

KEYHOLE MYSTERY

Magazine

APRIL, 1960



The Great
ELVIS PRESLEY
Mystery Case

By DICK ASHBAUGH



CORNELL WOOLRICH • ANTHONY BOUCHER
KEN MURRAY • AVRAM DAVIDSON • NORMAN KATKOV
MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD • HAYDEN HOWARD



Hello, all you bloodthirsty fans out there:

Since this is the first issue of **KEYHOLE MAGAZINE**, you who are reading this constitute a unique group of people. By buying this copy of **KEYHOLE**, you have automatically become a charter member of the Keyhole Murder-and-Mayhem Society. This membership entitles you to a number of the good things in life, such as:

It entitles you to enjoy in this first issue such spine-tingling stories as *Full Circle*—where a man on the run leaves an unusual trail of blood behind; *The North Star Caper*, a juvenile's terrifying jaunt into the world of crime; *Murder on El Capitan*, a tale of murder on a luxury Gold Coast train speeding through the night, which features the world's first Beatnik detective.

We could go on and on and on, but we won't. We will leave it to you to discover for yourself the delights that await you in this first banner issue, for instance, our new feature, *The Author Chooses*—in this case, the author being that master of mystery and murder, Anthony Boucher, who gives you the reasons why he thinks the story in this issue is his very best.

You are also entitled to write in and tell us what you like. As a charter member of the Keyhole Murder-and-Mayhem Society, we promise that your letters will be read carefully, and their grisly contents will be taken to our black hearts (we'll even print the most interesting ones that come in each month). Not only that but *your* name will be enshrined on a special tombstone in this charnel office of death.

The Evil Eye invites you to peer into the Keyhole again next issue.

Until then,

Shudderingly yours,
THE EDITOR

KEYHOLE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 1, No. 1, published bi-monthly by WINSTON PUBLICATIONS, Inc., 157 West 57th St., N. Y. 19, N. Y. Subscriptions 1 year (6 issues) \$2.00, 2 years (12 issues) \$4.00. Single copy 35c. Application for second class entry pending at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., and New York, N.Y. Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright 1960 by Winston Publications, Inc. Printed in U. S. A.

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"First things first," said Beasley. "Let us proceed to the corpse."

Where does the idea for a mystery story originate?

There are probably as many answers to that question as there are writers, but most of the writers we know aren't telling. Professional secrets, you know. But we can reveal where the idea for this story began. Not too long ago Dick Ashbaugh, well known writer for top national magazines, took his teenage daughter along with him when he interviewed Elvis Presley. At the close of the interview, as Elvis leaned forward to answer a question, the younger Ashbaugh impulsively gave her idol a kiss on the cheek. Her reaction to this event gave Dick the idea for an article which subsequently appeared in This Week magazine entitled, "My Daughter Kissed Elvis Presley!"

Naturally, then, when Will Folke was looking for a collaborator on a story to be called "The Great Elvis Presley Mystery", we suggested Dick Ashbaugh. After all, we reasoned, Dick had some personal experience with feminine reaction to the King of Rock-and-Roll.

Ashbaugh and Folke's collaboration resulted in the thoroughly beguiling tale which follows, a murder mystery with a light touch. This story also introduces one of the most fascinating new detectives we have met, the redoubtable Beasley Grove; thinking machine extraordinary, the pride and terror of Eastern U.

THE GREAT ELVIS PRESLEY MYSTERY

by WILL FOLKE and DICK ASHBAUGH

BEASLEY GROVE WAS WELL KNOWN even on the campus of Eastern U, which enjoys a reputation as a haven for oddballs, as a character. A genius, of course, but still a

character. There were some who claimed that Beasley was the type that only a mother could love.

Others claimed Beasley Grove had never been a child.

"He couldn't have been," said one of Beasley's less fervent admirers. "He's not even human. He's a Martian."

That, of course, was unfair. The truth is that Beasley Grove was born of distinctly human parents. In fact during his early years—up to the kindergarten period—he lay fallow. He was merely trying to solve the mysteries of strained spinach and the tendency of his parents to treat him like a small child. But once his prodigious mental growth was under way his parents were forced to acknowledge him as a superior being. Thereupon, a certain rapport was achieved—somewhat resembling the relationship that might have existed if Sir Isaac Newton's father and mother had been Cromagnons.

At Eastern U, where Beasley had to deal with 20,000 other youths of approximately his age, but barely a thousandth of his IQ, Beasley found solace in his extraordinary intellectual gifts. He dabbled—superbly—in the esoteric arts, played several musical instruments with a classical elegance that was the despair of teachers, managed an unbroken string of perfect exam papers in all his courses, and employed his idle moments in a study of criminology. This latter pursuit enabled him to assist the local police.

On a sunny afternoon in May Beasley was running over the de-

clension of Greek verbs in his mind and playing a Beethoven sonata on his slip horn when the telephone rang.

It was Harvey Haddox, editor of the college newspaper. Beasley had rarely heard him so excited. There was a babble of sounds and voices in the background.

"Beez," he moaned, "something terrible has happened. Sheilah Fentriss has been mur-murdered. I mean, she's dead. I mean, somebody killed her. And at the Phi Delta sorority house, too. This is going to ruin Eastern U."

"Not likely," said Beasley.

"But when this gets into the newspapers, with the investigation and police swarming over the campus.... Don't forget. Sheilah's father, Simon Fentriss, is one of the country's leading industrialists *and* a university trustee."

"Calm down," said Beasley. "I shall take charge of the investigation. When the killer is produced, the furor in the newspapers will die down. Nothing is staler than old news—even about murder."

"But the police have no idea who killed her."

"Neither have I, at the moment," said Beasley Grove. "But I shall find out."

Beasley put down his sliphorn, closed his mind to the problem of Greek verbs and opened it to the problem of Sheilah Fentriss' murder. As he strolled over to the

scene of the crime he reflected that he knew very little about the deceased. The Phi Delta house was, of course, one of the better sorority houses on the campus, presenting a nice balance of beauty, brains and loot. Sheilah had two of these attributes in outstanding quantity—beauty and loot.

There was a crowd gathered outside the sorority house, but Beasley edged past them and went through the front door. There he was greeted with an undeserved but not wholly unexpected chill by the local member of the constabulary.

"Just where do you think you're going, young fella?" asked this surly chap as Beasley ducked his scrawny five-foot two inches under the police rope in the foyer.

Beasley showed the constable his police identity card, which included a rather glowing testimonial signed by the commissioner himself and included a promise of total cooperation in any of Beasley Grove's criminological ventures. Beasley had received this as a token of esteem after having solved the mysterious disappearance of the local campus queen the preceding semester. Actually, the girl had merely eloped with the son of the neighborhood grocer, and Beasley's timely intervention had saved what might have proved an embarrassing piece of newspaper notoriety.

"Okay," said the surly lawman. "What do you want?"

"First things first," Beasley replied. "Let us proceed to the corpse."

The policeman led Beasley up the stairs and down a corridor to a locked room which he opened with a key. Inside, Beasley saw a room in considerable disorder. On the floor, lying face down in a fetching position, was the late Sheilah Fentriess. Her clothing was completely disarranged, ripped in some places, and there was the unmistakable mark of a stab wound in her back.

"You have the weapon?" Beasley inquired of the surly constable.

"Yeah. Lieutenant Mollison thinks it came from the sorority kitchen. It's down at the lab now being checked for fingerprints."

"I note her clothing is disarranged. Was there any evidence of a criminal attack?"

The constable shook his head.

"Who discovered the body?" Beasley asked.

"John Laszlo, the janitor. He told the sorority mother and she called the police."

Beasley Grove did not make notes. His mind, fantastically receptive to data, stored it like a veritable tabulating machine.

"The name of the sorority mother?" he asked crisply.

"Uh... Mrs. Grace Bradbury." Beasley chewed his lip. "I see.

That will be all I need from you now. Will you inform Lieutenant Mollison that I wish to see him?"

The surly constable hesitated, obviously moved to make some retort, but he could think of none. He muttered something barely audible about "this is going to be good" and departed downstairs.

A few minutes later Lieutenant Ralph Mollison of the police homicide squad appeared. He was an aging man of almost forty with no hair and a resigned look.

"Are you the nut that sent for me?" he asked of Beasley without any particular rancor.

"Indeed, yes," replied Beasley Grove, ignoring the personal allusion. He flashed his police identity card again. "I will require a little of your cooperation in solving this murder."

"Huh?" said Lieutenant Mollison.

"Undoubtedly you will already have observed a puzzling aspect of this case. Miss Fentriss is clutching in her right hand a picture of Elvis Presley in a gold frame."

"Listen," said Lieutenant Mollison, "why don't you college kids stop trying to act like Sherlock Holmes? We'll handle this case without any help from..."

"Elvis Presley," Beasley Grove repeated, all sixteen cylinders of his brain having gone into action. "I distinctly recall that the late Miss Fentriss was an ardent admirer of that rock-and-roll singer.

While on a European trip last summer she attempted to invade Elvis Presley's hotel suite disguised as a maid. The rendezvous failed, as Presley was on maneuvers with an Army group, and knew nothing at all of the incident."

"You don't think Presley had anything to do with this, do you?" asked Lieut. Mollison in a painfully baffled way.

"I consider that to be a totally ridiculous suggestion," Beasley said scornfully. "But the picture itself may prove to be an important clue. Do you have it in your possession?"

"Yes," said Lieutenant Mollison. "Guard it well," Beasley advised him. "I may wish to make a more careful examination of it in the very near future."

"You may want to—what?" asked Lieutenant Mollison.

"Perhaps you do not remember me. I am Beasley Grove, who helped the police to solve that so-called suicide at the Beta House last year. I was also of considerable assistance to the law in regard to the hit-run killing of the assistant dean last..."

"Go on, beat it," said Lieutenant Mollison.

Since his manner had become somewhat menacing, Beasley departed.

Beasley's next stop was the snack bar at the Student Union next to the social science building, which was crowded, as usual. He

squeezed in to a stool between a mammiferous female student and the hulking figure of Bix Benedict, a football star he knew slightly. The card file in Beasley Grove's mind flipped over, and he recollected that a romance between Bix Benedict and Miss Fentriss had been a choice bit of campus gossip the year before.

"Pardon me," he said. "I'm Beasley Grove. I see you down at the stadium on Saturdays."

Bix Benedict looked at him blankly. "I can't place you, son. Do you carry lemons for the squad?"

Beasley overlooked this crude attempt at humor. "I happen to play slyphorn in the band. After all, we have to do something to keep the crowd's mind off the score between the halves," he said. "As I remember, last Saturday, we were on the wrong end of a 48-7 fiasco. And there were those two damaging fumbles you made in the first quarter..."

Bix Benedict growled, "I'd rather not talk about it. My mind was on other things."

"Sheilah Fentriss, for example?"

Bix Benedict paled. "You know?"

Obviously, from his reaction, there was more in Bix Benedict's association with Miss Fentriss than Beasley had hoped for.

"I know everything," Beasley told him, which was, even for Beasley Grove, a slight exaggera-

tion.

"I couldn't stand the way she was treating me," Bix Benedict said. "Just like all the rest of her fellows. But it was different with her and me. She proved that when she agreed to marry me."

Beasley controlled his reaction and said with enviable coolness:

"Just when did you marry Sheilah, Bix?"

"After the Michigan game last year. We were only married about an hour. Her old man, Simon Fentriss, sent the State police out in force. They nabbed us a couple of miles from the J.P.'s office. Her father had the marriage annulled and it never even made the papers." He glared at Beasley. "I don't know how *you* heard about it."

Beasley passed up the opportunity to inform Bix Benedict that he had heard it from Bix's own lips. Instead, he shot the question in fast:

"Did *you* kill Sheilah Fentriss?"

For a moment Beasley thought the hulking fellow would topple backward off the stool in fright.

"No," Bix stuttered. "I didn't do it, believe me."

His innocence was almost touching in its completeness. Beasley softened. This monstrous fellow had neither the courage, the inclination, nor the intelligence to wreak permanent harm on other human kind. That was doubtless the trouble with his football play-

ing.

"I believe you," Beasley said. "Let me handle this. I'll do it my own way. Why don't you get lost someplace? Someplace where I can reach you later."

"I know a couple of guys in the Tower Club," Bix Benedict said. "I could stay there." He looked doubtful. "You're not going to get me jammed up, are you? Maybe I should turn myself in to the police."

"The police," Beasley Grove said, "are sufficiently confused without cluttering up their headquarters with useless suspects. You did not murder Miss Sheilah Fen-triss. Therefore, why take up the time of our harassed police force by letting them think you did?"

Bix Benedict gave Beasley a smile of honest admiration, shook his head, and then left. Beasley Grove watched him shoulder his way through the doors. Then Beasley stepped into the booth to call his girl, Susan Alcorn, a sorority sister of the late Sheilah Fen-triss, and a girl who possessed attributes of her own in a slightly different order. Susan had brains and beauty, but no loot.

"Oh, Beez," she said, and she was close to tears. "It's been awful. The police are swarming all over the place. I—I didn't particularly care for Sheilah, but I didn't want anything like this to happen to her."

"Why didn't you care for

Sheilah?" Beasley asked.

She blurted, "Oh, Beez, I never really told you but there was something about Sheilah. I can't tell you over the phone."

Beasley's curiosity was aroused.

"How about spilling all over coffee at the Positive End?" he asked.

"Not that place," she said. "I don't understand why you want to go there. Beatniks and all that crazy poetry."

Beasley considered Susan a sweet girl, but not an intellectual. However, in view of her many other desirable qualities, he had long ago decided to overlook this.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked.

"Can't we meet at Larry's?" Susan said. "I know it's expensive, but I'm hungry and I have a gorgeous \$100 bill Uncle Duffy sent me. It's his annual contribution to culture. He wants me to be a lady dentist."

"All right," said Beasley Grove.

A few minutes later he parked in the rear of Larry's and went in. When Susan came swaying down the aisle toward his table, Beasley forgot all about her intellectual deficiencies. After all, she could scarcely be blamed for not being his equal as a thinking machine. She swung into the booth seat alongside Beasley with a little rush and the faintest hint of fresh cologne.

He ordered lunch with a lavish

hand, knowing that Susan's uncle's \$100 was behind them like a fortress of financial strength. After Susan toyed with her *lasagne al forno* for a minute, she looked up.

"Beez, the police may even suspect that I murdered Sheilah Fen-triss," she said. "I mean, when they find out certain things."

"What certain things?" Beasley asked.

"We quarreled, and I once threatened to tell Mrs. Bradbury, the house mother, if Sheilah didn't cut out what she was doing." Susan swallowed nervously. "You remember Sheilah and I roomed together for one quarter last year? She was a horrible person, Beez. She was always flirting with the other girls' boy friends and always walking around in the—well, in the altogether. When anyone protested, Sheilah just laughed. Her father is on the Board of Trustees and she knew that no protest would be acted on."

"Is that all?" Beasley asked.

"No. This semester her father sent her a miniature camera, one of those special Japanese jobs that takes candid pictures at night without flashbulbs. She began taking . . . uh . . . *very* candid pictures of the other girls in the same . . . uh . . . state of undress. Later, she would show them around, just for laughs." Susan's eyes sparked. "She even showed the pictures to her boy friends, just for laughs. It was cruelly embarrassing. Espe-

cially when she got this new boy friend, Orval Grimes."

"I know him," Beasley said. "Plays tenor sax in the band."

"He's the shy, sensitive type and he hated to have Sheilah show him those stupid pictures. He and Sheilah broke up a few weeks ago. He's very handsome," she said. "All the girls think that he looks a lot like Elvis Presley." She sighed.

"I'll overlook that," Beasley said. "Sheilah was also a great admirer of Elvis Presley, was she not?"

"Oh, yes. She kept his picture in a gold frame on her dressing table. Sometimes she even burned incense in front of it. It was partly a gag and partly it wasn't. Sheilah brought every Elvis Presley record. And she played them continually, at all hours."

"That alone may have been a sufficient murder motive."

Susan looked at him blankly. "Oh, Beez, don't be a sil. That part was fine. Any girl in her right mind could listen to Elvis absolutely forever."

Beasley looked at her with pain. "Let us not discuss topics that are beyond the scope of your musical education. Is there anything else you can tell me about Sheilah? Did she have any friends?"

"Not really. Not even Mrs. Bradbury, the house mother, could get chummy with her. Mrs. Bradbury is really a whiz. She's pretty old, almost thirty-two, but she acts

just like one of the girls. We talk over all our problems with her. But Sheila and Mrs. Bradbury hardly ever spoke to each other."

"I see," Beasley said. Everything was becoming clearer now. The evidence, carefully sorted and classified in his mind, had begun to indicate a direction in which his investigation should continue.

"Excuse me," Beasley told Susan. "I'm going to look up Lieutenant Mollison. I have something urgent to tell him."

Just then, however, Lieutenant Mollison appeared, sank into their booth, facing them, and nodded to Susan. "Excuse me, Miss," he said.

The lieutenant removed his hat, which is unusual for police lieutenants. He looked at Beasley seriously.

"The chief suggested I get in touch with you," he said. "It has something to do with your work on that fraternity case last year. I should live so long, but here I am and I have orders to apologize if I was rude to you. Was I?"

"You are forgiven, Lieutenant," Beasley said magnanimously.

Lieutenant Mollison grunted. "Okay, that's over. Now, do you have any ideas on the Fentriss case?"

"A few," Beasley admitted modestly. "I suppose the police have their usual classic list of suspects."

Lieutenant Mollison looked at Beasley narrowly. "Bix Benedict, the football player, is our best bet.

But we can't find him. We've run the janitor, John Laszlo, through the mill, but he seems to be clean. The house mother, Mrs. Bradbury, can account for his movements."

"How about the house mother?" Beasley stirred his coffee idly with the tip of the spoon.

"She was having tea with the dean of women in the reception room. Orval Grimes, who was Sheila's last boyfriend, also has an alibi. He was rehearsing with the band at the time of the murder."

"He plays tenor sax in the band," Beasley Grove said. "I play the slip-horn myself, and I saw him at rehearsal."

"Then you're part of his alibi."

"That depends on when the murder was committed. Whose word do you have for the actual time Sheila Fentriss met her end?"

"John Laszlo, the janitor, found her in her room only a few minutes after the murder was committed. Her body was still warm."

"An interesting bit of testimony. But that also depends on something," Beasley said cryptically.

"On what?"

"Whether we can believe it," Beasley Grove said.

Lieutenant Mollison rose, sighing, "I've got enough troubles without having to play guessing games with a campus genius."

"May I see the photograph of Elvis Presley that was found in

Sheilah's hand?" Beasley asked.

Lieutenant Mollison stared at him. "You don't think I'm carrying it around with me, do you?"

"Where is it?" Beasley asked with mounting impatience.

"In Sheilah Fentriss' room. We left it there. I couldn't see any possible reason for..."

"I suggest you return and get that photograph at once, Lieutenant." Beasley glanced at his watch. "Meet me here in ten minutes and we will proceed to the police laboratory. In a short while, if my theory proves correct, we may be on the trail of our murderer."

Lieutenant Mollison looked expectant, joyful, sad and disturbed all at once. He had a very expressive face.

Beasley Grove passed the ten minutes' waiting time in enchanting chatter with Susan, whom he confidently expected would someday be the mother of his children, so that he felt it necessary to establish occasional mental rapport with her. On her own level, Beasley found her quite amusing.

When Lieutenant Mollison returned with the Elvis Presley photograph in its gold frame, Beasley and he went down the street together to his car, leaving Susan behind to pay the check with her Uncle Duffy's \$100 bill. As they crunched across the gravel of the parking lot to the car, Beasley had a swift intimation of danger. But it came too late.

A shadowy figure rose from where it had been crouching near the fender. Lieutenant Mollison shouted something and reached for his gun. Something flashed in the darkness, up and down, and the lieutenant fell.

Then Beasley Grove charged into action—all 120 pounds. He didn't know exactly what happened after that. Suddenly he began spinning up and around and then he landed heavily against the door of the car. Then he blacked out.

Beasley woke up, woozily, to see Susan's lovely face looking concernedly down at him.

"Darling, are you all right?" she asked tenderly.

"Of course." Beasley ignored the trip-hammer plinking inside his head and sat up, painfully. "How about Lieutenant Mollison?"

"He's still unconscious. There's a bad-looking bruise behind his ear. But he seems to be breathing normally."

Beasley made a swift deduction. "I'll wager that Lieutenant Mollison no longer has the picture of Elvis Presley. Would you mind searching him, Susan?"

She returned in a second with the empty gold frame.

"You're right," she whispered. "It's gone. But why would anyone want to steal a photograph of Elvis?"

Beasley passed a hand over his

forehead. "Would you mind helping me to my feet, Susan? I have to get somewhere in a hurry."

"You do? Where?"

"I imagine that my period of unconsciousness lasted no more than a minute or so," Beasley explained. "In that time, the person who assaulted the lieutenant and me has had to make his getaway. Did you see a car drive away?"

"No."

"Precisely. Then he has made his escape on foot. Look about you, Susan. This bright moonlight, there is a clear view in every direction for nearly a quarter of a mile. He could not have gone there. The other school buildings in our neighborhood are closed for the night. All except one. The rehearsal hall."

"Beez, I wish you'd stop thinking," Susan said. "It'll just hurt your head. And I won't allow you to move in your condition. Why, you may have a concussion or a fracture or something."

"Your solicitude is touching," Beasley told her. "And someday we'll explore your tender feelings toward me in more detail. Not now. I have a date at the rehearsal hall."

Reluctantly, Susan helped him to his feet.

"Beez, sometimes I don't understand you at all," she said.

"So few people do," Beasley murmured. "Take care of Lieutenant Mollison. I must go now and

apprehend a murderer."

As Beasley Grove entered the rehearsal hall, the various members of the band were tuning up. It sounded like a symphony of buzz-saws with a rooster call thrown in. Beasley listened for a moment, tuned to hear what he knew he would hear.

He heard it.

He strode up onto the stage, crossed to the second row of seats and clamped his hand with purpose on the shoulder of the tenor sax player.

"Orval Grimes," Beasley said, "you blew that note out of tune. It was sharp."

Everyone stopped tuning up and turned to look at them with interest.

"What's the difference?" asked Orval Grimes, slicking down his high pompadour nervously. He looked a great deal like Elvis Presley, even to his long sideburns.

"Simply this," Beasley said, aware that everyone was now listening with bated breath. "Your usually faultless tenor sax played sharp because it has recently been exposed to the cold air. No other instrument in the band suffers from this affliction, because every other instrument has been somewhere inside the rehearsal hall during these fifteen minutes."

"So what?" sneered Orval Grimes.

"So that establishes beyond

doubt that *you* are the one who assaulted Lieutenant Mollison and myself in the parking lot. If further proof is needed, I am sure that the laboratory will discover tell-tale evidence on the tenor saxophone which you wielded as a weapon."

"You must be crazy," Orval Grimes said in a shrill voice.

"Am I? I suspect you haven't had time to dispose of the most damning evidence of all. The photo of Elvis Presley that..."

Orval Grimes gave a grunt, reared up in his chair, batted Beasley aside and raced for the exit. The trombone player and the cellist brought Orval down neatly before he progressed very far.

He lay there, snarling, his handsome face quite disfigured with anger while Beasley Grove reached into his jacket pocket and produced the ripped portions of the photograph.

"Ah," Beasley ah-ed. "Another photo cleverly pasted to the back of this. That will supply the last, missing clue."

Beasley strolled over to the light where he carefully unpasted the portions of the other photograph and assembled them on the conductor's podium. The photograph was a clear one, although obviously taken at night, and showed Mrs. Bradbury and Orval Grimes in a highly indelicate love situation.

"Damn you, Beasley," said Orval Grimes.

Beasley slipped the pieces of the photograph back into his pocket.

Beasley bowed. "Don't mention it," he said.

Lieutenant Mollison, wearing a thick white bandage on his ear and looking somehow more resigned than ever, sat behind his desk at Police Headquarters.

"How did you suspect?" he asked Beasley.

"Elementary," Beasley told him, "for someone with powers of deduction as highly trained as mine." The lieutenant winced but said nothing. "All the evidence shouted that the answer had to be involved with Sheila's odd obsession with cameras—the peculiar property of the camera itself, which took pictures at night without flashbulbs, and her delight in using it at embarrassing moments.

"Ummm," said Lieutenant Mollison.

"Then there was the clue of her disarranged clothes, which, since there was no attempt at criminal attack, indicated that the killer had anxiously been searching for something he knew to be in her possession. That something was almost certainly an incriminating or embarrassing photograph.

"Then there was the odd fact that Sheila was found with the framed picture of Elvis Presley clutched in her hand. Despite the girl's infatuation with this famous rock-and-roll singer, it hardly seemed likely that she would have

sought his photograph to comfort her dying moments. What other reason could she have? Obviously an attempt to convey some sort of message about her killer."

"I see. You mean this Orval Grimes looks like Presley and so she was trying to tell us . . ."

"Nothing so simple-minded as that, Lieutenant," Beasley said, while Lieutenant Mollison flushed becomingly. "It was the concealed photograph, pasted to the back of Presley's, that she was trying to direct our attention to. That photograph when Mrs. Bradbury threatened Mrs. Bradbury's suspicions when you returned to get it at the sorority house. She phoned Orval Grimes at the rehearsal hall and he ran out and attacked us."

The lieutenant nodded. "Orval Grimes confessed that he killed Sheilah after a quarrel in which he demanded that she return the photograph. It seems that Sheilah showed Mrs. Bradbury the photograph when Mrs. Bradbury threatened to have Sheilah expelled because of her actions."

Beasley sighed. "In a way, I feel sorry for Orval Grimes," he said. "He was treated shamefully by Sheilah, and when she finally abandoned him, he turned for comfort to Mrs. Bradbury. Despite the difference in their ages, Orval strikes me as a type who would derive great satisfaction from such a pseudo-marital relationship."

"Oh, sure," said Lieutenant Mollison, fiddling with the penholder on his desk.

Beasley continued: "Sheilah, partly out of jealousy that Mrs. Bradbury should have taken for herself one of Sheilah's previous lovers, and partly out of maliciousness, took the photograph of them secretly. That led, eventually, to her death."

Beasley rose and smiled tolerantly at the lieutenant. "Well, it was all fairly interesting while it lasted. Not really challenging, of course. But interesting. If you fellows are again floundering about in some criminal investigation, I shall be pleased to straighten out your thinking."

"Thank you so much," said Lieutenant Mollison.

"Don't mention it," Beasley said. "I must be going now. There's a rehearsal of the school band this afternoon. We need to be in good shape for our weekly massacre on the gridiron on Saturday. With Bix Benedict back in the line-up, we probably won't lose by more than five or six touchdowns," Beasley sighed. "And, if this weren't a grim enough prospect, the band also has to break in a new tenor sax."

"I feel for you," said Lieutenant Mollison, and showed Beasley out.

For some reason, Lieutenant Mollison slammed the door so violently behind Beasley's back that the glass pane cracked. ■ ■

Where does a murder really begin or end? Here is a remarkable story that investigates, for the first time, the before and after ...



FULL CIRCLE

by *MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD*

IT WAS NEAR CLOSING TIME—A SLOW night, only a few regulars on hand. The door opened and a tall man came in. Sam Evers, standing behind the bar at the far end, mixing highballs for an order, looked up, automatically—and froze.

There was no mistaking the long, hard-boned face, the cold eyes, the grim mouth. It was Lew Dillon.

Sam Evers turned his back

quickly.

Mike, the head bartender, stared at him.

"What's wrong, kid?" Mike asked curiously. "You're the color of green cheese."

"I—I'm sick, Mike," Evers mumbled. "I better go out back for a minute. Take care of that tall guy for me, will you?"

"Sure, kid," Mike said.

Sam Evers went through the

door leading to the kitchen, carrying his bar towel. He stopped a moment at the big wooden ice chest. His head felt like bursting from the sudden unbearable pressure, but his fingers were nimble and sure.

Out front, Mike approached the man at the bar.

"Scotch and soda," said the tall man.

Mike brought it. "There you are, sir." He studied the man's hard-boned face. "You're new in town, aren't you?" he asked amiably.

"Yeah."

"You come in on one of the buses?"

"Yeah." The tall man drank up quickly. "What do I owe you?"

"Fifty cents," said Mike. This customer certainly had something on his mind. Anyone could see that. Whatever it was, it spelled trouble.

The tall man paid up and left. There was a lull in business. Mike went on back to see if Sam was all right.

Sam's white coat and apron were lying on the floor. His suit jacket was gone. And so was he.

Sam Evers stood against the wall, well back in the shadows of the 24-hour self-service parking lot, waiting. The right man would appear before the lot was empty—must appear. Sam Evers had to get away from town fast and he had to have a car and money. If

Lew Dillon once laid eyes on him, his life wouldn't be worth ten cents. Sam Evers cursed the day he'd got into Thelma's clutches; but that was all water over the dam now. He'd figured out long ago what he'd do if by some rotten stroke of luck Dillon ever caught up with him.

None of the big, conspicuous cars would do, or anything in light or bright colors. It must be a small or medium-size job of common make, painted black or dark green or blue or grey—something unnoticeable. The license plates were a problem, but as soon as he got out into open country he could stop at the nearest appropriate spot and plaster them with mud.

And the driver for whom he was waiting must be alone. He couldn't cope with more than one man, and that man must be somewhere near his own inconsiderable height and weight. Not only must he be alone, but the lot must be empty at the moment of anyone except his prospective victim and himself.

Back in the shadows, Sam Evers waited, while couples took out the possible cars and the only singles went up to impossible ones. He began to feel the calmness cracking which desperation had given him. His man must come soon, or the weapon he held, wrapped in a soaked towel, would melt.

He stood stoically while the

movie house across the street emptied: a dozen people crossed over, found their cars in the lot, and drove away. Now there were only four cars left that would be of any use to him. If no one came for them, or if no one came alone, his goose was cooked. He felt his heart beginning to pound, and breathed deeply to quiet it.

Then it happened, and it all went like clockwork. A short, thin man, unaccompanied, turned into the street from around the corner, walked swiftly to the lot, taking out his keys as he walked, and went to a black Chevy not ten feet from where Sam Evers stood.

Softly, on his rubber-soled shoes, Sam Evers followed him. As the man stooped to open the door, Evers lifted the towel stuffed with ice cubes and struck hard at the back of the driver's head. The man's knees buckled and without a sound he crumpled in a heap in the shadow of the car. Evers pushed the inert body into the darkness against the wall, then quickly possessed himself of keys and wallet, jumped into the car and drove off. It had all taken less than two minutes.

He drove, carefully within the speed limit, stopping for all signs, down back streets, headed away from the city. At the first culvert he leaned out and dropped into it the towel and what was left of the ice.

He didn't stop till he was a good

ten miles out of town. Then he ran the car up a side road from the highway, got out at a puddle left from the recent rain, and spattered both license plates and the lower part of the car with enough mud to look natural and to make it hard to read the numbers at first glance. He couldn't hope to evade a roadblock or fool a cop with a list of stolen cars, but if his luck held it would be quite a while—maybe morning—before the man would be discovered.

Before he started on again, he opened the wallet and by the car's lights looked the contents over. The man's name was Norman Bart, he was a salesman for a paper company, he lived at 4715 Mackehoy Street. That wasn't important; Evers wasn't intending to assume Bart's identity, and when he got where he was going he would abandon the car for anyone to find. There would be no fingerprints; he'd had sense enough to wear thin rubber gloves throughout.

What was important was how much money was in Norman Bart's wallet. He counted the bills: not too much, \$55, but enough. Once he got across the border he'd be O.K. That's where he should have gone in the first place, instead of thinking this was far enough.

With a satisfied grunt he drove back to the highway. He knew this territory; at a cut-off he

turned into the old road that ran roughly parallel, and kept going. It was nearly 2 a.m. by now; he had four good hours of darkness before him.

After about eight miles he had to get back on the highway for a four-mile stretch before his final turn-off. Even here, cars going either way were few and far between at this hour, except for long-distance trucks rumbling along in their own lane. Nevertheless, he stopped punctiliously at every red light; he was taking no chances with the graveyard shift of the State Highway Patrol.

He stopped at a light, and from the shadows beside the road a tall, husky figure stepped swiftly, pulled open the door, and climbed into the car beside him.

Evers cursed silently. They said you always made one mistake, and this was his. It had never occurred to him, at such an hour, to lock the car while he was in it.

"Just keep going, buddy," the intruder said in a smooth, soft voice that sent chills down Evers' spine. "Turn left at the next crossroad."

"What the—"

"Shut up and keep going."

The man—he was no more than a boy, Evers saw in a sideways glance, a young tough in jeans and a leather jacket—flicked his left hand; he must be left-handed. Through his coat and shirt Sam Evers felt the point of a knife

against his ribs. He drove on without another word.

Left was toward the desert. Sam Evers had been headed right—toward the safety for which he had just become a criminal.

He headed left.

It was four days later that a uranium prospector came across the black car, 20 feet off the road. It was splattered with blood, blood had soaked into the floor boards and run down to be lost in the sand. Tracks showed where it had been run off the road, and other tracks near it, footprints that led away from the spot, until they vanished on the hard surface of the road.

There was no one in the car, dead or alive. The car's trunk was open, and a shovel thrown back into it was coated with sand. But as far as the eye could see the desert floor and the clumps of sagebrush seemed undisturbed. The desert stretched for hundreds of miles, and nobody could dig it all up hunting for a grave.

From the license tags, when the dirt had been brushed off them, the name and address of the owner were ascertained. A detective called at once at 4715 Mackehoy Street.

The woman who opened the door had once been pretty; she had run to fat now, and she could have done with a bath. Hair that needed washing straggled over her

forehead, and a bedraggled slip showed under a dingy house dress where two safety-pins took the place of missing buttons.

"I'm looking for Mr. Norman Bart," said Detective Sergeant Hannan.

"Well, if you find him, keep him," the woman snapped, starting to shut the door in his face.

"Police," said Hannan, showing his badge. "Are you Mrs. Bart?"

"I suppose I am, even if he's left me."

"May I come in and talk to you?"

Grudgingly she opened the door wider and waved him toward a room which looked as if a hurricane had struck it. But nothing had happened to it, Hannan realized after a second, except that apparently it hadn't been cleaned or tidied for weeks. Newspapers were scattered on the floor, an empty coffee cup and a half-eaten cake nestled on a table next to a worn leather handbag, a big ash-tray was overflowing with cigarette stubs, a woman's hat hung askew on a lamp with a torn shade. Dust was everywhere.

Gingerly Hannan seated himself on the edge of a chair which he shared with a pair of high-heeled, rundown shoes. The woman plumped herself on a couch, kicking off it on to the rug a glossy magazine open at a highly colored advertisement of a chinchilla coat. She reached under a pillow and

drew out a pair of nylon stockings, fished again, and found a pack of cigarettes. She pawed around vainly for matches or a lighter, and Hannan rose, lighted her cigarette, then resumed his seat.

"You say your husband has left you?" he asked politely. "When did he leave?"

"Five days ago, come eight o'clock tonight," she answered sullenly.

"Did he say he was leaving? Had you had a quarrel?"

"He didn't say anything. He never does. That's what drives me crazy." Her voice rose. "How would you like it, cooped up in this dump all day, and then a man comes home and never talks—just looks and growls."

And I don't blame him, coming home to a place like this and a wife like you, Hannan reflected, with a thought of his own immaculate and efficient wife. Aloud he said:

"Why haven't you reported him missing?"

"Him? Why should I? He's got mad before and slammed out without his dinner, just because it was a little late, and stayed away till he got over it. Never this long, but a day or two, often. He hasn't the nerve to stay away forever. He'll be back, when he gets ready."

"I'm afraid he won't, this time. Haven't you missed the car, even

if you haven't missed your husband?" Hannan tried without success to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

A glint of fear shone in Mrs. Bart's eyes.

"I don't drive," she said. "He uses the car for his work. Why—has something happened?"

What do you care? Hannan thought; but he struggled to make his tone sympathetic.

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Bart. His car was found out on the desert, between Vincentville and Yucca. Nobody was in it, but there were—signs that somebody had been—hurt."

"Why, he had no business down there—that's way out of his territory! What do you mean, somebody had been hurt?"

"There was a lot of blood in the car," the detective said reluctantly. "Did Mr. Bart carry much money with him?"

"More'n he ought, instead of leaving it with me, the way I told him," Mrs. Bart retorted. Suddenly she looked up, her eyes widening. "He's dead!" she screeched. "Norm's dead! Somebody's murdered him for his money! I'm a poor lone widow!"

She snuffled, hunted for a handkerchief, found none, and wiped her eyes on the hem of her dress.

"And I begged him and begged him to take out more insurance!" she sobbed. "Now what am I going to do?"

Norman Bart came back to consciousness on a bed in the County Hospital, where he had been taken after he had been found in the parking lot by its day manager when he came on duty at seven o'clock. At first the manager had thought it was a drunk sleeping it off, but when he attempted to lift the man the sight of his turned-up eyes and the sound of his stertorous breathing frightened him, and he phoned the police. At the hospital they first suspected a basal skull fracture. But X-rays showed no fracture. It was just a bad concussion. He lay unconscious for almost a week.

Gradually, still too weak to speak, he came to himself. He could recall nothing of what had happened to him; he remembered only that dreary scene with Bessie, his constant nausea at the pigsty in which she kept herself and him, culminating in disgusted rebellion when he came home dead tired to find no dinner even begun, nothing but the usual dirt and disorder and whining complaints. Norman Bart hated controversy; he couldn't quarrel; he just stood things until he couldn't stand them any longer and then went away until he could make himself come back and stand them some more.

That night had been another such culmination; without a word he had got up, walked out of the

house, and driven away. He had had dinner downtown, gone to a movie which he was too upset to see, and when it was over had still been too angry to get his car and go home. On other such occasions he had checked in at a hotel and had once stayed away two days and nights. But that night he had been too weary even to make that effort.

He had waited until the movie house was almost emptied after the last show, to avoid having to be jostled by the crowd, and then had walked aimlessly for several blocks until he was sure the others would have left the parking lot where he had put his car.

He remembered drawing out his keys and walking up to the car. The next thing he knew, he was lying in bed, with a doctor and a nurse leaning over him.

Slowly, from a word here, a word there, Norman Bart gathered that nobody knew who he was. Whoever slugged him and stole the car must have taken his wallet also, with all his papers in it. To all intents and purposes, it occurred to him, Norman Bart must have vanished.

He thought long, deep, bitter thoughts about Bessie, about the wreck of his marriage, about his temperamental inability to do anything effective about it. He thought about his job, too, but it was a dead-end job that meant nothing to him except his salary,

with no prospect of promotion. He could find as good a one somewhere else, if he used his brain.

Suppose Norman Bart did disappear, vanish forever? If Bessie had declared him missing, by this time the police would have had his description and he would have been identified. He knew her: if she thought that at last he had deserted her—as he should have done years before—wounded vanity would keep her mouth shut, at least until their joint banking account had given out. If he played his cards right, he had a chance to escape.

So by the time he was able to speak and be interviewed, he had a name plucked out of the air—Tom Kessler would do—and a cover story. He came from a near-by town, not too near; he was an unemployed mechanic; he had come to the city looking for work, hadn't found it, had missed his bus home, and was just walking around to kill time till the next one. The last he remembered was passing the parking lot where they told him he had been found. Somebody must have come behind him, slugged him, taken his wallet with a few dollars and his ticket and all his identification in it, and dragged him into the lot to postpone discovery. Why they had done it, he had no idea; and that was the only truthful part of the narrative. If he had been foolish enough to pretend amnesia,

his photograph would have been published and that would have been that.

Norman Bart lay back with a contented smile as the police officer who had interviewed him left the ward. He had put it over. Now all he had to do was to recover his strength so that as soon as possible he could get out of the city, and in some place where he wasn't known, start a new life, as Tom Kessler or under another name. He wasn't penniless; the thief had been in too big a hurry to search his pockets, and he had \$12 or \$13 in loose coins and dollar bills. That would take him out of reach and feed him for a day or two, and he could pawn his watch to keep going till he found some kind of temporary work and earned enough to take him farther.

By the time he was able to leave the hospital the newspapers had stopped publishing stories about the unsolved Desert Murder.

A tough young hoodlum, wearing jeans and a leather jacket, was the last customer out of the Vincentville supermarket at closing time. His only apparent purchase was a carton of cigarettes. He laid it on the counter, and then leaned forward.

"Stick-up," he murmured to the startled woman cashier. "Come on, gimme."

She peered down. From the boy's clenched left fist protruded

the point of a vicious-looking switchblade knife.

She had been told what to do in such an emergency, but she was very scared. Shaking, not daring to look around at the other cashiers totting up their day's receipts, she opened the cash register and began taking out currency. The robber produced a paper bag, taken from the fruit counter, and methodically shoveled the bills into it as she produced them. "Nix on the silver," he said. "Just bills." Hers was the counter nearest the door, and nobody was noticing anything.

Her hands jerked and her knees knocked together, but she remembered her instructions. Her foot pressed down on the button of the silent alarm.

The prowler car drove up in front just as the youth, the carton under his arm and the paper bag full of money clutched in his right hand, the knife still in his left, walked through the swinging door.

As one of the policemen jumped out of the car, he started to run. The supermarket didn't close till ten, and the street was clear. The officer waved to his partner in the car, who drove up with the door open and let him in. In a minute they were abreast of the running thief. In two minutes more he was disarmed, handcuffed, and thrown into the car.

At the station he turned surly

and refused to talk, but once he was fingerprinted there was no need for any conversation from him. He had a record running back for nearly half of his 18 years. Name, Dick Gargan, no local address, no employment, twice a reform school graduate for auto theft, previous suspended sentences in juvenile court for assaults, malicious mischief, and auto theft again. Caught with the money, immediately identified by the cashier, he was advised by the lawyer appointed for him by the court to plead guilty, and did. Three weeks later he started to serve a five-year term in the penitentiary.

That might have been the end of a very ordinary crime if Dick Gargan hadn't got into a fight with his cellmate one evening, and beaten him up badly before the fight was stopped. When he got out of the week in solitary meted out to him for this performance, he was transferred to another cell. He felt safe and cocky, and got all ready to teach his new cellmate a lesson if he too got out of line—it was worth a week in solitary any time.

Dick Gargan took his self-assurance into recreation hour in the Big Yard. The way to take care of yourself was not to let anyone put anything over on you, and he had proved it. He kept a weather eye out for the man he had beaten up, but the man was no-

where in sight. Dick Gargan found himself the center of an openly admiring group.

Suddenly, without warning, a knife, surreptitiously sharpened from a piece of iron stolen from the machine shop, ripped into Dick Gargan's back. The group scattered immediately; when the guards came running nobody had seen anything.

They took Dick Gargan to the prison hospital with a deep stab wound in his left lung. The home-made knife was far from sterile; pneumonia followed infection and malignant endocarditis followed pneumonia. The hospital and the doctors were as good as any in the state, but they were powerless against all this. Six days later, it was obvious that he was near death.

Half-delirious, with periods of unconsciousness, in his lucid hours Dick Gargan was filled with a vast regret, a sadness for all the world. He knew he was through, before his life had really begun. Well, before he cashed in, he would do his best to set things straight. He indicated that he had things to talk about to the police.

"Year ago, about," he gasped to the detective rushed to his bedside, "I pulled that job on a man named Bart—that one where you found the auto with all the blood in it, out in the desert. I laid low by the highway, looking for a likely

prospect. When this heap come along and stopped for the red light, I jumped it. I pulled a knife and made the guy drive to the desert. Then I knifed this Bart and took his wallet. He had only \$55 on him—"

"What did you do with the body?"

"I found a shovel back with the tools, and I carried him a good ways off—it was dark still—and dug a hole and shoved him in and smoothed the sand back over it. Then when I got back and turned a flashlight on the inside of the car, the thing was so full of blood I didn't dare take a chance on it. I had to walk all the way back to town. I went into the supermarket to rob it, and that's when I got caught. I'm telling you, because I want you to know that I... that I..."

He choked, and clapped his hand to his mouth. Blood splashed through his fingers.

"Hemorrhage," exclaimed the doctor, and snapped directions.

"What is it, man—what do you want to say?" the detective asked.

There was no answer. Gargan's head fell back on the pillow. The doctor shrugged.

"Too late," he said. "It's all over."

It was near closing time—a slow night, only a few regulars on hand. The door opened and a tall man came in.

"Scotch and soda," he ordered.

Mike the bartender looked at him. As he handed the tall man his drink, Mike said:

"Your face looks familiar. Haven't you been in here before?"

"You got a good memory," the tall man said. "It was nearly a year ago. I got off the bus and stopped in here for a drink." He sipped his drink and smiled a little sheepishly. "I was on my way to Reno to get unhitched."

Mike clucked sympathetically. "That's a shame," he said.

"Yessir," the tall man said. "I can laugh about it now, but not then." He flushed with a remembered anger. "Damn it, how can a man be married to a woman for seven years and never suspect in all that time that she's nothing but a—tramp?"

"You can't prove anything by me," said Mike pacifically. "I'm not married." He brought the bottle of Scotch over and poured another shot into the tall man's glass, adding soda to it.

"You're lucky," said the tall man. "After Thelma, I've had enough of marriage. Why, she had three-four guys she was messing around with at the same time." He drank up. "I've got to catch my bus. Be seeing you some time, maybe, when I'm passing through again."

As he went out through the door Mike Daly, watching, suddenly remembered where he had

seen the tall man before. He had come in on the same night Sam Evers had walked out of the place, and nobody had seen hide nor hair of Sam since.

Fleetingly, Mike wondered

again about Sam Evers. What on earth possessed him that night, a year ago, to just walk out of the place without even a word? Some things people did sometimes just didn't make sense. ■ ■





AUTHOR'S CHOICE

No author is a competent judge of his own work; so I'll agree with the friends and critics who say that two of my stories are markedly better than the rest of my work. Twice, apparently, I wrote over my head: in "Mr. Lupescu" (1945) and in "Nine-Finger Jack" (1951).

If I knew precisely how I did this, I'd simply go and do it again. But I know a few reasons why these stories particularly please me. Both combine the two themes which I most like to write about (and to read about): murder and fantasy. Both are complete, fully

plotted stories written at short-short length. And both have kept on earning money and reaching new audiences long after their original publication.

I think there's an advantage in this trick (if it comes off) of writing a story in much less space than a similar plot would normally occupy. It sometimes makes the story hard to sell and unprofitable to begin with; but the result is sharp and clear and (if you're lucky) memorable.

"Mr. L" (which I like, personally, just a little bit better than "Jack") went the rounds for many months and finally sold for \$25 (a special bonus rate from a market that normally paid \$15). At last count it had earned over \$650 in subsidiary rights. And I think this is because I wrote it at precisely the length at which it asked to be written: I obeyed the story, and not my ideas of what was marketable.

Anthony Boucher

MR. LUPESCU

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE TEACUPS RATTLED AND FLAMES flickered over the logs.

"Alan, I *do* wish you could do something about Bobby."

"Isn't that rather Robert's place?"

"Oh you know *Robert*. He's so busy doing good in nice abstract ways with committees in them."

"And headlines."

"He can't be bothered with things like Mr. Lupescu. After all, Bobby's only his *son*."

"And yours, Marjorie."

"And mine. But things like this take a *man*, Alan."

The room was warm and peace-

ful; Alan stretched his long legs by the fire and felt domestic. Marjorie was soothing even when she fretted. The firelight did things to her hair and the curve of her blouse.

A small whirlwind entered at high velocity and stopped only when Marjorie said, "Bob-by! Say hello nicely to Uncle Alan."

Bobby said hello and stood tentatively on one foot.

"Alan . . ." Marjorie prompted.

Alan sat up straight and tried to look paternal. "Well, Bobby," he said. "And where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"See Mr. Lupescu 'f course. He usually comes afternoons."

"Your mother's been telling me about Mr. Lupescu. He must be quite a person."

"Oh gee I'll say he is, Uncle Alan. He's got a great big red nose and red gloves and red eyes—not like when you've been crying but really red like yours're brown—and little red wings that twitch only he can't fly with them cause they're rudder-mentary he says. And he talks like—oh gee I can't do it, but he's swell, he is."

"Lupescu's a funny name for a fairy godfather, isn't it, Bobby?"

"Why? Mr. Lupescu always says why do all the fairies have to be Irish because it takes all kinds, doesn't it?"

"Alan!" Marjorie said. "I don't see that you're doing a *bit* of good. You talk to him seriously like that and you simply make him think it *is* serious. And you *do* know better, don't you, Bobby? You're just joking with us."

"Joking? About Mr. Lupescu?"

"Marjorie, you don't—Listen, Bobby. Your mother didn't mean to insult you or Mr. Lupescu. She just doesn't believe in what she's never seen, and you can't blame her. Now supposing you took her and me out in the garden and we could all see Mr. Lupescu. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Uh uh." Bobby shook his head gravely. "Not for Mr. Lupescu. He doesn't like people. Only little

boys. And he says if I ever bring people to see him then he'll let Gorgo get me. G'by now." And the whirlwind departed.

Marjorie sighed. "At least thank heavens for Gorgo. I never can get a very clear picture out of Bobby, but he says Mr. Lupescu tells the most *terrible* things about him. And if there's any trouble about vegetables or brushing teeth all I have to say is *Gorgo* and hey presto!"

Alan rose. "I don't think you need worry, Marjorie. Mr. Lupescu seems to do more good than harm, and an active imagination is no curse to a child."

"You haven't *lived* with Mr. Lupescu."

"To live in a house like this, I'd chance it," Alan laughed. "But please forgive me now—back to the cottage and the typewriter... Seriously, why don't you ask Robert to talk with him?"

Marjorie spread her hands helplessly.

"I know. I'm always the one to assume responsibilities. And yet you married Robert."

Marjorie laughed. "I don't know. Somehow there's something *about* Robert..." Her vague gesture happened to include the original Degas over the fireplace, the sterling tea service, and even the liveried footman who came in at that moment to clear away.

Mr. Lupescu was pretty wonder-

ful that afternoon all right. He had a little kind of an itch like in his wings and they kept twitching all the time. Stardust, he said. It tickles. Got it up in the Milky Way. Friend of his has a wagon route up there.

Mr. Lupescu had lots of friends and they all did something you wouldn't ever think of not in a squillion years. That's why he didn't like people because people don't do things you can tell stories about. They just work or keep house or are mothers or something.

But one of Mr. Lupescu's friends now was captain of a ship only it went in time and Mr. Lupescu took trips with him and came back and told you all about what was happening this very minute five hundred years ago. And another of the friends was a radio engineer only he could tune in on all the kingdoms of faery and Mr. Lupescu would squidgle up his red nose and twist it like a dial and make noises like all the kingdoms of faery coming in on the set. And then there was Gorgo only he wasn't a friend, not exactly, not even to Mr. Lupescu.

They'd been playing for a couple of weeks only it must've been really hours cause Mamselle hadn't yelled about supper yet but Mr. Lupescu says Time is funny, when Mr. Lupescu screwed up his red eyes and said, "Bobby, let's go in the house."

"But there's people in the house and you don't—"

"I know I don't like people. That's why we're going in the house. Come on, Bobby, or I'll—"

So what could you do when you didn't even want to hear him say Gorgo's name?

He went into Father's study through the french window and it was a strict rule that nobody *ever* went into Father's study but rules weren't for Mr. Lupescu.

Father was on the telephone telling somebody he'd try to be at a luncheon but there was a committee meeting that same morning but he'd see. While he was talking Mr. Lupescu went over to a table and opened a drawer and took something out.

When Father hung up he saw Bobby first and started to be very mad. He said, "Young man, you've been trouble enough to your Mother and me with all your stories about your red-winged Mr. Lupescu, and now if you're to start bursting in—"

You have to be polite and introduce people. "Father, this is Mr. Lupescu. And see, he does too have red wings."

Mr. Lupescu held out the gun he'd taken from the drawer and shot Father once right through the forehead. It made a little clean hole in front and a big messy hole in back. Father fell down and was dead.

"Now, Bobby," Mr. Lupescu

said, "a lot of people are going to come here and ask you a lot of questions. And if you don't tell the truth about exactly what happened, I'll send Gorgo to fetch you."

Then Mr. Lupescu was gone through the french window.

"It's a curious case, Lieutenant," the medical examiner said. "It's fortunate I've dabbled a bit in psychiatry; I can at least give you a lead until you get the experts in. The child's statement that his fairy godfather shot his father is obviously a simple flight mechanism, susceptible of two interpretations. A, the father shot himself; the child was so horrified by the sight that he refused to accept it and invented this explanation. B, the child shot the father, let us say by accident, and shifted the blame to his imaginary scapegoat. B has of course its more sinister implications; if the child had resented his father and created an ideal substitute, he might make the substitute destroy the reality... But there's the solution to your eye-witness testimony; which alternative is true, Lieutenant, I leave up to your researches into motive and the evidence of ballistics and fingerprints. The angle of the wound jibes with either."

The man with the red nose and eyes and gloves and wings walked down the back lane to the cottage.

As soon as he got inside he took off his coat and removed the wings and the mechanism of strings and rubbers that made them twitch. He laid them on top of the ready pile of kindling and lit the fire. When it was well started, he added the gloves. Then he took off the nose, kneaded the putty until the red of its outside vanished into the neutral brown of the mass, jammed it into a crack in the wall, and smoothed it over. Then he took the red-irised contact lenses out of his brown eyes and went into the kitchen, found a hammer, pounded them to powder, and washed the powder down the sink.

Alan started to pour himself a drink and found, to his pleased surprise, that he didn't especially need one. But he did feel tired. He could lie down and recapitulate it all, from the invention of Mr. Lupescu (and Gorgo and the man with the Milky Way route) to today's success and on into the future when Marjorie, pliant, trusting Marjorie would be more desirable than ever as Robert's widow and heir. And Bobby would need a *man* to look after him.

Alan went into the bedroom. Several years passed by in the few seconds it took him to recognize what was waiting on the bed, but then Time is funny.

Alan said nothing.

"Mr. Lupescu, I presume?" said Gorgo. ■ ■

Give Cornell Woolrich the simplest opening situation—a man waiting for his girl outside a building, a misdirected package, a cryptic telephone call, and he will weave a web of suspense that traps the reader from the first line of the first page to the final exhalation of pent-up breath on the last line of the last page. Every detective writer envies Woolrich his incredible ability to spin out suspense from the most commonplace happenings. Under his own name, and his nom de plume, William Irish, Cornell Woolrich has built a solid literary reputation on just such tension-packed tales. But there is another facet to Woolrich's talent. He can project himself into any type of character and let you see the world through that person's eyes. In this unusual tale, the master of suspense tells of a planned gangland assassination from a unique viewpoint: a sixteen-year-old girl who begins an innocent masquerade that quickly develops into more than she intended. Even in this offbeat tale, however, one Woolrich characteristic is strongly in evidence—you will not put down this story until you have reached the last line of the last page.

CINDERELLA AND THE MOB

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE WHOLE FAMILY JUMPED ON me at once. You'd think I was a mere child or something, instead of sixteen. You'd think a person would have some rights on a Thursday evening.

Father said: "Not with that sore throat you've got, young lady!

We'll tell you all about the picture when we come home."

Mother said: "And even if she didn't have a sore throat she'd stay home tonight! She's got to study *some* of the time."

And of course Fran, my older sister, who wasn't going with

them but was going out with her this-month's beau, had to put her two cents' worth in too. "When I was your age—" she started to say.

"Oh, sure," I sighed wearily, "back in those Roman times things were different."

But it didn't do a bit of good. They all got ready and they all went out, and there I was stuck with a lot of books again. The last thing I got told was, "Now remember, I expect to find you in bed when we come home. None of this running over to Betty Lou's house!"

The front door went *bang!* And I was Cinderella again.

I gritted my teeth and opened my history book, but I couldn't see a thing in it for a long time, just waves of red.

And then, like it was just waiting for that much encouragement, the phone started to ring. I knew it was probably Fran's boy-friend calling to find out what was keeping her so long; she was the only one who ever got phone calls in our family.

"Hello," I croaked, and between what the sore throat had done to my voice and what the family had done to my disposition, I must have sounded like someone sawing wood.

It was a man's voice, but it wasn't Fran's boy-friend. He sounded sort of—I don't know how to put it—confidential, as if he was talking out of one corner

of his mouth and didn't want anyone but me to hear him. He said, "Hello, is this Chicago Rose?"

For a minute I was so surprised I just blinked, and then before I had a chance to tell him I wasn't, he rushed ahead.

"Listen, you don't know me, Rose," he said, "but it's all right; Eddie gave me your number. You know, Eddie Dubois back in Chi. He wrote it down for me before I came away; I mislaid it just now, but it didn't matter; I had it memorized anyway. He told me you'd sound just like you do, like you just had your tonsils taken out."

I'd kept trying to tell him, through the whole thing, that he must have the wrong number, but he was talking so fast I couldn't even get one good-sized word in.

And then it started to sound intriguing, so I changed my mind. I looked at it this way: every added five minutes I spent at the phone meant that much less time I'd have to spend over those poisonous books afterward, so what did I have to lose?

He said: "There's a bunch of us just in and we got a little job for you. Your kind of job, y'know, Rose? The kind of stuff that made you famous in Chicago."

"Oh," I said. Which is a pretty safe word.

"You'll get a cut," he went on, like he was trying to coax me.

"Well, if it's all the same to

you—" I started to say.

"Oh, I see, cash on the line ahead of time. Well, we'll do it your way then, Rose." Then he asked, "Are you warm right now? As long as you're not red-hot it's okay. Now listen, Rose, I can't give it to you over the phone, naturally. How's about coming out to your place?"

I looked around me and I rolled my eyes to myself. I could just imagine *their* faces if they came home and found—

"No," I said quickly, "I don't think you better do that." Was I having fun by now! This had the dates of the English kings beat all hollow.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Ain't you paying protection these days? Well, all right, make it anywhere you say, Rose."

I'd never met anyone at all until now, except Betty Lou, and I always met her in Gilman's drug-store down on our corner, right by the soda fountain. I couldn't make it there, because that fresh Willie Smith who tends the fountain knew me awfully well, and besides I owed him thirty cents for back sodas.

"You name the place," I said.

"I'll park on Main and Center," he said. "How'll that be? Northwest corner; you can't miss me."

That was all the way downtown, and it kind of scared me for a minute; if they ever found out that I went that far downtown at

this hour, I'd never hear the end of it. Even in the daytime that was out of bounds.

But I remembered I didn't really have to go; I could just tell him I would and then never show up, so it didn't matter. "All right," I said.

"I'll tell you how you'll know me," he said. "I'm wearing a very light lid, almost the lightest in town. I'll keep turning it around in my hand, like I was looking at the band."

"Well, uh, did—" I kept trying to remember that name he'd used at the beginning, and couldn't. "Did he tell you what I look like?"

"Eddie Dubois? Naw, only that you're red-headed and an eyeful."

I glanced in the hall-mirror next to me. "Well, I changed that a couple weeks ago. I'm blonde now."

He didn't seem surprised to hear that, as if all the girls he knew were always doing that to their hair. "Oh, sure, I know how it is. You just gimme the business, I'll know you."

I could tell he was getting ready to leave the phone, and I knew I ought to tell him that I wasn't Chicago Rose, that he'd been speaking to the wrong party the whole time; but I didn't have the nerve any more, after waiting this long.

The last thing he said was, "Make it as soon as you can, huh,

Rose; don't keep me waiting there on the open corner too long, it's not healthy." Then he rang off.

I hung up with a sigh. It had been the most interesting conversation I'd ever had, and I hated it to be over. Now I'd have to go back to those bum books waiting there all over the dining-room table.

I sighed again. I was wishing I really was Chicago Rose; I bet she didn't have to study civics and go to bed at eleven on week-nights.

Then I thought: I *could* be if I wanted to, just for a few minutes. He doesn't even know what she looks like himself. Or I could just go down there and take a peek at him from around the corner and then come straight back again. And that way, my study time would be all used up and it would be too late to bother with these books any more tonight.

And before I knew it I was upstairs in Fran's room, looking her things over.

I took down one of her old evening dresses and put it on. It didn't fit so good, so I pinned it tight behind me and that made it fit better. But my face looked too babyish sticking up out of it. So then I opened the bureau drawer and found a black crayon I'd watched her use sometimes and made rings around my eyes.

That helped a little, and then I spread on all the powder and

rouge she had there, until hardly any real skin showed through anywhere.

When I got through it didn't look so awfully good, but at least it didn't look like me any more.

I found a pair of her shoes and put them on too, because my own all had low heels. We both wore about the same size.

Up to now I'd been just sort of play-acting. I didn't really think I'd have the nerve to go.

But as long as I was all rigged up like that, it seemed a shame not to go down there and take a peek at him just for fun. Then I could tell Betty Lou all about it tomorrow in class, and we'd have a lot of fun over it.

I knew I'd be back long before they came home from the movie at half-past eleven—I'd have to be—but just to be on the safe side, in case Fran had a fight with her boy-friend and came home early, like sometimes happened, I put a laundry bag full of old clothes under the bedcovers to make it look like it was me lying there all cuddled up. With the light out you couldn't tell the difference.

Then I went downstairs. I put out all the lights and then I watched carefully from the front door, to make sure none of the neighbors were at their windows or out on the sidewalk just then, to see me come out.

As soon as I was sure the coast was clear, I ducked out. I had my

own key, that I used in the daytime to let myself in when I came home from school, so I wasn't worried about getting in again.

I walked fast until I got away from our house, and then I slowed down a little, so as not to attract attention.

What made me get in the cab was an accident. I mean, I made the first block all right without meeting anybody, and then this cab showed up and started trailing along next to me, on account of how swell I was dressed, I guess.

"Cab, lady?" the driver said. That gave me a thrill; it was the first time anyone had ever called me "lady." But of course I didn't need a cab; it was only thirty blocks from our house down to where he'd said he'd be, and that's not much of a walk. So I just shook my head politely.

Then the very next minute Mr. and Mrs. Jurgens, who lived right next door to us, turned the corner not ten yards ahead and started to come straight toward me. There was no chance to get out of their way. Luckily the cab was still there, right next to me. I gave kind of a sideways jump, and before I knew it I was in it.

The Jurgenses went right by without even looking at me, but before I could get out again, the cab had picked up speed and was on its way, so there didn't seem to be anything to do but go ahead

and tell the driver where I was going.

He kind of looked up sharp when he heard how scrapey my voice was, and then I saw him squinting at all the make-up on my face, in the rear-sight mirror. After a while he asked, kind of friendly and understanding, "How's business, sister?"

I didn't know much about business, only what I heard my father say, so I repeated an expression I'd heard him use to my mother lots of times.

"It's been so long since I made a sale," I said solemnly, "that I might just as well give my stock away to the Salvation Army!"

He looked kind of surprised at such a thought, but he shook his head sympathetically.

When we got near Main and Center I said, "Stop in the middle of the block, before you get all the way to the corner." I figured that way I could edge up to it and peek around it without him seeing me.

When he did, I got out and said cordially, "Well, thanks ever so much, it was awful nice of you to bring me all the way down here."

He said, "Wa-a-ait a minute, what is this?" And he started to climb out after me real slow.

I didn't like the look on his face, so I started to back away little by little. Then when I saw him spit on his hands and rub them

together, I turned and started going real fast.

But I made the mistake of looking back over my shoulder the whole time, and that way I forgot to watch where I was going. He took a jump and started sliding after me, like on an ice-pond. I gave a squeak and turned away too late.

My whole face went *spiff* into somebody's chest. It was hard, too, like a barrel; I nearly saw stars for a minute.

By the time I saw him stoop over to pick up a very light ice-cream-color hat he'd dropped, it was too late. He said, "I guess you're Rose, by that voice alone."

Then he laughed and said, "Same old Rose. Eddie told me about that trick of yours of getting out of cabs before they stop, and then when the drivers turn around to collect the fare they find the back seat empty."

He shoved a bill at the driver and growled: "Gedouda here before I wrap the crankshaft around your neck!"

What a growl that was! Like a sea-lion in the zoo.

Then before I knew what was happening, he had me by the arm and I was all the way over at a big black sedan waiting at the opposite curb. "Come on, Rose, I'll take you around to meet the boys."

"Y-you been waiting long?" I quavered. The only reason that

kept it from sounding as frightened as it was, was how inflamed my vocal cords were, I guess.

"Plenty *#&!c#* long!" he said. I'd heard two of the words before, but the other one was brand-new. Something told me this wasn't a very good time to tell him I wasn't Rose, that maybe I better put it off a little while, until a better opportunity came.

There were two other men in the sedan, one at the wheel, one in back. He introduced me, but only after we were already under way and I was firmly wedged on the back seat between him and one of the two others.

"Here she is, boys. Trigger, this is Rose. Rose, meet Oh-Johnny."

It seemed a worse time than ever to bring up about not being Rose. But compared to what it was going to be like later, if I'd only known it, it was practically ideal.

I said, "I don't even know *your* name yet," to my original acquaintance. There didn't seem to be any harm in that.

"I'm Blitz Burley," he said, like he was supposed to be famous or something.

They seemed to do their best to be agreeable to me, as if I was someone who might be valuable to them later on. The one called Trigger said, trying to make polite small-talk, "I b'lieve a moll I used to go around with knew your older sister in the Women's Re-

formatory at . . . ”

And the one next to me asked considerably: “Does my shoulder-sling bother you the way we’re sitting? I’ll move it out of the way if it does.”

“Huh,” Blitz said scornfully before I could answer, “she probably curls her hair with a repeater every night, don’tcha Rose?”

I didn’t exactly know what they were talking about, but the sensible thing to say seemed to be: “I used to but I found out I wasn’t getting the best results that way.” So I said it.

By this time we’d got to where they were bringing me, so we all got out. There was one pressed close on each side of me, and the one called Oh-Johnny was right in back of me. I don’t think they meant anything by it, they were just being sociable, but the only place I could have got to by breaking away suddenly from them and running would have been where we were going anyway, so there didn’t seem to be much sense to that.

It was some kind of a hotel, but it wasn’t a very presentable or tidy one. They went in the side way so they wouldn’t have to pass anyone, and up to a door on the third floor. It had an elevator, but they walked up.

Blitz knocked, in a funny way. Two quick ones and two slow ones. The door opened in a funny way too. First, just a ribbon

of orange showed, as if someone was looking out with just one half of one eye. Then it opened all the way, and we went in one behind the other.

Trigger was going to go first, but Blitz, who had very good manners, knocked him out of the way with his elbow and said, “Ladies first.”

There was another man on the inside of the door just finishing putting something away; I guess it was a handkerchief in his back pocket. There were also two more men in the room, playing cards at a table. I was now surrounded by six of them.

I still thought it could wait a little longer, to tell them I wasn’t Rose but just Penny Richards of Thomas Jefferson High School. Maybe till I got outside again, for instance.

There was a clock staring me in the face across the room, and it was already twenty after ten by now. I had less than an hour left, if I wanted to get back home before the family came in from the movies.

And to make matters worse, I’d lost track of just where we were, they’d driven in such a confusing, roundabout way coming over; I didn’t know how long it would take me to get back from here.

I kind of stood there in the middle of them and they all sized me up. This was the first time they’d got a good look at me, even

Blitz. He slapped his side and said: "I gotta hand it to you dames, I don't know how you do it these days! If I didn't know better, I could eat my hat you were only a twenty-year-old chicken just breaking in."

"Yeah," another one nodded. "Wudje do, Rose, have the old muzzle lifted on you?"

But they didn't waste any more time over that. They all pulled up chairs and kind of moved in close around me, like they were going to have a conference. Blitz said, "Okay, have a drink, Rose, while we're giving this to you."

What he handed me was tan and tasted like gasoline sprinkled with red pepper. When I got what was left of my blistered tongue safely back inside again I said no, I'd changed my mind, and handed it back.

"She's right," somebody spoke up. "Not when she's on a job."

"All right, now here it is, Rose," Blitz said, sitting down and hitching up his trousers at the knees. "We got a guy all nicely fingered-up for rubbing."

I shook my head hopelessly to myself, without letting them see me, before he even went any further. Out of that whole sentence he'd just given me, I hardly knew what the words meant.

"He come here from Chicago, and we come here after him," he went on. "He don't know we're

here yet, and he thinks he's pulled a curtain down after him. But even so, he's cagey, he's wise as they come. We can't get him out in the right spot where we can get at him easy. And then there's another reason why we ain't dropped him yet."

I knew what that word meant, at least. It's when you stop associating with somebody, snub them. Like when I dropped a girl last year in my French class because she always laughed every time I got up to recite.

"Now, he's gettin' it because he lammed out with the whole haul instead of splitting the way the agreement was. I was doing a little time right then, and a couple of the other boys had a little heat on them, and I guess he thought it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

"Well, he'll find out his mistake. But that don't do us no good, see Rose? First we gotta find out what he did with the haul. If we don't, once we dust him off, we can kiss it goodbye, we'll never see it again. That's where you come in."

What good is it when a person keeps talking and you don't even know what they're saying? I had the hardest time not yawning in their faces. I was beginning to wish I hadn't come. It hadn't turned out to be as much fun as I thought it would be.

"Now he's a pushover for a

dame. Always has been. But she's got to be his kind of dame, not just any dame at all. Machine-gun slugs can't drag a word out of him. But give him his head with a dame and he'll start talking. If she's the right kind of a dame, and he has confidence in her.

"The only thing which has saved him so far is that he goes for a peculiar, sweet, milk-fed type which has gone completely out of circulation; you can't find 'em any more. Enough of 'em have tried to be that way with him, but it don't go over; he can spot a fake a mile away.

"So you can see this ain't going to be an easy job, Rose. He's no fool. The minute a girl acts like she's too wise, he starts putting up his guard. And in a case like this, if he ever tumbles we primed you for this, it'll be curtains for you!"

I looked at the clock. It was quarter to eleven now. I didn't see how I was going to do it, and still get home safely ahead of the family. "About how long will it take?" I asked doubtfully.

"That depends entirely on how good you are, Rose," Blitz said. "If he falls at all, he falls hard and right away—he's that kind of a guy. If he once gets his fur up and starts suspectin' you, you'll never get anywhere in a week."

I thought maybe I better just say I would do it, and then go straight home and not pay any

more attention to them at all, once I was out of here. I hate arguments, and some of their faces looked kind of mean and ugly.

"All right," I sighed unenthusiastically.

"Now, we know where he's holed up, and we'll plant you where he can't miss you; we got everything worked out. The first thing you gotta do is find out what he done with that haul. Naturally, he ain't going to spill that easy, not even if he thinks you're his kind of a dame. So here's how you work it. There was some ice with it. Not much, it was mostly lettuce. But anyway, there was a little ice with it. The idea is, wherever the ice is, the dough ain't gonna be so far away.

"You tease him for some ice. If you've made a dent at all, he'll come across without thinking twice. That'll tell us what we want to know. He wouldn't bank it, accounta it's hot. It's a cinch it's around some place, not very far from him.

"Now the rest of it's simple. He'll wanta take you out. You see to it that he makes it the Jingle Club—" He stopped and grinned at me. "Djever hear of that before?"

"No," I said truthfully.

"No one else ever did either, before tonight. We're opening it specially for his benefit, just for this one night. It's a dummy, get it? Everything is all fixed, just

waiting for you to show up there with him. The waiters, the couples dancing, even the guys playing in the band are all props, so don't be surprised when you see them start easing out one by one, leavin' you all by yourselves.

"It's your job to keep him from noticing what's going on around him. You won't be left uncovered, don't worry. Every knothole will be plugged up with lead. We're doing this thing right. Now have you got it all straight?"

Straight? It was a complete blur as far as I was concerned; as bad as one of Mr. Peabody's dry lectures on a spring day when you're not paying attention.

Just about four or five words out of the whole thing were floating around loose in my head, without any meaning. *Ice. Jingle Club. Rubbing. Curtains.* "Uh-huh," I said vaguely.

"Whether you wangle the location of the haul outta him before or after you get to the Jingle Club don't matter, just so long as you wangle it. You be the best judge of that yourself. Soft music and dim lights sometimes help to loosen a guy up too, y'know."

I perked up a little at that, for the first time. "Oh, is there going to be music and dancing there?"

"Yeah," he answered dryly. "First there'll be music and dancing, for a front. Then as soon as you get up from the table for a tip-off that you've got the goods

on the haul, there'll just be music without the dancing."

They all sort of smiled at that. But what did I care? If there's one thing I'm crazy about—I started bouncing up and down on my chair. "Oo, I wish I was there already! I can hardly wait!"

He looked encouragingly at the others. "See? She's rehearsing already. Only, don't overdo it, Rose. You almost act *too* young, you act like you was on'y about sixteen. Don't let him spot you for a phoney or—"

I remembered that from the time before. "Curtains," I said placidly.

He rested his hand on my shoulder for a minute. "Babe, you got guts, all right."

They all started to shove their chairs back, like it was over. For my part I was glad; it hadn't been a bit interesting.

The last thing Blitz warned me was, "And for Pete's sake, Rose, when you do get up—to go back and powder your nose or whatever the stall is—stand good and clear of that table, or Heaven help you. It'll be wood one minute, Swiss cheese the next."

They were all kind of waiting, watching me. I didn't know what I was supposed to do next, so I didn't do anything, just sat on there without moving. A look of enlightenment crossed Blitz' face. "Oh, I get it!" he said, and reached

in his pocket and took out a bunch of bills. Before I knew it, they were in my folded hands.

"What do I do with this?" I asked, puzzled.

"Okay, Rose, okay," he said soothingly, like he didn't want any argument and took out some more and added them to what I was holding already. "That ought to hold you. And you can keep whatever ice he gives you."

Now I ask you, what good is keeping ice? In half an hour, all you've got is water.

They stood me up and looked me over, turning me around like a top. "Maybe she ought to scrape off a little of that plaster of Paris," one suggested. "She looks kind of weird."

"Naw," Blitz interposed hurriedly, "if she takes any of that off, her real age'll probably show through. This way she's just about right; she gives the impression of a school kid trying to act grown up."

With that, they all started to get ready to go out. Only instead of straightening their coats around their necks, like most people do, they all started smoothing and patting them down under their arms, like they had on woollen underwear that scratches.

Blitz gave them their final orders. "Okay, boys. Now, Trigger and me are going over with her. The rest of you go to the Jingle and get in position. You all know

your places.

"Al, you take the pantry doors. Biff, you're in the dummy phone booth, down out of sight. Oh-Johnny, you're behind the bar. Spike, you take it from above, through the ceiling; we got a sight-hole bored through. Me and Trigger'll seal up the front, once the stooges are out of the way.

"We're gonna have a truck outside dumping coal down a tin chute; you know how much noise *that* makes. There won't be a sound heard."

Meanwhile I was still clutching this bunch of bills in my hand. I thought it would be a good opportunity to get rid of it some place around the room while their attention was all taken up listening to him; I mayn't know lots of things, but I know enough not to take money from strangers.

I noticed a box with cigarettes in it on a table near the door, so I slipped it in there and closed the lid, when no one was watching.

But after they already had the door open, and half of them were already outside in the hall, the last one to leave must have reached into the box for a cigarette. He suddenly said: "Hey!" and stood there pointing down to the money.

They all moved so swiftly and so silently, like big cats, you could hardly follow them with your eyes. Before I knew it, I was back inside the doorway again, and

they were all around me in a ring, squinting hard and holding their hands under their arms.

"Y'weren't going to double-iggy us, were you, Rose? Is that why you left this behind?" Blitz asked. His lips had turned sort of white.

I seemed to be the only person in the whole room who wasn't all excited and shaking. "I was going to come back for it later," I explained coolly. If they were going to get that worked-up about my refusing it, I supposed I'd have to pretend to accept it.

They all took deep breaths and kind of relaxed. "Oh," Blitz explained, relieved, "she don't want Brennan to catch her with that much dough on her while she's around him. That's smart, fellas. He might smell a rat."

We all went down the stairs and out the side way again, me in the middle of the six of them. I kept thinking: "I've *got* to get away from them soon, I can't stay much longer; I'll just get in ahead of the family by the skin of my teeth as it is."

Anyway, I didn't like them much any more. The novelty had worn off. They were too quarrelsome and touchy, and I only understood about one word out of every three they said to me. I hadn't had a good time at all, the whole time I was up there with them.

Outside the hotel four of them left us, went down to another car

standing waiting further down the dark street, and Blitz and myself and Trigger got in the first car.

I had made up my mind that the quickest and easiest way of getting away from them, instead of going into a lot of wrangling and explaining, was to let them take me over to this other man they'd been talking about all evening, whoever he was. It wouldn't take more than five or ten minutes longer, and that way I'd get rid of them, first of all.

Then instead of having two people to get away from, I'd only have one, and it would be a lot simpler. I hadn't pretended to him I was Chicago Rose in the first place, so I wouldn't have to go ahead doing it.

I'd just say, "I'm Penny Richards from Jefferson High School and I was sent here to take you to the Jingle Club so you could get curtains, but you can just go over and get your own curtains, I'm going home!"

And if he didn't like it, he could lump it!

So I just sat still between them on the front seat and bided my time. If Betty Lou could make any sense out of this whole thing, when I told her about it tomorrow, she was better than I was.

On the way Blitz said, "Y'nervous?"

I thought of how late it was getting to be and what a calling down I was going to get if I ever

got caught sneaking in at this hour, so I admitted: "A little bit, not very much."

"Who wouldn't be?" Trigger said. "Until she gets him into the Jingle she's out-talking a thirty-eight every inch of the way, with no one to back her up. He'll drop her in a minute if he wises onto her. It's him or us, and he knows it."

Being dropped by someone I hadn't even taken up with yet wasn't going to worry me any. But like everything else they said, there wasn't any real sense to it.

They stopped finally around at the side of a great big building with a lighted glass shed over its entrance. I guessed it was another hotel; none of these people seemed to have any homes of their own.

"We're just in time," Trigger said. "That's his car waiting there, he'll be coming out in a minute."

Blitz said to me: "Y'know how y'gonna connect with him, don't-cha?" He sounded like I was a telephone wire. "Shoot out around the corner and let his fender throw you as soon as he turns on the ignition. You know how to work it so you won't get hurt, y'used to be in the fake-accident racket in Chi."

"No, I—" I quailed.

Trigger made that pawing gesture under his coat again.

"Just stage-fright," Blitz assured him tolerantly. "She'll be over it in a minute. All right, get out and

get ready for your dive, Rose."

They stood me up between them against the building wall, just back of the corner. Trigger kept watching around it. Blitz kept hold of me by the arms. It was dark around there where we were.

Trigger gave a sudden cut of his hand. "Here he comes now."

Blitz tightened his grip, turned me around and pointed me out toward the gutter that fronted the hotel. "No," I whined.

"He's in," Trigger whispered. There was the sound of a motor turning over, out of sight around the corner. Wheels started to slither.

"Okay, you're on the air, Rose," Blitz grunted. He gave me a sudden shove out away from him, like I was a volley-ball. I went staggering out across the sidewalk trying to keep from falling flat on my face, and the big headlights of a car were coming to meet me from the side.

I couldn't stop short of the gutter; the sidewalk was too narrow; and the car and I both got there at the same time.

I remembered something he'd said about grabbing the fender, and as I went down I caught at it with both hands and lay flat on top of it instead of going under it.

The car stopped short—it had hardly begun to pick up speed anyway—and I rolled off the fender and sat down on the ground in front of it.

A man with a leathery tan face and silver hair jumped out and came running around to me. "Are you hurt, miss?" he asked, picking me up. Then when he saw I was all right, he got kind of sore. "You should look where you're going; you could have been killed."

"Somebody pushed me," I insisted tearfully. I looked over where Trigger and Blitz had been, but there wasn't anyone there any more.

The doorman, who had come over to us, growled: "Ah, they always say that, Mr. Brennan."

Brennan looked around, said: "Help me take her into the lobby a minute, Joe, before there's cops around asking a lot of questions. I don't want the papers mentioning my name and address."

They helped me in between them. I looked around over my shoulder just before we stepped through the revolving door. I wasn't sure, but I thought I could make out a slice of ice-cream-color hat-brim sticking out around the corner down there.

I sat down and rested in the lobby for a minute and the doorman brought me a glass of water. Then Brennan stood up, said: "Wait a minute, let's see if I can't square this with you."

I didn't know what he was talking about, and I didn't care.

He sat down over in the corner and wrote something, then came back with a scrap of light-blue pa-

per and tried to give it to me. "Will fifty be all right?"

"Fifty what?" I said. Then when I saw that it was a check, like my father brings home sometimes, I pushed it back at him, told him politely but firmly that I wasn't allowed to take money from strangers.

He acted for a minute like he couldn't believe his ears. "How old are you?" he asked.

I was kind of tired pretending I was Chicago Rose by now; I hadn't pretended I was to him, anyway, so I didn't have to go ahead. "Sixteen and two months," I said defiantly.

He nodded to himself and murmured: "You'd have to be, to turn down money like you just did." Then he looked at me kind of skeptically. "You dress kind of old for your age. Well, if you won't take this, can I offer you a drink?"

"Yes," I said eagerly. I almost never seem to get enough refreshments.

He frowned a little and his eyes got squinty. "Come on in the bar," he said shortly.

I'd never been in one before. It was just like a soda fountain, only it didn't have faucets. He whispered something to the man behind it and then he left me sitting there.

"You go ahead," he said. "I've got a phone call to make."

The man brought two of those rotten tan things that I'd already

made the mistake of tasting over at *their* place. And then he brought the most irresistible pink malted you ever saw, and left it standing by itself a couple of chairs away from me, like it didn't belong to anyone. So of course I moved off down there where it was and started in on it.

Just when I got down to where the straw was gurgling at the bottom, I turned around and Mr. Brennan was standing there without a sound watching me. "That's another way of telling," he said.

We went back in the lounge and sat down again. He asked me how I happened to be going around, at my age, all dressed up like that.

"Well, they all went out to the movies and wouldn't take me with them," I started to explain, "so I got sore and went up to my sister's room—"

"I understand," he smiled, "just making believe, like little girls do."

I was going ahead to tell him the rest of it, how Blitz had called our house by mistake and everything, but just then I happened to get a look at a clock across the way and it said 11:25. That drove everything else out of my hand.

I jumped up and started edging away from him. "I'll have to go now, they'll be back any minute."

"Won't you stay just five minutes longer?" he urged. "I always wanted to have a little daughter

of my own, to take her around and show her the sights. We could go some place where there's music and dancing—"

But I started to run without waiting to hear any more. Was I going to get it when I got home! I pushed out through the revolving door and then I stopped short.

Blitz was standing there down by the corner, leaning back against the wall waiting, with his hat pulled down over his face and smoking a cigarette.

I looked up the other way and Trigger was standing up *there*, waiting the same way.

They both saw me, and they both started to take a slow step toward me. But they didn't have time to finish it; I turned around and went in again as fast as I'd come out.

Mr. Brennan was still sitting there, sort of day-dreaming about having a little girl like me, I guess. I went back to him and said: "I guess I will stay a *little* while, after all."

The damage was done now anyway, the family was almost certainly home by this time. The only thing left to do was wait a little longer, until they were safely in bed and had the lights out, and *then* go back.

He brightened right up and said: "Swell! Now, it's no fun here. Let me take you some place where you'll enjoy yourself."

Then he looked at me sort of

helplessly. "I don't know much about showing a little girl your age a good time. It's kind of late for amusements like parks or movies. Where would you like to go?"

I remembered that place they'd spoken of, the "Jingle." I wouldn't have suggested it if I could have thought of any other, but I couldn't, and he kept waiting to hear me say where I wanted to go, so finally in order not to seem a complete fool who didn't even know where she wanted to go herself, I mentioned it.

His eyes got that narrow look again for a minute and he said: "Have you ever been there before?"

"No," I said, "I just happened to hear somebody speak of it."

His face cleared again and he smiled. "Oh, I see, Cinderella wants to pretend she's grown up, just for one night, is that it? All right, we'll see if we can find it and we'll go there."

We went out and got in his car. This time you couldn't see a sign of Blitz or Trigger around, but when we flashed past the corner I could see that car they'd brought me in still standing there in the gloom, so I knew they weren't very far away.

I was going to tell him all about them—I really liked him much better than them by now—but he seemed so happy to be taking me

out, as if I was really his daughter, that I hated to spoil his evening for him, so I decided not to. The best way to treat mean people is to ignore them, not mention them at all.

He had a little trouble finding the "Jingle," because no one seemed to have heard of it before tonight, but finally a taxi driver told us where there was a new club being opened, and when we finally found it it turned out to be the one, all right.

It was in a creepy sort of dead-end street, up against the river, and there was a coal truck standing there backed up against a sidewalk grate, but it hadn't dumped its load yet, was just waiting.

We drew up outside and a man with a lot of brass buttons came over and opened the car door. Brennan said, "Haven't I seen your face somewhere before?" and the man got kind of confused, but told him he must be mistaken.

Then Mr. Brennan turned and looked at me, and asked: "Are you still sure you want to go in?" I could hear music coming out, and the colored lights looked so cozy, I couldn't resist. I told him yes, I'd love to.

"Well, I couldn't be wrong about *you*," he said to himself; but out loud: "If you've got me fooled, I'm sure slipping and I deserve to be bagged." So we got out and went in.

It was small, but it had the

prettiest colored bulbs strung all around, like a Christmas tree, and a few people sitting at tables all dressed up pretty, and two couples dancing.

It was the first really glamorous place I'd been in all evening, and when he saw how my eyes were shining and how thrilled I was, he sort of relaxed.

"Why does it have to be that table?" he asked, when the waiter tried to take us over to a certain one against the wall.

"That's the only one left; all the others are reserved, only the people are late getting here," the waiter said.

So we went over and sat down. The waiter asked us what we'd like to have. "Double choc'late soda," I said instantly.

Mr. Brennan sighed, "Ah, Cinderella, Cinderella, everything seems magic to your eyes."

After I'd finished my soda and we'd been sitting there a while, one of those disconnected words they'd used came back to my mind. *Ice*. But I didn't ask him for some because they'd told me to, but because I really was kind of dry and sticky. It certainly was close in there.

For a minute his face changed and he gave me that same squinty look again, and his hand even went in toward his coat, like those other people's had all the time. Then he said very quietly, "Sure, you can have some ice."

When the waiter brought it, he kept watching my face very closely, like he wanted to see what I'd say about it. Well, all I said was "Thank you," because it was just like any other ice I'd ever had. I looked at it kind of satisfied and started to crunch a piece between my teeth.

He dropped his hand down again and gave me a funny kind of a smile. "I thought you meant the other kind," he said. "I'm so used to—"

"What other kind is there?" I asked him. He seemed kind of silly.

"You wouldn't know about those things, Cinderella. But there is another kind. I've got some of it, and I've got a lot of green money, and there's some men I left behind me in Chicago would give their right arms to know where I've got it. I'm going to let you in on my secret, Cinderella, because I know it's safe with you."

He smiled some more. "We came here on it."

"How could we? It isn't snowy on the streets or anything."

He laughed, chucked me under the chin. "It's in the tires of the car, all packed in cotton wool."

That wasn't so terribly interesting; I couldn't see why they'd wanted to find out so bad. I was going to tell him about them, that they weren't in Chicago at all but right here, and that I'd been with them myself just before I met

him; but he went ahead talking and I didn't have the chance. I've been brought up never to interrupt people until they get through.

When we first came in there'd been two couples dancing on the floor. Then after a while there was only one. Then there weren't any, but the music kept on playing.

There wasn't anyone sitting at the tables now any more either, and I hadn't even seen them get up to go. But the colored lights shone down mostly in the middle of the room, so you couldn't tell so easily what was going on around the sides.

The music kept sounding thinner and thinner, as if each time there was one less instrument, and then finally there was just one man left, picking away at the piano soft and low. Then before you knew it, he must have strolled outside to rest a while; there was silence. The waiters had disappeared too. We were the only ones left in the place. There was a lull, like when something is going to happen. I couldn't tell, because I'd never been in a lull before.

And Mr. Brennan was so taken up talking to me, he didn't seem to notice anything going on around him. I seemed to have got him into a sentimental, reminiscent mood. He was giving me his life story.

"I'm sorry now for all the laws I've broken and all the things I've done, but it's too late. If I'd mar-

ried and settled down and had a sweet little girl like you for a daughter in the beginning, instead of going after the quick money—"

Then he stopped and looked at me and asked, "Am I rubbing you the wrong way, by telling you all these things about my past?"

"No—" I started to say. But that expression reminded me of something from earlier in the evening. "Mr. Brennan," I asked curiously, "excuse me for interrupting, but what does it mean when they speak about *rubbing* a person?"

"It means to kill someone. But the way I used it just now—"

My mouth opened wider than it ever had before, made a great big round O, and I put both hands at once over it.

He saw something was the matter. "Ah, I've frightened you," he said penitently. "I shouldn't have told you that."

"Curtains," I whispered hoarsely through my hands; "what do curtains mean?"

"Curtains mean a person's end."

"Mr. Brennan, you've got to listen to me!" And I told him the whole thing, everything that had happened from the time Blitz first rang our house by mistake, until they'd pushed me in front of his car.

"I didn't mean to do it!" I whimpered. "I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what they meant, until you told me just

now!"

For a minute he was altogether different. He was like they were, mouth all twisted and white, eyes hard as buttons.

"So they've got me sewed up, have they, thanks to you?" His hand went in under his coat. "Well, I'll go—but I'm gonna take you with me."

"Where to?" I asked wonderingly. "We can't get out—"

He sighed, and little by little his face went back to what it had been like before. He shook his head a little sadly.

"No, I guess you didn't know," he said. "Such thickness couldn't be faked; it must be the McCoy."

"Listen, Cinderella, I've got to go anyway; but they'll let you through. You get up and slowly walk away from the table, like you hadn't just told me.

"I won't give you away, I'll act like nothing was the matter. They might get tired waiting and give it to you with me, if we both sit here much longer."

"But that's the signal, it'll begin the minute I do that." I swallowed hard, but I wouldn't budge. "No," I said, "I didn't mean to, but I brought you in here. I'm not going to get up and walk away. I'm going to stay here at the table with you. They'll—they'll have to rub us both, I guess."

"But aren't you scared?"

"Oh, awfully," I whispered.

His hand dropped back to his

lap again. "You saved yourself that time," he said. "I would have dropped you before you got a foot away, if you'd taken me up on it. But now I see that you're on the level. That's the last time tonight I doubt you. I guess it's the last time tonight for anything."

We didn't say anything for a minute or two. It was awfully quiet in there; you could hear a pin drop. I had a creepy feeling like eyes were watching me, but I couldn't tell where they were coming from. After a while I asked, "Will it hurt much?"

"We're probably good for another few minutes sitting here," he said, "so let's think this out. Don't look around, Cinderella, just bend your head like you were listening, and I was talking to you like I was before."

"And don't talk too loud," I warned him under my breath. "Another thing I forgot to tell you, there's a hole right over us in the ceiling and one of them's up there."

His eyes didn't go up at all. He just took out a very shiny cigarette case and looked at the inside of the lid while he helped himself to one, then he put it away again.

"Yeah, there is," he said quietly. "I can see the rim of a gat-muzzle pointing down through it, right into the middle of my brain."

He took a careless puff and went on: "Now Cinderella, the lights are our only chance. This place

was rigged up in a hurry, just for tonight. The wiring is all strung around on the outside of the walls, not covered up; see it? It must be plugged into a master outlet at one certain place, this whole circuit of colored bulbs. Let me see if I can find where that is, first of all."

His eyes roamed around indifferently like he didn't have a thought in his mind. "Talk to me," he said out of the corner of his mouth.

"Three times three is nine," I pattered desperately, "four times three is twelve, five times three—"

The family didn't seem so awful to me right then; I was wishing I was back with them. But I couldn't get up and go. They'd shoot him.

"I've found it," he said. "Porcelain too, like I hoped. Now I've got to hit it squarely with just one shot, and blow the whole place to darkness. I've got to have a chance to draw and sight. Are you afraid of the noise of a gun, right up against your face?"

"I never heard one before."

"Then lean over me, from across the table, and pretend to be taking a cinder out of my eye. I'm gonna try to aim and fire with your body covering me, so they won't see me unlimber.

"Now listen close, Cinderella. I don't think we can make it, but at least we'll take a try. Throw yourself flat on the floor and crawl along it the minute the lights go.

Don't lift your head an inch, but *swim* for it. You're young and supple, you ought to be able to move fast even that way.

"There's no use trying to get out the front way, into the street. That's where they'll expect us to head for and that's where they'll point their fire. I'll hold mine after that first shot, to keep from showing them where we are.

"We'll make for the back. There must be stairs back there some place, leading up into the building over us. We'll try to get up through it and over the roof.

"Turn your head slow and place the direction you're going in, for yourself, while you still can see. It's that middle opening in the shadows back there, between the dummy phone booth and the swinging door.

"And if you once get out okay, don't wait for me. Hotfoot it all the way up, as high as you can go."

Then he said, "Are you ready, Cinderella?"

"I'm ready," I said, clenching my two hands down at my sides.

He smiled to give me courage. "Then here we go, Cinderella."

He blinked his eye and pretended he'd got something in it. I leaned over him, pretending to help him get it out. Once I happened to glance down, and he had a big monster of a black gun out in his hand, wedged between the two of us, right under my chin.

It was turned out, toward where that main light-plug was.

The last thing he said was, "In closer, Cinderella; there's someone over us too, don't forget."

So I leaned as close to him as I could, and by then I was nearly crying.

Something went *boom* right under my face like a lot of dynamite, and all the lights went out. I didn't have to drop like he told me to. I got such a fright when the thing went off right under me, I fell all the way over backwards, flat on the floor.

So then I just rolled over and started wriggling fast toward where I'd last seen that back door.

I heard the table we'd been at go over with a crash, and one of the little pieces of ice that had been on it hit me on the back of the neck and made me go even faster.

Meanwhile, the whole place was full of starry flashes, like there was a terrific lightning storm going on.

They came from all over—from behind the bar, from the telephone booth, from the front door, and even from the ceiling.

I heard Blitz' voice suddenly yell in from somewhere outside: "Get her too, you guys, she's ratted on us!"

I was nearly over at the back door by now. I was glad that dress of Fran's I'd borrowed was black and didn't show up in the flashes

that kept streaking around me. I couldn't tell what had happened to Mr. Brennan, whether he was down on the floor or flat up against the wall somewhere.

And then suddenly my head and shoulders wedged in between somebody's straddled legs. He was standing there with his feet spread out, firing over me toward the front doorway.

I was so scared I didn't know what I was doing. I grabbed hold of a leg with both hands, pushed with all my might to try to shove it out of the way. It kicked up in the air, somebody yelled and fell over on the floor right next to me with his whole weight.

Then I stood up, ran into the door with my hands out in front of me to guide me, flung it open and ran out into a back hall. It wasn't much lighter than in there where we'd been.

But at the end of it I saw a flight of stairs and I ran toward them for all I was worth and started up without waiting for him, like he'd told me to.

I went up one whole flight, and around the landing, and halfway up the next flight; and then I stopped and stood there in the gloom, listening and leaning over to see if he was coming. My heart was going so fast it nearly made as much noise as all that shooting down there.

Suddenly he came out, backwards and crouched over low, and

just before he backed away from the door he fired once into the dark, smoking room behind it.

Then he turned and sprinted as far as the foot of the stairs, and there he turned and crouched and fired again, to keep them back, because they'd seen him go and were trying to come out after him.

While he was standing there like that, with his back to the stairs, a shadow suddenly came out onto the landing between him and me—I guess the one that had been planted at the hole in the ceiling over us—and I caught the glint of a gun, raised and all ready in his hand. He pointed it square down at Brennan, at the back of his head.

There wasn't even time to yell a warning to Brennan, because by the time he turned to look up at me it would have been too late.

Somebody had left a pailful of garbage standing there on the step below me. I grabbed it up with both hands and flung it down there at the landing where he was with all my might.

I didn't even aim it, I was just lucky I guess. It hit him right in the side of the head and keeled him over sideways, and the gun went off into the ceiling, and eggshells and dirty vegetables poured all over him.

Brennan turned and looked up. "Good work, Cinderella!" he yelled. Then he came running up, and stooped and snatched the gun

up without stopping as he went by. He caught up with me, grabbed me by the hand, and started to tow me along with him.

They kept firing as they came up after us, but they couldn't get us in a straight line, because the stairs broke direction every flight and turned back on themselves.

When he'd finished using all the shots in his own gun, he threw it down at their heads and used the one he'd taken from the other man.

We got up to the roof door finally. It was locked, but he fired a shot at it and blew it open, and then we were out on the roof, running across it.

We skimmed over a low partition ridge between the two buildings and got to the skylight hutch of the other house. They'd come out after us by now and were firing at us from the first roof door. You could hear little things like wasps go humming by your ears.

The hutch here was locked like the other, but this time he couldn't blow it open because the padlock was on the inside.

"I'll get it," he panted, "the wood's rotten. Grab me by the coat if it caves in."

He backed up and took a run at the door, and crashed his whole shoulder into it. It shot in, and if I hadn't grabbed him by the tail of the coat like he'd said, he would have gone down the whole flight of stairs inside.

He swung around and hit the side of the framework. Then he righted himself and we started down through the new house. A lock of my hair fell off, like something had snipped it loose.

A minute later they got to the roof door we'd just come in by, and started firing down at us from up there. But again the zigzagging of the stairs saved us.

And then, just as we'd got half-way down through the house and it looked like we'd be out in the street in another minute, a shot came up at us from *below*.

We both staggered to a stop and looked over the rail. Faces were grinning up at us from below, more of *their* faces. Some of them had been told by the others what we were trying to do, and had come in from the street to head us off. They had us blocked.

Another shot came up through the little sliver of opening, and we both snatched our heads back.

"A whole army," he said bitterly, "just to get one man and a girl!"

"Everyone in there was in on it," I told him. "I heard them say so; waiters and musicians and all."

We couldn't go back either; the others were coming down behind us from the roof.

"Quick!" he said. "See if they'll let us in one of these flats here; it's our only chance."

I turned away from the stairs and ran down the long hall

pounding at door after door with the flat of my hands.

"Open! Help us! Let us in—oh, *please* let us in!"

He stayed behind there on the landing to keep them back a little longer.

I could hear people behind some of the doors, but they were too scared to open up, on account of all the firing that had been going on for the past ten minutes or more.

Frightened voices jabbered back at me, "Go away! Leave us alone!" And I heard one woman saying frantically—I guess she had a phone in there with her—"Quick, send over all the men you have. There's something terrible going on—two people being murdered here in the halls."

"Shoot in one of the locks—*make* them—" I pleaded to Brennan.

Something made a clicking sound in his hand. "I have no more left," he said, and he aimed at someone's head coming up, but with the back part of his gun, and then pitched it like a baseball.

There was only one more door left and then the hall ended, and then they'd just come into that corner-pocket after us and shoot us down, slow, over and over and over.

I rained slaps all up and down this door, and all of a sudden it swung in loose; the flat behind it must have been vacant.

"Brennan!" I squealed. "Here."

And I jumped in there, into the dark. A minute later he scuffed down the hall, turned in after me, and got the door closed on the two of us.

The shooting out on the stairs stopped, and you could hear feet slithering along the hall toward where we were. And in the sudden stillness I heard Blitz' voice say: "It's all right, take y'time, boys. We've got them now, he's out of slugs."

Brennan said: "See if there's a fire escape outside any of those windows behind us. I'll hold the door against them until you get down."

I ran from one to the other, flattening my nose against the grimy panes, swallowing dust and cobwebs, peering down. I didn't find one until I'd gone two empty rooms away.

I tugged at the warped window until I'd got it up. A shot thudded in there where he was, sounding like it came through wood or something.

I turned away from the window and ran back to him through the dark. "Hurry up, I've found one!"

"Too late, Cinderella," he grunted. He was still holding the door, but he was sagging lower on it now. "Quick, get down it, I still can hold this—"

"I'm not going to leave you up here," I said.

"Game little Cinderella," he

coughed.

Then the door swept back, carrying him with it, and about five or six of them walked in, one behind the other. They were just black silhouettes first, against the hall light.

Blitz' voice said, "Bring a light."

Someone turned on a flashlight and shone it on Brennan, making a big moon against the wall for him to die in. Blitz looked down at him where he was lying against the baseboard, and he took careful aim and fired.

Brennan jolted against the baseboard as if a nail had gone into him. I screamed and ran at Blitz, but they caught me and threw me back.

"That's for dishing us out of our share of the Chicago racket money. Now, where is it?"

Brennan just smiled sleepily.

"All right, you Rose, did he tell you where it is?" They pulled me forward again and threw me at him, and switched the light on me.

"I'm not Rose and I never was!"

"We know that now and it's your tough luck. But did he tell you where the haul is?"

Brennan's voice said brokenly from somewhere in the dark: "Tell them I did, Cinderella."

"Yes," I said into the dazzling torchlight.

"Out with it then, hurry up! Where is it?"

I waited, listening. Brennan's

weak gasp came again. "Don't tell them yet—hear me? Hold out as long as you can, they won't touch you as long as—"

He was trying to save my life.

Blitz snarled, "We'll see how long she can hold out!"

He grabbed my arm, wrenched it up behind my back until I thought I'd nearly faint. I went crashing down on my knees, pinned to him backwards.

Brennan's voice pleaded, "Don't—don't—promise to let the kid go and I'll tell you—"

One of them warned Blitz excitedly, "Come on, we gotta get outta here, don't you realize that?"

"Not until I put one into this interfering brat!" he raged. He let go of me and I tumbled forward on my face and rocked there on the floor, rubbing at my shoulder, looking around at him.

I saw his arm stretch out toward me, and the torch caught the gun at the end of it and made it shine.

I could hear Brennan trying to reason with them, but I was listening for the sound of the shot, not his voice.

The flash came from too far back behind Blitz, way back in the hallway. Blitz went up on his toes first and seemed to get twice as tall as he was, then he started to come down on me, leaning over more and more, and finally he fell flat right on top of me and pinned me there.

For a minute a puff of hot

breath stirred my hair, and then it stopped and didn't come again.

They must have made the mistake, Blitz' gang, of all crowding into the room around us, to watch and hear what went on, and left the street doorway and the stairs unguarded.

For a minute or two the whole thing started over again, just like before; flashes everywhere and thunder and feet running in all directions trying to get out. I wound my arms tight around my head and buried my face in them.

It didn't last as long as the first time; it ended right away. Lights came in, and there were heavy thuds as guns dropped to the floor.

I raised my head and saw some of them standing with their hands up. Some more came in that way from the other room, with policemen behind them.

Someone was lying still on the floor in there; I could see his feet sticking out.

A policeman's face bent down close and peered at me. "She's just a kid!" he gasped in surprise.

"Mister," I begged weakly, "will you please get this man off me so I can get up?"

"Didje get them all?" somebody asked. "How about the two that got down the fire escape?"

"They're both lying down there in the backyard, now. The first one missed his footing and pulled

down a whole section of the rusty thing with him. The second one just went down clean—"

They were bending over Brennan, and I heard him whispering: "—it's all in the tires of my car, just slit them. I know I got no right to ask you boys favors, but let the kid go home, she's just a little school kid."

Then they told me he wanted to say something to me. I bent down close by him. I could hardly hear him, he whispered so low.

"—always wanted to have a little girl of my own like you—"

Then his face sort of turned empty. I looked at them, not understanding, and one of them said quietly, "He's gone, Cinderella."

I started to cry. I'd only known him a little while, but I'd liked him a lot and it felt like I'd known him a long time.

They didn't let me go straight home, though, even after Brennan had asked them to. First, they took me downtown with them some place, and I had to answer a lot of questions.

Finally they called a motorcycle policeman up to the front door, and I told him where I lived and climbed on behind him, and we went skittering away.

When we got out to the house, I climbed down and hobbled across the sidewalk to our front door. "What's the matter with your foot?" the policeman wanted to know. He looked sympathetic.

"I lost one of my slippers on those tenement stairs, but I never noticed it until now."

"If that don't beat everything!" he said, slapping his handlebar. "Just like she did in the story-book!" ■ ■



What continually amazes us is the versatility of the comedians in show business. There is scarcely one who does not have several strings to his bow. Jackie Gleason is a musical composer, Steve Allen is a poet, Jimmy Durante is one of the finest jazz pianists extant, and Victor Borge has done the impossible: turned chicken-farming into a profitable business. Now along comes Ken Murray, the cigar-chewing, droll comedian whose famed "Blackouts" show ran for nearly eight years on the West Coast, with a crime story that has the pace and style of a detective fiction master. Of course, this crime does take place against a background of show business, and the characters portrayed are types with which Mr. Murray is all too familiar (he refuses to identify them further than that). But what surprises us is not Mr. Murray's evident knowledge of his locale and people, but his grasp of the short-story technique.

SWAN SONG

by KEN MURRAY



THE REHEARSAL HALL WAS A GIGANTIC, high-ceilinged room with one dusty window at the far end. A piano was shoved into a corner, and there were bars for dancers' exercises along two of the walls. Four wooden chairs were scattered in the room, and Greg was sitting on one of them, his head buried in his hands. Silver was standing at the window and she stared out past the flakes of dust

at the rooftops and the afternoon haze. Her slim body was taut with an unbearable tension.

"You show me, then," Greg said. "If there's any other way out, you show me."

Silver remained perfectly still. "There's got to be another way," she said. Her voice was husky and low-pitched. There was only the slightest strain in her voice.

"You show me," Greg said.

"We've been over everything a thousand times. We can't let things just go on forever."

"I wasn't suggesting that." Silver turned away from the window and went to the piano. She stood against it in the familiar pose, one hand resting on the smooth black top, the other at her side. "Darling, you know me better than that, don't you?"

Greg shook his head. "If we're going to change things, there's only one way to do it," he said. "No matter how much we dislike it. Divorce is out."

"I know," Silver said.

"Because if you ever do manage to get yourself a divorce, he'll blab what he knows all over the country. You'll be through."

"I know."

"So we've got to do something else," Greg said.

"We can't—kill him, like an animal," she said.

Greg stood up and came to the piano. He stood at the keyboard, facing her. "I can't stand just going on," he said. "From day to day. Never knowing anything. Never getting anywhere. Playing dates with you, rehearsing—sneaking around corners, while Bud sits back and grins. Oh, he knows what's going on. He knows."

"He couldn't," Silver said. Still the voice was perfect, the enunciation exact.

"He couldn't help but know," Greg said. "He doesn't care.

You're singing your heart out, night after night, and he takes the money and what does he care about you?"

"He—"

"He's satisfied so long as he gets the dough," Greg said. "He's the man of the house. It doesn't matter what you do with somebody else—so long as the clubs stay packed, and the records go on selling, and the dough comes in. He's taking the dough, and if you want to play around with some guy like me, it's all right with him."

"Play around..." she whispered. "It's not like that."

"I know it's not, baby." He sat on the piano bench. "But he doesn't know it. Bud doesn't know it's not just playing.

"Killing," Silver said, softly. "I don't want to think about it. It's terrible..."

Greg played a sharp brilliant chord on the piano. "You won't have to do a thing about it," he said. "You'll be outside it completely—uninvolved. I've got it all figured. It's foolproof."

"Suppose they catch you?" she said.

"They're not going to catch me," Greg said. He hit another chord, a crashing dissonance. "I told you it's foolproof. And—afterwards—we'll be together with nothing to separate us."

Silver started to say something, stopped, and leaned over the piano. "Now, we're here to rehearse,

right?" He grinned up at her. "Just forget about everything else. We open here in three days, baby."

"All right, darling." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Greg waited a second, then began to play. After four bars Silver opened her eyes and began to sing. The slow, soft music filled the room, her husky voice rising over the chords of Greg's solid, structured piano. The critics said that Silver Rourke's voice could summon up pain and heal it, all in the same melody. And the critics were almost right . . .

Their home was a ranch house, built to Bud's specifications, gleaming and beautiful. Silver drove the car into the garage and came in through the side entrance. Bud was in the living room, in the white leather armchair, a tall, balding man with a scratchy voice. He was reading a newspaper.

"How did things go, dear?" Silver said. She took off her jacket and folded it on her arm.

"All right," he said.

"Did you do anything special today?" she said.

His eyes were still on the paper. "No."

"Bud—" she began tentatively.

"Listen," he said, and looked up. "I'm trying to read, and here you go—where's Greg? Didn't he come back with you?"

"He was tired," Silver said. "He decided to go straight home."

Bud returned to his paper. "I

told Annie dinner at six-thirty. Okay?"

"Of course, dear." She went out to the hall and hung up her jacket. In her mind a dull pulse was beating: *How long? How long?* She walked into the kitchen, where Annie gave her a look that said she was too busy to talk to anybody just then. Silver came back to the living room.

She *had* to try.

"Bud—I've got to talk to you."

"Oh, all right," he said. He put the paper down on his lap and looked up. "What is it?"

"Suppose I told you I'm in love?"

"I appreciate the compliment," he said.

"With—someone else," she said. The words were difficult to say.

He waited a second. "I'd tell you to forget it," he said.

The next thing was even harder, but she had to know, once and for all.

"Bud, I want a divorce," she said.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said sharply.

"Bud, I'm serious."

"You won't get a divorce," he said. "Listen, you were glad enough to find a man who'd marry you five years ago."

"Bud, please. I didn't want to have to do this—"

"You listen to me," he said. He almost smiled at her. "You can have your divorce if you want it,"

he said. "But a price goes with it. Wouldn't the papers like to know about the wonderful Silver Rourke? Wouldn't they love to know how Silver Rourke was born Wilhelmina Roarity? I could tell them all about Wilhelmina Roarity, you know. All about the little mistake she made..."

"Bud, don't—"

"It wasn't so very serious, was it?" he said. "Only fifteen dollars, that was all—but the judge called it theft. Wouldn't the papers love to hear about the time Wilhelmina Roarity spent in jail? The expose magazines would like it, too. I could turn quite a little piece of change out of that little story—"

"No!"

He took a deep breath. "That was six years ago," he said. "You were glad enough to find a man who didn't mind marrying a girl with a prison record, weren't you? Then you started to sing, and the people liked your singing. And now you're too big for me, is that it? Now you figure old Bud might as well get out and make room for somebody else, some big flashy boy who's got youth and looks and everything else? You listen to me—"

"Please don't—"

"You listen to me," he said evenly. "I'm your husband, and I like being your husband. There's dough in it, and I like that. You want to play around with your little friends, you go ahead and

play around. But I'm sticking. This is a soft spot—you tell me why I should give it up."

She stopped trying then. It was hopeless, just as Greg had said. She had tried, and she had failed.

Now it was up to Greg.

They met at her agent's office, the next afternoon. Greg shook hands with Bud, and smiled at Silver, without giving a hint of the decision they'd reached the previous day. Her agent, a small wrinkled man named Sid Goulis, kept them waiting twenty minutes.

They sat in the anteroom, making small talk, while Silver wondered how Greg could go on pleasantly chatting with the man he'd decided to kill.

"We ought to get a couple of dates in Vegas or on the Coast after this," Greg told Bud. "That's what I figure, anyhow. Are you coming along with us?"

"I might stay here," Bud said. "Traveling's not for me—and you'll be back eventually."

"We'll come back," Greg said. "After all, there isn't any place like New York."

"No place," Bud agreed, while Silver kept her face a mask, and tried not to scream with the effort.

"Well, we're in shape, anyhow," Greg said. "Yesterday's rehearsal cleared up a lot of the rough spots. I'll look for you at ringside when we open tomorrow night."

"I'll be there," Bud said evenly.

Greg smiled at him, just as though the idea of murder had never entered his mind . . .

Somehow, for Silver, the following day passed. Minutes were hours or days; every time Bud was in the same room with her she felt she was going to tell him. She was going to tell Bud in the next second . . . but, somehow, she managed not to.

Soon, Bud would be dead.

She tried not to think about that at all. Greg had told her there was no other way out. If only Bud would give her a divorce . . .

It was after three when Greg called.

"Make some excuse to him, and get down here right away."

She stared at the blank receiver. After a long silence, he asked anxiously: "You there? Silver?"

"I'm here," she said. "I heard you."

"Tell him you want to ask me about an arrangement. Tell him anything, but get down here."

"Greg—"

"I don't like this any more than you do," he said. "Now get down here right away."

"Yes, Greg," she said. "Yes, darling."

"That's my baby."

She put the receiver down slowly and went into the living room. Bud was poking at the plants on the windowsill, his back to her.

"Bud, I've got to check on some arrangements with Greg. I'll

come back before showtime if I can. If not I'll see you there."

"Okay." He turned. "One more fling with your boy under the husband's nose, hey?" He laughed. "You and Greg have your fun. You do what you like—but you remember that you come back here in the end. Here's where you live and I'm your husband. You just remember that—when the checks arrive, Silver. And remember Wilhelmina Roarity, too—"

She turned and ran from the house.

Greg's apartment was small and untidy. She remembered his saying: "I don't stay in it long enough to bother with anything better." A small upright piano, against one wall, had an assortment of sheet music, letters and underwear draped on it; the only armchair was filled with a gigantic ashtray, a pen and a sheet of blank music paper. Greg met her at the door and shepherded her into the room. He scooped the litter off the chair with one big hand.

"It's all right," she said. "You were right. It's the only thing to do. I told him where I was going, and—Greg, it was awful." She wanted to cry, but this was no time for tears. "Just tell me what you want me to do. I'll do whatever you say, Greg."

"That's my baby." He paused for a second, fished in a pocket of his shirt for cigarettes, took one

out and lit it. The match dropped on the floor.

"You're going to have to tell him that there's somebody waiting for him," Greg said.

"Now?"

"Not now. During the show. Our second break." He nodded. "That should do it. I'll give you the address."

"What's going to happen?" she said.

"I'll be waiting there for him."

She didn't ask any more questions about that. "They'll find out."

"Don't worry about them finding out. I'll be back on the bandstand before anybody knows what happened—in time for our next show. I've worked out the timing close enough. A man in the bar's going to alibi me—say I was there all during the break."

"But—"

"It's foolproof," he said. "Don't worry about it."

After a pause she said: "Darling . . ."

She went into his arms. He held her close for a moment and then his mouth came down deliberately onto hers.

"Do you love me, Greg?" she asked when he let her go.

He looked at her, and smiled.

"Sure," he said. "Sure."

How she got through the first set of numbers, she never afterward knew. There was more than a spatter of applause, but it was

nothing like the swell she was used to. She went to the ringside table where Bud sat.

"You sounded a little nervous," he said. "Got something on your mind?"

"No, Bud," she said.

"Okay," he said. "You ought to be better for the second show. Because I want you to be a hit. I want you to go right on being a hit."

Time went on. She sang her second group of songs, Greg nodding and smiling at her from the piano. Again there was a spatter of applause, a little louder now. The set ended; she discovered that Greg had gone, and she went to Bud's table up front. Greg had given her the address.

"Bud," she said. "Someone just gave me a message backstage . . . for you. Somebody's waiting to see you—at this address." She gave him the slip of paper.

"Waiting for me? What about?"

"I don't know," she said. She had done her part, she thought. But he remained at the table.

"Funny place for somebody to wait," he said. "I wonder what he wants."

"They didn't tell me," she said. "It's just a message for you. But the man who gave it to me said it was urgent."

"Doesn't sound right," he said. He looked at her narrowly. "Maybe you've got something to do

with this. Maybe this is some crazy idea of Greg's—"

She could say nothing.

"No," he said at last. "You haven't got the guts for it." He grinned at her. "I'll be back after a while."

The ringside table was empty. She went backstage to her dressing room, and sat there throughout the break, not daring to see anyone.

When the third set began, she came out on stage, her body numb as if she had taken an anaesthetic. The ringside table was still deserted. She looked across the stage and saw Greg sitting at the piano; he raised his head, looked at her and smiled.

Bud was dead.

She bowed to the audience, and sang her first song from the center of the little stage. Then she went to the piano, leaning against it in her familiar pose.

A second of silence ticked by.

"It's okay," Greg whispered. "It's over."

She began to sing. A second song, then a third.

At last the set was over, and she must have been good, because the applause was loud. She stood on the stage as if she had no idea what to do. Greg rose and led her offstage.

"Greg, don't leave me."

He grinned down at her. "I won't leave you," he said. "And you won't leave me. It's not only that little theft now. You're an

accessory to murder. If they get me, they get you too. You won't leave me."

His words made no sense to her, for that long minute.

"Sixty-forty isn't that good a split, honey," he said softly. "Not with accompanists as good as I am. Not when I can have *all* the money..."

"Greg—" she whimpered.

"They want you for the last set," he said. "Better get out there and sing, baby."

She looked at his face. There was no expression there now.

"We'll get married as soon as it's safe," he said. "It won't be too long. And then I'm taking over—permanently. That Bud was a pretty smart guy. You're a wonderful meal ticket, baby, for any guy who knows how to play his cards."

She turned, then, and walked toward the stage. Greg followed her. There was a burst of applause as she appeared, but she hardly heard it.

She began to sing. There was nothing else she could do.

Her husky voice rose and soared over the chords of the piano accompaniment, pure and warm and throbbing with melody. She sang as well as she ever had—as though in singing she found the secret of pain and, singing, healed it.

That's what the critics always said. But only Silver knew how wrong they were... ■ ■

THE MUGGER

by HAROLD STRAUBING

HARRY PULLED THE STAINED RAIN-coat tighter about his shoulders as he squinted at the blue and white enamel sign.

"SPITTING ON THE PLAT-FORM OR OTHER PARTS OF THIS STATION IS UNLAW-FUL. OFFENDERS ARE LIA-BLE TO ARREST, BY ORDER OF THE HEALTH DEPART-MENT."

He could feel the moist ball forming in his throat. He pursed his lips and spat, watching the spit-
tle run down the sign.

Rules! Everybody makes rules. He listened to rain bounce off the kiosk of the subway entrance and he swore. It was almost midnight and there hadn't been a likely looking victim, yet.

Harry jammed his fists into his pockets and felt the two crumpled dollar bills. All he had in the world. The way his luck had been going lately, he'd be lucky to get enough for a decent meal out of the next mark that came along.

It was getting later, and trains began to run less frequently. Fifteen minutes passed while he waited for the next train to rumble into the station. The train doors sucked open, and a young fellow and his girl got out, walking arm in arm. There followed a grizzled old man in baggy trousers, with a battered old fedora pulled down on his head.

Harry gritted his teeth. Not a likely mark among them. He had to wait for someone who would be likely to have money, and not likely to put up much of a fight. If he tried to jump the young man, his girl would be screaming bloody murder. And the old bum probably didn't have a cent to his name.

He hitched his trousers up and leaned back against the wall to wait. It was a long wait for the next train. Nearly twenty minutes. His elbows were beginning to twitch and he felt his knees shake. At last he heard the distant ap-

A SHORT SHORT STORY

proaching roar, and the train shuddered to a stop. There was only a few people in the lighted cars before him. None of them got off.

With cold eyes, Harry watched the train pick up speed and roar off into the darkness beyond the space platform. Then, once again, there was no noise but the falling rain on the subway kiosk.

And then he heard it.

Step and thunk. Step and thunk.

He peered up the darkened steps that led to the street from the subway platform. A man's leg came into view, and the long wooden shape of a crutch. There was a cripple trying to get down the steps, while leaning heavily on the slippery railing.

Harry moved back into the shadows by the wall and studied the cripple as he approached the turnstile and put in his token. The fellow was well dressed, so he probably had some money on him. And there wasn't a likelihood that he could put up a struggle, since he was obviously unable even to walk without his crutch.

This was tonight's mark. Harry chuckled inwardly and tightened his coat about him.

He waited until the cripple reached the far side of the platform, leaning against a pillar for support. Then Harry moved out

of his place of concealment in the shadows of the wall.

Just before Harry reached the pillar where the cripple was standing, the cripple moved out away from it, awkwardly. Harry came up quietly beside him and nudged his toe against the man's crutch. The crippled man stumbled and in that instant Harry slipped behind and caught him in the expert, paralyzing mugger's hold.

Then a smashing pain exploded in Harry's arms. He felt himself being carried up and off his feet and the subway station reeled and filled with shooting stars and colored lights. Harry felt a dazing impact as he tumbled heavily to the cement platform. A crutch came down sharply on his head.

As Harry fought to hold on to consciousness, he felt fingers tear through his pockets to extract the two bills he had there.

He heard a voice mumble,

"They always think a cripple is an easy mark for a mugging. It's almost too easy." There was a short dirty laugh. "And I don't even have to worry about anyone complaining to the cops."

Blackness thickened as Harry heard the step and thunk sounds now moving off. And now the voice was very far away:

"Goodbye, chump." ■ ■

COMPLETE ON TWO PAGES

Bearded Lady



Fat Lady



Mom
Hicks



Buddy



Lou-Anne



Sometimes, when a man wants a girl, Mother stands in the way. But trying to get rid of her can have most surprising consequences...

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

BY THE END OF HER SECOND WEEK with the carny Lou-Ann had made up her mind. The old lady had to go. Peacefully, if possible—sure: Let her pack up and head for Sarasota, St. Petersburg, somewhere like that. A check every month (though you could be damn sure it wouldn't be too big a check!), and she could play shuffleboard in the sun with the other old goats to her heart's content. But—if not peacefully, then, well, okay, not. But old Mom Hicks had to go.

Even if she went feet first.

Listening to the Smith Sisters was what helped Lou-Ann make up her mind. Up till then there hadn't been much on her mind except Buddy Hicks, all six feet and two hundred pounds of him,

not an ounce of it fat, all beautiful and suntanned muscle.

But—the Smith Sisters...

"I love Mom Hicks like she was my own flesh and blood," said Isabella, the froth from the beer making a white line on her brown mustache and falling in little droplets onto her full beard. "But what I think, I think she's losing her grip."

"What, Mom Hicks?" Juliet guffawed, her four hundred pounds (*six* hundred pounds was what the posters said and what the talker claimed, but did the rubes know the difference? Hell, no!) quivering all over. "Why, Isabella, you must be out of your mind!"

Not that they were really sisters, they just had the same last

name. Of course this name was never used professionally, it had no class, no class at all. *Madame Isabella*, *The Bearded Lady*, and *Madame Juliet*, *World's Fattest Woman*, was how they were billed. But everybody in the Colonel Hicks' Spectacular Carnival called them the Smith Sisters.

Isabella wiped the froth off mustache and beard and shook her head.

"Oh, no. I'm not crazy," she said. "Look how she made the show pack up and move on, that time in West Virginia, when we'd only been there a few days. Huh?"

Juliet picked up a scented hankie with a lace border and delicately mopped her vast face. "Well, you've got a point there. But no one can be right all the—"

She broke off. Outside, the voice of a drunk was heard, loud, and yelling dirty words. It broke off abruptly into gurgles, which died away together with the sound of heavy footsteps moving rapidly away. Juliet inclined her head towards the tent-flap.

"Buddy," she said, in a satisfied tone. "He can handle the drunks. Oh, yes."

Madame Isabella nodded, drank more beer, swallowed.

"Yes, but listen," she went on, stubbornly: "She did the same thing in Indiana. Why, business was wonderful in Indiana: I was selling over a hundred autograph pictures a day, let alone the admis-

sions. But no. Nothing would satisfy her but what we should move on to Ohio. And you know how business was in Ohio!"

"Well—" Juliet seemed at a loss for words, shrugged massive shoulders.

"I tell you, she's losing her grip. Getting on in years. Getting jumpy. I don't like it. No, ma'am."

But Lou-Ann, listening all ears from her tent next to the Smith Sisters' tent, Lou-Ann had liked it. The old lady was getting jumpy? Fine. Make it just that much easier to get rid of her. Goodbye, Mom Hicks. And then Lou-Ann, and Buddy . . . and she let her mind slip readily into what had become in only two weeks' time its favorite dream. Lou-Ann and Buddy Hicks. Just the two of them. All alone.

Only two weeks before Lou-Ann had been working at the soda fountain back in Riverton (Pop. 6500, Watch Us Grow), her home town: and did she ever hate it! Town and job. Mr. Evergreen from the carnival must of known right off that she was bored stiff, because his first question, after drinking half his Bromo-Seltzer early that morning he first showed up, was:

"Like your job here, Miss?"

Lou-Ann made a face.

"What, isn't it a good job?" His eyes-continued to question her as he drank the rest of the fizzing drink. Real old guy, must of been

fifty if he was a day, but kind of nice.

"Well, the last girl who had it," she said, "she married the job. Worked here all her life until she was sixty, then she inherited some money from her bachelor brother and moved to California. But *I'm* not going to work here all my life, you can bet your life. And besides, I haven't got no brother. I haven't got no folks at all."

Mr. Evergreen laughed. "How'd you like to work for me?" he asked. Right away Lou-Ann was suspicious. But he said:

"Now, hold on a minute, Miss. I'm no white slaver, I'm a respectable businessman. Travel around the country with the Hicks carnival. I have the juice joint concession there. Hicks is a fine outfit—that's why the Legion is sponsoring it here in town. The girl who was working for me up and married a garageman in the last town we were at. Tomorrow we move on, and I'd like you to run the juice joint with me—"

The juice joint was what the carny people called the soda pop and orangeade stand. Funny name. They were funny people, but, even after only two weeks with the carny, Lou-Ann felt like this was what she wanted to do the rest of her life—travel around the country with them. The smell of sawdust, hot franks, hamburgers, popcorn—the sound of Squeak Jones, the talker, softening up the

tip for the kooch show, the loud-speaker blaring away music, the crowds passing back and forth and stopping for cold pop or pink lemonade (the silly small town girls looking envious at her, the silly small-town boys giving her the eye and sometimes leaning over and whispering hoarse invitations—as if she'd even *look* at any of them when there was Buddy!)—Lou-Ann loved every single minute of it.

Colonel Hicks himself had been dead for years, none of the carny people had been with the show that long ago. Mom Hicks was his widow. Mom ran the outfit and Buddy helped her. He was her son.

"Mr. Evergreen, how old is Buddy?" Lou-Ann asked her boss, while they were setting up one morning, she putting the dummy bottles on the shelves, he cracking the ice for the real ones.

"Buddy? Mmm. Why, we had a twenty-first birthday party for him a couple months back. Why? Oh. Silly question. Like the boy, don't you? Silly question the second. Well, Buddy is a nice kid. Known him since he was twelve or so. Don't bite my head off if I say he's not too much in the brains department." As if she was interested in his *brains!* "Well, I wish you luck, Lou-Ann, but I don't think you'll have any. Not with Mom Hicks around."

Buddy, stripped to the waist,

was across the way, tightening tent-ropes. He looked at Lou-Ann, kind of out of the corner of his eye, and she smiled. He smiled back, and walked on to the next tent. Beautiful Buddy, that lovely bronzed giant, chest a mile across. So different from most men. So different from, well, from silly Bob Willis, back in Riverton, with his narrow shoulders and narrow white chest.

"Nope," Mr. Evergreen went on, pouring a bottle of pure vegetable coloring into the lemonade mix, "that mother of his watches him like a damned hawk. Afraid he'll get married, I guess, and either take off and leave her, or bring his wife in to be a rival. What do they call it when women get on like that. Eddypuss complect? Something like that."

It was just too bad about her, Lou-Ann thought.

It was in that moment that Lou-Ann made up her mind. This was a chance in a million. Buddy was big, beautiful, and easy to handle. Only *she*, Lou-Ann, was going to do the handling.

She was going to marry Buddy Hicks. They would run the carnny together, and she'd be rich and respectable.

Nothing was going to stand in her way.

Modesty was all very well, but Lou-Ann had what the boys liked and she knew it, had known it since she was fourteen. *Let* the

other girls talk! Jealous, stuck-up things! She had smooth blonde hair and a lovely skin and nice big eyes and a sweater that was naturally well-filled (but not *too* much so) and she had long legs and she even had pretty teeth. She could take her pick of the boys and she'd taken her pick, too, all through high school, and afterwards. Bob Willis' grandmother had stopped her in the street and shaken a finger at her.

"You just stay away from my grandson!" the old lady shrilled. "I know all about you and you mark my words, you'll wind up in trouble yet!"

Naturally, Lou-Ann had gone right ahead and made that grandson just eat out of her hand, and she didn't wind up "in trouble," either. She could take care of herself, alright.

And she could take care of Mom Hicks, too.

Once she'd made up her mind, Lou-Ann went right ahead. It wasn't easy, though. The first time Mr. Evergreen left her to mind the stand, as luck would have it, who should come by but Buddy.

"Oh—Mr. Hicks!" she called.

He stopped. He laughed. He leaned on the other side of the counter.

"'Mr. Hicks!' Why, that sounds like somebody with a long white beard!" he said. "Call me Buddy."

She leaned on her own side of the counter. They were face to

face.

"But don't you have a real name, Mr. Hicks—I mean—Buddy?"

As she repeated his last name he pretended anger, frowned, doubled up his huge fist and touched it gently to her chin. "Lookin' for trouble?" he growled. Then, as her question sank in, he repeated:

"My real name?" He flushed, looked down. "Uh, it's—it's—*Wilbur!*"—adding quickly, "But don't you call me that, or I'll strangle you. Just Buddy, sec?"

Very softly, Lou-Ann said, "All right . . . Buddy."

Slowly, his big, handsome face broke into a smile. For a moment neither spoke, just enjoying the closeness of their first intimacy. Lou-Ann was all set to ask him to help her move a few crates of empty bottles, thus getting around on *her* side of the counter, when, out of nowhere, there was his mother. *Damn her!*

"Buddy, I need you."

Mom Hicks had a round, pink cushion of a face, in the center of which were gathered a tiny mouth, a tiny nose, two small eyes, and (as if added by a hasty afterthought) a pair of eyebrows done with light brown pencil. And, oh! what a dirty look she gave Lou-Ann! She led her son away like he was a baby.

One of the kooch-dancers, Miriam, said to Lou-Ann, a little later on:

"Sis, don't get mad, but don't

waste your time on Buddy. His Mom won't even let him alone with *me*—and I not only known the kid since he was singing soprano, but I've been married to Squeak Jones *and* let-me-tell you, faithfully, too, for twenty-five years, with three daughters of my own. They stay with my married sister in Chicago. My feet are killing me," Miriam added, losing the trend of the conversation.

They were eating hamburgers late one night in the Smith Sisters' tent. Isabella (she had confided in a whisper, leaning so close her beard tickled Lou-Ann's face) would have preferred a trailer. But where was the trailer that could hold Juliet? Even Juliet's bed was specially made for her out of reinforced steel. Buddy took it apart and packed it on the truck and set it up again at each stop. Buddy was so strong).

"Miriam is right. Mom Hicks is very jealous, dearie," Isabella said to the girl. "I love her like my own flesh and blood. But she is *so* jealous about that young man. It isn't normal."

Lou-Ann wasn't deterred. Did Mom Hicks expect she was going to keep her son a bachelor for the rest of his life? If so, she had another think coming. He was over twenty-one, and old man Hicks had left half the carny business to Buddy for when Buddy came of age. Mom Hicks was still hanging on to Buddy's half, but it didn't

belong to her, and neither did Buddy.

He's going to be mine, Lou-Ann thought. All of him. Forever. Maybe—but just maybe—if old Mom Hicks had been the soft and easy type, Lou-Ann might have been willing to share Buddy with her. Let her stay in the background, do the dishes, stuff like that. But Mom Hicks wasn't that type—so she would have to go. One way or the other.

After Miriam went home and Madame Isabella yawned politely behind her hand, Lou-Ann excused herself and said goodnight. She stepped into the blackness of her own tent and then almost screamed as a flashlight snapped on. In a second the flash beam shone on Buddy's face.

"Don't make any noise," he whispered. Then the light went out and he took her in his arms and fumbled for her lips. His kiss was awkward (Why, he's like a junior high school boy! she thought. I might even be the first one he's ever kissed. No wonder, too.) but his embrace was strong and fierce with half-suppressed passion.

What a lover he'll make! And he's so innocent he doesn't even know it! Lou-Ann pushed, and finally, reluctantly, he loosened his bear-like grip. In the darkness, still holding one hand against his rapid-beating heart, she said, "Now what?" She heard him

swallow, and he reached for her again.

"No," she said, stepping backwards. "I'm not that kind of a girl."

She felt him tense, tremble. She heard him swallow. Slowly, as with infinite reluctance, she moved back. Then he said:

"Of course. I respect you. I—I like you . . . a lot, Lou-Ann. And when I'm near you, I—" Finally, as if it had taken him that time to summon up all his courage, he said, "Look: We . . . we can see each other, can't we? I mean, without my mother having to know about it? You see, she's—"

Lou-Ann thought, exultantly, I've got him. If he's willing to fool his mother, the rest will be easy. Aloud, she said:

"Yes, Buddy. We can see each other." She lowered her eyes demurely. "Of course, I don't like having to go about it in such a sneaky way, any more than you do. But I don't think your mother would approve. So I'll see you any way you like—any time you like."

"Lou-Ann! You're what I need . . ." His hot cheek was against hers, and his big arms were around her, and for a moment Lou-Ann went weak and shivery inside. She wanted him, just as he obviously wanted her, but she'd had experience enough to know that in this game she had to play the Good Girl bit all the way. All the damned way.

"Oh, *Buddy!*" she said.

And she let him caress her a little longer, and then, regretfully, when his embrace became too insistent, she dismissed him, leaving him quite frustrated. She was careful, however, to arrange for their next meeting before he left her.

In the next few weeks they saw each other several times. Buddy became more demanding, more violent in his ardor, until Lou-Ann deemed Buddy's condition right for the next step up in her campaign.

It was a quiet night, a rainy night, and the carny people closed up early. Mom Hicks went into the Smith Sisters' tent for a game of cards, and Lou-Ann thought: In a little while he'll come into my tent, and tonight's the night I can get him to ask me to marry him.

Lou-Ann put on her frilliest dressing gown and touched her hair and eyelids and neck with real imported French perfume (the gift of some creep whose name she couldn't even remember in this wonderful moment of excitement, knowing Buddy was coming to see her).

And when Buddy came into the dimly lit tent, she threw herself into his arms and drove the big, bronzed giant to the verge of lunacy. Then at the right time, and in the right way, she deftly led him into the subject of marriage...

It was almost too easy.

"Yes, yes! I do want to marry you, Lou-Ann," said Buddy. "There's no other girl I ever *would* marry. You're the one I want."

The trouble was, before Lou-Ann could even answer him, there was his mother.

Mom Hicks had a battery-lamp in her hand, and her face, in the dim yellow light, looked awful.

"Mom, I was just—" Buddy's voice cracked.

"Yes, I see you were just!" she hissed. "You get out of here. Right now. *March!*" And, without a word, he turned and left the tent, his wide shoulders drooping. Mom Hicks said to Lou-Ann, "Now, my fine lady—"

Rapidly, angrily, the girl said, "Listen here, Mrs. Hicks, Buddy came here to see me and we didn't do anything wrong. I—"

"Never mind what you did and didn't," the woman snapped. "I know all about you, girlie. How you carried on with every boy in your home town, *oh*, yes! and with married men, too! I know all about that poor young fellow, his name was Willis, how you played him for a real sucker and took him for every penny he had and then you gave him his walking papers and he killed himself. Well, you listen to me! Who Joe Evergreen hires for his juice joint, that's his business, and I got sense enough to know a girl like you is good for sales—but you keep

away from my son! You hear? You just keep away from my son!" And she left the tent.

That night Lou-Ann could hardly sleep. Mean, jealous old thing! Listening to that old gossip back in Riverton (as if stupid Bob Willis wasn't old enough to know what he was doing!) and using it as an excuse, when all the time everybody in the carny knew that the girl wasn't born Mom Hicks would let her son so much as look at. And, in the angry darkness, she cursed and waited for the night to end . . .

For three days she only got glimpses of Buddy from a distance. Buddy, shirtless, arching his back and bringing down the mallet so hard that the ring of the bell could be heard all over the carny. A shout of admiration rose from the tip—the crowd of townsmen—and the young bucks jealously lined up to show their dates they could do the same. Only they couldn't compare with Buddy. But glimpses like this were all she had for three days.

For three days Lou-Ann raged in silence though obliged to keep on smiling at the rubes who lined up in front of the juice joint to buy cold drinks to pour down their silly throats. And, as her rage grew, so did her plans.

Saturday was, of course, the big day for the carny. That night all the reubens were liquored up, went whooping and hollering and

spending money like crazy. Mom did her accounting Sunday and on Monday morning she went to the local bank and sent off cashier's checks to her own bank in Chicago. Half the money in her name, half in Buddy's. And soon, oh, very soon, all that money would be in Lou-Ann's name! Buddy was sweet and lovely, but he had no head for business. Sometimes she wondered what he *did* have a head for. How had he amused himself up till now, for example? Oh, well, find out soon enough, not that it mattered.

Anyway, at the end of the third day without a single word from Buddy, Lou-Ann left Mr. Evergreen mixing the citric acid in the "lemonade" by himself, and took off to stalk Buddy through the carny grounds. Keeping a sharp eye out for Mom, of course. And finally she ran him down at Joe The Grease's, stuffing hamburgers into his mouth. He looked at her out of the corner of his eye as she smiled, slid onto the next stool.

"One without, Joe—" she gave her order. Buddy grunted what she supposed was intended for a greeting, but several ounces of grilled ground beef-and-pork, to say nothing of bun, onions, pickle and relish, tended to obstruct the sound.

As easy as if she hadn't spent three days boiling inside, she said to him, in a low, clear voice (while Joe bent over his fuming grill),

"I have to see you tonight, Buddy. I just have-to-see-you tonight!" He grunted again, swallowed. "I won't go away until you promise me you'll come to my tent tonight after we close. I don't care if you have to put sleeping drops in your mother's hot milk, but promise me you'll come!"

In a sweat, he took a desperate gulp, and said, "I promise, I promise!"

That night, after the last customer had left and the clean-up men were started clearing away the litter of popcorn boxes, candy wrappers, napkins, cigarette butts, and who knows what else, the Smith Sisters left their tent and stopped to say a few words to Lou-Ann.

"Me and Isabella and Squeak are going to play bridge again with Mom Hicks," said Madame Juliet, her many chins bobbing and shaking. "She wasn't too keen on it, but we persuaded her." She winked and the Bearded Lady winked and Lou-Ann, realizing that Buddy put them up to it, winked back. She put on her prettiest dress and turned her phonograph on (a hi-fi phonograph, one of silly Bob Willis' presents) and she waited.

The voices in the other tents died away. From the fields around the carny grounds came the sounds of the night, crickets, katydids, and from farther off, a chorus of frogs. After a while there was a heavy

footfall, and Buddy came in. He all but snatched her up, and crushed her in his hug. Partly because she could hardly breathe, she pushed him away after only a few seconds.

"Well, I did it," he said. "I kept my promise . . . How about another kiss?"

"I want more than kisses, Buddy, don't you?" she asked. "You said something the last time we were here, you said . . . *marriage* . . . I have to know. Did you mean it?" He nodded. "Well, then let's not talk about it. Let's *do* something about it. There's no three days' wait in this State, did you know that? We could elope. We could get married any time you want. *If you love me—*"

"I *want* you," he said. "I *need* you." His eyes glittered with desire.

Well, thought Lou-Ann, that's all I want to know.

"Buddy, darling," she pursued, voice carefully tremulous, "If you really want me to be your wife, you'll just have to talk to Mom about us. You're her partner in the show, and I want to be *your* partner—in everything. I can't stand seeing you all the time and not being part of you. You've got to talk to her."

He began to tremble.

"I—I just *can't* talk to Mom about it." His voice was thick and slow. "If she thought for a minute I—that you and I—why, she'd

close down the show! My money, in the bank in Chicago, I can't touch it without her consent. What would we *do*? She'll never let me get married. Not as long as she lives."

Well, *he'd* said it first, not her.

Lou-Ann put her hand on his shoulder.

"Are you a man—or a little boy? If you're a boy, then what do you want with a woman like me?" Her eyes were bold, meaningful. She came closer to him. "And if you're a man, *act* like one, Buddy darling. Stand up for your rights! If you and Mom can't be partners, if Mom won't let you marry me, then Mom will have to go. Tell her that. We can run the carny ourselves. We'll give her enough to live on. I wouldn't be mean to your mother, Buddy." (Not much.)

He stared at her. "She . . . won't . . . do it, Lou-Ann. She won't. Not as long as she lives."

"And if she doesn't live . . . ?" Lou-Ann asked.

He got her meaning.

"You mean . . . kill her?" His voice was a hoarse whisper.

Lou-Ann said, "I didn't say it, Buddy. You did."

He began to nod, slowly. "That's right. I said it."

"I'll help you, Buddy," Lou-Ann said huskily. "We could make it look like an accident . . ."

"Kill her? You want me to kill her?"

Lou-Ann said, "It's the only way, Buddy."

He looked down at his huge hands. A silly grin came over his face.

"All right," he said.

He reached out for her, she put her arms around his neck and once again was pressed to his heavy chest. He pushed her towards the camp-bed.

"No," she said, slipping away. "Not yet—we've got to make plans, Buddy."

"Plans?" he repeated, his eyes gone all a-glitter. She knew that look, she'd seen it before: he had his mind on other things—but they would have to wait.

"Yes, Buddy—we can't just go ahead without thinking this out. We have to . . ."

He took her hand. "Lou-Ann," he said.

"Not *yet*, Buddy—"

"Lou-Ann," he repeated. He seized her arm, pulled her towards him. In her mind was a half-formed desire to stop resisting. He'd agreed, hadn't he? Should she keep dangling the bait? Then, a shock of terror ran through her; Buddy's hands, his huge hands, were all at once around her throat. She screamed, but no sound came out. Her head was forced back, back. And all the while there was a look of wild joy upon Buddy's face. Terrible, terrible. There was a sudden, sharp, and dreadful pain, a snap, and then nothing.

Mom Hicks, having somehow managed her escape from the card-game before it was over, found him crouched beside Lou-Ann, weeping.

"Help me, Mom," he whimpered. "Oh, help me—please—Mom?" Tears rolled down his face. "Mom—she made me—I couldn't help it!"

For a few seconds there was no sound but the dry creaking of the crickets. Then,

"Of course I'll help you," she said, softly. Her tone, as she stroked his face, was soft and loving. She gave a worried look at the crumpled body with its eyes wide open in horror.

"I warned her," said Mom

Hicks, "but she wouldn't listen." She sighed. "They never listen. Not in Virginia...not in Indiana...not here." She kissed his cheek. "Don't cry, Buddy. You'll help mother get rid of...her, like you did with the others. And tomorrow we'll be in Toledo. Then you'll be all right, my baby."

And she thought, he will be all right—for a while. But time is running. Someday they'll catch up with my darling, and what will happen then? She forced the thought away. She'd face that when it came. Until then...well...he was still his mother's darling.

Tomorrow they would be in Toledo. ■ ■



THE NORTH STAR CAPER

by NORMAN KATKOV

Kenneth was willing to do anything the Sioux Braves commanded

AFTER SUPPER IN THAT SUMMER Saturday's twilight before the block party began, Ma and I walked up Concord Street toward Schwable's Bakery. Ma worked a split shift for Mr. Schwable so she could take care of the house and me. Mr. Schwable had been a good friend of Pa's so she made her own hours, almost. She even took off the afternoon I was in the swimming meet at the YMCA. Ma said everyone needed a cheering section and that day she was mine.

She wasn't cheering me now. She was, the way she said it, advising me. Her advice was: stay away from Calvin Yost who was Chief of the Seven Sioux. Stay

away from Ace Harkins and Frank Mulcahy, who were Sioux Braves. Stay away from Lloyd Mickelsen, another Sioux Brave, and stay away from . . .

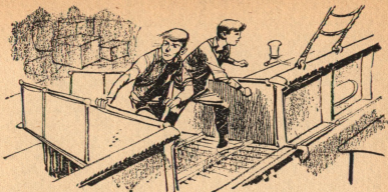
"You're not listening, Ken," Ma complained.

"I'm listening," I said. "Don't worry, I'm listening. That's all I ever do—listen—because you're the expert on kids."

"Kenneth, that isn't fair."

"Neither are you fair," I said. "You want me in a strait-jacket, that's all."

"Is the YMCA a strait-jacket, Kenneth Clark? Are the Boy Scouts in strait-jackets? Does the school Drama Club appear on stage in strait-jackets?"



to win the coveted black feather. But the Chief asked too much . . .

"You just don't understand, Ma," I said, as we approached the boat works.

"I understand completely. Calvin Yost is an undisciplined delinquent, that's what he is."

"Just because he's got guts!"

"Guts!" she replied. "Does it take guts to play hookey? I think it takes more guts to attend classes. Does it take guts to lead a vandals' raid on the school garden? I think it takes more guts not to. Does it take guts to insult any girl who passes the playground? I think it takes more—a lot more—guts to be polite. Ken, how can you want to be one of that awful Sioux gang?"

"Tribe," I corrected her. "Be-

cause they're different, I guess. They stick together. All the time, not just at a meeting once a month. They don't have meetings. The whole school knows the Seven Sioux. Well, six now that Mush Pector moved away. It isn't like the Scouts where everybody can belong."

"Everybody who is decent and courteous. Ken, I don't want you to see Calvin Yost and his—his—"

"Oh, Ma, let me alone!" I said, stopping there, a half block from Schwable's. "Why don't you stop telling me things? Why don't you give me one day where you haven't got every hour mapped out?"

I'd never talked to her that way.

She looked a long time at me. I watched her until she said, "I'm sorry, son. I just—I try to put myself in your father's place. I only want..." she was talking low, "...you needn't walk to the bakery with me."

"I want to," I said, and did. In front of the bakery she started to say I shouldn't pick her up.

"Don't, Ma," I said. "I'll be here," I promised, kissing her cheek before turning back down Concord Street. I didn't run but it was close to running: heel and toe, heel and toe, heel and toe, Seven Sioux, Seven Sioux, Seven Sioux toward the playground where they were waiting for the night so they could head for the block party up at the town square.

I found them standing around the playground swing in which Calvin Yost sat, his heels in the dry dusty earth. I could see the cowboy belt Paul Manning had given him. I could see the ring Paul had given him. I could see Paul standing behind Calvin Yost, ready to push him whenever the Chief gave the sign he wanted a ride. I wondered how I could ever win out over Paul Manning.

All the Sioux Braves were wearing their black feathers in their belts. I said, "Hi," to all of them, but watched Calvin Yost. He had his left arm against his chest, tightening his leather wrist band. While he worked on the middle buckle he said:

"Ken, how bad do you want to be a Brave?"

"You know."

"I don't know, Ken," he said. "How about you, Paul?"

"Oh, Chief," Paul said. "Chief, more than anything ever."

When Calvin Yost finished tightening his wrist band, he got off the swing. He was small, thin, and narrow, with a thin face and thin hands and narrow fingers like a girl's. I remembered before he was run over by the car on State Street and he was built funny even then.

"Okay," Calvin said. He moved out from the swing, limping more than usual. We could always tell when it was going to rain by Calvin's limp which was sometimes good and sometimes bad and always there, since he was run over.

"We can pick the new Brave tonight," Calvin said. "The guy who comes off the North Star with..." there was a sound like air coming out of a tire. The North Star was the biggest boat we'd ever seen, or half-seen. She was being built for somebody on the Hill we'd never heard of. All we could see of her was what stuck up over the fence. She was like a battleship.

"The man," Calvin Yost repeated, "who comes off the North Star with the most important souvenir, he's the new Sioux Brave."

"How about a race to decide?"

Paul Manning asked. "How about scaling something to decide? The fence there," he pointed. "How about scaling the State Street Bridge?" he said desperately while Calvin Yost waited for me.

I knew he was waiting for me. I knew he was listening for my voice. I knew I was afraid. Being afraid, I saw the black feather in my head. I saw the other guys at school, always making room for the Seven Sioux, and in the cafeteria always their own table, and in the gym always a basketball, always a basket to shoot at.

"What's an important souvenir?" I asked, my hands in my pockets, my fingernails in my hands, as Ancient Eli came into the playground behind the baseball backstop. "Just name it now," I said, feeling the sweat all over me. "You want something from the North Star, well..."

"Gee, Ken, watch it!" Ace Harkins hissed softly, poking me and nodding his head at Ancient Eli who was headed for his stone shack that had been a powder house in the Indian days. He was very tall. Captain Schoonover at the firebarn had gone to school with him. Captain Schoonover said he wouldn't hurt a fly.

We were in a circle with our backs to Ancient Eli now.

"Come on, Calvin," I said in a low voice, "what do you want off the North Star?"

"Maybe I'll come with you," he

said.

I should have known he would say it. I should have known the only reason he got the North Star into it was because he hoped Paul Manning and I would be afraid so he could go alone. I should have known if he couldn't go alone, he wouldn't let me go alone. I should have known, I'd known it before, that Calvin Yost had to prove he was the guy with the guts every day he lived. Calvin Yost and his limp.

"Yeah, I'll come with you," Calvin Yost said. "I wouldn't want to make a mistake with this," and he showed me the black feather. It was in tissue paper in his wallet.

"You guys go on up to the block party," he told the others. "Me and Ken will be there later." He punched my arm. "Let's go," he said.

Walking, it was easier. You could count your steps. You could balance on the curb. You could scoop up stones and throw them at the lamp poles. You could look for the Milky Way but you couldn't forget where you were going. At the Delos Street intersection you couldn't miss seeing the high rear fence of the boat works half a block down. I swallowed before taking a step toward the gates. Calvin Yost had my arm.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"Aren't we going over the...?"

"Brains," he said, pulling me

along. We went down toward Isabel Street and the one-story boat-works office. We passed the firemen sitting before the open doors of the firebarn. We turned there into Isabel and we were off the curb, starting across the street, when someone said, "Ken! Oh, Ken, wait up!"

I turned to see Captain Schoonover following us, his white shirt gleaming.

"I need some help," he said when he reached us. "I don't know how to put this exactly. What I'd like from both of you is to set an example toward Ancient Eli. Somebody has been banging rocks off that door of his at night. The poor guy is scared. I'm the only one he'll come to. You know we went to school together?"

"How was he then, sir?" Calvin Yost asked, all polite attention.

"He had the best curve ball I ever saw. He could kick a football a block and over the North Star if he wanted to. He was a real man, Eli Bartlett, every day of his life. Then in the first World War he went to France. When he came back...well, he was different. Anyway, will you two guys sort of spread the word about Eli? Maybe the kid who is pegging those rocks will get ashamed."

"Anything we can, we'll do, Captain," Calvin Yost said. "We've got to get going, sir. Block party," he said smiling. We

left the Captain and walked along the curb about 100 feet before Calvin led the way across the street from the boat works office.

"How do you like Ancient Eli?" I asked. "Baseball pitcher, football player, and everything."

"I think he's an old—"

"I don't mean the way he is now."

"Okay, Ken, do you want to go aboard or not?" Calvin Yost asked. He was leaning against a tree.

"Sure. Sure, I do."

"Go ahead," he said, as I felt the key he put in my hand. I felt it as hot as a branding iron in my hand.

"Now, listen," Calvin Yost said between his teeth. "This here is a skeleton key. I stole it from my Pa. It opens any door, especially that old thing. We're going right in the front way. Would they ever expect that?"

Maybe if he hadn't pushed me, I wouldn't have done it. If he hadn't whispered, "Walk!" as I stepped off the curb, I would have run all the way home instead of moseying across the street, my hands in my pocket, watching that door which became bigger, and bigger, and bigger, until it was the only thing in the world.

I went up the three steps. I felt the door against my forehead as the key went into the keyhole. The key turned in the keyhole. The doorknob turned in my hand, as the skin on my back

crawled with anticipation of my captors. The doorknob stopped turning and the door creaked as it opened.

"Don't," I said, but it creaked louder and I was inside, moving, hitting a desk with my hip, a chair with my foot, my hands out for the far door. Feeling it at last, I pushed and jumped over the steps into the yard. I hit and rolled, smelling the fresh cut wood and varnish and paint and hearing Calvin behind me. I was smiling in the darkness of the boat yard. It was just fun now.

"You've got to lock the door on the inside," he warned me. "I'll wait here," he said, pressing against the side of the office.

When I got back to him I said, "Come on," moving ahead, feeling the wood shavings under my shoes and his hand on my back, just touching my back.

"Where?" he asked. "Wait!" he ordered. "Ken! Darn you, wait!" he said. I kept going, happy now that it was over and finished, almost. I was hardly able to wait until I saw Ace Harkins and Harry Nye and the others. I could see all around me. All of a sudden, straight ahead, high as a downtown building and huge, was the immense, sprawling everywhere shape of the North Star.

I was first on the gangplank, first on the deck, first through a doorway with no door. It was a beautiful cabin with beautiful

woodwork. There was a bathroom behind it with a shower surrounded by glass and a sink that looked like gold. On the floor were colored tiles. I took two loose tiles that were chipped: a blue and a green.

"How's this for souvenirs?" I asked.

"Sure," Calvin said. "Hey, this is the real stuff."

"Let's go through the whole yacht," I said. "We'll never have a chance like this."

"Go ahead. I'll meet you at the gangplank."

I left him there while I explored the yacht from one end to the other, but not below decks. When I got to the gangplank, he was leaning against the rail, facing me.

"Have fun?" he asked.

"Sure. Where were you?"

"I had to get some souvenirs too, didn't I?" he asked. "Now, come on, let's get out . . ."

We heard it then—a tearing, rasping sound that chilled the sweat on me.

We didn't breathe.

It sounded once more—like a tenpenny nail coming down a blackboard. It was further away this time, towards the stern.

"Ken!" Calvin Yost had my arm with both hands. "Ken, what is—?" and we heard it a third time.

"A mouse," I said. I was terrified. "There are always mice in boat yards," I said, feeling my

stomach like I was on a roller coaster. "Just a mouse," I said. "Come on," and started walking stiff-legged toward the gangplank, climbing on, afraid to look back, moving along until we were in the office and out of the office, walking slowly across the street, not running until we were half a block away when we began on the same step, heads down, arms pumping, until we reached the bank at the foot of Cortland Street.

Five minutes later, going up the Cortland Street hill to the square, it was like we'd never been on the North Star. It was like all the best adventures—growing bigger and smaller at the same time, so you never could tell between what had really happened and what you thought had happened.

Ace Harkins saw us first, running at us and falling in alongside as we made for the others, there at the cake-and-ice cream table.

"Did you do it? Were you on her? Were you really on?" they asked.

Calvin Yost gestured for my tiles. "How about it?" he asked before returning them. The others grabbed us: Harry Nye and Frank Mulcahy and Lloyd Michelsen; all shooting questions at us. I saw Calvin Yost reach into his back pocket. When I saw the wallet, my heart just stopped, I guess. I rubbed my hands dry as he gave

me the tissue paper with the black feather inside. I couldn't talk. I fixed it in my belt and the other Braves slapped me on the back and dragged me along to watch the girl's potato race. After that, Harry Nye used his nickel trying to fish a first baseman's mitt out of a big tub.

We were all joking around the lemonade stand when Lloyd said, "The dekes."

"Where? Where?" Calvin Yost demanded.

"What's the difference?" I asked. "Why us? There's a thousand people here," I said, spotting the detectives: the fat one from the Delos Street Precinct, and the other, the short, solid guy, coming for us.

It happened so fast. The fat one reached for Harry Nye's arm, grabbing it, examining it, dropping it. As his partner got Lloyd, I whispered, "Calvin, your wrist band. They're looking for your wrist band," and pushed Ace Harkins in front of him.

Paul Manning! It had to be! Who else knew?

"Paul Manning!" Calvin Yost whispered, as though he had heard me thinking. He bent over, his left leg up with his wrist on his knee, his fingers clawing at the buckles, but the short deke had him.

"All right," the deke said, "which one is Clark?"

"He's gone," Ace Harkins said.

"Me," I said. "We didn't do anything. It was a game. Here," offering him the chipped tiles.

"You're pretty cute," said the fat detective. "Come on, kid, where's the copper tubing and the brass sink handles and the searchlights?"

"We didn't," I said. "Honest, we didn't. It was a test for the Seven Sioux. Mush Pector moved away. You can check on that. This was a test to choose the new Brave to take . . ."

"Hey, kid! Hey, you!" the short detective said as Calvin ran. He was free and running. I took a long step forward, crouched, pulled back, heard my shirt rip as I got free, twisted, turned, ducked, weaved, and went the other way before my detective could look around, running through the square dance, between the dancers, wanting to stop and turn and ask them to get Ma, and wanting to run, all at the same time.

He could never have caught me, not him nor anybody else who used his own two feet. In about three minutes, I was at the foot of Indian Hill. I knew the hill like a squirrel knows his tree. I went up into the darkness like a mountain climber, cutting over to the big cave. I wasn't there five minutes when Calvin Yost arrived.

"We can't stay here," he said. "Paul Manning," he said.

We were on our knees looking down toward the town square and

the lights from the block party.

"Calvin," I said, "let's hit for the Delos Street Precinct."

"Are you nuts?"

"No. They are. Copper tubing and searchlights and sink handles. What are they talking about?" Calvin Yost was out of the cave, heading toward George Street. "I'll show them these," I said, holding the chipped tiles in my hand.

"Go ahead."

"How about you?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"I'm going down this hill and out in the country," was the answer.

We didn't stop until we passed the city limits, walking straight into the country. The pavement ended. The lights ended. The houses ended. We tried to get into the back of a filling station to sleep. That was locked. We tried a county toolhouse. That was locked. We tried a truck behind the toolhouse. That was locked. We tried a barn, but a dog waited in the doorway. We walked again. Once a truck passed, its headlights coming at us like flying saucers. We crossed a bridge and in the rear storeroom of a roadhouse we fell on the cement floor and slept with our backs against beer cases.

The roosters woke us. I was hungry. I knew Calvin Yost was hungry. We washed our faces in the creek under the bridge. "Let's

steal some . . ." he said.

"No!" I said. "Or, rather, no for me. I don't care what you do, Calvin. You can steal the—the First National Bank Building. I'm not stealing anything. Nothing."

"How are you going to eat, smart guy?"

"On Sunday Elwood Brink cleans up Schwable's where my Ma works. He's my pal. If you help him, he gives you stale stuff: pie squares, doughnuts, and stuff."

"Schwable's on Concord Street?" Calvin Yost asked. He shook his head. "Oh, no!"

"Stay here," I said. "I'm going."

He grabbed my shirt. "And rat on me, smart guy?"

I got his wrist and held it. I held it away from my shirt and away from him. "I'm no rat, Calvin. There's nothing to rat about. I'm going to Schwable's. You can come, or stay here."

"How are we going to get there, smart guy?"

I was walking across the bridge. "We'll hitch a ride on a truck," I said. "We can get off near the cooperage company and come up Winifred Street behind the bakery."

It almost got me then about Ma. I almost let myself think about her: waiting at the bakery last night, coming home to wait, going to Captain Schoonover who would find out about the North Star and the cops. All the way into town I kept Ma out of my

mind by every which way—alphabetical lists of states and countries, World Series teams, heavyweight champions, any way I could.

Elwood Brink let us into the bakery right away. If he knew anything about the North Star, he didn't say it. After we finished cleaning, he gave us each a pie square, half a coffee cake, and three Bismarcks, hard jelly doughnuts. When he locked up, we left.

Calvin Yost was feeling easier. "Come on," he said. "The Palace."

"I haven't any money."

"Neither have I, stupid. Come on."

He took me in through the coal chute in the back. We waited in the furnace room until we heard, faintly and sounding like miles away, the trumpets which began the newsreel. Then we came up, Calvin Yost leading me behind the screen, up a catwalk, around the organ pipes, into the box seats that were never used and beyond, to the balcony where we sat just below the projection booth. Halfway through the movie the balcony was full enough for us to move down where we could see better. It was cool, comfortable, and safe in this darkness which I knew and I fell asleep during a big prison break.

I dreamed I sailed the North Star to China. I dreamed my Ma was aboard, dressed in white and smiling all the trip through. I dreamed the dekes worked below and Calvin Yost served me sup-

per and Paul Manning swabbed the decks and then I was awake, with that tearing, rasping sound of a nail on blackboard we had heard last night aboard the North Star ringing in my ears.

I shook Calvin Yost. "Listen!"

"What?"

"Listen! Listen!"

"Yeah," he whispered. "A mouse." He giggled. "Like the mouse we heard last night walking the deck of the North Star."

"No!" I whispered, pointing in the half-light from the movie screen as I heard it again. I pulled Calvin Yost forward as I heard it the third time. "Look! There's the mouse you heard," pointing at Ancient Eli who came down the aisle.

As he approached the aisle and the hooded light bulb which was ankle high, I pushed past Calvin Yost. Crouching in the dark aisle, I watched for his shoe and saw, as he passed me, his heel dragging against the cement floor. I heard the nail scratching the surface. I turned away, waiting until Ancient Eli had found his place among the unused box seats before waving at Calvin Yost.

"Come on!" I said. "Come on!"

I went right out through the front door of the Palace and into the sunshine of Concord Street. I waited on the corner where anybody could see me, but nobody saw me. I walked across the street and started down toward the play-

ground, and nobody recognized me. Calvin was alongside, first warning me, then asking me, then begging me to tell him what I was going to do. When we reached the ravine beyond which lay Ancient Eli's stone shack, I told him. "Let's go," I said.

"Ken, wait. Ken, listen. Ken," he said, holding my arm, "I'm the guy Schoonover was talking about, the guy who throws those rocks at Ancient Eli's door. It's just, you know, a good-night. It's nothing, but . . ."

"He always watches the movie three times," I said.

"But what if he . . . ?"

"All I want is the proof I'm not a crook," I said, coming across the ravine and going up the far side to the stone shack. I tried the big iron door but it was locked tight.

I guess I'd looked in the window of that shack a thousand times when Ancient Eli was gone, trying to see inside, but there was always a gunny sack across it, a gunny sack or a flattened out carton, or the roto.

I guess I never thought I would be breaking that window, at least the bottom half of it. I got the boost from Calvin Yost behind me and went in head first.

When I was on my feet, I couldn't believe what I saw. I guess I'll never in my life see anything like that again; newspapers stacked higher than me, folded as neatly as my Ma's sheets. License

plates going back to 1906. The plates were nailed to the wall and below them were flattened out cartons, bundles and bundles of them. There must have been a thousand shoes, no two alike, and some of them new. There must have been five thousand bottles, of every shape and color, all washed clean and stacked neat. There was everything useless in the shack. In the corner, resting on the iron cot, were the two searchlights staring at me like two eyes, and between them the roll of copper tubing.

I leaped to the door, turning the lock, pull, pull, pulling with all my might, opening it at last, yelling for Calvin Yost. As he came in slowly and carefully, I pointed at the cot.

"All we need now are the sink handles," I said. "Come on."

I was walking around the shack with Calvin Yost beside me. "This'll prove I'm not a crook," I said. "Don't you want to prove that?" I asked, and for answer heard a low, awful, drawn out moan behind me.

When I turned, facing Ancient Eli, Calvin Yost was crying already. He was weeping and saying, "Let us alone. Please, Eli. Please, Eli," while the tall man kept coming, coming, coming.

"Get out of here," I said, shaking I was so scared. "Get out," I said, reaching behind me, feeling a shoe, throwing it with all my

might. It bounced off him like a ball off a fence.

"Get out, Eli." I threw another shoe and whispered, "I'm going to tackle him. Help me when I tackle him, Calvin."

I had a shoe, backing off to draw him out in the open, bringing my arm back, throwing it, going after it, my hands out and my head down. I felt his legs against my shoulder and him falling on top of me as I squirmed and kicked to get free.

"Calvin!" I yelled. "Calvin!" I yelled. "Now, Calvin, now!" punching with both hands to get free and toward the door, but saw, as Ancient Eli reached for me, as overbearing in the musty, misty, damp shack as an octopus, Calvin Yost making for the door.

I yelled again, bringing it out from all the horrible fear I felt, but Calvin didn't turn. He stumbled and almost fell and two sink handles dropped out of his pockets. Still he kept going, out of the shack and out of Ancient Eli's reach, and out of the danger.

Isn't it crazy that watching Eli, fighting for my life, I could also see that bathroom aboard the North Star? Isn't it loony, really, that hearing Eli, I could also hear Calvin Yost last night, "I had to get some souvenirs too, didn't I?" Isn't it spooky that with Eli before me, I could still think of Ma and want, now, this instant, as I remained in terrible danger, only

to apologize to her and ask her forgiveness?

"Mine!" Ancient Eli moaned. "Mine! Mine!" trying to get a grip on me as I fought him, kicking and punching until I was free, rolling free and clear, but he guarded the door. He reached behind him, pushing it almost shut as he watched me.

"Take those, Eli," I said, pointing at the brass handles at his feet. He put them in his pocket as I inched back toward the window. "This is a nice place, Eli," I said, going backward.

"Mine!" he said. "Mine!"

"Sure it is, Eli," I said, feeling the stacks of papers, moving to the right, watching him, guessing at the window's location, and turning, leaping, grabbing, holding the window frame, my feet thrashing as I got head and shoulders and hands out, pushing and praying and promising, but he had me.

"Mine! Mine!" he moaned. I wanted to give up. I wanted to quit, slide to the floor, let him choke me, or kick me, or bash in my head, but fought him for I don't know what reason. I was tired and sleepy. I'd never been so tired. He was stronger than anyone I'd ever known. I screamed once for help before he threw me into the pile of shoes, standing over me, sounding like a ten-ton truck, his fingers crawling in the air as he reached down and the door behind him was flung open

and, through his long legs, I saw the cops coming.

I didn't cry then. I didn't cry when the dekes came with the cops and they got Ancient Eli in a corner. I didn't cry when Captain Schoonover came from the firebarn to put his arm around Eli and talk quiet to him. I didn't cry when I saw the Seven Sioux outside.

I didn't cry until I saw my Ma, and not then. Not until after I got to my feet and wiped my hands and walked out of the shack and said, "Please forgive me, Ma," and she said, "It's my fault."

"No," I said, trying to stop. "No. Going on the North Star. Running from the detectives. Staying away all night, but I'm not a a crook, Ma," and saw Calvin Yost. The dekes had the loot from the North Star: sink handles, copper tubing, searchlights. They were leaving with the loot so I waited for Calvin Yost to say it about the handles. They walked right past him while he remained quiet.

I went to Captain Schoonover then, sitting on the iron bed with Ancient Eli. I told him about the handles. I asked him what to do. He said, sitting with his arm around his school mate, he said, "He'll suffer more if he doesn't tell, Calvin will. You just take your Ma home now, Ken."

Ma was waiting. She took my arm. "There are certain things I

have to tell you," I said.

"At home, Ken. At home," she said.

"No." I stopped. "Now. I'll have to pay for the window." She nodded. "And the Palace. I sneaked into the Palace. I never did that before. That's a dime I owe."

"And . . .," she said.

"Okay," I said. "I'll go home," I said, but when she took my arm again it hit me. "Wait," I said. I had one more job to finish. I ran back to the stone shack.

Calvin Yost was standing with his Braves, bragging to them. He

saw me and stopped talking:

"Thanks for calling the cops, Calvin," I said. I looked at the Sioux. I looked at every one of them. "Calvin went to call the cops," I said.

I reached for the black feather, pulling it out of my belt.

"Don't, Ken," Calvin Yost said. "It's yours."

"Nope." I shook my head. "No, it isn't. I'm giving it back to you. Sink handles. You know why. Sink handles. Give it to Paul Manning," I suggested. I dropped the black feather and ran for Ma.

■ ■



The lecherous old man built his luxury motel to be a Peeping Tom's paradise. But, unfortunately, he overlooked one very small detail...



PEEPING TOM'S SCRAPBOOK

by CHARLES BOECKMAN

ALL HIS LIFE, OLD MAN JASE MARVIN had a very strange ambition. He'd wanted to become a Peeping Tom.

He explained this to me the day

he came to my office to see about having me build the motel for him. He sat on the other side of my desk like a wizened little spider and glared at me with his

pale blue eyes.

"Guess you think I'm an old crack-pot, young feller," he challenged.

He had fifty thousand dollars to spend on the motel. A contractor in my financial condition had no cause to look askance at the whims of any potential customer with fifty G's in his pocket. If the old coot wanted to become a Peeping Tom that was fine with me. I couldn't see anything wrong with it anyway.

"All my life I worked hard," he grumbled. "Forty years I was married to Emma." He spat tobacco juice at my waste-paper basket to show what he thought of Emma. "Most dried-up sexless female on the face of the earth," he muttered. "Just like an old lemon with all the juice squeezed out."

I made a sympathetic sound, but he wasn't paying any attention to me. He just had this forty-year gripe he had to get off his chest.

"Forty years I grubbed away at that job in the hardware store. Oh, I thought about other women, all right," he admitted slyly. "Always thought some day I'd get enough money ahead to go to a big city and get me a good-lookin' woman to play around with. But Emma snapped up that fifty dollar a week salary of mine like a hungry coyote. Forty years and I never had nothin' to do with any woman but Emma." He shuddered at the thought of that.

"Then," he explained, "I come into this legacy. Old maid aunt passed away an' left me her farm. I turned right around and sold it for sixty thousand." He leaned over the desk, saturating me with his chewing-tobacco breath. "You know what was the first thing I done then, young feller?"

I could guess but I didn't want to spoil his fun. "I don't know, Mr. Marvin."

"I got rid of Emma." He cackled with glee at the memory. "I kicked that old frigid hen right out of the house. Then I went into Dallas to the swankiest hotel I could find and I give the bell-boy a twenty dollar bill to find me a good-lookin' woman."

Here his voice turned miserable. "Oh, she were a beauty all right. Nineteen year old or thereabout, with platinum blonde hair and red lips." He shook his head sadly.

"Didn't do me no good though. It were too late. Forty years I dreamed about somethin' like that, and when it came it were too late." He sighed. "It was a terrible thing—enough to drive a man loco."

We both observed a moment's silence in respect to that awful tragedy.

Then he said, "But I ain't too old for everything. No sir. You want to know something? We used to have a neighbor that had a good-lookin' daughter in high school. One night I was goin' past

their house an' I seen this girl's window shade up a mite. I went up on the lawn an' peeped in an' there she were, buck nekkid." His rickety old frame shuddered a little with the delicious memory. He cackled and slapped his leg.

Then he sobered and glared at me. "Now I want you to build me a motel just the way I tell you, young feller. Figure to make me a nice livin' out of it the rest of my days." His eyes narrowed. "Figure to have me a leetle fun while I'm a-doin' it, too."

So we built the motel according to the old man's plans. Fifty thousand dollars worth of motel. The cabins were built in a giant "U" around a patio, with a sealed corridor running behind them.

Nobody in the world except me and Jase Marvin knew the reason for that secret corridor. Nobody but me and Jase knew about the trick mirrors in every bedroom. From the bedroom they looked like any other mirror fitted into the wall. You could look right into them and not know that somebody was watching you from the other side. Old Jase could walk down his private corridor and peer through those one-way looking glasses into every bedroom in that motel.

For a solid year after the motel was completed that's just what he did. The things that went on in those bedrooms were almost unbelievable. I didn't believe them

myself until Jase showed me the private diary he was keeping on his Peeping Tom activities. I guess you'd call it more of a scrapbook than a diary. Old Jase had taken a liking to me while I was building his motel. Afterwards, whenever I happened to be out on Route 63, I'd stop by for a visit. One night he got to telling me about this scrapbook and finally brought it out for me to see.

Old Jase astonished me. Besides setting down vivid descriptions of what went on in his motel rooms, he'd gone to great pains to verify names, addresses, license numbers. I was especially impressed by the photographs he'd taken through the one-way mirrors with infra-red flash and film.

That scrapbook was a case history of sex as practiced in our home town. To give you an idea, here's an interesting case, right out of the old man's book:

Case #8, Night of January 19, 1960—

Car pulled in, nine-thirty P.M. Thin, dark-haired woman, age about 30, came in, signed register, "Mrs. James Turner and nephew." Took her down to Cabins 11 and 12, adjoining. On way saw nephew sitting in car. He was kind of slumped down, and he looked pretty young. Went back to my office, through private door into corridor. Walked down to number 11 and looked through mirror.

The young fellow was just coming into cabin. He was real handsome, dark brown hair, black eyes, olive skin, sort of a Latin type. He came in with his head bowed down and sat on edge of bed, looking down at his hands clenched on his knees.

"Now, Joseph," the woman said, "you're going to be a sweet boy like you promised, aren't you? If you'll just be nice to me, I'll give you a passing grade so you can graduate with your class."

The young fellow kept his head down. I could just hear his voice. "Yes, Miss Kramer."

I thought, that ain't the name the woman wrote on the register. And furthermore she ain't the boy's aunt.

"You know I could tell your father about catching you trying to steal the answers to the final exam . . ."

The boy raised his head and I could see his face was dead white. "Please, Miss Kramer. My father will kill me if he finds out!"

"Don't worry, Joseph," the woman said. "I won't tell him. And I'll give you all the answers to the final exam questions."

"Okay," the boy said slowly, "okay, Miss Kramer."

The woman sat down beside him and started to pat him on the head. Then she bent over and kissed him. He didn't like it, I could see that . . .

Checked license number. Wom-

an's real name was Bessie Kramer, age 32, employed by local high school as English teacher. Address 422 Kling Street.

Case #12. Night of March 2, 1960—

Big Cadillac pulled into the drive about midnight. Very distinguished silver-haired gentleman expensively dressed asked for cabin for himself and wife. Also adjoining cabin for young man with them. The wife, age about 28, was a knock-out. Dressed in smart fur coat. Young man about her age. They had all been drinking.

Got them settled, then I went to the office, picked up my camera and went into corridor.

By the time I got down to their mirror the woman had taken off her coat. Under it she was wearing a skimpy cocktail dress. Figured they'd come straight here from a party.

The older gentleman opened his suitcase and took out bottles of whisky. Pretty soon they were all sitting around getting drunker. Then the gray-haired man said to his wife, "Dance for us, Toni!"

She kicked her gold slippers off, yelled, "Whoopee!" and kind of spun around, giggling. Her long red hair fell all around her face. Then she started dancing. She looked like a lady but she didn't dance like one. The two men clapped their hands together and encouraged her. She danced over

in front of the young man and suddenly unzipped her dress and let it fall off her. She was wearing a thin, low-cut chemise underneath.

The young man stopped clapping and sat looking red-faced and embarrassed. But the other gentleman was getting a big kick out of his wife showing herself off like that.

Next thing, the woman sat in the young man's lap and started kissing him.

Pretty soon the old silver-haired guy got up and left the cabin. He stood outside, smoking a cigarette in the dark . . .

License number, HW 8910. Checked on this. Old man's real name, Harmon Dawson, president First State Bank in town. Wife, socially prominent, charity worker and club woman. Her name, Toni Dawson. Young man, Tom Davis, employed as cashier in First State Bank.

Those are just two of the cases out of old Jase Marvin's scrapbook. There were others that made these two look pale.

But this Jase Marvin was a dumb old coot. He had this scrap-

book and he didn't know what he had. Why, the old fool had a gold mine. Those names, facts, figures, photographs—he could have made a fortune! But he got mad when I even suggested we work it together. It was just a hobby with him, he insisted. He wasn't intending that stuff to be used as blackmail.

Hobby—hell!

Well, a smarter guy than him has the book now. *I've* got it. You can bet on one thing . . . my contracting days are over. Each page in that scrapbook will mean a paid year's vacation for yours truly from now on.

I just got my hands on the book tonight. Tomorrow a lot of prominent people in town who once spent a night in Jase Marvin's Motel on Route 63, are going to start paying through the nose.

What is old Jase going to say about all this? He isn't going to say much. Right now he's sprawled out in his private Peeping Tom corridor back at his motel with a little round bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. *That's* the only way I could get the scrapbook from him . . . ■ ■



Ever since Jack Kerouac wrote his novel "On The Road", and introduced the word "beatnik" into the American language, we workaday people have been fascinated by the philosophy and bizarre conduct of these passive rebels. The beatnik attitude toward life is that of an innocent bystander, and their dominant creed is to keep "cool" and never to get involved. But while reams have been written about beatniks, we are sure this is the first time a beatnik detective has ever gotten into print. In a way, the two words are almost contradictory: no real beatnik could ever get interested enough in a mere murder to do anything about it. Therefore, Hayden Howard's beatnik turns out to be somewhat different from the run of the mill, a fact which will bring real pleasure to all detective aficionados, and real distress to a certain passenger aboard the speeding train El Capitan.

MURDER ON

FLAPPING RAVENS QUICKLY FELL BEHIND and, further from the train window, Arizona pines slid off the wide-screen like crazy.

But nowhere. Against the non-objective dawn sky, America's backbone, mountains, stood absolutely motionless as El Capitan, the trans-continental High-Level all-coach luxury train, rushed nowhere at seventy miles per hour.

His pad was the window seat.

His destination—who knew or cared?

"... as I was saying," her voice intruded cheerfully, "we hardly ever see young men with beards in Flagstaff, Arizona."

Roy couldn't bring himself to turn his head.

Her voice was eager to please. "But it isn't quite true. There *is* one young man back home with a beard like yours."

He laughed, loosening a little, still without looking at her.

"You mean there's one solitary beatnik in Flagstaff?"

"No, he has a job—I mean, he has four or five kids. I mean he works for the telephone company," she laughed helplessly.

Her name was Phyllis something. Last night, as soon as she settled down next to him in the aisle seat and even before the



EL CAPITAN *by HAYDEN HOWARD*

High-Level El Capitan pulled out of Los Angeles, she'd asked him where he was going.

As the ceiling lights flicked out, he'd begun to feel that relaxed closeness of talking with an absolute stranger. In the morning she'd be getting off at Flagstaff, extinct. In the dark she made her little town grow sunny and hopeful with the scent of Arizona pines.

Somewhere in their sleep-rimmed conversation he'd admitted he was riding El Capitan all the way to Chicago and then taking the Commodore Vanderbilt to New York, which didn't really answer the question.

Where was he going?

He'd slept facing the window, blurred and tossed. Waking in the clicking darkness he'd felt part of her warm and soft and sleeping against the small of his back. In the almost-forgotten relaxation of smiling sleep, he dreamed he was part of a—family—and all that square jive.

Now in the morning light he hesitated to look at her. Never mix dream and reality was his theory, for the synonym of reality is disappointment.

"But, mother," the boy's voice shrilled in the aisle, "he didn't look drunk to me. When I pushed on

the little door to the men's room, he sort of thumped over in there, his head did. He's right there in the men's room behind us. He looks real sick."

Early morning faces bleared above the backs of seats. Roy turned and saw the rear door of the car open, and the porter hurry in. The porter stopped at the little boy's seat.

"Where did you say he was sitting, sonny?" the porter asked.

"Right there," the little boy pointed, "in the empty seat next to the bald, fat man."

Roy glanced over to where a bald, fat man in an Ivy League suit was sitting across the aisle, next to a now vacant seat. In a moment the porter came up and whispered to the bald, fat man in the Ivy League. Roy saw Old Ivy League shake his head "No" several times, but finally the porter won out and Old Ivy League towered up to follow the porter.

The train lurched. Roy watched Old Ivy League's free hand snatch for support instinctively and his other hand jerk out of his coat pocket, wrapped in a white handkerchief.

Apparently he had injured his hand during the night. He tried to stuff the handkerchief-wrapped hand back into his coat pocket. Because of the pocket flap this became a two-handed job. The train swayed. With an elephantine wheeze, Old Ivy League staggered

after the porter, back to the rear of the High-Level coach, where they vanished through the door leading to the narrow stairway on the baggage and lavatory level.

Roy rubbed his beard with the heel of his hand and raised his eyebrows at the shimmering back of her hair-do, swaying with the motion of the high-speed train.

Her voice sounded genuinely concerned. "It must be the one you named Shook Man—who's sick."

He shrugged. "It's his problem. You heard the woman say he's drunk. Away from home, lots of men drink too much, you know."

Her beautiful wide eyes studied him, her lips unconsciously puckering in thought as her hand rose to the smooth skin of her cheek.

He retreated behind that real gone grin the group in the 'Frisco coffee house said made him look like Mephistopheles.

Because his best and only girl developed a sudden passion for Roy's oldest and closest friend and the two ran off and got married without a word to him, Roy had quit his good job as an architectural draftsman, on the San Francisco Peninsula. He'd played with the idea of finishing junior college or entering art school, but just then his mother died, and all at once life was nowhere.

So he'd sprouted a beard and drifted down to L. A. His dad had always been a real negative

out-grouper with high blood pressure. "Shave off that beard and come home to Glendale. I have a job for you in your uncle Ben's store." That sort of authoritarian guff.

Shuddering, El Capitan rushed eastward.

"I wonder," she was asking, "if the sick man, the one you named Shook Man, has a wife?"

Roy shrugged. "Girls do." He meant girls, thin or fat. They all wonder if the guy is married.

But she had to ponder it as a *non sequitur*. With a "to hell with you" smile, she challenged: "Do what?"

Roy had to grin with admiration. Raising an eyebrow, he was about to come up with a cool reply when Old Ivy League returned and sat down comfortably in Shook Man's window seat.

Leaning back until he was smiling up at the air-conditioning perforations in the ceiling, Old Ivy League managed to cross his legs. He lit a cigarette and lolled his head to look out Shook Man's window.

Roy frowned, trying to retain a neutral attitude. Last night when Roy had gone downstairs in the High-Level car to identify his suitcases, Old Ivy League was leaning against the luggage shelves. Shook man was there, too, looking grim. Old Ivy League had smiled around his cigarette, told a joke about a

buxom farm girl, an irate father with a loaded shotgun and a traveling salesman who tried to escape from the farmhouse in the dark, gruesomely.

Politely, the porter had laughed while he wired tags on their suitcases and scrawled their seat numbers across the tags with a black crayola.

Shook Man hadn't laughed. There was a drop of moisture gleaming on his grey toothbrush mustache. As if he weren't even sure of his seat number after sitting on it, Shook Man kept comparing the seat number on his ticket envelope with the number the porter had marked on his baggage tag. He asked the porter if there was any danger his bag might be put off on some platform before they reached Chicago. He fumbled for a tip, and a pad of medical prescription forms fell out, which was how Roy knew that Shook Man was a doctor.

Surprisingly, Shook Man's bag was brown pigskin, a real cool college-type job. Roy had half-imagined doctors carried sedate black bags, even on trips.

It was Old Ivy League's suitcase that had been black.

All his life Roy had been bothered by remembering scenes like this. In his head, he had immense movie files, in movement and color. He frowned, unconsciously rubbing his beard. His child-like trick of visual recall would have

been great in the old days of realistic art—before the rise of the camera and the blob, the abstraction.

Roy swung his face to the train window, where the abstract stream of morning sunlight sluiced through the distorted reflections from within the coach. Squealing, El Capitan began to apply its braking system.

"Where are we?" she asked, peering over him.

"Nowhere—as far as I'm concerned."

"See the buildings, the ambulance. This must be Ash Fork, and El Capitan is making an unscheduled stop to help poor Shook Man."

While Roy peered out at the man withdrawing the stretcher from the ambulance, a conductor appeared below his window, emerging from the High-Level coach where the mechanically-opening, let-down steps were situated. Glancing at his railroad watch, the conductor conferred with a small man who appeared, holding the typical doctor's black bag, and they disappeared into the coach.

Over on his side of the aisle, Old Ivy League leaned back in his new window seat and idly lit another cigarette, which was apparently allowed on this air-conditioned train. Roy supposed Old Ivy had never met Shook Man before they boarded the train last

night in Los Angeles, and didn't give a damn.

This was the proper attitude for a cool operator to take.

Roy stood up. He looked down at her legs. "Excuse me."

He walked back to the center of the car to get a cup of water. He hesitated there. He went down the narrow curving stairs into the baggage compartment in the center of the car. To his left was the door to the ladies' lounge and to his right, the narrow metal door was open. He could see the aluminum-colored exit platform with the stretcher lying there, too wide to go into the narrow door beyond, the door to the men's lounge and lavatories.

The door opened. The upturned soles of Shook Man's shoes emerged as the ambulance attendant backed out of the men's room. As they laid Shook Man on the stretcher, his head tipped back. Roy glimpsed the bloodied forehead, the open jaws. So that was what was meant by *teeth bared in death*. It was a gone world, and Shook Man was gone from it.

Talking rapidly, the doctor followed the conductor from the men's lounge. "—fell inside the lavatory, but not the cause of death — massive oral dose — I picked up two more capsules behind the toilet bowl. Be sure to put off *all* his bags. I'll notify the narcotics authorities. They should be the ones to search his luggage."

The porter bustled past Roy, breathing hard. Roy shrugged and turned to go upstairs in the coach, but she was in his way. Without saying anything, she started back up the stairs and he followed.

While he peered out from his window seat, she said in a challenging tone:

"Last night, you were advising me to detach myself—is that the word?—and stop worrying about my California relatives. You were selling something called absolute disinterest."

"I am disinterested! I'm completely neutral," he retorted defensively. "I only went down there to witness the irony of the situation. It proves my point: if you see life clearly, you see how ridiculous it is. So the only logical reaction is neutrality or, if you want to find out if you're still alive, a protest."

"This is beatnik-ism?" she demanded.

"How should I know? As an example of ridiculous, jazz music leaves *me* cold." Roy reached for the time-table. "To demonstrate how ridiculous a human life is: after you went to sleep, Shook Man started insisting he was going to get off the train. I don't know whether he was drunk or already doping himself. Old Ivy League kept trying to tune him down, but he wanted off. Finally they compromised on Albuquerque."

Roy ran his finger down the time-table. "We don't get into Albuquerque until 1:15 this afternoon." Enigmatically, Roy laughed: "Short track, man!—Hey, *Shook Man*, do you dig me? Ridiculous!"

"I wonder if he has any children," she murmured, ignoring this last bit.

"Speaking of ridiculous—" Roy breathed with a devilish smile as he peered out at the station platform.

Turning his head, he raised his eyebrows at Old Ivy League's unseeing profile. At any moment, the train would start. Like Roy's father, Old Ivy League would become the high blood pressure type, yelling: Stop the train, conductor, I have influence in Washington; and all that noisy guff. Roy twisted uneasily in his seat.

"Are you all right?" her voice asked.

"Do I look sick?" he laughed softly. "You see that black suitcase the porter just put out on the station platform? But Shook Man's bag was brown, brown pigskin. They've put the wrong bag off the train. That black suitcase out there belongs to Old Ivy League."

"Aren't you going to tell him?"

El Capitan gave a forward jolt.

She leaned across the aisle. "Excuse me, is that your suitcase on the platform?"

Old Ivy League turned his head.

His mouth sagged at her, and he stood up so he could see the platform on their side of the train.

"There is a similarity," he wheezed, bending over them, almost falling on her as the train gave a threatening forward jerk.

"Thank you," Old Ivy League laughed with sudden good-feeling. "My suitcase is safe in the baggage compartment, but I want to thank you."

Even her arm shaded pink. "I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"A natural enough mistake. I do want to thank you," Old Ivy League repeated with smiling sincerity. "There are so few thoughtful young people these days. Young girls are so observant. How did you notice the similarity between the two suitcases?"

She shook her hair in embarrassment. "I didn't notice—I mean, one's brown, the other's black."

Old Ivy League's smile never faltered.

To live through this absurdity, Roy had to turn and look out the window. Old Ivy League politely had said the two bags could be mistaken for each other. In her reply, without realizing it, she had called Old Ivy League a liar. Even the colors were different, brown, black. And Old Ivy League smiled through it all.

"I want to thank you in any case," his voice repeated jovially. "Young lady, I hate to admit this, but I suppose I'm caught. I'm

color-blind."

El Capitan was gaining speed now, making up time.

"L u c k i l y, color-blindness is primarily a male trait. But you girls are the carriers." Old Ivy League laughed as though he'd said something funny. "A confusion of red with green is most common. But I must confess I see the world as a succession of greys of varying intensities. I'd better regain my seat, before this train seats me in the aisle!"

When she finally turned her head in Roy's direction, Roy noticed even her eyelids were flushed. She raised her eyes and sharply pinned Roy with a long angry stare. "*His* suitcase on the platform?—I don't think that was at *all* funny!"

Roy shrugged, spreading his hands; never apologize was his motto.

But after a while he whispered vehemently: "Look, I wouldn't deliberately lie to you. I wouldn't deliberately make a fool out of you. Beard or no beard, I wouldn't pull that sick a gag."

She began thumbing through a fashion magazine.

He stared out the window. El Capitan was really clicking along now, making up time from that unscheduled stop. He peered unhappily at his wristwatch; it was still only 6:30 in the morning. He thumbed through his timetable: Ar WILLIAMS 7:26 A.M.—Lv

WILLIAMS 7:26 A.M. What did the passengers do, jump off the moving train?

Cross Arizona Divide—Lv FLAGSTAFF 8:06 A.M. Didn't they have to arrive there first?

"Another thing," she intruded briskly, "assuming you really did *mistakenly* believe it was his bag, now tell me—why did you just *sit* there then? Why didn't *you* warn him?"

All he could do was laugh. "Phyllis, you remind me of—somebody. I'm not laughing at you. I'm laughing at myself. How can I argue my way out of this? You've caught me in the middle. Either I played a sick gag on you or I was too uncivilized to warn a fellow passenger we were about to leave his suitcase behind. You are a clev-er gal! I wish you could have met my mother."

Her hand rose to her cheek. For some reason he had embarrassed her.

"Now hear this," he said. "From my point of view I'm innocent. I believe it *was* his bag. And I am not my brother's keeper. There are too many keepers already. That's why the world is such a ridiculous zoo!"

"Oh—?" she said noncommittally, and rose and headed for the dining car.

Watching after her, he decided she had a good sense of balance—for a girl.

Suddenly, he began to dig the

important part. She could have blamed the mistake on him. When Old Ivy was bending over her, she could have said—

From the corner of his eye, he caught Old Ivy League's movement. Lurching along the aisle toward the dining car, hand wadded in his coat pocket, Old Ivy League was a big one!

Roy swallowed. What he needed was his breakfast coffee. But he sat there. He refused to stand in chow lines in any man's dining car. He'd had enough of chow lines in the navy.

Past the window swept a grey wool factory on the hoof. His watch showed 6:41 A.M.—Lv WILLIAMS 7:26 A.M., if they made up time. Lv FLAGSTAFF 8:06 A.M. He wondered what her hometown would look like during two minutes from a train window, maybe one minute?

When she sat down beside him, to his own amazement he turned to apologize about something. But she beat him to it.

"I'm sorry if I acted tippy-nosed," she laughed. "You know, me—before breakfast."

"No, I'm the square. I want to thank you for taking the blame for my suitcase dope-off."

"Everybody's thanking everybody," she laughed. "Guess who was my breakfast companion."

"Old Ivy League." His face hardened above his beard.

"He's really very nice. All he or-

dered was coffee and orange juice, and this made me feel a little guilty. He said he's trying to reduce. I decided not to eat my waffle."

He laughed. He was glad she was back beside him.

"And he's one of those interesting talkers," she laughed. "You know, a good listener. He found out where I'm from and where I'm getting off. He said he's going to Chicago and then on to New York the same as you are. He asked about you. But I had to tell him you were just a chance acquaintance on a train. Do you know, he said he was once an angel for a Broadway show."

"I bet I know why," Roy drawled.

"I'm flattered," she laughed, "even though you're teasing me. But Old Ivy League's nothing like that. He's an important businessman in New York."

"Maybe."

"You really don't like him, do you?"

"What did he say about his seat-mate, ex-seat-mate, dead seat-mate, that is?"

"Apparently, he didn't want to mention him, so of course I didn't."

"Where's Old Ivy League right now?" Roy stood up.

"I suppose he's having his third cup of coffee. Do you know, he wanted to pick up my check, but of course I couldn't let him."

"Excuse me." Quickly, Roy walked to the middle of the car and down the curve of confining stairs to the baggage compartment. One of the conveniences of the High-Level El Capitan was that passengers could go downstairs at any time to get things from their suitcases and conveniently change their clothing in the lounges.

Roy shook his head at the brown pigskin bag. The tag wired to its handle now bore the number of Old Ivy League's aisle seat. There was no one down here. It would be a cinch to switch tags.

Submerged in the noise of the train, Roy felt rather than heard Old Ivy League behind him. The big man brushed past. Hand in pocket, Old Ivy League bumped through the doorway on to the roaring loading platform and on into the men's lounge.

Roy clutched the baggage shelf. Unwillingly, he admitted he'd been afraid, physically afraid. Total disinterest removes all fear, had been one of his theories, but it didn't work in conjunction with this hulking businessman in the Ivy League suit.

Deliberately, Roy barged into the men's lounge.

Old Ivy League whirled from the basin, and Roy glimpsed the reason for the handkerchief bandage, a curving row of red indentations across the back of Old Ivy League's hand.

As Old Ivy League turned back

to the basin, Roy felt like walking out of there fast. The whole thing was ridiculous. He wasn't involved, so he had no reason to be afraid. But someone had bitten Old Ivy League on the hand.

At least it had looked like a bite.

Watching Old Ivy League's broad back, Roy fumbled for a paper cup. Propped against a lavatory door—there were two—he swallowed lumps of water. It was none of his business who bit who.

When Old Ivy League turned with his hand wrapped in the dampened handkerchief, he took his time stuffing it into his coat pocket. Then their eyes met. Roy stood unflinching while Old Ivy League bulked past.

Grinning with relief, Roy went upstairs. He was detached, free of Old Ivy League and anything to do with him. He wasn't afraid. He'd proved that. He had too much imagination anyway. Now he could mind his own business. It was a relief.

He smiled down at her and took his seat.

She touched his arm, and he turned quickly, but she was indicating Old Ivy League with her head. "It looks as though he's planning to get off at Williams."

Roy tensed. "Didn't he tell you he was going all the way to Chicago?"

"I suppose he's going to stop over and get a good night's sleep."

"But it's morning. How big a

town is Williams? We get into Albuquerque this afternoon. You'd think he'd wait until Albuquerque and check in at a big hotel there."

"I know," she laughed. "Williams is where you can take a bus to visit the Grand Canyon."

"The Grand Canyon?" Uncomfortably rubbing the side of his beard, Roy watched Old Ivy League gather his slippers and cigarettes and time-table and, one-handed, stuff them into various pockets.

As Old Ivy League lurched into the aisle, he smiled down at them. A smile depends upon the viewer for its interpretation. She smiled back, her hand opening upward in farewell.

Empty-faced, Roy stared up at Old Ivy League's smile. To Roy it seemed a smile of impregnable contempt.

Lurching to the center of the coach, Old Ivy League conferred with the porter, and his uninjured hand made contact with the porter's hand, applying money, transferring his smile to the porter's face.

El Capitan was slowing as Old Ivy League and the porter descended to the baggage compartment.

By his window, Roy's head moved blindly from side to side as if he were in pain. He scrubbed his beard with his knuckles.

"Are you feeling all right?" she

asked with real concern.

He nodded, but his thoughts were way out.

"By my sundial," she laughed, apparently trying to cheer him up, "it's already 7:30. We're late getting into Williams, but El Capitan only stops for a couple of minutes to let people off. Then we'll see some of my favorite country."

Uneasily, as if suspecting her nose was shiny, she raised her hand to her face, but Roy was staring past her at the two empty seats, Old Ivy League's and Shook Man's—Dead Man's, that is.

"Maybe you ought to get some breakfast," she was saying. "Probably there isn't a waiting line now."

Almost painfully he began to rise from his window seat—and sank back.

"Want me to go get you a carton of milk or something?"

He shook his head. He turned his face to the window. Telephone poles blurred past, going nowhere. Shacks. A billboard. More shacks moving more slowly as El Capitan slowed. How could he know what had happened? What could he do? Somewhere he had missed the landmarks that squares, good people, right people, use to make decisions, even if they hurt themselves. What would she do?

"No milk," he blurted, and then his voice rushed, flailed by the ridiculous unbelievability of it all. "He's escaping from the train, Old

Ivy League. I think he murdered Shook Man. I know he's stealing Shook Man's bag."

Her lips curved upward in a smile that was beyond disbelief; it was disgust.

"How sick can your gags get? I fell right into the one about the suitcases, and I made a fool of myself. I think you're—I won't say!"

He hadn't imagined it would be as bad as this.

"Now," she said, "do you want me to go to the conductor? 'Excuse me, Mister Conductor, I've been played for a fool once today. Now I'd like to be a bigger fool and accuse a prominent businessman of murder!'"

"Listen," he protested, "I'm not asking you to do anything. I saw his hand. His hand's been bitten. I think that last night he followed Shook Man into the lavatory and overpowered him. I think they must have been traveling together and maybe Shook Man wanted to back out of—something. I saw Old Ivy League's hand. I say he was bitten when he crammed those capsules down Shook Man's throat."

"You *are* acting," she laughed uneasily. "The method?"

"I know he switched tags. He had to provide the body with a suitcase. He left his black one. Now he's going to walk off the train with Shook Man's brown bag!"

"Why don't you go have some breakfast?" she said.

He rose, swaying with the train. Unsteadily, he made his way along the aisle. He needed a drink of water. When he reached the center of the car, he looked toward her seat. He couldn't even see the back of her head.

Holding on, he went down the curving stairs into the blue fumes of cigarette smoke.

"—telegraph for a reservation on tomorrow's El Capitan," rose Old Ivy League's rich voice.

He was propped against the baggage shelves, and he smiled around his cigarette at Roy.

The conductor was smiling. "If you should change your mind, sir, it's less than three hours by bus to the Grand Canyon. Another thing about Williams, it may not be a metropolis, but the nights are nice and cool at this elevation, so you'll get a good night's sleep. Yes sir."

Standing beside the conductor, the porter was smiling too. "Would you like me to go up to your seat, sir, and check to see you didn't leave anything?"

"No, no, boy. What I leave, the Santa Fe Railroad can have." Old Ivy League swung his smile from the porter back to Roy and extended his pack of cigarettes toward Roy.

Roy shook his head, unsmiling, and the four of them, beatnik, porter, conductor, Old Ivy League, swayed forward in unison as El

Capitan's braking apparatus began to squeal.

The brown pigskin bag kept its balance between Old Ivy League's straddled legs, and when Roy looked up, Old Ivy League's smile widened through his cigarette's smoke until Roy was seeing that really hep cat, the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland, about to vanish, leaving his smile.

"Excuse me." Roy hesitantly touched the conductor's arm, and that smiling face turned with raised eyebrows and a polite nod.

"I think," Roy's voice blundered, "this man is getting off the train because he murdered the man next to him and now he's stealing the man's bag."

For a moment, the conductor seemed not to have heard. Gradually, the lines became vertical on his face so that a worried look appeared, and his hand closed gently on Roy's elbow. His eyes took in Roy's face. Then his mouth smiled.

"Son, I—" The conductor's voice lapsed into awkward silence.

Their mutual embarrassment was broken by Old Ivy League's laughter. "Conductor, you're not with it. Among the younger set, that's what's known as a sick joke, a sick-sick joke. They like to watch us old squares squirm."

Instead of getting angry, the conductor released Roy's elbow and grinned with relief. "O.K., son, you've had your joke. Better

go up to your seat."

Since Roy didn't move, the conductor laughed: "For a minute, I was worrying how to get you off this train and into the arms of a station policeman without losing more time. One time we had to chase a nut through the cars and hold the train. Seventeen minutes! Pulling into Chicago station we were still four minutes behind."

Since Roy still didn't move, the conductor laughed uneasily. He moved close to Roy: "You'd better go up to your seat, son. With that beard and the excited way you talked, for a minute I was afraid you were maybe a drug addict."

"If there are addicts," Roy cried out in frustration, "this man has something to do with it. Look in that brown bag. Why else would he steal it? He crammed some of those capsules in Shook—in the dead doctor's mouth. That's why his hand, look at his hand—"

"Beatniks, beatniks." Old Ivy League's voice over-rode his. "Conductor, I'm as tolerant as the next man, but when they even come on the trains—"

"Show us your hand," Roy gasped. "Show us the doctor's teeth marks on your hand."

"Doctor?" Old Ivy laughed suddenly, and then he grew serious. "Undoubtedly he's disturbed about the man who was taken off the train at Ash Fork."

The porter advanced on Roy,

smiling. "Sir, the sick man, I think he was a traveling salesman. I could tell by the way his black suitcase was worn along the bottom."

The porter's powerful hand closed around Roy's biceps, as Roy insisted desperately: "You've got to look at his other hand. You see, he hides it in his pocket!"

Old Ivy League shrugged at the conductor. "A slight bruise."

The conductor and the porter began maneuvering Roy toward the narrow stairway, and Roy shouted:

"You didn't hide your hand in your pocket when you boarded this train. People will testify to that. You were *bitten* while on this train."

The porter directed Roy upward, but the narrow stairway was blocked by an anonymous woman and above her—with her lips parted in disbelief—Phyllis.

"Merely a slight bruise, conductor," Old Ivy League's voice went on, "a slight bruise when one of the doors closed on it."

The train shuddered and came to a complete stop, and the conductor turned back to Old Ivy League.

"A door on El Capitan didn't injure your hand, sir?" the conductor asked with concern; the semi-automatic doors between the coaches had rubber-lined safety edges.

"The lavatory door," Old Ivy

League laughed apologetically. "I lost my balance as I was coming out. I let the lavatory door slam on my hand."

"If there is any medical attention required," the conductor began. "The lavatory doors are quite light—the designers planned them that way—but we want to prevent even the most minor injuries to our passengers. Might I see your hand, sir?"

"No need," Old Ivy League said smoothly. "No time, I'm getting off here."

"Yes, of course, but if I could see your hand." The conductor quickly turned to the porter. "George, you'd better hurry and let down the platform."

"If you like," Old Ivy League said more hurriedly. "I'll show it when I'm off this train. I'll show it to the station master or someone. I get off here!"

Old Ivy League picked up the brown pigskin bag, but the porter was still trying to get around Roy; whichever way he twisted, Roy seemed to be in his way.

"That's not his bag," Roy insisted to the porter. "Remember, last night when you numbered the tags, there were three passengers down here: me, this man, and the man who's dead! The brown bag belonged to the dead man. Remember, he asked you, he was worried it might be put off before reaching Chicago."

"Hurry up, George," the con-

ductor snapped, glancing at his railroad watch.

"This train better not start with me still on it," Old Ivy League laughed, stepping toward the narrow door that led to the unloading platform of the car, but leaving room for the porter to get by.

"You squares, you stupid squares," Roy yelled in frustration. "Can't you see? He switched tags after he killed him. At least make him open the bag—some way to identify it!"

"Don't stand there, George," the conductor snapped, "get out on the platform and open up!"

The porter's face was a turmoil of conflicting uncertainties.

Old Ivy League's thick knuckles whitened around the brown leather handles of the bag, but he widened his smile at Roy. "Conductor, I trust you'll take proper measures with this over-age juvenile delinquent when I'm gone—"

He took a backward step that virtually shoved the porter through the narrow door.

"Conductor," a girl's voice cried out. "that man has my brown bag!"

"God!" exclaimed the conductor.

"Young lady," Old Ivy League wheezed hurriedly at Phyllis, "it's my bag, it has my seat number on it, let go of my bag!"

"Open it then," she blurted, her face fiery with embarrassment, "if it has men's things in it, it's yours. If it has my underthings, it's

mine."

"It's a man's bag," Old Ivy League yelled, "not suitable for a woman. Conductor, she's already—"

"We pull out any second," the conductor bleated. "The quickest way is—open the bag."

Roy straightened, feeling a wonderful surge of vindication, bracing himself, expecting Old Ivy League would make a run for it.

Disturbingly, Old Ivy League's smile popped back on his face. He dropped the bag. He fished in his pocket for the key. To Roy's horror, he unlocked the bag with a smile of impregnable contempt.

"Are these your underthings, young lady? They look more like my shirts."

Roy couldn't bring himself to look at Phyllis.

Old Ivy League was muttering: "Press some sort of charges against these two."

As Old Ivy League's hand reached down to snap the lock, Roy knew the ultimate emptiness; he knew what "beat" meant. In the revolt that was built into the word, he lunged, tearing apart the handles of the brown bag.

In desperation, he tore out the shirts. "Size 15 neck? This fat slob couldn't wear a 16 shirt!"

As Roy's hands plunged deeper into the bag, rattling the underwear-wrapped bottles of capsules, Old Ivy League's shoe-toe smashed against his forehead, and he fell

backward, blinking, trying to see.

Old Ivy League towered above. Like a stubby finger from his handkerchief-wrapped hand, the small barrel of the automatic pointed.

Awkwardly, Roy stood up in front of her.

"No matter, hero," Old Ivy League wheezed, backing out past the porter, with the brown pigskin bag hanging open from his other hand. "If this train starts with me on it, I have seven shots. The last for me. We'll divide the rest."

The porter lunged, pulling the narrow door closed, closing off Old Ivy League's sagging face. With a gasp, he locked it.

El Capitan gave a forward jolt, and the porter pushed them up the steps. "Never unlocked the platform or let down the steps. He's out there like a fish in a bowl. Never made a baggage mistake before."

They could hear him hammering. "Like a fish in a bowl," the porter gasped as the train moved.

Then they were upstairs to their window, and the conductor was sprinting along the aisle to the next car. From his window seat, Roy could see people running alongside the train, pointing.

Phyllis clutched his arm.

Beneath their seats, just as El Capitan's braking system began to squeal, there was a muffled shot.

When the train came to a full stop, another stretcher made its

hurried trip into the lower level of their chair car and out again, the bearers staggering with the sheet-covered weight, and followed by a policeman carrying Shook Man's brown pigskin bag.

But Roy didn't see it. He was staring in wonder at her.

"You didn't have to," he asked softly. "You were just putting yourself in my crazy troubles. Even I was beginning to believe I was crazy. They were all so logical and smiling.

She rubbed her hand on her cheek, her eyes unfocussed on the seat ahead of her. "I guess I needed—I mean, I wanted to believe you."

"But no one ever—" he began, and she turned her head, and he was smiling excitedly at her. "Listen, what's the population of Flagstaff?"

"Not very many people," she laughed and waved her arm at the infinity of pine-furred mountain slopes beyond the glass, "but they say there's plenty of room for it to grow."

"Are there any architects with offices there? Do you have a job? What do you do? Do you like it?"

Then her own pink-checked smile faded, losing something. "Oh, there's the sawdust burner. We'll be in Flagstaff in 15 minutes."

"There's no time," he blurted, his face pained with indecision. "When you're going somewhere,

all of a sudden you're there."

His knuckles rubbed the edge of his beard so hard it hurt and felt good; *somewhere, man, somewhere!*—

"Excuse me." He stood up and hurried away down the aisle.

Her face turning in surprise, she lost her smile as she watched him vanish down the stairs. The minutes passed. She kept turning her head, searching for him.

Finally, she rubbed her cheek and stood up. Her eyebrows rose sadly until that became a kind of smile: she'd had a lot of smiling practice. She gathered her things while El Capitan shivered to a quick stop at Flagstaff, Arizona.

A strange young man came bounding up the stairs. In his haste in shaving, he'd nicked his pale and bloody jaw.

"Your beard?" she blurted.

"I shaved it off so I could get off at Flagstaff."

"But El Capitan only stops for one minute."

"My bag's being put off the train," he gasped happily. "My worldly goods. Phyllis, let me carry your magazines or something."

"Your bag is being put off at Flagstaff?"

"Do you dig me—I mean, do you understand me, Phyllis? Do you?"

"Roy, it's wonderful. I mean, it's the most!" She laughed excitedly as they left El Capitan together. ■ ■

This unusual dog spoke the Malay tongue. But when the time came for him to tell what he knew about a mysterious killing, he became ...



THE DOG THAT WOULDN'T TALK

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

FARNSWORTH, THE DISTRICT OFFICER, saw the stranger and his dog sitting in the mail *tonga* as it rattled past his verandah. He watched with only mild curiosity until he saw the *tonga* go on down the hill, past the bazaar, to stop in front of the *dak* bungalow.

The stranger got out, holding his dog on a chain-leash that flashed in the late afternoon sun. He was traveling without servants.

Farnsworth clapped his hands

and sent one of his bearers scurrying down the hill to open the *dak* bungalow, while another went off to find the *khansama* who usually looked after it. Few travelers used the Government of India's rest house at Gandapur. There were so many lonely tea planters in the district, only too eager to furnish hospitality in exchange for the rare pleasure of looking at a new face, that the *dak* bungalow was closed most of the time.

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The district officer waited a decent interval to give the stranger a chance to clean up, then with an effort hoisted his massive frame from his fan-backed chair and went down the hill to propose a drink and perhaps dinner. He had scarcely walked through the cobwebby door of the *dak* bungalow, when he knew he had made a mistake.

The stranger, bending over a valise as he came in, slammed it closed, straightened up instantly, and fixed Farnsworth with a challenging stare. He still wore the khaki shorts, white shirt, and khaki topee in which he had arrived. He was very thin, which made him seem much taller than he really was.

The dog came out from under the bed to growl at Farnsworth. It was off its leash.

"Hello. I'm Farnsworth, the D. O. here," said the district officer. "I thought perhaps you'd like to stop by the bungalow for a *chota peg*."

"I don't drink," said the stranger coldly.

"Oh. Sorry." A shadow of disappointment crossed Farnsworth's round, pink, good-natured face. He began to regret having left his fan-backed chair. He noted that the stranger did not volunteer his own name. "If there's anything I can do, Mr.—"

"The tonga driver said the Gandapur tea garden is quite near

here," the stranger interrupted. "Is he right?"

"That's the Gandapur tea garden right over there," Farnsworth said, pointing through the doorway. A succession of hills rolled back from the village, each striped with the green-and-brown plaid of tea plants against tilled earth. "The staff bungalows are just around that first hill, near the factory buildings. The *tonga-walla* could have driven you right there."

"I didn't want him to drive me there," the stranger said.

"If there's anyone in particular you'd like to see at the garden, I'd be glad to send over a chit for you."

"I'd rather you didn't," said the stranger.

"Yes, of course. Well. Sorry to have troubled you." Farnsworth backed away awkwardly. The stranger stared at him in silence. The animal growled again. "Goodnight," said Farnsworth.

He hurried back up the hill and had three *chota pegs* in quick succession.

At ten o'clock that night the *dak* bungalow was afire.

Farnsworth was playing bridge with the civil surgeon, and the forestry officer and public works engineer who were stopping with the doctor. He had just bid six spades and the civil surgeon had doubled, when a bearer came in with the news.

As they hurried down the hill, the thatched roof of the bungalow was already a roaring torch, hurling scraps of flame against the stars. Farnsworth pushed through the line of bronzed little Gurka guards who were holding off the crowd of open-mouthed natives. Bearded Sikhs were working furiously at the hand pumps of Gandapur's primitive fire brigade. The thin streams of water had no effect upon the conflagration except to add hissing clouds of steam to the twisting column of smoke and flame.

"There is a sahib in the bungalow," Farnsworth panted as he came up to the Sikh in charge of the ineffectual firefighters. "A sahib with a dog."

"No, Huzur. The sahib with the dog was seen to leave the bungalow half an hour before the fire."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Huzur."

Farnsworth breathed a sigh of relief—just as the roof fell in. In twenty minutes the *dak* bungalow was a mass of glowing embers. The stranger's luggage was no doubt part of the smouldering mass; but he so obviously resented any intrusion upon his privacy that Farnsworth thought it best to return home and play the hand upon which he had bid a small slam in spades.

He was set four tricks, vulnerable.

After the civil surgeon and his guests had gone home, Farnsworth sat on his verandah, sipping a nightcap and wondering if he could have made his contract by finessing the queen of hearts. He also wondered vaguely what had set fire to the *dak* bungalow; a carelessly abandoned cigarette, probably—although for a moment Farnsworth thought he had smelled kerosene.

He continued to sip his drink, listening to a jackal howling. Suddenly he realized that he was no longer stationed on the plains, and that there were probably no jackals in the Assam hills. It was a dog howling.

Farnsworth stood up. A drop of cold sweat trickled down his spine. The dog was some distance away, but its dismal howl sounded clearly in the stillness of the night, rising from the depths of animal woe. Farnsworth put an electric torch in his pocket and went out.

He told himself that he was merely taking a brisk walk before going to bed. Deep inside himself, however, he knew he was going out to look for the howling dog.

He passed the glowing ruins of the *dak* bungalow and continued down the road toward the Gandapur tea garden. The doleful lament of the dog was louder now: a hollow lugubrious note that rose to a sustained crescendo of despair and died in a whisper.

The Gandapur tea garden was

only a five-minute walk from the village, and the homes of the personnel were a hundred yards beyond the entrance to the estate. They were all dark: the manager's bungalow, now occupied by Dave Bell, the proprietor, who arrived with his blonde young wife only a month ago; the assistant's bungalow, now occupied by Manager Frank Rowan; and the bungalow of Henri Joubert, the factory overseer from Indo-China. The coolie lines were near the factory buildings, another few hundred yards further on.

When Farnsworth entered the plantation, the dog stopped howling. He drew his flashlight, shone it ahead of him as he walked up the road. When he had taken twenty steps, a furious barking began at his right. He left the road and advanced cautiously through the tea plants.

The savage barking increased in fury—almost underfoot. He shone his light downward. The luminous circle framed the open, aggressive jaws of the stranger's dog. The chain leash trailed on the ground.

Beyond the dog the stranger himself lay on his back, his lips parted forever in a silent cry of terror. Without touching him, Farnsworth knew the stranger was dead. The haft of a knife protruded from the crimson bosom of his shirt.

The dog continued to bark.

Lights went on in Dave Bell's bungalow. A screen door slammed and Bell appeared on the verandah steps, a raincoat over his pajamas. He held a flashlight in one hand and a revolver in the other.

"Don't shoot, Dave. It's Farnsworth," the district officer called in a shaky voice. "Come here."

Dave Bell hurried down the road in his slippers. He was a handsome, well-built man with a boyish face that belied his thirty-five years. "What's up?" he demanded. "That damned dog's been keeping us awake for an hour. Is it your— Good Lord, who's that?"

"That's what I was going to ask you," said Farnsworth.

"Never saw him before in my life." Bell came as close to the dead man as the dog would permit.

"He came in on the mail tonga this evening," Farnsworth explained. "I saw him for a minute at the *dak* bungalow. He asked the way to your place. I thought you knew him."

"Maybe he was a friend of Rowan's."

"Couldn't have been much of a friend," Farnsworth said, looking at the knife haft. "The bungalow burned down just after he left it tonight. Didn't you see the flames from your place?"

"We went to bed early," Bell said. "How—"

A scream cut him short—a shrill, chilling cry of terror. Both men whirled. The two flashlights

converged on the white, tense face of the blonde Mrs. Bell. She gripped a dressing gown of peacock blue silk closely about her shapely young body. Her hand trembled violently, and her blue eyes were round and staring.

Farnsworth had never seen her without makeup before. He couldn't help noting that even unadorned, even on the verge of hysterics, she was still beautiful in an elemental, sensuous way.

"Don't look, Mrs. Bell," Farnsworth said.

"I—I've seen. What happened?" Mrs. Bell spoke with difficulty.

"Nothing. An accident. Go back to bed, Linda," Bell ordered.

"He was stabbed. Who killed him?" Her voice faltered, as if she was afraid to hear the answer.

"We don't know. Do run along, Linda. Please," Bell pleaded.

"Did you ever see him before, Mrs. Bell?" Farnsworth asked.

Linda Bell shook her head until her blonde ringlets quivered. She did not look at Farnsworth, but stared at her husband with some strange fear in her eyes. She swayed slightly. The district officer had a sudden feeling that her terror was not merely the reaction of a woman to murder in her front yard; it was a deep dread, a personal shock that had wrenched her very soul.

"Here's Rowan," Bell said. "Maybe he knows the man."

The manager of the tea gardens,

a well-muscled redhead with big ears, came loping down the road ahead of Joubert, the factory man. He, too, denied knowing the stranger.

"The poor chap's done for, whoever he is," Rowan said. "Friend of yours, Joubert?"

Joubert lazily sauntered up to look at the corpse. He was a round, oily man, with a paunch that bulged over the belt of the ragged shorts which were his only garment. He peered through narrow, dark slits of eyes that had something of Asia in them. He shrugged.

"No," said Joubert. He turned away and slouched back toward his bungalow, shaking his head as if to say that he resented being disturbed for such trifles.

The excitable dog had stopped barking, but it still snarled menaces whenever anyone approached its dead master. Its eyes were green in the light of the pocket lamps.

"What are we going to do about that dog?" Farnsworth asked.

"Better shoot him," Rowan said. "It's easy to see he's a one-man dog. He won't let anybody else touch him."

"He's a fine-looking animal," Bell declared. "Be a shame to destroy him. I'll try to handle him."

"Good," said Farnsworth. "Then I'll make arrangements to have the gentleman removed right away. I'll see you all later to ask

the usual questions."

... The first thing that the district officer did when he returned to the village was to get the telegraph operator out of bed, to open a line to Gauhati so he could send a message to the deputy police commissioner. While Farnsworth represented full police authority at Gandapur, he saw he was going to need help on this case.

He was worried—or as nearly worried as possible for the most easy-going D. O. in the Indian Civil Service. This was the second mysterious death in Gandapur in a month.

Just a month ago, on the day that Dave and Linda Bell came to Gandapur, a young tea planter named Green was found dead with a bullet in his head and a gun in his hand. Green had been assistant to Rowan, who told Farnsworth that the boy was terribly homesick and probably killed himself while half-crazy with loneliness.

Farnsworth had believed the story; although Green left no suicide note, it was quite possible that loneliness had affected his mind. Farnsworth knew that loneliness did strange things to tea planters. Some tried to escape in drink; plenty quit; and once in a while some youngster would go balmy.

The strange events of tonight, however, made Farnsworth think

he had been perhaps too gullible. Two deaths on the same estate within a month might be a coincidence; again they might not. And the fact that Green had died on the day the Bells arrived, coupled with Mrs. Bell's complete terror at the death of the mysterious stranger—she had not been at all upset over Green's death—decided Farnsworth to seek the help of a more expert investigator than he.

Late the next afternoon an official-looking motor car stopped in front of the district officer's bungalow. A dynamic little man in white ducks, black alpaca coat, and khaki sun helmet sprang out and went up the steps with quick, determined strides.

"You're Farnsworth, of course," he said, when the district officer greeted him. "I'm Prike of the C. I. D."

"Indeed. You're more than welcome, Inspector." Farnsworth beamed. He knew Inspector Leonidas Prike by reputation. The deputy commissioner must have been impressed by last night's telegram to have sent the Criminal Investigation Department's ace detective. "I hardly hoped to meet you in this forsaken corner of the Assam hills, Inspector."

Prike removed his topee from an amazingly bald head. "I was en route to Shillong for a short

holiday," he said. "The burra sahib suggested I might break my journey and your murder case at the same time. Tell me about it."

"Certainly. You'll have a chota peg first?"

"Brandy, if you don't mind."

Farnsworth clapped his hands and gave orders to the red-turbaned bearer who appeared.

As the district officer began his story of the arrival of the stranger, Inspector Prike listened with the abstract attention of a mild-mannered scholar. But when Farnsworth told of Linda Bell's reactions to the discovery of the stranger's body, and of the coincidental death of the young planter on the day the Bells arrived in Gandapur—then a cold, hard glint came into Prike's steel-gray eyes, and the muscles of his strong jaw tightened in sharp, resolute lines.

"You found no marks of identification whatever, Mr. Farnsworth?" he demanded.

"None. There was nothing on the body or in the clothing he wore. The rest was destroyed in the *dak* bungalow fire."

"Deliberately, of course." Prike sipped his brandy. "We'll make photos of the corpse and ultimately our men will run down the man's identity. If possible, however, I should like very much to clean up the case in a day or two, so I can get along with my holiday. Have you the weapon?"

"Right here," said Farnsworth.

Inspector Prike put down his brandy and took the knife. He glanced at it casually, then screwed a jeweler's glass into one eye and examined it again. "Made in Hai-phong," he said. "Is there any Tonkinese labor at the tea garden?"

"Joubert, the overseer of the factory, comes from French Indo-China. Matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he is part Tonkinese. He certainly seems to have a touch of the tarbrush. I say, that's important, isn't it, Inspector?"

"Possibly," said Prike. The glint faded from his eyes. He stood up, fondled his brandy glass, and stared out at the woolly pattern the tea plantation made on the hills. For a long moment he was lost in thought.

"Too bad the only eye-witness was a dog," Farnsworth said. "You could leave for Shillong in ten minutes if the dead man's dog could talk."

Inspector Prike turned abruptly. "Perhaps we can get the dog to talk," he said.

Farnsworth started to laugh, but checked himself when he saw that the inspector was not joking.

Before he could say anything, he saw the red-headed Frank Rowan getting off his bicycle in front of the bungalow. Rowan ran up the steps, calling excitedly: "Mr. Bell wants you to come right over, Mr.

Farnsworth. Something—Sorry. I didn't know you were busy."

"Inspector, this is Rowan, manager of the tea garden," said the district officer. "Rowan, meet Inspector Prike of the C. I. D."

"You're just in time, Inspector," Rowan panted. "Joubert is gone."

"Gone?" Farnsworth glanced triumphantly at Prike, and nodded toward the factory overseer's knife. "Where did he go?"

"Nobody knows. Nobody saw him leave. He stole a rifle out of my bungalow and disappeared."

"That's an admission of guilt, isn't it, Inspector?" Farnsworth asked.

Prike reached for his tonee. "I suggest we drive over and have a few words with that dog," he said.

Rowan held his bicycle on the running board of Prike's car as they drove through the thickening dusk toward the Bell plantation. Prike, sitting next to the redhead, asked him:

"What part of Australia are you from, Mr. Rowan?"

Rowan grinned. "You caught the accent all right, Inspector. I'm from Melbourne."

"And how long have you been manager at Gandapur tea garden?"

"About five years," Rowan replied.

"Five years without a break?"

"Right. Except for a yearly holiday, Mr. Rowan?"

"Where do you go for your holiday?"

"Calcutta, usually. Last year I went to Singapore."

"And the missing overseer—Mr. Joubert, is it—how long has he been working with you?"

"About four years. He came the year after I did," Rowan said.

"From Indo-China?"

"Yes. He always said he was from Haiphong."

"Do you know if he's ever been back there on holiday?"

Rowan laughed. "He never arrived anywhere on holiday," he said. "Joubert always started out for Calcutta, but the farthest he ever got was Dacca. He usually woke up broke and sober in Gauhati."

Prike nodded. The car pulled up in front of the Bell bungalow. Dave Bell came down the steps to greet them, his usual boyish good nature clouded by worry. Linda Bell remained on the verandah, standing beside a lamp. She received the men with a cosmetic smile.

Farnsworth thought she was more lovely and less panicky than she had been the night before, yet she was still obviously upset. Her lips trembled as she said: "I hope you've sent your constables looking for Joubert, Mr. Farnsworth."

"Inspector Prike is taking over, Mrs. Bell."

"We'll all join in the hunt," Rowan said. "Just tell us what you

want us to do."

"I suppose we'd best wait until morning, since the man is armed," Bell said.

"Before organizing a hunt," said Inspector Prike, "it is always good to know exactly what is to be hunted. I should like to talk to the dead man's dog, Mr. Bell."

"Oh, the dog. He's been raising a frightful row all day," Mrs. Bell volunteered.

"He's in the lumber room," Bell said. "This way, Inspector."

Prike and Farnsworth followed Dave Bell to a small room at the back of the bungalow. Mrs. Bell held a lamp above her head as Prike opened a door. An outburst of savage sound and a baring of fangs greeted him.

"Stop it, boy," Prike called. "Be a good dog. Lie down now, old chap. Good dog."

"*Kutta, kutta kutta.*" Prike tried the vernacular. "*Idhar ao, kutta-ji. Imba kutta.*"

The barking increased in fury.

"He doesn't understand Hindustani," Bell said. "We've been trying it on him all day."

Prike next spoke to the dog in Tamil, Punjabi, and Pushtu. The dog showed no recognition of any of the Indian dialects. He tried French; the dog only barked the louder.

The inspector returned to the front of the house, frowning. "How long has Joubert been miss-

ing, Mr. Bell?" he asked.

"He probably left during the night," Bell said.

"Why did you not notify Mr. Farnsworth earlier?"

"Well, we weren't sure..." Bell sat down uneasily.

"I told Mr. Bell at noon that I hadn't seen him around this morning," Rowan volunteered. "But that's not unusual. Joubert sometimes went on solitary drunks. It was only when I found this afternoon that he'd taken my rifle from my bungalow that we thought something was wrong."

"I see." Prike turned to Bell. "How long have you owned this estate, Mr. Bell?" he asked casually.

Bell squirmed. "Well, it's not exactly mine," he admitted. "The title is in my wife's name. Linda inherited the plantation from her brother who died in Calcutta three years ago."

"This was before your marriage to Mrs. Bell?"

"After. We were married in Bombay four years ago."

"And this is your first visit to Gandapur?"

"Yes. We'd never been in eastern India before." Bell looked at his wife. "The plantation hasn't been doing very well the last two years; and when we actually lost money last year, we thought we'd better come up and see if we couldn't pull our chestnuts out of the fire. Our tea, rather."

"And are you succeeding, Mr. Bell?"

"Well, I'm not much of a tea planter myself," Bell said. "But Rowan, my manager, seems to think the soil may be played out. What about it, Rowan?"

"We haven't been getting a very good grade of leaf," Rowan said. "I told Mr. Bell that perhaps we'd better wait until after the third picking and then have the soil analyzed. We—"

Linda Bell screamed. She was standing near the door, staring across the verandah with wide-eyed dismay.

Chairs scraped the floor as the four men sprang up. Farnsworth turned to follow her gaze. Several hundred yards away he saw long tongues of flame licking at the darkness.

"Another fire!" Linda wailed.

"The tea factory!" Bell exclaimed, starting for the door. "You stay here, Linda."

"No, no!" Linda seemed to grow suddenly older as she gave her blonde head a terrified shake. "Not alone. I—I'd die!"

She joined the men already going down the verandah steps.

One end of the tea factory was blazing furiously. Men and women were streaming from the coolie lines nearby. The reflection of the fire gleamed on their black Tamil faces, flashed on the gold jewelry in the ears and noses of the women tea-pickers.

While Bell and Rowan began organizing a bucket brigade, Inspector Prike marched straight into the smoke-filled gloom of the sorting and grading sheds, which had not yet caught fire.

"I say, Inspector." Farnsworth ran after him. "Isn't this dangerous, Inspector? Those corrugated-iron roofs—"

"They won't fall on us for at least half an hour," said Prike, glancing casually upward. "There is an obvious connection between arson and homicide in this case of yours, Mr. Farnsworth, and if there is a possibility of discovering any evidence in the few minutes still left to us—"

The inspector stopped to scoop up a handful of fragrant leaves from the withering trays. He smelled them, examined them carefully by the lurid flicker of the crackling flames.

Farnsworth coughed and tied his handkerchief about his face as he followed Prike through the acrid haze. The inspector was quite deliberate as he walked through the rolling and fermenting rooms, taking his time to run his fingers through the half-processed tea whenever he found any. He seemed even intent on going in for a look at the firing ovens, although the blaze, which had obviously started at that end of the factory, was fiercest there. A flaming timber fell across the doorway,

however, before he reached it.

"Inspector—don't you think we've seen enough?" Farnsworth coughed, as Prike seemed to be considering means of surmounting the new hazard.

"No," Prike replied, "but I'm afraid we've seen all we possibly can. Do you know which is Joubert's bungalow?"

"Yes." Farnsworth groped through the smoke for Prike's arm.

"Then take me there, while Bell is still busy with his fire."

Farnsworth lost no time in getting out of the factory. He filled his lungs with fresh air, shook his head violently as if trying to get the roar of the flames out of his ears.

"This way," he said.

They pushed through the lines of Tamils passing buckets, and stepped over the pitifully inadequate hose of the Gandapur fire brigade which was just getting into action. They did not see either the Bells or Rowan.

Farnsworth led the way to Joubert's bungalow and climbed the steps. He tried the door. It was unlocked. He pushed it open—and immediately stepped back into Inspector Prike's arms. Two huge luminous eyes were staring at him from the darkness.

The ghostly, greenish blobs of phosphorescence shimmered from above eye level. The unearthly animal, whatever it was, must be

of tremendous size.

Inspector Prike's pocket lamp flung its cone of light into the darkness and the shining eyes disappeared. In their place was a glass jar on a shelf. The jar contained two lumps of some waxy, translucent substance immersed in a colorless liquid. A second bottle stood next to the jar.

Prike pushed Farnsworth aside and walked quickly to the shelf. He removed the cork from the bottle. A strong odor of rotten eggs immediately permeated the room.

Prike grunted with satisfaction. "Here is the explanation of your two fires," he said. "Phosphorus and carbon disulfide. The arsonist dissolved one in the other. When the carbon disulfide evaporated, the phosphorus burst into flame spontaneously. By the time the evaporation was complete, the arsonist was far away."

"But I thought I smelled kerosene at the *dak* bungalow last night," Farnsworth said.

"Probably you did. It could have been poured from a lamp, to help spread the fire quickly after the spontaneous combustion of the phosphorus."

"But why did Joubert set fire to the tea factory?" Farnsworth asked.

Prike replaced the cork in the bottle of carbon disulfide. "That is something we must discover," he said.

He lighted a lamp and carefully went through the three-room bungalow. He found nothing to interest him until he came to a pair of heavy shoes under an unmade bed. The shoes were caked with clay of a peculiar yellow color.

"Do you know any place in the vicinity where mud of this color might be found, Mr. Farnsworth?" Prike asked.

Farnsworth did not know. He had never noticed the color of the soil about Gandapur. "We shall have to wait for daylight to make certain," Prike said, "although my impression is that the soil of the plantation is sandy, darker, and not at all yellow." He probed the muddy crust with his finger. It was damp and soft underneath.

Suddenly he straightened up. An ominous sound beat upon the air. Farnsworth looked quickly at Prike and saw in the lamplight that the detective's jaw muscles were taut, his whole body rigid.

The sound came again: a sharp explosion that rolled off the hillside in a deep-throated echo.

Before Farnsworth could say, "Pistol shots?" the detective was already on his way out of Joubert's bungalow, running away from the dying fire of the tea factory, toward the bungalow of Dave Bell; and Farnsworth loped after him.

Linda Bell was standing on the verandah, a kerosene lamp in her hand. She was deathly pale, and

trembling from head to foot. Prike took the lamp from her quaking grasp and put it on the table.

"Well?" he demanded.

"I just got here," she whispered. "I heard the shots. They seemed to come from out back."

Frank Rowan came charging up the verandah steps, followed from another direction by Dave Bell.

"What happened?" Rowan demanded.

Prike looked puzzled for an instant. Then, "The dog!" he exclaimed. He whipped out his automatic. "Bring the light, Mr. Farnsworth."

The district officer followed Prike to the back of the house. He held the lamp above his head as Prike opened the door to the lumber room. The night wind blew through a shattered window. There were fresh blood stains among the broken glass on the floor. The dog was gone.

All eyes were on Inspector Prike as he looked at the broken window, examined the shattered glass. He did not tarry long. Thoughtfully he returned to the living room. Farnsworth, Rowan, Dave and Linda Bell followed him. None spoke as the little detective paced the floor in silence.

Suddenly Prike stopped in front of the fireplace—winter evenings are cool in the Assam hills—bent down, and ran his fingers through a small pile of ashes in the grate.

Farnsworth saw him pick out a few unburned scraps of paper—one of them the corner of an envelope with a tiny fragment of postage stamp on it—and drop them again. He straightened up, brushing his fingers against the palm of his other hand.

"Who has been burning paper here, Mrs. Bell?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," Linda replied. She did not look at Prike.

"The ashes were not here earlier in the evening," Prike said quietly. His keen eyes scanned the faces about him. No one spoke. "Come, Mr. Farnsworth," he said after a tense pause. "I think I shall retire for a few hours' sleep before resuming work tomorrow."

"Aren't you going to hunt for Joubert, Inspector?" Bell protested. "Evidently he's still in the neighborhood."

Prike's eyebrows raised slightly. "Is he?" he countered.

"I won't sleep tonight, knowing he's still about." Linda Bell shuddered.

"He's about, all right," Rowan said. "He did for the dog."

"I'm not certain Joubert has anything to do with the dog's disappearance," Prike said, looking squarely at Mrs. Bell. "The dog did not understand French. Good-night, everyone."

Inspector Prike was up before dawn. Daylight was just beginning to gray the East when Farn-

sworth heard him stirring. The district officer bathed and dressed quickly. He barely had time for a cup of tea before joining the inspector. They drove directly to the plantation.

They found the animal just as the sun was coming up over the hills. It was lying among the tea plants, not far from the road, a few yards from the spot where its master had been murdered. It was covered with dried blood from a long gash that split one shoulder and furrowed its flank.

As Prike bent over it, however, the dog lifted its head, bared its fangs and snarled savagely. It tried to get up, but sank back weakly on its haunches.

Suddenly a curious look came into Prike's steel-gray eyes. He addressed the dog in Malay. "*Mari sini, anjing.*" he said softly.

The animal stopped growling and pricked up its ears.

"*Bai' anjing,*" Prike continued. "*Branji anjing.*"

The dog wagged its tail feebly.

Prike picked the dog up in his arms, passed it to Farnsworth. "Take it to the Bell Bungalow and have Mrs. Bell bandage its wounds," he said. "On second thought, don't. Jump in my car and take the dog to your own place. Do you know Malay?"

"No."

"Then just say '*bai' anjing*' from time to time. That means 'good dog.' Have the pup bandaged, and

post someone to stand guard. We must save our only witness. Luckily the person who shot him last night was an atrocious marksman. You'll find me on the plantation."

Farnsworth followed instructions. When he drove back to the plantation from the village, he left the car opposite the still-smoking ruins of the tea factory. Then he asked several tea pickers which way the inspector had gone, and set out across the garden.

He had walked for hours, it seemed to him, without catching sight of his man. He was puffing badly by the time he had trudged to the northernmost limit of the plantation and found himself facing a wall of jungle.

"Inspector Prike!" he called.

There was no answer. He hurried along the edge of the forest, stopping every few minutes to call again, hearing only the deafening hum of cicadas in reply.

"Inspector Prike!"

"Hello, Mr. Farnsworth." Prike emerged from the undergrowth, his white trousers muddy, his alpaca jacket torn, his khaki topee decorated with wet, clinging leaves. "I've just been following an outcropping of rock. I wanted to make sure it was crystalline limestone."

"Really?" Farnsworth blinked his bewilderment.

"You probably think I've gone mad," Prike said, "but you must admit that establishing a motive is

sometimes quite useful in a murder investigation. I believe we're getting somewhere, Mr. Farnsworth."

"Are we, indeed? Where, Inspector?"

"Look at this, Mr. Farnsworth." Prike led the way to a narrow pit that had been dug into the plantation, near the edge of the undergrowth. It was only about two feet deep, but it extended for a considerable distance. The soil was of a peculiar yellowish color—like the mud that had caked the shoes under Joubert's bed. "They're all over the place, these pits," Prike continued. "I noticed one half a mile back. There's another right over here."

Prike stooped to pick up a handful of the yellow-brown clay. He held it out, asking: "Mr. Farnsworth, wouldn't you say this might be byon?"

"Byon?"

"That's what they call ruby earth in Burma. And the Mogok ruby fields are surrounded by crystalline limestone formation. Shall we go back now?"

Farnsworth had longer legs than the inspector, but he also had a longer waistline, and he had some difficulty keeping up. When they had walked for half an hour between the rows of tea plants, Prike stopped to let him catch up. Breaking off the end of a slim branch, he held it out and asked:

"What do you make of this, Farnsworth?"

Farnsworth said, "I'm new to the tea country."

"Look at the end leaves," Prike insisted.

Farnsworth looked. He saw only leaves.

"You will notice," Prike continued, "that the white terminal buds—the buds which yield the flowery pekoe if picked while the down is still on the young leaves—have been allowed to open and develop."

"Have they, Inspector?" Farnsworth tried to register intelligent surprise.

"They have. And as a consequence the next picking is going to yield considerably more sou-chong than pekoe."

Prike was off again, saying, no more until he had reached the Bell bungalow. He went directly to Linda Bell, who was having her morning tea on the verandah.

"The time has come, Mrs. Bell," he said crisply, "for you to tell me the truth."

Linda put down her cup. "I've told you everything."

"The animal was not killed last night, Mrs. Bell. And he does speak Malay."

Linda's lips parted but she said nothing. —

"The letter which was burned in the grate last night," Prike went on, "bore a Straits Settlement stamp; it was probably mailed

from either Singapore or Penang. Since the dog obviously comes from somewhere in Malaya, I am assuming that his dead master also came from there. Am I also to assume that Mr. Bell burned that letter to conceal the fact that he corresponded with the murdered man?"

"Dave didn't burn that letter!" Linda Bell sat up very straight. "I did."

"Then you knew the man?"

"Yes." Linda's voice was barely audible. "His name was Hugh Walter."

"Why didn't you say so last night?"

Linda took a deep breath and looked Inspector Prike squarely in the eyes. "Because I knew that Dave would be suspected of killing him—although Dave never saw the man in his life."

"That doesn't make sense, Mrs. Bell."

"Oh, but it does. Dave has always been terribly jealous of Hugh Walter. He knows I nearly married Hugh once—when I thought I was in love with him. Hugh was a friend of my brother's, and he once owned an interest in Gandapur tea garden. My brother bought him out several years before he died. Hugh left Bombay to go to Singapore—to get rich, he said. He did, too, but while he was gone I married Dave.

"Hugh had written me regular-

ly ever since, saying he was going to take me away from Dave. I've never answered, never seen him since, but just the other day he wrote that he knew the plantation was in trouble, and that he was coming up to buy it—for my sake. That was the letter I burned.

"Until I saw him lying dead, I didn't know he was in Gandapur. I swear it. But I was panicky, naturally, because Dave had always threatened to kill Hugh if he ever showed up. I—"

She stopped. Dave Bell was coming up the steps.

"Morning, Inspector," he said. "Any trace of Joubert?"

"I think we shall find Mr. Joubert later today," Prike said, "just as soon as the corrugated iron roof cools off enough so that we may lift it off the embers of the tea factory."

"Good Lord!" Bell exclaimed. "You don't think Joubert is dead?"

"I'm convinced of it," Prike said, grasping the back of a chair. "I—"

"Up with your hands! All of you."

The red-headed Rowan stood in the doorway, white-faced, grimlipped, a gun in each hand. He had come through from the back of the house.

Prike was the first to raise his hands—flinging the chair across the verandah into Rowan's face.

Rowan's two guns exploded.

The verandah was loud with shouts, screams, and the roar of gunfire. Before the echoes had died away, Rowan was on the floor, and Prike was astride him, with a tight body scissors about his middle. Farnsworth disarmed him.

Prike stripped Rowan's shirt from his back, and jerked a small chamois bag from the string around his waist.

"Keep the gun on him, please, Mr. Farnsworth," said Prike as he got up. "He's your man from now on. I suggest you ask him why he killed Joubert."

"I've got nothing to say," Rowan declared sullenly.

"I'm not sure whether Joubert objected to having his knife used in a murder, or whether he had been too curious about the ruby-earth at the far edge of the plantation. I would appreciate your correcting me, Mr. Rowan, as there are several points on which I am forced to guess. You know of course, Mr. Bell, that your manager has been deliberately depressing the value of your tea crops?"

"Rowan? How—"

"By sending the pickers out too late, after the higher-priced leaf had already grown into lower-grade tea. By making the plantation seem unprofitable; he hoped you would be willing to sell it cheap."

"But why?" Bell asked.

Prike tossed over the chamois

bag. Bell opened it. Half a dozen dull-red hexagonal crystals ran into his hand.

"Because he has discovered rubies on your plantation. And while he could steal a few as a sideline to managing your estate, rubies are mined in India under Government license, and it might prove difficult to sell stones on which royalties had not been paid. Therefore Mr Rowan went to Singapore on his last holiday to see a gentleman formerly connected with this plantation. Since this gentleman has become rich in the interim, I assume he was to furnish the capital for buying the tea garden when its present owner had been convinced that it was a liability. His name was Walter."

"Walter?" Dave Bell stared at his wife. "Was the dead man Hugh Walter?"

"Mrs. Bell, I wonder if I could trouble you for a double brandy," Prike said quickly.

When Linda Bell left the verandah, Prike went on: "I can't say exactly what caused the thieves to fall out when Walter reached Gandapur the other night. But it is a safe guess to say that Rowan killed him over a matter of greed."

"He asked for it." Rowan spoke at last. "He wanted to freeze me out."

"Or vice versa," Prike suggested. "You might very well have decided to hog the whole business, Mr. Rowan—particularly if Walter

arrived here with the purchase price in his pocket. Make a note of that when you search Rowan's bungalow, Mr. Farnsworth.

"You are a cold-blooded individual, Mr. Rowan. Your murder of Walter was carefully premeditated. You stole Joubert's knife for the purpose well in advance. You planted the phosphorus on Joubert's bungalow to tie up with the two fires. But you really should not have left Joubert's shoes, still caked with ruby-earth, where a curious investigator might find them. No doubt you were made bold by the ease with which you escaped detection for the murder of young Mr. Green."

"Green shot himself," Rowan protested.

"I rather think you killed him because of something he was about to reveal to Mr. Bell. It is quite likely that he had discovered the method by which you were causing a first-rate plantation to produce low-grade tea. That, however, is beside the point. The punishment for one murder is the same as for three . . . This is excellent brandy, Mrs. Bell. Thank you."

Prike drained his glass, then said: "I think we ought to see how the dog is getting on, Mr. Farnsworth. I would like to take him a large, juicy steak. I might not have remembered that Mr. Rowan was in Singapore for his holiday if the dog had not understood Malay."

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