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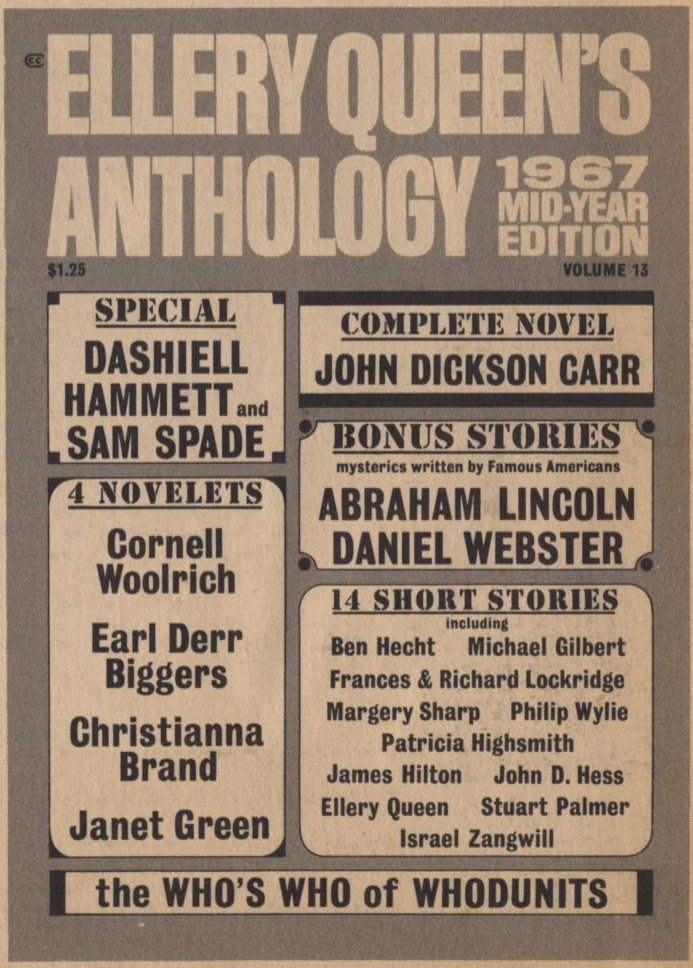

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Winner of FIRST PRIZE *in the* CWA *contest*

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

On November 15, 1965 we inaugurated a special short-story contest for members of CWA (Crime Writers Association of England). The contest closed on May 16, 1966, and it has taken us all this time to begin to publish the prize-winning stories. Here are the names of the winning authors and the titles of their prize-winning stories:

FIRST PRIZE

Christianna Brand's *Twist for Twist*

SECOND PRIZES

H. R. F. Keating's *The Justice Boy*
Celia Fremlin's *The Special Gift*
Colin Watson's *Return to Base*
Miriam Sharman's *Battle of Wits*
Guy Cullingford's *Something To Get At Quick*

In this issue we bring you the First Prize Winner—Christianna Brand's *Twist for Twist*—and what a twisting, turning, twisting story of pure detection it is! A fascinating cast of characters, a baffling murder—committed right before your eyes!—a detective on the spot (in both senses of the phrase), a plot that will whirl you like a top, with ingenious theory piled on ingenious theory until slowly the truth emerges—in an image, the "Golden Age" detective story in the middle of 1967!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Christianna Brand was born in, of all places, Malaya; she spent her early childhood in, of all places, India, and was then sent to school in England. When she left school, her parents were no longer alive, so Miss Brand was forced to earn her own living. While selling pots and pans (literally), she started to write mystery stories (what mysteries are there in pots and pans other than those concocted by chefs?), and completed her first novel just after her marriage to a

London surgeon. Now she is well-known in the field and her devoted fans grow in number with each new book about the "shrewd and stubborn" Inspector Cockrill (the detective in this First Prize story).

Since January 1958 we have published three stories by Christianna Brand—*Rabbit Out of a Hat* and *My Ladies' Tears* and *Blood Brothers.* Each was a distinguished story, worthy of Honor Roll rating. Her First Prize story, *Twist for Twist,* is Christianna Brand's finest story to appear in EQMM—until, we hope, next year . . .

TWIST FOR TWIST

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

"WE'VE GOT HORNETS NESTING in that old elm," said Mr. Harold Caxton, gulping down his last oyster and wiping his thick fingers on the table napkin. "Interesting things, hornets." He interrupted himself, producing a large white handkerchief and violently blowing his nose. "Damn these colds of mine!"

"I saw you were treating them," said Inspector Cockrill, referring to the hornets. "There's a tin of that wasp stuff on your hall table."

Harold Caxton ignored him. "Interesting things, I was saying. I've been reading up about them." Baleful and truculent, he looked round at the guests assembled for his wedding feast. "At certain times of the year," he quoted, "there are numerous males called the drones, which have very large eyes and whose only activity is to eat—" he glared round at them again, with special reference to the gentlemen present—"and to participate in the mass flight after the virgin queen."

He cast a speculative eye on his bride. "You are well named, Elizabeth, my dear," he said. "Elizabeth, the virgin queen." And added with ugly significance, "I hope."

"But only one of the hornets succeeds in the mating," said Inspector Cockrill into the ensuing outraged silence. "And he dies in the process." He sat back and looked Harold Caxton in the face, deliberately, and twiddled his thumbs.

Harold Caxton was really a horrid old man. He had been horrid to his first wife and now was evidently going to be horrid to his second—she had been the late Mrs. Caxton's nurse, quite young still and very pretty in a blue-eyed, broken-hearted sort of way. And he was horrid to his own stout son, Theo, who was only too thankful to live away from papa, playing in an amateurish way with stocks and bonds, up in Lon-

don; and horrid to his stepson, Bill, who, brought into the family by the now departed wife, had been pushed off to relatives in the United States to be out of Mr. Caxton's way.

And he was horrid to poor young Dr. Ross who, having devotedly attended the first wife in her last illness, now as devotedly attended Mr. Caxton's own soaring blood pressure and resultant apoplectic attacks; and horrid to his few friends and many poor relations, all of whom he kept on tenterhooks with promises of remembrances in his will when one of the choking attacks should have taken him off.

He would no doubt have been horrid to Inspector Cockrill too; but—Mr. Caxton being incapable of keeping peaceably to a law designed for other people as well as for himself—Cockie got in first, and was horrid to *him*. It must have been Elizabeth, the Inspector reflected, who had promoted his invitation to the wedding.

The pretty little nurse had stayed on to help with things after the first wife died, had gradually drifted into indispensability and so into accepting the pudgy hand of the widower. Not without some heart-searching, however; Inspector Cockrill himself had lent a shoulder in an off-duty moment—in those days of Mr. Caxton's uninhibited courtship; and she had had a little weep on his shoulder and told him of the one great love, lost to her, and how she no longer looked for that kind of happiness in marriage, and how she was sick of work, sick of loneliness, sick of insecurity.

"But a trained nurse like you can get wonderful jobs," Inspector Cockrill had protested. "Travel all over the place, see the world." She *had* seen the world, she said, and it was too big, it scared her; she wanted to stay put, she wanted a home; and a home meant a man.

"There are other men?" he had suggested; and she had burst out that there were indeed other men, too many men, all of them—oh, it was dreadful, it was frightening to be the sort of woman that, for some unknown reason, all men looked at, all men gooped at, all men wanted.

"With him at least I'll be safe; no one will dare to drool over me like that—not when he's around."

Inspector Cockrill had somewhat hurriedly disengaged his shoulder. He was a younger man, in those days of Mr. Caxton's second marriage and subsequent departure from this life, and he was taking no chances.

And so the courtship had gone forward. The engagement and imminent wedding had been announced and in the same breath the household staff—faithful apparently in death as in life to the late Mrs. Caxton—had made their own announcement: they had Seen it Coming and were now sweeping out in a body, preferring, thank you very much, not to continue in service under That Nurse.

The prospective bride, unchap-

eroned, had perforce modestly retired to a London hotel and thereafter left most of the wedding arrangements to Son Theo and Stepson Bill—Theo running up and down from London, Bill temporarily accommodated for the occasion beneath the family roof.

Despite the difficulties of its achievement, Mr. Caxton was far from satisfied with the wedding breakfast. "I never did like oysters, Elizabeth, as you very well know. Why couldn't we have had smoked salmon? And I don't like cold meat—I don't like it in any form. Not in *any* form," he insisted, looking once again at his virgin queen with an ugly leer. Inspector Cockrill surprised a look of malevolence on the faces of all the males present, drones and workers alike, which really quite shocked him.

She protested, trembling. "But Harold, it's been so difficult with no servants. We got what was easiest."

"Very well then. Having got it, let us have it." He gestured to the empty oyster shells. "With all these women around, am I to sit in front of a dirty plate forever?"

The female relations quickly acted on this broad hint, rising from their places like a flock of sitting pheasants and beginning to scurry to and fro, clearing used crockery, passing plates of chicken and ham. "Don't overdo it, my dears," said Mr. Caxton, sardonically watching their endeavors. "You're all out of the will now, you know."

It brought them up short—the crudeness, the utter brutality of it. They stood there staring back at him, the plates in their shaking hands. Half of them, probably, cared not two pins for five, or five-and-twenty pounds in Harold Caxton's will; nevertheless they turned questioning—reproachful?—eyes on the new heiress.

"Oh, but Harold, that's not true," she cried, and above his jeering protests insisted, "Harold has destroyed his old will, yes; but he's made a new one and—well, I mean, no one has been forgotten, I'm sure, who was mentioned before."

The lunch progressed. Intent, perhaps, to show their disinterestedness, the dispossessed scuttled back and forth with the cold meats, potato salad, and sliced cucumber—poured delicious barley water (for Mr. Caxton was a rabid teetotaler) into cut-glass tumblers that were worthy of better things. The bridegroom munched his way through even the despised cold viands in a manner that boded ill, thought Inspector Cockrill, for the wretched Elizabeth, suddenly coming alive to the horror of what she had taken upon herself. She sat silent and shrinking and made hardly any move to assist with the serving.

Son Theo carved and sliced, Stepson Bill handed out plates, even young Dr. Ross wandered round with the green-salad bowl; but the bride sat still and silent, and those three, thought Cockie, could hardly

drag their eyes from the small white face and the dawning terror there.

The meat plates were removed, the peaches lifted one by one from their tall bottles and placed, well soused with syrup, on their flowery plates. Stepson Bill dispensed the silver dessert spoons and forks, fanned out ready on the sideboard. The guests sat civilly, spoons poised, ready to begin.

Harold Caxton waited for no one. He gave a last loud trumpeting of his nose, stuffed away his handkerchief, picked up the spoon beside him and somewhat ostentatiously looked to see if it was clean, plunged spoon and fork into the peach, spinning in its syrup, and scooping off a large chunk he slithered it into his mouth, stiffened—stared about him with a wild surmise—gave one gurgling roar of mingled rage and pain, turned first white, then purple, then an even more terrifying dingy dark red, and pitched forward across the table with his face in his plate.

Elizabeth cried out, "He's swallowed the peachstone!"

Dr. Ross was across the room in three strides, grasped the man by the hair and chin, and pushed him back in his chair. The face looked none the more lovely for being covered with syrup, so he wiped it clean with one swipe of a table napkin; and stood for what seemed a long moment, hands on the arms of the chair, gazing down, intent and abstracted, at the spluttering mouth and rolling eyes. Like a terrier, Elizabeth was to say later to Inspector Cockrill, alert and suspicious, sniffing the scent.

Then with another of his swift movements the doctor was hauling Mr. Caxton out of his chair and lowering him to the floor, calling out, "Elizabeth—my bag! On a chair in the hall." But she seemed struck motionless by the sudden horror of it all and only stammered out an imploring, "Theo?"

Stout Theo, nearest to the door, bestirred himself to dash out into the hall, appearing a few moments later with the bag. Stepson Bill, kneeling with the doctor beside the heaving body, took the bag and opened it. Elizabeth, shuddering, said again, "He must have swallowed the stone."

The doctor ignored her. He had caught up the fallen table napkin and was using it to grasp, with his left hand, the man's half-swallowed tongue and pull it forward to free the air passages; at the same time his right hand was groping blindly toward the medical bag. "A fingerstall —rubber finger covering—it's on top, somewhere."

Bill found it immediately and handed it to him; the doctor shuffled it on and thrust the middle finger of his right hand down the gagging throat. "Nothing there," he said, straightening up, absently wiping his fingers on the table napkin, rolling off the rubber finger covering—all again with that odd effect of sniffing the air; then he galvanized into ac-

tion once more and fell to his knees beside the body. With the heel of his left hand he began a quick, sharp pumping at the sternum, and with his right gestured again toward the medical bag.

"The hypodermic. Adrenalin ampoules in the left-hand pocket."

Bill fumbled, unaccustomed, and the doctor lifted his head for a moment and said sharply, "For heaven's sake—Elizabeth!"

She jumped, startled. "Yes? Yes?" she said, staccato, and seemed to come suddenly to her senses. "Yes, of course. I'll do it." She dropped to her knees beside the bag, found the ampoules, and filled the sryinge.

"Keep it ready," he said. "Somebody cut away the sleeve." The doctor used both hands to massage the heart. "While I do this will someone give him the kiss of life? Quickly!"

It was a long time since anyone, his affianced included, had willingly given Mr. Caxton a kiss of any kind and it could not now be said that volunteers came forward eagerly. The doctor said again, "Elizabeth?" —but this time on a note of doubt. She looked down, faltering, at the gaping mouth, dribbling dreadfully. "Must I?"

"You're a nurse," said Dr. Ross. "And he's dying. Quickly, *please!*"

"Yes. Yes, of course I must." She brought out a small handkerchief, scrubbed at her own mouth as though somehow, irrationally, to clean it before so horrible a task, then moved to crouch where she would not interfere with the massage of the heart. "Now?"

Mercifully, Harold Caxton himself provided the answer—suddenly and unmistakably he gave up the ghost. He heaved up into a last great, lunging spasm, screamed briefly, and rolled up his eyes. She sat back on her heels, the handkerchief balled against her mouth, gaping.

Dr. Ross abandoned the heart massage, thrust her aside, himself began a mouth-to-mouth breathing. But he soon admitted defeat. "It's no use," he said, straightening up, his hands to his aching back. "He's dead."

Dead. And there was not one, perhaps, in all that big, ugly, ornate room who did not feel a sort of lightening of relief, a sort of small lifting of the heart—because with the going of Harold Caxton so much of ugliness, crudity, and cruelty had also gone. Not one, at any rate, even pretended to grieve. Only the widowed bride, still kneeling by the heavy body, lifted her head and looked across with a terrible question into the doctor's eyes, then leaped to her feet and darted out into the hall. She came back and stood in the doorway. "The tin of cyanide," she said. "It's gone."

Dr. Ross picked up the dropped table napkin and quietly, unobtrusively, yet very deliberately, laid it over the half-eaten peach.

Inspector Cockrill's underlings dealt with the friends and relations,

despatching them to their deep chagrin about their respective businesses, relieved of any further glorious chance of notoriety. The tin had been discovered without much difficulty, hidden in a vase of pampas grass which stood in the center of the hall table; its lid was off and a small quantity of the poisonous paste was missing, scooped out, apparently with something so smooth as to show no peculiarities of marking—at any rate, to the naked eye. It had been on the hall table since the day before the wedding; Cockie himself had seen it still there, just before lunch.

He thought it all over, deeply and quietly—for it had been a plot, deeply and quietly laid. "I'll see those four myself," he said to his sergeant. "Mrs. Caxton, the son, the stepson, and the doctor."

Establishing himself in what had been Harold Caxton's study, he sent first for Elizabeth. "Well, Mrs. Caxton?"

Her white teeth dug into a trembling lower lip to bite back hysteria. "Oh, Inspector, at least don't call me by that horrible name!"

"It is your name, now; and we're engaged on a murder investigation. There's no time for nonsense, Elizabeth."

"You don't really believe—?"

"You know it," said Cockie. "You're a nurse—you were the first to know it."

"Dr. Ross was the first," she said. "You saw him yourself, Inspector, leaning over Harold when he was lying in that chair, sort of—sort of sniffing, like a terrier on the scent. He could smell the cyanide on his breath, I'm sure he could—like bitter almonds they say it is."

"Who bought the food for the wedding luncheon, Mrs. Caxton?"

"Well, we all—we talked it over, Theo and Bill and I. It was so difficult, you see, with no servants, and me being in London. I ordered most of the stuff to be sent down from Harrod's and Theo brought down—well, one or two things from Fortnum's." Her voice trailed away rather unhappily.

"Which one or two things? The peaches?"

"Well, yes, the peaches. Theo brought them down himself, yesterday. He was up and down from London all the time, helping Bill." But, she cried, imploring, why should Theo possibly have done this terrible thing? "His own father! For that matter, why should anyone?"

"Ah, as to that!" said Cockie. Had not Harold Caxton spoken his own epitaph? *At certain times there are numerous males called the drones, which have very large eyes and whose only activity is to eat and to participate in the mass flight after the virgin queen.* He had seen them himself, stuffing down Mr. Caxton's oysters and cold chicken and ham, their eyes, dilated, fixed with an astonishing unanimity on Mr. Caxton's bride. *Only one of them succeeds in the mating*, he repeated to himself, *and he dies in the*

process. That also had been seen to be true.

"Elizabeth," he said, forgetting for a moment that this was a murder investigation and there was to be no nonsense, "from the hornet's-eye view I'm afraid you are indeed a virgin queen."

Then Theo, the young drone Theo, stout and lethargic, playing with his stocks and bonds in his cosy London flat . . . Inspector Cockrill had known him from his boyhood. "You needn't think, Cockie, that I wanted any of my father's money. I got my share of my mother's when she died."

"Oh, did you?" said Cockrill. "And her other son, Bill?"

"She left that to my father to decide."

"Wasn't that a bit unfair?"

"You can fly across nowadays easily enough, but he never came over from America to see them. My mother had sort of written him off, I suppose. Though I believe they did write to each other, secretly, when she knew she was dying. The servants told me. Father would never have allowed it, of course."

"Of course!" said Cockie. He dismissed the matter of money. "How well, Theo, did you know your father's new wife?"

"Not at all well. I saw her when I came to visit my mother, and again at the funeral, after she died. But, of course—" But of course, his tone admitted, a man didn't have to know Elizabeth well to— There was that certain something—an irresistible something—

"You never contemplated marrying her yourself?"

But Theo, lazy and self-indulgent, was not for the married state. "All the same, Inspector, it did make me pretty sick to think of it. I mean, my own father—"

Would Theo, dog in the manger, almost physically revolted by the thought of his beloved in the gross arms of his own father—would Theo kill for that? "Those bottled peaches, Theo. You served them, I know; but who actually opened them? I mean, had they been unsealed in advance?"

"No, because they'd have lost the bouquet of the Kirsch. They were kept sealed right up to the last minute,"

"Can you prove that?"

"Elizabeth can bear me out. We nipped in here on the way to the wedding—I drove her down from London—for me to go to the john. And she took a quick dekko just to see that everything looked all right. She'll tell you that the bottles were still sealed up then; you can ask her."

"How quick a dekko? Tell me about this visit."

"Oh, good heavens, Inspector, the whole thing took about three minutes—we were late and you know what the old man was. We rushed in, I dashed into the powder room, and when I came out she was standing at the dining-room door looking in and she said, 'It all looks wonder-

ful,' and what a good job Bill and I had done. Then she went into the powder room and we both got back into the car and went off."

"Was the tin of cyanide on the hall table then?"

"Yes, because she said thank goodness Bill seemed to have got it for her and saved her more trouble with Father."

"No one else was in the house at this time?"

"No, Bill had gone on to the church with my father."

"Okay. Well, send Bill in to me, will you, Theo? And tell him to bring his passport with him."

Bill was ten years older than his stepbrother—well into his thirties; blond-headed, incisive, tough, an ugly customer probably on a dirty night; but rather an engaging sort of chap, for all that. Cockie turned over the pages of the passport. "You haven't been to this country since you were a boy?"

"No, they shipped me out as a kid—the old man didn't want me and my mother doesn't seem to have put up too much of a fight for me. So I wasn't all that crazy to come rushing home on visits."

"Not even when she died?"

"At that time I was—prevented," he said briefly.

"By what, may I ask?"

"By four stone walls," said Stepson Bill ruefully. "Which in my case, Inspector, *did* a prison make. In other words, I was doing time, sir. I got into a fight with a guy and did six months for it. I only got out a few weeks ago."

"A fight about what?"

"About my wife if you have to know," he said sullenly. "I was bumming around, I admit it, and I guess he got her on the rebound. Well, bum or not, I chucked her out and that was the end of her. And I pulled him in, and that was the end of *him*. In the role of seducer, anyway."

"You divorced your wife?"

"Yeah, divorced her." He stared at Inspector Cockrill and the hard bright eyes suddenly had a look, almost of despair. "I think now I made some pretty big mistakes," he said.

"At any rate, having got out, you learned that your stepfather was marrying the nurse, that your mother's money was in jeopardy, perhaps? So you came across, hotfoot, to look the lady over?"

And having looked her over . . . Another drone, drawn willy-nilly—the more so having been for long months starved of the company of women; having been deprived of his wife, whom he still loved—drawn into the mass flight after the virgin queen. "It was you, I believe, who brought the poison into the house?"

"Yes, I did. The old man was furious with Elizabeth because she hadn't ordered it. How could she, poor girl, when she wasn't here half the time? So I went and got it at the village drug store, just to save her from more trouble, and put it on the table so he'd think she'd got it."

"But she was in London. How could he expect her to get it?"

"Oh, hell, he didn't care; if it wasn't there, she was responsible."

"And after all this alleged fuss and urgency, it never got used? For hornets, I mean."

"Didn't I tell you?—it was only to make more aggravation for Elizabeth."

"I see. Well, we agree it was you who introduced the cyanide. Didn't you also hand a plate of cold meat to your stepfather?"

"Me? For heavens' sakes, Inspector! Those old girls were running around like a lot of decapitated chickens, snatching plates out of our hands, dumping them down in front of anyone who'd accept them."

"You just might have said specifically to one of them, 'This plate is specially for Mr. Caxton.' "

"I might at that," said Bill cheerfully. "Why don't you just ask around and find out?" He shrugged. "Anyway, what does it matter? The poison wasn't on the meat, was it? It had been put on the peach."

"If it had," said Cookie, "it had been put there by someone very clever." He dwelt on it. "How could it have been put there so that the whole dose—to all intents and purposes—was on the one mouthful he happened to take? And, the first mouthful at that."

And he sent Stepson Bill away and summoned Dr. Ross. "Well, Doctor, so we have it? *Only one mates, and he dies in the process.*"

"You're referring to the thing about hornets?" said Dr. Ross, rather stiffly.

"That's right—to the thing about hornets. But nobody could call *you* a drone, Doctor. So busy with that little bag of yours that you had it with you out in the hall, all ready to hand."

"At intervals of about once a week," said Dr. Ross, "policemen like yourself exhort us not to leave our medical bags in unattended cars." He fixed Inspector Cockrill with a dark and angry eye. "Are you suggesting it was I who murdered my own patient?"

"Will you declare yourself outside the mass flight after the queen, Dr. Ross? You must have seen a good deal of our little queen in the sickroom of the late Mrs. Caxton?"

"I happen to have a little queen of my own, Inspector. Not to mention several little drones, not yet ready for flighting."

"I know," said Cockie. "It must have been hell for you." He said it very kindly, then added, "I accuse you of nothing."

Disarmed, the doctor capitulated immediately, wretchedly. "I've never so much as touched her hand, Inspector. But it's true—there's something about her . . . and to think of that filthy old brute—"

"Well, he's gone," said Cockie. "Murdered under your nose and mine. And talking of noses—?"

"I smelled it on his breath. Only the faintest whiff—but it was there. I

thought it must be just the Kirsch—the Kirsch on the peaches."

"Such a curious meal!" said Inspector Cockrill, brooding over it. "He was the bridegroom, so you'd think everybody would be falling over themselves to please him. But, no; he didn't like oysters, but he has oysters; he hated cold meat but cold meat is all there is; he was violently teetotal but he's given peaches soaked in liqueur."

Cockrill sat with his chin in his hand, his bright birdlike eyes gazing away into nothingness. "There has been a plan here, Doctor. No simple matter of a lick of poison scraped out of a fortuitous tin, smeared onto a fortuitous peach-in-liqueur. No, a very elaborate, deep-laid, long-thought-out, absolutely sure-fire plan. But who planned it? Who carried it out and with what ultimate motive?" He broke off, then said slowly, "Of course whatever's in the will, as the law is now, she will still be a rich widow—more agreeable to her, presumably, than being a rich wife."

"You don't honestly think that Elizabeth—?"

"Elizabeth had nothing to do with the preparation of the food; she hasn't been in the house for the past three days, except for that brief period when she and Theo dropped in on the way to the church. Each was then alone for only a minute or two—not nearly enough time to have chanced prying open the tin, scooping out the stuff, and poisoning the peaches, which anyway were still in sealed bottles, or the cold meat or the oysters or anything else. Anyway, you'd taste it on cold meat or oysters. On the other hand, Elizabeth is a trained nurse." He mused over it. "He had a bad cold. Could she have persuaded him to take some drug or other? On the way back from the church, for example."

"He was a man who would never touch medicines. He got these periodic colds, and the place was full of pills and potions I'd prescribed for him, but he'd never even try them. Besides," he insisted, as Bill had before him, "wasn't the stuff on the peach?" And it was that fat slob Theo who had been responsible for the peach. Not that he wanted to suggest, he added rather hurriedly, that Theo would have murdered his own father. But— "You needn't think I haven't seen him, gooping at her."

"You needn't think I haven't seen you all gooping at her."

"I've made up my mind," said the doctor, quietly and humbly. "If I can get out of this business with my family still safe and sound, never so long as I can help it will I see Elizabeth again."

"You are a worker," said Cockie, "not a true drone. It will be easier for you. Bill is a drone; he admits it—only *he* calls it a bum."

And so was fat Theo a drone. Bill, Theo, the doctor . . .

But the doctor had a family of his own whom he had had no intention,

ever, of deserting for Elizabeth the virgin queen. And so for that matter had Bill a wife of his own whom, even now, even knowing Elizabeth, he cared for. And Theo was sufficient unto himself and would go no further than a little yearning, a little mooning, an occasional sentimental somersaulting of the fatty heart.

Only one of them mates . . . Of the four, mass flighting after the queen, only one in fact had been a mate—and sure enough he had died.

Of the three remaining—which one might be capable of murder simply to prevent that mating?

Investigation, interrogation—the messages to Harrod's, to Fortnum's, to the pharmacist's shop in the village; the telephone calls to Mr. Caxton's lawyers, to Stepson Bill's few contacts in America, to the departed domestic staff . . .

The afternoon passed and the light summer evening came; and Cockrill stood with the four of them out on the terrace of the big, ugly, anything-but-desirable residence, which must now be all Elizabeth's.

"Elizabeth—Mrs. Caxton—and you three gentlemen. In this business there is only one conceivable motive. Money doesn't come into it. The new will had been signed, so Mr. Caxton's death now or later made no difference to its contents. None of you appears to be in any urgent financial need. So there's only one motive, and therefore only one question: who would commit murder to prevent Harold Caxton from ever going to bed with Elizabeth?"

Theo, Bill, Dr. Ross. Out of these three . . . Softly, softly, catchee monkey, said Inspector Cockrill to himself. Aloud he said, "This murder was a planned murder—nothing was left to chance. So why, I go on asking myself, should his very first mouthful of peach have been the fatal one? And I answer myself, 'Think about that spoon!' "

"You mean the spoon Theo was using to dish out the peaches?" said Elizabeth quickly. "But no, because Theo didn't hand the plate to his father. He couldn't know which peach he'd get."

"Unless he directed a special plate to his father?" suggested Bill, casting a quizzical eye on Inspector Cockrill. He reassured a suddenly quacking Theo. "Okay, okay, pal, take it easy! We've already worked through that one."

"In any event, it still wouldn't account for the first mouthful being the poisoned one. And Elizabeth," said Inspector Cockrill severely, "please don't go trying to put me off! That was a red herring—to draw my attention away from the *other* spoon—the spoon handed directly to your husband by Bill, here."

She began to cry, drearily, helplessly, biting on the little white screwed-up ball of her handkerchief. "Inspector, Harold is dead—all this won't bring him back. Couldn't you—? Couldn't we—?" And she burst out that if it was all because of

her, it was so dreadful for people to be in all this trouble.

"But your husband has been murdered. What do you expect me to do, let it go at that, just because his murderer had a sentimental crush on you?" He came back to the other spoon. "If that spoon had been smeared with poison—"

She stopped crying and raised her head triumphantly. "It couldn't have been. Harold looked at it to see if it was clean—he always did after the servants left. He said that I —" The lower lip began to wobble again. "I know he's dead, but he wasn't very kind," she said.

Not Theo, then, who could not have known that the poisoned peach would reach his father. Not Bill, who could not have poisoned the peach at all.

"And so," said Dr. Ross, "you come to me?"

It was very still out there on the terrace; the sun had gone down and soon the stars would be out, almost invisible in the pale evening sky. They stood, still and quiet, and for a little while all were silent. Then Elizabeth said at last, slowly, "Inspector, Dr. Ross has a wife of his own. He has children."

"He still might not care for the vision of you in the arms of 'that filthy old brute,' as he called him."

"That went for the three of us," said the doctor.

"But it was you that went for Mr. Caxton, Doctor, wasn't it? Or went *to* him, if you prefer. Went to him and put down his throat a finger protected by a rubber fingerstall."

A rubber finger covering—thrust down the throat of a man having an everyday choking attack. A fingerstall dabbed in advance in a tin of poison.

"You don't really believe this?" said Dr. Ross, aghast. "You *can't* believe it! Murder my own patient!" Elizabeth caught at his arm, crying out, "Oh course he doesn't mean it!" But the doctor ignored her. "And murder him in such a way! How could I have known he'd have an attack of choking at exactly the right moment?"

"He was always having attacks of choking," said Cockie.

"But Dr. Ross couldn't have *got* the poison," said Elizabeth. "It wasn't he who fetched the bag from the hall." She broke off. "Oh, Theo, I didn't intend—"

"I got the bag," said Theo. "But that doesn't mean anything."

"It could mean it was you who dabbed the fingerstall with poison."

Theo's round face lost color. "Me, Inspector? How could I have? How could I know anything about it? *I* don't know what they use fingerstalls for and what they don't."

"Anyway, he wouldn't have had time," said Elizabeth. "Not to think it all out, open the poison tin, find the fingerstall in the bag. Fingerstalls are kept in a side pocket, not floating about at the top of a medical bag."

But in fact that was just where it

had been—floating about at the top of the medical bag. Bill, crouching beside the doctor over the heaving body, had located it immediately and handed it to him. "I had used it on a patient just before I came to the church," said Dr. Ross. "You can check, if you like. I dipped it in an antiseptic, dried it, and chucked it back into my bag. I was in a hurry to come to the wedding."

In a hurry to come to Elizabeth's wedding. "So the fingerstall was in the front of your mind then, Doctor? When you brought in your medical bag and put it down on the chair in the hall your eye fell on that tin of poison. Everyone was milling about, just back from the ceremony, not thinking of anyone except the bride and bridegroom. You take out a little scoop of the poison, using the fingerstall—just in case an occasion arises. And an occasion does arise. What a bit of luck!"

"Inspector Cockrill," said Elizabeth steadily, "this is all nonsense! Dr. Ross smelled the stuff on Harold's breath long before he needed the fingerstall. You saw him yourself, as I said, sort of sniffing—"

"Sort of sniffing at nothing," said Cockie. "There was nothing to sniff at, was there, Doctor?—not yet. But it placed the poison, you see, in advance of the *true* poisoning with the fingerstall. The man chokes, the doctor leans over him, pretends to be suspicious. *Then* the poisoned fingerstall down the throat—and this time there *is* something to sniff at. And when the fingerstall is examined later, the fact of its having been down the throat of a man already poisoned would account for any traces of cyanide on it. Now all that remains is to pinpoint the earlier source of the poison. Well, that's easy. The doctor wipes off the fingerstall on the napkin, and then—so innocently!—places the napkin over the peach, thus putting poison on the peach." His bright eyes, birdlike, looked triumphantly at them.

They all stood, rigid, staring at the doctor—horrified, questioning. Elizabeth cried out, "Oh—it isn't true!" But a note of doubt had crept into her voice.

"I don't think so—no," said Cockie. "This isn't a crime in which anything was left to chance."

She went over to the doctor, put her two little hands on his arm, laid her forehead for a moment against his shoulder, in a gesture entirely devoid of coquetry. "Oh, thank God! He frightened me."

"He didn't frighten me," said Dr. Ross stoutly; but he looked, all the same, exceedingly pale. To Cockrill he said, "He got these attacks of choking, yes, but only once or twice a year. You couldn't risk all that on the chance of his having one today."

"So that brings us back to you, Theo," said Inspector Cockrill blandly. "You gave him peaches in Kirsch and you *made* him have one."

Theo looked as likely to have a choking attack as his father had. "I *made* him have one?"

"My dear Theo! The man was a rabid teetotaler. You provide him with a peach in a thick syrup of Kirsch, having observed that he has a heavy cold and won't smell the liqueur. He takes a great gulp of it and realizes he's been tricked into taking alcohol. You knew your father—he would go off into one of his spluttering rages and if he didn't choke on the peach he'd choke on his own spluttering. And it's true, isn't it, that you know all about choking attacks, and how the air passages can be freed with a finger covered with a fingerstall? You must have seen your father having an attack at least once or twice—he'd been having them for years."

Theo began to splutter, himself. "I couldn't have done it—gone out into the hall, you mean, to get the bag and put stuff on the fingerstall? Elizabeth showed that, earlier—I wouldn't have had time."

"We were all preoccupied, getting your father out of his chair and lowered onto the floor. The seconds pass quickly."

But she couldn't bear it for Theo, either. "Don't listen to him, Theo, don't be frightened. This is no more true than his other theories. He's—he's sort of needling us, trying to make us say something incriminating. If Theo did it, Inspector, what about Dr. Ross? Why should he have sniffed at Harold's breath, when he was lying back in the chair? There would have been nothing to sniff at, not yet. You might say he was pretending; but if it was Theo who put the poison on the fingerstall, why should the doctor have pretended? Unless—"

She broke off, clapped her hand across her mouth, took it away immediately, and began to fiddle with her handkerchief. Inspector Cockrill said, "Yes, Elizabeth? Unless—?"

"Nothing," said Elizabeth. "I just mean the doctor wouldn't have put on an act if it had been Theo who had done it."

"Unless—" He thought about it and his eyes were as brilliant as stars. "Unless, Elizabeth, you were going to say, unless they were in it together."

And the Inspector looked round at the three of them and smiled with the smile of a tiger. "Unless they were all three in it together."

Three men united—united in loving the same woman, united in not wishing actually to possess her, but united in their determination not to let a fourth man have her.

The first casual exchange of thought, of feeling, of their common disgust and dread; the first casual discussion of some sort of action, some sort of rescue; the vague threats, hardening into determination, into hard fact, into realistic plotting. But—murder! Even backed up by the others, which one of them would positively commit murder? And, none accepting, divide the deed, then, among them—as in an execution

where a dozen men fire the bullets and no one man kills.

Bill's task was to acquire the poison and see that it remained available in the hall.

Theo's task was to insure as far as possible that a chance arose to use a poisoned fingerstall.

The doctor's that, of course, was to actually employ it.

But lest that seem too heavy a share of the guilt for one partner to carry, Theo could be the one to go out into the hall and poison the fingerstall, Bill to take the bag from him and hand the poisoned thing to the doctor.

Executioners: does he who administers the poison kill more than he who procures it? Does he who presents the victim to the murder kill the less because he does not do the actual slaying? All for one, and one for all! And all for the purity of Elizabeth, the virgin queen.

Elizabeth stood with him, weeping, in the hall, while a sergeant herded the three men into the huge, hideous drawing room and kept them there till the police car arrived. "I don't believe it—I utterly don't believe it, Inspector. Those three? Together?"

He had said it long ago, from the very beginning: "A very elaborate, deep-laid, long-thought-out, absolutely sure-fire plan."

"Between the doctor and Theo, then, if you must. But Bill—why drag Bill into it?"

"Ah, Bill," the Inspector said. "But without Bill . . . ? You have been very loyal, but I think we must now come out into the open about Bill."

And he was back with her, so many weeks ago now, when Harold Caxton's proposed new marriage had first become an open secret. "But a trained nurse like you can get wonderful jobs," he had said to her. "Travel all over the place, see the world." "I *have* seen the world," she had answered.

"All right," she admitted now, in a small voice. "Yes. I did go to America, I did get married there. Harold knew I'd been married, and divorced. I didn't tell other people because he didn't like anyone else knowing."

Married, and divorced. Married to one who "bumming around" had heard through the old, devoted family servants that his mother's illness would be her last, that the rich old stepfather would soon be a widower. "Inspector, we were desperate. He wouldn't work, he gambled like a maniac, I couldn't keep the two of us. And yet I couldn't leave him. I told you that he was my 'lost love'; well, that was true, in its own way. He was my love, still is, and always will be. I suppose that's the way some women are."

"And some men," admitted Cockie, thinking of the suddenly desolate look when Bill had said, "I think now I made some pretty big mistakes."

"I have been so ashamed, Inspector," she said, weeping again. "Not only of what we were doing, but of all the lies, all the acting."

"Yet you went through with it?"

"You don't know Bill," she said. "But—yes, it's true. He wrote to his mother, secretly, through the servants. He said he knew of a girl, a wonderful nurse, who would soon be coming over to England. He told his mother to say nothing to the old man about it, but to try to get this girl engaged to look after her; of course the girl was me, Inspector. Then he set about getting a divorce. He actually beat up a man he pretended was having an affair with me. He overdid things a bit and got himself a term in prison, but that helped in speeding up the divorce."

"Without a divorce, of course, you couldn't have inherited; the marriage with the old man had to be watertight."

"Inspector," she said in anguish, "don't believe for one moment that this was a murder plot. His stepfather was old, in bad health, he was going to die soon anyway. I think, in fact, Bill imagined him much older and sicker than he was. He hadn't been home for a long time—to a boy his elders seem far more ancient than they really are."

"He was prepared to wait?"

"He saw the thing in terms of a year or two, no longer. Meanwhile, he would remain in England, we could see one another—after all, he was a member of the family. And I could provide him with money, I suppose; and he could keep on gambling."

"But before this happy condition of things you were to come over here, nurse the poor sick mother, then succeed in her place with the widower?"

She turned away her head. "You think it sounds terrible, Inspector; put that way, it seems terrible to me too—and it always has. But—once again, you don't know Bill. What Bill says, you have to do. And I did nurse her; she was dying, I couldn't make any difference to that, but I did nurse her and care for her—almost her last words were of gratitude to me. When she died, I could hardly bear it. I rang up Bill in America and told him I couldn't go through with it. But—well, he just said—"

"He said you *must* go through with it—and came over here himself to make sure you did?"

"To make sure of that—and of something else," she said faintly.

"Yes," he said, thinking it over. "Of something else too. Because he's still in love with you, Elizabeth, in his own way. And he might drive you to the altar with a horrible old man, but he would never let you get as far as the old man's bed."

And in that determination he had found allies. "I suppose, Inspector, he may have meant to do it himself—God knows he never breathed even a word of such a thing to me. I think back in the States he was visualizing more of a—well, an old-man-and-nurse relationship. But

anyway he's a gambler—here was this chance and nothing must stand in the way of it. Then he came over here and saw me again; and saw me with his stepfather . . . And then perhaps, finding how the other two felt about it, I suppose he roped them in. Another gambler's chance, and so typical of Bill. Only this one will come off for a change, because the law can't do anything to them."

"How do you mean—can't do anything to them?"

"Well, but—who has committed any crime? Bill bought a tin of stuff for killing wasps—there's nothing wrong in that. Theo bought a bottle of peaches—there's nothing wrong in that either. The doctor—well, I suppose he did put the fingerstall down Harold's throat. But *he* didn't poison it. None of them has actually done one wrong action. They can't even be put in prison!"

"Only for a very short time," acknowledged Cockie.

"For a short time?"

"Till they're taken out and hanged," said Inspector Cockrill.

"You don't truly mean that? All three of them could be—executed?"

"All three," said Cockie. "For being accessories to a murder—that's the law. The flight of the queen, Elizabeth—*at certain times of the year the drones sit around eating*—well, we saw them do that—*and gazing with huge eyes upon the virgin queen*—well, we saw them do that too. And then, *the mass flight after the queen*—and that, also we've seen. But here something goes wrong with the comparison—because only one succeeds in the mating, and therefore—only one dies."

"You mean that all three—?"

"I mean that all three are not going to die. It would be too inartistic an ending to the metaphor.

"What can save them?" said Elizabeth, beginning to tremble.

"Words can save them—and will save them."

"Words?"

A dozen words—exactly a dozen, carelessly spoken, hardly listened to at all. But with reflection, how clear it had all become! Curious, thought Cockrill, how two brief sentences, barely heard, could so twist themselves about and about until they wound themselves into a rope—into a noose.

Twelve little words, hardly listtened to . . . "Except by me, when I remembered them later. Your husband saying, 'Why couldn't we have had smoked salmon?' and you replying, 'We got what was easiest.' "

A plain-clothes man who all this time had sat quietly on a chair by the front door, got up, as quietly, and came forward; and Inspector Cockrill shot out a hand and circled her little wrist with fingers of steel. "Why should oysters have been easier than smoked salmon, Elizabeth?" he demanded.

A very elaborate, deep-laid, long-thought-out, absolutely sure-fire plan . . . The ugly collusion be-

tween husband and wife to implant in the household of the dying mother a new bride for the rich widower, soon to be. On the husband's part, probably nothing more, nothing worse intended, than an impatient waiting for the end of a life whose expectations had been somewhat underestimated. On her part—ah! *she* had been on the spot to recognize in advance the long years she might yet have to serve with a man who at the least sign of rebellion would pare down her inheritance to the minimum the law allowed. Had she really confessed to Harold Caxton an earlier marriage? Not likely! Of all of them, the one who had had most cause to dread Mr. Caxton's marriage bed had been Elizabeth herself—"the virgin queen."

The plot, then, deeply laid—but in one mind alone. Use the ex-husband, expendable now, as red herring Number One; ensnare with enchantments, long proved irresistible, such other poor fools as might serve to confuse the issue. With gentle insistence, no injury pinpointable, alienate servants too long faithful and now in the way. And, the scene set, sit, sweet and smiling, little hands fluttering, soft eyes mistily blue—and in the back of one's scheming mind, think and think and plan and plan . . .

"You can't know," she said, spitting it out at him as they drove away from the house, the three men left sick, bewildered, utterly confounded, watching her go; sitting between the Inspector and the sergeant in the smooth black police car, ceaselessly, restlessly struggling against their grip on her wrists. "You can't *know*. It's all a trick, trying to lead me up the garden path."

"No," said Cockrill. "Not any more. We've been up enough garden paths—with *you* leading *me*." His arm gave, slackly, against the tug and pull of her hand but his fingers never gave up their firm hold. "How well you did it!—poking the clues under my nose, snatching each of them back when you saw it wasn't going to work—and all with such a touching air of protecting your poor dear admirers, fallen into this terrible trap for love of you. But I matched you," he said with quiet satisfaction. "Trick for trick."

"You *can't* know," she repeated.

"I knew," he said, "from the moment I remembered his asking why he couldn't have smoked salmon. *You* ordered the meal; so why give him oysters which would only make him angry? If one thought about it —taking all the other factors into consideration—the answer had to be there."

"But the tin of poison! You saw it yourself on the hall table when we came into the dining room. I never left the dining room—so how could I have hidden it in the vase on the hall table?"

"You hid it when you went out to 'look'—it wouldn't take a second and you had your little hankie in

your hand, didn't you, all ready to avoid leaving fingerprints." And with his own free hand he struck his knee. "By gum!—you'd thought this thing out, hadn't you?—right down to the last little shred of a handkerchief."

She struggled, sitting there between them, to ease their grip on her wrists. "Let me go, you brutes! You're hurting me."

"Harold Caxton didn't have too comfortable a time a-dying."

"That old hog!" she said viciously. "Who cares how such an animal dies?"

"As long as he dies."

"You'll never prove that I killed him, Inspector. How for example," she said triumphantly, "could I have taken the poison from the tin?"

"You could have taken it while you were in the house with Theo, on the way to the church. Theo went off to the powder room—"

"For half a minute—how long does a man take, nipping into the loo? To get the stuff out of the tin and do all the rest of it—"

"Ah, but I don't say you did 'do all the rest of it'—not then. 'All the rest of it' had been prepared in advance. We'll find—if we look long enough, and we will—some pharmacist in London where you bought a *second* tin of the cyanide for wasps. The tin in the hall was a blind; there was time enough even during Theo's half minute in the powder room to take a quick scoop out of it—no doubt you'd arranged to have it left on the hall table. That scoop was probably disposed of in the powder room when *you* went there, after Theo."

"You know it all, don't you?" she said sarcastically; but she was growing weary, helpless; she was sitting limply between them now, slumped against the seat.

A very elaborate, deep-laid, long-thought-out, absolutely sure-fire plot, and all of it conceived in the mind of one little woman—a woman consumed, destroyed, by the dangerous knowledge of her own invincibility in the hearts of men. But the cleverness, thought Cockie, the infinite patience! The long preparation, the building-up piece by piece of the "book" itself, of the props, the scenery—the way a producer will work months ahead on a projected stage production.

Then—the stage set at last, the puppet actors chosen—and curtain up! The "exposition"—"Bill, for goodness sake get the stuff from the pharmacist for me—the old man will slay me if I don't get his wretched old wasp stuff. Just leave it on the hall table, let him think I got it for him and I put it there"; and "Theo, I've ordered the stuff from Harrod's, but I never thought about a dessert. You could hop across to Fortnum's and get some of those peaches-in-Kirsch; I've seen them there and they look delicious. Teetotal?—oh, lord, so he is! But still, why should everyone else suffer?—perhaps this will make up to them

for having no champagne. And he's got his usual fearful cold, so he probably won't even notice."

In the excitement and confusion who would remember accurately, who would carry in their heads, all the commands and countercommands, all the myriad unimportant small decisions, and who had made them? Who, for that matter, of her three cavaliers, would shelter behind her skirts to cry out, "It was Elizabeth who told me to." So Bill introduces the poison into the house, and Theo the peach which is to be found guilty of conveying the poison; and if the doctor does not bring in his medical bag, then busy little Elizabeth, ex-nurse, will be there to remind him of police exhortations not to leave the bag in his car.

The stage is set, the cast assembled, the puppet actors—Inspector Cockrill himself included, to do the observing—are moved this way and that at the twitch of a thread, held in a small hand already dyed red with the victim's blood.

For even as he swallowed his last oyster, even as he munched his way resentfully through his cold meat, even as he began on the peach, already Harold Caxton had been a dying man. "Why couldn't we have had smoked salmon?" he had asked angrily; and, after all, smoked salmon could have been sent down from Harrod's just as easily as oysters. But, "We got what was easiest," she had replied; and ultimately Inspector Cockrill had asked himself—*why?* Why should oysters have been easier than smoked salmon?

Answer: Because you cannot conceal a capsule of poison as easily in a plate of smoked salmon as you can in a plate of oysters.

A man who likes oysters will retain them in his mouth, will chumble them a little, gently, savoring their peculiar delight for him. A man who does not care for oysters—and Mr. Caxton was not one to make concessions—will swallow them down whole, and be done with it.

Harold Caxton had had a heavy cold—he was always having colds—and the house was full of specifics against the colds, though he would not touch any of them. Among the specifics would certainly be some bottles of small capsules made of slow-dissolving gelatine, filled with various compounds of drugs. A capsule, emptied out, could be filled with enough cyanide to kill a man. An oyster, slit open with a sharp knife, could offer just such a pocket as would accommodate the capsule and then close over it again, thus concealing the poison-filled capsule.

No time, of course, as she had truly said, to achieve it all in the brief period when she and Theo had visited the house. But an oyster bar would be found in London, if Cockie searched long enough—and he would search long enough—where a little, blue-eyed woman had yesterday treated herself to a dozen oysters, eaten only eleven, and left behind her only eleven shells. A

small plastic bag, damp with fluid from the uneaten oyster, no doubt was also got rid of in the powder room. For the rest—it wouldn't take a moment to slip into the dining room (Theo having been sent off like a small boy to the loo) and substitute the poisoned oyster for an innocent one on Harold Caxton's plate.

Ten minutes later Elizabeth the virgin queen had given her hand to a man who within the hour, and by that same hand, would to her certain knowledge be dead; and had promised before God to love, cherish, and keep him till death did them part . . .

Well, if there was an afterlife, reflected Inspector Cockrill coming away from the Old Bailey a couple of months later, at least they would soon be reunited. Meanwhile, he must remember to look up hornets, and see whether the queens also have a sting.

Two *NEW* stories from members of MWA (Mystery Writers of America)

We doubt if you could think of two stories by different authors that have so much in common and yet are so totally different—so different that they depict amazingly the extraordinary range of the mystery short story as it is being written today.

Morris Cooper's "As It Was in the Beginning" is a story of primitive crime—a crime that took place 20,000 years ago. Elaine Slater's "The Way It Is Now" is a story of ultramodern crime—a crime that could have taken place this morning. And even the styles of the story-telling reflect the criminological contrast . . .

Ah, "age cannot wither . . . nor custom stale her infinite variety." What a "world without end" the mystery genre is!

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

by MORRIS COOPER

"DON'T SNEER AT CIRCUMSTANTIAL evidence," my Grandfather said. "It's still the best proof we have that the world was created."

"Let's not wander off the track," I replied. "We were discussing modern detectives and current crime."

"Murder in particular."

"Yes. And I insist that too many murderers have been convicted purely on circumstantial evidence."

"Well, now, murder is as old as man. But I can tell you about circumstantial evidence and a detective who lived about 20,000 years ago."

Grandfather, who was 92 on his last birthday, is agile enough to walk briskly and virile enough to whistle at a shapely ankle. He still has 30 of his own teeth; two wisdom teeth became infected when he was 80 and had to be extracted, and he dates his real good sense from them. But Grandfather tends to exaggerate.

"You're throwing zeros around," I said.

"I said 20,000 years."

"Now what would a cave man need with a detective and with circumstantial evidence?"

"Haw!" Grandfather snorted. He snorts like a stallion and his eyes bulge. "Don't you remember anything at all from your school days?"

"Of course I do. Man—or whatever *you* choose to call him, lived in caves—."

"And was a glowering, hulking brute, slouching along at a shambling gait, dining on grubs, and beating his hairy chest in a perpetual rage."

"Something like that." I grinned. "But free of the tensions of modern civilization and filling his bestial lungs with smogless air."

"Well, let me refresh your memory and update your thinking a bit." Grandfather had taught biology for 45 years, and anthropology was his lifelong hobby; so I listened.

"First we need a little background," Grandfather lectured. "Let's go back 35,000 years—perhaps even 40,000. And we meet Cro-Magnon man. Now, I know there are other schools of thought on dating, but we'll stick to mine. You could get more than one argument on my use of the term 'man'."

"Not from me," I said.

Grandfather ignored the interruption. "Cro-Magnon man wasn't exactly a pygmy. Lots of them were five and a half feet in height. Their thigh bones were straight and their limbs long and they stood and walked completely erect. Their skulls were rounded back to the brain-case—which is typical of modern man. Cro-Magnon had a forehead that was domed and high, and some of them had a brain volume of 1600 c.c. And that's more than most modern adults have."

He pointed a schoolteacher's finger at me. "Remember anything about the cortex?"

I nodded. "Yes, teacher. That's the part of the brain which allows us to pursue our lofty ideals."

"Correct, if crudely put. At any rate, the motor activities so great in earlier species were reduced, and the brain was beginning to show its superiority over mere brute strength. While not as powerful physically as Neanderthaloids, toward the end both probably existed simultaneously and Cro-Magnon's brain made him the ultimate victor. Now, in the course of phylogeny Cro-Magnon gave way to—" My hand shot up. "Phylogeny?"

"The pattern of the lineal descent of groups of organisms—the organism in this case being what we like to call mankind. And stop interrupting."

"Yes, sir," I said meekly.

"Now where was I?"

"Cro-Magnon gave way to something."

"Yes—to the Magdalenian culture. That period was about 20,000 years ago."

"So our detective was a Magdalenian?"

"Of course. I maintain the Magdalenian culture was the opening of the flower of mankind, his emergence into glory. For the first time—for the very first time—we have clear evidence of creative energy in its most abstract sense, of religious and esthetic elements as we understand them today."

"And all this happened 20,000 years ago?"

"Roughly. It ended about 10,000 years ago—perhaps 12,000. That was when the Upper Paleolithic period ended and the Magdalenian culture gave way to the Mesolithic—"

"Wait a minute," I said. "It's possible this detective of yours is no more than 10,000 years old."

"Are you twitting me?" Grandfather asked.

"Me? What's 10,000 years more or less."

"As I said before, stop interrupting," Grandfather snorted.

I stopped and he continued. "It must be fifty years since I saw that piece of ivory, and yet I remember it as clearly as my own face.

"Professor Joy—you wouldn't remember him—I think he died when you were five or six. Simeon Joy. At any rate, he'd come home from a couple of years of digging and he brought this piece of ivory over one evening. In this very room.

"It was a piece of mammoth tusk. So old. So very, very old. Thousands of years old before our primitive artist found it and used it as his canvas. It was the end of a tusk, slightly curved and broadening. I remember it was exactly twenty inches long. Exactly. And jammed on the tip was a cowrie shell.

"On one side of the tusk—if a tusk can be said to have sides—there were three engravings, and on the other side there were two engravings."

"Sorry," I said, "but I'll have to interrupt again. Engravings?"

"Of course. You must have seen reproductions in books and magazines. Engravings—simple, of course—but engravings nevertheless; etched with pointed flints, and perhaps other tools. In some caves they've found painted frescoes, beautifully colored and shaded. Some of them would do credit to a great modern artist."

"I remember."

"Back to the engravings on that ivory tusk. It took me a long time before I understood the whole of the artist's story—or if you prefer, what I personally believe the story to be. Of life and death, of murder and love—"

"Love?"

"Why not? Do you insist that love is a civilized adventure?"

"Of course not. But to equate sex with love in that age—no."

"I said love. And I didn't mean sex alone. I'll admit I didn't see that part of the story until your Grandmother pointed it out, but it makes sense. It has to make sense."

"All right, but what about those engravings?"

"Yes. As I said, there were three on one side and two on the other. The three engravings were on what I'll call the top side—page one.

"I suppose in modern art circles they would be called impressionistic line drawings. In the first engraving there was a representation of two

large human figures and four smaller human figures.

"One of the large figures had a flared hip line—clearly indicating the female form. A husband and his wife and their four children. I'm taking a liberty, of course, in using the terms husband and wife, but I like to think of them in that manner. Mate would give the impression of a lower form of animal.

"A curved line in the shape of a half circle—or dome—surrounded the six figures. I have no doubt that it was meant to represent the entrance to a cave—their home.

"Now, from the data we have, it is extremely likely that the Magdalenians had what might be loosely termed a tribe—or at least several families living closely together. There is even evidence that they built crude shelters, though I suppose they preferred caves whenever they were available.

"At any rate, there is a high probability that there was some kind of chief—a leader. And I take the privilege of assuming my picture hero was the chief.

"Perhaps he was a superior hunter. Or it might have been his skill as an artist. Artists were highly esteemed. The pictures, most likely, were intended primarily for purely materialistic reasons—for what we call sympathetic magic.

"Draw an animal on the wall of a cave and there was no reason why that animal might not be found on a hunt. And a picture of an animal with a spear in its side might increase the magic potential.

"But I like to believe there may have been another reason—faint, perhaps, but still there. The esthetic pleasure, the pleasure to the beholder as well as the artist.

"So we have a family—a husband and his wife and their four children. I wonder if any of the children had red hair like their mother?"

"Red hair? Now, Grandfather, you *are* reading a lot into a primitive picture."

"Not at all. The artist has gone to great pains to rub red ocher into the lines representing the woman's hair. And I insist that was to indicate its color—red."

I laughed. "Why not?"

"I suppose the red hair was unusual, but it is of vital importance to our story."

"Sort of local siren?"

"Your facetious remark may be closer to the truth than we shall ever know."

"You mean our 20,000-year-old detective—or chief—or husband—"

"Yes, all those. At any rate, the cave was the family home. A smoking fire—on the flat floor of the cave—or they may have deepened a naturally convenient hollow. Skins from the animals of the hunt. Horse and reindeer and other gregarious game. Perhaps even a stone lamp, with a wick of moss and filled with rancid animal fat. The children might be playing with bone pipes and crude whistles—"

"Musical? A local swing group?"

"In all probability. The whistles and pipes were undoubtedly used as an accompaniment to ritual chants."

"Or for a high old time," I suggested.

"Why not? After a successful hunt there may have been joy songs. Remember, they were Man—our ancestors. They used animals' teeth and shells for necklaces. Perhaps the wife wore a bracelet made from mammoth ivory and decorated by her artist husband. And she probably had charms and implements made of horn and bone and ivory. A housewife's tools.

"Against a wall of the cave were the husband's tools—his arrowheads and spears, hammers of stone, and wedges. Harpoons and scrapers for meat. A well-provided arsenal for the time. And all decorated with his skill as an artist.

"Now the children go out to play—perhaps to gather wood for the fire and bring back food. Berries and an occasional small animal or bird. Perhaps even fish if they are not too far from running water or a lake.

"And back home, as husbands and wives do today, they talk of what has happened and of their children and plan for tomorrow."

"Grandfather," I remonstrated, "this is getting out of hand. Talk? I'll grant you they had sounds for certain things—"

"I said talk. At that stage of their development the Magdalenians almost certainly had more than a speech limited to objective needs—something more than just vague sounds and words for material things. They must have had the ability to express certain abstract ideas. Also music of a sort. Religion. A word for life. Surely a word for death."

"Okay, I'll go along. So they were billing and cooing."

"I'd like to believe that," Grandfather said softly. "Now, I remember that first picture was approximately four inches wide. The next was twelve inches and the third was four inches wide."

"Why would that be important?"

"I'm not saying it is. But it showed a striving for design. Even the placement on the other side was revealing. Picture number four was three inches wide and number five was six inches. And then there were the simplicity and drama of blank space."

"Fine. So we've given them a comfortable home, security, children. Now what's the problem?"

Grandfather laughed. "I suppose they might have been talking of the coming hunt. That's the subject of the second engraving."

"The twelve-inch picture?"

"Yes. This showed the figures of four running men with spears in their hands, with our husband in the lead. They are pursuing a stampeding herd of wild horses toward the edge of a cliff. One horse is even depicted going over the edge of the cliff."

"Neat."

"And practical. They were certain of a good hunt by stampeding a number of horses over the edge of the cliff. In a chase over level ground their chances of getting even one horse were pretty slim."

"After that I suppose the tired hunters had to lug the kill home?"

"Not by themselves. Following the skilled hunters were other members of the tribe—the carriers. It was their job to tote the carcasses back to the home camp.

"And on the way back, perhaps a song or a chant recounting the mighty prowess of the stalwart hunters who had killed so much meat to fill their hungry bellies.

"So our husband heads back to his home, full of joy and anticipation, the hunter returning to his castle, to comfort and love—and finds death instead."

"The murder you spoke of?"

"Yes. The third picture. The last on the top side—a turning point in his life—and suspense for the viewer."

"I'm full of suspense."

"In the third picture the tragedy is clearly engraved. At the mouth of the cave lies the body of his wife. Her head is separated from the body, and the ocher colors her hair. No coloring at the neck juncture—nothing at all to suggest blood. Just red ocher for her red hair . . . So the wife is dead. But more than just dead—she has been murdered."

"Murdered? Come on, now!"

"Must you have a code of English and Napoleonic law to use the term 'murder'?"

"Of course not. What I mean is —"

"Never mind what you mean. Even then there must have been taboos—laws not to be taken lightly. And murder—or wanton killing, if you prefer—must have been one of the strongest taboos. I say that the woman had been murdered—and the husband realized that fact."

"So a happy hunt ended in a tragic homecoming."

"Yes. And in a saddened family. A husband bereft of his wife. Children made motherless."

"You're really building this up."

"Why not? Don't you suppose our long-ago ancestors had feelings like ours? Don't you suppose they could feel pain—and happiness—and surely sorrow?"

"Too bad they didn't have a trusty watchdog."

"Oh, they had dogs. But in all probability they went along on the hunt."

"All right, no watchdog. So now what?"

"The burial ceremony, I suppose —whatever was the custom of that particular group. Burial in the back of a cave, perhaps on a ledge, with a ritual circle of stones beneath. Or in a deep ravine, with some sort of covering to protect the body from animal scavengers."

"Why not in a special cave reserved for magical services and for the dead?"

"No. It was a bit too early for that. Such a cave would suggest a temple, and I doubt if our friends had progressed that far on the cultural road. But her husband may have placed some of the jewelry she liked on her body, along with pebbles marked with the magic designs of the tribe. And perhaps he covered her with a soft skin to keep the cold of death from coming too quickly."

"Calm down, Grandfather," I said. "It isn't as if this happened yesterday."

"Something like it happens every day."

"Murder, you mean?"

"It was more than just murder."

"I know. So now where are we?"

"At the end of one side of the tusk."

"Turn it over and two more etchings to go."

"Yes. We come now to the fourth picture."

"The burial you spoke of?"

"No. It is the representation of a huge man with a hunter's club."

"The murderer, of course."

"Naturally. But how did it happen? Did he come by the cave, find the children away, and go in on the spur of the moment?"

"Perhaps they had a share-the-wife-plan, something like certain Eskimo groups used to have."

"I doubt it. Then there would have been no need for him to kill her."

"Maybe she made eyes at him—you know how some redheads are."

"Again I doubt it. No. He must have gone beyond the tribal taboos relating to another man's wife—perhaps attracted by her unusual red hair, as you suggested. And she struggled. He stifled her attempted screams so that none of the nearby group could hear.

"But he knew she would tell her husband when he returned from the hunt—so there was nothing left for him to do but to kill her."

"At least that reasoning hasn't changed through the ages."

"No."

"But how did the husband find out who the murderer was? Even if this big brute was a local Romeo, that wouldn't have been incriminating, even for so primitive a time."

"No. But there was evidence—real, physical evidence. Evidence that our killer overlooked and that our 20,000-year-old detective didn't. And that was the subject matter of the fifth and final engraving."

"Evidence?"

"The whole ending—the verdict—and the evidence."

"I'm listening. Go on."

"Now, we must assume that the killer was not one of the hunters."

"Why not? After all we *have* been assuming quite a bit—a little more can't do any harm."

"Are you being sarcastic?"

"Not at all, Grandfather."

"At any rate, it's a safe assumption. Had the man been along on the hunt, he couldn't very well have been the murderer. Even in those

days a man can't be in two different places at the same time. So he must have been one of those who remained behind—perhaps because he'd been on an earlier hunt. Or he might have found some other plausible excuse to remain behind so he could go after the red-haired woman."

"You mean, premeditated murder?"

"No. I hardly think so. Her refusal to accept his advances probably came as great a shock to him as it does to so many modern lovers."

"About the fifth picture. Does it show the murder actually being committed?"

"No, it doesn't."

"Grandfather, you're dragging this out."

"After 20,000 years you certainly can wait a few more seconds."

I grinned.

"All right," Grandfather went on. "The fifth and last engraving shows our villain stretched out, *his* head detached from *his* body. Next to him is his hunter's club, with a thin streak of red ocher on the head of the club."

"So our hero killed him and left a gruesome drawing as a reminder to posterity of his revenge."

"Not at all. Our husband must have confronted the killer with the evidence. There may even have been a primitive kind of trial. And execution. With the killer's body a choice item on the menu."

"Cannibals?"

"If you wish. I prefer the practical reason of not wasting freshly killed meat."

"How can you be so certain that the tribe held a trial?"

"I'm not. Our husband may very well have been the detective, accuser, jury, and executioner all rolled into one."

"Didn't you mention something about a cowrie shell being jammed on the tip of the mammoth's tusk?"

"I certainly did. And that's what makes this such a beautiful love story."

"The cowrie shell?"

"Perhaps the shell was jammed onto the tip accidentally, but I prefer to believe our husband put it there deliberately."

"What difference would it make?"

"For ages, right down to the present day, the cowrie shell has been highly prized as an allure—probably because the shape of a cowrie shell suggests that of the human vulva. A symbol of love."

"That would make this love story as old as the ages."

"Why not? Can't you believe the first men may have loved as deeply as we do?"

"More, perhaps. No installment buying and charge accounts to dampen his husbandly ardor. Now, if I had the answer to one more question, I'd be satisfied with your reconstruction."

"And that question—?"

"I'd like to know what made our hero so certain that this particular

joker was the murderer of his wife."

"The killer's club in the fifth engraving. The thin streak of red ocher."

"Blood from the killer's head?"

"No, no, no! I told you there was no indication of *blood*—none at all. The thin streak of ocher was a red hair from the wife's head."

"A red hair?"

"Of course. Since the killer hadn't been on the hunt, he couldn't have claimed it was from some red-skinned animal. And I haven't any doubt that they could easily distinguish her red hair from that of an animal's."

"Circumstantial evidence."

"As I said in the beginning."

"Grandfather, you've quite an imagination."

"Not nearly as much as that remote ancestor of ours. Though I do believe he loved his wife as much as I did your Grandmother."

THE WAY IT IS NOW

by ELAINE SLATER

WHEN THEY WERE FIRST MARried right after graduation from college, he had never been able to spend enough time with her. They bought a small cabin in the North Woods with no communication to the outside world, and spent every week-end there, walking hand in hand, sitting by a roaring fire, lost in each other—that is, when they weren't chopping wood or hauling water from the brook, huffing and laughing at the unaccustomed exertion.

But lately things had changed. Business commitments kept him occupied on Saturdays. He could no longer find the time to escape to the cabin. When she spoke to him, he was never quite there. His reading moved gradually from the *Partisan Review* to *The Wall Street Journal*, and endless market reports. He still sat through the arty movies—Fellini, Truffaut—but when she tried to probe their murky depths he never contributed a word.

"Where *are* you?" she would ask in exasperation. "Am I talking to a stone?"

"I heard you," he would reply, jumping slightly as though she had caught him at the cookie jar. "Your last words were precisely 'and the dog, of course, symbolizes the eternal evil in man.' "

She would sigh. He was listening evidently, but still . . . he wasn't all there. His mind was on other things, and not all the newly acquired luxuries that his business success brought could compensate

for the loss of her young, playful, loving husband. His sense of humor seemed now to be reserved for his business associates, who told her how he broke them up at the Board meetings. He worked several nights a week and came home bone-weary. How could a man that tired exercise a sense of humor, or talk, or, for that matter, make love?

Now they had a house in the suburbs and a housekeeper. She read the magazine advertisements and decided there was a ready remedy at hand. She bathed at twilight, perfumed herself, donned an expensive dressing gown, lit candles, and made a mixer of martinis. When he arrived home his favorite Mozart concerto was playing. He looked mildly surprised at her outfit, commented that she smelled good, said he preferred a bourbon on the rocks to a martini which gave him indigestion, suggested more lighting over dinner because he couldn't see what he was eating, picked up the latest *Barrons Report*, and fell asleep on the sofa. His own snoring woke him up and he stumbled up to the bedroom.

If she had suspected another woman she would have had a better idea of how to fight back. But how does one fight the overwhelming commitment to Business? She read Betty Freidan and decided to get a job, but even that didn't fill the gaping void in her life. She thought about taking a lover, and had lunch with one of the young men with whom she worked. He showed an extraordinary interest in her husband's stock portfolio, and shuddering at the thought of a preoccupied lover, she decided she hated all men.

She began to brood. Her friends had children on whom they could vent their frustrations. She had no one. She mulled over the idea of suicide, but her other self kept calling out rebelliously.

"Why should *I* die? *I'm* perfectly capable of laughter, of life, of love! It's *he* who is dead already and doesn't know it. It's not fair for you to kill me."

The *Evergreen Review* slipped out of her lap, and she stared for a long time at her hands.

When he came home that night she made no attempt to share with him the boring day's activities. He didn't seem to notice the deathly silence, although the housekeeper became so nervous that she broke a rare Minton plate. When the telephone rang just as they were having their coffee, he jumped up to answer it.

His suddenly animated voice was saying, "Harry! How did it go in Toronto? I've thought of nothing else all evening."—as she walked thoughtfully upstairs.

When he came into their bedroom he was jubilant. He caught her around the waist and shouted, "The Toronto deal is going through! Can you beat that? After two years of negotiating it's finally going through. Bigness is the only thing

that talks these days, and we're going to be *BIG!* If only Harry was here right now, would I love to hear all the details. I'd—"

She interrupted him quietly. "Let's celebrate. Let's go to the cabin this week-end. We haven't been there in months. The road will soon be impassable and we won't be able to go again until spring."

"This week-end?" He looked dubious.

"Yes—we'll have a second honeymoon. We could find each other again."

"Have you lost me? Or have I lost you?" he asked in his old teasing voice. "Okay, honey, if you want a second honeymoon you'll have it. But I'll have to cancel two meetings on Saturday. How about putting it off for a week or two?"

"No," she said firmly.

He was too triumphant at the thought of the successful Toronto deal to argue; so on Friday they drove up to the cabin.

It was just as they had left it. No one ever came near the place. There was a pile of wood in the snow by the ax. The wood was not too wet and they quickly made a smoky fire to warm the little room.

She bounced on the squeaky brass bed a few times, and gazed about her happily. All the old warmth and affection began to return. Perhaps here they would find what they had lost. Perhaps here he would look *at* her again, not *through* her. Perhaps here he would once again be interested, if only for a week-end, in her, in her life, in her love—and forget the business world which consumed him. Yes, she was ready to settle for a week-end.

He gazed into the fireplace, at the crackling blue and orange flames. There was a distant, even wistful look on his face. She watched him tenderly, feeling the old love for that tired worn face. She sat opposite him in the shabby old chair that they had bought together in a country junk shop, and had loaded hysterically onto the pickup that he had driven in those days. The front seat was so loaded with their gear that she had ridden the whole way to the cabin seated on that chair in the back of the truck amid a clutter of second-hand household goods.

How funny that had been! Everyone on the road had turned to look, laugh, and wave. And when they arrived at the cabin after an unbelievably bumpy trip—over miles of isolated dirt roads with low overhanging branches that clawed at her face and battered the truck—she had jumped into his waiting arms. Happily he had carried her to the threshold, where he discovered he had to drop her unceremoniously in order to get at the key which was hanging on a rusty nail. They had laughed together until they couldn't stand up, but they had clung to each other for support. Yes, clung to each other . . .

She was deep in nostalgia. He lifted his head and gazed at her. She

gazed back into his eyes, trying to guess his thoughts. Were they as far away as hers? He started to speak, and she leaned forward, a slight smile on her lips.

"You know—" he began wistfully.

"What?" she interrupted flirtatiously.

"—Central American Tobacco has just merged with Amalgamated Biscuit."

She buried the bloodstained ax in the snow and went back to sit by the fire—to lose herself in nostalgia before she had to go look for the shovel.

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THE SCIENTIST AND THE INVISIBLE SAFE

by ARTHUR PORGES

THERE WERE TIMES WHEN LIEUtenant Trask wondered if he put too much faith in pure logic. Not that he was naive enough to expect criminals to behave like mathematical elements: he knew that many people were wildly improbable in their actions, and that crooks were often the wildest. But the facts, at least, should make a coherent pattern, with no inconsistencies or contradictions.

He was more hurt than angry when he emphasized this point to Cyriack Skinner Grey, who sat in his wheelchair listening. Grey would always sit there, having been paralyzed in an auto crash. But there was nothing wrong with his brain, which was that of a well-trained research scientist, and holder of an enormous amount of data, all available for instant reference. And if Grey's brain wasn't quite up to an extraordinary demand, it could be supplemented by a library of thousands of technical books. And for a legman he always had his brilliant fourteen-year-old son, Edgar, with a high I.Q. and low laugh-point.

"In a way," the scientist told Trask in his mellow baritone, suggestive of a bronze gong, "you're rather ungrateful to a kindly universe. Most of your cases are both irrational and illogical. That is, Joe Doakes, having consumed six or eight fluid ounces of methyl alcohol, decides that Bill Brown has insulted the great garden state of West Carolina, and brains him with an empty fifth.

"There are nine eyewitnesses; the man's fingerprints are on the bottle; he even confesses, and weeps over his sin. After which, probably, a jury convicts him of involuntary manslaughter, and an Appeals Court frees him over a flyspeck mistaken for a comma.

"Now, tell the truth: can there be much creative enjoyment for you in handling such a matter? So you really should be delighted with any problem that offers an intellectual challenge. Or am I talking nonsense?"

"I don't say that," Trask admitted, though not very enthusiastic about the reasoning. "But I've got a diamond worth a quarter of a million dollars hidden in a hotel room —just a few square feet of space, and not exactly cluttered—and I simply cannot find the blasted thing! The D.A.'s screaming like a blistered eagle; the owner, Countess Elena Braganza, a V.I.P. from Brazil, is chiming in with not very ladylike wails of her own. And the thief, Doc Meinecke, is laughing his head off at all of us. That kind of challenge," he added sourly, "I can do without."

"And your complaint against logic, I take it, is that since a room has only X cubic inches of space, what one man conceals there, another should be able to find—right?"

"Exactly."

The scientist pressed a button on the arm of his chair, was offered a thin, very black cigar by a humidor that swiveled out invitingly, and lit it at a disk that glowed red-hot nearby. For the detective he filled a fragile cup, translucent and pearly, from a tiny spigot; it might have been bourbon he drew, but it was black coffee, steaming hot. Trask nodded his thanks, and sipped the fragrant brew greedily. It was some kind of sea captain's coffee, strong enough to yell like Tarzan, but never bitter.

"Sounds quite intriguing," Grey said, blowing three quick smoke rings. "Let's have the details."

"This Doc Meinecke," Trask began, hitching his chair closer to the scientist's, "is the cleverest jewel thief in the business. The old—ah—fellow always uses the same *modus operandi,* and why not, since it's never failed him. He gets his paws on a prize gem—second-story stuff, con game, sometimes even a stick-up; he couldn't care less. Then he takes a hotel room. Pays for two weeks in advance, so that if he's arrested nobody else can move in—not that they'd find anything; *we* can't. He wants the same room available after making bail, which he gets every time, hiring the best lawyer around. Not that he's held in most cases; Doc seldom gives any grounds for arrest—he's too slick an operator.

"Well, once settled in the hotel room, he waits for buyers, having sent out word about the merchandise. The top fences show up and bid. Most of the details are straightforward, but Doc has one gimmick all his own. He claims to have a private little invisible safe to carry the loot in, and to hide it safely in the room. I tell you, Professor, cops all over this country, and in Europe, too, have caught him in a hotel room absolutely sure a valuable jewel was hidden there, and have never once found it.

"Doc gets a bang out of that record. He brags about his 'invisible safe,' and even gives the 'combination': P 6-2-3. Only nobody but Doc knows what it means."

Grey hunched deeper in his wheelchair, his deep-set eyes shining like embers.

"And," the scientist said softly, "now it's your turn, eh? You've trapped him in a hotel room, but you can't find the Braganza diamond."

"Right. We got a tip and took him by surprise. Well, not really. He always has a few minutes' warning somehow—enough to put the loot in his hiding place. But we know the stone's still there—it has to be—in fact, Meinecke makes no bones about it. He was chortling like crazy all the way to the precinct house. The old buzzard knows we can't hold him more than forty-eight hours at the most. Then he'll go back to the room, and wait for us to give up the search.

"Sure, we can stake out the hotel, but a fox like that can smell a cop. He won't make a move until he's sure we've gone; we haven't the men or budget to watch one crook for long. But if we could only find that diamond before Meinecke gets out of jail, then it's his finish. Not to mention getting the D.A. and the Countess off our backs."

"A very interesting problem," Grey said. His eyes grew blank with thought. "The logic is quite clear. Obviously his hiding place must be something not only normal for any hotel room, but a location utterly above suspicion—invisible, not literally, but one the police see right through, and don't dream of checking. There can't be many such hiding places in an ordinary hotel room—in fact, offhand, I can't think of even one. But we're bound to spot it in time."

"That's the trouble," Trask said bitterly, "we don't have time. Believe me, we took that room apart. There's a definite routine; nothing is missed. Furniture, floor, walls, fixtures, electrical outlets, plumbing, strings dangling out of windows, goo against outer walls, ventilators, ducts, ice or food in refrigerator, if there is one. We've even broken eggs, so help me. You can soften part of a shell, insert something, and patch it up so it looks new. The diamond *can't* be in that blasted room—but I'm sure it *is!*"

"And the combination, you say, is P 6-2-3 . . . hmm," the scientist said.

He sat immobile, not even blinking. His amazing brain, like a huge computer hunting chess moves, worked with great speed and precision. Trask guessed what he was doing. Grey was undoubtedly visualizing a typical hotel room, and then inventorying it one cubic foot at a time. Like the tormented genius, Tesla, the professor could call up anything ever seen—and some concepts never before seen—in full color and in three-dimensional detail.

Trask watched him quietly for ten minutes, his own body so tense that the muscles began to ache.

Then Grey sighed, blinked, and a wintry smile touched his lips.

"I may have it," he said. "At least, there's only one hiding place that seems to qualify. But let me see if the combination Doc gave is consistent with it in some way. P 6-2-3. Tell me, what do you know about Doc Meinecke's background?"

"Well, he's not a real doctor, of course. That's just a title his fellow crooks gave him for having a bit of education."

"College?"

"Yes and no. He started out, believe it or not, in a theological seminary."

Grey cocked his massive head.

"P 6-2-3. Now, I wonder . . . hah! Bible, almost certainly. But which part. P for proverbs? VI-um-two-three. Don't recall." He flipped a switch on the left arm of his chair, and Edgar's voice came over the speaker on the wall.

"Yes, Dad."

"Bring me a Bible, will you, son?"

"Right away," the boy said, and shortly appeared with a bulky volume.

"Hi, you fifty-year-old dwarf genius," Trask said. "Still claim to be only fourteen?"

"I'm ready for you this time," was the grinning reply. The redhead held out a document and a big sheet of film. "My birth certificate—and an x-ray showing sutures that establish age."

Grey smiled, and Trask gulped. The scientist took the Bible, riffled the pages, and said, "Not two-three. Let's try twenty-three . . . well, now." He looked at the Lieutenant. "Did you happen to notice a light in the room that seemed rather dim for its size?"

"A light? No, I didn't see—wait a minute! You trying to tell me—"

"I certainly am. A light bulb—on and glowing—is the only explanation that makes sense. Nobody ever would suspect it. After all, it's shining; it's brittle glass; it must have a vacuum, and it won't function if it's broken. How could a lit electric bulb possibly hide anything?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Trask said fervently.

"What Doc did, I'd say, is use the heavily frosted bulb of a high wattage light. It's easy enough to break off the brass end—a little flame would do it, properly used. Then he could fit a *smaller* bulb inside, with a tight friction joint where the metal part of the smaller bulb sticks out of the hole at the base of the larger bulb. Or if he's not handy himself, some friend with a glass cutter and a few simple tools could rig the thing.

"Now, when you screw the 'double' bulb into a socket, you'd be connecting the smaller bulb, which would glow inside the outer empty-glass shell. Since the outer one's frosted, nothing inside would show except the light. Probably to make sure nothing showed he'd fill the extra space with some non-inflam-

mable packing—say, glass wool. So even if somebody unscrewed the bulb—"

"Which I did to every bulb in the place to check the sockets!" Trask moaned. "What an idiot I am. And I remember now that Doc had a sleeve of new bulbs and an extension cord. Camouflage, of course, so that when the trick bulb was being transported from home to hotel we wouldn't spot it; lots of people bring their own light bulbs to hotel rooms. Brother, was I fooled!"

The Lieutenant jumped up, anxious to get back to the hotel room. Then he paused. "Almost forgot. What about that combination?"

Grey lifted the Bible.

"The particular proverb goes: 'The commandment is a lamp; and the law is *light.*' A bit vague perhaps, but close enough to justify Doc's little joke."

"It may be his joke," Trask said, "but we'll have the last laugh—thanks to you."

He grabbed Edgar's x-ray, studied it, and said, "Only fourteen, you say? How come I see a small metal plate in the brain that reads '1920' and underneath—why I can hardly believe it!—'Made in Japan.'"

"Go find your old diamond," the boy grinned; and the detective did just that.

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THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

by MICHAEL GILBERT

EVERYONE IN LAMPERDOWN KNEW that Mr. Behrens, who lived with his aunt at the Old Rectory, and kept bees, and Mr. Calder, who lived in a cottage on the hilltop outside the village and was the owner of a Persian wolfhound called Rasselas, were the closest of close friends.

They knew, too, that there was something out of the ordinary about both of them.

Both had a habit of disappearing. When Mr. Calder vanished he left the great dog in charge of the cottage; and Mr. Behrens would plod up the hill, once a day, to talk to him and see to his requirements. If both men disappeared at the same time, Rasselas would be brought down to the Old Rectory where (according to Flossie, who did for the Behrens') he would sit, for hour after hour, in one red-plush armchair staring silently at Mr. Behrens' aunt in the other.

There were other things. It was known that a buried telephone line connected the Old Rectory and the cottage; that both houses had elaborate systems of burglar alarms; and that Mr. Calder's cottage (according to Jack, who had helped to build it) had steel plates inside the window shutters.

The villagers knew all this and being countrymen, talked very little about it, except occasionally among themselves toward closing time. To strangers, of course, they said nothing.

That fine autumn morning Rasselas was lying, chin on ground, watch-

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ing Mr. Calder creosote the sharp end of a wooden spile. He sat up suddenly and rumbled out a warning. "It's only Arthur," said Mr. Calder. "We know him."

The dog subsided with a sigh.

Arthur was Mr. Calder's nearest neighbor. He lived in a converted railway carriage in the company of a cat and two owls, and worked in the woods which cap the North Downs from Worthen Hill to the Medway. Brimstone Wood, Molehill Wood, Long Gorse Shaw, Tom Lofts Wood, and Leg of Mutton Wood. It was a very old part of the country, and like all old things it was full of ghosts. Mr. Calder could not see them, but he knew they were there. Sometimes, when he was walking with Rasselas in the woods, the dog would stop, cock his head on one side, and rumble deep in his throat, his yellow eyes speculative, as he followed some shape, flitting down the ride ahead of them.

"Good morning, Arthur," said Mr. Calder.

"Working, I see," said Arthur. He was a small thick man, of great strength, said to have an irresistible attraction for women.

"The old fence is on its last legs. I'm putting this in until I can get it done properly."

Arthur examined the spile with an expert eye, and said, "Chestnut. That should hold her for a season. Oak'd be better. You working too hard to come and look at something I found?"

"Never too busy for that," said Mr. Calder.

"Take your car, it'll be quicker," said Arthur. "Bring a torch, too."

Half a mile along the rutted road they left the car, climbed a gate, and walked down a broad path, forking off it onto a smaller one. After a few minutes the trees thinned, and Mr. Calder saw that they were coming to a clearing where woodcutting had been going on. The trunks had been dragged away, and the slope was a litter of scattered cord wood.

"These big contractors," said Arthur. "They've got no idea. They come and cut down the trees and lug 'em off and think they've finished the job. Then I have to clear it up. Stack the cord wood. Pull out the stumps, where they're an obstruction to traffic."

What traffic had passed, or would ever pass again through the heart of this secret place, Mr. Calder could hardly imagine. But he saw that the woodmen had cleared a rough path which followed the contour of the hill and disappeared down the other side, presumably joining the road they had come by somewhere down in the valley. At that moment the ground was a mess of tractor marks and turned earth. In a year the raw places would be skimmed over with grass and nettles and bluebells and kingcups and wild garlic. In five years there would be no trace of the intruders left.

"In the old days," said Arthur, "we done it with horses. Now we do

it with machinery. I'm not saying it isn't quicker and handier, but it don't seem altogether right." He nodded at his bulldozer, askew on the side of a hummock. Rasselas went over and sneered at it, disapproving of the oily-gasoliny smell.

"I was shifting thisser stump," said Arthur, "when the old cow slipped and came down sideways. She hit t'other tree a proper dunt. I thought I messed up the works, but all I done was shift the tree a piece. See?"

Mr. Calder walked across to look. The tree which Arthur had hit was no more than a hollow ring of elm, very old, and less than three foot high. His first thought was that it was curious that a heavy bulldozer, crashing down onto it from above, should not have shattered its frail shell together.

"Ah! You have a look inside," said Arthur.

The interior of the stump was solid concrete.

"Why on earth," said Mr. Calder, "would anyone bother to—"

"Just have a look at this."

The stump was at a curious angle, half uprooted, so that the right-hand side lay much higher than the left.

"When I hit her," said Arthur, "I felt something give. Truth to tell, I thought I'd cracked her shaft. Then I took another look. See?"

Mr. Calder looked. And he saw.

The whole block—wooden ring, cement center and all—had been pierced by an iron bar. The end of it was visible, thick with rust, sticking out of the broken earth. He scraped away the soil with his fingers, and presently found the U-shaped socket that he was looking for.

He sat back on his heels and stared at Arthur, who stared back, solemn as one of his own owls.

"Someone," said Mr. Calder slowly, "God knows why—took the trouble to cut out this tree stump and stick a damned great iron bar right through the middle of it, fixed to open on a pivot."

"It would have been Sam Owtram who fixed the bar for 'em, I don't doubt," said Arthur. "He's been dead ten years now."

"Who'd Sam fix it for?"

"Why, for the military."

"I see," said Mr. Calder. It was beginning to make a little more sense.

"You'll see when you get inside."

"Is there something inside?"

"Surely," said Arthur, "I wouldn't bring you out all this way just to look at an old tree stump, now would I? Come around here."

Mr. Calder moved round to the far side and saw, for the first time, that when the stump had shifted, it had left a gap on the underside. It was not much bigger than a badger's hole.

"Are you suggesting I go down *that*?"

"It's not so bad, once you're in," said Arthur.

The entrance sloped down at about forty-five degrees and was only really narrow at the start, where the earth had caved in. After a short slide Mr. Calder's feet touched the top of a ladder. It was a long ladder—he counted twenty rungs before his feet were on firm ground. He got out his flashlight and switched it on.

He was in a fair-sized chamber, cut out of the chalk. He saw two recesses, each containing a spring bed on a wooden frame; three empty packing cases, up-ended as a table and two chairs; a wooden cupboard, several racks, and a heap of disintegrating blankets. The place smelled of lime and dampness and, very faintly, of something else.

A scrabbling noise announced the arrival of Arthur.

"Like something outer one of them last war films," he said. "Remember?"

"*Journey's End!*" said Mr. Calder. "All it needs is a candle in an empty beer bottle and a couple of gas masks hanging up on the wall."

"It was journey's end for him all right." Arthur jerked his head toward the far corner and Mr. Calder swung his light round.

The first thing he saw was a pair of boots; then the mildew remains of a pair of flannel trousers, through gaps in which the leg bones showed white.

The man was lying on his back. He could hardly have fallen like that—it was not a natural position. After death someone had taken the trouble to straighten the legs and fold the arms over the chest. The beam from Mr. Calder's flashlight moved upward, to the head, where it stayed for a long minute. Then Mr. Calder straightened up.

"I don't think you'd better say much about this. Not for the moment."

"That hole in his forehead," said Arthur. "It's a bullet hole, ennit?"

"Yes. The bullet went through the middle of his forehead and out at the back. There's a second hole there."

"I guessed it was more up your street than mine," said Arthur. "What'll we do? Tell the police?"

"We'll have to tell them sometime. Just for the moment, do you think you could cover the hole up? Put some sticks and turfs across?"

"I could do that all right. T'won't really be necessary though. Now the wooding's finished you won't get anyone else through here. It's all preserved. The people who do the shooting, they stay on the outside of the covers."

"One of them didn't," said Mr. Calder, looking down at the floor and showing his teeth in a grin.

Mr. Behrens edged his way through the crowd in the drawing room of Colonel Mark Bessendine's Chatham quarters. He wanted to look at one of the photographs on the mantelpiece.

"That's the *Otrango*," said a girl

near his left elbow. "It was grandfather's ship. He proposed to Granny in the Red Sea. On the deck tennis court, actually. Romantic, don't you think?"

Mr. Behrens removed his gaze from the photograph to study his informant. She had brown hair, and a friendly face and was just leaving the puddy-fat stage. Fifteen or sixteen, he guessed.

"You must be Julia Bessendine," he said.

"And you're Mr. Behrens. Daddy says you're doing something very clever in our workshops. Of course he wouldn't say what."

"That was his natural discretion," said Mr. Behrens. "As a matter of fact, it isn't hush-hush at all. I'm writing a paper for the Molecular Society on Underwater Torque Reactions, and the Navy offered to lend me its big test tank."

"Gracious!" said Julia.

Colonel Bessendine surged across.

"Julia, you're in dereliction of your duties. I can see that Mr. Behrens' glass is empty."

"Excellent sherry," said Mr. Behrens.

"Tradition," said Colonel Bessendine, "associates the Navy with rum. In fact, the two drinks that it really understands are gin and sherry. I hope our technical people are looking after you."

"The Navy have been helpfulness personified. It's been particularly convenient for me—being allowed to do this work at Chatham, I mean. Only twenty minutes run from Lamperdown, you see."

Colonel Bessendine said, "My last station was Devonport. A ghastly place. When I was posted back here I felt I was coming home. The whole of my youth is tied up with this part of the country. I was born and bred not far from Tilbury, and I went to school at Rochester."

His face, thought Mr. Behrens, was like a waxwork. A clever waxwork, but one which you could never quite mistake for human flesh. Only the eyes were truly alive.

"I sometimes spent a holiday down here when I was a boy," said Mr. Behrens. "My aunt and uncle —he's dead now—bought the Old Rectory at Lamperdown after the first World War. Thank you, my dear, that was very nicely managed." This last was to Julia, who had fought her way back to him with most of the sherry still in the glass. "In those days your school," he said to the girl, "was a private house. One of the great houses of the County."

"It must have been totally impracticable," said Julia Bessendine severely. "Fancy trying to *live* in it. What sort of staff did it need to keep it up?"

"They scraped along with twenty or thirty indoor servants, a few dozen gardeners and gamekeepers, and a cricket professional."

"Daddy told me that when he was a boy, he used to walk out from school, on half holidays, and watch

cricket on their private cricket ground. That's right, isn't it, Daddy?"

"That's right, my dear. Captain Barrow—"

"He used to creep up the hedge from the railway and squeeze through a gap in the iron railings at the top, and lie in the bushes. And once the old Lord walked across and found him, and instead of booting him out, he gave him money to buy sweets with."

"Major Furlong looks as if he could do with another drink," said Colonel Bessendine.

"Colonel Bessendine's father," said Mr. Behrens to Mr. Calder later that evening, "came from New Zealand. He ran away to sea at the age of thirteen, and got himself a job with the Anzac Shipping Line. He rose to be head purser on their biggest ship, the *Otrango*. Then he married—an Irish colleen, I believe. Her father was a landowner from Cork. That part of the story's a bit obscure, because her family promptly disowned her. They didn't approve of the marriage at all. They were poor but proud. Old Bessendine was a Colonial, with the additional drawback of being twice as rich as they were."

"Rich? A purser?"

"He was a shrewd old boy. He bought up land in Tilbury and Greys and leased it to builders. When he died, his estate was declared for probate at £85,000. I expect it was really worth a lot more. His three sons were all well educated, and well-behaved. It was the sort of home where the boys called their father 'Sir' and stood up when he came into the room."

"We could do with more homes like that," said Mr. Calder. "Gone much too far the other way. What happened to the other two sons?"

"Both dead. The older went into the Army. He was killed at Dunkirk. The second boy was a Flight Lieutenant. He was shot down over Germany, picked up, and put into a Prison Camp. He was involved in some sort of trouble there. Shot while trying to escape."

"Bad luck," said Mr. Calder. He was working something out with paper and pencil. "Go away." This was to Rasselas, who had his paws on the table and was trying to help him. "What happened to young Mark?"

"Mark was in the Marines. He was blown skyhigh in the autumn of 1940—the first heavy raid on Gravesend and Tilbury."

"But he came down in one piece."

"Just about. He was in the hospital for six months. The plastic surgeons did a wonderful job on his face. The only thing they couldn't put back was the animation."

"Since you've dug up such a lot of his family history, do I gather that he's in some sort of spot?"

"He's in a spot all right," said Mr. Behrens. "He's been spying for the Russians for twenty years, and we've just recently tumbled to it."

"You're sure?"

"I'm afraid there's no doubt about it at all. Fortescue has had him under observation for the last three months."

"Why hasn't he been put away?"

"The stuff he's passing out is important, but it's not vital. Bessendine isn't a scientist. He's held security and administrative jobs in different Naval stations, so he's been able to give details of the progress and success of various jobs. Where a project has run smoothly, or where it got behind time, or flopped. There's nothing the other side like more than a real flop."

"How does he get the information out?"

"That's exactly what I'm trying to find out. It's some sort of post office system, no doubt. When we've sorted that out, we'll pull him in."

"Has he got any family?"

"A standard pattern Army-type wife. And a rather nice daughter."

"It's the family who suffer in these cases," said Mr. Calder. He scratched Rasselas' tufted head, and the big dog yawned. "By the way, *we* had rather an interesting day, too. We found a body."

He told Mr. Behrens about it, and Mr. Behrens said, "What are you going to do about it?"

"I've telephoned Fortescue. He was quite interested. He's put me onto a Colonel Cawston, who was in charge of Irregular Forces in this area in 1940. He thinks he might be able to help us."

Colonel Cawston's room was littered with catalogues, feeding charts, invoices, paid and unpaid bills, seed samples, gift calendars, local newspapers, boxes of cartridges, and buff forms from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food.

Mr. Calder said, "It's really very good of you to spare the time to talk to me, Colonel. You're a pretty busy man, I can see that."

"We shall get on famously," said the old man, "if you'll remember two things. The first is that I'm deaf in my left ear. The second, that I'm no longer a Colonel. I stopped being that in 1945."

"Both points shall be borne in mind," said Mr. Calder, easing himself round to his host's right-hand side.

"Fortescue told me you were coming. If that old bandit's involved I suppose it's security stuff?"

"I'm not at all sure," said Mr. Calder. "I'd better tell you about it."

"Interesting," said the old man when Mr. Calder had finished. "Fascinating, in fact."

He went across to a big corner closet, dug into its cluttered interior, and surfaced with two faded khaki-colored canvas folders, which he laid on the table. From one of them he turned out a thick wad of papers; from the other, a set of quarter- and one-inch military maps.

"I kept all this stuff," he said. "At one time I was thinking of writing a history of special operations

during the first two years of the war. I never got round to it, though. Too much like hard work."

He unfolded the maps and smoothed out the papers with his bent and arthritic fingers.

"Fortescue told me," said Mr. Calder, "that you were in charge of what he called 'Stay-Put Parties'."

"It was really a very sound idea," said the old man. His frosty blue eyes sparkled for a moment, with the light of unfought battles. "We did the same thing in Burma. When you knew that you might have to retreat, you dug in small resistance groups, with arms and food, and radio sets. They'd let themselves be overrun, you see, and then operate behind the enemy lines. We had a couple of dozen posts like that in Kent and Sussex. The one you found would have been—Whitehorse Wood, you said?—here it is—Post Six. That was a very good one. They converted an existing dene-hole—you know what a dene-hole is?"

"As far as I can gather," said Mr. Calder, "the original inhabitants of this part of the country dug them to hide in when *they* were overrun by Angles and Saxons and such. A sort of pre-Aryan Stay-Put Party."

"Never thought of it that way." The old man chuckled. "You're quite right, of course. That's exactly what it was. Now then. Post Six. We had three men in each—an officer and two N.C.O.'s." He ran his gnarled finger up the paper in front of him. "Sergeant Brewer. A fine chap that. Killed in North Africa. Corporal Stubbs. He's dead too. Killed in a motor crash a week after V.E. Day. So your unknown corpse couldn't be either of *them*."

There was a splendid inevitability about it all, thought Mr. Calder. It was like the unfolding of a Greek tragedy, or the final chord of a well-built symphony. You waited for it. You knew it was coming. But you were still surprised when it did.

"Bessendine," said the old man. "Lieutenant Mark Bessendine. Perhaps the most tragic of the lot, really. He was a natural choice for work. Spoke Spanish, French, and German. Young and fit. Front-line experience with the Reds in Spain."

"What exactly happened to him?"

"It was the first week in November 1940. Our masters in Whitehall had concluded that the invasion wasn't on. I was told to seal up all my posts and send the men back to their units. I remember sending Mark out that afternoon to Post Six—it hadn't been occupied for some weeks—told him to bring back any loose supplies. That was the last time I saw him—in the flesh, as you might say. You heard what happened?"

"He got caught in the German blitz on Tilbury and Gravesend."

"That's right. Must have been actually on his way back to our H.Q. The explosion picked him up and pushed him through a plate-glass window. He was damned lucky to be alive at all. Next time I saw him

he was swaddled up like a mummy. Couldn't talk or move."

"Did you see him again?"

"I was posted abroad in the spring. Spent the rest of the war in Africa and Italy. Come to think of it I did bump into him once. He'd got himself a job running the big Reception Centre at Calais. I went through there on my way home in 1945."

"Did he recognize you? Or did you recognize him?"

"It was a long time ago. I can't really remember." The old man looked up sharply. "Is it important?"

"It might be," said Mr. Calder.

"If you're selling anything," said the old lady to Mr. Behrens, "you're out of luck."

"I am neither selling nor buying," said Mr. Behrens.

"And if you're the new curate I'd better warn you that I'm a Baptist."

"I'm a practicing agnostic."

The old lady looked at him curiously, and then said, "Whatever it is you want to talk about, we shall be more comfortable inside, shan't we?"

She led the way across the hall, narrow and bare as a coffin, into a surprisingly bright and cheerful sitting room.

"You don't look to me," she said, "like the sort of man who knocks old ladies on the head and grabs their life's savings. I keep mine in the bank, such as they are."

"I must confess to you," said Mr. Behrens, "that I'm probably wasting your time. I'm in Tilbury on a sentimental errand. I spent a year of the war in an Air Force Prison Camp in Germany. One of my greatest friends there was Jeremy Bessendine. He was a lot younger than I was, of course, but we had a common interest in bees."

"I don't know what you were doing up in an airplane at your time of life. I expect you dyed your hair. People used to do that in the 1914 war. I'm sorry. I interrupted you, Mr.—?"

"Behrens."

"My name's Galloway. You said Jeremy Bessendine?"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"I knew *all* the Bessendines. Father and mother, and all three sons. The mother was the sweetest thing, from the bogs of Ireland. The father—well, let's be charitable and say he was old-fashioned. Their house was on the other side of the road to mine. There's nothing left of it now. You can see? Not a stick nor a stone."

Mr. Behrens looked out of the window. The opposite side of the road was an open space, containing a row of prefabricated huts.

"Terrible things," said Mrs. Galloway. "They put them up after the war as a temporary measure. Temporary!"

"So that's where the Bessendine's house was," said Mr. Behrens sadly. "Jeremy often described it to me. He was so looking forward to living in it again when the war was over."

"Jeremy was my favorite," said Mrs. Galloway. "I'll admit I cried when I heard he'd been killed. Trying to escape, they said."

She looked back twenty-five years and sighed at what she saw. "If we're going to be sentimental," she said, "we shall do it better over a cup of tea. The kettle's on the boil." She went out into the kitchen but left the door open so that she could continue to talk.

"John, the eldest, I never knew well. He went straight into the Army. He was killled early on. The youngest was Mark. He was a wild character, if you like."

"Wild? In what way?" asked Mr. Behrens.

Mrs. Galloway arranged the teapot, cups, and milk pitcher on a tray and collected her thoughts. "He was a rebel. Strong or weak?"

"Just as it comes," said Mr. Behrens.

"His two brothers, they accepted the discipline at home. Mark didn't. Jeremy told me that when Mark ran away from school—the second time—and his father tried to send him back, they had a real set-to. The father shouting. The boy screaming. That was when he went off to Spain to fight for the Reds. Milk and sugar?"

"Both," said Mr. Behrens. He thought of Mark Bessendine as he had seen him two days before. An ultra-correct, poker-backed, poker-faced regular soldier. How deep had the rebel been buried?

"He's quite a different sort of person now," he said.

"Of course, he would be," said Mrs. Galloway. "You can't be blown to bits and put together again, and still be the same person, can you?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Behrens. "I suppose you can't."

"I felt very strange myself for a week or so, after it happened. And *I* was only blown across the kitchen and cracked my head on the stove."

"You remember that raid then?"

"I most certainly do. It must have been about five o'clock. Just getting dark, and a bit misty. They came in low, and the next moment—crump, bump—we were right in the middle of it. It was the first raid we'd had—and the worst. You could hear the bombs coming closer and closer. I thought, 'I wish I'd stayed in Saffron-Walden'—where I'd been evacuated, you see—'I'm for it now,' I thought. And it's all my own fault for coming back like the poster told me not to. And the next moment I was lying on the floor with my head against the stove and a lot of warm red stuff running over my face. It was tomato soup."

"And that was the bomb that destroyed the Bessendine's house and killed old Mr. Bessendine?"

"That's right. And it was the same raid that nearly killed Mark. My goodness!"

The last exclamation had nothing to do with what had gone before. Mrs. Galloway was staring at Mr. Behrens. Her face had gone pale.

She said, "Jeremy! I've just remembered! When it happened they sent him home, on compassionate leave. He *knew* his house had been blown up. Why would he tell you he was looking forward to living in it after the war? When he must have known it wasn't there?"

Mr. Behrens could think of nothing to say.

"You've been lying, haven't you? Who are you? What's this all about?"

Mr. Behrens put down his tea cup and said gently, "I'm sorry I had to tell you a lot of lies, Mrs. Galloway. Please don't worry about it too much. I promise you that nothing you've told me is going to hurt anyone."

The old lady gulped down her own tea. The color came back slowly to her cheeks. She said, "Whatever it is I don't want to know about it." She stared out of the window at the place where a big house had once stood, inhabited by a bullying father, a sweet Irish mother, and three boys. She said, "It's all dead and done with, anyway."

As Mr. Behrens drove home in the dusk his tires on the road hummed the words back at him. *Dead and done with, dead and done with . . .*

Mr. Fortescue, who was the Manager of the Westminster Branch of the London and Home Counties Bank, and a number of other things besides, glared across his broad mahogany desk at Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens and said, "I have never in all my experience encountered such an irritating and frustrating case."

He made it sound as if they, and not the facts, were the cause of his irritation.

Mr. Behrens said, "I don't think people quite realize how heavily the scales are weighted in favor of a spy who's learned his job and keeps his head. All the stuff that Colonel Bessendine is passing out is stuff he's officially entitled to know. Progress of existing work, projects for new work, personnel to be employed, security arrangements. It all comes into his field. Suppose he *does* keep notes of it. Suppose we searched his house, found those notes in his safe. Would it prove anything?"

"Of course it wouldn't," said Mr. Fortescue sourly. "That's why you've got to catch him actually handing it over. I've had three men —apart from you—watching him for months. He behaves normally—goes up to Town once or twice a week—goes to the cinema with his family—goes to local drink parties—has his friends in to dinner. All absolutely above suspicion."

"Quite so," said Mr. Behrens. "He goes up to London, in the morning rush hour. He gets into a crowded underground train. Your man can't get too close to him. Bessendine's wedged up against another man *who just happens to be carrying a brief case identical with his own—*"

"Do you think that's how it's done?"

"I've no idea," said Mr. Behrens. "But I wager I could invent half a dozen other methods just as simple —and just as impossible to detect."

Mr. Calder said, "When did Mark Bessendine start betraying his country's secrets to the Russians?"

"We can't be certain. But it's been going on for a very long time. Back to the Cold War which merely turned into a Hot War—1947 perhaps."

"Not before that?"

"Perhaps you had forgotten," said Mr. Fortescue, "that until 1945 the Russians were on our side."

"I wondered," said Mr. Calder, "if before that he might have been spying for the Germans. Have you looked at the 'Hessel' file lately?"

Both Mr. Fortescue and Mr. Behrens stared at Mr. Calder, who looked blandly back at them. Mr. Behrens said, "We never found out who 'Hessel' was, did we? He was just a code name to us."

"But the Russians found out," said Mr. Calder. "The first thing they did when they got to Berlin was to grab all Admiral Canaris' records. If they found the Hessel dossier there—if they found out that he had been passing successfully, for more than four years, as an officer in the Royal Marines—"

"Posing?" said Mr. Fortescue sharply.

"It occurred to me as a possibility."

"If Hessel is posing as Bessendine, where's Bessendine?"

"At the bottom of a Pre-Aryan chalk pit, in Whitehorse Wood, above Lamperdown," said Mr. Calder, "with a bullet through his head."

Mr. Fortescue looked at Mr. Behrens who said, "Yes, it's possible. I had thought of that."

"Lieutenant Mark Bessendine," said Mr. Calder slowly, as if he was seeing it all as he spoke, "set off alone one November afternoon with orders to close down and seal up Post Six. He'd have been dressed in battle-dress and carrying his Army pay book and identity papers with him, because in 1940 everyone did that. As he was climbing out of Post Six, he heard, or saw, a strange figure. A civilian, lurking in the woods, where no civilian should have been. He challenged him. And the answer was a bullet—from Hessel's gun. Hessel had landed that day, or the day before, on the South Coast, from a submarine. Most of the spies who were landed that autumn lasted less than a week. Right?"

"They were a poor bunch," said Mr. Fortescue. "Badly equipped, and with the feeblest cover stories. I sometimes wondered if they were people Canaris wanted to get rid of."

"Exactly," said Mr. Calder. "But Hessel was a tougher proposition. He spoke excellent English—his mother was English, and he'd been to an English public school. And here was a God-sent chance to improve his cover and equipment out of all knowledge. Bessendine was

the same size and build. All he had to do was to change clothes, and instead of being a phoney civilian, liable to be questioned by the first constable he met, he was a properly dressed, fully documented Army officer. Provided he kept on the move, he could go anywhere in England. No one would question him. It wasn't the sort of cover that would last forever. But that didn't matter. His pickup was probably fixed for four weeks ahead—in the next no-moon period. So he put on Bessendine's uniform and started out for Gravesend. Not, I need hardly say, with an intention of going back to Headquarters. All he wanted to do was to catch a train to London."

"But the Luftwaffe caught him."

"They did indeed," said Mr. Calder. "They caught him—and they set him free. Free of all possible suspicion. When he came out of that hospital six months later, he had a new face. More. He was a new man. If anyone asked him anything about his past, all he had to say was—'Oh, that was before I got blown up. I don't remember much before that."

"But surely," said Mr. Fortescue, "it wasn't quite as easy as that. His family—" He stopped.

"You've seen it too, haven't you?" said Mr. Calder. "*He had no family.* No one at all. One brother was dead, the other was in a prison camp in Germany. I wonder if it was a pure coincidence that he should later have been shot when trying to escape. Or did Himmler send secret instructions to the camp authorities. Maybe it was just another bit of luck. Like his father being killed in the same raid. His mother's family lived in Ireland—and had disowned her. His father's family—if it existed—was in New Zealand. Mark Bessendine was completely and absolutely alone."

"The first Hessel messages went out to Germany at the end of 1941," said Mr. Fortescue. "How did he send them?"

"No difficulty there," said Mr. Calder. "The German short-wave transmitters were very efficient. You only had to renew the batteries. He'd have buried his in the wood. He only had to dig it up again. He had all the call signals and codes."

Mr. Behrens had listened to this in silence, with a half smile on his face. Now he cleared his throat and said, "If this—um—ingenious theory is true, it does—um—suggest a way of drawing out the gentleman concerned, does it not?"

"I was very interested when you told me about this dene-hole," said Colonel Bessendine to Mr. Behrens. "I had heard about them as a boy, but I've never actually seen one."

"I hope we shan't be too late, said Mr. Behrens. "It'll be dark in an hour. You'd better park here. We'll do the rest of the trip on foot."

"I'm sorry I was late," said Colonel Bessendine. "I had a job I had to finish before I go off tomorrow."

"Off?"

"A short holiday. I'm taking my wife and family to France."

"I envy you," said Mr. Behrens. "Over the stile here and straight up the hill. I hope I can find it from this side. When I came here before, I approached it from the other side. Fork right here, I think."

They moved up, through the silent woods, each occupied with his own, very different, thoughts.

Mr. Behrens said, "I'm pretty sure this was the clearing. Yes—look! You can see the marks of the woodmen's tractors. And this—I think—was the stump."

He stopped and kicked at the foot of the elm bole. The loose covering of turfs on sticks, laid there by Arthur, collapsed, showing the dark entrance.

"Good Lord," said Colonel Bessendine. He was standing, hands in raincoat pockets, his shoulders hunched. "Don't tell me that people used to live in a place like that!"

"It's quite snug inside."

"Inside? You mean you've actually been *inside* it." He shifted his weight so that it rested on his left foot and his right hand came out of his pocket and hung loose.

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Behrens. "I found the body, too."

There was a long silence. That's the advantage of having a false face, thought Mr. Behrens. It's unfair. You can do all your thinking from behind it.

The lips cracked into a smile.

"You're an odd card," said Colonel Bessendine. "Did you bring me all the way here to tell me that?"

"I brought you here," said Mr. Behrens, "so that you could explain one or two things that have been puzzling me." He had seated himself on the thick side of the stump. "For instance, you must have known about this hideout, since you and Sergeant Brewer and Corporal Stubbs built it in 1940. Why didn't you tell me that when I described it to you?"

"I wasn't quite sure if it was the same one," said Colonel Bessendine. "I wanted to make sure."

As he spoke his right hand moved with a smooth, unhurried gesture into the open front of his coat and out again. It was now holding a flat blue-black weapon which Mr. Behrens, who was a connoisseur in such matters, recognized as a zyanid pistol or compressed-air cyanide gun.

"Where did they teach you that draw?" he said. "In the Marienamt?"

For the first time he thought that the Colonel was genuinely surprised. His face still revealed nothing, but there was a note of curiosity in his voice.

"I learned in Spain to carry a gun under my arm and draw it quickly," he said. "There were quite a few occasions on which you had to shoot people before they shot you. Your own side, sometimes. It was rather a confused war, in some ways."

"I imagine so," said Mr. Behrens.

He was sitting like a Buddha in the third attitude of repose, his feet crossed, the palms of his hands pressed flat, one on each knee. "I only mentioned it because some of my colleagues had a theory that you were a German agent, called Hessel."

In the Colonel's eyes a glint of genuine amusement appeared for a moment, like a face at a window, then ducked out of sight again.

"I gather that *you* were not convinced by this theory?"

"As a matter of fact, I wasn't."

"Oh? Why?"

"I remembered what your daughter told me. That when you were a boy you used to crawl up the middle of a hedge running from the railway line to the private cricket ground at the big house. I went along and had a look. You couldn't crawl up the hedge now. It's too overgrown. But there *is* a place at the top—it's hidden by the hedge, and I scratched myself damnably getting into it—where two bars are bent apart. A boy could have got through easily. That was something Hessel *couldn't* have known."

"You're very thorough," said the Colonel. "Is there anything you haven't found out about me?"

"I would be interested to know exactly when you started betraying your country. And why. Did you mean to do it all along, and falling in with Hessel and killing him gave you an opportunity—the wireless and the codes and the call signs—"

"I can clearly see," said the Colonel, "that you have never been blown up. Really blown to pieces, I mean. If you had been you'd know that it's quite impossible to predict what sort of man will come down again. You can be turned inside out, or upside down. You can be born again. Things you didn't know were inside you can be shaken to the top."

"Saul becoming Paul on the road to Damascus."

"You *are* an intelligent man," said the Colonel. "It's a pleasure to talk to you. The analogy had not occurred to me, but it is perfectly apt. My father was a great man for disciplining youth, for regimentation, for the New Order. Because he was my father I rebelled against it. That's natural enough. Because I rebelled against it I fought for the Russians against the Germans in Spain. I saw how those young Nazis behaved. It was simply a rehearsal for them, you know—a rehearsal for the struggle they had dedicated their lives to. A knightly vigil, if you like. I saw them fight, and I saw them die. Any that were captured were usually tortured. I tortured them myself. If you torture a man and fail to break him, it becomes like a love affair. Did you know that?"

"I too have read the works of the Marquis de la Sade," said Mr. Behrens. "Go on."

"When I lay in the hospital, in the darkness, with my eyes bandaged, my hands strapped to my side, coming slowly back to life, I had the strangest feeling. I *was* Hes-

sel. I *was* the man I had left lying in the darkness at the bottom of that pit. I had closed his eyes and folded his hands, and now I was him. His work was my work. Where he had left it off, I would take it up. My father had been right, and Hitler had been right, and I had been wrong. And now I had been shown a way to repair the mistakes and follies of my former life. Does that sound mad to you?"

"Quite mad," said Mr. Behrens. "But I find it easier to believe than the rival theory—that the accident of having a new face enabled you to fool everyone for twenty-five years. You may have had no family, but there were school friends and Army friends and neighbors. But I interrupt you. When you got out of the hospital and decided to carry on Hessel's work, I suppose you used his wireless set and his codes?"

"Until the end of the war, yes. Then I destroyed them. With the Russians I use other methods. I'm afraid I can't discuss them, even with you. They involve too many other people."

In spite of the perils of his position, Mr. Behrens could not suppress a feeling of deep satisfaction. Not many of his plans had worked out so exactly as expected. Colonel Bessendine was not a man given to confidences. A mixture of carefully devised forces was now driving him to talk—the time and the place, the fact that Mr. Behrens had established a certain intellectual supremacy over him, the fact that he must have been unable for so many years to speak freely to anyone, the fact that silence was no longer important, since he had made up his mind to liquidate his audience.

On this last point Mr. Behrens was under no illusions. Colonel Bessendine was on his way out. France was only the first station on a line which would lead to Eastern Germany and Warsaw or Moscow.

"One thing puzzles me," said the Colonel, breaking into Behrens' thoughts. "During all the time we have been talking here—and I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed our conversation—I couldn't help noticing that you have hardly moved. Your hands, for instance, have been lying cupped, one on each knee. When a fly annoyed you just now, instead of raising your hand to brush it off you shook your head quite violently."

Mr. Behrens said, raising his voice a little, "If I were to lift my right hand, a very well trained dog, who has been approaching you quietly from the rear while we were talking, would have jumped for your throat."

The Colonel smiled. "Your imagination does you credit. What happens if you lift your left hand? Does a genie appear from a bottle and carry me off?"

"If I raise my left hand," said Mr. Behrens steadily, "you will be shot dead."

And so saying, he raised it.

The two men and the big dog stared down at the crumpled body. Rasselas sniffed at it once, and turned away. It was carrion, and no longer interesting.

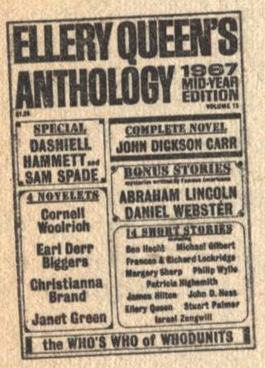
"I'd have liked to try to pull him in alive," said Mr. Behrens. "But with that foul weapon in his hand I didn't dare chance it."

"It will solve a lot of Mr. Fortescue's problems," said Mr. Calder. He was unscrewing the telescopic sight from the rifle which he was carrying.

"We'll put him down beside Hessel. I've brought two crowbars with me. We ought to be able to shift the stump back into its original position. With any luck they'll both lie there undisturbed for a very long time."

Side by side, in the dark earth, thought Mr. Behrens. Until the Day of Judgment, when all hearts are opened and all desires known.

"We'd better hurry, too," said Mr. Calder. "It's getting dark, and I want to get back in time for tea."



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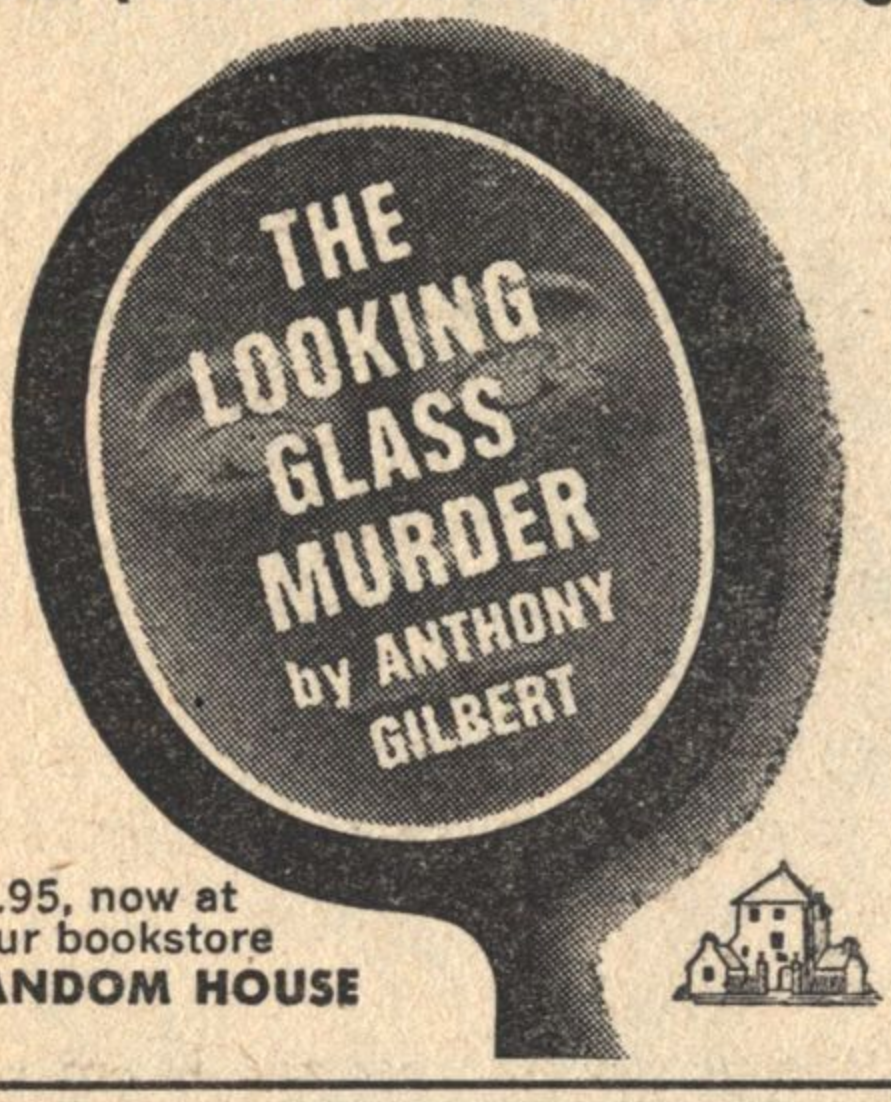

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's UNCLE SILAS (1864), often considered the last of the (in the original sense) Gothic novels, is really, as Elizabeth Bowen has pointed out, the first of the modern novels of psychological suspense. This masterpiece, ranking with the best work of Wilkie Collins, has been out of print for almost two decades, but is now available in its first paperback edition, only slightly abridged (Paperback Library 54-490, 75¢). For modern reprints probably of comparably classic status, see Ross Macdonald's ARCHER IN HOLLYWOOD (Knopf, $6.95), containing THE MOVING TARGET (1949), which was filmed as HARPER; THE WAY SOME PEOPLE DIE (1951); and THE BARBAROUS COAST (1956)—three of the finest private-eye novels since Hammett, and acute studies of our times.

★★★★ **THE FACE OF THE ENEMY, *by Thomas Walsh*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.95)

Beautifully plotted and calculated study in pursuit-suspense, in which New York's Kennedy Airport becomes the dominating character.

★★★★ **SLY AS A SERPENT, *by Kyle Hunt*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

John Creasey's best recent novel—a devious, unpredictable plot; human insight; and a murder trial like no other in fact or fiction.

★★★★ **THE THIRTY-FIRST FLOOR, *by Peter Wahloo, translated by Joan Tate*** (Knopf, $4.95)

Gifted Swedish author uses the detective-story form to create a disturbing near-future world, suggesting Kafka and Dürrenmatt.

★★★ **ONE BLACK SUMMER, *by Barbara Jefferis*** (Morrow, $4.50)

Poison-pen writings and murder in an Australian summer school of the arts, written with penetration, wit and finesse.

★★★ **MURDER IS ABSURD, *by Pat McGerr*** (Crime Club, $3.95)

Murder in a summer theater presenting a new comedy of the absurd; firm story, excellent firsthand theatrical background.

John D. MacDonald dept.: Amateur scholar Len Moffat (9826 Paramount Blvd., Downey, Calif. 90240) is publishing the mimeographed *JDM Bibliophile,* full of interesting research on Mr. MacD. and other aspects of criminous bibliography. A postcard will bring you a sample copy. . . . Travis McGee's latest adventure, ONE FEARFUL YELLOW EYE (Gold Medal d1750, 50¢), is, as usual, a hard-hitting and intricate melodrama with a fine cynical view of American society.

★★★ **GREEN GROW THE TRESSES-O, *by Stanley Hyland*** (Bobbs-Merrill, $3.95)

The Midlands wool industry and the fascinations of bibliography both add special interest to a trickily plotted case for Inspector Sugden.

★★★ **WANTED FOR KILLING, *by John Welcome*** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95)

Perils of French politics in Corsica make for a grand adventure in the Buchan-Household tradition of open-air pursuit.

★★★ **CABLE CAR, *by June Drummond*** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95)

Danger on a Mid-European ski lift, with nice blend of public and private motivations—welcome U.S. debut of South African novelist.

★★★ **A NAMELESS COFFIN, *by Gwendoline Butler*** (Walker, $3.95)

Subtle, complex, ultimately chilling story of a psychotic slasher who advances from handbags to people, starring Inspector John Coffin.

★★★ **THE JAMES JOYCE MURDER, *by Amanda Cross*** (Macmillan, $3.95)

As with Miss Cross's scroll-winning IN THE LAST ANALYSIS (1964), little action, but a noteworthy amount of wit, scholarship and brightness.

★★★ **THE PHANTOM OF THE TEMPLE, *by Robert van Gulik*** (Scribner's, $3.95)

Magistrate Dee Jen-djieh, in 670 A.D., satisfyingly solves the puzzle of the Imperial gold bars, the erotic Buddhists, the Tartar witch, and the corpse with the wrong head.

Fact-crime dept.: N.Y. *Post* reporter Leonard Katz's THE COPPOLINO MURDER TRIAL (Bee-Line 169, 95¢) is poorly written but well researched, and contains large excerpts from the trial transcript, including F. Lee Bailey's superb cross-examination of that most incredible of prosecution witnesses, Marjorie Farber. (And isn't it wonderful that we have almost regained the state of a century ago, when one could automatically expect a prompt book on any interesting murder trial!)

SEVEN DEAD WOMEN:

Who Killed Charlotte Schaber?

by EDWARD D. RADIN

DESPITE THE CLICHÉ THAT A KILLER always leaves a clue pointing to his identity, there are many murders in which a killer leaves absolutely no clue. In such cases a shrewd investigator always looks for an unusual act to supply him with a lead.

There were no clues in the murder of Mrs. Charlotte Schaber, 42, an attractive housewife who lived on Licking Pike near Alexandria, Kentucky.

Shortly after 10 o'clock Thursday morning, January 6, 1949, her body was found on the driveway of her garage, located across the road from her home. She had been shot twice with a shotgun.

The police learned that at 8 o'clock that morning Mrs. Schaber had boarded a bus in front of her house, told the driver she had been unable to start her car, and got off at an inn, about two miles away.

She ordered a cup of coffee and chatted about inconsequential matters with the woman owner until the bus came by again on its round trip, returning home about 9:30.

Her kitchen indicated that the victim had started right in on her housework as soon as she had returned. The refrigerator was being defrosted and a beef stew was simmering on the stove.

The victim's husband had been at work in Cincinnati, about 10 miles away, since 8:30 that morning, but the police were interested in two bits of information supplied by him.

Schaber said his wife recently told him she had taken a part-time job in a Newport restaurant, but would not tell him the exact address. Shortly before that she said somebody had tried to blackmail her, but she had refused to give him any details.

During the next 24 hours a thorough check was made of every establishment selling food or liquor in and near Newport without finding any place where Mrs. Schaber had been employed. When informed of this development, Campbell County Police Chief Jacob Racke said, "I thought so. If Mrs. Schaber really had a part-time job she would have told her husband where. It probably was an excuse to meet some man."

From routemen and others who drove along Licking Pike, investigators learned that two different men callers had been seen at the

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Schaber home. One drove a maroon coupe and the other a cream-colored convertible.

Peter Duckworth, owner of the coupe, was located first. He explained that he was a former neighbor who had sold his farm on Licking Pike when he had gone to work in a steel plant. He continued his friendship with the Schabers and dropped in often for visits. The steel plant was closed for several weeks and he had been doing odd jobs.

On the morning of the murder, Duckworth said, he had stopped off at the Schabers' at 8:30 but no one was in; so he drove to a home in Fort Thomas where he worked all day on a gardening job. Detectives recalled that at 8:30 that morning Mrs. Schaber had been at the inn.

The owner of the house in Fort Thomas, an elderly man confined to a wheel chair, confirmed Duckworth's alibi and said, "Duckworth called me last night and told me he had forgotten a pair of gloves while he was here Thursday."

The owner of the convertible was identified as John Clayton, a commercial artist. He said that his wife, who was in poor health, and Mrs. Schaber had been good friends. "Her visits always cheered up my wife," he said, "and I visited her house only when I picked her up and brought her back after these visits."

He said that on Thursday he had a series of business appointments in Cincinnati that kept him there until after lunch. Detectives learned that he had appeared at each appointment.

A third suspect was questioned when several people reported they once had heard Mrs. Schaber exchanging loud words with William Street, a handyman who lived in a houseboat.

Street, who was hard of hearing, said the overheard loud words were nothing more than a friendly discussion. He claimed he had not left his houseboat the day of the murder.

With nothing further developing, the puzzled detectives talked over the case with Chief Racke.

"There's one unexplained action by Mrs. Schaber that I think tips us off to her killer." he remarked.

How good a detective are you? You have the essential facts Chief Racke had in this actual case from official files. Who killed Charlotte Schaber? . . . You will find the real-life solution on page 102.

newest Father Crumlish story

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ALICE SCANLAN REACH**
TITLE:	***Father Crumlish and His People***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Father Francis Xavier Crumlish
LOCALE:	St. Brigid's parish, Lake City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The warmly human pastor of St. Brigid's—with more compassion than is always good for his peace of mind—once again crosses swords with Satan . . .*

JUST AS FATHER FRANCIS XAVIER Crumlish sank into his worn easy chair and turned to the sports page, a woman's agonized scream, cut short by the sharp report of a revolver, shattered the rectory silence. The pastor's only reaction was to slip off his left shoe to ease the corn on his little toe. He knew very well that the death-dealing sounds were emanating from the second-floor room occupied for the past twenty-two years by St. Brigid's housekeeper, Emma Catt, who at this hour of the day was immersed in her favorite TV serial, "Secret Life."

Thus, moments later, when the rectory telephone pealed, Father Crumlish knew it was foolish to entertain the notion that Emma might respond to the summons. Replacing the offending shoe, the old priest got to his feet and promised himself that today he would put his foot down on Emma, corn and all. At the same time he reluctantly admitted that it was a promise he frequently made but never kept.

Why was it that he had no fear of crossing swords with Satan, but that the very thought of meeting Emma's grim, gray gaze made him hesitate even to don his armor? This exasperating, unanswerable question always gave rise to his Irish temper,

so that by the time he picked up the telephone receiver his usually mild tone of voice was explosive.

"St. Brigid's!"

"Sorry to trouble you, Father."

Father's irritation evaporated as he recognized the voice of Lieutenant Thomas Patrick "Big Tom" Madigan of Lake City's police force. The handsome young man with the crisp, curly hair, with the warm brown eyes which took on a steely glint in the performance of his duty, was the priest's pride and joy. Twenty-five years ago "Big Tom" had been one of the worst hooligans in the parish. Only with God's help had the pastor succeeded in saving him from reform school, transforming him into a model altar boy, and convincing him to pursue a career on "the force."

"What can I do for you, lad?" Father asked, hoping Madigan might ask permission to stop by the rectory this evening for a tot of honest Irish whiskey and a little serious talk about the merits of Willie Mays.

"I thought I could do something for you, Father." The tautness in the policeman's voice dashed Father Crumlish's hopes. "I'm at Marion Spear's house. She's been murdered—"

"God help us!"

"—and it might be the work of one of your boys."

"Who?"

"George Nelson."

Father's heart stumbled. Despite the priest's warnings, nineteen-year-old Nelson had got into a drunken brawl and, admittedly, had stabbed to death a member of his own rowdy gang. Less than a year ago, having served seven years of his ten-year sentence for manslaughter, Nelson had been paroled—thanks to the pastor's tireless efforts; after a long session with his wayward parishioner, Father Crumlish was convinced that Nelson had profited from his experience and now wanted to lead a law-abiding life.

"I'll be right along," Father said heavily. Moments later he cautiously eased his shabby black Chevy away from the curb in front of the rectory and into the late afternoon traffic.

Since Father Crumlish had spent most of his more than forty years in the priesthood at St. Brigid's, there was very little that he didn't know about the people who lived, worked, and died in the depressed and bedraggled section of Lake City where his parish was located. Some of them were his "lambs," some his "strays," some were members of other faiths, and some had no religious affiliations at all. But the pastor of St. Brigid's believed that all of them were "his people." They came to him with their troubles and triumphs—and if they didn't, he sought them out.

Now, driving through the pall of smoke and dust which rose relentlessly from the docks, warehouses,

and steel mills of the parish area, the priest's thoughts were on the murdered woman. He remembered her when she was Marion Welch, a scrawny girl with a hard, wise face and a fierce desire to escape from the dreary tenement which she shared with a shiftless father (long deceased), a restless pleasure-seeking sister, Evelyn, and a brother, Leo, whose only visible means of support was a suspicious deck of cards.

Most people thought that Marion's frantic efforts to better herself were fully realized when she married Jacob Spear, an elderly, wealthy widower twice her age. However, Father Crumlish thought otherwise: he suspected that Marion was far from content, that her new husband's ingrained preoccupation with his own comfort and leisure, and with the stock market, took easy precedence over his wife's social ambitions.

Therefore, Father reasoned, Marion's avid interest in Lake City projects dealing with the rehabilitation of potential and convicted criminals was not wholly unselfish; rather it was a means to bolster her long-battered ego, an instrument to help her achieve a place in the limelight.

When Spear had died a year ago, Father thought Marion might lose interest in the work of the committees on which she served. He was very glad that she had not; otherwise he wouldn't have been able to appeal to her for a job for George Nelson when the young man was granted his parole. Marion had responded to his plea by hiring Nelson as her gardener-handyman.

True, the monthly stipend was meager. But the job carried the compensations of living quarters above the Spears' garage plus three meals a day. Best of all, it gave Nelson a chance to start a new and decent life. And never once in the subsequent months had the pastor heard a word of complaint from either employer or employee.

Father Crumlish recalled all this as he steered his car to a gently curved finger of road which was flanked on one side by an empty stretch of field, and on the other by an unblemished view of the lake. A moment later he turned into Lakecrest Drive, an exclusive section of Lake City where a scattering of aloof, majestic homes dominated the landscape.

As always, this impressive sight saddened the priest. How could it happen, he wondered, that human beings lived virtually side by side and yet were a million miles apart in the *way* they lived? But just then he reached his destination—an imposing white-brick home sheltered by towering elm trees.

A police officer admitted the pastor to a long, handsomely furnished living room where he immediately spotted Lieutenant Madi-

gan's broad shoulders and hurried to his side.

"What happened, Tom?"

"She was stabbed," Big Tom said grimly. "We don't know with what—yet. The maid came back from marketing and found her in there." He indicated a small den off the living room. "George Nelson was the only person here. The brother and sister were both out—"

"Leo and Evelyn Welch?" Father broke in, mildly astonished. "You mean, they're living here?"

Madigan nodded. "Leo checked in a month ago; Evelyn, last week." He glanced at some notes in his hand. "Before I talk to Nelson I want to see the maid, Violet Clark."

Again Father was astonished. Violet Clark had been in and out of jail for shoplifting ever since he could remember. Well, he reflected, when it came to giving a helping hand to lawbreakers, Marion Spear had certainly practiced what she'd preached. "I'll come along with you, Tom," he said.

Madigan hesitated for an instant, caught the determined look in Father's dark blue eyes, and knew it would be useless to mention police regulations. With a resigned sigh he led the way to the kitchen.

Violet Clark was slumped in a chair at a large rectangular table. A plain girl with thick limbs and features, she stared mutely at the policeman and the priest, her face pale with shock. Finally she acceded to Madigan's request and began to speak.

"I served Mrs. Spear her lunch in the den at one o'clock, like always," she said shakily. "She told me to do the marketing when I finished my lunch and to tell the Welches and George Nelson to see her in the den when they finished theirs."

"Weren't the Welches having lunch with her?" Madigan asked.

"Uh, uh. They eat all their meals in the kitchen with me and George."

Now that's an odd thing, Father Crumlish thought. A glance at Big Tom's face told him that the policeman thought so too.

"Any idea why she wanted to see them?"

"To tell them what they were supposed to do this afternoon, I guess." Violet pawed her stringy, mouse-colored hair. "I washed up the dishes and went to Eat-Well, the supermarket."

"What time did you leave here?"

"I'm not sure exactly. Sometime around two. I was a long time at Eat-Well." She pointed to a shopping cart bulging with overloaded brown paper bags. "I had to buy all those groceries."

"Were the Welches and Nelson here when you left?"

"I don't know about the Welches. But I saw George in the den with Mrs. Spear."

"Now tell me what happened when you got back here."

"Well, I wheeled the cart into

the kitchen and then went to the den to tell her I was back and see if she wanted anything." The maid paused and began to sniffle. "She was sitting at her desk, but all slumped over—" She broke off and covered her face with her hands.

Instinctively the pastor started to rise—to go to her side and say a comforting word. But a warning look from the policeman deterred him.

After a few moments the girl resumed. "I remember screaming. And then I looked out the window and saw George trimming the grass around the rosebushes. So I ran out—"

"Out where?" Madigan interrupted.

Violet stared at him, momentarily distracted. "Why, out the door that connects the den with the greenhouse." She took a tissue from her apron pocket and blew her nose. "Then I ran to the greenhouse door —it opens into the garden—and I hollered out to George." Again she paused and shuddered.

Madigan stood up. "Thank you for your help," he said politely. "Please don't remove or disturb anything in the house or on the premises until we've completed our investigation."

"Okay, Lieutenant."

"By the way," Big Tom remarked casually as he turned to leave. "Mrs. Spear was a good employer? She treated you right?"

Violet's expression hardened. "She knew all about my record. Still she gave me room and board, and a little spending money." She gazed down at her thick, work-reddened hands. "I had no gripes."

Something evasive in her manner prompted Madigan to probe further. "Did *she* have any gripes?"

"Well, she bawled me out a lot about my cooking. Said I used too much butter or eggs or milk, that I was always wasting food."

"Would you say she was stingy?"

"Maybe you can get somebody to say that about a dead person, Lieutenant," Violet burst out in a sudden show of spirit. "But it won't be me!"

Father Crumlish followed the policeman out of the kitchen and over to a corner of the living room where Leo Welch sat munching on a dead cigar. The priest greeted him civilly, but could barely conceal his distaste. Leo's appearance and demeanor automatically provoked distaste. Short and slightly built, he reminded Father of a weasel. Now Leo's small furtive eyes, buried in a doughy, lifeless face, evaded Madigan's stern glance as Big Tom began to question him.

"When was the last time you saw Mrs. Spear alive?"

"Right after lunch," Leo replied. "She asked me to take her convertible to Simmons' garage for a grease job. I left here around two o'clock, I guess. While I was waiting for it, I stopped at McCaffery's Saloon for a beer. Then I picked

up the car, drove home, and one of your cops met me at the door. That's all I can tell you."

"Is it?" Madigan inquired coldly. "Why were you living in this house?"

"I had to move out of the joint I was in. So Marion invited me here. I was her guest."

"Is that why you ate all your meals in the kitchen with the hired help?"

Leo's pasty face darkened with anger.

"Because I wasn't good enough for my 'do-gooder' sister, that's why!" he burst out. "You think she was Lady Bountiful? I got news for you. She was the stingiest dame in town." He leaned forward in his chair. "And I'll tell you something else, copper. If you want to figure I bumped her, you're welcome. I didn't. But I'm not crying that somebody did. She asked for it."

Leo sank back, an ugly sneer on his loose mouth. "Maybe now I'll get a slice of that loot she's been tucking away all these years."

"And you could use it too, couldn't you?" Madigan snapped. "I hear you're in real deep trouble this time. Maybe you're just finding out that big-time gamblers play rough when small-time card sharks like you can't pay up."

Leo's cocky attitude diminished as Big Tom pressed on. "Knowing the way you operate, Leo," he said, "I'm willing to bet that you've been trying to con Mrs. Spear into picking up your I.O.U.'s. But all she'd give you was room and board. So maybe you thought of another way to get a slice of that loot you're talking about."

"I've said all I'm going to say," Welch muttered sullenly.

"Oh, no, you haven't. You're going to say a lot more before we're through." Abruptly Madigan turned away.

"Surely now, Tom," the priest said as he hurried after him, "you can't seriously think the fellow's guilty? Why, he came right out and told you that he had good reason to murder the poor woman."

Big Tom snorted. "That's a tired old dodge, Father—to come right out and tell a cop you had motive and hope he won't believe you."

Father considered that, nodding. "And who's next on the list, lad?"

"Evelyn." Madigan led the way toward a sloppily dressed woman seated in another corner of the room. "I want to hear the fairy tale she has to tell."

Many times through the years Father Crumlish had approached Evelyn Welch hoping he could persuade her to abandon her Godless and pleasure-bent ways. Each time he had failed. Now, gazing at her vapid face, he again reproached himself for his failure as he sighed deeply.

Evelyn greeted the pastor and the policeman through a haze of smoke from her cigarette. "Who'd ever do

a thing like that to Marion? As far as I know, she never hurt a fly."

"How did it happen that you were staying here?" Big Tom said abruptly.

She shrugged. "I lost my job a couple of weeks ago. Heard Leo had moved in, so I called Marion and asked her to tide me over."

"You two got along okay?"

"Why, sure." Evelyn seemed surprised by the question. "Why not?"

"I thought this business about eating in the kitchen—" Madigan began.

"Didn't bother me," Evelyn interrupted. "This was her house. Why should I complain *where* I eat—just as long as I eat?"

"When was the last time you saw her?"

"After lunch. In the den. I never thought it would be the last time—" She stopped and put a handkerchief to her eyes.

Madigan waited while she composed herself.

"Marion was always working on some committee, so she didn't have much time to go shopping. She asked me to go to Cozette's, that fancy-priced women's shop, and pick out a half dozen sweaters. She was going to select a couple and return the rest." Once more she dabbed at her eyes.

"What time did you leave here?"

"About two, I think."

"Was anyone here in the house when you left? The maid? The gardener? Your brother?"

"They could have been around somewhere. But I didn't see them. I walked to Cozette's, got the sweaters, and walked home—" she paused, sniffed, and waved a nail-bitten hand "—and into this."

"While you were walking, did you see anyone you know?"

Evelyn shook her head. Then suddenly her eyes widened and she straightened in her chair. "You mean I need an alibi? Cozette's can tell you—"

"I'm sure they can," Big Tom said smoothly. "And will." He turned and nodded to the priest, indicating that he was ready to move on.

George Nelson was stretched out on a sofa when the pastor and the Lieutenant walked into his sparsely furnished room above the garage. Instantly he sprang to his feet, eyes wary. Then, at the sight of Father Crumlish, a look of relief crossed his lined face.

"Gee, Father," he began. "I'm sure glad you're here to—"

Madigan cut him off. "Sit down, George. I've got a few questions."

"Sure, Lieutenant." Respectfully George lowered his slight, stooped frame and sank back on the sofa. Father gazed at him. At least the months of freedom and work in the open air had put some color in his parishioner's face. But despite this, at twenty-six, George Nelson had the appearance and attitude of a despairing old man.

"When's the last time you saw Mrs. Spear alive?" Madigan asked.

"Right after I finished my lunch. She told Violet she wanted to see me in the den."

"Were the Welches still eating when you left the table?"

"No." His fingers worried the coverlet on the couch. "Mrs. Spear wanted to see them too."

"Then they left the table together?"

"Uh, uh," George said with a weary shake of his head. "I got the long straw—" He stopped and bit his lip.

"Long straw?"

"Just a—a gag we had going."

"You'd better tell me about it." The policeman's voice was harsh.

Nelson glanced pleadingly at the priest. "Do I have to, Father? The woman's dead now. I don't want to say anything against her."

"Tell the Lieutenant everything you know, lad," Father replied.

George shifted uneasily. "Well, Mrs. Spear had a lot of crazy ideas. Not crazy, maybe, but strict. She was the boss and she let everybody know it. Every day she ordered us into the den, one at a time, and she'd tell us what she wanted done, or bawl us out for something or—" He attempted a feeble grin. "Sort of like a—a jailer! We had to account for every penny she gave us to buy stuff. Gave me a five-spot once to get gas and when she counted the change I was short a quarter. I must have dropped it somewhere. Boy! You would have thought I'd robbed a bank!"

Father Crumlish sat dumfounded. Is that what I let the poor lad in for? he thought dismally.

"When we'd get the word from Violet that Mrs. Spear wanted to see us," George continued, "we'd draw straws to see who would go first. Today Leo got the short straw, Evelyn was next, and then me."

"In other words," Madigan said evenly, "you were the last one to see her?"

Nelson sat motionless, his head bowed.

"What did Mrs. Spear tell you to do this afternoon?"

"She told me to take the station wagon and deliver some jewelry that she wanted cleaned and repaired to Barnard's, the jeweler." He put his hand into his jacket pocket. "Here's the receipt."

Madigan took the slip and read aloud: "One diamond necklace; one emerald necklace; two emerald earrings—" He stopped and read the rest of the list in silence. Then he gave Nelson a keen glance. "Seems Mrs. Spear trusted you with jewelry worth a lot of money."

"Yeah," George said bitterly. "She was always doing things like that. Tempting me. Almost like she was hoping an ex-con like me would pawn the stuff and light out for South America."

"Are you telling me that Mrs. Spear tried to tempt you to steal?" Madigan asked disbelievingly. "Why?"

George shrugged. "For kicks, I

guess. She bugged Violet and the Welches too. Ask them."

"Let's get back to you. Where did you go after you left the jewelry store?"

"I drove around a little, then stopped to have a beer."

"Where?"

"McCaffery's Saloon."

Madigan started. "If you were there between two thirty and three o'clock you must have run into Leo Welch."

"I didn't know a soul in the joint—not even the bartender."

"Why didn't you check in with Mrs. Spear when you got home? Wouldn't that have been normal?"

"She told me to trim the grass around the rosebushes as soon as I got back from Barnard's. So I just drove the station wagon into the garage, went to the greenhouse to get the grass shears—I keep all the small tools on a workbench in there—and then went out in the garden to work. Next thing I knew, Violet was hollering to me."

"That door between the den and the greenhouse—was it open or closed?"

"Closed. I figured she had somebody from one of her committees in the den with her."

Madigan got to his feet. "Okay, Nelson. We'll check out your story." He motioned to the pastor to follow him out the door. But Father Crumlish had no intention of leaving. Instead he walked over to Nelson.

"If what you've told us is the truth—and I believe it is, "Father said, "then I blame myself, partly, for getting you into all this trouble." He placed a reassuring hand on his parishioner's shoulder. "And I'll do my best, lad, to see that you get out of it."

When Father Crumlish arrived back at the rectory, he was greeted at the door by an irate Emma Catt.

"I had a nice hot dinner ready and waiting for you nearly two hours ago," she snapped. "Now it's in the oven, luke-warm and dried-out."

Father gestured wearily. "A cup of tea will do."

"Tea!" Emma said scornfully. "A man your age needs nourishment. Why, you could keel over any minute."

"If I'm going to meet my Maker," Father said as he removed his Roman collar, "I'd like to be fortified with a cup of tea." He didn't need to glance at his housekeeper to know that she was still in full battle dress and far from surrender.

"Tomorrow's Thursday," she continued. "My regular shopping day. When I try to save a few pennies on the week-end sales. But what's the sense of spending good money for food you don't eat?"

"And make the tea strong, Emma," Father said in a firm tone. Under fire, Emma retreated.

The pastor limped over to his easy chair—in times of stress his arthritis always seemed to act up—

and again he slipped off his left shoe as he had so many hours before. Then he leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

Madigan had taken Violet Clark, George Nelson, Evelyn, and Leo Welch to headquarters for their formal statements. His men were checking out their alibis. And still searching for the weapon that had killed Marion Spear.

But Father's mind was filled with the astonishing reports he'd heard about Marion's character. If they were true, he'd badly misjudged the woman. Worst of all, he'd jeopardized young Nelson's new start in life, placed him in the path of temptation, and possibly paved the way to a life sentence for murder—or worse.

Filled with self-recrimination and anxiety, the priest resolved to call Big Tom at headquarters as soon as he had his tea. But by the time Emma arrived with a steaming cup, Father Crumlish was deep in what he called "a little snooze."

A faint but perceptible murmur of voices roused the priest. It took him a moment or two before he realized that the sounds were from Emma's TV set. Glancing at his watch, he discovered to his dismay that his "little snooze" had lasted well over an hour. Moreover, he'd missed his tea.

Getting to his feet, Father went to the kitchen and put the kettle on; then he sat down at the kitchen table and waited for it to boil. A yellow advertising flyer, the size of a tabloid newspaper, caught his eye. Printed in large red letters, a banner headline announced: EAT-WELL MARKET WEEK-END SPECIALS! Listed below, in heavy black type, was an imposing array of food items and the week-end sale prices.

Father noticed that Emma had checked off a number of the items which she intended to buy. And well acquainted with his Scottish housekeeper's thrifty nature, he reflected gloomily that he'd probably be eating tuna fish sandwiches for lunch for the remainder of his mortal days. The teakettle's shrill whistle brought him to his feet. But as he was about to walk to the stove, his eyes widened.

"Glory be to God!" The pastor's lips formed the words soundlessly. He seated himself once more and, his thoughts whirling, sat brooding for all of five minutes. Then he rose, went to his office, and called police headquarters.

"Tom," he began when Madigan's voice came on the phone.

"I was just going to call you, Father," Madigan broke in. "We're pretty sure we've located the murder weapon—it's in the lab now for tests. Seven-inch-long steel grass shears. Found them jammed into the ground right where Nelson was trimming around the rosebushes. He swears he just stuck 'em there when he heard Violet screaming. And Leo's in the clear—McCaffery's

bartender remembers him. But we showed him a mug shot of Nelson and he says he never saw him before. I'll admit Nelson might have been there and missed Leo by minutes. But I'm not taking any chances. I'm releasing the maid and the Welches and holding Nelson on suspicion of murder."

"Hold off on all that, Tom," the pastor said in an urgent tone, "until I get to headquarters,"

"Father, this is an open-and-shut case."

"Not until I've had a chance to get a look at something in Marion Spear's house."

"Now listen—"

"It would be a mighty handy thing if you arranged to have me admitted," Father said. "Otherwise, I don't mind telling you that you'll look mighty foolish if your own pastor is arrested for breaking and entering!"

With Madigan's protests ringing in his ear, Father Crumlish hung up . . .

Less than half an hour later the priest walked into Big Tom's office, a brown paper bag tucked under his arm.

"What have you got up your sleeve this time?" The policeman's voice was edged with annoyance.

"Emma Catt—and Frank La-Dora."

Madigan stared. "Would you mind telling me what that means?"

The priest told him. And shortly thereafter the Lieutenant picked up the telephone on his desk and pushed one of an imposing panel of buttons.

When Violet Clark walked into the office there was a feverish intensity about her that reminded Father Crumlish of a bird poised for flight—a bird impatiently waiting for the hand that would open the door of its cage.

"Sit down, Violet," Madigan said quietly. He nodded to the priest. "Go ahead, Father."

"Emma Catt, my housekeeper, is a thrifty soul," Father said. "And when I got home tonight I found this on the kitchen table." He held up the yellow advertising flyer with the headline, EAT-WELL MARKET WEEK-END SPECIALS!

Violet gazed at it, wordless.

"I recalled that you intimated, Violet, that Mrs. Spear had something of a thrifty nature too. So it set me to wondering. How did it happen that she sent you to the market today—Wednesday—when the sale doesn't start until tomorrow?"

"I—I don't know," Violet said in an uncertain voice. "She was always doing funny things."

Father's expression was bleak as he gazed at her. "I've just come from the house," he said. "You obeyed Lieutenant Madigan's orders and didn't disturb anything. The shopping cart was still there in the kitchen, still filled with groceries."

The girl looked startled. "I guess with the excitement and all I—I forgot to ask permission to put the stuff away."

"This is one of the bags that was in the cart," Father said, handing her the brown paper bag he'd brought with him. "Would you take a look and tell me if you bought these canned goods today?"

Violet opened the bag and removed several of the cans. "Sure," she said. "I bought them."

"And would you mind reading the prices on the cans?"

Nervously she read aloud the figures stamped in ink on the cans. "Tuna fish, three cans for 83 cents; sliced pineapple, four cans for 89 cents; tomato paste, 28 cents."

Father waited a moment before he spoke. "Frank LaDora, the Eat-Well store manager, is one of my parishioners. I called him at home tonight and he confirmed my suspicion. The prices on those cans are *sale* prices, Violet. If you'd bought them today you would have paid 87 cents for the tuna, 93 cents for the pineapple, and 31 cents for the tomato paste."

He paused as Violet seemed to shrivel.

"I opened the kitchen cupboards and saw all the empty spaces," Father continued. "You filled that shopping cart with groceries you'd bought a week or more ago at Eat-Well sales—to give yourself an alibi, to make the Lieutenant think you were away from the house when the murder took place. But to tell the truth, lass, you were never out of the house at all, were you?"

Violet stared at Father wild-eyed, then put her hands to her face and burst into tears.

Madigan had been sitting there quietly. Now he got to his feet and moved to her side. "You'd better tell me about it," he said. "Why did you kill her? You said she was good to you—"

"Good!" Clenching her fists, the girl jumped to her feet. "She was mean and rotten! Always leaving things lying around on purpose, hoping she'd catch me stealing something so she could send me back to jail." She began to sob again as she sank back down into her chair.

At the sight of her misery, compassion filled the pastor's heart.

"And she finally caught you?" Madigan asked after a while.

"Yesterday," Violet said dully. "I'll bet she had at least six compacts on her dresser. I never stole anything from her before. But they were so pretty—and I only took the smallest one. She was always snooping in my room and she found it. Said I'd have to turn myself in to the police by tonight or she would!"

"When you brought Mrs. Spear her lunch today, did you try to change her mind?"

"Yes. But she laughed at me."

"I'll take a guess at the rest," the policeman said. "The door to the greenhouse was open. You saw the grass shears on Nelson's work-

bench and decided that as soon as you were alone in the house with her you'd use them, then put them back on the bench. That's the way it happened, wasn't it?"

Violet stared at him for a moment, tears flooding her eyes; then she shuddered and pitched forward. Father Crumlish caught her just before her head struck the floor.

"Fainted, Tom!" he said, as he gently eased her to the floor. Poor hapless child, he thought as Madigan went to the desk and picked up the phone. She'd stolen all her miserable life and finally, in desperation, she'd stolen life itself from another human.

But it was Marion Spear, who had selfishly tried to lessen the burden of her own bitterness and frustration by infecting weak-willed unfortunate souls like Violet, George Nelson, even her own sister and brother—it was really Marion Spear who was the real thief, the real murderer.

"May the Lord have mercy on all sinners," the priest murmured.

Now at last he could have his cup of tea, Father Crumlish told himself as he put the kettle on the stove, sat down at the kitchen table, and picked up the sports page.

"Can I fix you a sandwich, Father?" Emma called from the back stairs.

"Thank you, no, Emma. I'm just brewing a cup of tea."

"Well, you'll have to make up tomorrow for the dinner you missed tonight. And I'm planning something special for you, Father. A lovely tuna fish casserole."

The pastor grimaced and gloomily ran a hand through his still-thick snowy hair. But seconds later, concentrating on the newspaper page in his hand, he brightened considerably. That giant of the Giants, Willie Mays, had hit the winning home run with two out in the ninth inning.

A gem of a short-short—the kind of story that will excite discussion among readers, and possibly arguments, as to exactly what the last two words mean . . . Happy controversy!

THE IMPERSONATOR

by HENRY STONE

"YES, SIR," SAID SERGEANT McCloud, looking up from the precinct desk, "what can I do for you?"

It was not everyone who rated a "sir" from Sergeant McCloud on first approach; but the person in front of him, presumably in his mid-fifties or older, was tall, well dressed, bald, with carefully trimmed gray hair around the temples—all in all, reasonably distinguished-looking.

Could be a judge, a commissioner, or just a substantial citizen, thought McCloud. He repeated with a note of respectful interrogation, "Yes, sir?"

The person in front of him, in a tone evidently accustomed to carrying authority but now with an undercurrent of confusion in it, said, "I don't know. I'm not sure if I am in the right place to make this complaint."

"What is it?" said McCloud. "What is the complaint?"

"Somebody is impersonating me."

"Impersonating you?"

"Yes, using my name and going here and there claiming to be me."

"It's not the usual, but I think what you better do is go upstairs and see Detective O'Hara. He's the one that can tell you what to do if anyone here can help. Up that stairway to the first door on the left. I'll give him a buzz and say you're coming."

As McCloud watched the visitor go upstairs, he wondered what a man had to do to have someone else impersonate him. No one, thought McCloud, would ever impersonate me unless he wanted to get into that private dice game.

Upstairs, Detective O'Hara sat making careful notes on a yellow pad.

"You say, Mr. Judson, he's impersonating you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By charging things to me—using my name and address here and there."

"How long has that been going on?"

"A month or so."

"And you've actually seen him?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see him?"

"This afternoon at Rogers Peet, the Forty-first Street store."

"About what time was this?"

"About four thirty. The market

was dull today and so I left a little early. Rogers Peet had advertised a sale and I am particularly fond of that store. I was a Ropeco when I was a kid."

"What's a Ropeco?"

"Rogers Peet Company—the first two letters of each word—a club they had for kids whose parents took them there for clothes. They gave you a pin and they got out a monthly magazine. I don't know why they gave it up. At any rate, this fellow was there today."

"What was he doing?"

"Trying on a suit and looking at it in one of those three-way mirrors. I was right behind him."

"And you say he gave the salesman your name and address?"

"Yes."

"What did he do after that?"

"I don't know. I started to say something to the salesman and when I looked back the fellow was gone."

"What does this fellow look like? How tall?"

"About my height, bald, gray around the temples, and maybe—" Judson looked apologetically at his own stomach "—a little paunchy."

"How old would you say he is?"

"Mid-fifties—close to sixty."

O'Hara scanned his notes carefully and said, "There's one thing I don't have down here, Mr. Judson. How old are you?"

Judson sat back in his chair and said to O'Hara, "I'm eighteen."

a *NEW* detective story by

NEDRA TYRE

A thoroughly satisfying short-short that we predict will become an anthology favorite . . . in which Lieutenant Detective Williams faces his professional "moment of truth" . . .

A CASE OF INSTANT DETECTION

by NEDRA TYRE

LIEUTENANT DETECTIVE WILLIAMS sat in Classroom 109.

He was the first night student to arrive and he welcomed the few minutes of being alone. Earlier in the term he had bolted a hamburger and milk shake on his way from the Police Bureau to the State University evening school, but that had made him late so that he entered during Miss Lowell's opening remarks and had to run the gantlet of the other students' hostility as he edged toward a seat.

He realized that the hostility wasn't so much for him as a person as for him as a policeman. Well, no one liked a cop and in the Introductory Sociology class he had been marked as the whipping boy from the very first session when everyone exchanged his or her name and occupation. In the months that followed, whatever topic was assigned, somehow the discussion period centered on the lawlessness in Lexington and the police's laxity in coping with it.

The background of the group taking the course was varied—a manufacturer, a lawyer, a banker, a dentist, a cateress, a young mother, a nurse, an elderly woman with a broad A and a fortune, and a football player who also ran the classroom films and was a regular daytime student making up a flunked subject. Whatever their occupation or status, they were all cop haters, as far as Williams could judge. They brandished newspapers with crime headlines at him. Mrs. Lawrence, the young mother, asked just as if she blamed him, "What right had I to bring children into this violent, crime-ridden world?"

He tried to placate their hostility, saying, "We do as well as we can at the Bureau."

They answered, "That's not good enough."

He insisted that the crime rate was soaring everywhere; they were concerned only with Lexington's crimes. Miss Lowell, the instructor,

wouldn't let the situation get entirely out of hand; she came mercifully to his defense by steering the remarks to other channels.

Remembering the students' jibes, Williams got up and moved to a seat in the last row, nearest the side wall. All right, he admitted to himself, I'm acting as if I really am to blame for every crime in Lexington by cowering back here and pretending to be engrossed in the textbook so I won't have to exchange talk when the other students enter. No matter, the semester had only two more weeks to go; surely he could take it that much longer.

Mrs. Willoughby, the cateress, sauntered in. Williams looked up and nodded to her and her greeting was pleasant enough. He found refuge again in the textbook. Mrs. Drake, the wealthy one, and Mrs. Cook, the nurse, came in; the others arrived in a straggly procession. Then, as the bell rang, Miss Lowell walked in and arranged her notes on the desk.

So far, so good, Williams thought. No complaints. No snide references to police inefficiency and brutality.

A projector had been set up and a silver screen in front of the blackboard made a flattering background for Miss Lowell's bright red dress. Everyone enjoyed the occasional movies that supplemented the text or lecture.

"Has anybody seen Joe?" Miss Lowell asked. "We need him to run the film."

Joe marched in then as if he were marching across a football field with cheer leaders screaming his name. The women smiled at his confidence and good looks; the men squirmed.

"Tonight," Miss Lowell said, "we're going to see one of the great film documentaries of all time—Flaherty's *Nanook of the North.* This movie is about an Eskimo's struggle for survival. I want you to notice as many characteristics of Eskimo culture as you can. Look very closely and carefully. Later we'll discuss how Eskimo culture compares with some of the others we've studied—say, the Zuni or Aztec. All set, Joe?"

"All set, Miss Lowell. Lights out, please."

Mrs. Drake sat nearest the light switch; her diamond-crowded hand sparkled as she clicked the lights off.

The glow from the projector made a Gothic setting of the plain, unadorned classroom; the students' shadows gathered on the walls in threatening and conspiratorial masses. The machine whirred and stopped; it whirred again and stopped once more.

"Sorry," Joe said. "Something must be wrong." He fiddled with the projector. Mrs. Drake turned the lights back on and they all craned to watch Joe tinker with the projector.

"There's no need to waste any more time," he said. "I can't fix it here. But the basement auditorium is free and the projector down there is okay—at least, it was this morning

when I showed a film on Picasso to the fine arts class."

"Good," Miss Lowell said. "I don't want you to miss Nanook and besides, the film has to go back to the State Library the first thing tomorrow morning."

The students rose. Mrs. Drake dropped her pencil and Williams picked it up. Mrs. Cook's coat fell from around her shoulders and the dentist retrieved it. They began their long trek down the corridors; from the closed doors of the classrooms bits of other lectures leaked out—laborious and timid French conversation, a few lines of poetry by Eliot, a comparison of the gross national products of England and France.

The basement auditorium was large; the university film society had its programs there, and the drama department used it for experimental plays. In its vastness the night session of Introductory Sociology was swallowed up; their few members made a drab, pathetic show; it might have been a funeral for a person with only a handful of dutiful acquaintances.

Unaccustomed to so much space, the students had difficulty in deciding where to sit. Mrs. Drake and Mrs. Cook moved farther back; Williams moved closer to the screen. Others shifted toward the center.

Joe called out, "Everything's fine, Miss Lowell. I'm ready when you are."

"Good. Let's begin at once."

The lights went off. The students turned eager faces toward the screen.

Nanook's struggle to find food for himself and his dependents engrossed them. They watched Nanook's family in the intimacy of their igloo, and then later the sound track rose to a fierce keening as the brutal winds tore across the limitless waste of snow.

When the film ended and the lights went back on, the students blinked in the sudden brightness. Miss Lowell made a shade of her right hand, stood up, and stared out at the group. "Who would like to begin the discussion?" she asked.

"I'll never complain again about anything," Mrs. Cook said. "What a ghastly, desperate battle for life Nanook had, and how Flaherty—"

A scream shattered the auditorium.

They all looked toward Mrs. Lawrence, the young mother. "Oh, my God," she cried out, "that man over there is dead! There's a knife in his back!"

Their eyes followed the direction of her quivering hand to a man slumped across a seat near the right wall.

"He must have been there when we came in," the banker said.

"Now really," Mrs. Drake said. "It wouldn't be possible for an officer in the Lexington Homicide Squad to walk right past a dead man without even noticing the body. Or would it?"

"He wasn't in here before," the

manufacturer said. "The place was empty when we came in. I was the first one to enter and I know."

"He may be only drunk," the cateress said. "Maybe he thought this would be a good place to sleep it off."

Of course no one believed her.

The nurse walked toward the wall and bent over the man. "He's dead. There's no question about that."

Williams stood up. This was his domain. He had to take control. "Stay where you are," he said. His voice had desperation instead of authority in it and they looked at him almost with contempt. "I must telephone the Bureau."

He had felt their hostility from the first session; now their faces were inquisitors' masks of suspicion and anger.

They all moved toward him, encircling him, cutting off his exit.

As if he had been elected spokesman for the group the banker said, "Well, Williams, why do you need help? Why call the Bureau? You've got all the possible clues and all the possible suspects right in front of you. This should be an easy one for a cop."

Williams looked beyond the immediate disdain to the disdain which would color the newscasts and the newspapers. He saw the headlines: *POLICEMAN AT MURDER UNABLE TO FIND KILLER.* He could read the caustic editorials about another unsolved crime in Lexington's shameful roster.

"Go ahead," the manufacturer said. "Show us how the police operate."

There were penalties, Williams wanted to shout, for anyone interfering with an officer trying to carry out his duty, and there was a rigid procedure to follow when a murder had been committed. No spectator or bystander could reasonably expect a policeman to solve a crime on the spot, right then and there. He needed help. Also, regulations forbid him to make crime solution a one-man show.

Williams moved toward the door. But the manufacturer and the dentist were there ahead of him, standing in his way.

They were daring him, challenging him. Williams could not cut through their contempt. He realized that the crime had made them lose all sense of logic.

Or maybe they were right; since crime was his business and murder had been committed in his presence, perhaps he ought to be able to name the murderer.

He had to collect himself. He must ignore their disrespect.

"All right," he said. "All right. I'll try to determine who the murderer is if you'll let me think a moment."

He pushed through the threatening circle and isolated himself in the front of the auditorium. He faced the empty screen that had just pictured Nanook's struggle for existence. He reviewed everything that

had happened since he had entered the classroom at ten minutes before seven.

Then Williams saw that the banker was right. It was an easy one for a cop. He turned toward the students.

"It's not hard to name the murderer," he said. "Perhaps you've all come to the same conclusion." But on looking into their perplexed faces he knew that they hadn't. But their contempt was weakening. He could sense it—they were waiting for him to end their uncertainty.

"Only one person could have committed murder in this auditorium at this time. Only one person could have arranged to meet someone here. *Because only one of us knew we would be here.* It has to be Joe. He said the other projector was broken. He brought us down here. He told the man he murdered to meet him here. He couldn't have killed him in the classroom because it's too small and the only door is at the front—we could have seen the man enter. Here the door is at the back."

"You're crazy, man," Joe said. You're a crazy cop."

The group then turned toward Joe, and Williams felt their hostility turning on the young athlete. There was real authority in Williams now. "I don't know why Joe killed the man. He'll have to be questioned. Now you mustn't interfere any longer. I've got to get on with my job. I need the others in Homicide. A detective isn't supposed to work alone. Miss Lowell, please telephone the Bureau. Tell them we have a murdered man and a suspect. Mr. Jones, you're a lawyer. Explain to Joe what rights he has. Hurry, Miss Lowell."

Next day the murder and its details dominated the front page: Joe Barnes had taken money to throw a game the previous autumn during the football season; instead, he had made the touchdown that won the game. After months of stalling he had promised to return the money that night in the basement auditorium. Instead, he had committed murder while the sociology students watched *Nanook of the North.*

When the class next met, the cateress brought Williams a chocolate layer cake, the young mother showed him the most recent snapshots of her little boys, the manufacturer and dentist shook his hand, Mrs. Drake praised him, the others crowded around to congratulate him on the editorial commending his quick action; and Miss Lowell said he was sure to make an A as his final grade.

For a brief time at least everybody loved the cop.

"The cottage was a temporary refuge only, a place of blessed shelter that he had been fortunate to find; but the prison from which he had escaped was a bare twenty miles away . . ."

THE OTHER MAN

by ROBERT J. TILLEY

WITH HIS BACK TO THE WINDOW he had broken, he stood listening to the faintly dusty silence in the cottage.

Gradually he allowed himself to relax. There was no one here, he was now quite sure. Even if there were a bed-ridden occupant who had chosen to ignore his earlier use of the front-door knocker, his eventual entry would at least have provoked some sort of query by this time.

He looked about him. The room in which he stood was a kitchen, its walls white and carrying no decoration. There were three doors, two of them paneled and the third a lighter affair that obviously led to a pantry. The table and four wooden chairs were plain waxed wood, and a recess beside the pantry door contained a small stove, with a gas bottle leaning in the corner.

He glanced over his shoulder through the window, carefully studying the sunlit clutter of the woods and the tire-rutted dirt road beyond the white fence that enclosed the untended garden behind the cottage; then he moved across the kitchen to the nearer paneled door and opened it.

It led directly into the living room, a surprisingly large room that must at one time have been two smaller ones. A staircase was on his right, and the front door of the cottage was directly in front of him. He crossed the living room to the nearest window and moved the closed curtain fractionally to one side. Glances in both directions reassured him that the path he had left little more than a minute before was still deserted, an empty strip of baked earth that curved gently beside the placid sheen of the river.

He wandered about the room, studying its contents. These walls were also white, but this time they carried simply framed reproductions of paintings. With a start of pleasure he saw that one of them was a Rousseau, a personal favorite—a thing of somber greens and one patch of sullen red, a scene of shadowed violence that had gripped his imagination ever since he had first seen it in a museum.

He looked at the other pictures. There were a Klee and a Shahn, the

Klee only vaguely familiar, but the Shahn one that he remembered clearly—the violinist in his dark and formal suit contrasting sharply with the rural dress and simple instruments of his fellow musicians.

He brushed a hand absently at the dusty front of his overalls and looked thoughtfully at the rest of the room. The furniture was a carefully chosen blending of old and new—modern lounge chairs contrasting pleasantly with the more traditionally styled items. There was a recess on each side of the open fireplace, one with unpainted shelving filled with books, the other containing a cabinet with a portable record player on top of it. He went over to the cabinet, knelt, and slid the doors back. One compartment contained glasses and bottles, the other long-playing records.

He reached for a bottle, uncorked it, and tilted it against his mouth. The whiskey fumes, unfamiliar after so long a time, caught at his throat. He coughed, corked the bottle, placed it on top of the cabinet, then reached inside the second compartment and pulled out the top record.

He read the bold type on the cover with a cautiously wondering look, his pose suddenly one of disbelieving wariness. Placing the record beside the bottle, he reached for others, extracting a few this time. He flipped through them with a kind of numbed fascination, hungrily identifying them. Then he spread them in a neat semicircle around him, muttering names in a barely audible voice.

Stravinsky, Ellington, Bartok, Ravel, Armstrong, Parker, Holst, Basie. He rested a hand that shook slightly on the nearest cover. It was firm to his touch, a tangible link with things he had once had and lost, and their loss was now suddenly more terrible than it had ever been, a knife of memories that dug deep into his mind.

He rose and moved aimlessly about the room, touching things with nervous fingertips. Despite their reassuring solidity he returned to each item several times, now smoothing or gripping it, as though afraid that each was a fragment of a mirage that would fade and vanish unless he repeatedly obtained tactile and irrefutable evidence of its reality.

At last he paused and found himself looking directly at the bookshelves. He stared at them for some time without moving. Something, he knew, had pulled him past them during his circuit of the room, so that in fact he had not touched them once or even glanced closely at them. He absently acknowledged this, and also the inescapable fact that this omission had been occasioned by sheer funk, a fear that what he might find there would in some way disturb the pattern that was gradually resolving around him.

"Thurber," he said aloud. His voice was slightly hoarse. "Carr. Queen. Benchley. Dahl." He paused,

then laughed nervously. "Bradbury."

Kneeling, he ran his eyes slowly across each shelf, savoring familiar titles like a gourmet who had long been denied food that would genuinely excite his palate. They were all there, sandwiched between tantalizingly unread authors and titles, some of whom he knew vaguely by name, others that were totally unfamiliar. He fumbled one of these from the shelf and glanced at the contents page. It was a science-fiction anthology, its stories striking chords of varying resonance in his memory. He replaced it carefully, then let his eyes wander hungrily along the other shelves, nodding frequently as though acknowledging the presence of old friends.

After a time he rose and crossed the room to the stairs, still moving cautiously, but with an undercurrent of elation that now added briskness to his walk. He found a solitary bedroom at the top of the house, a long low-ceilinged room that contained a double bed, modern unmatched chairs, and a dressing table with a smudge of face powder on its top. There was a curtained alcove at the far end, empty except for a few wire clothes hangers. He moved back to the bed and tested it with both hands, smiling at the softly sprung reaction that he felt.

He went downstairs again, through the living room and into the kitchen. One of the paneled doors yielded a toilet. Behind the pantry door he saw a handful of cans and bottles—meat loaf, peas, beans, soup, apricots, and condensed milk. One of the bottles contained instant coffee. He walked slowly back into the living room and slumped in a chair, tilting his head back and closing his eyes.

The picture was now clear. This was a week-end cottage, the property of a man whose tastes matched his own to an almost uncanny degree, even to the style of décor and furnishings. A successful man, who possessed enough money to create a sanctuary where he could temporarily escape his work and responsibilities, lulled by the restful quiet of the surroundings and the books and music of his choice.

A man like himself in many ways —but with one irremovable difference.

He grimaced, and moved restlessly in his chair. It was almost as though his discovery of this place was a piece of sadistically calculated punishment, a cruel and deliberate demonstration of what might have been. But he had blundered, and the last five months, surrounded by bleak gray stone and whitewashed walls, had been the price of his greed and stupidity. Now these things were forever beyond attainment, dreams that would torment him for a while and then inevitably fade and die in the furtive future of running and hiding that confronted him, never knowing when an authoritative hand would seize his shoulder

or a uniformed figure block his path.

He swore, a sudden burst of directionless invective, and opened his eyes. Sunlight was cutting a swath down the wall in front of him, ending dazzlingly on the polished wooden top of a small gate-leg table. In the center of this almost blinding brightness was a framed photograph that he had somehow bypassed during his earlier exploration of the room.

He stared at it without moving, slitting his eyes against the glare, sullenly reluctant despite his burning curiosity to confront what he assumed to be a portrait of his unwitting host. Then reasoning doubt tempered his initial flush of animosity. Would such a person be likely to keep a photograph of himself? He queried his own streak of narcissism, and found the answer to be a firm negative. Pushing himself out of the chair, he crossed the room and looked down at the portrait.

It was a photograph of a woman in a sweater and skirt, with a large kerchief on her head knotted beneath her chin. Fair hair showed in a careless fringe that covered part of her forehead. She was leaning against a stone wall, her feet crossed, and she was laughing. He judged her to be a little younger than his own twenty-seven years. He picked up the frame, walked back to the chair and sank into it, holding the picture in front of him with both hands.

It was a good photograph, the details sharp and clear. The two rings on her left hand showed plainly, the carelessly displayed badges of respectability and ownership. He stared woodenly, his mouth hot and dry. Here, then, was the ultimate seal of triumph, the possession of a beautiful woman; one who could love such a man, sharing his tastes and desires, the partner who slept with him in the bed upstairs. A woman who might, in other times and other circumstances, have been his.

His mind slid dully back to his own amours, a spasmodic series of shallow and unresolved relationships that had all concluded flatly, their collective aftertaste more one of relief than misery. He had always been finicky about women, consciously seeking one with whom he could experience genuine rapport, a true partner whom he could turn to with the knowledge that his emotions were shared; but his idealistic search had been fruitless, inevitably terminating in cul-de-sacs of misunderstanding or boredom.

But this must be such a woman. He stared at the laughing face and trim figure in the photograph, a hard lump of futility lodged tightly in his throat.

He rose again, tiredly, and replaced the frame on the table, then wandered back into the kitchen. Common sense nudged at his apathy, telling him that he must eat—he had had no food for over twenty-four hours—and then decide on his next move. The cottage was a temporary

refuge only, a place of blessed shelter that he had been fortunate to find; but the prison from which he had escaped was a bare twenty miles away and isolated houses such as this would inevitably be included in the ever-widening net that the authorities would have spread by now.

It was only in a city that he could hope for permanent freedom, some large anonymous place where money, which he would have to steal, could buy the means of getting him out of the country. As he saw it, he had no other choice. His attempt to rob his employers had been a solitary affair, and his parents' reaction at the time of his arrest and imprisonment had left him with no illusions that help of any kind could be expected from that quarter. None of his friends possessed enough money, and he wryly conceded that even if they did, not a single one of them could be trusted not to salvage his own conscience and respectability by turning him in.

He took some cans from the pantry and opened them. The bottle of gas, he found, was half full. He lit the stove and made coffee, swallowing the hot and bitter fluid greedily between spooned mouthfuls of beans as he sat at the kitchen table, his mind drifting grayly back over the events that had brought him to this sanctuary.

At first, almost numbed by his sense of guilt, he had not found prison the total nightmare he had expected. But as time dissipated this protective coating he had begun to view his surroundings with a queasy sense of horror, gradually aware of the vast gulf that separated him from the majority of its occupants. There were others like himself, a handful of withdrawn, quiet men whose solitary falls from grace had similarly led to apprehension and punishment; but they formed a small segment of the prison's population. For the most part, the men with whom he worked, ate, and shared sleeping quarters were practiced criminals, the possessors of an inverted code of ethics that he found wholly terrifying.

His escape he genuinely considered to have been a natural consequence of his awareness, an evolutionary step in his existence that had become as necessary as air and water. It had been traditional in procedure and surprisingly easy; a sudden pall of mist had permitted him to simply walk away from the working gang of which he was a member, and then circle around it to head north instead of the to-be-expected eastern route to the towns and cities. An aimless period of skulking flight had followed, an exhausting passage of time that had at last brought him to the woods and eventually to this cottage.

He finished eating, carefully washed the utensils, and replaced them where he had found them. He returned to the living room and once again lay back in the chair,

some of his tension now gone. He closed his eyes, deliberately shutting out the photograph, reluctant to do so but realizing that its distraction would only aggravate his maudlin thoughts.

Drowsily, he tried to marshal his limited knowledge of the neighborhood, the location of roads and towns, but his thoughts persistently returned to his immediate surroundings and the strange pattern of coincidence that had brought him there. He knew he must leave, that to stay meant an inevitable magnification of his personal danger; but the world outside, unfamiliar and inhabited by a menacing multiplicity of people and things, both horrified and repelled him. The walls of the cottage and what they contained, this chair in which he sat, were safe refuges against these terrors. Gradually his head lolled and his breathing deepened. One arm slid down slowly and limply beside the chair . . .

It was dusk when he woke. He shivered involuntarily and blinked at the shadowed room, fuzzily reorienting himself, unwilling to leave the comforting blankness of his sleep, but already experiencing again the strange sense of compatability that he shared with his surroundings. It was very quiet, with only faint insect sounds disturbing the orange-tinted silence outside. He pushed himself to his feet and padded to the kitchen, drank deeply from the cold-water tap, then returned to stand in the center of the living room.

In the dim light the photograph was an enigmatic patch of shadow now barely visible. He stared at it, watching it gradually merge with the deeper shadows until at last it seemed to vanish.

The room was almost dark when he moved forward, his hands outstretched before him. They found the invisible indentations of the frame, and he fumbled it hungrily from the table, staring down at the featureless wedge of blackness between his hands, the gloom somehow assuaging the turmoil of emotions that bit like acid into his body and mind.

Stiffly, and with his head bowed, he groped his way up the stairs, sprawling exhaustedly on the bed, the glass that covered the picture smoothly cold beneath one outstretched palm . . .

The sun was high when he finally rolled onto his back and opened his eyes again. He stared at the low ceiling, listening to the sharp bird calls that occasionally cracked the warm silence of the woods; he was reluctant to move but he knew he must.

He shifted restlessly against the covers. Must? Why *must* he? Where could he find another shelter that in any way compared with his present one, where he would find refuge, food, and a bed? He thought of the books and records downstairs, a sudden hunger for just the sight of them tugging at his mind.

Why not stay for a day or two

more, until the food was gone and he was forced to move on? By then the search would probably have passed him by, moving farther east toward the more heavily populated areas. Surely it was at least possible that the cottage might be overlooked—

He jerked himself up off the bed in one convulsive movement, cursing at the wheedling voice in his mind. This was simply an extension of the dream, a tenuous, futile hope that somehow the existence of the house would be removed from the consciousness of the people searching for him so that they would flow out and around the spot where it stood, carelessly passing it by as they would a rock or a tree.

He paced feverishly about the room, willing himself away from this lassitude that a cold and prickling corner of his mind told him he must cast out now, before it was too late. The cottage, he realized, was in its own way becoming another prison, a padded snare where, unless he moved on, he would cower until the inevitable time of discovery—if not by the police then some passer-by or even the owners.

He stood stock-still, staring at the crumpled covers on the bed. The photograph lay partially covered by an overturned sheet, the glass dull and blank in the shadow it cast.

He moved slowly back to the bed and picked up the picture, staring down at it with suffering eyes, then with a muffled cry hurled it across the room. It struck the wall beside the stairs with a splintering crack and fell to the carpet, shards of glass surrounding the frame.

He went past it and down the stairs, moving quickly, trying by sheer speed of action to shut his mind against the clamor of anger and frustration that boiled inside him. He savagely rifled the pantry, carelessly stuffing cans into the pockets of his overalls, then a can opener and a knife. About to slam the table drawer closed, a final gesture of impotent fury, he suddenly froze.

Through the window he saw movement beyond the white fence. A man was walking there, a creel slung from his shoulder and a canvas-wrapped fishing rod in one hand.

He shrank back into the room, listening to the muffled, measured footsteps that unhurriedly approached, and then, mercifully, went on. There was no break in their rhythm that he could detect, no hesitation that would indicate that the window he had broken had been seen. Moving silently, he went back into the living room and flattened himself beside a window. Through the slit beside the curtain, he saw the man moving away down the path, casually studying the surface of the water.

He relaxed gradually, taking in deep, shuddering breaths, appalled at the narrowness of his escape. If he had wakened one minute earlier and then followed the same pattern of action, by this time—

He smeared a shaking hand across his face, and moved quietly back across the room, feeling suddenly strangely calm. It was as though his attempted departure and its conclusion had resolved his relationship with the cottage, relieving him of any further decision. Simply, his near-encounter with the fisherman meant that the woods were not the safely empty place he had assumed them to be, and he would plainly have to wait until cover of darkness before he could leave without fear of further such meetings.

He emptied his pockets, replacing their contents, then went back into the living room and up the stairs to the bedroom. Kneeling, he picked up the photograph, carefully removing the remains of splintered glass inside the frame and collecting the pieces that littered the carpet. He carried them downstairs, dumped the broken glass in a pail beneath the sink, then took the picture back into the living room and returned it to the table, repositioning it carefully before turning away with an air of tired finality.

A cedarwood box on the mantelpiece that he had failed to examine before yielded a handful of cigarettes. He took one, lit it with a book match that lay beside the box, and drew the smoke deeply and luxuriously into his lungs, ducking his head at the faintly dizzy reaction that this caused. The tobacco was stale, but not too unpleasantly so. He selected a book from the shelves, the science-fiction anthology he had picked out on the previous day, seated himself in one of the lounge chairs, and began to read.

He read unhurriedly for several hours. His absorption in the stories was complete, a period during which he was relaxedly cocooned in a kaleidoscope of other places and times, distant futures where men and other beings played out their destinies in bizarre and ingenious ways. He enjoyed the book enormously, as he had known he would. He finished it and selected another, sprawling back in the chair again, glancing once at the photograph on the table before opening the book and recommencing reading.

When he became hungry, he went out to the kitchen and heated soup, completing the meal with canned meat and fruit. He cleaned the dishes again, lit another cigarette, and returned to the living room. He read for a while, then placed the book on one side and rose to study the record player. It was battery-operated, and a faint hum replied to his pressing of the ON switch. He selected a record from the cabinet, placed it on the turntable, and carefully lowered the arm and needle onto its rim. The impressionistic patterns of Ravel langorously filled the room, a blanket of gentle sound that pricked nostalgically at his mind. He reduced the volume to little above a whisper, then sat down again, his eyes closed and his hands crossed loosely in his lap.

He spent the remainder of the afternoon alternately playing records and reading. Despite the streak of pragmatism that assured him of the true nature of the situation, he was immensely soothed, devouring the imaginative play of word and sound with the voracity of a starving man, as near to being at peace for the first time since—when? He couldn't remember. His surroundings induced a sense of well-being that was unknown to him, a formula for serenity that he had never considered attainable and which, while he still saw it as an ingredient of some calculated trick of fate, he was at last able to accept without bitterness.

The light was beginning to fade when he finally rose, replaced the book, and stood looking at the slowly darkening room for the last time. There was something fitting about this last sight of it, as though its gradually softening contours were deliberately dimming his memory, making his departure less of a wrench than if he had been able to see clearly. Finally he looked at the photograph, once again a blurred and featureless shape, and he nodded to it, briefly expressing regret for what he had done and also for what might have been.

He went out to the kitchen and brewed coffee, staring through the window at the darkening tangle of the woods as he slowly drank, tentatively wondering which would be his safest route once he was in the clear. He washed and replaced the cup and saucer and once again took cans from the pantry, unhurriedly selective now, then opened the table drawer and took out a spoon, a can opener, and lastly a knife.

Faintly, ever so faintly, a car engine sounded outside in the gathering dusk.

He stiffened, his hand clamped on the wooden handle of the knife, an icy coldness abruptly gripping his throat and stomach. The sound was like a sudden violent blow, a thunderous buffet that crashed through the barrier of his tranquillity and savagely thrust him back into a world of shadows, a place where he could only run and hide, dwelling briefly in one patch of darkness before encroaching danger forced him to run and hide again, a compulsory and terrifying game that he must almost certainly lose.

Dry-mouthed and sick, he stood motionless beside the table as the sound grew steadily louder, faded, then coughed gently to a silence directly outside the cottage.

He heard the sound of a door opening, a muffled exchange of conversation, then a metallic slam. Footsteps came quickly toward the front of the cottage.

He moved then, numbly turning to face the open door that led into the living room. A detached part of his mind told him that one rapid movement would take him up onto the table against which he rigidly leaned, another would release the window catch, and a third take him

outside to where he could leap the low fence and be immediately lost in the darkening woods. He knew that it would take only seconds, but still he stood facing the doorway, staring fixedly through the shadowed living room at the dark patch of the front door.

Then above the paralyzing thunder inside him he heard the scrape of an inserted key and the faint click as it was turned.

The door opened.

For several seconds she failed to see him where he stood, statue-like, in the gloom of the kitchen. He saw her near-silhouette against the oblong of twilit trees, and then she was inside, setting down a small suitcase. Straightening, she paused, and in a flush of shame he knew that she had caught sight of the missing glass in the photograph frame.

She stood motionless for a second, then her head darted in rapid, searching movements. She froze again when she finally saw him, her sharp intake of breath a small explosion in the deep silence of the room.

He stepped forward, searching the shocked but still beautiful face with shy hunger, hoping to reassure her by unhurried movement, lifting his hands in a gently placatory way.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm not going to—" He broke off in horror as the forgotten knife rose up before his eyes, its blade a flash of menace in the gloom. Then the woman screamed a name.

"John!" She backed a solitary step, then screamed again. "John, *John!*"

He blundered to a halt, jerking the knife fretfully, shaking his head rapidly from side to side. "No, no, please—"

Outside there was a startled exclamation, the sound of something striking the ground, then a pounding of footsteps. A shadow bulked in the doorway, paused momentarily, then lunged toward him.

In the seconds before the man reached him, despite his terror he was conscious chiefly of a feeling of surprise. While he had never attempted to draw a picture in his mind of his emotional counterpart, he had assumed in a hazy and perhaps vain way that he bore at least a passing physical resemblance to himself. But the figure before him was tall and solidly built, contrasting sharply with his own slenderness, a dark and hugely handsome manifestation beyond his wildest imaginings. Confronted by it, he quailed, feeling himself shrink to an awed and insignificant shadow that crouched spellbound, a rabbit before the magnetically freezing approach of a stoat.

The blow took him on the side of the face and he spun away from it, the knife still tightly in his fist, reeling back across the kitchen and colliding heavily with the table. A vice-like set of fingers gripped his shoulder and heaved him around. He stumbled and somehow broke free,

and they confronted each other. He jerked the knife in front of him, sobbing.

And then he looked across the heavy shoulder, past the darkly handsome face that held its own shadow of fear now, and he saw the woman, her hands squeezing flatly at the sides of her head, framing her agonized eyes and mouth, and in that still and terrible moment he knew that she must not be hurt, and also that to harm the man in front of him would be to mutilate himself in some obliquely bitter way.

He stumbled back, lowering the knife and turning his eyes once again to the figure that loomed in front of him. "No—"

The huge fist struck his face again, a splintering blow that had terror behind it, and he fell, striking the wall before slumping heavily to the floor, his fading mind mercifully blanketing the pain as the knife slid searchingly between his ribs and the final darkness overtook him.

"Get up," the big man said, panting. "Get up, you dirty little toad." Then he saw the slowly spreading blood that came from beneath the motionless figure on the floor. "Oh, God," he said in a suddenly weak voice.

The woman said, "What is it?" She moved shakily into the doorway, her hands still pressed against her face. She looked down and recoiled. "Oh, *no!*" She spun away and leaned shudderingly against the door frame.

The man knelt and gingerly touched the body, fumbling at the wrist of a limply sprawled arm. After a few moments he rose.

"I think he's dead," he said thickly.

The woman moaned wretchedly. The man caressed his knuckle, scowling furiously, then abruptly dropped his hands to his sides. "We've got to get out of here," he said.

Bowed, the woman continued to sob. The man went rapidly to her and gripped her arm. "Betty, for God's *sake!* We must *go!*"

The woman turned to him, her face haggard. "But we can't just leave him here—"

"We have to," the man said urgently. He stared at her uncomprehending face, then shook her again. "What the hell else can we do? Do you mean we have to take him somewhere and dump him? How do we know they won't trace him back here somehow? We have to leave him and let somebody else find him, hope they think there were two of them, or something—" His voice trailed away at the shocked expression on her face.

"You mean let Peter and me find him when we come down here again?" the woman said. "Do you think I shall ever be able to come here again? Oh, God, do you think I could *bear* to come, knowing what we'd find?" She wrenched herself away from him. "You don't realize what you've done," she whisper-

ed. Her voice was barely audible.

"Done?" the man said. His voice rose. "You bloody fool, I saved you from getting knifed, didn't I?" The woman moved away from him into the living room. He followed her, his voice still high and furious. "Well, didn't I?"

She turned toward him, her face an empty, tear-stained mask.

"Peter will never forgive me," she said, "when he finds out about us and my bringing you here." Her voice was low and cold. "Here, of all places."

They stared at one another in a confusion of fear and sudden hatred as the light faded and the shadows slowly filled the room and the still and silent kitchen beyond.

Wilkie Collins' famous short story, "The Biter Bit," first appeared in the United States in "The Atlantic Monthly," issue of April 1858; its first book appearance was in Volume Two of Wilkie Collins' triple-decker, THE QUEEN OF HEARTS *(London, 1859).*

"The Biter Bit" was an important story in the history of the genre. Published more than a century ago, it introduced comedy into the detective story—a development of first magnitude. It also coined an imperishable phrase to describe what has become a classic variation in crime-story plot-and-technique—"the biter bit."

Now we give you a grimly humorous short-short that might be called a contemporary variation of the Wilkie Collins' variation; it might also be called a "maid's-eye view" of the events as seen after the funeral . . . Gin and bitters!

WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW WON'T HURT THEM

by VERA HENRY

"HOW WAS THE FUNERAL?" MR. Leary asked putting down his cutting knife and surveying with distaste the fifteen-dollar-a-square-yard white living-room carpeting which he was listlessly installing.

Estelle, the hefty maid, reached for a key attached to a magnetized plate on the bottom of the teakwood cabinet. She produced a bottle of the most expensive gin.

"The way they rushed it through, you'd have thought the old lady had to catch a train to heaven—or wherever she went," she said, handing him a generous drink. "They didn't waste no time or tears—cheapest kind of casket—no music—and had her cremated next day. If you ask me, it shows a lack of respect."

"Won't you get in trouble drinking up the boss's liquor?" Mr. Leary asked.

"What they don't know won't hurt them," Estelle said, slipping off her scuffed shoes. "Mr. Leary, I've spent my whole life working in other people's houses. I figure I've got a drink coming."

"Don't seem fair at that," Mr. Leary sympathized. "People like you and me work and slave and what've we got to show for it?"

"Say when," said Estelle as she tilted the bottle.

She nodded at the picture on the stereo of a young woman with large white teeth. "The things I could tell you about *that* one. I could write a book."

"Did she get the old lady's money?" Mr. Leary asked, his voice beginning to blur.

Estelle refilled the glasses. "She sure did. She let the old lady live alone in that smelly apartment with all those cats until the week before she died. Then they brought her here and expected me to do all the extra work. That Saturday, the two of them, Margo and Harry—that's the husband—were in the old lady's bedroom all morning fighting and arguing over something called a power of attorney. Poor soul and her so sick and drugged—cancer, you know. Then Margo came waltzing down cool as a cucumber, and first she calls the contractor to order a new swimming pool and *then* she calls the doctor and the undertaker. I didn't even know the old lady was dead. She didn't look no worse than usual when I took up her breakfast tray."

"Some people haven't got any feelings," Mr. Leary said. "Margo's a good-looking woman though."

"You should see her first thing in the morning without her blonde wig and those false eyelashes," Estelle sniffed. "Her figure isn't bad but it isn't enough to keep *him* home."

"Harry's got a girl friend?"

"Mrs. Carol Snyder—the red-headed divorcee in the tri-level on Locust Lane."

Mr. Leary looked interested. "I laid wall-to-wall pink carpeting in her bedroom. Some setup! One of those big round beds and a mirror in the ceiling right over it."

"The traffic that pink rug gets, it won't last long," Estelle prophesied. "If it wasn't for expecting the old lady's money, Margo'd have lost Harry long ago."

"So now he's got the money," said Mr. Leary, getting unsteadily to his feet.

"So now Margo's got it," Estelle corrected.

A tired-looking beagle wandered into the room. Estelle poured gin into an ashtray and the dog lapped it with a thoughtful air.

"Mr. Leary! Take it easy with those scissors," Estelle cried. "Look what you did to the lamp cord! Lucky it wasn't turned on."

"Who's going to see it behind this table?" Mr. Leary hiccupped.

"If you aren't the limit," said Estelle. "How about one for the road?"

"You called about the carpeting, ma'm?" Mr. Leary said a few weeks later as he stood in the same doorway. Then he leaned forward, his blood-veined eyes squinting. "I didn't recognize you at first, Estelle. What happened to your hair?"

"You'd think you'd never seen a wig before," Estelle said in a lofty tone. She led him into the living room. Like the garden and the

swimming pool, the room had a neglected air.

"This burn mark by the door," Estelle said. "Can you fix it?"

Mr. Leary frowned. "There'll be an extra charge."

"Who cares," said Estelle. "Your boss is going to have trouble collecting anyhow."

The liquor cabinet was open and there was a half-empty bottle of gin on the dusty coffee table.

"Cheers," said Mr. Leary accepting the proffered drink. "I've been taking a vacation with my folks in Kentucky. Just heard the news when I came back. How was this funeral?"

"It was real nice," Estelle said dreamily. "You should've seen the crowds and all those police and newspapermen. Margo looked as natural as life. She wore her second best wig, but you couldn't tell the difference in the coffin."

Mr. Leary held his glass up to the light. "How come you're still here with Harry in jail?"

The beagle, that had been curled up in front of the air conditioner, slouched over and whined until Estelle filled the ashtray with gin.

"When the police were all through tearing the place apart they said they supposed I might as well stay on. Someone had to look after old Renoir here and the tropical fish. Besides, Harry didn't want any of those raggedy relatives of his moving in and taking over.

"'Don't you worry about a thing,'" I says to Harry when I went to jail to see him. 'I'll look after things as if they was my own.'"

She fluttered her new eyelashes and jangled an armful of bracelets.

"How did it all happen?" Mr. Leary asked. He patted the dog and moved a little closer to his hostess.

"It was that very day you was here," Estelle said. "Him and her got home late at night. They'd had a fight at some party and were still at it. I heard Margo yell she was going for a swim. He got mad and turned off all the lights and went to bed. When she came out of the pool stark naked, I suppose she didn't want to drip water on the new carpet. So she stood on that metal strip in the doorway and reached around to turn on the table lamp. They say it had a short circuit."

"The lamp," repeated Mr. Leary, shaking his head as if to clear a somewhat befuddled memory. He gave her an uneasy glance. "Wasn't there something about the lamp—"

"If people ask me," Estelle said virtuously, "I always tell the truth. That smarty bald-headed detective asked if the cord was all right when I'd done my cleaning that morning —before you came. He never asked me if I knew what happened to it while you were laying the new carpet. So I told him the gospel truth. Nothing wrong with the cord *then*. I always say, Mr. Leary, there ain't no sense sticking your nose in other people's business. He's the one that's supposed to be a detective."

Mr. Leary relaxed. He helped himself to a cigar from the box on the end table.

"So the police blamed Harry for monkeying with the lamp."

"Why not?" said Estelle. "Especially after they found out about his girl friend and the power of attorney where he had forged the old lady's name."

"And here you are sitting pretty," Mr. Leary said. He gave her plump rear a friendly slap. "How about a swim after I finish?"

"And you a married man, Mr. Leary," Estelle giggled. She sank comfortably back on the white sofa. "Well, like I always said, money isn't everything."

Real-Life Solution to

WHO KILLED CHARLOTTE SCHABER?

by EDWARD D. RADIN

"Not long after having breakfast," Chief Racke continued, "Mrs. Schaber took a bus, went two miles to a restaurant where all she had was a cup of coffee, unimportant conversation, and then came back home. Her actions indicate that she wanted to *avoid seeing somebody*—and we know Duckworth was there around 8:30."

"But he has a solid alibi," an officer pointed out.

"Has he?" the chief asked. "He was working for an old man confined to a wheel chair to whom one day is just like another. Duckworth called this man and told him he had been there Thursday, so the man assumed it was correct. Find out if Duckworth really worked there that day."

Officers soon learned that the man had been misled by Duckworth's phone call, and that the suspect had been there another day. With his alibi broken, Duckworth confessed. He and Mrs. Schaber had been having an affair and she wanted to break it off. When he found she was out at 8:30 he had returned later, and when she ordered him away, he shot her. He was sentenced to prison for 15 years.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 305th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . and you will find it a bitingly accurate parody-pastiche of Ed McBain and his 87th Precinct police procedurals. One might even say that Jon L. McBreen's—pardon, Jon L. Breen's "The Crowded Hours" is a "hard-hitting, realistic, detail-packed investigation" by the 97th Precinct squad. Ed McBain read the parody-pastiche in manuscript and thought it "a fine and funny job."

The author, Jon L. Breen, was nearly 23 when he wrote "The Crowded Hours." He was born in Montgomery, Alabama, but has lived in California most of his life. In July 1966 he finished work at the University of Southern California for his master's degree in library science, and almost immediately joined the library staff of California State College.

Mr. Breen's interest in detective fiction goes nearly as far back as his earliest reading, and he began to collect detective fiction fanatically (Mr. Breen's own word) in 1956—when, he tells us, he bought his first issue of EQMM. In addition to reading and collecting mystery books, his chief enthusiasms are "thoroughbred racing and silent movies."

We'd welcome detective stories on both subjects!

THE CROWDED HOURS

by JON L. BREEN

The city in these pages is real.
The characters are drawn directly from life.
The police procedure is strictly a product of the author's imagination.

The city.

She.

They'll all tell you the city's a female. To some she's a laughing girl, to some a full, ripe woman; to some a lady, to some a dame, and to more than a few a bitch. But she's a female to all of them—just as she is to you, whether you grew up in a swank penthouse in Tewart Towers or a slum tenement in downtown Itolja, whether you graduated from the plush country club of

Elizabethtown High or survived the hard knocks of North Manual Trades —or even if you met her only as a mature man and felt you'd known her always.

A female, this city, a she, whether she's warm and comforting or cool and exhilarating or hot and making you drip sweat or cold and unfriendly and chilling—she can be any of these, and she'll be all of them at some point to every man, even you who love her. At noon her tall spires implore heaven like arms of shimmering brilliance, gazing with haughty magnificence at the clear waters of her harbor. She exudes exuberant life. The curves of her shoreline, the patterns of her streets and freeways can be graceful or provocative or cute—their charm can obscure the midriff bulge of her slums. She's home to more Swiss than the city of Geneva, more Canadians than Toronto and Vancouver combined.

When you love her—if you love her, and how could one not love her? —her small flaws don't repel you but make you love her all the more, this sweetheart of your youth, this mistress of your best years, this comforting friend of your old age.

She's a female, this city, your female.

And you love her.

But you wish she'd change her deodorant and take a bath, because she's dirty and she stinks.

The squadroom was hot, August hot, and Melvin Melvin's bald pate glistened with sweat.

Melvin Melvin was a good cop. He was proud of being a good cop, and he thought he knew why he was a good cop. He was patient. Melvin Melvin thought he was one of the most patient men in the world, certainly one of the most patient cops. One of Melvin's father's ill-advised practical jokes— one of his more permanent jokes—had left Melvin with a name that was bound to draw gags, taunts, and boyhood beatings, like corpses draw insects. Melvin was thankful his name had at least taught him tolerance and patience and left no visible scars except a totally bald head that had been devoid of hair since he was twenty-eight.

Melvin's philosophical bent made him thankful for another small blessing regarding his nomenclature—no one had ever found out his middle name.

It was Melvin.

Melvin Melvin Melvin.

Ridiculous.

"Say, Melvin," said Mascara, from the clerical office.

"What is it?" said Melvin. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Do you want coffee?"

"Sure I want coffee. I got nothing better to do in this lousy precinct but drink your lousy coffee. All I do is sit around all day and guzzle your coffee, because all you do all day in that crumby clerical office of yours is make coffee. And for a guy who makes coffee all day, you sure make the goddamnedest putrid coffee, you know that, Mascara?"

"Sure, Melvin. You want coffee?"

"Yeah, I want coffee. Didn't I say so?"

"I guess so. You know what, Melvin?"

"What?"

"You should try to be more patient."

"More patient? I'm the patientest cop in this whole stinking 97th precinct. Doesn't everybody say so?"

"Yeah, they do, Melvin. I never could figure that out."

"Ah, you're just like my father."

The phone on Melvin's desk rang.

"Ninety-seventh. Melvin."

"This is Ella Anders speaking. My husband Phil has just been murdered. Can you send someone over here right away?"

"Certainly, ma'am. Just take it slow. Now, what's the address, please?"

The Anders address was a plush apartment in Itolja, overlooking the River Vix. The body of Phil Anders had been found on a rubdown table in a makeshift gymnasium opening onto the hallway. There was a knife in his chest.

Curt Bing and Houghton Claws were the two 97th detectives sent to investigate the murder. For the two of them to be paired was a rare occurrence in the 97th squad, for both were given to making the wrong moves, and each usually needed the steadying influence of Steve Berella to function successfully. On this occasion it was hoped they would act as a steadying influence on one another.

Bing, who was the youngest of the squad's detectives and looked even younger than he was, frequently antagonized suspects with his crude, tactless interrogation style. Houghton Claws, a huge, handsome man with streaks of red and black in his blond hair, was of so sporting a nature in dealing with dangerous criminals that he had frequently gotten his fellow detectives almost killed.

"What happened, ma'am?" Claws asked the widow.

"I was giving him a rubdown," said Ella Anders. "I give him a rubdown every day at two thirty. I had gone in the next room to get a towel. I was gone just a few seconds. When I came back, there he was. With that thing in his chest."

"Was he dead when you came back into the room?"

"No, he was still alive, gasping for breath."

"Did he say anything?"

"Yes. He said 'Teddy Bear.' That was all. Then he died, and I called you."

" 'Teddy Bear,' " repeated Claws musingly. "Does that mean anything special to you, Mrs. Anders?"

"No, it doesn't. I don't understand what he meant."

"I see. Did your husband have any enemies?"

"No. No one. Everybody loved him."

"Come on, lady," said Curt Bing. "He's dead. Somebody killed him. He must have had one enemy. Unless you killed him. Did you kill him, Mrs. Anders?"

"How can you say such a thing?" said Ella Anders. "How can he say that?" she asked Claws.

"Let me handle this, will you, Curt?"

"Why did you kill him, Mrs. Anders? Jealousy?" Bing persisted.

"Curt, shut up! Can't I take you any place? Go out and wait in the car."

"Aw, come on, Houghton. That's no fun!"

"Just wait in the car, Curt."

"Aw, you're just like my father," Bing whimpered and ran out.

"I apologize for my partner, ma'am. He's young and has known great tragedy."

"I think I understand," said Ella Anders.

"Isn't there anyone your husband has quarreled with lately?"

"Well, there was one person. A Mr. Bridger was here yesterday, a Mr. Norville Bridger. He was ghost-writing a book for my husband about strength and health, but they couldn't agree about what should be included in the book. Phil was threatening to fire Bridger and get another ghost."

"It sounds like a slim motive for murder, but we'll look into it. Do you know Bridger's address?"

Ella Anders gave the address of a well-known magazine publisher in the skyscrapered business district of Itolja.

"Thank you. One more thing, Mrs. Anders. How did the murderer get into the room?"

"Anyone could have. The door that opens onto the hallway was unlocked. But there is one thing I cannot understand."

"What is that?"

"Why did the murderer take such a chance? I was talking to Phil from the next room all the time I was getting the towel. Why did the murderer

take the chance of killing my husband when he knew there was a witness in the next room who might walk in on him at any moment?"

"That's a good point. We'll keep it in mind."

As the technicians and photographers worked with the body, Houghton Claws said goodbye to Ella Anders, giving her hand a comforting squeeze. He had fallen hopelessly in love with the widow the moment he had entered the makeshift gym, but his innate sense of decency, ingrained in him by his father, who was a minister, made him decide to wait a couple of days after her husband's murder before going to bed with her.

Houghton Claws was that kind of a cop.

Houghton Claws was a gentleman.

"All you Chinese look alike to me," said Melvin Melvin.

Handsome, dark, oriental-looking Steve Berella smiled good-naturedly. "You know I'm Italian, Melvin."

"Well, all you Chinese Italians look alike to me."

"Yeah. We make spaghetti that you're hungry half an hour after." Steve got to his feet. "I'm going home, Melvin, before you find some reason to keep me here."

"If I could go home to what you got to go home to," said Melvin, "I wouldn't be sitting around making ethnic jokes about bald Eskimos."

"Eskimo? I thought you were Jewish, Melvin."

"Sure, my wife makes chicken soup in our igloo. Say, Steve, you heard about this Anders case?"

Berella was nearing the door of the squadroom. "Sure, I heard about it."

"It's a hilariously funny case."

"Funny? How?"

"It's a dying massage case. You never heard of a dying massage?"

"You're a riot, Melvin. See you."

"So long, Steve," said Melvin, patiently.

Norville A. Bridger, as the door of his office proclaimed, appeared to be doing very well as an employee of the biggest magazine chain in Itolja. Well enough that it seemed doubtful he'd kill a man who threatened to fire him from a not too promising ghosting job.

As Houghton Claws was talking to Bridger, he was hoping to cut the interview short and get back to Bridger's secretary, with whom he'd fallen hopelessly in love at first sight and whom he hoped to seduce by nightfall.

"Now, just what is it you do here, Mr. Bridger?"

"I cut novels. Several of our magazines regularly run condensations of new novels before their publication in hardcover form."

"And this is a full-time job, Mr. Bridger?" asked Claws, interested despite his other preoccupation.

"You might be very surprised at what a demanding job it is, Mr. Claws. Cutting books is an art. I had a friend who was in this business and could never get the hang of it. He cut mystery novels for a slick-paper women's magazine. There was one of their regular writers whose books were fairly easy to cut—for a pro, I mean. He usually had about 1500 words worth of plot which he'd beef up to novel length with all kinds of descriptions and character analyses. Well, this friend of mine fell in love with the guy's prose so much that he'd leave in the descriptive passages and cut out half the plot instead. In one story it turned out that the murderer wasn't even a character in the story—my friend had cut him out completely."

"That must have made it confusing to the reader."

"It did."

"What's your friend doing now?"

"He was with *Reader's Digest* briefly but then after the fire—"

"What fire?"

"He ran amok and burned the complete works of Evan Hunter one night. It was the biggest conflagration in the history of Pleasantville, New York."

"I see. Well, this is all very interesting, Mr. Bridger, but I'd like to hear about the quarrel you had with Mr. Anders."

"Oh, it was nothing at all. I just couldn't make his fool book long enough for him. It's my training here, I guess. He had only about fifty pages worth of ideas and I had it all said in twenty. Ghosting books is a dirty business. I much prefer being a cutter."

Steve Berella was bleeding and wondering why.

Not why he was bleeding. He was bleeding because someone had smashed the side of his head in with a bottle. And his belly ached because someone had kicked him there repeatedly.

The feel and taste and smell of blood were easy to explain. So was the aching gut.

But Steve Berella was wondering why he had become a cop. Was it his job to collect the city's human trash? Was it his duty to clean the stains off her shimmering spires? Was it his job to maintain the Chamber of Commerce's façade of respectability? Was it his job to get bottles smashed over his head and get kicked in the gut? Repeatedly? In his own apartment?

Steve Berella thought about it and decided he was glad he was a cop.

But he wished he could stop bleeding.

On the carpet.

He kept bleeding for a while.

Blood is messy.

Curt Bing sat in the squadroom, drinking Mascara's coffee and examining the contents of Phil Anders' billfold. There was no lead to Teddy Bear.

Bing fingered Anders' social security card, his oil company credit card, his Diners Club credit card, his American Express credit card, his five department store credit cards, and his public library card.

(NOTE: *Insert here facsimiles of Anders' social security card, oil company credit card, Diners Club credit card, Amerean Express credit card, five department store credit cards, and public library card.*)

There was no lead.

"There's no lead, Melvin. I don't understand it."

"Be patient, kid, like I am."

"This is getting us nowhere. I feel I should be out questioning somebody."

"*NO!* Not that. You can do better here. Keep mulling over that billfold and something will come to you."

Bing pouted thoughtfully.

Mascara poked his head out of the clerical office. "More coffee, Melvin?"

"Mascara, you want me to tell you what you can do with your lousy coffee?"

"Okay, if you don't want any, say so. Melvin, with everybody else you're so patient. Why can't you be patient with me? Huh?"

"Mascara, you just can't make coffee, that's all." Besides that, Mascara reminded him of his father. "Why don't you go to some friendly neighborhood market and get some friendly little old grocer to tell you what you're doing wrong, huh? That's what my wife did."

"Sure, Melvin. More coffee, Curt?"

"I don't think—hey, wait a minute! I've got it! I just cracked the Anders case!"

Curt Bing reached for the telephone and began dialing the Anders apartment. Melvin cringed.

"Hello, Mrs. Anders? This is Detective Bing of the 97th squad . . . Who is this? Houghton? What the hell are you doing there? . . . What do you mean it's none of my business? . . . Well, put Mrs. Anders on. I won't insult her, Houghton. Honest . . . Oh, all right. Ask her if she's sure all her husband said when he died was 'Teddy Bear.' Were those his exact words? This is very important."

There was a lengthy pause. "Yeah? That's not quite all he said? He said

her name, too? He said Ella? That's just what I was hoping, Houghton. I'll explain later, Houghton. You and Mrs. Anders can get back to whatever it was you were doing. Goodbye."

Bing hung up the phone and leaped out of his chair.

"Do you get it, Melvin? He said, 'Teddy Bear, Ella'—at least, that's what she thought he said. But she thought the Ella part was just her name, so she dropped it from the message when she told us about it. But it *was* part of the message. What he really said was—"

"Teddy Berella?" said Melvin incredulously. "You mean Steve's deaf and dumb wife? *She* did it?"

"Sure. That's why she didn't hear Mrs. Anders talking in the next room. She's deaf and dumb. She didn't know danger was nearby. It all fits, Melvin!"

"But, Curt, she has no connection with the case. She hasn't even come into the thing. And why did she do it, Curt?"

Curt Bing shrugged his youthful shoulders. "I don't know, Melvin. I guess we'll just have to wait until the hardcover edition comes out this fall."

Melvin nodded his bald head, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and gave thanks for his patience.

a *COMPLETE* 87th Precinct *SHORT NOVEL* by ED McBAIN

She was living in a $60-a-month furnished room—a cheap place to live in and to die in. Yet she had two healthy bank accounts, one with deposits totaling almost $60,000 . . . In a sense it was the only clue the men of the 87th Precinct had. The lab report had told them very little, and the coroner had fixed the cause of death as strangulation, which really didn't tell them much—detectives Steve Carella and Cotton Hawes had seen that for themselves . . .

One of Ed McBain's best police procedurals—you'll enjoy every minute of the hard-hitting, realistic, detail-packed investigation by the 87th Precinct squad. (And don't miss Jon L. Breen's parody-pastiche of Ed McBain which appears just ahead of "the real McBain.")

THE EMPTY HOURS

by ED McBAIN

THEY THOUGHT SHE WAS COLORED AT FIRST.

The patrolman who investigated the complaint didn't expect to find a dead woman. This was the first time he'd seen a corpse, and he was somewhat shaken by the ludicrously relaxed grotesqueness of the girl lying on her back on the rug, and his hand trembled a little as he made out his report. But when he came to the blank line calling for an identification of RACE, he unhesitatingly wrote "Negro."

The call had been taken at Headquarters by a patrolman in the central Complaint Bureau. He sat at a desk with a pad of printed forms before him, and he copied down the information, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, rolled the form and slipped it into a metal carrier, and then shot it by pneumatic tube to the radio room. A dispatcher there read the complaint form, shrugged because this seemed like a routine squeal, studied the precinct map on the wall opposite his desk, and then dispatched car eleven of the 87th Precinct to the scene.

The girl was dead.

She may have been a pretty girl, but she was hideous in death, distorted

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by the expanding gases inside her skin case. She was wearing a sweater and skirt, and she was barefoot, and her skirt had pulled back when she fell to the rug. Her head was twisted at a curious angle, the short black hair cradled by the rug, her eyes open and brown in a bloated face.

The patrolman felt a sudden impulse to pull the girl's skirt down over her knees. He knew, suddenly, she would have wanted this. Death had caught her in this indecent posture, robbing her of female instinct. There were things this girl would never do again, so many things, all of which must have seemed enormously important to the girl herself. But the single universal thing was an infinitesimal detail, magnified now by death: she would never again perform the simple feminine and somehow beautiful act of pulling her skirt down over her knees.

The patrolman sighed and finished his report. The image of the dead girl remained in his mind all the way down to the squad car.

It was hot in the squadroom on that night in early August. The men working the graveyard shift had reported for duty at 6:00 P.M., and they would not go home until eight the following morning. They were all detectives and perhaps privileged members of the police force, but there were many policemen—Detective Meyer Meyer among them—who maintained that a uniformed cop's life made a hell of a lot more sense than a detective's.

"Sure, it does," Meyer insisted now, sitting at his desk in his shirt sleeves. "A patrolman's schedule provides regularity and security. It gives a man a home life."

"This squadroom is your home, Meyer," Carella said. "Admit it."

"Sure," Meyer answered, grinning. "I can't wait to come to work each day." He passed a hand over his bald pate. "You know what I like especially about this place? The interior decoration. The décor. It's very restful."

"Oh, you don't like your fellow workers, huh?" Carella said. He slid off the desk and winked at Cotton Hawes, who was standing at one of the filing cabinets. Then he walked toward the water cooler at the other end of the room, just inside the slatted railing that divided squadroom from corridor. He moved with a nonchalant ease that was deceptive. Steve Carella had never been one of those weight-lifting goons, and the image he presented was hardly one of bulging muscular power. But there was a quiet strength about the man and the way he moved, a confidence in the way he casually accepted the capabilities and limitations of his body. He stopped at the water cooler, filled a paper cup, and turned to look at Meyer again.

"No, I like my colleagues," Meyer said. "In fact, Steve, if I had my

choice in all the world of who to work with, I would choose you honorable, decent guys. Sure." Meyer nodded, building steam. "In fact, I'm thinking of having some medals cast, so I can hand them out to you guys. Boy, am I lucky to have this job! I may come to work without pay from now on. I may just refuse my salary, this job is so enriching. I want to thank you guys. You make me recognize the real values in life."

"He makes a nice speech," Hawes said.

"He should run the line-up. It would break the monotony. How come you don't run the line-up, Meyer?"

"Steve, I been offered the job," Meyer said seriously. "I told them I'm needed right here at the Eighty-seventh, the garden spot of all the precincts. Why, they offered me chief of detectives, and when I said no, they offered me commissioner, but I was loyal to the squad."

"Let's give *him* a medal," Hawes said, and the telephone rang.

Meyer lifted the receiver. "Eighty-seventh Squad, Detective Meyer. What? Yeah, just a second." He pulled a pad into place and began writing. "Yeah, I got it. Right. Right. Okay." He hung up. Carella had walked to his desk. "A little colored girl," Meyer said.

"Yeah?"

"In a furnished room on South Eleventh."

"Yeah?"

"Dead," Meyer said.

The city doesn't seem to be itself in the very early hours of the morning.

She is a woman, of course, and time will never change that. She awakes as a woman, tentatively touching the day in a yawning, smiling stretch, her lips free of color, her hair tousled, warm from sleep, her body richer, an innocent girlish quality about her as sunlight stains the eastern sky and covers her with early heat.

She dresses in furnished rooms in crumby rundown slums, and she dresses in Hall Avenue penthouses, and in the countless apartments that crowd the buildings of Isola and Riverhead and Calm's Point, in the private houses that line the streets of Bethtown and Majesta, and she emerges a different woman, sleek and businesslike, attractive but not sexy, a look of utter competence about her, manicured and polished, but with no time for nonsense, there is a long working day ahead of her.

At five o'clock a metamorphosis takes place. She does not change her costume, this city, this woman, she wears the same frock or the same suit, the same high-heeled pumps or the same suburban loafers, but something breaks through that immaculate shell, a mood, a tone, an undercurrent. She is a different woman who sits in the bars and cocktail lounges, who

relaxes on the patios or on the terraces shelving the skyscrapers, a different woman with a somewhat lazily inviting grin, a somewhat tired expression, an impenetrable knowledge on her face and in her eyes: she lifts her glass, she laughs gently, the evening sits expectantly on the skyline, the sky is awash with the purple of day's end.

She turns female in the night.

She drops her femininity and turns female. The polish is gone, the mechanized competence; she becomes a little scatterbrained and a little cuddly; she crosses her legs recklessly and allows her lipstick to be kissed clear off her mouth, and she responds to the male hands on her body, and she turns soft and inviting and miraculously primitive. The night is a female time, and the city is nothing but a woman.

And in the empty hours she sleeps, and she does not seem to be herself.

In the morning she will awake again and touch the silent air in a yawn, spreading her arms, the contented smile on her naked mouth. Her hair will be mussed, we will know her, we have seen her this way often.

But now she sleeps. She sleeps silently, this city. Oh, an eye open in the buildings of the night here and there, winking on, off again, silence. She rests. In sleep we do not recognize her. Her sleep is not like death, for we can hear and sense the murmur of life beneath the warm bedclothes. But she is a strange woman whom we have known intimately, loved passionately, and now she curls into an unresponsive ball beneath the sheet, and our hand is on her rich hip. We can feel life there, but we do not know her.

She is faceless and featureless in the dark. She could be any city, any woman, anywhere. We touch her uncertainly. She has pulled the black nightgown of early morning around her, and we do not know her. She is a stranger, and her eyes are closed . . .

The landlady was frightened by the presence of policemen, even though she had summoned them. The taller one, the one who called himself Detective Hawes, was a redheaded giant with a white streak in his hair, a horror if she'd ever seen one. The landlady stood in the apartment where the girl lay dead on the rug, and she talked to the detectives in whispers, not because she was in the presence of death, but only because it was three o'clock in the morning.

The landlady was wearing a bathrobe over her gown. There was an intimacy to the scene, the same intimacy that hangs alike over an impending fishing trip or a completed tragedy. Three A.M. is a time for slumber, and those who are awake while the city sleeps share a common bond that makes them friendly aliens.

"What's the girl's name?" Carella asked. It was three o'clock in the morning, and he had not shaved since 5 P.M. the day before, but his chin

looked smooth. His eyes slanted slightly downward, combining with his clean-shaven face to give him a curiously oriental appearance. The landlady liked him. He was a nice boy, she thought. In her lexicon the men of the world were either "nice boys" or "louses." She wasn't sure about Cotton Hawes yet, but she imagined he was a parasitic insect.

"Claudia Davis," she answered, directing the answer to Carella whom she liked, and totally ignoring Hawes who had no right to be so big a man with a frightening white streak in his hair.

"Do you know how old she was?" Carella asked.

"Twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I think."

"Had she been living here long?"

"Since June," the landlady said.

"That short a time, huh?"

"And *this* has to happen," the landlady said. "She seemed like such a nice girl. Who do you suppose did it?"

"I don't know," Carella said.

"Or do you think it was suicide? I don't smell no gas, do you?"

"No," Carella said. "Do you know where she lived before this, Mrs. Mauder?"

"No, I don't."

"You didn't ask for references when she took the apartment?"

"It's only a furnished room," Mrs. Mauder said, shrugging. "She paid me a month's rent in advance."

"How much was that, Mrs. Mauder?"

"Sixty dollars. She paid it in cash. I never take checks from strangers."

"But you have no idea whether she's from this city, or out of town, or whatever. Am I right?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Davis," Hawes said, shaking his head. "That'll be a tough name to track down, Steve. Must be a thousand of them in the phone book."

"Why is your hair white?" the landlady asked.

"Huh?"

"That streak."

"Oh." Hawes unconsciously touched his left temple. "I got knifed once," he said, dismissing the question abruptly. "Mrs. Mauder, was the girl living alone?"

"I don't know. I mind my own business."

"Well, surely you would have seen . . ."

"I think she was living alone. I don't pry, and I don't spy. She gave me a month's rent in advance."

Hawes sighed. He could feel the woman's hostility. He decided to leave

the questioning to Carella. "I'll take a look through the drawers and closets," he said, and moved off without waiting for Carella's answer.

"It's awfully hot in here," Carella said.

"The patrolman said we shouldn't touch anything until you got here," Mrs. Mauder said. "That's why I didn't open the windows or nothing."

"That was very thoughtful of you," Carella said, smiling. "But I think we can open the window now, don't you?"

"If you like. It does smell in here. Is—is that her? Smelling?"

"Yes," Carella answered. He pulled open the window. "There. That's a little better."

"Doesn't help much," the landlady said. "The weather's been terrible—just terrible. Body can't sleep at all." She looked down at the dead girl. "She looks just awful, don't she?"

"Yes. Mrs. Mauder, would you know where she worked, or if she had a job?"

"No, I'm sorry."

"Anyone ever come by asking for her? Friends? Relatives?"

"No, I'm sorry. I never saw any."

"Can you tell me anything about her habits? When she left the house in the morning? When she returned at night?"

"I'm sorry. I never noticed."

"Well, what made you think something was wrong in here?"

"The milk. Outside the door. I was out with some friends tonight, you see, and when I came back a man on the third floor called down to say his neighbor was playing the radio very loud and would I tell him to shut up, please. So I went upstairs and asked him to turn down the radio, and then I passed Miss Davis' apartment and saw the milk standing outside the door, and I thought this was kind of funny in such hot weather, but I figured it was *her* milk, you know, and I don't like to pry. So I came down and went to bed, but I couldn't stop thinking about that milk standing outside in the hallway. So I put on a robe and came upstairs and knocked on the door, and she didn't answer. So I called out to her, and she still didn't answer. So I figured something must be wrong. I don't know why. I just figured . . . I don't know. If she was in here, why didn't she answer?"

"How'd you know she was here?"

"I didn't."

"Was the door locked?"

"Yes."

"You tried it?"

"Yes. It was locked."

"I see," Carella said.

"Couple of cars just pulled up downstairs," Hawes said, walking over. "Probably the lab. And Homicide South."

"They know the squeal is ours," Carella said. "Why do they bother?"

"Make it look good," Hawes said. "Homicide's got the title on the door, so they figure they ought to go out and earn their salaries."

"Did you find anything?"

"A brand-new set of luggage in the closet, six pieces. The drawers and closets are full of clothes. Most of them look new. Lots of resort stuff, Steve. Found some brand-new books, too."

"What else?"

"Some mail on the dresser top."

"Anything we can use?"

Hawes shrugged. "A statement from the girl's bank. Bunch of canceled checks. Might help us."

"Maybe," Carella said. "Let's see what the lab comes up with."

The laboratory report came the next day, together with a necropsy report. In combination, the reports were fairly valuable. The first thing the detectives learned was that the girl was a white Caucasian of approximately thirty years of age.

Yes, white.

The news came as something of a surprise to the cops because the girl lying on the rug had certainly looked like a Negress. After all, her skin was black. Not tan, not coffee-colored, not brown, but black—that intensely black coloration found on primitive tribes who spend a good deal of their time in the sun. The conclusion seemed to be a logical one, but death is a great equalizer not without a whimsical humor all its own, and the funniest kind of joke is a sight gag. Death changes white to black, and when that grisly old man comes marching in there's no question of who's going to school with whom. There's no longer any question of pigmentation, friend. That girl on the floor looked black, but she was white, and whatever else she was she was also stone-cold dead, and that's the worst you can do to anybody.

The report explained that the girl's body was in a state of advanced putrefaction, and it went into such esoteric terms as "general distention of the body cavities, tissues, and blood vessels with gas," and "black discoloration of the skin, mucous membranes, and irides caused by hemolysis and action of hydrogen sulfide on the blood pigment," all of which broke down to the simple fact that it was a damn hot week in August and the girl had been lying on a rug which retained heat and speeded the postmortem putrefaction. From what they could tell, and in weather like this it was mostly a guess, the girl had been dead and decomposing for at least

forty-eight hours, which set the time of her demise as August first or thereabouts.

One of the reports went on to say that the clothes she'd been wearing had been purchased in one of the city's larger department stores. All her clothes—those she wore and those found in her apartment—were rather expensive, but someone at the lab thought it necessary to note that all her panties were trimmed with Belgian lace and retailed for $25 a pair. Someone else at the lab mentioned that a thorough examination of her garments and her body had revealed no traces of blood, semen, or oil stains.

The coroner fixed the cause of death as strangulation.

It is amazing how much an apartment can sometimes yield to science. It is equally amazing, and more than a little disappointing, to get nothing from the scene of a murder when you are desperately seeking a clue. The furnished room in which Claudia Davis had been strangled to death was full of juicy surfaces conceivably carrying hundreds of latent fingerprints. The closets and drawers contained piles of clothing that might have carried traces of anything from gunpowder to face powder.

But the lab boys went around lifting their prints and sifting their dust and vacuuming with a Söderman-Heuberger filter, and they went down to the morgue and studied the girl's skin and came up with a total of nothing. Zero. Oh, not quite zero. They got a lot of prints belonging to Claudia Davis, and a lot of dust collected from all over the city and clinging to her shoes and her furniture.

They also found some documents belonging to the dead girl—a birth certificate, a diploma of graduation from a high school in Santa Monica, and an expired library card. And, oh, yes, a key. The key didn't seem to fit any of the locks in the room. They sent all the junk over to the 87th, and Sam Grossman called Carella personally later that day to apologize for the lack of results.

The squadroom was hot and noisy when Carella took the call from the lab. The conversation was a curiously one-sided affair. Carella, who had dumped the contents of the laboratory envelope onto his desk, merely grunted or nodded every now and then. He thanked Grossman at last, hung up, and stared at the window facing the street and Grover Park.

"Get anything?" Meyer asked.

"Yeah. Grossman thinks the killer was wearing gloves."

"That's nice," Meyer said.

"Also, I think I know what this key is for." He lifted it from the desk.

"Yeah? What?"

"Well, did you see these canceled checks?"

"No."

"Take a look," Carella said.

He opened the brown bank envelope addressed to Claudia Davis, spread the canceled checks on his desk top, and then unfolded the yellow bank statement. Meyer studied the display silently.

"Cotton found the envelope in her room." Carella said. "The statement covers the month of July. Those are all the checks she wrote, or at least everything that cleared the bank by the thirty-first."

"Lots of checks here," Meyer said. "Twenty-five, to be exact. What do you think?"

"I know what *I* think," Carella said.

"What's that?"

"I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary. Everything she did last month is right here, Meyer. All the department stores she went to, look, a florist, her hairdresser, a candy shop, even her shoemaker, and look at this. A check made out to a funeral home. Now who died, Meyer, huh? And look here. She was living at Mrs. Mauder's place, but here's a check made out to a swank apartment building on the South Side, in Stewart City. And some of these checks are just made out to names, *people*. This case is crying for some people."

"You want me to get the phone book?"

"No, wait a minute. Look at this bank statement. She opened the account on July fifth with a thousand bucks. All of a sudden, bam, she deposits a thousand bucks in the Seaboard Bank of America."

"What's so odd about that?"

"Nothing, maybe. But Cotton called the other banks in the city, and Claudia Davis has a very healthy account at the Highland Trust on Cromwell Avenue. And I mean *very* healthy."

"How healthy?"

"Close to sixty grand."

"What!"

"You heard me. And the Highland Trust lists no withdrawals for the month of July. So where'd she get the money to put into Seaboard?"

"Was that the only deposit?"

"Take a look."

Meyer picked up the statement.

"The initial deposit was on July fifth," Carella said. "A thousand bucks. She made another thousand-dollar deposit on July twelfth. And another on the nineteenth. And another on the twenty-seventh."

Meyer raised his eyebrows. "Four grand. That's a lot of loot."

"And all deposited in less than a month's time."

"Not to mention the sixty grand in the other bank. Where do you suppose she got it, Steve?"

"I don't know. It just doesn't make sense. She wears underpants trimmed with Belgian lace, but she lives in a crumby room-and-a-half with bath. How the hell do you figure that? Two bank accounts, twenty-five bucks to cover her backside, and all she pays is sixty bucks a month for a flophouse."

"Maybe she's hot, Steve."

"No." Carella shook his head. "I ran a make with C.B.I. She hasn't got a record, and she's not wanted for anything. I haven't heard from the Feds yet, but I imagine it'll be the same story."

"What about that key? You said—"

"Oh, yeah. That's pretty simple, thank God. Look at this."

He reached into the pile of checks and sorted out a yellow slip, larger than the checks. He handed it to Meyer. The slip read:

THE SEABOARD BANK OF AMERICA
Isola Branch P 1698

July 5

We are charging your account as per items below. Please see that the amount is deducted on your books so that our accounts may agree.

FOR Safe deposit rental #375		5	00
U.S. Tax			50
AMOUNT OF CHARGE		5	50

CHARGE Claudia Davis
1263 South Eleventh
Isola

ENTERED BY BPL

"She rented a safe-deposit box the same day she opened the new checking account, huh?" Meyer said.

"Right."

"What's in it?"

"That's a good question."

"Look, do you want to save some time, Steve?"

"Sure."

"Let's get the court order *before* we go to the bank."

The manager of the Seaboard Bank of America was a bald-headed man in his early fifties. Working on the theory that similar physical types are *simpático*, Carella allowed Meyer to do most of the questioning.

It was not easy to elicit answers from Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, because he was by nature a reticent man. But Detective Meyer Meyer was the most patient man in the city, if not the entire world. His patience was an acquired trait, rather than an inherited one. Oh, he had inherited a few things from his father, a jovial man named Max Meyer, but patience was not one of them. If anything, Max Meyer had been a very impatient if not downright short-tempered sort of fellow. When his wife, for example, came to him with the news that she was expecting a baby, Max nearly hit the ceiling. He enjoyed little jokes immensely, was perhaps the biggest practical joker in all Riverhead, but this particular prank of nature failed to amuse him. He had thought his wife was long past the age when bearing children was even a remote possibility. He never thought of himself as approaching dotage, but he was after all getting on in years, and a change-of-life baby was hardly what the doctor had ordered. He allowed the impending birth to simmer inside him, planning his revenge all the while, plotting the practical joke to end all practical jokes.

When the baby was born, he named it Meyer, a delightful handle which when coupled with the family name provided the infant with a double-barreled monicker: Meyer Meyer.

Now, that's pretty funny. Admit it. You can split your sides laughing over that one, unless you happen to be a pretty sensitive kid who also happens to be an Orthodox Jew, and who happens to live in a predominately Gentile neighborhood. The kids in the neighborhood thought Meyer Meyer had been invented solely for their own pleasure. If they needed further provocation for beating him up, and they didn't need any, his name provided excellent motivational fuel. "Meyer Meyer, Jew on fire!" they would shout, and then they would chase him down the street and beat hell out of him.

Meyer learned patience. It is not very often that one kid, or even one grown man, can successfully defend himself against a gang. But sometimes you can talk yourself out of a beating. Sometimes, if you're patient, if you just wait long enough, you can catch one of them alone and stand up to him face to face, man to man, and know the exultation of a fair fight without the frustration of overwhelming odds.

Listen, Max Meyer's joke was a harmless one. You can't deny an old man his pleasure. But Mr. Anderson, the manager of the bank, was fifty-four years old and totally bald. Meyer Meyer, the detective second grade who sat opposite him and asked questions, was also totally bald. Maybe

a lifetime of devoted patience doesn't leave any scars. Maybe not. But Meyer Meyer was only thirty-seven years old.

Patiently he said, "Didn't you find these large deposits rather odd, Mr. Anderson?"

"No," Anderson said. "A thousand dollars is not a lot of money."

"Mr. Anderson," Meyer said patiently, "you are aware, of course, that banks in this city are required to report to the police any unusually large sums of money deposited at one time. You are aware of that, are you not?"

"Yes, I am."

"Miss Davis deposited four thousand dollars in three weeks' time. Didn't that seem unusual to you?"

"No. The deposits were spaced. A thousand dollars is not a lot of money, and not an unsually large deposit."

"To me," Meyer said, "a thousand dollars is a lot of money. You can buy a lot of beer with a thousand dollars."

"I don't drink beer," Anderson said flatly.

"Neither do I," Meyer answered.

"Besides, we *do* call the police whenever we get a very large deposit, unless the depositor is one of our regular customers. I did not feel these deposits warranted such a call."

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson," Meyer said. "We have a court order here. We'd like to open the box Miss Davis rented."

"May I see the order, please?" Anderson said. Meyer showed it to him. Anderson sighed and said, "Very well. Do you have Miss Davis' key?"

Carella reached into his pocket. "Would this be it?" he said. He put a key on the desk. It was the key that had come to him from the lab together with the documents they'd found in the apartment.

"Yes, that's it," Mr. Anderson said. "There are two different keys to every box, you see. The bank keeps one, and the renter keeps the other. The box cannot be opened without both keys. Will you come with me, please?"

He collected the bank key to safety-deposit box number 375 and led the detectives to the rear of the bank. The room seemed to be lined with shining metal. The boxes, row upon row, reminded Carella of the morgue and the refrigerated shelves that slid in and out of the wall on squeaking rollers.

Anderson pushed the bank key into a slot and turned it, and then he put Claudia Davis' key into a second slot and turned that. He pulled the long, thin box out of the wall and handed it to Meyer who carried it to the counter on the opposite wall and lifted the catch.

"Okay?" he said to Carella.

"Go ahead."

Meyer raised the lid of the box.

There was $16,000 in the box. There was also a slip of notepaper. The $16,000 was neatly divided into four stacks of bills. Three of the stacks held $5,000 each. The fourth stack held only $1,000. Carella picked up the slip of paper. Someone, presumably Claudia Davis, had made some annotations on it in pencil.

7/5 20,000
7/5 -1,000
19,000
7/12 -1,000
18,000
7/19 -1,000
17,000
7/27 -1,000
16,000

"Make any sense to you, Mr. Anderson?"

"No. I'm afraid not."

"She came into this bank on July fifth with twenty thousand dollars in cash, Mr. Anderson. She put a thousand of that into a checking account and the remainder into this box. The dates on this slip of paper show exactly when she took cash from the box and transferred it to the checking account. She knew the rules, Mr. Anderson. She knew that twenty grand deposited in one lump would bring a call to the police. This way was a lot safer."

"We'd better get a list of these serial numbers," Meyer said.

"Would you have one of your people do that for us, Mr. Anderson?"

Anderson seemed ready to protest. Instead, he looked at Carella, sighed, and said, "Of course."

The serial numbers didn't help them at all. They compared them against their own lists, and the out-of-town lists, and the F.B.I. lists, but none of those bills was hot.

Only August was.

Stewart City hangs in the hair of Isola like a jeweled tiara. Not really a city, not even a town, merely a collection of swank apartment buildings overlooking the River Dix, the community had been named after British

royalty and remained one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in town. If you could boast of a Stewart City address, you could also boast of a high income, a country place on Sands Spit, and a Mercedes Benz in the garage under the apartment building. You could give your address with a measure of snobbery and pride—you were, after all, one of the élite.

The dead girl named Claudia Davis had made out a check to Management Enterprises, Inc., at 13 Stewart Place South, to the tune of $750. The check had been dated July ninth, four days after she'd opened the Seaboard account.

A cool breeze was blowing in off the river as Carella and Hawes pulled up. Late-afternoon sunlight dappled the polluted water of the Dix. The bridges connecting Calm's Point with Isola hung against a sky awaiting the assault of dusk.

"Want to pull down the sun visor?" Carella said.

Hawes reached up and turned down the visor. Clipped to the visor so that it showed through the windshield of the car was a hand-lettered card that read POLICEMAN ON DUTY CALL—87TH PRECINCT. The car, a 1956 Chevrolet, was Carella's own.

"I've got to make a sign for my car," Hawes said. "Some wise guy tagged it last week."

"What did you do?"

"I went to court and pleaded not guilty. On my day off."

"Did you get out of it?"

"Sure. I was answering a squeal. It's bad enough I had to use my own car, but for Pete's sake, to get a ticket!"

"I prefer my own car," Carella said. "Those three cars belonging to the squad are ready for the junk heap."

"*Two*," Hawes corrected. "One of them's been in the police garage for a month now."

"Meyer went down to see about it the other day."

"What'd they say? Was it ready?"

"No, the mechanic told him there were four patrol cars ahead of the sedan, and they took precedence. Now how about that?"

"Sure, it figures. I've still got a chit in for the gas I used, you know that?"

"Forget it. I've never got back a cent I laid out for gas."

"What'd Meyer do about the car?"

"He slipped the mechanic five bucks. Maybe that'll speed him up."

"You know what the city ought to do?" Hawes said. "They ought to buy some of those used taxicabs. Pick them up for two or three hundred bucks, paint them over, and give them out to the squads. Some of them are still in pretty good condition."

"Well, it's an idea," Carella said dubiously, and they entered the building. They found Mrs. Miller, the manager, in an office at the rear of the ornate entrance lobby. She was a woman in her early forties with a well-preserved figure and a very husky voice. She wore her hair piled on the top of her head, a pencil stuck rakishly into the reddish-brown heap. She looked at the photostated check and said, "Oh, yes, of course."

"You knew Miss Davis?"

"Yes, she lived here for a long time."

"How long?"

"Five years."

"When did she move out?"

"At the end of June," Mrs. Miller crossed her splendid legs and smiled graciously. The legs were remarkable for a woman of her age, and the smile was almost radiant. She moved with an expert femininity, a calculated conscious fluidity of flesh that suggested availability and yet was totally respectable. She seemed to have devoted a lifetime to learning the ways and wiles of the female and now practiced them with facility and charm. She was pleasant to be with, this woman, pleasant to watch and to hear, and to think of touching. Carella and Hawes, charmed to their shoes, found themselves relaxing in her presence.

"This check," Carella said, tapping the photostat. "What was it for?"

"June rent. I received it on the tenth of July. Claudia always paid her rent by the tenth of the month. She was a very good tenant."

"The apartment cost seven hundred and fifty dollars a month?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that high for an apartment?"

"Not in Stewart City," Mrs. Miller said gently. "And this was a river-front apartment."

"I see. I take it Miss Davis had a good job."

"No, no, she doesn't have a job at all."

"Then how could she afford—?"

"Well, she's rather well off, you know."

"Where does she get the money, Mrs. Miller?"

"Well . . ." Mrs. Miller shrugged. "I really think you should ask *her*, don't you? I mean, if this is something concerning Claudia, shouldn't you . . .?"

"Mrs. Miller," Carella said, "Claudia Davis is dead."

"What?"

"She's . . ."

"What? No. No." She shook her head. "Claudia? But the check . . . I . . . the check came only last month." She shook her head again. "No."

"She's dead, Mrs. Miller," Carella said gently. "She was strangled."

The charm faltered for just an instant. Revulsion knifed the eyes of Mrs. Miller, the eyelids flickered, it seemed for an instant that the pupils would turn shining and wet, that the carefully lipsticked mouth would crumble. And then something inside took over, something that demanded control, something that reminded her that a charming woman does not weep and cause her fashionable eye make-up to run.

"I'm sorry," she said, almost in a whisper. "I am really, really sorry. She was a nice person."

"Can you tell us what you know about her, Mrs. Miller?"

"Yes. Yes, of course." She shook her head again, unwilling to accept the idea. "That's terrible. That's terrible. Why, she was only a baby."

"We figured her for thirty, Mrs. Miller. Are we wrong?"

"She seemed younger, but perhaps that was because . . . well, she was a rather shy person. Even when she first came here, there was an air of—well, lostness about her. Of course, that was right after her parents died, so—"

"Where did she come from, Mrs. Miller?"

"California. Santa Monica."

Carella nodded. "You were starting to tell us—you said she was rather well off. Could you . . . ?"

"Well, the stock, you know."

"What stock?"

"Her parents had set up a securities trust account for her. When they died, Claudia began receiving the income from the stock. She was an only child, you know."

"And she lived on stock dividends alone?"

"They amounted to quite a bit. Which she saved, I might add. She was a very systematic person, not at all frivolous. When she received a dividend check, she would endorse it and take it straight to the bank. Claudia was a very sensible girl."

"Which bank, Mrs. Miller?"

"The Highland Trust. Right down the street. On Cromwell Avenue."

"I see," Carella said. "Was she dating many men? Would you know?"

"I don't think so. She kept pretty much to herself. Even after Josie came."

Carella leaned forward. "Josie? Who's Josie?"

"Josie Thompson. Josephine, actually. Her cousin."

"And where did *she* come from?"

"California. They both came from California."

"And how can we get in touch with this Josie Thompson?"

"Well, she . . . Don't you know? Haven't you . . . ?"

"What, Mrs. Miller?"

"Why, Josie is dead. Josie passed on in June. That's why Claudia moved, I suppose. I suppose she couldn't bear the thought of living in that apartment without Josie. It *is* a little frightening, isn't it?"

"Yes," Carella said.

DETECTIVE DIVISION SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT	SQUAD	PRECINCT	PRECINCT REPORT	DETECTIVE DIVISION REPORT NUMBER
pdcn 360 rev 25m	87	87	32-101	DD 60 R-42

NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON REPORTING					DATE ORIGNAL REPORT
Miller	Irene (Mrs. John)		13	Stewart Place S.	8-4-60
SURNAME	GIVEN NAME	INITIALS	NUMBER	STREET	

DETAILS

Summary of interview with Irene (Mrs. John) Miller at office of Management Enterprises, Inc., address above, in re homicide Claudia Davis, Mrs. Miller states:

Claudia Davis came to this city in June of 1955, took $750-a-month apartment above address, lived there alone. Rarely seen in company of friends, male or female. Young recluse type living on substantial income of inherited securities. Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carter Davis, killed on San Diego Freeway in head-on collision with station wagon, April 14, 1955. L.A.P.D. confirms traffic accident, driver of other vehicle convicted for negligent operation.

Mrs. Miller describes girl as medium height and weight, close-cropped brunette hair, brown eyes, no scars or birthmarks she can remember, tallies with what we have on corpse. Further says Claudia Davis was quiet, unobtrusive tenant, paid rent and all service bills punctually, was gentle, sweet, plain, childlike, shy, meticulous in money matters, well liked but unapproachable.

In April or May of 1959, Josie Thompson, cousin of deceased, arrived from Brentwood, California. (Routine check with Criminal Bureau Identification negative, no record. Checking now with L.A.P.D., and F.B.I.) Described as slightly older than Claudia, rather different in looks and personality.

"They were like black and white," Mrs. Miller says, "but they hit it off exceptionally well." Josie moved into the apartment with cousin. Words used to describe relationship between two were "like the closest sisters," and "really in tune," and "the best of friends," etc.

Girls did not date much, were constantly in each other's company, Josie seeming to pick up recluse habits from Claudia. Went on frequent trips together. Spent summer of '59 on Tortoise Island in the bay, returned Labor Day. Went away again at Christmas time to ski Sun Valley, and again in March this year to Kingston, Jamaica, for three weeks, returning at beginning of April. Source of income was fairly standard securities-income account. Claudia did not own the stock, but income on it was hers for as long as she lived. Trust specified that upon her death the stock and the income be turned over to U.C.L.A. (father's alma mater). In any case, Claudia was assured of a very, very substantial lifetime income (see Highland Trust bank account) and was apparently supporting Josie as well, since Mrs. Miller claims neither girl worked. Brought up question of possible lesbianism, but Mrs. Miller, who is knowledgeable and hip, says no, neither girl was a dike.

On June 3, Josie and Claudia left for another weekend trip. Doorman reports having helped them pack valises into trunk of Claudia's car, 1960 Cadillac convertible. Claudia did the driving. Girls did not return on Monday morning as they had indicated they would. Claudia called on Wednesday, crying on telephone. Told Mrs. Miller that Josie had had a terrible accident and was dead. Mrs. Miller remembers asking Claudia if she could help in any way. Claudia said, quote, No, everything's been taken care of already, unquote.

On June 17, Mrs. Miller received a letter from Claudia (letter attached--handwriting compares positive with checks Claudia signed) stating she could not possibly return to apartment, not after what had happened to her cousin. She reminded Mrs. Miller lease expired on July 4, told her she would send check for June rent before July 10. Said moving company would pack and pick up her

belongings, delivering all valuables and documents to her, and storing rest. (See Claudia Davis' check number 010, 7/14, made payable to Allora Brothers, Inc., "in payment for packing, moving, and storage.")

Claudia Davis never returned to the apartment. Mrs. Miller had not seen her and knew nothing of her whereabouts until we informed her of the homicide.

DATE OF THIS REPORT

August 6

RANK	SURNAME	INITIALS	SHIELD NUMBER	COMMANDING OFFICER
Det 2/gr	Carella	S.L.	714-56-32	Det/Lt. Peter Byrnes

The drive upstate to Triangle Lake was a particularly scenic one, and since it was August, and since Sunday was supposed to be Carella's day off, he thought he might just as well combine a little business with pleasure. So he put the top of the car down, and he packed Teddy into the front seat together with a picnic lunch and a gallon Thermos of iced coffee, and he forgot all about Claudia Davis on the drive up through the mountains. Carella found it easy to forget about almost anything when he was with his wife.

Teddy as far as he was concerned—and his astute judgment had been backed up by many a street-corner whistle—was only the most beautiful woman in the world. He could never understand how he, a hairy, corny, ugly, stupid, clumsy cop, had managed to capture anyone as wonderful as Theodora Franklin. But capture her he had, and he sat beside her now in the open car and stole sidelong glances at her as he drove, excited as always by her very presence.

Her black hair, always wild, seemed to capture something of the wind's frenzy as it whipped about the oval of her face. Her brown eyes were partially squinted against the rush of air over the windshield. She wore a white blouse emphatically curved over a full bosom, black tapered slacks form-fitted over generous hips and good legs. She had kicked off her sandals and folded her knees against her breasts, her bare feet pressed against the glove-compartment panel. There was about her, Carella realized, a curious combination of savage and sophisticate. You never knew whether she was going to kiss you or slug you, and the uncertainty kept her eternally desirable and exciting.

Teddy watched her husband as he drove, his big-knuckled hands on the

wheel of the car. She watched him not only because it gave her pleasure to watch him, but also because he was speaking. And since she could not hear, since she had been born a deaf mute, it was essential that she look at his mouth when he spoke. He did not discuss the case at all. She knew that one of the Claudia Davis checks had been made out to the Fancher Funeral Home in Triangle Lake and she knew that Carella wanted to talk to the proprietor of the place personally. She further knew that this was very important or he wouldn't be spending his Sunday driving all the way upstate. But he had promised her he'd combine business with pleasure.

This was the pleasure part of the trip, and in deference to his promise and his wife, he refrained from discussing the case, which was really foremost in his mind. He talked, instead, about the scenery, and their plans for the fall, and the way the twins were growing, and how pretty Teddy looked, and how she'd better button that top button of her blouse before they got out of the car, but he never once mentioned Claudia Davis until they were standing in the office of the Fancher Funeral Home and looking into the gloomy eyes of a man who called himself Barton Scoles.

Scoles was tall and thin and he wore a black suit that he had probably worn to his own confirmation back in 1912. He was so much the stereotype of a small-town undertaker that Carella almost burst out laughing when he met him. Somehow, though, the environment was not conducive to hilarity. There was a strange smell hovering over the thick rugs and the papered walls and the hanging chandeliers. It was a while before Carella recognized it as formaldehyde and then made the automatic association and, curious for a man who had stared into the eyes of death so often, felt like retching.

"Miss Davis made out a check to you on July fifteenth," Carella said. "Can you tell me what it was for?"

"Sure can," Scoles said. "Had to wait a long time for that check. She give me only a twenty-five dollar deposit. Usually take fifty, you know. I got stuck many a time, believe me."

"How do you mean?" Carella asked.

"People. You bury their dead, and then sometimes they don't pay you for your work. This business isn't *all* fun, you know. Many's the time I handled the whole funeral and the service and the burial and all, and never did get paid. Makes you lose your faith in human nature."

"But Miss Davis finally *did* pay you."

"Oh, sure. But I can tell you I was sweating that one out. I can tell you that. After all, she was a strange gal from the city, has the funeral here, nobody comes to it but her, sitting in the chapel out there and watching the body as if someone's going to steal it away, just her and the departed. I tell you, Mr. Carella—is that your name?"

"Yes, Carella."

"I tell you, it was kind of spooky. Lay there two days, she did, her cousin. And then Miss Davis asked that we bury the girl right here in the local cemetery, so I done that for her, too—all on the strength of a twenty-five-dollar deposit. That's trust, Mr. Carella, with a capital T."

"When was this, Mr. Scoles?"

"The girl drowned the first weekend in June," Scoles said. "Had no business being out on the lake so early, anyways. That water's still icy cold in June. Don't really warm up none till the latter part July. She fell over the side of the boat—she was out there rowing, you know—and that icy water probably froze her solid, or give her cramps or something, drowned her anyways." Scoles shook his head. "Had no business being out on the lake so early."

"Did you see a death certificate?"

"Yep, Dr. Donneli made it out. Cause of death was drowning, all right, no question about it. We had an inquest, too, you know. The Tuesday after she drowned. They said it was accidental."

"You said she was out rowing in a boat. Alone?"

"Yep. Her cousin, Miss Davis, was on the shore watching. Jumped in when she fell overboard, tried to reach her, but couldn't make it in time. That water's plenty cold, believe me. Ain't too warm even now, and here it is August already."

"But it didn't seem to affect Miss Davis, did it?"

"Well, she was probably a strong swimmer. Been my experience most pretty girls are strong girls, too. I'll bet your wife here is a strong girl. She sure is a pretty one."

Scoles smiled, and Teddy smiled and squeezed Carella's hand.

"About the payment," Carella said, "for the funeral and the burial. Do you have any idea why it took Miss Davis so long to send her check?"

"Nope. I wrote her twice. First time was just a friendly little reminder. Second time, I made it a little stronger. Attorney friend of mine in town wrote it on his stationery; that always impresses them. Didn't get an answer either time. Finally, right out of the blue, the check came, payment in full. Beats me. Maybe she was affected by the death. Or maybe she's always slow paying her debts. I'm just happy the check came, that's all. Sometimes the live ones can give you more trouble than them who's dead, believe me."

They strolled down to the lake together, Carella and his wife, and ate their picnic lunch on its shores. Carella was strangely silent. Teddy dangled her bare feet in the water. The water, as Scoles had promised, was very

cold even though it was August. On the way back from the lake Carella said, "Honey, would you mind if I make one more stop?"

Teddy turned her eyes to him inquisitively.

"I want to see the chief of police here."

Teddy frowned. The question was in her eyes, and he answered it immediately.

"To find out whether or not there were any witnesses to that drowning. *Besides* Claudia Davis, I mean. From the way Scoles was talking, I get the impression that lake was pretty deserted in June."

The chief of police was a short man with a potbelly and big feet. He kept his feet propped up on his desk all the while he spoke to Carella. Carella watched him and wondered why everybody in this town seemed to be on vacation from an MGM movie. A row of rifles in a locked rack was behind the chief's desk. A host of WANTED fliers covered a bulletin board to the right of the rack. The chief had a hole in the sole of his left shoe.

"Yep," he said, "there was a witness, all right."

Carella felt a pang of disappointment. "Who?" he asked.

"Fellow fishing at the lake. Saw the whole thing. Testified before the coroner's jury."

"What'd he say?"

"Said he was fishing there when Josie Thompson took the boat out. Said Claudia Davis stayed behind, on the shore. Said Miss Thompson fell overboard and went under like a stone. Said Miss Davis jumped in the water and began swimming towards her. Didn't make it in time. That's what he said."

"What else did he say?"

"Well, he drove Miss Davis back to town in her car. 1960 Caddy convertible, I believe. She could hardly speak. She was sobbing and mumbling and wringing her hands, oh, in a hell of a mess. Why, we had to get the whole story out of that fishing fellow. Wasn't until the next day that Miss Davis could make any kind of sense."

"When did you hold the inquest?"

"Tuesday. Day before they buried the cousin. Coroner did the dissection on Monday. We got authorization from Miss Davis, Penal Law 2213, next of kin being charged by law with the duty of burial may authorize dissection for the sole purpose of ascertaining the cause of death."

"And the coroner reported the cause of death as drowning?"

"That's right. Said so right before the jury."

"Why'd you have an inquest? Did you suspect something more than accidental drowning?"

"Not necessarily. But that fellow who was fishing, well, *he* was from the city, too, you know. And for all we knew him and Miss Davis could have been in this together, you know, shoved the cousin over the side of the boat, and then faked up a whole story, you know. They both coulda been lying in their teeth."

"Were they?"

"Not so we could tell. You never seen anybody so grief-stricken as Miss Davis was when the fishing fellow drove her into town. Girl would have to be a hell of an actress to behave that way. Calmed down the next day, but you shoulda seen her when it happened. And at the inquest it was plain this fishing fellow had never met her before that day at the lake. Convinced the jury he had no prior knowledge of or connection with either of the two girls. Convinced me, too, for that matter."

"What's his name?" Carella asked. "This fishing fellow."

"Courtenoy."

"What did you say?"

"Courtenoy. Sidney Courtenoy."

"Thanks," Carella answered, and he rose suddenly. "Come on, Teddy. I want to get back to the city."

Courtenoy lived in a one-family clapboard house in Riverhead. He was rolling up the door of his garage when Carella and Meyer pulled into his driveway early Monday morning. He turned to look at the car curiously, one hand on the rising garage door. The door stopped, halfway up, halfway down. Carella stepped into the driveway.

"Mr. Courtenoy?" he asked.

"Yes?" He stared at Carella, puzzlement on his face, the puzzlement that is always there when a perfect stranger addresses you by name. Courtenoy was a man in his late forties, wearing a cap and a badly fitted sports jacket and dark flannel slacks. His hair was graying at the temples. He looked tired, very tired, and his weariness had nothing whatever to do with the fact that it was only seven o'clock in the morning. A lunch box was at his feet where he had apparently put it when he began rolling up the garage door. The car in the garage was a 1953 Ford.

"We're police officers," Carella said. "Mind if we ask you a few questions?"

"I'd like to see your badge," Courtenoy said. Carella showed it to him. Courtenoy nodded as if he had performed a precautionary public duty. "What are your questions?" he said. "I'm on my way to work. Is this about that damn building permit again?"

"What building permit?"

"For extending the garage. I'm buying my son a little jalopy, don't want

to leave it out on the street. Been having a hell of a time getting a building permit. Can you imagine that? All I want to do is add another twelve feet to the garage. You'd think I was trying to build a city park or something. Is that what this is about?"

From inside the house a woman's voice called, "Who is it, Sid?"

"Nothing, nothing," Courtenoy said impatiently. "Nobody. Never mind, Bett." He looked at Carella. "My wife. You married?"

"Yes, sir, I'm married," Carella said.

"Then you know," Courtenoy said cryptically. "What are your questions?"

"Ever see this before?" Carella asked. He handed a photostated copy of the check to Courtenoy, who looked at it briefly and handed it back.

"Sure."

"Want to explain it, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Explain what?"

"Explain why Claudia Davis sent you a check for a hundred and twenty dollars."

"As recompense," Courtenoy said unhesitatingly.

"Oh, recompense, huh?" Meyer said. "For what, Mr. Courtenoy? For a little cock-and-bull story?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Recompense for *what*, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"For missing three days' work, what the hell did you think?"

"How's that again?"

"No, what did you *think?*" Courtenoy said angrily, waving his finger at Meyer. "What did you think it was for? Some kind of payoff or something? Is that what you thought?"

"Mr. Courtenoy—"

"I lost three days' work because of that damn inquest. I had to stay up at Triangle Lake all day Monday and Tuesday and then again on Wednesday waiting for the jury decision. I'm a bricklayer. I get five bucks an hour and I lost three days' work, eight hours a day, and so Miss Davis was good enough to send me a check for a hundred and twenty bucks. Now just what the hell did you think, would you mind telling me?"

"Did you know Miss Davis before that day at Triangle Lake, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"Never saw her before in my life. What is this? Am I on trial here? What is this?"

From inside the house the woman's voice came again, sharply, "Sidney! Is something wrong? Are you all right?"

"Nothing's wrong. Shut up, will you?"

There was an aggrieved silence from within the clapboard structure. Courtenoy muttered something under his breath and then turned to face the detectives again. "You finished?" he said.

"Not quite, Mr. Courtenoy. We'd like you to tell us what you saw that day at the lake."

"What the hell for? Go read the minutes of the inquest if you're so damn interested. I've got to get to work."

"That can wait, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Like hell it can. This job is away over in—"

"Mr. Courtenoy, we don't want to have to go all the way downtown and come back with a warrant for your arrest."

"My *arrest!* For what? Listen, what did I—?"

"Sidney? Sidney, shall I call the police?" the woman shouted from inside the house.

"Oh, shut the hell up!" Courtenoy answered. "Call the police," he mumbled. "I'm up to my ears in cops, and she wants to call the police. What do you want from me? I'm an honest bricklayer. I saw a girl drown. I told it just the way I saw it. Is that a crime? Why are you bothering me?"

"Just tell it again, Mr. Courtenoy. Just the way you saw it."

"She was out in the boat," Courtenoy said, sighing "I was fishing. Her cousin was on the shore. She fell over the side."

"Josie Thompson."

"Yes, Josie Thompson, whatever the hell her name was."

"She was alone in the boat?"

"Yes. She was alone in the boat."

"Go on."

"The other one—Miss Davis—screamed and ran into the water, and began swimming towards her." He shook his head. "She didn't make it in time. That boat was a long way out. When she got there, the lake was still. She dove under and came up, and then dove under again, but it was too late, it was just too late. Then, as she was swimming back, I thought *she* was going to drown, too. She faltered and sank below the surface, and I waited and I thought sure she was gone. Then there was a patch of yellow that broke through the water, and I saw she was all right."

"Why didn't you jump in to help her, Mr. Courtenoy?"

"I don't know how to swim."

"All right. What happened next?"

"She came out of the water—Miss Davis. She was exhausted and hysterical. I tried to calm her down, but she kept yelling and crying, not making any sense at all. I dragged her over to the car, and I asked her for the car keys. She didn't seem to know what I was talking about at first. 'The

keys!' I said, and she just stared at me. 'Your car keys!' I yelled. 'The keys to the car.' Finally she reached in her purse and handed me the keys."

"Go on."

"I drove her into town. It was me who told the story to the police. She couldn't talk, all she could do was babble and scream and cry. It was a terrible thing to watch. I'd never before seen a woman so completely off her nut. We couldn't get two straight words out of her until the next day. Then she was all right. Told the police who she was, explained what I'd already told them the day before, and told them the dead girl was her cousin, Josie Thompson. They dragged the lake and got her out of the water. A shame. A real shame. Nice young girl like that."

"What was the dead girl wearing?"

"Cotton dress. Loafers, I think. Or sandals. Little thin sweater over the dress. A cardigan."

"Any jewelry?"

"I don't think so. No."

"Was she carrying a purse?"

"No. Her purse was in the car with Miss Davis'."

"What was Miss Davis wearing?"

"When? The day of the drowning? Or when they pulled her cousin out of the lake?"

"Was she there then?"

"Sure. Identified the body."

"No, I wanted to know what she was wearing on the day of the accident, Mr. Courtenoy."

"Oh, a skirt and a blouse, I think. Ribbon in her hair. Loafers. I'm not sure."

"What color blouse? Yellow?"

"No. Blue."

"You said yellow."

"No, blue. I didn't say yellow."

Carella frowned. "I thought you said yellow earlier." He shrugged. "All right, what happened after the inquest?"

"Nothing much. Miss Davis thanked me for being so kind and said she would send me a check for the time I'd missed. I refused at first and then I thought, What the hell, I'm a hard-working man, and money doesn't grow on trees. So I gave her my address. I figured she could afford it. Driving a Caddy, and hiring a fellow to take it back to the city."

"Why didn't she drive it back herself?"

"I guess she was still shaken up. Listen, that was a terrible experience. Did you ever see anyone die up close?"

"Yes," Carella said.

From inside the house Courtenoy's wife yelled, "Sidney, tell those men to get out of our driveway!"

"You heard her," Courtenoy said, and finished rolling up his garage door.

Nobody likes Monday morning.

It was invented for hangovers. It is really not the beginning of a new week, but only the tail end of the week before. Nobody likes it, and it doesn't have to be rainy or gloomy or blue in order to provoke disaffection. It can be bright and sunny and the beginning of August. It can start with a driveway interview at seven A.M. and grow progressively worse by nine thirty that same morning.

Monday is Monday and legislature will never change its personality. Monday is Monday, and it stinks.

By nine thirty that Monday morning Detective Steve Carella was on the edge of total bewilderment and, like any normal person, he blamed it on Monday. He had come back to the squadroom and painstakingly gone over the pile of checks that Claudia Davis had written during the month of July, a total of twenty-five, searching them for some clue to her strangulation, studying them with the scrutiny of a typographer in a print shop.

Several things seemed evident from the checks, but nothing seemed pertinent. He could recall having said, "I look at those checks, I can see a life. It's like reading somebody's diary," and he was beginning to believe he had uttered some famous last words in those two succinct sentences. For if this was the diary of Claudia Davis, it was a singularly unprovocative account that would never make the nation's best-seller lists.

Most of the checks had been made out to clothing or department stores. Claudia, true to the species, seemed to have a penchant for shopping and a check book that yielded to her spending urge. Calls to the various stores represented revealed that her taste ranged through a wide variety of items. A check of sales slips showed that she had purchased during the month of July alone three baby-doll nightgowns, two half slips, a trenchcoat, a wrist watch, four pairs of tapered slacks in various colors, two pairs of walking shoes, a pair of sunglasses, four Bikini swimsuits, eight wash-and-wear frocks, two skirts, two cashmere sweaters, half a dozen best-selling novels, a large bottle of aspirin, two bottles of Dramamine, six pieces of luggage, and four boxes of cleansing tissue. The most expensive thing she had purchased was an evening gown costing $500.

These purchases accounted for most of the checks she had drawn in July. There were also checks to a hairdresser, a florist, a shoemaker, a candy

shop, and three unexplained checks that were drawn to individuals, two men and a woman.

The first was made out to George Badueck.

The second was made out to David Oblinsky.

The third was made out to Martha Fedelson.

Someone on the squad had attacked the telephone directory and come up with addresses for two of the three. The third, Oblinsky, had an unlisted number, but a half-hour's argument with a supervisor had finally netted an address for him. The completed list was now on Carella's desk together with all the canceled checks. He should have begun tracking down those names, he knew, but something was bugging him.

"Why did Courtenoy lie to me and Meyer?" he asked Cotton Hawes. "Why did he lie about something as simple as what Claudia Davis was wearing on the day of the drowning?"

"How did he lie?"

"First he said she was wearing yellow, said he saw a patch of yellow break the surface of the lake. Then he changed it to blue. Why did he do that, Cotton?"

"I don't know."

"And if he lied about that, why couldn't he have been lying about everything? Why couldn't he and Claudia have done in little Josie together."

"I don't know," Hawes said.

"Where'd that twenty thousand bucks come from, Cotton?"

"Maybe it was a stock dividend."

"Maybe. Then why didn't she simply deposit the check? This was cash, Cotton, *cash.* Now where did it come from? That's a nice piece of change. You don't pick twenty grand out of the gutter."

"You sure don't."

"I know where you can get twenty grand, Cotton."

"Where?"

"From an insurance company. When someone dies." Carella nodded once, sharply. "I'm going to make some calls. Damnit, that money had to come from *some* place."

He hit pay dirt on his sixth call. The man he spoke to was named Jeremiah Dodd and was a representative of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc. He recognized Josie Thompson's name at once.

"Oh, yes," he said. "We settled that claim in July."

"Who made the claim, Mr. Dodd?"

"The beneficiary, of course. Just a moment. Let me get the folder on this. Will you hold on, please?"

Carella waited impatiently. Over at the insurance company on the other

end of the line he could hear muted voices. A girl giggled suddenly, and he wondered who was kissing whom over by the water cooler. At last Dodd came back on the line.

"Here it is," he said. "Josephine Thompson. Beneficiary was her cousin, Miss Claudia Davis. Oh, yes, now it's all coming back. Yes, this is the one."

"What one?"

"Where the girls were mutual beneficiaries."

"What do you mean?"

"The cousins," Dodd said. "There were two life policies. One for Miss Davis and one for Miss Thompson. And they were mutual beneficiaries."

"You mean Miss Davis was the beneficiary of Miss Thompson's policy and vice versa?"

"Yes, that's right."

"How large were the policies?"

"Oh, very small."

"Well, how *small* then?"

"I believe they were both insured for twelve thousand five hundred. Just a moment; let me check. Yes, that's right."

"And Miss Davis applied for payment on the policy after her cousin died, huh?"

"Yes. Here it is, right here. Josephine Thompson drowned at Lake Triangle on June fourth. That's right. Claudia Davis sent in the policy and the certificate of death and also a coroner's jury verdict."

"Did you pay her?"

"Yes. It was a perfectly legitimate claim. We began processing it at once."

"Did you send anyone up to Lake Triangle to investigate the circumstances of Miss Thompson's death?"

"Yes, but it was merely a routine investigation. A coroner's inquest is good enough for us, Detective Carella."

"When did you pay Miss Davis?"

"On July first."

"You sent her a check for twelve thousand five hundred dollars, right?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you say . . . ?"

"The policy insured her for twelve-five, that's correct. But there was a double-indemnity clause, you see, and Josephine Thompson's death was accidental. No, we had to pay the policy's limit, Detective Carella. On July first we sent Claudia Davis a check for twenty-five thousand dollars."

There are no mysteries in police work.

Nothing fits into a carefully preconceived scheme. The high point of any

given case is very often the corpse that opens the case. There is no climactic progression; suspense is for the movies. There are only people and curiously twisted motives, and small unexplained details, and coincidence, and the unexpected, and they combine to form a sequence of events, but there is no real mystery, there never is.

There is only life, and sometimes death, and neither follows a rule book. Policemen hate mystery stories because they recognize in them a control that is lacking in their own very real, sometimes routine, sometimes spectacular, sometimes tedious investigation of a case. It is very nice and very clever and very convenient to have all the pieces fit together neatly. It is very kind to think of detectives as master mathematicians working on an algebraic problem whose constants are death and a victim, whose unknown is a murderer. But many of these mastermind detectives have trouble adding up the deductions on their twice-monthly pay checks. The world is full of wizards, for sure, but hardly any of them work for the city police.

There was one big mathematical discrepancy in the Claudia Davis case. There seemed to be $5,000 unaccounted for.

Twenty-five grand had been mailed to Claudia Davis on July 1, and she presumably received the check after the Fourth of July holiday, cashed it some place, and then took her money to the Seaboard Bank of America, opened a new checking account, and rented a safety-deposit box. But her total deposit at Seaboard had been $20,000 whereas the check had been for $25,000, so where was the laggard five? And who had cashed the check for her?

Mr. Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc., explained the company's rather complicated accounting system to Carella. A check was kept in the local office for several days after it was cashed in order to close out the policy, after which it was sent to the main office in Chicago where it sometimes stayed for several weeks until the master files were closed out. It was then sent to the company's accounting and auditing firm in San Francisco. It was Dodd's guess that the canceled check had already been sent to the California accountants, and he promised to put a tracer on it at once. Carella asked him to please hurry. Someone had cashed that check for Claudia and, supposedly, someone also had one-fifth of the check's face value.

The very fact that Claudia had not taken the check itself to Seaboard seemed to indicate that she had something to hide. Presumably, she did not want anyone asking questions about insurance company checks, or insurance policies, or double indemnities, or accidental drownings, or especially her cousin Josie. The check was a perfectly good one, and yet she had chosen to cash it *before* opening a new account. Why?

And why, for that matter, had she bothered opening a new account when she had a rather well-stuffed and active account at another bank?

There are only whys in police work, but they do not add up to mystery. They add up to work, and nobody in the world likes work. The bulls of the 87th would have preferred to sit on their backsides and sip gin-and-tonics, but the whys were there, so they put on their hats and their holsters and tried to find some becauses.

Cotton Hawes systematically interrogated each and every tenant in the rooming house where Claudia Davis had been killed. They all had alibis tighter than the closed fist of an Arabian stablekeeper. In his report to the lieutenant, Hawes expressed the belief that none of the tenants was guilty of homicide. As far as he was concerned, they were all clean.

Meyer Meyer attacked the 87th's stool pigeons. There were money-changers galore in the precinct and the city, men who turned hot loot into cold cash—for a price. If someone had cashed a $25,000 check for Claudia and kept $5,000 of it during the process, couldn't that person conceivably be one of the money-changers? Mayer put the precinct stoolies on the ear, asked them to sound around for word of a Security Insurance Corporation check. The stoolies came up with nothing.

Detective Lieutenant Sam Grossman took his laboratory boys to the murder room and went over it again. And again. And again. He reported that the lock on the door was a snap lock, the kind that clicks shut automatically when the door is slammed. Whoever killed Claudia Davis could have done so without performing any locked-room gymnastics. All he had to do was close the door behind him when he left.

Grossman also reported that Claudia's bed had apparently not been slept in the night of the murder. A pair of shoes had been found at the foot of a large easy chair in the bedroom and a novel was wedged open on the arm of the chair. He suggested that Claudia had fallen asleep while reading, had awakened, and gone into the other room where she had met her murderer and her death. He had no suggestions as to just who that murderer might have been.

Steve Carella was hot and impatient and overloaded. There were other things happening in the precinct, things like burglaries and muggings and knifings and assaults and kids with summertime on their hands hitting other kids with baseball bats because they didn't like the way they pronounced the word "*señor.*" There were telephones jangling, and reports to be typed in triplicate, and people filing into the squadroom day and night with complaints against the citizenry of that fair city, and the Claudia Davis case was beginning to be a big fat pain in the keester. Carella wondered what it was like to be a shoemaker. And while he was wondering, he began

to chase down the checks made out to George Badueck, David Oblinsky, and Martha Fedelson.

Happily, Bert Kling had nothing whatsoever to do with the Claudia Davis case. He hadn't even discussed it with any of the men on the squad. He was a young detective and a new detective, and the things that happened in that precinct were enough to drive a guy nuts and keep him busy forty-eight hours every day, so he didn't go around sticking his nose into other people's cases. He had enough troubles of his own. One of those troubles was the line-up.

On Wednesday morning Bert Kling's name appeared on the line-up duty chart.

The line-up was held in the gym downtown at Headquarters on High Street. It was held four days a week, Monday to Thursday, and the purpose of the parade was to acquaint the city's detectives with the people who were committing crime, the premise being that crime is a repetitive profession and that a crook will always be a crook, and it's good to know who your adversaries are should you happen to come face to face with them on the street. Timely recognition of a thief had helped crack many a case and had, on some occasions, even saved a detective's life.

So the line-up was a pretty valuable in-group custom. This didn't mean that detectives enjoyed the trip downtown. They drew line-up perhaps once every two weeks and, often as not, line-up duty fell on their day off, and nobody appreciated rubbing elbows with criminals on his day off.

The line-up that Wednesday morning followed the classic pattern of all line-ups. The detectives sat in the gymnasium on folding chairs, and the chief of detectives sat behind a high podium at the back of the gym. The green shades were drawn, and the stage illuminated, and the offenders who'd been arrested the day before were marched before the assembled bulls while the chief read off the charges and handled the interrogation. The pattern was a simple one. The arresting officer, uniformed or plainclothes, would join the chief at the rear of the gym when his arrest came up. The chief would read off the felon's name, and then the section of the city in which he'd been arrested, and then a number.

He would say, for example, "Jones, John, Riverhead, three." The "three" would simply indicate that this was the third arrest in Riverhead that day. Only felonies and special types of misdemeanors were handled at the line-up, so this narrowed the list of performers on any given day. Following the case number, the chief would read off the offense, and then say either "Statement" or "No statement," telling the assembled cops that the thief either had or had not said anything when they'd put the collar on him.

If there had been a statement, the chief would limit his questions to

rather general topics since he didn't want to lead the felon into saying anything that might contradict his usually incriminating initial statement, words that could be used against him in court. If there had been *no* statement, the chief would pull out all the stops. He was generally armed with whatever police records were available on the man who stood under the blinding lights, and it was the smart thief who understood the purpose of the line-up and who knew he was not bound to answer a goddamned thing they asked him. The chief of detectives was something like a deadly earnest Mike Wallace, but the stakes were slightly higher here because this involved something a little more important than a novelist plugging his new book or a senator explaining the stand he had taken on a farm bill. These were truly "interviews in depth," and the booby prize was very often a long stretch up the river in a cozy one-windowed room.

The line-up bored the hell out of Kling. It always did. It was like seeing a stage show for the umpteenth time. Every now and then somebody stopped the show with a really good routine. But usually it was the same old song-and-dance. It wasn't any different that Wednesday. By the time the eighth offender had been paraded and subjected to the chief's bludgeoning interrogation, Kling was beginning to doze. The detective sitting next to him nudged him gently in the ribs.

". . . Reynolds, Ralph," the chief was saying, "Isola, four. Caught burgling an apartment on North Third. No statement. How about it, Ralph?"

"How about what?"

"You do this sort of thing often?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Burglary."

"I'm no burglar," Reynolds said.

"I've got his B-sheet here," the chief said. "Arrested for burglary in 1948, witness withdrew her testimony, claimed she had mistakenly identified him. Arrested again for burglary in 1952, convicted for Burglary One, sentenced to ten at Castleview, paroled in '58 on good behavior. You're back at the old stand, huh, Ralph?"

"No, not me. I've been straight ever since I got out."

"Then what were you doing in that apartment during the middle of the night?"

"I was a little drunk. I must have walked into the wrong building."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought it was my apartment."

"Where do you live, Ralph?"

"On—uh—well—"

"Come on, Ralph."

"Well, I live on South Fifth."

"And the apartment you were in last night is on North Third. You must have been pretty drunk to wander that far off course."

"Yeah, I guess I was pretty drunk."

"Woman in that apartment said you hit her when she woke up. Is that true, Ralph?"

"No. No, hey, I never hit her."

"She says so, Ralph."

"Well, she's got it all wrong."

"Well, now, a doctor's report says somebody clipped her on the jaw, Ralph, now how about that?"

"Well, maybe."

"Yes or no?"

"Well, maybe when she started screaming she got me nervous. I mean, you know, I thought it was my apartment and all."

"Ralph, you were burgling that apartment. How about telling us the truth?"

"No, I got in there by mistake."

"How'd you get in?"

"The door was open."

"In the middle of the night, huh? The door was open?"

"Yeah."

"You sure you didn't pick the lock or something, huh?"

"No, no. Why would I do that? I thought it was my apartment."

"Ralph, what were you doing with burglar's tools?"

"Who? Who me? Those weren't burglar's tools."

"Then what were they? You had a glass cutter, and a bunch of jimmies, and some punches, and a drill and bits, and three celluloid strips, and some lockpicking tools, and eight skeleton keys. Those sound like burglar's tools to me, Ralph."

"No. I'm a carpenter."

"Yeah, you're a carpenter all right, Ralph. We searched your apartment, Ralph, and found a couple of things we're curious about. Do you always keep sixteen wrist watches and four typewriters and twelve bracelets and eight rings and two mink stoles and three sets of silverware, Ralph?"

"Yeah. I'm a collector."

"Of other people's things. We also found four hundred dollars in American currency and five thousand dollars in French francs. Where'd you get that money, Ralph?"

"Which?"

"Whichever you feel like telling us about."

"Well, the U.S. stuff I—I won at the track. And the other, well, a Frenchman owed me some gold, and so he paid me in francs. That's all."

"We're checking our stolen-goods list right this minute, Ralph."

"So check!" Reynolds said, suddenly angry. "What the hell do you want from me? Work for your goddamn living! You want it all on a platter! Like fun! I told you everything I'm gonna . . ."

"Get him out of here," the chief said. "Next, Blake, Donald, Bethtown, two. Attempted rape. No statement . . ."

Bert Kling made himself comfortable on the folding chair and began to doze again.

The check made out to George Badueck was numbered 018. It was a small check, five dollars. It did not seem very important to Carella, but it was one of the unexplained three, and he decided to give it a whirl.

Badueck, as it turned out, was a photographer. His shop was directly across the street from the County Court Building in Isola. A sign in his window advised that he took photographs for chauffeur's licenses, hunting licenses, passports, taxicab permits, pistol permits, and the like. The shop was small and crowded. Badueck fitted into the shop like a beetle in an ant trap. He was a huge man with thick, unruly black hair and the smell of developing fluid on him.

"Who remembers?" he said. "I get millions of people in here every day of the week. They pay me in cash, they pay me with checks, they're ugly, they're pretty, they're skinny, they're fat, they all look the same on the pictures I take. Lousy. They all look like I'm photographing them for you guys. You never see any of these official-type pictures? Man, they look like mug shots, all of them. So who remembers this—what's her name? Claudia Davis, yeah. Another face, that's all. Another mug shot. Why? Is the check bad or something?"

"No, it's a good check."

"So what's the fuss?"

"No fuss," Carella said. "Thanks a lot."

He sighed and went out into the August heat. The County Court Building across the street was white and Gothic in the sunshine. He wiped a handkerchief across his forehead and thought, *Another face, that's all.*

Sighing, he crossed the street and entered the building. It was cool in the high-vaulted corridors. He consulted the directory and went up to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles first. He asked the clerk there if anyone named Claudia Davis had applied for a license requiring a photograph.

"We only require pictures on chauffeurs' licenses," the clerk said.

"Well, would you check?" Carella asked.

"Sure. Might take a few minutes, though. Would you have a seat?"

Carella sat. It was very cool. It felt like October. He looked at his watch. It was almost time for lunch, and he was getting hungry. The clerk came back and motioned him over.

"We've got a Claudia Davis listed," he said, "but she's already got a license, and she didn't apply for a new one."

"What kind of license?"

"Operator's."

"When does it expire?"

"Next September."

"And she hasn't applied for anything needing a photo?"

"Nope. Sorry."

"That's all right. Thanks," Carella said.

He went out into the corridor again. He hardly thought it likely that Claudia Davis had applied for a permit to own or operate a taxicab, so he skipped the Hack Bureau and went upstairs to Pistol Permits. The woman he spoke to there was very kind and very efficient. She checked her files and told him that no one named Claudia Davis had ever applied for either a carry or a premises pistol permit.

Carella thanked her and went into the hall again. He was very hungry. His stomach was beginning to growl. He debated having lunch and then returning and decided, Hell, I'd better get it done now.

The man behind the counter in the Passport Bureau was old and thin and he wore a green eyeshade. Carella asked his question, and the old man went to his files and creakingly returned to the window.

"That's right," he said.

"What's right?"

"She did. Claudia Davis. She applied for a passport."

"When?"

The old man checked the slip of paper in his trembling hands. "July twentieth," he said.

"Did you give it to her?"

"We accepted her application, sure. Isn't us who issues the passports. We've got to send the application on to Washington."

"But you did accept it?"

"Sure, why not? Had all the necessary stuff. Why shouldn't we accept it?"

"What was the necessary stuff?"

"Two photos, proof of citizenship, filled-out application, and cash."

"What did she show as proof of citizenship?"

"Her birth certificate."

"Where was she born?"

"California."

"She paid you in cash?"

"That's right."

"Not a check?"

"Nope. She started to write a check, but the blamed pen was on the blink. We use ballpoints, you know, and it gave out after she filled in the application. So she paid me in cash. It's not all that much money, you know."

"I see. Thank you," Carella said.

"Not at all," the old man replied, and he creaked back to his files to replace the record on Claudia Davis.

The check was numbered 007, and it was dated July twelfth, and it was made out to a woman named Martha Fedelson.

Miss Fedelson adjusted her pince-nez and looked at the check. Then she moved some papers aside on the small desk in the cluttered office, and put the check down, and leaned closer to it, and studied it again.

"Yes," she said, "that check was made out to me. Claudia Davis wrote it right in this office." Miss Fedelson smiled. "If you can call it an office. Desk space and a telephone. But then, I'm just starting, you know."

"How long have you been a travel agent, Miss Fedelson?"

"Six months now. It's very exciting work."

"Had you ever booked a trip for Miss Davis before?"

"No. This was the first time."

"Did someone refer her to you?"

"No. She picked my name out of the phone book."

"And asked you to arrange this trip for her, is that right?"

"Yes."

"And this check?" What's it for?"

"Her airline tickets, and deposits at several hotels."

"Hotels *where*?"

"In Paris and Dijon. And then another in Lausanne, Switzerland."

"She was going to Europe?"

"Yes. From Lausanne she was heading down to the Italian Riviera. I was working on that for her, too. Getting transportation and the hotels, you know."

"When did she plan to leave?"

"September first."

"Well, that explains the luggage and the clothes," Carella said aloud.

"I'm sorry," Miss Fedelson said, and she smiled and raised her eyebrows.

"Nothing, nothing," Carella said. "What was your impression of Miss Davis?"

"Oh, that's hard to say. She was only here once, you understand." Miss Fedelson thought for a moment, and then said, "I suppose she *could* have been a pretty girl if she tried, but she wasn't trying. Her hair was short and dark, and she seemed rather—well, withdrawn, I guess. She didn't take her sunglasses off all the while she was here. I suppose you would call her shy. Or frightened. I don't know." She smiled again. "Have I helped any?"

"Well, now we know she was going abroad," Carella said.

"September is a good time to go," Miss Fedelson answered. "In September the tourists have all gone home." There was a wistful sound to her voice.

Carella thanked her for her time and left the small office with its travel folders on the cluttered desk top.

He was running out of checks and running out of ideas. Everything seemed to point toward a girl in flight, a girl in hiding, but what was there to hide, what was there to run from? Josie Thompson had been in that boat alone. The coroner's jury had labeled it accidental drowning. The insurance company hadn't contested Claudia's claim, and they'd given her a legitimate check that she could have cashed anywhere in the world. And yet there *was* hiding, and there *was* flight—and Carella couldn't understand why.

He took the list of remaining checks from his pocket. The girl's shoemaker, the girl's hairdresser, a florist, a candy shop. None of them really important. And the remaining check made out to an individual, the check numbered 006 and dated July eleventh, and written to a man named David Oblinsky in the amount of $45.75.

Carella had his lunch at two thirty and then went downtown. He found Oblinsky in a diner near the bus terminal. Oblinsky was sitting on one of the counter stools, and he was drinking a cup of coffee. He asked Carella to join him, and Carella did.

"You traced me through that check, huh?" he said. "The phone company gave you my number and my address, huh? I'm unlisted, you know. They ain't suppose to give out my number."

"Well, they made a special concession because it was police business."

"Yeah, well, suppose the cops called and asked for Marlon Brando's number? You think they'd give it out? Like hell they would. I don't like that. No, sir, I don't like it one damn bit."

"What do you do, Mr. Oblinsky? Is there a reason for the unlisted number?"

"I drive a cab is what I do. Sure there's a reason. It's classy to have an unlisted number. Didn't you know that?"

Carella smiled. "No, I didn't."

"Sure, it is."

"Why did Claudia Davis give you this check?" Carella asked.

"Well, I work for a cab company here in this city, you see. But usually on weekends or on my day off I use my own car and I take people on long trips, you know what I mean? Like to the country, or the mountains, or the beach, wherever they want to go. I don't care. I'll take them wherever they want to go."

"I see."

"Sure. So in June sometime, the beginning of June it was, I get a call from this guy I know up at Triangle Lake, he tells me there's a rich broad there who needs somebody to drive her Caddy back to the city for her. He said it was worth thirty bucks if I was willing to take the train up and the heap back. I told him, no sir. I wanted forty-five or it was no deal. I knew I had him over a barrel, you understand? He'd already told me he checked with the local hicks and none of them felt like making the ride. So he said he would talk it over with her and get back to me. Well, he called again—you know, it burns me up about the phone company. They ain't supposed to give out my number like that. Suppose it was Doris Day? You think they'd give out her number? I'm gonna raise a stink about this, believe me."

"What happened when he called you back?"

"Well, he said she was willing to pay forty-five, but like could I wait until July sometime when she would send me a check because she was a little short right at the moment. So I figured what the hell, am I going to get stiffed by a dame who's driving a 1960 Caddy? I figured I could trust her until July. But I also told him, if that was the case, then I also wanted her to pay the tolls on the way back, which I don't ordinarily ask my customers to do. That's what the seventy-five cents was for. The tolls."

"So you took the train up there and then drove Miss Davis and the Cadillac back to the city, is that right?"

"Yeah."

"I suppose she was pretty distraught on the trip home."

"Huh?"

"You know. Not too coherent."

"Huh?"

"Broken up. Crying. Hysterical," Carella said.

"No. No, she was okay."

"Well, what I mean is—" Carella hesitated. "I assumed she wasn't capable of driving the car back herself."

"Yeah, that's right. That's why she hired me."

"Well, then—"

"But not because she was broken up or anything."

"Then why?" Carella frowned. "Was there a lot of luggage? Did she need your help with that?"

"Yeah, sure. Both hers and her cousin's. Her cousin drowned, you know."

"Yes. I know that."

"But anybody coulda helped her with the luggage," Oblinsky said. "No, that wasn't why she hired me. She really *needed* me, mister."

"Why?"

"Why? Because she don't know how to drive, that's why."

Carella stared at him. "You're wrong," he said.

"Oh, no," Oblinsky said. "She can't drive, believe me. While I was putting the luggage in the trunk, I asked her to start the car, and she didn't even know how to do that. Hey, you think I ought to raise a fuss with the phone company?"

"I don't know," Carella said, rising suddenly. All at once the check made out to Claudia Davis' hairdresser seemed terribly important to him. He had almost run out of checks, but all at once he had an idea.

The hairdresser's salon was on South Twenty-third, just off Jefferson Avenue. A green canopy covered the sidewalk outside the salon. The words ARTURO MANFREDI, INC., were lettered discreetly in white on the canopy. A glass plaque in the window repeated the name of the establishment and added, for the benefit of those who did not read either *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*, that there were two branches of the shop, one here in Isola and another in "Nassau, the Bahamas." Beneath that, in smaller more modest letters, were the words "Internationally Renowned."

Carella and Hawes went into the shop at four thirty in the afternoon. Two meticulously coifed and manicured women were sitting in the small reception room, their expensively sleek legs crossed, apparently awaiting either their chauffeurs, their husbands, or their lovers. They both looked up expectantly when the detectives entered, expressed mild disappointment by only slightly raising newly plucked eyebrows, and went back to reading their fashion magazines.

Carella and Hawes walked to the desk. The girl behind the desk was a blonde with a brilliant shellacked look and a finishing-school voice.

"Yes?" she said. "May I help you?"

She lost a tiny trace of her poise when Carella flashed his buzzer. She read the raised lettering on the shield, glanced at the photo on the plastic-encased I.D. card, quickly regained her polished calm, and said coolly and unemotionally, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

"We wonder if you can tell us anything about the girl who wrote this check?" Carella said. He reached into his jacket pocket, took out a photostat of the check, and put it on the desk before the blonde. The blonde looked at it casually.

"What is the name?" she asked. "I can't make it out."

"Claudia Davis."

"D-A-V-I-S?"

"Yes."

"I don't recognize the name," the blonde said. "She's not one of our regular customers."

"But she did make out a check to your salon," Carella said. "She wrote this on July seventh. Would you please check your records and find out why she was here and who took care of her?"

"I'm sorry," the blonde said.

"What?"

"I'm sorry, but we close at five o'clock, and this is the busiest time of the day for us. I'm sure you can understand that. If you'd care to come back a little later—"

"No, we wouldn't care to come back a little later," Carella said. "Because if we came back a little later, it would be with a search warrant and possibly a warrant for the seizure of your books, and sometimes that can cause a little commotion among the gossip columnists, and that kind of commotion might add to your international renown a little bit. We've had a long day, miss, and this is important, so how about it?"

"Of course. We're always delighted to cooperate with the police," the blonde said frigidly. "Especially when they're so well mannered."

"Yes, we're all of that," Carella answered.

"July seventh, did you say?"

"July seventh."

The blonde left the desk and went into the back of the salon. A brunette came out front and said, "Has Miss Marie left for the evening?"

"Who's Miss Marie?" Hawes asked.

"The blonde girl."

"No. She's getting something for us."

"That white streak is very attractive," the brunette said. "I'm Miss Olga."

"How do you do."

"Fine, thank you," Miss Olga said. "When she comes back, would you tell her there's something wrong with one of the dryers on the third floor?"

"Yes, I will," Hawes said.

Miss Olga smiled, waved, and vanished into the rear of the salon again.

Miss Marie reappeared a few moments later. She looked at Carella and said, "A Miss Claudia Davis was here on July seventh. Mr. Sam worked on her. Would you like to talk to him?"

"Yes, we would."

"Then follow me, please," she said curtly.

They followed her into the back of the salon past women who sat with crossed legs, wearing smocks, their heads in hair dryers.

"Oh, by the way," Hawes said, "Miss Olga said to tell you there's something wrong with one of the third-floor dryers."

"Thank you," Miss Marie said.

Hawes felt particularly clumsy in this world of women's machines. There was an air of delicate efficiency about the place, and Hawes—six feet two inches tall in his bare soles, weighing a hundred and ninety pounds—was certain he would knock over a bottle of nail polish or a pail of hair rinse. As they entered the second-floor salon, as he looked down that long line of humming space helmets at women with crossed legs and what looked like barbers' aprons covering their nylon slips, he became aware of a new phenomenon. The women were slowly turning their heads inside the dryers to look at the white streak over his left temple.

He suddenly felt like a horse's rear end. For whereas the streak was the legitimate result of a knifing—they had shaved his red hair to get at the wound, and it had grown back this way—he realized all at once that many of these women had shelled out somebody's hard-earned dollars to simulate identical white streaks in their own hair, and he no longer felt like a cop making a business call. Instead, he felt like a customer who had come to have his goddamned streak touched up a little.

"This is Mr. Sam," Miss Marie said, and Hawes turned to see Carella shaking hands with a rather elongated man. The man wasn't particularly tall, he was simply elongated. He gave the impression of being seen from the side seats in a movie theater, stretched out of true proportion, curiously two-dimensional. He wore a white smock, and there were three narrow combs in the breast pocket. He carried a pair of scissors in one thin, sensitive-looking hand.

"How do you do?" he said to Carella, and he executed a half bow, European in origin, American in execution. He turned to Hawes, took his hand, shook it, and again said, "How do you do?"

"They're from the police," Miss Marie said briskly, releasing Mr. Sam from any obligation to be polite, and then left the men alone.

"A woman named Claudia Davis was here on July seventh," Carella said. "Apparently she had her hair done by you. Can you tell us what you remember about her?"

"Miss Davis, Miss Davis," Mr. Sam said, touching his high forehead in an attempt at visual shorthand, trying to convey the concept of thought without having to do the accompanying brainwork. "Let me see, Miss Davis, Miss Davis."

"Yes."

"Yes, Miss Davis. A very pretty blonde."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "A brunette. You're thinking of the wrong person."

"No, I'm thinking of the right person," Mr. Sam said. He tapped his temple with one extended forefinger, another piece of visual abbreviation. "I remember. Claudia Davis. A blonde."

"A brunette," Carella insisted, and he kept watching Mr. Sam.

"When she left. But when she came, a blonde."

"What?" Hawes said.

"She was a blonde, a very pretty, natural blonde. It is rare. Natural blondness, I mean. I couldn't understand why she wanted to change the color."

"You dyed her hair?" Hawes asked.

"That is correct."

"Did she say *why* she wanted to be a brunette?"

"No, sir. I argued with her. I said, 'You have *beau*-tiful hair, I can do *mar*-velous things with this hair of yours. You are a *blonde*, my dear, there are drab women who come in here every day of the week and *beg* to be turned into blondes.' No. She would not listen. I dyed it for her. Made her a brunette."

Mr. Sam seemed to become offended by the idea all over again. He looked at the detectives as if they had been responsible for the stubbornness of Claudia Davis.

"What else did you do for her, Mr. Sam?" Carella asked.

"The dye, a cut, and a set. And I believe one of the girls gave her a facial and a manicure."

"What do you mean by a cut? Was her hair long when she came here?"

"Yes, beautiful long blonde hair. She wanted it cut. I cut it." Mr. Sam shook his head. "A pity. She looked terrible. I don't usually say this about someone I worked on, but she walked out of here looking terrible. You would hardly recognize her as the same pretty blonde who came in not three hours before."

"Thank you, Mr. Sam. We know you're busy."

In the street outside Hawes said, "You knew before we went in there, didn't you, Mr Steve?"

"I suspected, Mr. Cotton. Come on, let's get back to the squad."

They kicked it around like a bunch of advertising executives. They sat in Lieutenant Byrnes' office and tried to find out how the cookie crumbled and which way the Tootsie rolled. They were just throwing out a life preserver to see if anyone grabbed at it, that's all. What they were doing, you see, was running up the flag to see if anyone saluted, that's all.

The lieutenant's office was a four-window office because he was top man in this particular combine. It was a very elegant office. It had an electric fan all its own, and a big wide desk. It got cross ventilation from the street. It was really very pleasant. Well, to tell the truth, it was a pretty ratty office in which to be holding a top-level meeting, but it was the best the precinct had to offer. And after a while you got used to the chipping paint and the soiled walls and the bad lighting and the stench of urine from the men's room down the hall. Peter Byrnes didn't work for B.B.D. & O. He worked for the city. Somehow, there was a difference.

"I just put in a call to Irene Miller," Carella said. "I asked her to describe Claudia Davis to me, and she went through it all over again. Short dark hair, shy, plain. Then I asked her to describe the cousin, Josie Thompson." Carella nodded glumly. "Guess what?"

"A pretty girl," Hawes said. "A pretty girl with long blonde hair."

"Sure. Why, Mrs. Miller practically spelled it out the first time we talked to her. It's all there in the report. She said they were like black and white in looks and personality. Black and white, sure. A brunette and a goddamn blonde!"

"That explains the yellow," Hawes said.

"What yellow?"

"Courtenoy. He said he saw a patch of yellow breaking the surface. He wasn't talking about her clothes, Steve. He was talking about her *hair*."

"It explains a lot of things," Carella said. "It explains why shy Claudia Davis was preparing for her European trip by purchasing baby-doll nightgowns and Bikini bathing suits. And it explains why the undertaker up there referred to Claudia as a pretty girl. And it explains why our necropsy report said she was thirty when everybody talked about her as if she were much younger."

"The girl who drowned wasn't Josie, huh?" Meyer said. "You figure she was Claudia."

"Damn right I figure she was Claudia."

"And you figure Josie cut her hair afterward, and dyed it, and took her cousin's name, and tried to pass as her cousin until she could get out of the country, huh?" Meyer said.

"Why?" Byrnes said. He was a compact man with a compact bullet head and a chunky economical body. He did not like to waste time or words.

"Because the trust income was in Claudia's name. Because Josie didn't have a dime of her own."

"She could have collected on her cousin's insurance policy," Meyer said.

"Sure, but that would have been the end of it. The trust called for those stocks to be turned over to U.C.L.A. if Claudia died. A college, for Pete's sake! How do you suppose Josie felt about that? Look, I'm not trying to hang a homicide on her. I just think she took advantage of a damn good situation. Claudia was in that boat alone. When she fell over the side, Josie really tried to rescue her, no question about it. But she missed, and Claudia drowned. Okay. Josie went all to pieces, couldn't talk straight, crying, sobbing, real hysterical woman, we've seen them before. But came the dawn. And with the dawn Josie began thinking. They were away from the city, strangers in a strange town.

"Claudia had drowned but no one *knew* that she was Claudia. No one but Josie. She had no identification on her, remember? Her purse was in the car. Okay. If Josie identified her cousin correctly, she'd collect twenty-five grand on the insurance policy, and then all that stock would be turned over to the college, and that would be the end of the gravy train. But suppose, just suppose Josie told the police the girl in the lake was Josie Thompson? Suppose she said, 'I, Claudia Davis, tell you that girl who drowned is my cousin, Josie Thompson'?"

Hawes nodded. "Then she'd still collect on an insurance policy, and also fall heir to those fat security dividends coming in."

"Right. What does it take to cash a dividend check? A bank account, that's all. A bank account with an established signature. So all she had to do was open one, sign her name as Claudia Davis, and then endorse every dividend check that came in exactly the same way."

"Which explains the new account," Meyer said. "She couldn't use Claudia's old account because the bank undoubtedly knew both Claudia *and* her signature. So Josie had to forfeit the sixty grand at Highland Trust and start from scratch."

"And while she was building a new identity and a new fortune," Hawes said, "just to make sure Claudia's few friends forgot all about her, Josie was running off to Europe. She may have planned to stay there for years."

"It all ties in," Carella said. "Claudia had a driver's license. She was the one who drove the car away from Stewart City. But Josie had to hire a chauffeur to take her back."

"And would Claudia, who was so meticulous about money matters, have kept so many people waiting for payment?" Hawes said. "No, sir. That was Josie. And Josie was broke. Josie was waiting for that insurance policy to pay off so she could settle those debts and get the hell out of the country."

"Well, I admit it adds up," Meyer said.

Peter Byrnes never wasted words. "Who cashed that twenty-five thousand-dollar check for Josie?" he said.

There was silence in the room.

"Who's got that missing five grand?" he said.

There was another silence.

"Who *killed* Josie?" he said.

Jeremiah Dodd of the Security Insurance Corporation, Inc, did not call until two days later. He asked to speak to Detective Carella, and when he got him on the phone, he said, "Mr. Carella, I've just heard from San Francisco on that check."

"What check?" Carella asked. He had been interrogating a witness to a knifing in a grocery store on Culver Avenue. The Claudia Davis or rather the Josie Thompson Case was not quite yet in the Open File, but it was ready to be dumped there, and was the farthest thing from Carella's mind at the moment.

"The check paid to Claudia Davis," Dodd said.

"Oh, yes. Who cashed it?"

"Well, there are two endorsements on the back. One was made by Claudia Davis, of course. The other was made by an outfit called Leslie Summers, Inc. It's a regular company stamp marked 'For Deposit Only' and signed by one of the officers."

"Have any idea what sort of a company that is?" Carella asked.

"Yes," Dodd said. "They handle foreign exchange."

"Thank you," Carella said.

He went there with Bert Kling later that afternoon. He went with Kling completely by chance and only because Kling was heading downtown to buy his mother a birthday gift and offered Carella a ride. When they parked the car, Kling asked, "How long will this take, Steve?"

"Few minutes, I guess."

"Want to meet me back here?"

"Well, I'll be at 720 Hall, Leslie Summers, Inc. If you're through before me, come on over."

"Okay, I'll see you," Kling said.

They parted on Hall Avenue without shaking hands. Carella found the street-level office of Leslie Summers, Inc., and walked in. A counter ran the length of the room, and there were several girls behind it. One of the girls was speaking to a customer in French and another was talking Italian to a man who wanted lire in exchange for dollars. A board behind the desk quoted the current exchange rate for countries all over the world.

Carella got in line and waited. When he reached the counter, the girl who'd been speaking French said, "Yes, sir?"

"I'm a detective," Carella said. He opened his wallet to where his shield was pinned to the leather. "You cashed a check for Miss Claudia Davis sometime in July. An insurance-company check for twenty-five thousand dollars. Would you happen to remember it?"

"No, sir, I don't think I handled it."

"Would you check around and see who did, please?"

The girl held a brief consultation with the other girls, and then walked to a desk behind which sat a corpulent, balding man with a razor-thin mustache. They talked with each other for a full five minutes. The man kept waving his hands. The girl kept trying to explain about the insurance-company check. The bell over the front door sounded. Bert Kling came in, looked around, saw Carella, and joined him at the counter.

"All done?" Carella asked.

"Yeah, I bought her a charm for her bracelet. How about you?"

"They're holding a summit meeting," Carella said.

The fat man waddled over to the counter. "What is the trouble?" he asked Carella.

"No trouble. Did you cash a check for twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes. Is the check no good?"

"It's a good check."

"It looked like a good check. It was an insurance-company check. The young lady waited while we called the company. They said it was bona fide and we should accept it. Was it a bad check?"

"No, no, it was fine."

"She had identification. It all seemed very proper."

"What did she show you?"

"A driver's license or a passport is what we usually require. But she had neither. We accepted her birth certificate. After all, we *did* call the company. Is the check no good?"

"It's fine. But the check was for twenty-five thousand, and we're trying to find out what happened to five thousand of—"

"Oh, yes. The francs."

"What?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of French francs," the fat man said. "She was going abroad?"

"Yes, she was going abroad," Carella said. He sighed heavily. "Well, that's that, I guess."

"It all seemed very proper," the fat man insisted.

"Oh, it was. Thank you. Come on, Bert."

They walked down Hall Avenue in silence.

"Beats me," Carella said.

"What's that, Steve?"

"This case." He sighed again. "Oh, what the hell!"

"Yeah, let's get some coffee. What was all this business about all those francs?"

"She bought five thousand dollars' worth of francs," Carella said.

"The French are getting a big play lately, huh?" Kling said, smiling. "Here's a place. This look okay?"

"Yeah, fine." Carella pulled open the door of the luncheonette. "What do you mean, Bert?"

"With the francs."

"What about them?"

"The exchange rate must be very good."

"I don't get you."

"You know. All those francs kicking around."

"Bert, what the hell are you talking about?"

"Weren't you with me? Last Wednesday?"

"With you where?"

"The line-up. I thought you were with me."

"No, I wasn't," Carella said tiredly.

"Oh, well, that's why."

"That's why what? Bert, for the love of—"

"That's why you don't remember him."

"Who?"

"The punk they brought in on that burglary pickup. They found five grand in French francs in his apartment."

Carella felt as if he'd just been hit by a truck.

It had been crazy from the beginning. Some of them are like that. The girl had looked black, but she was really white. They thought she was Claudia Davis, but she was Josie Thompson. And they had been looking for a murderer when all there happened to be was a burglar.

They brought him up from his cell where he was awaiting trial for Burglary One. He came up in an elevator with a police escort. The police van had dropped him off at the side door of the Criminal Courts Building, and he had entered the corridor under guard and been marched down through the connecting tunnel and into the building that housed the district attorney's office, and then taken into the elevator. The door of the elevator opened into a tiny room upstairs. The other door of the room was locked from the outside and a sign on it read No Admittance.

The patrolman who'd brought Ralph Reynolds up to the interrogation room stood with his back against the elevator door all the while the detectives talked to him, and his right hand was on the butt of his Police Special.

"I never heard of her," Reynolds said.

"Claudia Davis," Carella said. "Or Josie Thompson. Take your choice of names."

"I don't know either one of them. What the hell *is* this? You got me on a burglary rap, now you try to pull in everything was ever done in this city?"

"Who said anything was done, Reynolds?"

"If nothing was done, why'd you drag me up here?"

"They found five thousand bucks in French francs in your pad, Reynolds. Where'd you get it?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Don't get snotty, Reynolds! Where'd you get that money?"

"A guy owed it to me. He paid me in francs. He was a French guy—so he'd pay in francs."

"What's his name?"

"I can't remember."

"You'd better start trying."

"Pierre something."

"Pierre what?" Meyer said.

"Pierre La Salle, something like that. I didn't know him too good."

"But you lent him five grand, huh?"

"Yeah."

"What were you doing on the night of August first?"

"Why? What happened on August first?"

"You tell us."

"I don't know what I was doing."

"Were you working?"

"I'm unemployed."

"You know what we mean!"

"No. What do you mean?"

"Were you breaking into apartments?"

"No."

"Speak up! Yes or no?"

"I said no."

"He's lying, Steve," Meyer said.

"Sure he is."

"Yeah, sure I am. Look, cop, you got nothing on me but Burglary One, if that. And that you got to prove in court. So stop trying to hang anything else on me. You ain't got a chance."

"Not unless those prints check out," Carella said quickly.

"What prints?"

"The prints we found on the dead girl's throat," Carella lied.

"I was wearing—!"

The small room was as still as death.

Reynolds sighed heavily. He looked at the floor.

"You want to tell us?"

"No," he said. "Go to hell."

He finally told them. After twelve hours of repeated questioning he finally broke down. He hadn't meant to kill her, he said. He didn't even know anybody was in the apartment. He had looked in the bedroom, and the bed was empty. He hadn't seen her asleep in one of the chairs, fully dressed.

He had found the French money in a big jar on one of the shelves over the sink. He had taken the money and then accidentally dropped the jar, and she woke up and came into the room and saw him and began screaming. So he grabbed her by the throat. He only meant to shut her up. But she kept struggling. She was very strong. He kept holding on to her, but only to shut her up.

But she kept struggling, so he had to hold on. She kept struggling as if—as if he'd really been trying to kill her, as if she didn't want to lose her life. But that was manslaughter, wasn't it? He wasn't trying to kill her. That wasn't homicide, was it?

"I didn't mean to kill her!" he shouted as they took him into the elevator. "She began screaming! I'm not a killer! Look at me! Do I look like a killer?" And then, as the elevator began dropping to the basement, he shouted, "I'm a burglar!" as if proud of his profession, as if stating that he was something more than a common thief, as if he was a trained workman, a skilled artisan.

"I'm not a killer! I'm a burglar!" he screamed. "I'm not a killer! I'm not a killer!" And his voice echoed down the elevator shaft as the car dropped to the basement and the waiting van.

They sat in the small room for several moments after he was gone.

"Hot in here," Meyer said.

"Yeah." Carella nodded.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Maybe he's right," Meyer said. "Maybe he's only a burglar."

"He stopped being that the minute he stole a life, Meyer."

"Josie Thompson stole a life, too."

"No," Carella said. He shook his head. "She only borrowed one. There's a difference, Meyer."

The room went silent.

"You feel like some coffee?" Meyer asked.

"Sure."

They took the elevator down and then walked out into the brilliant August sunshine. The streets were teeming with life. They walked into the human swarm, but they were curiously silent.

At last Carella said, "I guess I think she shouldn't be dead. I guess I think that someone who tried so hard to make a life shouldn't have had it taken away from her."

Meyer put his hand on Carella's shoulder. "Listen," he said earnestly. "It's a job. It's only a job."

"Sure," Carella said. "It's only a job."

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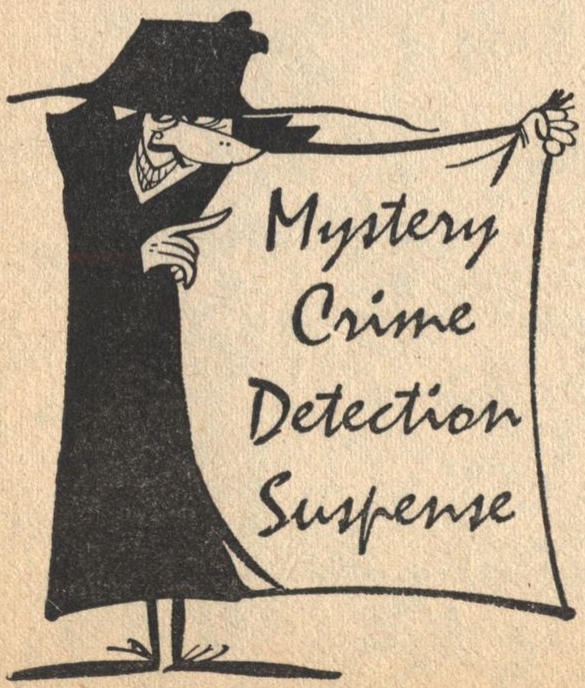

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