," Byrnes said wonderingly, then hung up.

George Cooper was waiting for Meyer when he came out of the booth. The same scowl was on his face.

"I ran that tape," he said.

"Okay."

"I timed it with a stopwatch. What do you want to know?"

"When he came on, how long he stayed, and when he collapsed."

Cooper looked sourly at the pad in his hand and said, "The folk singers went off at eight thirty-seven. Stan came on immediately afterwards. He was on camera with that Hollywood ham for two minutes and twelve seconds. When the guest went off to change, Stan did the coffee commercial. He ran a little over the paid-for-minute, actually a minute and forty seconds. He started his pantomime at eight forty-one prime fifty-two. He was two minutes and fifty-five seconds into it when he collapsed."

"And the total time on camera?"

Cooper looked at the pad again. "Seven minutes and seventeen seconds."

"Thanks," Meyer said. "I appreciate your help." He started walking toward the door leading to the studio floor.

Cooper stepped into his path. His eyes met Meyer's and he stared into them searchingly. "Somebody poisoned him, huh?" he said.

"What makes you think that?"

"They're all talking about it out there—saying it was poison."

"That doesn't necessarily make it true, does it?"

"Dr. Nelson says you'll be asking for an autopsy."

"That's right."

"Then you *do* think he was poisoned."

Meyer shrugged. "I don't think anything yet, Mr. Cooper."

"Listen," Cooper said, and his voice dropped to a whisper. "Listen, I—I don't want to get anybody in trouble but before the show tonight, when we were rehearsing—"

He stopped abruptly. He glanced into the corridor. A man in a sports jacket was approaching the hallway, reaching for the package of cigarettes in his pocket.

"Go ahead, Mr. Cooper," Meyer said.

"Skip it," Cooper answered and walked away quickly.

The man in the sports jacket came into the hallway. He nodded briefly to Meyer, put the cigarette into his mouth, and struck a match.

Meyer took out a cigarette of his

own, then said, "Excuse me. Do you have a match?"

"Sure," the man said. He was a small man, with piercing blue eyes and a head that sported a crew cut, giving his face a sharp triangular shape. He struck the match for Meyer, shook it out, then leaned back against the wall again.

"Thanks," Meyer said.

"Don't mention it."

Meyer walked to where Krantz was standing with Nelson and the hospital intern. The intern was plainly confused. He had answered an emergency call, and now no one seemed to know what they wanted him to do with the body. He turned to Meyer pleadingly, hoping for someone who would take command of the situation.

"You can move the body," Meyer said. "Take it to the morgue for autopsy. Tell your man one of our detectives'll be down there soon."

The intern left quickly, before anybody could change his mind. Meyer glanced casually toward the corridor, where the man in the sports jacket was still leaning against the wall, smoking.

"Who's that fellow out there in the hallway?" he asked Krantz casually.

"Art Wetherley," Krantz answered. "One of our writers."

"Was he here tonight?"

"Sure," Krantz said.

"All right, who else is connected with the show?"

"Where do you want me to start?"

"I want to know who was here tonight, that's all."

"Why?"

"Oh, Mr. Krantz, *please*. Gifford could have died from the noise alone in this place, but there's a strong possibility he was poisoned. Now, who was here tonight?"

"All right. I was here. And my secretary. And my associate producer, and his secretary. The unit manager, and his secretary. The—"

"Does everybody have a secretary?"

"Not everybody."

"Let me hear the rest."

Krantz folded his arms, and then began reciting: "The director and the assistant director. Two scenic designers, a costume designer, the booking agent, the choral director, the chorus—seventeen people in it—the orchestra conductor, two arrangers, thirty-three musicians, five writers, four librarians and copyists, the music contractor, the dance accompanist, the choreographer, six dancers, the rehearsal pianist, the lighting director, the audio man, two stage managers, twenty-nine engineers, twenty-seven electricians and stagehands, three network policemen, thirty-five pages, three makeup men, a hair stylist, nine wardrobe people, four sponsor's men, and six guests." Krantz nodded in quiet triumph. "That's who was here tonight."

"What were you trying to do?"

Meyer asked. "Start World War Three?"

Paul Blaney, the assistant medical examiner, had never performed an autopsy on a celebrity before. The tag on the corpse's wrist told him, as if he hadn't already been told by Carella and Meyer who were waiting outside in the corridor, that the man lying on the stainless-steel table was Stan Gifford, the television comedian.

Blaney shrugged. A corpse was a corpse, and he was only thankful that this one hadn't been mangled in an automobile accident. He never watched television, anyway. Violence upset him.

He picked up his scalpel. He didn't like the idea of two detectives waiting outside while he worked. The next thing you knew, they'd be coming into the autopsy room with him and giving their opinions on the proper way to hold a forceps. Besides, he rather resented the notion that a corpse, simply because it was a celebrity corpse, was entitled to preferential treatment.

Oh, sure, Detective Meyer had patiently explained that this was an unusual case and likely to attract a great deal of publicity. And yes, the symptoms certainly seemed to indicate poisoning of some sort, but still Blaney didn't like it. It smacked of pressure. A man should be allowed to remove a liver or a set of kidneys in an unhurried way, not with policemen breathing down his neck.

The usual routine was to perform the autopsy, prepare the report, and then send it on to the investigating team of detectives. If a homicide was indicated, it was sometimes necessary to prepare additional reports, which Blaney did whenever he felt like it, more often not. These were sent to Homicide North or South, the Chief of Police, the commander of the detective division, the district commander and the technical police laboratory.

Sometimes—but only when he was feeling in a particularly generous mood—Blaney would call the investigating precinct detective and give him a verbal necropsy report over the phone. But he had never had cops waiting in the corridor before. He didn't like the idea. He didn't like it at all.

Viciously he made his incision.

In the corridor outside, Meyer Meyer sat on a bench alongside one green-tinted wall and watched Carella, who paced back and forth before him like an expectant father. Patiently Meyer turned his head in a slow cycle, following Carella's movement to the end of the short corridor and back again.

"How'd Mrs. Gifford take it?" Carella wanted to know.

"Nobody likes the idea of autopsy," Meyer said. "But I drove out to her house and told her why we were going ahead, and she agreed."

"What kind of woman is she?"

"Why?"

"If someone poisoned him—"

"She's about thirty-eight or thirty-nine, tall, attractive, I guess. It was a little hard to tell. Her mascara was running all over her face." Meyer paused. "Besides, she wasn't at the studio, if that means anything."

"Well, just who *was* at the studio?" Carella asked.

"I had Genero take down all their names before they were released." Meyer paused. "I'll tell you the truth, Steve, I hope this autopsy comes up with a big fat natural cause of death."

"How many people were in the studio?" Carella said.

"Well," Meyer said, "I think we can safely discount the studio audience, don't you?"

"I guess so. How many were in the studio audience?"

"Five hundred and sixty."

"All right, let's safely discount them."

"So that leaves everyone who was connected with the show and present tonight."

"And how many is that?" Carella asked. "Two or three dozen?"

"Two hundred and six people," Meyer said. "If we want to interrogate them all at the same time, we'll have to hire a hall."

The door to the autopsy room opened, and Paul Blaney stepped into the corridor, pulling off a rubber glove the way he had seen doctors do in the movies. He looked at Meyer and Carella sourly, then said, "Well, what is it you'd like to know?"

"Cause of death," Meyer said.

"Acute poisoning," Blaney answered.

"Which poison?"

"What would you guess?"

"You're the toxicologist," Steve said.

"Yes, yes, but you're the detectives."

"He wants to play games," Meyer said. "We're sorry, Blaney, but we didn't bring our jacks. What killed the man?"

"Did the man have a history of cardiac ailments?" Blaney asked.

"Not according to his doctor."

"Hmmm," Blaney said.

"Well?" Carella said.

"That's very funny because . . . well, I found strophanthin in the small intestines, and I automatically assumed—"

"What's strophanthin?"

"It's a drug similar to digitalis, but much more powerful. Both are used therapeutically in the treatment of cardiac cases."

"How?"

"Digitalis by infusion, or as a tincture, or even in tablet or capsule form."

"And strophanthin?"

"Intravenously or intramuscularly. The normal dose is very small."

"Is it ever given by pill or capsule?"

"I doubt it. It may have been produced as a pill years ago, but it's been replaced by other drugs today. As a matter of fact, I don't know of

many doctors who would normally prescribe such a drug."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, whenever there's a rhythmical disturbance or a structural lesion, digitalis is the more commonly prescribed stimulant. But strophanthin—" Blaney shook his head.

"Why not strophanthin?"

"Look, I'm not saying it's *never* used. I'm only saying it's rarely used. A hospital pharmacy may get one call for it in five years. A doctor might prescribe it—oh, if he wanted immediate results. It acts much faster than digitalis." Blaney paused. "Are you sure this man didn't have a cardiac history?"

"Positive." Carella hesitated a moment, then said, "Well, what form *does* it come in today?"

"An ampule, usually."

"Liquid?"

"Yes, ready for injection. You've seen ampules of penicillin, haven't you? Well, similar to that."

"Does it come in powder form?"

"Well, it comes from a plant called *strophanthus kombé,* and I imagine when the glucoside is purified you'd get a powder, yes."

"What kind of a powder?"

"A white crystalline. But I doubt if any pharmacy, even a hospital pharmacy, would stock the powder. You might find one or two, but it's rare."

"What's the lethal dose of strophanthin?" Carella asked.

"Anything over a milligram is considered dangerous. That's one one-thousandth of a gram. Compare that to the fatal dose of digitalis, which is about two and a half grams, and you'll understand what I mean about power."

"How much would you say Gifford had inside him?"

"I couldn't say exactly. Most of it, of course, had already been absorbed, or he wouldn't have died. It's not easy to recover strophanthin from the organs. It's very rapidly absorbed and easily destroyed. Do you want me to guess?"

"Please guess," Meyer said.

"Judging from the results of my quantitative analysis, I'd say he ingested at least two full grains."

"Is that a lot?" Meyer asked.

"It's only about a hundred and thirty times the lethal dose."

"What!"

"Symptoms would have been immediate," Blaney said. "Nausea, vomiting, and eventually convulsion and death."

The corridor was silent for several moments. Then Carella said, "What do you mean by immediate?"

Blaney looked surprised. "Immediate," he answered. "What else does immediate mean but immediate? After he took the injection—"

"He was on that stage for maybe ten minutes," Carella said, "with the camera on him every second. He certainly didn't—"

"It was exactly seven minutes and seventeen seconds," Meyer corrected.

"Whatever it was, he certainly

didn't take an injection of strophanthin."

Blaney shrugged. "The poison could have been administered orally," he said.

"How?"

"Well . . ." Blaney hesitated. "I suppose he could have broken open one of the ampules and then swallowed the contents."

"He didn't. He was on camera. You said the dose was enough to bring on immediate symptoms."

"Perhaps not so immediate if the drug were taken orally. Look, we really don't know very much about the lethal *oral* dose. In tests with rabbits, forty times the normal intramuscular dose, and eighty times the normal intravenous dose have proved fatal when taken by mouth. Rabbits aren't humans."

"But you said Gifford probably had a *hundred and thirty* times the normal dose," Carella said.

"That's my estimate."

"How long would that have take to bring on symptoms?"

"Minutes."

"How many minutes?"

"Five minutes, perhaps."

"And he was on camera for more than seven minutes. So the poison got into him just before he came on."

"I suppose so."

"What about this ampule?" Meyer said. "Could it have been dumped into something he drank?"

"Yes, it could have."

"Any other way he could have taken the drug?"

"Well," Blaney said, "if he'd got hold of the drug in powder form somehow, I suppose two grains could have been placed in a gelatin capsule."

"What's a gelatin capsule?" Meyer asked.

"You've seen them," Blaney said. "Vitamins, tranquilizers, stimulants —many pharmaceuticals are packaged in gelatin capsules."

"Let's get back to 'immediate' again," Carella said. "How long does it take for one of those capsules to dissolve in the body?"

"I have no idea. Several minutes, I would imagine. Why do you ask that?"

"Well, the capsule would have had to dissolve before the posion could be released, isn't that right?"

"Yes, of course."

"So immediate doesn't always mean immediate, does it? In this case, for example, immediate means *after* the capsule dissolved."

"I just told you it would have dissolved within minutes."

"How *many* minutes?" Carella asked.

"I don't know. You'll have to check that with the lab."

"We will," Carella said.

When Carella got to the Squad Room the next morning, Meyer was already there, and a note on his desk told him that a man named Charles

Mercer at the police laboratory had called at seven forty-five a.m.

"Did you call him back?" Carella asked Meyer.

"I just got in a minute ago."

"Let's hope he's got something," Carella said, and dialed the lab. He was told that Mercer had worked the graveyard shift and gone home at eight a.m.

"Who's this?" Carella asked.

"Danny Di Tore."

"Would you know anything about the tests Mercer ran for us? On some gelatin capsules?"

"Yeah, sure," Di Tore said. "Just a minute. That was some job."

"What'd he find out?"

"Well, to begin with, he had to use a lot of different capsules. They come in different thicknesses, you know. Like all the manufacturers don't make them the same."

"Pick up the extension, will you, Meyer?" Carella said, and then into the phone, "Go ahead, Di Tore."

"And there're also a lot of things that can affect the dissolving speed. Like if a man just ate, his stomach is full and the capsule won't dissolve as fast. If the stomach's empty, you get a speedier dissolving rate."

"Yeah, go ahead."

"It's even possible for one of these capsules to pass right through the system without dissolving at all. That happens with older people sometimes."

"But Mercer ran the tests."

"Yeah, sure. He mixed a batch of five-per-cent solution hydrochloric acid with a little pepsin. To simulate the gastric juices, you know. He poured that into a lot of separate containers and then dropped the capsules in."

"What'd he come up with?"

"Well, he used different brands and also different sizes. They come in different sizes, you know, the higher the number, the smaller the size. Like a four is smaller than a three."

"And what'd he find out?"

"They dissolve at different rates of speed—ten minutes, four minutes, eight minutes, twelve minutes. The highest was fifteen minutes, the lowest three minutes. That's a lot of help, huh?"

"Well, it's not exactly what I—"

"But most of them took an average of about six minutes to dissolve. That gives you something to fool around with, doesn't it?"

"Six minutes, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Thanks a lot, Di Tore. And thank Mercer, will you?"

"Don't mention it. It helped keep him awake."

Carella replaced the phone in its cradle, and turned to Meyer.

"So what do you think?"

"What am I, a straight man? What do I think? What *else* can I think? Whether he drank it or swallowed it, it had to be just before he went on."

"Had to be. The liquid works within seconds, and the capsule

takes approximately six minutes to dissolve. He was on for seven."

"Seven minutes and seventeen seconds," Meyer corrected.

"You think he took it knowingly? Suicide maybe?"

"In front of forty million people?"

"Why not? There's nothing an actor likes better than a spectacular exit."

Meyer took a deep breath and said, "Gifford was earning twenty-five grand a week. According to Krantz, he just signed a new contract, and was bringing in fifteen million dollars yearly in advertising revenue. He was happy with the network, and the network was happy with him. He didn't drink or play the horses, he wasn't in debt, he loved his wife, and had no women on the side. He didn't seem despondent—"

"Okay, okay," Carella said.

"Does that add up to a suicide?"

"No, I admit it. Stop badgering me." Carella yawned. "I guess we'll have to find out who was with him just before he went on."

"That should be very simple," Meyer said. "Only two hundred and six people were there last night."

"Let's call your Mr. Krantz. Maybe he'll be able to help us."

Carella dialed the network and asked to talk to David Krantz. The switchboard connected him with a receptionist, who in turn connected him with Krantz's secretary, who told him that Krantz was out, but would he care to leave a message?

Carella asked her to wait a moment, then covered the mouthpiece. "Are we going out to see Gifford's wife?" he asked Meyer.

"I think we'd better," Meyer said.

"Please tell Mr. Krantz he can reach me at Mr. Gifford's home, will you?" Carella said and hung up.

Larksview was perhaps a half hour outside the city, an exclusive suburb that miraculously managed to provide its home owners with something more than the conventional sixty-by-a-hundred plots. In a time of encroaching land development it was pleasant and reassuring to enter a community of wide rolling lawns, of majestic houses set far back from quiet, winding roads.

Carella had been speculating wildly from the moment they left the city, but he was silent now as they pulled up in front of a pair of stone pillars set on either side of a white gravel driveway. A half dozen men with cameras and another half dozen with pads and pencils were shouting at the two Larksview patrolmen who stood blocking the driveway.

Meyer rolled down the window on his side of the car and shouted, "Break it up there! We want to get through."

One of the patrolmen moved away from the knot of newspapermen and walked over to the car. "Who are *you*, Mac?" he said to

Meyer, and Meyer showed him his shield.

"Eighty-seventh Precinct, huh?" the patrolman said. "You handling this?"

"That's right," Meyer said.

"Then why don't you send some of your own boys out on this driveway detail?" he asked.

"What's the matter?" Carella said, leaning over. "Can't you handle a couple of reporters?"

"A couple? You shoulda seen this place ten minutes ago. The crowd's beginning to thin out a little now."

"Can we get through?" Meyer asked.

"Yeah, sure, go ahead. Just run right over them. We'll sweep up later."

Meyer honked the horn and then stepped on the gas pedal. The newspapermen pulled aside hastily, cursing.

"Nice fellas," Meyer said. "You think they'd leave the poor woman alone."

"The way *we're* doing, huh?"

"This is different."

The house was a huge Georgian Colonial, with white clapboard siding and pale green shutters. Either side of the door was heavily planted with big old shrubs that stretched beyond the boundaries of the house to form a screen of privacy for the back acres. The gravel driveway swung past the front door and then turned on itself to head for the road again, detouring into a small parking area to the left of the house before completing its full cycle.

Meyer drove the car into the parking space, pulled up the emergency brake, and got out. Carella came around from the other side of the car, and together they walked over the noisy gravel to the front door. A shining brass bell pull was set in the jamb.

Carella took the knob and yanked it. The detectives waited. Carella pulled the knob again. Again they waited.

"The Giffords have help, don't they?" Carella said, puzzled.

"If you were making a half million dollars a year, wouldn't you have help?"

"I don't know," Carella said. "*You're* making fifty-five hundred a year, and Sarah doesn't have help."

"We don't want to seem ostentatious," Meyer said. "If we hired a housekeeper, the Commissioner might begin asking me about all that graft I've been taking lately."

"You, too, huh?"

"Sure. Cleared a cool hundred thousand in narcotics alone last year."

"My game's white slavery," Carella said. "I figure to make—"

The door opened.

The woman who stood there was small and Irish and frightened. She peered out into the sunshine and then she said, "Yes, what is it, please?"

"Police Department," Carella

said. "We'd like to talk to Mrs. Gifford."

"Oh." The woman looked more distressed then ever. "Oh, yes," she said. "Yes, come in. She's out back with the dogs. I'll see if I can find her. Police, did you say?"

"That's right, ma'am," Carella said. "If she's out back, couldn't we just go around and look for her?"

"I don't know."

"You *are* the housekeeper?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"Well, *may* we walk around back?"

"All right, but—"

"Do the dogs bite?" Meyer asked cautiously.

"No, they're very gentle. Besides, Mrs. Gifford is with them."

They turned away from the door and began walking on the flagstone path leading to the rear of the house. A woman appeared almost the moment they turned the corner of the building. She was comong out of a small copse of birch trees set at the far end of the lawn—a tall blonde woman wearing a tweed skirt, loafers, and a blue cardigan sweater, looking down at the ground as two golden retrievers ran ahead of her. The dogs saw the detectives almost immediately and began barking. The woman raised her head and her eyes curiously, then hesitated a moment, her stride breaking.

"That's Lydia Gifford," Meyer whispered.

The retrievers were bounding across the lawn in enormous leaps. Meyer watched their approach uneasily. Carella, who was a city boy, and unused to seeing lion cubs racing across open stretches of ground, was certain they would leap at his jugular. He was, in fact, almost tempted to draw his pistol when the dogs stopped some three feet away and began barking in furious unison.

"Shhh!" Meyer said, and stamped his foot on the ground. The dogs, to Carella's immense surprise, turned tail and ran yelping back to their mistress, who walked directly toward the detectives now, her head high, her manner openly demanding.

"Yes?" she said. "What is it?"

"Mrs. Gifford?" Carella asked.

"Yes?" The voice was imperious.

Now that she was closer, Carella studied her face. The features were delicately formed, the eyes blue and penetrating, the brows slightly arched, the mouth full. She wore no lipstick. Grief seemed to lurk in the corners of those eyes and on that mouth; grief sat uninvited and omnipresent on her face, robbing it of beauty. "Yes?" she said again, impatiently.

"We're detectives, Mrs. Gifford," Meyer said. "I was here last night. Don't you remember?"

She studied him for several seconds, as if in disbelief. The dogs were still barking, courageous now that they were behind her skirts. "Yes, of course," she said at last, and

then added, "Hush, boys," to the dogs, who fell silent.

"We'd like to ask you some questions, Mrs. Gifford," Carella said. "I know this is a trying time for you, but—"

"That's quite all right," she answered. "Would you like to go inside?"

"Wherever you say."

"If you don't mind, may we stay out here? The house—I can't seem to—it's open out here, and fresh. After what happened . . ."

Carella, watching her, had the sudden notion she was acting. A slight frown creased his forehead. But immediately she said, "That sounds terribly phony and dramatic, doesn't it? I'm sorry. You must forgive me."

"We understand, Mrs. Gifford."

"Do you really?" she asked. A faint, sad smile touched her unpainted mouth. "Shall we sit on the terrace?"

"The terrace will be fine," Carella told her.

They walked across the lawn to where a wide flagstone terrace sprawled from the rear doors of the house, open to the woods alive with autumn color. There were white wrought-iron chairs and a glass-topped table on the terrace.

Lydia Gifford pulled a low white stool from beneath the table and sat. The detectives pulled up chairs opposite her, sitting higher than Lydia, looking down at her. She turned her face up pathetically, and again Carella had the feeling that this, too, was carefully staged, that she had deliberately placed herself in a lower chair so that she would appear defenseless.

On impulse Carella said, "Are you an actress, Mrs. Gifford?"

Lydia looked surprised. The blue eyes opened wide for a moment, then she smiled the same wan smile and said, "I used to be. Before Stan and I were married."

"How long ago were you married, Mrs. Gifford?"

"Six years."

"Do you have any children?"

"No."

Carella nodded. "Mrs. Gifford," he said, "we're primarily interested in learning about your husband's behavior in the past few weeks. Did he seem despondent or overworked or troubled by anything?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Was he the type of man who confided things to you?"

"Yes, we were very close."

"And he never mentioned anything that was troubling him?"

"No. He seemed very pleased with the way things were going."

"What things, Mrs. Gifford?"

"The show, the new stature he'd achieved in television. He'd been a night-club comic before the show went on the air, you know."

"I didn't know that."

"Yes. Stan started in vaudeville many years ago and then drifted into night-club work. He was working in Vegas, as a matter of fact,

when they approached him to see if he'd do the television show."

"And it's been on the air how many years now?"

"Three years."

"How old was your husband, Mrs. Gifford?" Carella wanted to know.

"Forty-eight," she said unhesitatingly.

"And how old are you?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Was this your first marriage?"

"Yes."

"Your husband's?"

"Yes."

"I see. Would you say you were happily married, Mrs. Gifford?"

"Yes. Extremely."

"Mrs. Gifford," Carella said flatly, "do you think your husband committed suicide?"

Without hesitation Lydia said, "No."

"You know he was poisoned?"

"Yes."

"If you don't think he killed himself, you must think—"

"I think he was murdered. Yes."

"Who do you think murdered him, Mrs. Gifford?"

"I think—"

"Excuse me, ma'am," the voice said from the opened French doors leading to the terrace. Lydia turned. Her housekeeper stood there apologetically. "It's Dr. Nelson, ma'am."

"On the telephone?"

"No, ma'am. He's here."

"Oh." Lydia frowned. "Well, ask him to join us, won't you?" She said immediately, "Again."

"What?"

"He was here last night. Came over directly from the show. He's terribly worried about my health. He gave me a sedative and then called twice this morning."

She folded her arms across her knees—a slender, graceful woman who somehow made the motion seem awkward. Carella watched her in silence for several moments. The terrace was still. On the lawn one of the dogs began barking at a bird.

"You were about to say, Mrs. Gifford?" Steve prodded.

Lydia looked up. Her thoughts seemed to be elsewhere.

"We were discussing your husband's alleged murder."

"Yes. I was about to say that I think Karl Nelson killed him."

Dr. Karl Nelson came onto the terrace not two minutes after Lydia had spoken his name, going first to her and kissing her on the cheek, and then shaking hands with Meyer, whom he had met the night before.

He was promptly introduced to Carella, and he acknowledged the introduction with a firm hand clasp and a repetition of the name, "Detective Carella," with a slight nod and a smile, as if he wished to imprint it on his memory. He turned immediately to Lydia then, and said, "How are you?"

"I'm fine, Karl," she said. "I told you that last night."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes."

"This has been very upsetting," Nelson said. "I'm sure you gentlemen can understand."

Carella nodded. He was busy watching the effect that Nelson seemed to be having on Lydia. She had visibly withdrawn from him the moment he stepped onto the terrace, folding her arms across her chest, hugging herself as though threatened by a strong wind. The pose was assuredly a theatrical one, but it seemed genuine, nonetheless. If she was not actually frightened of this tall man with the deep voice and the penetrating brown eyes, she was certainly suspicious of him, and the suspicion forced her to turn inward.

"Was the autopsy conducted?" Nelson asked Meyer.

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask what the results were? Or are they classified?"

"Mr. Gifford was killed by a large dose of strophanthin," Carella said.

"Stophanthin?" Nelson looked honestly surprised. "That's rather unusual."

"Are you familiar with the drug?"

"Yes, of course. That is, I know of it. I don't think I've ever prescribed it, however. It's rarely used, you know."

"Dr. Nelson, Mr. Gifford wasn't a cardiac patient, was he?"

"No. I believe I told that to Detective Meyer last night. Certainly not."

"He wasn't taking digitalis or any of the related glucosides?"

"No, sir."

"What *was* he taking?"

"What do you mean?"

"*Was* he taking any drugs?"

Nelson shrugged. "No. Not that I know of."

"Well, you're his personal physician. If anyone *would* know, it'd be you—isn't that so?"

"That's right. No. Stan wasn't—oh, just a moment."

"Yes?"

"Of course, that's not a drug."

"*What's* not a drug, Dr. Nelson?"

"The vitamins."

"*What* vitamins?"

"B-complex with vitamin C."

"How long had he been taking them?"

"Oh, several months. He was feeling a little tired, rundown, you know. I suggested he try them."

"You prescribed them?"

"*Prescribed* them? No." Nelson shook his head. "He was taking a brand called PlexCin, Mr. Carella. It can be purchased at any drug store without a prescription. But I *suggested* it to him."

"You suggested this specific brand?"

"Yes. It's manufactured by a reputable firm, and I've found it to be completely relia—"

"Dr. Nelson, how are these vitamins packaged?"

"In a capsule. Most vitamins are."

"How large a capsule?"

"An 0 capsule, I would say. Perhaps a double 0."

"Dr. Nelson, would you happen to know whether or not Mr. Gifford was in the habit of taking his vitamins during the show?"

"Why, no, I . . ." Nelson paused. He looked at Carella, then turned to Lydia then looked at Carella again. "You certainly don't think . . ." Nelson shrugged. "But then, I suppose anything's possible."

"What were *you* thinking, sir?"

"That perhaps someone substituted the strophanthin for the vitamins," the doctor mused.

"Would that be possible?"

"I don't see why not," Nelson said. "The PlexCin capsule is an opaque gelatin that comes apart in two halves. I suppose someone could conceivably have opened the capsule, removed the vitamins, and replaced them with strophanthin. But that would seem an awfully long way to go to—" He stopped.

"To *what,* Dr. Nelson?"

"Well—to murder someone."

The terrace was silent again.

"Did he take these vitamin capsules every day?" Carella asked.

"Yes," Nelson answered.

"Would you know *when* he took them yesterday?"

"No."

"*I* know when," Lydia Gifford said.

Carella turned to her. She was still sitting on the low stool, still hugging herself, still looking chilled and lost.

"When?" Carella asked.

"He took one after breakfast yesterday morning." Lydia paused. "I met him for lunch in town yesterday afternoon. He took another capsule then."

"What time was that?"

"Immediately after lunch. I'd say about two o'clock."

Carella sighed.

"What is it, Mr. Carella?" Lydia Gifford asked.

"I think my partner is beginning to hate clocks," Meyer said.

"What do you mean?"

"You see, Mrs. Gifford, it takes six minutes for one of those capsules to dissolve, releasing whatever's inside it. And strophanthin acts immediately."

"Then the capsule he took at lunch couldn't have contained any poison."

"That's right, Mrs. Gifford. He took it at two o'clock, and he didn't collapse until about eight fifty-five. That's a time span of almost seven hours. The poison *had* to be taken while he was at the studio." Meyer paused. "Which brings us right back to the big question: who was with him before he went on?"

Nelson looked thoughtful for a moment. "You shouldn't have too much difficulty—" he began, and stopped speaking abruptly because the telephone inside was ringing furiously.

David Krantz was matter-of-

fact, businesslike, and brief. His voice fairly crackled over the telephone wire.

"You called me, Mr. Carella?"

"Yes."

"How's Lydia?"

"She seems fine."

"You didn't waste any time getting over there, did you?"

"We try to do our little jobs," Carella said drily, remembering Meyer's description of his encounter with Krantz.

"What is it you want?" Krantz said. "This phone hasn't stopped ringing all morning. Every newspaper in town, every magazine, every cretin in this city wants to know exactly what happened last night! How do *I* know what happened?"

"You were there, weren't you?"

"I was up in the control booth. I only saw it on the monitor. What do you want, Mr. Carella? I'm very busy."

"I want to know exactly where Stan Gifford was last night before he went on camera."

"How do I know where he was? I just told you I was up in the control booth."

"Where does he usually go when he's off camera, Mr. Krantz?"

"That depends on how much time he has before he's back on."

"Suppose he had the time it took for some folk singers to sing two songs?"

"Then I imagine he went to his dressing room."

"Can you check that for me?"

"Who do you want me to check it with? Stan's dead."

"Look, Mr. Krantz, are you trying to tell me that in your well-functioning, smoothly oiled organization of two hundred and six people—"

"Two hundred people," Krantz corrected. "The extra six were guests."

"—*nobody* had any idea where Stan Gifford was while those singers were on camera?"

"I didn't say that."

"What did you say? I'm sure I misunderstood you."

"I said *I* didn't know. I was up in the control booth. I went up there about fifteen minutes before air time."

"All right, Mr. Krantz, thank you. You've successfully established your alibi. I assume that Gifford did not come up to the control booth at any time during the show?"

"Exactly."

"Then you couldn't have poisoned him. Is that your point?"

"I wasn't trying to establish an alibi. I simply—"

"Mr. Krantz, who *would* know where Gifford was? Would *anybody* in your organization know?"

"Yes."

"Who, Mr. Krantz?"

"Our assistant director. He's the person responsible for making sure everyone's in on cue."

"And his name?"

"George Cooper."

"And his address?"

"He lives downtown in the Quarter. I don't know the address. It's in the phone book."

"Thank you, Mr. Krantz," Carella said. "Thank you very much."

On the way back to the city Meyer was peculiarly silent.

Carella, who had spelled him at the wheel, glanced at him and said, "Do you want to hit Cooper now or after lunch?"

"Might as well do it now," Meyer said somewhat dolefully.

"You seem tired. What's the matter?"

"I think I'm coming down with something. My head feels stuffy."

"All that clean, fresh suburban air."

"No, I must be getting a cold."

"I can go alone," Carella said. "Why don't you go on to lunch?"

"No, it's nothing serious."

"I mean it. I can handle—"

"Stop it already," Meyer said. "You'll make me *meshugah*. You sound just like my mother used to. You'll be asking me if I got a clean handkerchief or something next."

"You got a clean handkerchief?" Carella asked, and Meyer burst out laughing. In the middle of the laugh he suddenly sneezed. He reached into his back pocket, hesitated, then turned to Carella.

"You see that?" he said. "I *haven't* got a clean handkerchief."

"My mother taught me to use my sleeve," Carella said.

"Is there any Kleenex in this car?"

"Try the glove compartment. What'd you think of our esteemed medical man, Dr. Nelson?"

Meyer reached into the glove compartment, found a box of tissues, and blew his nose resoundingly. He sniffed again, said, "Ahhh," and then immediately said, "I don't like doctors, anyway, but this one I particularly dislike."

"How come?"

"He looks like a smart movie villain," Meyer said.

"Which means we can safely eliminate him as a suspect, right?"

"There's a better reason than that for eliminating him. He was home during the show last night." Meyer paused. "On the other hand, he's a doctor, and would have access to a rare drug like strophanthin."

"But he was the one who suggested an autopsy—right?"

"Right. Another good reason to forget all about him. If you just poisoned somebody, you're not going to tell the cops to look for poison, are you?"

"A smart movie villain might."

"Sure, but then a smart movie cop would instantly know the smart movie villain was trying to pull a swiftie."

"Lydia Wistful seems to think he did it," Carella said.

"Lydia Mournful, you mean. Yeah. I wonder why?"

"We'll have to ask her."

"I wanted to, but Karl Villain wouldn't quit the scene."

"We'll call her later. Make a note."

"Yes, sir," Meyer said. He was silent for a moment, and then he added, "This case stinks."

"Give me a good old-fashioned hatchet murder any day."

"Poison is a woman's weapon, as a rule, isn't it?" Meyer asked.

"I don't know. Are there separate rules for men and women?"

"The thing I don't like about you," Meyer said, "is that you're a very argumentative guy."

"Steve Argumentative."

"Steve Loathsome," Meyer corrected.

The Quarter was all the way downtown, jammed into a miniscule portion of the city, its streets as crowded as a bazaar. Jewelry shops, galleries, book stores, sidewalk cafés, espresso joints, pizzerias, paintings on the curb, bars, basement theaters, art movie houses, all combined to give the Quarter the flavor, if not the productivity, of a real avant-garde community.

George Cooper lived on the second floor of a small apartment building on a tiny, twisting street. The fire escapes were hung with flower pots and bright-colored serapes, the doorways were painted pastel oranges and greens, the brass was polished—the whole street had been conceived and executed, by the people who dwelt upon it, as quaintly phony as a blind con man.

They knocked on Cooper's door and waited. He answered it with the same scowling expression Meyer had come to love the night before.

"Mr. Cooper?" Meyer said. "You remember me, don't you?"

"Yes, come in," Cooper said. He scowled at Meyer, whom he knew, and then impartially scowled at Carella.

"This is Detective Carella."

Cooper nodded and led them into the apartment. The living room was sparsely furnished—a narrow black couch against one wall, two black Bertoia chairs against another; the decorating scheme was obviously planned to minimize the furnishings and emphasize the modern paintings that hung facing each other on the other two walls.

The detectives sat on the couch. Cooper sat in one of the chairs opposite them.

"What we'd like to know, Mr. Cooper, is where Stan Gifford went last night while those folk singers were on," Carella explained.

"He went to his dressing room."

"How do you know that?"

"Because that's where I went to cue him later on."

"I see. Was he alone in the dressing room when you got there?"

"No," Cooper said.

"Who was with him?"

"Art Wetherley. And Maria Vallejo."

"Wetherley's a writer," Meyer ex-

plained to Carella. "Who's Maria—what's her name?"

"Vallejo. Wardrobe mistress."

"And they were both with Mr. Gifford when you went to call him?"

"Yes."

"Would you know how long they were with him?"

"No."

"How long did *you* stay in the dressing room, Mr. Cooper?"

"I knocked on the door and Stan said, 'Come in,' and I opened the door, poked my head inside and said, 'Two minutes, Stan,' and he said, 'Okay,' and I waited until he came out."

"Did he come out immediately?"

"Well, almost immediately. A few seconds. You can't kid around on television. Everything's timed to the second, you know. Stan knew that. Whenever he was cued, he came."

"Then you really didn't spend any time at all in the dressing room, did you, Mr. Cooper?"

"No. I didn't even go inside. As I told you, I just poked my head in."

"Were they talking when you looked in?" Carella asked.

"I think so, yes."

"They weren't arguing or anything, were they?"

"No, but—" Cooper shook his head.

"What is it, Mr. Cooper?"

"Nothing. Would you fellows like a drink or something?"

"Thanks, nothing for us," Meyer said. "You're sure you didn't hear anyone arguing?"

"No."

"Raised voices?"

"No." Cooper rose. "If you don't mind I'll have one."

Cooper walked into the other room. They heard him pouring his drink, and then he walked into the living room again with a short glass containing ice cubes and a healthy triple-shot of whiskey.

"I hate to drink so damn early," he said. "I was on the wagon for a year, you know. How old do you think I am?"

"I don't know," Carella said.

"Twenty-eight. I look older than that, don't I?"

"No, I wouldn't say so," Carella said.

"I used to drink a lot," Cooper explained. The scowl seemed to vanish from his face. "I've cut down."

"When Mr. Gifford left the dressing room," Meyer said, "You were with him—right?"

"Yes."

"Did you meet anyone between the dressing room and the stage?"

"Not that I remember. Why?"

"Would you remember if you'd met anyone?"

"I think so, yes."

"Then the last people who were with Gifford were Art Wetherley, Maria Vallejo, and you. In fact, Mr. Cooper, if we want to be absolutely accurate, the very last person was *you*."

"I suppose so. No, wait a minute. I think he said a word to one of the cameramen, just before he went on. Something about coming in for the close shot. Yes, I'm sure he did."

"Did Mr. Gifford eat anything in your presence?"

"No."

"Drink anything?"

"No."

"Put anything into his mouth at all?"

"No."

"Was he eating or drinking anything when you went into the dressing room?"

"I didn't *go* in, I only *looked* in. I think maybe there were some coffee containers around. I'm not sure."

"They were drinking coffee?"

"I told you, I'm not sure."

Carella nodded, then very slowly and calmly said, "What is it you want to tell us, Mr. Cooper?"

Cooper shrugged. "Anything you want to know."

"Yes, but specifically."

"Look, I don't want to get anybody in trouble."

"What is it, Mr. Cooper?"

"Well . . . well, Stan had a fight with Art Wetherley yesterday. Just before the show. Not a fight, an argument. Words. And . . . I said something about I wished Stan would calm down before we went on the air, and Art . . . Look, I don't want to get him in trouble. He's a nice guy, and I wouldn't even mention this, but the papers said Stan was poisoned and . . . well, I don't know."

"What did he say, Mr. Cooper?"

"He said that he wished Stan would drop dead."

Carella was silent for a moment. He rose then and said, "Can you tell us where Mr. Wetherley lives?"

Cooper told them, but it didn't matter very much because Wetherley was out when they got there. They checked downstairs with his landlady, who said she had seen him leaving the building early that morning. No, he didn't have any luggage with him. Why in the world would he be carrying luggage at ten o'clock in the morning?

Carella and Meyer told the landlady that perhaps he would be carrying luggage if he planned to leave the city, and the landlady told them he never left the city on a Thursday because that was when they ran the tape of the show from the night before so the writers could see which jokes had got the laughs and which hadn't, and that was very important to Mr. Wetherley's line of work.

Carella and Meyer explained that perhaps, after what had happened last night, the tape might not be run today. But the landlady said it didn't matter what had happened last night, they'd probably get a replacement for the show, and then Mr. Wetherley would have to write for it, anyway, so it was very important that he see the tape.

They thanked her, then called the

network who told them the take was not being shown today and, no, Wetherley was not there.

They had lunch in a diner near Wetherley's apartment, debated putting out a pick-up-and-hold on him, and decided this would be a little drastic on the basis of hearsay, assuming Cooper was telling the truth to begin with—which he might not have been. They were knowledgeable and hip cops and they knew all about that television rat-race where people slit each others' throats and stabbed each other in the back. It was, after all, quite possible that Cooper was lying. It was, in fact, quite possible that *everybody* was lying.

So they called the Squad Room and asked Bert Kling to put what amounted to a telephone surveillance on Wetherley's apartment, calling him every half hour, and warning him to stay right in that apartment where he was, in case he happened to answer the phone. Bert Kling had nothing else to do but call Wetherley's apartment every half hour, being involved in trying to solve four burglaries and three Grover Park muggings, so he was naturally very happy to comply with Carella's wishes.

The two detectives discussed how large a tip they should leave the waitress, settled on a trifle more than fifteen per cent, then went out into the street again. They got into Carella's car and drove uptown, hoping Maria Vallejo would be home and willing to talk to them . . .

The street on which Maria Vallejo lived was in one of the city's better neighborhoods, a block of old brownstones with clean-swept stoops and curtained front doors. They entered the tiny lobby with its polished brass mailboxes and bell buttons, found a listing for Maria in Apartment Twenty-two, and rang the bell.

The answering buzz was long and insistent; it continued noisily behind them as they climbed the carpeted steps to the second floor. They rang the bell outside the apartment door. It opened almost immediately.

Maria was small and dark and bursting with energy. She was perhaps thirty-two, with thick black hair pulled tightly to the back of her head, flashing brown eyes, a generous mouth, and a nose that had been turned up by a plastic surgeon. She wore a white blouse and black tapered slacks. A pair of large, gold hoop earrings decorated her ears, but she wore no other jewelry.

She opened the door and then looked out at the detectives in puzzlement.

"Yes?" she said. "What is it?" She spoke without a trace of accent. If Carella had been forced to make a regional guess based on her speech, he'd have chosen Boston.

"We're from the police," he said, flashing his buzzer. "We're investigating the death of Stan Gifford."

"Oh, sure," she said. "Come on in."

They followed her into the apartment. The room was furnished in brimming good taste, cluttered with objects picked up in the city's antique and junk shops. The shelves and walls were covered with ancient nutcrackers and old theater posters and a French puppet, and watercolor sketches for costumes and stage sets, and several enameled army medals, and a black silk fan, and pieces of driftwood.

The living room was small, with wide curtained windows overlooking the street, luminous with the glow of the afternoon sun. It was furnished with a sofa and chair covered in deep green velvet, a bentwood rocker, a low needlepoint footstool, a marble-topped table on which lay several copies of *Paris Match*.

"Do sit down," Maria said. "Can I get you a drink? Oh, you're not allowed, are you? Some coffee?"

"I can use a cup," Carella said.

"It's on the stove. I'll just pour it. I always keep a pot on the stove. I guess I drink a million cups of coffee a day."

She went into the small kitchen and came back with cups, spoons, sugar, and cream on a small teakwood tray. She shoved aside the copies of the French magazine and served the detectives. Then she sat in the bentwood rocker and sipped her coffee.

"What did you want to know about Stan?" she asked.

"We understand you were in his dressing room with him just before he went on last night, Miss Vallejo. Is that right?"

"That's right," she said.

"Were you alone with him?"

"No, there were several people in the room."

"Who?"

"Gee, I don't remember offhand. I think Art was there, yes . . . and maybe one other person."

"George Cooper?" Carella suggested.

"Yes, that's right. Say, how did *you* know that?"

Carella smiled. "But Mr. Cooper didn't come into the room, did he? He simply knocked on the door and called Mr. Gifford. Isn't that right?"

"No, he came in," Maria said. "He was there quite a while."

"How much time would you say he spent in the dressing room?"

"Oh, maybe five minutes."

"You remember that clearly?"

"Oh, yes. He was there, all right."

"What else do you remember, Miss Vallejo?"

"Oh, nothing. We were just talking. Stan was relaxing while those singers were on and I just sort of drifted in to have a smoke and chat, that's all."

"What did you chat about?"

"I don't remember." She shrugged. "It was just small talk. The monitor was going and those

nuts were singing in the background, so we were just making small talk."

"Did Mr. Gifford eat anything? Or drink anything?"

"Gee, no. No, he didn't. We were just talking."

"No coffee? Nothing like that?"

"No. No, I'm sorry."

"Did he take a vitamin pill?"

"Gee, I didn't notice."

"Or *any* kind of a pill?"

"No, we were just talking, that's all."

"Did you like Mr. Gifford?"

"Well . . ."

"Did you like him, Miss Vallejo?"

"I don't like to talk about the dead."

"We were talking about him just fine until a minute ago."

"I don't like to speak *ill* of the dead," she corrected.

"Then you didn't like him?"

"Well, he was a little demanding."

"Demanding how?"

"I'm the show's wardrobe mistress, you know."

"Yes, we know."

"I've got eight people working under me—that's a big staff. I'm responsible for all of them, and it's not easy to costume that show each week, believe me. Well, I . . . I don't think Stan made the job any easier, that's all. He—well—well, really, he didn't know very much about costumes and he pretended he did and—well, he got on my nerves sometimes, that's all."

"I see," Carella said.

"But you went into his dressing room to chat, anyway," Meyer said.

"Well, there wasn't a feud between us or anything like that. It's just that every once in a while we yelled at each other a little, that's all. Because he didn't know a damn thing about costumes and I happen to know a great deal about costumes, that's all. But that didn't stop me from going into his dressing room to chat a little. I don't see anything so terribly wrong about that."

"No one said anything was wrong, Miss Vallejo."

"I mean, I know a man's been murdered and all, but that's no reason to start examining every tiny little word that was said or every little thing that was done. People *do* argue, you know."

"Yes, we know."

Maria stopped rocking, turned her head toward the curtained windows streaming sunlight, and very softly said, "Oh, what's the use? I guess they've already told you Stan and I hated each other's guts." She shrugged hopelessly. "I think he was going to fire me. I heard he wouldn't put up with me any longer."

"Who told you that?"

"David. David Krantz, our producer. He told me Stan was about to give me the ax. *That's* why I went to his dressing room last

night. To ask him about it, to try to . . . well, the job pays well. I didn't want to lose the job."

"*Did* you discuss the job with him?"

"I started to, but then Art came in, and right after that George, so I didn't get a chance." She paused again. "I guess it's academic now, isn't it?"

"I guess so."

Meyer blew his noise noisily, put his tissue away, and then casually said, "Are you very well known in the field, Miss Vallejo?"

"Oh, yes, sure."

"So even if Mr. Gifford *had* fired you, you could always get another job. Isn't that so?"

"Well, word gets around pretty fast in this business. It's not good to get fired from *any* job. I'm sure you know that. And in television . . . I would have preferred to resign, that's all. So I wanted to clear it up, you see, which is why I went to his dressing room. To clear it up. If it was true he was going to let me go, I wanted the opportunity of leaving the job of my own volition."

"But you never got a chance to discuss it with him."

"No. I told you. Art walked in."

"Well, thank you, Miss Vallejo," Carella said, rising. "That was very good coffee."

"Listen—"

She had come out of the bentwood rocker now, the rocker still moving back and forth, and she stood in the center of the room with the sun blazing on the curtains behind her. She worried her lip for a moment, and then said, "Listen, I didn't have anything to do with this."

Meyer and Carella said nothing.

"I didn't like Stan and maybe he *was* going to fire me, but I'm not nuts, you know. I'm a little temperamental maybe, but I'm not nuts. We didn't get along, that's all. That's no reason to kill a man. I mean, a lot of people on the show didn't get along with Stan. He was a difficult man, you know, and the star. We blew our stacks every now and then, that's all. But I didn't kill him. I—I wouldn't know how to begin hurting someone."

The detectives kept staring at her. Maria gave a small shrug.

"That's all," she said.

The afternoon was dying by the time they reached the street again. Carella glanced at his watch and said, "Let's call Bert. See if he had any luck with our friend Wetherley."

"You call," Meyer said. "I feel miserable." He sniffed emphatically.

"You'd better get to bed," Carella said. "Take some aspirin, too."

They went into the nearest drugstore, and Carella called the Squad Room. Kling told him he had tried Wetherley's number three times so far, but no one had answered the phone. Carella thanked him, hung

up, and went out to the car where Meyer was blowing his nose and looking very sick indeed. By the time they got back to the Squad Room, Kling had called the number a fourth time, again without luck.

Carella told Meyer to get the hell home, but Meyer insisted on typing up at least one of the reports on the people they'd talked to that day. He left the Squad Room some twenty minutes before Carella did.

Carella finished the reports in time to greet his relief, Andy Parker, who was a half hour late, as usual. He tried Wetherley's number once more, and then told Parker to keep trying it all night long, and to call him at home if he reached Wetherley. Parker assured him that he would, but Carella wasn't at all sure he'd keep the promise.

He got to his house in Riverhead at seven fifteen. The twins met him at the door, almost knocking him over in their headlong rush to greet him. He picked up one under each arm and was swinging them toward the kitchen when the telephone rang.

He went to the phone.

"Hello?" he said.

"Bet you thought I wouldn't, huh?" the voice said.

"Who's this?""

"Andy Parker. I just called Wetherley. He told me he got home about ten minutes ago. I advised him to stick around until you got there."

"Oh," Carella said. "Thanks."

He hung up and turned toward the kitchen where Teddy was standing in the doorway. He looked at her silently for several moments, and she stared back at him. Then he shrugged. "I guess I can eat before I leave."

Teddy sighed almost imperceptibly, but Mark, the older of the twins by five minutes, was watching the byplay with curious intensity. He made a vaguely resigned gesture with one hand and said, "There he goes." And April, thinking it was a game, threw herself into Carella's arms, squeezed the breath out of him, and squealed, "There he goes, there he goes, there he goes!"

Art Wetherley was waiting for him when he got there. He led Carella through the apartment and into a studio overlooking the park. The studio contained a desk on which sat a typewriter, an ashtray, a ream of blank paper, and what looked like another ream of typewritten sheets covered with penciled hen-scratches. There were several industry-award plaques on the wall and a low bookcase beneath them.

Wetherley gestured to one of the two chairs in the room, and Carella sat in it. Wetherley seemed extremely calm, eminently at ease, but the ashtray on his desk was full of cigarettes.

"I'm not used to getting phone

calls from the police," he said immediately.

"Well, we were here—"

"Especially when they tell me to stay where I am, not to leave."

"Andy Parker isn't the most tactful—"

"I mean, I didn't know this was a dictatorship," Wetherley said.

"It isn't, Mr. Wetherley," Carella said gently. "We're investigating a murder, however, and we were here earlier today, but—"

"I was out all day. There's no law against that."

"Certainly not." Carella smiled. "I'm sorry if we inconvenienced you, but we did want to ask you some questions."

Wetherley seemed slightly mollified. "Well, all right," he said. "But there was no need, really, to warn me not to leave the apartment."

"I apologize for that, Mr. Wetherley."

"Well, all right," Wetherley said.

"I wonder if you could tell me what happened in Stan Gifford's dressing room last night. Just before he left it."

"I don't remember in detail."

"Well, suppose you just tell me what you *do* remember."

Wetherley thought for a moment, crushed out his cigarette, lighted a new one, then said, "Maria was there when I came in. She was arguing with Stan about something. At least—"

"Arguing?"

"Yes. I could hear them shouting before I knocked on the door."

"Go ahead."

"The atmosphere was a little strained after I went in, and Maria didn't say very much all the while I was there. But Stan and I were joking, mostly about the folk singers. He hated folk singers, but this particular group is hot right now and he was talked into hiring them for the show."

"So the two of you were making jokes about them?"

"Yes. While we watched the act on the monitor."

"I see. In a friendly manner, would you say?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then what happened?"

"Well, then George came in—George Cooper, the show's A.D."

"He came into the room?"

"Yes."

"How long did he stay?"

"Oh, three or four minutes, I guess."

"I see. But *he* didn't argue with Gifford, did he?"

"No."

"Just Maria?"

"Yes. Before I got there."

"I understand. And what about you?" Carella asked.

"Me?"

"Yes. What about your argument with Gifford before the show went on the air?"

"Argument? Who said there was an argument?"

"Wasn't there one?"

"Certainly not."

Carella took a deep breath. "Mr. Wetherley, didn't you say you wished Stan Gifford would drop dead?"

"No, sir," Wetherley said emphatically.

"You did *not* say that?" Steve said.

"No, sir, I did not. Stan and I got along very well." Wetherley paused. "A lot of people on the show *didn't* get along with him, but I never had any trouble."

"*Who* didn't get along with him?"

"Well, Maria, for one. I just told you that. And David Krantz didn't particularly like him. He was always saying, within earshot of Stan, that all actors are cattle, and that comedians are only funny actors. And George Cooper didn't exactly enjoy his role of—well, handyman, almost. Keeping everyone quiet on the set and running for coffee, and bringing Stan his pills and making sure everybody—"

"Bringing Stan his *what?*"

"His pills," Wetherley said. "Stan was a nervous guy, you know. I guess he was on tranquilizers. Anyway, George was the chief errand boy and bottle washer, hopping whenever Stan snapped his fingers."

"Did George bring him a pill last night?" Carella wanted to know.

"When?" Wetherley asked.

"Last night. When he came to the dressing room."

Wetherley concentrated for a moment, then said, "Now that you mention it, I think he did."

"You're sure about that?"

"Yes, sir. I'm positive."

"And did Stan *take* the pill?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did he swallow it?"

"Yes, sir."

Carella rose suddenly. "Would you mind coming along with me?"

"Come along? Where?"

"Uptown. There are a few things we'd like to get straight."

The few things Carella wanted to get straight were the conflicting stories of the last three people who were with Gifford before he went on camera. He figured that the best way to do this was in the Squad Room, where the police would have the psychological advantage in the question-and-answer game.

There was nothing terribly sinister about the green globes hanging outside the station house, or about the high desk in the muster room, or the sign advising all visitors to stop at the desk, or even the white sign announcing DETECTIVE DIVISION in bold black letters, and pointing toward the iron-runged steps leading upstairs.

There was certainly nothing menacing about the steps themselves or the narrow corridor they opened onto, or the various rooms in that corridor with their neatly

lettered signs, INTERROGATION, LAVATORY, CLERICAL. The slatted-wood railing that divided the corridor from the Squad Room was innocuous-looking, and the Squad Room itself—in spite of the meshed-wire grids over the windows—looked like any business office in the city, with desks, filing cabinets, ringing telephones, a water cooler, bulletin boards, and men working in shirt sleeves.

But Art Wetherley, Maria Vallejo, and George Cooper were visibly rattled by their surroundings, and they became more rattled when they were taken into separate rooms for their interrogation. Cotton Hawes, a big cop with a white streak in his otherwise red hair, questioned Cooper in the Lieutenant's office. Steve Carella questioned Maria in the Clerical office. Meyer Meyer, suffering from a cold, and not about to take any nonsense questioned Art Wetherley at the table in the barely furnished Interrogation Room.

The three detectives had decided beforehand what questions they would ask and what their approach would be. In separate rooms they went through a familiar routine.

"You said you weren't drinking coffee, Miss Vallejo," Carella said. "Mr. Cooper tells us there *were* coffee containers in that room. Were there or weren't there?"

"No. I don't remember. I know *I* didn't have any coffee."

"Did Art Wetherley?"

"No. I didn't see him drink anything, either."

"Did Cooper hand Gifford a pill?"

"No."

"Were you arguing with Gifford before Art Wetherley came in?"

"No."

"Let's go over this one more time, Mr. Cooper," Hawes said. "You say you only knocked on the door and poked your head into the room."

"That's right."

"You were there only a few seconds."

"Yes. Look, I—"

"Did you give Stan Gifford a pill?"

"A pill? No! No, I didn't!"

"But there were coffee containers in the room, huh?"

"Yes. Look, I didn't give him anything! What are you trying—"

"Did you hear Art Wetherley say he wished Gifford would drop dead?"

"Yes!"

"All right, Wetherley," Meyer said, "when did George Cooper give Gifford that pill?"

"As soon as he came in the room."

"And Stan Gifford washed it down with what?"

"With the coffee we were drinking."

"You were all drinking coffee, huh?"

"Yes."

"*Who* was?"

"Maria and Stan, and I was, too."

"Then why'd you go to that room, Maria, if not to argue?"

"I went to—to talk to him. I thought we could—"

"But you *were* arguing, weren't you?"

"No. I swear to God, I wasn't!"

"Then why are you lying about the coffee? Were you drinking coffee or weren't you?"

"No. No coffee. Please, I—"

"Now hold it, Mr. Cooper. You were either in that room or not in it. You either gave him a pill or you—"

"I didn't, I'm telling you!"

"Did you *ever* give him pills at all?"

"No."

"But Gifford was taking tranquilizers, wasn't he?"

"I don't know what he was taking. I never brought him anything."

"Never?"

"Once maybe or twice. An aspirin. If he had a headache."

"But never a tranquilizer?"

"No."

"How about a vitamin capsule?"

"He handed him the pill," Wetherley said.

"What kind of a pill?"

"I don't know. A small pill."

"What color?"

"White."

"A tablet, you mean? Like an aspirin? Like that?"

"Yes. Yes, I think so. I don't really remember."

"Well, you saw it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but, . . ."

They put it all together afterward in the Squad Room. They left the three suspects in the Lieutenant's office with a patrolman watching over them and they sat around Carella's desk and compared their answers. They were not particularly pleased with the results, but neither were they surprised by them.

They had all been cops for a good many years, and nothing human beings perpetrated against each other ever surprised them. They were perhaps a little saddened by what they discovered each and every time, but never surprised. The facts were simple and disappointing. They decided, after comparing results, that all three of their suspects were lying.

Maria Vallejo *had* been arguing with Gifford, and she *had* been drinking coffee, but she denied both allegations because she realized how incriminating these seemingly isolated circumstances might seem. She recognized quite correctly that someone could have poisoned Gifford by dropping something into his coffee. If she ad-

mitted there had been coffee in the dressing room, that indeed she and Gifford had been drinking coffee together, and if she then further admitted they'd been arguing, could she not have been the one who slipped the lethal dose into the brew?

So Maria had lied in her teeth, but had graciously refused to incriminate anyone else while she was lying. It was enough for her to fabricate her own way out of what seemed like a horrible trap.

Art Wetherley had indeed wished his employer would drop dead, and he had wished it out loud, and he had wished it in the presence of someone else. And that night—lo and behold!—Stan Gifford *did* drop dead, on camera, for millions to see. Art Wetherley, like a child who'd made a fervent wish, was startled to realize it had come true. Not only was he startled, he was frightened. He immediately remembered what he'd said to George Cooper before the show, and he was certain Cooper would remember it, too. His fear reached new dimensions when he recalled that he had been one of the last few people to spend time with Gifford while he was alive, and that his proximity to Gifford in an obvious poisoning case, coupled with his chance remark during rehearsal, could easily serve to pin a murder rap on him.

When a detective called and warned him not to leave the apartment, Wetherley was certain he'd been picked as the patsy of the year, an award that did not come gold-plated like an Emmy. In desperation he had tried to discredit Cooper's statement by turning the tables and presenting Cooper as a suspect himself. He had seen Cooper bringing aspirins to Gifford at least a few times in the past three years. He decided to elaborate on what he'd seen, thus incriminating Cooper. But a frightened man doesn't care who takes the blame, so long as it's not himself.

In much the same way Cooper came to the sudden realization that not only was he one of the last people to be with Gifford, he was *the* last person. Even though he had spent several minutes with Gifford in the dressing room, he thought it was safer to say he had only poked his head into it. And whereas Gifford hadn't stopped to talk to a soul before he went on camera, Cooper thought it was wiser to add a mystery cameraman. Then, to clinch his own escape from what seemed like a definitely compromising position, he remembered Wetherley's earlier outburst and promptly paraded it before the investigating cops, even though he knew the expression was one that was uttered a hundred times a day.

Liars all.

But murderers none.

The detectives were convinced, after a grueling three-hour session, that these assorted liars were now

babbling all in the cleansing catharsis of truth. Yes, we lied, they all separately admitted, but now we speak the truth, the shining truth. We did not kill Stan Gifford. We wouldn't know strohoosis from a hole in the wall. Besides, we are kind, gentle people. Look at us. Liars, yes, but murderers, no. *We did not kill.*

The detectives believed them.

They had heard enough lies in their professional lives to know that truth has a shattering ring which can topple skyscrapers. They sent the three home without apologizing for any inconvenience.

Cotton Hawes yawned, stretched, asked Carella if he needed him any more, put on his hat, and went home, too. Meyer and Carella sat in the lonely Squad Room and faced each other across the desk. They faced the facts.

They were beginning to believe that Gifford had taken his own life.

On Monday morning they drove out to Larksview again.

They had spent all day Friday and part of Saturday questioning a goodly percentage of the two hundred and six people who were present in the studio loft that night. They did not consider any of them possible suspects in a murder case. As a matter of fact, they were trying hard to find something substantial on which to hang a verdict of suicide. Their line of questioning followed a single simple direction: they wanted to know whether anyone connected with the show had, at any time before or during the show, seen Stan Gifford put anything into his mouth.

The answers did nothing to substantiate a theory of suicide. Most of the people connected with the show were too busy to notice who was putting what into his mouth; some of the staff hadn't come across Gifford at all during the day, and those who *had* spent any time with him had definitely not seen anything go into his mouth.

A chat with David Krantz revealed that Gifford was in the habit of delaying dinner until after the show each Wednesday, eating a heavy lunch to carry him through the day. This completely destroyed the theory that perhaps Gifford had eaten again after meeting his wife. But it provided a new possibility for speculation, and it was this possibility that took Meyer and Carella to Larksview once more.

Happily, the reporters and photographers had forsaken the Gifford house now that the story had been pushed off the front page and onto the pages reserved for armchair detection. Meyer and Carella drove to the small parking area, walked to the front door, and once again pulled the brass knob set into the jamb.

The housekeeper opened the door and said, "Oh, it's you again."

"Is Mrs. Gifford home?" Carella asked.

"I'll see," she said, and closed the door in their faces.

They waited. In a few moments the housekeeper returned.

"Mrs. Gifford is having coffee in the dining room," she said. "She says you may join her, if you wish."

"Thank you," Carella said, and they followed her into the house.

A huge winding staircase started just inside the entrance hall, thickly carpeted, swinging to the upper story. Doors opened onto the living room, beyond which was a small dining room with a bay window overlooking the back yard.

Lydia Gifford sat alone at the table, wearing a quilted robe. Her blonde hair was uncombed and hung loosely about her face. As before, she wore no makeup, but she seemed more rested now, more at ease.

"I was just having breakfast," she said. "I'm afraid I'm a late sleeper. Won't you have something?"

Meyer took the chair opposite her and Carella sat beside her at the table. She poured coffee for both men.

"Mrs. Gifford," Carella said, "when we were here last time you said something about your husband's physician, Karl Nelson."

"Yes," Lydia said. "Sugar?"

"Thank you." Carella spooned a teaspoonful into his coffee, then passed the sugar bowl to Meyer. "You said you thought he'd murdered your husband. Now what made you say that?"

"I believed it," Lydia Gifford stated.

"Do you still believe it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I see now that it would have been impossible. I didn't know the nature of the poison at the time."

"Its speed, you mean?"

"Yes."

"You mean it would have been impossible because Dr. Nelson was not at the studio?"

"Yes."

"But what made you suspect him in the first place?"

"I tried to think of who could have had access to poison and I immediately thought of Karl."

"So did we," Carella said.

"I imagine you would have," Lydia said. "These muffins are very good. Won't you have some?"

"No, thank you. But even if he did have access why would he have wanted to kill your husband?"

"I have no idea."

"Didn't the two men get along?"

"You know doctors," Lydia said. "They all have God complexes." She paused, then added, "In any universe there can only be one God."

"And in Stan Gifford's universe *he* was God."

Lydia sipped at her coffee and said, "If an actor hasn't got his ego, then he hasn't got anything."

"Are you saying the two egos came into conflict occasionally, Mrs. Gifford?"

"Yes."

"But not in any serious way, surely."

"I don't know what men consider serious. I know that Stan and Karl occasionally argued. So when Stan was killed, as I told you, I tried to figure out who could have got his hands on any poison, and I thought of Karl."

"This was before you knew the poison was strophanthin."

"Yes. Once I found out what the poison was, and knowing Karl was home that night, I realized—"

"But if you didn't know the poison was strophanthin, then it could have been any poison."

"Yes. But—"

"And you also must have known that a great many poisons can be purchased in drug stores, usually in compounds of one sort or another. Like arsenic, cyanide—"

"Yes, I suppose I knew that."

"But you still automatically assumed Dr. Nelson had killed your husband."

"I was in shock at the time. I didn't know what to think."

I see," Carella said. He picked up his cup and took a long deliberate swallow. "Mrs. Gifford, you said your husband took a vitamin capsule after lunch last Wednesday."

"That's right."

"Did he have that capsule with him or did you bring it to him when you went into the city?"

"He had it with him."

"Was he in the habit of taking vitamin capsules with him?"

"Yes," Lydia said. "He was supposed to take one after every meal. Stan was a very conscientious man. When he knew he was going into the city he carried the vitamins with him, in a small pillbox."

"Did he take only one capsule to the city last Wednesday? Or *two?*"

"One," Lydia said.

"How do you know?"

"Because there were two on the breakfast table that morning. He swallowed one with his orange juice and he put the other in the pillbox, then put it in his pocket."

"And you saw him take that second capsule after lunch?"

"Yes."

"And to your knowledge, that was the only capsule he took after leaving this house last Wednesday."

"That's right."

"Who put those capsules on the breakfast table, Mrs. Gifford?"

"My housekeeper." Lydia looked suddenly annoyed. "I'm not sure I understand all this," she said. "If he took the capsule at lunch, I don't see how it could possibly—"

"We're only trying to find out for sure whether or not there was a *third* capsule, Mrs. Gifford."

"I just told you there wasn't."

"We'd like to be sure. We know the capsule he took at lunch couldn't possibly have killed him. But if there was a *third* capsule—"

"There were only two," Lydia said. He knew he was coming

home for dinner after the show, the way he did every Wednesday night. There was no need for him to carry more than—"

"More than the one he took at lunch—right?"

"Yes."

"Which couldn't possibly have killed him—right?"

"Yes," Lydia said.

"Nonetheless, we'd like to talk to your housekeeper," Carella said. "Would you mind calling her?"

Lydia lifted the small bell near her right hand, and gave it a rapid shake. The housekeeper came into the dining room immediately.

"These gentlemen would like to ask you some questions, Maureen," Lydia said. "If you don't mind, gentlemen, I'll leave you alone. I'm late for an appointment now, and I'd like to get dressed."

"Thank you for your time, Mrs. Gifford," Carella said.

"Not at all." Lydia started out of the room, then turned at the door. "Whoever did it," she said, "catch him."

Maureen stood by the table.

Meyer glanced at Carella, who nodded. Meyer cleared his throat and said, "Maureen, on the day Mr. Gifford died, did you set the breakfast table?"

"For him and for Mrs. Gifford, yes, sir. Who else would set it?"

"Do you always set the table?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you put Mr. Gifford's vitamin capsules on the table that morning?"

"Yes, sir. Right alongside his plate, same as usual."

"How many vitamin capsules?"

"Two," Maureen said with certainty.

"Not three?"

"I said two," Maureen said.

"Was anyone in the room when you put the capsules on the table?"

"No, sir."

"Who came down to breakfast first? Mr. Gifford or Mrs. Gifford?"

"Mrs. Gifford came in just as I was leaving."

"And then Mr. Gifford?"

"Yes. I heard him come down about five minutes later."

"Do these capsules come in a jar?"

"A small bottle, sir."

"Could we see that bottle, please?"

"I keep it in the kitchen." Maureen paused. "You'll have to wait while I get it." She went out of the room.

Carella waited until he could no longer hear her footfalls, then asked, "What are you thinking?"

"I don't know. But if Lydia Gifford was alone in the room with those two capsules, she could have switched one of them."

"The one he was taking to lunch?"

"Yeah."

"Only one thing wrong with that theory," Carella said.

"Yeah, I know. He had lunch

seven hours before he collapsed." Meyer sighed and shook his head. "We're stuck with that lousy six minutes. It's driving me nuts."

"Besides, why would Lydia want to do in her own dear Godlike husband?"

"I don't know why," Meyer said. "Who cares why? It's just I get the feeling she's too cooperative. Her and her doctor buddy. Both so very damn helpful. He right away diagnoses poison and insists we do an autopsy. She immediately points to him as a suspect, then changes her mind. And both conveniently away from the studio on the night Gifford died." Meyer nodded. "Maybe that six minutes is *supposed* to drive us nuts."

"How do you mean?"

"Maybe we were *supposed* to find out which poison killed him. I mean, we'd naturally do an autopsy anyway—right? And we'd find out it was strophanthin and we'd also find out how fast strophanthin works."

"Yeah, go ahead."

"So we'd automatically rule out anybody who wasn't near Gifford before he died."

"That's almost the entire city."

"No, you know what I mean. We'd rule out Krantz who says he was in the control booth, and we'd rule out Lydia who was here, and Nelson who was at his own house. Krantz called him there, remember?"

"Yes, I remember. So given a dead end to work with, knowing how much poison he'd swallowed, and knowing how fast it worked, we'd come to the only logical conclusion—suicide. Is that what you mean?"

"Right," Meyer said.

"There's only one trouble with that."

"Yeah, what's that?"

"The facts. It *was* strophanthin. It *does* work instantly. You can speculate all you want about Lydia, Nelson, and Krantz, but the facts are the same."

"Suppose she *did* switch that lunch capsule?"

"All right, suppose she did. He'd have dropped dead on his way to the studio."

"Or suppose Krantz got to him *before* he went up to the control booth?"

"Then Gifford would have shown symptoms of poisoning before the show even went on the air."

"Arrrggh, facts," Meyer said, and Maureen came back into the room.

"I asked Mrs. Gifford if it was all right," she said. She handed the bottle of vitamin capsules to Carella. "You can do whatever you like with them."

"We'd like to take them with us, if that's all right. We'll give you a receipt," Meyer said.

He looked at the bottle of vitamins in Carella's hand. The capsules were jammed into the bottle, each one opaque and colored purple and black. Meyer stared at

them sourly. "You're looking for a third capsule," he said to Carella. "There're a *hundred* of them in that bottle."

He blew his nose then, and began making out a receipt for the bottle.

There is nothing so discouraging as a case that will not make sense. It provides a gloom that can spread from the Squad Room to the entire precinct. Carella and Meyer were only working cops, not mathematicians. But as working cops, they realized how often basic mathematics entered their professional lives and they were baffled and frustrated now by a case that seemed to defy all the laws of addition and subtraction.

They could have called it suicide and had done with it, but the feel was wrong; the feel told them this was murder. Fact upon fact upon fact should have added up to one solution—suicide—and their intuition told them this was wrong.

They stopped at a drug store on the way back to the Squad Room to pick up some fresh medication for Meyer's cold. At the Squad Room, Carella put in a call to the police lab, telling them he was sending over a bottle of capsules for analysis. It was still only mid-morning. Carella looked at the wall clock and wondered how long it would take for the messenger to get all the way downtown, wondered how long it would take for the lab to analyze those vitamin capsules.

At the water cooler Meyer was filling a paper cup. He came back to his desk and tore open the cellophane wrapping on what appeared to be a cardboard strip of brightly colored capsules.

"What are you taking now?" Carella asked him.

"These are supposed to be good," Meyer said. "Better than that other junk. Anyway, you only have to take them twice a day."

Carella looked at the wall clock again. Only a minute and a half had passed. Meyer put one of the capsules into his mouth and washed it down with some water.

It was not until ten minutes later that Carella said, "How come?"

"How come what?" Meyer asked.

"How come you only have to take them twice a day?"

And five minutes later, Carella was placing another call to Detective-Lieutenant Sam Grossman at the police lab.

Dr. Karl Nelson's office was on Hall Avenue in a white apartment building with a green awning that stretched to the curb. Carella and Meyer got there at one o'clock, took the elevator up to the fifth floor and then announced themselves to a pretty redheaded receptionist who said the doctor had a patient with him at the moment, but she'd tell him they were waiting, and wouldn't they please have a seat?

They had a seat.

In about ten minutes an elderly lady with a bandage over one eye came out of the doctor's private office. Karl Nelson followed her, hand extended.

"How are you?" he said to the detectives. "Any news?"

"Yes, we have a few ideas, Dr. Nelson," Carella said. "We wanted to get your expert opinion."

"Happy to help in any way I can." He turned to his receptionist. "When's my next appointment?"

"Two o'clock, Doctor."

"No calls except emergencies until then, please," Nelson said, and he led the detectives inside. He sat immediately at his desk, offered Carella and Meyer chairs, then folded his hands before him in a patiently expectant way.

"I've got a cold," Meyer said.

Nelson's eyebrows went up.

"I've been trying everything," Meyer continued. "I just started on some new stuff. I hope it works."

Nelson nodded, then smiled in professional sympathy. He glanced from Carella to Meyer, waiting. Carella reached into his jacket pocket and placed a purple and black gelatin capsule on the desk near Nelson's folded hands. He didn't say a word for several seconds. Then he asked, "Know what that is, Dr. Nelson?"

"It looks like a vitamin capsule."

"It is—to be specific, a PlexCin capsule, the combination of Vitamin C and B-complex that Gifford was taking."

"Oh, yes," Nelson said, nodding.

"In fact, to be more specific, it is a capsule taken from the bottle of vitamins Gifford kept in his home."

"Yes?" Nelson said. He seemed extremely puzzled.

"We sent the bottle of capsules to the lab this morning," Carella said. "No poison in any of them. Only vitamins."

"But I've got a cold," Meyer said.

Nelson frowned.

"And Detective Meyer's cold led us to call the lab again, just for the fun of it. We've been down there all morning, Dr. Nelson. Sam Grossman, who's in charge of the lab, had some interesting things to tell us, and we wanted your ideas. We want to be as specific about this as possible, you see, since there are a great many specifics in the Gifford case. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"The specific poison, for example, and the specific dose, and the specific speed of the poison, and the specific dissolving rate of a gelatin capsule. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, that's right," Nelson said.

"You're an attending physician at General Presbyterian, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"We called the A.M.A. after we left the lab. Didn't know you'd been a captain in the Army," Carella said, smiling.

"Oh, yes."

"We also called the hospital, Dr. Nelson. We spoke to the pharmacist there. He tells us they stock stro-

phanthin in its crystalline powder form—oh, maybe three or four grains of it. The rest is in ampules, and even that isn't kept in any great amount."

"That's very interesting."

"Open the capsule, Dr. Nelson."

"What?"

"The vitamin capsule. Open it. It comes apart. Go ahead. The size is a double 0, Dr. Nelson."

"I would assume it was either an 0 or a double 0."

"But let's be specific. This specific capsule that contains the vitamins Gifford habitually took is a double 0."

"All right then, it's a double 0."

"Open it."

Nelson took the capsule in his hands and carefully pulled one part from the other. A sifting of powder spilled out.

"That's the vitamin compound, Dr. Nelson. The same stuff that's in every one of those capsules in Gifford's bottle. Harmless. In fact, beneficial. Isn't that right?"

"That's right."

"Take another look at the capsule." Nelson looked. "No, Dr. Nelson, *inside* the capsule. Do you see anything?"

"Why, there—there appears to be a smaller capsule inside it."

"Why, yes!" Carella said. "Upon my soul, there *does* appear to be another capsule inside it. As a matter of fact, Dr. Nelson, it is a number three gelatin capsule which, as you see, fits very easily into the large double 0 capsule. We made this sample at the lab this morning."

Carella took the larger capsule from Nelson and shook out its vitamin contents together with the smaller capsule. Then, using his forefinger, he separated the smaller capsule from the small pile of vitamins and said, "The third capsule."

"I don't know what you mean."

"We were looking for a third capsule, you see. Since the one Gifford took at lunch couldn't possibly have killed him. Now, Dr. Nelson, if this smaller capsule were loaded with strophanthin and placed inside the larger capsule, *that* could have killed him, don't you think?"

"Certainly, but—"

"Yes, Dr. Nelson?"

"Well, it seems to me that—that the smaller capsule would have dissolved very rapidly, too. I mean—"

"You mean, don't you, Dr. Nelson, that if the outside capsule took six minutes to dissolve, the inside capsule might take, oh, let's say another three minutes to dissolve. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"So that it doesn't really change anything. The poison *still* would have had to be taken just before Gifford went on."

"Yes, I would imagine so."

"But I have a cold," Meyer said.

"Yes, and he's taking some capsules of his own," Carella said, smiling. "Only has to take two a day because the drug is released slowly over a period of twelve

hours. They're called time-release capsules, Dr. Nelson. I'm sure you're familiar with them."

Nelson seemed as if he were about to rise, and Carella instantly said, "Stay where you are, Dr. Nelson, we're not finished."

Meyer smiled and said, "Of course, *m*y capsules were produced under strict pharmaceutical supervision. I imagine it would be impossible to duplicate a time-release capsule without manufacturing facilities, wouldn't it?"

"I would imagine so," Nelson agreed.

"Well, to be specific," Carella said, "Lieutenant Sam Grossman said it *was* impossible to duplicate such a complicated process. But he remembered experiments from away back in his Army days, Dr. Nelson, when some of the doctors in his outfit were playing around with what is called enteric coating. Did the doctors in your outfit try it, too? Are you familiar with the expression?"

"Of course, I am," Nelson said, and he rose. Carella leaned across the desk and put his hands on the doctor's shoulders and slammed him down into the chair again.

"Enteric coating," Carella said, "as it specifically applies to this small *inside* capsule, Dr. Nelson, means that if the capsule had been immersed for exactly thirty seconds in a one-per cent solution of formaldehyde, then allowed to dry—"

"What is all this?"

"—then held for two weeks to allow the formaldehyde to act on the gelatin, hardening it, then the—"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"I mean that a capsule treated in just that way would *not* dissolve in normal gastric juices for at least three hours, Dr. Nelson, by which time it would have left the stomach. And after that, it would dissolve in the small intestines within a period of *five* hours. So you see, Dr. Nelson, we're not working with six minutes any more. Only the outside capsule would have dissolved that quickly. We're working with anywhere from three to eight *hours*. We're working with a soft outer shell and an inner nucleus as hard as nails, containing two full grains of poison. To be specific, Dr. Nelson, we are working with the capsule Gifford took *at lunch,* which Mrs. Gifford undoubtedly substituted at the breakfast table, and which was undoubtedly prepared for her by *you.*"

Nelson shook his head. "I had nothing to do with this."

"Ahhh, Dr. Nelson," Carella said. "What did you do? Steal what you needed from the hospital pharmacy?"

Dr. Karl Nelson said not a word.

Carella sighed and took his handcuffs from his belt. "We know *how* you did it, Dr. Nelson," he said. "Do you want to tell us *why?*"

They told the police they were lovers, but sitting on straight-

backed chairs in the Squad Room, their hands still stained with the ink that had been used to fingerprint them, they seemed like nothing more than murderers.

"We started seeing each other secretly a year ago," Lydia said.

Neither of the pair seemed to realize they would be taken from the precinct by police van in the morning, brought downtown for arraignment, and then held in separate cells, that they would not see each other again until they were brought to trial, and then perhaps never after.

"We asked him for a divorce six months ago," Nelson said. "He refused."

Carella and Meyer listened silently as the tale unfolded. They listened unemotionally, patiently, as Nelson and Lydia told how they had pleaded with Gifford to no avail. The same old story—only the faces were new.

"We loved each other, you see, we *love* each other."

The strophanthin had been Nelson's idea. They had not necessarily expected him to die on camera before 80,000,000 eyes; they had only wanted him to die of a huge dose of instant-acting poison while neither of them was close enough to have administered it.

"His dying on camera was pure chance," Nelson said. "We knew it would take between three and eight hours for the inner capsule to dissolve, but we didn't know exactly how long. We'd be nowhere near him, in any case."

And yet they had realized that Nelson, as a physician with access to drugs, would be a prime suspect, and so they had planned for this possibility, too. *He* would be the one who suggested foul play to the police; *he* would be the one who demanded an autopsy. And then Lydia would point an accusing finger at him, a finger that would certainly be turned aside once the police discovered the nature of the poison.

They sat still after they finished talking. The police stenographer showed them transcripts of what they had said, and they signed multiple copies of it, and then Alf Miscolo came out of the Clerical office, handcuffed the pair together, and took them downstairs.

"One for us, one for the Lieutenant, and one for Homicide," Carella told the stenographer.

The stenographer nodded. He, too, had heard it all already. There was nothing you could tell him about love or homicide. He left his copies, put on his hat, and went out.

"I wonder . . ." Carella started, and then shook his head.

"What do you wonder?" Meyer asked.

"Well, I wonder what it's like to be a postman."

"That's funny. They wonder what it's like to be cops."

"I just . . ." Carella shook his head again, then sighed heavily. "Come on," he said, "let's go home."

the *NEWEST* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Do you think that an Inspector on the Homicide Squad is just that and nothing more? Perish the thought. He has to be a public relations man too. Lieutenant Decker told Mitch Taylor to "sell" the people on the efficiency of the Squad—convince them the precinct uses only the latest methods, the finest scientific equipment. And that wasn't all: in the Grogan case, Mitch had to prove himself a mathematician and an income tax expert! . . . Another of Lawrence Treat's fascinating new stories about realistic cops . . .

K AS IN KNIFE

by LAWRENCE TREAT

INSPECTOR MITCH TAYLOR, HOMICIDE, sat across the desk from the Lieutenant in that tiny office of his and took another look at the complaint sheet they'd sent down from the Fifth. The thing said Breaking and Entering, and the address was over on Harte Terrace, and the rest of the stuff you could forget. From the way Mitch saw it, maybe there'd been an attempted robbery, or maybe some drunk had walked into the wrong house at three o'clock in the morning and stumbled over the furniture. Anyhow, whatever had happened, Lieutenant Bill Decker said it had scared the hell out of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Pace and they were blowing their tops over how they didn't get the right kind of police protection.

"The precinct couldn't turn anything up," Decker said, "so better go over there and show these people we're on the ball. We use the latest methods, finest scientific equipment, and every man on the Homicide Squad is an expert. Inspector Taylor, I repose complete confidence in you." And the Lieutenant leaned back and looked pleased with himself, as if he expected Mitch to swallow that malarky and salute or something.

"Yeah," Mitch said. "Public relations, huh?"

He knew the play all right. You ask a bunch of questions and you mention fingerprints a couple of times, and you cart off some junk for evidence and say you're bringing it to the lab. You knock off a

little after four and go back to headquarters, where you sit around the Squad Room until five, and then you go home. You're a cop, you impress the citizens, and everybody's happy.

So Mitch drove over there and parked. As soon as a couple of kids noticed him, he stepped out and opened his jacket and made like he had to snug his gun down a little more comfortable in the holster. That way, word would get around pretty fast that a plains-clothes detective was here asking questions.

After he'd locked the car he stood there for a couple of seconds, a chesty guy, medium height, with dark eyes that took in everything around, which wasn't much. Just a bunch of attached houses set back from the street, and kids playing mostly on the sidewalk. You couldn't see the garages on account they opened up onto a rear alley. Anybody could sneak along the alley without being seen, if he stuck close to the line of doors—except, in a middle-class neighborhood like this, nobody but a goof-ball would bother.

Mitch had the Pace address and he went in and this cute, hopped-up little tornado named Winnie Pace let fly. She told off the Police Department and the city administration and a few of her neighbors, and then she got down to telling Mitch what *he* ought to do. He kind of waited her out, hoping she'd lose steam even if he didn't see much chance of it. About the only other way to get her off his back was a diversionary action, which worked out fine when he smelled something burning and told her about it.

"My cake!" she yelled, and sprinted out to the kitchen.

She came back smiling and full of thanks. It seemed her specialty was chocolate layer cake with raspberry filling—that's what she was making right now. She was sorry it wasn't finished yet, and so was Mitch. He gave her a little advice about cake-making, stuff he'd picked up from his wife Amy. After that he switched over to police work and how tough it was, and pretty soon he had this Winnie female eating out of his hand. By the time he left, she was saying she wished he'd done the investigating in the first place—she had real confidence in him.

Mitch figured he'd done the job the Lieutenant had wanted him to. Still, it was a little early to knock off; he might get another assignment if he showed up at headquarters too soon, so Mitch decided to speak to a couple of the neighbors. Which he did, without learning anything much except what a whiz-bang Winnie Pace was. What she couldn't do hadn't been invented yet, and Mitch's ears were buzzing. To kind of get back to normal, he parked himself on the sidewalk and looked around at nothing. All

of a sudden he heard a scream, and there was Winnie scooting out of her house and aiming straight at him.

"Mr. Taylor!" she yelled, and she was all out of breath from running fifty feet. "Mr. Taylor—there's a murder—quick—you'd better go in —maybe he's still there!"

"Take it easy," Mitch said. "Just tell me who, and where."

She pointed across the street at Number 18. "There—hurry up—go quick—*shoot him!*"

Mitch swung around. He saw Number 18 and he saw some women pouring out of their doorways and heading this way, as if Winnie had given them some kind of riot signal. He turned back to her.

"Listen," he said. "Let's get this straight. You think somebody got killed?"

"I saw her—she's full of blood."

"Saw who from where?"

"Go ahead" she screamed. *"Do something!"*

The way Mitch figured it, when Winnie popped off, the whole neighborhood went along with her. And if he didn't watch himself, he was liable to get mobbed by this bunch of dames that were milling around him already and asking what it was all about.

To give himself time to think, he took out his pad and pencil and scrawled something down. What he ought to do was tell Winnie to call the police and have them send a radio car to block off the rear alley. Then he'd tackle the front, and anybody inside would be trapped.

On the other hand it struck him that the sun was shining right on the picture window of Number 18, so how could Winnie have seen anything, except through one little corner that was in shadow? And even if she had spotted something, what made her so damn sure it was murder? She must have had a telescope or something.

Putting it like that, he felt pretty safe. This was a false alarm if he'd ever come across one, and he had a chance to make like the perfect cop, protecting the citizens and handling everything exactly right. But first, he had to turn off the noise from all these excited females chattering at him.

"Okay, everybody," he said, waving his hand to shut them up. "Stay here till I get things straightened out. I wouldn't want anybody to get hurt."

That held them, and he straightened his shoulders, crossed the street, and walked up the path to Number 18. He stuck his hand on the bell, waited a couple of seconds, then tried the knob. The door was unlocked, so he opened it.

He took a couple of steps inside, and he yawned. He had nobody to talk to and nothing to do except case the joint and then come outside and announce there was nothing wrong. In a way he felt sorry for Winnie and he wondered how she'd squirm out of this boo-boo.

Only it was no boo-boo—because when he got halfway across the room his eye caught this female lying on the floor in front of the couch.

She was blonde and she had no clothes on—not a stitch. Her feet were tangled up in a blanket, and the green hilt of a knife stuck out of her chest, and there was blood all over it.

Mitch stood stock-still and studied the room, section by section, so as to miss nothing. The cushions on the couch weren't disturbed, and nothing much seemed upset. The only thing out of the ordinary was the second knife. It was lying on an end table and looked like the one that must have killed her, and what the hell was a kitchen knife doing there? And why two of them?

Something was cockeyed, and Mitch frowned and walked over to the body, and he damn near bust out laughing. Because the blonde was a life-size plastic dummy; he could smell ketchup, and the knife turned out to be just a wooden handle that somebody had fastened on with Scotch tape.

"Come on out," he called. His voice, a high tenor, sounded spooky in here. He tried to lower it and repeated his words. "Come on," he said. "I know you're here."

That did it. He heard a noise, and he spun around and saw a tall guy with thin shoulders and a sharp face come staggering in from the rear of the house, where the kitchen was. He was waving an empty whiskey bottle and he couldn't even walk straight.

"Who are you?" Mitch demanded.

The guy kind of snickered. "Friend of the family. Who are you?"

Mitch showed his badge. "Inspector Taylor," he said. "Now let's have it. Who are you and what's this all about?"

"L'il practical joke. 'Scuse it."

Mitch stepped up to him and grabbed the whiskey bottle. The guy had spilled the stuff all over his suit, and he was so scared his breath came out in gasps, and no alcohol on it, either.

"You're not drunk," Mitch said. "Cut the act and let's see your identification, and then tell me what gives."

He had a driver's license that read Norman Kadison and a business card that read "Kadison Studios—Designing and Window Displays," so that much checked.

"How'd you get in?" Mitch asked.

"From the garage. I drove in and walked up the back stairs. The rear door was open."

Like the front, Mitch thought, and wondered why people had locks on their doors if they didn't use them. "Who lives here?" he asked.

"The Grogans. Julius is an accountant. His wife—her name's Irene—works in a dress shop."

Mitch walked over to the phone, looked up Julius Grogan in the book and found that he lived at this address and had a business phone downtown. Mitch called the business number, and a voice announced that this was a recording and could take messages.

Grunting, Mitch hung up and called the place where Kadison said Irene Grogan was supposed to be working. He had to wait a couple of minutes before a high lilting voice said, "Yes? Mrs. Grogan speaking."

Mitch looked at the dummy and told himself the same face was maybe at the other end of the wire. "This is the police," he said. The face, being plastic, didn't bat an eye. "We're in your house," he went on, "and we found a man who says he's Norman Kadison. Know him?"

He thought Mrs. Grogan hesitated, and her voice sounded jittery when she answered. "Yes, of course. He's a friend of my husband and of myself. Why? Is anything wrong?"

"What does he look like?"

"He's tall and rather thin. He has black hair and his eyes are brown. Why? What *is* the matter?"

"Just checking," Mitch said, and hung up.

Kadison was grinning. "Satisfied now?" he asked.

"Not by a long shot," Mitch said. He glanced past Kadison and he could see a half dozen women with their noses pressed flat up against the picture window. They were breathing against the glass and getting it all smudged up, and Winnie, of course, was in the center of the group.

Mitch turned his back to them. "Where'd this come from?" he said, nodding at the nude figure.

"It's one of the mannikins I made for a women's store. This one was damaged." He picked up the blanket and tossed it on the couch. Both legs of the mannikin were broken off. "So I brought it here."

"What for?"

"It looks like Irene. I thought she'd get a kick out of it."

"Yeah," Mitch said. He was certain now that this dummy looked exactly like her. "Where'd you get the knife?" he asked.

"From the kitchen."

"What about the other knife?"

"I tried to snap off the blade but it wouldn't break, so I left it on the table and got another. The second one worked."

"No kidding?" Mitch said. The whole business smelled, and most of what Kadison was handing out explained nothing. But Mitch had no charge to hold Kadison on, so what could he do about it?

"I'm letting you go," Mitch said. "Take that thing and get out of the house."

"Suppose I don't want to?"

"You want to," Mitch said.

Kadison shrugged, picked up the mannikin, and lugged it to the garage downstairs. After he'd driven off, Mitch locked the doors and

went back up into the house and out the front door.

Winnie and her gang were still waiting. It was like being a movie star and having all these females jump on him, only instead of being after his autograph, they wanted to know who'd been in there and what he'd said and how Mitch explained the mannikin. He said he had some ideas about it, which he didn't, and then he asked Winnie how she'd spotted the thing in the first place.

"I was watching from my upstairs window," she said defiantly. "Through binoculars."

"What for?"

"Because Irene Grogan doesn't belong here, not in this neighborhood. We want her to go."

What Winnie meant was, the Grogan female was a tramp and was playing around with somebody's husband, and they wanted to get the goods on her. Which was no skin off Mitch's nose, except the rest of the dames were crowding him and acting like they'd mob him instead of the Grogan dame if he didn't lay off Winnie. He made what is called a strategic retreat, and he was glad to get away from the neighborhood and back to headquarters, where he felt safe.

He reported the whole business to the Lieutenant. "Screwy," Mitch ended up. "Practical joke, huh?"

Decker burst out laughing. "Brother!" he said. "You sure turn a simple investigation into a plate of chop suey! But what did you do about the ketchup? Make him clean it up?"

Mitch let the crack go. He couldn't tell if the Lieutenant was kidding, or if this was one of those wild flashes of his that had something behind it. "What do you make of it?" Mitch asked.

"Practical," Decker said, "but no joke. I'd like to talk to Grogan, first." And he dialed the Grogan number. He got the recording and he left word for Grogan to call back first thing in the morning.

At dinner that evening Mitch told Amy about the mannikin business, and like she did sometimes, she knew all about it. "Kadison was trying to kill her," she said. "It's perfectly obvious."

"Kill her?" Mitch said. "How do you figure that out?"

"With pins. They do it in voodoo —I read all about it. You make an image of your enemy and stick pins in it, and he dies."

"A hell of a way to commit a homicide," Mitch said. "And some pin!"

"But it works," Amy said brightly. Mitch stared at her, and she added, "Well, that's what I read."

"Yeah," Mitch said. He'd won that round all right.

Then the phone rang, and it was the despatcher telling him there was a homicide up at 18 Harte Terrace. A female had been stabbed.

Mitch put the phone down and gawked at Amy. "I guess you're

right at that," he said. "It does work."

There was a crowd outside the Grogan house, and the usual bunch of police cars blocked off the street. A uniformed cop let Mitch inside, and he found Jub Freeman, lab man and the best one in the business, already at work. The only difference between what Mitch had run into this afternoon and what he saw now was that this time the body was real and so was the knife, and this time it looked like there'd been some kind of a struggle.

Jub, busy examining the room and grinning like this was his birthday, said, "Hi, Mitch. The boss wants you. He's back there in the kitchen."

The Lieutenant and Bankhart were standing next to the stove and blocking off somebody sitting at the dinette table. When Mitch came in, Decker stepped back and there was Kadison hunched in a chair and looking sick.

Decker snapped at Mitch. "Is this the guy you found here this afternoon?"

"Same one," Mitch said, nodding.

Decker's voice crackled. "Tell him, Kadison. Tell him what you told us."

"It's the truth," Kadison said nervously, speaking to Mitch. "I went straight home—you know I did. You saw me. I was shook up, I—"

"Just tell him," Decker said.

Kadison gulped. "I got back to my studio and tried to do some work, and then—it must have been about six thirty—the phone rang. It was Irene. She whispered, 'Come quick, I need you.'

"I could tell she was in trouble, so I came straight over and found—" He shook his head and panted. "It was awful. I called the police right away. I—"

"What did you kill her for?" Decker demanded.

It was the stock question. Kadison's eyes popped and he blurted out, "No, no! Not me. Why would I do that? Not to her!"

There's a routine how you handle a homicide, and Decker's gang had it down cold. The Lieutenant directs traffic and decides who does what. Nobody touches the body until the Medical Examiner releases it and tells you what you pretty much know already. This time he said she'd been killed by a knife wound that had penetrated her heart, and that she'd died around six o'clock, give or take an hour.

Meanwhile, Art Handler takes pictures of the body and the room and anything else he can think of. Jub collects physical evidence and dusts for prints. A couple of the boys canvass the neighborhood and try to find out if anybody was seen entering or leaving the house and when, and what he or she looked like and so on. It's a kind of a fishing expedition.

Besides that, you bang away at whoever reported the crime and at

anybody else who knew the deceased or was involved in any prior incidents. And that last included Winnie.

Mitch questioned her, but she hadn't been upstairs spying on the Grogan house. Not then. Not when she could have seen a real murder and made everything easy for the police.

"I didn't have time to look," she said. She was mad at herself on account she'd missed the boat. "I was in the kitchen. Late in the afternoon my children came in with some friends and they ate the chocolate cake, every bit of it. There wasn't any of it left."

"Your husband came home?"

"Yes. He was a little late and I told him about the cake, and we laughed. Then I fixed dinner and we were eating when I heard the first of the police cars."

Her husband backed her up, and Mitch left them and returned to the Grogan house. The body had been removed, Kadison was on his way to the city jail as an overnight guest, and Decker was steaming because Grogan hadn't showed up and nobody could locate him. He hadn't checked with his answering service, he'd told nobody where he was going, and it looked like he might be the key to the whole shebang.

He showed up around eleven p.m. He was a small sallow guy with baggy eyes and too much nose. The crowd outside had told him what had happened, and he looked like he was liable to faint clean away.

"I have a bad heart," he said nervously. "The doctor gave me some tablets. I'd better take them."

The Lieutenant agreed. "Bankhart," he said, "go along with him and help."

Bankhart, big, reliable, tough-looking, nodded. He knew what the Lieutenant meant: keep an eye on the guy and don't let him out of your sight.

Ten minutes later, with Mitch and Bankhart looking on, the Lieutenant questioned Julius Grogan. Stretched out, leaning on the pillows of a studio couch in an upstairs room, he spoke in a low, tired voice.

"I was at the Norris store," he said. "I go over their books every three months and do their tax work. I get there after lunch, park in the lot behind the store, and work in a small rear office, just off the parking place. About seven o'clock a boy brings me coffee and sandwiches. I eat there and I stay until I've finished my job. That's what I did this evening, and I just left there and drove home. That's all."

"How much life insurance do you carry?" Decker asked.

"Fifty thousand," Grogan said.

Mitch's mind clicked, and he had the answer to this afternoon. Kadison had been setting up the murder tableau for Grogan's benefit. With his bad heart it was an even bet that when he came home and saw the

dummy lying there, he'd think it was his wife and he'd keel over and collapse from the shock. All anybody had to do was keep him away from his medicine.

Irene must have been in on it, too, and when Kadison had told her Mitch had broken up the scheme, she'd decided to go through with it anyhow, using herself instead of the mannikin to scare him to death. The only hitch was, somebody had come in and made the murder real.

Who?

Maybe Kadison, although offhand he didn't seem to have a motive. Maybe one of the jealous wives, like Winnie, except that she'd been feeding chocolate cake to those kids, and later on she'd been cooking dinner. Maybe Grogan, if they could break his alibi. Or maybe somebody else. Mitch didn't know.

It being pretty late, the Lieutenant called it quits for the night, so Mitch forgot about the case and went home. He slept fine, like he always did.

In the morning Decker held a bull session in the Squad Room, and his thinking was pretty much the same as Mitch's, and for the same reasons. The squad hashed stuff over for a while and some of the boys made bets on who'd killed her. Bankhart mentioned the whispered phone call from Irene Grogan to Kadison. Balenky said it didn't cut any ice with him—Kadison had probably made the story up. Mitch said it sounded phony, but suppose it was true—then what? Maybe the call was from Irene and maybe it was from the killer—you can't identify a whisper, can you?

They chewed that one over for a while, until the Lieutenant broke it up and handed out assignments. Mitch drew the Grogan alibi, which would take all day to look into, and he'd have to dig.

He drove over to the Norris store and made a quick check with the owner, the night watchman, and the office boy who'd brought Grogan his sandwiches. First off, it stacked up as a pretty straight story. Grogan's car had been seen in the parking lot and had stayed put there from two in the afternoon until half-past ten at night. He'd been in the office when this kid had brought him supper, and there was nothing to show he'd ever left the joint. Still—

To kind of get the feel of things, Mitch went into the cubbyhole office where Grogan had been working. Nobody had taken away the coffee container or the sandwich wrappings, and the tax forms were still lying all over the desk. Mitch stared at them and wondered what kind of a guy sat on his can for eight hours and just added and subtracted and multiplied. It was a hell of a way to spend your life.

Mitch picked up one of the forms. He'd never been much good at arithmetic—Amy kept the check book and did all the budget stuff. But Mitch took care of making out

the income tax, and it was one big headache every year.

His eye caught a column of figures and he tried adding them up, and his answer was way off. Then, on account he didn't like to think he was that much of a dope, he tried it again, and it came out the same way. Suddenly it struck him that maybe Grogan had made the mistake, and Mitch began studying the figures, and none of them made sense.

Grogan had just penciled in amounts, anything at all, and some of them were pretty wild and woolly. Like a man would do who'd just killed his wife, for instance, and couldn't concentrate, but had to stick *something* down and hope he could get by with it until he had a chance to fix things up later.

Mitch leaned back and felt pretty good—he'd hit it. Still, this was only the beginning. What came next was a checkup on taxis and buses and then a house-to-house canvass. He'd have to sweat it out until he had that alibi of Grogan's busted wide open and could not only place Grogan right on Harte Terrace at the time of the murder but prove how he got there. Which wouldn't be easy, what with the thing happening when everybody was home eating dinner and the street just about deserted.

Mitch picked up the papers and stacked them. On second thought he decided he ought to call the Lieutenant and report how things stood—and would that stand the Lieutenant on his ear! Everybody running around on the wrong track, while Mitch sat here and cracked the case all by himself. Mitch Taylor, mathematician and tax expert!

But it turned out even better than that, because the door opened behind him and there was Grogan, along with a uniformed cop. Mitch figured the cop was escorting Grogan on his way to headquarters and Grogan had stopped off to collect his phony papers.

He seemed kind of surprised to find Mitch here, and a little upset to see that Mitch had his hands on the tax forms.

"What are you doing with those?" Grogan said. "They're mine, give them to me." And he reached out and tried to grab them.

He was stronger than Mitch expected, but Mitch wrestled him off and almost slammed him up against the wall. Then Mitch, remembering Grogan's bad ticker, caught him and held him steady. Grogan looked scared—you could see that the fight had gone out of him. He just stood there, panting and trying to get his breath back. When he spoke up, you could tell he was licked.

"Give them to me," he croaked out. "Give them—"

Mitch shook his head. "Lay off," he said. "I know what you want with them. You faked the tax en-

tries and you don't want anybody to find out, because then they'll want to know what you were really doing yesterday afternoon."

Grogan had no answer to that one, so Mitch decided to pull a bluff and see how far he could get. "We know where you were," he said. "We got witnesses, they saw you go into your house. We even got hold of the bus driver, he remembers you. We got you cold, Grogan."

The man tottered, and took a couple of steps over to a chair. "Let me sit down," he said. "I'm not a well man."

"Sure," Mitch said. "But tell me the truth, and you'll feel a lot better."

"I'll tell you," Grogan said weakly. "I felt sick when I got here yesterday. I wasn't up to working, so I took a taxi home and went upstairs to rest. I heard Kadison come in a little later on and I heard him phone Irene and explain what he was doing. They'd planned it—my wife and her lover wanted to kill me. I heard everything. I even heard him tell you he was just playing a practical joke on Irene."

"Why didn't you call out?" Mitch asked.

"I was too weak and miserable. I just lay there, and I must have fallen asleep. What woke me up were voices, and then a scream and some groans, and then the door slammed. After a while I went downstairs and found Irene lying on the floor. She was dead. She'd been stabbed."

"Then what?" Mitch asked.

"I was afraid I'd be accused of killing her. But I didn't think anybody had seen me come into the house and I was pretty sure nobody had seen me leave the office here. If I could sneak back without being noticed and if I could bring Kadison to the house, nobody would even suspect me. So I phoned him, pretended to be Irene, and whispered to come over quick. That's all."

"Look," Mitch said. "You tried to frame Kadison because you'd killed her. You were the one. You did it."

Grogan just shook his head and kept on shaking it, and Mitch took him by the arm and said, "All right, Grogan. Let's go."

He was pretty sure he could drive holes through Grogan's story and come up with a confession, but it might take some time. And the procedure was, if your suspect held out you brought him down to headquarters and let the Lieutenant take over, where he could do things right. He'd have a stenographer handy and a couple of the boys standing by to check up, and check fast, on anything he needed.

Twenty minutes later Mitch had Grogan planted in the outer office, while Mitch went in to see the Lieutenant. Jub Freeman was with him and they were talking something

over, and they both looked up as if Mitch was the one guy in the world they wanted most to see.

Mitch spoke up fast, before they could sidetrack him. "Lieutenant," he said, "I got Grogan outside and he wants to tell you something. That alibi of his—it's shot. I broke it wide open."

Decker made like he'd hardly heard. "You were at the Norris place," he said. "What did Grogan eat there last night?"

"Ham sandwiches and coffee."

"Any candy?"

"No sign of it. Why?"

Decker gestured. "Tell him, Jub."

"The handle of the murder weapon," Jub said. "There were no fingerprints on it—they'd been wiped off. But I found traces of chocolate icing on it, and a fragment of a raspberry seed was wedged in between the blade and the wooden handle. So whoever ate—"

Mitch let out a low whistle. "Winnie!" he said. "The Grogan dame was having an affair with somebody's husband, I guessed that much. It was with Winnie's husband, and she was jealous and hated Irene Grogan—that's why she kept an eye on her. And Winnie has no real alibi. All she said was, she was with her kids when they got back from school, and then her husband came home late, so she had plenty of time to cross the street. And when you cut a cake and hand the pieces out to a bunch of kids, you're bound to smear some of it over your hands. Sure. Winnie."

That dream of his about cracking the case all by himself hadn't exactly panned out. Still, if he played it right and kind of left Grogan with the impression that Mitch had got him out of the mess, then why wouldn't Grogan want to show his gratitude by making out the Taylor income tax, and for free? And so Mitch Taylor, the guy who thought of everything, went out to see Grogan and fix things up.

EDITORS' NOTE: Don't miss the next in Lawrence Treat's new series of modern police procedural stories. It is titled *H As in Heist,* and will appear in EQMM soon . . .

(Continued from other side)

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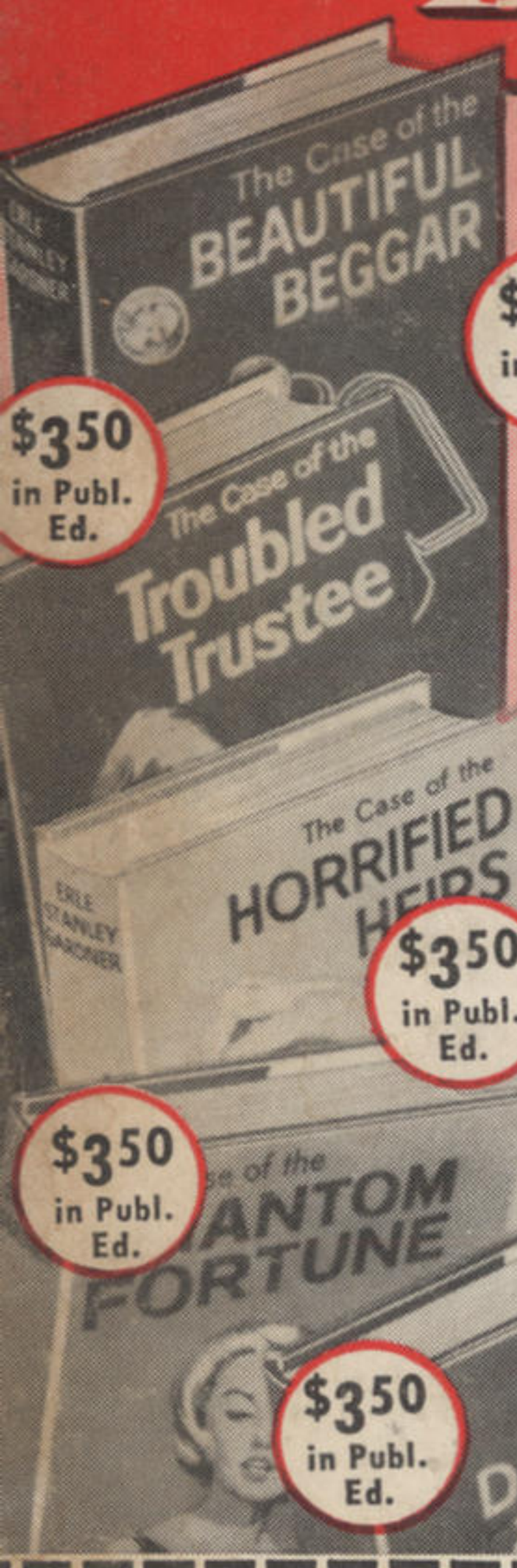

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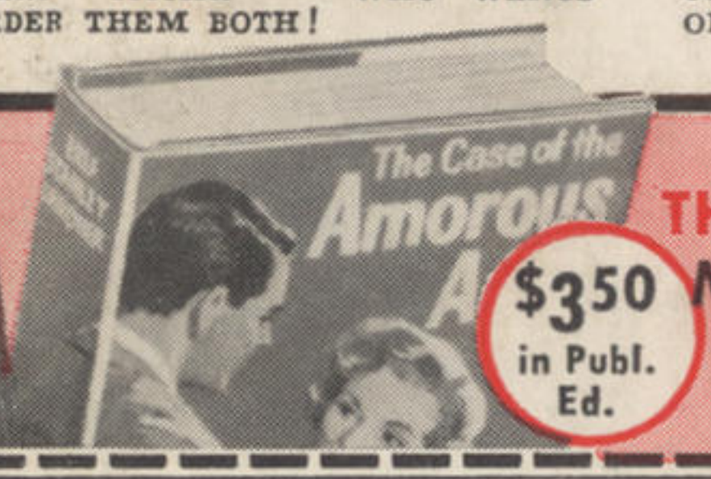

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