

GUILTY

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

**HORROR IN
THE NIGHT**

IND

by KOLLER ERNST

MARCH

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ALL
NEW
STORIES

VAMPIRE GIRL

by BRYCE WALTON

THE WOMAN AND THE AXE

by GIL BREWER



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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

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VAMPIRE GIRL

by BRYCE WALTON

The patient had a delusion she needed to drink blood

IT was five p.m. Friday. On the ledge outside the tenth floor window of an office building on N. E. 32 Street, a man appeared. He perched there screaming and entertaining the crowd below with repeated promises that he would soon jump.

Fire trucks also appeared be-

low. Men struggled with nets. Other men with grappling hooks crawled over the roof. Lieutenant Bill Hall stepped into the shadowed office and looked at the young man silhouetted in the window.

"My father-image is dead," he screamed. "I have nothing to live for."



Lt. Hall, a big, plodding, practical and serious man, did not believe in suicide. He did not believe in anything that failed to make the simplest kind of sense. Suicide was sheer nonsense.

"Son," Lt. Hall said, "get the hell inside here. I want to talk to you."

The young man turned. "Don't call me that," he yelled. "You're not my father. I never had a father. That was my trouble. He was my father-image. I was just completing a successful transference, and now he's dead."

Puzzled, an unusual condition for Lt. Hall, he turned and looked at the couch to the right of the white oak desk. A man rather tall and slim, and dressed in a rumpled tweed suit, lay stiffly on the couch. His mouth hung open. One hand dangled near the floor where lay a bottle of spilled white tablets, and an aluminum Yo-Yo.

As the young man in the window moved, a ray of the setting sun slipped passed him. It reflected from the Yo-Yo and

shone directly into Lt. Hall's eyes, momentarily blinding him. At this moment, the young man groaned and fell inside the office and lay in a dead faint on the plush gray shag rug.

Officer Jim Sloane came in and revived the young man while Lt. Hall bent over the man on the couch. Lt. Hall had seen enough dead men to know another one on sight, but for some reason he got the impression that this fellow was somehow the deadest dead man he had ever come across. Ridiculous, of course, because there weren't degrees of being dead.

Vaguely, Lt. Hall heard the vast sigh of relief bellow upward from the crowd below, tintured with an unconscious disappointment.

"Well, well," Lt. Hall murmured. The dead man's face was the color of wax, or rather, it was totally colorless and transparent. The contours of facial bones were starkly outlined as though threatening to push through the skin.

"This kid's coming around all right," he heard Sloane say.

"This one's dead," Lt. Hall

said. "Rigor mortis."

"The selfish hypocrite," the young man began screaming again. "Pretending he loved me and cared for me. Working on me and becoming my father-image, then killing himself. Rejecting me, abandoning me. The bastard, he didn't love me. He didn't care. Who ever cares about me?"

The young man then refused to say another word and was forceably removed from the office and taken to the precinct station for later questioning. The wagon and the medics and photographers arrived, together with the Assistant Medical Examiner, all of whom performed their cursory duties. And then Dr. Harold Eastman, psychiatrist, was taken away for the coroner's post mortem.

AFTER everyone else had left the scene, Lt. Hall stood alone in the office looking around and enjoying a cigar. The MA had said the pills were sleeping tablets. It seemed an obvious suicide. But until the report from the coroner's office, you were never sure. Meanwhile, Lt. Hall could

make certain precautionary efforts in preparation for an unexpected lab report that might suggest murder. In a way, Lt. Hall hoped it would be murder. Murder seemed a far more sensible thing than suicide.

Things, he thought, just never made the proper sense, and sometimes the suggestion of illogic all around made him uneasy. In fact, Lt. Hall, for no reason that he could explain, felt very uneasy now.

He picked up the Yo-Yo with his handkerchief and put it on the desk. Sloane had taken the sleeping tablets with him over to the police laboratory.

"Thirty-five bucks an hour," Lt. Hall mused. "This plush office. If it was suicide, then why didn't he have *his* head examined?"

Suicide among professional men was relatively high. But he couldn't off hand recall any doctor killing himself, at least not in his jurisdiction. And personal experience was the only kind that Lt. Hall considered relevant.

"This one was a head-doctor though," he thought. "They

call it mental disease. Couldn't that kind of disease be contagious? Like small pox? Maybe Eastman had caught something."

Interesting thought. It was growing dark rapidly. He switched on the green-shaded desk lamp and listened to the evening wind rising. He sat down on the corner of the desk and looked at the big metal cabinet, then at the couch.

The medical examiner had said that Dr. Eastman must have lain there on his own couch for at least 24 hours. Hall checked the dead man's appointment schedule stuck with scotch tape to the top of the desk leaf. The patients' names were all there. Eastman had had several scheduled appointments for the day, ending with that of the young man who had arrived at four forty-five. The square labeled 8:00 p.m. merely had the word "she" written in it.

The other patients appearing for their appointments throughout the day may or may not have forced their way into the Doctor's inner sanctum and

found him dead. If any had done so, only the suicidal young man had called attention to his discovery. That young man—or any of a murdered psychiatrist's patients—would certainly make interesting suspects.

A suspect, for example, who played with a Yo-Yo. Assuming, naturally, that Dr. Eastman had not been addicted to making a Yo-Yo crawl up and down thirty-six inches of string.

The idea that an authority on what made human beings tick might have died playing with a Yo-Yo irritated Lt. Hall's sense of propriety and he dismissed the thought.

He stopped shuffling through the neatly-filed folder of case histories in the filing cabinet because it made him feel somewhat like a Peeping Tom. He found lipstick and bobbie pins in one of the desk drawers and drew certain logical conclusions. He wondered about Eastman the man, whether or not he was married, and other questions. All of which weren't important, and wouldn't be until he got the coroner's report.

Then he saw the tape record-

er in the bottom desk drawer. After a moment's hesitation, he switched it on.

Half an hour later, his hand was nervous as he hastily lit a fresh cigar. The room was dark beyond the range of the shaded desk lamp. The room was unpleasantly quiet.

"Well," he said. "Well, well."

He reversed the tape, pressed the "play" button again. He leaned back in the leather chair, put his feet on the desk, and turned up the volume. But Dr. Eastman's posthumous voice still did not project well. It had a distant, weak sound.

This time, Lt. Hall listened more attentively, while his big homely face assumed the determined but uneasy look of the practical tourist being entertained by an Indian rope trick, or an act of levitation.

I TOOK on this new patient Dr. Eastman said from the tape, two weeks ago, May sixteen, after receiving a desperate phone call. The significant thing is that she called that first time after dark, from a public phone booth. She had

called my office. I wasn't in and she called my home number. She refused to give her name. She never told me where she lived or worked.

I had determined not to take on any new patients. I was suffering from exhaustion. I was considerably debilitated by the imposed stresses and strains of my numerous patients. My appetite had suffered. I was tired and found it difficult to get any genuine rest at night. I had lost a great deal of weight from lack of healthy nourishment and sleep. On the other hand, it was always my policy never to turn down a desperate call for help.

"All right," I said. "Tomorrow at eleven, would that be—"

"Oh no," she interrupted. "I must make an appointment for sometime in the evening, after dark."

Later she said to me coyly, "I guess you would say that I'm allergic to light."

I arranged to see her that evening at my office. I made an eight o'clock appointment for her. But she didn't appear. The following night she called again, still desperate, practically hysterical, and apologized

for not showing up, and begged me for another appointment. "I just couldn't make it last night," she said. "Because of the rain. I can't go out in the rain."

I agreed to see her that evening at eight and she arrived promptly. She was a strangely beautiful girl, hardly out of her teens, it seemed to me, although she never told me her age. She had a childlike quality that alternated with spells of brooding that made her seem much older.

She was very thin. She had bright red hair. Her skin was unbelievably white. She took an aluminum Yo-Yo out of her handbag and began playing with it as she sat a c r o s s the desk from me. When she looked at me with an exceptionally direct and uninhibited stare, I noticed that her eyes were a peculiar shade of jade green.

I asked a number of routine questions, trying to classify her generally b e f o r e proceeding. Despite my determination not to take on any more patients, I agreed to take her, and afterward I couldn't understand

why. In the first place, as I have said, I was exhausted with listening to patients all day. They were literally draining me of my vitality, I felt, and I knew I was liable to break down.

In the second place, after a few preliminary physical and psychological tests, including an electroencephalograph, I knew she was markedly schizophrenic. A nearly hopeless confusion of fantasy and reality. I had made it a strict policy never to take on schizophrenics because of the negligible percentage of effected cures.

Just the same, as I have said, I agreed to see her regularly, eight o'clock at my office, three nights a week.

SHE didn't lie on the couch until the second session. During the first session she sat across the desk and played with the Yo-Yo. The Yo-Yo irritated me from the beginning. I found myself staring at it as it rose and fell hypnotically on its red string. The light from the desk lamp shone on it, reflected into my eyes. I avoided looking at the Yo-Yo as much as possible, and, of course, at-

tempted to hide my irritation from my patient.

When she finally lay down on the couch she did not lie on her back, but on her side, so that she could, from time to time, run the Yo-Yo up and down.

It was, of course, an anxiety-relieving device. Similar to nail-biting, smoking, doodling, other such habits. It was a symptom, and, as such, I could hardly object to it, because my purpose is to provoke symptoms and anxiety in order to study and alleviate them. That fifty minutes was hers. And it was not incumbent upon me to protest against the monotonous playing with the Yo-Yo. As the sessions continued, the Yo-Yo, however much it was relieving her anxiety, provoked my own.

She free-associated readily enough. She talked constantly of weird dreams which she later insisted had, at least in part, actually occurred. A common characteristic of severe schizophrenics.

Physically, I had found nothing wrong with her except anemia, and that was rather serious. I recommended medical treatment. But I could find no

indication of organic disintegration usually found in schizophrenics. Her anemia, I decided, accounted for her obsessive idea that she hungered for blood. Her anemia created and reinforced the obsession. And the obsession increased the emotional state that encouraged the anemia. Such is the vicious and inevitable cycle.

I wanted to break the cycle, of course, and I knew it would be a long difficult pull, with a good chance of failure. But she intrigued me. The nature of the delusions fascinated me, despite my generally run-down condition. There is a terrible similarity in mental illnesses. But she was a very exceptional patient, I must admit.

Her dreams and fantasies invariably involved darkness, the night, picking up children, sometimes young men, and, after somehow rendering them unconscious and taking their blood, murdering them.

She would entice men to her room, or more often allow herself to be picked up and taken to their rooms, or for drives in a car. The illogic and the inconsistencies of these fantasies and dreams made them ob-

viously fantasies and dreams, despite her insistence that they had actually happened. Later she said that murder was not the object and that most of the time they didn't die.

I would sit listening and trying to avoid looking at the shining disc of the Yo-Yo rise and fall. It made me strangely sleepy, or rather numb mentally, perhaps semi-hypnotized, and sometimes I would be startled into the realization that I hadn't been listening at all to her speaking, that minutes of unawareness had passed.

I forget now which session it was—perhaps the third or fourth—but I woke up and found that she had left my office while I was in some sort of stupor. It was the first time I had ever been guilty of falling asleep during a session. An analyst, in spite of himself, is often bored. But he tries not even to yawn in a patient's face, not to mention passing out.

Once, in the next session, I asked her, "Have you always had this fear of the dark?"

In schizophrenics, a partial

or complete reversal of more previous conditions is observed. They are usually found to be the opposites of what they once were. Former pleasures and pursuits suddenly develop into depraved, suicidal, or antisocial behavior. However, she answered that she had always been afraid of the dark, had always been the way she was now, and couldn't remember having been any different.

Free association, dreams, drugs, nothing elicited any information from her unconscious that contradicted her assertions.

"I can," she said, "remember a house in the hills back in the woods, away off somewhere. It was an old house. The road was muddy and no one ever came there. I can't remember my parents but they were there. We went out after dark. But never in the rain. It seems like a dream. We always slept during the days and went out at nights."

I asked her where she lived now, and she wouldn't tell me. I asked her how she lived, where she worked. She answered that she worked as a part-time waitress, at nights.

She slept during the days. On rainy nights she never went to work, but that was why she was a part-time waitress. There was always a job for her.

Obsessed as she was, she became even more of an obsession with me. This poor, lonely and wretched girl—that she should have to believe herself some sort of night creature, some sort of vampire, in order to feel some identity and importance, this was intolerable to me. I determined to break the delusions imprisoning her. My other patients became less and less significant, banal is the word. My exhaustion increased. I began to cancel daytime appointments.

Perhaps I should have laughed more, if not in their face, at least after my patients left me alone. Every patient suggested at times an animated Charles Addams drawing, but it is the burden of my profession that every egomaniacal and tortured soul must be taken with absolute dead seriousness. Other wise, their cure is endangered. A maximum identification with them is necessary for

me. It cannot be achieved by taking fantasies, delusions, hallucinations, and babblings in any whimsical way.

Finally I asked her point-blank if she considered herself to be, somehow, not human. She answered that she had never felt human. I watched the damned Yo-Yo flash up and down on its red string.

"That's why I'm here," she said simply. "I've tried to explain it to myself some other way. I'm not like other people. Sometimes I want to be. But I never have been and I don't feel human at all. I feel—something like a vampire, sometimes."

I had avoided using or hinting at such direct labeling of the obsession.

"Well," I said, "we can start on the road to recovery by making it absolutely and categorically a fact that you are not now nor have you ever been any such damn thing as that."

"Is there any other explanation?" she asked.

"Yes, there is," I said. "Or I wouldn't be here."

I told her there was a logical, normal explanation for

her condition. I told her what it was. I knew what it was. The point to be considered was—when would she be capable of accepting a normal rational explanation? Not yet. Still, I wanted to plant the seeds in her unconscious early, give the submerged healthy part of her psyche something to feed on, something with which to combat the delusions and obsessions with which she had tried to justify her seedy existence.

I explained that her abnormal childhood environment had set the course of distorted reasoning. She had been exposed to a certain kind of weird atmosphere, and, needing some justification for her feeling of being odd and a freak, she had accepted the only reason available and had used it, built on it.

She had inherited a certain kind of anemia, I said. That explained her genuine hunger for blood. That is a common occurrence in medical case histories. The red blood cells, the erythrocytes, had been disintegrating. The chemical organisms had been involved in an intense struggle to balance. She had certain classical physical

features reinforcing the delusion. Her white skin, her red hair, green eyes. Childhood neglect, loneliness and emptiness filled in with imagination, books, movies, superstitions.

Of course it was far more involved than that. That was the basis. On it was the superstructure of neurotic blocks built high. The self-justification in being different. The over-compensation. The feelings of pride in being unique. The compensatory power image. Even of immortality perhaps.

Her anemia would be treated, and analysis in depth would start her back up the trail to normalcy. She lay on her side on the couch listening, the Yo-Yo dancing up and down. It was all I could do to keep from grabbing it away from her and throwing it into the wastepaper basket.

I assured her that she would be like the others. She would go into the sunshine and the rain and she would fall in love with a nice young man and have normal children and an apartment and a teevee set and all the rest.

But as in all cases of that sort, the patient was frightened of being cured. Unpleasant as her delusions were, they were familiar, and less terrifying than the normalcy she knew nothing about. She was like one who had never known love, knows that love is vital to healthier living, yet is afraid to love. That is the trouble, you see. This resignation to states of living death because of the fear of full life.

AN hour ago I woke up and she was gone. She had left sometime during her session. I can't remember when. It is now a little after ten o'clock. The reason I'm recording all this is because I'm afraid. The truth is, I am so physically weak I can hardly lift my own weight out of this chair. Indeed I can scarcely speak into this microphone. It isn't that I'm sleepy, you understand. It is a kind of total exhaustion together with an extreme nervous excitation that makes any kind of beneficial sleep impossible. I haven't been able to benefit from a decent hour's sleep for two weeks.

I should have gone for a thorough physical check-up months ago. I suppose the nature of my profession contributed to my not doing so. After all, I have always assured my patients that all their physical symptoms are mental. It seems only just that I should give myself the benefit of the psychiatric doubt. However, this dogmatic attitude could have been a terrible mistake. Perhaps I am exaggerating my condition tonight, but the truth is that I'm not sure I can get across the room to the couch and lie down. I will take a couple of sleeping tablets and hope for a few hours rest.

I'll cancel my appointments tomorrow. I would also cancel hers for eight tomorrow night. But I don't know how to get in touch with her, don't even know her name.

I wish I could go away, take a long vacation. Where no one ever says anything at all, never talks. Or where there are no people except perhaps those who are dumb.

I hear her footsteps. She is coming down the hall now. Coming back. They always

come back. All I can give is never enough.

But now I notice that it is raining. That is probably the explanation. She got caught in the rain and is coming back to tell me why the rain burns like fire. The truth is I don't care why anymore. There are too many of them—

L T. HALL switched off the recorder. His legs were stiff as he took his feet from the desk. He called Dr. Guthrie over at the morgue.

"Sure," Guthrie said, "He took several sleeping tablets. But that didn't kill Eastman. From causes I haven't yet been able to determine, he lost most of his blood. No internal or external indications of h e m o r rhage. No hemoptytic symptoms. Just damn near totally without any blood!"

"Is it a homicide?"

"I don't know. I don't know how. But he's just been bled white, that's all!"

There was an ominous click of a dead line.

"Well, well," Lt. Hall started to say, but was interrupted by a soft chime from the clock

and looking up he saw that it was eight o'clock. He hadn't heard the door open, but he saw a white hand move across the desk.

"I knew I left it here," she said as she dropped the Yo-Yo and it spun like a silver spider down the cord, then up, then down, then up and down, flashing it in the light from the green-shaded desk lamp.

"Well, well," Lt. Hall tried to say again, without success. He also tried to detach his gaze from the silver disc glistening while he heard her speaking softly to him about sleep and how dark it was and the silver disc grew brighter.

Then he didn't care because there was something fascinating about the Yo-Yo. And it occurred to him oddly that never in his life before had he ever been what anyone would call fascinated by anything.

And as the Yo-Yo expanded and brightened, he felt the plain simple rules that had held his life together suddenly let go, relax, expand, and with a shiver of released vibration, dance off into space.

THE END

HIRED FOR THE KILL

by AL JAMES

Paul had a sure-fire set-up for the big payoff murder

“YOU’VE got to kill her!”

Paul Clinton heard the words spoken by the woman sitting across from him. He’d thought them a thousand times. But out in the open they were harsh—jagged chunks of rock beneath bare feet. He nervously ran the palm of his hand across his broad forehead.

“You’re right of course,” he said slowly.

The girl smiled. “Of course I’m right. Isn’t that why you married her in the first place? So we could be rich?”

Paul nodded absent-mindedly, his eyes searching the dimly lighted roadhouse. No one was paying any attention to



them. They were just a couple seated in the rear booth.

The flashing neon sign on the road outside reflected through the window beside them, playing across the girl's face. The sharp, tight features were accentuated by the red glow as she eagerly leaned forward, her hand hard on his. "You've *got* to do it, Paul," she said, her low voice full of meaning.

The man nervously sipped at his drink, carefully wiping the beads of moisture away from his well-trimmed mustache. He looked up at the girl. "It's just that I can't really see any reason for killing her," he said. "I have control of all the money. I can easily give you your share now."

The girl's eyes narrowed to luminous green slits. Anger swelled the tiny wrinkles hidden by layers of powder. "Like hell you can," she spat. "That dame's worth over a million bucks. That's five hundred thousand for me. And I want every cent of it. I haven't worked in that mausoleum for three years because I'm fond of the old bat."

The man smiled grimly.

"Well, she's pretty fond of you. I wouldn't be surprised if she left you a little something in her will."

It was a poor joke. The girl snuffed out her cigarette savagely. "Go to hell," she spat angrily.

A car pulled in off the highway. Paul watched the twin lights sweep the side of the road house and vanish around back. "Supposing I don't decide to kill her," he said slowly. "Supposing I tell you to go to hell. Just what the devil can you do about it?"

A slanted smile twisted across the girl's over-full lips. "Just try it," she snapped. "What do you think the old dame will do when I tell her you married her only for the money? Do you think she'll keep you around like a favorite house cat after I flash our marriage license under her nose?" The girl lighted another cigarette, studying the silent man through the smoke. "And don't get any ideas about getting rid of me. I've got everything down on paper. If I'm found dead it will make interesting reading."

Paul sighed deeply. It was a very interesting mess. He heard the door to the roadhouse creak open. In the distance he saw the back of an overcoat approach the bar and talk to the aproned figure behind the wood.

The girl across from him stood up. "I've got to get back to the house. You better wait an hour before you come in. No sense making her suspicious now."

"Yeah," Paul agreed. "No sense."

HE watched the girl disappear out the front door and around back to the parking area. He wondered what the hell he'd ever seen in her. But it was too late for that now. He was married to two women. One a bastard and the other filthy rich. He had to admit that it had seemed like a good idea when they first thought of it. A million bucks was a lot of green. Enough to sit back and guzzle good Scotch the rest of his life.

He sipped at the drink, staring out the window at the cars speeding along the highway. So why kill the old gal? All

he had to do was hold her hand and he had everything. The big house in the country, a penthouse in New York. Plus the money.

He thought of Kate and sobered. She'd bitch until she had her way. And she'd keep her threat. If he didn't act fast she'd tell the old lady he was her legal husband.

Paul shuddered. The thought of going back into the old con racket was repulsive. He had no choice. The old dame had to go.

A deep, male voice chopped into his thoughts. "Well, well, if it ain't Paul Clinton. Long time no see."

Paul looked up from the table. The overcoat stood towering above him, a grin spread across the ugly face. "For Pete's sake," he spat. "What the hell you doing in this neck of the woods?"

The ugly face smiled thinly. "Just passing through, Clinton." The man motioned at the empty seat. "Ain't you going to ask me to sit down?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure." He waved at the seat. "Sit!"

The man grunted his frame into the booth and waved a

couple of drinks onto the table. At last he looked up from the whiskey. "I hear from the boys you been doing pretty good the last few years."

Clinton shrugged. "I suppose you might say so." He studied the man across from him, the glimmer of an idea worming its way into his skull. "You still in business?"

The man tapped a cigarette on his finger nail and stuck it into his mouth, his eyes hard on Clinton. "Yeah," he said coldly. "I'm still in business."

Clinton thought rapidly. He hated getting his own hands dirty. He'd had a lot of small mixings with the law but nothing big. He didn't relish the idea of something going wrong and having to take the big dive. He made up his mind rapidly, leaning forward on the table, lowering his voice in confidence. "What's the current price?"

The man smiled grimly, his eyes running the length of Clinton's expensive clothes. "Depends," he said slowly.

"On what?"

The man leaned back against the leather, his eyes

friendless slits. "On who gains what and how much."

"Quit the double talk," Clinton snapped angrily. "You know damned well what I'm talking about."

"Sure I do," the man smiled. "You and your wife had a bright idea about three years ago. Now that it's time you don't want to get dirty." He sucked at the cigarette, his eyes boring into Clinton. "The price to yellow backs is ten thousand bucks."

"You're still a bastard," Clinton hissed.

The man laughed. There was no humor in the sound. "Maybe so," he agreed. "But you need me."

CLINTON had to admit the man was right. He had a reputation that would chill the heart of Dracula. For a price he'd take a crack at the devil. "Okay. Ten thousand," he snapped.

"Half now."

"For Christ sake," Clinton growled. "I don't carry that much on me. I'll meet you at the junction of the highways tomorrow morning at nine."

The man scowled. "Where

the hell is that? I already got lost once tonight. That's why I came in here. To get directions."

"It's about ten miles up the road. Number 91 and 27 join in a 'Y'. You can't miss it."

"Okay," the man agreed. "Now how do I do it?"

"You have a rifle?"

"Sure," the man snapped. "What kind of a businessman do you think I am?"

Clinton ignored the caustic comment. "About five miles from Hilldale there's a cemetery. It's just about an acre square, surrounded by deep woods. My wife's brother's buried in it. I'll take her out there tomorrow at noon. You can hide in the woods and do the rest. It will be easy to pass it off as some hunter who got careless."

The man grinned, pleased. "Hey, that's good," he said. "No sweat."

"That's right," Clinton said grimly. "No sweat."

"Just one thing," the man interjected. "How can I be sure the dame with you is the right one?"

Clinton was impatient. "You can be sure," he snapped. "But

to make you feel better I'll borrow a handkerchief from her. She always carries a brown one. That's your target."

"Perfect," the man said slowly. "Real neat." He drained his drink and stood up, extending a gloved hand. "Until tomorrow when you gring the dough."

Clinton ignored the outstretched hand. The man spun on his heels and walked rapidly out of the roadhouse.

THE big house was quiet when Clinton let himself in. He looked in his wife's bedroom. She was asleep. He closed the door silently and moved down the hall to his own room.

For a long time he sat in the darkness, smoking and listening to the sounds of the country drifting in through the open window. Kate was right. The only thing to do was kill the old dame. Then he'd have the money and time to figure out a way to get rid of Kate. After that it would be nothing but whiskey and dames for the rest of his life. Clinton smiled

in the darkness. He liked that.

The noise at the door startled him. "Who's that?" he whispered nervously.

"Don't get excited," a feminine voice replied. "It's just your loving wife."

"For Christ sake," Clinton snapped. "Get the hell out of here. Supposing the old gal finds you in here?"

A dark figure moved closer and sat on the edge of the bed beside him. Moonlight filtering through the half drawn blinds flowed across the girl dressed in a thin nightgown. The dark tips of the firm breasts pressed against the flimsy material. Her teeth glowed in the darkness as she pulled her lips back in a smile. "Don't worry," she said soothingly. "She's beat from her trip to New York today."

"All the same," Clinton protested. "We should be more careful."

The girl ignored his worry. "You decided when?"

"Yeah. Tomorrow."

"Good," the girl hissed, pleased. "Let's celebrate."

"Celebrate?"

The girl wiggled out of the nightdress and lay flat on the

bed. Her voice, sultry and dipped in meaning came out of the darkness. "After all it's yours. Use it!"

Clinton did!

THE morning never seemed to end. By ten o'clock Clinton had met the gunman and given him the money and gotten back to the house.

Kate busied herself around the house doing the chores of a maid. His wife wasn't up yet.

He glanced at the hall clock. It stood at ten thirty. Clinton began to sweat. He had to get her to the cemetery by noon.

At last he heard activity upstairs. Kate passed him on the way to the kitchen. "Your wife is up, Mr. Clinton," she said, her eyes full of meaning. "She asked me to pour her coffee. She'll be right down."

Clinton nodded brusquely and moved into the breakfast room. He hadn't told Kate how it was to be done. It was none of her business.

The woman entering the room was ten years older than Clinton. Wrinkles of age traced deep valleys across the harsh skin. Her snow white hair was piled carelessly on

top of her head. She nodded at Clinton and sat down, sipping at her coffee.

He watched the aged figure in disgust. For three years he'd been forced to cater to her every whim. He must have been out of his mind last night to even consider going on living with her. He thought of the nights she demanded him and his stomach flipped.

He forced a smile to his lips. "Good morning, Clarissa," he said cheerfully. "How'd you sleep?"

"Rotten," the woman snapped, her voice dry as the toast in front of her. She stopped eating and looked at him curiously. "You look in good spirits. You must have slept well."

Clinton shrugged, pouring himself a cup of coffee from the silver decanter. "Just so so. The heat irritated me."

Clarissa poised the cup in front of her mouth. "Nothing else bothered you?"

Clinton shook his head. "No. Why?"

She swallowed the coffee and set the cup back in the saucer with a clatter. "Noth-

ing," she snapped. "Nothing at all."

Something was wrong here, Clinton thought. She suspected. That had to be it. It was lucky he'd arranged everything for today.

"I thought we might go out to the cemetery today," he said. "We haven't been there in some time." He'd expected an argument. There was none. Clarissa nodded her head.

"Good idea, Paul," she said brusquely. "I'll get ready. Tell Kate to come upstairs."

Clinton waited in the furniture cluttered front room. The big clock boomed sound in the quietness of the house. He wiped sweat from his hands and lighted a cigarette from the one he was smoking.

At last Clarissa came out of the dimness of the hall. Kate followed closely behind, carrying a large basket of flowers.

"She's going with us?" he asked, trying to keep the trembling out of his voice.

"Of course she's going with us," Clarissa snapped.

Paul glanced at Kate whose eyes were filled with mock amusement. He covered his nervousness by yanking the

front door open. It was lucky, he thought, that he'd been smart enough to have a signal.

BY the time they got to the cemetery, Clinton was a nervous wreck. No one had said a word during the short drive. He followed the two women across the well kept lawn to the brother's grave, his eyes searching the surrounding woods for some sign. All he saw were the thick trees waving gently in the breeze. He wondered if he'd been crossed.

And then he saw the glint of metal in the bushes a block away. It was all set. He helped place the flowers and straightened up, his eyes moving between the two women.

He knew the time was at hand but his voice refused to co-operate. He cleared his throat and faced Clarissa who was standing in front of him, his hand fumbling through his pockets. "Can I borrow your handkerchief?" he said huskily. "I seem to have left mine at home."

Clarissa snorted. "Just like you to be so careless." She reached in her purse. When her

hand came out it was empty. "Looks like I forgot mine too," she snapped.

"Here, take mine," Kate said from behind him.

Clinton spun around and his blood chilled. In her outstretched hand she held a *brown* handkerchief.

"Where—where did you get that?" he stammered.

Kate smiled, pushing the cloth towards him. He backed away as if she were offering him a live rattlesnake. "Why, Mrs. Clinton gave it to me for Christmas last year," she said, smiling. "For being such a good employee."

"Drop it," Clinton snapped. "For God's sake get rid of it."

It was too late. The flat bark of a rifle shattered the afternoon and Kate's face melted to blooded puty. The blow spun the body away from the startled man. It dropped lifeless to the ground, draped across a tombstone.

Clinton tore his eyes away from the still figure and leveled them on Clarissa. Her face was stone as she stood rigid in front of him.

"You knew," he accused, his voice shouting. "You knew all

the time. You wanted to get rid of her so you could have me all to yourself."

Only the lips moved in the rock face. "Did I?" she said coldly, her eyes flint.

Clinton's brain spun. The heat of the afternoon blazed into his skull. And then he remembered. Why had the man been in the neighborhood? Why had Clarissa been so concerned if he'd heard anything in the night? *Why had she gone to New York? Shooting Kate had not been an accident.*

The woman in front of him guessed his thinking. A cold smile pulled the ancient flesh back in a smile. "Ten thousand to go," she muttered.

Clinton swore an oath and dug his heels into the soft

ground, sprinting across the grass as fast as his gasping lungs would let him. He was inches away from the protective trees when he heard the rifle bark again. A red hot poker smashed at his shoulder. He stopped running and ducked for the ground.

The stars exploded in his head. He felt his legs collapse into rubber bands. Something trickled across his eyes, warm, blurring his vision. He tried to struggle to his feet. Pain smashed at his chest. A black wall started toppling onto him.

From a long distance away he heard a woman laughing. The cackle grew to hysteria.

Clinton could see nothing to laugh at!

THE END



WOMAN AND THE AXE

It was fun to make his wife think he was sick mentally

by C. B. GILFORD

THE clock struck eleven. Automatically both of them began the ritual of going to bed. He did not allow himself his customary luxury of watching her undress, for this new game was vastly more entertaining. She crawled shiveringly into her nightgown and slipped into the bed beside him. They did not kiss. They did not even say good-night.

And then the clock began again. It could be heard all the way from the living room, alive, ticking. They lay perfectly still, not touching each other. He was aware that her body was trembling. The bed could not warm her. Hours passed. He counted them, midnight, one, two. Then finally, from exhaustion perhaps, she fell asleep.

Released at last, he moved. He got out of bed, but he did it slowly, with infinite pa-



tience, a fraction of an inch at a time. The springs remained silent, the bedclothes were scarcely disturbed. She did not awaken.

On the floor, barefooted, he could proceed with absolute quiet. Moonlight was streaming through the windows. He had already selected his place to stand, where the pale beams would outline him starkly, slanting across his face to lend it a graven, mask-like quality. He went to that spot now and took up his position, close beside her, looking down at her. He set his features into an enigmatic frown...and waited.

He knew that she would awake. He knew that her tortured mind could not be completely at rest, that it would respond eventually to the psychic pressure of his riveted, concentrated stare. Actually, it took only five minutes.

She opened her eyes, not sleepily, but suddenly, into full awareness. She did not look first to see if he were still lying beside her. Rather, she seemed to know immediately where he would be, standing over her. She screamed, piercingly, in pure, awful terror.

She sprang in the direction away from him, out of the bed, and ran. Stumbling and crashing into objects in her path, she ran to the bathroom. The lock clicked behind her.

He pursued slowly, at his leisure. He went to the bathroom door and stood there, listening to the pathetic sobbing from within.

It was there that he suffered what was probably his last attack of conscience. He was of half a mind to call to her, "Marcia, come out now. I was only fooling. Playing a game. It's a nasty, cruel game, and I'm sorry. The game is over now though, and it won't happen again."

And then later, when she would have been calmer, and nestled in his arms perhaps, he would have offered the rather lame excuse he had so carefully prepared, to soothe both her and his own guilty feelings. He would have said, "Well, you know, Marcia, it really could happen. I could go suddenly, dangerously insane. People ought to be prepared for that, you know. For an emergency, like appendicitis or anything else. Well, now you've seen

what insanity looks like. Maybe now you'd know what to do."

But he didn't say either of these things somehow. He liked this too much. He had liked the look of utter fear that had ravaged her face. He had liked the sound of her scream. A sweet sound, sweeter even than the sound of her voice when she had first said, a couple of years ago, "I love you, George. Of course I'll marry you." And now...now this moment...he liked the sound of her sobbing in the darkness behind the locked door.

No, he wouldn't stop it. He couldn't, because he was enjoying himself so much. And besides, it was her own fault, in a way. He had mentioned it so casually that morning...that any husband might go suddenly berserk and murder his wife...and Marcia had been afraid...so temptingly afraid...

IN the days that passed, he became something of a virtuoso in his role. He was constantly discovering new facets of it, new avenues to explore. In only one way was he con-

sistent. He never at any time pretended to notice her reactions to his antics.

Whether she tried to assume that he was behaving normally, or cringed away from him in terror, or merely, as she often did, wept quietly and helplessly, or whether she fled home to her mother, as she did once for three days—never did he give any hint that he was aware there was anything unusual in her response to him. Thus too, he was better able to maintain his own characterization—eccentric, strange lunatic, maniacal—in turns, never the same two days in a row.

It was the very variety of possibilities which most interested him. He discovered the highest delight of all dedicated tormentors, that of devising constantly new and ever more exquisite instruments of torture. She was a willing victim because of her persevering love for him, and his only limitation was the inventiveness of his own mind.

One of the never-failing methods at his disposal and one of the easiest, he found, was also the simplest. Long

periods of brooding silence. Silence that would last a whole evening. Silence that would endure for days at a stretch, until their house seemed a tomb, inhabited by walking corpses.

They would eat together, facing each other across the table, wordless, the clicking of cutlery on plates embarrassingly, nerve-shatteringly loud. Or he would go to his book, always to the same book, always to the same page. Or sometimes he preferred to stare at her, in the midst of an awful quiet, never lowering his eyes, watching her as she occasionally tried to stare back, watching the twitching in her face, the trembling of her hands, the shivers that now and then traversed the length of her, as if icicle fingers were caressing her body.

And then, always suddenly and unexpectedly, he would change. He would talk to her. But what he said was never as it had been in the normal days of the past. His orations were concocted out of the material of nightmares, erotic, or morbid, or sadistic, but never the same. He possessed a vivid imagination and he let it work.

The tales he told her were not those of a meek, mild, nine-to-five office man, but rather more those of a dope addict who could put into language the fancies of his maddest dreams. How could she answer him, make conversation with him, when he talked like this? She couldn't. It left her dangling, helpless, more on edge than even his silences.

Sometimes he made love to her. But here again his techniques varied, till all she knew to expect was the unexpected. His was the gamut from the most violent to the most gentle. Occasionally he would seize her as a criminal stranger might. He would be in a frenzy, and he was a strong man. These encounters left her bruised and sobbing. Then again he would be tender with her and for a few moments—precious to her—things were as they had been in older, gladder days. But he was not one to grant too long a reprieve. When her happiness, her anticipation, her relief at his apparent return to normalcy, were at their peaks, he would break it off, leave her, abandon

don her to a pit of despair deeper than before. The bruises he inflicted at these times were on her soul.

It was inevitable perhaps that she should eventually think of a doctor. She found the courage to mention the subject out of the depths of her misery. With an ease that amazed her he consented.

"All right, Marcia, I'll go to see the doctor...if it will make you feel any better."

And he kept his promise. Three times he visited the renowned psychiatrist in his plush office high in the city's most imposing skyscraper. On the last visit Marcia accompanied him. They sat together facing the bespectacled, distinguished mind specialist.

"Mrs. Kasten," the man began, toward Marcia, "it was your idea, of course, that your husband come to see me."

"Yes," Marcia quavered.

"You told me a number of rather amazing stories of his odd behavior."

"Yes..." Her confidence was dwindling fast.

"Your husband denies eve-

rything, everything you say."

"But it's true! It's true!" Her voice rose just a little out of control. She was on the edge of her chair, gripping the arms of it till her knuckles gleamed whitely.

"Please, Mrs. Kasten." The famous man was calm, soothing. "There's no need to get excited... But I must tell you. I'm more inclined to believe your husband than you."

"Oh..." It was a low, soft moan, escaping from her involuntarily.

"After repeated psychiatric examination of your husband, I am of the opinion that he is completely normal, as sane as a man could be. Sanity, of course, being only a comparative thing..."

All she could do was to shake her head, negatively, in mute, helpless protest.

"Now," the doctor pursued, "what I am curious about is the motive that prompted you to libel your husband in the way you did, to tell me all those elaborate fictions about the way he was acting. Fictions, I repeat, Mrs. Kasten. Now why? Why? Don't you love your husband?"

HE had her now. She would not question his power over her again. She would not question his right to torment her. She was his chattel now, his property, his special plaything. She would never again seek outside assistance. Whatever he wanted to do to her, he could do. She would respond meekly to whatever string he pulled. She would weep, sob, shudder, tremble, cry out, scream—whichever he preferred.

This was their agreement. It was reached silently, without discussion, without argument. A mutual understanding between torturer and tortured.

It was this new state of things—this feeling he had now of absolute dominion over another human being—which gave him new ideas. He'd been getting bored with the old ways of playing the game anyway. He would introduce one more variation, more awful than what had gone before. And then, he told himself, he would stop.

He brought the package home from work with him one evening. It was done up in

enough brown wrapping paper to blur any telltale outline of it. He offered no immediate explanation to his wife, but took the package down to the basement. She didn't follow him.

So he came upstairs and ate his dinner almost like a gentleman. He was gay. He talked of his achievements at the office, of a promotion he expected to receive shortly. She listened to him dully, pre-occupied. Exactly as he knew it would be. She was thinking of the package in the basement.

Right after dinner he went down there again. He placed the package conspicuously on his work table, but he did not unwrap it. Instead he sat down to wait, staring at the package, waiting...patiently. From overhead he could hear noises his wife was making, and could track her movements. She cleared away the dinner dishes, and then she washed them. Once there was a crash, as one of the dishes fell and broke. He smiled with satisfaction. She was nervous. She hadn't forgotten about the package, or the fact that he was down here, with the package.

Nevertheless, it was almost

eight o'clock before her curiosity got the better of her. He had been listening to her footsteps pacing over him. Now the footsteps changed pattern, hurried, crossed determinedly to the basement door, and came down the steps.

She found him sitting motionless, gazing fixedly at the brown-wrapped, unidentified object. "George," she whispered.

"Yes?" He did not turn to her but went on staring.

"What is it, George?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes..."

"You might regret knowing ...if you knew."

She hesitated. She was standing just at his elbow, and he could watch her out of the corner of his eye. She was pale, her bosom rising and falling rapidly, as if she could scarcely find air to breathe.

"I want to know," she said finally.

So he unwrapped the package. He did it slowly, savoring to the fullest the painful suspense he was causing her. At last, with a flourish, like a magician unveiling the hidden

rabbit, he revealed his purchase. New, gleaming, sparkling wickedly. A long-handled, razor-sharp woodsman's axe.

She did not even breathe. He knew the questions that were racing through her mind to her lips, questions she could not speak. He answered them with a careless nonchalance.

"I decided I was getting flabby. I need some exercise. They tell me the best exercise is chopping wood. So I thought I'd chop up some wood for the fireplace."

There were other things, of course, which he did not bother to explain, but which would have their own incongruous, insane explanations. For there was no wood anywhere about to be chopped. True, he might order some. But on the other hand, their house had no fireplace.

He left the axe nestling in its torn sheaths of brown paper, turned away from her, and went back upstairs. As if to escape from the dreadful presence of that shining metal, she tagged closely at his heels.

He went to his easy chair. He took up his book. The

same book. He turned to the marked page. The same page. He sat down to read.

He didn't have to watch her to guess the mischief he had wrought in her. She was approaching a state of panic. She tried to sit down, but she couldn't remain seated for very long. Once in a while she paced to the window to look out. Strangely, it didn't seem to occur to her that she might leap through that window, and so escape. Or simpler still, unbolt the door and run out into the street. She was in a prison of the mind, pent up with a maniacal killer. The tempo of her movements about the room quickened...sofa...to window...to door...sofa to window to door...lurching, stumbling over familiar objects...caroming from one unfriendly wall to another, like a billiard ball in perpetual motion...

But quite suddenly she broke the rhythm. She was gone out of the room almost before he realized it. He laid aside his book, stood up. He could hear the clatter of her heels as she descended the basement stairs. He strode swiftly through the kitchen, to

the door leading to the stairs.

HE saw her at the bottom of the steps. She had the axe, holding it in front of her and away from her, staring at the blade as she might have stared at a deadly snake whose head she gripped to keep it from biting her. She started to climb the stairs, and looking up for an instant, she saw him.

He read the look she gave him. She was bringing the axe to him and she was mutely pleading, "You're going to kill me with this, George. I know you are. So I beg you, do it now. Do it quickly. Because I can't stand this any more...I can't stand it..."

But she'd have to endure it just a little longer, he decided. This was joy, this abject terror of hers, this absolute submission, bringing him the axe, bringing him her suffering, trembling body to carve upon. This was what he had waited for, and it had been worthwhile...just a few more seconds, Marcia...bring it to me...that's a good girl...bring me the axe...and then tell me what you want me to do with it...bare your throat...tell

me to hit you there because there one blow will be enough ...tell me...scream for the mercy of that one blow...and then your eyes will pop open, because I'll be laughing at you ...laughing and telling you this has all been a joke...and how silly you look standing there holding that axe...

Perhaps he waited too long, kept his secret from her just a fraction of a second too long. He saw his mistake, saw it in the way she shifted the weapon in her grasp. Saw it in her eyes, where a sudden wild hatred exploded into being.

He backed away, not daring to remove his gaze from her. She came up the rest of the stairs with the speed and agility of a cat. In the kitchen she paused, seemed to be searching, experimenting with the proper way to wield the thing she carried. He turned and fled.

He headed for the front door, reached it, tore at the bolt with frantic fingers. But she was right behind him. He heard her there, felt her presence. He whirled to face her, putting his back against the door and keeping her at bay

for a moment with his own fierce terror. One hand behind him tried to work the bolt again.

He managed to dodge away from the first blow.

He would have tried a window next. He would have dived through the glass, wouldn't have cared about cuts and blood. But he dared not turn his back on her. So he tried to protect himself with a chair, holding it up in front of him like a trainer of wild beasts might. The second blow of the axe splintered and demolished it. He found himself holding only useless sticks.

Then he screamed to her, just after she'd swung the axe again, close enough to rip his shirtsleeve. "Marcia, listen. It was all a joke. A game. Understand?...a joke...a game..."

She could not hear him. There was no mind to receive the message. Now he knew what he had accomplished.

He retreated from her again, and his back came in contact with a wall...

THE END

THE SHOWDOWN

by
GIL SCHECHTMAN

Bernie was getting out of prison. Could he stay top dog with his former gang?



THERE were five of them waiting in the one-room cabin. Nothing had been said for an hour, and Stella Carney was becoming very tired of the silence and the tension and the hot, sick smell of five people in a room not big enough for two. They had been holed up for two long months and it had seemed to Stella more like two years.

"How long a drive is it from Joliet?" Kyle asked no one in particular. He didn't look up as he said it, but kept his face on the cards set out in front of him. He picked up a red jack and put it on a black queen.

"About two hundred miles," Racowski answered after no one else said anything. "Four hours, maybe a little more."

"You sure Bernie's getting out of stir today?" Kyle asked

indifferently, trying to keep it casual.

"That's the word," Corrigan said, "at twelve noon." He was sitting at the wooden table peeling the paint off with his finger nails. Corrigan owed a lot to Bernie. Seven years in Leavenworth for a postal violation had sucked the guts out of Corrigan, and when Bernie had picked him up he had been nothing. Bernie had turned him into a wheel man, steady, sure, not afraid to take chances with an automobile if he had to.

"Maybe Bernie don't know where we are," Lud Krauss growled. He was pacing back and forth like a caged animal. Bank tellers in seven states would have recognized the wild cruelty in his eyes and the restrained ferocity of his huge ape body. Bernie had been able to keep Krauss under control. But when Bernie had gone back to Joliet Kyle hadn't been so successful in keeping Krauss in line. Lud had gotten out of hand and killed a bank guard in a hick town in Tennessee and they had been holed up for two months because of the heat it had generated.

"He knows where we are," Corrigan said. "That's the word I get from Joliet. Anyway, he can use his head. He knows we're holed up and he knows we'd go to the cabin."

"Yeah," Kyle said, picking up the cards. "I suppose so."

Stella looked at Kyle out of the corner of her eye from the cot where she lay reading a magazine. She wondered how Kyle felt.

Kyle had come a long way since Bernie had taken the fall eight years ago and had gone back to Joliet because an eager state trooper had recognized him from a wanted poster for an old supermarket job. Kyle had taken over the gang without a murmur. He had done it with coolness and without trouble. "Well boys," he had said, "I guess I'll run things now. Any objections?"

There had been none. Racowski was a follower. Corrigan was too tired to quarrel; he wanted to be left alone and to drive and that was all. Krauss was an ox with a gun and no brain. So Kyle had taken over. He had certainly come a long way from being

the punk reform school graduate that Bernie had picked up in a skid row tavern. And with Bernie gone he had moved up even faster, gaining the assurance he needed after a couple of successful jobs.

He had taken the gang and he had taken Stella just as casually. "I do Bernie's job," he had said, "and I sleep in Bernie's bed. Be there tonight."

And she had been there. What did it matter? She had had seven lousy years with Bernie. It couldn't be worse. Only it was, a little. Because Bernie was only bad mean when he was drunk or when things weren't going well, but Kyle had a mean dog in him all the time and he fed it with Stella. He took her in bed as brutally as he might mug some bank teller who didn't move fast enough.

And then, after Krauss dropped that guard in Tennessee, it was even worse because they were all cooped up together.

And then, as if things weren't bad enough, they got the word that Bernie Frank

was being released. There could be no doubt that he would head back to the gang. None at all. So it was going to be Kyle or Bernie, one of the two, and they all knew it. Kyle *could* step down; but he wouldn't. The step down was a long one and once you made it you never came up again. Or Bernie *could* set up another operation somewhere; but he wouldn't. He had worked too hard to weld four indifferent punks into a smooth group.

So it was a showdown; Kyle or Bernie. And showdowns made Kyle jumpy. Stella had the scars to prove it.

For the past two nights Kyle didn't sleep. He paced the floor and he laid out the cards and he raised hell with Stella and then finally he made a decision. That morning Krauss had gone out behind the cabin in the woods and dug a hole, eight by six by two. And everyone knew what that meant. *When* it would happen, *how* it would happen, they didn't ask. But *that* it would happen, they knew.

"I wish to hell he'd hurry,"

Kyle said slowly, banging down the cards.

"Two hours more, maybe a little longer, that's the way I figure it," Racowski said.

IT wasn't two hours, it was five hours, before they heard an automobile taking the rough road through the woods to the beginning of the foot path which led to the cabin. In that five hours Kyle had lost some of his cockiness. The cards had been thrown to the floor. He had asked Stella for a cigarette and when she hadn't had one he had slapped her and thrown her back on the cot. Like a dog, Stella had thought. Fifteen years of it altogether, seven with Bernie, eight with Kyle, and she still wasn't used to it.

The sound of the car motor stopped. Bernie had come to the footpath.

Which way would the rest of them go? Stella wondered idly. Kyle was beginning to sweat. He had taken off his suitcoat. He had unbuttoned his collar and loosened his tie. How would the rest of them stand?

Racowski, for instance. Ra-

cowski was a follower. Whoever came out on top would do for him. As long as there was someone to tell him what to do.

Corrigan? Something had happened to him in that seven years in Leavenworth. He was a wheel now, competent to drive a car, fast and sure, but beyond that he didn't care.

Krauss? An ape. He dug a hole for Kyle because Kyle had told him to, and he would just as soon put Kyle into it as Bernie Frank.

"Stella," Kyle snapped, "will you—," but he stopped short. They heard footsteps in front now, climbing the stairs.

The door began to open. They all stiffened. Corrigan took his hands away from the table. Kyle stood up. Krauss stopped in his tracks.

The door opened and there was Bernie Frank as big as life. He shut the door behind him and walked in. No one said anything for a minute.

Stella looked up at him from the cot where she lay. Eight years hadn't made as much difference as she had thought it would. He had lost weight and

he was very fallow, but his eyes had the same bright glimmer as always and the smile was the same. She would know that smile anywhere. When he was tensed and ready and mean he had that smile. She had been his dog long enough to know that smile.

Kyle and Bernie looked at one another for a long minute during which no one breathed.

Then Bernie said slowly, "Glad to see me, Kyle?"

Kyle's answer came from his pocket in one fast motion, the black, ugly Luger.

There was a shot like the crack of a whip and in stunned surprise Kyle clutched his belly and fell.

The smile was gone from Bernie's face, replaced first by fear and then astonishment

that he was still alive. They all looked at the same time at the cot where Stella sat with the small automatic still smoking.

"Stell!" Bernie gasped. "For godsake, Stell." His body relaxed with relief and gratitude.

Without changing her expression she squeezed the gun again and it spat flame. Bernie fell with a low moan.

She turned to them all then. Even Corrigan was taut with attention. "All right, Krauss," she said calmly to the ape, "go dig another hole. Then get back in here fast. We've got a lot to talk about."

Stella sat back and breathed deeply and enjoyed it. She had been somebody's dog for fifteen years, and that was a very, very long time.

THE END

CRIME LESSON

That kid needed instruction,
and got it from his victim!

by ARNOLD ENGLISH

NORTON was standing near the Central Park Mall. He held his jacket over an arm. Every so often he would tap his right hand pants pocket to feel the shape of a wallet, then swear at himself for having done it. Just the same, that wallet held all the money he had in the world, 48 dollars.

He was fingering the back of a cracked wooden bench shaved white by the moon, when he heard, "This is a stick-up."

Norton held his breath only briefly, then turned. He saw a youngster whose buck teeth shone faintly in the light from nearby lamps. His hair had been clumsily cut, leaving white patches above the small ears. He wore a white shirt and gray pants.

"You're kidding, aren't you?" Norton asked, hollow-voiced.



"Try me, mister," the kid whispered. "Don't hand over the money, and you'll see."

"Suppose I told you that the money I'm carrying is all I've got in the world."

"I'd say you're lying." The kid's eyes raked him up and down. "And it don't make no difference, anyhow. Hand over the money."

A gun glinted in a shaky hand. It was possible that the kid didn't have a hell of a lot of control.

As Norton paused, music tingled in the warm air. An outdoor band concert had begun on the Mall. Listeners old and young lined the wooden seats. Uniformed cops watched, walking back and forth or stopping to talk to each other.

The band was playing something of Schubert's, when the kid said, "Hand over that wallet, mister, or I'll let you have it."

"You can't afford to shoot," Norton answered quickly. "You'd never get out of the park in one piece."

The kid pulled air with his free palm. "Are you going to hand it over? If not, I can

knock you out and then take it. The cops are out there. They can't see what we're doing."

Norton looked at the glare of a faraway lamplight, flies bussing around it, and that turned benches ghost-white. The band played Chopin.

"All right, suppose you knock me out and come up back of me," Norton said. "You can't be sure you've knocked me out. I might be faking and then I could get to you and beat the living day-lights out of you."

Saying that much had been a mistake. The kid's fingers on the gun grew harder, and Norton had to control the impulse to call out. From where he stood, he wasn't sure that the safety catch had been released.

"If you come up back of me," Norton said, keeping his voice down and even, "then you'll be close to me and I'll be able to get to you. I may not look it, but I'm pretty strong."

"Don't give me no lectures..."

"In the second place, if our hands touch while I give you the wallet, I can get at you, too."

"And the gun? That doesn't count, I suppose."

"You're not very handy with it," Norton said. "You're scared of it. My guess is that if I made a jump at you, kid, you'd howl and run."

"Come on and try it." Again the gun grip stiffened. "Let's see what happens."

CLASH! went the cymbals on the bandshell in Chopin's Polonaise. The shock of it tingled the legs of the bench Norton was touching, one of a series spaced awkwardly along the path.

"If I put a hand in my pocket," Norton said, "I might be going for a gun of my own, for all you know."

The boy was being worked up to a pitch that could cause him to throw away any caution he'd already shown. But Norton was keeping the wallet, so far.

This tight place was the first one he'd lived through in quite a while. His mind showed him vivid scenes from his recent troubles. The jailbreak, for instance, and the carefully chosen hideout to be used till the heat had died down.

And then the attempts to get a job, failing on account of social security requirements. Money was spent, and nothing legitimate, to keep him out of extra trouble, could be done about it. Or at least he didn't know what.

And now a kid had come forward to try to rob him, and in the tension he could live for a moment without experiencing the continual dullness that he had known so vividly in recent months.

"Why don't you give it over?" the kid asked, his voice rising to a thin note. "What are you trying to pull?"

"I'm trying to help you, believe it or not," Norton said finally. "Don't laugh, I mean that. If you were making a touch on Joe Average, you'd scare him gutless with that popgun of yours. But you're not touching Joe Average this time, kid."

"No, I can see that."

He sounded tired. Norton's sharp eyes rested briefly on the sagging line of the kid's body. He tried to visualize what might happen if he made a grab for the gun, but let it go.

"Is this your first job?"

"I—second."

"Robbery carries a heavy sentence if you get caught."

As the kid began to say something, Norton put in fiercely, "You've got to figure on getting caught. It's a risk of the job. You've got to start saving money so you'll have a nest-egg when you get out of jail, something to start with."

"Nest egg?"

"Crooks have to feel secure, too, just like other people. And you won't be on Civil Service. No benefits and health plans go with this line of work, kid."

"No, I guess not."

"Kid, I've spent about a third of my life in prison and it don't pay. There's no percentage in it. A guy goes to prison, he loses everything."

THOUGH talking quietly, his voice vibrated with sudden conviction. His intensity caused the kid to flinch, as if from a burn.

"You get out of touch with normal people, with women," Norton added. "Prison turns a man into a goddam animal. It sets him up to go crooked for

the rest of his life. You've got a chance to stay out of it and live good, get a job someplace—all sorts of things."

"Maybe." The kid was rubbing an eye in tiredness, his fierce expression almost gone. He couldn't seem to take in what he was hearing. But the gun was firmly held in a hand.

Then Norton smiled slightly, probably in triumph, and the kid said sharply, "And you get to hold on to your dough! Mister, you're a real smart cookie. I'm surprised you don't get down on your knees and beg for the dough."

Norton flushed and made a fist. He released the bunched-up fingers, though. The kid, seeing it, smiled.

"Okay, now we understand each other," the kid said softly. "Give it here. The dough, I mean."

Norton was suddenly aware of moisture softening the smells of pigeon droppings, and of grass bending to throaty wind-whispers. At his side, the kid was growing angrier.

"You won't give it here? Mister, I can use this, don't make no mistake. You give

damn pretty speeches, but they don't prove nothing. The color of your money proves plenty, and I want the money and I don't want no more speeches. And mister, I'm asking you real nice—for now."

Norton drew air into his lungs and let it out in a long sigh as he reached a hand into his breast pocket. Careful to make no urgent moves and a little surprised by his own nerve, he turned and looked down at the boy's gray pants and up to the white button-down shirt.

"You ought to wear dark clothes next time," he said, almost as if to pass the time of night. "What's wrong with you, kid? Do you *want* to land in the can?"

The boy said sharply, "I want the dough, that's all I want. That's all you've got that interests me."

Perhaps the words were meant as a challenge. If that was the case, Norton promptly picked it up.

"Kid, I'm willing to strike a deal with you. Your part of the deal is that you let me keep my money. My part is that I teach you how to handle

yourself the next time you do a robbery."

"I already know."

"You know enough to wear dark clothes? To cover yourself? To do the hundred and one things a guy has to do if he'd going to hold up another guy?"

"I didn't have no trouble last time."

"Sure, you hit it lucky. But you don't always hit it lucky. Well, kid, what do you say?"

IN the silence between them, the military music came to a brief halt. Applause sounds were scattered by wind over the tops of trees. Clouds scudding by above, were shaped in the small curves of bunched fingers.

"Mister, you better know what you're talking about," the kid said. "I don't make no guarantees, but if you want to talk, I'll listen."

"All right. Put away that damn gun..."

"Ixnay! I'll give you three minutes. No more, no less. After that," the kid paused, "either I decide you didn't tell me anything and I take the

dough—or you get away with it.”

“In three minutes I can’t even start—”

“You’re wasting time, mister. I been counting, already.”

Norton accepted it with a shrug. “First off, kid, dress in something dark, and wear a hat that covers your eyes as much as possible. Stick to dark places for robbery.”

“If that’s all you’ve got to offer, mister, you can shove it you-know-where.”

“I’ve just started.”

A new selection was being played. Sudden hot wind distended Norton’s shirt. He didn’t seem aware of danger, standing with hands in his pockets and feet spread wide. His eyes were fastened to the front, but every so often he would sweep a look to his right.

“Don’t carry a gun,” he said. “Guns are dangerous and they go off and get a guy in big trouble. That’s important to remember. Put something square and bulky and harmless in your jacket pocket, instead. Keep it where the bulge shows. Don’t use a toy gun, either.”

A couple passed by arm-in-arm. The music was stronger now, the tempo picking up.

“And don’t mention a stick-up,” Norton added. “Say something like, ‘I sure wish I had the money in your pocket.’ Don’t let yourself say directly that you’re making a threat, but keep your hand in your pocket, and make sure the sucker can see that bulge.”

“That’s crazy!” the kid snapped. “And suppose the Honest John tries to jump me? You talked about it, somebody else might do it.”

“You can’t prevent a foolish guy from doing something,” Norton answered. “If he’s going to jump you, there’s no help for it. Usually, though, Honest John is so anxious to see the last of you, he kicks in without a word.”

Norton glanced at an attractive girl as her footsteps pattered out of the ring of benches and past the light-edge thrown by the nearest lamp.

“In case you get a girl’s rings in a job, or other stuff, you’ll need a fence. Try Jimmy Idaho in Muldoon Street. He gives you the most you can expect out of a fence.”

"Any more you want to say, buddy? Time's running out."

"The big thing is that you've got to be learning all the time," Norton said, "and always on the lookout for the main chance. For instance, learn about jewelry and what's valuable and what isn't. Reason is that you can fence it for more money if you know what's going on." A pause. "That's all."

"I ought to take the leather away, anyhow, just to show you not to fool around with me." The kid ran a thin hand over his hair. "But I won't. I play fair."

Norton nodded. He wasn't relieved, only a little more angry that his fate should have turned on the whims of a kid. He tried to discount the impulse to turn fiercely on the boy and slap him down, then take away his gun.

"I want to do a job, tonight," the kid said. "Who do you think is a likely prospect?"

IT was familiar enough to Norton, what was happening, but he felt himself growing older even as he listened.

There had been a time when he had been the boy's age, but he couldn't remember a day of it.

"How does that guy strike you?" Norton pointed to a prosperous looking man in a dark suit, a bowler hat on his lap. A band gleamed in his vest, probably the extension of a pocket watch. "I don't think you'd have any trouble with him. One look and he'd give you the money."

The boy sneered at the man in the distance. "Got Honest John written all over him."

It was Norton's thought almost exactly, so closely phrased that it jarred on him. A mind-reader might have taken the boy to be his son, their thoughts were so close together.

When the kid took a step towards the bench where the honest john was sitting, Norton saw that the kid's eyes were almond-shaped, but he wasn't of Chinese origin; his hair was blond. His face was pimpled, which Norton hadn't noticed before, either, and that, too, irritated him.

The honest john was sitting some 50 yards off, tapping the

bowler hat in time to the military music. The hat whipped up and down at increasing speed as the music's tempo became faster.

"Okay," the kid said, satisfied. "Mr. Honest John has got a few things to learn."

"The gun."

The kid turned, smiling. "I suppose you want it for yourself."

"I don't give a damn," Norton said very quickly, "but you'd be a lot better off to remember what I told you. The least you can do is not to wave it in his face. Everybody around him will know what's happening."

"Yeh, I remember. You told me. Crooks have got to be sharp, skillful." He looked down at himself. "I ought to be wearing dark clothes. I know it now, but I want to pull a job tonight."

The kid looked from Norton to the older man. Norton wiped his lips with the back of a palm.

"At least put the gun away."

The gun wavered. Norton suddenly rubbed his hands together, as if calling on the unknown to give him patience.

The kid dropped the gun into a pocket.

Norton scowled around to make sure that no cop was nearby, and struck out. The palm of a hand crashed into the side of the kid's neck, sending the kid down to the earth.

NORTON stooped over the fallen form and pushed up one of the boy's eyelids, nodded with satisfaction, and allowed the lid to curtain the eye. From the boy's pants pocket he took out the revolver. He glanced at the chambers, then put away the gun in a jacket pocket. The feel of it soothed him, somehow, settled his nerves. All the skill and sharpness in the world didn't mean a thing compared to the feel of a gun in your pocket. He smiled down at the kid.

The things he had told the kid—Norton shrugged. He had waited a long, long time to get his hands on a gun again. He'd worked hard to get it away from the kid. The biggest surprise he'd had in a long time was that a gun should come his way so easily. It'd keep

him from starving, let him have a chance to live again like a human being. The things he had told the kid would have been absolutely right if not for the human element taking the shapes, in this case, of instincts that couldn't be controlled.

Norton walked very slowly

over to the bench where the older man sat, bowler hat on a knee. Norton sat down gingerly, then pulled out the gun so that it was in the other man's plain sight.

"This is a stick-up," he said.

THE END

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DESPERATE KIDNAPPER

by SIDNEY ROBERTS

Kent had only one year to live. This made him frantic

"HEY, Beautiful! That man's home!"

Johnny Burke tossed his hat on the hall table watching the kitchen door and when it didn't open he called out again but it was still negative. Going into the kitchen he found it empty and when he looked out the rear window he didn't

see Betty on the patio. The kitchen clock said quarter after five and when it said quarter to six he was in the living room with a drink and a problem generating rapidly into a gnawing worry.

Betty was not home and there was no scribbled note left propped against anything.



By phone he'd learned she was not over at Sue's or Helen's, and he'd even called Doctor Standish who told him Betty wasn't there but not to worry because pregnant women often did odd things at odd times. No doubt she had a sudden craving for a dill pickle or a strawberry sundae and took off to town. She would be back presently and with no idea of the time. Make a drink, Johnny, and relax. The drink he made, but the relaxing he could not do for Betty's Buick was out there in the garage and she hated busses.

By six o'clock he was toying with thoughts of the police when the front door bell rang. He answered it quickly but his hopes went into a tail-spin. It was Darwin Kent, a friend of the family and a real estate salesman long trying to interest them in one of the places in the new Valley Manor development out beyond Hill Top. He was a man in his forties not too ruggedly constructed with a pleasant enough looking face despite its slight sallow complexion. He

carried a brief case under his arm and his smile was engaging as usual.

"Evening, Johnny! May I come in?"

Burke pulled the door wide. "You bet, Darwin, but Betty's not home if it's another pitch."

Kent laughed and walked by him into the living room and sat in a chair and placed the brief case on his knees. Johnny returned to his own chair and was about to offer a drink when Kent spoke first.

"I know Betty's not home, Johnny, and this isn't another pitch."

Burke started. "Hey, you've seen Betty?"

The real estate man nodded and unzipped his brief case but did not put his hand inside.

"I left her a couple of hours ago quite well and comfortable," he said.

Johnny stared at him. "Left her *where*?"

"I won't tell you now," Kent said with a shake of his head. "You see, I've kidnapped Betty, but I will take you to her for twenty thousand dollars in cash."

The words made several circuits in Burke's head before he could regain control of his tongue.

"*Kidnapped?* Look, is this some kind of a lousy joke? I don't...!"

"It is not a joke!" Kent said sharply. "It is the truth! I came here about two this afternoon and told Betty you'd asked me to show her another place in Valley Manor I'd described to you. On the way out I said there was something else quite different I'd like to show her first. So we went there and that's where I've hidden her. She's quite safe but unable to leave, and for twenty thousand in cash I'll take you to her."

FOR several seconds Burke simply could not grasp the truth, and when he did a bomb went off in his head dropping a red curtain down over his eyes. He started to lunge from his chair for the other's throat, but ceased abruptly when Kent plunged his hand in the brief case and jerked out a gun.

"Don't be a fool!" he barked angrily. "Violence won't solve

anything. It certainly won't get Betty back because I'm quite willing to die before I'll tell you or any one where she is!"

Johnny Burke froze while the blood ran hot and cold through his veins and the inside of his head became a seething turmoil.

"You must be insane!" he whispered hoarsely. "Stark mad!"

"Perhaps!" Darwin Kent grimaced and shrugged. "Perhaps in a manner of speaking I am. Who knows what happens to a man's sense of mental balance when he suddenly learns he is going to die in a year and that no power on earth can prevent it? Does an insanity in the form of frantic desperation come to him? I don't know, do you?"

"What in God's name are you talking about?" Burke gasped.

"I am going to die in a year's time," Kent told him. "Of late I haven't been feeling well, so last week I went into the Stinson Clinic for a complete check. The answer is I

have Hodgkin's Disease. That is cancer of the glands and there is absolutely no cure for it now known to medical science. In my case it has progressed to where I have but one year left to live. Dr. Marc Blenheim, the famous cancer specialist, broke the news to me himself. I am going to die in a year!"

For an instant the nucleus of compassion formed in Burke, but quickly became a hard core of blazing anger.

"So you're going to die in a year but...!"

Darwin Kent stopped him with a movement of the gun and then placed the gun on his brief case but kept his hand on it.

"Let me finish, Johnny," he said quietly. "I don't expect you to understand, or even try, but I owe you at least some sort of an explanation. I am forty-four, never married, no living relatives that I know of, and I've been on my own since I was ten. It has been a long hard pull with little or no time out to have fun and go places and do things. A treadmill

grind ever since I was ten!"

He stopped and groaned bitterly.

"A forty-four year old non-entity!" he spoke again. "I've done nothing and seen nothing, and now I no longer even have hope. A year of life left to me. Just one! Do you know what that can mean to a man? To *me*? It can mean the end of everything but it can also mean a chance for the fulfillment of everything. All the things I've missed all my life. *I'm going to have that chance!* I have my one last year all planned out in detail from beginning to end. I'm going to do and see everything I've missed doing and seeing, and it will cost only twenty thousand dollars. No more and no less. I know you have that amount to give me, Johnny, and that is why I kidnapped Betty. Pay me twenty thousand dollars and I will take you to her."

AS the other stopped talking Burke closed his eyes and put his hands to his face and rubbed gently. Insane or not

Darwin Kent should be handled as such. One careless move or thoughtless word and God knew what might happen. He lowered his hands and looked at him.

"Why, Darwin?" he asked softly. "What makes you do this to us? We've been good friends a long time. You've often been here as a house guest, and we've had lots of laughs. And you knew of Betty's condition! In Heaven's name, *why?*"

"Johnny, believe me!" Kent said in a strained voice. "I swear if there were some other way I'd take it, but there isn't! I have nothing saved up. I have nothing to turn into quick cash. I have no way at all of getting a lot of money in a hurry. It just *has* to be you! I know you have that amount available. I even know you have more than twenty thousand but that's all I'll need. Twenty thousand, no more and no less."

Burke started to speak but gasped as sudden remembrance jolted him.

"What did you mean *Betty's*

unable to leave?" he cried wildly. "What did you do to her? If you've..."

"She's *all right!*" Kent stopped him raising the gun. "She's sleeping comfortably. When we got there we were both thirsty as I knew we would be. So we had a drink of water but her's contained a harmless sleeping drug. She became drowsy and went to sleep almost immediately. She knows nothing of what's happening. Nothing! She's sleeping quite peacefully and won't wake up for hours. Believe me, I wouldn't harm Betty but I'm a desperate man. You can make another twenty thousand, but nothing on earth can make life longer for me. I have only one year to live! *Only one!*"

Johnny stared hard for a moment and nodded.

"All right, I'll give you twenty thousand," he said slowly. "But you don't think I keep that kind of money around the house, do you?"

A dull flush of anger crept into Kent's sallow cheeks.

"Don't take me for an in-

sane *fool*, Johnny!" he said harshly. "Of course I don't, but today is Friday and the banks re-open from five to nine on Fridays. We'll go to your bank and you can draw it out. I want ten one thousands and twenty five hundreds in one of those heavy bank envelopes."

The man paused to nod and gesture again with his gun.

"Before we leave let me make something *very clear* to you!" he said tight lipped. "I know where Betty is, but no one else on earth does. I said she is sleeping and she is, but even when she wakes up she cannot leave that place. It is locked and the windows boarded tight. Believe me, Johnny, if I handed you this gun you couldn't force me to tell you where Betty is. Nobody could! The stakes I'm playing for are too high. One worthwhile year of life for me. I swear that if I can't have this one last year as I've planned it I'll gladly take death now! I swear it again, Johnny, so if you want Betty back don't be a fool. Don't try anything! Just do as I say. Have I made myself

very clear? Very, very clear?"

Burke wet his lips and pushed the words off. "Very clear."

Darwin Kent nodded and put the gun in the brief case and zippered it shut and stood up.

"We'll go to the bank in your car and then to where Betty is," he said. "From there I'll use my own transportation."

A thought clicked in Burke's brain and it must have shown in his eyes for Kent quickly shook his head.

"Don't even hope," he said evenly. "I've worked this out in every detail. Nothing has been left to chance. When I leave you and Betty I become another person. The Darwin Kent you know will cease to exist and no one will ever find the new me, I assure you. I've planned for every possibility and it is all foolproof. Well, shall we start?"

Johnny hesitated and rose to his feet. "Let's go."

THE drive to town and finding a parking space by the

bank took some twenty minutes. When he got out Burke looked at Kent but the kidnapper shook his head.

"I'll wait here," he said. "It's all your show now."

Burke went into the bank and withdrew twenty thousand from his account in ten one thousand dollar bills and twenty five hundreds and put them in one of the bank's heavy envelopes and went outside and got into the car.

"There it is," he said and put the envelope on the seat between them. "Where to now?"

Darwin Kent looked at the envelope but made no effort to pick it up.

"Go out North Drive toward the Valley," he said. "Swing onto Route Nine when you come to it. I'll tell you more later. And drive carefully, Johnny! With twenty thousand here on the seat and a gun in my brief case there could be serious complications should we have an accident."

If the remark was spoken in levity it left Burke cold. He started the car and tooled it

out of the parking space into heavy early evening traffic. Half an hour later they were well out of town and rolling along North Drive toward its junction with Route 9. They had not spoken again after leaving the bank but when he swung onto Route 9 Burke broke the silence.

"How far from here?" he asked.

"A distance," Kent said in a flat voice. "Believe me, Johnny, you won't know we're there until we are, so why not just drive and not try to out-smart me?"

Burke opened his mouth but said nothing and returned all his attention to the road ahead. At the end of an hour's time he had driven miles and miles through totally unfamiliar countryside, turning off onto half a dozen different roads at Kent's direction, and now on a road leading toward the foothills of towering snow-capped mountains far away. A thousand times a thousand thoughts of Betty had flashed through his brain and each added to the terrific pressure

building up in him. Dark night was close to the earth but the top bit of a huge silver dollar moon was beginning to show above the rim of the horizon.

During the course of the hour's ride Darwin Kent had twisted around countless times to peer out the rear window, and when he did it once again growing suspicion became a certainty in Johnny.

"Damn your soul!" he blazed. "You've been taking us in circles to see if we're being followed!"

"That's right," Kent said calmly. "There was, you know, the slight risk you might have acted foolishly when you were in the bank. I apologize. I'm quite positive now that you didn't."

"Goddamn you!" Burke cried in a gagging voice. "Tell me which way to Betty *now* or so help me I'll..!"

"You won't, so shut up!" Kent shouted. "Take the next left. It goes out toward Indian Lake. Have you ever driven around there?"

"No."

"Then never mind," Kent

said. "I'll direct you as we go along."

ANOTHER hour of agonizing driving dragged by and the pressure in Johnny Burke had built up so it was a dull pain pushing against the roof of his head. The big moon was now well up the sky and washing the earth with a bright silver that almost made the car's headlight unnecessary. They were deep in the foothills of the far away mountains and as they reached the flat top of a long grade of a lonely dirt road Kent touched him on the arm.

"Stop and turn around."

Sudden panic hit Burke like a mule's hoof and icy sweat broke out all over him.

"We're *lost*?" he cried. "Why you..!"

"No, you fool! Do as I say. *Stop and turn around!*"

Burke clamped down hard on his jangling nerves and braked the car to a stop. It was not until then he saw Kent had the gun out of the brief case and pointed at him. His heart skipped a single beat but

that was all. Steeling himself he slowly worked the car around on the narrow road until they were pointed back the way they had come.

"This is where we say good-bye, Johnny," Darwin Kent then said quietly. "I know it's no use saying I'm sincerely sorry, so we'll skip it. If you look out your side you'll see a path leading up through those pines. About a hundred yards up it is a hunting lodge. A very nice one, by the way. Betty was delighted when she saw it, but we'll skip that, too. Here's a skeleton key to the place. It'll open the front door and also the door to the first room to the right where Betty is."

As he spoke the last the kidnapper held out a key with his left hand. Burke let go of the wheel just long enough to take it from him.

"How do I *know* she's there?" he asked tightly. "And..."

"You don't, but I assure you she's there," Kent interrupted him. "And stop worrying if I'm going to abandon you, too. I told you I had other trans-

portation available. However, I will have to leave this car down the road a ways where it will take you a little while to reach it. I don't need much of a head start, Johnny, but I do need some of course."

"Just how far down the road?" Burke asked grimly. "I may have to carry Betty."

"I'm sorry but I'm afraid you will have to," Darwin Kent said easily. "That shouldn't take you much longer, though. Well, go up and get her, Johnny. And good bye and thank you. I'll think of you often and hope that in time you'll get to think of me not too unkindly."

Burke acted as though he hadn't heard. Still gripping the wheel he turned his head as if to peer out the window at the path leading up to the hunting lodge, but out the corner of his eye he was watching Darwin Kent reaching down with his left hand to pick up the bank envelope. As the man's fingers touched it the pressure in Johnny exploded in furious action. He jammed his right foot down on the accelerator and

jerked his left off the clutch. He'd left the gear shift in reverse and as the car lunged backward he twisted around and slammed his right clenched fist down on Kent's gun as the violent movement of the car threw him against the dash.

The gun dropped to the floor and Kent screamed and wrenched open his door and dived out before Burke could grab him. He took two blind racing steps and collided with a sapling at the edge of the road and spun around and went toppling over and down out of sight. A brief instant later Burke scooped up the gun off the floor of the now stalled car and dived out the door himself.

He succeeded in halting his momentum in time and stared down over the lip of an abrupt rocky drop-off at Darwin Kent's crumpled figure showing clearly in the moonlight some thirty feet below. The man lay with both legs twisted grotesquely under his body and his eyes were closed and his mouth partly open as though a scream was in his

throat when he became unconscious.

BURKE hesitated and then shoving the gun in his pocket he turned and ran back across the road to the path leading up through the thick stand of pine. At the end of a hundred yards of lung-bursting uphill running he came out onto a flat clearing with a picturesque hunting lodge in a silver moon postcard setting. Its picturesqueness touched him not at all as he raced up to the front door and opened it with the skeleton key.

Inside was pitch darkness, but opening the door wide let in enough moonlight to show him the first door on the right. He opened that one, too, but no moonlight followed him into the room and he took out his cigarette lighter and snapped it into flame. A moment later he saw Betty stretched out on a couch and he leaped over to her with his heart in his throat, but she was sleeping peacefully and the bloom of perfect health was in her beautiful face.

Choking back the sobs of relief in his throat he gathered her up tenderly in his arms and carried her out of the lodge and back down to the car. He put her gently down on the rear seat and was closing the door when he heard Darwin Kent's agonized wail.

"Johnny, help me! Where are you, Johnny? Oh dear God, *help me!*"

Going over to the edge of the drop-off Burke stared down at the crumpled figure below. Kent had not moved, but the eyes in his dead-white face were wide open. The man saw him against the moonlight flooded sky and lifted up imploring hands.

"My legs, Johnny!" he screamed out. "They're broken. I can't move! Johnny, do something. Help me! The pain is terrible. I can't stand it! You've got to help me!"

All the rage in the world had Burke by the throat and he could only stand there trembling violently. Darwin Kent screamed again and clasped his hands together in frenzied beseeching.

"God in Heaven, help me, Johnny! Don't let me die. I swear I'm sorry for what I did. Forgive me, I was insane. But don't let me die now, Johnny. I want to live. I want to live if only for a little. Johnny, I'll do anything. *Anything!* Only help me! The pain's killing me. Johnny, in Christ's name, *help me!*"

Burke tried to speak, but the anger in his throat clogged it tight. Darwin Kent placed the palms of his hands on the ground beside him and tried to push himself up. His face was horribly twisted with pain and his voice was a ragged screech.

As the last trailed off in a gargled wail Burke drew the gun from his pocket and glared downward.

"Suffer to hell, you bastard!" he cried in a fury choked voice.

Reaching out his hand he dropped the gun down beside Darwin Kent's crumpled body and went over to the car and drove away.

THE END

YOUR DAUGHTER WAS ATTACKED

by CARROLL MAYERS

The law was a lot too slow
for the father's vengeance

WHEN Walter Lyson reached home shortly before six-thirty that night, his wife poked her head around the kitchen door. "I was beginning to think you'd missed the bus," she smiled. Then she bit her lip, glimpsing the bulging briefcase Lyson was depositing on the hall table. "More work tonight?"

Lyson was a lean, balding man in his late forties; his sensitive features resolved into a rueful grin as he began washing his hands at the kitchen sink. "Afraid so," he said. "You know how those reports pile up at the end of the month."

Martha Lyson shook her



head soberly. "I know how hard you work," she told him, bringing her smile back. She pulled out Lyson's chair, turned to the stove. "I've kept everything hot."

He sat down, glancing at a third chair. "Linda upstairs?"

"She phoned after school, said she and another girl are staying overnight with one of their friends. Something about starting a camera club."

Lyson chuckled. "Last month it was a record club." He picked up his fork.

They had hardly begun the meal when the doorbell rang. Lyson frowned at the kitchen clock, muttered, "Why does anyone call at mealtime...?"

Martha Lyson started to rise. "Finish your dinner."

He pushed back his plate. "I'll go," he said, turning into the hall. "Probably only somebody wanting directions."

Two men stood on the small porch. As Lyson opened the door, one of them bent forward inquiringly. "Walter Lyson?"

He nodded. "That's right."

The man flashed a badge. "Police, Mr. Lyson. We'd like to talk to you."

Lyson's pale blue eyes flickered uncertainly; he blocked the doorway. "Police? I don't understand...?"

"I'm Sergeant Sloan. My partner's Sergeant Vitella. May we come in, sir?"

The officer's query was polite, yet firm. Lyson flushed, abruptly fell back. "Of course. I'm sorry—"

AS the two sergeants stepped into the hall, Sloan withdrew a notebook, flipped the pages. He was a tall man, well-built, with a ruddy face. His associate was stocky, dark-featured.

Finding the page he wanted, Sloan asked, "You have a daughter, Mr. Lyson? Linda Lyson?"

Lyson stared at the sergeant. "Why, yes." Then he added quickly: "Is...anything wrong?"

"About seventeen. Blonde. Hazel eyes." Sloan was reading his notes. "Birth mark on her right shoulder."

The sombre tone of the officer's words brought sudden apprehension to Lyson's gaze. He said: "What is it?"

Sloan snapped shut the notebook. His mouth was grim but he kept his voice low, even. "I'm afraid your daughter's been hurt, sir. She's—"

The sergeant broke off as Martha Lyson came into the hall. She looked at her husband, her eyes instantly wide with intuitive fear at his expression. She said, "What's the matter, Walter?"

Lyson went to her. "I... don't know." He took his wife's hands. "These men are the police," he said. "They say Linda's been hurt—"

"Oh, no!" Martha Lyson whispered.

Sloan said, "She'll be all right, ma'am. She had a bad time, but she'll be all right."

Lyson supported his wife, repeated Sloan's words. "What do you mean, she had a bad time?"

The sergeant avoided Lyson's gaze, glanced at his associate. It was Vitella who finally said quietly: "Your daughter was attacked in Clinton Park, sir. Her screams frightened the fellow off, but before he fled he beat her pretty badly. She—"

"It can't be Linda!" Martha Lyson pleaded. "She wouldn't've been in Clinton Park. She and another girl are staying with a school friend..."

Sloan said, "I'm afraid it was Linda, Mrs. Lyson. Her two friends were with her; they'd decided to visit another girl, were cutting through the park. They panicked when the fellow jumped Linda, ran off. Afterward, they identified her." He stopped, added simply: "Please believe us; she's going to be all right. She's at Mercy Hospital now."

A nerve was throbbing in Lyson's cheek. "This... fellow," he said, his pale eyes cold. "You know who he was?"

Sloan pocketed his notebook. "No. We picked up a suspect in a bar across from the park shortly after Linda was found. A young punk who's been in trouble before on the same complaint. But we couldn't tie him in."

The chill in Lyson's gaze grew bleaker; he gripped Sloan's arm. "You...released him?"

The sergeant's nod was sober. Martha Lyson shook her

husband fiercely. "I want to see Linda, Walter! I want to go to her now."

Lyson took a deep breath. "Of course, dear," he said. He looked at Sloan. "You said Mercy Hospital?"

Sloan said, "We'll drive you there."

AT the hospital, a young intern approached as the two sergeants escorted Lyson and his wife down a corridor. Vitella said, "Here are Mr. and Mrs. Lyson, the girl's parents."

The intern nodded. "Your daughter's in no real danger," he said kindly. "We've given her a sedative."

Martha Lyson was hardly listening. "Where is Linda? I want to see her."

Lyson's arm went about his wife. "Martha—"

She caught at the intern's sleeve. The young man's gaze flicked from the sergeants to Lyson, back to Lyson's wife. "The sedation will be effective for several hours, Mrs. Lyson. This way, please."

Lyson steadied his wife, guided her into the room across the corridor. At first glimpse

of his daughter, lying drugged, her head bandaged, her soft eyes and lips puffed and bruised, Lyson's fists balled. As his wife sobbed softly, he gently eased her onto a chair beside the bed. Then he turned, the nerve in his cheek twitching. The two officers and the intern stood just inside the door; Lyson shouldered past them. "I want that punk's name," he told Sloan.

The sergeants followed Lyson into the hall. Sloan said, "We couldn't hold him, sir. I mentioned that."

"I want his name!"

Sloan frowned. "His name's Leo Karsh. A wise hood with a bad record. Suspicion of pushing narcotics. Molesting girls. Violence with rival gangs. But he swore he was clean tonight and we couldn't prove otherwise. Your daughter was hysterical with shock, her friends too terrified to remember details, make a positive identification. And Karsh wouldn't break."

Lyson said hotly: "So you let him go!"

Vitella exchanged a glance with Sloan, said mildly: "We

know how you feel, Mr. Lyson. But we had no choice."

For a long moment Lyson's only motion was his trembling fists. Abruptly, his shoulders slumped. He said stiffly: "I ... appreciate your bringing us here." Then he turned, re-entered the room.

Martha Lyson still huddled beside the bed while the intern checked Linda's pulse. Lyson drew the young man aside. "You're certain she's going to be all right?"

"There's nothing to worry about, Mr. Lyson."

"Thank God," Lyson muttered fervently. He caught the intern's arm, added: "Please keep checking my wife, too." Then he crossed, silently squeezed Martha Lyson's shoulder. Her agonized gaze did not lift from Linda's bruised face. Lyson took a deep breath, slipped out of the room.

Sloan and Vitella had departed. Lyson's jaw bunched; the hunched tensity of his shoulders suggested a previous slump had been feigned. He left the hospital quickly, flagged down a cab. "Clinton Park," he directed.

THE tavern was drab and dingy, jammed with a noisy crowd babbling above the blare of a juke box. Lyson stood at one end of the bar, squinting against the smoky haze, finished a beer. He had already visited two similar places; this was the only remaining dive opposite the park.

Noting Lyson's empty glass, the barkeep moved down. Lyson nodded; when his glass was filled he asked casually: "Karsh been around?"

The barkeep's fat features were stolid. "Who?"

"Karsh," Lyson said. He had paid for the first beer with change; now a five dollar bill was in his fingers. "Leo Karsh."

A speculative glint flickered in the man's eyes. "Oh... Leo." He swabbed the mahogany with a dirty rag. "Yeah, he was in earlier."

The bill rested on the bar. "Know where I can find him?"

The barkeep eyed Lyson sharply. "Who's looking for him?"

Lyson said, "Friend of mine." He lowered his voice. "He needs a fix."

The man scowled. "What the hell's that supposed to mean?"

Another five joined the first. Lyson said, "My friend needs that fix bad."

Down the bar, a busty blonde giggled, pounded her glass. "'Nother one, Charlie."

The barkeep kept watching Lyson shrewdly, then turned, took care of the blonde. Lyson's fingers still toyed with the two fives when Charlie swung back. Abruptly, a sweep of the bar rag encompassed the money. "I don't know nothing about a fix, Mac," Charlie muttered, "but I hear Karsh's got a pad over on Ferry."

Lyson pushed back his glass. "That's a long street."

"Twenty-two," the barkeep said. "Fourth floor, rear." He shoved the bills into his pocket as Lyson left the bar.

Ferry street was across town, near the river; Lyson paid off his cab two blocks short, walked. Locating number twenty-two, a crumbling brownstone, he climbed quickly to the fourth floor, his nostrils twitching at the rancid odors of filth and cooking.

Before the scarred door of the rear apartment, Lyson set himself, knocked shortly. Nobody answered. Lyson frowned, rapped again, rattled the knob. His mouth etched thin as the sagging panel shook in its frame.

Lyson glanced at his watch. Nine thirty-five. He peered down the shadowy hall, decision mounting in his bleak eyes. Then he hunched his shoulder, thrust hard against the door. The lock held the first two assaults; at Lyson's third lunge, the bolt sprang. He burst inside.

The apartment was a single room and bath, both littered, unkempt. Lyson closed the door, switched on the light long enough to orient himself, take in the unmade bed against the far wall, the battered table and straight-backed chair. His lips curled in distaste as he noted the garish pin-up pictures over the bed. Then he turned off the light, sat down on the chair. An hour passed. And another...

THE scuff of footfalls brought Lyson to his feet. Silently, he pushed the chair

aside, fists clenching. A key rasped in the lock, followed by a short oath as the door sagged inward. The light blazed.

"What the—" The youth entering the room had hard black eyes, dark oily hair and a bad case of acne. He scowled at Lyson. "Who the hell're you?"

Lyson squinted against the glare of light, stepped to block the door. He said tightly: "You're Leo Karsh?"

The youth's scowl darkened. "That's right. Look, man, what goes—?"

Lyson's voice was cold. "I'm the father of the girl you attacked tonight, Karsh."

Surprise glinted in Karsh's eyes; then his slack lips split in a sneer. "You're bugs, pappy."

Lyson's hot gaze never left the youth's face. "You didn't confess to the police, did you, Karsh?" he said softly, moving forward.

Karsh's sneer faded slightly; he took a step back. "So the fuzzies pulled me in," he said quickly. "They couldn't prove nothing."

The corners of Lyson's

mouth were white. He brought up his balled fists, whispered, "You'll confess to me."

Retreating, Karsh abruptly checked himself, cocked his own fists. "Relax, pappy," he rapped. "I'm telling you like I told the fuzzies: if your chick was jumped, it wasn't by me. You say it was, you gotta prove it." His sneer flashed back.

Lyson shook his head, suddenly lunged, grabbed the youth. "You filthy scum!"

Karsh was no weakling. He fought Lyson viciously, kneeling his groin, finally broke free. He swung hard at Lyson's chin, missed, fell onto the bed. Lyson leaped on the youth, thudding blows into his body. Karsh kicked wildly, but Lyson was relentless. He yanked Karsh from the bed, slammed him against the wall, then beat him to the floor. On his knees, sobbing curses, the youth tried to squirm loose, almost succeeded. But Lyson caught his ankle, swarmed over him.

"Confess!" Lyson panted. "Confess!" He began pounding Karsh's head.

IT was past midnight when Lyson returned to the hospital. His sensitive face was rigid with intensity as he strode down the corridor, but when he entered his daughter's room the stark light in Lyson's eyes instantly faded. Linda was conscious.

"You're all right, honey?"

Lyson's voice broke as he drew a chair beside his wife, caught Linda's hands. "You're really all right?"

Linda managed a weak smile. Martha Lyson said tensely: "She'll be fine, Walter." She looked searchingly at her husband." The doctor said you'd stepped out, but you were gone so long..."

Lyson said simply: "I went home. There was nothing I could do here, and I had all that work..." He met his wife's gaze, smiled. "I checked with the doctor first, made certain both of you would be all right—"

He broke off as the door opened and Sloan and Vitella came into the room. Both sergeants were sober; their features relaxed only slightly as they saw Linda was conscious.

Sloan said, "They told us at the desk your daughter'd come around fine, Mr. Lyson."

Lyson smoothed Linda's forehead, nodded without speaking. Watching him, the sergeant added: "They also mentioned you left here for three hours."

"That's correct. I've just told my wife the same thing." Lyson's voice was steady. "It seemed likely to be several hours here, just waiting, and I had some urgent office reports. I went home, finished up the work, came back."

Vitella said, "You can prove that, sir?"

Lyson looked puzzled. "Why, no... not definitely. I was alone." He met Vitella's stare. "Why?"

Sloan cut in. "Because from blood on a shirt found in his closet matching Linda's, we now know Leo Karsh did attack your daughter," he said. "And because that shirt was discovered after one of Karsh's associates stopped by his room an hour ago, found him beaten to death."

Martha Lyson's intake of breath was audible; she put

trembling fingers on her husband's arm. Again her gaze was searching, with an added hint of dread.

At the word 'attack', Linda began to cry softly. She clutched Lyson's hands, lips quivering. "Oh, Daddy, I'll never forget it—"

He stroked her hair. "Yes, you will, honey," he murmured. "It was just a bad dream, that's all. Just a bad dream for us all."

Lyson kissed his daughter,

then turned to the two policemen. "You mentioned Karsh had been involved in violence with rival gangs before."

Sloan nodded gravely. "We'd still like a statement about your working home alone, Mr. Lyson."

"Of course." Lyson's gaze was direct. Momentarily, he looked at his wife, strong reassurance in his quiet smile. "Anything, sergeant," he said.

THE END



HOT MONEY

by JAMES P. DUFF

Harry wanted to change his
luck with money and women



HE was a tired-looking little man with a stomach going to fat and reddish hair thinning on top and lines of bitterness around his tight mouth. He sat at the dining room table, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, going over the carefully typed reports again and again. He was positive this time, so positive. He felt the pride of a job well done, and the smallness of a grin touched his face, stayed there until he heard his wife calling his name from the bedroom. He sighed. She called again, and he sighed again. He got up, wearily, and rolled down his shirt sleeves and went into the bedroom.

"Do you have to go out again tonight?" she asked. She could have been a pretty woman at one time, but now she was loose and flabby and no longer took care of herself. She

lay on top of the bed clothes, a fluffy nightgown of some kind hiding the obscene mounds of her flesh.

He took his coat from the closet, not answering her.

"Why, Harry?" She was whining now, playing the part she had so many times in the past. "They don't give a damn for you down at that office. Why do you do it?" She didn't wait for an answer. "I know why you do it, damn you Harry! You enjoy it, don't you? You like to stick your nose into other people's business, grub around in their dirt, don't you?" She was almost screaming now.

He walked out of the room, still not answering her. He knew there was no answer he could give that would satisfy her; he had learned that over the years.

He stood on the sidewalk below, in the darkness, lighting his nightly cigar, and then looked up at the lighted window of their apartment, and wondered what had happened to them. It had been different in the beginning; there had been something between them

then, and now there was nothing.

He knew she was right: they didn't give a damn for him at the office. Twenty-two years he had spent with them, doing the hardest jobs, the almost impossible jobs, and then they had passed over him for a man younger than he to head the district office. But he would show them their mistake. This time, he had solved one of those impossible jobs; this time, he would save them \$150,000, and then they would know about Harry Decker.

He drove down Wilshire to the shoddy, low-rent district around MacArthur Park. He parked in front of the three-story apartment building with the false-brick front and the marks of neglected age on it. He sat there and finished his cigar and felt the moment of triumph. It had been a long and hard trail, and now it was at its end, and he would show his wife and he would show them, and they would all realize their mistake.

THE woman lived on the third floor. He was puffing by the time he got up there,

puffing and a little embarrassed from having caught the two kids necking on the second-floor landing. He stood before her door, letting his breathing return to normal, and then knocked.

She opened the door and that moment of triumph returned. He said, "Mrs. Maxwell?"

"Yes?"

He took his card from his wallet and handed it to her. "I'm Harry Decker, Mrs. Maxwell. Coast States Insurance Company."

She didn't bother looking at the card. He grudgingly admired her coolness. She was tall, taller than he, with dark hair cut short in the popular Italian style, and wide, innocent-looking blue eyes, and a body that would be looked at and admired and sought after by men, and envied by women. He knew her hair was dyed; it had been blonde at one time. He knew a lot about this woman.

"I'm afraid," she was saying, "that I don't need any insurance."

"I'm not a salesman, Mrs.

Maxwell. I'm here on another matter."

"Oh?"

"May I come in? It's rather important."

She was wearing burnt-orange colored shorts and matching halter, and fuzzy bedroom slippers. She studied the toe of one of the slippers for a moment, then opened the door to admit him. The inside was clean and neat; she had done the best she could with what she had. It must have taken a lot from her, not to have spent the money, to have lived in holes like this for the past two years; she was a woman used to the better things. Again, the admiration for her came to him.

She lit a cigarette and sat down on a flowery sofa, and crossed her legs. She didn't ask him to sit down.

"Alright, Mr....?"

"Decker."

".....Mr. Decker. What is it that's so important?"

He sat down in a canvas chair opposite her. One of her legs was cranking back and forth over the other, a little gesture that betrayed her nervousness. He was pleased to

see that. He smiled, and said, "I must say that I admire you, Mrs. Maxwell. I've been an insurance investigator for 22 years. You've been very difficult to follow, Mrs. Maxwell. Or should I say, *Mrs. Chandler? Mrs. Ray Chandler?*"

She tried to hide the shocked surprise, but failed. The leg cranked harder and one of her slippers came off. He noted the bright red polish on her toenails.

"I'm afraid I....I don't understand," she said.

"I think you do. Please, let's not play silly games with each other. I have too many facts at my disposal. It's taken me a long time to trace you down, Mrs. Chandler."

She rose to her feet, her head tilting angrily. She replaced the slipper on her foot. "I think you'd better leave."

He shrugged. "If that's the way you want it." He got to his feet slowly. "I'm not a policeman, Mrs. Chandler."

"My name is Maxwell!"

"As you prefer. As I said, however, I'm not a policeman. I'm not interested in the whys and wherefores of the case. I'm only interested in seeing that

the money is returned, the \$150,000 to be exact. Really, Mrs.....Maxwell, it's useless to you. The bills are all marked. You can't spend any of it."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about." She lit another cigarette from the first one. She looked at him, carefully, and then giggled a small giggle. "What an absurd idea, Mr. Decker. Do you think if I had that much money—was it \$150,000?—that I'd be living here, like this?"

"You would if you were smart, and you are smart, Mrs. Maxwell." He took a small notebook from his inner coat pocket, opened it, and read: "On May 19, 1954, one Ray Chandler was married to one Helen Ericson in the city of Las Vegas, the county of Clark, the state of Nevada." He put the notebook away. Her face was composed, studiously calm. "On February 11, 1955, Ray Chandler and two other men held up the Northern Independent Grocers Association of Redwood, California. They got away with \$150,000. Chandler and his accomplices

were caught, Mrs. Maxwell, and are now serving terms in San Quentin. However, the money was never recovered. My company insured that loss. It would be quite a feather in my cap if I could recover it."

"This whole thing is ridiculous," she said. "I've never heard of this.....this Ray Chandler. I'm a war widow, Mr. Decker. My husband was killed in Korea."

"I'll give you time to think it over, Mrs. Maxwell. You have my card. I'm sure you understand my position, as well as your own. Good night, Mrs.....Maxwell."

THERE was a note on his desk in the morning, asking him to see Mr. Emerson, the district manager, as soon as possible. He disliked seeing Mr. Emerson; in fact, he disliked Mr. Emerson. The man was too young for his position, too young and too self-confident and too patronizing.

Mr. Emerson sat behind his desk in a richly-furnished private office, a long yellow pencil in his hands, a quick smile on his handsome, sun-tanned face. Decker wondered how

he ever found the time to acquire a sun tan.

"How's the Redwood case coming, Harry?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"Slow. Very slow."

"Anything new?"

"Well, I—" he hesitated; this was his, his personally, and he didn't want anyone else sharing the glory "—there might be something. But if you don't mind, Mr. Emerson, I'd like to keep it to myself for a few more days. I might be wrong, you know."

"I understand, Harry."

There was a meaningful slur behind the words, and Decker didn't like it. A quick retort came to his lips, and stayed there.

"We'll let that ride for now, Harry," Mr. Emerson said. He put the pencil on his desk, leaning back in his chair. He was embarrassed about something, obviously, and Decker wondered what it could be. "I guess the best thing for me to do is to be blunt. I hope you won't take offense, Harry. Your wife called me last night, at my home. I know you were disappointed when they gave me this job, but....."

"She had no right to do that, Mr. Emerson."

".....She did, though." He studied his hands. "Harry, this is a trifle unpleasant for me. You've been with the company for 22 years. If you're having trouble at home because of the situation here in the office, I wish you would see to it that the trouble stays there."

"I apologize for my wife's actions," he said.

"I know you do. I know this is as embarrassing for you as it is for me. But I wanted you to know how I felt, Harry. This job is demanding, as you very well know, and I have neither the time nor the inclination to get involved in any family squabbles. I don't think I need to say any more about it."

"I appreciate your frankness, Mr. Emerson." He rose to his feet. His stomach ached with the embarrassment, the humiliation, he felt. "Is that all?"

"For now, yes. But going back to the Redwood case, I certainly hope you turn up something soon there."

"I will, Mr. Emerson, I will."

Mr. Emerson watched him leave. He shook his head, then leaned across his desk, pressing a button on the inter-com. "Susan, get in touch with Ken Brady. Tell him I want to see him as soon as possible."

HE knew she was sitting there, staring at him, waiting for him to bring it up. He had never been quite so disgusted with her. The food tasted bitter in his mouth; he pushed the plate away, wiping his lips with the napkin.

"You haven't said anything about my calling Mr. Emerson," she said. "I'm sure he told you."

"He told me, Martha."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"I hope he realizes that at least one member of this family has the backbone to stand up to him."

"Oh, cut it out!" he snapped. "It embarrassed me, if that was your intention."

"You don't fool me, Harry. I've been on to you for a long time. You don't work on these cases night after night. There's a woman some place."

"Don't be ridiculous, Martha."

He got up and walked into the living room, and she followed him. He was so tired of these nightly arguments, so tired of her whining and griping. She picked and picked, about the office, about other women; she should have known better. He turned to look at her, her face set in the usual angry lines, her hands gripped before her so tightly that the knuckles showed white. A sudden feeling of pity came to him.

"We used to have so much fun together, Martha." He spoke quietly, almost tenderly. "Just the two of us. Remember the time we. . . ."

"Oh, grow up, Harry! That was years ago. I could believe you then. But now I'm cooped up in this damn little apartment day after day, night after night, and I know what you're doing, the way you're running around."

It was senseless, and he knew it. He stood there, wondering what the solution was, how it could resolve itself, and then the phone rang, and he waited while she answered it.

She shoved the phone into his hands, the smile superior and all-knowing on her face.

"Mr. Decker," the voice on the other end said, "this is Helen Maxwell."

"I've been expecting your call."

"I apologize for calling at your home. I. . . . I thought it might be better than calling at your office."

"I understand."

"Could I see you, Mr. Decker?"

"Of course. I'll be there in 20 minutes."

He hung up and went for his coat. Martha gripped his arm, swinging him around to face her.

"*I'll be there in 20 minutes,*" she mimicked. "You've got a lot of gall, Harry, having her call here."

"Martha! For crying out loud. It's business."

"I suppose she's young and attractive and she tells you all the things you want to hear. You don't fool me, Harry. You haven't fooled me in a long time."

She was beyond reason. He refused to talk to her. He got his coat and started to leave,

and the last thing he heard was her shrill voice saying: "One of these nights, I'll lock that door so you can't get back in, and then you'll....."

But he didn't hear the end of it. It was an old song; she had made the threat so many times in the past.

SHE was dressed in a too-tight skirt that accentuated her curves and a low-cut blouse allowed as much viewing as was decently possible. He knew what was coming. He had run up against it before, many times, and he'd always turned it down.

"Well, Mrs. Maxwell," he said, "I'm glad that you've finally decided to cooperate."

"You're reading too much into the call, Mr. Decker. May I fix you a drink?"

"I don't drink, Mrs. Maxwell. This isn't a social visit."

"Alright then, I'll get to the point. You've been following me, Mr. Decker. You're annoying me. I'm tempted to call the police."

"Why don't you?"

She laughed lightly. "Let's not be childish. Supposing—just supposing now—that I ad-

mit being the wife of this Ray Chandler. What would that prove?"

"It wouldn't *prove* anything."

"I thought not," she said.

She bent over the coffee table, getting a cigarette, letting him have his look. When she raised up again, her mouth was open, the lips wet and red, so red, and he thought of Martha in the apartment and the accusations she had made. It would be so easy. He was getting older; there wouldn't be many more like this.

"What would you do—is it, Harry?—if I was this Mrs. Ray Chandler and I did have the money?"

"I'd see it was returned." She got up and moved across the room to close a door. She walked with a lithe gracefulness, enticing, inviting. "I've been in this business long enough....."

"Long enough to know all the angles?"

He knew what she was driving at. "Long enough, Mrs. Chandler," he said, "to know that you can't get away with such things."

The floor show continued as

she sat down, crossing her legs.

"I'm going to be frank with you, Harry. I am Mrs. Chandler. I do have that money. I've had it all the time." The tempo of her voice quickened. "God, you can't imagine it. I look at it all the time, look at it and count it, all \$150,000 of it. I have to fight myself not to spend it, and I'm losing that fight."

She re-crossed her legs for his benefit. "But I know the bills are marked, and I know I can't spend them. But I know something else, too, and that is that there are men who'll buy *hot* money. I know that much, and yet I can't do anything about it. Believe me or not, I didn't know what Ray was when I married him. I don't have the.....the connections to dispose of the money. I've been waiting for someone like you, Harry, someone who would know who to see and how to change the money." She leaned forward, her blue eyes intent on his face. "I've been waiting a long time, Harry."

He had to laugh, and he knew it came out as a nervous sound. "I told you I'd been in

this business a long time, Mrs. Chandler. I know what you're trying to do. I've had it tried before. It won't work. I'm too old a horse to get caught up in anything like this."

She got up and came over to him. Her fingers lifted his face to hers. The kiss was long and exciting and demanding and when she moved away he felt himself losing ground. He rose to his feet, avoiding her eyes.

"Good night, Mr. Decker," she said, and laughed.

He walked to the door, and then stopped. He turned to look at her and what he saw made him want it, and he fought against this. He stood there and thought about it, remembering the way Martha was, remembering the excitement of the kiss, the promise of the kiss, with this woman. What, after all, did he owe them? What had they given him after 22 years? What had Martha given him?

"You couldn't get full value for it," he said. "Maybe 30 cents on the dollar, maybe a little more. Certainly no more than \$50,000."

She came over to him then, knowing she was winning, and

put her arms around him. Her lips brushed against his ear and she whispered, "I'm tempting you, Harry, aren't I?"

He wasn't thinking about the money; he wasn't thinking about anything but the woman next to him. He grabbed her roughly, and she returned that, that and more, and then he was lost in the violent passions that he had thought he had forgotten.

MR. Emerson rose and shook hands with the man who had entered his office. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Ken," he said.

"No hurry, Mr. Emerson. It's your time and your money."

"You don't have to remind me. I don't like hiring an outside investigator to have one of my own men followed." He hesitated. There was something almost distasteful about this. "Anything to report?"

"He's stepping out on his wife. He's been seeing quite a bit of a war widow, a Mrs. Helen Maxwell." Brady's smile was quick. "I can't say as I blame him much, looking at them both."

"Something bothers me here, Ken. I can't explain it. Maybe it's just a hunch. God knows I hate doing this, but stay with it a few more days, will you?"

"Like I said. Mr. Emerson, you're paying for it."

HE rolled over on the bed, and sat up. His back was tired and his head ached, and he heard Helen murmur his name from the other side of the bed. He got up quickly. He was too old for this sort of thing, too old and too played-out.

She came around to him, standing beside him in the darkness, the nakedness of her body punishing his. She whispered something trite in his ear, and then moved away, switching on the light. He hated for her to see him in the light, the way his stomach protruded out, the way his mussed-up hair showed the bald spot. It was almost vulgar, his body against hers, young and alive and demanding. He hurriedly began dressing, while she lay back on the bed, stretching her wantonness before his eyes.

"When?" she asked. "When's it going to be, Harry?"

He didn't answer.

"And then Mexico," she went on. "Just the two of us. Oh, Harry, I'm so glad you found me, so glad." She sat up, quite suddenly, and her eyes were serious on his face. "I still don't like it, though, you taking the money to your place. What if that wife of yours finds it?"

"She won't find it. And I've told you before, the money is safer there. If I traced you, someone else could do the same."

He looked at his watch, and knew the time was near. He turned and she was against him again, her mouth grinding against his, demanding and wanting. But there was nothing left in him.

"Get dressed," he said, "and pack your clothes. We're going tonight."

The surprise showed on her face. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I thought it better that you didn't know until the last minute. Hurry now. The plane

leaves at 11:30. We have a lot to do before that. Pick up the tickets and then go by my place and get the marked money. The man is meeting us at 10:30."

"How much, Harry?"

"\$45,000."

"Is that all?" She couldn't hide her disappointment.

He watched her dressing, and wondered if it was worth it. He knew that he should have wondered about that before. It was too late to turn back now.

HE walked up the hallway, searching his pockets for the key. He stood in front of the door for a moment, and knew that this would be the last time he would go through that door, the last time he would see Martha. The faintest twinge of nostalgia touched him, and then left. He had made his decision. The plane tickets were in his pocket; Helen was waiting downstairs in the car; the man with the \$45,000 in unmarked bills would meet them at 10:30 and then, an hour later, they would be winging on their way to Mexico City, and Mr. Emer-

son and the company and Martha, all of them, would only be a dim memory. He had been an honest man all his life; now, for the first time, he was doing something dishonest, and he was surprised at the lack of guilt he felt.

He raised the key to the lock, but it wouldn't go in. He stepped back, surprised. He tried it again, and still it didn't fit. He looked at the brass number above the door. He was at the right apartment. He tried the key a third time, with the same result. His hands began shaking. The \$15,000 was on the other side of the door, tucked away in a safe hiding place. What in the world had Martha done?

He dropped the key. He stooped down, picking it up. He very carefully pushed it against the lock again. Good God!

Panic waved over him. He pounded his fists against the door and yelled, "Martha! Martha!" But there was no answer. He pounded again and again and yelled her name again and again. He kicked at the door, trying to break it

down. Damn her! Damn her, damn her, damn her!

He hadn't heard them behind him, not until he felt the hand on his shoulder, and then he turned and saw them, Mr. Emerson and the other man, and the two policemen.

"It's no use, Harry," Mr. Emerson said.

He slumped back. His knees gave way beneath him, and he sat down on the floor, and shook his head. "I guess not," he said, slowly. "I should have known better."

"You should have," Mr. Emerson said.

The door opened a crack, and Martha stood there, a puzzled look on her face. She saw him sitting on the floor, and she hunched up her shoulders and smiled broadly. "It won't do you any good, Harry," she said. "I had the lock changed. I'm not going to let you in, even if the police are with you."

One of the policeman said, "The girl's downstairs."

Decker nodded his head. "It's in the bedroom, in the bottom drawer of the bureau, underneath my shirts."

Martha stepped out into the hallway. Anger had replaced the victorious smile on her face. "What's this all about? Who's downstairs? What's in the bureau drawer?"

"It's no use, Martha," he said. "There's \$150,000 in stolen money in there."

"You must be joking!" She had snapped the words out. She realized that he was telling

the truth, and she looked down at the huddled little figure on the floor, and her mouth twisted itself into an ugly grimace. "Why? Why in the world would you do such a thing, Harry? Why?"

She was whining again. That was the way he would remember her.

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT
OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED
BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933,
AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, Unit-
ed States Code, Section 233)
SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP,
MANAGEMENT, AND CIR-
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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher Feature Publications, Inc. 1790 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y., editor, W. W. Scott, 1790 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y., managing editor, none, business manager, Maurice Rosenfield, 1790 Broadway, N. Y. 19, N. Y.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

Maurice Rosenfield (Signature of business manager). Sworn to and subscribed before me this 19th day of September, 1957.

WILLIAM THOMA

Notary Public, State of New York
Qualified in Bronx County No. 03-396282
Cert. filed in N. Y. & Bronx County
Commission Expires March 30, 1959

ONE MINUTE TO DEATH

by DAN STRIBE

Arrested, tried, convicted of murder. Must I die now?

THE details of that day I remember clearly. The tenth of December, the day I started to die.

I left the train as usual and joined the crowd as it crawled up the ramp like a centipede squeezing itself from the cocoon of Union Station. Fanning out through the doors, the wiggling, squirming flow of commuters swarms into the mist and down the concrete troughs to the loop.

It's Chicago with buildings tall and silent, tombstones of the living. In the brick-lined gulleys stream the bodies, mine included.

Cold tightened my face. Snow spattered my glasses. My scarf choked my neck and the overcoat whipped open at the bottom, gulping big swallows of icy air.

The crowd elbowed under the elevated. Whirling doors began sifting people into the marble hives. The clerks here, the bankers there. The executives up and the janitors down.

My door lay just ahead. I never reached it. Not that day. Not ever again.

But I saw the car and the man. He was tall, big. To me he was just a dark coat sagging from a pair of sloped shoulders, a hat pulled down tight, gloves held in bare hands. Another guy leaped from the same car. He was even less, only a vague shadow.

"Just a second, buddy," the overcoat said. Now it had a voice too. "I wanna talk to you."

I hesitated. Ahead I saw my office. It looked safe and warm. I quickened my pace,

hugging the wall. The two men broke into a trot. Roughly they shoved me into the doorway.

"Police," one said.

A bulging wallet flipped open waist high. A metal badge lay there.

"What's your name, mister?" he asked.

"Fred Fuller. Fredrick J. Fuller. I can prove it." My hand reached for my wallet.

Thick fingers clamped shut on my wrist.

"Stand steady, Mr. Fuller," the voice said from over my shoulder.

Hands appeared. Unbuttoning my coat, the hands moved briskly from chest to hips. They sought a gun and found none.

Now they'd see my credentials. My driver's license... needs glasses, it read. My draft card... born 1928. My business card... assistant advertising manager.

"What's this all about?" I asked. "Did I jay walk or something?"

THE face didn't answer. Instead the dry lips flipped

questions at me. Where did I work? Was I married? Where did I live? Had I ever been arrested?

I stammered. I stuttered. The life of Fredrick J. Fuller sounded like a jumbled mess. Yet it was so simple. If only they'd let me tell it straight. If only...

"Look, I'm a family man. Look..."

A wife, two kids, a mortgaged home and I've never been in jail. That's Fredrick Fuller, Social Security number 343 22 9296.

Only then two cops were towering over me. Questions, questions and more questions. In loud voices. In soft whispers.

Finally I shouted, "That's enough. Tell me what this is all about or leave me alone. I'm respectable. I don't have to take this."

Then a moment's silence.

"Sorry, Mr. Fuller," the officer said at last. "It seems you fit the description of a suspect. If you have no objections, we'd like you to come down to headquarters."

"Object? Of course, I object."

I'll be late for work. My boss'll raise hell."

"We insist, Mr. Fuller," the second cop said.

He tucked his arm under my elbow and led me to the curb. A crowd had gathered. It split to let us through. I ducked my head and pulled my hat down tighter.

We got into the car. The doors shut. We pulled away from the gawking crowd. The car crept along the snow slick streets to the precinct station. Like a hearse, only the corpse still breathed.

"I don't get this," I said. "Am I under arrest?"

"No, of course not, Mr. Fuller," the driver answered. "That shouldn't be necessary. If you cooperate."

"Naturally you can phone an attorney if you like, Mr. Fuller," the second cop said. "Not that we recommend it. Not at this point anyway."

"An attorney? What do I need an attorney for? I haven't done anything wrong."

The car stopped. The officers got out and waited. They stayed calm and casual. It was just another day for them. Through those doors they

walked every morning. Not me. The drab halls, the dirt-covered lights, the musty odor... all this had a strange horror to Fredrick J. Fuller.

INSIDE at a counter my escorts stopped, discussing the weather. They ignored me, almost. Eventually, a sergeant looked up from his desk. I got introduced.

"The cigar store case," one of the cops explained.

"Yeath, I see the resemblance," the sergeant nodded.

"Look, this is some kind of mistake," I said. My voice squeaked. My throat stiffened. Sweat poured out under my arms.

The sergeant smiled.

"We'll clear this up quickly, Mr. Fuller," he said. Then he turned back to my escorts. "Take him upstairs. The show's just starting."

"Show? What's that?"

No one answered. A hand took my arm. Up the stairs we went. A finger pointed to a long bench. Half a dozen men sat there already. I joined them, sitting next to a doubled up drunk. He had retched recently. I could smell it.

For five minutes I sat. I couldn't look up. I couldn't let myself think.

A door opened. A uniformed cop motioned at us and swore. I followed obediently into a brightly-lit room. For a second I didn't understand. The light hurt my eyes. Shadows concealed the far end of the chamber.

A voice shrieked.

"That's him. That's the bastard," it yelled.

I looked around, trying to figure which punk in the line up had been picked. Maybe the drunk on my left or the playboy with the tuxedo.

That's when it happened. A figure charged up at us. From the shadows he brushed past the outstretched arms of the officers. He leaped, his arms flaying. His fist beat into my face. His body toppled me to the floor. Pain swelled into my head, my arms, my chest.

"You killer. You dirty, lousy killer," he screeched.

An eternity later the guards pulled him off. Gently they eased him away, but not before he had slammed a kick into my groin. I lay there numb. No one helped me up.

Later I staggered to my feet. Cops surrounded me. Metal gripped my wrist. The handcuffs bit into the skin.

"All right, Fuller, let's go."

"Wait, I don't understand."

My protest sounded weak.

"You understand all right, Fuller," a voice said sharply. "We're booking you for murder."

Blood rushed from my head. My stomach knotted.

It didn't seem real. A dream perhaps, a horrible nightmare. Yet my legs were moving. They carried me along, down the steps, through the halls, past an iron door. Metal clanged. I whirled. Bars... black steel bars...loomed before me. The cell gripped me like a powerful fist.

"Stop, you can't do this," I hollered. "Guard, listen, I gotta get to work."

The guard stopped, looking around.

"Relax, mister, you probably ain't never going to that job again. So relax, you're probably going to spend the rest of your life in here."

That's when I said it for the first time.

"Wait, I'm innocent. Don't you believe me? I'm innocent."

I yelled it. I whispered it. I shouted it at the top of my voice. And I beat my fists against the bars until my hands throbbed in pain.

It was only the beginning. Just the first time I screamed out my innocence. It was only the start of an endless venture into hell

NOW some of the later details have faded. The mind plays its tricks, sifting memories, destroying some and magnifying others. It's a little game played with hours, days and months.

The grilling I forget. The questions weren't important. Not to me. I just wanted to get home for supper. Nothing else mattered. Just to be home at the kitchen table with the kids spilling milk and slopping the soup.

But I didn't make it. Instead, Cathy, my wife came to me. They ushered her into the cell. The metal door rattled behind her.

Her frightened, startled

look, I never forgot. Fear had tattooed its tortured lines across her cheeks. In hours she had aged a decade.

The prosecuting attorney I remember, too. What a blood sucking leech. To him Fredrick Fuller was not a man... not a living, loving man. No, Fred Fuller was just a rung on a ladder. On my body he could climb one step higher towards success.

His case was weak. Only one man could identify me. Only sixty year old eyes had watched from the back of the cigar store. But the old man's story was pat. He saw me pull a gun and then dip my greedy palm into the cash register, that was his claim.

Then with tears streaking his cheeks he continued: His gallant son had resisted suddenly until I pumped a hole into the boy's chest. The youth died in his father's arms.

I denied it. I denied everything. But how do you deny a murder?

"Where were you at 9 p.m. on October fourth?"

How would you know? How would you prove it?

And motive...who hasn't

at least one motive for robbery and murder? A mortgaged home, a big debt on a car, a sick child. Any one will do.

Or how's your character? Sure I got questioned by the cops once before. I faked my age on my driver's license as a kid. You could buy a drink that way sometimes. Yeah and I took a defense job to stay out of the Korean deal. They got me anyway. And I even wrote two bad checks once. What the hell...hasn't everyone overdrawn their account now and then?

Then at last came the verdict. The skinny little guy with the lisp read it off. Guilty, he said. Just like that.

And later when I stood before the judge for sentencing, I fainted.

I had to die, he said. I had to sit in a chair and let the state of Illinois pump voltage through my body until I was dead. That's the law. That's the big penalty for murder. Whether you're guilty or innocent, it makes no difference. You stay dead just as long.

"Of course, we'll appeal," that's what my lawyer said.

Why not? My insurance would pay the bill. He couldn't lose.

Yeah, he appealed. He didn't miss a trick. It took days and weeks and months. And every hour of those months I spent looking at bars and walls.

IN the death row every hour is bleak and hideous. Yet every second is cherished by those who wait. But with every moment lingers a thought of death. Even in your sleep you dream of that walk. Fifty steps they say. A hundred feet or so to hell.

Here in the shadow of the chair you cry your innocence again. Here perhaps a few believe you. It doesn't matter.

Throughout every day, too, the mental battle continues. For a moment there's hope. Then dread. First the appeals. Then the denials. Finally your lawyer makes the last begging plea to the governor.

Not even a day more, the governor says. Not another day can you live.

Suddenly there are only hours and then only minutes.

Not even enough time to finish one last letter. There's only moments for fear, all encompassing fear that starts in your stomach and spreads into your head and knees.

They're coming. The uniformed guards with their heads ducked and the warden with his eyes straight ahead. They're looking at me from far away now, from a distant world somewhere. Are they real?

"It's time," the warden says. "Are you ready, Fred?"

He speaks softly as though to avoid arousing the others in the row. There's kindness, too, in that far off voice that invites me to walk with him

into the void.

He hates this moment. It's an instant of excruciating torture to him, for tonight he thinks he slays the innocent. Executing the guilty is sin enough to him, but burning the life from the proclaimed innocent bores into his mind like a fiery torch of Satan.

Now the cell door opens. I hear myself screaming from afar.

"Oh, God, why do I have to die? For a lousy hundred bucks. Why did the fool resist? I didn't want to shoot him. What made me do it? Please, please, don't let me die."

THE END



MOVE IN, TAKE OVER

by ROBERT BOWEN

Joey tried to crash his way to top cat of the kid gang

JOEY SAVOIA walked over to the apartment window and stared out at the view such as it was. A desolate salt marsh and the reeking clam flats stretching into the sea. He pinched his nose and turned away in disgust.

"Jeez, Mama! Couldn't you get anything besides this stink-pot?"

Rosita Savoia straightened up from the laundry basket with her hands balled on her hips.

"You no like, eh?" she shrilled angrily. "For Joey is no good? Maybe you got money for better place?"

"Aw, Mama, for...!"

"Maybe you got hundred dollars Mama pay judge in



Danvers? Pay so they no put Joey in prison, Hah?"

He ran his hands through his thick black hair and flung them wide.

"A mistake, Mama, and I'm sorry! Jeez, how many times I got to tell you. And I'll pay it back to you soon's I can. Every buck, I promise!"

The big woman moved over to plant herself in front of him with her black eyes snapping.

"You promise, eh? How many times you promise this and promise that? You listen what I say, Joey Savoia! Is no more acting like big shot. Is no more all the time with no good bums. You hear Mama?"

"Sure, Mama, I hear you. I'll be okay, you'll see."

Rosita Savoia stared deep and long into his eyes and gripped him by the shoulders to shake him gently.

"Is fresh start for everybody, Joey," she said softly. "Was no good in Danvers. Carmen she work so hard for little bit money. Joey he make bad friends and is troubles with policemen. So we come live here in Brixton where Carmen gets fine job. Say maybe is summer job for you at same place. Af-

ter summer you go to high school here and learn good for fine all the time job when you grow up. Is fresh start for everybody. No break no more promises, Joey. You be good boy and make Mama proud like little sister Carmen, eh?"

Joey groaned inwardly but smiled and kissed her nose.

"Sure, Mama, sure! I promise and I mean it. You'll see. You'll really see, Mama."

She gripped his shoulders a moment longer searching his face and dropped her hands smiling.

"Mama believe this time, Joey," she said and patted his cheek. "Is already little bit proud. Okay! Pretty soon Carmen come home and we have supper. Maybe drink little wine for start fresh celebration. You like that, eh?"

Joey laughed and kissed her nose again.

"Sure, swell, Mama! Hey, I think I'll go meet Carmen at the subway. Feel like some fresh air. Okay?"

His mother beamed. "Sure you go, Joey. Carmen like that and maybe she have news about summer job. Mama fix

fine supper for everybody. You good boy, Joey."

"Beginning right now, Mama!" he declared and went out the door and down the three flights to the street.

FROM the street the building wasn't too bad looking. It was one of several brownstone fronts all in a row like blocks, but there were plenty of fresh clean curtains and drapes showing and a few window boxes of flowers to add touches of bright color to an otherwise drab picture. As a matter of fact, on the whole it was a far better looking neighborhood than the one in Danvers. But it was not Danvers and as Joey paused on the sidewalk and stared about a great big ache welled up in his chest.

A foreign land! That's where he was now or might as well be. No contacts, no pals, and no nothing. A fresh start? Mama you're so right, only not the way you think. A fresh start like a guy standing naked in the middle of nowhere. That's how he felt!

But take Danvers. Right now, right this very minute, the

gang would be collecting down by the old car barns. Chico and that real crazy dance he was always doing. Jackie with his hot dice and Sully with another of his goofy ideas how they could make a quick buck. Irish, too, if he was out of the reformatory and he should be by now. And Gyrene teaching them judo and all the other tricks he learned in the Marines before they tossed him in the brig for eighteen months and then bounced him out with a dishonorable discharge. He missed Gyrene the most. Smart, smooth, and loaded with dynamite. Cripes, the air-tight capers Gyrene worked out to keep everybody in green stuff!

Joey sighed and shook his head and started ambling along the sidewalk in the opposite direction to the subway station.

Yeah, if he'd only kept his ears open to Gyrene's words chances were he wouldn't now be here in this lousy town. At least he wouldn't have gone for a ride with Chico in that hot car and been in the crack-up. Nor would Mama have had to come up with a hundred bucks to clean his nose. And that

stinking probation cop wouldn't have had the chance to talk Mama and Carmen into moving to another town. Oh sure, maybe a lot of things, but here he was! For a fresh start and okay if that's the way it's got to be. But no goofing, Joey! No more mistakes, not even one. Fresh start right from scratch and play it real smart all the way. Like Gyrene would and...

It was then his thoughts slowed down enough to let him become conscious of two youths sauntering toward him. A couple of punks about his own age and close to his build. One looked like Chico and wore a real crazy yellow and black jacket. The other was fair and mouse-looking all over. Black slacks and leather jacket you wouldn't pick up off a dump even if you were that hard up.

Like a high speed camera his eyes took in all the details and then concentrated on the way the two approached him. Strolling along side by side but separated enough to take up the sidewalk with maybe eighteen inches of open space between

them. He could laugh out loud it was so funny! How many times had he pulled the same trick with Chico or Jackie or one of the others on some new punk just come into the neighborhood? Fifty times and maybe more.

Sure, spread apart just enough and stroll up on the guy. Then when real close *whamo!* The old squeeze play. Both move in fast on the sucker for the double shoulder slam and down he goes *whacko!* Then sit on him while you find out has he got anything you want and ask him questions to see if the answers are okay enough to let him up to get acquainted.

The old routine strolling right toward *him* and he could laugh out loud it struck him so funny. Gyrene, you should be here to watch. You really should!

A MATTER of fifteen seconds later the two other youths were but a step from him and to all appearances about to spread further apart to give him room to pass. But of course they wouldn't and of course he knew they wouldn't.

As a matter of fact, they were not even looking at him, but his own eyes were watchful and waiting. And a split instant after each youth dropped a shoulder he went into whirlwind action the way Gyrene had taught him to perfection.

He shot out his left hand with the second and third fingers forked stiff and rammed them straight into the eyes of the fair-haired youth. At the same time he shot out his right hand to hook it in back of the yellow jacket kid's head and yanked forward dropping his own head. The top of his skull smashed into the other's face and as it did he let go with his hand and brought his right knee up into the groin. His last move was to step back and grin at the pair writhing in pain on the sidewalk. One clawing at his eyes to see and the other clutching his groin with one hand and holding his bleeding nose with the other.

"You crumbs wanted to see me about something?" he asked and laughed.

The fair haired youth lowered his hands and squinted up out of reddened eyes streaming

tears. "Jesus, man, what'd we do?" he choked out.

"Nothing," Joey said and snickered. "Not a thing. Know what I mean?"

The boy in the yellow and black jacket pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped the blood off his nose and threw it in the gutter. His dark eyes smouldered with stark hatred and Joey tensed, but the hatred suddenly vanished as the youth showed strong white teeth in a broad smile.

"Beautiful, man, real beautiful!" he exclaimed and got up on his feet. "Where'd you learn that cutie? Maybe you teach Bingo, eh?"

Joey shrugged and swiveled his eyes from one to the other. "Maybe."

The one who called himself Bingo stepped back with a laugh and raised his hands in a placating gesture.

"Relax, man, relax!" he cried. "Me and Swede asked for that, so who's sore? Nobody, man! Where you from?"

"Danvers," Joey said. He grinned faintly, a tiny offering of friendliness, but kept his

eyes alert for he had often learned the lesson in Danvers. When you're not sure expect anything.

The fair haired boy grinned and pointed at his red eyes.

"That where you learned to blind a man, eh?"

"And other things," Joey told him. "You guys left yourselves wide open, you know that?"

"We know it now!" Bingo said and laughed again. "What they call you in Danvers? What's the name, man?"

Joey told him and the kid in the yellow and black jacket put out his hand.

"Press the flesh, Joey," he said. "Me, I'm Bingo Batista. Him, he's Swede Swanson. Press the flesh, man!"

Joey shook hands with both of them still keenly alert for the slightest hostile movement, but apparently it was a sincere enough gesture of a new-found friendship. A tiny feeling of warmth slid through him.

"You guys live around here?" he asked.

"Next block up," Bingo said and jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Look, man, you ever hear of the Bats?"

"Should I have?" Joey countered.

"You really should, man!" Swede declared. "Hottest cats in town, the Bats."

Bingo nodded and put out a hand palm up and slowly closed his fingers into a fist. "We got it like that in this territory," he said. "Anything at all. The Bats really got it made around here. I tell you truly, man!"

Joey raised his brows slightly, but not enough to look too impressed. "Any other clubs in town?"

Bingo scowled, but quickly wiped it away with his toothy smile. "Bunches of crumbs," he said. "The Bats are it. You ask around and listen."

"Maybe I will," Joey said. He looked at his wrist watch and shrugged. "I got to shove off. See you guys around maybe."

"Wait, hold it!" Bingo said quickly. "You got a date or something going tonight?"

Joey cocked his head. "Why?"

"Maybe you'd like to meet some of the crew," the other kid said. "We kick it around every night at the Dirty Spoon."

A real cool crew, man, and after I tell 'em they'll want to meet you. How about eight o'clock?"

Joey pursed his lips and scratched his chin as if giving it deep consideration. Inwardly he was tingling slightly. It had turned out so easy. His first day in Brixton and already a couple of punks were opening the door.

"I might work it in," he finally said. "Where's this Dirty Spoon at?"

"Three blocks down and two over," Bingo said pointing. "There's an Esso station and across from it Mac's Diner. That's it. Look, I'll be waiting out front at eight. You make it, eh?"

"If I'm not tied up," Joey said and gave them each a light tap on the chest. "See you around, men," he added and walked up the street.

The other two watched him go for a few moments and then looked at each other and laughed and continued on their way.

JOEY reached the front steps of the brownstone at the

same time as his sister Carmen. She was inches shorter than he but three years older and pretty as a Caribbean cruise poster. Jet black hair, dark flashing eyes and roses in her cheeks, but with the mark of poise and character depth stamped all over.

"Hi, Joey!" she greeted him warmly enough despite the shadow of a frown on her delicate brows. "Who are your friends?"

"Couple of guys I got talking to," he said instantly on the defensive. "So?"

"So I only asked," Carmen said lightly and went up the stone steps with him. "Oh by the way, there is a definite chance for a summer job at the store. In the stockroom. I spoke to Mr. Busby today, he's the stockroom manager and he said they were taking on a couple of more boys. It's from seven to four with an hour for lunch, and it pays forty-seven fifty. Not bad, huh?"

Joey shuddered but didn't let it show. "Me, a millionaire!" he said with a small laugh.

"Many are started at far less!" Carmen said quickly and

took hold of his arm as he was about to open the outer door. "Look, Joey, I've never preached, you know that," she said quietly, "but please *try* not to make it so rough on Mama. Okay? She's sick, Joey. No, I don't mean she needs a doctor. She's sick inside with worry about you, and me, too, I guess. We're all she's got. Her whole world. It would kill her if anything happened to...either of us. Know what I mean, Joey?"

"Sure, I know, and stop worrying yourself," he said. "Joey's learned his lesson and it won't happen again. Not ever. So don't make it tougher always climbing his back. Okay?"

Carmen studied him a moment and nodded. "Subject's dropped," she said. "Mr. Busby's interviewing between ten and eleven tomorrow morning. I'm sure you can get a job. Okay, let's go in."

At a quarter after eight that evening Joey stood in the dark doorway of a vacant store a half block up from Mac's Diner. He had been standing there now for half an hour taking a good look at the lay of

everything and at everybody going in and out of the diner which was of considerable size and brightly lighted and apparently doing a good business for the water front part of the city.

The taxi drivers, truck drivers, dock workers, and other grownups he passed over with a glance. It was the guys his age he paid special attention to, and there were six of them inside there now. Rather, there were five inside and Bingo Batista outside walking up and down the sidewalk waiting for him. The oldest one had looked around eighteen and he was the biggest one. A couple of inches and twenty-five pounds more than him. So what? So nothing.

All in all they were a pretty fair-looking bunch and a couple of things really impressed him. With the exception of Swede Swanson they were sharp dressers. No crazy rags that shouted in your face and made you want to puke, but real sharp stuff that showed they had it made when it came to the necessary buck. The other item was that two of them had

a car. The big guy and a red-headed kid with a boot camp hair cut. A Ford and a Chevy and no crocks either. Sassy looking boats that had plenty under the hood from the smooth song coming out the duals.

Yeah, Joey, maybe it was all here just begging for you!

He grinned at the thought and stepped out of the dark doorway and walked along the sidewalk toward the diner. When Bingo saw him coming he hurried forward to meet him.

"About thinking you'd chickened out, man!" the boy cried showing his white teeth in a pleased grin.

Joey eyed him unsmiling. "Don't push it, Bingo! I said maybe I'd work it in. Remember?"

"Sure, okay," the youth in the yellow and black jacket said quickly. "Anyways, you're here now and that's it. Come on in and meet 'em. They been waiting."

AS Bingo spoke, he opened the diner's door and pushed Joey in ahead of him. A

half dozen men were seated at the counter, but none bothered to turn his head. Joey wouldn't have noticed anyway, for he wasn't looking. His eyes were on the end two of the booths that lined the front of the diner toward which Bingo was leading him. In the nearest booth were three kids one of them the red head with the boot camp cut. And in the end booth was the big guy and Swede Swanson. Everybody had a Coke in his hand, but not a single pair of eyes watched Bingo and him approach. The old frost treatment the way they used to do it in Danvers. Cripes, like seeing yesterday's movie!

As they passed the nearest booth the redhead and the two others still didn't look up and when they stopped at the end booth the big guy and Swede were deeply absorbed in reading the tune titles on the juke box coin meter. He grinned inwardly and wished he had a fire cracker to toss for laughs.

"Hey, Mike," Bingo suddenly broke the silence. "Here's a guy wants to meet you. Joey Savoia. Comes from Danvers.

Joey, this is Mike Kosik. And Swede, sure."

Swanson turned around and said, "Hi", and Joey said, "Hi", but kept his eyes on the big guy. A few moments later Mike Kosik turned slowly and stared up at him out of flat, slate-colored eyes.

"Hi," he said tonelessly. "Park it, man. A Coke?"

Joey nodded and Kosik looked at Bingo. "Get it!"

The kid in the yellow and black jacket scurried over to the machine and Joey slid into the booth seat beside Swede Swanson and looked casually about fully conscious of Kosik's slate eyes fixed on him. "Not bad," he said presently. "Not a half bad dump."

"Better in Danvers, eh?" Kosik challenged softly.

Joey met his eyes and nodded. "We liked privacy," he said, easily.

At that moment Bingo returned with two Cokes and pushed one across the booth table to him. Kosik nodded at it. "Want something in it? Can be had."

Joey shook his head. "Belly's full of chianti," he said and

nodded right back at the other's drink. "But you go right ahead. Break it out. Don't let me spoil the party."

Kosik acted as if he hadn't heard. He took a long pull on his own Coke and looked at Joey again.

"Bingo and Swede tell me you know tricks," he said.

"You have to in Danvers," Joey said and returned the steady stare. "What about it?"

Mike Kosik's eyes tightened but he shrugged it off quickly.

"Just wondering if maybe you could fit in," he said and yawned.

Joey grinned and said nothing. Another routine procedure Gyrene had taught him so well. When you want something never go for it. Make it come to you. He drank some of his Coke and pushed the button for "Real Gone Gal" on the juke box listings and put a nickle in. He could almost smell the three in the booth in back of him straining their ears for every word. He bobbed his head in time with the tune and when the record was half over Kosik suddenly asked. "You handle a car, man?"

"Who doesn't?" Joey countered and went on bobbing his head.

"Let's go," Kosik said presently and stood up and shoved Bingo out of the booth ahead of him. "Let's see can you. Okay?"

Joey shrugged and got up with Swede and the four of them went out to the street and over to the parked Ford. Kosik pulled some keys from his pocket and gave them to him and he slid in behind the wheel very conscious of the redhead and the other two piling out of the diner and running over to the Chevy. Three guesses what was coming up and he was certain he needed only one. The old chicken game? So Okay. It wouldn't be the first time. Nor the last!

AFTER ten minutes of following direction instructions from Mike Kosik sitting in front with him Joey tooled the Ford onto a long straight stretch of night-shrouded deserted highway with the white line running down the middle. For a moment he was tempted to swing over and put his left wheels dead on the white line,

but on second thought he decided to play it dumb. By now he didn't go at all for Mike Kosik so the hell with him! Let him think he was calling the signals for the big laugh.

"Get your wheels on the line, man," Kosik said a few moments later. "See can you keep 'em there. Ever try it?"

"No," Joey lied and moved the car over. "So what's hard about it?"

"Nothing," the other boy said and laughed. "Nothing at all. Just see can you keep 'em there and hold it at fifty."

"Easy," Joey said and felt like laughing himself.

Presently headlights winked on way up ahead and came barreling toward him. He couldn't see by the headlights, but he didn't have to. He knew that the redhead with the boot camp cut was behind the wheel of the oncoming car, and he also knew the car's left wheels were dead on the center line. A tiny chill touched him for an instant and was gone.

Holding the car at a steady fifty he drilled it forward and half closed his eyes against the oncoming headlights and fixed

them fast on the white line. He could tell that Kosik seated beside him was watching him like a hawk and he could sense that Bingo and Swede in the back seat were doing the same. It made him feel swell inside and he knew his left wheels were on that white line to stay. Let the redhead climb right up over the fender the Ford's wheels were staying right on the white line. Gyrene, you should be here to see this one, too!

The next ten seconds were like riding a rocket straight into the blazing glare of twin suns that were hurtling closer and closer, but the only thing Joey Savoia was conscious of was the bright white line stretching out from in front of his left front wheel. And then in the last split instant when it seemed the glaring twin suns would pierce his very eyes panic pin-pricked his brain, but before his muscles could react the twin suns had swerved to the side and gone howling by, and the white line was still there dead in front of the left wheel.

"Jeezus!"

It sounded like Swede's voice, but it didn't matter to

Joey. He swung off the white line and pushed the Ford up to seventy and glanced sidewise at Kosik.

"Something else you want to find out?" he asked and laughed.

The other boy gave him a hard cold stare and pulled down the corners of his mouth.

"Don't crowd it, man!" he said darkly. "There's some other things....when we get around to 'em. Go on back to Mac's."

The drive back to Mac's Diner was made in silence and when they got there the redhead and the two others in the Chevy were waiting for them. Conscious of all eyes fixed on him Joey got out of the Ford and handed Kosik the keys with a mocking smile.

"Thanks for the boat ride," he said. "Maybe again sometime? I got to blow now, but I'll see you around."

"Maybe!" Kosik said in a flat voice. "I'll let you know."

"Anytime," Joey said easily and started to turn away.

It was then Mike Kosik shot out his hand with two fingers forked, but his eyes had already telegraphed the move-

ment. In a whirlwind of motion Joey ducked and twisted, flung up his two hands to grab the other's wrist, and then arching his back he heaved and let go. Mike Kosik sailed through the air like a bird and fell down in a sprawling heap on the sidewalk.

His reaction to Kosik's attack had been so fast it was all over before Joey realized, and fear stabbed at his heart. He quickly leaped back a step and came up on the balls of his feet poised for a jet take-off if a single switchknife gleamed in anybody's hand. But not a thing happened. They all stood very still staring at Mike Kosik gasping for breath and struggling up onto his feet. Swift relief surged through Joey. So that's the way it was with the Bats? Everybody for himself and nobody holds his hand or wipes his nose? Okay and a break for him, but the gang in Danvers sure wouldn't play it this way. An all for one crew, those guys!

He took a deep breath and dropped down on his heels and grinned over at Kosik.

"You okay?" he asked pleas-

antly. "No hard feelings?"

Mike Kosik wiped something from his mouth and shook himself like a dog and without a word went over and got into the Ford and rode away.

For several seconds dead silence hovered over the group on the sidewalk and then the redhead with the boot camp haircut laughed.

"School's out!" he cried. "Anybody for bowling at Silver Beach? How about you, Savoia? You cats bowl in Danvers?"

Joey nodded and started to speak, but Bingo Batista beat him to it.

"Later, men," he said. "Shove off and maybe we'll join you. Joey and me got things to talk. See you."

The redhead eyed Bingo a moment and then shrugged and with a hooking motion of his arm at the others he walked over and got into the Chevy. The others piled in after him and with a blast of souped up power the Chevy took off down the street. When it was gone Bingo winked at Joey and jerked his head at the diner.

"Mug of mud, man? You got

the time, I got the things to say."

Joey thought it over a moment and shrugged. "Maybe I have," he said. "What things?"

"Tell you inside," the other said and led the way into the diner and down to the end booth.

"Maybe Coke instead?" he asked when they got there.

"Mud's okay," Joey said. "Black."

"Two blacks coming up," Bingo said and went over to the counter.

WHEN he came back with the two cups his face was thoughtful and for several moments he sat staring into the black liquid without speaking. Finally Joey was about to say something when he looked up and grinned broadly.

"A real cool rod pilot, man!" he said and laughed. "I tell you truly you really scared it out of me. Old stuff for you, right?"

"Kid stuff," Joey said and sipped his coffee. He put his cup down holding Batista with his eyes. "That all the Bats got

to offer?" he asked dryly. "Kid stuff?"

Bingo scowled but it went away as a sly grin tugged at his lips.

"Mike's idea," he said. "For laughs *he* thought!" He paused and wagged his head. "Man, he asked for tricks and really got 'em! Right?"

Joey shrugged. "So?"

Bingo turned his hands palms up and cocked his head.

"So Mike didn't go for it," he said. "Would any Top Cat?"

"Top Cat?" Joey echoed absently.

The other boy shot him a wide-eyed stare. "You don't read me, man? *Top Cat*. That's Mike. Up to now anything he says we do."

A little quiver of excitement rippled through Joey. He grinned slowly. "Up to *now*, Bingo?" he murmured.

The other nodded slowly and drank some coffee. "Yeah," he said presently. "So maybe something should be done about it. Know what I mean?"

"Maybe," Joey said cautiously. "That all of it? Just something? What something?" He shook his head. "You want

me to read you clear, Bingo, you send it all. Okay?"

Batista nodded but didn't speak. Instead he turned his head around and looked at the other customers arguing baseball with the counterman at the far end. Presently he turned back and leaned forward over the booth table.

"Tonight's not the only thing about Mike," he said speaking low. "Fouled up a couple of things lately like he's gone chicken. Some of the crew are starting to wonder. Know what I mean?"

Joey shrugged and waited.

"Take just now," Batista spoke again. "New guy in town gives Mike the old one-two and what happens? Anybody do something about it? The crew, I mean?"

"Yeah!" Joey shook his head. "Some crew!"

Bingo's eyes darkened. "Don't worry about 'em," he said softly. "Mike asked for something and he got it. Anybody else and you'd a had trouble. Lots of it!"

"Okay, okay," Joey said. "So?"

The other boy frowned and chewed his lower lip.

"Maybe it's time somebody took over for Mike," he said slowly. "Maybe it is."

"Meaning you?"

Batista shook his head and pointed a finger. "You, man."

Joey stared at him wary eyed. "Why me?"

"Why not?"

JOEY sipped some of his coffee and let it trickle down his throat. Yeah, why not? The words echoed about in his head and sounded better and better. Hadn't Gyrene done it in Danvers? Moved right in and taken over and anybody didn't like it was free to do something? So he wasn't Gyrene and maybe not even close but he had a good idea he could keep that crew in line he'd had a look at tonight. So why not? Because it's come too fast and all at once? Okay, so it has!

He studied Bingo's face for a few moments.

"I might give it thought," he said slowly. "Only I'm still wondering about you. You'd go for an outsider taking over? Just why? Would the rest of the crew? Just why, too?" He stopped and leaned forward his

eyes boring. "You know something, Bingo?"

"What, man?"

"It don't figure, that's what!" Joey shook his head. "It don't add up. So what's the gimmick? You tell me it. You level with it and really tell. Okay?"

Bingo suddenly laughed and put out his hands and turned the palms upward.

"Sure I level with you, man!" he exclaimed. "What else? You wonder about Bingo. Okay! You're asking yourself why don't Bingo want it? Right?"

"You're sending it," Joey said evenly. "More, man."

"Simple," the other youth said and slapped the table lightly. "Me, I like to run with the pack, see? The man up front has all the headaches and he can have 'em! Know what I mean?"

Joey shrugged and suppressed a fake yawn. "My ears are open," he said. "Keep talking."

Bingo gave another of his sudden laughs and hunched a shoulder and wiggled his hands.

"So okay, it's the two of us,"

he said. "Me and you. You got brains and know lots of things. I got brains, too, and know the angles in this territory. Between us we have it beat. We really got it made. Anytime, man!"

Joey drank the last of his coffee and held the cup out in front of him and studied it intently.

"The rest of the Bats?" he suddenly shot out the words at Batista.

"Sheep. Okay crew, but sheep. Don't worry about 'em. That'll be simple to handle."

"One other thing," Joey spoke again after a few moments of silence between them.

"I'm tuned in, man! Give."

"Kosik. What about him?"

"Yeah, Mike," Bingo said and slid his lips back in a wide grin. "He wouldn't like it. Something he don't like right now. You, man! Mike's hating your guts real good, you guess that?"

"I'm crying," Joey said tonelessly. "So?"

"So like I said," Batista replied, "something should be done about Mike. So we do it. Me and you." He stopped and

leaned way forward. "You go for a deal, man? A real sweet deal?"

"Maybe, if it listens good," Joey told him. "But who's heard it yet?"

The other nodded and winked and turned around to take another look toward the three at the far end of the counter. They were still arguing baseball and presently he turned back to Joey with a second nod.

"I got it all figured beautiful," he said softly. "A real sweet deal. A mess of the green stuff for me and you and a mess of cops for Mike. Just like that, and he ain't around any more. How's it listen, man?"

Something small and cold slid through Joey Savoia, but it was gone before he hardly noticed. He peered at Batista intently with one eyebrow arched.

"The gimmick," he suddenly said.

"Like this," Bingo told him and inched a little closer. "It's something I been conning a couple of months. Solo on my own time, know what I mean?"

He paused and laughed. "Maybe I just been waiting for you to show, man!" he breathed.

"Yeah," Joey grunted and waited.

"Place on the water front near here," Bingo said lowering his voice even more. "Boats for hire and bait and crud like that. An old guy runs it. Looks a hundred and hits the bottle like he's got to dry up the world." He grinned broadly and winked. "And he don't like banks. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah, but do you?" Joey countered quickly. "All this about him. Says who?"

Batista looked angry and hurt. He shook his head and took a breath.

"I say I know all about him!" he whispered fiercely. "Ain't I telling it? Sure I know all about him. I was in his place a while back on an errand for a guy gives me a buck. Anyway this old boy is closing up for the night and, man, he's rolling. He really is. Stinks like a brewery, I tell you truly."

THE youth stopped and wet his lips with the few drops left in his coffee cup.

"Old guy's place has two rooms, a pier shack," he went on speaking. "One where he sleeps it off and the other where he keeps his junk. There's an old desk and he keeps the green in a drawer. I seen it when he opened it to make change. Man, lots of green! Maybe a thousand bucks. Keeps it locked, but a guy could open it with his teeth. Man, you'd never have it so good on an easy touch! You still got me tuned in?"

The small voice of caution in Joey was trying hard but the mounting excitement squashed it out.

"Still reading you," he said slowly. "And it's still there? How come if such an easy touch?"

Bingo Batista looked hurt again and for a few moments he didn't speak.

"Ain't I said I know the angles in this territory?" he eventually snapped. "You think the cops love us Bats? Hell, any place gets knocked over around here the cops talk about it with the Bats *fast*, know what I mean? *Unless they got somebody to grab right away!*

It coming through clear now, man?"

Joey nodded. "Kosik?"

"Him," Bingo said and winked. "Look, an accident and I find a real easy touch. But not for Bingo. No man! I pull it alone and I'm up to here in cops. So is all the crew. It ain't worth it, see? But I'm itching knowing it's there. I even con the old guy's place a few nights to double check and it comes out the same. Half plastered when he closes up and out like a light an hour after. Once I sling a rock against the side of his place just to test, but there ain't a rumble. He's cold. Wouldn't even hear a bomb."

He stopped talking for a moment and pulled down the corners of his mouth.

"Man, I really itched for it, but I just keep itching. This cat ain't crazy. Without a sure pigeon for the cops it could blow up easy as nothing. So I forget it. Until now."

"And Kosik?" Joey grunted. "The pigeon? How?"

Batista smiled slyly and put his hands in his pocket and pulled out a silver identification

bracelet and held it up for Joey to see. The name Michael Kosik was engraved on it and below a social security number.

"Funny how things can check in," he said and laughed. "Only this morning I find this on the floor right where we're sitting. And tonight me and you are looking at it....with ideas. Know what I mean?"

Joey nodded but didn't look impressed. "Haven't heard all of those ideas yet," he said flatly.

Joey brushed the air with his hand and jiggled the bracelet.

"Okay, okay, I spell it out!" he said in a low tight voice. "Me and you pick up the old man's green and leave this on the floor. So presto, the cops take over Mike and we take over the Bats. As simple as that, and we got it made so easy, man. So simple, right?"

"Simple?" Joey echoed and gave the other a hard stare. "Kosik just goes away and that's it? No rumble out of him? He won't have nothing to say where he was when the caper happens? You kidding somebody, man?"

Bingo drew in a breath and

puffed his cheeks and blew it out.

"No rumble that'll go for a thing," he said softly. "Mike's in the book plenty times. Small stuff, but in there. The cops don't like him and would they just love to hang him real high! A thing like this and they'd latch onto him so fast! Man, he could rumble like crazy and maybe even prove a little, but it wouldn't change nothing. The cops would like something on him that bad, see? I tell you truly, Mike would be standing on just air, that's all. With his record nobody'd believe him." He stopped and shook his head solemnly. "Not even the crew, you want it that straight. So how about it? A deal? Me and you take over, but good?"

Joey ran the tip of his tongue across his lips and frowned as if giving it weighty consideration, but the only answer was there all the time.

"You got a deal," he spoke it aloud. "When?"

Batista looked surprised. "Tonight, man! Right *now*! Take us half an hour to get there and maybe a little more if he ain't closed up and stiff yet. Should be. Nothing doing

in his racket after ten. "All boats in by then and he's whacking away at the bottle. Sure, man, tonight. *Right now!*"

JOEY glanced up at the diner's clock on the wall behind the counter and received a mild jolt when he saw the hands pointing to twenty minutes after ten. He should be home from the movies by eleven and that's where he'd told Mama and Carmen he was going. They'd had a lot of hot yakking about it, but he'd smoothed it out in the end. What was the place, his prison? Hadn't he promised he'd be okay from here on in? He'd go down in the morning and get that stockroom job. Was going to a lousy movie a crime? Stuff like that and in the end he got an out. But it was ten-twenty now and...

"What's bugging you, man?" Bingo's voice cut in on his thoughts. "You looking at the clock? You got a curfew or something? So what's the bug or do we roll?"

Joey gave him a hard stare and nodded. "Just checking the time. Let's roll."

At the end of half an hour Joey Savoia's feet felt as if he'd walked a dozen miles. In Danvers there were a lot of side streets and alleys, but nothing like here in Brixton. The town was lousy with them and it seemed as if Batista led the way down them all and with the stench of the water front in his nose every inch of the way, too. Neither of them spoke and for a reason that was very obvious Bingo hugged the darkest sides and carefully skirted every street light.

But by the end of the half hour Joey's feet were really starting to pop and something he couldn't put his finger on, if really anything, was gnawing at the back of his brain. So when they came to yet another corner he touched Batista on the arm.

"Look, how far now?" he whispered. "Or have you been walking us in circles, man?"

The other grinned and bobbed his head. "Sort of, but to play it smart. I know the cops' beats around here like my palm, see? Let one of them spot us and it maybe wouldn't be so good later on, know what I mean? So we went where they

ain't. But relax, we're there. Or just about." He stopped and pointed beyond the corner to his left. "Out there at the end of that pier," he said. "Take a gander. Shack's dark as your belly. Nice for us, hey, man?"

Joey peered through the night gloom in the direction of the other's pointing finger. They were standing almost at the edge of the water and at the far end of the long pier reaching out he could just see the blurred outline of a small pier shack.

"See it," he whispered. "So?"

Batista laughed softly. "So we go visit the old guy. Only he don't know it, right? Come on."

With a nod and a crooking of a finger the youth slid around the corner and walked out onto the pier. Joey hesitated a moment, not knowing why, and then quickly caught up with him and together they walked catfooted through the dark. With each step Joey took more of the exciting tingle of old times in Danvers came back to him. He gave a little bob of his head and grinned to himself in the dark. Gyrene, I get it made so easy. One day and look at me, man! Going right to

the top. Okay, Bingo is taking the ride, too, but so what? I can keep him in line once I get set and that's soon, man. Real soon! I just wish, Gyrene, you were....

His rambling thoughts were blown away as Batista suddenly grabbed him and fell with him to the pier planking. Words jumped into his throat, but stopped there as the bright white beam of a searchlight swung through the night air only a foot or two above their heads and passed on out of sight. Only then did he hear the power rumble of a boat somewhere out there on the water.

"Harbor cops!" Bingo hissed in his ear. "Always poking that lousy light around but I heard 'em. Okay, they're gone now. Won't be back for a couple of hours." He peered at Joey in the bad light and grinned broadly. "Scare you, man?" he whispered.

Joey got up onto his feet and gave him a hard stare. "Next time pass a guy the rumble!" he said tightly. "I don't like surprises!"

Bingo shrugged and brushed off the front of his jacket.

“Didn’t hear it soon enough, man,” he said. “But no sweat, we’re clear now. Come on and watch how a good man works.”

A question formed in Joey’s head, but a minute later when the two of them crouched in front of the door of the night-shrouded pier shack he received the answer without asking. Bingo first tried the door knob with a delicate touch and finding it locked he put his hand in his pocket and took out a skeleton key. There was just the faintest murmur of sound as it turned in the lock and then Bingo silently eased the door open and slipped inside with a jerk of his head for Joey to follow.

SECONDS later Joey was through the door opening and standing in a pitch dark room with a hundred different smells and all of them of the water front variety. He sensed rather than heard Batista close the door and then at the same instant as the faint click of a switch the place was filled with pale yellow light. Pale as it was it blinded him for a split instant and just as his eyes re-

turned to focus he heard another click. A very different click than that of the light switch, but it was exactly like a clicking sound he had heard more than once in Danvers, and although his brain shouted he was crazy his blood ran cold.

He spun around quickly and he was not crazy. Bingo Batista stood with his back to the door and in his right hand was a gleaming razor edge switch-knife!

For an eternity Joey could only stand there completely dumbfounded and paralyzed with fear.

“Jesus, what...?” he suddenly gasped and choked.

Bingo laughed and reached back his other hand and slipped the skeleton key into the inside lock and turned it and put the key in his pocket.

“Yeah!” He nodded and laughed again. “Little surprise. Right, man?”

Joey swallowed and closed his eyes and opened them quickly and stabbed glances about. What he saw chilled his blood all the more and made something start to revolve inside his head. There was noth-

ing in the room, not even a stick of furniture. Dust and grime covered the floor and the one window that faced seaward was boarded up on the outside. There was nothing, absolutely nothing to use as a defensive weapon and the thing in his head revolved faster and faster.

"What the hell, Bingo?" he cried out. "What's the idea? You crazy or something? What's the play?"

The youth in the yellow and black jacket took a single step away from the door and stopped. His dark eyes gleamed and his lips parted in a triumphant leer.

"You can't guess, man?" he breathed softly. "You give Bingo the old one-two and everybody should laugh? Him, too?" He stopped and with his free hand touched his groin and then his nose. "You read me now, man? You think Bingo laughs, too, eh? You think that, man?"

Joey couldn't believe his ears and he couldn't make his tongue work either. He opened and closed his mouth several times but no sounds came out.

"You think I let it pass, a thing like that, man?" Batista spoke again. "Smart punk thinks he gets away with it? No, man. I tell you truly, *no!*"

"But you admitted you asked for it!" Joey cried as his voice came with a rush. "You said so. What the hell, Bingo? It was just one of those things. Happens all the time and no sweat. It's happened to me, too. Look, this is crazy. Real crazy! I tell you...."

BINGO stopped the rest by taking another step forward and pushing the switchknife out in front of him.

"The wrong man," he said. "You picked the wrong man, you know that now? Nobody does a thing like that to Bingo. You hear me, man? *Nobody!*"

"But why the knife?" Joey gasped as his feet began to feel like lumps of lead he couldn't move. "Why? Did I use a knife, did I? And what'll it get you to cut me up? Those guys in the diner. They saw us leave together. You cut me up and... Bingo, use your head! This is all crazy!"

The other youth laughed silently and pulled the silver

identification bracelet from his pocket and tossed it onto the dust covered floor.

"Crazy, man?" he mocked. "Who's crazy? Me? You? Mike? Do you read me now, man? Begin to get the pattern? *Do* you, man?"

Like a house of cards the horrible truth of it all began to tumble down in pieces inside Joey's head. And that other thing there revolved faster and faster.

"You really get the pattern, man?" Batista taunted again. "All the stuff I told you, the build up? You ate it, didn't you, man? Yeah, you really lapped it up. Mike's out and me and you in. Top Cats, right? Only no! Just *one!*" He stopped and tilted the needle point of the knife toward his chest. "Me, Bingo! You're dead. Mike fries for it. So just one Top Cat. *Me!*"

"No, you'll fry!" Joey cried. "Don't you realize? The crew bowling. They left us together. They'll guess. They'll *know* and they'll..."

"Stuff it, man!" Batista hissed. "Just you and Mike. That's the way it'll be. The

crew seen you clobber Mike. You think they don't figure Mike'll do something about it? Top Cats gets clobbered in front of his crew and that's the end of it for him? You crazy enough to think that, man? It's Mike and you. That's the way it'll be. Harbor cops check these old pier shacks every few days and they'll find you and Mike's dog tag. Then that'll be it. You dead and Mike never coming back. You see, man? Okay, you've had it. *Tough tiddy, right?*"

The sweat was pouring out of Joey hot and turning ice cold as it trickled down his skin. As Bingo advanced slowly the switchknife became an all powerful magnet for his eyes. The only thing in all the world. Gyrene, help me! You showed us how to take a knife, but we used fake ones. This is real, Gyrene! This is a real one and so can I remember? Can I do it like you showed? Gyrene *help me!*

The words streamed through Joey's head an unspoken prayer in a void of roaring fog. All was fog there except for one single split instant when mem-

ory whipped back to Batista throwing his blood-soaked handkerchief into the gutter with the naked hatred in his eyes. That's when he should have known and realized. Guys like Bingo and Chico never forgive or forget. They keep it hidden way down inside them until they get the chance to pay it back. Like now! Oh God, Joey, why didn't you spot it then and realize!

Like the others the words streamed through his head and were lost in the roaring fog. And then there was nothing there. Only the gleaming blade slashing through the air at him, but instinct took care of Bingo's first lunge. He leaped back and twisted away searching for a chance to dart in underneath and pin the other's arm. But Bingo knew all about that, too. He checked his lunge as quickly as he started it and came up on the balls of his feet grinning. He was having fun. This he liked. Don't get it over quick. It was much sweeter the other way. The youth's lips moved, but if he said anything Joey didn't hear for the roaring in his head and

the thunder of his blood in his ears.

The switchknife flashed out again like a striking golden cobra and Joey whirled clear of it, but not quite all the way. Fire raced across his left shoulder and part way down the arm. He heard his own voice cry out and he heard Batista laugh as the youth went into a little fancy dance step and whipped the gleaming blade back and forth in front of him.

"Stings you, man? Stings you real mean, right?"

He heard the words this time but they didn't make any sense in his roaring head. There was only the gleaming knife. That's all his brain could feel now. The knife and the fire in his shoulder. And then Batista lunged with the knife again, but this time Joey didn't just try to twist away. The things Gyrene had taught him came flashing back and he made as if to step back from the lunge, but instead he dropped half way to his knees and shot up his two hands to grip Bingo's wrist as the knife flashed by over his head.

But his hands were slippery

with sweat and he lost his grip with the right one and at the same unfortunate instant he stumbled and fell against Batista. As he did he whipped his right arm about the youth's neck and cupped his hand over the chin and yanked hard, but it was too late. His left hand slipped off Bingo's wrist and down came the needle pointed knife to plunge deep into his side.

White fire streaked through him and swirled up into his head to explode. He felt himself falling and Bingo's two hands were clawing at his face and throat and the knife was not in either hand! And then he was down on one knee on the floor and his right hand was still cupped over Batista's chin and somehow the youth was on his back across his knee and his face was so purple it looked ready to burst. With the

few drops of life's strength left in him he cupped his left hand over Bingo's chin on top of his right and then twisted and yanked downward as he let the weight of the upper half of his body drop on the youth's face. And lastly just as Batista's neck bones let go with a snap, black oblivion closed over him.

A little after midnight the duty officer aboard the harbor police boat spotted a crack of light showing through the boarded up window of the pier shack and when he investigated he found the two dead bodies in a pool of blood. And at three o'clock that morning a police cruiser stopped in front of the brownstone front and a cop went up the steps and played his flashlight over the apartment bell button cards until he came to the one marked, SAVOIA.

THE END

HORROR IN THE NIGHT

by KOLLER ERNST

The doctor vowed hideous revenge on the young hoodlums

DAVID CONDON, MD., put his arm around Elsie, his bride of 24 hours, trying to reassure her. He wished, fervently, that there were someone to put a reassuring arm around his own shoulders as he faced the four overgrown kids on the black, lonely cut-through in Allegany State Park

between Bradford and Salamanca.

It was 3 A.M. The kids stood in the glare of the headlights; big, silent now against the blackness, the whispering of the forest which hung over them. They leered suggestively at Elsie.

It's not real, he thought in



growing panic. A road-sign, white in the glare of lights, read:

"Ranger Station 1 Mi." A black, painted finger pointed straight ahead.

People are there, he thought. Good people, peacefully sleeping. The camps are there. Help was there, all around them. Only a mile away. Yet, there they stood, captives of four oversized boys, smiling among themselves, deadly as four mad wolverines.

"I thought you kids were in trouble," David repeated, motioning toward the battered, topless jalopy which was skewered sidewise in the road, blocking two-thirds of it.

"He thought we were in trouble," said the one with the woman-like hips they called Fatso. "Imagine that."

Elsie squeezed close to David. He could feel the violent tremble of her slender body tight against him.

"He thought we were in trouble," repeated the tall one they called Slim. "Now ain't that nice. Always worryin' about us teenagers."

"Sure," said Fatso. "Why, kids," he mimicked. "Can't I

help? Is somebody hurt? I'm a doctor. Polite bastard, ain't he?"

Somewhere an owl said whoooo.

The boys laughed, came a step closer, flowing like a human wave.

"Who?" the stocky one called Crusher said. "Why the Doc, that's who." He stepped out, squat, bulge-chested for all his baby-fuzz which still shone on his round chin. "You are a gentleman, aren't you, Doc?"

"Look, boys," David said, tightening his arm around Elsie, "I'm glad nobody's hurt. Thought you'd had an accident. We'll go now."

He took a step, but they tightened around him.

"You afraid, Doc?" Slim asked. "There isn't anything to be afraid of. This stuff you hear about teenagers is for the birds. We're just misunderstood boys, aren't we, fellas?"

"Sure," said the slight one, the blond with the heavy duck cut and the surprising basso voice. "We're really a bunch of Galahads at heart, Doc." He winked at Elsie. "Say, chick, this guy been molesting you?"

Elsie found her voice. It was a shaking treble in the quiet night.

"Please," she said. "My husband and I would like to go now. Glad...glad no one was hurt in the...accident."

"The chick is scared," Slim said. "You think she's scared of us?"

"Naw," said Fatso, he with the hips and waddle of a woman. "She's scairt of the square. Maybe he's kidnapping her."

"Listen," David said tightly. "We're going. Make way through, or, so help me, I'll punch a way through. Come on Elsie. Now open up."

He took a step and stopped. They lined up tightly in the lights, four teen-age boys, the smallest as big as he; four boys with the bodies and muscles of men. Dave looked longingly at the car. If only I could get to my bag, he thought. The sight of a scalpel might frighten them off.

BUT they lounged before him, wary, watching, their eyes cold, their lips curled, contemptuous. Like cats, they were cats with tails

twitching, crouched, ready to pounce upon an unwary field mouse.

"Listen, he says," mimicked Blondy. "He says they're going through. Make way, fellas. The creep is going through. Through what, pop?"

David felt Elsie's tremble increase. She pressed against him like a frightened animal. Her fingers bit into his arm. He could sense the panic rising in her like a running tide.

"Damn you," he said harshly, "One at a time I'll take you on if it's only a fighting thrill you want. One at a time I'll teach you, what society forgets to teach you when it brings you hoodlums into court. Is there one who isn't afraid on a man-to-man basis, or do you only hunt in packs, like rats?"

He drew no rise from them. They merely laughed.

"Hear, hear," said Slim. "He wants to fight us one at a time. Doc wants to be a hero."

"Shame," said Blondy. "He has his values twisted. He thinks we're hoodlums. You know what I think, fellas?"

"What?" They chimed into the game.

"I think we'd better rescue the frail," Blondy said. "I think he's transporting her across the state line for immoral purposes. You know what that means, fellas."

"Look, boys," David said, feeling the icy undercurrent come into his bowels. "You've had your fun. Let's forget this and we'll all go home. How about it?"

"Mann Act," said Slim, paying no attention to him and answering Blondy. "We gotta save the frail from the Mann Act."

For a terrible moment the park was as quiet as a grave. The lights accentuated the blackness which hemmed them in; whispered at them, cackled at them. Yet, only a mile ahead began the trail camps; Buffalo Trail, Camp Turner, Beaver Run, the dozens of others. Hundreds slept peacefully at that moment almost within shouting distance. But there in that little patch of glare, they were nevertheless as isolated as though they stood on top of Mount Everest.

THEN Elsie sobbed. It was a pitiful, frightened sound,

a quivering slice out of David's heart. He tightened his grip on her trembling shoulders.

"Get out of the way," he said grimly.

Angrily he stepped forward, fists clenched, feeling the bite of his nails into the palms of his hands, ready to lash out, to fight his way clear. "If they attack," he said clearly to Elsie, "get into the car and lock it. They can't harm you then. Drive to a ranger station. I can fight these hoodlums off long enough for that."

Miraculously, a path opened before him. He felt a surge of triumph, even though his back crawled as he passed between them and reached for the car door.

They struck then, a quick staggering blow at the back of his neck. Elsie was wrenched from his side. He heard her startled sob, then arms seized him. Fists rained against his head and face, raising blinding stars in his brain. He fought back like an animal, turning and squirming, his teeth bared, ripping at them, snarling.

He hurled one away. Knocked down a second. But they came back cursing. A

shoe caught him in the stomach. His breath exploded in agony. A fist caught his jaw. rocked him. Then he was down and they were kneeing him and kicking him and pounding his head on the road.

For an instant he lost consciousness. When he opened his eyes he saw Elsie struggling in Slim's embrace. He tried to rise. But Blondy, Fatso and Crusher, panting and cursing, held him down.

"God damn you!" he cried. "Touch her, and I'll kill every last bastard of you, if I have to hunt you down for the rest of my life!"

Blondy slammed him across the mouth.

"Shut up, Pop," he said. He yelled at Slim. "For Crissake, get done with the frail. We can't wait all night. Or can't you handle her alone like a man?"

There was a ripping of clothes, then Elsie's quavering scream. It was cut short immediately, followed by the thud of savage blows crunching against soft, tender skin. Then there was silence except for the sound of a body being thrown onto the seat of the car.

Dave struggled. He got an arm free, smashed a fist upward, felt the shock of knuckles breaking against teeth; felt the give, the shatter of the teeth and for a moment, he fought in a manic frenzy, back to the ground. He hurled Blondy clear. But the blocky ones continued to smash him. He got a headlock. An ear brushed his face. He bit, ripped it away, spat it out. A terrible scream of pain cut the night.

Then a boot descended, grated off his forehead. He remembered nothing after that.

IT was still dark, the headlights were still on when he finally groaned to consciousness. There remained only one car. His own.

For an instant he lay in the road. Then came remembrance, like a terrible, unendurable hot stab. He crawled to his feet, fell, crawled and finally staggered up.

"Elsie!" he called. Elsie! Elsie! Elsie!"

Only the sighing trees answered him, waving gently above him. What they had

seen, they had seen. Being part of nature, they would never give up their secret. But they sighed gently their sympathy.

He staggered to the car, wrenched open the door.

"Thank God," he gasped, falling into the seat. "Thank God at least you're here."

He fell against Elsie. But she did not move. She sat in the front seat, staring straight ahead. Her clothes were ripped from her. In the light from the dash her face was twisted and misshapen and swollen. She whimpered softly, like an animal. Her beautiful body was a mass of gouges, scratches, fist-big bruises.

He took her in his arms, rocked her, tried to cover her with the shreds which remained. Finally he put his own, tattered coat about her.

"Elsie," he crooned, "Elsie, Elsie. It's over now. It's all right now. We'll be all right. We're going home now, Elsie. To your new home."

Hopelessly, he kept saying it over and over, although he could not believe it himself, and inside him his soul ran hot like rushing lava, and his heart beat like red hammers,

and his stomach hurt and his mind screamed.

But Elsie, who had not yet seen her new home, did not answer. She stared straight ahead, whimpering, trembling.

She never did answer. Then, nor at the Ranger Station where he reported what had happened. Nor at the State Institution when they placed her in the single, solitary room and David held her and kissed her and wiped her face and whispered to her, his heart broken, his mind still paralyzed at the horror, the savagery, the suddenness of it all.

"Darling," he whispered to her. "My poor darling."

He kissed her broken, bleeding lips, and her vacant eyes and her shell ears. And she just sat and trembled and stared and whimpered.

In the institution office he turned to the head psychiatrist and asked, although he too, knew the answer.

"Will she ever?"

The psychiatrist made some squiggles on a pad. Then he looked up with a smile, one meant to be reassuring, but one which reminded Dave of his hopelessness that night.

"There is always hope," the doctor said. "Where there is life, there is hope. She's had a terrible experience."

"Yes," David said.

Mutely he turned and walked from the institution. Outside, he stopped and looked at the red building, with its black barred windows. One of them belonged to her. His Elsie. His bride of 24 hours. It was her honeymoon room.

Then he walked down the street, blindly, past people who stared at him, to his car.

"A juvenile," he said as the starter whirled and the car sprang to life. "A juvenile with a part of an ear missing; a juvenile who is blond, like a girl, but has a bass voice; a pimply juvenile they call Slim, and a fat, rumpy one they call Fatso. God, please God, let me find them."

HE drove first to the Salamanca trooper barracks. No, they said. No luck on the juveniles. Too bad he didn't get the license. The descriptions? A Lieutenant MacDonald, said sadly, sympathetically:

"All juveniles look alike. All have Slims, and Crushers, and Blondies and little fat, girl-like guys they call Fatso. They could be from Buffalo. Olean. Hornell. Bradford. Kane. Rochester even. Or Pittsburgh. Or any one of a hundred little towns around here. But we don't remember four such kids."

"If I found them," Dave said, "what would happen to them?"

The lieutenant spread his hands.

"If they're real juveniles, we're helpless," he said. "A judge could send them to Randall's Island. A reform institution."

"That's all?"

"That's all."

"That's nice," said David. "We actually encourage juvenile delinquency, don't we, lieutenant?"

Lieut. MacDonald nodded slowly. "In a way," he said guardedly.

"In every way," snapped David. "They assaulted me. But worse even than that, they erased her mind with the horror of that night. That's worse than murder. Murder is merci-

ful. You are dead. But she is dead and she is alive. Can't you understand what we're letting these juvenile delinquents do?"

"What can I do?" the lieutenant asked. "What do you want me to do? Shoot them?"

"No," David said. "That would be too easy for them. And certainly, a couple years in Randall's Island is not the answer. The law is wrong. The system is wrong. These are not juveniles. These are monsters, not yet 18. They haven't a right to be classed as human beings."

The lieutenant reached across the desk, touched his arm.

"Take it easy, Doctor," he said. "I know how you feel. God knows, I'd feel the same. I got two young daughters. But we can't do anything. We can't even touch them. There are old women's sob societies that would scream their stupid heads off if we so much as slapped one of these damned bastards. I sure know how you feel. Sometimes I can't look at myself. But...that's the way it is."

David nodded. The trem-

bling anger which had been shaking him, left suddenly. It left him cold and rock-like.

"Perhaps, lieutenant," he said. "Perhaps you can't do anything. Perhaps I can."

He walked out. At the door the lieutenant's voice stopped him for a fraction of a second. His words were soft, sympathetic.

"Be careful about it, Doctor," he said. "And...good luck."

GOOD luck.

The words haunted David for weeks. He moved from town to town, delaying his return to Niagara Falls to open his practice. He was young. Just a year out of his internship. Proud he'd been, because he had managed to get a nice Colonial near the American Falls. Elsie, a Pittsburgh girl, had never seen it. It was to have been her honeymoon surprise.

They had been coming home, cutting through the park north from Bradford.

Now he hunted. Like a restless jungle beast he hunted, for a terrible hunger was in

him. He combed the Southern Tier towns. A week here. Two weeks there. Staying until he had rooted out all the hang-outs of the juveniles.

Looking, seeking, searching, dying for the sight of four boy-men, one with a half ear. There wasn't a day that passed without some motorist pulling up behind him in a torture of brakes, a curse on his lips as he pulled past. For there wasn't a day that David didn't see the four hoodlums, and stop suddenly to make sure.

He drove the streets of the towns, his eyes on every adolescent that walked by. He was lucky that he wasn't killed. He narrowly missed smashups dozens of times. But there is a God who protects the seeker, the dedicated, and David continued on, looking.

Each time he thought he saw one, or all of them come from a pool hall, or gin mill, or hot dog stand, he felt the red brain fire. Until he had a second, closer look. Then he saw these were other boys.

They look alike, he thought savagely, hopelessly. Just like the lieutenant said; every

teenage gang has a Blondie, a Slim, a Crusher, a Fatso.

And so he drove. He grew thin and haggard. He let his beard grow. He did not want to look at himself in the mirror to shave. He began to look like an eccentric. His eyes were sunken, blazing pits which frightened people.

Doggedly he continued his search. He reasoned the youths must have been from somewhere in the Southern Tier. They'd had a topless jalopy. They couldn't have driven that too far. Why, it wouldn't run too far. They had to be from the State. He felt hot panic whenever he thought they might have been from California, for instance. Or Florida. Or Ohio, even. His task would be hopeless.

He wiped these thoughts away and drove, blindly, with eyes only for young men who walked the streets, or drove past in cars; or even buses.

He lived on hot dogs and black, scalding coffee. Quick meals, so that he could continue his quest. First in Olean. Then Hornell. Then down to Bradford. Then Kane. Then back up to Wellsville, Sala-

manca, Corning, Dunkirk. Back through Allegany State Park, slowly through the dozens of camps. Searching. Looking. Hoping. His soul screaming with impatience at the terrible injustice of it all.

But, although he pulled up short many times, nowhere was there a boy with a missing half ear. Nowhere was there a blond with a thick duck cut. Nowhere was there a tall one with pimples, nor a fat one with hips like a woman and narrow shoulders and a waddle like a bear.

Nowhere.

Not until he came, finally, to Franklindale, a town of 900, a dozen miles north of Allegany State Park on route 219 toward Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

There he found the missing half ear. There he found Slim, and Blondy, and Woman Hips.

THEY were tumbling out of a pool hall as he drove along Route 219. He'd just spied it and was looking around for a rooming house where he could stay. They piled into the old, topless Ford.

He recognized it with a shiver of savage delight. For an instant he had an urge to drive headlong against them. Smash them, his mind said. Destroy them! Maim them!

But he had to be sure. Certainly, there was the blond, and the tall one, and the two blocky ones. There were laughing and joking and jostling each other into the car. The last one to enter was the fat one. He turned to watch a woman walk across the street, whistling at her and they all shouted.

David saw the half ear. It was the right ear. He'd thought it would be. But in that jumble of bodies that night, he couldn't be sure.

"Hey, Slim," the fat one cried. "How about that hip movement?"

"Cool, Crusher," Slim said. "Cool."

They roared away, cutout open, the old jalopy cracking and snarling like a racing car.

David backed around, followed until he was close enough to get the license number. Then he braked and stopped, lest they discover him. After that he looked

around for a single house. He'd changed his mind about a room.

In the town's real estate agency, a little hole in the wall along the two-block main street, he learned of an empty farmhouse, for rent on Losson Road. He took it, saying his family would follow in a few days. Then he located the police station and drove there. A greying man in a crumpled blue shirt was dozing behind a littered desk. Wanted posters hung slabsided on a little blackboard.

"I want to report reckless driving," Dave said.

The old man opened his eyes, focused on him and slowly groaned to an upright sitting position.

"Your car hit?" he asked without interest.

"No," David said.

He made up a story, about how he'd been cut off on the road. A car full of juvenile delinquents, he said. He gave the license number of the jalopy. The old man grinned, scratched his head.

"Hell," he said, "that ain't no juvenile delinquent, though

the boys are a mite loud at times. That's Judge Bevan's son, Slim. A young hellion, he and his crowd. What he do, did you say?"

David spread his hands, forced a smile. He looked like a hungry Satan. He'd had what he want to know. He had intended to report the reckless driving and thus, get the name and address of the jalopy owner. The village policeman had unwittingly supplied it right off the bat.

"Forget it," he said. "If he's a judge's son, I must have been mistaken. Probably got the license number wrong."

The old man relaxed, settled back and grinned.

"Just as well, stranger," he said. "You bring a charge against Slim in this town and his pappy'd shore enough throw it out. Mebbe throw you in jail. Though, I ain't sayin' the boy hasn't got some licks comin'."

"Thanks," David said.

"Don't mention it."

AT a corner drug store David bought coffee and a hamburger. Then he looked up

Judge Bevan's number. When he was finished he returned to the real estate office and arranged for a telephone under his assumed name of Martin Wilson of Pittsburgh. Then he waited.

That night he spent sitting in the living room of the old house, staring out at the moon-bathed road and the gently waving trees. The smell of mint and ripening blueberries was strong in the air. But he was not aware of these things. He saw Elsie, in her barred room, 90 miles away, pale-faced, staring, whimpering, trembling.

He saw the headlights etching the boys against the black trees. He saw Slim, savaging her toward the car. He saw terror and horror and sheer brutality. And he heard her scream; hopelessly, pitifully.

After a while he went and opened his black bag and injected a sedative. He wanted time to pass quickly. He wanted to be unconscious until it was time to arise; time for action; time for justice.

The following day the telephone men came and installed his phone. Then he waited for

nightfall, impatience burning in him, hate a red acid seared his heart and mind. Haggard-eyed, he watched the slow passage of time on his watch. Finally, it was night.

At midnight he made his first call. He spoke in a treble and asked for Slim. After a while he heard the voice and, for an instant, he couldn't speak, so violent was his reaction. It was the voice of that night in the park.

"Well, who is it?" Slim was saying. "Speak up. This is Slim."

"Slim," David whispered. "This is Blondy." He lowered his voice to a growl. "We got a caper. We're in the old farmhouse, you know, on Losson Road. Hurry up, meet us here."

"I don't get it," Slim said. "I just leave you guys, now..."

"Shutup," snapped David. "This is something we stumbled on after we left you. Shake your fanny and get over here. Or do you want to chicken out?"

"Don't you call me chicken," Slim said. "I'll be there in ten minutes."

Softly David hung up. Then he went into the kitchen to wait. Fifteen minutes later Slim drove into the deserted farm yard. David went out to greet him.

"Hello, Slim," he said, as the tall, pimpled youth slid from behind the wheel. "Imagine meeting you again."

Slim started, stared at him uncertainly.

"Hey," he said, "what's the gag? I don't know you. Where's Blondy and the guys?"

"Inside, you scurvy bastard," David said.

He grabbed the tall youth suddenly by the throat and shook him. All the anger, all the pent-up emotion, all the bottled savagery exploded in him in a frenzy of strength which left Slim helpless, terrified.

"Inside, you scurvy bastard," David snarled.

He propelled Slim ahead of him. He flung him against the wall and hovered over him. Slim's eyes were big, white with fright.

"What's the matter?" he whimpered. "What I ever do to you?"

"You're not so brave now, alone, are you?" David asked. He slammed his hand across the youth's face, and Slim whimpered some more and crouched like a dog. He tried to press himself into the very wall. He shivered so his heels clacked.

"Why don't you fight?" David asked. "You were brave enough before."

"Cheez, mister," Slim said. "I ain't done nothin'. Wait till the law hears about this. You know what you can get for beating up a juvenile."

"Yes, I know. But who will you tell them beat you up?" He laughed sourly. His beard was a perfect disguise. "Imagine, a big boy like you, afraid."

He slammed his fist into Slim's face. Then he smashed a crunching right on his nose, felt the bridge give, saw the spurt of blood over the boy's face and chin. Slim began to cry. David was tempted to tell him why, to remind him about the woman, the bride of 24 hours, on the black road. But this, he knew, would have been folly. He seized Slim by the

throat, dragged him to the phone.

"Now," he said, "I want you to call Blondy. Have him meet you here. I have work for him, too. After that I'll have Blondy call Crusher and then I'll have him call Fatso. Then we'll have a picnic."

"A...a picnic."

"A picnic. Dial."

Slim's hand shook as he put through his call to Blondy. Then David dragged him into the bedroom and bound him securely.

ONE by one he tricked them there, fought them, overcame them with implacable savagery; feeling disgust at himself for what he was doing, but grimly hewing to his task; feeling surprise, too, at the ease with which he was able to handle them alone.

"You're cowards!" he screamed. "Cowards! Cowards! Cowards! You have courage only in gangs! Fight!"

Then, when it was all over, and they were all bound, he took a syringe from his black bag and injected a strong dose of morphine into each. He

waited until it took hold. Finally they lay still, no longer moaning and tossing. Then he gave each a local anaesthetic.

"Now," he said, stepping back to study the four of them, stretched side by side on the bed.

Slowly he rolled up his sleeves. Swiftly he worked then. Swiftly and expertly he performed his operations in the yellow light of the bedside lamp. Then he bandaged them, washed his bloody hands, counted their pulses, nodded dispassionately and left the bedroom with his bag.

In the living room he picked up the phone, dialed. A gruff voice said:

"Franklindale police."

"You'll find four hoodlums in the Losson Road farm house. Get them to a hospital."

He hung up immediately, packed his meager belongings and drove quickly away, heading northwest, where his empty Colonial waited. It was 3 A.M. when he arrived home.

HE felt heavy, terribly lonely as he walked slowly up the stairs of the little Colonial, a quarter mile from

the brink of the American Falls, deep in a setting of gently waving elms. Tiredly he unlocked the front door.

For a moment he gazed at the sign beside the door. It read:

"David M. Condon, Surgeon. Hours 1-3 daily except Thursdays and Sundays."

Then he went inside, shut out the woman behind the bars and sat down and cried. Elsie, he whispered. Dear God, why?

He tried to sleep, but he could not. The face of his wife haunted him. The black, staring eyes, the terrible shiver. Elsie, who had been so gentle, so happy, like a kitten.

"Darling," he had said even as they drove with the joy fresh in them to the church for the marriage, "being a doctor's wife is hard work. Your life isn't your own. Up in the middle of the night. Emergencies, always emergencies. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy."

They laughed. Elsie touched his cheek, brushed her lips against his face.

"I'll love it," she said simply. "I'll love being part of

you. Helping people. Doing good for them. When they get you up in the night, I'll make hot coffee while you dress to open your eyes and steady your nerves."

"I believe you really mean it," he said.

"Of course. Isn't that what a doctor's wife is for?"

Yes, he thought, that was what a doctor's wife was for. But not one cup of coffee had she been destined to make; not one night call had she been destined to share. Damn these kids. Damn them to the deepest hell forever.

Then he saw again the four still forms on the bed, and suddenly they haunted him.

Had he the right? Was it man's right to exact vengeance? Wasn't that the right of God, of God alone? Weren't there courts?

No, he cried. No, no, no, no. Courts are too weak. There comes a time when man must act like a man to stamp out a disease. This juvenile madness was a disease. Worse, it was unhuman. Someone had to take action. Someone had to take violent steps to bring the age back to normalcy; to bring

back youth to respect decency and fear the law.

He sat up, sweat streaming from him. He was trembling. Elsie looked at him out of the darkness. "Darling," he whispered, "I had to do it for you. For you and every other girl like you." And she smiled sadly and vanished. He slept.

At noon he awoke, feeling like one of the damned. He took a shower. Then he shaved. Then he went downstairs to his office. The receptionist nurse he had hired when he had left to bring home his bride, was already there. She rose when he entered. Her face was lined with sympathy. Her long, pale hands fluttered.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Condon," she said. "So..."

Wearily he held up a hand.

"The mail," he said. "I'll catch up with the mail first. Then patients if there are any."

AT 1 P.M. the nurse brought in his first patient. David looked up, started.

"Why, Lieutenant MacDon-ald," he said. He waited.

The tall state trooper sighed

with infinite weariness, seated himself before David's desk and slowly spread out that afternoon's newspaper. It carried a big, black, 72-point, 8-column shock headline.

"4 Teenagers Mutilated. Bearded man sought."

"Why do you show me this?" David asked.

"There was an operation," the lieutenant said.

"Yes? Should I be interested?"

"It was a professional job, Doctor. A skilled operation. Whoever did it, even thought to have them taken to a hospital."

"Really?"

"Yes. And a remarkable thing, one of them had only half a right ear."

"Remarkable?"

"Yes. We found the other half a month ago on that park road after you'd reported to us what had happened. I thought you'd like to know who these boys really are."

David rose, walked to the window and stared out across the expanse of park toward the American Falls in the distance. At that moment the sun caught it and there was a rainbow in

it. That meant good luck. But not for him. But he didn't care. He was tired. He was worn. He had exacted vengeance. Now he no longer cared what happened to him.

"I knew it, Lieutenant," he said turning. "You come to the right place. I did it. I..."

"It's a funny thing," Lieut. MacDonald said, "but sometimes I can't hear a thing. What do you suppose causes that, Doctor?"

"I operated on them," continued David woodenly. "They had no right to have children; they forfeited their right to have progeny carrying their kind of genes. They..."

"It's a kind of dull roaring. Now, it's better. What were you saying?"

David looked at him then. The lieutenant's big, long face was very solemn. There was sympathy in his eyes.

"I got the report on your

wife," he said softly. "It's rough."

David understood what he was trying to say; that he was absolving him; that here was, finally, law, willing to abide by the code of vengeance.

"You look tired," David said. "Shall I prescribe something?"

The lieutenant shook his head. "No. But let me prescribe something for you, Doctor."

"Yes?"

"Get some sun. You're pale where you shaved. Some goody-goody biddy might remember about your wife and get the idea you were wearing a beard recently."

David watched him leave.

"Thanks," he said.

He sat down then, put his face in his arms. He was terribly tired, terribly lonely.

THE END

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