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# EDGAR WALLACE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH 1966 50¢

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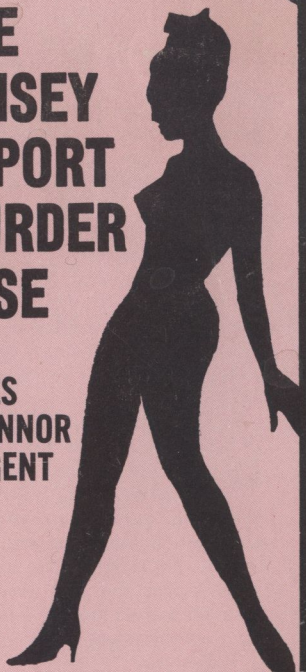


# MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE

Author of the memorable "King Kong," Edgar Wallace certainly needs no introduction as a writer whose reputation is reinforced through his many stories in top-flight magazines as well as the successful films his material has inspired. It is a pleasure to introduce you to the EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE and the exciting hours of mystery-reading enjoyment within its pages.

A mystery, at least a good one with all the ingredients in place and every detail perfectly organized and established, is one of the most engrossing types of stories known to modern man. How comforting is the evening that includes a mystery, some cherished drink and quietitude, so relaxing and yet so deliciously unnerving if the story itself is of high calibre.

Consequently, a well-done mystery is indeed one of the hardest forms of writing to complete successfully . . . contrary to the uninspired boasts of penny-a-word hacks who claim they can "dash off" a good mystery in a matter of hours. It has taken a long time for the mystery to evolve to its present form and stature. Edgar Allan Poe was a consummate master craftsman back in the 1840's. Edward Bulwer-Lytton carried on the Poe-ish tradition, joined by others in the 19th century period. Time passed and the modernists emerged on the scene, with John D. MacDonald et al making their contributions.

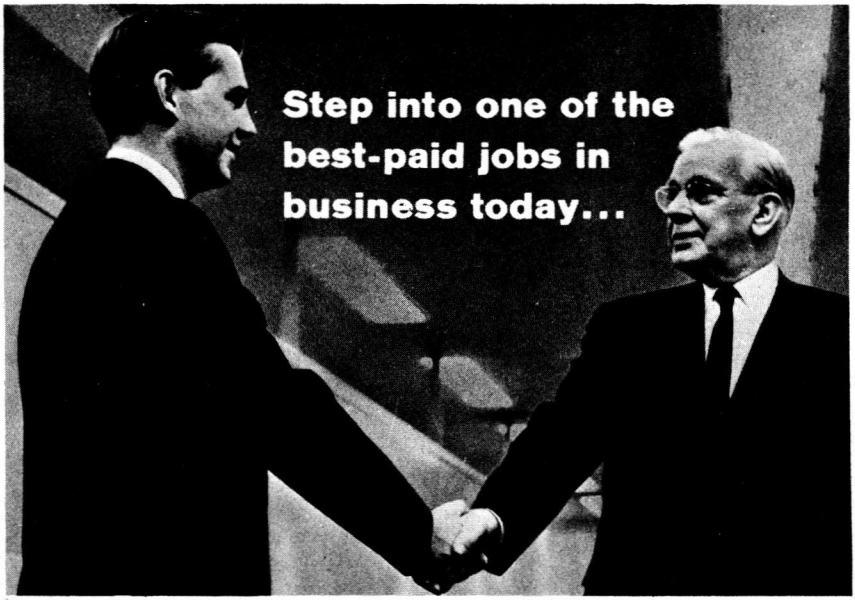
Following the evolutionary development of the mystery genre has been a parallel cycle of popularity and non-popularity among its adherents. This is true with any *type* of story; it is especially the case with mysteries.

Now mysteries are indeed on an up cycle, nurtured by the advent of the spy vogue which is a variant form of the genre. Sales of mystery novels, particularly those in the so-called "Gothic" category, are impressive indeed.

It is this belief in the present-day quality and popularity of mysteries that prompted us to publish this first issue. Our mentor is, even posthumously, one of the greatest of them all and we hope to uphold his level of quality by presenting some top-flight mysteries for your enjoyment in the months ahead.

Thank you.

The Editor

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MARCH 1966 VOL. 1 NO. 1

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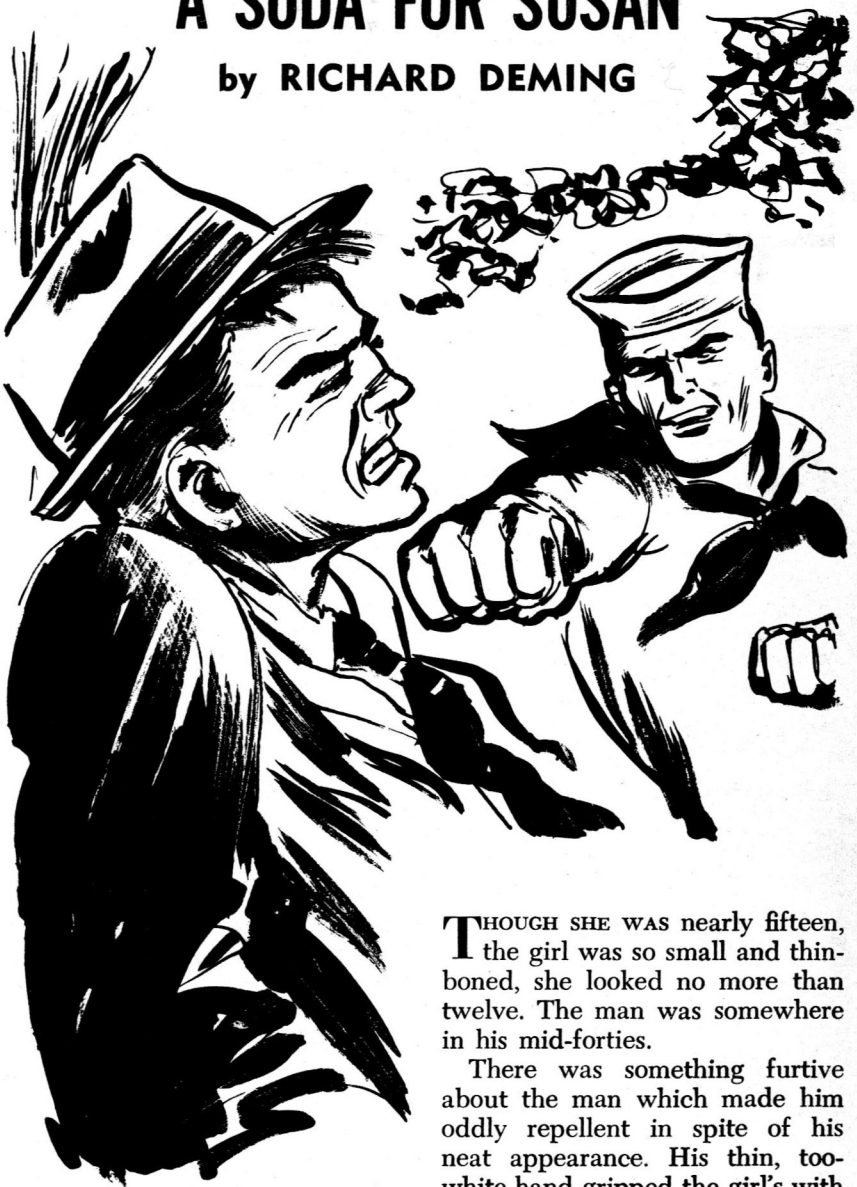
EDGAR WALLACE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 1, No. 1. March, 1966. Published monthly by Classic Mystery Publications, Inc., 315 West 70 St., New York, N.Y. Subscriptions, 12 issues $6.00, single copies, 50¢. Second class postage pending at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices.  Printed in the United States of America.

# A SODA FOR SUSAN

## by RICHARD DEMING



THOUGH SHE WAS nearly fifteen, the girl was so small and thin-boned, she looked no more than twelve. The man was somewhere in his mid-forties.

There was something furtive about the man which made him oddly repellent in spite of his neat appearance. His thin, too-white hand gripped the girl's with

a possessiveness which didn't seem quite normal.

The girl's face was set in placid lines as she trudged along by his side eating the candy bar he had given her. Looking up into the man's face, she noted the strange urgency in it, but it didn't seem either to puzzle or disturb her.

St. Louis' Forest Park is dotted with refreshment stands but the girl had paid no attention to the several they had passed up to that moment. Now, as they started to pass the last stand before the entrance to the bridle path toward which they were headed, she suddenly hung back against the man's grip. Obviously the enticements of the stand motivated her, however, and not reluctance to go on with the man.

He attempted to drag her past, but stopped abruptly and forced a thin smile when the child spoke in a piping voice which clearly carried to every customer at the stand.

"I'm thirsty, mister," she said. "Can I have a soda, please?"

More than twenty customers clustered about the refreshment stand, a mixture of couples of all ages, young girls in giggling groups, groups of young men who speculatively eyed the gigglers, plus a few people who seemed to be alone. A number turned to glance at the man and girl when the girl spoke.

One was a powerfully-built sailor in his late teens, a clean-looking youngster with his cap jauntily riding the back of his crew-cut head. He looked from the small girl to the man with a frown.

His face frozen into its smile, the man said in a voice so low it was audible only to the girl, "Later. After a while I'll buy you all the soda you want. Come on now."

"But I'm thirsty, mister," the girl piped.

Several people were now frowning at the man, and dead silence fell over the group about the stand. The sailor's expression became an undecided scowl.

The man avoided looking at anyone but the girl. "Wait here," he said in an unnerved voice, released her hand and walked over to the counter.

"Bottle of soda," he said, laying down a dime.

The attendant had been too busy serving customers to notice either the man and child or the sudden unnatural silence of his patrons. In a harried voice he asked, "What kind?"

"Any kind," the man said.

Shrugging, the counterman uncapped a bottle of orange, set it down and picked up the dime. The man quickly carried the bottle to the girl.

"Come on now," he said, starting once again to move toward the entrance to the bridle path.

"You didn't get me a straw," the child said loudly.

The man stared at her as though he would enjoy boxing her ears, but he forced another thin smile. His gaze avoiding the numerous eyes now studying him with indecisive hostility, he returned to the counter, plucked a straw from a glass container and carried it to the girl.

"Thanks, mister," she said in a clear voice, sticking the straw in the bottle and trustingly holding her free hand out to him again.

The man grasped it convulsively and moved off toward the bridle path at such a rapid pace, the girl's thin legs almost had to run to keep up. Every eye at the refreshment stand stared after them.

The teen-age sailor's indecisive scowl suddenly became an expression of determination. Straightening away from the counter, he announced generally, "That kid doesn't know that guy from a hole in the wall. You people can stand here and think about it all day, if you want, but I'm going to check up on this."

He strode off after the man and child. Almost instantly a group of three young men followed, then another lone man, and then the entire group was trailing after the sailor.

Casting a worried look back over his shoulder, the man saw the crowd of more than twenty

people streaming toward him, and halted in a sudden terror. He attempted to jerk his hand from the girl's, but the move surprised her into tightening her grip, so that he couldn't run without dragging her along with him. Frenziedly he slapped at her wrist, belatedly causing her to turn loose, but by then the sailor was upon them.

The man backed to a tree, both hands raised defensively and his face forming what he meant to be a placating smile. It came out as a grimace of fear.

Now that he had his quarry cornered, the sailor wasn't sure how to proceed. Stopping directly in front of the cringing man, he clenched his fists but said nothing.

Both were still standing in silence, the man attempting an appeasing smile and the sailor glaring at him, when the rest of the crowd arrived and formed a semicircle about them.

A middle-aged woman with a lantern jaw, trailed by a meek-looking man her own age, took the initiative from the sailor.

In a demanding voice she asked the girl, "Do you know this man, dear?"

The child had been staring around interestedly at the crowd so suddenly formed about her and her companion. She didn't seem in the least disturbed by the phenomenon. At the question she focused her attention on the lantern-jawed woman.

"No, ma'am," she said politely. "He's just a nice man who bought me candy."

The woman's nostrils flared as she looked at the man. Then her attention returned to the girl and she summoned a smile designed to get the child's confidence.

"You just met this man today, honey?"

"Yes, ma'am. Just outside the rest room over at the pavilion."

The woman turned to the man, her expression approaching ferocity. "You were hanging around the woman's rest room, were you? Waiting for some innocent child too young to know she shouldn't talk to strangers? Where were you taking her? Off in the bushes?"

"Listen," the man said feebly. "I ain't done nothing. What's eating all you people?"

"Where were you taking her?" the woman repeated in a voice of doom. "There's nothing up this bridle path but a lot of deserted spots."

"We was just taking a walk," the man said in a semi-whine. "There's no law against giving kids candy. I just like kids."

"That I believe," the woman spat at him.

The man's eyes darted around the circle of hostile faces without much hope. He gulped twice before he could manage words that bordered on hysteria, "You people got no right to question me. I ain't done nothing."

His tone, his expression and his whole manner were so obviously guilty that his mild opposition only further incensed the crowd. It was enough to finally trigger the rage of the young sailor, who all this time had been standing before the man and had never unclenched his fists.

"You damned kid raper!" he said, and smashed the man back against the tree with an uppercut.

The man made a feeble effort to defend himself, but he didn't have a chance against the powerful youngster. Deliberately, with almost emotionless calculation, the sailor beat him until his face was a bloody pulp and his body a quivering mass of bruises. When

the man tried to end the one-sided fight by huddling on the ground with his arms protectively around his head, the sailor jerked him to his feet, held him erect against the tree with one hand and smashed blow after blow into his face and body.

The crowd watched silently with a mass look of grim approval, not a semblance of horror on any face.

The girl watched too, her placid expression evaporating with the first blow and a peculiar intentness replacing it. As the sailor warmed to his task, her expression became more and more excited until her eyes seemed to glow feverishly.

When the sailor finally began to tire, the girl's excitement simultaneously began to fade. Unobtrusively she backed through the crowd, which was too intent on the beating to notice her, and drifted away toward the refreshment stand. By the time the sailor let his unconscious victim slump to the ground, the girl was well beyond the stand and had quickened her pace to a near trot.

An hour later, when she entered her house, she found her father asleep on the front-room sofa and her mother reading the Sunday society column.

As the girl came in the front door, her mother looked up casually and said, "Back already, Susan? Have a nice time at the park?"

"Yes, ma'am," Susan said politely.

"What do you find to do there?" her mother asked. "I should think that after a few Sundays you'd exhaust the facilities. You haven't missed a Sunday this summer, have you?"

But the question was only an idle attempt to show parental interest, and she didn't expect an answer. She had returned to her paper before her daughter could even reply.

The following Sunday Susan arrived at the pavilion promptly at two P.M. as usual. Seating herself on a bench against the wall just outside the men's rest room, she waited quietly.

Though she was an intelligent girl and unusually well read for her age, it was knowledge born of experience rather than from books that made her pick this particular spot. Any text on abnormal psychology could have told her that public rest rooms are a favorite hunting ground for sexual deviates. She hadn't any books on abnormal psychology or sexual deviates, but she did know that if she sat on this particular bench long enough, the type of person necessary to her Sunday-afternoon game would inevitably appear.

She had developed an instinct for spotting the type, and she dismissed most of the men who passed in and out of the door with a glance. Once she smiled tentatively at a nervous-looking man in his sixties, but he only gave her a pleased smile in return, said, "Hi there, young lady," and walked on.

It was nearly three-thirty before she found the man she wanted. He was a slovenly-dressed, red-faced man of about fifty-five, with little red-rimmed eyes which constantly shifted from side to side. He glanced at her as he started to pass on his way to the rest room, then stopped abruptly when she gave him a radiant smile.

He smiled back, not in the way most adults smile at children, but in an appraising manner, running his eyes slowly over her thin form.

"Waiting for your daddy, honey?" he asked hopefully.

"No," she said. "Just resting. I'm not with anybody."

The red-faced man looked gratified. He glanced around in a vaguely furtive manner. "Like to go over to the zoo and look at the bears?"

"I saw them," she said. "I'd rather have a bar of candy."

The man took another cautious look around, seemed satisfied that no one was paying any attention to them, and asked, "Now why should I buy a little girl candy? What would that get me?"

"Whatever you want," she said placidly, looking straight at him.

The man looked surprised. He examined the girl again and a faintly glazed expression appeared in his eyes.

"How do you mean, whatever I want?"

"Well, you know. Buy me some candy and we'll play whatever game you want. I'll go look at the bears with you, or take a walk somewhere, or whatever you want."

He licked his lips. "Take a walk with me where?"

"Anywhere. I know a bridle path where nobody ever goes, hardly."

The man's expression became a mixture of hope and amazement. "You know pretty much for such a young one, don't you? How old are you?"

"Twelve," she lied.

He ran his eyes over her thin body again. "You been to this bridle path with men before?"

"Sure," she said. "When they buy me candy."

Again the man glanced all around, an increasing furtiveness in his manner.

"They sell candy right there," Susan said, pointing to the refreshment stand in the center of the pavilion. "I want a chocolate bar with nuts."

"All right," he said. "You wait here."

Hurrying over to the stand, he returned with a candy bar and gave it to her. She said, "Thank you," in a polite tone and rose from the bench. Familiarly she slipped her hand into his.

"This bridle path is pretty far," she said. "Halfway across the park. I'll show you where."

Bridle paths snaked over a good portion of Forest Park, and the girl led her companion in a direction exactly opposite to the one she had taken with her companion of the previous Sunday. They walked nearly a half mile, passing two refreshment stands enroute, before they came in sight of their destination.

Here, as in the location she had chosen the previous Sunday, a refreshment stand was situated only a short distance from the place the bridle path came out on the road. The usual mixed crowd ringed the stand, men and women of all ages, plus a few children. As she and the man neared it, she scanned the faces of the customers, her attention settling on a young soldier in uniform whose wide shoulders strained the material of his suntan shirt.

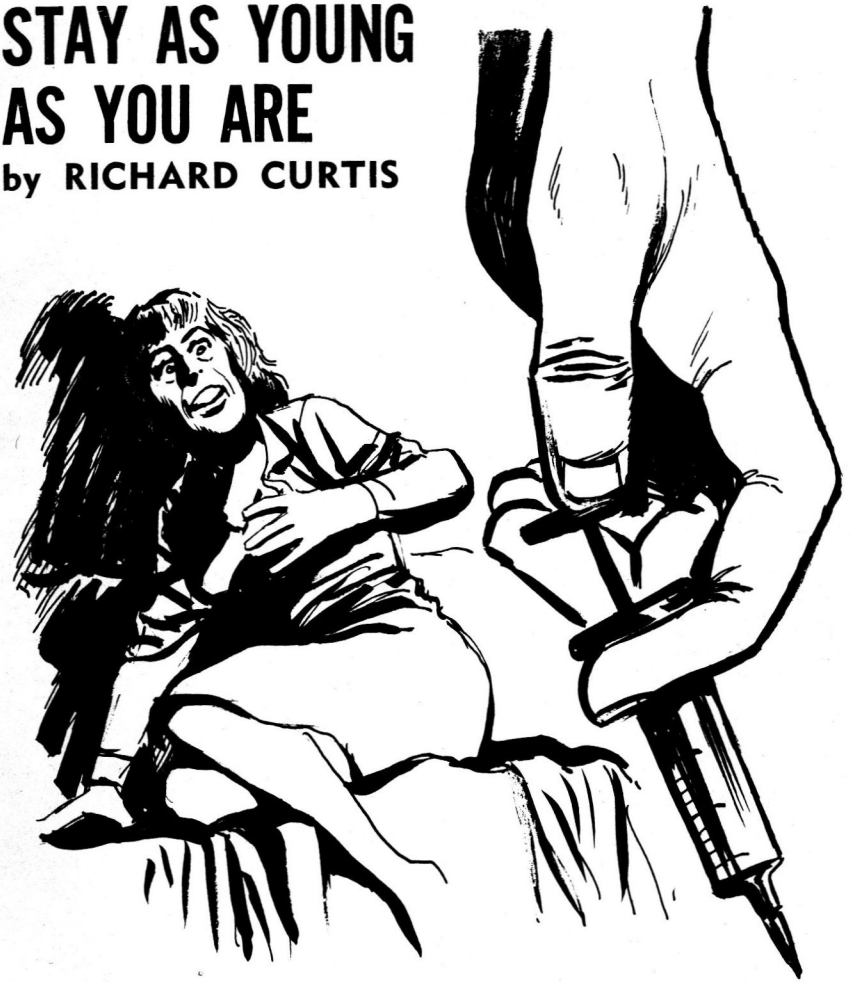
Directly alongside the soldier Susan suddenly hung back from her companion's grip.

"I'm thirsty, mister," she said in a clear voice. "Can I have a soda, please?"

Dropping Susan's hand, the red-faced man selfconsciously began to fumble in his pocket for a coin. Susan's face was placid as she looked up at him, but its placidity concealed growing excitement at what she knew would shortly begin to happen. Excitement mixed with the hate she felt for all men who bought little girls candy.

# STAY AS YOUNG AS YOU ARE

by RICHARD CURTIS



ON THE DAY Donald Pinke lost his innocence, his destiny as a murderer was sealed.

It would have been appropriate if that day had been dismal and turbulent, but the agony of childhood's end was all the more poignant for him because it happened on such a splendid day, a crisp autumn afternoon when life seemed sweeter to him than ever before. It was as if the weather

had cruelly prepared him for a joyous miracle and was now mocking his catastrophe with a bright orange sun and a delicious frosty sky and the toasty smell of burning leaves. But then any weather is bad weather on the day the shock of reality opens your eyes to life.

He'd come from high school to find his grandmother, his mother's mother who had lived with them since the grandfather died, in a state of great distress. She sat rocking on the edge of her bed, her fist pounding her heavy bosom, tears flowing down her cheeks, a keening sob coming from her throat. For a moment he thought it was an especially severe diabetic reaction, and, having administered relief to her many times in the past, he snatched her paraphernalia off the dresser. But she waved it away. "If that's all that was wrong it would be a blessing," she sobbed.

Donald got terribly frightened. "What's the matter? Has something happened to Mom? Dad?"

With this she let out a chilling cry. Very near panic, he wanted to run away screaming, but he managed to get a grip on himself. Sitting down beside her, he rubbed her back the way he knew soothed her, and chattered whatever phrases of comfort came to mind. At last her rocking and sobbing abated, and when she seemed calm he delicately questioned her about the cause of her agony. But she said he could not tell him.

Coming on top of his fright, his grandmother's perverse reticence made him violently anxious. In the tightlipped Pinke household she was the only person he had ever talked to. If she sealed *her* lips, it would be as if the last exit from a crypt had clamped shut, trapping him in black suffocation. He got up from the bed and paced the floor in front of her, trying to hold down his hysteria. "What do you mean, you can't tell me? Why can't you tell me?"

"You're too young to know about these things."

He scowled and took a position in front of her, forcing her to look up at him. Reluctantly she surveyed his height and broad shoulders and the shadow of beard on his cheeks. Her lips quivered. He was no longer a boy and she knew it.

Donald wasn't a forceful person, and he had never had to assert himself to get his way. He almost didn't know how. But the gravity of the situation demanded that he find the power to coerce somewhere, and he reached deep into himself, found something that felt like strength, and dragged it up. Gently but with uncompromising firmness he said "I may be only sixteen, but I can handle myself like a man. Whatever's wrong, I want to know about it. You must tell me. Grandma, you

*must* tell me."

She sat still for a long time, not looking at him.

Then, her voice dry as tinder, she told him that his father had asked his mother for a divorce.

It struck him like lightning from a cloudless sky. His jaw dropped fatuously and hot tears flooded his eyes. "I don't believe you! You're joking. It's impossible!" In sympathy his grandmother started crying again and for several minutes they both carried on, the old woman and the boy, as though it were a funeral. And indeed, Donald was no less stunned than if his parents' lives *had* been snuffed out suddenly.

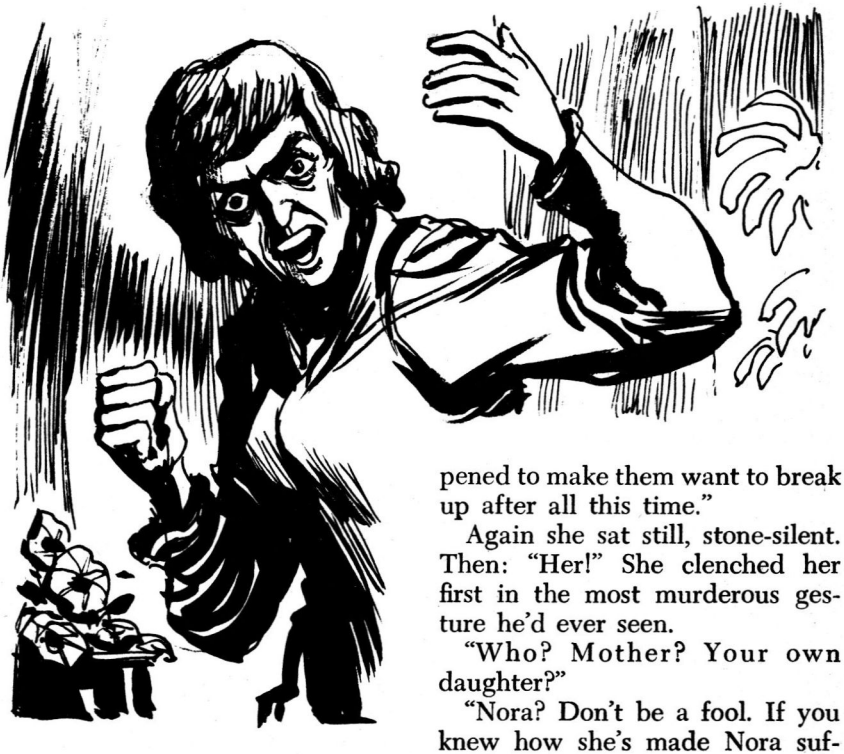
A divorce—when their marriage had been virtually perfect? When they had appeared to be no less than perpetually in love with each other? When he had never heard them argue or raise their voices at each other or even disagree? When, of all parents he knew, *his* parents presented the only absolutely united front? The irony made him want to laugh.

He had boasted of the security in his family as a result of this united front of theirs, and the fact that he had convinced himself it was true is what set him up for the shock of his grandmother's announcement. And yet . . . yet secretly he had sensed how very forbidding the front was. And even more secretly—he hated it. Perhaps it was his hatred that made him want to laugh.

It was as if his parents had joined hands in an unbreakable grip to exclude other people, to exclude *him*. He saw how other boys took advantage of conflicts between their parents to play father and mother off against one another. But there *was* no conflict between Donald's parents. They were two against the world, a kind of conspiracy to protect themselves against a hostile humanity. But Donald, having no basis for comparison, interpreted their lack of friction as love. Indeed, his mother and father loved each other so much that there was no love left over for him. Time and again he had probed for chinks in the wall, and sometimes he had hurled himself in frustration against it, hoping to find a niche between them in which he could huddle and feel warm and accepted. But no, they were locked in such tight embrace that he couldn't ever part them. Or so he had believed. In fact, his unquestioned belief in his parents' love for each other formed the keystone of his relationship to them.

It was out of this immense illusion, then, that whatever dissatisfaction they felt for each other had, unknown to Donald, gathered so much momentum. And now it had knocked away his keystone, leaving him . . . where?

His grandmother offered scanty elaboration. "They never talked



things over. They always held it in when they were mad at each other. They saved up all their grievances, and now—this!"

"But why now? Why all of a sudden now?"

She got up heavily and pulled a tissue out of the box on her nighttable. "Don't ask me any more, please."

"If there's more I want to hear it, all of it." His voice was at a dangerously tense pitch, and she cowered. "Now tell me what happened to make them want to break up after all this time."

Again she sat still, stone-silent. Then: "Her!" She clenched her first in the most murderous gesture he'd ever seen.

"Who? Mother? Your own daughter?"

"Nora? Don't be a fool. If you knew how she's made Nora suffer!"

"Who?"

"Florence. Vile woman. Vile, vile woman."

"Florence? *Aunt* Florence? You don't mean that she and Dad . . .?"

His grandmother nodded sadly.

Coming on top of the first shock, this one all but floored him. He collapsed in his grandmother's armchair and stared mutely for he didn't know how long, trying to grasp the enormity of the facts, to find some resource in his experience that would enable him to

understand and to bear the pain.

Florence Ames, his father's secretary, was not literally an aunt, but was such a close friend of the family that everyone treated and addressed her as one. From adult conversations Donald had gathered that the family thought of her as an attractive bachelor woman who, though she could have had many men, had never found the right one. She had therefore thrown her energies into helping Mr. Pinke build up his business into the success it was now. Her behavior in relation to Mr. Pinke had been a model of circumspection, and if there had ever been a question about the degree of their intimacy, the characteristic Pinke silence had prevented it from reaching open discussion.

The Pinkes had adopted her and she'd weathered many difficulties with them, both hers and theirs. She could never do enough for the family. Donald had always been crazy about her and sometimes wished she were his mother, because as wonderful as his real mother was in her fashion, she never took him to shows and ball games the way Florence did. Her position in the family was so natural that he accepted it without question, and of course his innocence had precluded him from asking the kind of question that might occur to an adult.

But such questions now came to his mind in abundance. "How long . . .?"

"Years," his grandmother answered as if she's been reading his thoughts. "Oh, they've been discreet about it all right! But she's getting tired of being the sneak she is, and she's getting old. She wants to marry your father. She's no longer satisfied just to be his—to be unmarried to him." Her suppressed hatred crackled in the air.

"How did you learn about this?"

She explained that she'd overheard it from her room, which was across the hall from the Pinke's bedroom. Stewart Pinke had, it seems, been on the phone with Florence promising her he'd speak to Nora about a divorce, when Nora walked into the room. He quickly hung up and he and Nora launched into a terrific, bitter fight. He told Nora he found her dull, and Florence gave him the excitement he needed in his life. Nora swore she'd never grant him a divorce, and insisted that he get rid of Florence. He said he would never do that and stormed out of the house to report to Florence. Nora ran into the park to be alone and think about it.

Donald listened to his grandmother's story in a state of mute horror, and when she finished, one question above all preyed on his mind. "How long have you known this thing was going on?"

"Nora and I have suspected for years."

"Then *why* didn't you ever get it out in the open before it came to *this*?" He had never shouted at anyone before, and his grandmother shrank under the withering rage in his voice.

"Nobody talks to anybody in this house," she answered bleakly. "Nobody ever talks to anybody."

DONALD ASSUMED THAT now that the issue had been aired, it would come to a head. But he was mistaken. The effort necessary for them to expose the ugly matter had, it seemed, drained them of the courage and candidness necessary to negotiate with each other in the face of their initial refusal to compromise. They appeared to take each other's threats at face value: Nora would never grant Stewart a divorce, and he would never throw Florence over. Finding themselves deadlocked after their first clash, they slid back into their shells of silence and isolation, to remain there, for all anyone knew, indefinitely. The next three weeks went by as if nothing had ever transpired. Mr. and Mrs. Pinke affected the same cordiality they'd shown before.

Though Donald and his grandmother participated in this deception, they found it almost impossible to live with. It was just too big and glaring and strident to make believe it didn't exist. His grandmother had the advantage of age in suppressing her feelings, but she paid for the suppression cruelly. She was after all an ailing woman. Her sorrow displayed itself in her condition, which jumped from hyper-to hypoglycemia—diabetic coma to insulin shock—with every turn of hope to despair and despair to hope.

Donald hardly bore the strain better than she. The revelation had yanked him from a world of relative serenity into one seething with ferocity and ugliness, and the idea of the family returning to the status quo ante bellum was absolutely insufferable to him. Ignoring how much his parents hated each other was like ignoring a needle pushed against his heart. His pain demanded relief, just as his grandmother's did. He was committed to act.

He was sensible enough to know there was no point in trying to restore the old order, any more than there was in trying to bring back his lost innocence. He was not the old Donald and the family was not the old Pinkes. The false structure of their lives had been revealed, and a new and honest one must now replace it. There must be a new balance. Donald wasn't sure what it should be, wasn't even sure he cared. The important thing to him was that stability be re-established at any cost. It was beyond his comprehension that such an arrangement

as now existed between his mother, father and Florence could remain in equilibrium for an extended time, possibly forever. Since it made him suffer, he couldn't imagine what pleasure they could get out of prolonging it.

Unable to abide the hypocrisy, then, and impelled by his awful hunger for security, he decided to break through the Pinke silence and speak to the parties. He announced his plan to his grandmother, who told him with no conviction at all that he was naive and that his parents' affairs were none of his business. In truth she was as desperate as Donald to see the thing done with, and at last she gave him her blessing.

FLORENCE AMES, STATELY and imposing in her tweed suit, was more than a little patronizing when Donald confided in her that he "knew what was going on." Her amusement merely added to the awful embarrassment he felt when she joined him in the cocktail lounge he'd so maturely selected for the place of their tryst. The waiter knew he was under age, but Florence's wink had settled the matter of serving him, and Donald got his scotch and soda.

"Have you spoken to your parents about it?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Then why have you come to *me*?"

"Because you're . . ." He took a deep draught of drink while searching for a polite way of putting it.

"Because I'm the third party—the intruder? Donald, you're young and there's a lot you don't know. Your notions of love are still restricted to crushes and necking and going steady." She tousled his hair as he blushed and tried to show indignation. "If you weren't so loyal to your mother I'd say something right now," Florence said.

"I'm not loyal to anybody. Say what you were going to say."

Her eyes, amber in the reflection from her drink, glowed provocatively across the dimness of the lounge. "The real 'third party' is your mother. If she and your father really loved each other, I'd wash my hands of the thing. But they don't. Your father loves *me*. He wants to marry me. That makes your mother the intruder."

Donald held down his gorge. Her words embittered him but they had the stamp of truth. In response he could only fall back on a feeble argument. "Third party or not, she's his wife and he's her husband and that comes first."

She disposed of this with a worldly sigh. "Ah Donald, the virtue of youth is that it can rally behind duty. But conscience is a muscle that gets soft with age. When you're my age there's only

desire to govern you." She smiled at him with a touch of piety and covered his trembling hand. "You'll understand when you're older."

He withdrew his hand. "If that's all there is to being older I don't want any part of it."

Ruffled, she said sharply "What would you have me do?"

"I don't know."

"Yes you do. You have a pretty good idea, don't you?"

"Well, I don't want to tell you what to do, but . . . well why can't you leave here, get married, settle down somewhere. There are plenty of men interested in you, I've seen them. Why pick on the one man you can't have?"

"Who says I can't have him?"

"My mother, that's who. She'll never let him go."

"I don't know about that. But even if it's so I'll take your father however I can get him. I love him, don't you understand? I don't love anyone else. Besides which, he needs me. His business depends on me. I've been with the firm for years and no one knows enough about it to take over. Without me it'd collapse."

"I'm sure you've seen to that," he said between his teeth.

She rose suddenly. "I won't have you being fresh to me. I'm not obliged to discuss this with you at all, you know."

"I'm sorry." He pulled her back into her seat.

She relaxed and patted his hand gently. "You're under strain, darling. I know it's a great shock to you, but you'll survive it. Just stop putting your nose into something that doesn't concern you. You'll only get hurt." She pushed her drink away, paused thoughtfully, and then brightened. "Look, if you really are intent on getting involved, why don't you speak to your mother? She's the one who's dragging her heels."

"Are you suggesting I talk her into granting my father a divorce?"

"No," she said quickly, "but if she were made to understand that divorce is inevitable and that your father and I are determined to hold the line . . ." She backed off, seeing how it aroused Donald's anger. "Look, you love me, don't you? How often have you told me you think of me as your second

mother? What would be so bad about my marrying your father? Think of all the fun we could have." She touched her tongue to her lower lip, and Donald grew warm. The woman's seductive powers were all too clear to him; he could hardly blame his father for falling for them.

"Then you don't intend to do anything? That's your last word?"

Rising again, she shrugged. "What can I do? I have to play the game the way your mother wants it."

"And what if she wants it this way forever?"

She turned her palms up. "I won't be happy about it, but if it has to be, it has to be."

She kissed him, reached into her purse and pressed some bills into his hand for the drinks. He objected but she wouldn't hear of him paying, and she strode proudly out of the lounge. Donald felt childish and humiliated and he rushed to the men's room before anyone could see the tears in his eyes.

A VETERAN OF one battle, he was a bit better prepared to grapple with his mother. She, by contrast to Florence, was pale and small, but sturdily built and deceptively energetic. He had never found her "dull," as his father had described her, but merely deliberate and not too spontaneous. She could get enthusiastic about things that closely affected her, but by the time she warmed to them everyone usually had lost interest in hearing what she had to offer. However, on the subject of her marriage and the threat to it, she waxed very hot indeed once she'd overcome her surprise at the intensity of Donald's interest and his resolution to flush the matter into the open. "Who else have you spoken to about it?" she wanted to know.

"No one else," Donald lied somewhat uneasily.

She examined his eyes suspiciously. "Then what makes you say it's 'obvious' your father is in love with Florence?"

He gulped, almost losing the composure he'd strived to present to her, but covered himself nicely. "Why, if Dad wants to marry her he *must* be."

She cut him off brusquely. "One thing doesn't necessarily follow from the other. "You're very young, Donald. There's a lot about the relations between the sexes that's still a mystery to you. I don't know if there's even any point in going into it with you. But as long as it's made you so unhappy I suppose I owe you some explanation."

"Then explain why he'd marry her if he didn't love her."

"He only thinks he loves her."

Donald found this funny and gently rebuked her. "Really, Mom, don't you think you're wishfully

thinking just a wee bit? I'm sure he knows what he wants and what he doesn't want by this time."

"Well I'm not sure, by any means. Your father has never wanted what he has and has always wanted what he doesn't have. I admit Florence may be more attractive than I am, but what unmarried woman isn't? She has no responsibilities, so of course she can be adventurous and exciting and free. But take my word for it: as soon as she's landed her man, she'll show him a not-so-exciting side. Then he'll long for the comfort which only I can give him."

"But you're not going to give him a chance to find out."

"That's right."

"But shouldn't he be free to decide what he *thinks* is best, even if he's . . . well, misguided?"

"Certainly he *should* be. It's a free country and ideally a man has the right to make a fool of himself. But when he threatens to make fools of other people and do even worse harm to them, they have a right to protect themselves. He's free to do what he pleases as long as I'm not jeopardized."

"Which is to say," said a Donald who grew wiser by the moment, "that he's not free to do anything at all."

"No, he's free to carry on his relationship with her, though it causes me the greatest unhappiness. I simply won't permit him to divorce me."

"You mean you're willing to let it drag on—and on"

"And on." Her face suddenly became ashen, stricken as it seemed, with a vision of an eternally loveless marriage founded on spite and nastiness, a marriage of silent hatred so much worse than what it used to be because it had risen once to the surface, tried to break into the open, then sunk again hopelessly to the bottom. "You're thinking what a waste it is, aren't you? But remember this, Donald: When we can't have love, we settle for *things*. Just having him in the house, however much he hates me, is better than . . ."

She began trembling, her chin quivered, and then she burst into tears. She embraced her son and clung to him for several minutes, sobbing uncontrollably. Donald's heart ached, but somehow a callus had begun growing around it and he was not as affected as he might have been a short while ago. Soon his mother calmed down. "Maybe you can speak to your father," she sniffled. "If he knows how concerned you are, maybe he'll be human enough to break with her for his son's sake. Maybe he'll give in to another male, even . . ." She stopped herself.

He pushed her away roughly. "Even if I'm only a boy, is that what you were going to say?"

"Don't be hurt, darling. I know

you're trying to act like a man, but there's so much you can't see yet. Talk to your father, ask him to come back for your sake as well as mine. You do want us to remain together, don't you? I know how fond of her you are, but . . ."

"If I had to make a choice, *you* know who I'd take," he said, throwing his arms around her.

"That makes me so happy," his mother murmured.

Behind her back, Donald smiled faintly at his growing accomplishment in the diplomatic art of strategic obfuscation.

DONALD WAS ALREADY two inches taller than his father, but the disparity in height seemed much greater because his father slouched. From his hazy eyes to his puckering lips to his round shoulders to his slender, fretting fingers, Stewart Pinke was the picture of an uncertain man. Yet the muscles of his jaw contradicted the picture and showed him to be, on the contrary, a most determined person. They were knotted and tight, as though from years of biting on something he neither wanted to swallow nor spit out. Perhaps he was both determined *and* uncertain. Perhaps, yes, he was determined *to* be uncertain, as if that were the only way to maintain the illusion he had everything he wanted.

He played his cards very close to his chest, and when Donald told him he knew a thing or two about the affair, Pinke proceeded with the utmost resistance.

"Why have you come to me first?" he asked his son after interrogating him obliquely on some points of fact.

Having profitted from his two previous failures, Donald was able to lie with almost adult facility. "Because you're the man in the middle. It's really up to you. No one can do anything until you decide."

"Oh, I don't know," he said insincerely.

With a boldness born of his rapidly expanded knowledge of human nature, Donald said, "I think you do. The women are stalemated and you're the only one who can break the tie."

"You *have* spoken to them."

Donald shook his head vigorously. "I haven't, really. It's just obvious from the way things have bogged down since you argued with mother."

"Look here, what business is this of yours at all?"

"It makes a big difference to me whether my mother is Mom or Florence or neither or both, and whether I have a man for a father instead of . . ." He felt himself on the verge of losing control, the last thing he wanted. He whirled away from his father and caught his breath.

"Donald," said his father in

that conciliatory tone that meant, Donald knew from his encounters with his mother and Florence, a shift in tactics, "I know you mean well, but you're still a child. When you're older you'll see that nothing is a simple yes or no. There are so many things to consider."

"Maybe there are, but can't you just decide who you prefer?"

"Who do *you* prefer?"

"I . . ." Donald's mouth closed slowly. "I don't know," he murmured. He really didn't know, nor did it matter to him. What he really wanted was peace and quiet. He wanted his parents to act maturely and decisively. He would accept anything they did in this spirit. "That's not my province," he said.

"Perhaps not, but you still see how hard it is to decide."

"Yes, but isn't a decision better than just leaving things hanging forever?"

"Not always," Pinke replied, and there was something so monstrous in the way he savored this answer that Donald felt he was gaping into the ultimate sink of human malice. He whirled and ran out of the room as his father was saying "Perhaps if *you* were to speak to the women . . ."

HE RAN TO the park, to the private place there where he could always be most alone with himself, and there he allowed his rage to sweep him up and carry him away. His mother, his father, Florence—he hated them with a murderous passion. He had summoned all his courage to break through the pall of self-indulgent, self-gratifying silence that smothered the household, only to be rebuffed and humiliated and exploited beyond the limits of dignity.

At last he saw clearly why the three of them were satisfied to be deadlocked. As things stood and would continue to stand, Florence had her lover without having to be responsible for him; Nora Pinke had her husband without having to be glamorous for him; and Stewart Pinke, very simply, had a wife and a mistress at the same time. Why would they want to undo such an ideal state of affairs? Certainly not for duty's sake, and who represented duty but Donald? Oh, they knew what he represented all right, and they'd sent him around to each other to remind each other of their duties to act like adults. But they didn't want to be adults, and so when Donald, the voice of conscience, threatened their sense of duty they reduced him to a child.

It was this cruel game that inflamed Donald and made him wild with a lust for revenge. His furor was explosive and the only way to charge the intolerable tension was to kill. But which one of them did he hate most? He considered each, found pleasure in contemplating

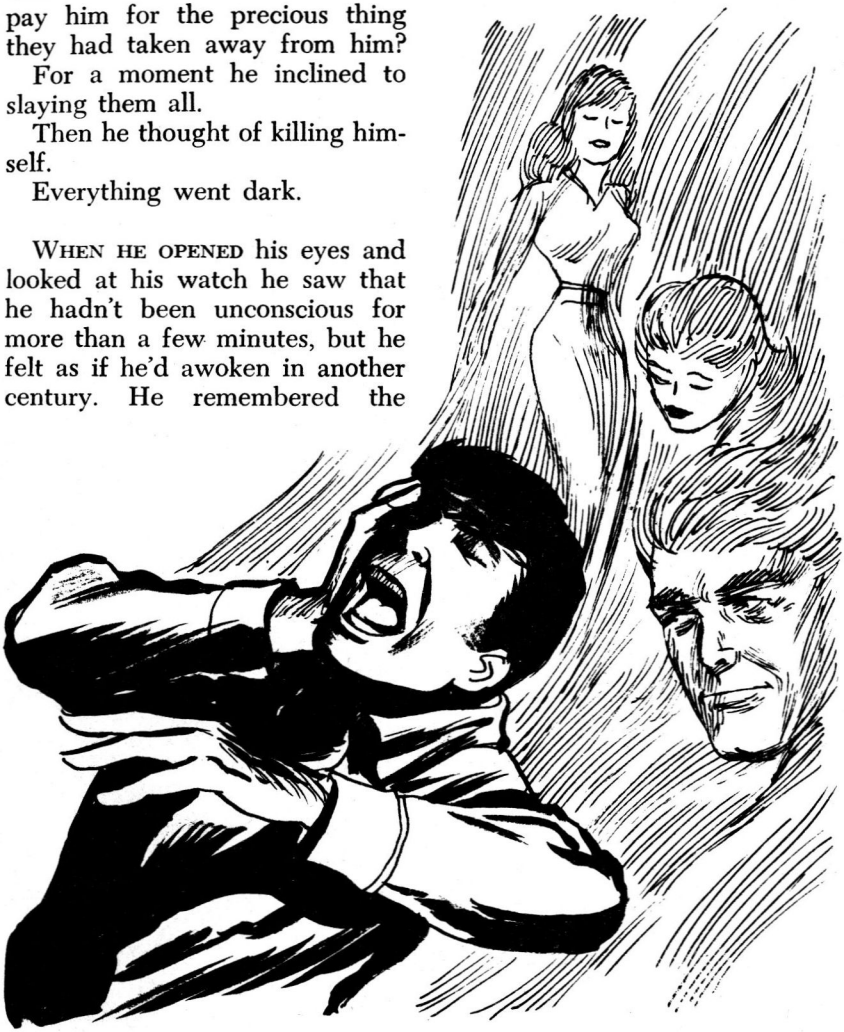
his or her death, then rejected the idea as the pleasure was quickly balanced by the pain of loss. His indecision merely served to whip him into a greater frenzy. Whose death would satisfy his hunger, whose elimination would best repay him for the precious thing they had taken away from him?

For a moment he inclined to slaying them all.

Then he thought of killing himself.

Everything went dark.

WHEN HE OPENED his eyes and looked at his watch he saw that he hadn't been unconscious for more than a few minutes, but he felt as if he'd awoken in another century. He remembered the ferocious hatred he had felt just a short time ago, but it was simply a memory, burned out and dead. What he felt in its place was another kind of hatred, icy and calm as the ocean far beneath



Arctic glaciers. It was a sudden turnabout, but looking back at events of the past month or so he could see how cold self-control had been replacing the hot blood of his anger. The blood had boiled over in one final surge, and now he was calm and icy. And without quite understanding why, he knew beyond doubt that he was now an adult.

Looking at his life through adult eyes he saw how foolish he'd been to fight the unbreakable union between his father and mother, and how equally foolish to fight the one that now existed between his father, his mother and Florence. The more he'd opposed these alliances the closer they'd clutched each other and thus conspired, unwittingly, to make him feel childish. Well, that had been fine when he was trying to preserve his childhood.

But now that he was an adult, how must he best preserve his adulthood? Obviously by helping them maintain the triangle which, despite their protests to the contrary, gave them so much pleasure. Of course! Why hadn't he ever realized this before?

Because until now he'd never recognized how much pleasure their triangle gave *him*!

Now everything fell into place, and he saw that under the illusion of struggling with his pain, he'd really been grappling with its opposite, fighting against admission to himself of the satisfaction it gave him. What satisfaction? Why simply this: that as long as their triangle continued, they would continue treating him like a child. And though he certainly was a child no longer, he could now enjoy all the rights and privileges of one without responsibility. Enjoy them, that is, for as long as he helped them maintain *their* illusion that the whole episode was giving them so much pain.

This then was his advantage over them: that he had conquered his guilt, but they had not conquered theirs. This fact was to be the baton by which he would henceforth conduct the affairs of his family. Closing his eyes, he envisioned himself rotating among them, making first his mother feel he favored her cause, then his father, then Florence. He would sympathize with the agonies they were going through, report on the progress he'd made in getting the other parties to change their positions, and promise each to continue working in her or his behalf. In reward for his loyalty and sincerity—and for his not making a pest of himself about duty—they would shower affection and gratitude upon him, and quite likely more material displays of their appreciation.

And what if they began to suspect him and balk at his exploitation of them? He had the controls

right in his hands. He would merely start taking their complaints at face value; he would go a little too far in helping them dissolve the triangle they pretended to find so odious. He would remind them of their duty, in other words. That would frighten them back into their corners, and he could then go on extorting their love. It was a dangerous game, but he'd been coached by pros, and before long he'd be playing it expertly. This was *really* getting away with murder!

Suddenly it became all-important that this nest of snakes not be stirred. There was only one thing standing in his way.

HE RETURNED HOME and went to his grandmother's room. He found her, as he'd found her with increasing frequency lately, on the edge of her bed, distressed and distracted and very ill. He closed the door behind him. "What's the matter?"

She said what she'd been saying often in the past few days. "You know what's the matter. I can't live this way, Donald. I *won't* live this way. How can *you* stand it?"

"I did all I could. They won't change. This is the way things are."

"No, it's unnatural, it's perverted. Something must be done."

"What can we do? We've done everything we can."

"I don't know. I can do something. I'll call them all together. I'll tell them how it's killing me, how it's hurting you. We'll settle it somehow."

"You can't do that."

She was twitching and her eyes became ominously glassy. Her breath filled the air with the cloying, symptomatic odor of acetone. "I can do it and I will. This must not go on!"

"We'll talk about it again," Donald said, gazing at her coldly. "But you look very ill now. I think you could do with a shot of insulin."

"Yes," she said, pulling her robe aside to bare her thigh. "Good boy."

Donald took the apparatus from her dresser, filled the hypodermic with a quadruple dose of insulin, swabbed her thigh with alcohol and pushed the needle into it. He kissed her and made her comfortable. In six or eight hours she'd be dead.

No one would hold him responsible. He knew how impossible it was to gauge the correct dosage in an emergency. He would simply say he'd found her in a coma, gotten panicky and misjudged the amount of insulin she required.

They wouldn't blame him for her death. After all, you can't expect a boy, in an emergency, to react with the calm deliberateness of an adult.

# HOW TO MURDER YOUR BOSS

## by ROGER ELWOOD

*We are proud to publish the following story and we predict big things for this writer in the future. You will be inclined to agree with us after you experience the chilly terror underlying his sardonic account of murder-by-poison that also turns out to be murder-in-reverse. . . .*

GEORGE HENDRICKS sat quietly behind his desk, glancing up every so often at the round-faced clock over the entrance to the N.Y. accounting firm where he worked as an underpaid and much-abused bookkeeper. He was trembling, his hands shaking uncontrollably, his left eye betraying a tendency to twitch.

He swallowed quickly, once, twice, a third time, beads of perspiration coming out on his forehead and then trickling down his cheeks and neck.

The clock registered: 4:53.

He noticed one of the firm's partners scowl at him through the half-opened door of a nearby office and pretended to become engrossed in the pile of papers that cluttered the top of his desk. Each second continued creeping by with intolerable slowness, one by one by . . .

4:55.

He shifted his eyes to the clock and back again to the papers with their uninteresting columns of figures and drab totals.

*Getting late,* the thought pushed its way past the anxiety that clouded his mind. *Only five more minutes before I leave, before I begin executing my plan.*

He glanced up again.

4:56.

How was it possible that only *one* minute had passed? It seemed like an eternity, waiting, waiting . . .

"George, I want to speak to you for a moment," he heard a familiar voice calling. "Will you come into my office please?"

He stood up and walked across the room, past the other people who kept staring at him, *through* him, waiting for him to enter the boss's office and face a barrage of scathing epithets, making him once again look like a fool.

"Yes," he said expectantly at the doorway. "I mean, yes, *sir.*"

"About tonight, George," the plump, balding man named Albert Thompkins spoke softly and deliberately, his left hand touching his chest as though in a brief moment of inner pain. "Can I make it to your apartment at 8:00 instead of 7:30? My wife's bridge party was moved up a few minutes."

"Fine," George replied, smiling to himself. "That'll be fine."

He was about to turn when, suddenly, a bell shattered the comparative quiet of the office. It was the signal for the bees to leave their hives. Five o'clock had come, quitting time. George thought of the many occasions he had stayed until 5:20 or 5:30, making sure all *his* work was properly done. The others simply did not care. When that bell rang, they ceased being employees of the firm of Golding, Osborne and Thompkins and merged with the rest of the crowd streaming home amidst the after-hours rush.

George cleared up his desk, locked it, slipped on his hat and

coat and waved goodbye to Mr. Thompkins . . goodbye, that is, until three hours later.

He knew the time would go slowly, the hands of his clock back at the apartment crawling like mechanical snails until they struck 8:00. Within ten minutes, at precisely 8:10, he would have his revenge.

. . . *revenge.*

He repeated the word to himself. It was a strange one, a new addition to his vocabulary. As he got on the bus outside the building in which he had worked for 17 years, George tasted its strangeness on his tongue once again for what must have been the twentieth time in a week.

Sitting down beside a fat, dark-haired woman who was smoking a particularly smelly cigarette, he wrinkled up his nose, gave a polite cough and when he saw that this had done no good whatsoever, he submitted meekly to the 13 block ordeal, hoping that she'd get off before he did which, unfortunately, she did not.

While he sat there, he thought over his plan as he had done on other bus trips previous to this.

It was a good one, incredibly smooth and with any amount of luck, also flawlessly executed. Though involving grisly details that made him shudder and his left eye-lid twitch nervously, he recognized that it was nevertheless quite unavoidable in view of the injustices he had suffered throughout the years.

For a large part of his adult life, he had served Golding, Osborne and Thompkins to the best of his ability, doing his job as meticulously as he knew how, while seething inside when *other* employees got the raises and promotions. Now, after 17 years, he had finally decided to do something about it.

At 5:40, the bus stopped in front of the apartment building where he lived and he got off, nearly missing the last step. Smiling sheepishly, he went inside and waited for the elevator. Several seconds later, it came down to the first floor and took him to the fifth where his modestly-furnished apartment was located.

The door was unlocked.

Gladys, his colored house-

keeper, must still have been there.

He opened it and walked inside. Gladys stuck her head out from the bedroom and smiled at him. He said hello and asked why she was working overtime.

"Oh, Mr. Hendricks, I *am* sorry," she apologized after taking his hat and coat and putting them in a nearby closet. "Will you *ever* forgive me? My cousin Hortense called me on the phone this afternoon and I got so interested in talking to her that I didn't notice how the time was flying."

Assuring her that it was all right, he sat down on the livingroom sofa, took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. His hands were still shaking.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Hendricks?" Gladys asked, a trace of concern in her voice.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am."

"All right then, I'll be leaving now."

"Good night, Gladys."

"Good night, Mr. Hendricks."

She closed the door behind her.

George sighed with relief, glancing at the little electric alarm clock over the television across from him.

5:57.

*Just two hours to go,* he smiled to himself.

He then got up, prepared a hasty dinner and consumed it quickly. By the time he had finished, another half an hour had passed and that little alarm clock indicated the time to be: 6:30.

George went to a cabinet in the kitchen and got out a bottle of scotch and two fairly small glasses, setting them down on the coffee table in the livingroom.

6:37.

He had less than 90 minutes to wait until Albert Thompkins knocked on the door to his apartment, an hour and a half before he got his sweet, sweet revenge. George went into his bathroom and washed his face and hands, stopping a moment to gaze at himself in the mirror.

. . . a 45 year-old, pale and washed out shell of a man, dark circles under tired-looking eyes, hair thinning with bald spots showing through, shoulders that drooped slightly, nose too big for his face, ears that were too small.

George knew that he was a poor physical specimen, a left-over creation, ineffectual in every respect *except* his job and in 17 years, even the dignity of that had slowly been swept under the carpet. Albert Thompkins ordered him to do this or that, check these-and-those figures, but no *praise.* When he made a slight human error, a trifling mistake, Thompkins never failed to tell him about it, tell him before the six other employees in the office, making him seem like an incompetent imbecile. That was why

Albert Thompkins of the accounting firm of Golding, Osborne and Thompkins *was* going to pay with his life.

Pain.

George grimaced as a sudden burst of pain shot through his arm. He looked down.

His hand . . . it was bleeding. Somehow, he had crushed the plastic drinking glass he'd been holding until it splintered and one of the jagged pieces cut his hand.

Momentarily taken aback, he proceeded to dab the cut with mercurochrome and bandage it. Then, before he closed the door of the medicine cabinet, he reached for the bottle of quick-acting poison that rested in the corner of one shelf, taking it out and holding it in his hand. His eyes widened, his pulse quickened and he wiped his lips of the saliva that began dripping off them. Turning, he went back to the livingroom and stood before the empty glasses.

At ten minutes to eight, he would take two of the tablets in the bottle and drop them into one of the glasses, then pour scotch over them until they dissolved, perfectly odorless, tasteless and undetectable. There would never be any violent reaction to them, no pain, no agony, nothing but a cloud of darkness and then—final oblivion.

George made absolutely certain of this before he purchased the tablets. He wanted the ordeal to be over with quickly and it served no purpose to have a dying man gag horribly, tongue protruding from between puckered-up lips, eyes bloodshot with mortal anguish, lungs gasping for air and then the body going limp, stiff as a board. Get it done neatly and unobtrusively, without all the melodramatics. Anything else would be too messy, and George didn't have a particularly strong stomach.

By 7:30, he had broken out in a cold sweat. By 7:45, he was drenched, his head throbbing with anticipation. By 7:50, his hands were visibly shaking again when he dropped the two tablets in one of the glasses, watching them dissolve as the scotch poured over them. He went into the kitchen, got a container of ice and put several small cubes in each glass to keep the liquor cool.

Then he sat back, waiting . . .

7:54.

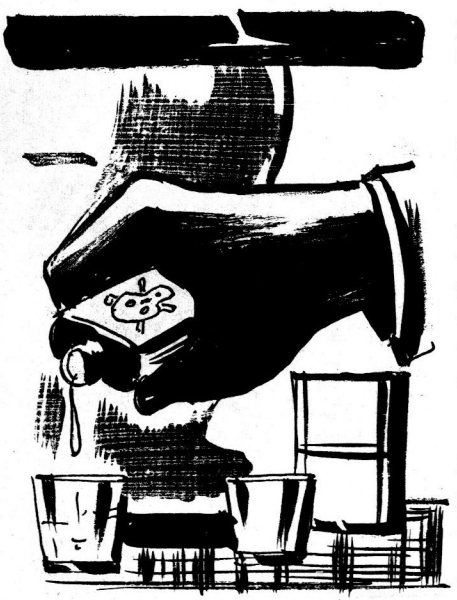
He moved his legs nervously around on the inexpensive bargain-basement rug he'd bought one day some eight months before. It was already beginning to wear through in sections but on his salary, he could not afford much else, which was another reason why he hated Albert Thompkins. George liked quality and yet for 17 long years, he could afford very little of *anything*. Even the television set was a bargain model and the picture tube had an annoying habit of gradually dim-

ming, dimming, dimming until it was almost impossible to watch.

George threw a brief glance about his apartment eyeing the cheap pictures on the walls, the painted gold ornaments, the rickety chairs, the second rate this-and-that. Without Gladys to clean for him twice a week, he would also have had the added disadvantage of several inches of dust and dirt. To hire her, he had to make some sacrifices as it was . . .one less movie each week and practically no dinners out at the fine restaurants in which he loved to eat. Everything suffered . . . for 17 long years, years that would soon be coming to an end.

7:56.

In four or five minutes, Albert Thompkins, a senior partner of the accounting firm of Golding, Osborne and Thompkins, would knock on his apartment door, ostensibly to discuss some suggestions for more efficient office procedure over a friendly glass or two of scotch. As bait, George had mentioned an imaginary coin collection since he knew Thompkins was a bug on the subject. Ten minutes later, it would be finished, his worries and frustrations solved forever.



7:57.

George wet his lips.

7:59.

His muscles tensed.

8:00.

. . . nothing.

8:01.

*Where is he?* The thought exploded into George's mind. *Everything is so well planned, so . . .*

8:05.

Panic was welling up inside his chest, his heart throbbing, throbbing, throbbing.

*Where in Heaven's name is that dictator?* George screamed wordlessly. *I'm waiting, waiting to pay him back for each year of ingratitude, each moment of holding me up to public ridicule, each . . .*

Knock-knock-knock.

*There he was! Any other time, he'd be punctual. But I'm not important enough. I don't matter. It's all right if he's late for me.*

George got up and answered the door.

Albert Thompkins stood out in the hallway, his hat in his hand.

"Come right in," George said politely. "Let me take your coat."

"No, no," Thompkins said impatiently. "I won't be staying long. I have to go to the doctor's early tomorrow morning for a cardiogram and I want to get to sleep early tonight."

*You will, Mr. Thompkins, you will,* George chuckled to himself.

"Won't you have some scotch?" he asked after they sat down on the couch.

"Yes, George, yes," he answered, glancing at his watch. "But please hurry."

"Here," George said, handing him a glass. "I've got it already poured for you."

"That was thoughtful," Thompkins said, his voice softening slightly.

"Come on," George urged. "Drink up before it gets too watery."

"Wait," Thompkins interrupted.

George's heart stopped. Why did he want to wait? Why—?

"A toast," came the answer to his unspoken question.

George smiled.

"A toast to what, sir?" he asked curiously.

"To you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you, George. We enjoy having you at the office. Always good to have a competent, reliable man nearby."

*Lair!* George hissed to himself.

"Yes, let's toast that," he said outloud.

He raised the glass to his lips watching Thompkins do the same He opened his mouth, feeling the liquid course down his throat, tasting it, savoring each drop and waiting for the slight sensation of drowsiness that would come. The drowsiness which, he knew, would lead to his own death . . . and, when the police found the note he had left, Thompkins would be there, also dead . . .

"*Very* good scotch," Thompkins exclaimed.

"Thank you."

"You will be able to afford more of this starting next week, you know."

"What do you mean, sir?" George asked, a burning feeling in his throat.

"Your raise, of course."

"What raise?" he asked again, the burning getting sharper, spreading, engulfing, covering him from head to foot.

"Didn't you hear about it?"

"You mean I . . . I . . .," he stuttered, hardly able to speak, his body on fire, his throat scorched and tightening up, gagging him, his eyes bulging from their sockets. Everything had gone wrong, here he was killing himself for nothing. It wasn't supposed to *be* like this, it . . .

"George . . . what's the matter?" he could dimly perceive Thompkins saying though his voice was gradually fading away, far, far away until those last shocked

words seemed no more than faint echoes.

"George! My God, what *is* happening? What . . .?"

Just before final oblivion came, quencing the fire in his poisoned body, George heard the man named Albert Thompkins scream with sudden horror and he knew that his plan had not *completely* failed.

An ironic smile crossed his face and he almost welcomed the comforting darkness that soon engulfed him. . . .

The ambulance pulled quickly away from the curb and faded into the night. Rubbing his chin, the landlord turned to one of the two detectives who were getting into a nearby squad car.

"Do you know why he would commit suicide?" the taller detective asked.

"No," the landlord replied. "No, I don't. But isn't it also a pity about that *other* man."

The detective nodded.

"George worked for him, you know."

He rubbed his chin again.

"Both dead," he said regretfully. "One of poison, the other of a heart attack. A pity, yes, a *real* pity."

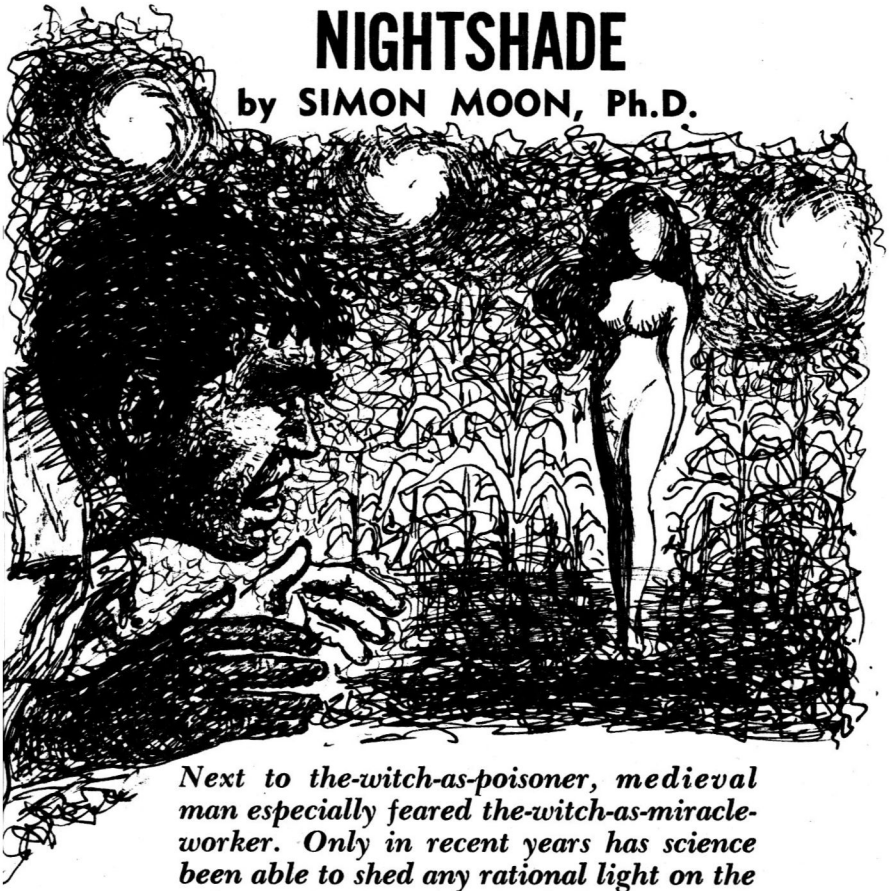
Still puzzling to himself, he turned and walked back into the building.

Somehow the place would not be the same to him without George Hendricks.

. . . not the same at all.

# NIGHTSHADE

## by SIMON MOON, Ph.D.



*Next to the-witch-as-poisoner, medieval man especially feared the-witch-as-miracle-worker. Only in recent years has science been able to shed any rational light on the subject of witch-craft, and the basic fact about the medieval witches—which was, simply, that they used that class of drugs which nowadays are known as hallucinogens or psychedelics—explains most of the "mysteries" which baffled and terrified our ancestors. Here, as a kind of footnote to one of the classic detective novels of the 20th Century (Carr's Crooked Hinge), is a personal report by a man who dared to drink "the potion of the witches" . . .*

READERS OF John Dickson Carr's detective novels—especially his two witch-novels, *The Crooked Hinge* and *Below Suspicion*—are among the few people, outside of special scholars, who know what "witchcraft" was, and what the great medieval "witch-trials" were all about. As Carr's hero, Dr. Gideon Fell, explains, in both of those novels, the "witches" were, simply, European peasants who refused to be converted to Christianity and maintained, instead, an ancient religion, native to Europe, which goes back to the Stone Age. This religion combined elements of phallus-worship, matriarchal institutions, belief in reincarnation, and worship of the goat. (as a fertility symbol.) Because the actual name of this cult has been lost in history, scholars refer to it—following a suggestion by the Oxford anthropologist, Dr. Margaret Murray—as "the Dianic cult."

The existence of "the Dianic cult" explains who the witches were, and why they were persecuted by the Church, but leaves other mysteries unsolved. Among these mysteries, none is more bothersome, to the rationalist, than the fact that many "witches," *not forced to undergo torture,* spontaneously confessed to flying through the air, seeing supernatural figures, and performing "miracles." These confessions pop up again and again in the witch-trials, from places as diverse as England, Scotland, France, Germany and Spain, over a period of centuries, and it is hard to believe that all of the confessors were suffering from a similar form of lunacy.

It was the anthropologist previously mentioned, Dr. Murray, who first shed light on this mystery. Examining the "magic potions" listed by Church authorities from the 14th Century as being among the effects of captured witches, she noticed two hallucinogenic drugs among them: marihauna, or hemp, and belladonna, or deadly nightshade. Illusions of flying, and supernatural visions, are quite common under heavy doses of marihauna, and belladonna is said to be similar but stronger.

Very little is recorded about belladonna in the literature of psychedelic (hallucinogenic) drugs. Much has been written about marihauna, and—in the last five years – about the stronger psychedelics, such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate), peyote, psylocybin and yage. All of these drugs have been scientifically researched, and in all of the research, monotonously, we find that a majority of subjects claim to have either "divine" or "diabolical" experiences—visions of Heaven or visions of Hell. Each of these drugs has been connected with a religious movement—marihauna with the Ishmaelian

sect in Islam*, LSD (via morning glory seeds) with the religion of the Mexican Indians, peyote with the Native American Church, psylocybin with the Mexican Indians again, and yage with the Indians of the Amazon valley. If the Dianic cult, or witches, really do date back to the Stone Age, belladonna may well be the oldest of the psychedelic drugs, and may provide significant clues to man's first religious experiences. If, therefore, seemed to me worthwhile to investigate this peculiar drug.

A few words of clarification, however, before reporting my experience:

Psychedelic drugs, as a class, are not illegal in the United States. Marihauna, the best known and mildest of the psychedelics, *is* illegal—but only because it was erroneously classified as a narcotic by early researchers. Although scientists are now aware that marihauna is not a narcotic, it remains illegal due to the conservatism of legal authorities. L.S.D., which has become illegal in a few states, is classified as "a dangerous drug," a convenient term for non-narcotic drugs which are explosive in the hands of the uninformed. A narcotic drug, basically, is a pain-killer, a desensitizer. The people who become addicted to narcotics, outside of

*From the name of the leader of this sect, Hassani Sabbah, comes the Arab word *hashish* (marihauna) and the English *assassin*.

those suffering from chronic pains, are persons suffering from acute anxiety, which is itself a form of chronic pain. The "bliss" of a narcotic is that it *turns you off*, it deadens you. (This is "bliss" enough for those whose normal existence is Hell.) Psychedelic drugs, on the contrary, are *sensitizers*. They *turn you on*—they expand the consciousness, enrich the senses, and intensify every experience. They also produce hallucinations, and the question that a psychedelic experience always leaves with the subject is precisely: how much was a hallucination and how much was a new truth which I was too dull to realize before? This question has bitterly split the medico-psychiatric profession, some of whom regard the psychedelics as educational keys to new levels of consciousness having great value, and some of whom regard them merely as "hallucination-makers" that simulate psychoses in otherwise normal people. This controversy will still be raging ten

years from now, and this article does not hope to end it.

With that background, I will now describe my experience with the "deadly nightshade" used by medieval witches.

I took the belladonna in the form of a tea—two tea-spoons in a cup of hot water. I had previously taken peyote in that form, and expected a similar experience. Since peyote takes about an hour to start acting, I went for a walk around my farm, not expecting any "symptoms" until I was back at the house. In about two minutes, however, I began to see a peculiar *blue* flickering in the air. I immediately remembered that William Burroughs, the author of *Naked Lunch*, had seen a blue flickering in the air when he experimented with the Amazon Indian drug, yage. "Belladonna experience starts like yage experience," I saw myself scribbling when I got back to the house.

The blue flickering increased. Tiny dots of blue danced about, all over the farm-yard. I looked up at the stars, and they all had blue whorls around them—exactly as painted by Van Gogh in *The Starry Sky*. Van Gogh, I remembered, was psychotic when he painted that. Is this further proof that the world of the psychotic is the world entered by users of psychedelic drugs? If so, the psychotic world can be shot through with ecstasy, beauty and divinity, as I had learned in my peyote experiences. I did not yet know that I was about to learn that this world can also be shot through with horror, monstrosity and evil.

I returned to my house. Standing on the porch, I looked again at the flickering sky. Suddenly, completely without warning, a fully three-dimensional hallucination occurred: a monster, bearing a slight resemblance to the Wolf-Man and a family likeness to Gill-Man, with touches of "The Picture of Dorian Grey," was coming right at me, shambling and sort of flopping about, but covering ground rapidly. Sick terror flowed through me dizzingly, for an instant, and the apparition disappeared. But I could not "calm down" as one usually does after a fright. My legs started twitching peculiarly, and a few moments concentrated effort showed this to be a vegetative function outside the control of the brain. Finally, I realized I was about to fall—I was as agitated, below the waist, as an epileptic—and I quickly reclined in a horizontal position before I could stumble and hurt myself.

I remained that way for about five minutes. Meanwhile, the twitching moved upward, from my legs to my arms. In between twitches, "bolts" of purely irrational terror shot through me. I know that "bolt of terror" is a cliché, but no other term quite describes this sensation. It was exact-

ly like a flow of electricity, except that it was a flow of emotion—very unpleasant emotion. Nothing I did seemed able to stop it, and it grew more intense with each wave.

My wife, at this point, got worried and came out on the porch looking for me. She is a rather good-looking woman, I think, but when I saw her just then I was in the grip of hallucination. Her face was distorted by a weird and saturnine smirk, an expression of gleeful evil. I felt myself shrink back—and her smirk grew more cruel, more sadistic. (Actually, as she told me later, her expression must have been one of pity and worry, for I looked like a very sick cat at the moment.) I jumped up and began staggering across the yard. She followed, trying to calm me.

"I've got to go see the Cannings," I said. (They were our neighbors.) "I'm flipping out, and they can help me." At the time, it seemed obvious that the Cannings could help me, but, of course, this was some kind of "magical" or neurotic thinking. They were merely baffled, and concerned, when I came staggering in their front door a few moments later.

"I took some belladonna," I said to them, in what seemed to me a very rational manner. "Research for an article, you know. I'm going out of my mind, sort of, but it'll all be over in a few hours. I just need a little company, that's all."

My wife, coming in behind me, no longer looked like Lady Dracula, but my satisfaction over that fact was short-lived. The Cannings now began changing into smirkingly evil figures.

"Out," I yelled, and plunged toward their kitchen. Standing at the sink, I forced my finger down my throat and provoked the vomit reflex. I heaved five or six times before my stomach was empty. Meanwhile, the towels began changing color on the wall before me, and the silver of the faucets took on a new and glorious sheen. Under peyote, in the "divine" ecstasy that led the American Indians to say that peyote contains a god, I would have found those esthetic effects surpassingly beautiful, but now they merely frightened me more. They indicated that the drug was in my bloodstream, still affecting me, and that

the vomiting had not solved my problem.

My wife had followed me into the kitchen and stood beside me, worried. Still feeling quite rational, although subject to waves of terror and inexplicable twitches, I said, "It's in my bloodstream, and I'm trapped for six to eight hours." (I was guessing, basing my estimate on my experience with peyote.) "Don't worry. I'll be back to normal as soon as it's all over."

Peals of laughter greeted this speech. Twenty or thirty people were standing in the doorway, laughing at me. "Simon Moon is going crazy," the yelled gleefully, "Simon Moon is going crazy."

Like a subsiding wave, the laughter, faded.. Another hallucination, I thought. That was my last rational thought for eight hours.

"Out," I shouted again, my wife says. (I don't remember this.)

Immediately, I ran, full-speed, right into the wall. Turning, I headed in the opposite direction, and rammed into another wall . . .

*We were crawling through a tunnel, the dwarf and me. The tunnel led into a woods, and above the woods was a mountain. On top of the mountain was a castle. I recognized it at once: Dark Tower. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came." I was the Fisher King. I had to go through the Dark Tower to rescue the Holy Grail, but I kept banging my head in the tunnel. The dwarf encouraged me to go on.*

(The Cannings and my wife kept trying to get me to lie down on a couch, but I kept getting up and running head-on into the walls, my wife told me later.)

*The Tin Woodsman of Oz came galloping at me, riding a white horse. He tried to stab me with a lance.*

*The Storm Trooper took my arm roughly. He was leading me toward the Ovens. I screamed and tried to break away. He held my arm firmly. We walked and walked, but the Ovens never seemed to come closer.*

(Joe Canning, unable to get me to lie down, started walking me up and down on the country road between our farms. He says I talked incessantly, and the Nuremberg Trials were my main topic, but nothing I said made sense because my subjects and predicates never hung together. One fragment he remembers: "Because the Nuremberg Trials because the Holy Grail because the witches loved earth of the pickle that ex-

ploded." "The Dutchman"—Arthur "Dutch" Schultz, prohibition—ex-gangster—spoke exactly in that style on his death-bed, with a bullet in his brain. His last words were, "A boy has never wept nor dashed a thousand kim.")

My friend, Jim Bradley, came along at this point, and found me being walked up and down by Joe Canning. Joe went home to bed, and Jim and my wife led me home. I was very docile, but showed considerable fear of both of them. Apparently, I had decided to submit to the Ovens without struggling. *The dwarf and the Tin Woodsman were leading me up the mountain* . . . I rambled on and on, in my "Dutch" Schultz style . . .

I kept lighting imaginary cigarettes, my wife tells me, and I smoked each of them with evident enjoyment. We sat in our kitchen, and I talked a mile a minute about Marxism, literature, the Nuremberg Trials, the Irish Republican Army and witchcraft, all in unintelligible sentences. At one point, I announced, my face radiant with joy, "I've got it, I've got it!" I began writing on an imaginary piece of paper. My wife, convinced that I might have a very important revelation, put a pencil in my hands and a paper on the table before me. Alas, I didn't coordinate very well, and my entire message was written in the air, about a foot above the paper.

(William James, the psychologist, had the same experience with peyote, but did manage to record his message. It was: "Over all is a smell of fried onions." Ouspensky, the Russian mystic, on the other hand, had a revelation under the influence of nitrous oxide and wrote the eminently sensible message: "Think in other categories.")

After a few hours, I looked at my wife suddenly and seemed to recognize her. I said, quite clearly, "It was worth all the pain to see you looking so lovely." I reached out and touched her hair—which probably looked like jewelry at the moment. Then I shuddered and pulled back, crying "Oh God, it's starting again," meaning, I assume, that she was turning into the Evil Witch again. I remember none of this.

About five in the morning, they got me to drink some coffee. I swallowed a few mouthfuls, then asked paranoically, "Is this poisoned?" They told me it wasn't,

and I smiled happily and drank the rest of it.

As the sun came up, I was talking fairly rationally, trying to explain something I thought I understood about lunacy and mysticism, when I became *aware of myself*. "My God," I said, "I've been crazy for eight hours!"

From that moment on, I was sane again—but the hallucinations were not over. I went out, a bit later, to get some fresh air and confirm my feeling of recuperation, and I saw King Kong sitting up in a tree looking at me. I blinked, and he disappeared. The next minute, however, a beautiful naked woman, standing on a non-existent pedestal, caught my attention in our corn-field. I returned to the house and slept for several hours. Mid-afternoon, I woke and went outside again, only to see a polar bear in a black turtle-neck sweater walking calmly across the yard.

That night, I attended a black-and-white movie (I forget its name) and found it slowly shifting into technicolor as I watched. Waves of irrational fear again hit me, and I walked out of the theatre and paced the streets until I calmed down.

A week later, I thought all this was a memory. Then, one day, in the middle of the street, I saw the Hunchback of Notre Dame shambling toward me. In a minute, I recognized a quite ordinary man. But a few nights later, making love to my wife, I saw her turn into a skeleton for a moment.

A year has passed, and no more hallucinations bother me. My wife says—and others who have known me for a long time agree—that my character has changed considerably, from a rather introverted and scholarly person to a dominating and extraverted one. My own feeling is that, before the night of the nightshade, I was always basically afraid of people and now am no longer afraid.

According to Plato's dialogue, *Crito*, the Eleusian Mysteries—a very secretive religious festival, about which we know very little, since those who passed through the initiation were forbidden to reveal what they had experienced—included use of a drug which created unbearable fear in the subject. Only those who could pass through this ordeal of terror, according to Plato, were admitted to the "higher mysteries." It is my

suggestion that the drug used in this case was belladonna, and that the European witches used belladonna in precisely the same way.

I do not regret my nightshade experience, painful as it was. It has given me new insight into the psychotic, whom I now recognize as my brother in more than an ordinary Christian sense. It has made me feel, I think correctly, that my ability to read people intuitively, to emphathize with them, has been increased. Finally, it has opened my mind to thoughts that I never would have conceived otherwise.

One such thought is that the flickering blue-ness I saw that night might be real. It was correlated with my feelings of emotional energy flowing through my own body, and I definitely sensed an awareness of the unity between my life-energy and the motor energy of the universe. In the 18th Century, Anton Mesmer described such a unifying force, which he called Animal Magnetism. Modern medicine rejects the theory of Animal Magnetism, but modern medicine cannot duplicate the cures achieved by Mesmer, according to reputable records of that time. Gurwitch, the biologist, discovered a similar force, which he called "mytogenetic rays." (sometimes called "Gurwitch rays") Wilhelm Reich, the Freudian heretic, suggested a

"cosmic orgone energy" which flowed through the universe and affected human emotions. I think very confidently that future investigations of psychedelic drugs will shed more light on these connections between man and the universe, and that the study of belladonna in particular will illuminate the mysterious origins, and even more mysterious persistence, of man's religious sense.

The "witches," it is obvious, experienced powerful visions with this drug. The hallucinations I experienced were, except at the beginning and end of the experience, completely "real" to me *at the time I experienced them.* I saw dark castles, Nazi ovens, dwarfs, King Kong, etc., because these were images that had powerfully influenced my unconscious mind previously. A young European peasant girl, being initiated into the witch-cult in the 14th Century, would have a head full of supernatural beliefs, *and no modern medical knowledge of drugs.* "You only have *faith* in your god," the witches frequently said, at trials before the Holy Inquisition, "but we have actually *seen* our god." I think my experience shows clearly that we can understand this claim without assuming that half the population of Europe was insane in those days. I believe, very firmly, that my experience had psycho-therapeutic value for me, although it was more painful than orthodox psychotherapy; the overwhelming majority of those who have sampled LSD or psylocybin in modern laboratory research have also claimed such therapeutic value. The witches clung to their religion so tenaciously, in spite of all persecution, because it had this kind of psychotherapeutic value for them, in an age when mental healing was very hard to find elsewhere. It is pitiful to think that, because of the peasants' loyalty to this old religion, 15,000,000 of them were murdered by bigots who, the trial records clearly indicate, made no attempt to understand that which they so cruelly persecuted.

# THAT STRANGER, MY SON

## by C. B. GILFORD

IT WAS DARK when they arrived. At the door the man fumbled with the keys. But because his hands were shaking, he could not seem to find either the keyhole or the correct key. Finally the boy took the keys. They went inside. The boy found the light switch.

"It's like an oven in here," the man said.

But the boy refused to abandon his smile. "We're home, Dad," he answered. He started making the rounds of the windows, unlatching them, heaving them upward.

The man did not join in the homecoming chores. He looked all around him, taking inventory of the familiar walls and furniture. The close, hot atmosphere of the room quickly brought beads of perspiration to his face. But he was too unaware of it even to apply a sleeve to his forehead.

"Dad, make yourself at home!" The boy had returned, the persistent smile with him. He crossed the room to the man and hugged him briefly, without embarrassment.

The man made no motion to return the show of affection. "Are all the windows open?" he asked.

"Sure thing, Dad."

The man peered closely at his son. The boy was not much shorter than his father, and though he lacked the man's mature heaviness, he showed promise of future hardihood and power.

"You're a strong boy for thirteen, Paul," the man said.

"Yes," the boy agreed proudly. "I'm like you, Dad."

"And Davey wasn't like me. Is that it?"

"Don't talk about Davey, Dad . . ."

"He was my son!"

"But he's dead!"

A gray shadow of worry flitted across the boy's face. Like his father, he had begun to perspire. The wetness glistened on his smooth, tanned skin.

"We're alone now, Paul. For the first time since it happened." The man walked back to the door and closed it, shutting out a portion of the small breeze. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

"You're pretty tired, Dad. Can't we talk tomorrow?"

"Now, Paul. Sit down."

Obediently the boy sat in a chair. The expression on his face was blank, submissive.

"What happened to Davey, Paul?" the man began.

"Dad, I've told you a hundred times. I've told everybody."

"I don't mean that, Paul. I want you to tell me what really happened."

"I've told you everything I remember," the boy answered cautiously.

"You said it was Davey's own idea to go swimming?"

"Yes, he said this summer he wanted to become a real good swimmer."

"You encouraged him?"

"No, I told him he was too little. And he wasn't very strong."

"Because you knew that would make him want to become a good swimmer all the more? He always envied his big brother, didn't he, Paul? . . . So like a big brother should, you went out with him?"

"Yes, we swam out together. Not very far. Then I said to Davey. 'We better swim back now.' I thought he heard me. So I started back, and I thought he was with me. When I was halfway in, I looked up and he wasn't there. He was out toward the middle. He'd been swimming away from the shore all the time. And he was calling for help."

"Then what happened, Paul?"

"Dad, I've told you . . ." The boy stood up. He wiped across his eyes with the back of his hand. But his hand was wet too.

"Sit down, Paul. Tell me again."

The boy was accustomed to obedience. He sat down again. "I knew I couldn't swim clear out to where Davey was and then swim all the way back with him. The only thing to do was to come the rest of the way in and get the boat. That's what I did."

"Did the motor start right away?"

"Not right at first. But it was only a minute. Then I steered right out to where I'd seen Davey, figured he'd gone down but he'd

be up again. I went to the place and stopped the boat and jumped into the water. But I couldn't find him . . ."

The boy could see that his father had not moved, except for the big hands which kept closing into fists and then opening again. In the ensuing silence he watched the hands.

"Is that all?" the man asked finally.

"Yes."

"It's not all!" Almost in one stride the man was across the room and standing over the boy's chair.

The boy waited. Not daring to look into his father's eyes, the boy watched the fists instead.

"There's one thing I've never asked you, Paul." The man's words came thickly. "If you really loved your brother, Paul, why did you take the time to go back for the boat? If you loved him, why didn't you swim out there and do your best . . . even if you drowned with him?"

The boy lifted his head, daring to meet the wild look in his father's eyes. He spoke finally, his voice steady and clear.

"I'm glad I didn't do that, Dad," he said. "If I'd have drowned with Davey, you'd have been left here all alone."

The man's rage ebbed out of him with a terrible suddenness, leaving him white and shaking. He groped his way unsteadily to the door, threw it open, and sucked in the cooler, reviving air of the outdoors.

Without going to him, the boy stood up and explained himself simply. "I love you, Dad," he said.

The man did not turn back. "Go to bed, Paul," he ordered finally.

"All right, Dad. See you in the morning."

"Yes, in the morning."

The sun rose early, and the day was hot before it was half an hour old. The boy, accustomed to waking at dawn, slept a few minutes later this morning, because he was tired from the motor trip. But the heat and light eventually roused him. He dressed sketchily, and found his father already up, standing in front of the fireplace, staring at the photograph perched above it.

But the boy did not go to him.

He moved instead to the open door, breathed the morning air with great satisfaction. "The lake looks fine this morning," he began.

"I never noticed until just now," the man answered, "how strange that picture really is. Come here and look at it, Paul. There are you and I on the left. We have our arms around each other. And your Mother and Davey on the right. Their arms are around each other. It isn't a group picture at all. It's divided right down the middle."

The boy came obediently. "That's the way it was, Dad," he said. "I belonged to you. Davey belonged to Mother."

"Davey was my son too!" It was a protest.

"Sure, Dad. I mean that I was like you, and Davey wasn't. We did things together, and we liked the same things. Davey liked what Mother liked, books and pictures and things . . . And now we're together, and they're together. Maybe it's better, Dad . . . for Mother, I mean."

The man listened, strangely fascinated. In the end he turned away, and stood with sagging shoulders, looking at nothing. When he went finally to a chair and sat with his face hidden in his hands, the boy followed and knelt beside him.

"Sure you loved them, Dad," the boy said, soothing, comforting.

"You stayed in town and worked when you really wanted to be out here. You bought Mother all the medicine she needed, and you paid for the operations. And I took care of the house. But they're gone now. Thinking about them won't bring them back and it'll spoil things for us."

It was an impassioned speech, and a long speech for a boy. It was the manifesto of a mind matured before its time by unusual responsibility.

"You said, Paul," the man answered finally, "that I loved Davey. What about you, Paul?"

"Me? Of course, Dad."

"You hated Davey, didn't you, Paul?"

The question surprised the boy. He rose from his kneeling position and backed away. For a long time he stood, thinking. Then he replied, "No, I didn't hate him, Dad. But I loved you more."

The simple confession went unanswered. The man continued to stare at the floor, lost in some secret sorrow. After a while the boy turned away. The conversation or trial or whatever it was, he knew, was over.

The boy's mind was of the very practical sort. And he was only thirteen. He went to the kitchen. He went about the task of preparing breakfast with the confidence and sureness which only a motherless boy can learn.

And when breakfast was finished, he followed his father down to the dock, keeping worshipfully close to him. They stood together there for a while, watching the lake. The sun was hot on their heads. The water looked inviting to the boy, but he refrained from mentioning it.

The boat was sitting sluggishly beside the dock, its bottom heavy with rain water. Absently the man noted its condition.

"Sombeody has stolen the motor," he concluded, but without dismay or alarm.

"No, Dad," the boy assured him. "I took it in the house."

"When?"

"Three days ago. Before we left."

"Just after we brought Davey in?"

"Yes. The motor's dry and safe."

The man seemed to shiver, as if hit by a sudden cool wind.

"Did you want to go out in the boat, Dad?" the boy asked eagerly.

"No, Paul. Not now."

The boy looked longingly at the water once more, but he did not argue. Together they walked back up to the house.

The boy loved the water. Every day, when he had finished his chores, he stripped to his swimming trunks and went down to the dock. There he would let the warmth of the sun possess him and, as time passed, his healthy tan deepened. Often, when it was very hot, he would sit on the dock with his legs dangling over the side. Then, by stretching a little, and pointing his feet downward, he could manage to get his toes into the water. But beyond this small delight he did not go. He did not swim.

The boy was, in fact, so supremely happy that no petty difficulty could touch him. His happiness was not even disturbed for very long when his father discovered the absence of the photograph.

"I was dusting," the boy explained easily. "It fell off and broke the glass. I put it away in a drawer until we could get another glass. I thought you'd want me to take good care of it."

The man did not argue. The fire that had begun to smoulder in his eyes died slowly. The boy's answer had been so open, frank, without mischief or guile.

And the boy passed the next

test too, on the following day, at dinner time.

"I've been looking around," the man told him. "Everything's gone. Everything of Davey's. His books, his stamp collection, his brushes and paints. Even his clothes. The house doesn't look as if Davey ever lived here."

The boy was calm but wary. "I took care of it, Dad," he answered simply.

"Who told you to?"

"No one. But I thought it would be easier for me to do than for you. So it was my job."

The man stood up. He cast a long shadow over the table, and in the shadow the boy remained seated.

"None of the things I got rid of were any good. Davey was little and skinny. I couldn't wear any of his clothes. I didn't want his books or stamps or paints. If the things stayed around, they'd just remind you of Davey, and you'd be sad. So I burned everything."

The man walked away, walked to the open door and stared out.

From the table the boy said, "When Mother died you got rid of everything of hers. You said it wasn't right to have a house seem like it was lived in by somebody who didn't live there any more."

The man was wrestling with his thoughts. It was in his face, in the twitching of his mouth, in the look of intense concentration he turned toward his son.

He spoke at least, slowly, with great difficulty. "I've had terrible thoughts, Paul. Maybe I've been wrong."

"About what, Dad?"

"It doesn't matter now."

The boy went to him then, and they hugged each other, unashamedly. There were tears in the man's eyes, but the boy was too happy to cry.

"You're all I have left, Paul. I can't lose you. If I lose you, there's nothing."

It was enough for the boy.

In the morning the boy was up before his father. The day was warm and stickly like its predecessors. He went immediately to look out at the lake. The sight fascinated him. A soft, early breeze came through the door and caressed his bare skin. He felt exhilarated.

He checked first to make sure his father was still asleep. Then he donned his swimming trunks and went down to the dock. Even there he hesitated, the victim of grave doubts and his natural caution. But the attraction was too strong. He sat on the side at first and dangled his legs, wetting only his toes. A moment later, however, he had lowered his whole body into the beckoning, cooling, delightful water.

Then he commenced to swim, at first close by the dock, slowly, without exerting great effort, enjoying the water's touch and feel. Occasionally he plunged his head below the surface for a few seconds and then, coming up, he shook moisture from his face and eyes, blew spray out of his mouth, and laughed aloud from the sheer joy of the experience.

Finally he began swimming in earnest, making a straight course away from the dock. His strokes were long and churned the water furiously. He was the kind of swimmer whose progress could be noted and computed from quite a distance. He did not know how far he swam, but when his first burst of energy had been spent, he turned about and headed back toward shore. On this return journey he proceeded more slowly, stopping now and then to rest, floating on his back or treading water, even though he wasn't exhausted he conserved his strength in this way, so that when he finished, he was breathing easily and still felt good. And he was happier than he had been for a long time . . .

Until he climbed back on the dock, and found his father standing there, and saw his father's face. The face was hard and pale, the eyes in it cold, deadly.

"I saw you out there," the man said. "I saw you through the window. Don't you suppose I know the spot where they found Davey? I know exactly where it is, where your little brother drowned. And just now, you swam to that place, and you swam back again!"

The boy could not speak. He stood transfixed, his tanned, well-muscled body clean and still gleaming from the water.

The man's face had grown even paler as he spoke. It was a wet clammy pallor, composed of equal parts of horror and perspiration. The eyes spelled a hatred that the boy could read.

"Dad!" The boy screamed finally, the cry of a wounded animal. He rushed to the man, threw himself at him, encircled him with groping arms.

"Dad, I love you. Whatever you think of me, I love you." The words came sobbing out of him, as he clawed and hugged his father, and struggled to prove his words by the strength of his embrace.

But the man was stronger. He seized the boy's arms in his big hands, and thrust the smaller body away from his own. The boy's feet slipped on the puddle-wet dock and he fell.

"What are you going to do with me, Dad?" he asked, without daring to move.

The man's voice was toneless and dead when he answered. "That's what I've been trying to decide," he said and turned away to stare out at the lake.

Not even then, and not till minutes later, did the boy venture to lift himself up. His father paid no attention to him. So he trudged silently back to the house.

He did not eat any breakfast. Instead he lurked at the window. He saw his father continue to stand motionless, hands thrust deeply into his pockets, his gaze fixed, never straying from the lake. He saw, too, the gathering of the clouds and the disappearance of the sun, and at last the rain itself, which began softly, stealthily, scarcely more than a drizzle at first.

It was the rain which finally impelled the boy to action. He saw his father oblivious to it, standing in it, getting chilly and wet. For with the arrival of the rain, the air had cooled. The boy felt the change on his near naked body.

So he left the house finally and went part of the way down toward the dock. From a distance of twenty feet or more he called out, "Dad, come inside."

The man turned to face him, but made no move to come in. "We're going out in the boat," he announced.

"But, Dad, it's raining and getting colder."

"You wanted a boat ride, didn't you?" The words came clipped, fierce, unarguable. "Well, that's what we're going to do . . . Bring down the motor."

The boy was puzzled, but he obeyed. The man let him do everything. He bailed with a tin can. He carried down the heavy outboard motor. He brought the fuel can, filled and primed the motor, got it started.

"Ready to go, Dad."

"You in front, Paul."

The man steered. The course he followed was perpendicular to the shoreline, and they ran at full speed. The rain pursued them. The boy shivered a little, but it was mere reflex, and he was not conscious of it. They rode almost to the middle of the lake, and there the man stopped the motor. Their world, which had been so full of rasping sound, became suddenly and completely quiet. The boy looked about him. The water was clear and unobstructed, the boat being the only visible object on its surface. He looked then to his father. They regarded each other across six feet of silence.

"How far from our dock would you say we are?" The question came suddenly, from nowhere.

It surprised the boy, but he looked around calmly before he answered. "Almost a quarter of a mile."

"Davey was a hundred yards offshore when he drowned. If you could have swum in with him that day, it would be about equal to swimming from here to our dock, wouldn't it?"

The boy was thinking, and he spoke very solemnly. "A swimmer who could swim in from here ought to be able to pull in a drowning person from a hundred yards."

The man nodded. "There's been a question about how far you can swim, Paul. We'll settle it now. Get into the water."

His father was acting very strangely and the boat was small, so the boy seemed almost glad to escape its narrowness. He slipped over the side easily, disappearing briefly beneath the surface, then coming up again. Shrugging moisture from his eyes, he looked to his father for instructions.

"Go ahead, Paul. See if you can make it to our dock."

The boy turned away quickly, put his face into the water, and began to swim. He started strongly, as if pursued, making great splashes with his flailing

arms.

The man watched the swimmer for a little while. Finally he started the motor. The boat quickly overtook the boy. By throttling the motor to idling speed, the man was able to keep just abreast of the swimmer.

They had covered perhaps a third of the distance to shore, moving thus together, when the boy stopped. His head bobbing up and down, now above, now under the surface, he began to tread water. The boat pulled slowly away from him.

"You're only pretending you're tired, Paul," the man called out.

Stung by the rebuke, the boy commenced swimming again, with greater effort even than before. For a few seconds he managed to gain on the boat. But he could not maintain such a pace. He began once more to fall behind. The great splashes he made, and which marked his progress so well, diminished quickly in size and vigor.

The man watched intently. Once he dipped a hand into the water. The coldness of it surprised him. But its surface, except for the imprint of the rain and the foaming course of the swimmer, was smooth and untroubled. The boat continued toward the dock, and the interval between it and the boy lengthened.

Man and boat were more than two-thirds of the way to their destination when the call first came. It was clear and certain, a single, shrill, piercing word carrying across the water.

"Help!"

The splashes were there, but they were moving slowly. So the man did not turn the boat, nor did he cut the motor.

"Dad, help!"

The man craned his neck to look. He blinked against the rain, which was coming down quite heavily now. He could not see too well, but he was nevertheless sure that he still saw the splashes.

"Dad, come back!"

But the splashes were there . . .

When the boat reached the dock, the man moored it, and climbed out. He stood there then, and faced toward the lake, watching still. The splashes were not more than fifty yards away, and they were still coming closer.

But quite suddenly they stopped. A hand reached out of the water, groping upward, grasping air. When it disappeared, the lake closed over it, and the rain came down.

He knew the truth then, because he got back in the boat and raced it furiously to that empty place on the water. And he circled round and round it, till the motor ran out of fuel and the boat began to drift aimlessly.

And he kept calling into the unresponsive depths, "Paul . . . Paul . . . son . . . my son . . ."

# THE MEMORY GUY

## by HENRY KANE

IT WAS EARLY morning, but I had a worried client. I pushed her door bell and waited until the peephole moved. I saw the bright blue eye, and the peephole closed. Then she opened the door and she said, "You're a doll to come so early."

"Nine-thirty," I said. "That was our appointment."

"You're usually asleep at nine-thirty."

"I don't usually have a client as frightened as you."

"Frightened to death. You can't imagine what a week it's been."

"I can, Rosie, but I tell you again—people who make threats over the phone rarely do much else." I walked through the living

room to the phone on the desk and lifted the receiver. The phone was dead. "Good girl," I said.

"I did what you told me."

"When was it disconnected?"

"Yesterday. There's a man coming to switch it to a new number."

"Good girl."

"Hungry?"

"Starved."

"You'll have breakfast with me?"

"You bet."

I followed her to the kitchen and watched her as she puttered at the stove. She was nervous as a filly and jumpy as a hare but she was a gorgeous creature: Rosanne Hamilton, rising young actress, driven, obsessed, fighting the world—even her father—in pursuit of her career.

I thought about the father while the daughter performed at the skillets. Judge David Hamilton, recently retired from General Sessions. The old man, a widower and a millionaire many times over, had gone along with what he had considered temporary whims on the part of his only child. Upon her graduation from college, he had consented to her having her own apartment although he had insisted that he have a key. He was a conservative man, strait-laced as an old-fashioned corset. Her interest in dramatics had, to put it mildly, distressed him, but the old Judge had applied psychology: he had voiced objection but he had made no overt move; not at the beginning; he had hoped it was a disease that would run its course and end.

"Bacon with your eggs?" Rosanne called.

"Yes ma'am."

"How do you like your bacon?"

"Crisp."

"The eggs?"

"Over lightly."

She returned to her skillets and I returned to my contemplation of Papa. The disease had not ended, it had progressed; and then the Judge had made many overt moves, none subtle. The old man was past seventy, a craggy New Englander, a Victorian throwback, a relic. There are not many any more; in today's aura they are anomalies; but they exist; and in their own way they suffer. The Judge suffered, and would not suffer his daughter to be an actress. To him an actress was akin to a tart, a strumpet—not for his daughter!—and the old Judge had taken steps. He had ceased paying the rent for her apartment. He had cut off her substantial allowance. He had implored, then commanded, then threatened. He had even engineered – evoked – her marriage to a young lawyer, George Hudson. Nothing had helped: The daughter was as adamant as the father. The contest had progressed to conflict, and then to schism.

Now she brought eggs, bacon, toast, and coffee to a pine-paneled breakfast nook and we ate.

"It's been hell, a week of hell,"

she said.

"I'm sure."

"The calls at all hours. The obscenities. The threats."

"But not to you."

"Pardon?"

"The threats weren't directed to you, Rosie. 'Tell the Judge I'll murder him; tell the Judge I'll knife him.' "

"And then the stream of filth." She shuddered.

"But when you told the Judge—"

"He just shook it off. Maybe he's accustomed to cranks. I'm not."

I stirred sugar into my coffee.

"How're you two getting along?"

"We're not." Her eyes filled with tears. "He's impossible. He's over the hump. He's senile, I tell you. We had a terrible scene yesterday in Mr. Swanson's office. Probably the last—"

The bell rang.

She jumped, gasped.

"Easy," I said. "I'll get it."

I went to the door and opened it for a smiling young man carrying equipment.

"Telephone Company," he said.

I led him into the living room. "Right there on the desk."

"Thank you, sir."

He went to work and I went back to the breakfast nook.

"Phone man," I said.

"Yes, I heard."

"By the way, anyone else—aside from your father—have a key to this place?"

"No."

"The Memory Guy?"

She squinted. "Who?"

"George. Your husband, you know? George Hudson."

"No. George doesn't have a key. He returned his key . . . when . . . when we decided to live apart." She pushed away her coffee cup. "Now, Peter, please. I've been patient, I haven't badgered you, but you've been working, and you *must* have something to tell me—*something!*"

"I've got a hunch we're going to resolve it today."

"Oh, I hope to God!"

She stood up and took away the dishes. Obviously her nerves had bitten through: she needed something to do. Despite the strain—and the strain showed—she was very beautiful: thick red hair, enormous blue eyes, tall defiant carriage. She was Rosanne Hamilton, actress, and she wore it like an emblem. She was Rosanne Hamilton, now in rehearsal for an important role, female lead in a Broadway play, and that strain showed, and other strains: the strain of the marriage that had broken up, the strain of the long struggle with her father, and now the strain of the harassment by the anonymous caller.

She brought coffee in fresh cups and sat opposite me.

"Well, Peter?"

"I've done a check on all the recently released prisoners who were sentenced by your father." I lit a cigarette, inhaled, sipped coffee on top of it. "Every now and then

a psycho stores up animus against the sentencing judge. Now there was only one such prisoner-release within the last month and it's my hunch—"

"Pardon me." It was the telephone man, smiling in the doorway. "I have disconnected the old instrument and put in a new one unlisted and if you have any further annoyance, ma'am, please let us know and we'll do it all over again."

"Thank you," Rosanne said.

"Would you sign here, Miss Hamilton?"

She signed and I let the guy out and locked the door and came back to the breakfast nook. "Where was I?" I said.

"The released prisoner."

"Sentenced a year ago, just before your father retired. Jeff Anderson, lives with his parents at 2 West 18th. A kid of twenty-two, sneak thief, petty burglar. I've talked with his Parole Officer. He fits. A kook-type, a coward, a grudge bearer. A sick type kid who can let loose like that over a phone. We've an appointment with him at noon."

"*We?*"

"You may be able to identify the voice. The Parole Officer will be there too. If he's our boy, we'll put a stop to this once and for all."

"But I promised to be at the lawyer's office at eleven. And at one o'clock I've got rehearsal."

"So? Noon fits right in between."

"Will you go to the lawyer with me, please, Peter?"

"Sure."

"I . . . I'm afraid to go about alone these days."

"Sure," I said.

Adam Swanson had his office in the Empire State Building and there the receptionist talked to her mouthpiece and then said to us, "Mr. Swanson is busy but Mr. Hudson will be right out," and then George Hudson pushed through the leather swinging doors.

He was tall, dark, handsome, ruddy, with a wide white smile: the Memory Guy. He was quite famous for that quirk of his: what the eye saw the brain registered—a photographic memory. He was also a brilliant young lawyer. It was that combination—the photographic memory and the brilliant mind—that had won him the job as legal secretary to Judge Hamilton. When the Judge had retired he had recommended his protégé to his closest friend and former law partner, Adam Swanson.

We did "Hi" all around and then George Hudson took us to his office. "Adam is finishing up with a client. He knows you're here and he'll be with us in a jiffy. How are you, Rosanne?"

"Fine, thank you," she said.

"I tried to call you a number of times yesterday, couldn't get through. Phone disconnected, they told me."

"I had a new phone put in today."

There was a knock and Adam Swanson came in, unsmiling. He was lean, frost-haired, young for fifty, usually genial. Today he was tight-lipped and abrupt to the point of discourtesy. He gave us no greeting, no hello, nothing. He said, "I'm glad you're here, Peter. Maybe you can help."

"So?" I said.

"You're a friend of both father and daughter. Perhaps your good influence may ameliorate matters. Sit, sit, won't you?" We sat, and then he sat, on the edge of a chair.

"They had a horrible wrangle yesterday, right out in front of George and myself. Ugly things were said."

Rosanne lit a cigarette. "Why don't you tell him about the day before yesterday?"

"You tell Mr. Chambers, my dear."

"Sure." She blew a plume of cigarette smoke. "My father burst in on rehearsal, acting like crazy. He ranted, raved, demanded that the producer discharge me, threatened to sue for God knows what. They had to put him out. Correct. The Judge was ejected. You can imagine how bitterly embarrassed I was, and still am. Well, yesterday, here, in Mr. Swanson's office I finally told him off. . . ."

Swanson folded his arms. "Do you remember *how* you told him off?"

"I said what I thought. That he had flipped, that he was overboard—senile, crazy, nutty, and a total embarrassment. I told him I'm no longer a child. . . ."

"You said worse." Swanson was grim.

"I have a temper."

"So does your father. And I don't think he's crazy, senile—not at all."

"You've a right to your opinion."

"Tell Mr. Chambers what else you said."

She shrugged. "I don't know. I don't care. I don't remember."

"Well, I remember and so does George and so does your father.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"What did she say?" I said.

"That if he ever got in her way again, she'd kill him. Nice talk, from a daughter to a father. *'I swear, by God, I'll kill you.'*"

The Memory Guy raised both hands as though he were pushing back a falling fence. "Now hold it, Adam! People say wild things in moments of hysteria. Who takes it seriously?"

"The old man took it damned seriously."

"Hell, I'm a grown woman," Rosanne said. "I've got a right to live my own life in my own way. Nobody interferes."

"Your own way may prove very difficult, my dear."

"I'm willing to risk that."

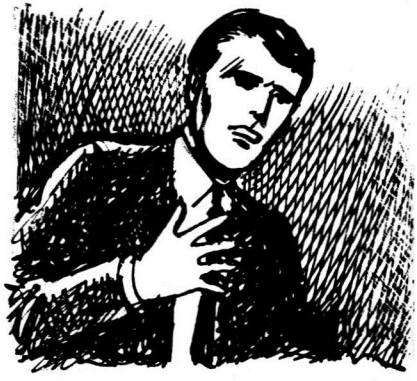
Swanson sat back in his chair, talked directly at me.

"The old man has finally had his fill. You see, Peter, the Judge never wrote a will, no need. There's only Rosanne. No wife, parents, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, cousins—no one but Rosanne. Dying intestate, his estate would go to her—his only next of kin. But now"—Swanson moistened his lips—"he's determined to cut her off—completely."

I looked toward Rosanne.

She sat stiff, stubborn, dry-eyed.

"This office has been instructed to draft a will," Swanson said. "In the circumstances it's no breach of ethics to inform you of its provisions. Young George here gets



fifty thousand dollars. The rest of the estate is to be divided in half—half to me and the other half to certain specified charities. The daughter gets nothing."

"Unconscionable and unfair," George Hudson said, "but a person does have that legal right. He can cut off his own flesh and blood without a penny."

Swanson sat forward. "I do believe, however, that the Judge, at this extreme of pique, has gone too far."

"Damn right," I said.

"On the other hand, no will exists as yet. Just remember that, Rosanne. Nothing, as yet, has been executed."

"What's the point?" I said.

"Just this. I've persuaded the Judge—before he acts—to have one final talk with his daughter. Now if you please, Rosanne."

"Yes sir?"

"He's promised to be at your apartment directly after your re-

hearsal today. That's over at five o'clock, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And it takes you about fifteen minutes from the theater to your place?"

"Yes."

"You'll please go straight to your apartment. And you'll please try to be sensible."

She flared. "Just what do you mean by sensible?"

Swanson slapped his knees and stood up. "Please try to talk some sense into her, Peter. She's stubborn, headstrong, bad tempered. . . ."

"Temperamental," I said.

"This is a matter of many millions," he said. "Hell, I've known this kid since she was born. In all good concsience, I couldn't accept this legacy if I didn't try to persuade her to think carefully about it. All the old man wants is that she quits the stage, no more. Right or wrong, that's all he wants. If she does that, there'll be no will, and we'll all be back in status quo. Just remember—there's no will yet. Now try to talk some sense into her, Peter. . . ."

It was a warm and lovely day and for a while in the cab going to 18th street we just sat and breathed the air and did not talk. Then Rosanne said, "Simply this. Money, per se, just doesn't mean that much to me."

"But, Rosie, you heard the man. This isn't just money. It's millions. That's *money!*"

"You can only eat one steak at a time, wear one dress, one pair of shoes. Nobody's going to talk me out of my life, Peter. Not you, not anybody. I don't need his millions. I can get along on my own. Now let's drop the subject."

I dropped that subject and shifted to another. "What about the Memory Guy?"

"What about him?"

"Are you going back with him?"

She shook her head. "No. That was a mistake. Even my dear father knows that. . . ."

"I don't get it."

"Daddy worked out that marriage. He threw us together constantly and kept us together as often as possible. He told me it would please him if I married George and he told the same to George. I admit there was a physical attraction between us but physical attraction isn't love."

"But you did get married."

"Daddy pressed. George comes from a poor family, he's never had any real money in his life. George believed he was marrying an heiress with all the perquisites that go with such. And Daddy believed that once I married I would give up the business of career and settle down to having babies. Well, as you know, it didn't work out."

"So?"

"When Daddy cut off all the money, George was hooked to a girl without a dime, and I was hooked to a device that my father

had concocted, and I resented that and was nasty to George and George resented that and got nasty with me and so it went, on and on, until poor George was happy to move out."

"But I was under the impression the separation was temporary—"

"No. Neither of us has made a move for divorce simply out of sheer inertia, that's all. But it's obvious that my dear father realizes the selfish trick he played on George and hopes the bequest of fifty thousand dollars will balance the scale. Money talks with Daddy, only sometimes it just doesn't talk loud enough. . . ."

The Anderson apartment was on the second floor of a walkup and the Parole Officer, Tom Murphy, opened the door for us and led us into a small cramped living room. There he introduced us to Jeff Anderson, and to the worn grey-haired woman who was his mother, and to the worn grey-haired man who was his father. All three were seated, looking scared. Tom said, "Stand up, Jeff."

The guy got up. He was thin, sallow, small-boned, and narrow-faced, with long-fingered trembling hands.

"Talk to Miss Hamilton," Tom Murphy said.

"Whadaya want me to say?"

I was holding Rosanne's arm. I felt the muscles constrict.

Instantly she said, "He's the one!"

Mildly Tom Murphy said, "Talk some more, Jeff."

"Whadaya want me to say, Mr. Murphy?"

"Well," Tom drawled. "Say something like 'Tell the Judge I'm going to murder him. Tell your father—' "

"No! Please! No!" The narrow face twisted in a grimace and the boy began to cry. "Please! I'm sorry! Sorry!"

"You admit making these calls, Jeff?"

"I only wanted like to get even. . . ."

"We're going to have to revoke your parole, Jeff."

The worn grey-haired woman said, "I beg you, no."

Rosanne said, "I'd rather not press charges."

I said, "Maybe he's had his lesson, Tom."

Tom said, "Sit down, Jeff. We're going to have a long talk, you and me and your mother and father. . . ."

I went with her to rehearsal and watched and admired. She had an enormous talent, there was no question she was on her way: whether it was worth the sacrifice of millions was not for me to decide. At least she was not fooling herself, she was not relinquishing an inheritance under some form of delusion: she was an accomplished actress.

Later, at five minutes to five, in her dressing room, as she creamed off make-up, I said, "I'm glad you

invited me. I enjoyed it."

"How did it go? How was I?"

"Only great."

"Thank you. I wish I could sit here and listen to more. I devour praise, but let's save it for the cab. Dear old Daddy is waiting, you know."

I rode her by cab to her house, but I stayed in the cab.

"Good luck," I said.

I gave the driver my address and he pulled away but after a few blocks I told him to turn back. It was wrong to let her face up to the old man alone, a cold confrontation, each with a deep grievance and both with fierce tempers. The old man was fond of me: at least at the beginning I might be able to pave the way, use whatever small influence I had to try to effect some sort of reconciliation.

The cab stopped and I paid my fare and went up in the elevator and put my finger on the button. There was no answer. I tried the knob: the door was not locked. I went into the living room and saw Judge David Hamilton on the floor, rigid in death, bleeding from a bullet hole in his forehead. Above him stood Rosanne Hamilton with a gun in her hand.

Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, Homicide, was the man in charge. While his men worked—fingerprint men, photographers, uniformed policemen, Medical Examiner—I acquainted him with all the details. Then he took the girl aside for quiet questioning and I buttonholed one of the uniformed policemen. "You'll pick up a Jeff Anderson at 2 West 18th and bring him here. And you'll get Tom Murphy at the Parole Office. It's okay with the Lieutenant."

The policeman verified with Parker and departed and I called Adam Swanson at his home. "Please come up to Rosanne's apartment, Mr. Swanson. It's urgent. Thank you." I hung up and called George Hudson. I got his answering-service:

"Sorry, Mr. Hudson isn't at home. Any message?"

"Yes. Tell him Peter Chambers called. Tell him to come over to Rosanne Hamilton's apartment as soon as he gets this message. Tell him it's very important, urgent."

And then I went to where Parker was talking to the girl.

He was pointing at a pearl-handled .22 calibre Smith & Wesson revolver. ". . . and it is your gun, isn't it?"

"Yes, my gun."

"And where'd you keep this gun, Miss Hamilton?"

"Right hand drawer of the desk."

"And now will you repeat exactly what happened here?"

"I came in. The door wasn't locked."

"That didn't surprise you?"

"No. I knew my father was going to be here. He has a key. He needn't have locked the door. I came in and . . . I saw him . . . ly-

ing like that . . . touched him. He was dead. The pistol was on the floor. I . . . I picked it up . . . just stood there, bewildered, shocked. I . . . I suppose I would have gone to the phone, called the police, but then Peter, Mr. Chambers, was here."

"What time, Pete?"

"I dropped her off downstairs at about five-fifteen. I came back within the next, oh—five-ten minutes."

The Medical Examiner came to us.

"Time of death?" Parker said.

"Very close. I'd say within a half hour of when we got here."

"How's five-fifteen?"

"It would fit."

"Suppose we give it the full stretch," Parker said. "Between ten to five and twenty after five."

"That would tie it," the Medical Examiner said and went away.

The bell rang. A policeman ushered in Jeff Anderson and Tom Murphy. "Who's that?" Parker said.

"The Anderson boy I told you about."

"Thanks, Pete." The Lieutenant went to the boy at once. "One question, quick. Where were you between ten to five and twenty after?"

"I can answer that, Lieutenant," Tom Murphy said.

"Hello, Tom."

"Hello, Lieutenant. He was at home with me and his parents."

"Okay, that's it. Get him out of here. Thank you, Tom."

In the bustle of their exit, Adam Swanson joined the party.

I was about to greet him when the phone rang. I grabbed it. It was George Hudson. I talked quickly. "Hustle your can right over here, George. There's been, well, trouble, bad trouble. Yes. Right away, please. Good boy." When I hung up Parker was beside me with Rosanne. "That was George," I said to her. To Parker I said, "The husband. He lives only a few streets away. I think you ought to hold up until he gets here. Matter of minutes."

Parker nodded, then said to the girl, "Who knew you had this pistol? Anybody?"

"Everybody," she said. "Everybody who knows me. My father bought it for me. Mr. Swanson got the permit for me."

"And they knew where you kept it?"

"It wasn't a secret."

I went to Swanson and talked with him and then the bell rang and George Hudson was with us and then Parker began his summation. "We've got three ways on this—all of them, of course, involving Miss Hamilton."

"Three ways?" said Adam Swanson.

"First, *her* way. She came in and found him like that and was going to call the police. That has complications, of course."

"What complications?" George Hudson said.

"Well. . . ." Parker jutted his jaw. "The fact that she *didn't* call the police."

"She didn't have time," I said.

"That's *her* story, and maybe it's true. Then the gun was in her hand. She was shocked, bewildered—but that's still *her* story. Then it gets further complicated by the business of the will, the bad feeling between the two of them, and the fact that she made an actual threat before witnesses."

"What's the second way?" Adam Swanson said.

"Heat of passion killing. They got caught up in an argument; maybe he took the gun out; maybe she did—and boom."

"And the third way?" George Hudson said.

"Deliberate premeditated murder."

"Are you crazy?" I said.

"Maybe. Maybe not. But that way she'd have her career *and* her millions."

"*What* way?" George Hudson said.

"She didn't expect Peter Chambers to pop in on her."

"So?" I said.

"Let's project it. She's an actress. She could carry it off."

"Carry *what* off, for Christ sake?" George Hudson said.

"She shoots him, wipes the gun, puts it in his hand, maybe explodes another bullet, and then runs out screaming. What would we have then, gentlemen? We would have, ostensibly, a suicide."

"No," George Hamilton said. "She couldn't."

"Why not, Mr. Hudson?"

"It's just not in her."

"Nonsense, it's in all of us, given sufficient provocation. Her provocation: two-pronged: career and money. If he's dead before he executes his will, she gets it all. Right? And could we disprove that suicide? Hardly—when we're dealing with one whose business it is to dissemble, an actress. She didn't know that Pete was going to walk in on her and she sure did know that the old man was here waiting for her."

"So did Mr. Hudson," I said. "And so did Mr. Swanson."

"But neither of these gentlemen could be involved because neither would have purpose. If the Judge was killed *after* he made his will. . . ." Parker shrugged. "But before? Before—George Hudson would be out fifty thousand dollars. Before?—Adam Swanson would be out millions. No, sir. Where there's no motive, there's no sense. What's the matter, Pete? You look unhappy."

I must have continued to look unhappy because Parker grunted and picked up with routine interrogation. "Mr. Swanson."

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Could you tell us where you were between ten to five and twenty after?"

"At home. George and I left the office together at about four o'clock."

"Anyone at home to corroborate that you were at home, Mr. Swanson?"

"Actually, no. My kids are up at school, and my wife returned from the beauty parlor just as Peter called me."

"Were you here, at this apartment, at any time today?"

"Absolutely not."

"Mr. Hudson."

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"You heard my questions to Mr. Swanson?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Well, how about you?"

"Left the office with Adam. He took a taxi, I walked. It's beautiful day—I walked all the way home. There I called my Service and they gave me Peter's message. I called back immediately and Peter told me to come here at once, urgent, and I did exactly that."

"And were you here, at this apartment, at any time today?"

"Absolutely not."

"Now both you gentlemen did hear this girl threaten her father?"

Neither one answered.

"Mr. Swanson," Parker said.

"Yes, I heard."

"Heard what?"

"Heard her threaten."

"Just what did she say? Do you remember?"

Swanson cleared his throat. "She said that if he ever interfered with her again, she'd kill him. She said, *'I swear, by God, I'll kill you.'* "

"You heard that too, Mr. Hudson?"

"Now, please, Lieutenant! This makes no sense at all! I'm certain she didn't mean it. People say ridiculous things in moments of crisis, in the passion of argument. That was no threat."

"Very gallant," I said.

It came out sharp, like a shot.

Heads snapped up. Policemen moved near.

"Why the sarcasm?" George Hudson said.

"Because you and I—we both know Rosie didn't kill her father."

"I don't *think* she did but I *know* nothing. And I certainly don't know what you know."

*"I know that you killed him."*

He rushed at me. A clip on the chin rushed him right back. The cops held him.

"What in hell are you talking about?" Parker said.

"Murder, First degree. Deliberate and premeditated."

"Bastard!" The Memory Guy pulled forward for another clip on the chin but the cops restrained him.

Parker wrinkled his eyes. "What reason, what purpose? The best that could happen to him would be the loss of fifty thousand dollars."

"Not quite," I said. "He's a brilliant young man, with an exquisite legal mind, once chosen to be the legal secretary to Judge Hamilton himself. He knows the law and the convolutions of the law."

"Convolutions," Parker said, but

encouragingly.

I blew a sigh. "If Judge Hamilton died before the execution of his will, true, George Hamilton would miss out on a bequest of fifty thousand dollars. But now let us inquire, somewhat more carefully, just what would happen in such circumstances."

"Okay," Parker said. "Inquire."

"The old guy would die intestate. No will."

"No will," Parker said.

"The Judge had no other heir—except his daughter. But there's a rule of law that a wrongdoer cannot profit by his own wrongdoing, isn't there, Mr. Swanson?"

"There is."

"Thus if there were a decision that she killed her father, she couldn't inherit, could she?"

"Correct," Swanson said.

"Then what would happen to the estate?"

"It would devolve to her next of kin."

"Which would be the husband, George Hudson. They're separated but still legally married. But even if his nice little scheme didn't work—even if it was decided that she *didn't* kill her father—then he would still be the legally wedded husband of a woman who had inherited millions, and it would cost her plenty—more than fifty thousand dollars—to buy her freedom when she wanted it. Motive, Lieutenant?"

"Liar!" George Hudson

screamed. "He can't prove a word of this!"

"Oh yes I can, Memory Guy."

"Let's have it," Parker said.

"He says he wasn't in the apartment today."

"I swear to Christ I wasn't!"

"I can prove you were, Georgie."

"Not on your life!"

"You just prove that, Peter." And now Parker was very close to the policeman holding George Hudson.

"There's a new telephone in this apartment," I said.

"Telephone!" It was a groan. The gravel in Parker's voice was disappointment. "Now what in hell has a telephone to do with this?"

"It was installed this morning. I used that very telephone to call our Memory Guy. He wasn't at home. I left a message with his Service for him to come here at once. He didn't come right away. He called first."

"So, damn, *what?*" Parker said.

*"Unless he was here in this apartment today—he could not have called."*

Parker blinked. "Brother, somewhere along the way you've lost me."

"I was with Rosie Hamilton all day—since this new phone was installed. She didn't give the number to anyone. . . ."

"But Information would have it," Adam Swanson said.

"Information would *not* have it. As the telephone man mentioned after he put in the new phone—*it's an unlisted number.*"

"You're beginning to find me again, Peter." And now Parker was smiling.

"George came here pretending it was a social call. The Judge opened the door for him, and they probably exchanged casual amenities. Then George went to the desk, opened the drawer, took out the gun, shot the Judge, wiped the gun, dropped it on the floor beside the body, and blew the joint."

"Knowing Miss Hamilton would arrive at about five-fifteen," Parker said.

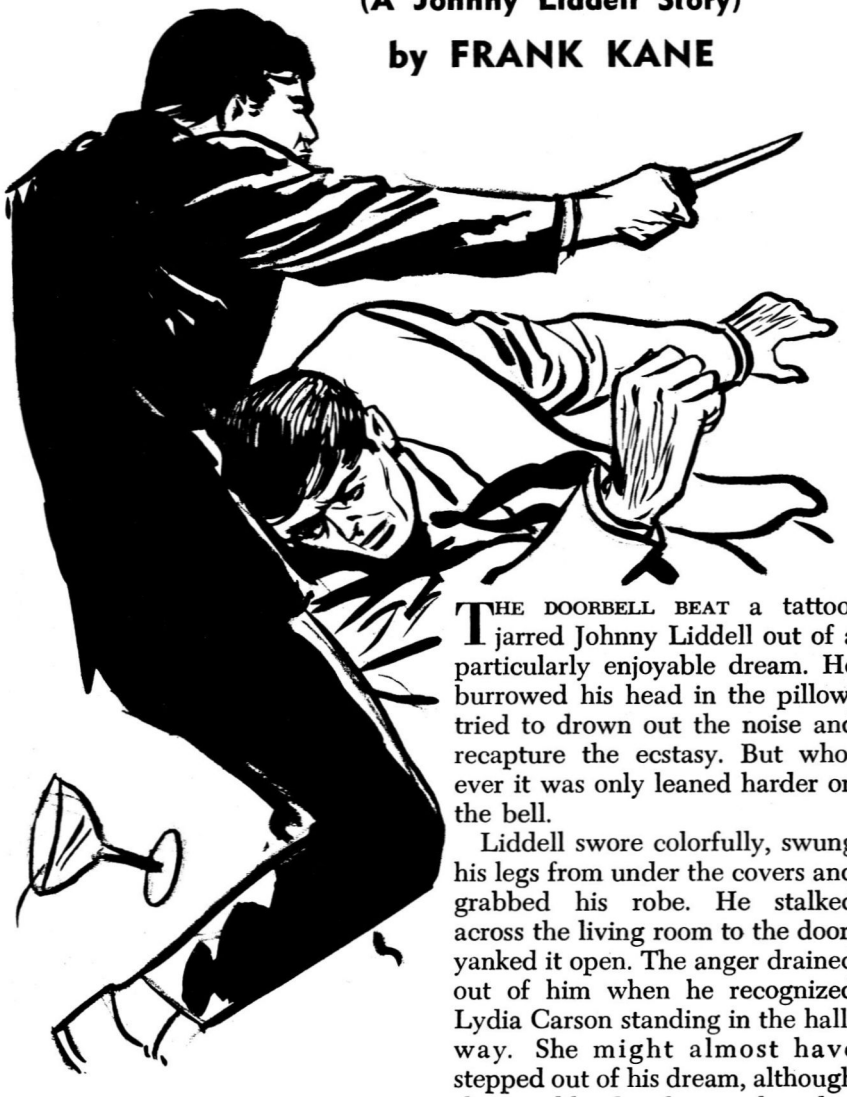
"He knew the phone had been disconnected yesterday. Rosie told him. And she told him a new one was installed today. So when he was here, taking the gun out of the desk, he must have flicked a glance at the telephone plaque, and with his kind of mind the number automatically registered. He *had* to be here in this apartment today to know the number—to be able to call back."

George Hudson was a brilliant young man, with an exquisite legal mind, once chosen to be the legal secretary to a Judge of General Sessions. He could bluster and bellow at what he considered random accusations but he could not resist the indictment of unimpeachable logic. He sagged and the policemen held him up. The fight was out of him. He was docile as they led him away.

# WITH FRAME TO MATCH

## (A Johnny Liddell Story)

### by FRANK KANE



THE DOORBELL BEAT a tattoo, jarred Johnny Liddell out of a particularly enjoyable dream. He burrowed his head in the pillow, tried to drown out the noise and recapture the ecstasy. But whoever it was only leaned harder on the bell.

Liddell swore colorfully, swung his legs from under the covers and grabbed his robe. He stalked across the living room to the door, yanked it open. The anger drained out of him when he recognized Lydia Carson standing in the hallway. She might almost have stepped out of his dream, although she was blonde whereas the other

vision had been a redhead. But all the other details dovetailed.

She was even more breathtaking than he remembered. The thick blonde hair was piled on top of her head. Her face was scrubbed clean of makeup, save for a smear of lipstick and some expert tinting over her slanted eyes. She was wearing a full length polo coat, loafers and no stockings.

"I'm sorry to barge in on you like this, Johnny." She brushed past him into the room, and waited until he had closed the door behind her. "I need your help."

Liddell walked over to the lamp on the table next to the couch, snapped it on. Then he turned to her. "What's happened?"

"My kid brother has just been arrested for murder."

"Where?"

"Powhatan. My home town." She walked over, laid her hand on his arm. "He's being framed, Johnny. I want you to prove it. Ron's no killer."

"How long since you saw your brother?"

A slight frown marred the smoothness of the blonde's forehead. "Not since I came to New York. Five years ago. Why?"

"Five years is a long time. People change. Circumstances change."

The blonde's face went cold. "I'm sorry I bothered you." She snatched her hand away from his arm, swung around and high-tailed it for the door. Liddell went after her, caught her by the arm and swung her around.

"Don't get so feisty. I'm not saying he did it." She let him lead her back to the couch. "I'll fix us a drink while you tell me about it."

"That's the whole trouble," she told him, a trace of sulkiness in her voice. "I don't have too many details. All I know is what the girl told me—"

Liddell poured some scotch over over the ice in two glasses, handed her one. "What girl?"

"Her name was Madge Regan. She said she was Ron's girl. He told her to call to tell me they were trying to frame him."

Liddell set his glass down, found a sheet of paper and a pencil, scribbled down the name. "And who's he supposed to have killed?"

"A man named Harvey Bright. Some kind of special prosecutor."

Liddell sighed. "What kind of a town is Powhatan? A lot of gambling? Vice?"

The blonde wrinkled her nose. "It's a Hell-hole. It's right in the mining section. You can buy anything you want as long as you've got the price. That's why I got out as soon as I could."

Liddell picked up his glass, sipped at the liquor. "Your brother ever been in trouble with the law?"

"Just kid stuff. He's always been high spirited."

"High spirited." Liddell sighed. "How high?"

"Before I left there was something about a stolen car, but it was all straightened out and—"

"High enough," Liddell nodded. "Have you heard from him since you left? What he was doing? Where he was working?"

The blonde shook her head. "I guess he was doing all right, though. He never asked for money or help." She eyed Lidell's face anxiously. "You've got to help him, Johnny."

"How about the police?"

"The police?" The blonde made a face as if she had a bad taste in her mouth. "Unless things have changed a lot in five years, the police chief is owned body and soul by the gamblers."

"Like that, huh?" Liddell considered for a moment. "Okay. I'm not making any promises. But I'll take a run down to that garden spot of yours in the morning and have a look around."

The blonde jumped to her feet, ran to him and pasted her half-open mouth against his. After a moment, she broke away. "You'll never know how grateful I'll be."

Liddell grinned. "If that's just a sample, I don't know if I could survive the whole bit. But it'll do your heart good to see me try."

The blonde walked back to the couch, unbuttoned the polo coat. Liddell whistled noiselessly as she slipped out of it. Under the coat she was wearing only a pair of light blue, silk pajamas, the legs rolled up to her knees.

"I was already in bed when the girl called. I didn't take time to dress. I just grabbed my coat and ran practically the whole way."

"Pretty dangerous for a good looking chick like you to be wandering around the streets in this town at this hour," Liddell told her.

"I know. I was scared half out of my wits. But I had to talk to you." She sat down on the couch, leaned back against the pillows, straining her high, tip tilted breasts against the fragile fabric of the pajama top. "I don't know how I'll get home. It's almost impossible to get a cab."

Liddell dropped down alongside her, was pleasantly aware of the roundness of her thigh against his. "Maybe you'd better stay here."

Lydia leaned toward him, her breath warm and fragrant against his cheek. "That'd be so nice, Johnny. You sure I won't be a bother?"

She wasn't.

Pennsylvania has many beautiful towns. But Powhatan wasn't one of them. It consisted of rows of streets of squat, soot-stained buildings, a few evidence of green where a bush or a stunted tree managed to survive the grime, the cinders and the fumes that are part and parcel of it. Towering above the town to the south were

the hills, scarred by the gaping wounds that were the mine shafts, from which its citizens scraped their living.

Martin Conroy, the town's police chief, was thick-set, red-faced; with a thin, bony nose and a balding pate that showed an inclination to freckle. He sat behind the desk in his office and stared at Liddell with no show of enthusiasm.

"We don't much like outsiders coming in here, stirring things up," he growled. "Especially private detectives." He picked up the credentials Liddell had dropped on his desk, riffled through them, tossed them back onto the desk, "We especially don't like keyhole peeping."

Liddell picked up his papers, stowed them in his pockets. "I wasn't figuring on doing any keyhole peeping. Lydia Carson hired me to have a look at this murder her brother's supposed to have committed."

The chief's face darkened at the word "supposed." He reached over, lifted a fat cigar out of the humidor, tested its firmness between thumb and forefinger. "Little Miss Stuckup, huh? Too good for this town, she figures. Well, maybe the town's too good for her, what with having a brother a murderer."

"That's what remains to be seen. Whether or not he is a murderer."

The chief scowled at him for a moment, then jammed the cigar between his teeth and chewed on it. "I don't know why I should be so good natured, but just to keep you from wasting your time, I'll let you have a look at our cards." He pressed a button on the base of his phone, the door opened and a uniformed cop stuck his head in. "Give me the file on the Harvey Bright killing."

The cop withdrew his head, closed the door.

Conroy scratched a match, lit his cigar. He rolled it in the center of his lips, drew a mouthful of smoke and blew it at the ceiling.

After a moment, the uniformed cop was back. He dropped a manila folder on the desk, left the office. The chief spilled some typewritten sheets and a glossy print out of the envelope onto the desk. He picked up the photograph, held it out so Liddell could see three signatures on the back.

"This is a deathbed identificaby Lenora Ross, Harvey Bright's secretary. She walked in on Carson just after he shot Bright. He gunned her, left her for dead. She lived long enough to pick out his picture." The chief jabbed his spatulate index finger at the other two signatures. "The identification was witnessed by the doctor and nurse taking care of her." He reversed the picture, Liddell could see the resemblance to the blonde. "The picture she picked out was Ron Carson." He dropped the picture on the top of his desk, picked up a typewritten sheet. "Deposi-

tion by Estelle Stein, registered nurse, stating she was present when Lenora Ross was shown a stack of pictures and witnessed the identification." He flipped it on the desk, picked up another sheet. "Deposition by Dr. Stanley Regan, resident at Powhatan General swearing to the same thing." He dropped the sheet to the desk, picked up a third typewritten report. "Ballistics report. The bullet in Bright came out of a gun found in Carson's apartment after his arrest—"

Liddell bobbed his head. "Quite a case," he conceded.

"Perfect," the chief blew smoke at him.

Liddell scratched the side of his chin. "Too perfect." He watched the chief replacing the papers in the envelope. "How about a motive?"

"Bright was brought in to check on rumors of vice in town," he shrugged away responsibility. "Seems Carson was running a cat house on the south side. Looks like Bright had the goods on him and was getting ready to lower the boom." He took the cigar from between his teeth, studied the macerated end. "My guess is Carson either tried to buy him off or scare him off and when Bright wouldn't stop leaning, the kid killed him."

"You find anything to indicate that Bright had any evidence against Carson?"

The man behind the desk replaced the cigar between his teeth, chewed on it for a moment. "Bright's files were ripped apart. Whatever he had was gone." He stared up at Liddell. "So you see, you'd just be wasting your time."

"Well, you understand. I have to go through the motions for my client. Of course, if you tell me I can't—"

"Why should I do that? It's your time if you want to waste it."

"I don't suppose it would be convenient for me to see my client?"

The chief considered, shrugged. "Right now if you want."

Liddell eyed the red faced man

suspiciously. "Right now would be fine.

The chief lifted his receiver off its hook. "Call the detention block. Tell Al a guy's coming down to have a talk with Ron Carson. Tell Al to handle this guy with kid gloves. He's a big town private eye out slumming to teach us country boys." He returned the receiver to the hook. "Anything else I can do for you?"

The skeptical look still clouded Liddell's eyes. "If I think of anything, I'll let you know. Where is the detention pen?"

"Basement of the county courthouse. Over on the south side."

Liddell nodded, walked to the door, let himself out.

The red faced man sat chewing on his cigar for a moment, then he reached for his telephone and started dialing.

The jailer was sitting in the outside office of the detention pen, his chair tilted back against the wall, his feet propped comfortably in an open bottom drawer. He had the sallow complexion of a man who didn't get enough sunshine; his eyes were weak and watery. He watched Liddell walking from the elevator to where he sat with no change of expression.

The private detective stopped alongside his desk. "My name is Liddell. Chief Conroy phoned an okay for me to have a talk with Carson."

The jailer let the front legs of his chair hit the floor. He reached for the big key ring on his desk, stood up. "This way." He unlocked the barred door, led the way through.

There were eight cells in the block, four on either side of the concrete corridor where the lights were lit twenty-four hours a day. None of the other cells in the block were occupied.

The jailer started to insert the key into the lock of the last cell on the right side, glanced up. His jaw sagged, the key ring slipped from his fingers. "Mother of God," he whispered.

Liddell felt a tightening of the muscles in his midsection. He bounded to the side of the jailer, grabbed the bars and stared into the cell.

Ron Carson, in person, looked less like his sister than his photograph had. His eyes bulged as he returned Liddell's stare unblinkingly. He must have been a little over five-eight. Now that his feet cleared the floor by a few inches his eyes were almost on a level with Johnny's.

The belt around his neck had been tied to the bars that protected the set-in light fixture in the ceiling.

Liddell bent to pick up the keys, the jailer recovered enough to reach down and snatch them away.

"Open it up," Liddell urged.

The jailer shook his head firmly. "Not me," he told Liddell. "I'm

not touching a thing until the boys from headquarters get here. And that goes double for you." He turned and dogtrotted back to his desk. Liddell stood for a moment, staring morosely at the hanging man, then followed the jailer.

". . . but I tell you I don't know when it happened. I haven't talked to him since breakfast. He was alive then," he was telling the mouthpiece of the telephone. He bobbed his head. "Sure, I understand. Okay, chief. I'll see that nothing is touched." He glanced up at Liddell with his colorless eyes. "By nobody!" He hung the receiver up. "That was Conroy. He's on his way over. You can wait if you want to see him."

"I've seen all of him I want to," Liddell grunted. He brought out a slip of paper, read the name he'd scribbled on it the night before. "You know a girl named Madge Regan?"

An obscene grin twisted the loose lips of the jailer. "Say, you sure are a detective."

"What's that mean?"

The jailer shook his head in admiration. "A stranger in town and already you got the name of the best piece in town." He eyed Liddell up and down, shook his head. "Not that you look like the type that has to buy it. But then, you can never tell."

"Look, I didn't ask for an analysis. All I asked for is an address."

"Any cabby'll take you where you want to go. Just ask for Madge's Place. It's on the fifty-cent tour along with the statue of Benjamin Franklin in the town park."

Madge's Place turned out to be an old two-story shingle house that stood back about a hundred feet off the road. It was surrounded by a decaying picket fence from which many of the pickets had fallen to rot in the weed-choked front yard.

The cabby braked to a stop at the curb outside, swung halfway around in his seat. He lifted a toothpick from the corner of his mouth, glanced at the macerated end. He flipped it through the open window.

"Not much to look at from the outside," he conceded. "But it's the best we got in town." He checked his wristwatch. "Kind of early for any real action, though."

Liddell pushed a bill through the window at him. "That won't bother me. I'm selling subscriptions to the *Ladies' Home Journal.*" He pushed open the door, stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Most of the shades in the front of the house were drawn, it had the appearance of being deserted. Liddell walked up the front steps, rang the bell. After a moment, the curtain on the front door was pulled aside, someone looked him over.

Liddell could hear the chain being removed from the inside of the door, then it swung open.

A tall redhead in a light blue

dressing gown stood in the doorway. Her hair cascaded down over her shoulders, the dressing gown sagged open enough in front to make any speculation that she wore anything under it unnecessary. It also gave ample evidence that she needed no artificial assist to the magnificence of her facade.

In the bright light of day, the redhead looked older than her figure would indicate. The merciless sunlight exposed the fine network of lines under her eyes, and the losing fight she was making against crow's feet around her eyes and at the sides of her mouth. She looked tired.

"I don't know you, do I, honey?" she asked.

"We have mutual friends," Liddell told her. "That is, if you're Madge Regan?"

The redhead nodded. "I'm Madge. Who are these mutual friends?"

"Ron Carson. And his sister. You called her last night."

Madge opened the door, invited him into the dimness of the hall. She closed it after her, led him toward a room in the rear of the hall. Through the open door of the big living room, Liddell had a view of four other girls, in varying degrees of undress, sitting around listlessly playing solitaire or sipping on coffee cups. They looked up expectantly at the sight of him, returned to their boredom when he disappeared out of the doorway in the wake of the redhead.

Madge pushed the door to her room open, stepped aside for Liddell to enter. It was furnished with a large dresser and a make-up mirror, a couple of easy chairs with a reading light in position behind one of them and a king-sized bed. The walls were draped with velvet, there was a door leading to a private lavatory.

The redhead closed the door behind her. She walked over to the make-up mirror, poked at her hair with the tips of her fingers. "What makes you think I called Ron's sister last night?" Her eyes sought his in the mirror.

"She came to me for help. Said her brother was being framed for murder. She wanted me to look into it."

The redhead turned around. "He's being framed, all right. But—"

"Was being framed."

Madge's eyes widened, some of the color drained out of her face. "Was?"

Liddell nodded. "He's dead. Supposed to have hung himself in his cell. I just came from the detention cell."

"The dirty bastards. The dirty rotten bastards. They killed him." The readhead walked to the bureau, opened the drawer and brought out a bottle. "I guess I'm next." She spilled some liquor into the two glasses on the top of the bureau.

"Why should they kill you?"

She handed him a glass, twisted her lips into a bitter grin. "They won't. They'll take care of me a better way." She tilted the glass over her lips, drained it. "You think this town is bad? The Organization runs dumps that would make this look like the Ritz. You know what it's like for a white girl in Marrakech or some of the South American seaports? Even if they take a loss on me, they'll do it just to keep other people in line." She walked back to the bottle, spilled some more into the glass. "They're real great at teaching lessons. Once they find out you came here to see me—"

Lidell sighed. "They already know. I asked the jailer for your address." He took a swallow from his glass. "You say Carson was working with Bright? Why?"

"This setup used to belong to Ron. Him and me, we did all right with it. So good that Marty Steel decided to take it over."

"Who's Marty Steel?"

"Who's Marty Steel?" the redhead mimicked bitterly. "Marty Steel is Mr. Big in this town. He represents the Organization and he owns the police department and the mayor's office. He tells them what to do and when to do it and they jump." She took a swallow from her glass, walked to the chair, sat on the arm. "One day he walks in here and tells Ron he's got a new boss. Not a partner. A boss. Steel's taking over for the Organization and he's going to be real big about it. He's going to let Ron keep running the house for a percentage." She either didn't know or didn't care that the robe fell open, revealing a wide expanse of thigh.

"Just like that? And Carson stood still for it?"

"Not at first. Neither of us did." She slid the gown back off her right shoulder. Her bared right breast was full, round, a trifle over-ripe, a shadow of things to come. She half turned on the arm of the chair so Liddell could see the faint red strips that criss-crossed her back. "Marty has a boy named Denton. Les Denton. He dropped by with some muscle to give us a sales pitch. It was two weeks before I could get on my back. We got the message." She pulled the robe up to cover her shoulder. "But that didn't say we had to like it."

"So when Bright moved in to clean up the town, Carson saw a chance to hit back. Right?"

The redhead nodded. "He got his hands on a copy of the ice list. Last night, he put it in Bright's hands. That was early, like around nine. At about three, two dicks from Conroy's office walk in, grab Ron. They search his room and come up with a gun." She leaned forward with an interesting effect on the neckline of her gown. "Mister, Ron Carson's been my old man for almost five years. I ought to know if he ever had a

gun or not. He wouldn't go near one. He was scared to death of them."

Liddell nodded. "Planted, probably. It was the gun that killed Bright."

"They didn't miss a trick. How they did it, I don't know. But they even conned a doctor and a nurse into swearing that Lenora Ross identified Ron's picture as the killer. They're lying in their teeth. Both of them."

Liddell scratched his ear. "Not necessarily. All they did was witness the Ross woman's signature on the back of a photograph she identified."

"So? Isn't that enough? It was Ron's picture."

"Maybe it wasn't." He brought out his notebook, tore two pages out. He scrawled a big "X" on the front of one sheet. "Now sign your name on the back of this sheet." He turned the paper over, handed her the pencil. She scrawled her named.

Liddell separated the two sheets, showed her that her signature was on the back of a blank page that he had held against the back of the sheet marked "X." "It's an old art faker's trick. He pastes a cheap copy to the back of a valuable painting, then urges the sucker to have it appraised. The appraisal is always much higher than the price, so the sucker signs his name to the back to make sure he gets the right painting. Then, all the dealer has to do is peel the valuable painting off and give him the fake with his name signed on it."

The redhead's jaw slackened. "You mean there were two pictures pasted together?"

"Probably. So when the doctor and nurse were witnessing the Ross signature, they were signing the back of Ron's picture, not the one she picked out."

The blonde took the two pieces of paper, tried it for herself. She swore bitterly. "That's just how they did it. For all the good it will do Ron now."

"We can't do anything for him," Liddell conceded. "But maybe we can even the score and make sure they can't do anything to you."

"How?"

"By doing it to them first."

Madge got up, walked back to the dresser, spilled the rest of the liquor into her glass. She held the bottle up to the light, satisfied herself it was empty. "There's nothing you can do. Get on a plane and get as far away from here as you can. Forget you ever heard about Ron Carson or me. All you can buy for yourself is grief."

Chief Martin Conroy squirmed into a more comfortable position on the oversized couch in Marty Steel's living room. His normally red face was tinged with purple now. He was glaring at a thin, dapper man in a three button Continental suit who was mixing martinis. The slim cut of the suit

made the man look like he had been dipped to the waist in black ink, the martinis were blue white.

Marty Steel sat across from the couch, watching the police chief. He was comfortably rounded, his lips were a red smear in the dish shaped face; his eyes were half-closed, deceptively lazy looking. "I still think killing Carson was a mistake," he told the red faced man.

Conroy tore his eyes away from the thin man. "If your boy had done the job right last night, we wouldn't have to."

Les Denton served the martinis, was unimpressed by the criticism.

"Now, this wise guy from New York is out talking to Carson's broad. Maybe we could fool the yokels with that phony identification bit, but we never would have fooled him. That's why Carson had to do the dutch."

"What about the girl?" Steel wanted to know.

"That's your department. She's your property. Just get her out of here before she starts shooting off her lip," Conroy grunted.

Steel tasted his martini, nodded his satisfaction to the thin man. "Excellent, Denton." He held the stem of the glass between thumb and forefinger, turned it slowly. "What the chief says is right. The girl's got to go. But no more killing. Bring her up here. We'll arrange for her transportation to someplace where she can't give us any trouble." He rolled his eyes to the chief. "Satisfactory?"

"And the private eye?"

Steel shrugged. "With Carson dead, with the Bright case wrapped up and the girl out of the picture, what's there for him to find?"

Conroy considered, bobbed his head. "Sounds okay." He glared up at Denton. "As long as nobody gets careless."

The man in the three button suit smiled. He reached up, flattened the hair over his ear with the palm of his hand. It was fluffed, carefully casual on the top.

His eyes were large, liquid. The effect was spoiled by a thin, cruel slit of a mouth. He barely moved his lips when he talked. "It will all be nice and legal like." He brought a leather holder out of his pocket, flipped it open to show a badge. "I'm a deputy. Remember?" He rolled his eyes to where Steele was sitting. "Bring her here?"

The round man considered, nodded. "You'd better. That way we can keep an eye on her until she's shipped out."

Denton nodded. "Any other instructions, chief?" he asked the red faced man. He managed to make the title sound like a dirty word.

Conroy glared at him, shook his head. After the thin man had left the room and slammed the door behind him, the chief turned to Marty Steel. "I don't like that boy of yours, Marty."

The round man drained his glass, set it down. "I do," he said flatly. "And that's what counts."

Madge Regan had half finished a second bottle by the time the rapping came on the front door. She got to her feet, staggered to the bureau, poured one last slug into the glass, waited. She could hear the door being opened, the sound of voices, then footsteps. She raised the glass to her lips, took a deep swallow.

The door to her bedroom swung open, Les Denton swaggered into the room. He looked around, twisted his thin lips into a grin. "Celebrating something?" he wanted to know.

The redhead ignored him.

His face went an angry white, he crossed to her, caught her roughly by the arm and swung her around. "I asked you a question," he snapped.

She wrenched her arm free. "Don't handle the merchandise."

He sneered at her. "After a couple of days where you're going, I won't stay in the same room with you without a mask," he told her.

The redhead swung her glass, the contents splashed into his face. Denton screamed shrilly as the alcohol stung his eyes, backed away rubbing them with the heels of his hands. Some of the other girls stood in the doorway, formed a semicircle staring in, wide-eyed.

Denton kicked the door closed. He crossed to the redhead, slashed her across the side of the face with the flat of his hand, backhanded her head into position. As she went for his face with clenched fingers, he backhanded her again. She stagggered backward, lost her balance over the arm of a chair, landed in a heap on the floor, her gown hiked over her hips. She lay there sobbing, tears streaking the mascara on her face.

The thin man caught her by the arm, dragged her to her feet. "Let's go." He started pulling her to the door.

"My clothes. Let me pack my clothes," the redhead pleaded.

Denton sneered at her. "Where you're going, you won't need them. You won't have time to put them on and take them off."

In the hallway, the clotted group of girls parted as he dragged the sobbing redhead to the door, down the path to where a car with a red light on its roof and a star on the side of the door precluded any interference.

Down the street, Johnny Liddell flattened into the shadows of a building as the police car rolled past. He walked to the nearest corner, got into the cab he had kept waiting.

"Hey, wait a minute," the cabbie protested. "You didn't tell me the car you wanted me to follow was a cop car."

"I didn't know it would be, for sure." He passed a bill up to the driver, the figure "ten" prominent in the corner of it. "Let's go."

The driver lost his struggle to take his eyes off the bill, lifted it from Liddell's fingers, tucked it in his watch pocket. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I'm in a helluva good spot to find out," Liddell grunted.

Marty Steele lounged in the big armchair, explored the faint stubble along the line of his chin with the tips of his fingers. He eyed Madge Regan with no show of interest.

"You might as well level with me. You sent for the shamus, didn't you?" he asked in an incurious voice. It was more a statement of fact than a question. "Why?"

"They were trying to frame Ron. I—I didn't know you were involved, Mr. Steel. I thought it was the chief—"

"You're a liar," the round man snapped. He reached over to the end table alongside his chair. "Carson delivered this list to Bright." He waved the paper. "You know what this list is? It's a list of every cop on the force who's on the take and for how much." He leaned forward, waved the list under her nose. "Who did you think was paying that dough? The chief? Or me?" He settled back, studied the redhead from under half-closed lids. "You could

have walked away from it. We hang the killing on Carson, let him serve a few years and forget it. You," he shrugged, "you wouldn't even get that. But you had to play it smart, call for a private eye."

"I'd do it again," the redhead told him defiantly.

"She needs a little lesson, Mr. Steel," Denton told the man in the chair. He reached out, caught the neckline of the girl's blouse, ripped it down. Her full breasts spilled out as she struggled to back away.

Denton came up with the knife, tried to cash in on Liddell's momentary disadvantage. The girl had apparently fainted, her arms and legs were tangled with Liddell's. The force of the collision had knocked the .45 from his hand, it lay on the floor just out of reach.

As the thin man slashed out at his face, Liddell managed to disentangle the unconscious girl from him, rolled out of the path of the blade. Relentlessly, the thin man stalked him, knife blade held up in the true style of an expert.

"We've got plenty of time," Denton told him. "You're going to walk to the edge of the terrace and then keep going. And after fifteen stories a few cuts won't show." He circled where Liddell lay waiting, kicked the .45 across the room. Slowly, he moved toward him.

Liddell waited until the thin man was within reach, lashed out with his foot. He connected with the thin man's shin, Denton roared his pain and hopped back on one foot. He massaged his shin, kept Liddell at bay with the blade.

"That goes on the bill, too, shamus," he snarled.

Slowly he started to circle, looking for an opening. Suddenly, Denton made his move. Liddell dropped down and away from the knife, heard it swish over his head, heard the thin man grunt as he missed.

Before Denton could get set, Liddell charged at him, head down, in a body check. His shoulder hit the thin man's midsection,

knocked him sprawling on his back.

Liddell threw himself on the man with the knife, caught the wrist of the knife hand in a crushing grip. Slowly, inexorably, he lifted the hand holding the knife, then smashed the knuckles against the floor. The thin man screamed, tried to free his hand from Liddell's grip.

Johnny continued to smash the thin man's knuckles against the floor until the knife fell from his nerveless fingers. As Denton lay there panting and spitting curses at him, Liddell brought back his fist and slammed it against the thin man's jaw. Denton stopped struggling and spitting curses. The panting turned into a strangled snore, a thin ribbon of red ran from the corner of his mouth.

Liddell got up, satisfied himself that the girl had merely fainted. Then he walked over to the bottle on the table next to the dead man. He started to pour a drink, picked up the piece of paper on the table next to the bottle. Liddell unfolded it, read the names and amounts they were being paid. He whistled softly, walked to the phone.

He dialed the operator, asked to be connected with the police chief.

Conroy's voice was belligerent when he learned the identity of the caller. "What do you want?"

"Just calling to say goodbye, chief," Liddell told him.

The chief failed to keep the note of triumph out of his voice. "So you're taking my advice and getting out of town?"

Liddell shook his head. "Not me. But I figured you might be."

"What?" the police chief roared.

"Marty Steel is dead," Liddell told him. "And I've got the ice list. I'm going to finish the job Carson started and see that it gets into the right hands."

"You won't live even as long as Carson did. When Denton—"

Liddell glanced over to where the thin man was struggling back to consciousness. "Denton? Is he the guy in the tight pants?"

"He's the guy that's going to see that you don't give that list to anybody," Conroy growled.

"I wouldn't count on it, if I were you. Denton just ran out on the terrace and kept going. That first step is fifteen stories. He knew how narrow-minded the Organization can get when a good setup like this blows up in their face." He glanced at his watch. "I figured you might want a head start before they find out how you fouled things up."

"Wait a minute, you!" the chief blustered.

"You're wasting time. And you're going to need all the time you can get. If I were you, I'd start running. For all the good it's going to do you."

He cut off the protest from the other end by dropping the receiver on its hook.

# HIS HEART COULD BREAK

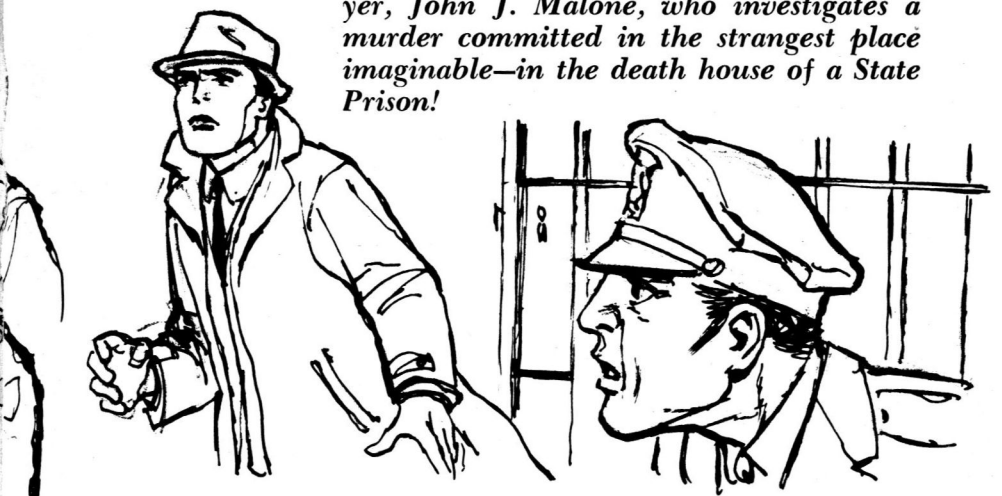
## by CRAIG RICE

*"As I passed by the ol' state's prison,*
*Ridin' on a stream-line' train—"*

JOHN J. MALONE shuddered. He wished he could get the insidious melody out of his mind—or, remember the rest of the words. It had been annoying him since three o'clock that morning, when he'd heard it sung by the janitor of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

It seemed like a bad omen, and it made him uncomfortable. Or maybe it was the cheap gin he'd

***The creator of Jake Justus and Helene Brand—and who doesn't love that delightfully wacky detectival duo?—wrote this hauntingly nostalgic tale especially for "Edgar Wallace's Mystery Magazine." We are proud to print it—an engrossing story of the modern school, about that hard-living, hard-drinking little criminal lawyer, John J. Malone, who investigates a murder committed in the strangest place imaginable—in the death house of a State Prison!***



switched to between two and four a.m. that was making him uncomfortable. Whichever it was, he felt terrible.

"I bet your client's happy today," the guard said cordially, leading the way towards the death house.

"He ought to be," Malone growled. He reminded himself that he too ought to be happy. He wasn't. Maybe it was being in a prison that depressed him. John J. Malone, criminal lawyer, didn't like prisons. He devoted his life to keeping his clients out of them.

*"Then the warden told me gently—"*

That song again! How did the next line go?

"Well," the guard said, "they say you've never lost a client yet." It wouldn't do any harm, he thought, to get on the good side of a smart guy like John J. Malone.

"Not yet," Malone said. He'd had a close call with this one, though.

"You sure did a wonderful job,

turning up the evidence to get a new trial," the guard rattled on. Maybe Malone could get him a better appointment, with his political drag. "Your client sure felt swell when he heard about it last night, he sure did."

"That's good," Malone said noncommittally. It hadn't been evidence that had turned the trick, though. Just a little matter of knowing some interesting facts about the judge's private life. The evidence would have to be manufactured before the trial, but that was the least of his worries. By that time, he might even find out the truth of what had happened. He hummed softly under his breath. Ah, there were the next lines!

*"Then the warden told me gently,*

*He seemed too young, too young to die,*

*We cut the rope and let him down—'"*

John J. Malone tried to remember the rhyme for "die". By, cry, lie, my and sigh. Then he let loose a few loud and indignant remarks about whoever had written that song, realized that he was entering the death house, and stopped, embarrassed. That particular cell block always inspired him with the same behavior he would have shown at a high class funeral. He took off his hat and walked softly.

And at that moment hell broke loose. Two prisoners in the block began yelling like banshees. The alarms began to sound loudly, causing the outside siren to chime in with its hideous wail. Guards were running through the corridor, and John J. Malone instinctively ran with them toward the center of disturbance, the fourth cell on the left.

Before the little lawyer got there, one of the guards had the door open. Another guard cut quickly through the bright new rope from which the prisoner was dangling, and eased the limp body down to the floor.

The racket outside was almost deafening now, but John J. Malone scarcely heard it. The guard turned the body over, and Malone recognized the very young and rather stupid face of Paul Palmer.

"He's hung himself," one of the guards said.

"With me for a lawyer?" Malone said angrily. "Hung himself,—" He started to say "hell", then remembered he was in the presence of death.

"Hey," the other guard said excitedly. "He's alive. His neck's broke, but he's breathing a little."

Malone shoved the guard aside and knelt down beside the dying man. Paul Palmer's blue eyes opened slowly, with an expression of terrible bewilderment. His lips parted.

"It wouldn't break," Paul Palmer whispered. He seemed to recognize Malone, and stared at him, with a look of frightful urgency. *"It wouldn't break,"* he

whispered to Malone. Then he died.

"You're damned right I'm going to sit in on the investigation," Malone said angrily. He gave Warden Garrity's wastebasket a vicious kick. "The inefficient way you run your prison has done me out of a client." Out of a fat fee, too, he reminded himself miserably. He hadn't been paid yet, and now there would be a long tussle with the lawyer handling Paul Palmer's estate, who hadn't wanted him engaged for the defense in the first place. Malone felt in his pocket, found three crumpled bills and a small handful of change. He wished now that he hadn't got into that poker game last week.

The warden's dreary office was crowded. Malone looked around, recognized an assistant warden, the prison doctor—a handsome grey-haired man named Dickson—the guards from the death house, and the guard who had been ushering him in—Bowers was his name, Malone remembered, a tall, flat-faced, gangling man.

"Imagine him hanging himself," Bowers was saying incredulously. "Just after he found out he was gonna get a new trial."

Malone had been wondering the same thing. "Maybe he didn't get my wire," he suggested coldly.

"I gave it to him myself," Bowers stated positively. "Just last night. Never saw a man so happy in my life."

Doctor Dickson cleared his throat. Everyone turned to look at him.

"Poor Palmer was mentally unstable," the doctor said sadly. "You may recall I recommended, several days ago, that he be moved to the prison hospital. When I visited him last night he appeared hilariously—hysterically—happy. This morning, however, he was distinctly depressed."

"You mean the guy was nuts?" Warden Garrity asked hopefully.

"He was nothing of the sort," Malone said indignantly. Just let a hint get around that Paul Palmer had been of unsound mind, and he'd never collect that five thousand dollar fee from the estate. "He was saner than anyone in this room, with the possible exception of myself."

Dr. Dickson shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't suggest that he was insane. I only meant he was subject to moods."

Malone wheeled to face the doctor. "Say. Were you in the habit of visiting Palmer in his cell a couple of times a day?"

"I was," the doctor said, nodding. "He was suffering from a serious nervous condition. It was necessary to administer sedatives from time to time."

Malone snorted. "You mean he was suffering from the effect of being sober for the first time since he was sixteen."

"Put it any way you like," Dr. Dickson said pleasantly. "You remember, too, that I had a cer-

tain personal interest."

"That's right," Malone said slowly. "He was going to marry your niece."

"No one was happier than I to hear about the new trial," the doctor said. He caught Malone's eye and added, "No, I wasn't fond enough of him to smuggle in a rope. Especially when he'd just been granted a chance to clear himself."

"Look here," Warden Garrity said irritably. "I can't sit around listening to all this stuff. I've got to report the result of an investigation. Where the hell did he get that rope?"

There was a little silence, and then one of the guards said "Maybe from the guy who was let in to see him last night."

"What guy?" the warden snapped.

"Why—" The guard paused, confused. "He had an order from you, admitting him. His name was La Cerra."

Malone felt a sudden tingling along his spine. Georgie La Cerra was one of Max Hook's boys. What possible connection could there be between Paul Palmer, socialite, and the big gambling boss?

Warden Garrity had recognized the name too. "Oh yes," he said quickly. "That must have been it. But I doubt if we could prove it." He paused just an instant, and looked fixedly at Malone, as though daring him to speak. "The report will read that Paul Palmer obtained a rope, by means which have not yet been ascertained, and committed suicide while of unsound mind."

Malone opened his mouth and shut it again. He knew when he was licked. Temporarily licked, anyway. "For the love of mike," he said, "leave out the unsound mind."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," the warden said coldly.

Malone had kept his temper as long as he could. "All right," he said, "but I'll start an investigation that'll be a pip." He snorted. "Letting a gangster smuggle a rope in to a guy in the death house!" He glared at Dr. Dickson. "And you, foxy, with two escapes from the prison hospital in six months." He kicked the wastebasket again, this time sending it halfway across the room. "I'll show you from investigations! And I'm just the guy who can do it, too."

Dr. Dickson said quickly, "We'll substitute 'temporarily depressed' for the 'unsound mind.'"

But Malone was mad, now. He made one last, loud comment regarding the warden's personal life and probably immoral origin, and slammed the door so hard when he went out that the steel engraving of Chester A. Arthur over the warden's desk shattered to the floor.

"Mr. Malone," Bowers said in a low voice as they went down the hall, "I searched that cell, after

they took the body out. Whoever smuggled in that rope smuggled in a letter, too. I found it hid in his mattress, and it wasn't there yesterday because the mattress was changed." He paused, and added "And the rope couldn't of been there last night either, because there was no place he could of hid it."

Malone glanced at the envelope the guard held out to him—pale grey expensive stationery, with "Paul Palmer" written across the front of it in delicate, curving handwriting.

"I haven't any money with me," the lawyer said.

Bowers shook his head. "I don't want no dough. But there's gonna be an assistant warden's job open in about three weeks."

"You'll get it," Malone said. He took the envelope and stuffed it in an inside pocket. Then he paused, frowned, and finally added, "And keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. Because there's going to be an awful stink when I prove Paul Palmer was murdered."

The pretty, black-haired girl in Malone's anteroom looked up as he opened the door. "Oh, Mr. Malone," she said quickly. "I read about it in the paper. I'm so sorry."

"Never mind, Maggie," the lawyer said. "No use crying over spilled clients." He went into his private office and shut the door.

Fate was treating him very

shabbily, evidently from some obscure motive of personal spite. He'd been counting heavily on that five thousand buck fee.

He took a bottle of rye out of the filing cabinet marked "Personal", poured himself a drink, noted there was only one more left in the bottle, and stretched out on the worn red leather davenport to think things over.

Paul Palmer had been an amiable, stupid young drunk of good family, whose inherited wealth had been held in trust for him by an uncle considered to be the stingiest man in Chicago. The money was to be turned over to him on his thirtieth birthday—some five years off—or on the death of the uncle, Carter Brown. Silly arrangement, Malone reflected, but rich men's lawyers were always doing silly things.

Uncle Carter had cramped the young man's style considerably, but he'd managed pretty well. Then he'd met Madelaine Starr.

Malone lit a cigar and stared dreamily through the smoke. The Starrs were definitely social, but without money. A good keen eye for graft, too. Madelaine's uncle was probably making a very good thing out of that political appointment as prison doctor.

Malone sighed, wished he weren't a lawyer, and thought about Madelaine Starr. An orphan, with a tiny income which she augmented by modelling in an exclusive dress shop—a fashionable and acceptable way of making a living. She had expensive tastes. (The little lawyer could spot expensive tastes in girls a mile away.)

She'd had to be damned poor to want to marry Palmer, Malone reflected, and damned beautiful to get him. Well, she was both.

But there had been another girl, one who had to be paid off. Lillian Claire by name, and a very lovely hunk of girl, too. Lovely, and smart enough to demand a sizable piece of money for letting the Starr-Palmer nuptials go through without a scandalous fuss.

Malone shook his head sadly. It had looked bad at the trial. Paul Palmer had taken his bride-to-be night-clubbing, delivering her back to her kitchenette apartment just before twelve. He'd been a shade high, then, and by the time he'd stopped off at three or four bars, he was several shades higher. Then he'd paid a visit to Lillian Claire, who claimed later at the trial that he'd attempted—unsuccessfully—to talk her out of the large piece of cash money, and had drunk up all the whiskey in the house. She'd put him in a cab and sent him home.

No one knew just when Paul Palmer had arrived at the big, gloomy apartment he shared with Carter Brown. The manservant had the night off. It was the manservant who discovered, next morning, that Uncle Carter had

been shot neatly through the forehead with Paul Palmer's gun, and that Paul Palmer had climbed into his own bed, fully dressed, and was snoring drunk.

Everything had been against him, Malone reflected sadly. Not only had the jury been composed of hard-working, poverty-stricken men who liked nothing better than to convict a rich young wastrel of murder, but worse still, they'd all been too honest to be bribed. The trial had been his most notable failure. And now, this.

But Paul Palmer would never have hanged himself. Malone was sure of it. He'd never lost hope. And now, especially, when a new trial had been granted, he'd have wanted to live.

It had been murder. But how had it been done?

Malone sat up, stretched, reached in his pocket for the pale grey envelope Bowers had given him, and read the note through again.

*My dearest Paul:*

I'm getting this note to you this way because I'm in terrible trouble and danger. I need you—no one else can help me. I know there's to be a new trial, but even another week may be too late. Isn't there *any* way?

Your own

*M.*

"M", Malone decided, would be Madelaine Starr. She'd use that kind of pale grey paper, too.

He looked at the note and frowned. If Madelaine Starr had smuggled that note to her lover, would she have smuggled in a rope by the same messenger? Or had someone else brought in the rope?

There were three people he wanted to see. Madelaine Starr was one. Lillian Claire was the second. And Max Hook was the third.

He went out into the anteroom, stopped halfway across it and said aloud, "But it's a physical impossibility. If someone smuggled that rope into Paul Palmer's cell and then Palmer hanged himself, it isn't murder. But it must have been murder." He stared at Maggie without seeing her. "Damn it, though, no one could have got into Paul Palmer's cell and hanged him."

Maggie looked at him sympathetically, familiar from long experience with her employer's processes of thought. "Keep on thinking and it'll come to you."

"Maggie, have you got any money?"

"I have ten dollars, but you can't borrow it. Besides, you haven't paid my last week's salary yet."

The little lawyer muttered something about ungrateful and heartless wenches, and flung himself out of the office.

Something had to be done about ready cash. He ran his mind over a list of prospective lenders. The

only possibility was Max Hook. No, the last time he'd borrowed money from the Hook, he'd got into no end of trouble. Besides, he was going to ask another kind of favor from the gambling boss.

Malone went down Washington street, turned the corner, went into Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, and cornered its proprietor at the far end of the room.

"Cash a hundred dollar check for me, and hold it until a week from,"— Malone made a rapid mental calculation—"Thursday?"

"Sure," Joe the Angel said. "Happy to do you a favor." He got out ten ten-dollar bills while Malone wrote the check. "Want I should take your bar bill out of this?"

Malone shook his head. "I'll pay next week. And add a double rye to it."

As he set down the empty glass, he heard the colored janitor's voice coming faintly from the back room.

*"They hanged him for the thing you done,*
*You knew it was a sin,*
*You didn't know his heart could break—"*

The voice stopped suddenly. For a moment Malone considered calling for the singer and asking to hear the whole thing, all the way through. No, there wasn't time for it now. Later, perhaps. He went out on the street, humming the tune.

What was it Paul Palmer had whispered in that last moment? *"It wouldn't break!"* Malone scowled. He had a curious feeling that there was some connection between those words and the words of that damned song. Or was it his Irish imagination, tripping him up again? *"You didn't know his heart could break."* But it was Paul Palmer's neck that had been broken.

Malone hailed a taxi and told the driver to take him to the swank Lake Shore Drive apartment-hotel where Max Hook lived.

The gambling boss was big in two ways. He took in a cut from every crooked gambling device in Cook County, and most of the honest ones. And he was a mountain of flesh, over six feet tall and

three times too fat for his height. His pink head was completely bald and he had the expression of a pleased cherub.

His living room was a masterpiece of the guild-and-brocade school of interior decoration, marred only by a huge, battle-scarred roll-top desk in one corner. Max Hook swung around from the desk to smile cordially at the lawyer.

"How delightful to see you! What will you have to drink?"

"Rye," Malone said, "and it's nice to see you too. Only this isn't exactly a social call."

He knew better, though, than to get down to business before the drinks had arrived. (Max Hook stuck to pink champagne.) That wasn't the way Max Hook liked to do things. But when the rye was down, and the gambling boss had lighted a slender, tinted (and, Malone suspected, perfumed) cigarette in a rose quartz holder, he plunged right in.

"I suppose you read in the papers about what happened to my client, Palmer," he said.

"I never read the papers," Max Hook told him, "but one of my boys informed me. Tragic, wasn't it."

"Tragic is no name for it," Malone said bitterly. "He hadn't paid me a dime."

Max Hook's eyebrows lifted. "So?" Automatically he reached for the green metal box in the left-hand drawer. "How much do you need?"

"No, no," Malone said hastily, "that isn't it. I just want to know if one of your boys—Little Georgie La Cerra—smuggled the rope in to him. That's all."

Max Hook looked surprised, and a little hurt. "My dear Malone," he said at last, "why do you imagine he'd do such a thing?"

"For money," Malone said promptly, "if he did do it. I don't care, I just want to know."

"You can take my word for it," Max Hook said, "he did nothing of the kind. He did deliver a note from a certain young lady to Mr. Palmer, at my request—a bit of a nuisance, too, getting hold of that admittance order signed by the warden. I assure you, though, there was no rope. I give you my word, and you know I'm an honest man."

"Well, I was just asking," Malone said. One thing about the big gangster, he always told the truth. If he said Little Georgie La Cerra hadn't smuggled in that rope, then Little Georgie hadn't. Nor was there any chance that Little Georgie had engaged in private enterprises on the side. As Max Hook often remarked, he liked to keep a careful watch on his boys. "One thing more, though," the lawyer said, "if you don't mind. Why did the young lady come to you to get her note delivered?"

Max Hook shrugged his enormous shoulders. "We have a certain—business connection. To be

exact, she owes me a large sum of money. Like most extremely mercenary people she loves gambling, but she is not particularly lucky. When she told me that the only chance for that money to be paid was for the note to be delivered, naturally I obliged."

"Naturally," Malone agreed. "You didn't happen to know what was in the note, did you?"

Max Hook was shocked. "My dear Malone! You don't think I read other people's personal mail!"

No, Malone reflected, Max Hook probably didn't. And not having read the note, the big gambler probably wouldn't know what kind of "terrible trouble and danger" Madelaine Starr was in. He decided to ask, though, just to be on the safe side.

"Trouble?" Max Hook repeated after him. "No, outside of having her fiancé condemned to death, I don't know of any trouble she's in."

Malone shrugged his shoulders at the reproof, rose and walked to the door. Then he paused, suddenly. "Listen, Max. Do you know the words to a tune that goes like this?" He hummed a bit of it.

Max Hook frowned, then nodded. "Mmm—I know the tune. An entertainer at one of my places used to sing it." He thought hard, and finally came up with a few lines.

*"He was leaning against the prison bars,*
*Dressed up in his new prison clothes—"*

"Sorry," Max Hook said at last, "that's all I remember. I guess those two lines stuck in my head because they reminded me of the first time I was in jail."

Outside in the taxi, Malone sang the two lines over a couple of times. If he kept on, eventually he'd have the whole song. But Paul Palmer hadn't been leaning against the prison bars. He'd been hanging from the water pipe.

Damn, and double damn that song!

It was well past eight o'clock, and he'd had no dinner, but he didn't feel hungry. He had a grim suspicion that he wouldn't feel hungry until he'd settled this business. When the cab paused for the next red light, he flipped a coin to decide whether he'd call first on Madelaine Starr or Lillian Claire, and Madelaine won.

He stepped out of the cab in front of the small apartment building on Walton Place, paid the driver, and started across the sidewalk just as a tall, white-haired man emerged from the door. Malone recognized Orlo Featherstone, the lawyer handling Paul Palmer's estate, considered ducking out of sight, realized there wasn't time, and finally managed to look as pleased as he was surprised.

"I was just going to offer Miss Starr my condolences," he said.

"I'd leave her undisturbed, if I

were you," Orlo Featherstone said coldly. He had only one conception of what a lawyer should be, and Malone wasn't anything like it. "I only called myself because I am, so to speak and in a sense, a second father to her."

If anyone else had said that, Malone thought, it would have called for an answer. From Orlo Featherstone, it sounded natural. He nodded sympathetically and said, "Then I won't bother her." He tossed away a ragged cigar and said "Tragic affair, wasn't it."

Orlo Featherstone unbent at least half a degree. "Distinctly so. Personally, I cannot imagine Paul Palmer doing such a thing. When I visited him yesterday, he seemed quite cheerful and full of hope."

"You—visited him yesterday?" Malone asked casually. He drew a cigar from his pocket and began unwrapping it with exquisite care.

"Yes," Featherstone said, "about the will. He had to sign it, you know. Fortunate for her," he indicated Madelaine Starr with a gesture toward the building, "that he did so. He left her everything, of course."

"Of course," Malone said. He lighted his cigar on the second try. "You don't think Paul Palmer could have been murdered, do you?"

"Murdered!" Orlo Featherstone repeated, as though it was an obscene word, "Absurd! No Palmer has ever been murdered."

Malone watched him climb into a shiny 1928 Rolls Royce, then started walking briskly toward State Street. The big limousine passed him just as he reached the corner, it turned north on State Street and stopped. Malone paused by the newsstand long enough to see Mr. Orlo Featherstone get out and cross the sidewalk to the corner drug store. After a moment's thought he followed and paused at the cigar counter, from where he could see clearly into the adjacent telephone booth.

Orlo Featherstone, in the booth, consulted a little notebook. Then he took down the receiver, dropped a nickel in the slot, and began dialing. Malone watched carefully. D-E-L—9-6-0— It was Lillian Claire's number.

The little lawyer cursed all sound-proof phone booths, and headed for a bar on the opposite corner. He felt definitely unnerved.

After a double rye, and halfway through a second one, he came to the heartening conclusion that when he visited Lillian Claire, later in the evening, he'd be able to coax from her the reason why Orlo Featherstone, of all people, had telephoned her, just after leaving the late Paul Palmer's fiancée. A third rye braced him for his call on the fiancée herself.

Riding up in the self-service elevator to her apartment, another heartening thought came to him. If Madelaine Starr was going to inherit all the Palmer dough—then

it might not be such a trick to collect his five thousand bucks. He might even be able to collect it by a week from Thursday.

And he reminded himself, as she opened the door, this was going to be one time when he wouldn't be a sucker for a pretty face.

Madelaine Starr's apartment was tiny, but tasteful. Almost too tasteful, Malone thought. Everything in it was cheap, but perfectly correct and in exactly the right place, even to the Van Gogh print over the midget fireplace. Madelaine Starr was in exactly the right taste, too.

She was a tall girl, with a figure that still made Malone blink, in spite of the times he'd admired it in the courtroom. Her bronze-brown hair was smooth and well-brushed, her pale face was calm and composed. Serene, polished, suave. Malone had a private idea that if he made a pass at her, she wouldn't scream. She was wearing black rayon house-pajamas. He wondered if they were her idea of mourning.

Malone got the necessary condolences and trite remarks out of the way fast, and then said, "What kind of terrible trouble and danger are you in, Miss Starr?"

That startled her. She wasn't able to come up with anything more original than "What do you mean?"

"I mean what you wrote in your note to Paul Palmer," the lawyer said.

She looked at the floor and said, "I hoped it had been destroyed."

"It will be," Malone said gallantly, "if you say so."

"Oh," she said. "Do you have it with you?"

"No," Malone lied. "It's in my office safe. But I'll go back there and burn it." He didn't add when.

"It really didn't have anything to do with his death, you know," she said.

Malone said, "Of course not. You didn't send him the rope too, did you?"

She stared at him. "How awful of you."

"I'm sorry," Malone said contritely.

She relaxed. "I'm sorry too. I didn't mean to snap at you. I'm a little unnerved, naturally." She paused. "May I offer you a drink?"

"You may," Malone said, "and I'll take it."

He watched her while she mixed a lot of scotch and a little soda in two glasses, wondering how soon after her fiancé's death he could safely ask her for a date. Maybe she wouldn't say Yes to a broken-down criminal lawyer, though. He took the drink, downed half of it, and said to himself indignantly, "Who's broken-down?"

"Oh, Mr. Malone," she breathed, "you don't believe my note had anything to do with it?"

"Of course not," Malone said. "That note would have made him want to live, and get out of jail." He considered bringing up the

matter of his five thousand dollar fee, and then decided this was not the time. "Nice that you'll be able to pay back what you owe Max Hook. He's a bad man to owe money to."

She looked at him sharply and said nothing. Malone finished his drink, and walked to the door.

"One thing, though," he said, hand on the knob. "This—terrible trouble and danger you're in. You'd better tell me. Because I might be able to help, you know."

"Oh, no," she said. She was standing very close to him, and her perfume began to mingle dangerously with the rye and scotch in his brain. "I'm afraid not." He had a definite impression that she was thinking fast. "No one can help, now." She looked away, delicately. "You know—a girl—alone in the world—"

Malone felt his cheeks reddening. He opened the door and said, "Oh." Just plain Oh.

"Just a minute," she said quickly. "Why did you ask all these questions?"

"Because," Malone said, just as quickly, "I thought the answers might be useful—in case Paul Palmer was murdered."

That, he told himself, riding down the self-service elevator, would give her something to think about.

He hailed a cab and gave the address of the apartment building where Lillian Claire lived, on Goethe Street. In the lobby of the building he paused long enough to call a certain well-known politician at his home and make sure that he was there. It would be just as well not to run into that particular politician at Lillian Claire's apartment, since he was paying for it.

She was a cuddly little thing, small, and a bit on the plump side, with curly blonde hair and a deceptively simple stare. She said, "Oh, Mr. Malone, I've always wanted a chance to get acquainted with you." Malone had a pleasant feeling that if he tickled her, just a little, she'd giggle.

She mixed him a drink, lighted his cigar, sat close to him on the biggest and most luxurious divan, and said, "Tell me, how on earth did Paul Palmer get that rope?"

"I don't know." Malone said. "Did you send it to him, baked in a cake?"

She looked at him reprovingly. "You don't think I wanted him to kill himself and let that awful woman inherit all that money?"

Malone said, "She isn't so awful. But this is tough on you, though. Now you'll never be able to sue him."

"I never intended to," she said. "I didn't want to be paid off. I just thought it might scare her away from him."

Malone put down his glass, she hopped up and refilled it. "Were you in love with him?" he said.

"Don't be silly." She curled up beside him again. "I liked him.

He was much too nice to have someone like that marry him for his money."

Malone nodded slowly. The room was beginning to swim—not unpleasantly—before his eyes. Maybe he should have eaten dinner after all.

"Just the same," he said, "you didn't think that idea up all by yourself. Somebody put you up to asking for money."

She pulled away from him a little—not too much. "That's perfect nonsense," she said unconvincingly.

"All right," Malone said agreeably. "Tell me just one thing—"

"I'll tell you this one thing," she said. "Paul never murdered his uncle. I don't know who did, but it wasn't Paul. Because I took him home that night. He came to see me, yes. But I didn't put him in a cab and send him home. I took him home, and got him to his own room. Nobody saw me. It was late—almost daylight." She paused and lit a cigarette. "I peeked into his uncle's room to make sure I hadn't been seen, and his uncle was dead. I never told anybody because I didn't want to get mixed up in it worse than I was already."

Malone sat bolt upright. "Fine thing," he said, indignantly and a bit thickly. "You could have alibied him and you let him be convicted."

"Why bother" she said serenly. "I knew he had you for a lawyer. Why would he need an alibi?"

Malone shoved her back against the cushions of the davenport and glared at her. "A'right," he said. "But that wasn't the thing I was gonna ask. Why did old man Featherstone call you up tonight?"

Her shoulders stiffened under his hands. "He just asked me for a dinner date," she said.

"You're a liar," Malone said, not unpleasantly. He ran an experimental finger along her ribs. She did giggle. Then he kissed her.

All this time spent, Malone told himself reprovingly, and you haven't learned one thing worth the effort. Paul Palmer hadn't killed his uncle. But he'd been sure of that all along, and anyway it wouldn't do any good now.

Madelaine Starr needed money, and now she was going to inherit a lot of it. Orlo Featherstone was on friendly terms with Lillian Claire.

The little lawyer leaned his elbows on the table and rested his head on his hands. At three o'clock in the morning, Joe the Angel's was a desolate and almost deserted place. He knew now, definitely, that he should have eaten dinner. Nothing, he decided, would cure the way he felt except a quick drink, a long sleep, or sudden death.

He would probably never learn who had killed Paul Palmer's uncle, or why. He would probably never learn what had happened to Paul Palmer. After all, the man had hanged himself. No one else could have got into that cell. It wasn't murder to give a man enough rope to hang himself with.

No, he would probably never learn what had happened to Paul Palmer, and he probably would never collect that five thousand dollar fee. But there was one thing that he could do. He'd learn the words of that song.

He called for a drink, the janitor, and the janitor's guitar. Then he sat back and listened.

It was a long, rambling ballad, requiring two drinks for the janitor and two more for Malone. The lawyer listened, remembering a line here and there.

*"When they hanged him in the mornin',*
*His last words were for you,*
*Then the sheriff took his shiny knife*
*An' cut that ol' rope through."*

A sad story, Malone reflected, finishing the second drink. Personally, he'd have preferred "My Wild Irish Rose" right now. But he yelled to Joe for another drink, and went on listening.

*"They hanged him for the thing you done,*
*You knew it was a sin,*
*How well you knew his heart could break,*
*Lady, why did you turn him in—"*

The little lawyer jumped to his feet. That was the line he'd been trying to remember! And what had Paul Palmer whispered? *"It wouldn't break."*

Malone knew, now.

He dived behind the bar, opened the cash drawer, and scooped out a handful of telephone slugs.

"You're drunk," Joe the Angel said indignantly.

"That may be," Malone said happily, "and it's a good idea too. But I know what I'm doing."

He got one of the slugs into the phone on the third try, dialed Orlo Featherstone's number, and waited till the elderly lawyer got out of bed and answered the phone.

It took ten minutes, and several more phone slugs to convince Featherstone that it was necessary to get Madelaine Starr out

of bed and make the three-hour drive to the state's prison, right now. It took another ten minutes to wake up Lillian Claire and induce her to join the party. Then he placed a long-distance call to the sheriff of Statesville County and invited him to drop in at the prison and pick up a murderer.

Malone strode to the door. As he reached it, Joe the Angel hailed him.

"I forgot," he said, "I got sumpin' for you." Joe the Angel rummaged back of the cash register and brought out a long envelope. "That cute secretary of yours was looking for you all over town to give you this. Finally she left it with me. She knew you'd get here sooner or later."

Malone said "Thanks," took the envelope, glanced at it, and winced. "First National Bank." Registered mail. He knew he was overdrawn, but—

The drive to Statesville wasn't so bad, in spite of the fact that Orlo Featherstone snored most of the way. Lillian snuggled up against Malone's left shoulder like a kitten, and with his right hand he held Madelaine Starr's hand under the auto robe. But the arrival, a bit before seven a.m., was depressing. The prison looked its worst in the early morning, under a light fog.

Warden Garrity's office was even more depressing. There was the warden, eyeing Malone coldly and belligerently, and Madelaine Starr and her uncle, Dr. Dickson, looking a bit annoyed. Orlo Featherstone was frankly skeptical. The sheriff of Statesville county was sleepy and bored, Lillian Claire was sleepy and suspicious. Even the guard, Bowers, looked bewildered.

He pulled it out fast. "Paul Palmer was murdered," he said flatly.

Warden Garrity looked faintly amused. "A bunch of pixies crawled in his cell and tied the rope around his neck?"

"No," Malone said, lighting a cigar. "This murderer made one try—murder by frame-up. He killed Paul Palmer's uncle for two reasons, one of them being to send Paul Palmer to the chair. It nearly worked. Then I got him a new trial. So another method had to be tried, fast, and that once did work."

"You're insane," Orlo Featherstone said: "Palmer hanged himself."

"I'm not insane," Malone said indignantly, "I'm drunk. There's a distinction. And Paul Palmer hanged himself because he thought he wouldn't die, and could escape from prison." He looked at Bowers and said "Watch all these people, someone may make a move."

Lillian Claire said, "I don't get it."

"You will," Malone promised. He kept a watchful eye on Bowers and began talking fast. "The whole

thing was arranged by someone who was mercenary and owed money. Someone who knew Paul Palmer would be too drunk to know what had happened the night his uncle was killed, and who was close enough to him to have a key to the apartment. That person went in and killed the uncle with Paul Palmer's gun. And, as that person had planned, Paul Palmer was tried and convicted and would have been electrocuted, if he hadn't had a damn smart lawyer."

He flung his cigar into the cuspidor and went on, "Then Paul Palmer was granted a new trial. So the mercenary person who wanted Paul Palmer's death convinced him that he had to break out of prison, and another person showed him how the escape could be arranged—by pretending to hang himself, and being moved to the prison hospital—*watch her, Bowers!*"

Madelaine Starr had flung herself at Doctor Dickson. "Damn you," she screamed, her face white. "I knew you'd break down and talk. But you'll never talk again—"

There were three shots. One from the little gun Madelaine had carried in her pocket, and two from Bowers' service revolver.

Then the room was quite still.

Malone walked slowly across the room, looked down at the two bodies, and shook his head sadly. "Maybe it's just as well," he said. "They'd probably have hired another defense lawyer anyway."

"This is all very fine," the Statesville County sheriff said. "But I still don't see how you figured it. Have another beer?"

"Thanks," Malone said. "It was easy. A song tipped me off. Know this?" He hummed a few measures.

"Oh, sure," the sheriff said. "The name of it is, 'The Statesville Prison.'" He sang the first four verses.

"Well, I'll be double-damned," Malone said. The bartender put the two glasses of beer on the table. "Bring me a double gin for a chaser," the lawyer told him.

"Me too," the sheriff said. "What does the song have to do with it, Malone?"

Malone said, "It was the crank on the adding machine, pal. Know what I mean? You put down a lot of stuff to add up and nothing happens, and then somebody turns the crank and it all adds up to what you want to know. See how simple it is?"

"I don't," the sheriff said, "but go on."

"I had all the facts," Malone said, "I knew everything I needed to know, but I couldn't add it up. I needed one thing, that one thing." He spoke almost reverently, downing his gin. "Paul Palmer said *'It wouldn't break'*—just before he died. And he looked terribly surprised. For a long time, I didn't know what he meant. Then I heard that song again, and I did know." He sang a few lines. *"The sheriff took his shiny knife, and cut that ol' rope through."* Then he finished his beer, and sang on *"They hanged him for the thing you done, you knew it was a sin. You didn't know his heart could break, Lady, why did you turn him in."* He ended on a blue note.

"Very pretty," the sheriff said. "Only I heard it, *'You knew that his poor heart could break.'* "

"Same thing," Malone said, waving a hand. "Only, that song was what turned the crank on the adding machine. When I heard it again, I knew what Palmer meant by *'it wouldn't break.'* "

"His heart?" the sheriff said helpfully.

"No," Malone said, "the rope."

He waved at the bartender and said "Two more of the same." Then to the sheriff, "He expected the rope to break. He thought it would be artfully frayed so that he would drop to the floor unharmed. Then he could have been moved to the prison hospital—from which there had been two escapes in the past six months. He had to escape, you see, because his sweetheart had written him that she was in terrible trouble and danger—the same sweetheart whose evidence had helped convict him at the trial.

"Madelaine Starr wanted his money," Malone went on, "but she didn't want Paul. So her murder of his uncle served two pur-

poses. It released Paul's money, and it framed him. Using poor old innocent Orlo Featherstone, she planted in Lillian Claire's head the idea of holding up Paul for money, so Paul would be faced with a need for ready cash. Everything worked fine, until I gummized the whole works by getting my client a new trial."

"Your client shouldn't of had such a smart lawyer," the sheriff said, over his beer glass.

Malone tossed aside the compliment with a shrug of his cigar. "Maybe he should of had a better one. Anyway, she and her uncle, Dr. Dickson, fixed it all up. She sent that note to Paul, so he'd think he had to break out of the clink. Then her uncle, Dickson, told Paul he'd arrange the escape, with the rope trick. To the world, it would have looked as though Paul Palmer had committed suicide in a fit of depression. Only he did have a good lawyer, and he lived long enough to say *'It wouldn't break.'*"

The phone rang—someone hijacked a truck over on the Springfield Road—and the sheriff was called away. Left by himself, Malone cried a little into his beer. Lillian Claire had gone back to Chicago with Orlo Featherstone, who really had called her up for a date, and no other reason.

"Might as well face realities," Malone said to the bartender. "And bring me another double gin."

He drank the gin, tore open the envelope, and took out a certified check for five thousand dollars, with a note from the bank to the effect that Paul Palmer had directed its payment. It was dated the day before his death.

Malone waltzed to the door, waltzed back to pay the bartender and kissed him good-bye.

"Do you feel all right?" the bartender asked anxiously.

"All right!" Malone said. "I'm a new man!"

What was more, he'd just remembered the rest of that song. He sang it, happily, as he went up the street toward the railroad station.

# ALBERT WEPT

## by A. J. BENCHLY

*A story of almost unbearable suspense, set against the background of the most tragic event of our century. Although not for the squeamish, this story will be—we predict—the best-remembered yarn in this issue. Mr. Benchly draws you in so carefully that before you know it you are Albert Simon, face to face with the most insane and implacable totalitarian government of all history, and you must make a decision as to how a man should die . . .*

ALBERT SIMON could no longer deny the anxiety that balled in his bony chest like an unripe plum he might have swallowed whole. He fingered a small glass vial resting in his torn pocket and wondered whether to shift the precious glass to his jacket, knowing it wouldn't matter, really; all his pockets had holes and there was nothing he could do except wish for a tiny needle and some thread. A few stitches would mend the hole that threatened to expose his glass vial if it fell to the ground, perhaps to be crushed into oblivion by the cruel heel of Vaulkner, the head guard at Stalag Seven.

The vial contained clear liquid that smelled like bitter almonds. The first time Albert had looked at it in secret, jealous fear gathered in his dark brown eyes; he became suspicious as he had never been before his arrest or before the war. So that none of the other prisoners would try to steal it from him, he kept his fingers forever curled around the vial, never trusting it to a hiding place; he had the warmest, dampest vial anywhere in the country.

Vaulkner had laughed when he passed it to Albert, saying there was enough in the vial to kill two men. Albert could not be sure about that; he would not share it with anyone to find out. Not just yet. There was no one he trusted except Max.

"It looks like water," Albert murmured, "and yet, Max, it is deadly. I simply cannot believe that it kills. It looks so harmless. Like water, it looks."

"We are both no longer young men," Max said sharply, "but you are, I think, in your second childhood."

Albert ignored the remark. "I call the contents of my vial 'D.I.' for want of a better name. Vaulkner has refused to divulge what kind of poison it is. He insists, however, that half the vial will swiftly kill any man. Death instantly. D.I. Is that not clever, Max?"

Max turned his back and Albert shrugged; he was used to the cold rejection of men in this place and remembered well how it had been only a few weeks before. When he had arrived at Auschwitz, he alone possessed a large-denomination bill, hidden in his shoe. The moment he learned *why* he was here, he extracted the money without hesitation and bribed Vaulkner for the I-will-kill-myself-before-you-can-kill-me escape route into eternity. Word had quickly spread through Stalag Seven that he was friendly with the head guard and a thick surly silence greeted Albert whenever he came into view. Although he despised the Nazis as much as anybody, his fellow prisoners remained coldly contemptuous in their disbelief.

The only one who could speak to him at all was Max Woodford, imprisoned not for any crime but for being, as were all the rest of

them, a non-Aryan. Max was braver than anybody and had accepted his fate with a stoicism that quite unnerved Albert and there were times when Albert wondered if the man were a cold-dry robot, a sadist, or just a terribly brave fool.

Fingering the vial in his jacket that last week in November, Albert said, "I cannot bear the thought of a tortured death, Max. Anything unnatural is repugnant to me."

"So you have told me."

Albert's dark eyes ping-ponged to the right and to the left. His voice cracked in a whisper. "I have my way out, Max. Come, take a look." He pulled back into the shadows, hissed the word 'poison' and allowed Max to see the vial.

"You have already shown it to me." Max sighed in weary tolerance. "You are repeating yourself, Albert."

He seemed not to hear. "Yes, I have my way out, if the time should come."

"It will," Max said gravely. "Neither you nor I will be spared, you may be certain of that." He rose from the dirty bunk-bed and looked away through the dirty window of the dirty barracks. He sighed as if he could not bear the sight of the lifeless though faintly stirring forms lying on pillowless, blanketless bunk-beds.

Max turned to his worried cellmate. "What makes you think that pig, Vaulkner, sold you a vial of poison?"

Albert paled. "What . . . what do you mean?" As if riding in an elevator, his stomach dropped and his throat tightened. Then he grew angry and his anger boiled over like potatoes put on in a rush. "How do you dare to put a doubt in my mind? You are cursed with envy! You . . . you devil!"

Max shrugged and turned from him to seek another friend. Albert, flushed with anger, felt his stomach rise as if the elevator had stopped suddenly; he thought he would faint at the insidious doubt that Max had created for him.

Needing reassurance, Albert went out into the chill November rain to find Vaulkner. He saw the head guard standing near the gate but could not catch his eye without attracting the attention of another guard and a few prisoners who found it necessary to exercise in the outdoors.

Albert stood heel-deep in mud, shaking from the cold and shaking in wonder at the prisoners who exercised; if it was to keep healthy, it seemed stupid to him since they were slated to die anyway. Shaking from cold and wonder and fear, Albert stared at the gate. How he hated the mercenary head guard!

Vaulkner was a vulturesque figure with faded blue eyes that peered from glasses whose lenses had the thickness of beer-bottle bottoms. He fed an inbred sense

of cruelty by dealing in bootleg bounty, catering to a prisoner's need only if there was money involved. He supplied cigarettes, candy, soap . . . little luxuries that made life bearable before death.

"The swine," Albert thought venomously, inching to the far end of the barracks. From there he could hear Vaulkner talking to another guard and it surprised him to hear his name mentioned.

"I consider Herr Simon a fool, yes, but money is money. Ach, he has paid well for his vial of poison." Vaulkner let out a loud belch and then laughed in a taunting way that reached across the yard and settled on the crouching Albert.

His shoulders sagged as if the laughter were heavy, as if he knew that Vaulkner would not tell him ahead of time when they were to die. With a violent shudder, Albert thought of the torture deaths he had heard about and a stream of sweat ran down from one arm-pit; he realized *his* body could be also treated like some over-sized loaf of bread. If the idea were not horrendously serious, he would consider it funny in an utterly mad sort of way.

Thinking he might be close to losing his mind, he pulled the vial from his pocket and touched the cork with his broken thumbnail. He wanted to swallow the liquid now and put a quick end to his doubts yet the desire to live was stronger.

"How strange," he thought in bitter amazement, "that I cling to life with such fierce determination."

He returned the vial to his pants pocket and shuffled into the barracks. Standing at the far end of the long room, he watched Max talking to Joseph Plunkett. Albert wanted to hear what they discussed but he did not join them; he disliked Plunkett if for no other reason than that his eyes were blue and Albert now mistrusted all eyes not the color of his.

In soft anger, Max said to Plunkett, "It does no good, my friend. It does no good at all to become ill."

Plunkett lowered his bald head. "I suppose you are right, Max. The pain . . . is not so bad. What does it matter now, eh?"

Max nodded.

During the evening meal, Albert burned with a desire to know if the vial contained genuine poison. It would be of no use to

him otherwise and he would wear his nerves out, wondering, if he did not satisfy his mind *now*, if he did not prove Max wrong.

When Plunkett's back was turned, Albert slipped less than half the liquid into the thin cabbage soup, being careful to retain enough D.I. for himself. Before Plunkett could turn around to pick up his spoon, the door opened and Vaulkner appeared in the frame.

Without thinking, Albert rose and made his way down the long room, intending to confront Vaulkner and demand to know if the vial *were* poisonous or not. But as he walked past the benches, low mutterings and curses rubbed against him and he paused in the center of the room to look back at Plunkett. A small group had huddled together down there and he could see nothing.

Vaulkner never stepped beyond the frame of the door. He looked around at everyone through his thick glasses then turned, closing the door with an unnecessary bang as if he had been annoyed to check in on them at all. To Albert it seemed as if the guard had made that dramatic entrance merely to rattle him and draw his attention away from Plunkett.

When Albert returned to his place at the table, Max and several others had placed Plunkett on his bed. They looked at one another then someone whispered.

"He is dead."

Albert fingered the vial in his pocket and his brown eyes narrowed in relief; the D.I. had worked and no longer was there the smallest doubt in his mind.

Later that night, Max and another man, on orders from the guards, carried Plunkett out to the storage room. When Max returned, Albert was on the point of confiding to him how he had used Plunkett as a guinea pig when Max said something quite strange.

"His waiting is over, Albert. He would not have lasted much longer anyway."

"What . . . what do you mean?" The familiar fear became like an odorous breeze, strangely pleasant yet chilling him.

"I am sure Plunkett died of a heart attack." Max was calm as he said it.

Albert moved in jerky unsure steps around the uncleared table. "Are you sure, Max?" he asked in a low voice. There was the dead man's cabbage soup and there was the spoon, resting inside the bowl. "He didn't eat much soup," Albert remarked.

"I cannot remember if he ate any at all." Max scowled. "But what does it matter? Why do you even interest yourself in a man you cared nothing about?"

Albert did not like the scowl and because of it said nothing about the D.I. He needed at least one person in this desolate place to talk to.

He turned his back and walked to the dirty window, no longer sure if he *had* a potent way out in the vial so carefully carried in his pocket. Albert cursed Vaulkner and wished he had slipped it in the guard's cabbage soup or glass of water or whatever the swine swallowed at mealtime.

All that night Albert brooded about the vial and seven times he took it out and held it up to the light of the moon that had come out after an entire day's rain. He looked at the clear liquid, he smelled it. The odor of almonds, it seemed strangely, was less strong than before; could the potency be evaporating?

The only thing left to do was ask Max to slip it to him just before they were to die. He could not bear to do it himself anymore, the uncertainty would be too cruel. And futile as it all seemed in this place of doom, he still clung stubbornly to life.

"Max, will you do it?" Albert asked next morning when the news reached him. He had been told by Vaulkner that half of Stalag Seven's prisoners would be marched to the north end of the compound which housed the death chambers.

There was intense fear in Albert's voice as he whispered the terrible news to Max. Max paled a bit but made no comment either about the announcement or the request for execution. He merely lifted a tiny glass container from

his pants pocket.

Albert, curious in spite of his fear, asked, "What do you have there, my friend?"

"An eye-cup I found in the guards' trash can." With a cloth, Max wiped it out once, blew on it, then wiped it again.

"Of what use is that?"

"Who can tell."

Albert sighed, wanting to return to his own problem. "Will you do it, Max? Give me the D.I. when I need it?"

Softly, Max replied, "Put the vial under your mattress, Albert. I will pour it into your food or water sometime before the day is over." At the odd look on Albert's face, Max shrugged. "Would you rather *watch* me pour it in your food? So you will *know* precisely at which moment you die?"

Albert shook his bald head vehemently. "No, no, of course not! I appreciate your kindness, my friend, please believe that." As if to assure him this was so,

Albert looked around to make certain he wasn't observed then carefully slid the precious, half-full vial under his mattress corner. "There, Max, it is done. I trust you now . . . with my life."

"As I trust you with mine," Max murmured, shoving the eye-cup into the cuff of his jacket sleeve.

Albert did not understand the import of that remark but had little time to brood about it. He, along with several others, was summoned to a morning work detail and it was not until after lunch that he even thought about Max again.

He could not *help* thinking of Max; that stoic shuffling figure was in the line that slowly, in solemn single file, moved toward the north compound. Albert had been spared; perhaps today was not to be his day, after all. He felt deeply sorry for Max and wished that he could help but there was nothing . . . nothing . . . to be done.

He could not see what happened just as Max got into the fenced-in area around the death chambers. Albert heard only moans and half-stifled screams and saw bodies being prostrated upon the cold wet ground before being shoved into the building.

In the fading light of a day that had been much too long, he could not see the figure of Max slump over and fall against the door that led to the execution rooms. A guard briefly examined Max then shoved his body onto the ground so the door could be opened.

No one knew if the execution rooms contained a gas chamber or the ovens. No one knew. And Max would never find out even in the infinitesimal split-second between life and the extinguishing of its flame into darkness.

An hour later, Vaulkner rounded up another group to fall into single file and march north. Albert became nervous. He made his way to his bunk-bed and groped under the mattress corner. He pulled out the precious glass vial. He held it up. It was still half-full. It still looked as clear as water. "Nothing had changed," he thought, shaking his head in amazement.

He speared the cork with his jagged thumb-nail. He inhaled the

liquid lightly. Albert sighed and placed the cork back loosely. He might become frightened and would need to quickly flip off the cork and swallow the liquid before anyone saw him and thus it would not do to jam the cork in too tight.

"Ah," he thought sadly, "how precious life is . . . even now."

Vaulkner waved him into the line. It had come.

As Albert shuffled along, he joined in the singing of his compatriots. His seedy, half-starved, frightened, compatriots, yet with a special bravado marvelous to the memory of their race and kind.

Albert found himself mouthing not the words of the song they were singing but a speech of his own about the vial in his pocket. Strange words, his; crazy and childish words coming from his throat as if with a force of their own. He was appalled suddenly to hear his quavering voice raised in a hysterical tenor, appalled to realize they had neared the gate and all voices were stilled except his. He could not stop himself, it was if he were in a trance and on exhibition.

"It looks so clear . . . it cost me dear . . . it must not spill . . . for kill it will . . . it looks like water . . . it looks like . . ." He ceased, completely frightened now.

They were like cows at round-up time, herded inside the gate and when the guard clicked it shut, Albert's mind seemed also to snap.

Quickly then they were shoved into a room bright with lights and with a stagnant smell of unwashed bodies that had filled the room before and lingered on, like a ghost. Albert, stunned by the seeming swiftness of it all, jerked the vial from his pocket and repeated a single line from his ridiculous song.

"It looks like water . . . it looks like water," he mumbled in a voice as hollow as his eyes were wide. Then, he snapped out of the trance. He ripped off the cork. He lifted the vial to his nose. "Oh God, oh God!" he moaned in a cry torn up from the very center of his soul. "It even smells like water!"

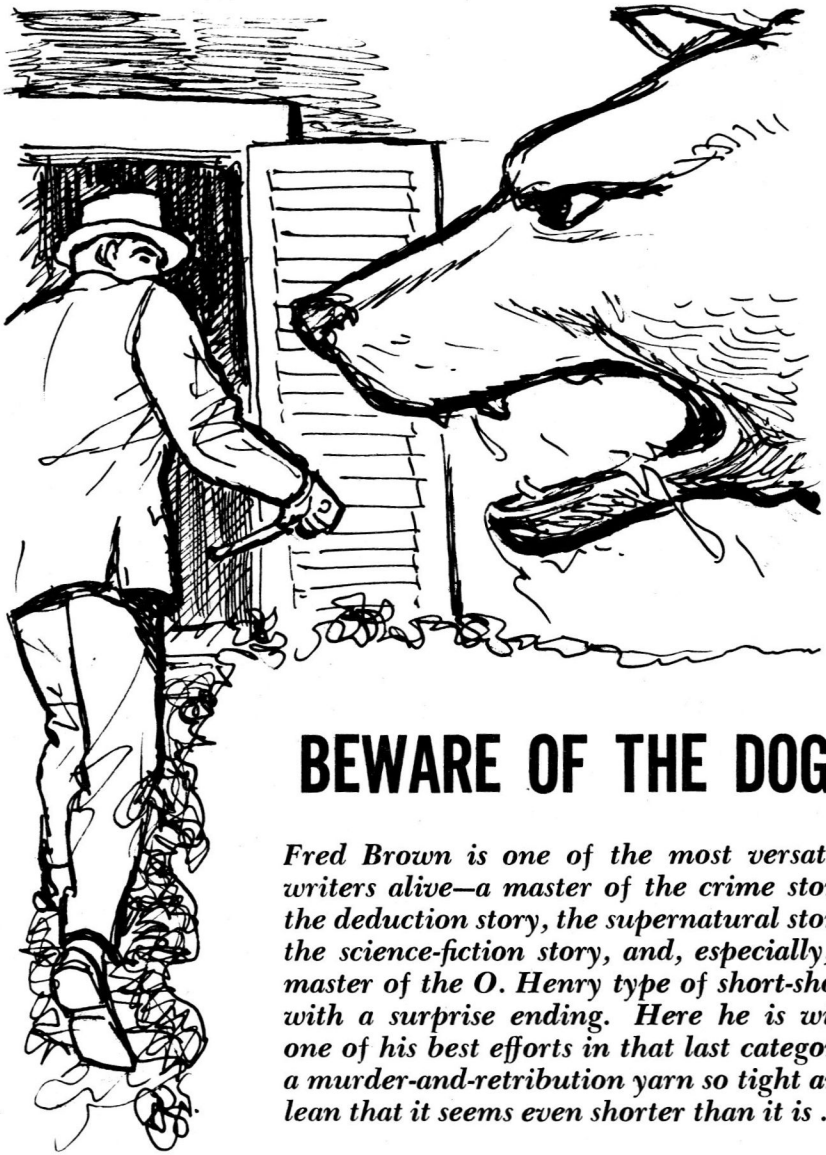
He flung himself against the door. His hands, like the broken wings of a bird that had hurled itself against a closed window, beat on it in frustration. His fingers bled and the blood blended with the clear liquid . . . peppermint lines streaked across the steel door.

He had smashed the precious D.I. and the only proof of it now lay as tiny crystals, imbedded in the hair and the flesh of his hands.

One picture flashed across his tortured mind. An image of Max and the eye-cup.

Albert sank to the floor. Cradling his head in his arms, he realized then that he would never know.

Before he died, Albert wept.



# BEWARE OF THE DOG

*Fred Brown is one of the most versatile writers alive—a master of the crime story, the deduction story, the supernatural story, the science-fiction story, and, especially, a master of the O. Henry type of short-short with a surprise ending. Here he is with one of his best efforts in that last category, a murder-and-retribution yarn so tight and lean that it seems even shorter than it is . . .*

**by FREDERIC BROWN**

THE SEED OF murder was planted in the mind of Wiley Hughes the first time he saw the old man open the safe.

There was money in the safe. Stacks of it.

The old man took three bills from one orderly pile and handed them to Wiley. They were twenties.

"Sixty dollars even, Mr. Hughes," he said. "And that's the ninth payment." He took the receipt Wiley gave him, closed the safe, and twisted the dial.

It was a small, antique-looking safe. A man could open it with a cold chisel and a good crowbar, if he didn't have to worry about how much noise he made.

The old man walked with Wiley out of the house and down to the iron fence. After he'd closed the gate behind Wiley, he went over to the tree and untied the dog again. Wiley looked back over his shoulder at the gate, and at the sign upon it: "Beware of the Dog."

There was a padlock on the gate too, and a bell button set in the gatepost. If you wanted to see old man Erskine you had to push that button and wait until he'd come out of the house and tied up the dog and then unlocked the gate to let you in.

Not that the padlocked gate meant anything. An ablebodied man could get over the fence easily enough. But once in the yard he'd be torn to pieces by that hound of hell Erskine kept for a watchdog.

A vicious brute, that dog.

A lean, underfed hound with slavering jaws and eyes that looked death at you as you walked by. He didn't run to the fence and bark. Nor even growl.

Just stood there, turning his head to follow you, with his yellowish teeth bared in a snarl that was the more sinister in that it was silent.

A black dog, with yellow, hate-filled eyes, and a quiet viciousness beyond ordinary canine ferocity. A killer dog. Yes, it was a hound of hell, all right.

And a beast of nightmare, too. Wiley dreamed about it that night. And the next.

There was something he wanted very badly in those dreams. Or somewhere he wanted to go. And his way was barred by a monstrous black hound, with slavering jowls and eyes that looked death at you. Except for size, it was old man Erskine's watchdog.

The seed of murder grew.

Wiley Hughes lived, as it happened, only a block from the old man's house. Every time he went past it on his way to or from work he thought about it.

It would be so easy.

The dog? He could poison the dog.

There were some things he wanted to find out, without ask-

ing about them. Patiently, at the office, he cultivated the acquaintance of the collector who had dealt with the old man before he had been transferred to another route.

He went out drinking with the man several times before the subject of the old man crept into the conversation—and then, after they'd discussed many other debtors.

"Old Erskine? The guy's a miser, that's all. He pays for that stock on time because he can't bear to part with a big chunk of money all at once. Ever see all the money he keeps in—?"

Wiley steered the conversation into safer channels. He didn't want to have discussed how much money the old man kept in the house. "Ever see a more vicious dog than that hound of his?"

The other collector shook his head. "And neither did anybody else. That mutt hates even the old man. Can't blame him for that, though; the old geezer half starves him to keep him fierce."

"The hell," said Wiley. "How come he doesn't jump Erskine then?"

"Trained not to, that's all. Nor Erskine's son—he visits there once in a while. Nor the man who delivers groceries. But anybody else he'd tear to pieces."

And then Wiley Hughes dropped the subject like a hot coal and began to talk about the widow

who was always behind in her payments and who always cried if they threatened to foreclose.

The dog tolerated two people besides the old man. And that meant that if he could get past the dog without harming it, or it harming him, suspicion would be directed toward those two people.

It was a big if, but then the fact that the dog was underfed made it possible. If the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, why not the way to a dog's heart?

It was worth trying.

He went about it very carefully. He bought the meat at a butcher shop at the other side of town. He took every precaution that night, when he left his own house heading into the alley, that no one would see him.

Keeping to the middle of the alley, he walked past old man Erskine's fence, and kept walking.

The dog was there, just inside the fence, and it kept pace with him, soundlessly.

He threw a piece of meat over the fence and kept walking.

To the corner and back again. He walked just a little closer to the fence and threw another piece of meat over. This time he saw the dog leave the fence and run for the meat.

He returned home, unseen, and feeling that things were working out his way. The dog was hungry; it would eat meat he threw to it. Pretty soon it would be taking food from his hand, through the fence.

He made his plans carefully, and omitted no factor.

The few tools he would need were purchased in such a way that they could not be traced to him. And wiped off fingerprints; they would be left at the scene of the burglary.

He studied the habits of the neighborhood and knew that everyone in the block was asleep by one o'clock, except for two night workers who didn't return from work until four-thirty.

There was the patrolman to consider. A few sleepless nights, at a darkened window gave him the information that the patrolman passed at one and again at four.

The hour between two and three, then, was the safest.

And the dog. His progress in making friends with the dog had been easier and more rapid than he had anticipated. It took food from his hand, through the bars of the alley fence.

It let him reach through the bars and pet it. He'd been afraid of losing a finger or two the first time he'd tried that. But the fear had been baseless.

The dog had been as starved for affection as it had been starved for food.

Hound of hell, hell! He grinned to himself at the extravagance of the descriptive phrase he had once used.

Then came the night when he dared climb over the fence. The dog met him with little whimpers of delight. He'd been sure it would, but he'd taken every precaution — two pairs of trousers, three shirts, and a scarf wrapped many times around his throat. And meat to offer, more tempting than his own. There was nothing to it, after that.

Friday, then, was to be that night. Everything was ready.

So ready that between eight o'clock in the evening and two in the morning, there was nothing for him to do. So ready he set and muffled his alarm, and slept.

Nothing to the burglary at all. Or the murder.

Down the alley, taking extra precautions this time that no one saw him. There was enough moonlight for him to read, and to grin

at, the "Beware of the Dog" sign on the back gate.

Beware of the dog! That was a laugh, now. He handed it a piece of meat through the fence, patted its head while it ate, and went up toward the house.

His crowbar opened a window, easily.

Silently he crept up the stairs to the bedroom of the old man, and there he did what it was necessary for him to do in order to be able to open the safe without danger of being heard.

The murder was really necessary, he told himself. Stunned—even tied up—the old man might possibly have managed to raise an alarm. Or might have recognized his assailant, even in the darkness.

The safe offered a bit more difficulty than he had anticipated, but not too much. Well before three o'clock—with an hour's factor of safety—he had it open and had the money.

It was only on his way out through the yard, after everything had gone perfectly, that Wiley Hughes began to worry and to wonder whether he had made any possible mistake. There was a brief instant of panic.

But then he was safely home, and he thought over every step he had taken, and there was no possible clue that would lead the police to suspect Wiley Hughes.

Inside the house, in sanctuary, he counted the money under a light that wouldn't show outside. Monday he would put it in a safe deposit box he had already rented under an assumed name.

Meanwhile, any hiding place would serve. But he was taking no chances; he had prepared a good one. That afternoon he had spaded the big flower bed in the back yard.

Now, keeping close under cover of the fence, so he could not be seen in the remotely possible case of a neighbor looking from a window, he scooped a hollow in the freshly spaded earth.

No need to bury it deep; a shallow hole, refilled, in the freshly turned soil would be best, and

could never on earth be detected by human eyes. He wrapped the money in oiled paper, buried it, and covered the hole carefully, leaving no trace whatsoever.

By four o'clock he was in bed, and lay there thinking pleasantly of all the things that he could do with the money once it would be safe for him to begin spending it.

It was almost nine when he awakened the next morning. And again, for a moment, there was reaction and panic. For seconds that seemed hours as he lay rigidly, trying to recall everything he had done. Step by step he went over it and gradually confidence returned.

He had been seen by no one; he had left no possible clue.

His cleverness in getting past the dog without killing it would certainly throw suspicion elsewhere.

It had been easy, so easy for a clever man to commit a crime without leaving a single lead. Ridiculously easy. There was no possible—

Through the open window of his bedroom he heard voices that seemed excited about something. One of them sounded like the voice of the policeman on the day shift. Probably, then, the crime had been discovered. By why—?

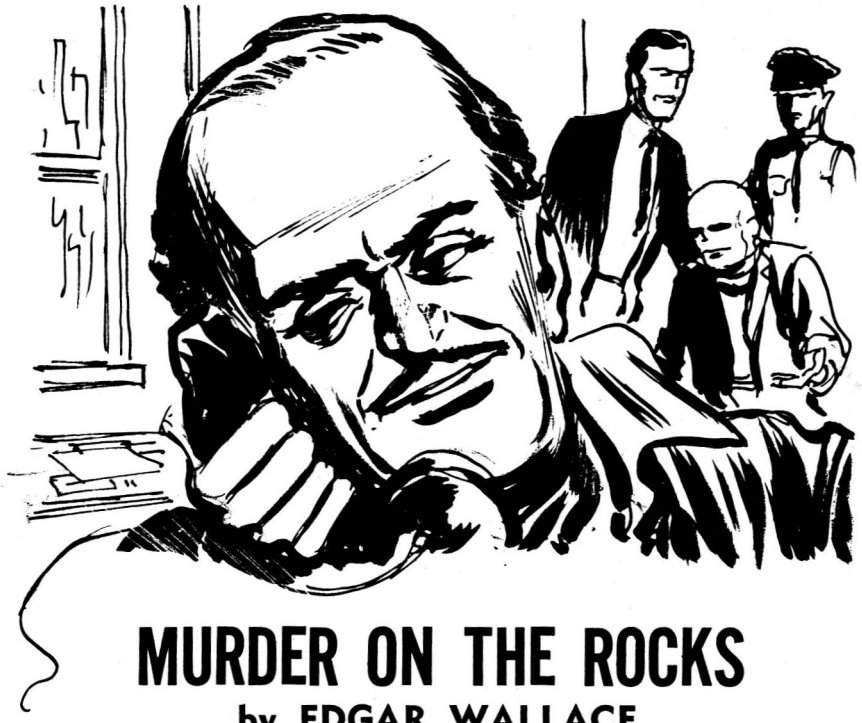
He ran to the window and looked out.

A little knot of people were gathered in the alley behind his house, looking into the yard.

His gaze turned more directly downward and he knew then that he was lost. Across the freshly turned earth of the flower bed, strewn in wild profusion, was a disorderly array of banknotes, like flat green plants that had sprouted too soon.

And asleep on the grass, his nose beside the torn oiled paper in which Wiley had brought him the meat and which Wiley had used later to wrap the banknotes, was the black dog.

The dangerous, vicious, beware-of-the-dog, the hound of hell, whose friendship he had won so thoroughly that it had dug its way under the fence and followed him home.



# MURDER ON THE ROCKS

## by EDGAR WALLACE

***When you read a story by a master craftsman, nothing need be said. Superior writing invariably tells a more eloquent tale . . .***

THE ORATOR was not in his most amiable mood when the telephone bell rang. He looked round helplessly for his clerk, for he hated telephone calls: they made greater demands on speech than he was prepared to meet.

"Is that Mr. Rater?"

Girls' voices are not easily recognizable through a telephone receiver, but Chief Inspector Oliver Rater had no difficulty in identifying the speaker.

"Yes, Miss Linstead."

It would have been unpardonable if he had forgotten her, for less than a year before she had been his secretary, a dark-haired girl, incorrigibly shy and nervous, who had given up work at the earnest request of her uncle, who for some reason had suddenly become aware of her existence. She was now, he remembered vague-

ly, living in a handsome flat in Mayfair.

"I wonder if it's possible to see you, Mr. Rater? It's a very important matter to me . . . nothing to do with the police, of course . . . and yet it is in a way—I mean my trouble—but you were so kind to me . . ."

She ended on a note of incoherence.

The Orator rubbed his nose thoughtfully. He was a man who had very few likes and many dislikes. He liked Betty Linstead for reasons which had no association with her prettiness. She was efficient, accurate and silent. Talkative secretaries drove him mad; secretaries who demanded that he should discuss the weather he loathed. He began liking her when he found that she did not think it necessary to say 'Good morning'.

"I'm not busy; I'll come along," he said, and scribbled down her address on the blotting-pad.

He had an idea that Brook Manor was a most expensive block of flats, but he discovered it to be more exclusive than he had imagined—a place of glass and metal doors, of dignified hall porters who had the appearance of family retainers, of heavily carpeted corridors. When he was admitted to No. 9 he found himself in an apartment so luxuriously appointed and furnished that his attitude towards the girl who came to meet him was a little reserved. This was not the plainly dressed secretary he knew. About her wrist were three bracelets, the value of which probably represented Mr. Rater's salary for at least four years.

"I'm so glad you came, Mr. Rater," she said breathlessly. "I want you to meet Arthur—Mr. Arthur Menden."

She was the same fluttering, nervous creature he had known in other days. She led him into the drawing-room and introduced him to a good-looking man; and if Mr. Rater was embarrassed by the splendor of the flat, he was more embarrassed by the presence of this third party.

"It's all dreadfully complicated," said Betty, in her quick, frightened way. "It's about uncle . . . and Arthur. Uncle doesn't wish me to marry Arthur . . ."

Inwardly the Orator groaned. He had expected many problems, but that of the young lady in love with a man objectionable to her relatives was the last he anticipated. She must have guessed his growing annoyance, for she almost pushed him into an armchair.

"I must tell you everything from the beginning. Uncle Julian you know, of course—everybody knows Uncle Julian. He's a bachelor. But he's always been very kind to me, and made me a small allowance when I was working for you. Just enough to live on. I think he would

have given me more, but he believes in girls working for their living. I only saw him once in six months, unless I met him by accident. I used to dine with him on Christmas Day, if he was in London. Once he asked me down to his box at Ascot, but I made him so uncomfortable, and was so uncomfortable myself, that I rather dreaded those meetings."

"I think, in fairness to your uncle, you ought to tell Mr. Rater that there was nothing unpleasant about Julian Linstead. He simply didn't wish to be bothered with girls," interrupted Arthur Menden. And then, with a laugh: "He's a strange old devil and I've no reason to excuse him. But I haven't been exactly straightforward in the matter—"

"It was my fault entirely," interrupted Betty.

"When did you come into this property?" The Orator was heavily sarcastic as he comprehended the beauties of the room with a wave of his hand.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," she said. "It was when I was working at Scotland Yard that I had a very urgent letter from uncle asking me to come and dine with him. I knew Arthur then, of course. We'd been—friends for a long time. I dined with Uncle Julian at the Carlton. He offered me the long lease of a big flat; he said he would furnish it regardless of cost, and that he would pay me five thousand a year so long as I didn't marry. I was bewildered at first, but eventually, after another meeting, I agreed. I don't suppose any girl would think three times about such an offer. He was my father's brother, and I was his only relative, and it was always understood that I was his heiress.

"I didn't really think very seriously about the clause prohibiting my marriage—I thought that was just a provision for my own protection, but I soon discovered that he was very much in earnest. He found out about Arthur, I really think, by employing detectives to watch us. He came round here one day in a state of terrible excitement and begged me not to think of marrying Arthur or anybody else. He made me promise that I would tell him before any-

body when I had found the man I wanted to marry. I didn't really like it."

"Does he know Mr. Menden?" asked the Orator.

She shook her head.

"No. That's a queer thing: he had no objections to Mr. Menden as an individual until he learnt that I was very fond of him."

"And then?"

"Oh, then he was beastly—he did everything he possibly could to ruin Arthur."

Arthur interrupted: he was a young man with a sense of justice.

"I don't know whether you'd call it ruin to be offered a job in the Argentine, but he certainly was very anxious to get me out of the way. Naturally I wouldn't like Betty to lose her allowance, but thank the Lord I'm earning enough to keep two."

"Then you're getting married?"

She nodded slowly.

"We've been married four months," she said, and stared at him in fright.

"The devil you have!" said the Orator.

She nodded again.

"It was underhanded, but . . . I don't know. I must have been a little crazy, but I hadn't the courage to tell Uncle Julian, and I wouldn't let Arthur tell him either. What I have done is to write to him today, telling him I'm going to be married tomorrow. You see, we were married in a registar's office and, somehow, I do want to be married in a church."

"So you're being married all over again and you're making a false declaration, and you want me to get you out of all your trouble before you get into it?" said the Orator.

"No—you're wrong," Betty Linstead said, quickly. "It is quite legal; Arthur has made enquiries. Lots of people get married in churches of different denominations, one for the husband and one for the wife; and lots of others go through two ceremonies, the one civil and the other religious. I want the religious one for . . . for a special reason."

The Orator sighed heavily.

"All this is interesting," he said, "but what exactly do you wish me to do?"

The young people looked at one another, and it was the man who spoke.

"The truth is, Mr. Rater, Betty thinks her uncle is mad. It isn't the loss of the money that worries her, it is the fear of what may happen to—well, to me, when Julian Linstead hears about the marriage. He is insane on the subject of Betty remaining a spinster. And he's one of the nicest of men on any other subject—that's the weirdness of it. There isn't anybody who could say a word against him. I doubt if he has an enemy in the world. Honestly, I'm rather scared about what will happen—not to myself but to Betty."

A light began to dawn on Mr. Rater.

"You want police protection?"

They nodded together, so like children in their concern that the Orator almost broke a lifetime's habit and laughed.

"I think you're crazy, but I'll see what I can do about it," he said.

He was more amused than annoyed at the trivial cause of his summons. It was a simple matter to have the house watched, but he had no intention of wasting three perfectly good detectives on such a job—and here he was wrong.

Julian George Linstead was an antique dealer who had speculated on the Stock Exchange to such purpose that he was no longer interested in antiques, which means that he was not an antiquarian at heart but had engaged in his energies and such genius as he possessed in the buying and selling of furniture, pictures and the like, having acquired in his youth the technique necessary for the successful prosecution of his business.

He was a bachelor of forty-five, good-looking in a dark and rather sinister way. He was a man of very charming manners, had a sense of humour, was a generous giver to charities, but rather shy of having his name associated with his many gifts.

He had a flat in Curzon Street which was run by a Mrs. Aldred, an elderly and unprepossessing housekeeper. There were also living in the flat a maid, Rosie Liffing, and Mr. Aldred, who acted as butler-valet. These three people were commonplace and respectable folk: the girl rather plain and stout, and a member of the congregation of Plymouth Brethren.

Mr. Linstead did not entertain at the flat; on those occasion when he gave a party it was invariably at the Carlton Hotel. Even these were of a modest kind. So far as could be ascertained, he had no entanglements of an embarrassing nature. He was a member of the Junior Carlton.

So he lived blamelessly, accepting his annual tax assessment as an act of God, and fulfilling the

social obligations which convention dictated in a quiet and unostentatious fashion. He had a shoot in Norfolk, rented a fishing in Scotland, hunted twice a week in the early weeks of the season, had a box at Ascot (which more often than not be occupied alone) and a small yacht in Southampton Water. He was at Deauville and Nice at the right moment, and spent at least three weeks at St. Moritz in the winter. People knew him as well off; he was, indeed, an exceedingly rich man. His saturnity denied him a few acquaintances who might have made life interesting, and a larger number who would certainly have made living expensive.

He had one amiable weakness, an interest in the occult, and was a friend of that remarkable man, Professor Henry Hoylash, the geometrical astrologer. Professor Hoylash was a mild little man who could and did predict world events with amazing accuracy. He was known as 'The Sirius Man' because all his prophecies were in some mysterious fashion founded on the position in the heavens of this star at the date when the Pyramids were built. It was a science that had many votaries, and Mr. Linstead, who had not even known that there was such a star, and who had the impression, gained from travel posters, that the Pyramids were erected to advertise Thomas Cook & Sons, was terribly impressed when the subject was explained to him.

Professor Hoylash came occasionally to dinner, and on one occasion did persuade Linstead to forego his winter sports holiday to make a trip to Cairo.

Mr. Rather made his enquiries and learned all that there was to be learnt about Mr. Linstead. Whatever change of attitude his niece may have detected, such change had been invisible to his servants. Mr. Aldred, the butler, who spoke freely to one of Mr. Rater's men—it was in the saloon bar of the Cow and Gate—said that a better employer never existed.

"He's taken up with these ghosts and spirits that the professor's so keen on and he talks about Egyptian gods and things but, bless his heart and soul, isn't a gentleman entitled to his hobbies?"

The detective pressed him on the question of Mr. Linstead's occultisms.

"There's nothing in it," protested the butler. "He amuses himself casting horoscopes, and is always asking what hour and day in the year I was born and my wife was born; otherwise you'd never know that he's gone in for this Egyptian stuff."

Apparently Mr. Linstead had taken up his studies with some seriousness. He had acquired a library of sorts on occult subjects, had a marvellous model of the Pyramids that took to pieces, would spend hours in making mysterious calculations.

The Orator's interest in Mr. Linstead's obsessions was hardly alive to start with—it waned into oblivion as soon as his enquiries were completed. After all, there was nothing remarkable in a rich uncle holding views about the destination of his money, for Betty was certainly his heiress. He returned to Scotland Yard, signed a few letters, heard the reports of his immediate subordinates and went home.

He went to bed early that evening, and he was so sound a sleeper that he did not hear the telephone ring at first, but after some time, cursing silently, he slid from his bed and picked it up.

"It's Arthur Menden, sir," said an anxious voice at the other end of the wire. "You remember you saw me at Betty's flat."

"Why, yes—"

The Orator realized from the young man's hoarse voice that something was wrong.

"She has been spirited away tonight—I'm speaking from her flat."

"Spirited away? What the devil do you mean? Don't talk. I'll come round."

He dressed furiously. Why should he, a responsible police official, be called out of bed in the middle of the night on such a fool's errand?

He found Mr. Menden in a state of agitation which he did not imagine could be possible in so phlegmatic a young man. Apparently he had been unaware of the disappearance until midnight.

Although he and Betty were married, they lived apart. Ordinarily he would have spent the evening with her, and it was at her request that he had gone to his own flat after dining with her at Ciro's Grill and seeing her home. At half-past ten he was called upon the telephone by a stranger, who said that he was speaking for the head of an engineering company for whom Menden worked. The caller asked him to go at once to the senior partner's house on Kingston Hill to discuss a cable that had arrived from Bermuda, where, in point of fact, Arthur Menden's firm had a big contract.

Never suspecting that there was

anything wrong, he dressed, found a taxi and was driven to Kingston. Here he found a birthday party in progress. Mr. Fallaby, the engineer in question, had no knowledge whatever of the call and had no cable to discuss. Puzzled and annoyed by the hoax, Menden went back to his apartment. He arrived home home at a quarter to one and heard the telephone bell ringing when he went in. It was Betty's maid. She had tried for an hour to get in touch with the husband of her mistress, but without result.

The story she told was that at eleven o'clock Betty had been called up by somebody who said he was the porter of her husband's flat. Would she go to the flat at once? He must have said something more, but this was all the maid knew. Looking out of the window, she saw a car standing by the pavement and saw Betty talking to a man for a little while before she entered the car with him and drove off.

"Did she recognize the man or the car?"

The maid shook her head. It was a very dark night, she thought the car was a Rolls-Royce—it was a very long one.

The girl dressed and waited for Betty's return. When twelve o'clock came, she became alarmed and rang up Menden's flat—to receive no answer.

That was all the information she could give and was, indeed, the only information available.

"It's Julian Linstead! It can't be anybody else," said Arthur Menden, in a state of nervous frenzy. "I waited for you to come, Mr. Rater, otherwise I'd have been at his flat by now."

The Orator could find no other explanation for the girl's flight. She had no friends in London and would not have gone off alone in a car with a stranger.

The only other clue, if it was a clue, was the fact that she had taken her sleeping things with her—her brush and comb were gone from the dressing-table and her nightdress and slippers were missing.

Ten minutes later they were knocking at the door of Mr. Linstead's flat. After a while the door was opened by the butler, who was in his dressing-gown.

He was too picturesquely dishevelled for conviction. The Orator saw that his shoes were laced and tied and this did not accord, exactly, with the disorder of his hair.

"No, sir, Mr. Linstead went out of town yesterday morning. I think he went to Paris—"

His protest was a little too loud. The Orator looked him in the eyes.

"I am a police officer," he said simply, and he saw the man look and blink.

"Will you let me write a letter

to Mr. Linstead?"

The man nodded mutely, led the way into Mr. Linstead's handsome study and switched on the lights. The Orator sat down at the desk, looked left and right and, stooping, lifted the waste-paper basket and took out two crumpled envelopes. These he smoothed out on the table before him, and recognized that the first was in the handwriting of Betty Linstead. It had been posted early that morning.

He beckoned Mr. Aldred.

"Here's a letter addressed to Mr. Linstead posted this morning, delivered this afternoon. Who opened it?"

The man swallowed, but said nothing.

"Mr. Linstead opened it," the Orator went on; "therefore he couldn't have gone to Paris this morning. It arrived this evening, didn't it?"

Confronted with this evidence of his omnipotence of Scotland Yard, the butler was dumb.

"Where's Mr. Linstead gone?"

The man could only shake his head and make curious sounds. Obviously on this matter he was ignorant. He knew Mr. Linstead had one or two little places in the country. Brighton was one favourite haunt and he had an unpretentious bungalow on the Thames, but the butler was not quite sure where; and the Thames, as the Orator remarked sardonically, was a rather long river, mainly fringed with bungalows in which wealthy and semi-wealthy bachelors spend their week-ends.

He questioned the other members of the household. They were genuinely without information. If there was anybody who was privy to Mr. Linstead's movements it was the butler and no other, and he had relapsed into a dogged silence, relieved with denials. The man was dismissed, and Mr. Rater had a consultation with the bereaved husband.

"I think the matter is not as serious as you imagine," he said, "but I shall know better when I have had a talk with this bird. Walk round the houses for an hour and come back. You understand, of course, that I am acting without any authority or warrant, and

that I am on a kick in the pants to nothing."

No sooner was the young man gone than the Orator sent for the butler. For the greater part of half an hour he questioned and cross-questioned, illicitly examined the contents of such drawers as were open and at least a dozen volumes of Mr. Linstead's occult library. In that space of time he became acquainted with more devils and gods than he had dreamed existed: Hat and Seth and Osiris and bull-headed monstrosities that Tutankhamen knew; but his principal discovery was in one of the drawers of Mr. Linstead's desk.

By the time Arthur Menden had returned, the Orator had concluded his investigations and had formulated an exact theory.

"I don't think there's any trouble coming to your young lady. I advise you to go home and get a night's sleep. I'm going to wait here until brother Julian returns."

"Do you know where he's staying?"

The Orator shook his head.

"Haven't the slightest idea, and it doesn't matter," he said curtly.

It was with considerable reluctance that Menden at last took his departure, though not to bed; looking out of the window, the Orator saw him pacing restlessly up and down the opposite pavement.

It was half-past six o'clock when the detective heard a key in the hall lock and, anticipating the Butler, whom he pushed back into his room, he opened the door.

Julian Linstead's eyes were so heavy with sleep and weariness that he did not observe that it was a stranger standing in the dark hallway and, brushing past him with no word of thanks, he walked quickly into his study. He stood for a moment just inside the room, sniffing the unexpected fragrance of the cigar which the Orator had been smoking, and then turned to face the detective.

"Why, what—what's wrong?" he stammered.

"You," said the Orator and then Linstead recognized him.

"You're Mr. Rater, from Scotland Yard?" he said, in a shrill, almost hysterical voice.

The Orator nodded. He was a little taken aback by the recognition, for he never dreamed he was amongst the famous figures of contemporary history.

"Where is Miss Linstead?" he asked.

"Miss Linstead? My niece?" Julian made a heroic attempt to appear unconcerned. "Good heavens, what has happened to her, and why on earth should I know?"

"Where is she?"

"I swear to you—"

"What's the use, Mr. Linstead?" The Orator's voice was one of infinite weariness. "I haven't been sitting up all night to have this

kind of child's talk handed to me. I know pretty well that she's at your bungalow on the Thames, but I don't happen to know where your bungalow is situated, though I can find it in half an hour after I return to Scotland Yard."

The man's unshaven face was white and haggard.

"All right," he said, and suddenly seemed to grow old. "Have it your own way; she is there, and she's quite safe and well. I took her there last night and got her a woman attendant from a mental home to look after her. She won't be hurt, and I hope to be able to bring her to reason. I don't mean she's mad," he went on quickly. "God forbid that she should be! Only . . ."

"Only you take a great deal too much notice of that bogy friend of yours. Professor Hoylash," said the Orator quietly.

Julian looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"That's why you're trying to prevent your niece from marrying. Well, you'll be interested to know, and apparently she hasn't told you, that she's already married.

A look of horror came to Linstead's face.

"Married?" he croaked.

"Married four months ago," said the Orator.

He saw the terror in Linstead's face vanish. It was replaced by a look of wonder and then of infinite relief.

"Four months ago?" he repeated in a hollow tone. "But that is impossible—"

"It isn't impossible," said the Orator. "Horoscopes are impossible. I have just been examining a couple, and putting two and two together. Your Professor Hoylash drew up two horoscopes, one of your life and one of your niece's, and he discovered that you would die on the day she was married. And you're alive."

"But she never told me . . . why should she say she is going to be married . . . in a church . . . tomorrow?"

"There's a very good reason, I suspect," said the Orator drily. "A little one but a good one. I shouldn't be surprised if there are a couple of heirs to your property in a few months' time."

# THE KINSEY REPORT MURDER CASE

## by JAMES O'CONNOR SARGENT

*The classic detectives stories of Poe, Doyle and their contemporaries mirrored the rationalism and optimism of the 19th Century. The murderer was obviously a worthless villian, the detective was a Man of Reason, and logic solved all problems. After the first World War—and for a while after the second World War—the New Detective Story flourished: the tale of brute force. Like the Hemingway protagonist, Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe won their bitter battles, not through logic primarily, but through stoic courage, stubborn integrity and total commitment to a tough and very personal ethic.*

*What will the next stage of the murder novel be like? Will it follow Ian Flemming in projecting a hero without an ethic, a hero who triumphs over Evil only because he, himself, is even more Evil? Perhaps. But, perhaps, to become contemporary with books like Catch-22, The Magic Christian and Naked Lunch plays like Rhinoceros, Endgame and The Visit—and movies like Dr. Strangelove—the murder story will veer off in the direction of satire, gallows humor and the borderline of fantasy. Perhaps the detective story will become a distorting, lunatic mirror held up to a distorted and lunatic world. If so, this remarkable story, a witch's blend of horror and hilarity, will become known as the Murders in the Rue Morgue of the new school of murder . . .*

LIKE MOST husbands, I had thought of murdering my wife many times, but only in a vague, wishful sort of way. As a matter of fact, if it hadn't been for that damned Kinsey Report—

But, wait, let me get my ideas in order. Actually, it began with Julie Smithers. I can still see her, the way she was that morning, just as if it were yesterday. She was standing in front of my mirror, arranging her hair. You know those girls who have really classical features, sort of bland and uncommitted, like Switzerland? The kind who can stand primping in front of a mirror and still their expression remains neutral? Julie was like that, and, even though I loved her, she always faintly irritated me. After all, it's the damned neutralists who have made all the trouble in the world.

"Captain Wright," she said to me suddenly, "we've got to talk about it." I could see it was going to be brutal as soon as she called me "Captain Wright" instead of "Ram." Women like that can be surprisingly brutal—damn neutralists. I wish we could get recruits for the services half as brutal as the average American woman. It can't be done, you know; our men are soft. It's the American women I count on, in the long view, to save us from those rotten commies and the damn neutralists.

I sat up in bed, groaning inwardly.

"Maybe you got this kookie way from living with Edna . . ." Julie went on. See what I mean? In two minutes, if I didn't find some way to block the attack, she'd be calling me an all-out psycho, or implying that I was a latent homosexual. These neutral, *Vogue*-faced women aren't satisfied until they nail you to the cross or hang you from the rafters. The hell of it was that I loved her.

"You don't have to call me a nut *and* bring up my wife's name in the same sentence," I said. I meant: only once below the belt in each round, please. After all, there might be a Great Referee in the sky, you know, and He could stop the fight if you foul me too often.

"Ram," she said softly—and that was a gain for my side, but then she went on, sternly again (she has an ON and OFF button somewhere, I'll swear): "I really did mean it. This is the last time. Never again will I turn down a date with Ted Conroy to come running at your beck and call . . ."

"Julie . . ."

"No good, Ram. You're not free to marry me. There's no future in loving you. Get dressed and drive me home . . ."

Swinging out of bed, I padded across the floor to the adjoining bath. "It isn't easy to find what we have, Julie . . ."

After showering, I slipped into slacks and sports shirt. While brushing my crew cut, I noticed that Julie's glance was taking in

the full sweep of the apartment. "Well, goodbye Number 119 Wymering Terrace, I won't be seeing you anymore . . ." As though to accent her words, she let her eyes light on the photograph of us at the race track. She picked it up. "May I have this?"

I nodded. I crossed the room, trying to take her in my arms.

But the ON button wasn't working. "No, Ram, we're doing no remakes . . ."

"Until the next time . . ." I grumbled.

Julie shook her head. "I don't want to be bitter, and I don't want to be cheap either. I'm twenty-three years old now. We've had ten months, and that's long enough for me to have a sweet little baby boy with a teddy bear . . ." a crack in her voice, "if we were married. I want three babies before I'm thirty, because that's when the women in my family stop having babies, and we make very good wives. You can ask all my brothers-in-law, or my uncles . . ."

"I intend to marry you, Julie. But my hands are tied as long as Edna's a patient in Saint Mary's. You have no idea how hard it is to divorce somebody in the booby hatch. Even my parents are on Edna's side . . ."

"But Edna's been in that place a whole year; is she getting any better?"

"Better?" I plopped into a chair, swinging my car keys absentmindedly. "She ate two buttons off my trench coat the last time I was there. Just directed my attention elsewhere, reached over, and snagged the buttons, one at a time, popping them into her mouth before I could say anything. I felt such a fool."

"Edna, the button eater . . ." Julie said grimly. "My competition! How many buttons would she have to eat to be carried out in the long box?"

I frowned, for Julie's question had turned an ON button in my own mind, lighting a bulb that had been making its presence felt there for some time.

While driving Julie back to her apartment, I talked about the unfairness of the Air Force's promotion system, and the prejudice that Regulars had for Reserve Officers. The Regulars are as bad as the damn commies or the neutralists, I swear. Julie stifled a yawn, mentioning that Ted Conroy didn't seem to have any difficulty being promoted to Major. "And Ted's a Reserve Officer."

"An apple polisher, too . . ." I reminded her. "Which I'm not."

I didn't bother mentioning to her that I knew for a fact that some of the men in charge of rating reports are commies. I'm saving that block-buster for the time when it'll do the most good. If only there were a man like McCarthy in the Senate today—

But that's not telling my story, is it? What happened next was

that damned Kinsey Report. You see, I never read the confounded thing when it first came out and everybody was reading it. Too busy in those days, doing my own research on communism and fluoridation that I'm going to reveal when I'm good and ready to really drop a blockbuster on the Pentagon.

What happened was that the fellow who had the apartment above me, a civilian but not really queer (as far as I could judge), was throwing out some old books, and he asked me if I'd like to look through them to see if there was anything I cared to read. You can be sure I jumped at the chance. Not that I read books much, but I wanted to sniff around to see if he had anything that would add him to my list of dangerous persons—you know, left-wing pamphlets, Adlai Stevenson speeches, books by people like Mailer or Saroyan or Lillian Smith. Well, the only suspicious-looking thing I found was this Kinsey Report, and I started leafing through it to find out how bad it was . . . Well, in two minutes I was hooked. I took the damn thing downstairs to my apartment and read it from cover to cover.

It was a revelation to me. I never realized that such things were going on. What really hit me where it hurts were the adultery figures. Here I'd been sort of feeling these twings of conscience over girls like Julie and that Terry in the typing pool and Mickey three years ago, and it turns out that I'm just in the minor leagues actually. I mean, it was like I had been remorseful about dunking a toe in bathtub and everybody elese has been splashing around in the ocean for twenty years. It was like I had bothered myself about humming a tune when everybody else was going around bellowing Grand Opera. It was like I had stolen a few lollypops while the rest of the country was busy looting Chase Manhattan Bank.

Sorry: don't mean to get carried away like that. You see my point, course. I made up my mind, then and there, that I wasn't going to be deprived of my Julie, not for some snot-nosed neutralist like Ted Conroy. If it meant murdering Edna, well, that was the hand the House dealt me and I had to play it like a man. Besides, as I've said all along, the reason that the commies are beating the tar out of us all over is because we're too soft. We have to learn to be as hard and mean as the enemy. This is Total War. Edna had to go.

All that week I kept calling Julie every day, but she refused to meet me. Then one day I saw her entering the Pentagon cafeteria with Major Conroy, the eyes of a dozen men tracing every movement of her sweet little schwanz.

And to top it all off, I heard that Conroy's divorce was in the mill.

I began to get burning sensations in the stomach. I smoked too much. I got a toothache that spread all the way to my ear. The old trouble with my knee-cap began to bother me again. I was 34 years old and I began to feel ready for the Senile and Incompetent Ward.

Dating other girls didn't help. If they had ON buttons, they were powered by little 15-watt batteries. Julie was a dynamo, a rocket, with a short count-down. "There goes Mars," I used to say to her, "Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus . . . Julie, one of these nights we'll make it all the way to Pluto." And —God!—she'd say she wanted to go to Pluto some night.

I took my two small sons to the zoo. I wish they didn't look so much like Edna, and hadn't inherited her uncontrollable appetite. Buy me this, Daddy. Buy me that. "Doesn't your grandmother ever buy you anything? She owns three houses and I have to exist on the sub-standard pay of an Air Force Captain. I'm not going to get any War on Poverty funds, you know. Go on, put your head in the cage, and the lion will bite it off. How the hell do I know what lions like to eat?"

I paid my routine Sunday visit to Edna at Saint Mary's Hospital. I wondered if the tranquilizer pills were responsible for her weight. Or were the buttons? Who knew how many buttons she might be eating these days?

Doctor Graber assured me that button-eating wasn't so unusual, and that Edna probably passed them with the great amounts of food she consumed.

"We've assigned your wife to one of our mental therapy classes, Captain Wright, where the patients are encouraged to talk their problems out, to communicate with each other; and with Doctor Hunyadi, who's had considerable success in leading these discussions. Also, your wife is showing some interest in sculpture. The well-known sculptress, Anna Shoe-

maker, gives a few hours of her time each week to this developing humanitarian project."

I had never heard of the sculptress, Anna Shoemaker, but the grin on Doctor Graber's face suggested that the Shoemaker's products were as bizarre as the wrought-iron ant on the doctor's desk which seemed to be supporting a square universe.

That day, when Edna stole a button from my trench coat, popping it into her mouth stealthily, I tore two more buttons from the coat and handed them to her. Edna stowed them down the front of her dress. "You could stow Fort Knox down there, Edna . . ."

As was my custom, I asked: "Edna, do you know who I am?"

Sometimes, she recognized me as her husband, but today she said: "You're the one who shot the Crown Princess . . ." Forgetting the two buttons she had cached, she snagged the remaining one off my trench coat. I removed one of my Captain's bars from my battle jacket, handing it to her, pin open.

"Chew on that, Edna . . ."

Julie agreed to have coffee with me one morning at the Pentagon. I was elated until I noticed the sparkling diamond she was wearing. "Major Conroy and I are going to be married as soon as his divorce is final . . ."

She went on in that damn cool way like a neutralist: "No regrets, Ram. I'll never love anybody the way I loved you . . . With such abandonment. But I'm going to be a good wife to Ted. I believe lots of women fall in love with their husbands afterwards, don't you, Ram?"

Julie sighed contentedly when I didn't answer. She waved to two young Lieutenants across the cafeteria. "I'll admit that Ted has kind of a one-track mind . . ." her hands covering her embarrassed face as she remembered something, "but I'll always know where he is . . . That sounds awful, doesn't it, Ram?"

"Just give me a little longer, Julie . . . I will marry you."

"Oh? You going to divorce the button eater?"

I steered Julie from the cafeteria along the ramp.

"Julie, remember the very last time you were at my place. You gave me the bright idea: you said, 'how many buttons would she have to eat to be carried out in the long box?' That's what you said. She stole four buttons the last time I was there. And my Captain's bars . . ."

"Captain's bars? Pin open?"

I nodded. We were near the door of Julie's office. I removed three long rusty nails from my pocket. "I found these this morning . . ."

"You've got to be careful, Ram. Do you have her insured?"

"Ten-thousand. I'm careful. Anything I give her will be something she could come across on the

grounds of Saint Mary's, that old 19th Century campus, where so much building takes place. Edna's permitted to walk about. You ever been over there, Sweet Dumpling?"

Julie shivered. "No. For some reason, I'd just hate to have to go inside. When I worked for the Department of State, my boss was a patient there for two months, and I was the only one in the Section that couldn't bring myself to visit him. He was an old New Dealer."

For a moment, Julie's mind seemed to be dwelling on something far away. "Ram? Circus people don't really swallow swords and go on living, do they? I mean anybody really swallowing a penknife with the blade open . . ." She reached into her bag, removing a penknife. "I had to take this away from a small boy in my apartment house . . . I was afraid he might hurt himself . . ."

I kissed the penknife, before depositing it in a pocket. I had always known that Julie was true-blue all the way. Let our men go soft. The commies don't have a chance as long as we produce women like her.

After that, it was hunt, hunt, hunt. I'd find the top of a sardine can one day, a discarded nail file the next. I found the prong of a can opener, a fish hook, a religious medal, and the spool of a typewriter ribbon. My cache was considerable by the time I arrived at Saint Mary's, where nurses marked me among the few really loyal and attentive husbands.

Once when I was supplying Edna, she remarked: "We have to be careful around here. They're always spying on us . . ."

Toward the end of August, I asked Edna if she were eating well.

"Like a horse. That's what my mother used to say: 'Edna, you eat like a horse, and you're never going to get a husband.' When we heard that my brother Buddy was bringing you home from Korea, because you were on the outs with your own family, it was Mama who made me go on the Fat Boy diet. I only weighed 120 when I met you the first time. You said I was beautiful, Ram. Remember? But that's why there weren't any old pictures of me around the house . . ."

"It figures . . ." I murmured. "But eating with you is glandular, Edna. You always said so. You should eat more. The things you like . . ." He tapped her stowage area.

"I never seemed to lose weight after Ronnie was born . . ." Looking up, "Ronnie! Ronnie and Ricky . . . Oh, how I miss my babies . . . Are they still with my mother?"

"Now you know very well where they are, Edna. Stop being so foolish. You know your mother was only too glad to get them. After all, you seem to know who I am today . . . For a change. Are

you still attending mental therapy classes? Sculpturing?"

"Sometimes. One of the women in the mental therapy class said she overate because she was so frustrated. She said that's why I eat . . . I try to cooperate . . . But I'm not very creative, you know. I feel foolish when Anna Shoemaker watches me working, and I think Doctor Hunyadi stops by to study the things we make, so that he'll understand our problems . . ."

"Now what are you talking about?" I asked, a bored tolerance on my face. "You never make sense, Edna. That's what your mother always says. She thinks you're getting worse. That's why she's secretly adopting Ronnie and Ricky. So you'll never be able to have them again . . . Oh, I don't blame you for eating, Edna. Sometimes I feel like jumping out a window, do you?"

Edna's body began to shake and I asked her if she were cold. "Here, Edna. Take this. It's called a crooked needle. For upholstery work, you know? Remember how you tried to reupholster that chair with the antique velvet and what a mess you made of it."

Edna accepted the needle, her hand cold as ice.

During the weeks that followed, I thought a lot about her preference for buttons. It wouldn't be safe to buy a pound of buttons at one of those salvage sales. There could be some questions raised afterwards. But I took to stealing individual buttons from garments in Salvation Army outlet stores.

Once at a cocktail party, I had myself a ball, listening to the way that woman from the Department of Commerce complained: The woman was so sure that she had her buttons when she placed her sweater on that chair. Such nice, big, red buttons they were, too. The woman wondered where she would be able to buy replace-

ments.

Another evening, when I was assigned to security and had to check the desks of secretaries, I learned something unique about women in general. So many of them kept buttons in their drawers with various types of tissues, a few needles, and tiny spools of thread. Edna, the gourmand, would make short shift of these.

Besides, there was a full moon tonight.

"Edna, do you know who I am this evening?"

"You're the button man . . ."

"Why, Edna! I'm your husband, Ram. How do you feel?"

Edna laughed half-heartedly. "With my hands, I guess. Plaster of Paris makes my fingers itch . . ."

How could her constitution digest all this junk? Didn't the needles perforate any part of her? Did she have too much protective fat?

Even worse, the nurses never complained about Edna's antics; and vainly did I wait for a frantic summoning to Edna's death bed.

Summer was ending when Julie told me that she and Major Conroy would be married early in November. "A quiet wedding. We'll drive into Maryland. Oh, Ram, I wish it could have been different . . ." She handed me her collection: a beer-can opener, three jagged-edged stones. "I felt like soaking them overnight in lye . . ." Oh, she was true-blue, I tell you.

"But that could show up in an autopsy, Julie . . ."

"What autopsy?" Julie scoffed. "I'm beginning to wonder if you really feed her all the things I find for you. No human body could take that . . . What is she? Some kind of nanny goat?"

"It takes time, Julie. You should see how big she's getting. And I noticed her holding her hand on her stomach last night. Like it hurt bad . . ."

Julie ran a finger along my tie. "It's so long since we said goodbye for the last time. I like goodbyes . . ."

"Nobody says goodbye like you . . ." I whispered. "I'll be home tonight. Late-ish. The stars will be out . . ."

Julie smiled prettily as she left me.

As October broke, Doctor Graber called me into his office. "Your wife is making genuine progress now, Captain Wright. That new drug that Doctor Hunyadi suggested . . . She often speaks of you in mental therapy class, Captain. In fact, she's practically taken over the class. Your wife is particularly interested in Doctor Hunyadi's belief that the entire family unit should be treated in these cases. I believe Doctor Hunyadi may have made some such suggestion to you last May or June . . . Have you ever considered analysis, Captain Wright?"

I burst into laughter, of course. "Me? I don't even believe in all

this mumbo-jumbo of psychiatry, Doctor. I believe some people just go crazy. Now, I had two aunts and an uncle on my mother's side . . . Anyway, I signed Edna in here because there was nothing else to do. She was preserving coffee in jars, for one thing. I mean coffee from the perculator each morning. Putting it up in pickle jars until it had green mold on it . . . Did she tell you that in mental therapy class?"

"Oh, yes. She has spoken of the coffee episode often, Captain Wright. I believe it was you who told her that we were going to war with Brazil . . ."

"Oh, no. I told her that we *ought* to go to war with Brazil . . . damn neutralists, Doctor, Edna's own mother will tell you plenty. Ask Edna's mother about the time Edna painted the concrete floor of the back porch with green paint. Concrete floor, Doctor Graber . . ."

"Your wife has mentioned that incident also. It was her mother who used to tell Edna that she didn't have all her buttons, wasn't it?"

"Well, there you are, Doctor. Her own mother said that. Not me . . ."

When I had Edna off in a corner of the visitor's room, I noticed that she was holding her stomach again, as though she were in pain. "Never complain about any aches or pains in here, Edna. They like to operate on people, because they need the beds. The doctors who do the operating are generally part-time patients in here." I touched my head meaningfully.

"I feel fine, Honey . . ." Edna blurted out.

"For instance, if you were to complain of stomach pains, they'd be only to happy to rush you to surgery and cut you wide open. They need the beds. They say half the city of Washington is about ready to get in here. But no free beds. So they love to ship the old patients out in long boxes . . ."

"How do you feel, Honey?" Edna asked.

"Well, how do you think I feel? Worrying about you, having to break up my little home, give my sons to your mother . . ."

"I meant is everything fine at your office, Ram? That terrible Coloney Murphy still so against you because you don't have your college degree? And what was the name of the one you said was really a neutralist?"

"I have more important worries, Edna. You're thinking I'm the man who shot the Crown Princess. What Crown Princess? See, you don't even know. You don't even know who I am half the time. All you know is to preserve one-hundred-and-sixty-six jars of coffee . . ."

"I was very sick . . ." Edna admitted ruefully.

"Edna . . . I am the man who

shot the Crown Princess. She was riding in the state carriage to the coronation when I just gunned her down in the street."

"I always liked your jokes, Ram. Even when nobody else laughed . . ." She opened her eyes wide at the loot I was removing from a pocket. "Where in the world do you find me all this junk?"

"You don't eat enough of the right things, Edna. You need these little snacks between meals. Remember, how you used to claim it was glandular with you? Well, you need iron for the blood, more tin, the right things . . ."

Back at my apartment, I found Julie waiting. "It won't be long now . . ." I sang, twisting into the living room. "Edna has terrible pains in her stomach, and she's agreed not to let the hospital know . . ."

"Sometimes, I think you're as far gone as Edna is . . ." Julie answered. "Ted Conroy told me this afternoon that you're going to be passed over when the promotions are handed out, and you know what that means?"

"Julie, Dumpling, Conroy's jealous of me, because he knows that you're in love with me . . ."

"He does not know that . . ." Julie snapped. "And don't you dare ever say that in front of anybody. Especially when Ted and I get married. And pray tell me, Sir, how are you going to earn a living if you are passed over on the next promotion list and are

kicked out of the Air Force?"

"We'll have the ten-thousand from Edna's insurance. And I can always get a job at the Central Intelligence Agency. Colonel Murphy, the old fool who hates my guts, is always telling me that I should be working for the CIA . . . He admits I have the right mentality for it."

"Just you keep in mind that I'm engaged to Ted Conroy. He's the first man who's ever given me an engagement ring, and I don't intend to muff my chance. Ted's a pretty fine man, settled, with a future. Who cares if he's bald? Hair isn't that important."

"I didn't say that hair was important . . ." I said, taking Julie in my arms. "Life is very simple, Julie. It's all in the stars. You ever see Mars or Venus with Ted Conroy?"

Julie broke away. "If you must know, I've never been in a space capsule with Ted Conroy. And for a good reason. I intend to marry him." You see? The real *Vogue* bitch type, just like I told you. She can't go to bed with Conroy before she marries him—that would be immoral. So she goes to bed with me instead. Oh, I tell you that Kinsey didn't know the half of it. "Just you keep in mind that Ted's divorce will be final in two weeks . . . Oh, I have a good mind to go to that hospital and see for myself . . ."

"You should, Julie. We'll say you're Edna's girlfriend. We'll

have a ball confusing Edna . . ."

So that Sunday, Julie accompanied me. We arrived early Sunday evening. The visitor's room was rather crowded for a change.

"Good Lord . . ." I said in an aside. "I forgot. They've had some kind of open house here today. The patients put on a ballet. They exhibited their handicrafts."

"Is that stout girl over the radiator Edna?" Julie asked.

"Who else? The nurse with her is Mrs. Peters. Remember you're a girl friend. Of Edna's . . ."

I spoke briefly to Mrs. Peters, before kissing Edna perfunctorily. Edna exhibited self-consciousness, glancing now and then at her shoes.

"Edna, I've brought an old friend of yours to see you . . . You remember Francesca, don't you?"

"No . . ." Edna said, looking to Mrs. Peters for advice. But she extended her hand to Julie.

"You don't remember me!" Julie exclaimed.

"I have trouble remembering some things, and it's going to be such a disappointment to Doctor Hunyadai. Because his new drug is supposed to help me remember. Strange, but I can't recall ever having known anybody named Francesca . . . What's your last name?"

"Allegro . . ." Julie lied. "You used to be mad about my hi-fi. Don't you remember all the nut

fudge you made me?"

"Oh, I make wonderful nut fudge. But I do not recall anybody named Francesca Allegro. And it's not the kind of name one would forget . . ."

I smiled unctiously, turning to Mrs. Peters. "Edna tells me I'm the man who shot the Crown Princess . . ."

Mrs. Peters urged the visitors to be seated. Edna seemed deep in painful thought. "Well, now that you have company, Mrs. Wright, I'll just mosey across the room and visit some of the others . . ."

We watched Mrs. Peters walk away. When I was sure that nobody was watching, I exhibited an old-fashioned button hook on the palm of my hand. "What do you

think of this, Mrs. Pettigrew?"

"Pettigrew?" Edna asked. "I'm Edna Mary Pauline Baxter Wright. Your wife, Ram. Don't you know me? And I don't need that junk anymore. My project is all finished . . ."

Julie evaluated the fistful of buttons she was holding.

"Why I know who you are . . ." Edna exclaimed. "You're not Francesca Allegro at all. You're Julie Smithers, the girl who used to ride to the Pentagon, first with my brother, Buddy, and then with Ram. My brother had four pictures of you. And my mother wished that Buddy would stop running around and settle down. Mama said Buddy should get married. But Buddy said you were too much of a free lance swinger for him. A free lance swinger, that's what Buddy said . . ."

"Edna!" I said. "Is that any way to talk . . .?"

Edna turned back to Julie, who was standing up. "I'm sorry, Miss Smithers. But my new drug lets me remember even the most unimportant details. I can recall all the circumstances that go with any face and the very words that were spoken.

Quickly, I put a hand on Edna's mouth, her OFF button. When I glanced at Julie, I saw a death sentence in her basilisk eyes.

Julie shoved her fistful of buttons into my lapel pocket. "You and Edna take them to Neptune with you . . ."

Julie turned to go, but Doctor Graber interrupted. "Oh, Captain Wright, I do hope that Mrs. Wright has told you about her great success in sculpturing. Mrs. Wright took first prize in this afternoon's contest . . ."

Just then a practical nurse wheeled the cart across the room, which contained Edna's project. Exclamations of admiration rose from the visitors and patients, as they stepped out of the way of the cart. All eyes were glued on that massive conglamoration of junk imbedded into the plaster of paris mold, surely a world of buttons surrounding the anguished death's head, ten huge arms and hands extended in supplication, all holding buttons, and the arms of some pierced with a parade of needles. On the death's skull rested a laurel wreath of victory and protruding from one of the ears was the silvered double bars of a Captain.

"I must be going . . ." Julie said disjointedly, her words shaking. "I'm to be married shortly, and I have things to do . . ."

For a moment, I was certain that the scream came from the death's head on the cart, but it was my own arms that were being pierced by the needles. "MY ARMS! MY POOR EAR!" I shrieked. Still, I was able to turn my hands into fists. With these I pummelled Edna back against the wall, before Doctor Graber and the nurse pulled me off her.

As they led me out of the room, a wraith-like figure, surely 90 years old, advanced upon Julie asking, "What's it called, Girl? It's got to have a name. Everything on God's green earth must have a name . . ."

I saw Julie look at the horror and heard her say, wearily, "It's called the Button Man."

In the doorway, I looked back at Julie, despairingly. She avoided my eye. I heard one patient telling another, "As usual, it was the visitor who attacked the patient . . ."

They've had me here for six months. Edna is in the out-patient category now, and only comes back to the hospital twice a week for group therapy sessions with me. Doctor Hunyadi is getting his dream at last: treating the whole family unit together. He's a neutralist, of course. The whole thing was a plot. They planted that Kinsey book where I'd see it. They manipulated poor feeble-minded Edna to goad me into a rage. Oh, they'll do anything to get rid of the real men, lock us up, kill us, railroad us into these places. They're all queer, you see. That's the whole secret. Once you understand, you can read the whole conspiracy. They can't bear to have any of us left, any of us real men who can hear the call of Pluto—the furtherest from the sun, the ultimate—and make a tigress like Julie hear it also. And we might have made it, to the end of the solar system, if we had only had a chance.

*We have a weakness for horror stories that begin with lines as inoccuous as "Listen to the mockingbird . . ." Such stories, when they are well-done, move quietly and unobtrusively—the way a cobra moves—and carry the reader, step by step, from the logic of the most common-place family breakfast into the logic of murder and mania. Reading such a story is like opening a door into your own living room and finding Something waiting for you there, Something that shouldn't exist in this sane universe. For a perfect example of this kind of story, we recommend the little yarn innocently titled . . .*

# THE ANGEL MAKERS

## by MAXINE HART

"LISTEN TO THE mockingbird," Mrs. Derrick commanded, and her husband came to stand beside her at the kitchen window. Obligingly, the bird imitated a meadowlark.

"Where is it?" Mr. Derrick asked.

"Over there in the maple tree by the pond."

At that moment the bird raised its white patched wings, circled over the water, and flew away out of sight. Mrs. Derrick moved then to the stove and took a firm grip on her spatula. "I like the trees and the lily pond," she announced. She turned the hamburgers in the frying pan and placed a slice of golden cheese on each patty. "The trees form a border around the yard and they're so striking this time of the year with their red leaves."

Mr. Derrick sent her vast, straight back a wary look, but he said mildly, "I'm glad you like them," and seated himself at the kitchen table.

"It's really the worst house yet, though." He glanced up apprehensively as she slammed a lid on the


skillet. "Some of them have been nice, but this one is so large and hard to keep clean." She wrenched the burner handle and the gas flame under the pan lowered abruptly. "But the location is convenient." She glanced past the open kitchen door to the table where she had placed the tinted photograph of their son. The artist, she thought with satisfaction, had used exactly the right shade of blue for the bright eyes and had only suggested the freckles and the space between the two front teeth. The boy, caught in a moment of self-conscious posing, nevertheless looked fresh and fair and alert. His mother smiled fondly and proudly. "Walt can come home from school for lunch," she said then, and added as an afterthought, "and you can usually manage to be home at noon, too."

"It's handy," Mr. Derrick agreed, "and there seems to be plenty of work in this town." He

leaned over to drink from his too full coffee cup and with distaste she saw the red letters wrinkling on the narrow back of his gray coveralls: C. B. DERRICK, EXTERMINATOR. Her contemptuous glance went to the toolkit on the floor beside him, where the same colored words were firmly printed. He drank half the coffee and sat back again in his chair. "I'll never forget the last town. For all the business I got, you'd've thought the people there really liked rodents and bugs crawling all over."

"I wish you wouldn't slouch like that," she said sharply.

"Sorry, Annie." He sat up straight and prepared to listen. His pale eyes focused on the bridge of her nose.

"The house we had there was so neat." She added nicely, "Well, I guess there are advantages and disadvantages to every place." She put two of the cheeseburgers on the plates and the plates on the table. "It wouldn't be very interesting if every place was the same." Her eyes went to the kitchen clock on the far wall. "Walt should be home any minute." She watched her husband finish his coffee and she bent to pour more for him; then, changing her mind, she straightened and replaced the pot on the stove. She walked to the window and, with her back to him, said, "I wonder if we'll stay here—for a long time, I mean."

He looked up at her with a show of warning on his face, but she was standing stiffly, as at attention, peering out the window, and did not see his expression. He cleared his throat and then, finally, "I don't know," he answered.

"I don't mean to sound impatient." She turned, spreading her hands in an impatient gesture, and came to sit down across from him. The table shook as her chair moved against it.

"I know," he said and moved his toolkit an inch or two to the right, away from the table. "I know, we have to keep moving, and we're seeing the country. We can go north in the summer and south in the winter."

Her eyes lighted up then and she nodded in agreement. "Yes, that's right. Walt won't like this area much when cold weather comes."

"That's a good thing about my work—we can pack up and go anytime." His hand reached down to touch his tool box. "When I pick up my kit—" He stared off into space then and, recognizing the reminiscent look, she knew what he would say and she did not bother to listen. "I guess I got used to traveling when I was a boy. Walt's seeing the east at about the same age I was when I saw the west." He picked up his cup and set it down again without drinking. "My father's kit was

about the same size as mine. Of course, it had different things in it. I remember the black hood with the eye slits and the big coil of rope. I used to practice knot tying with it, in between times." His fingers drummed lightly on the blue formica table top as he saw her disinterested expression.

She snapped, "You make me nervous when you tap like that!"

"Sorry." His fingers lay still. After a while, he said, "I've often thought that maybe Walt should work for the government, too, later on. He shows a lot of promise and we wouldn't want it to go to waste. He ought to have more authority and—well, *status* than he'd get working with me."

Sitting there, arms akimbo, she asked with a glare of disgust, "So you're finally getting around to admitting it, are you?"

"I've known it for a long time now," he answered humbly. "Walt's a throwback, way back to the Derrick of the seventeenth century, the most famous—"

"I know all about your illustrious ancestors," she assured him grimly. "Too bad you didn't have more gumption yourself."

"It's a gift, Annie," he protested. "You can't just get the hang of it by—"

"Oh, forget it," she cut him off and added bitterly, "C. B. Derrick, exterminator. Cesare Borgia Derrick, ha! I always said, 'What's in a name?'" Her head nodded emphatically. "I said that when you wanted to name Walt 'Sinan'."

"Yes, you did," he agreed meekly. "You said that." He lowered his eyes and looked at his failure's hands, almost as if he were praying. "I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you, Annie."

Her neck arched and her eyes gleamed. "Well, Walt won't disappoint me."

"No, he won't. Walt won't do that. He has everything ahead of him. He can look forward to things and not back." He took a deep breath and exhaled heavily. "That was the life, when I was a boy." He added then, frowning, "And never any trouble about anything, either."

His wife sighed, too, then, and shook her head. "It *has* been—unpleasant."

"Just plain stubbornness," he said, and their eyes wet warily. "All accidents and never any proof of anything else." His fingers found and gripped the handle of his cup.

In an attempt at modesty, she looked down at her plate. "Four

towns in three years." She could not restrain the smile of triumph curving her lips. "Ever since he was six."

"A different way every time, too," Mr. Derrick said warmly. "He's got imagination, that boy. I hope he doesn't lose it."

"I worry more about his self-control than I do about his imagination," she confessed, her smile disappearing. "The last time, I couldn't help but wonder. It bothered me. He was angry—something about some stolen marbles. And he tends to smile so broadly just before he's ready to—" She broke off and added, "Well, he's only nine." She bit into her sandwich. "He has a new friend," she told her husband, and he looked at her with interest. "Billy Anders. They've been playing together after school at Billy's. Walt had lunch there yesterday and today Billy's coming here."

Mr. Derrick was silent but his expression was alert and waiting.

"Mrs. Anders called yesterday morning and asked if Walt could have lunch with Billy. I said yes and we got to talking, oh, about our two boys—Billy's an only child, too—and school and recipes and—" She put down her sandwich, stood, and went once more to the window. "Here they come now," she said. "Oh, they're skipping. Walt never skips unless he's happy."

Mr. Derrick spooned sugar into his empty coffee cup.

"Billy isn't quite up to Walt. He's lagging behind, but of course, he's smaller." A shout of childish laughter sounded from outside as a stone skimmed over the surface of the pond. Mrs. Derrick watched the two boys. "Billy seems so small for his age—downright frail looking. Almost as if a good wind might blow him away. Seems like Walt picks out that type for his friends, not that he'd have to. Well, they say opposites attract." She cleared her throat. "I think I'll call Mrs. Anders and let her know Billy's here so she won't worry." She faced her husband then, frowning thoughtfully. "She struck me as a bit on the nervous side."

"Good idea," he approved eagerly. "If she gets edgy and comes over to check on them, it could spoil their—friendship."

"Obviously," she said. "There mustn't be any interference with their play." She walked to the other end of the kitchen, picked up the telephone receiver, dialed, and waited.

A thin voice questioned, "Hello?"

"Mrs. Anders? This is Mrs. Derrick, Walt's mother. I just thought I'd tell you that Billy's here. He and Walt are just about to come in for lunch."

"Oh, yes, well, I—" the voice trailed off.

"Well, I just didn't want you to worry. His first time coming here and all."

"Yes, that's kind of you. I do tend to worry about him. You've probably noticed he's a delicate child."

"Well—" Mrs. Derrick thought of Billy's thinness, especially his pale narrow face and underfleshed arms. "Maybe he could use a special diet, you know—plenty of vitamins and all that." She laughed a little. "Well, I won't keep you, Mrs. Anders. I hear the boys coming now. I'll see that Billy has a big glass of milk with his lunch."

"Thank you." Mrs. Anders coughed.

"You're welcome," Mrs. Derrick said. "Goodbye for now. I'll be talking to you again soon." She started back toward the stove and stopped, smiling, as the door opened and the two boys came in.

"Hi, Mom!" Walt was rather large for his age, but his wide blue eyes and freckles and the gap between his front teeth made his face look very young.

"Hello, Walt, dear." She noticed that his cub scout kerchief which he liked to wear with his school clothes was splashed with pond water, but she decided not to mention it. "Well, this must be Billy." She turned to Mr. Derrick. "This is Billy Anders."

"Hello, Billy."

Billy, blond and brown eyed, smiled shyly.

Mrs. Derrick lifted the lid from the frying pan. "You boys wash your hands and sit down now. I've kept your food warm."

At the kitchen sink, Walt and Billy let water dribble briefly over their fingers and wiped their hands on paper towels. Mrs. Derrick brought their sandwiches to the table and, as they seated themselves, went to the refrigerator and poured two glasses of milk.

She set the milk on the table before the children and asked her husband, "Do you want a piece of pie?"

"Not right now, thank you," he answered. "If it's all right, I'll wait and have dessert with the boys."

They ate quickly. Walt finished first and pushed back his plate. He looked measuringly and a little dreamily at Billy. "You look something like Frankie," he said. "He was one of my pals."

"Where does he live?" Billy asked.

Walt laughed. "He doesn't live anywhere any more. He hung himself." He saw Billy turn to look

at him. "In his garage. I cut him down, but it was too late by then. His face was all blue."

Billy stared at him. He put the rest of his sandwich on his plate and was silent.

"He didn't look as bad as Paul did, though," Walt added. "He was another pal of mine, after Frankie."

Billy swallowed. "Did—did Paul hang himself, too?"

"Nah, he tripped and hit his head on a rock," Walt answered. "Busted his brains out."

"Walt," Mrs. Derrick said firmly, "that isn't very nice talk at the table."

"OK, OK." Walt grinned at her. "C'mon, Billy, let's go outside." They pushed back their chairs and stood up.

"Don't you want some pie?" Mrs. Derrick asked.

They shook their heads and Billy said, "Thanks for lunch, Mrs. Derrick."

"C'mon, c'mon." Walt shoved him out of the door ahead of him.

Alone again, the Derricks looked at each other. "Nice looking boy, Billy," Mr. Derrick remarked.

"Yes," she said, "I suppose he is, if you like the frail type. Personally, I like to see boys like Walt, with rosy cheeks and some meat on their bones."

"Yes, you're right." He shifted in his chair. "Well, I'd like to have that pie now, if you don't mind, and then I suppose I'd better get back to work. What kind is it?"

"Apple." She gave him a slice of pie and sat down beside him. "I picked the apples from our own trees yesterday. There aren't many left on a tree, but there're so many trees."

"It's good pie." He finished eating and filled and lighted his pipe.

The loud sound of a splash came from outside, and another. The Derricks looked at each other and away and said nothing. A mockingbird began to sing, stopped, and began again. There were gurgling sounds which faded as the birdsong ended until, finally, there was no sound at all.

"He didn't use much imagination this time," Mr. Derrick said and stood up. "He's getting older and just using what's handy."

"He was calm and sure of himself," she said with pride. "He's growing up."

"Not really cold enough yet to head south, either. Well—" he turned to look at Walt who was just coming in the door—"I guess a few weeks more or less won't matter."

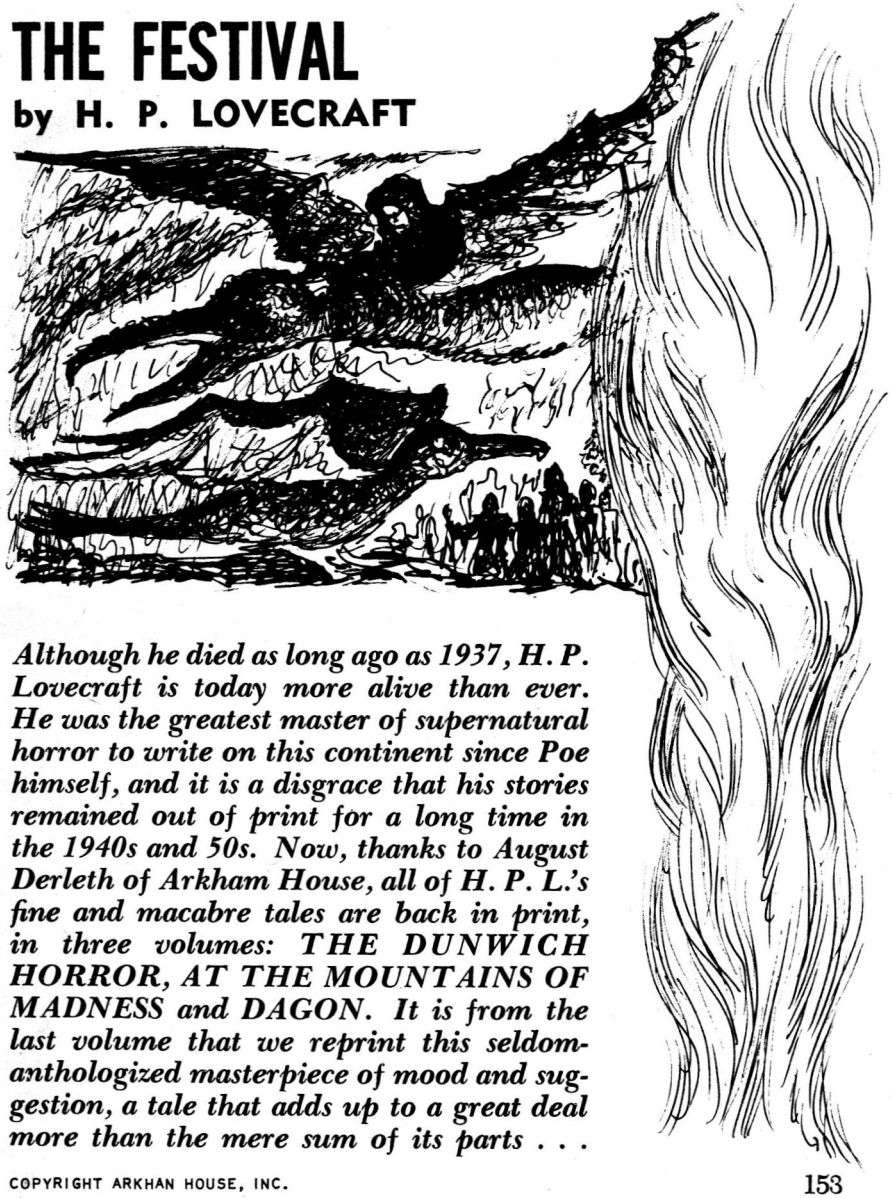
Walt bent down and picked up the toolkit with the red letters printed on it. He straightened and handed it to his father and then walked to his mother's side. He stood there smiling up at her. One of his front teeth was loose and he wriggled it with his tongue. He looked like a sturdy, freckled angel.

*Efficiut Daemones, ut quae non sunt, sic tamen quasi sint, conspiceda hominibus exhibeant.*

*LACTANTIUS*

# THE FESTIVAL

## by H. P. LOVECRAFT



***Although he died as long ago as 1937, H. P. Lovecraft is today more alive than ever. He was the greatest master of supernatural horror to write on this continent since Poe himself, and it is a disgrace that his stories remained out of print for a long time in the 1940s and 50s. Now, thanks to August Derleth of Arkham House, all of H. P. L.'s fine and macabre tales are back in print, in three volumes: THE DUNWICH HORROR, AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS and DAGON. It is from the last volume that we reprint this seldom-anthologized masterpiece of mood and suggestion, a tale that adds up to a great deal more than the mere sum of its parts . . .***

I WAS FAR from home, and the spell of the eastern sea was upon me. In the twilight I heard it pounding on the rocks, and I knew it lay just over the hill where the twisting willows writhed against the clearing sky and the first stars of evening. And because my fathers had called me to the old town beyond, I pushed on through the shallow, new-fallen snow along the road that soared lonely up to where Aldebaran twinkled among the trees; on toward the very ancient town I had never seen but often dreamed of.

It was the Yuletide, that men call Christmas though they know in their hearts it is older than Bethlehem and Babylon, older than Memphis and mankind. It was the Yuletide, and I had come at last to the ancient sea town where my people had dwelt and kept festival in the elder time when festival was forbidden; where also they had commanded their sons to keep festival once every century, that the memory of primal secrets might not be forgotten. Mine were an old people, and were old even when this land was settled three hundred years before. And they were strange, because they had come as dark furtive folk from opiate southern gardens of orchids, and spoken another tongue before they learnt the tongue of the blue-eyed fishers. And now they were scattered, and shared only the rituals of mysteries that none living could understand. I was the only one who came back that night to the old fishing town as legend bade, for only the poor and the lonely remember.

Then beyond the hill's crest I saw Kingsport outspread frostily in the gloaming; snowy Kingsport with its ancient vanes and steeples, ridgepoles and chimney-pots, wharves and small bridges, willow-trees and graveyards; endless labyrinths of steep, narrow, crooked streets, and dizzy church-crowned central peaks that time durst not touch; ceaseless mazes of colonial houses piled and scattered at all angles and levels like a child's disordered blocks; antiquity hovering on grey wings over winter-whitened gables and gambrel roofs; fanlights and small-paned windows one by one gleaming out in the cold dusk to join Orion and the archaic stars. And against the rotting wharves the sea pounded; the secretive, immemorial sea out of which the people had come in the elder time.

Beside the road at its crest a still higher summit rose, bleak and windswept, and I saw that it was a burying-ground where black gravestones stuck ghoulishly through the snow like the decayed fingernails of a gigantic corpse. The printless road was very lonely, and sometime I thought I heard a distant horrible

creaking as of a gibbet in the wind. They had hanged four kinsmen of mine for witchcraft in 1692, but I did not know just where.

As the road wound down the seaward slope I listened for the merry sounds of a village at evening, but did not hear them. Then I thought of the season, and felt that these old Puritan folk might well have Christmas customs strange to me, and full of silent hearthside prayer. So after that I did not listen for wayfarers, kept on down past the hushed lighted farmhouses and shadowy stone walls to where the signs of ancient shops and sea taverns creaked in the salt breeze, and the grotesque knockers of pillared doorways glistened along deserted unpaved lanes in the light, curtained windows.

I had seen maps of the town, and knew where to find the home of my people. It was told that I should be known and welcome, for village legend lives long; so I hastened through Back Street to Circle Court, and across the fresh snow on the one full flagstone pavement in the town, to where Green Lane leads off behind the Market House. The old maps still held good, and I had no trouble; through at Arkham they must have lied when they said the trolleys ran to this place, since I was not a wire overhead. Snow would have hid the rails in any case. I was glad I had chosen to walk, for the white village had seemed very beautiful from the hill; and now I was eager to knock at the door of my people, the seventh house on the left in Green Lane, with an ancient peaked roof and jutting second story, all built before 1650.

There were lights inside the house when I came upon it, and I saw from the diamond window-panes that it must have been kept very close to its antique state. The upper part overhung the narrow grass-grown street and nearly met the over-hanging part of the house opposite, so that I was almost in a tunnel, with the low stone doorstep wholly free from snow. There was no sidewalk, but many houses had high doors reached by double flights of steps with iron railings. It was an odd scene, and because I was strange to New England I had never known its like before. Though it pleased me, I would have relished it better if there had been footprints in the snow, and people in the streets, and a few windows without drawn curtains.

Some fear had been gathering in me, perhaps because of the strangeness of my heritage, and the bleakness of the evening, and the queerness of the silence in that aged town of curious customs. And when my knock was answered I was fully afraid, because I had not heard any footsteps before the

door creaked opened. But I was not afraid long, for the gowned, slippered old man in the doorway had a bland face that reassured me; and though he made signs that he was dumb, he wrote a quaint and ancient welcome with the stylus and wax tablet he carried.

He beckoned me into a low, candle-lit room with massive exposed rafters and dark, stiff, sparse furniture of the seventeenth century. The past was vivid there, for not an attribute was missing. There was a cavernous fireplace and a spinning-wheel at which a bent old woman in loose wrapper and deep pole-bonnet sat back toward me, silently spinning despite the festive season. An indefinite dampness seemed upon the place, and I marvelled that no fire should be blazing. The highbacked settle faced the row of curtained windows at the left, and seemed to be occupied, though I was not sure. I did not like everything about what I saw, and felt again the fear I had had. This fear grew stronger from what had before lessened it, for the more I looked at the old man's bland face the more its very blandness terrified me. The eyes never moved, and the skin was too much like wax. Finally I was sure it was not a face at all, but a fiendishly cunning mask. But the flabby hands, curiously gloved, wrote genially on the tablet and told me I must wait a while before I could be led to the place of the festival.

Pointing to a chair, table, and pile of books, the old man now left the room; and when I sat down to read I saw that the books were hoary and mouldy, and that they included old Morryster's wild *Marvells of Science*, the terrible *Saducismus Triumphatus* of Joseph Glanvil, published in 1681, the shocking *Daemonolatreia* of Remigius, printed in 1595 at Lyons, and worst of all, the unmentionable *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, in Olaus Wormius' forbidden Latin translation; a book which I had never seen, but of which I had heard monstrous things whispered. No one spoke to me, but I could hear the creaking of signs in the wind outside, and the whir of the wheel as the bonneted old woman continued her silent spinning, spinning. I thought the room and the books and the people very morbid and disquieting, but because an old tradition of my fathers had summoned me to strange feastings, I resolved to expect queer things. So I tried to read, and soon became tremblingly absorbed by something I found in that accursed *Necronomicon*; a thought and a legend too hideous for sanity or consciousness, but I disliked it when I fancied I heard the closing of one of the windows that the settle faced, as

if it had been stealthily opened. It had seemed to follow a whirring that was not of the old woman's spinning-wheel. This was not much, though, for the old woman was spinning very hard, and the aged clock had been striking. After that I lost the feeling that there were persons on the settle, and was reading intently and shudderingly when the old man came back booted and dressed in a loose antique costume, and sat down on that very bench, so that I could not see him. It was certainly nervous waiting, and the blasphemous book in my hands made it doubly so. When eleven struck, however, the old man stood up, glided to a massive carved chest in a corner, and got two hooded cloaks; one of which he donned, and the other of which he draped round the

old woman, who was ceasing the monotonous spinning. Then they both started for the outer door; the woman lamely creeping, and the old man, after picking up the very book I had been reading, beckoning me as he drew his hood over that unmoving face or mask.

We went out into the moonless and tortuous network of that incredibly ancient town; went out as the lights in the curtained windows disappeared one by one, and the Dog Star leered at the throng of cowled, cloaked figures that poured silently from every doorway and formed monstrous processions up this street and that, past the creaking signs and antediluvian gables, the thatched roofs and diamond-paned windows; threading precipitous lanes where decaying houses overlapped and crumbled together, gliding across open courts and churchyards where the bobbing lanthorns made eldritch drunken constellations.

Amid these hushed throngs I followed my voiceless guides; jostled by elbows that seemed preternaturally soft, and pressed by chests and stomachs that seemed abnormally pulpy; but seeing never a face and hearing never a word. Up, up, up, the eery columns slithered, and I saw all the travellers were converging as they flowed near a sort of focus of crazy alleys at the top of

a high hill in the centre of the town, where perched a great white church. I had seen it from the road's crest when I looked at Kingsport in the new dusk, and it had made me shiver because Aldebaran had seemed to balance itself a moment on the ghostly spire.

There was an open space around the church; partly a churchyard with spectral shafts, and partly a half-paved square swept nearly bare of peaked roofs and overhanging gables. Death-fires danced over the tombs, revealing gruesome vistas, though queerly failing to cast any shadows. Past the churchyard, where there were no houses, I could see over the hill's summit and watch the glimmer of stars on the harbour, though the town was invisible in the dark. Only once in a while a lanthorn bobbed horribly through serpentine alleys on its way to overtake the throng that was now slipping speechlessly into the church. I waited till the crowd had oozed into the black doorway, and till all the stragglers had followed. The old man was pulling at my sleeve, but I was determined to be the last. Crossing the threshold into the swarming temple of unknown darkness, I turned once to look at the outside world as the churchyard phosphorescence cast a sickly glow on the hilltop pavement. And as I did so I shuddered. For though the wind had not left much snow, a few patches did remain on the path near the door; and in that fleeting backward look it seemed to my troubled eyes that they bore no mark of passing feet, not even mine.

The church was scarce lighted by all the lanthorns that had entered it, for most of the throng had already vanished. They had streamed up the aisle between the high pews to the trapdoor of the vaults which yawned loathsomely open just before the pulpit, and were now squirming noiselessly in. I followed dumbly down the footworn steps and into the dark, suffocating crypt. The tail of that sinous line of night marches seemed very horrible, and as I saw them wriggling into a venerable tomb they seemed more horrible still. Then I noticed that the tomb's floor had an aperture down which the throng was sliding, and in a moment we were all descending an ominous staircase of rough-hewn stone; a narrow spiral staircase damp and peculiarly odorous, that wound endlessly down into the bowels of the hill past monotonous walls of dripping stone blocks and crumbling mortar. It was a silent, shocking descent, and I observed after a horrible interval that the walls and steps were changing in nature, as if chiselled out of the solid rock. What mainly troubled

me was that the myriad footfalls made no sound and set up no echoes. After more aeons of descent I saw some side passages or burrows leading from unknown recesses of blackness to this shaft of nighted mystery. Soon they became excessively numerous, like impious catacombs of nameless menace; and their pungent odour of decay grew quite unbearable. I knew we must have passed down through the mountain and beneath the earth of Kingsport itself, and I shivered that a town should be so aged and maggoty with subterraneous evil.

Then I saw the lurid shimmering of pale light, and heard the insidious lapping of sunless waters. Again I shivered, for I did not like the things that the night had brought, and wished bitterly that no forefather had summoned me to this primal rite. As the steps and the passage grew broader, I heard another sound, the thin, whining mockery of a feeble flute; and suddenly there spread out before me the boundless vista of an inner world—a vast fungous shore litten by a belching column of sick greenish flame and washed by a wide oily river that flowed from abysses frightful and unsuspected to join the blackest gulfs of immemorial ocean.

Fainting and gasping, I looked at that unhallowed Erbus of titan toadstools, leprous fire and slimy water, and saw the cloaked

throngs forming a semicircle around the blazing pillar. It was the Yule-rite, older than man and fated to survive him; the primal rite of the solstice and of spring's promise beyond the snows; the rite of fire and evergreen, light and music. And in the stygian grotto I saw them do the rite, and adore the sick pillar of flame, and throw into the water handfuls gouged out of the viscous vegetation which glittered green in the chlorotic glar. I saw this, and I saw something amorphously squatted far away from the light, piping noisomely on a flute; and as the thing piped I thought I heard noxious muffled flutterings in the foetid darkness where I could not see. But what frightened me most was that flaming column; spouting volcanically from depths profound and inconceivable, casting no shadows as healthy flame should, and coating the nitrous stone with a nasty, venomous verdigris. For in all that seething combustion no warmth lay, but only the clammines of death and corruption.

The man who had brought me now squirmed to a point directly beside the hideous flame, and made stiff ceremonial motions to the simicircle he faced. At certain stages of the ritual they did grovelling obeisance, especially when he held above his head that abhorrent *Necronomicon* he had taken with him; and I shared all the obeisances because I had been summoned to this festival by the writings of my forefathers. Then the old man made a signal to the half-seen flute-player in the darkness, which player thereupon changed its feeble drone to a scarce louder drone in another key; precipitating as it did so a horror unthinkable and unexpected. At this horror I sank nearly to the lichened earth, transfixed with a dread not of this or any world, but of the mad spaces between the stars.

Out of the unimaginable blackness beyond the gangrenous glare of that cold flame, out of the tartarean leagues through which that oily river rolled uncanny, unheard, and unsuspected, there flopped rhythmically a horde of tame, trained, hybrid winged things that no sound eye could ever wholly grasp, or sound brain ever wholly remember. They were not altogether crows, nor moles nor buzzards, nor ants, nor vampire bats, nor decomposed human beings; but something I cannot and must not recall. They flopped limply along, half with their webbed feet and half with their membranous wings; and as they reached the throng of celebrants the cowled figures seized and mounted them, and rode off one by one along the raches of that unlighted river, into pits and galleries of panic where poison springs feed frightful and undiscoverable cataracts.

The old spinning woman had gone with the throng, and the old man remained only because I had refused when he motioned me to seize an animal and ride like the rest. I saw when I staggered to my feet that the amorphous flute-player had rolled out of sight, but that two of the beasts were patiently standing by. As I hung back, the old man produced his stylus and tablet and wrote that he was the true deputy of my fathers who had founded the Yule worship in this ancient place; that it had been decreed I should come back, and that the most secret mysteries were yet to be performed. He wrote this in a very ancient hand, and when I still hesitated he pulled from his loose robe a seal ring and a watch, both with my family arms, to prove that he was what he said.

But it was a hideous proof, because I knew from old papers that that watch had been buried with my great-great-great-great-grandfather in 1698.

Presently the old man drew back his hood and pointed to the family resemblance in his face, but I only shuddered, because I was sure that the face was merely a devilish waxen mask. The flopping animals were now scratching restlessly at the lichens, and I saw that the old man was nearly as restless himself. When one of the things began to waddle and edge away, he turned quickly to stop it; so that the suddenness of his motion dislodged the waxen mask from what should have been his head. And then, because that nightmare's position barred me from the stone staircase, I flung myself into the river, flung myself into that putresent juice of earth's inner horrors before the madness of my screams could bring down upon me all the charnel legions these pest-gulfs might conceal.

At the hospital they told me I had been found half-frozen in Kingsport Harbour at dawn, clinging to the drifting spar that accident sent to save me. They told me I had taken the wrong fork of the hill road the night before, and fallen over the cliffs at Orange Point; a thing they deduced from prints found in the snow. There was nothing I could say, because everything was wrong. Everything was wrong, with the broad windows showing a sea of roofs in which only about

one in five was ancient, and the sound of trolleys and motors in the streets below. They insisted that this was Kingsport, and I could not deny it. When I went delirious at hearing that the hospital stood near the old churchyard on Central Hill, they sent me to St. Mary's Hospital in Arkham, where I could have better care. I liked it there, for the doctors were broadminded, and even lent me their influence in obtaining the carefully sheltered copy of Alhazred's objectionable *Necronomicon* from the library of Miskatonic University. They said something about a "psychosis", and agreed I had better get any harassing obsessions off my mind.

So I read that hideous chapter, and shuddered doubly because it was indeed not new to me. I had seen it before, let footprints tell what they might; and where it was I had seen it were best forgotten. There was no one—in waking hours—who could remind me of it; but my dreams are filled with terror, because of phrases I dare not quote, I dare quote only one paragraph, put into such English as I can make from the awkward Low Latin.

"The nethermost caverns," wrote the mad Arab, "are not for the fathoming of eyes that see; for their marvels are strange and terrific. Cursed the ground where dead thoughts live new and oddly bodied, and evil the mind that is held by no head. Wisely did Ibn Schacabao say, that happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy the town at night whose wizard are all ashes. For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fats and instructs *the very worm that gnaws;* till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swells monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl."

(continued from other side)

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