
ANC
MANHUNT
DETE STORY ONTHLY
I Want A French Girl
James T. Farrell
author of
STUDS LONIGAN
EVERY STORY NEW!
35
A LEW ARCHER Novel by JOHN ROSS MACDONA

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MANHUNT

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Chinese Puzzle

A Novelette

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

The voice on the phone told Mary she was dead. So, Mary died.

THE GIRL slumped at the desk just inside the entrance doorway of the small office. The phone lay uncradled, just the way she'd dropped it. An open pad of telephone numbers rested just beyond reach of her lifeless left hand.

The legend on the frosted glass door read *Gotham Lobster Company.*

The same legend was repeated on the long row of windows facing Columbus Avenue, and the sun glared hotly through those windows, casting the name of the company onto the wooden floor in shadowed black.

Mr. Godrow, President of Gotham Lobster, stood before those windows now. He was a big man with rounded shoulders and a heavy paunch. He wore a grey linen jacket over his suit pants, and the pocket of the jacket was stitched with the word *Gotham*. He tried to keep his meaty hands from fluttering, but he wasn't good at pretending. The hands wandered restlessly, and then exploded in a gesture of impatience.

"Well, aren't you going to do something?" he demanded.

"We just got here, Mr. Godrow," I said. "Give us a little . . ."

"The police are supposed to be so good," he said petulantly. "This girl drops dead in my office and all you do is stand around and look. Is this supposed to be a sightseeing tour?"

I didn't answer him. I looked at Donny, and Donny looked back at me, and then we turned our attention to the dead girl. Her left arm was stretched out across the top of the small desk, and her body was arched crookedly, with her head resting on the arm. Long black hair spilled over her face, but it could not hide the contorted, hideously locked grin on her mouth. She wore a tight silk dress, slit on either side in the Oriental fashion, buttoned to the throat. The dress had pulled back over a portion of her right thigh, revealing a roll-gartered stocking. The tight line of her panties was clearly visible through the thin silk of her dress. The dead girl was Chinese, but her lips and face were blue.

"Suppose you tell us what happened, Mr. Godrow," I said.

"Freddie can tell you," Godrow answered. "Freddie was sitting closer to her."

"Who's Freddie?"

"My boy," Godrow said.

"Your son?"

"No, I haven't any children. My boy. He works for me."

"Where is he now, sir?"

"I sent him down for some coffee. After I called you." Godrow paused, and then reluctantly said, "I didn't think you'd get here so quickly."

"Score one for the Police Department," Donny murmured.

"Well, you fill us in until he gets back, will you?" I said.

"All right," Godrow answered. He said everything grudgingly, as if he resented our presence in his office, as if this whole business of dead bodies lying around should never have been allowed to happen in his office. "What do you want to know?"

"What did the girl do here?" Donny asked.

"She made telephone calls."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. Freddie does that, too, but he also runs the addressing machine. Freddie . . ."

"Maybe you'd better explain your operation a little," I said.

"I sell lobsters," Godrow said.

"From this office?" Donny asked skeptically.

"We take the orders from this office," Godrow explained, warming up a little. It was amazing the way they always warmed up when they began discussing their work. "My plant is in Boothbay Harbor, Maine."

"I see."

"We take the orders here, and then the lobsters are shipped down from Maine, alive of course."

"I like lobsters," Donny said. "Especially lobster tails."

"Those are not lobsters," Godrow said indignantly. "Those are crawfish. African rock lobster. There's a big difference."

"Who do you sell to, Mr. Godrow?" I asked.

"Restaurants. That's why Mary worked for me."

"Is that the girl's name? Mary?"

"Yes, Mary Chang. You see, we do a lot of business with Chinese restaurants. Lobster Cantonese, you know, like that. They buy small lobsters usually, and in half-barrel quantities for the most part, but they're good steady customers."

"And Miss Chang called these Chinese restaurants, is that right?"

"Yes. I found it more effective that way. She spoke several Chinese dialects, and she inspired confidence, I suppose. At any rate, she got me more orders than any Occidental who ever held the job."

"And Freddie? What does he do?"

"He calls the American restaurants. We call them every morning. Not all of them each morning, of course, but those we feel are ready to reorder. We give them quotations, and we hope they'll place orders. We try to keep our quotes low. For example, our Jumbos today were going for . . ."

"How much did Miss Chang receive for her duties, Mr. Godrow?"

"She got a good salary."

"How much?"

"Why? What difference does it make?"

"It might be important, Mr. Godrow. How much?"

"Forty-five a week, plus a dollar-fifty commission on each barrel order from a new customer." Godrow paused. "Those are good wages, Mr. . . ."

"Parker. Detective-Sergeant Ralph Parker."

"Those are good wages, Sgt. Parker." He paused again. "Much more than my competitors are paying."

"I wouldn't know about that, Mr. Godrow, but I'll take your word for it. Now . . ."

A shadow fell across the floor, and Godrow looked up and said, "Ah, Freddie, it's about time."

2.

I turned to the door, expecting to find a sixteen-year-old kid maybe. Freddie was not sixteen, nor was he twenty-six. He was closer to thirty-six, and he was a thin man with sparse hair and a narrow mouth. He wore a rumpled tweed suit and a stained knitted tie.

"This is my boy," Godrow said. "Freddie, this is Detective-Sergeant Parker and . . ."

"Katz," Donny said. "Donald Katz."

"How do you do?" Freddie said.

"Since you're here," I said, "suppose you tell us what happened this morning, Freddie."

"Mr. Godrow's coffee . . ." Freddie started apologetically.

"Yes, yes, my coffee," Godrow said. Freddie brought it to his desk, put it down, and then fished into his pocket for some silver which he deposited alongside the paper container. Godrow counted the change meticulously, and then took the lid from the container and dropped in one lump of sugar. He opened his top drawer and put the remaining lump of sugar into a small jar there.

"What happened this morning, Freddie?" I asked.

"Well, I got in at about nine, or a little before," he said.

"Were you here then, Mr. Godrow?"

"No. I didn't come in until nine-thirty or so."

"I see. Go on, Freddie."

"Mary . . . Miss Chang was here. I said good morning to her, and then we got down to work."

"I like my people to start work right away," Godrow said. "No nonsense."

"Was Miss Chang all right when you came in, Freddie?"

"Yes. Well, that is . . . she was complaining of a stiff neck, and she seemed to be very jumpy, but she started making her phone calls, so I guess she was all right."

"Was she drinking anything?"

"Sir?"

"Was she drinking anything?"

"No, sir."

"Did she drink anything all the while you were here?"

"No, sir. I didn't see her, at least."

"I see." I looked around the office and said, "Three phones here, is that right?"

"Yes," Godrow answered. "One extension for each of us. You know how they work. You push a button on the face of the instrument, and that's the line you're on. We can all talk simultaneously that way, on different lines."

"I know how it works," I said. "What happened then, Freddie?"

"We kept calling, that's all. Mr. Godrow came in about nine-thirty, like he said, and we kept on calling while he changed to his office jacket."

"I like to wear this jacket in the office," Godrow explained. "Makes

me feel as if I'm ready for the day's work, you know."

"Also saves wear and tear on your suit jacket," Donny said.

Godrow seemed about to say something, but I beat him to the punch. "Did you notice anything unusual about Miss Chang's behaviour, Mr. Godrow?"

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact. As Freddie told you, she was quite jumpy. I dropped a book at one point, and she almost leaped out of her chair."

"Did *you* see her drink anything?"

"No."

"All right, Freddie, what happened after Mr. Godrow came in?"

"Well, Mary started making another phone call. This was at about nine-thirty-five. She was behaving very peculiar by this time. She was twitching and well . . . she was having . . . well, like spasms. I asked her if she was all right, and she flinched when I spoke, and then she went right on with her call. I remember the time because I started a call at about the same time. You see, we have to get our orders in the morning if Booth Bay is to deliver the next morning. That means we're racing against the clock, sort of, so you learn to keep your eye on it. Well, I picked up my phone and started dialling, and then Mary started talking Chinese to someone on her phone. She sits at the desk right next to mine, you see, and I can hear everything she says."

"Do you know who she was calling?"

"No. She always dials . . . dialled . . . the numbers and then started talking right off in Chinese. She called all the Chinese restau . . ."

"Yes, I know. Go on."

"Well, she was talking on her phone, and I was talking on mine, and all of a sudden she said in English, 'No, why?' "

"She said this in English?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear this, Mr. Godrow?"

"No. My desk is rather far away, over here near the windows. But I heard what she said next. I couldn't miss hearing that. She yelled it out loud."

"What was that, sir?"

"She said 'Kill me? No! No!' "

"What happened then?"

"Well," Freddie said, "I was still on the phone. I looked up, and I didn't know *what* was going on. Mary started to shove her chair back, and then she began . . . shaking all over . . . like . . . like . . ."

"The girl had a convulsion," Godrow put in. "If I'd known she was predisposed toward . . ."

"Did she pass out?"

"Yes," Freddie said.

"What did you do then?"

"I didn't know what to do."

"Why didn't you call a doctor?"

"Well, we did, after the second convulsion."

"When was that?"

"About . . . oh I don't know . . . ten, fifteen minutes later. I really don't know."

"And when the doctor came, what did he say?"

"Well, he didn't come," Freddie said apologetically.

"Why not? I thought you called him."

"The girl died after the second convulsion," Godrow said. "Good Lord, man, she turned blue, you saw her. Why should I pay a doctor for a visit when the girl was dead? I cancelled the call."

"I see."

"It's obvious she was predisposed toward convulsions, and whoever spoke to her on the phone frightened her, bringing one on," Godrow said. "He obviously told her he was going to kill her or something."

"This is all very obvious, is it, Mr. Godrow?" I asked.

"Well, of course. You can see the girl is blue. What else . . ."

"Lots of things," I said. "Lots of things could have caused her coloration. But only one thing would put that grin on her face."

"What's that?" Godrow asked.

"Strychnine poisoning," I said.

3.

When we got back to Homicide I put a call through to Mike Reilly. The coroner had already confirmed my suspicions, but I wanted the official autopsy report on it. Mike picked up the phone on the third ring and said, "Reilly here."

"This is Ralph," I said. "What've you got on the Chinese girl?"

"Oh. Like you figured, Ralph. It's strychnine, all right."

"No question?"

"None at all. She sure took enough of the stuff. Any witnesses around when she went under?"

"Yes, two."

"She complain of a stiff neck, twitching, spasms?"

"Yes."

"Convulsions?"

"Yes."

"Sure, that's all strychnine. Yeah, Ralph. And her jaws locked the way they are, that grin. And the cyanotic coloring of lips and face. Oh, no question. Hell, I could have diagnosed this without taking a test."

"What else did you find, Mike?"

"She didn't have a very big breakfast, Ralph. Coffee and an English muffin."

"Have any idea when she got the strychnine?"

"Hard to say. Around breakfast, I suppose. You're gonna have a tough nut with strychnine, Ralph."

"How so?"

"Tracing it, I mean. Hell, Ralph, they sell it by the can. For getting rid of animal pests."

"Yeah. Well, thanks, Mike."

"No trouble at all. Drop in anytime."

He hung up, and I turned to Donny who had already started on a cup of coffee.

"Strychnine, all right."

"What'd you expect?" he said. "Malted milk?"

"So where now?"

"Got a check on the contents of the girl's purse from the lab. Nothing important. Lipstick. Some change. Five-dollar bill, and three singles. Theatre stubs."

"For where?"

"Chinese theatre in Chinatown."

"Anything else?"

"Letter to a sister in Hongkong."

"In Chinese?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"That's it. Oh yes, a program card. She was a transfer student at Columbia. Went there nights."

"So what do you figure, Donny?"

"I figure some bastard slipped the strychnine to her this morning before she came to work. Maybe a lover, how do I know? She called him later to say hello. She talks Chinese on the phone, so who can tell whether she's calling a restaurant or her uncle in Singapore? The guy all at once says, 'You know why you're feeling so punk, honey?' So she *is* feeling punk. She's got a stiff neck, and her reflexes are hypersensitive, and she's beginning to shake a little. She forgets she's supposed to be talking to a Chinese restaurant owner. She drops the pose for a minute and says 'No, why?' in English. The boyfriend on the other end says, 'Here's why, honey. I gave you a dose of strychnine when I saw you this morning. It's going to kill you in about zero minutes flat.' The kid jumps up and screams 'Kill me? No! No!' Curtain. The poison's already hit her."

"Sounds good," I said. "Except for one thing."

"Yeah?"

"Would the poisoner take a chance like that? Tipping her off on the phone?"

"Why not? He probably knew how long it would take for the poison to kill her."

"But why would she call him?"

"Assuming it was a him. How do I know? Maybe she didn't call anybody special. Maybe the joker works at one of the Chinese restaurants she always called. Maybe she met him every morning for Chop Suey, and then he went his way and she went hers. Or maybe she called . . . Ralph, she could have called anyone."

"No. Someone who spoke Chinese. She spoke Chinese to the party in the beginning."

"Lots of Chinese in this city, Ralph."

"Why don't we start with the restaurants? This book was open on her desk. Two pages showing. She could have been talking to someone at any one of the restaurants listed on those pages — assuming she opened the book to refer to a number. If she called a sweetheart, we're up the creek."

"Not necessarily," Donny said. "It'll just take longer, that's all."

4.

There were a lot of Chinese restaurants listed on those two pages. They were not listed in any geographical order. Apparently, Mary Chang knew the best times to call each of the owners, and she'd listed the restaurant numbers in a system all her own. So where the first number on the list was in Chinatown, the second was up on Fordham Road in the Bronx. We had a typist rearrange the list according to location, and then we asked the skipper for two extra men to help with the legwork. He gave us Belloni and Hicks, yanking them off a case that was ready for the DA anyway. Since they were our guests, so to speak, we gave them the easy half of the list, the portion in Chinatown where all the restaurants were clustered together and there wouldn't be as much hoofing to do. Donny and I took the half that covered Upper Manhattan and the Bronx.

A Chinese restaurant in the early afternoon is something like a bar at that time. There are few diners. Everyone looks bleary-eyed. The dim lights somehow clash with the bright sunshine outside. It's like stepping out of reality into something unreal and vague. Besides, a lot of the doors were locked solid, and when a man can't speak English it's a little difficult to make him understand what a police shield means.

It took a lot of time. We pounded on the doors first, and then we talked to whoever's face appeared behind the plate glass. We showed shields, we gestured, we waited for someone who spoke English. When the doors opened, we told them who we were and what we wanted. There was distrust, a natural distrust of cops, and another natural distrust of Westerners.

"Did Gotham Lobster call you this morning?"

"No."

"When did Gotham call you?"

"Yes'day. We take one ba'l. One ba'l small."

"Who did you speak to at Gotham?"

"Ma'y Chang."

And on to the next place, and the same round of questions, and always no luck, always no call from Gotham or Mary Chang. And then we hit a place on the Grand Concourse where the waiter opened the door promptly. We told him what we wanted, and he hurried off to the back of the restaurant while we waited by the cash register. A young Chinese in an impeccable blue suit came out to us in about five minutes. He smiled and shook hands and then said, "I'm David Loo. My father owns the restaurant. May I help you?"

He was a good-looking boy of about twenty, I would say. He spoke English without a trace of singsong. He was wearing a white button-down shirt with a blue and

silver striped silk tie. A small Drama Masks tie-clasp held the tie to the shirt.

"I'm Detective-Sergeant Parker, and this is my partner, Detective-Sergeant Katz. Do you know Mary Chang?"

"Chang? Mary Chang? Why, no, I . . . oh, do you mean the girl who calls from Gotham Lobster?"

"Yes, that's her. Do you know her?"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"When did you see her last?"

"See her?" David Loo smiled. "I'm afraid I've never seen her. I spoke to her on the phone occasionally, but that was the extent of our relationship."

"I see. When did you speak to her last?"

"This morning."

"What time was this?"

"Oh, I don't know. Early this morning."

"Can you try to pinpoint the time?"

David Loo shrugged. "Nine, nine-fifteen, nine-thirty. I really don't know." He paused. "Has Miss Chang done something?"

"Can you give us a closer time than that, Mr. Loo? Mary Chang was poisoned this morning, and it might be . . ."

"Poisoned? My God!"

"Yes. So you see, any help you can give us would be appreciated."

"Yes, yes, I can understand that. Well, let me see. I came to the restaurant at about . . . nine-ten it was, I suppose. So she couldn't have called at nine, could she?" David Loo smiled graciously, as if he were immensely enjoying this game of murder. "I had some coffee, and I listened to the radio back in the kitchen, and . . ." Loo snapped his fingers. "Of course," he said. "She called right after that."

"Right after what?"

"Well, I listen to swing a lot. WNEW is a good station for music, you know. Do you follow bop?"

"No. Go on."

"Well, WNEW has a newsbreak every hour on the half-hour. I remember the news coming on at nine-thirty, and then as the newscaster signed off, the phone rang. That must have been at nine-thirty-five. The news takes five minutes, you see. As a matter of fact, I always resent that intrusion on the music. If a person likes music, it seems unfair . . ."

"And the phone rang at nine-thirty-five, is that right?"

"Yes, sir, I'm positive."

"Who answered the phone?"

"I did. I'd finished my coffee."

"Was it Mary Chang calling?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"She said, 'Gotham Lobster, good morning.' I said good morning back to her — she's always very pleasant on the phone — and . . ."

"Wasn't she pleasant *off* the phone?"

"Well, I wouldn't know. I only spoke to her on the phone."

"Go on."

"She gave me a quotation then and asked if I'd like some nice lobster."

"Was this in Chinese?"

"Yes. I don't know why she spoke Chinese. Perhaps she thought I was the chef."

"What did you do then?"

"I asked her to hold on, and then I went to find the chef. I asked the chef if he needed any lobster, and he said we should take a half-barrel. So I went back to the phone. But Miss Chang was gone by that time." Loo shrugged. "We had to order our lobsters from another outfit. Shame, too, because Gotham has some good stuff."

"Did you speak to her in English at all?"

"No. All Chinese."

"I see. Is that customary? I mean, do you usually check with the chef after she gives her quotation?"

"Yes, of course. The chef is the only one who'd know. Sometimes, of course, the chef himself answers the phone. But if he doesn't, we always leave the phone to check with him."

"And you didn't speak to her in English at all?"

"No, sir."

"And you didn't know her, other than through these phone conversations?"

"No, sir."

"Ever have breakfast with her?" Donny asked.

"Sir?"

"Did you ever . . ."

"No, of course not. I told you I didn't know her personally."

"All right, Mr. Loo, thank you very much. We may be back."

"Please feel free to return," he said a little coldly.

We left the restaurant, and outside Donny said, "So?"

"So now we know who she was speaking to. What do you think of him?"

"Educated guy. Could conceivably run in the same circles as a Columbia student. And if he *did* poison her this morning and then tell her about it on the phone, it's a cinch he'd lie his goddamned head off."

"Sure. Let's check Miss Chang's residence. Someone there might know whether or not Loo knew her better than he says he did."

5.

Mary Chang, when she was alive, lived at International House near the Columbia campus, on Riverside Drive. Her roommate was a girl named Frieda who was a transfer student from Vienna. The girl was shocked to learn of Miss Chang's death. She actually wept for several moments, and then she pulled herself together when we started questioning her.

"Did she have any boyfriends?"

"Yes. A few."

"Do you know any of their names?"

"I know *all* of their names. She always talked about them."

"Would you let us have them, please."

Frieda reeled off a list of names, and Donny and I listened. Then Donny asked, "A David Loo? Did he ever come around?"

"No, I don't think so. She never mentioned a David Loo."

"Never talked about him at all?"

"No."

"That list you gave us — all Chinese names. Did she ever date any American boys?"

"No. Mary was funny that way. She didn't like to go out with Americans. I mean, she liked the country and all, but I guess she figured there was no future in dating Occidentals." Frieda paused. "She was a pretty girl, Mary, and a very happy one, always laughing, always full of life. A lot of American boys figured her for . . . an easy mark, I suppose. She . . . she sensed this. She wouldn't date any of them."

"Did they ask her?"

"Oh, yes, all the time. She was always very angry when an American asked her for a date. It was sort of an insult to her. She . . . she knew what they wanted."

"Where'd she eat breakfast?"

"Breakfast?"

"Yes. Where'd she eat? Who'd she eat with?"

"I don't know. I don't remember ever seeing her eat breakfast."

"She didn't eat breakfast?"

"I don't think so. We always left here together in the morning. I have a job, too, you see. I work at Lord and Taylor's. I'm . . ."

"Yes, you left here together?"

"To take the subway. She never stopped to eat."

"Coffee?" I asked. "An English muffin? Something?"

"No, not when I was with her."

"I see. What subway did you take?"

"The Broadway line."

"Where did she get off?"

"At 72nd Street."

"What time did she get off the subway usually?"

"At about nine, or maybe a few minutes before. Yes, just about nine."

"But she didn't stop for breakfast."

"No. Mary was very slim, very well-built. I don't think she ate breakfast in the morning."

"She ate breakfast *this* morning," I said. "Thank you, Miss. Come on, Donny."

6.

There was an Automat on West 72nd Street, a few doors from Broadway. Mary Chang wouldn't have gone to the Automat because Mary Chang had to be at work at nine, and she got off the train at nine. We walked down the street, all the way up to the building that housed the offices of Gotham Lobster, close to Columbus Avenue.

There was a luncheonette on the ground floor of that building. Donny and I went inside and took seats at the counter, and then we ordered coffee.

When our coffee came, we showed the counter man our buzzers. He got scared all at once, the way some people will get scared when a cop shows his shield.

"Just a few questions," we told him.

"Sure, sure," he said. He gulped. "I don't know why . . ."

"You know any of the people who work in this building?"

"Sure, most of 'em. But . . ."

"Did you know Mary Chang?"

He seemed immensely relieved. "Oh, her. There's some trouble with her, ain't there? She got shot, or stabbed, or something, didn't she?"

"Did you know her?"

"I seen her around, yeah. Quite a piece, you know? With them tight silk dresses, slit up there on the side." He smiled. "You ever seen her? Man, I go for them Chinese broads."

"Did she ever eat here?"

"No."

"Breakfast?"

"No."

"She never stopped here in the morning for coffee?"

"No, why should she do that?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

"Well, what I mean, he always come down for the coffee, you know."

I felt Donny tense beside me.

"Who?" I asked. "Who came down for the coffee?"

"Why, Freddie. From the lobster joint. Every morning like clockwork, before he went upstairs. Two coffees, one heavy on the sugar. That Chinese broad liked it sweet. Also a jelly donut and a toasted English. Sure, every morning."

"You're sure about this?"

"Oh yes, sure. The boss didn't know nothing about it, you know. Mr. Godrow. He don't go for that junk. They always had their coffee before he come in in the morning."

"Thanks," I said. "Did Freddie come down for the coffee this morning?"

"Sure, every morning."

7.

We left the luncheonette and went upstairs. Freddie was working the addressing machine when we came in. The machine made a hell of a clatter as the metal address plates fed through it. We said hello to Mr. Godrow and then walked right to the machine. Freddie fed postcards and stepped on the foot lever and the address plates banged onto the cards and then dropped into the tray below.

"We've got an idea, Freddie," I said.

He didn't look up. He kept feeding postcards into the machine. The cards read MAINE LIVE LOBSTERS AT FANTASTIC PRICES!

"We figure a guy who kept asking Mary Chang out, Freddie. A guy who constantly got refused."

Freddie said nothing.

"You ever ask her out, Freddie?"

"Yes," he said under the roar of the machine.

"We figure she drove the guy nuts, sitting there in her tight dresses, drinking coffee with him, being friendly, but never anything more, never what he wanted. We figured he got sore at all the Chinese boys who could date her just because they were Chinese. We figure he decided to do something about it. Want to hear more, Freddie?"

"What is this?" Godrow asked. "This is a place of business, you know. Those cards have to . . ."

"You went down for your customary coffee this morning, Freddie."

"Coffee?" Godrow asked. "What coffee? Have you been . . ."

"Only this time you dumped strychnine into Mary Chang's. She took her coffee very sweet, and that probably helped to hide the bitter taste. Or maybe you made some comment about the coffee being very bitter this morning, anything to hide the fact that you were poisoning her."

"No . . ." Freddie said.

"She drank her coffee and ate her English muffin, and then — the way you did every morning — you gathered up the cups and the napkins and the crumbs and whatever, and you rushed out with them before Mr. Godrow arrived. Only this time, you were disposing of evidence. Where'd you take them? The garbage cans on Columbus Avenue? Do they collect the garbage early, Freddie?"

"I . . . I . . ."

"You knew the symptoms. You watched, and when you thought the time was ripe, you couldn't resist boasting about what you'd done. Mary was making a call. You also knew how these calls worked because you made them yourself. There was usually a pause in the conversation while someone checked with the chef. You waited for that pause, and then you asked Mary if she knew why she was feeling so ill. You asked her because you weren't making a call, Freddie, you were plugged in on her extension, listening to her conversation. She recognized your voice, and so she answered you in English. You told her then, and she jumped up, but it was too late, the convulsion came. Am I right, Freddie?"

Freddie nodded.

"You'd better come with us," I said.

"I . . . I still have to stamp the quotations on these," Freddie said.

"Mr. Godrow will get along without you, Freddie," I said. "He'll get himself a new boy."

"I . . . I'm sorry," Freddie said.

"This is terrible," Godrow said.

"Think how Mary Chang must have felt," I told him, and we left.

THEY thought they were through talking, but as far as I was concerned they'd just started.

"I'll have to know more," I said. "Especially the Why."

The man in the gray pin-stripe spoke. "I don't think that's necessary," he said.

"I haven't said I'll take the job," I reminded him.

The three of them shifted in their chairs and tried to come to an agreement with their eyes: the pin-stripe, the small olive-skinned man, and the big man who'd been eating too well for fifteen years.

I pointed to the man in the pin-stripe. "You start it off," I said.

My Game, My Rules

BY JACK RITCHIE

Without the girl, it would have been a simple job. But Johnny couldn't get the girl out of his mind . . .

They exchanged glances again, and then he sighed and got up. He was the kind of man who made after-dinner speeches and he had to get up when he talked.

"My name is Frederick Harlow," he said.

I shook my head. "No," I said. "You're Marcus Whitney Adrian."

His mouth sagged slightly and he had to look at the other two again.

"I lived in this town once," I said. "Everybody knows Marcus Whitney Adrian."

They thought about it, and then the man who liked food too much said, "Go ahead, Adrian. He probably knows, anyway. I thought his face was familiar."

This one was Sergeant Matt Hogan of the Sixth Precinct. A few years ago he had been Chief of Police Hogan.

Adrian shrugged his shoulders. "Very well, then. As you say, everyone knows me." He frowned at how to begin. "This has always been a clean city. . . ."

Hogan opened heavy lids. "Never mind the crap. Get to the point."

"All right," Adrian said irritably. "The point. The point is Bull Moberg."

The olive-skinned man, smiling quietly to himself, was Gino Cosmo. "Good old Bull Moberg," he said.

Adrian ignored him. "Moberg is an ignorant lout from what is commonly referred to as the other side of the tracks."

"Adrian's Row," Cosmo said, amiably. "Shacks, tenements, no culture, and high rents."

Adrian turned angrily. "The rents are in line with costs, and the houses are perfectly sound. Certainly better than those Bohunks and Da — those immigrants had where they came from."

Hogan stirred. "Lay off, Cosmo. You're making Adrian nervous, and you know he can't concentrate on two things at the same time." He lit a big cigar. "What Adrian's getting to is that he owns half the ground anybody walks on in this burg. Moberg's making him kick in a couple of hundred grand a year for protection."

Adrian was trembling with indignation now. "Moberg," he said, "threatened to have my houses condemned and torn down unless I agreed to pay him what he calls a 'percentage'."

He brought out a handkerchief and wiped his palms. "At first I refused to pay. I still have certain friends in the Judiciary. But then a lot of my houses began to catch fire, and the fire trucks always developed flat tires or got there too late. I've been paying ever since."

I looked over at Gino Cosmo, still smiling to himself. "What's *your* problem, Cosmo?" I asked.

"I see you know me, too," he said. He brought out a silver cigarette case and extracted a king-size. "Then you probably know I run a few places around town. Gambling houses, joints — places like that."

He lit the cigarette. "I liked Bull Moberg, and I was the one who gave him his first job. I stuffed him into an over-size tux and used him to scare the complainers."

He paused for a minute. "Yes," he said, thoughtfully. "Moberg is an impressive boy. Big and tough."

That touched something in Hogan. "If I was twenty years younger he wouldn't look so tough. I've cut his kind down to kindling before."

Cosmo eyed Hogan's stomach. "Just fall on him now. That's all you'd have to do."

They stared at each other for a moment, and then Cosmo cleared the smoke from his nostrils and went on. "Bull was a good boy. He was useful and he came up fast. In five years he was my right hand. A brother. Even a friend."

Cosmo ground out the cigarette. "And then one pretty night I came to work and Bull was sitting in my chair with his feet on the mahogany."

He reflected on it sadly and then resumed the smile. "You notice I smile a lot," he said. "That's because I've got good teeth. Also there are times when I can't do anything else.

"And so I smiled and he smiled and he kept his feet where they were. We had a new administration."

Cosmo showed his good teeth. "We're still friends," he said softly. "I get invited to his headquarters regularly for a drink, a look at his swanky furniture, and a peek or two at his dame.

"Her name is Helen," Cosmo said. His eyes hazed and his smile was envious. "If those blue eyes were for me, I wouldn't mind the seventy-five grand Bull costs me each year."

Not blue, I thought with sudden bitterness. *Violet.*

It was Hogan's turn now. He put a match to the dead end of his cigar and got it going. "If you know the others, you know me.

"Bull Moberg is just a small-time punk who got lucky. I knew he was growing and I figured to slap him down when he got too big. But I'm not the worrying type and I let it go until it was too late."

He chewed his cigar, remembering. "When I saw how things were — when I woke up and saw that he had the administration in his pocket — I was plenty willing to cooperate. But Moberg had other ideas and other men. Since then he's had me sitting in the Sixth sorting traffic tickets all day."

He took the cigar from his mouth. "Now you know everything."

The three of them sat expectantly and watched for me to talk.

"Moberg's got an organization," I said.

"Sure," Hogan said. "But he picked his own boys, and not for brains. Without Moberg, the organization won't last twenty-four hours." His eyes lit up. "The old days will come back. Adrian handles the property, Cosmo helps the citizens get rid of their dough, and I see that everybody stays in line. Every-

thing under control. Just like a three-decker sandwich."

Cosmo leaned forward in his chair. "There isn't anyone we can really depend on in this city. That's why we've had to send for you."

The three pairs of eyes focused on me and waited.

I let them stew while I tasted my drink. "All right," I said. "You're all nice people, and you've convinced me. I'll take the job."

The first part of my job is always to find out a man's routine, if he has one. You've got to be able to depend on it that a man will be at the same place at least once during every day. If you're lucky, it'll be at the same time.

At one o'clock the next afternoon, I parked about a hundred yards from the entrance of the Lake Crest where Bull had a penthouse apartment.

I lazed until four o'clock until Bull came striding out of the place. He was trailed by two muscle men who kept a couple of steps behind him.

A dark-blue chauffeur-driven Cadillac pulled up to the curb and Bull and his friends got in. I put my car into gear and kept a careful block behind.

Moberg made almost a dozen stops in the next four hours. It looked like he was checking his operations to make sure everybody was happy and paying.

At eight-thirty, he picked up Helen. I'd known about that, of course, for a couple of years now. There are always some smiling friends who let you know when something like that happens.

They dined leisurely at the Merrill House and then at ten they moved on to the Green Cockade, where everything costs the best.

Because I was hired for it, I paid some attention to Bull. He was big, plenty big, over two-fifty and carrying enough of that in the shoulders not to be bothered by it. His heavy face liked to roar with laughter and it liked to eat and drink.

And because I'd never gotten her out of my mind, I watched Helen too. Her eyes were the remembered violet, glistening violet. Her honey-blonde hair shimmered with each movement.

I was at the bar at the far end of the main room when she saw me. Our eyes held for seconds, and then she looked away. She kept her eyes on her hands for a long time before Bull said something sufficiently funny so that she could smile.

She came to the bar after a while.

"Hello, Johnny," she said quietly. "I made excuses, but I can only stay a minute."

"That's plenty," I said. It wasn't easy to say. She had been twenty when I left, and now she was four years lovelier.

Her face was expressionless. "Did you come back for anything?" she asked. "Perhaps you forgot something?"

"Just passing through," I said. "Having fun?"

Her eyes met mine. "Lots," she said.

"It's a living, anyway," I said.

She bit her lower lip. "I'm untouchable now. Is that it?"

I signalled the bartender for a refill. "I wouldn't say that," I told her. "Try to keep awake after Bull leaves your place tonight. Maybe I'll come up and — say hello."

"I'll be too tired," she said, her face white. She walked quickly away.

Bull took her back to her apartment at one-thirty. His two gorillas waited in the car, and Bull was back out at four.

I slept late the next day, but, by the time Bull was ready to make his rounds, I was waiting for him in my car. The routine was the same as the previous day, and Bull and Helen were at the Green Cockade at nine.

I was at the bar again when she came to me.

"I know you're not following *me*," she said. "What do you want here?"

"I'm here for a drink," I said.

She put her hand on my arm, but then pulled it back. "If it's Bull, be careful."

"Worried about me?" I asked.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

I looked over at the ringside table. "I figured you stopped worrying when you took up with Moberg . . ."

Her face was white again. "I waited two years," she said. "You never even wrote."

The bitterness was gone from inside me, suddenly, because I knew she was right — or, anyway, as right as I was. "I was waiting to raise a stake," I said. "The trouble is, I'm still waiting. You'd better go back to your table."

They left for her apartment at two, and I settled down outside for the hours to pass. But Bull was out again in twenty minutes, and from the way he slammed the door, he wasn't happy. It looked as though Helen wasn't in a cooperative mood.

I let his car disappear while I smoked another cigarette. Then I got out of the car and went up to her apartment.

She wore a black nylon robe, small-netted and transparent. It was held together at her breasts with the sparkle of a diamond pin.

She stood in the doorway with one hand on the doorknob. "If it's just this once, I don't want you here."

"My plans aren't definite yet," I said. "You want me to go?"

"You don't back up an inch, do you, Johnny? It has to be your way or not at all."

"I make the rules," I said. "Always."

She was silent, watching my face. Then she turned and walked back into the room, leaving the door open. "No," she said quietly. "I don't want you to go."

She waited for me and I put my arms around her. Her lips were warm with hunger, and she held me very

tight. My hands went over her, and when I let her go, she unfastened the diamond clip and the cloth slithered off her shoulders and was a black mist on the floor.

She was mine for now, and I knew that she had never wanted it any other way.

The next morning, I drove to Bull Moberg's hotel and walked to the entrance. I stood there looking up and down the street until I found what I wanted.

It was at the end of the block and across the street: a red brick five-story hotel called the Cary House.

I checked out of my own hotel and got a third floor room with a view of Bull's hotel at the Cary House. I had my suitcase taken up to the room while I had dinner in the Grill downstairs. Then I killed time at the bar until about twenty to four.

Upstairs in my room, I put the suitcase on the bed and opened it.

I began getting ready to do the thing the three of them had hired me for.

I assembled the pieces of the carbine and fitted the silencer. I opened the window, lit a cigarette, and waited for Bull Moberg.

At five after four, Bull and his two shadows came out of the wide doors of the Shore Crest. I ground out my cigarette and rested my elbow on the window sill.

The Cadillac pulled up to the curb. Bull began walking toward it.

I squeezed the trigger. The gun made no more noise than a rubber band snapped against a wall.

Bull Moberg took one more step and then he fell.

I closed the window and wiped away my fingerprints. The carbine was broken down and went back into the suitcase.

I put on my hat, picked up the suitcase, stopped to use a handkerchief on the doorknob, and then went out into the corridor.

I was in my car behind the Cary House three minutes after Bull died. In another twenty minutes I was outside the city limits and relaxed for the two-hour drive back to Chicago.

I wondered what kind of a scramble my clients would get into back there. I wondered whether they would return to the three-decker sandwich or whether one of them was big enough to step into Bull's shoes.

Not Adrian. He didn't have the guts for it and his line was more respectable, like rent gouging and slum profiteering.

It wouldn't be Matt Hogan either. That fat wasn't all belly. And he was getting old. His limit was being a crooked cop.

Cosmo was the best bet, but not a good one. He had it up there, but that smile got in the way. It made him too ready to be a good loser.

No. None of them had it. It took the three of them just to get up nerve enough to hire me.

I thought about the payment in my suitcase and I smiled until I thought higher.

I thought about the seventy-five grand Bull took from Cosmo, and the two hundred G's Adrian cried about each year.

I thought about those things and I thought about violet eyes and honey-blonde hair.

Bull was gone now and his machine would collapse because there was no one strong enough to take over.

Power, money, and soft blonde hair.

I slowed the car to a crawl and waited for an open spot in the traffic lane.

I made a U-turn and drove back.

BY
HUNT COLLINS

Association Test

"Boy," the psychiatrist said.

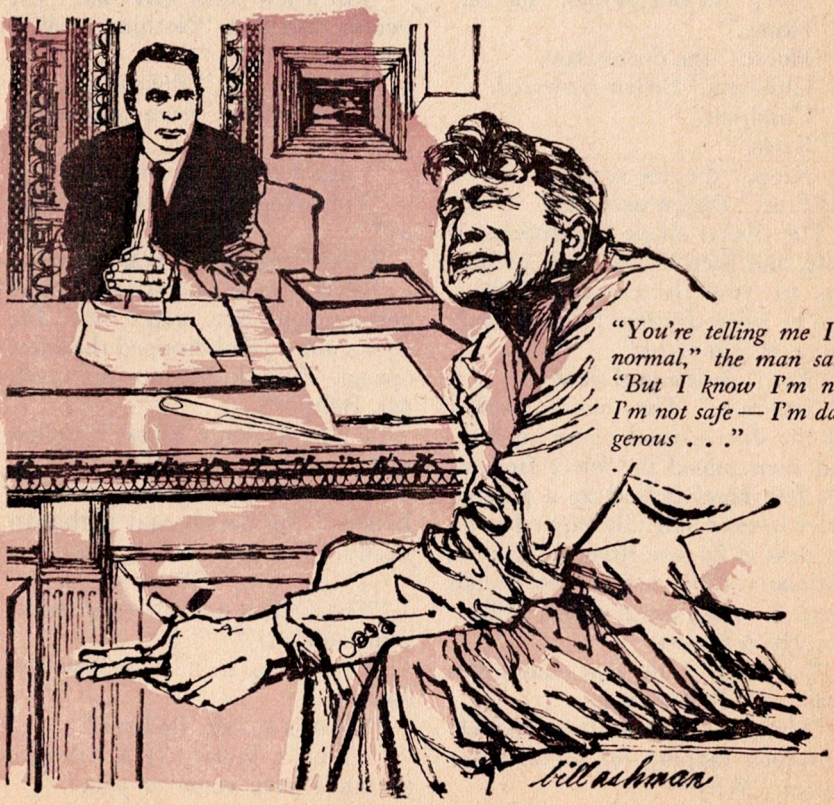
"Girl," the man answered.

"Black," the psychiatrist said.

"White," the man answered.

"Mmm," the psychiatrist said. He jotted some notes down on a sheet of paper, and then said, "All right, Mr. Bellew, let's go on, shall we?"

Bellew was a thin man with shaggy brown hair.



"You're telling me I'm normal," the man said. "But I know I'm not. I'm not safe — I'm dangerous . . ."

He twisted his hands nervously and said, "All right, doctor."

"Now then," the doctor said, consulting his notes. "Bird."

"Free," Bellow said.

"Did you say 'tree'?"

"No. No, I said 'free.' Free."

"Um-huh. Knife."

"Death."

"Um-huh. Red."

"Bl . . ."

"What did you say?"

"Blue. Blue was what I said."

"I see," the doctor said. "House."

"Home."

"Home," the doctor said.

"Children," Bellew answered.

"Children."

"Kites."

"Kites," the doctor said.

"Free," Bellew answered.

The doctor made a disinterested note, and then looked up. "According to your letter, Mr. Bellew, you've been disturbed about something, is that right?"

"Yes," Bellew said slowly.

"Um-huh." The doctor reached for the slitted envelope on his desk, and then pulled the letter from it. His free hand picked up a pointed letter opener and idly tapped it on the desk as he read from the sheet of stationary. "It's curious you should write. I mean, most people call, or stop by in person."

"I wanted to do that, but I was afraid to," Bellew said.

"Afraid to?" the doctor asked. He continued tapping the metal letter opener. "Why?"

"I . . . I don't like doctors," Bellew said nervously.

"Oh, come now. Don't you like me?"

"Well . . ."

"You *did* come here, didn't you? After I called you to arrange for an appointment, you did come, didn't you? You're here now, aren't you?"

"Yes," Bellew said. "I'm here."

"And it hasn't been so terrible, has it?"

"No, it hasn't."

"Just a few tests, that's all." The doctor chuckled. "Nothing at all to be afraid of."

"I suppose not," Bellew said.

"Then what's been disturbing you?"

"I don't know," Bellew said.

"You don't like doctors, is that it?"

Bellew hesitated. "Yes," he said.

"Well, I'm a doctor, and we're getting along fine, aren't we?" The doctor smiled and dropped the letter opener. "You do like me, don't you, Mr. Bellew?"

"I . . . I don't know," Bellew said.

"But we're getting along fine, Mr. Bellew," the doctor said enthusiastically. "You must admit that."

"Y . . . yes," Bellew said.

"There! You see how your dislike is unfounded?"

"I . . . no, I . . ." Bellew wet his lips.

"What is it, Mr. Bellew?"

"I don't know. If I knew, I wouldn't have come to you."

"Now, now, easy does it," the doctor said. "Quite frankly, Mr. Bellew, the tests we've just taken show no indication of any personality disturbance. I'm speaking off the cuff, you understand, since the tests must still be interpreted. But I can judge fairly accurately from a casual interpretation of your answers, and I'd say you were in the pink of mental health."

"The . . . the pink," Bellew repeated blankly.

"Yes, the pink. Top shape. Excellent form. Oh, a few anxieties, perhaps, but nothing serious." The doctor chuckled. "Nothing more than all of us are suffering in these nervous times."

"I . . . I can't believe that," Bellew said.

The doctor lifted his eyebrows. "But the tests . . ."

"Then the tests must be wrong," Bellew said firmly.

"No, I don't think so," the doctor said patiently. "Really, Mr. Bellew . . ."

"Are you trying to tell me I'm not disturbed when I know I'm disturbed?"

"There," the doctor said. "Most seriously disturbed persons don't even know they're disturbed. That's the root of all their troubles. When a person seeks the aid of a psychiatrist, seeks the doctor voluntarily, his battle is half won. Don't you see?"

"No. You haven't helped me at all. You've just told me I'm all right when I know I'm not all right."

"I said you may have a few anxieties, but we can clear those up in just a very short time. There's certainly nothing serious to worry about."

"I don't believe it," Bellew said.

"Well . . ." The doctor spread his hands wide. "I don't see how I can convince you." He paused, a blank expression on his face.

Bellew snorted disgustedly. "You're all the same," he said. "All you damn doctors."

"Now, now, Mr. Bellew . . ."

"Oh, don't 'now-now' me. All you're after is a fee, just like the rest. I tell you I'm sick, and you won't believe it. What the hell am I supposed to do? You just give me your damn tests and ask me to identify ink blots and associate words and . . . oh, what the hell."

"That's all part of your anxiety, Mr. Bellew," the doctor said. "As I said, we can clear that up in no time."

"That's what you say. On the basis of your damn tests," Bellew said, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"The tests are usually valid, Mr. Bellew," the doctor said. He paused, and then an inspired look crossed his face. "Say, look, I'll show you. I mean, I can show you just how normal you are, all right?"

"Go ahead," Bellew said tightly, his fists clenched now.

"Just give me the first word that pops into your mind when I give you a word. The way we just . . ."

"We did this already," Bellew said, a tic starting at the corner of his mouth.

"I know. But I want to show you something. Let's try it, shall we?" He paused and then said, "Boy."

"Girl," Bellew said.

"A perfectly normal response," the doctor said happily. "Girl."

"Woman," Bellew said.

"Again, a normal response. Woman."

"Bed," Bellew said.

"You see, Mr. Bellew, these are all normal responses." He rose from his desk and began walking around the room. "Bed," he said.

"Sheet," Bellew answered.

"Fine, fine," the doctor said. "Sheet."

"White."

"White," the doctor said.

"Flesh," Bellew answered.

"Flesh," the doctor said.

"Blood."

"All quite normal," the doctor said, turning his back and examining a picture hanging on the wall. "Flesh and blood, a normal association."

Bellew rose from his seat and stared at the doctor's back.

"Blood," the doctor said, still studying the picture.

"Knife," Bellew answered. His eyes fled to the desk top, and he reached for the letter opener there, grasping it in firm fingers.

"Knife," the doctor said wearily.

"Death," Bellew answered, walking swiftly around the desk and raising the sharp metal letter opener over his head.

"Death," the doctor repeated softly.

The letter opener sped downward with a terrible rush. It sank between the doctor's shoulder blades, and Bellew screamed, "Death, death, death, *Death!*" as the doctor sank to the floor.

Two Grand

DOUG WALLACE thought he knew all about dames and love. He'd had plenty of experience — almost any chick in L. A. could tell you that.

But it took his brother's wife, Sadie, to teach him how a hill country woman can love.

She wasn't one of those smooth, sophisticated girls. She lived back in the Ozarks on Jim Wallace's farm and she'd probably gone barefooted until she was fifteen. Doug met

Doug was safe. He could stay hidden for years on his brother's farm — with his brother's beautiful wife . . .

BY CHARLES BECKMAN, JR.

her when he took a vacation one summer to get away from the heat — the kind of heat that Mannie Lewis puts on a guy for not paying his gambling debts.

It was nice and peaceful where Jim lived, with the hills and trees all around and the little cabin with the smoke curling from the stone chimney.

Jim was really glad to see his younger brother, Doug. They sat over a supper of fried chicken, corn bread and turnip greens that first night and Jim told Doug how glad he was to see him.

"You stay around with us as long as you want, Doug. We don't get much company up here. We're plumb tickled to have somebody like you to pass the time with us. Ain't that so, Sadie?"

His wife lowered her tremendous blue eyes and agreed softly. "We're real glad to have you, Doug." For some reason she hadn't looked straight at him since he'd come.

Doug yawned and leaned back, patting his full stomach contentedly. He glanced around the cabin, at the rough-hewn beams, the smoke-darkened walls, the red checkered oil cloth on the table. Then he looked at his brother, a tall, rangy man in loose fitting overalls and he thought that sometimes it paid to have a hick brother who lived at the end of nowhere. Mannie would never find him in this God-forsaken place.

"Tell us about L. A., Doug," Jim urged, shaking loose tobacco out of a can into a flimsy cigarette paper. "I was up there for a couple days before the army shipped me overseas. But I never got to see much of it."

Doug shrugged. He took out a platinum cigarette case, offered some ready-rolls around and then began talking. Jim sat back in his hide-bottom chair, smoking and listening. Sadie, who had looked everywhere but at Doug ever since he'd driven in this afternoon, now began watching him.

Doug was a handy man with his tongue. The old-fashioned clock ticked steadily in the other room as he rattled on. And as he talked, Sadie's big blue eyes got more and more fascinated by his face. Her lips parted slightly and she looked like a person under a spell. It made Doug a little uncomfortable the way she was staring at him.

They kicked it around until midnight, and finally Doug went on off to bed. Just before he fell asleep, he got to thinking that there was something strange going on between Jim and his wife, Sadie. You noticed it in the way they'd look at each other, sometimes. A peculiar tension.

Well, Doug didn't lose any sleep over it — not that night, anyway.

The next morning, he got up around ten o'clock and moseyed into the kitchen. Sadie was in there, busying herself over the drainboard. She gave a little cry and jumped around when he came in. Then she laughed. "Gee, you gave me a start, Doug. Here, sit at the table."

After he'd swallowed enough coffee to start his gears in motion, Doug grunted, "You sure are jumpy."

"You think so?" She laughed again, but it sounded a bit forced. "I just had my mind on something else when you came in. That's all."

Doug stared at her. The warmth from the stove had brought a deep color to her throat and cheeks. She bustled around, setting things on the table for him and Doug noted, with the eye of a connoisseur, the movement of her hips and the supple twist of her slender waist when she bent over to pull the biscuits out of the oven.

She was maybe twenty-two. She had the healthy, deep-chested body of a woman reared in the hills. Her hair was honey colored and down to her shoulders. Jim's old army shirt, which she wore tucked in her blue jeans, had the sleeves rolled up and the top buttons open.

Once, when she leaned over the table to set a plate in front of Doug, the shirt fell away from the two full, creamy mounds beneath it. She caught Doug's glance and straightened abruptly, coloring as she fumbled at the buttons.

Doug ate his breakfast, paying no more attention to her. After all, Jim was her husband and no doubt well able to take care of her. Virility ran strong in the Wallace men.

After breakfast, Doug strolled outside and looked over the Buick convertible that had brought him here from California. Maybe he could get two thousand for it, if he was lucky. That still left him two grand short of what he owed Mannie.

He knew there was no going back to L. A. for him until he figured some way to pay Mannie back, with interest.

Then he noticed that Jim was walking behind a plow in a nearby meadow. For want of anything better to do, Doug wandered down there. He was swearing by the time he reached his brother. His yellow flannel slacks were full of burrs and the thick clods of freshly turned dirt had soiled the white part of his two-tone sport shoes.

"Mornin', Doug," Jim grinned. He stopped his mule, slung the reins over a shoulder and leaned on his plow handle. "Hope we didn't wake you this mornin'. We get up with the chickens."

Doug took out his case and offered Jim a cigarette. They smoked for a while, then Doug said, "You got a nice place here. Nice lookin' wife. You're doin' okay, Jim."

The strange look that Doug had noticed the night before came into Jim's face. It was a tight look that strained the corners of his eyes and cut bitter lines around his mouth.

"Yeah," he said flatly. "We got everything — and nothing, Doug. Funny, the damn lousy things life can do to you —"

Doug was a little surprised at the deep hatred in his brother's tone. Jim seemed to want to get some-

thing off his chest, but Doug didn't prompt him. He didn't particularly give a damn about his brother's troubles; he had enough of his own. But he listened, if for no better reason than to pass the dull morning.

Jim avoided his brother's eyes. He looked like a man driven to the point where he had to talk about his trouble, and yet ashamed to put it into words.

"The war was rough on a lot of guys," he half mumbled. I guess I got no call to bitch. But why couldn't I have got it some other way? I wouldn't have minded losing an arm or a leg, Doug. You can still be a man with an arm or leg missin'. But not with —" He shook his head and crushed a dry clod beneath his heavy brogans. "I begged Sadie to leave me when I come back. I told her over and over what it'd be like — that I couldn't be a real husband any more. But she stuck by me. It's been hell for both of us, but she won't leave me. She's a wonderful girl, Doug, and faithful. I reckon I'd pretty near die if she *did* go away. . . ."

It gradually dawned on Doug what the hell his brother was talking about. His eyes opened wide. So — now he understood it. The feeling of tension in the house, the strained looks on Jim's and Sadie's faces.

He remembered vaguely that Jim had gotten the Purple Heart for being shot in Korea. But now he knew *where* Jim had been shot. As Jim said — that was a hell of a thing to happen to a man. Especially if the man had a wife like Sadie.

In a little while, Jim went back to plowing. Doug walked down to the creek. He sat on the bank and tossed pebbles into the water.

Now he knew why Sadie was so jumpy and nervous. He grinned widely. Let's see, he thought, they'd been married less than a year when Jim went overseas, two years ago. That made two years now that she'd been doing without.

Some women could take it or leave it alone. But not a woman like Sadie, Doug knew. He grinned again.

The next morning, he was down at the creek and Sadie came down after some chickens that had strayed.

"Hi, kid," Doug said.

She gave a little start, then came over and sat on the bank beside him. "You surprised me again," she said, smiling at him.

"Your nerves sure are jumpy," Doug said, grinning inwardly. "Something eating you?"

"No," she answered quietly. " 'Course not." She kicked her shoes off and rolled her blue jeans up to her knees. Then she dangled her bare feet in the creek water.

Doug stared at the water swirling around her slender white ankles. The calves of her legs were smooth and rounded. His eyes followed them up to her knees. It had been over a week since he left the girls in L. A. He was beginning to miss

them. The boredom of sitting around all day didn't help any, either.

He trailed his fingers in the water. Then, suddenly, he slid his palm up the smooth curve of her calf. "Ol' Jim sure can pick 'em," he grinned at her.

She jerked her leg away as if she'd gotten an electric shock. She edged a few feet away from him. "You — you oughtn't say things like that, Doug. It . . . ain't proper."

Doug raised his eyebrow. "You're my sister-in-law, aren't you? Nothin' wrong with a man being friendly with his sister." He edged closer.

She began breathing hard. "I — I guess I better go look for the chickens," she said nervously. But she didn't leave.

He rested one hand in the grass, beside hers and leaned over until less than an inch separated their lips. All the time he was grinning.

He had a right to be sure of himself. After all, Doug Wallace was a pretty good-looking guy. Ask any girl in L. A. They couldn't resist him.

Her breath was coming hard through her lips. Her eyes were wide and terrified. A cord in her neck stood out and her whole body was rigid as if she were fighting to hold it back.

Then something in her snapped and she leaped to her feet. For a moment she stood there, trembling. Then, angrily, she whispered, "Don't you never do anythin' like — like that again!" And she turned and ran up the trail.

Doug lay back on the grass, laughing softly to himself. He was pleased that she hadn't given in right away. It always whets a man's appetite to have to work for it a little. He began whistling. Maybe he was going to enjoy farm life after all.

That night Sadie didn't say much at the supper table, but twice Doug glanced up and caught her eyes on him.

Once, she got up to go to the pantry after some more sugar. Doug said he'd help her and followed her into the old-fashioned shelf-lined pantry. There, in the dark, he moved close to her and ran his hand down the soft curve of her back.

He felt her body shudder and grow rigid.

"Don't, Doug," she whispered. "For God's sake, he's right in the next room!"

"Meet me at the creek again in the morning?" Jim whispered, his lips brushing her ear.

"No! Please let me go."

"Not unless you promise to meet me at the creek."

"I — I don't know. . . ."

"I'll be there at ten, baby," he whispered.

The next morning he lay on his back on the grassy bank of the creek, looking up at the clouds that moved like cotton balls across the blue sky. He had his fingers laced behind his head and he was whistling.

Then he heard the grass rustle. In a moment, she sat down beside him. Today she was wearing a thin calico dress instead of the blue jeans. She arranged the dress around her knees, and sat there, her back stiff, staring at the rippling creek.

"You look pale, baby," Doug said softly. "You got circles under your eyes. You look like you didn't sleep good last night, maybe."

She touched the tip of her tongue to her lips. "Listen, Doug," she began, "I want you to go away. Today. I want you to make up some story to tell Jim and I want you to get in your fancy car and go away from here. You ain't welcome at this house no more!"

Doug chuckled softly. He reached over and ran his fingers up the soft inside of her arm.

Again, her body gave the convulsive shudder.

He sat up and leaned toward her the way he had done the day before. "Doesn't it get hard, baby," he said very softly, "not having a man?"

Her full breasts rose and fell, tugging at the thin dress. "He — *told* you," she breathed.

His lips were drawing very near to hers. "Yeah," he murmured, "he told me. You're not the kind of woman that can live that way, Sadie."

Her throat worked. A hot, sleepy look was creeping into her eyes. "You don't know what you're doin' to me," she said in a monotone.

The corners of Doug's lips twitched. "I know what I'm doin'," he answered. The excitement was growing in him. She was a lot of woman. And there was two years of passion stored up in her body.

His lips came down on hers. Her mouth opened with a choked sob and she grabbed at his back, clawing him with her fingers as she dragged herself up against him. Then, with almost the same movement, she leaped to her feet and ran up the trail, crying.

Doug leaned against a tree and swore softly, but eloquently.

The next morning he awakened to the sound of water running in the bathroom. He lay there listening for a while. Presently, the water stopped running and there was the sound of splashing in the tub.

A smile crept across his lips. He got up and padded down the hall, stood in front of the bathroom door, listening. Then, suddenly, he turned the knob and walked in.

Sadie was in the tub. She gave a little shriek and tried, without much success, to cover herself with her soapy hands and the wash rag.

Doug stood there, grinning. "Why, I'm sorry, baby. Jim really ought to fix the lock on this door."

She scrambled out of the tub and grabbed for a towel. "Get out, Doug," she ordered.

But he moved closer. He put his arms around her and pulled her up, hard against him.

She began crying hopelessly.

"Quit fighting it, baby," he said softly.

"No — you don't understand."

"I understand. Two years is a long time, honey."

"That ain't what I mean. It's me. I ain't like them girls of yours in Los Angeles."

" 'Course not."

"I'm — if I belong to a man, it's got to be for always. You understand that, Doug?"

"Why, sure, baby. I wouldn't want it any other way."

He kissed her and she began clinging to him and her voice grew thick. "Please don't," she begged in a monotone. "He's your brother. Please don't do this to your brother. . . ."

His only answer was a soft laugh as he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom.

Through the bedroom window could be seen the crest of a hill a quarter mile away, and on it, the outline of Jim's rangy form plodding behind his mule and plow. . . .

Doug and Sadie met regularly down at the creek after that. She was quite a woman all right. There wasn't any end to her wanting him.

One day, about a week later, they were lying close together on the grass, holding hands. Sadie asked him when he was going back to Los Angeles.

"Soon's I figure where to get a couple grand," he sighed. "I owe a guy back there four grand. I can sell the car for a couple thousand, but that leaves two more I got to raise."

"Can't the man wait on the two thousand?"

Doug laughed softly. "He ain't that kind of guy, honey."

She looked up at the clouds moving across the sky. Idly, Doug watched the stirring of her breasts as she breathed.

"I know where you can get four thousand," she said, suddenly.

He came up on one elbow excitedly. "That's a lot of dough, honey. You sure?"

" 'Course." Her blue eyes moved toward his face. There was a deep intensity in her eyes. It was there constantly now, smoldering possessively when she looked at him. "You got to take me with you, though. I told you — I'd never let you go if I ever once belonged to you."

"Why, sure I'll take you along, baby," he said, willing to promise her anything to get out of his mess. He could get rid of her easily enough, once they were in L. A. And he had a feeling he was going to tire of her in a hurry.

"Well, then," she said, "I'll get the money in the mornin'. We can wait until Jim goes into the field, an' then you can ride me into town. We'll git the money an' keep right on goin'."

"Look," he said, "it ain't that I don't trust you. But four grand — that's a lot of dough. How —"

She closed her eyes. "Jim's got it

in the bank," she said calmly. "He's been savin' it ever since we was married. Some of it's his army pay. I can sign for it too, the way he's got it fixed up at the bank."

So the next morning, Doug Wallace headed out of the hills, going west with his brother's wife and his brother's savings.

L. A. looked good to Doug again. The buildings looked good. The bars looked good. The dames looked good. Even Mannie Lewis was a welcome sight.

They might have gotten along all right there, if Doug could have left the dames alone. But a guy like Doug Wallace made women his career. And his motto was "variety is the spice of life."

Sadie cried a lot those days. She waited up in the apartment he had rented for them, and cried softly to herself. And sometimes, at night, she'd look down at him in bed beside her and whisper, "You're no good, Doug. You cheat on me and hurt me, and I love you so. There ain't no man I ever loved like I do you."

And he'd tell her to shut up so he could get some sleep. He was getting tired of her nagging at him about his infidelities and he had a good mind to kick her out of the apartment. But he wasn't entirely through with her, yet. She had something that these smog-fed chicks didn't possess. It was hard to find a woman that could love like Sadie.

And then he met Mannie's red-headed wife, Laurie. The first slow smile she gave him scorched her lipstick. And he'd decided that the time had come to kick Sadie out of the apartment. In Laurie, he'd finally met a woman that could give Eve lessons.

It would have been a nice romance if Mannie hadn't found out. He did find out, though, and he came up to Doug's apartment with a gun one night. Mannie was a very jealous guy. He was short, bald headed, sallow faced, and he was sensitive about his young red-headed wife playing footsie with handsome guys like Doug.

"Look, Mannie," Doug said, licking his lips. "You got this all wrong —"

Lewis stood there with the gun in his hand and a wintery smile on his lips. "How dumb do you think I am, you lousy punk?" He lifted the gun and centered it on the third button of Doug's shirt.

Doug stood there bathed in sweat and trembling. He tried to think of something else to say, but his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth.

Sadie reached up and snapped the light switch just before Mannie pulled the trigger. It saved Doug's life.

There was an interval of darkness, with Mannie's gun exploding every once in a while. Then an agonized scream and in a moment the sodden fall of a body.

Doug spoke in a careful voice.

"Put the light back on, Sadie."

She reached for the same switch.

They didn't move for a minute or two. Sadie stared with wide open eyes at the body of Mannie Lewis on the floor at her feet. She'd never seen a murdered man before, and Mannie was awfully dead.

Shakily, Doug bent over and pulled the spring knife out of Mannie's chest. He wiped the blade on Mannie's imported silk shirt and put it back in his coat pocket. "We got to get out of here," he whispered. "You don't kill a guy like Mannie Lewis and just forget about it. His boys will be up here after me."

They drove like crazy, getting out of L. A. Sadie sat beside him, her face a white mask in the glow from the dash.

"You was carryin' on with that man's wife," she said in a dead voice. "He said so —"

"For God's sake," Doug screamed. "Is that all you can think of? Get this through your dumb, country head. I just killed Mannie Lewis. As far as the cops are concerned, it's self-defense. But that won't be the way the Syndicate and Mannie's boys will look at it. The minute word gets around, a half dozen of Mannie's best guns will be out looking for me for cooling their boss. Understand?"

She never had the chance to answer that. They started into a curve that was never built for a car doing ninety-five. The howl of rubber on concrete was like the scream of a tortured woman. Then a ripping crash of two thousand dollars worth of steel and chromium turning into fifty dollars worth of junk — followed by silence.

Doug opened his eyes painfully. He could see a patch of star-dotted sky. Outlined against it, was a white-walled tire on a wheel, slowly revolving. He tried to move and he couldn't. He opened his mouth and a sound came out. But he couldn't move his arms.

Somebody bent over the patch of sky. A woman with blood all over her face . . . clothes torn away from white flesh that leaked blood.

"Doug?" she said. It was a strange way that she said it. It sounded like a cat mewing.

He swallowed some of the blood. When he tried to talk again, he made a gurling sound with the words. "Sadie. Sadie, I can't move. My arms. Something's on them. Get somebody, Sadie."

"Doug?" She bent over him, touching his cheek with the tip of her fingers. "Doug, I love you so much," she said.

"Listen," he gurgled, "get hold of yourself, Sadie. Go run for help. This car might start burning any minute and I'm stuck here."

But she didn't seem to hear him. She whispered, "I love you so much, but you're bad clear through."

She was fumbling in his coat, going through his pockets. "Sadie," he croaked, "are you nuts? Stop wasting time. Go get help."

She found what she was looking for. She took it out and pressed the spring. The sharp, seven-inch blade that had killed Mannie Lewis a few minutes ago leaped out and glittered in the starlight.

Doug stared up at it, fascinated. Sweat began running down his forehead, getting into his eyes. "Sadie," he whispered. "You wouldn't do anything crazy, would you? Look, kid, I love you. Honest. Those other dames didn't mean anything to me. I swear. I won't play around any more, Sadie. I swear I won't."

"I know you won't, honey," she answered, with a little smile playing across her lips. "I know you won't. I'm going to fix it so you won't ever be bad again."

She bent over him. "I used to think it was hell, when I was married to Jim, because he got shot that way in the war and couldn't be a man for me any more. But now I know it's worse'n hell to be married to a man's that's chasin' after every girl he sees. I think it's better to be livin' with a man in the shape Jim was, honey."

She was crying. "I love you, Doug, honey. I love you too much to share you with any other woman. . . ."

It suddenly occurred to Doug Wallace what she was going to do. He began screaming. He was screaming so loud that the people who were coming to investigate the wreck, heard him blocks away.

The cop thought his wife would be safe from the prowler. Sure, he had to leave her alone — but he'd taught her

The Judo Punch

SHE was not in the apartment when he came in, though her perfume hung in the air like a tune that had been finished only a moment ago. He stood, frowning, a heavy, fair-complexioned man in the blue uniform of a beat policeman. Then he shrugged, peeled the coat from his back and went into the kitchen. He fixed himself a drink, very strong, and went back to an easy chair. He was off for the rest of the week; Saturday afternoon had arrived.

Her portrait stood over the piano — a gold-framed, tinted picture. She was an incredibly good-looking woman to be a beat policeman's wife. She looked like Hol-

BY

V. E. THIESSEN

lywood, or Palm Springs, or Miami Beach — the kind you'd see with a guy with a Caddy and plenty of dough. She was twenty-seven, but the photograph looked younger.

He lifted his drink and toasted the photograph, the perfume tickling memories into a faint excitement. The photograph showed the platinum sheen of her hair, and something of the sea color of her eyes. It didn't quite do justice to her figure.

But then, he thought, that would be quite a trick for a photograph. Drink in hand, he wandered to the window and looked out. He saw her coming, a grocer's sack in her arms; she was walking along the alley that was a short cut to the shopping district. Something about the way she walked caught his attention.

It wasn't just that she wore a yellow sweater and skirt, and must have worn it without a thing underneath. And it wasn't just the way the skirt moulded the rest of her figure. There was something else, a haste in her walk, an excitement, a strain that he saw dimly on her face as she rounded the corner by the window and was out of sight for an instant.

Then he heard the click of the latch on the door, and she came into the room with a tapping of four-inch spike heels. She looked at him, and she was breathing hard, too hard, just to have been walking. The sea-green of her eyes was overlaid with a faint grey. She eased the grocery sack down on an end table and looked at him. She said, "I saw him again, the man with the broken nose. He's found me again. He followed me most of the way home."

He moved close and took her in his arms, feeling her mould against him under the sweater, feeling her excitement, the trembling that came from suspecting what the man wanted.

He said, "All right, honey. I'll check all the locks. Nights I'm on duty you stay home. No more short cuts up that alley. Next week, maybe, I'll speak to the boys downtown, and maybe we can set a trap for him."

She said, shakily, "Maybe it's just coincidence. Maybe he wasn't following me."

He said, "Sure, Angel, maybe that's it. But be careful anyway."

But he didn't think it was coincidence. Last winter, before they had moved his beat to this side of town, the broken-nosed guy had followed her a couple of times. He'd figured an apartment this side of town would be better, in view of the new beat, and they'd moved.

He felt her draw back from him. The grey film over her eyes deepened. Her breath was shallow. She said, "That trick with the hand — the judo blow that you showed me before. How did it go?"

He turned her loose. He said, "You do it with the edge of the hand, chopped against the neck. It must be very sharp, and very severe,

if you ever have to use it. If you try it and fail, it will be worse than if you didn't try it."

She said, "You can kill like that?"

"I suppose so. But you won't. You'll just paralyze him until you can get away." He put the edge of his hand against her neck to show her just where. He heard her breathing coming more quickly, shallower. She pressed against him, and he could feel the tremble of her hips, and see that the grey had almost covered her eyes. He slid his hand down, then up under the sweater. She didn't have anything under it. She strained toward his touch.

She moaned once, just before he picked her up and carried her toward the back of the apartment.

They had steak for dinner, and after that she wanted to go to the fights, but he was too tired. He'd met her at the fights, and while they were courting he'd taken her there often. He closed his eyes, remembering that, remembering the way her breathing would quicken at a good fight, the way her body wouldn't stay still.

It was good, he thought, that she was like that. A cop's life was violent, at times, and it would be bad to have a woman who was too soft, too clinging. Once in a while they'd have a big thing, and he'd tell her about it, so that she'd understand this part of a cop's life that was different than the life of a banker, for instance.

There'd been the time they trapped Johnny Navarra in a warehouse, and Johnny had shot three cops before they got him with the riot gun. When he told Angel about things like that, she was scared, all right, and she began to breathe fast, like she had when he'd demonstrated that judo blow. But scared as she was, she never said, "Let's talk about something else."

Lucky, he thought. How does a guy get so lucky? He stole a glance at her, over the magazine he was reading. She was sitting, legs tucked back under her, sewing a button on his uniform shirt, her full lips twisted into concentration on the simple task.

He was still telling himself how lucky he was when the telephone rang. He grinned at her, and said, "I'll get it."

When he turned from the telephone he said unhappily, "Got to go down to the station for a few hours. Some kind of special investigation. I ought to be back by midnight."

She put the shirt down and moved to kiss him goodbye. Her eyes were the clear green of the sea. He said, "Keep the windows down and locked, Angel. A man can come through a screen, or unhook it easy. And keep the draperies closed."

"But it's so hot —" she said.

"Be cool in a few hours. Better keep the windows down." He went around the apartment, shutting the windows and locking them. He went out, hearing the night latch click

behind him. She'd be all right, he figured.

The job at the station took longer than he thought. There was a rumble that some cop had taken a loan from a big-time gambler. He hadn't known a thing about it, but it took them quite a while to get around to asking him. He got back to the apartment about one o'clock in the morning. He figured Angel would be in bed, asleep, and he let himself in with care, so as not to awaken her. A dim light came from the bedroom, the night light, and for an instant he thought he heard voices.

He moved swiftly into the bedroom. A heavy man stood over Angel's bed, one hand on her throat, pinning her to the bed. With the other hand he held a gun, pointing at her breast. She was only half-covered with the sheet and, as always in hot weather, she was sleeping nude. As the man held her he was talking to her, telling her what he was going to do, giving her the details.

He leaped for the man, jerking him back from the bed, trying to get him where he could break that gun wrist with a special hold. But he was a bit slow, and the intruder half whirled, and then he was holding that gun wrist, struggling with the man in a kind of crazy dance. Close like this, he could see the twisted face and the broken nose.

As they struggled he saw Angel had come out of the bed, and was standing against the wall as they fought.

The intruder was younger than he was, and stronger and harder. He fought, knowing what was at stake here. His eyes caught Angel's as they writhed, and he gasped, "His neck, Angel, the edge of the hand!" He saw her eyes greying and heard the panting of her breath.

Then he saw her move in from the side, saw her raise her hand.

And then there was pain, staggering, sudden pain in his neck and shoulder that froze him, and loosened his muscles. He tried to cling so that she could see her mistake; that she had hit the wrong man. She could run and scream, if he gave her time. He saw her raising her hand for another blow, and then her eyes met his, and horror washed over him at what he saw in them. The second blow paralyzed him, and he felt himself releasing the gun wrist, sliding down the other man's body, unable to hold himself.

And he saw, as he crumbled, that Angel wasn't running, wasn't screaming, but was standing there, waiting. Her eyes were grey, and one part of his mind could hear the vast quickening of her breath.

Then he felt the man with the broken nose stepping toward him, saw him raise the gun and slash downward, and the blackness came, the vast, cascading blackness that comes with a gun slapped against the skull.

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Hooked!

Down in Memphis, Tenn., a thief, tired of the beaten path, shot a circular hole in the plate glass window of a downtown jeweler's with an air pistol. Then, producing a fishing pole, he calmly hooked himself $3,300 in gems and departed with the loot.

Teetotaller, Too!

In Dallas, Tex., George Gallo, questioned by FBI Agent Vincent Drain, freely gave details of his robbery of a bank in Stamford, Conn.

Then, offered a cigarette, he stiffly refused.

"Thanks, but I haven't any bad habits," he assured the FBI man.

The Light That Failed

An embittered Chicago woman called police to report the loss of $400. Six gypsies who stopped at her house appeared so friendly that she served them coffee and doughnuts. When they somehow appropriated her savings, she was stricken in heart as well as purse.

"Guess I'll have to find a new job," she said sadly.

Her career as a professional character reader hadn't paid off.

Rank Injustice

The sheriff of Delaware Co., Indiana, recently had a neat problem on his hands, when Ed Femyer, Justice of the Peace in Yorktown, was given a 15-day jail sentence for drunken driving.

The diligent Justice wanted his docket brought down to his cell. "If I have to go to jail I want to take my books with me. I've got a lot of things to attend to right now."

But Sheriff Pete Anthony decided differently. He insisted that no court be held in his cells.

Lonely Heart

In McLeansboro, Ill., a compassionate woman ran the following ad in the local journal: "Will the person or persons who took all my hens and left the old rooster come and get him. He is lonesome."

You Can't Win

G. H. Ford of Dallas, Tex., operates a cafe which, in the past four years, has been burglarized 24 times. Tiring of the deal, he rigged up a shotgun pointing toward the window the thieves had been using, and set it to go off when the screen was tampered with.

Several days later the disgruntled Ford reported to police that the twenty-fifth burglary had occurred.

This time thieves had not only rifled the vending machine but stole the shotgun too. They had entered by another window.

The Biter Bit

The sneak thief who "lifted" a box set down by a busy shopper in Muncie, Ind., made the most surprising haul of his career recently.

Reporting the incident, the woman told police about her sad loss. Since she had no yard in which to bury her treasure, she was taking the box to relatives outside of town. Contents: the body of her pet cat.

A Bus Named Revenge

For 24 years John Snay has been a bus driver in the Detroit area, calmly bearing up under the vagaries of passengers. But recently he took on the school bus, and found teenagers another story.

Finally the day came when his patience reached its limit, and Snay turned the tables in a calculated revenge. Once the doors shut on the yelling youngsters, he shot off course and careened madly on a non-stop ride through northeast Detroit, paying no heed to their frantic pleas for a halt.

One hour later Snay dropped the load of cowed teensters at the high-school steps and let them get home under their own steam.

"I just got fed up," he told officials. "It was the same thing every day. A bunch of clowns screaming, pulling the bell rope, running up and down the aisles. When they started shooting off firecrackers, I let them have it."

City officials decided he had administered a well-earned punishment and let him off without rebuke.

Stolen Heart Murder

One of the Orient's most bewildering crimes took place in Peiping on the night of Jan. 8, 1937, when a beautiful and prominent young girl, adopted daughter of a British civil servant, was declared missing.

Pamela Werner, 19 years old, was home from her convent school to spend the Christmas holidays with her widowed father. Pamela, a studious girl, had only recently found a group of more active friends. On this January afternoon she went ice skating, then had tea with a girl, whom she left to go home to dinner.

From that time nothing is known of her movements until her father found her body, nude and mercilessly slashed in a Chinese slum alley. A $200 watch remained on her wrist, but her clothes, skates and purse were never found.

Each of her new friends had an unshakeable alibi. But some undiscovered person, possessed of a surgeon's skill, had climaxed a fiendish murder by expertly removing and stealing her heart.

Robin Hood Daze

A bow and arrow caught a prowler for Robert Dale of Los Angeles. Awakened by his dog early one

morning, Dale saw a man racing up the hill. The only weapons available were a bow and arrow, but Dale set after him in true medieval style. The stunned man, Albert B. Collins, 41, was flushed from some bushes and held at drawn arrow until the arrival of police, who booked him on suspicion of burglary.

Piece Work

Robert Richards, 36, a contractor of Nachusa, Ill., and an employe, Henry Moffatt, 26, of Grand Detour, Ill., were caught by police after stealing enough material from half-built houses in the vicinity to build one of their own.

According to their confession they picked up $640 worth of lumber, and a second load from another home site a few days later. On the third foray they made off with all bathroom fixtures, a kitchen sink, picture window and a back door. Their plans calling for more items, Moffatt said, they then helped themselves to a front door and eight windows. Later, they acquired still more lumber, cement and nails.

Their plan was to build a house and sell it at approximately 100% profit. Moffatt told police that he and his boss were ready to start building "pretty soon."

Prince of Poverty

When Boston police took into custody Chester Sargent, 60, for attempting to steal a $25 topcoat in a department store, they were astounded to find in his billfold $11,425 in cash.

Questioned, Sargent was also surprised. He'd thought it was only about $5,000, "but hadn't counted it for some time."

He had been in Boston only three weeks after living a year in Springfield. His sympathetic landlady, on his plea of poverty, had reduced by twenty-five cents his $4 weekly rent. His record disclosed that, 23 years before, he had been sentenced as a "common and notorious thief" to three years in prison.

The Magic Touch

In Detroit recently, Charlie Conrad proved himself expert at slipping handcuffs, but not so expert at evading the police. After a tavern brawl on New Year's Day, police handcuffed him to a hospital bed during treatment.

In a few minutes he escaped, only to be found hiding outside in the parking lot. Once more he escaped minus handcuffs. The third time, peeking through a crack, officers saw him start to pick the locks with tinfoil from his cigarettes. Then they put him on the ninth floor of the county jail, behind four locked doors. On the way to the jail from the hospital he had amused the police by picking locks, an art he had learned, he said, as a magician in a road show.

This time, Conrad said, he'd stay put. "I always get caught again anyway," he observed philosophically.

Sanctuary

Joe Varden was worth $1,000 if you caught him. Pete had him at gun-point — but Pete could never turn Joe Varden in.

BY

W. W. HATFIELD

JOE VARDEN stood in swamp water up to his armpits, and his feet kept sinking deeper into the ooze. Sawgrass hid his head and shoulders, but it would betray him if he moved. The boat was only three rods away, and he could hear the men talking:

"Think Joe Varden'll come back this way?"

"Not him! He'll head for the coast.

"There's a thousand dollars reward on him, dead or alive."

"Yeah, but run the other way if you see him. Joe's a bad 'un."

"Bashed her head in with a chunk of stovewood, didn't he?"

"That's right. Called it manslaughter. It'll be

different now, since he stuck the knife into that guard."

"A thousand dollars is a heap of money."

"Oh, sure. But your widow'd get it."

The boat drifted out of earshot. Joe Varden tried to free his feet and couldn't. The swamp water was up to his chin then. He had to duck under and cut his shoelaces with the razor-edged knife he'd used to kill the guard. Then he worked his feet out, leaving his prison shoes imbedded in the mud, and swam to a little hummock. The ground was reasonably dry under the cabbage palms, and he crouched there a while, shivering.

"Ten more miles," he muttered, "and I'll be safe, with Pete and his old woman."

He was a lean, hungry-looking man with a hawk nose. He was brown and leather-tough from months of chain-gang labor under a broiling sun. He had thin lips that curled back over yellowed snags of teeth. His eyes were blank, glass, expressionless.

Three days ago he had knifed the guard on the road-gang. Since then he had come a thousand box-car miles — seventy-two hours, without food or sleep. But ahead of him was sanctuary.

Presently he slid back into the water and swam to another hummock. He walked across that, and then sloshed sockfooted for a mile over a pathless route that was half land, half water and all wilderness. Night came on, and the fog eddied around him, but he moved steadily onward with the air of a man who knew where he was going.

He waded knee-deep into a little pool where limbs of live-oaks hung low, trailing their long streamers of Spanish moss in the red water. In a few minutes he had found the half-submerged boat.

"She's still here," he said. "No one's ever touched her."

He dumped the water out of the boat. Standing in the stern, he cut a cypress pole and shoved the boat from the hidden pool into a weed-choked channel.

The moon came up, full and large on the Florida horizon. The boat wound its way deeper and deeper into the swamp. Forks and branches appeared in the waterways, but the man with the pole never hesitated.

It was midnight when he found another shelter for the boat and stepped out on a large hummock. The moon was high. He could see the small fenced clearing, the patches of sweet potatoes and sugar cane. A pig grunted. A scrawny cow moved restlessly. Chickens clucked under a thatched roof which was supported crazily on cypress poles. Beyond it was a shack built of palmetto logs, gaping with paneless windows, and topped with a palmetto leaf roof.

Joe Varden stood staring at the place for a second. A man appeared suddenly in his path, holding a rifle slung forward in his arms.

"Figured you'd come, Joe," he said.

He was a lean hungry-looking man who might have been a replica of Varden, even to the thin lips, the hawk nose, the yellowed snags of teeth.

"I guess you know why I came, Pete," Joe Varden said.

"Guess I do. I don't hold with what you did, Joe. Killing your old woman. But that's not here nor there. We're blood kin, and you're safe here."

Joe Varden's lips curled back in a satisfied smile. It made no difference what he had done: the law of sanctuary among blood kin was inviolable.

"Come in and set, Joe," Pete invited. "I'll roust out the wife to cook you some grub."

It was a one-room shack, floored with earth. A cypress stump served for a table. A kerosene lamp stood on it. There were orange-boxes for chairs, and a sheet-iron stove. In one corner four orange-boxes supported flat bedsprings and a straw-tick mattress. A woman lay sleeping on the mattress, dressed in a faded cloth that rose and fell with each breath. Pete shook her awake and she sat up slowly.

"Wake up, Ginny. He's come."

The woman stared at Joe Varden and, in spite of himself, Joe felt stronger, more awake. She wore her dark hair long and its natural waves came to her shoulders. Her face was small and heart-shaped, and even through the shapeless cloth that covered her Joe could see and want the slim curves of a still-young figure.

She barely glanced at him before she busied herself at kindling a fire, shivering while she coaxed the flame with splinters of fat pine.

"Figure on getting a new stove," Pete apologized. "Maybe a real good one, soon's I kill me the black panther that's been wandering around here. There's a fifty-dollar bounty on the critters."

"Too bad I'm your kin," Joe said. "There's a thousand-dollar bounty on me."

"We heard about it." Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Blood kin is blood kin."

Ginny prepared ham and eggs. She added water to the coffee-grounds and heated it. As she put the food on the table she explained: "Coffee's weak. We can't get any more till Pete shoots that panther."

"You got 'shine, ain't you?" Joe asked.

Pete hoisted a gallon of 'shine to the table. The men spiked their coffee with it. Ginny sat down silently.

After a few minutes she said to Joe: "You must've been near starved. Joe, why'd you ever do that to your wife?"

"I came home hungry that night, and she wouldn't get up and fix me grub. I just lost my temper."

"Well, I suppose a woman ought to fix food for her husband," Ginny admitted.

"You're damn right she ought to," Joe said.

"I don't hold with you, Joe," Pete put in. "But you're my kin. Nobody'll get you here."

Joe Varden, replete with food and 'shine, shrugged off the past easily. The present was here, and the future. He let his eyes rove around the shack. He thought of the pig, the cow, the chickens. He looked most of all at Ginny.

"Right nice place you got, Pete," he said slowly. "I got a mind to stay here quite a while."

"You're sure welcome," Pete said. "Grub's plenty, and we've got places to hide if anybody comes snooping around. Now and again we could shoot a critter and send Ginny in after the bounty money."

"Might even build a shack here and get me another woman," Joe said, staring openly at Ginny now. "Sort of miss a woman."

"You can't go courting in town for none," Pete pointed out. "I don't see how you could find a woman very easy."

"Yeah." Joe shook his head. "Don't figure I could." He looked at Ginny. She did not look away.

"Thought you were aiming to shoot that panther tonight, Pete?" she said finally. "You put down bait, didn't you?"

"Sure." Pete reached for his rifle. "Better get out back there. You coming along, Joe?"

Joe didn't answer right away. Joe was watching Ginny. She got up from the table, carrying the men's cups. Her movements were graceful. Under the thin cloth her body swayed gently as she walked.

"You coming?" Pete said again.

"Yeah, I'm coming," Joe said.

They sat in the cover of the palmetto at the edge of the creek. They couldn't talk. They had to wait silently to see whether a black panther would be lured by the bait, a suckling pig tied to a stake.

The frogs croaked and the crickets chirped. Occasionally there was the dull rumble of a bull 'gator, the repetitious song of a whippoorwill, the hoot of an owl or the raucous cry of a nighthawk.

The symphony of night noises pleased Joe Varden. There was something in it that suggested peace and security. He envied his cousin.

A shack — a cow — chickens.

And a woman.

A woman like Ginny.

A woman Joe Varden wanted as much as he wanted freedom.

The moon sank low on the horizon. The first faint signs of dawn appeared in the east.

Something stirred in the jungle. The black panther, half-hidden, crouched to spring.

Pete lifted his rifle and fired.

"Good shot!" Joe said.

Pete chuckled. "Ginny can go to town and get us some bounty tomorrow. I'll put the critter in the boat, so she can be on her way. Hold my rifle, Joe."

Joe Varden watched his cousin drag the carcass to the boat. It was then, as the morning sun struck Pete's face, that the idea came full-fledged.

He and Pete looked just alike. If Pete Varden vanished, Joe could take his place.

His woman.

Joe Varden got to his feet. He put the rifle butt to his shoulder. The bead was perfect. Varden's eyes were cold again and empty.

Pete turned just before it happened.

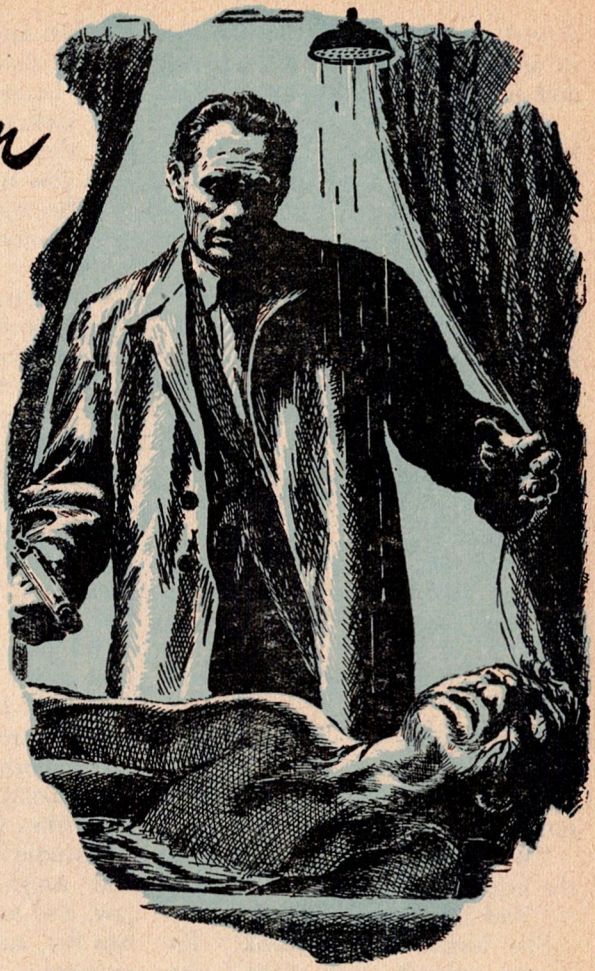
"Don't, Joe! We're kin. We're blood kin!"

A rifle shot rang out. Joe fell dead.

Ginny stepped down from the shack. Her head was bent. She put the body of the man in the boat, alongside the carcass of the black panther. She put the oars in the rowlocks and, pulling hard, shoved off slowly for town.

"He wasn't blood kin to me," she called back. "I figure on collecting the bounty for both critters."

Return



Trina had started Cordell on the road down, when he'd gunwhipped a man because of her. And now Trina was back.

A Matt Cordell Story

BY

EVAN HUNTER

You line up for blood, you know. You stay off the booze for a few days, and then you hit the blood bank. You don't shave, and you don't press your suit or comb your hair. You just go as you are, because all they want is your blood — and they pay you five bucks for a pint of it. You can make a business of it. I know some guys who do. They say it's easier than panhandling, and what's a pint of blood every few days? You go to the different banks around town, and if you haven't had any bad diseases, and if you haven't

served anywhere in the Pacific in any war, they take your blood and are damned glad to get it.

Afterwards, you eat a few juicy hamburgers instead of the steak they recommend, and you feel fine. You can use the rest of the five skins to buy wine or a pint, or whatever's your pleasure.

"Your name?" the nurse asked. She was starched and crisply efficient. She stood a little back from me, as if she were afraid my lice could leap the slatted wood railing that separated us.

"Matt Cordell," I said. "Matthew J. Cordell."

"Address?"

I gave her the address of my current fleabag in the Bowery, and then she asked, "Age?"

"Thirty."

"Have you ever given blood before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here. My name is in your records."

"Why didn't you tell me that in the beginning?"

"You didn't ask," I said.

She looked at me blankly for several seconds. "All right," she said at last, "go right in. You know the procedure."

"Sure," I said. I walked through the gate in the railing and then turned to my left. There were two tables in the room, and a guy was stretched out on one table, with his blood running brownly into a jar. His face was turned from me, and he didn't bother to look over when I came in. I took off my coat and jacket, rolled up my sleeve, and then lay down on the table. In a few minutes, the nurse came in. She rigged her jar, and then tapped my arm, leaning over to work. Her thighs brushed against the fingers of my hand when I began opening them and closing them to pump the blood.

"You'll be all right," she said. She walked away from me, her buttocks tight beneath the white smock. I looked at the jar and watched the red-brown line of blood mounting against the thick glass. The nurse came in after a few minutes and unhooked the guy on the other table. She left again, and I heard him rolling down his sleeves and pulling a sweater over his head. He picked up his coat, and was passing my table on his way out when he stopped. He came back, looked at me, and said, "Cordell? Matt Cordell?"

I studied his face. It was broad and rough-hewn, with a heavy jaw, and small blue eyes. His nose was flat, and it was running at the moment.

"I'm Cordell," I said.

"Sailor Simmons," he said. "Maybe you don't remember."

I looked at him harder. "I remember," I said.

Simmons smiled. "I changed, huh, Matt?"

"You changed, Sailor."

He shrugged. "Yeah, I know. Yeah."

Sailor had been a good fighter in his day. We'd got to know him well, Trina and I. We'd been married a month or so then, and she loved the fights, and we'd hit them every Wednesday night. We were introduced to Sailor, and we immediately became fans of his. He was a big lummox of a guy, with not too much upstairs, but a heart as big as the Pacific. He'd changed, all right. He was just a carbon copy of the hundreds of stumblebums I'd met since that time with Trina.

"We all change," I said, trying to console him.

Sailor smiled and nodded his head in agreement. "Not your wife, though. Not her, Matt."

"We're divorced," I said.

"I know, Matt, no offense meant. I read about it in the papers. That sonovabitch Garth, Matt. You did good to hit him. You should have killed him. You should have called me, Matt. I'd have fixed him."

I looked at Sailor's face. He wasn't being a wise guy. He still had the heart, and he was still as sincere as they come.

"Thanks," I said.

"But she ain't changed, Matt. Not a bit."

"I don't follow, Sailor." I was still pumping my hand, and the blood was mounting in the jar.

"Pretty as ever. Pretty as a picture."

"How do you know, Sailor?"

"I seen her, Matt. Two, three days ago."

That's all he said, and it stabbed deep inside me like a stiletto. All he said was that he'd seen her, and that was enough to make the memory a thing that almost suffocated me.

"Where?" I asked. "Where'd you see her?"

"Right here, Matt. In the city. She was all tanned, Matt, and wearing fancy clothes. Jesus, she looked a million."

"Here? In New York? Where, Sailor?"

"On Broadway it was. Alone. She's cut her hair short, Matt, not like it used to be. Real short, you know. Remember how it used to be long, Matt? No more now."

"I remember," I said. I remembered it long and blonde and trailing over Garth's arm. I remembered her head tilted back, and his lips tight against her flesh. I remembered the thin nightgown she'd been wearing, and the way Garth's fingers clutched at the fabric, grasping, grasping. I remembered.

The blood was racing through my veins now. I didn't have to pump my fist now. My heart was doing all the pumping, and the blood poured into the jar.

"You didn't know she was back, Matt?"

"No," I said.

"Gee, I'm sorry if . . ."

"I appreciate your telling me, Sailor."

The nurse came in and unhooked me, and Sailor and I went over to the cashier's window together and copped our five skins. I bundled into my jacket and coat. Sailor wasn't wearing a coat, and when we stepped outside, the late October wind knifed at the thin sweater covering his chest.

"I feel maybe I shouldn't have told you, Matt."

"No," I said. "It's all right. That's all dead and gone."

"Look, Matt, I got this five and a few loose ones burning a hole. I got a friend on First Avenue, with a pad that's the end. He can fix us with some mootah, and we can . . ."

"That's not my poison, Sailor," I said.

"A little stuff? Just a little M? Mary Juana never hurt a fly, Matt. The dream stuff, and no hangover. Come on, we'll smoke down a roach or two."

"Thanks a lot, Sailor," I said. "You pipe it alone this time."

"And no hard feelings? About me mentioning your wife, I mean?"

"None at all, Sailor."

He took my hand and gripped it firmly, and there was still some of the old boxer's power in it, and I wondered which had come first — the nosedive or the marijuana?

"No hard feelings," he repeated, and then he left for the friend with the pad and the mootah.

No hard feelings.

No, I thought, *no hard feelings.*

The October wind was keen. I ducked my head against it, and I walked. The people pushed past me in their overcoats, rushing for home, rushing for the comfort of steam-heated apartments. The wind played with the skirts of the women, slapping them against strong legs, lifting them over rounded knees, occasionally getting playful enough to show ribbed nylon tops and taut garters.

A man sold chestnuts on the corner, and his hands were brown with the stain of the Autumn fruit. He held his hands close to the glowing brazier, seeking the warmth of the fire.

Trina was back.

How long now? How long had it been?

The hell with it, I thought. The hell with it, no matter how long it's been. It's been too long.

But she's back, my mind insisted. Trina is back.

I bought two hamburgers and a fifth of rotgut, and then I drifted back to my Bowery roachtrap.

I threw open the door to my room. Some weeks I could afford a room. Most weeks, I flopped with the rest on cots in dark dormitories. And there were weeks when the park sufficed, but some weeks the pickings were good, and the suckers were generous, and if I didn't spend it all on liquid anesthesia, I could afford a room.

The rooms were all the same,

and the roaches didn't care which wallpaper paste they were munching on. There was always a three-drawer dresser and a beat-up bed, and a wash-basin, and a dirty window shade, and a naked light bulb. I locked the door behind me, and I turned to face this room that was just like every other room I'd flopped in, but this room was different.

This room was different because there was a girl sitting on the edge of the beat-up bed. The girl had her legs crossed, and the skirt rode high on her thighs. She wore red pumps, and she jiggled one foot, and my eyes started at the foot, up the curve of her calf and her thigh, over the crisp lace showing where her slip started. She sucked in a deep breath, and my eyes followed her breasts and the curve of her throat and the good chin and full mouth and tilted nose and the laughing eyes which were not laughing now but which were very serious and very deep in the semi-darkness.

This room was different because the hair clipped close to the girl's neck was blonde, not long, as I'd remembered it, but curling around her face, framing it.

This room was different because the girl sitting on the edge of the bed was Trina.

"Hello, Matt," she said, and there was that same husky depth in her voice, and she still said my name as if she were caressing each letter.

I stared at her, and I blinked my eyes. She was very trim and very chic, and in her presence I suddenly felt like just what I was. A bum, and she'd led me down the path, all the way down.

"What do you want, Trina?" I asked. I'd thought about this often. I'd thought about seeing her again, and of what I would say, and now she was here, and not smiling, not mocking me, just sitting on the bed with her foot jiggling and her eyes serious, and I couldn't think of anything to say but "What do you want, Trina?"

"You," she said.

"I heard you were back. What happened? Did they kick you out of Mexico?"

"I left of my own accord, Matt," she said. "I *wanted* to come back."

"Did Garth want to come back, too?"

"Not particularly."

"Mmmm."

"I made a mistake, Matt," she said.

"Did you, honey? That's a shame. Lots of people make mistakes. I made one, too."

I uncorked the fifth and fished two water glasses out of the top dresser drawer.

"Do you want a drink, Trina?"

"All right," she said.

I poured whiskey into both glasses, and I drained mine without waiting for a toast and then filled it again.

"Well, you've seen me," I said. "Now you can go back to Garth

and tell him all about it. Tell him all about Matt Cordell. Go ahead, Trina, you've seen me now."

"Matt . . ."

"For Christ's sake," I said, "why'd you have to come back? Why didn't you stay where you were? Haven't you done enough?"

Her foot stopped jiggling, and she got to her feet and walked toward me slowly. I smelled the perfume in her hair, and then she put her hand on my arm, standing very close to me, standing so close I could feel the thrust of her breasts against my chest.

"Matt," she said, "will you take me back?"

"No."

"Matt . . ."

"Get the hell out of here, Trina. Get out of here and leave me alone. Go back to Garth."

"I don't want to go back to Garth."

"Then pick another bastard out of the gutter. Leave me alone."

"No, Matt," she said softly, and then she was in my arms, with her hands at the back of my neck. She kissed me on the mouth, gently, almost not a kiss at all, almost as if she were trying on my lips for size. I moved away from her.

"No, Trina. What are you trying to do? It's no good anymore. It's . . ."

"It's still good, Matt. We'll make it good."

"No. No, goddamnit, let it lie. Can't you . . ."

She reached for me again, and this time I shoved her back roughly, and she staggered across the room until she hit the bed. She toppled backward, and her skirt pulled up over her gartered nylons, and she lay on the bed breathing heavily, not moving to touch her skirt.

She didn't say anything. She looked at me, and her eyes were still serious, and they pleaded with me silently as she lay there unmoving. Maybe she was remembering. Maybe the memories were rushing up inside her the way they were with me. I looked at her, and all of the longing was suddenly in my throat, and I couldn't see too clearly. I walked toward her slowly. She didn't move. She lay there quietly, expectantly. She lay there with her dress high on her waist, her long legs burned brown by the Mexican sun.

I was wild all at once, and she held my head close to her breast, and all I could do was murmur "Trina, Trina" over and over again, and it was like coming home after a long, long time.

I shaved that night.

I shaved and I showered while Trina went home to dress. She told me where to meet her later, and she told me a lot of other things, and we were like two kids who were discovering each other for the first time. I hit Manny Zimmer for ten bucks, and I bought a suit from one of the second-hand

shops. It wasn't DePinna's, but it made me feel like a new man. I thought about Trina all the while I was dressing, and I thought *Matt Cordell, you sonovabitch, you* can *start all over again.* You can taper off, and you can get a job with some agency, skip tracing, whatever, if the cops give you back your license. And when things start going again, you can branch out, maybe your own agency again, Matt Cordell Investigations, just like when you and Trina were together.

I was sixteen again, I swear it. I began to breathe the air deeper, and I began to notice kids walking in the streets hand in hand, and I saw the color of the leaves on the trees in Cooper Square, and the faces of the people on 14th Street. And inside me there was this big want-to-bust feeling, the way a guy must feel when he hits the sweepstakes. I'd hit the sweepstakes, all right. And now there was no more Garth, and there'd be no more nightmares of what had happened and no more whiskey, Christ, no more whiskey.

I walked with a quick spring in my step, and I didn't even feel like taking a drink. I walked with the world on a string, the way the song says, and I wasn't going to let go of that string for anything. I was going to hold that string tight this time. I was going to roll that old world into a corner and stamp it *Matt Cordell* because it had been a hell of a long time, and it sure felt good to be alive again.

We went to a brauhaus on East 86th Street that night. We sat and drank beer, and we danced, and we talked. Mostly we talked.

"Was it . . . was it hard for you, Matt?" she asked.

"What difference does it make?" I said. "You're back, Trina." "But . . . was it?"

"You saw me, honey. You saw what I looked like. You can still see it, can't you? Look at my eyes. It'll take a while."

"I don't know what got into me, Matt. I was crazy, crazy. It was just . . . I don't know, I really don't know. Something inside me, I suppose, something I had to do. Can you understand that?"

"Yes," I said, not understanding, but not caring. She was back.

"I've . . . I've always been like that. When there's something I've got to do, I do it. Regardless of who's hurt. I really hurt you, didn't I, Matt?"

"Yes, Trina, you did."

"And it was all for nothing. Matt, I hated him. Oh, not in the beginning, not when we first got to Mexico. It was all very exciting, you know. Acapulco, blue waters, blue skies, sun. I . . . I didn't think of you much, Matt." She lowered her lashes and then reached across the table to take my hand. "But after a while, I began to see him as a man. Or as a lack of man. He was nothing, Matt . . . a . . . a nothing is the only way I can describe him. You're everything that he wasn't."

"It took you a long time, honey," I said.

"Yes, a long time. But now I'm sure, and now I know this will be good." She paused and studied my face intently. "Matt, will they give you back your license?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think so?"

"Maybe. They were pretty nasty about it all, Trina. Gave me the old clichés about a detective's license not being a hunting license, and acted pretty damn glad to take it away from me. Hell, the cops never did like my methods."

"Then they still hold a grudge, Matt? They still remember the beating you gave Garth?"

"I suppose so. Yes, I suppose so. It made quite a splash here, Trina. I don't know if you got the papers down in Mexico."

"Yes, I saw the stories. Well, don't you worry, darling. We'll get your license back."

"What about a divorce, Trina?"

"From Garth, you mean?"

"Yes."

"He . . . he doesn't want to give me one. I'll work it out with him, though. He'll come around."

"Is he in New York?"

"Yes."

"Let me talk to him, Trina."

"No, Matt. I have to do this my own way. Besides, I'm afraid of what might happen if you two got together again."

"Don't be silly, hon. I'd just tell him . . ."

"No, let me handle it. I think he's coming around, Matt. No man wants a woman who doesn't love him."

"I suppose not."

"I'll handle it, believe me."

We were silent for a few moments, and I felt the silence on the table. "Say," I said, trying to cheer things up, "do you know who I ran into today?"

"No, darling," she said, smiling. "Who?"

"Sailor Simmons. Do you remember him?"

"Yes, of course. Did you really, Matt? Is he still fighting?"

"Well, no. He . . . he's not fighting any more."

"But why not?"

"He's a punchie, Trina. And I think he's on dope."

"Oh, what a shame. I liked him so much. He was such a nice person, Matt."

"Did you really like him that much?"

"Why yes! Didn't you? He always treated us so wonderfully."

"Yes, but . . . well, that was a long time ago. I didn't think you'd remember."

Trina squeezed my hand and leaned over the table. "It'll be the same again, Matt, you'll see."

I saw a lot of Trina in the next week. She was staying at a hotel, and she insisted that I go home at night. I didn't mind that at all because it somehow put us on a different level than she and Garth had been. She

was, after all, still married to him although she told me she was making progress and that he'd be ready to agree to divorce as soon as they ironed out a few "minor details."

I didn't question her. She wanted to handle it, so I left it to her. I knew she hated Garth. She told me one afternoon that Garth had beaten her viciously on more than one occasion. I'd almost blown my top that day. I told her I'd really finish the job on him if he so much as looked at her again after they were divorced. She'd smiled and kissed me on the cheek, but there was a strange reflective look in her eyes, as if she wanted the divorce to go through very quickly. So I didn't ask many questions. There was a lot of forgetting we both had to do, and if she wanted to clear up the minor details by herself, I wasn't going to intrude.

And then one afternoon she called, and I rushed to the wall phone when Artie yelled for me.

"Hello," I said.

"Matt, this is Trina."

"Hello, honey."

"How are you today?"

"Fine, just fine."

"I've finally got an apartment, Matt."

"Oh, good."

"I've also got a surprise for you."

"The divorce. Has Garth agreed to . . ."

"Can't tell you. Take down my new address." She read it off and I copied it down, and then she asked, "Can you come up tonight?"

"Sure," I said.

"About eight-thirty?"

"All right. Say, what is this sur . . ."

"No, I can't tell you."

"Well, you make me feel bad. I mean, I haven't got a surprise for you."

"That's all right. Do you love me, Matt?"

"Yes."

"I love you, too. Eight-thirty."

"I still feel . . ."

"Eight-thirty?"

"All right. And maybe I'll dig up a surprise for you, too."

"If you like."

"I'll see you tonight then, hon."

"I love you, Matt."

She hung up, and the warmth of her voice clung to the receiver. I stood in the hallway like a goof, wondering what her surprise could be, wondering what I could get her for a surprise. And then I got an idea. Why sure, that would be just the ticket! And she wouldn't mind, I knew she wouldn't.

I left the fleabag, and then I started looking, and it wasn't an easy job I gave myself. But I finally got it all set up, and there was a big smile on my face because I knew Trina would be pleased.

I bought a new shirt that afternoon, and I shaved and showered, and I tried it on with a tie Trina had given me. Trina had also given me the money for the shirt, but the tie was different because that was something she'd picked out all by herself.

I got the second-hand clothes pressed and I looked halfway decent.

I spent the afternoon walking around, and I guess the guys on the Bowery thought I was nuts. I greeted them all with a big hello and a smile, and I even stopped to talk to Fat Benny, whom everybody hated.

I took the subway up to 72nd, and then I walked crosstown, watching the lights in the store windows, thinking about Trina all the time, thinking *She hasn't changed, except for cutting her hiar. She's the same Trina, my Trina.* I also thought of the surprise I'd cooked up for her, and I checked the new address in my pocket to make sure I'd given the right one. When I reached the brownstone on West 73rd, I took the steps up to the second floor, grinning for no good reason, just feeling happy as hell, sure that Trina's surprise was news that Garth was coming through with the divorce.

I rang the bell outside the apartment number she'd given me, and I heard the chimes sound inside. I waited, and then I rang again, and I listened for footsteps, but there weren't any. I rang again.

"Trina?"

I suddenly realized that all this was probably part of her surprise. I tried the doorknob, satisfied I'd been right when the door swung wide.

"Trina?"

There was no answer. The apartment was very quiet and seemingly deserted. I looked around the foyer, and then I spotted the package on the table, and the note on the package. I unfolded the note and read it:

Darling:

Before you take your shower, please open this. It's for your new start, for when the future is good to us. Open it, darling.

For when I took my shower, huh? I grinned and tore the ribbon from the package. I opened the box and then my grin got wider. A .45 automatic lay nestled in the tissue paper. I grabbed the walnut stock of the gun and tested the grip, and then I hefted it on my right hand. It was a brand new weapon, blue-black, glistening clean.

"Honey!" I shouted, and then I remembered the *shower* part. Why, Trina was in the shower, of course. I walked through the living room, looking for the bath. "Trina!" I wanted to find her and grab her to me, soaking wet if that's what she was. I wanted to kiss her and thank her for coming back to me and thank her for her surprise, and I wanted to tell her there would be a new start, and there would be a new agency, and I'd carry that gun legally as soon as I could get my license back.

"Trina, where are you?" I asked the apartment. I was excited, and there was a big smile on my face. I ran past the living room with the gun in one hand, and then I spotted the closed door, and I twisted the knob. It was the bathroom, all right, but there was no water running, and that puzzled me for a minute.

"Trina?" I asked.

The shower curtain was closed. I took it in my left hand and pulled it back, expecting to find Trina about to step out of the tub.

The person inside the tub was not Trina.

The person was naked, and there was a hole the size of a half-dollar in his forehead, and blood had smeared all over his face.

The person was Garth.

I stared at him, and my brows knotted, and I couldn't understand what he was doing there in the tub, dead. I shook my head, like someone who's just had a safe fall on him. I walked out of the bathroom slowly, still not understanding, almost stunned.

I suddenly realized I was holding a .45 in my hand, and the whole thing hit me, hard and all at once. Like someone slamming at my stomach with a club. I brought the gun to my nose, and it was a new gun but it still stank of cordite, and it was in *my* hand, and *my* fingerprints were all over the stock, and all over the bathroom doorknob, and all over the shower curtain.

I felt sick. Really sick, sick enough to vomit. I'd stepped into a frame, and the frame was tighter than a drum, and Trina had hung the frame. And I cursed myself for being such a stupid bastard, but I couldn't stop feeling sick. I'd stepped into this apartment thinking this was the beginning. I'd built a big high sand castle, and someone had kicked it out from under me, and that someone was wearing a high-heeled shoe.

What better way to get a divorce when hubby wasn't willing?

Kill him.

What better sucker to kill him? What better sucker than the guy who'd creased his skull with a .45 so many years ago?

Matt Cordell.

What better sucker than Matt Cordell, still jealous, fuming over the assault with a deadly weapon charge and the lost license and the stolen wife and the Mexican divorce? What better sucker than Cordell?

Who else?

And what better way? Sucker him into a rekindling of the old flame, get his confidence and his trust, keep living with Garth in the meantime, using the hotel as a front. And then give him the address of the apartment shared with Garth, shared with him all along. Leave a note that could mean anything, especially after the promise of a surprise, and leave a dead body in the tub, waiting to be . . .

The note! Now hold it. The note. Hell, the note was the answer. Even the cops would see through that. Even the cops would realize that any sucker would have opened the box and hefted the gun and then followed the note directly to the shower. Even the cops should be able to smell a frame there.

I started to leave the living room, heading back for the table in the

foyer, heading back for that note. I almost didn't notice what was on the piano until I was right on top of it. I stopped short then and took a good look.

It was made of bronze. It held two fountain pens, and it must have cost a pretty penny, but murder patsies never come cheap. It was a desk set, a set for the hurried, harried executive. A small brass plaque was riveted onto the bronze, and the plaque read: FROM TRINA, WITH LOVE, and under that the day's date. I thought back to the note on my surprise package, and I realized then how tight the frame actually was.

Darling:

She hadn't said *Matt Darling.* Just *Darling,* and why shouldn't the police assume she was writing to Garth, her husband, the way she wanted them to assume? Why shouldn't they assume that this note, this ambiguous note, was left together with a package for hubby, and that the package contained the desk set now resting on the piano? Why shouldn't the police assume that hubby came home, opened the package, lovingly carried the desk set into the living room, and then went to take his shower — as his loving wife knew he would? The desk set could be in celebration of anything.

A new business? Why not? A hope for better times in the future, as the note read? Sure, why not? Trina would swear up and down that she and Garth had a new enterprise in mind and had discussed it a thousand times. And would the cops believe me? Would they believe that I'd found that .45 in a ribboned box? Hell, no. They'd say Garth's gift was in the box. They'd say I *came* to the apartment with the .45, found Garth in the shower, and proceeded to ventilate his skull. The cops . . .

Where *were* the cops? The frame depended on them. The building had no doorman and no elevator operator. The frame would work only if the cops arrived while I was still in the apartment, How had Trina worked that one? A call to the police? "I tried to reach my husband, and he doesn't answer the phone, and I know he's home. Would you send someone to check, please?" A call at 8:40, say, knowing that lovesick me would show up at eight-thirty as promised? Give me time to open the box and take out the gun, and then *Surprise!* P.D.N.Y.

Only they weren't there yet, and if I could help it I wasn't going to be around when they got there. God, how she must have hated Garth! And how she must have hated me to hang this rose garland around my neck. I thought of that, and the sickness gave way to a cold gnawing at my stomach.

I ran to the bathroom. I wiped the fingerprints from the curtain and the knob, expecting the cops to show at any moment. I went back to the living room, wiped the .45 clean and then tossed it behind the couch.

I packed the desk set back into the box, where it fit perfectly, and I stuffed the wrapping paper and ribbon into the box, too. Still no cops. I wiped the hall table, and then I snapped the lock on the outside door and wiped that too. I slammed the door hard, wiped the outside doorknob and took the steps two at a time, waiting for the cops all the while, expecting that front door to open the second I reached it. But the cops didn't arrive.

When I got down to the street, I found out why.

I found out when I reached the corner, where cars were parked on either side of the street and a third car blocked the middle of the street. My surprise was lying in the gutter.

My surprise had been hit by that third car, and the police squad car was parked on the Avenue, getting the facts, forgetting about a crank phone call in favor of something that was definitely real. My surprise lay broken and twisted.

My surprise answered to the name of Sailor Simmons, a guy I thought Trina would be tickled to see again.

I passed the squad car rapidly. I threw the desk set into the nearest sewer, with the cold knot in my stomach getting bigger and bigger and bigger until I thought it would bust out the top of my skull. I heard the desk set splash in the black water under the sewer grating, and then I headed quickly for the subway.

The cops would look for Matt Cordell, because the cops would remember that beating long ago. But the cops would find me dead drunk, and I wouldn't even know Garth was back in town, and there were enough guys on the Bowery who'd be willing to swear I'd been too drunk to move for the past six days.

And Trina? She was fresh in town. How many people would be willing to swear to her whereabouts at the time of the murder? Hell, let *her* explain the dead husband in the bathtub. Let her explain the .45 behind the couch. Let her pull a plausible alibi out of the hat, especially after she never thought she'd need one. And let her do it while the cops pounded questions at her under the light. It was all downhill for Trina, downhill all the way, the way it would have been for me.

And in spite of all she'd done, I wondered if I was glad.

Portrait of a Killer

No. 11—Vernon Booher

BY DAN SONTUP

IT STARTED with a girl, a farm boy, his mother's disapproval of the girl — and it ended with four people shot through the head.

Life wasn't too easy on the farm, and Vernon Booher worked hard along with his parents, his two brothers, his two sisters, and the two hired men. There wasn't much pleasure for Vernon in all this, and he had little social contacts outside of the farm. For all of his twenty-one years, he had been shy, withdrawn, quiet — and unhappy. Then, one day, he met a girl in town.

That was the beginning. The girl was pretty, she was friendly, and she and Vernon started seeing a lot of each other. Vernon was a little less shy now, he took more of an interest in things, and he began to feel real happiness for the first time in his life. It didn't last long, though, because Vernon's mother began to hear things about the girl, rumors that made her fear her son hadn't picked a girl who would make a respectable daughter-in-law.

The mother let things ride for a while, but then couldn't hold back any longer and had to step in. She spoke to Vernon, told him what she had heard about the girl, and suggested he stop seeing her. An argument followed, but Vernon didn't stop seeing the girl.

His mother didn't give up, though. She was even more convinced now that she was right about the girl, and she kept after Vernon to give the girl up. Vernon was equally stubborn about continuing to go out with the girl, but now things were no longer as pleasant as they had been for him.

The girl found out what the mother had been saying. As long as Vernon made no move to leave her, she let the issue ride without making a big fuss over it. But now Vernon was being torn from two sides. He knew it was only a matter of time before the girl and his mother would force him to make a final decision, and he dreaded the thought of deciding the whole thing one way or another.

Finally, the whole situation reached the breaking point. The girl asked him if he believed all the things his mother had been saying about her. Vernon didn't answer her, and that's when the girl decided to call it quits. She walked out on him and told him she never wanted to see him again.

So, Vernon went back to his work on the farm — and that's when the slow hate for his mother began festering in his mind.

For six months he brooded about the girl, about what his mother had done, about how lonely he was now, and the hate built up in him. Finally, he couldn't take it any more. He went to town, found the girl at a dance with another man, and told her how sorry he was now that he had listened to his mother. He begged the girl to take him back; he swore he wouldn't let his mother interfere again. But the girl would have none of it. She laughed at Vernon and went back to her partner.

That's when Vernon broke.

He didn't carry on, he didn't go insane so that anyone could notice, he was quite calm about the whole thing. He merely waited until supper was over at the farm one night — and then he sneaked over to a neighbor's house and stole a rifle that the man had in his home. Then he started walking back to the farm, the rifle cradled in his arm.

Vernon's two sisters were away at some affair in town, his father was out in the fields, the hired men were working with the tractor within sight of the house, his brother was working between the tractor and the house — and Vernon's mother was alone in the house. She was sitting at the dining room table, a bowl of strawberries in front of her, preparing a strawberry shortcake for the next day.

Vernon came in through the kitchen, walked over to the dining room, and looked at his mother sitting with her back to him. Then he quietly raised the rifle to his shoulder, aimed it, and pulled the trigger. His mother died instantly, the bullet from the rifle going straight into the back of her head.

Vernon lowered the rifle and turned to leave. But the sound of the shot had carried outside, and Vernon's brother, Fred, had heard it and came running into the kitchen. Fred saw Vernon coming from the living room, the rifle in his hands, but before he could ask what had happened, Vernon raised the rifle again and fired point blank into his brother's face.

Leaving his brother lying face downward on the floor, Vernon walked outside. The hired men were still working with the tractor. They looked up, saw Vernon, and waved to him. He waved back. They had seen him now, he knew. They hadn't heard the shots because of the noise the tractor was making, but they had seen him come from the house with the rifle in his hands.

Vernon was still calm. He hung around until the two hired men finished their work and split up. One went into the barn. Vernon followed him, and when the man turned around to face him, Vernon pulled the trigger on the rifle again.

Then he went out and found the other hired man in the bunkhouse. He shot him also — in the face.

Vernon's mind was still working clearly. There were no witnesses left, but he had to make sure no evidence was found. He retraced his steps and gathered up all the spent rifle shells he could find. Then he hid the rifle in a clump of bushes and went back into the house and called a doctor.

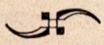
To the doctor and the police, Vernon told a straight story of coming home and finding his mother and the three men shot to death. The police investigated, found one of the rifle shells where it had fallen into a basin of water near Fred's body, traced the shell to the neighbor's missing rifle, reconstructed the killings, questioned Vernon's ex-girl friend, and then arrested Vernon.

He was still quite calm about the whole thing, though. Surprisingly enough, the police hadn't been able to find the rifle, perhaps because it was hidden so near the house and in such an obvious place. Vernon told them that they had nothing on him, that they couldn't prove anything until they found the rifle, that he would deny the whole thing, and that he would never confess.

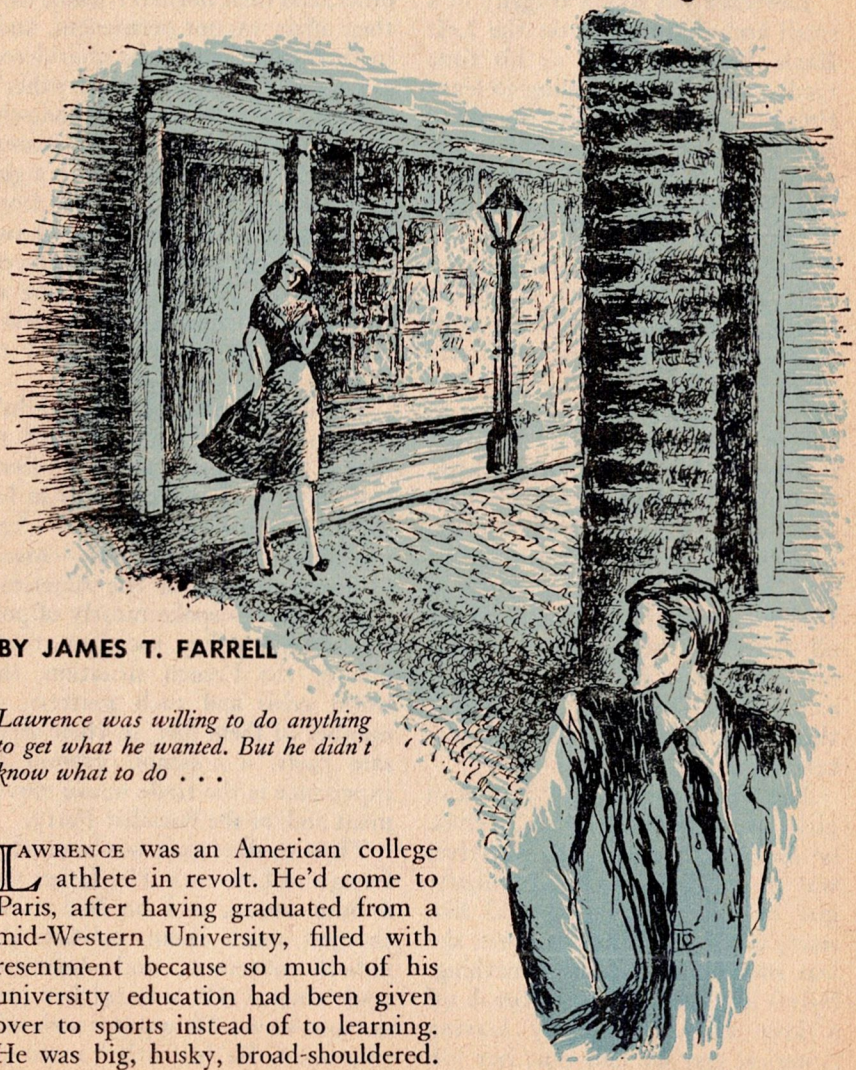
The police realized that without the murder weapon or a confession from Vernon they wouldn't have a case that would stand up in court. They tried questioning Vernon again and again, but it did no good. Meanwhile, the search for the rifle went on — and by a stroke of good luck they found it.

They told Vernon about it, told him his fingerprints had been found on the rifle, and that's when Vernon — still calm and composed — confessed to all four murders.

He went to his death on the gallows quietly.



I Want a French Girl



BY JAMES T. FARRELL

Lawrence was willing to do anything to get what he wanted. But he didn't know what to do . . .

LAWRENCE was an American college athlete in revolt. He'd come to Paris, after having graduated from a mid-Western University, filled with resentment because so much of his university education had been given over to sports instead of to learning. He was big, husky, broad-shouldered.

He was quiet and serious, and determined to learn. He wanted to write, and had, in fact, sold two articles on college sports to a national magazine.

Lawrence was living frugally in a small and cheap hotel on the Left Bank. He spent most of his time reading, writing and trying to learn French. He didn't know many of the Left Bank Americans who cluttered up the sidewalk and the cafés about the Square St. Germain, and he didn't want to know them.

He was twenty-four, and believed that, already, too much of his life had been wasted, and that he must make up for much lost time. He often said that he could learn nothing from most of the Americans in the St. Germain district, and that if he spent much time with them, he would only be wasting it. There was too much for him to learn, too many books for him to read, and he was organizing his life in Paris so that he could try to make up for all that had been wasted in his university days. He was, as he often remarked, trying to get for himself the education which he hadn't gotten as a student.

Lawrence had met a few American girls, and with one of them, Sylvia, he had struck up an affair. Sylvia was a sensitive, highly-intelligent girl but, like Lawrence, and like many other Americans in Paris, she was running away from something. Sylvia had been unable to break off a love affair, except by leaving America, and she had quit her job and was planning to write. She was gay and friendly and youthful and good-looking. She and Lawrence liked each other, but told each other, and their mutual friends, that their affair was not permanent, and, in that sense, not to be considered as serious. They read each other's writing, and frankly and honestly discussed and criticized the manuscripts. Sylvia, who lived with a girl friend whom she had known from high school, often cooked for Lawrence and fed him, which reduced his expenses. And he was living as cheaply as he could in order to make his money go far. He wanted to prolong his stay in Europe.

Sylvia's friends, at first, didn't take to Lawrence, and referred to him as "the athlete" and "the football player." He seemed slow in his thinking, spoke simply, and often was quiet. Sylvia's friends — many of whom worked for the American government — spoke mostly of politics, foreign policy, socialism, trade unions, the French situation, the world crisis and such matters. A number of them had, in their separate pasts, a common ground of experience in the trade union movement and/or the Socialist Party.

Their conversation was somewhat foreign to Lawrence. His father was a businessman, and he had never thought much about politics, the radical movement and American trade unions. He was neither pro- nor anti-union. He was not seriously concerned. He had other interests,

and his major ones were his own development, his education and intellectual development, and his desire to write. However, when Sylvia took him to parties, he would listen closely to what was said and, if he did ask questions, these were intelligent, and bore upon what had been said and was being discussed.

However, Lawrence would become tense at these parties, as the evening wore on. He would feel an overpowering need to do something, to release himself physically, and he would sometimes jump up and down, perform various exercises, and let out yells and war-whoops, some of these sounding like the war-cries of American Indians. Following such a performance, he would relapse into quiet. His physical tension would be eased.

2.

Lawrence liked Paris, but frequently he felt as though he were overwhelmed by it. He sometimes went to the galleries or looked at churches, gazing carefully, with intensity. At the Louvre, or looking at Notre Dame or Saint Chappelle, his broad face would become intensely and almost painfully serious. On it, one could almost see him struggling to grasp, to understand and to make his own judgments. He felt himself unequipped to understand and to judge the art of the past and of the Old World, but he had a psychological need to judge and understand. He had to know that he was making up his own mind. He had used his mind for too little in college, and, as a college athlete, his mind had been made up for him by his coaches. In him, there was a burning resentment against coaches.

Like many other young men, going to Paris or, for that matter, travelling elsewhere, Lawrence had set out with hopes of meeting girls, and of having adventures and love affairs. But he was dissatisfied with and critical of American girls. They talked too much, and in too intellectual a vein, and he believed this was especially true of the American girls whom he had met in Paris. He objected to and disliked seeing girls in dungarees, and believed that, when they wore these, they became less feminine. In dungarees, he insisted, the girls looked like half-women. He told this to Sylvia, who sometimes wore dungarees, but she laughed and didn't agree with him. She, like him, never looked upon their relationship as serious or intended to be permanent.

Lawrence associated dungarees and slacks with the American girl. And an American girl was, for him, only a convenience. He wanted a French girl. He had wanted one ever since he had arrived in Paris, and he had come believing that a French girl would be easy to meet and to acquire. All of the way over from America, he had kept imagining himself with French girls and, although he knew better, he none-

theless believed that French girls would be strikingly different from and superior to American girls. They would be more intelligent, more feminine, more understanding, and above all else more passionate. They would know how to make love in a way that no American girl could. He considered that most American girls, anyway, were cold. The French girls wouldn't be cold.

Lawrence was modest. He was not at all without humility. He was eager and serious, and he was determined to be honest, and to write honestly. But nonetheless there were times when he would have vain male fantasies about himself, about his virility. He would, he'd imagine, prove and demonstrate his masculine vigor. His fantasies, now and then, had even become extreme so that he had felt a little ashamed of them and, also, he'd laughed at himself. He'd sometimes imagine a French girl telling him that he was a better lover than any Frenchman, and that he disproved what many of the French thought about American men.

He had always imagined the French girls as dark, with passionate dark eyes and dark hair, and when he first came to Paris, he was surprised at the number of fair-haired French girls that he saw on the streets.

During his first days in Paris, particularly, he would wake up each morning with the hope that he would meet a French girl, and that this imagined and hoped-for meeting would be the beginning of the love affair that he dreamed of and wanted. He imagined various ways in which he might meet a French girl. Often, he imagined one living in the same hotel as he did. Sometimes, he imagined one sitting alone at a table next to his table in a café.

3·

As soon as Lawrence had arrived in Paris, he'd set to work studying French. Every morning, he would work over a French grammar for from half an hour to an hour. He didn't believe that he was learning much, though, and he would give way to recurrent fits of depression. But every such depression only seemed to galvanize him into doing more work and applying himself to study with renewed determination. However, when it came to talking, Lawrence was shy, and his memory of French would fail him. He didn't want to look foolish or ridiculous in the eyes of others, especially in the eyes of anyone who appeared to be more cultivated or better educated than he was. He didn't want to make mistakes in front of such people, and he didn't want to seem in any way to be ridiculous. Also, he was particularly self-conscious about trying to use the little French that he'd learned with some French girl who was a stranger to him.

During his first days in Paris, he had looked at French girls on the streets, in cafés and in restaurants,

again and again, wishing to be able to pick them up, wondering how he might or ought to go about trying to pick up a French girl. Seeing them on the streets, and observing their clothes and their style of dress, overhearing them talking in cafés, even when he didn't understand what was being said, and, above all else, seeing them kissing their lovers passionately in the streets along the Seine, in the parks and on métro trains, he wanted a French girl even more than when he'd first arrived in Paris.

He sat, fairly frequently, in the *Deux Maggots* on the Royal St. Germain on the Place Saint Germain. It seemed that most of the customers were American, and he didn't take to them. He explained to Sylvia that if he got to know many of them, he'd only waste his time in the same way that so many of the St. Germain Americans were wasting theirs. He didn't approve of their dress, of the long hair of the young men, and he laughed scornfully at those who sported beards. He had a couple of sport-shirts and he sometimes wore these, but mostly, he dressed in an inconspicuous manner.

And during the times when he did sit in the cafés, mostly with Sylvia, he kept his eyes on the watch for French girls. If he happened to go to a café alone, he would sit at a corner table, reading, but he would also be watching for a French girl. Now and then he would look up from his book and stare at the pedestrians, watching and hoping.

Lawrence thought that the best way to meet a French girl might be to go to the *Alliance Française* and post his name there as someone "desirous of exchanging French and English conversation." He did this after he had been in Paris just a few days more than three weeks. He walked back to his hotel, feeling very good and hopeful. It was a clear spring day. Paris was shining in the soft light of the April sun. The streets were crowded, and the city seemed to him to be on a holiday.

Paris was still new and strange to him, full of promises of adventure, discovery and joy. He paused to look in windows, especially bookstore windows. He gazed at people on the streets, especially girls, and most especially French girls, or girls who looked as though they were French. Mostly he could tell, but occasionally he was deceived. Then, suddenly, he decided to have a coffee before going back to his room, and he walked to the Royal St. Germain.

4·

He was young and healthy. Although he still needed to acquire more confidence in himself, his confidence, at that moment, wasn't at a low ebb. He sat down near the sidewalk and glanced about at others who were seated at the tables. There were not many in the café. Lawrence thought that he shouldn't

be there. People seeing him could think that he was like other Americans here, a poseur, a faker, a trivial person who wasn't trying to accomplish anything of a serious nature. There was a flurry of hostility within him. But then, he decided that he could give himself this little respite before he went back to his small room and plunged back into studying.

He ordered *café crème.*

He looked out on the busy street and square, with traffic flowing steadily and noisily by and pedestrians passing in steady succession. The sky was extraordinarily clear, bright with the sun. He gazed for a moment at the tower of the Abbey of Saint Germain des Prés, and then at the bright sky behind it.

The waiter came with his coffee. He put sugar in the glass, stirred the coffee and took a sip.

There was a group of young Americans about ten feet away from him. There were three young fellows and four girls, and they all sat, looking bored and blasé and as though they were very much used to Paris life. Lawrence looked at them with contempt. Two of the girls were wearing dungarees, and their hair was cut short. They looked somewhat like boys, Lawrence thought. Anyhow, they certainly didn't look like girls. One of the young fellows had longish hair, and he kept running his hand through it. Now and then, the group would let out a laugh. Then they would be quiet. Lawrence thought that they were just here in Paris for the ride, like many others. Between himself, and them and their type, there was a difference. All over again, he renewed his determination to work hard, to study, to try and write and to learn and teach himself to write better and, also, to learn French.

But he would sit here in the sun for a while. He knew that he wasn't wasting his time, and if anyone passing by and noticing him wanted to think that he was like the Americans here who were wasting their time, let them. He knew better.

He sipped his coffee and lit a Gaullons cigarette. He enjoyed the first puff. Then, he thought that he was seeing Sylvia that night, and he hoped she would have some American cigarettes. He missed American cigarettes.

It was spring. He wanted to sit there and dream. Perhaps, through the *Alliance Française*, he'd meet a really cute French babe. He almost sighed. If he met one who was really terrific . . . Maybe he'd prefer a blonde French babe instead of a brunette. And after they got to know each other, they would come and sit here. They would talk French and English. The Americans around here might notice him with her, and they might envy him. But what about Sylvia?

He took another sip of coffee.

He hadn't made any vows to Sylvia. He hadn't ever told her that their relationship was a permanent one, and she understood clearly.

He sat back in his chair, and looked around. He was still surprised and happy and, sometimes, even elated to be in Paris. But he had done it on his own. His parents had opposed his coming here. The old man had wanted him to go into the family business. They'd been disappointed because of his decision. The old man had been proud, damned proud of him when he'd made good in college athletics. But to want to learn and write, that was a different matter. And it only proved what he had come to understand and to believe — that life, the decisions you made about your own life and your career all were to be seen as a question of values. And it was the same in the question of college sports. There again, the nub of the question was in values. No one had ever told him to think this way. He had grown up in an environment where the values were false or trivial. That was what he was so griped about. And when you considered the question of American girls, it was still the same. There again, it was a question of values.

At this moment, one of the girls, who had been sitting with the group near him, walked by. She was small and her figure was boyish, and its boyishness was accentuated by her short-cropped black hair and her dungarees. Lawrence watched her walk on, and disappear down the Boulevard. No, he decided, he didn't want anything like that.

An outlandish-looking man came along. He wore a cocked hat, a blue coat, a uniform of blue and white and big, polished black boots. There were some laughs. An American behind Lawrence called out:

"Hi-ya, Napoleon!"

The man, dressed like one of Napoleon's Marshals, walked on, not looking at the American who had called out to him. Lawrence watched him pause to talk with a small group at the corner. A crowd collected. Lawrence thought of going to stand and watch the lunatic. He'd heard of him before. Someone had told him that this madman believed that the only salvation of the world lay in the return of Napoleon, and that he was the herald of the coming resurrection of Napoleon Bonaparte. Lawrence, thinking of this, laughed. He noticed that the crowd was laughing.

He got up to go and watch, but the madman rushed off in anger and disappeared along the Rue de Rennes. Lawrence sat down, again, disappointed.

And as he finished his coffee, he thought again of a French girl.

5.

The first girl with whom Lawrence was put in contact through having posted a notice at the *Alliance Française* was not really a girl. She was a middle-aged woman, tall and thin and hatchet-faced. When Lawrence met her by appointment at the *Alliance*, his face dropped in an expression of instant disappoint-

ment. He'd built up his hopes and expectations for three days, prior to this meeting. He didn't listen carefully when she gave him her name. When she said she was Mademoiselle Ernèstine Charles, he thought that there were old maids in France as well as in America, and this Mademoiselle reminded him of an old-maid aunt of his whom he'd never liked.

They went to a café, and talked in English. What little French he knew vanished from his mind. When the woman spoke to him in French, his face went blank. Then, rather haltingly, she spoke to him in English. She said that she was going to England to visit friends. She had studied English in school but had rarely had any opportunity to speak it, and wanted to improve her speaking. And someday she would go to his country, America.

Lawrence was utterly bored. He was unable to mask his feelings. He knew that he should try to be a little gracious, but it was difficult for him. His disappointment was too great. After about fifteen minutes, he excused himself, took the woman's telephone number, and promised to phone her.

Walking away from the café, he felt foolish and ridiculous. His eyes wandered, and picked out a plump, well-built French girl who was wearing a tight-fitting black dress which fell just below the knees, and a sweater which outlined her full bosom. His desire for her became almost painful, and he felt even more foolish, more ridiculous than he had a moment ago.

Maybe he could say something to this girl. She was precisely what he wanted. With her, he could learn French. And she looked as though she were very passionate. He wanted a passionate French girl. Perhaps, if he went up to her and were brash, she would be impressed. He wasn't, he knew, a brash person, but he could be brash if necessity demanded it. And meeting this girl seemed to him, like a necessity. But just as he stepped forward to speak to her, she met and kissed a small, shabbily-dressed Frenchman with graying hair.

Lawrence's disappointment was as great as it had been when he'd met the Mademoiselle earlier at the *Alliance Française*.

6.

He went to his hotel room and, with great effort, buried himself in a volume of Toynbee. That night he went to see Sylvia and told her that he wanted to go to bed. Making love to Sylvia, he kept imagining that she was a French girl.

Lawrence's hopes didn't dim. He again went to the *Alliance Française*, and in two days he met a second conversational companion. She was a small, dumpy girl with a very plain face. Again, there was the meeting in the café. This girl spoke better English than the Mademoiselle, but as they spoke, Lawrence

found her to be increasingly unattractive. She had a high-pitched semi-hysterical voice, and three gold crowns in the front of her mouth. She might be somebody to talk French to, but most certainly, she was no one to sleep with, he decided.

As they talked casually about Paris, the weather, the French and English languages, Lawrence's sense of disappointment grew. The girl wanted to improve her English because she wished to get a job as a French and English secretary. But Lawrence wasn't interested. Even if she weren't so plain-looking, even if she didn't have those three gold crowns in the front of her mouth, her voice would have been enough to disqualify her. No, he reflected, he couldn't stand that voice in bed.

Again disappointed, Lawrence went to his hotel room and buried himself in Toynbee.

Through the *Alliance Française*, Lawrence met three other French girls. One seemed crazy to him. One couldn't speak a word of English, had warts and moles on her face, a sallow skin and a very bad breath; another was a fat Polish émigré who was married and the mother of two children. After these disappointments, Lawrence abandoned the *Alliance Française* as a means of meeting the kind of French girl he wanted.

7·

The weeks passed into months, and the spring turned into the summer. Lawrence continued to live frugally. He spent long hours working and reading. He struggled in his own mind with disappointments, the problem of winning his own confidence, and the race he felt himself to be making against time. His desire for a French girl became bound up with these inner struggles of his. He stared at them on the streets, in the cafés and in the subways. He watched the French lovers kissing passionately in the streets, and he became wistful, envious, and sometimes depressed.

In all other ways, he believed that his time in Paris was proving to be beneficial and successful. He was learning, and believed that he was growing mentally. He wrote and sold another article, receiving for it a check for three hundred and fifty dollars. Even with prices high, and continuing to rise, he lived so frugally that this added money would enable him to stay on much longer. Also, his self-confidence was buoyed up, enormously so. And he could look forward, expecting to sell other articles. He even began to think of writing a book.

There were times, though, when Lawrence would be working or studying, or walking about the streets, when he would become suddenly and unexpectedly lonesome for America. He was doing well by himself. He was giving himself the kind of life and training he thought he needed. He had already had some success. And Paris was, for him, a

wonderful city. Its streets and cafés and buildings attracted and interested him. He enjoyed riding on the busses and subways, looking at the people. He found endless interest and enjoyment in looking at French people. Their gestures interested him. They seemed, also, strange to him.

He didn't particularly like them, however, and, at times, he fell into an acceptance of the attitudes of Americans whom he saw. They saw France as disorganized and decadent. He sometimes agreed with this. At other times, he would confess to himself that he didn't know what the French were like. He would recognize that he had taken over impressions, attitudes and opinions at second hand, and he'd resent himself. And he would pose for himself the question whether or not it might be the case that the French had a better sense of values than Americans.

But he did persist in believing, along with other Americans, that the French were hard to know and unfriendly to strangers. He, like many other Americans, some of whom he knew, was living in Paris in a vacuum. The life of France went on and they touched it only at the periphery. He couldn't avoid, at times, the feeling that he was excluded.

But such feelings were only passing. He knew, as he had known consistently since he had left America, that he would return. His real ambition was to return as a person who had grown and had learned and proven himself. At the same time, he wanted to return to America with pleasant memories of experiences and adventures with girls. His desire for a French girl recurred and recurred to prey on his mind, to give him a sense of incompleteness. If he didn't succeed in making love to one at least, he believed that there would remain a certain emptiness to his otherwise personally rich sojourn abroad.

8.

One evening, Lawrence met a friend, Tom Kogan, whom he'd known in college. Kogan was working for the American government in Europe and was frequently in Paris. They went out to dinner and talked about college and about what had been happening to them in Europe. Kogan told Lawrence that he envied him his freedom, and that he, himself, wasn't at all satisfied to be working for the government. He felt hampered and restrained. Suddenly, Lawrence burst out about French girls. He told of his experiences with those he'd met through the *Alliance Française*. They both laughed. But Lawrence was serious, and his laughter was strained and artificial.

"There are plenty of American girls over here on the loose with no mothers to chaperone them," Tom said.

Lawrence didn't care. He men-

tioned Sylvia, but said that he could find girls like Sylvia in America.

"No matter where you find some of the American babes, it's good findings."

"So would French girls be."

"I've never had a French girl. I wouldn't throw one out of bed, though."

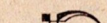
"You'd have to be damned hard up not to kick out of bed the French dames I met through the *Alliance Française*," Lawrence said.

Tom laughed.

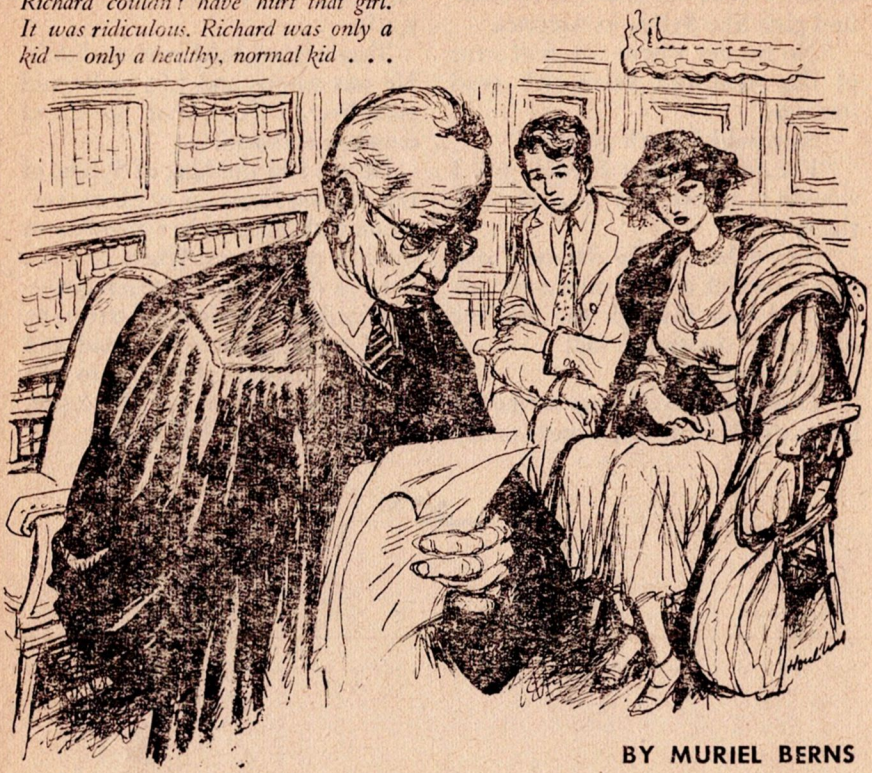
"Damn it, Tom, I want to meet a French girl. How can I meet one?" Lawrence burst out, almost plaintively.

Tom laughed, but Lawrence didn't. He was serious and felt, as he said good-bye to Tom, that his friend didn't understand.

He was still thinking of Sylvia, of the *Alliance Française*, of his conversation with Tom, as he walked down the Rue de Rennes. When he saw a girl — a dark-haired, French girl — coming down the deserted street, he stood watching her for a second, and then he moved silently into the shadows and toward her. He knew, suddenly, what he had to do.



Richard couldn't have hurt that girl. It was ridiculous. Richard was only a kid — only a healthy, normal kid . . .



BY MURIEL BERNS

The Innocent

THE LIGHT in the judge's chambers was bad and the air seemed a little chill.

"Richard Leamon," the judge said.

Harriet sat a little straighter, controlling her impatience. There was no reason for making them wait so long. Of course, the judge wasn't accustomed to talking to boys like

Richard. That was obvious. If he were, he would have given him preference.

"Age seventeen," the judge said.

Harriet sighed softly. Seventeen. So young — and at the same time, so old. She glanced down at the veined backs of her hands. Seventeen years old. It seemed hardly possible.

"Attempted rape and assault," the judge said. "First offense."

Harriet felt her body stiffen. Rape, she thought. That was ridiculous. And assault! Probably some of the boys were fooling around, the way all boys did, and the police had misunderstood. Boys Richard's age were always high-spirited. Everybody knew that. And maybe their pranks were sometimes a little rough. But the idea of a boy like Richard actually attacking someone — actually *hurting* someone — that was absurd.

The judge looked at Richard, and then at Harriet.

"I suppose you know why we're handling this here instead of in open court, Mrs. Leamon," he said. "The less attention we draw to something like this, the better chance the boy has of straightening out."

Harriet nodded. She wondered if the judge expected some comment. No — he was picking up Richard's folder again.

"I see your husband died some time ago," the judge said. "But he left you pretty well off, it seems. The house is all clear, and the monthly income from his insurance and investments appear to be adequate." He paused. "That's very important. So many of the boys — well, their home life isn't all it could be. In Richard's case, though, the home life and background are excellent."

Harriet's hands were curved stiffly around her purse. She tried not to let her emotions reflect in her face. She was trying to be intelligent about the processes of the law, but it wasn't easy. Of course Richard came from a good family! The judge should be able to take one look at him and tell that.

The judge turned a page. "Richard seems to be pretty fond of girls," he said. "Goes out quite a bit, according to this, but never more than two or three times with the same girl."

That shows you, Harriet thought. Someone had been telling the police lies about Richard. Why, he never went out with girls at all. He'd told her so himself, at least a dozen times. He didn't care anything about them. He'd rather go out in the evenings with a group of other boys, like any other seventeen-year-old.

The judge ran his finger down the page. "This is kind of an interesting point here, Mrs. Leamon. One of the people the police talked to said Richard thought all girls were too silly to ever take seriously. He seems to think they'll believe anything, or do anything — so long as you keep telling them how beautiful and sweet

they are." The judge read silently for a moment. "And a little further on," he said, "this same person told of how Richard had a habit of ridiculing other boys when they bragged of their mothers, or talked about giving them presents and taking them to dinner — things like that."

Where did the police dig up such lies? Harriet wondered. And that's what they were — lies. Why, Richard was devoted to her. He was always telling her how pretty she was, and how young she looked. Somebody was just jealous of her because she had a son like Richard, that was all. Somebody wanted to make trouble for him because his own son was mean and thoughtless. Well, she wouldn't say anything just now. She'd let the judge finish, and then she'd set him straight.

"Richard's school record is fine, for the first two years of high school," the judge said. "Very high grades. And then comes a long account of truancy and failure to hand in homework. For a long time now, he's just managed to squeeze by."

What does he expect? Harriet thought. After all, Richard was the kind of boy who made a lot of friends. And he was older now, and older boys found new interests. You couldn't expect a boy Richard's age to study all the time. Everybody knew there were things to learn besides what you found inside text books. Social experiences were important. Why, learning how to get along with people was every bit as important as anything he would learn in the classroom. The judge just didn't understand boys; that was the trouble.

The judge closed the folder. "Well, that takes care of that. Now the charges." He picked up a long sheet of yellow paper. "I won't bother reading this verbatim, Mrs. Leamon — I'll just give you the gist."

Harriet sat quite motionless, waiting. None of this was called for, she reflected. If the judge knew anything at all, he would know that Richard couldn't possibly have . . .

"On the night of May 12th Richard was picked up on the accusation of Betty Stenn. The Stenn girl said he'd taken her for a drive earlier in the evening, and that he'd parked the car and attempted to have relations with her. When she fought him off, she said, he pushed her out of the car, and then jumped out after her and beat her unconscious with his fists."

Harriet heard the sharp intake of her own breath. It was a lie, of course — a filthy, terrible lie. Lord, how could Betty Stenn say such a thing? Didn't she know the police would find out she was lying, and that they would . . .

"Betty identified Richard, just as soon as she came to in the hospital," the judge said. "She wasn't very pretty to look at, after Richard finished with her, Mrs. Leamon."

Harriet compressed her lips and met the judge's gaze.

Lies, she thought. Every bit of it.

"You're an intelligent woman," the judge said. "You can understand just how serious this might be. As it stands, Betty Stenn has withdrawn her charges, but that doesn't change what happened. It merely means that Richard is just about the luckiest young man to come before me since I've been on the bench. I don't have to remind you that proceedings could be started against him, despite the fact that Miss Stenn has seen fit to drop the charges. Is that clear?"

Harriet nodded. Why was he dragging this out? she wondered. Would an experienced man like this judge really believe a little flip like Betty Stenn before he believed Richard? If he did, then he didn't deserve to be a judge in the first place.

"The girl took a pretty bad beating," the judge said. "But she's not permanently scarred. She'll recover from the experience, in time."

Of course, she'll recover, Harriet thought. Girls like that always do. But what about Richard? Would he get over this so easily?

The judge put the yellow sheet down on his desk and stood up. "We don't like to prosecute boys Richard's age, Mrs. Leamon," he said. "And we especially don't like to prosecute first offenders. I'm going to let Richard walk out of here with you. But I can tell you this. If I see him here again, it will be a different story. The girl has dropped the charges, and it's my hope that this experience will wake him up. At least I hope it will wake *you* up. It's up to you to straighten him out before it's too late, Mrs. Leamon — you, and nobody else."

Harriet could scarcely believe the sun was still shining when they left the building. Why, they'd been there only two hours! Looking up quickly to glance at her son's face, she was momentarily blinded. She'd been facing directly into the sun.

It came to her, then. Blinded! Of course. The judge had been blind. He'd been hypnotized by the girl and that lying report. He'd taken the girl's side. Richard had been accused by a young girl, and so the judge had to make everything fit what she'd said.

She felt strength seeping back.

As if Richard could ever have done things like that! she thought. And still, you couldn't really be too hard on the judge. He'd never had a chance to know Richard. The only boys he knew anything about were those awful juvenile delinquents you kept reading about in the papers.

She smiled, tossing her head slightly, and met her son's eyes. He seemed startled, and perhaps it was the way the sun struck his face, throwing shadows to distort it, but they were oddly bleak for a moment. Well, naturally he'd look a little bitter, she thought — an innocent boy being brought up before a judge like that.

Harriet smiled comfortingly, and took his hand. Chattering gaily, she led him up the street to the car.

Burglaries

BY FRED L. ANDERSON

Lock manufacturers are fighting a constant battle to keep ahead of the burglar. Locks are constantly being improved in order to make it even more difficult for the modern burglar to pick them and thus gain entrance to a home or office or any other place the burglar wishes to rob. A good, professional burglar, however, can pick some locks — if he's good at his trade.

For example, if the lock is of the old-fashioned keyhole type, the burglar can make use of the *oustiti*, a French slang term for a pair of long, thin tongs which are inserted into the keyhole from the outside. The ends of the tongs are rifled to provide a firm grip on the end of the key, and the key can then be turned in any direction from the outside. The rifling on the tongs, however, will often leave marks which can easily be seen by the investigating detective.

Taking the key out of the lock after closing the door doesn't help, either, as some people like to believe. If there's no key in the lock, then the burglar can make a duplicate — if he wants to take the time to do this. He inserts a blank key which has been blackened with carbon, or which has been dipped into molten wax, and then turns the key in the lock just enough to touch the lock mechanism. The marks left on the wax or carbon act as a guide for filing a duplicate key into the proper shape.

In checking locks of this type after a burglary, detectives use a special tool which allows them to examine the inside of the lock without removing it from the door. The tool is made up of a long, very thin tube with a small light bulb and a mirror at the end. The bulb is lighted by a battery, and the detective can insert the end of the tube into the lock, switch on the light, and examine the inside of the lock through the mirror arrangement.

More modern locks can sometimes be picked by using regular lock picks, by using a strip of lead, and by several other methods. However, it requires great skill on the part of the burglar to pick a modern lock, and not too many of them can do it. Also, all of these methods leave traces and scratches on the coating of oil and grease inside the lock. Usually, only those parts of the inside of a lock which are regularly touched by the key are shiny, and, therefore, marks on the other parts of the lock can easily be seen.

Most burglars will stick to one method or technique of committing

their crimes, and they seldom branch out into other fields or other techniques. However, a criminal has been known to change his methods after learning a trade which will help him become more efficient. For example, a criminal who has learned how to use an acetylene torch can then try his hand at safe-cracking.

There are no modern "Jimmy Valentines" with sandpapered fingers among present-day safe-crackers. In fact, police doubt if this type of burglar ever really operated successfully. There are, however, highly skilled criminals who can open a safe by manipulating the combination. They often make use of a special tool which consists mainly of a very thin steel rod. The rod is inserted into a small hole drilled near the lock, and it is used to help the burglar in manipulating the combination.

There is also a mathematical method for opening a combination lock without knowing the combination. It takes a lot of knowledge to use it, an it also involves hours of work in order to make it work properly. Firms which manufacture safes usually have men who can perform this task.

Most safe-cracking today, however, is accomplished by a rather crude means, by "ripping" the bottom or back out of the safe with the aid of special tools. The tool most often used for something like this is called the jimmy. It usually takes the form of a sectional jimmy, the separate parts of which can be screwed or bolted together when the criminal is ready to use it. Thus, the criminal can carry the jimmy around with him in small sections and can then fit them together when ready to use it.

Safes can be blown open, of course, but it requires a good knowledge of explosives in order to do this successfully. Modern criminals use dynamite, while the old-time safe-crackers used nitroglycerin. Some of the old-timers used to carry the nitro in a hot water bottle concealed under their clothing.

Naturally, blowing open a safe involved a lot of noise, and so the criminal often tries to muffle the sound, as well as covering the safe in order to avoid the danger of flying particles of steel. There are cases on record where burglars have often muffed this, though. In one instance, burglars covered a safe with expensive Oriental rugs — and the rugs were worth more than the contents of the safe.

Modern fireproof safes provide some good clues for identifying burglars who have blown them open. This type of safe has a special insulating material in it which, when the safe is blown apart, often gets imbedded in the clothing of the burglar. Therefore, when the police pick up a suspect in a safe-blowing job, they can check his clothing to see if any of the insulating material has become imbedded there.

Apartment or house burglars often

rely on advance tips from employees, delivery boys, and others who know when a house will be empty and where other valuables are kept.

However, the burglar doesn't even have to wait for a house to be empty. One of the most daring types of burglars is known as the "supper man." He operates, usually, only between seven and nine o'clock in the evening — and he makes sure that the family are all at supper downstairs. He then climbs to the roof of the building (and that's a risky thing to do), gets into an upper floor, and proceeds to steal what he can while everyone is downstairs eating. The one advantage this sort of burglar has is that most people will not expect to have their homes robbed while they are in the house and are not sleeping, but awake and alert.

If the house is empty — especially in neighborhoods where new buildings have gone up and tenants are not too well acquainted with each other — a burglar will often take his time robbing the place and then walk boldly out the front door, carrying his loot in a pillow case to make it look like a laundry bag slung over his shoulder, or in an ordinary paper bag such as a grocery delivery clerk might carry.

The police keep close tabs on all the methods used by burglars, of course, but, in the long run, it's up to the ordinary citizen to use common sense in being careful and in providing the proper safeguards against burglaries. "If the barn door is locked, the horse cannot be stolen."

Confession

BY JOHN M. SITAN

Calmly, methodically, Egan went on killing people. And when his murders were finished, there was just one more thing he had to do . . .

JOHN EGAN adjusted the rifle's telescopic sight again. It was quite easy to pick out the circle of light from the single lamp over the theatrical announcement plaque. The spot was a good target point. It was ten minutes after eleven and no one was about on the apartment house roof. He had counted eight persons crossing the circle of light. They had all been men. The ninth person was a woman. The white shoes and dress under a dark coat indicated she was a nurse. There was a young couple walking behind her. A policeman turned the corner.

When the nurse reached the circle of light her head flew apart.

John Egan detached the stock of his gun and fitted the barrel portion and the stock into a trumpet case that had been rebuilt to accommodate them. When he looked again to the street below the young couple and the policeman were beside the fallen nurse. John settled to watch; his German Army sniper rifle had a silencer and there had been no sound excepting a dull thud when he fired.

The policeman went to the corner and a police call-box. When he came back, John picked up his trumpet case and backed from the building edge. As he had been watching the scene below his hands had continuously opened and closed, the fingernails digging into the palms of his hands. Now that he was out of sight of anyone in the street he began running from roof to roof until he reached a building on the other side of the block. He let himself through a roof doorway and went quickly but quietly down the stairs until he was on the street. A tight smile of satisfaction was on his face.

The smile was still there when he got back to his two-room apartment. He put the trumpet case on the single bed in his bedroom and opened it. It took him half an hour to clean and oil the rifle. He then put the rifle in its trumpet case and put the case at the back of his closet. He took a black leather-covered notebook from his desk and made an entry. It took him twenty minutes of studied writing and then he put the notebook away. A moment later he went down the hall to the bathroom and took a hot bath and shower. When he returned he went to bed and slept very soundly.

The death of the nurse — her name was Edith Scarf — occupied the front page of the daily newspapers the next day. John Egan bought a newspaper on his way to work. When he saw the name of the nurse he wrote it down in a small wallet notebook and threw the newspaper away. The name was to be added to his records. He did not hear any more about the murder, as he did not have a radio in his apartment and never bought a newspaper unless he needed a name from it. He usually found what he wanted on the front page.

At work John Egan did not hear anything about the murder. The factory was noisy, which wasn't conducive to conversation while working. He worked for a company that made paper containers of all sorts. He had been there six weeks. It was his job to collect all the paper scrap and bale it in a giant baling machine. The scrap was sent back to the pulp mill for reprocessing.

When he had finished work John Egan went to the library, which he visited from two to three times a week. This time he returned two biographies he had been reading of Abraham Lincoln and checked out

yet another biography of Lincoln. It would take him two days to finish reading it. His reading speed was good and he could scan a printed page quickly with full understanding. He had read biographies on Edison, Ford, Einstein, the great U. S. presidents and a host of other famous men. He kept a list of famous names (they were all men) and of the material he had read about each of them. His list was of quite formidable length. He was twenty-eight years old and had been keeping the list since he was twenty-two years old. He had not seen his parents since he was seventeen when he had run away from his father's house where his mother had left him when she divorced his father. He had always lived alone, except for a three-year interruption of Army service, and liked living alone. He had never gone out on dates with girls. He did not like girls.

Saturday afternoon John Egan went to the park. He spent the day there walking its many twisting pathways. Finally he settled on a grassy knoll that was lightly wooded but allowed unbroken vision of several pathways and of a children's playfield. He spent nearly an hour judging distances, and finally paced from his position to several points on the pathways. He decided at last on the juncture of three meeting pathways. From the knoll it took him four minutes of walking at a reasonable pace to reach the edge of the park. There he could catch any one of a number of busses that arrived and departed every few minutes.

Sunday at eleven o'clock John Egan walked to the grassy knoll in the park carrying his trumpet case. He sat down and then lay on his back for awhile and let himself relax completely. When almost an hour had passed he sat up and looked around to see that he was alone on the knoll. He opened his trumpet case and fitted together the German sniper rifle. It took a moment to adjust the sight on the junction of the three pathways. A number of people passed and he did nothing. He sighted on the junction again when he saw a woman and a little girl coming along. The girl was about five years old and wore a pink frilly dress. She was skipping a little ahead of the woman when she reached the junction. At that moment John Egan squeezed the trigger of his rifle. He watched the convulsive sideways jerk as the bullet thudded home. At his distance it appeared as if the child had stumbled. John did not look back until he had broken the sniper rifle down and put it in the trumpet case. When he did look back the woman was on her knees and screaming.

Two minutes later John was on the main pathway leading from the park. He reached the bus stop just as a bus arrived and got aboard. He dozed on the bus until it reached

the business section of town and got off. He went to a motion picture theatre that had a double bill featuring two comedies, and enjoyed himself hugely. His laugh was high-pitched and piercing. It was late in the afternoon before he returned to his room. He bought a late edition newspaper on the corner before he went up to his room.

In his room John Egan cleaned his rifle lovingly and put it away. Then he opened the newspaper and found the name he wanted on the front page. The little girl's name was Kathy Lewis. It took John only half an hour to make the entries in his black leather notebook. After that he applied his attention to a sheaf of papers that were typewritten double-space from edge to edge and contained numerous penciled marginal notes and corrections in the body of the material. He pulled a portable typewriter from under his bed and rolled a sheet of paper into the machine. He worked on the typewriter for an hour and a half. He spent another half-hour working over what he had written, making additions and deletions. When he finished he again put the typewriter under his bed and the sheaf of papers back in their drawer. Before going to sleep he read some of the biography of Lincoln that he had on the stand beside his bed.

John Egan went to work as usual the next day. At noon he talked to his boss, who sent him to the main office. In the main office a secretary had him sign a company voucher. Before quitting work that evening he received a check from the cashier's window. It was a check for payment of his services in full. On the way to his apartment he stopped at the library and returned two books he had out on a library card.

When he left his room later he carried only a good-sized suitcase, his portable typewriter and his trumpet case. He stopped at the landlord's door and rapped. The week's rent he owed was seventeen dollars. A taxi was waiting at the entrance and took him to the railroad station. Five minutes later he had bought a ticket for Seattle, Washington. After a half hour's waiting he boarded a coach car of the train. It was ten o'clock, and he made himself comfortable in his seat. Before he put the portable typewriter case above him in the luggage rack he opened it. There was a small space above the typewriter in the case. John had packed his black leather notebook there. He now opened the notebook and thumbed through it. The notebook was divided into four sections, each headed with the name of a different city. San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland. Turning a page he started a new section — S...E...A...T...T...L...E — he wrote the city's name carefully. The notebook was repacked and John dozing as the lights of the Portland, Oregon, disappeared behind the train.

It was early morning when John Egan arrived in Seattle. Outside the train station he caught a cab and went to a hotel. In his hotel room he stripped down and took a hot bath. He soaked in the tub for some time. When he came out of the bathroom he towelled himself and looked at his watch on the bureau. He was thoughtful for a moment and then, making a decision, went over to the bed and pulled back the bedspread. He got into the bed nude and was asleep almost immediately. He had always been able to go to sleep quickly and easily.

It was close to noon when he woke up. He lay looking at the ceiling for awhile and then finally got up and dressed and opened his typewriter case. He spent some time in reading from his black leather notebook. It was one o'clock when he lay the notebook down. Hunger was beginning to bother him, as he hadn't eaten since the evening before. Before leaving the hotel room he took a heavy manila envelope from a secret pocket in the suitcase. In the envelope was nearly six hundred dollars. Money that he had saved from the numerous jobs he had had in the past six years. He nodded in satisfaction over the horde, and took three twenty dollar bills from the envelope and put them in his wallet. On the way downstairs to a restaurant he stopped at the hotel's desk and paid for his hotel room for two weeks.

After eating he walked around the city streets for awhile and then returned to his hotel room. He bought a daily newspaper in the hotel lobby but did not read it when he got to his room. On his walk about town he had bought a ream of typewriting paper and an envelope of carbon paper. He worked until very late at night over the sheaf of papers that bore many alterations and corrections. At two o'clock in the morning he stopped working. Before he went to bed he read the theatre section of the paper. When he finally got into bed he fell asleep immediately and slept soundly.

John Egan awoke at ten the next morning and went down for breakfast. When he returned to his room he went back to work on the sheaf of papers. He worked on them the remainder of the day and only paused to go out for a late dinner. The next day and the three following were spent on the growing sheaf of papers. He now had a respectable manuscript of over seventy thousand words. At last he was satisfied and began reading the manuscript over to make more corrections. The title he had affixed to the first page was: "The Autobiography of John Stevenson Egan."

It took John Egan a week of constant and careful work to complete the final copy of the autobiography he had written. He had one carbon copy. The manuscript was finished up to the last chapter. It was early

evening when he finished the final copy of the manuscript up to that point. He went out for dinner and, as usual, brought back with him the evening paper he had been buying every day. He again read only the theatrical section. This time he took particular notice of a movie that was going to premiere in Seattle in two days' time. That evening he went to bed early. He needed the rest that the extra hours would afford him.

The next day John Egan located the theatre he wanted to find. It was on a corner facing a busy intersection. The three facing corners housed two department stores and a jewelry store with the floors above it rented out to doctors and lawyers. He found that he could reach the roof of the building housing the jewelery store quite easily. The surrounding buildings were all taller than the one he had picked. When he returned to the intersection at eight o'clock that night he was pleased to see that only one or two of the windows of the overshadowing buildings were lighted. When he had made certain of the hour the building's doors were locked he returned to his hotel room.

The next day John Egan hired a car for the day and took a long drive around Seattle's Lake Washington. He stopped along the shore and sat looking out over the water. It was a bright sunny day and many small sailboats were on the lake. He returned to his hotel room at six o'clock and opened up his trumpet case. It was the first time he had opened the case since his arrival in Seattle. He spent an hour in cleaning and oiling the rifle. When he had finished he took a carton of cartridges from his suitcase and poured ten shells on the bureau top. He lined the shells up on their flat ends and looked at them for a moment. Then he knocked the first one down which, in turn, upset the remaining nine in a chain reaction. He picked the shells up one by one and put them in a spring clip. He put the clip in the trumpet case with the rifle. When he finished he looked at his watch. He still had an hour before the building housing the jewelry store closed. He spent the hour in musing over his notebook. He had used the notebook extensively in writing the last part of his autobiography. The notebook had ninety name-entries in it. The greatest number of names came under the heading of Los Angeles. When it was twenty minutes to the closing of the jewelery store building he left his room. He entered the building without being noticed. Instead of using the elevator he walked up the stairs. When he reached the roof he closed the door quickly, stood near the closed door for a moment, and looked at the facing buildings overlooking the roof. There were no lighted win-

dows excepting those of a stairwell. No one was on the stairwell.

It took John only a moment to set up his sniper rifle and telescopic sight. When he looked over the building edge he faced the theatre across the way. It was as it had been when he had entered the building. A long line of people snaked for about a hundred yards along the sidewalk. This was the premiered picture. John Egan sighted through his telescopic sight and made another adjustment. When he began firing he moved methodically from target to target and emptied the clip in less than a minute. The first target was the woman driver of a car waiting for a stop light. The car moved into the intersection and was smashed by two other cars . . . each going in opposite directions. John moved to the girl dispensing tickets in the glass booth of the theatre. The glass shattered as the girl was struck in the throat. In swift order eight other women were shot down. In one case a bullet passed through the woman and smashed a plate glass window behind. The crowd was beginning to panic and shoved three persons onto the broken shards of glass. Events had moved so quickly that many people in the crowd had not reacted at all. John Egan did not pause to watch events developing below but hurriedly took the sniper rifle apart and packed it in the trumpet case. When he reached the street below women were screaming and the sound of approaching sirens wailed over the scene. A lone policeman was at the wrecks of the three cars in the intersection, trying to bring some sort of order to the scene. When John rounded a corner away from the intersection a police car had arrived.

In his room John cleaned his rifle. He fondled it lovingly for a moment. He had long ago had his name engraved on the barrel. After he had put the rifle in its case he sat for a moment in silence. Finally he smiled. He sat for a moment longer and then got ready for bed. He fell asleep immediately after climbing between the blankets.

The next morning John Egan was up early and down to the hotel lobby. He went to the cigar stand and bought a paper. The front page was alive with bold-face print, pictures and dark headlines. Up in his room he read the paper with care. His notebook was to one side of him and every now and then he jotted a name and some data down. There were twelve names in the paper of those who had died. Eleven were women and one was a man who had been shoved into the broken window and bled to death. One woman had died in the accident in the middle of the intersection. She had suffered from a bad heart condition. The remaining ten had all died instantly from John Egan's well-placed bullets.

When he had completed the notes in his notebook he rolled a fresh

sheet of paper into the typewriter and began typing. As he composed he consulted his notebook frequently. He was working on the last chapter of his autobiography.

It was late afternoon before John had a draft that satisfied him. Then he began a final copy and made a carbon copy. It was ten o'clock when he finished. He then typed out a short letter. The letter was to the publishing company he was sending his manuscript to.

Dear Sirs:

I am a murderer. I have killed one hundred women and children directly and several persons indirectly. This is not a hoax. You will see the truth of my statements when you read this autobiography I intend you to publish. When you receive this manuscript I will be in the hands of the Seattle, Washington, police. You will be readily able to check the validity of my statements.

Yours truly,
JOHN STEVENSON EGAN

When he had typed the letter he enclosed it with the manuscript and addressed the package. He went to bed and slept. His sleep was sound and he did not dream.

In the morning John Egan got up early and went downstairs for breakfast. When he was again back in his room he rolled a piece of paper into the typewriter and started composing what he titled "Press Statement." At noon he went to the Post Office and sent his manuscript to the publishing house, airmail express. He finished his "Press Statement" at two o'clock. It took him an hour to pack his belongings neatly. He was careful to fold all his shirts and roll his socks. He wanted his things to be neat when they were unpacked. He put his suitcase and typewriter centered on the bed. He had made the bed up carefully. Taking his trumpet case, the carbon copy of his autobiography and his black leather notebook he left the room. At the police station he stepped into the press room and looked around; no one was there. He saw a bulletin board in a corner and, clearing the board, pinned his "Press Statement" in the center of the board. The papers he had removed from the bulletin board he straightened and left on a table.

PRESS STATEMENT

My name is John Stevenson Egan. I have shot and killed twenty-four children and seventy-six adults. I was further responsible for the death of two persons by heart failure, one person by crushing in an automobile accident and another who was shoved into a shattered plate glass window and bled to death. I used a German Army sniper rifle brought from Germany where I saw service with the U. S. Army during World War II. All the persons I have shot and killed with my rifle have been women.

My motive in this action is to insure the inclusion of my name in man's history and memory. Further details

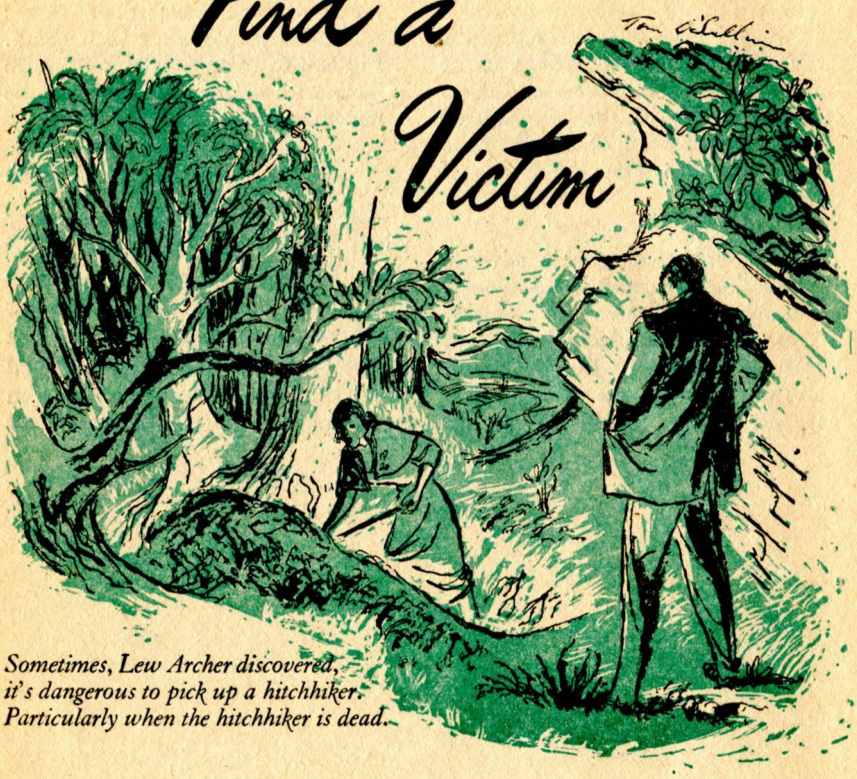
of my case can be found in the autobiography I have sent to the Bismark Publishing Company for publication. The police will have my notebook in which I have kept a record of the place, names and conditions under which I killed each person. Bullets fired from my rifle can be compared with those that undoubtedly have been recovered from the bodies of my victims.

I thank you gentlemen in advance for placing my name in newspapers and magazines across the country. You will find my story a sensational and unusual one. I will cooperate in any way with anyone wishing information about myself . . . serious biographers are especially welcomed. I am sure I will be a quite interesting and important subject for psychiatry journals. Few have their names remembered long after their death. I intend to be one of the few. I have made sure of it. My name will be remembered.

Signed,
JOHN STEVENSON EGAN

The police sergeant was busy when John Egan came up to his desk. John wasn't noticed until he put the trumpet case, black leather notebook and manuscript on the sergeant's desk. The sergeant frowned and was about to speak when John Egan opened the trumpet case.

Find a Victim



Sometimes, Lew Archer discovered, it's dangerous to pick up a hitchhiker. Particularly when the hitchhiker is dead.

A Lew Archer Novel

BY JOHN ROSS MACDONALD

HE WAS the ghastliest hitchhiker who ever thumbed me. He rose on his knees in the ditch. His eyes were black holes in his yellow face, his mouth a bright smear of red like a clown's painted grin. The arm he raised overbalanced him. He fell forward on his face again.

I stamped the brake-pedal and backed a hundred yards to where he lay, a dark-headed man in jeans and a grey workshirt, prone among the jimson. He was as still as death now. But when I squatted down

beside him I could hear the sigh and gurgle of his breathing.

Supporting his hip on my knee and his loose head with my arm, I turned him onto his back. The blood at his mouth was breaking in tiny bubbles. The breast of his grey shirt was dark and wet. Unbuttoning it, I saw the round hole among the sodden hairs on his chest, still pumping little bright spurts.

I removed my jacket and tore off my own shirt. Wadding it over the bullet-hole, I fixed it in place with my tie. The wounded man stirred and sighed. The eyelids quivered over the dusty-black eyes. He was a young man, and he was dying.

I looked back to the south, and then to the north. No cars, no houses, no anything. I had passed one clot of traffic somewhere north of Bakersfield and failed to catch another. It was one of those lulls in time when you can hear your heart ticking your life away, and nothing else. The sun had fallen and the valley was filling with twilight.

I lifted him, his head lolling on my chest, and carried him to the car. He was hard to handle, neither big nor heavy but terribly lax. I got him onto the back seat with his head propped up on my overnight bag so he wouldn't smother, and covered him with the car blanket.

He rode six or seven miles in that position. I turned down my rearview mirror to keep an eye on him. As the twilight faded, his face in the mirror faded almost out.

I passed a sign: *Camp Fremont, U. S. Marine Corps Base.* Cyclone fence sprang up along the highway. Beyond it streets of weathered barracks marched across the valley to the humpbacked horizon. There wasn't a trace of life. The quonset hangars of the attached airbase could have been barrows built by a lost race of giants.

Then there were lights at the roadside, a city of lights beyond them. Neons stained the thickening air green and yellow: *Kerrigan's Court — Deluxe Motor Hotel.* Its lobby and pueblos were brilliantly floodlit. I stopped in front of the lobby and went inside.

It was all blonde plywood and green imitation leather furniture. The woman behind the registration desk was also blonde. Her long blue eyes surveyed me, making me conscious of my naked chest. I buttoned my jacket as I crossed the room.

"Can I help you?" she said in a distant way.

"A man in my car needs help, badly. He's been shot. I'll bring him in while you call a doctor."

She rose in nervous haste and opened a door behind her. "Don. Come here a minute."

"He needs a doctor now," I said. "This is no time to talk it over."

"Talk what over?" A big man filled the doorway. He was heavy-shouldered in a light gabardine suit, and he moved like an ex-athlete gone to seed. "What in hell is it now? Can't you handle anything?"

Her slim hands wrenched at each other. "I won't permit you to speak to me that way."

He smiled at her without showing his teeth. Under clipped sandy hair, his face was fiery with alcohol or anger. "I talk the way I want to in my own place."

"You're tight, Don."

"You've never seen me tight."

They were standing close to each other in the space behind the desk, face to face in furious intimacy. I said:

"There's a man bleeding to death outside. If you won't let him come in here, at least you can call an ambulance."

He turned to me, his eyes grey triangles under folded lines. "Bleeding to death? Who is he?"

"I don't know. Are you going to get some help for him or not?"

"Yes, of course," the woman said.

She lifted a telephone book out of the desk, found a number and dialled. The man went out, slamming the door behind him.

"Kerrigan's Motor Court," she said, "Mrs. Kerrigan speaking. We have an injured man here. — No. They say he's been shot. — Yes, it seems to be serious, an emergency."

She replaced the receiver. "The County Hospital is sending an ambulance." She added, in hardly more than a whisper: "I'm sorry for what happened. In our family we don't rise to an emergency. We sink beneath it."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does to me. I'm really sorry."

Her face slanted across the desk. Her pale smooth hair was drawn back severely from it, as if to emphasize its stark beauty.

"Isn't there anything else I can do?" she said on a rising note. "Call the police?"

"The hospital will. They're required to by law. Thanks for your trouble, Mrs. Kerrigan."

She followed me to the door, a troubled woman who had missed her chance to react like a human being and couldn't let it go. "This must be a terrible thing for you. Is he a friend of yours?"

"He's nothing to me. I found him on the highway."

She touched my arm, as if to establish contact with reality, and quickly withdrew her hand, as if the contact frightened her. Her eyes were focused on my chest. I looked down at the drying smear where the bloody face had rested.

"Are you hurt, too? Can I do anything for you?"

"Not a thing," I said, and went outside.

Kerrigan was leaning in at the open back door of my car. He straightened sharply when he heard my feet in the gravel.

"Is he still breathing?"

"Yeah, he's breathing." The alcoholic blood had drained out of his face, leaving it blotched. "I don't think we ought to move him, but we'll take him inside if you say so."

"He might dirty your carpet."

"There's no need to get unpleasant. You heard me offer to take him in."

"Forget it."

He moved closer to me, his eyes opaque and stony grey in the floodlights. "Where did you find him?"

"A couple of miles south of the Marine base, in the ditch."

"How did you happen to bring him here? If I may ask."

"You may ask. This was the first place I came to. Next time I'll keep going."

"I don't mean that. I merely wondered if it was a coincidence."

"Why? Do you know him?"

"Yeah. He drives a truck for the Meyer Line in town. Name's Tony Aquista."

"You know him well?"

"I wouldn't say that. In my line of business I have a speaking acquaintance with most of the jerks in Las Cruces. But I don't hobnob with Mexican truck-drivers."

"Good for you. Any idea who shot him?"

"That's kind of a silly question."

"You could still answer it."

"What gives you the right to ask questions?"

"Go on getting mad like that. It sends me."

"Maybe I ought to ask you a question or two," he said. "You didn't happen to shoot him yourself, by any chance?"

"You're very acute. Naturally I shot him. This is my getaway."

"I was merely asking. I couldn't help noticing the blood on you."

He smiled with soft malice. His changeable mouth, both sensitive and brutal, tempted my fist the way a magnet tempts iron. He was big enough, and not too old, but he was a little ripe. I put my fist in my pocket and walked around to the other side of the car.

I switched on the dome light. Tony Aquista was still blowing his sad small bubbles. His eyes were completely closed now. He was blind and deaf with the effort to hold onto life. The ambulance sighed in the road.

I followed it on its return trip through the highway suburbs, past motels and cabins and trailer parks where soldiers and salesmen and tourists and migrant workers passed temporary nights with temporary bedmates. At a six-lane wye where two main roads converged, the ambulance turned off the highway to the left.

I missed the green arrow and had to wait. The hospital was visible in the distance, a long white box of a building pierced with lights. Nearer the highway, the lighted screen of an outdoor theatre, on which two men were beating each other to the rhythm of passionate music, rose against the night like a giant dream of violence.

I found the ambulance entrance at the rear of the hospital. Its red electric sign spelled out *Emergency* and cast a hellish glow on the oil-stained concrete driveway. Before

I went in, I took a clean shirt out of my bag and put it on.

In the receiving room, half-a-dozen white-coated people were grouped around the table where Tony Aquista lay. Now even his lips were yellow. An inverted bottle of blood was dripping into a tube that was strapped to his arm.

A young doctor, resident or interne, leaned over the closed face and pressed his thumbs down into the eyes. Aquista didn't stir. The room seemed to be holding its breath. I moved to the doctor's side. He glanced at me sharply:

"Are you a patient?"

"A witness. I found this man."

He shook his head from side to side. "You should have found him sooner." He turned to one of the nurses: "Don't waste any more blood on him."

She closed off the rubber tube and disconnected the half-empty bottle. The odor of dissolution was keen in my nostrils.

"Is he going, doctor?"

"He's gone. No pulse, no respiration. He must have been bleeding for some time, probably didn't have a pint left in his system."

"Bullet wound?"

"Unquestionably, I'd say. Those lung wounds are murder."

I looked down at Tony Aquista's grinning wax face. "Murder is the word."

I must have said it loudly or strangely. The doctor gave me a compunctious look:

"This man a buddy of yours?"

"No. I just don't like to see it happen to anybody. Have you called the police?"

"The sheriff's office. It happened in the county, didn't it?"

"That's where they ditched him, anyway."

He moved to the door, saying over his shoulder: "The sheriff will want you to stick around, I expect."

I didn't tell him that waiting in sterile rooms for policemen was my calling. I waited for this one on a metal camp-chair outside the receiving room. The business of the hospital went on around me. Nurses came and went, clearing the room for the next emergency case. Tony Aquista, featureless under a sheet, was trundled away to the morgue at the end of the corridor.

Part of my mind went with him into the cold darkness. It's like that sometimes when a younger man dies. I felt as if a part of me had turned to wax under the white lights.

From somewhere in the murmurous bowels of the building, an infant's cry rose sharp. I wondered if it was a newborn baby equalizing the population of Las Cruces.

2.

A tall man in a grey business suit opened the door of the morgue. His dazzling off-white Stetson just missed the top of the door-frame as he came out. He smacked the concrete wall with the flat of his

hand, and said to the uniformed deputy behind him: "God damn it, what happened to Tony?"

The deputy shrugged. "Woman trouble, maybe. You know Tony, chief."

"Yes. I know Tony."

The sheriff's striding shadow lengthened toward me. The face under the hat-brim was long and lean like his body, and burned by the valley sun. Though he was young for his job, about my age, I could see the scars of old pain branching out from the corners of his eyes and bracketing his mouth. His eyes were deep-set and dark like the windows of a haunted house.

"You're the one who brought him in?"

"I'm the one."

"You're not a Las Cruces man, are you?"

"Los Angeles."

"I see." He nodded as if I had made a damaging admission. "Let's have your name and home address."

I gave him my name, Lew Archer, and my business address on Sunset Boulevard. The deputy wrote them down. The sheriff dragged a second chair up to mine and sat facing me:

"I'm Sheriff Church. This is Danelaw, my identification officer. And what's your occupation, Mr. Archer, besides acting like a good Samaritan?" If Church was trying to be genial, he wasn't succeeding.

"I'm a licensed private detective."

"Quite a coincidence. Or is it? What were you doing out on the highway?"

"Driving. I'm on my way to Sacramento."

"Not tonight," he said brusquely. "It doesn't pay to be a good Samaritan nowadays. I'm afraid you're going to have to put up with a certain amount of red tape. We'll need you for the inquest, for one thing."

"I realize that."

"I'll hurry it if I can — tomorrow or the next day. Today is Thursday; can you stay over until Saturday?"

"If I have to."

"Good. Now, how did you happen to pick him up?"

I told him the story. When I mentioned Mrs. Kerrigan he looked up. "What was she doing there?"

"Holding down the desk, apparently."

"Wasn't Kerrigan's manager around? Miss Meyer?"

"If she was, I didn't see her. Does it matter?"

"No." The sheriff's voice had risen. He brought it under control. "It's the first time I ever heard of Kate Kerrigan going to work in the place."

Danelaw looked up from his notebook. "She's been out there all week."

Church looked at him as if he had more questions, but he swallowed them. His knobbed throat moved visibly. I said:

"Kerrigan was a little under the weather. Which may account for

his manners. He asked me if I shot the man myself."

A tight smile pincered the sheriff's mouth. "What did you say to that?"

"No. I never saw the man before. I thought I'd get that on the record, in case he babbles some more."

"Not a bad idea, under the circumstances. Now, if you'll show me the way to the spot where you found him."

We stood up at the same time. His bony hand closed on my shoulder and urged me toward the exit. I couldn't tell whether it was a gesture of encouragement or command. In any case, I jerked my shoulder free.

His car was a new black Mercury special with undercover plates and no official markings. It followed me south out of town, the way I had come. The twilight lull in the traffic was over. It was full night now. Headlights after headlights stabbed up through the valley from the south, flashed in my eyes and away. From the north we were overtaken by a second official car.

We passed through the deserted camp and I began to watch the roadside. Spotlight beams from the cars behind me dragged in the ditch like broken oars of light. After two false stops, I found the place. It was marked by a dribble of drying blood on the gravel shoulder.

Several deputies climbed out of the second patrol car. One of them gave the sheriff an impatient salute:

"Communications got in touch with Meyer. Aquista was driving today, all right, and the truck is missing."

"What was on the truck?"

"Meyer won't say. He wants to talk to you about it."

"Where's Meyer now?"

"At the yard."

"Go over to the west side and get the dope on the truck. Tell the old man I'll be along later. Put out a general alarm on it. And I want roadblocks on every road leading out of the county. Got that?"

"Yessir."

The deputy ran to his car. The sheriff and the rest of his men went over the ground with eyes and fingers and flashbulbs.

Danelaw took an impression of my shoe and checked it against the footprints in the ditch. There were none except mine, and no new tire-tracks on the gravel shoulder.

"It looks as if he was dumped from a car," Church said. "Or maybe from his truck. Whatever it was it didn't leave the concrete." He looked at me. "Did you see a car? A truck?"

"No."

"Nothing at all?"

"No."

"It's possible they didn't stop, just flung him out and let him lie, and he crawled off the road himself."

Danelaw spoke up from the side of the road. "I'd say that's what he did, chief. There's traces of blood

where he dragged himself into the ditch."

Church spat on the concrete. "A God-damn nasty business." He turned to me, almost casually. "Can I have a look at your license, by the way?"

"Why not?" I showed him my photostat.

"It looks all right to me. And what did you say you were going to do when you got to Sacramento?"

"I didn't say. I have a report to make to a legislative committee." I named the committee chairman. "He hired me to study narcotics distribution in the Southern Counties."

I started for my car, but Church stopped me:

"Don't bother. You're not under suspicion. Not too much, anyway." He was silent for a moment. "What do you say we go and talk to Kerrigan?"

"It sounds delightful."

By this time the roadside was lined with cars, official and unofficial. A highway patrolman was directing traffic with a flashlight. He made room for the sheriff's Mercury to turn, and I followed in my car.

The red glow over the city reminded me of the reflection of the emergency sign at the hospital, infinitely magnified. Beyond the glowing city, in the hills, the rotating beam of an air beacon seemed to be probing the night for some kind of meaning.

3.

Kerrigan must have been watching for the sheriff. He came out of the lobby as I pulled up behind the Mercury.

"How's the boy, Brand?"

"Good enough."

They shook hands. But I noticed as they talked that each man watched the other like chess opponents who had played before. Or opponents in a deadlier game than chess. No, Kerrigan said, he didn't know what had happened to Aquista, or why. He had seen no evil, heard no evil, done no evil. The man in the car had asked to use his phone, and that was his sole connection with the case. He gave me a look of bland hostility.

"How's business, by the way?" Church glanced up at the No-Vacancy sign, which was lit. "I guess I don't have to ask."

"As a matter of fact it's lousy. I turned that on because my wife's too upset to handle the desk. She says."

"Is Anne on her vacation?"

"You could call it that."

"Did she quit?"

Kerrigan lifted and dropped his heavy shoulders. "I wouldn't know. I was going to ask you."

"Why me?"

"She's your relative, after all. She hasn't been on the job all week, and I haven't been able to get in touch with her."

"Isn't she in her apartment?"

"The phone doesn't answer." Kerrigan peered up sharply into the sheriff's face. "Haven't you seen her either, Brand?"

"Not this week. We don't see too much of Anne any more."

"That's funny; I thought she was practically part of the family."

"You thought wrong. She and Hilda get together now and then, but mostly Anne leads her own life."

Kerrigan smiled his soft and ugly smile. "Maybe this week she's leading her own life a little more than usual, eh?"

"What does that mean?"

"Whatever you want it to."

Church took a long step toward him, his hands clubbed. His eyes were wide and black, and his face had a green patina in the colored light. He looked sick with anger.

I opened the car-door and got one foot on the gravel. The sound of my movement checked him. He stood shivering, staring down into Kerrigan's evil grin. Then he turned on his heel and walked away from us. He walked like a mechanical man to the margin of the light and stood there with his back to us and his head down.

"Shut my big mouth, eh?" Kerrigan said cheerfully. "He'll blow his top once too often, and blow himself out of the courthouse."

Mrs. Kerrigan opened the door of the lobby. "Is something the matter, Don?" She came toward us, wearing a silver fox cape and an anxious expression.

"Something always is. I told the sheriff Anne Meyer didn't turn up this week. He seems to think I'm to blame. I'm not responsible for his God damn sister-in-law."

She laid a timid hand on his arm, like somebody trying to soothe an excited animal. "You must have misunderstood him, darling. He probably just wants to ask her about Tony Aquista."

"Why?" I said. "Did she know Aquista too?"

"Of course. He had a crush on her. Didn't he, Don?"

"Shut up."

She backed away on her high heels, as if she'd been pushed.

"Go on, Mrs. Kerrigan. It may be important. Aquista died just now."

"He died?" Her hands went to her breast and wound themselves in the fur cape. She looked from me to her husband. "Is Anne mixed up in it?"

"I wouldn't know," he said. "That's enough, Kate. Go inside. You're cold and upset and making a fool of yourself."

"I am not. I have a perfect right to talk to anyone I choose."

"You're not going to shoot off your mouth to this bastard."

"I haven't been —"

"Shut up." His voice was quiet and deadly. "You've made enough trouble for me already."

He seized her elbows from behind and half-carried her to the door of the lobby. She struggled weakly,

but when he released her she went in without a backward glance.

He came back toward me, running his fingers through his hair. It was clipped in a crew-cut, much too short for his age. It gave him an unreal surface of youth, under which a current of cruelty flickered.

"You don't believe in killing them with kindness."

"I know how to handle bitches. Purebred bitches or any other kind. I also know how to handle nosy sons of bitches. Unless you've got official business here, I suggest you get out. Quick."

I looked around. Church was in a phone booth at the end of the row of cottages. The receiver was at his ear, but he wasn't talking.

"Take it up with the sheriff," I said. "I'm with him."

"Just who are you, mac? If I thought you sicked the sheriff onto me —"

"What would happen, sweetheart?" He was my favorite man now. I kept my hands down and my chin out, hoping he would swing and give me a chance to counter.

"You'd be flat on your back with a throatful of teeth."

"I thought you only pushed women around."

"You want a demonstration?"

But he was bluffing. From the sharp bright corners of his eyes, he was watching the sheriff approach. Church's face was solemn:

"I owe you an apology, Don. I don't often lose my head like that."

"Don't you? You'll try it once too often."

"All right. Let's bury it. I didn't hurt you."

"I'd like to see you try."

"I said bury it," Church repeated quietly. His facial muscles were anatomized by the effort he was exerting to hold himself under control. "Tell me more about Anne. Nobody seems to know where she is. She didn't tell Hilda anything."

"She didn't quit the job. She just went away for the weekend and didn't show up for work Monday. I haven't had any word from her."

"Where did she go?"

"You tell me. She doesn't report to me."

They faced each other for a long still moment. There was something worse than potential violence between them, a hatred that went beyond violence and absorbed them completely, like a grand passion.

Church saw me watching them, and jerked his head in command. I left them bound in their quiet vicious quarrel, and went into the dark lobby. It was lit only by the green and yellow light filtering through the venetian blinds, and all I could see of Mrs. Kerrigan, curled on a lounge in the farthest corner, was silver-pointed hair and the wet gleam of eyes.

"Who is it?"

"Archer. The one who brought you the trouble."

"You didn't bring the trouble. I've had it all along." She rose and

came to the center of the room. "Who are you, Mr. Archer?"

"I'm a private detective. The Southern Counties are my normal beat. I stumbled into this one."

"Didn't we all." Her odor was faint and fragrant, like nostalgia for half-forgotten summers. Her troubled whisper might have been the voice of the breathing darkness: "What does it all mean?"

"Your guess is better than mine. You know the people involved."

"Do I? I don't really know my own husband, even."

"How long have you been married?"

"Seven years. Seven lean years." She hesitated. "Mr. Archer, are you the sort of detective people hire, to find out things about other people?"

I told her I was.

"Could I — can I trust you?"

"It's up to you. Other people have been able to, but I don't carry references."

"Would it cost a great deal? I have *some* money left."

"I don't know what you have in mind."

"Of course you don't. I'm sorry. Perhaps I just don't want to make trouble for anyone —"

"Such as your husband?"

"Yes. My husband." Her voice dropped, almost out of hearing. "I found Don packing last night. I believe he intends to leave me."

"Why not ask him?"

"I wouldn't dare," she said with a desolate kind of wit. "He might give me an answer."

"You're in love with him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," she said a little wildly. "I was at one time."

"Another woman?"

"Other women, yes."

"Would Anne Meyer be one of them?"

"I know she used to be. There was a — a thing between them last year. He told me it was off, but it may still be on. If you could find her —" Her voice trailed off.

"Where did she spend the weekend?"

"I really don't know."

"With your husband?"

"No. At least, he says not. I was going to say —"

Kerrigan spoke behind me: "What were you going to say?"

He had quietly opened the door of the lobby. His bulky shadow moved forward out of its light. He pushed past me and leaned tensely toward his wife:

"I told you not to shoot off your mouth."

"I didn't —"

"But I heard you. *You* wouldn't call me a liar now, would you, Kate?"

His back swung sideways. I heard the crack of the blow, and the woman's hissing gasp. I took him by the shoulder. "Lay off her, bully boy."

The heavy wad of padding tore in my hand. He let out a canine

yelp and turned on me. One of his fists numbed the side of my neck.

I backed into the light from the doorway and let him come to me. He charged like a ram, directly into my left. It straightened him up, and I followed through with a short right cross to the jaw. His knees buckled. He swayed forward. I hit him again with my left before his face struck the carpet.

His wife looked at me fearfully. "You'd better get out of here now. Don has a gun and he knows how to use it."

"Did he use it on Aquista?"

"That's ridiculous." Her voice was high and defensive. "My husband had nothing to do with it. He was here with me all afternoon." Without looking at me she said: "Please go now."

"What about the job we were discussing?"

"We'll simply have to forget it. I can't stand any more trouble."

"Whatever you say. It's your marriage."

4.

Sammy's Oriental Gardens was a big old-fashioned restaurant with a crowded bar along one side and wooden booths on the other, painted black and orange. Unlit paper lanterns were swaying dismally near the smoky pressed-iron ceiling when I walked in, and a languid ceiling fan stirred an atmosphere compounded of rancid grease and soy sauce, whiskey-laden breath and human sweat. The people were from the lower echelons of valley life: oilfield roughnecks and their women, cowpokes in high-heeled riding boots, an old rumdum sitting in a booth in alcoholic isolation, waiting for dreams to begin.

It surprised me that this should be Kerrigan's choice of hiding-place when he'd recovered from the quick fight we'd had. But I couldn't very well argue about it, since I'd followed him here.

The Chinese waiter came forward from the rear and showed me his teeth and gums. "You wish a booth, sir?" he said precisely.

Kerrigan had gone into a private room. "I'd prefer a private room."

"Sorry, sir, it's been taken. If you had come a minute earlier."

"It doesn't matter."

I sat down in one of the front booths so that I could watch the archway in the mirror behind the bar: the archway that led to Kerrigan's private room. The menu featured a steak; Fit for a King, it said, So Bring Your Queen. It lied.

I was washing down the last leathery shreds of the steak with beer when a girl sauntered in from the street. Her head was small and beautifully moulded, capped with short black hair like glistening satin. She had flat black eyes, a mouth as sullen as sin. Her mink-dyed rabbit coat hung open, and her hips swayed as she walked to an obvious rhythm.

Every man at the bar, including

the Filipino bartender, was simultaneously aware of her. She loitered near the entrance, soaking up their awareness as if it was a fuel or a food. Her soft tiny-waisted body seemed to swell and luxuriate, and her breasts rose against the pressure of eyes.

My eyes met her. I couldn't help smiling at her. She gave me a scornful look, and turned to the waiter:

"Is he here?"

"He just came in, miss. He's waiting for you in the private room."

I watched her sway out after him, wondering if she could be Anne Meyer. She didn't look like any motel manager I had ever seen. Whatever her business was, there had to be sex in it. She was as full of sex as a grape is full of juice, and so young that it hadn't begun to sour.

I waited until the waiter had disappeared through the swinging door to the kitchen. Then I got up and moved to the curtained archway. The corridor behind it was narrow and ill-lit, with doors marked *Men* and *Ladies* at the far end. A nearer doorway was hung with a thick green curtain, through which I could hear a muffled conversation. I leaned on the wall beside it. The girl's voice said:

"Was that your wife on the phone? I never talked to her before."

"That was her." Kerrigan let out a mirthless snort. "You shouldn't have phoned me at the court. She caught me packing my bags last night; I'm afraid she's catching on."

"To us, you mean?"

"To everything."

"Does it matter? She can't stop us."

"You don't know her," he said. "She's still stuck on me, in a way. And everything matters right now. I shouldn't be here. We should have waited."

"I waited all day, Donny. I didn't hear from you, I didn't have any weed, and my nerves were screaming. I had to see you. I had to know what happened."

"Nothing happened. It worked. It's all over."

"Then we can go? Now?" She sounded young and eager.

"Not yet. I have things to do. I have to contact Bozey —"

"Isn't he gone?"

"He better not be. He still owes me money."

"He'll pay you. Bozey's no con man. When do you see him?"

"Later. He isn't the only one."

"When you see him, will you do something for me, Donny?" Her voice was a kittenish mew. "Ask him for a couple of reefers for me? I can get plenty in Mexico, only I need them now, tonight. I can't stand this waiting."

"You think I'm enjoying the strain?" Self-pity whined in his tone. "It's tearing me apart. If I wasn't crazy I wouldn't be here at all."

"Don't worry, honey. Nothing can happen here. Sammy knows about us."

"Yeah. How many other people

know about us? And how much? There was a private detective snooping around the motor court —"

"Forget about it, Donny." The kitten in her throat was purring now. "Come over here and tell me about the place. You know? How we'll lie in the sun all day without any clothes and have fun and watch the birds and the clouds and have servants to wait on us. Tell me."

I heard his feet on the floor and looked in through the narrow crack between the door-frame and the edge of the curtain. He was standing behind her chair with a doped expression on his face, a Band-Aid cross on his chin. His hands moved downward from her neck and clutched her with a kind of desperation. She sighed and shivered, leaning back against the tumescent center of his body. Her depthless eyes had taken on depth and luster.

"Don't hurt me, Donny."

"I wouldn't hurt you, baby. Stand up."

She put her hands over his and lifted one of them to her mouth. It came away red-smeared. Kerrigan bent over her face, his fingers plucking at her clothes like a dying man at his sheets.

A sibilant voice said behind me: "Looking for something, sir?"

The Chinese waiter was in the archway, balancing a tray on which a pair of steaks sizzled.

"The men's room?"

"At the end of the hall, sir." His smile looked ready to bite me.

"Thank you. I'm very short-sighted."

"Don't mention it, sir."

When I came back the private room was empty. The steaks sat untouched on the table, with Kerrigan's empty glass. I went out through the restaurant. The Chinese waiter was behind the bar.

"Where did they go?" I said.

He looked at me as if he had never seen me before, and answered in sing-song Chinese.

Outside, the street was deserted. Kerrigan's red convertible had left its parking-place. I circled the block in my car, fruitlessly, and widened the circle to take in several blocks. Near the corner of Main and a street called Yanonali, I saw the girl walking in a westerly direction on Yanonali.

She was by herself, but her body swayed as if she had an audience. I let her get well ahead, then crawled along in second half a block behind her. The pavement and the buildings deteriorated as we left the downtown section. Dilapidated flats were interspersed with dim little bars and sandwich counters. The people, brown and black and dirty grey, had dim personalities to match the buildings. All but the girl I was following. She swaggered along through the lower depths of the city as if she was drunk with her own desirability.

Street lights were few and far between. On a corner under one of them a gang of Negro boys too young for the bars were horsing in

the road, projecting their black identities against the black indifference of the night. They froze when the girl went by, looking at her from eyes like wet brown stones. She paid no attention to them.

She went into the lobby of an apartment building. It was big for the street, three-storied, and had once been fairly pretentious. But the dark tides of Yanonali Street had lapped at its foundations and surrounded it with an atmosphere of hopelessness. The lights behind the blinded windows, the ill-lit lobby open on the street, gave an impression of furtive transiency.

I didn't know the girl's name, and she would be almost impossible to find in the warren of rooms and corridors. I went back to my car. The Negro boys were standing around it on the road.

"How fast will she go?" the smallest one said.

"I've hit the peg a couple of times. A hundred. Who was the girl that just went past, the one in the fur coat?"

Nobody knew.

"Any of you kids know old man Meyer? The Meyer Truck Line?"

The tallest one said: "Mister, you want a girl or a truck? Make up your mind."

The small boy gave me an address. I thanked him and put a dollar in his hand. The others watched the transaction with the same bright stony look that they had given the girl. As I drove away, a tin can rattled on my turtle-back. Their rattling laughter followed me down the street.

5.

Meyer lived in a big frame house which stood against a eucalyptus grove at the rear of a vacant lot. The lot wasn't entirely vacant. Eight or nine car bodies, T-models, A-models, an old Reo truck and a pickup, lay among its weeds in various stages of disintegration.

I tried the front door. It was locked. Three shots cracked out, from somewhere deep inside the house, probably the basement. Between them I heard the tap-tap of approaching footsteps. A woman's voice said through the door:

"Is that you, Brand?"

I didn't answer. A light went on over my head and she pulled the heavy door open. "Oh. I'm sorry. I was expecting my husband."

She was a tall woman, still young, with a fine head of chestnut hair. Her body leaning awkwardly in the doorway was heavy-breasted and very female, almost too female for comfort.

"Mrs. Church?"

"Yes. Have we met somewhere?"

Her malachite-green eyes searched my face, but they were only half-focused. They seemed to be looking through me or beyond me for something in the outside darkness, someone she feared or loved.

"I've met your husband," I said.

"What's all the shooting about?"

"It's only father. When something upsets him, he likes to go down in the basement and shoot at a target."

"I don't have to ask you what upsets him. In fact, I want to talk to him about the truck he lost." I told her my name and occupation. "May I come in?"

"If you like. I warn you, the house is a mess. I have my own house to look after, and I can't do much for father's. I've tried to get him to have a woman in, but he won't." She opened the door wider and stood to one side. Stepping in past her, I gave her a close look. If she had known how to groom herself, she could have been beautiful. But her thick hair was chopped off in girlish bangs which made her face seem wide. Her dress was too young and it hung badly on her, parodying her figure.

She backed away from my gaze like a shy child, turned and went to a door at the end of the hallway. She called down a lighted stairway:

"Father, there's someone to see you."

A rough bass asked: "Who is it?" — punctuated by a single shot.

"He says he's a detective. A Mr. Archer."

"Tell him to wait."

Five more shots shounded under the floor. I felt their vibration through the soles of my shoes. Heavy feet mounted the stairs, and Mrs. Church backed away from the man who appeared in the light. He faced me under a deerhead, a big old wreck of a man who had started to shrink in his skin. White glinted in the reddish stubble on his cheeks and chin, and his eyes, rimmed with red, smouldered in his head like the last vestiges of inextinguishable and ruinous passion.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Archer?"

I told him I had stumbled into the case and wanted to stay in it. I didn't tell him why. I didn't know exactly why, though Kate Kerrigan had something to do with it. And perhaps Aquista's death had become the symbol of the senseless violence I had heard about in the valley towns. Here was my chance to get to the bottom of it.

"You mean you want me to hire you?" Meyer said.

"I'm giving you the opportunity."

"Who you been talking to? Has Kerrigan been griping?"

"Where does he come in?"

"It's Kerrigan's whiskey they lifted."

"You mean he owns the payload?"

"Seventy thousand dollars' worth of bourbon. He runs the *Golden Slipper* club on Yanonali Street."

"The load was insured?"

"Ninety percent insured. I didn't have full coverage. The other ten comes out of my pocket." He grimaced painfully, as if he were describing a surgical operation that he faced, a moneyectomy.

"I'll work for ten percent of the ten percent. Seven hundred if I get the load back."

"And if you don't?"

"One hundred for expenses. Paid now."

He smiled for the first time, foxily. "I hear you. Okay, I'll make a deal."

"Aren't you pretty business-as-usual for a man who lost a driver and a truck? Not to mention a daughter."

"What daughter are you talking about?"

"Anne. She's missing."

"You're crazy. She works for Kerrigan."

"Not any more. She dropped out of sight last Friday, according to Mrs. Kerrigan. They haven't seen her all week?"

"Why doesn't anybody tell me these things?" He went to the telephone which stood on a desk in the corner of the room, and dialled a number. Hilda looked at me anxiously:

"Has something happened to Anne?"

"Let's not jump to conclusions. You wouldn't have a picture of her around, a recent picture?"

"I have at home, of course. I don't know if father has. I'll see." She moved to the door on white flitting legs as if she was glad to escape from the room.

Meyer dropped the receiver. "She doesn't answer," he said. "Doesn't Kerrigan know where she is?"

"He says not."

"You think he's lying?"

"I got the idea from his wife."

"Don't tell me she's waking up after all these years. I thought he had her buffaloed for keeps."

"I wouldn't know," I said cautiously. "Did Kerrigan know what driver you were going to use?"

"I guess he did at that. Tony's the only one bonded for that amount." His small eyes peered at me from under bunched grey eyebrows. "What kind of lines are you thinking along, boy? You think he jacked his own whiskey? If I thought that I'd cut out his liver and lights and eat them for breakfast."

"It's a little early to plan a menu," I said. "I need more facts. Right now, I need a hundred dollars from you."

"Damn it, I thought you forgot about that."

Two fifties changed hands. "Anything else?"

"As a matter of fact, there is. About your daughter Anne, has she been in trouble before?"

"Is Annie mixed up in this some way?"

"She's close to Kerrigan, and pretty close to Aquista, I understand."

"You understand wrong. Tony was stuck on her, all right. She couldn't see him for sour apples. Hell, she was scared of him. She came around here one night last year, and she wanted —" He paused and looked at me warily.

"Wanted what?"

"Something to protect herself with. I told her I'd fire Tony, but she didn't want it that way; she was a soft-hearted kid in her way. So I gave her what she asked for."

"A gun?"

"An old .38 revolver that I had." He caught and answered my silent question: "Anne didn't shoot him with it, if that's what you're thinking. All she wanted was something to protect herself from him. It just goes to show that Tony was a big nothing to her."

"Is Kerrigan?"

"I wouldn't know." But his eyes clouded with embarrassment.

"Have they been living together?"

"I guess so." The words came hard, forced from the bitter mouth. "I heard last year that he was paying the rent on her apartment."

"It's a lie," Hilda said from the doorway. She came toward us, pale and stiff with emotion. "You should be ashamed of yourself, passing on that rotten lie. The people in this town will say anything about each other. Anything."

"I was ashamed all right. Not for myself. There was no way I could stop her."

"There was nothing to stop," she said to me. "It was all a lot of gossip. Anne wouldn't have anything to do with a married man."

"That's not the way I heard it," the old man said.

An electric arc of hatred flared suddenly between them. He hunched his shoulders threateningly. Hilda raised one arm to defend her fear-radiant face. She was holding a rectangle of shiny paper in her upflung hand. Meyer snatched it from her. "Where did you get this?"

"It was stuck in your bureau drawer."

"You stay out of my room."

"With pleasure. It smells like a bear-cage."

He shrugged her off and looked down at the snapshot, shielding it like a match-flame with his hands. I asked him to let me see it. He passed it to me unwillingly, handling it like money.

The girl in the snapshot was sitting against a white boulder on a sun-drenched beach, holding her legs as if she loved their shape. Her curly dark hair was windblown, and she was laughing. She bore some resemblance to her sister, though she was prettier. She bore no resemblance at all to the girl I had seen with Kerrigan.

"What color is her hair, Mrs. Church?"

"Brown, reddish brown, like mine. We're quite alike in some ways. We used to wear the same clothes and even shoes. Though she's seven years younger than I am. Twenty-five."

"Is this a recent picture?"

"Fairly recent. Brandon took it last summer." She looked at her father with cold curiosity: "I didn't know you had a print of it."

"There's a lot of things you don't know."

"I wonder."

Hilda Church broke the silence: "Didn't you say Brandon was going to call for me?"

"If he could make it. He's pretty busy tonight."

I said: "I'll be very glad to drop you off."

"Oh, no, you're very kind, but I couldn't."

"Of course you could, Hilda. Mr. Archer don't mind. He was just leaving anyway."

Before we left I took him aside and asked him about the truck Aquista had been driving. He described it for me, a new, big semi.

I thanked him and we got out quickly. He stayed in his corner like a tired old bull in his *querencia.*

6.

"We live on the far side of town, Mr. Archer, in the foothills. I'm afraid it's a long drive."

"I don't mind." I backed the car out past the stalled, rusting cavalcade in the vacant lot and turned east toward the center of the city. "I wanted to talk to you anyway, in private."

"About my sister?"

"Yes. Has she gone away like this before?"

"Once or twice she has. But not without telling me."

"You two are close, aren't you?"

"We always have been. We're not like some sisters I know, fighting all the time. We used to wear each other's clothes and shoes, even."

"Where does your sister live when she's at home?"

"She has her own apartment, in Bougainvillea Court, number three. It's not far from here, on Los Bagnos Street."

"I may go over there later. I don't suppose you have a key?"

"No, I don't. Why do you want a key?"

"I'd like to have a look at her possessions. They might give some indication of where she's gone, and why."

"I see. No doubt the superintendent can let you in. Where do you think Anne has gone, Mr. Archer?"

"I was going to ask you. I have no idea, unless it's with Kerrigan."

"Don't listen to father," she said. "That stinking gossip he told you about Anne and Mr. Kerrigan — there's nothing in it at all. Why do you keep harping on it?"

"When a woman disappears, you look for the men in her life. What about the men in her life?"

"Anne goes out with dozens of men. I don't keep track of them." Her voice was sharp, and I wondered if there was some jealousy.

"You turn off here to the left," she said suddenly."

The road spiralled off among low hills whose flanks were dotted with houses. It was a good residential

suburb, where people turned their backs on small beginnings and looked to larger futures. Most of the houses were new, so new they hadn't been assimilated to the landscape, and very modern. They had flat jutting roofs, and walls of concrete and glass skeletonized by light.

I turned up a blacktop drive at her direction and stopped the car. The house was similar to the other houses, except that there were no lights behind the expansive windows. She sat motionless, looking out at the dark low building as if it was a dangerous maze that she had to find her way through.

"This is where you live?"

"Yes. This is where I live." Her voice surrounded the words with tragic overtones. "I'm sorry. I keep saying that. But I'm afraid to go in."

"Afraid of what?"

"What are people afraid of? Death. Other people. The dark. I'm terrified of the dark. A doctor would call it nyctophobia, but knowing the name of it doesn't seem to help."

"I'll go in with you if you like."

"I would like. Very much."

I gave her my arm as we mounted the flagstone path. She held it awkwardly, pulling away as if it embarrassed her. But her hip and bosom bumped me in the doorway. She took my hands in both of hers, in the dark hall: "Don't leave me now."

"I have to."

"Please don't leave me alone. I'm terribly afraid. Feel my heartbeat."

She pressed my hand to her side, so hard my fingertips sank through the soft flesh and felt the ribcage, hammered from within by fear or something wilder. Her voice was a whisper close to my ear, so close I could feel her breath, and then her lips: "You see? I am afraid. I've had to spend so many nights alone."

I kissed her lightly and then disengaged myself. "You can always turn on the light." I fumbled along the wall for the switch.

"No." She pushed my arm down. "I don't want you to see my face. I'm crying, and I'm not pretty."

"You're pretty enough for all practical purposes."

"No. Anne is the pretty one."

"I wouldn't know. I've never met her. Good night, Mrs. Church."

7.

Bougainvillea Court was guarded by a pair of date palms which stood like unkempt sentries on either side of its entrance. Each of the eight cottages surrounding it had a small front porch overgrown with purple-flowering bougainvillea. There were lights and music in most of the cottages, but not in number three.

The door opened with a touch. I switched on my pocket flashlight. The edge of the door was grooved and splintered around the lock. I stepped inside and closed it with my elbow.

My light picked walls and furniture out of the darkness. There were brown Gauguin nudes on the walls and big-hatted Lautrec tarts in light wood frames; a false fireplace, a small bookcase, spilling paperbacks, a birdseye maple secretary, a rattan portable bar and a sectional davenport covered in zebra stripes, which looked both new and expensive. The secretary was hanging open, the bolt of its flimsy lock bent out of shape. Its drawers were stuffed with papers and envelopes. The topmost one was addressed to Miss Anne Meyer in a masculine hand. It was empty.

A curtained archway led through a short hall to the bedroom. I looked around. The closet was full of clothes, sports clothes, business suits, a couple of evening dresses lightly sented with sachet.

It was impossible to tell if anything was missing, but there were gaps in the shoe-stand. There was nothing under the bed; nothing of special interest in the chest of drawers, except to underwear fetishists. Anne Meyer had spent a lot of money on underwear.

I was looking in the bathroom and finding nothing when I heard the door click. I came back into the front room but nobody was there. I took a letter out of the secretary; the envelope had been postmarked in San Diego almost a year before. It was signed "Tony." I went back into the lighted bathroom and shut myself in to read it:

Dear Anne:

Maybe you are supprized to hear from me. I am supprized myself. After what you said the last time I didn't think I would want to see you again, let alone write a letter. But here I am stuck in Dago with nothing better to do since this is a dreary berg since the war. The ship I am supposed to meet won't dock until tomorrow at the earliest so here I am stuck in a room in Dago for the night. I can see youre face right here in the room with me Anne. Why don't you smile at me.

The letter went on like that for two pencil-scrawled pages, and closed:

I saw you thru the window with "him." You looked like the Madonna right when you were "doing it." That is the way I see your face on the wall in front of me in this room. When I turn out the light I see you in the dark shinning like a star. I love you Anne.

Your loyal friend,

Tony

When I opened the bathroom door I knew why the door had clicked open. There was a gun thrust past the gathered curtain at the side of the arch. It was a .45 but it was small in the hand that was holding it.

"Come out of there."

I froze in the doorway, half of my body exposed. I could feel the line between safety and danger bisecting my center.

"Out of there with your hands up." It was the sheriff's voice. "I'll

give you a count of three before I fire." He began to count.

I dropped the flash in my pocket and raised my hands, stepping out of the friendly shadow. Church came through the arch. He looked about seven feet tall.

"You." He came up close, pressing his gun into my solar plexus. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Meyer hired me to look for his truck."

"And you thought it was concealed here?"

"He also hired me to look for his daughter."

He pushed the gun deeper and leaned on it. "Where is she, Archer?"

I tensed myself against the gun's sharp pressure, against the sharper pressure of panic. Church's eyes were wide and blank. The muscles were ridged and dimpling around his mouth. He looked ready to kill.

"I wouldn't know," I said. "I'd suggest you ask Kerrigan."

"What do you mean?"

"If you'll drop the tough-cop kick I'll tell you. Iron isn't good for my stomach. Neither is lead."

He pulled the gun away, looking down at it as if it were a separate entity which resisted his control. But he didn't return it to its holster. "What about Kerrigan?"

"He crops up all over the place. When Tony Aquista was shot, Kerrigan was the nearest citizen. The truck was loaded with Kerrigan's whiskey. Now your sister-in-law turns up missing. She was Kerrigan's employee, very likely his mistress. And that's only the beginning." I was tempted to go on and tell him about *Sammy's Oriental Gardens.* But I decided not to. It belonged to me.

Church pushed his hat back as if it constricted his thoughts. His hand stayed up, rubbing a spot on his temple: a grooved bluish-white scar which might have been left there by a bullet-welt. He looked like a different man with his high forehead uncovered — a puzzled, sensitive man who wore the western hat and the hard-nosed front as protective coloration. Or a man so deeply split he didn't know himself. The gun hung down forgotten in his other hand.

When he spoke, it was in an altered voice, shallow and flat: "I've already questioned Kerrigan. He has an alibi for the shooting."

"His wife? A woman like that would lie for her husband."

"Maybe. She isn't lying."

"Maybe not," I said.

"If you want trouble," he promised me, "I can lock you up for breaking in the front door."

"I can do neater work than that. It was broken when I got here."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. The place was burglarized, but not by an ordinary burglar. There's an expensive watch on the bedroom table. A burglar would have taken it. He wouldn't have taken the other things that are missing — personal things."

"You had no right to barge in here," he said. "Even if you didn't jimmy the door yourself, you're breaking the law." It was important to him.

"Your wife gave me permission. Her sister's missing, she's next of kin —"

"Where did you see her?"

"I drove her home from Meyer's, less than an hour ago."

"Stay away from her, do you hear me?" he said in a rising voice. "Stay away from my house and my wife."

"Maybe you better instruct your wife to stay away from me."

I shouldn't have said it. Anger shook and wrenched him. His gun swung up, and the barrel clipped my chin. I wiped blood with the back of my hand.

"You'll probably regret this, sheriff."

His long face slanting forward over the gun was like tortured bronze. His eyes were blind and empty.

I walked on remote legs to the open door. The radio in the next cottage asserted loudly that loneliness, fear and unpopularity were things of the past, abolished by chlorophyll.

8.

Yanonali Street bent north at the city limits to join a state highway. A building stood at the angle of the roads. On its roof a high-heeled slipper outlined in yellow bulbs hinted broadly at women and champagne gaiety. Some of the bulbs were missing.

The champagne was domestic and flat. Three girls were waiting on the three end stools at the bar. Their drooping bodies straightened when I entered. They inflated their chests and opened their paint-heavy mouths in welcoming smiles. I passed them and went to the far end of the bar.

The room was shaped like a flat bottle with the narrow end in front. At the rear, behind an empty dancing space, a big neurotic jukebox voice was crying out loud in an echo-chamber for love which it didn't deserve, except from tone-deaf women.

Four youths in Hawaiian-print shirts were sucking on beer bottles in one of the rear booths. Each of the four had white peroxided forelocks, as if the same lightning had blasted them all at once. They looked at me with disdain. I had ordinary hair. I wasn't atomic.

I ordered a beer and took it to a booth. I didn't have to wait long. A picture over the bar took my glance and held it. The girl in the picture was the girl I'd seen in *Sammy's Oriental Gardens*. I was looking at it when one of the girls from the front of the bar slid into the booth, across from me:

"I'm Jerry Mae."

She was blonde, pretty enough and young in spite of the professional glaze in her eyes. "I'm Lew," I said.

"I love to dance."

"I used to."

"You got tired blood? You could always buy me a drink."

"I'd rather lie down."

She chose to interpret this as a pass and giggled mechanically. "You're a fast worker. Where do you hail from, Lew?"

"Los Angeles."

"I spent some time there myself. Los Angeles is a great town."

"A great town," I agreed.

Her fingertips moved on the sleeve of my jacket, assessing the probable cost of the fabric. "What do you do there, Lew?"

"Various things."

"I'd love to hear about them. Come on and buy me a drink and tell me about yourself."

"I'm interested in a girl," I said.

"Let's have a drink first."

"A particular girl. The one in the poster up there."

"She's not here any more. Won't I do?"

"What's her name?"

"I'm not an information bureau, mister." She got up to leave. I waved the bartender over. Sullenly, she sat down again. I ordered a beer and, on her request, a daiquiri for Jerry Mae.

"Please. It's important. Where can I get in touch with her?"

"I don't want to get Jo into any trouble," she said.

"I want to get her out of trouble."

"What do you want to know?"

"When did you see her last?"

"Three-four nights ago, here. Something happened to her?"

"No. Who was she with?"

"The boss — the guy who used to be the boss — brought some guy in. He must of told Jo to be nice to the guy. His name was Tony, he was an awful lush, loaded to the gills that night. Jo had to take him home."

"Who used to be the boss?"

"What? Oh. Kerrigan."

"Used to be?"

"Yeah. He sold the place, only day before yesterday it was. Why?"

"Never mind," I said. "Where can I get in touch with Jo?"

"The Cortes Apartments, on Yanonali Street. Listen, mister —" I was *mister* now.

"What's her last name?"

"Listen, mister," she went on, as if she was too far away to have heard me, "I don't want to get Jo in any trouble."

"You said that. Neither do I."

She shook her head. "Maybe I shouldn't tell you. Jo Summer."

"Thanks," I said. I got up and put two tens on the booth. "Split it with the boy at the bar."

"No thanks," she said. "So long. And listen, mister, if Jo gets into any trouble —"

"She won't," I said. I hoped I wasn't lying.

9.

Driving east on Yanonali Street, I remembered the evidence case in the back of my car. It contained

several hundred marijuana cigarettes, done up in packs of five. I had taken them from a pusher in Southgate and was going to turn them over to the State Bureau in Sacramento. If five were missing, the Bureau would never know the difference.

The Negro boys had vanished from the corner. I parked, opened the rear trunk and took out one of the little packets wrapped in butcher's paper.

The inner door of the lobby was locked. I looked for the name and found it, "Miss Jo Summer" in immature green handwriting. I pushed the button marked 7 and waited.

A low voice drifted through the grille of the speaking tube: "Is that you, doll?"

"Uh-huh."

The buzzer released the door-catch. I mounted the stairs into the obscurity of the building. My shadow climbed the wall and broke its neck on the ceiling.

Seven was the last door on the left. Its metal numeral rattled when I knocked. The door came ajar and the girl peered through the crack, blinking at me astigmatically. She said in a kittenish mew:

"I wasn't expecting you so soon. I was just going to take a bath."

She moved toward me, her body silhouetted in a thin rayon wrapper. One of her hands insinuated itself between my arm and my side. "A kiss for baby, Donny?"

Then she pushed herself away from me suddenly, stood with both hands flat against the wall. "Who are you? You said you were him."

"You got me wrong, Jo. Kerrigan sent me."

"He didn't say nothing to me about you."

She looked down at her breasts and gathered the wrapper across them, folding her arms. The kitten in her throat was scared and hissing: "Where is he? Why didn't he come himself?"

"He couldn't get away."

"Is *she* holding him up?"

"I wouldn't know. You'd better let me in. He gave me something for you."

"What?"

"I'll show you inside. You have neighbors."

"Have I? I never noticed. R. K. O., come in."

Inside the grimy room she came up to me like an eager child who had been promised a gift. "What did Donny send me?"

"This." I closed the door behind me and gave her the packet.

Her fingers tore it open, scattering the brown cigarettes on the rug. She went down on her knees to retrieve them, snatching at them as if they were live worms that might wriggle away from her. She stood up with four in her hands and one in her mouth.

I flicked my lighter and lit it for her. I told myself that it was necessary, that she had the habit anyway. But I couldn't shake off my feeling

that I had bought a small piece of her future.

She sucked on the brown weed like a starved baby on an empty bottle. Six of her deep shuddering drags ate half of it away. In no time at all the butt was burning her fingers.

She pressed it out in an ashtray and put it, along with the four whole reefers, away. She did a few dance-steps around the room, and then sat down on the red divan in a corner. Her smile kept changing: girlish and silly, queenly and triumphant, feline, evil and old, and gay again and girlish.

I sat down beside her. "How are you feeling, Jo?"

"I feel wonderful." Her voice came from far inside her head, barely moving her lips. "Jesus, I needed that. Thank Donny for me."

"I will. If I see him again."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"They're looking in his direction," I said.

"Who?" She took hold of my arm with both hands and shook it. "The cops?"

I nodded.

"What's the matter, isn't the protection working?"

"It takes pretty solid protection to cover murder."

Her lips curled, baring her teeth. "Did you say murder?"

"You heard me. A friend of yours was shot. Tony Aquista."

Without shifting her blazing eyes from my face, she edged away from me, crawling on hands and buttocks into the far corner of the divan. She said from her teeth:

"Aquista? Should I know the name? How many A's in Aquista?"

"Don't try to kid me, Jo. You brought him home here Sunday night."

"Who told you that? It's a lie." But her voice was croupy with fear: "Did they kill Tony?"

"You ought to know. You set him up for it."

"Tony isn't dead," she said suddenly. "You're trying to con me."

"Would you like to pay a visit to the morgue?"

"Don didn't tell me. He would of, if Tony got it. It wasn't supposed to happen."

"Why would he tell you? You knew. You fingered Tony, didn't you?"

"I did not. I didn't even set eyes on him since last Sunday night. I've been home here all day today." She rose and stood over me. "Is somebody trying to frame me? Who are you, anyhow?"

"A friend of Don's. I talked to him tonight."

"Is he arrested?"

"Not yet."

"Are you sluff?"

"Oh, sure," I said. "That's why I brought you those reefers."

"Funny Don never mentioned you."

"He doesn't tell you everything."

"No. I guess he doesn't." She

huddled in the corner of the divan, hugging her knees to her breast. "Are you supposed to be in on the deal?"

"I thought I was. But it looks as if he's been stinging both of us. The way he laid it out, you were the one that was going to finger Tony."

"That was the original plan," she said. "I was supposed to flag him down. No shooting, understand — I wouldn't go for that. Just stop the truck on the road and let Don and Bozey take over. Only they changed the plan. Something came up — something Tony told me Sunday night. He was drunk at the time, I didn't believe it. But Don believed it when I told him."

"What did you tell him?"

"This tale about Anne Meyer."

"Try it on me."

She looked at me sideways. "You ask an awful lot of questions. How do I know you're not a cop?"

I stood up, feigning anger, and moved to the door. "Have it your way, sister. I can take so much, but calling me sluff —"

She followed me. "Wait a sec. You don't have to flip your lid. Okay, you're a friend of Don's, you're in on the deal. You got a car?"

"It's outside."

"Will you drive me someplace?"

"If you say so. Where?"

"I don't know where. But I'm not going to sit here and wait to be picked off." She went to an inner door and turned with her hand on the knob: "I'll shower and put some clothes on. It won't take a minute." Her smile went on and off like an electric sign.

I waited for fifteen minutes. I smoked an old-fashioned cigarette made of tobacco and leafed through the "romance" magazines on the divan. It hit me finally that her shower-bath had lasted much too long.

I walked into her bedroom without knocking. The bureau drawers were hanging open, empty except for a few soiled clothes. I opened the bathroom door. The shower was running full force into the bathtub, but there was no girl under it.

I went through the dark kitchen, out the back door, down a flight of wooden steps into a walled alley. A little light filtered down through the porous sky, and showed me a man's figure at the mouth of the alley. Wide-shouldered and narrow-hipped in a leather windbreaker, he moved with a tomcat's grace and silence. I caught a glimpse of his face. It was young and pale. Dark red hair hung down over his temples in lank wings. He pushed it back with one hand. The other hand was hidden under the windbreaker. The wall's shadow fell across him.

"Did you happen to see a girl come out of here?" I asked.

"A little brunette? Yeah. I saw her."

He moved along the wall toward me, so close I could see his eyes and the frightened savage lostness in them.

"Which way did she go?"

"That depends. What do you want from her?"

His voice was quiet and calm, but I could sense the one-track fury behind it. He was one of the dangerous boys, born dry behind the ears and weaned on fury and grief. I set myself for trouble. "You wouldn't be Bozey?"

He didn't answer in words. His fist came out from under the windbreaker, wearing something bright, and smashed at the side of my head.

My legs forgot about me. I sat on the asphalt against the wall and looked at his armed right fist, a shining steel hub on which the night revolved. His face leaned over me, stark and glazed with hatred:

"Bow down, God damn you, sluff. I'm Bozey all right. Bow down and kiss my feet."

His bright fist drove downward at my face, and the night revolved more quickly, like dirty water going down a drain.

When I came to, I was in my car, trying to turn the trunk-key in the ignition. I drove like a drunk for a couple of blocks, weaving from curb to curb. Then my vision cleared and steadied.

Crossing the main street, I saw my bleeding face in the mirror over the windshield. It looked curiously lopsided. I glanced at my wristwatch to see what time it was. My wrist was bare. I shook myself down and found that my wallet was missing. But my .38 was still in the glove compartment. I transferred it to the side pocket of my jacket.

10.

Kerrigan's house stood on a slope in the northeastern part of the city. I parked in the slanting street. It was getting late, and most of the houses were dark. Kerrigan's wasn't. The red Ford convertible was standing in front of it.

I left the sidewalk, waded through dew-dense grass to the side of the next house, and stepped over a low fieldstone wall into Kerrigan's yard. The terraced lawn was splashed with light from the windows. There was a rumor of voices inside the house. The windows were too high to see through. I moved along the wall toward the front, and came to the front verandah, a deep railed platform partly shielded with split bamboo screening. I jumped for the railing, caught it, pulled myself over.

From where I stood I could see the interior of the room without being seen. It was a beautiful room, white-carpeted and filled with the suave and fragile curves of eighteenth-century furniture. The airy white ceiling was supported on Ionic capitals, repeated in the pilastered marble mantel. Someone with Europe on his mind had tried to trap a dream of civilization in the room, and had almost succeeded. Its present occupants were standing in front of the fireplace, telling each other that the dream was stone dead.

The woman's back was to me, straight and tense. A pearl collar gleamed coldly on her neck, under the yellow hair. "What I had is gone," she said, "so you're running out. I always knew you would."

"You always knew, eh?" Kerrigan stood facing her, leaning negligently against the mantel. One hand was in his pocket, the other held a short briar pipe. It was an actor's pose.

"Yes, I've known for a long time. Since you took up with the Meyer woman, anyway."

"That was over long ago."

"So you let me believe. But you've never been honest with me."

"I've tried. You want the honest truth?"

"You're not capable of telling it, Don. You're a helpless liar. Your entire life with me has been a lie. You haven't even given me common fidelity."

"Prove it."

"I don't have to. I know. You think you fooled me with your childish excuses —"

"Wait a minute." He pointed the stem of his pipe like a gun at her head. "Did you hear yourself, Kate? *Your* house, you said. Not our house. Yours. And you wonder why I feel like an interloper."

"Because you are one," she said. "My grandfather built this house for my grandmother. They left it to my father. My father left it to me. It's mine, one thing you'll never get your hands on."

"Who wants it?"

"You do, Don. It was only the other day you wanted me to sell it and give you the money."

"So I did." He shrugged his shoulders, smiling crookedly. "Well. It's too late now. You can keep your house and live in it yourself. Keep the doghouse, too. You'll need it for your next husband."

"Would I be likely to marry again, after my experience with you?"

"You're no tragic figure," he said. "Don't go dreaming you are. I admit I wasn't in love with you when we got married. I married you for your money. Is that such a terrible crime? Your hotshot friends in Santa Barbara do it every day. Hell, I thought I was doing you a good turn."

"Thank you for your gracious kindness —"

"No, listen to me for a change." His voice deepened, and he forgot his pose. "You were all by yourself. Your parents were dead. Your lover got himself killed in the war —"

"Talley wasn't my *lover*."

"That I can believe. Listen to me. You needed a man. I elected myself to fill the bill. I didn't make it, but you'll never know how hard I tried. I couldn't make it work, I had no chance to. You never even liked me."

"I loved you, though." She turned away from him. Her hands held her breasts as though they ached.

"Maybe you loved me in your

head. Only what good is love in the head? It's just a word. It's been chilly work, trying to be your husband, Kate. You never made me feel like a man. Not once."

Her face was drawn sharp over the harsh bones. "I'm not a magician," she said.

He raised his eyes to the blank patrician ceiling. "What's the use?"

"No use. It's over and done with. It only confirmed what I knew when I found you packing. I wasn't even surprised. I realized what was coming when I met you on the grounds of the Inn, a month ago, with that girl on your arm. And you pretended not to know me, Don. You kept looking at her."

"I don't know what you mean," he said without conviction. "I never was at the Inn with any girl."

"Of course not." She turned on him suddenly, clenching her hands, but her voice was quiet. "You're going away with her tonight, aren't you?"

"You're crazy."

"Am I? You gave her the keys to the Lodge last Friday. I heard her thank you for them. I suppose she's at the lake now, waiting for you."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"She spent the weekend at Lake Perdida. Didn't she?"

"All right. I told her she could have the lodge for the weekend. We weren't using it. I gave her the keys. Does that make me a criminal?"

"You're going there now," she said accusingly.

"I am not. Anne isn't there anyhow. I drove up to the lake on Monday to look for her and she was gone."

"Gone where?"

"I don't know." The subject seemed to disturb him. "Why do you keep on with it? Listen: I don't need anything you have."

She recoiled as if from a blow. After a while she repeated his name: "Don. Don, why did Brand Church come here tonight?"

"Routine investigation."

"It didn't sound that way to me."

"Were you eavesdropping?" He walked toward her.

"Certainly not. I couldn't help overhearing you."

"Forget it." His fingers curled about the pipe and clenched, snapping the amber stem. "Forget all about me. I'm a dismal loss, as you said. It's not all my fault. A man can take only so much." He shook his broken pipe at her, his voice rising. "I've had my bellyful. I'm getting out."

He started across the room toward the door. His wife called after him: "You don't fool me. You've been planning this for weeks. You just don't have the manhood to admit it."

He stopped in his tracks. "Since when have you been interested in manhood? It's the last thing that would appeal to you."

She laughed. It sounded like something delicate and brittle breaking

inside of her. "Is this what manhood looks like? Is this how it talks? Is this how a husband speaks to a wife?"

"What wife?" he said. "I don't see any wife." Kerrigan turned, grinding his heel in the white carpet, and wrenched the door open. I heard his angry feet stamp up the stairs.

I looked away from the unmoving woman. Below me Las Cruces lay tangled in its lights. The thickest, brightest cord in the net of lights was the yellow-lit freeway which carried the highway. The highballing trucks and cars, from the distance at which I sat, were like children's toys pushed without purpose across the face of midnight.

At the other end of the verandah a door opened. I pulled my legs up out of sight. Kerrigan stepped out, his shoulders bowed by a heavy leather suitcase in each hand.

"This is for good?" she said behind him.

"That's for sure."

She appeared in the doorway, a pale and desolate figure holding out one tentative hand. "Where are you going, Don?"

He said with his back to her, "You'll never know. So long, Kate. Don't make trouble for me. If you do, you'll get double trouble."

She watched him go down the steps and along the walk to the street where his car was parked. Her fingers clutched at her throat. They tore the pearl collar. The beads rattled like hail on the tiles.

11.

His double-red tail-light diminished down the slope, flashed at a boulevard stop and disappeared. When I reached the boulevard, his car was a long block away, headed south toward the suburbs. I kept the block's distance between us as far as the wye at the city limits. Then I closed in on him, cutting in and out through the highway traffic.

We were only a couple of miles from his motor court, and I thought he was on his way there. Instead, he pulled out of the southward stream of traffic and turned in on the asphalt apron of a drive-in restaurant. Its parking space held two cut-down jalopies, occupied by mugging couples, and a blue Buick coupe with battered fenders. As I went by, I saw Kerrigan draw up beside the Buick.

Next door to the drive-in stood a dark and unattended service station. I stopped beside its gas-pumps. From where I sat I could see the entrance to the drive-in and one glass wall of the building. Through the glass, Kerrigan's red Ford and the Buick coupe were dimly visible.

Kerrigan was standing between the two cars, talking to someone in the Buick. Its occupant, whose face was hidden from me, held out a package wrapped in dirty paper or newsprint. Kerrigan stuffed the package under his coat and returned to his car. The Buick's headlights went on. It backed and turned to-

ward the entrance. I caught a glimpse of a fur-collared leather jacket, a pale hard face framed in lank red hair. Bozey. A jet of adrenalin went through me. I followed him south out of town.

A few miles past Kerrigan's motor court I looked at my speedometer, which was climbing past seventy-five. At the same moment the Buick ahead slowed and seemed to hesitate, then turned off the highway to the right. Its headlights swept a side road lined with cyclone fence. Then they were cut. I passed the intersection, slowing gradually, and saw its lightless shape crawling blind along the blacktop.

I braked hard, hit the dirt, cut my own lights and U-turned. When I rolled slowly back to the intersection, the Buick was out of sight and out of hearing. I turned down the blacktop after it and drove for nearly half a mile without lights.

The night was starless and moonless. The road ran straight as a yardstick between the high wire fences on either side. The sloping field to my left was gashed and ploughed by erosion like a landscape on the dark side of the moon. The hangars of the disused airbase loomed on the other side. Around them concrete runways lay like fallen tombstones in the wild grass.

I stopped at a break in the fence, and twirled the chamber of my .38 Special to make sure it was fully loaded. It was. I got out of the car. Except for the rusty sighing of cicadas, the night was very still. My footsteps made distinct sounds in the grass.

A double wire gate about thirty feet wide stood open in the fence. Its padlock bar had been filed through. I felt the sharp edges. A concrete road ran through the gate and merged with one of the runways. The door of the nearest hangar yawned open. The Buick was beside it.

I started toward it, across two hundred yards of open concrete. I felt small and alone and expendable. The revolver in my hand was cold comfort.

The high whistling whine of a starting diesel penetrated the silence. Headlights flared inside the cavelike hangar. I broke into a run, hoping to get there before the motor warmed. But it must have been primed with gasoline. The truck rolled out of the building, pulling its huge aluminum semi-trailer. Its headlights swung toward me. A white face gleamed in the darkness on the cab.

As the truck bore down, I took careful aim at the lower left-hand corner of the windshield and fired twice. Cracks spider-webbed the glass, but it didn't shatter. Without swerving or slackening, the truck roared directly at me.

When it was almost on top of me, I stepped to one side and ran away from it. Its multiple tires growled in my ear. Something tugged at my trouser-leg and spun me. I got a

tight grip on air and hit the concrete like a sack of sand. Slid down its dead-end street to the rough edge of consciousness and went over.

It was a long fall straight down through the darkness of my head. I was a middle-aging space cadet lost between galaxies and out of gas. With infinite skill and cunning I put a grain of salt on the tail of a comet and rode it back to the solar system. My back and shoulder were burned raw from the sliding fall. But it was nice to be home.

I sat up and looked around. There was nothing to see except the bare concrete, the open hangar, the abandoned coupe beside it. From somewhere and everywhere the cicadas chided me: You should have waited and followed, waited and followed. I got to my feet and searched for my gun and found it. It was a long walk back to my car.

I backed in through the open gate and drove to the front of the hangar. My headlights found a pool of oil where the truck had stood. There was nothing else in the place but an empty coke bottle, years' accumulation of dust drifted along the walls, some spatters of aluminum paint on the concrete slab floor. I touched one metallic droplet with my finger. It wasn't quite dry

I went outside to the Buick. It was a fairly new car, but driven to pieces. California plates. No registration card. Several brown cigarette butts squashed on the rubber floormat. I sniffed them. Marijuana. A roadmap of the southwestern states was jammed behind the front seat cushion. I took it along and drove back to the highway.

I sat at the intersection of blacktop and highway, my motor idling, and looked at the black mountainous horizon: a jagged graph of high hopes, repeated disasters.

There was a black and white sign on the far side of the highway: *Las Cruces Pass.* I tried to put myself in Bozey's place. If he had turned right and south, he'd be sure to hit a roadblock on the borders of the county. Northward, the highway would lead him back into town. The pass road seemed most likely, and I took it.

Four or five miles from the intersection, where the road twisted high and narrow among the foothills, I came around a hairpin curve and saw a pulsating red light. I braked to a stop in time. The sheriff's Mercury was parked diagonally across the road.

He came forward, carrying a red flashlight in his left hand, a carbine in the crook of his other arm. "Pull off the road and get out. Keep your hands in sight." Then the flash found my face. "So it's you again."

I sat perfectly still under the twin eyes of the carbine and the flash. "It's also you again. Have you seen the truck?"

"What truck?"

"Meyer's semi-trailer."

"Would I be sitting here if I

had seen it?" His voice was impatient, but the anger that had shaken him earlier had passed and left no trace.

"How long have you been here, sheriff?"

"Over an hour. It's just after one o'clock now. Is there anything else you'd like to know? What I had for supper, for instance?"

"That sounds interesting."

"I didn't get to eat any supper." He leaned in at the window to look at me. The flashlight lent his face an unnatural rosiness. "Who's been clobbering you?"

"You're very solicitous all of a sudden. It moves me deeply."

"Cut the vaudeville. And answer my question."

"I took a fall." I told him where and how. "This redhead had the truck stashed in an empty hangar at the airbase. He blanked out Meyer's signs with aluminum paint and waited for the heat to die down. Less than an hour ago, Kerrigan met him at the Steakburger drive-in and gave him the go-ahead. The redhead — his name is Bozey — handed Kerrigan a package of something, probably something long and green. Kerrigan's payoff."

"Payoff for what?"

"For setting up the truck, and arranging the getaway."

"How would Kerrigan do that?"

I didn't answer. We looked at each other in silence. Shadowed by his hatbrim, his face was as inscrutable as the sky.

"Aren't you a little hipped on this Kerrigan business?" he said. "I don't like the bastard either. But that doesn't mean he's involved with a gang of hijackers."

"The facts point in his direction. I've given you some. There are others. He ordered a load of whiskey that he had no use for."

"How do you know that?"

"He sold the *Slipper*. He's leaving his wife for another woman, and he needs ready cash, a lot of it."

"Who's the other woman?"

"Not your sister-in-law, if that's what worries you. The girl's name is Jo Summer, and she was an entertainer at the *Slipper*. The last couple of weeks she's been playing up to Aquista, apparently getting set to finger him."

Church pointed the flashlight at me. "Don't let that paranoid streak run away with you, Archer. I can sympathize with your feelings, after the beating you took. But there are worse things than a beating. So don't press too hard, Archer."

"That could be a threat."

"It could be, but it isn't. It wouldn't be good for me if you got hurt in my territory — badly hurt. And it wouldn't be good for you."

I had my hand on the revolver in my pocket. "Is a carbine bullet what you had in mind?"

Church fingered the stock of his carbine. His face was impassive, almost dreamy. A light wind from the mountains chilled me. The moral chill went deeper. He said:

"You didn't catch my meaning, I'm afraid. I don't want anything to happen to you. If you'll take my advice, you'll get patched up and then treat yourself to a rest. That ought to be clear enough."

"Crystal clear. I lay off Kerrigan and his gentle friends."

"You lay off, period. I can't assume responsibility for you if you keep on throwing your weight around. Goodnight."

He stepped back to let me turn. The last I saw of him, he was standing in the road beside his car, a lonely silhouette.

12.

I drove back down the pass road and turned toward the city. The glow of its lights was paler, as if the fires that consumed it were burning out. A few late trucks went by toward the south. None of them was a rig I had seen before. Bozey would be out of the county by this time, headed east or south. Kerrigan would be on his way to Mexico.

I was wrong about Kerrigan. His red convertible was standing on the gravel apron in front of his motor court. The engine was idling, and its blue-grey exhaust puffed and plumed on the air.

I parked on the shoulder of the highway and walked back. The convertible was empty. Switching off the ignition, I dropped the keys in my pocket and took my gun out. All the cottages in the court were dark, but there was light in the main building. It leaked through a side window and glazed the green surface of a small oval swimming-pool. I walked around the pool to the rear of the building. The water looked deep and cold.

The light was in the office. Its back door was partly open, and I looked in. The room was newly furnished with a couple of chromium chairs, a metal desk with a black composition top, fluorescent fixtures in the ceiling. Kerrigan was prone between the desk and a small safe, which was open. The back of Kerrigan's head was open too. In the blank efficient light, I could see the color of his brains.

The cork floor around his head was soaked with blood. I lifted his head by the short hairs and saw where the bullet had entered, between the eyes. It looked like a medium-calibre hole, probably .38. A siren in the distance was whirling a thin loop of sound over the rooftops.

I went through the dead man's pockets, quickly. Kerrigan had no wallet, no money in any form. There was no trace of the package Bozey had handed him, either in his clothes or in the safe. I pulled out the contents of the safe: bills and cancelled checks, the current ledger for the motor court. It had been losing money.

There didn't seem to be anything more to do. Or anyone to chase.

I only had to take care of one thing, for the moment.

I went to see Mrs. Kerrigan.

13.

There was music in the house behind the bamboo-screened verandah: a nervous dialogue of piano and strings. Pity me, the piano said. We pity you, said the strings. The music was switched off when I knocked on the door. Mrs. Kerrigan opened it on a chain.

"Who is it?"

"Archer." There was silence behind the door. "May I come in?"

She fumbled with the chain, finally got it unhooked, and stood back to let me enter. She had on a blue serge bathrobe, severely cut, with white piping. Below it, her slender legs were sheathed in nylon, and she was wearing shoes.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "I believe I had a premonition of something wrong. I've been sitting here listening to the Bartok. It's very much like listening to the sound of my own thoughts. Something is wrong, isn't it?"

"Your husband has had an accident, Mrs. Kerrigan."

"Is it serious?"

"He was murdered, Mrs. Kerrigan. I wouldn't go to him now if I were you. They'll be coming here — the police, the sheriff's men. They'll have some questions to ask you. So have I."

She moved uncertainly through the door to the living room and teetered a little, a slender tree in gusts of wind. "Give me a moment, won't you? That concerto is still running in my head. I feel as if —" She raised her head. "How was he killed?"

"He was shot, Mrs. Kerrigan. In his office at the motor court, no more than an hour ago."

"And I'm a suspect, is that what I'm to understand?"

"Not with me. Let's say I like your face."

"I don't," she said with a child's seriousness. "I don't like my face. You must have a better reason than that."

"All right. *Did* you shoot him?"

"No." She went on in a harsher, stronger voice: "But I can't say I'm sorry for what was done. Don wasn't a good man. Which was fair enough, I suppose. I'm not a good woman."

"I wouldn't talk like that to the police. They're likely to tab you as the primary suspect. In any case, do you have an alibi for the last hour or so?"

"No. I've just been listening to records for an hour or more. Before that I was picking up my beads. And when I had them all picked up, I took them and threw them away. Wasn't that an insane thing to do?" Her fingers went to her temples, which were hollow and smooth and delicate as shell. "Do you think I'm insane?" she said suddenly.

"I think you're a good woman who has gone through a lot of suffering. I'm sorry you have to go through more."

"Sheriff Church was here tonight," she said after a pause.

"Do you know what he wanted?"

"No. When he was leaving, I asked him. He told me about the stolen truck."

"Did he seem suspicious of your husband?"

"No. He was very angry, but he didn't say a word about Don."

"Could your husband's position have helped him win the argument?"

"It wasn't an argument." Then, sharply: "Of course not. Brandon — Mr. Church wouldn't be influenced by personal considerations."

"You're sure?"

"Perfectly. I respect his integrity."

I told her, very quickly, about the hijacking, and about what had to be her husband's part in it. She said with a kind of awe: "I had no idea. I knew that he was in trouble, I didn't realize how serious it was. He should have told me," she whispered to herself. "He could have had the house. Or anything."

I broke in on her self-recriminations. I told her about Jo Summer, and about Anne Meyer, as far as I could. But she had nothing for me. Finally, I left. She stood like a stone pillar in the front doorway and watched me climb into my car.

I drove east toward the phantom mountains. When I was a few miles outside the city limits, something broke like a capsule behind my eyes. It leaked darkness through my brain and numbness through my body. I stopped the car on the shoulder of the road, wishing that I was made of steel and powered by electricity.

I drove on slowly through the night-filled hills until I came to a tourist camp. I rented a cottage from a bleary-eyed boy and had a bad night's sleep, wrestling nightmare on a lumpy bed.

Toward morning I dreamed of a city I'd never seen. Its people died surrounded by their children, in the same bed they were born in. I took a walk through the white streets and met Kate Kerrigan. She said that she'd always wanted to learn to swim.

We went to a fountained court and took off our clothes and swam in the bubbling water. For a while, nobody seemed to mind. Then jeering people crowded around our fountain. They called us bad names and threw clods of dirt at our heads. The muddy water began to revolve like a whirlpool, sucking us under. We held each other in the swirling darkness. Her body was cold as death.

14.

Lake Perdida was a narrow body of water held in place at six thousand feet by a concrete dam inserted

in the slot between two timbered mountains. It was mid-morning when I babied my hot engine over the top of the final grade and came to a filling-station overlooking the lake, which looked as if it might be open. I stopped in front of it and leaned on my horn.

A grey-haired woman came out of the small stone building. She wore blue jeans and a battered man's felt hat with a trout fly stuck in the ribbon like a cockade.

"Hello there. You want gas?"

"It'll take about ten." I got out of the car, handed her the keys and stood by while she manipulated the hose. Her face was square and weathered, and her eyes looked out of it like someone peering through a wall: "You from L. A.?"

"I am," I said.

"You're the first customer I've had today."

"It's getting pretty late in the season, isn't it?"

"Season's over, far as I'm concerned. I've started closing this place half the day. When I feel like it." Hanging up the dripping nozzle, she read the meter: "That'll be three and a quarter."

I gave her a ten-dollar bill and she made change from the pocket of her jeans. "Closed up half yesterday, went up to visit with what's-his-name Kerrigan up the road."

"Find anybody home?" I said.

"Why do you want to know?"

"I'm going up there myself," I said. "Why waste a trip?"

"You'd be wasting one to go up there, then," she said. "Nobody was home. You know anything about them digging holes?"

"What?"

"No need to shout at me, young man. I asked you a simple question; answer yes or no."

I said: "No. But I'd like to. Who was digging holes?"

"That Kerrigan and some girl," she said instantly. In spite of her caution, she had to tell somebody about that Kerrigan. "He wasn't doing any of the digging, just watching her."

I thought that over. "Can we go up and see it?" I asked.

"Never seen a hole before?"

"I'm in one," I said.

She laughed, and said: "Just a minute. Might's well close the place up; it's not going to get any busier."

She climbed into my car and we started off. Half a mile beyond the gas station, a weathered wooden sign was attached to a pine tree on the upper side of the road: *Green Thought: Craig, Las Cruces.* A smaller newer metal sign: *J. Donald Kerrigan, Esq.*, was nailed below it. At the woman's direction, I turned up the rocky lane.

The cabin itself stood on a slope, hidden from the road by the trees. It was a large one-story house with a deep verandah. Its squared redwood timbers were grey with age. The shadow of ancient trees hung over it like a foretaste of winter.

I went inside, my feet rattling

the boards of the verandah. The woman had been right; nobody had used the cabin for several days. I came out again and asked her about the hole.

She led me away from the road, back toward the gas station, until we came to a granite ridge projecting like a broken rib from the earth, and down into the hollow. The hole was there, about six feet long by two feet wide. It was roughly the shape of a grave, but shallower, no more than a foot deep. A pile of sandy earth mixed with pine needles stood beside it. I got down on my knees and tested the bottom of the hole with my fingers. The earth at the bottom was still impacted. It hadn't been dug deeper and filled in.

"I gave you fair warning it wasn't much to look at," the woman said. "Wonder what those darn fools thought they were doing. Digging for buried treasure?"

I stood up and turned to face her. "She was doing the digging?"

"That's right."

"Was he holding a gun on her, anything like that?"

"Not that I saw. Maybe he had one in his pocket. He was standing right here where I am, with his hands in his pockets. Just the sort of thing he'd do, let a woman do his dirty work."

"Did you stay around until they left?"

"Guess I did. Something must have scared them off, because they ran off like regular jackrabbits, both of them. I bet that Kerrigan hasn't run so fast in years."

"Did he go first?"

"That's right. She had a hard time keeping up. Matter of fact, she took a tumble before she got to the road."

"Where did she fall?"

"I'll show you."

On the way down, along a small narrow path through the choked weeds and bushes, I showed her the picture of Anne Meyer. "Is that the girl?"

"Could be," she said slowly. "Looks a lot like her."

We half-slid downhill to a shallow ditch overgrown with manzanita bushes, the branches red and shiny as if they had been freshly dipped in blood. "Right about here," she said, pointing. "He was in the car already when she fell. He didn't get out and help her, either."

"You're not very fond of Kerrigan, are you?"

"No, mister, I'm not. I—"

She saw that I wasn't listening, and broke off. My eye had caught a glint of something among the manzanitas. It was the heel of a woman's shoe, wedged in the crack between two granite boulders. Several bright nails protruded from the top. I pried it loose with my fingers: a heel of medium height, tipped with rubber and covered with scuffed brown leather.

"Looks like she lost a heel," the woman said. "I noticed she walked

peculiar when she got up. Thought maybe she hurt her leg."

"Where did they go from here?"

"There's only the one way *to* go." She pointed down-hill.

From where we stood, I could see the mercury trickle of the lake between the trees. The sun hung over it like a great silent blowtorch. Below the white lip of the dam, the powerhouse and its company town were hidden. Under the white valley haze, Las Cruces lay out of sight. It was hard to imagine from the cool forest height, but I knew it was there, with fifty thousand people sweltering in its streets. I looked down at the leather object in my hand, and wondered which of the fifty thousand was Cinderella.

15.

I drove back through the green silence along the lakeshore road. Passing the Kerrigan cabin, I saw the red convertible parked in the entrance to the lane. Mrs. Kerrigan waved frantically through the windshield. I left my car at the roadside and went to hers.

She was beautifully dressed and groomed, in black silk and a black hat and black gloves. Except for her eyes and mouth, her face was colorless.

"I didn't expect to see you," I said.

"I thought you'd come up here. And if you did, you had to pass by the cabin. I've been waiting."

"For these?"

I brought her keyring out of my pocket and handed it in through the window. It jangled nervously in her gloved hand.

"It isn't why I came," she said. "Now that I'm here, though, I'd like to see the cabin. Will you come up with me?"

"I wouldn't go in if I were you."

"Is she there? I knocked on the door and no one answered. Is she hiding inside?"

"No. She's nowhere around. Anne Meyer's dropped out of sight, as your husband said."

"But he was lying to me about Monday. Mrs. Devore saw them together on Monday."

"Mrs. Devore?"

"The gas station woman. I was talking to her after you left. You see, I followed you deliberately."

"Did Mrs. Devore tell you that she caught them in the woods? They were doing a rather peculiar thing."

A faint flush appeared on her cheekbones. "Were they making love?"

"Hardly. She was digging a hole. Your husband was watching her dig."

"A hole? I don't understand."

"Neither do I. Do you mind if I get in?"

"Of course. Please do."

She slid over in the seat, making room for me behind the wheel. I showed her the brown leather heel:

"Do you recognize this?"

She took it from me and held it up to the light. "I believe I do. Is it Anne Meyer's?"

"Are you guessing, or do you know?"

"I can't be absolutely certain. It think she was wearing shoes like this when I saw her last Friday. Where did you get this?"

"In the woods. She seems to have lost it when Mrs. Devore frightened them off."

"I see." She dropped the heel in my hand as if it was tainted. "Why in the world were they digging a hole in the woods?"

"Not they. She was digging. He was standing there watching. It raises a lot of questions, and one possible answer. I've heard of sadistic murderers taking their victims to a lonely place and forcing them to dig their own graves. If he was planning to kill her —"

"But it's incredible." The words exploded softly from her mouth. "Don couldn't have done a thing like that." She was gripping the door-handle as if we were going around a curve at high speed.

I offered her a cigarette, which she refused, and lit one for myself. "It's merely a possibility that occurred to me. Did you see him Monday night when he came home?"

"Yes. It was very late, but I was still awake. He didn't come to bed. He sat up drinking. I heard him prowling around the house for a long time. Eventually I took a sleeping pill." Her hand shifted from the door-handle to my arm. "How can you say he killed her? You don't even know that she's dead."

"No, but the signs are bad. If she isn't dead, where is she?"

"Are you asking me?" The pressure of her hand was almost painful. Her eyes were a tragic blue-black. "You can't believe I killed her?"

"That's true. I can't."

She didn't seem to notice my denial. "I was at home all day Monday. I can prove it. I had a friend with me all afternoon. She came for lunch and stayed until nearly dinnertime. Marion Westmore — the District Attorney's wife, really."

"You don't have to prove an alibi for me."

"I can, though, and I want to. We were planning the Junior League rummage sale. What a silly way to spend an afternoon."

"You think so?"

"I do now. Everything seems silly to me now. Did you ever have the feeling that time had stopped for you? That you were living in a vacuum, without a future or even a past?"

"I had it once," I said. "The week after my wife left me. But it didn't last. It won't last for you, either. You'll get over it."

"I didn't know you had a wife."

"That was a long time ago."

"Why did she leave you?"

"She said she couldn't stand the life I led. That I gave too much

to other people and not enough to her. And I guess she was right in a way. But it really boiled down to the fact that we weren't in love any more. At least, one of us wasn't."

"Which one?"

"I'd rather not go into it. Exhuming corpses is an ugly business."

The rebuff held her silent for a time. She twisted suddenly in her seat and looked up the lane toward the hidden cabin. Her half-turned body made a breathtaking line against the light.

"Won't you come up to the cabin with me?"

"What for?"

"I want to see what sort of condition it's in. I intend to sell it."

"You ought to stay out of there."

"Why? Is her body —"

"Nothing like that. You simply wouldn't like it there."

"I'm going up anyway."

"All right," I said. I started the car and we drove up. Nothing passed between us until I had drawn the car up before the cabin.

"Is it safe for you to stay in Las Cruces?" she asked.

"I don't know if it's safe. It should be interesting."

She said in a small, clear voice: "You're a brave man, aren't you?"

"Not brave. Merely stubborn. I don't like to see the jerks and hustlers get away with too much. Or they might take over entirely."

"You won't let them, will you?"

Her voice was dreamy, almost childish. Her gentian eyes were wide and dewy. They closed. I took her head between my hands and kissed her mouth.

Her hat fell off, but she didn't try to retrieve it. Her head rested on my shoulder like a ruffled golden bird. Her breast leaned on me, and I could feel the quickened movement of her breathing.

"You'll stop them," she said.

"If they don't stop me first, Katie."

"How did you know my name was Katie? Nobody's called me Katie for a long time."

I didn't answer. Having no answer to give her. After a time we got out of the car and walked to the cabin. She walked quickly ahead of me; with her bright hair loose on her neck, she might have been a slim young girl. It was hard to believe that she'd gone through seven years of marriage and been widowed by a gun.

At the door I moved up close to her. "Your life isn't over, it's only starting."

"I'm afraid you can't console me with rustic philosophy. — No, forgive me for saying that. You've been kind to me right through from the beginning."

"It was easy, Katie."

"He said I wasn't a woman. I am a woman, aren't I?"

I turned her by the shoulders and held her. She gave me her mouth. She said with her lips against my cheek: "Lew. Please don't take any more chances."

"I won't."

"Am I a woman, really? Are you — attracted to me?"

I couldn't answer her in words. After a time, she said: "I feel like the widow of Ephesus."

"I'm full of hard sayings, and you're loaded with literary allusions. But go ahead. It's very educational."

"You're making fun of me."

"Why not?"

She pulled my head down against hers and whispered in my ear:

"Am I a woman, Lew? Am I?"

Together we went into the cabin.

16.

I reminded myself, much later, that there was still work to be done. I drove her back to where my car was still parked, and left her to get back to the city alone. In my own car I drove on, intending to see Meyer. I never got to see him.

As I parked outside his house I saw Mrs. Church come running down the verandah steps, across the uncut lawn. She looked up and saw me and ran faster. At the edge of the vacant lot her feet got tangled in the rank crabgrass. She fell on her knees and huddled there, her hair veiling her face, her white nape bare to some unknown fatal axe.

I got out of the car and lifted her to her feet. I kept one arm around her to steady her. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know. We had a fight. I can't stay here with him. I'm afraid of him." Her breasts moved against me like wild things caught in a net. "He's an evil man, and he hates me. He's hated us both from the time we were born. I remember the day Anne was born. My mother was dying, but he was angry with her. He wanted a son. He'd be glad to see me dead, too. I was a fool to come back here."

"Why did you leave your husband, Mrs. Church?"

"He threatened me. He threatened to kill me if I set foot outside his house. But anything would be better than staying here."

Sometimes an outside guess like that pays off. Not often. She looked up at the blind house-front and across the vacant lot strewn with its rusty car-frames. Beyond it, in the street, a black sedan turned the corner and stopped at the curb, abruptly. I saw the white Stetson emerge from the driver's seat.

"Brand." Her body went soft against my side, as if its bones had dissolved in acid terror.

The husband I now knew she had left came across the vacant lot, walking stiffly on long pistonlike legs. I went to meet him. We faced each other on the narrow path.

"What are you doing with my wife?"

"You'd better ask her."

"I'm asking you." His large hands were open at his sides, but they were taut and trembling. "I told you to stay away from her. I also

ordered you to drop the case."

"It didn't take. I'm on it, and I'm staying."

"We'll see about that. If you think you can disregard my orders and get away with it —" His teeth bit off the sentence. "I'm giving you a choice right now. Be out of my county in one hour, or stay and face the consequences."

"The county belongs to you, eh?"

"Stick around and find out."

"This is where I came in, Church. Every time I run into you, you have a bright new plan for getting me off the case. I'm slow in the mind, but when a thing like this goes on and doesn't stop, I get just a little suspicious."

"I'm not interested in your suspicions."

"The D. A. might be, unless he's as sour as you are. If your whole county government is sour, I'll go higher."

He looked up. "What makes you think you can talk to me like this?"

There was something histrionic in the question. I suspected that his will was bending under pressure, that his integrity was already broken.

"The fact that you're a phony. You know it. I know it. Your wife knows it."

A pale line framed his mouth, almost as white and definite as a chalk-line. "Are you trying to force me to kill you?"

"You haven't the stuff."

His lips stretched, uncovering his teeth. His eyes sank and darkened. I watched them for a signal. They shifted. His right shoulder dropped.

I ducked inside of his swing. His fist went by like a blundering bee, stinging my ear in flight. He staggered sideways off balance, open to a left to the jaw or a right to the middle. I let him have the right. His stomach was like a plank under his clothes. He blocked my left with his right forearm and countered with a left of his own. It caught the side of my head and whirled me around.

Hilda Church was crouched at the edge of the lot like a frightened animal. Her eyes were wide and empty, and her mouth was open in a silent scream.

I turned on Church with my face covered. His fists drove in under my elbows and doubled me over. I came up from underneath with an uppercut that turned his face to the sky. His hat fell off. He staggered backward a few steps and went down. Rolled over and got up and came at me again.

I hammered at his body, fast, and he dropped his guard. I looped a right at his jaw, felt the pain of the impact electric to my elbow. His dazed profile turned sideways, nimbused with red. I could have finished him. Instead I tied him up, partly because he was beaten and partly because the woman cried out behind me:

"Stop it! You have to stop it!"

I held his arms immobilized. His face was like a skull covered with stretched parchment. The scar in his temple was red and beating. He struggled to get loose, closing his eyes in the agony of effort. My blood ran onto him and mixed with his, and I had my first clear thought since the fight began. One of us was going to have to kill the other.

Fury surged through him again. He kneed me and flung himself backwards, out of my hold. He staggered sideways in the weeds, steadied himself on the wheelless car rusted behind him. I saw Church leaning sleepily on the car-frame, the trees steady in the windless heat, the mountains behind the trees ghostly and two-dimensional in the haze. His hand went to his hip in a jerky mechanical motion.

Fear ran through me like a jagged spark. I had a gun in my pocket. I didn't reach for it. That would be all he needed to make it self-defense. And he was law.

The .45 in his hand dragged him toward me. His slouching silence was worse than any words. If I was going to get it, this was the time and place, under a white valley sky, in the middle of a case I'd never solve. Sweat ran in cold runnels under my clothes, and the drip of blood from my chin counted off the seconds.

The woman stepped around me. "Brand. This man has been kind to me. He doesn't mean any harm. Don't hurt him. Please."

Her hands reached for the gun and pushed it down. She walked close into him and stood with her face against his shoulder:

"Say you won't hurt him. Please. There mustn't be any more killing."

He looked down at the top of her head as if he had never seen her before. Slowly his eyes focused.

"There won't be any more." His voice was deep in his throat. "I came to take you home, Hildie. Will you come home with me?"

She nodded, leaning against him like a dutiful doll.

"Go and get in the car, then. I'll be along in a minute."

"No more trouble? You promise?"

"No more trouble. I promise."

He thrust the blue gun back into its holster. Their bodies came apart gradually like a giant cell dividing. She walked with stunned leisureliness along the path to the street. He watched her all the way until she was in the front seat with the door closed. Then he picked up his hat and turned to me, brushing it on his sleeve:

"You're making a mistake."

"You make your mistakes and I'll make mine."

"Damn it, Archer, can't we get together?"

"Not on any terms that would suit you. I'm staying in Las Cruces until this thing is finished. Try slapping charges on me and I'll show you a couple of charges of my own."

"Such as?"

"Failure to do your duty. Conspiring with hoods."

"No." He reached for my arm. "You don't understand."

I stepped back out of his reach. "I understand this. I'm trying to solve two homicides, and something is trying to stop me. Something that looks like law and talks like law but doesn't smell like law. Not in my nostrils. It smells like zombie meat. A zombie that takes the public's money and sits behind a courthouse desk pretending to be an officer."

"I've always done my duty." But he said it without conviction. His anger had turned inward, and his corroded snarl was chewing on itself.

"Did you do it last night, when that truck broke out of the county?"

He didn't answer. He stood and looked at the ground between us, then turned on his heel and walked toward his car, stumbling a little. The back of his coat was split. There was a streak of dirt on the crown of his Stetson. In the diffused light, his body cast a faint and wavering shadow.

17.

I found a doctor, and had eight stitches put in my face. The doctor seemed to take it as a matter of course, and asked no questions. When the job was finished, though, he asked me for twenty-five dollars in cash. He was that kind of a doctor, or I was that kind of a patient.

When I left his office, I had a powerful impulse to climb into my car and drive away from Las Cruces and never come back. I couldn't think of a single solid reason for staying. So I drove out of town to the Kerrigan cabins, accompanied by my Messianic complex.

And the first thing I learned there, because Katie Kerrigan had called Mrs. Devore, was that a party of searching deputies had found Anne Meyer's car, parked carefully in a small and almost invisible pass near the lodge. And that Anne Meyer's body had been in it.

She wanted to go out to the cabin at once, but I vetoed that on two counts: it was no place for Katie Kerrigan, and the body would be at the morgue. It took a long talk before I was able to leave her and go to the morgue alone.

18.

Her body lay on a rimmed table made of stainless steel. It was ivory white except for the tips of the breasts, the hole under the left breast, the two long incisions curving down from the shoulders to a point below the breastbone, the secret dark triangle meant for love and childbearing.

A middle-aged pathologist named Treloar was working at a sink in the corner. He cleaned his instruments

and set them on the sinkboard one by one: a scalpel and a larger knife, a bone saw, an electric vibrator saw. They gleamed in the frosty fluorescent light.

He turned to me, peeling off his rubber gloves. "You had some questions?"

"Have you recovered the bullet?"

He nodded and smiled with professional cheerfulness: "I went after it first thing. Had to use X-ray to find it. It pierced the heart and lodged between the ribs close to the spine."

"Can I have a look at it?"

"I've already turned it over to Danelaw. Sheriff's identification officer. It's definitely .38-calibre, but he has to use his comparison microscope to ascertain if it came from the same revolver as the bullet that killed Kerrigan."

"How long has she been dead, doctor?"

"I can give you a more precise answer when I have a chance to make some slides. Right now I'd say a week, give or take a day."

"Six days minimum?"

"Absolutely."

"This is Saturday. She was shot last Sunday, then."

"No later than last Sunday."

"And she couldn't have been seen alive on Monday."

"Not a chance. I'm telling you the same thing I told Danelaw. I'm scientifically certain, even without the slides."

Treloar went back to the sink to wash his hands. The door opened. Displaced air moved coldly against my face, and Church came in.

He passed me without noticing me. All he saw was the woman under the light. He leaned on the foot of the table.

Treloar glanced over his shoulder. "Where've you been, Brand?"

Church paid no attention. His eyes were steady and shining, focused on the woman. They seemed to be witnessing a revelation, looking directly into the white heat at the center of things.

"You're dead, Anne." He spoke to her as though he was addressing a dumb animal, or a child too young to talk. "You're really dead, Anne."

Treloar looked at him curiously, and came forward wiping his fingers on a hospital towel. Church was unaware. He was alone with the woman, hidden in the intensity of his dream. His large hands moved and took one of her feet between them. He chafed it gently as if he could warm it back to life.

Treloar backed to the door and jerked his head at me. We went outside. The door shushed closed behind us.

He whistled softly. "I heard that he was stuck on his sister-in-law. I didn't realize he had it so bad." His smile was crooked with embarrassment. "Cigarette?"

I shook my head. Something deeper than embarrassment tied my tongue. On the other side of the metal door there were rough and

broken sounds: a man's dry grief, a woman's name repeated in deaf ears.

"Excuse me," Treloar said. "I have to make a call."

He walked away quickly, his white smock flapping behind him.

19.

Right then I had all the answers, or at any rate I knew the right questions to ask. It was just a matter of tying things up. And I wanted to do that quickly and be rid of it, because it was a job I wasn't going to like.

Before Brandon Church came out of the autopsy room, I turned and left, walking quickly to get to my car outside, then driving too fast down to Church's home.

Hilda Church opened the front door and looked out shyly. In her quilted cotton housedress, she might have been any pretty suburban chatelaine interrupted at her morning work. But there was a tight glazed look around her eyes and mouth. Her eyes were translucent and strange, a clear pale green like deep ocean water.

"May I come in, Mrs. Church?"

"I'm sorry, I don't feel like talking to anyone. Not this morning."

She tried to close the door. I held it open.

"You better let me come in."

"No. Please. Brandon will be angry if he finds you."

"I'm coming in, Mrs. Church."

I set my shoulder against the door she was holding and forced it open. She retreated to the doorway of the living-room and stood in it, her arms stiff at her sides, her fingers working at the ends of them. She looked sideways at me, with a kind of fearful coquetry. The cord in the side of her neck was strung taut like a thin rope.

I moved toward her. She retreated further, into the living-room. She walked with a queer cumbersomeness, as if her body was lagging far behind her thought. Stopping beside a bleached mahogany coffee table, she leaned over and moved a white clay ashtray a fraction of an inch, into the table's mathematical center.

"What do you want with me?" she whispered.

She looked so much like the dead woman in that instant that I couldn't believe in her reality. Death had aged Anne Meyer and made them almost twins. Time jarred to a stop and reversed itself. The helpless pity I had felt for Anne went through me like a drug. Now I pitied the unreal woman who was standing with her head bowed over her immaculate coffee table.

She had acted beyond her power to imagine what she had done. I had to drive the truth home to her, give her back reality and regain it for myself. I'd rather have shot her through the head.

"You killed your sister with

your father's gun. Do you want to talk about it now, Mrs. Church?"

She looked up at me. Through her tide-green eyes I could see the thoughts shifting across her mind like the shadows of unknown creatures. She said:

"I loved my sister. It was an accident. The gun did it. The gun went off in my hand. Anne looked at me. She didn't say a word. She fell to the floor."

"Why did you shoot her if you loved her?"

"It was Anne's fault. She oughtn't to have gone with him. She shouldn't have let him. I know how you men are, you're like animals, you can't help yourselves. The woman can help it, though.

"I've done a great deal of thinking about it," she said. "I've done nothing but think about it since it happened. I've spent the whole week thinking and cleaning house. I cleaned this house and then I cleaned father's house and then I came back here and cleaned this house again. I can't seem to get it clean, but I did decide one thing, that it was Anne's fault. You can't blame fath — you can't blame Brandon for it, he's a man."

"When did it happen, Mrs. Church?"

"Sunday morning, early, at the lake. I went there and I just intended to talk to Anne. She was always so thoughtless, she didn't realize what she'd done. She needed someone to bring her to her senses."

"You knew about it, then?"

"I'd known for months. I saw how Brand looked at her and how she acted. And then they started to go on weekend trips. Last Saturday they did it again. Brand said he had a meeting in Los Angeles. I called the hotel and he wasn't there. He was with Anne. I knew that, I didn't know where.

"Then Tony Aquista came here Saturday night. It was very late, past midnight. He got me out of bed."

"Go on," I said. "What did Aquista tell you?"

"He said that he followed her to Lake Perdida and saw her with Brand. He said that they were in front of the fireplace, and the fire was burning and they had no clothes on. He said that she was laughing and calling out his name.

"After Tony left, I knew he was drunk and he hated Brand, but I sat all night, trying to think what to do. And then the churchbells started ringing for early mass. They came as a sign to me, they sounded like my own wedding bells. All the time I was talking to Anne, they were ringing in my ears. I had to shout so I could hear myself. They didn't stop until the gun went off."

She shuddered, as if she could feel its fiery orgasm penetrating her own flesh.

"Where was your husband when it happened?"

"He wasn't there. He left before I got there."

"Where did you get the gun? From your father?"

"I must have. I don't remember."

"Try, Mrs. Church."

Her face went completely blank. "I try to think back and it's just a blur with Anne's face in it, and the sound of the bells. Everything moves so fast, and I'm so slow. I ran away."

"But you went back?"

"Yes. I did. On Monday. I wanted to — to give Anne decent burial. I believed if I could bury her I wouldn't have to think of her lying there."

"Was Kerrigan with you?"

"He came in when I was there. I was trying to carry her out to the car. Mr. Kerrigan offered to help me. He drove me to a place where I could bury her, out in the woods. Then that woman came spying on us." Anger darkened her eyes, fleeting and meaningless. "It was her fault I couldn't give my sister decent burial. He made me fall and lose my heel. And Anne and I wear the same size shoe —"

I remembered her telling me that. How long ago?

"— so Mr. Kerrigan said if I changed shoes with her, no one would ever know the difference. I left *her* shoes at her apartment."

"And what did Kerrigan want from you, in return for all his help? Another accident?"

"I don't remember." But her look was evasive.

"I'll remember for you," I said. "Kerrigan told you to be out on the highway Thursday afternoon along towards evening. You were to stop Aquista's truck and get him out of it somehow. But he didn't know that you had a reason to kill Aquista. Or did he?"

"What reason? I don't understand."

"Aquista could figure out that you had murdered your sister."

"Please don't use that word." She looked up wildly, as if I had released something fearful and blind in the room, a bat that might dive and cling to her hair.

"It's the correct word, Mrs. Church. You murdered Aquista in order to silence him. That left one witness against you. Kerrigan."

"You make it sound so evil," she said, "so planned. It wasn't that way at all. I didn't intend to shoot Tony. But when he got into the car he saw the gun on the seat and it made him suspicious. He made a grab for it, and I had to pick it up quickly."

"And it went off again?"

"Yes. He slumped down in the seat and began to breathe queerly. I couldn't stand the sound of him, the sight of the blood. So I pushed him out of the car." She thrust her arms out violently, against thin air.

"The gun went off once more," I said. "In Kerrigan's office."

"Yes. I remember." Her voice was firmer, her look more definite. It seemed to have strengthened her,

in some secret way, to reenact her murders and confess. "The others were accidents. But I killed Mr. Kerrigan because I had to. He had told Brand about the others. Everything. I had to prevent him from telling other people. Brand locked me in, but then he had to go out again. I broke a window and went to the motor court. I hated to do it, after all the help he gave me. But I had to."

I looked into the shadowed depths of her eyes, unable to tell if the irony was intended. She was stern and unsmiling.

"Three killings with three shots is quite a record. Where did you learn to shoot so well?"

"Father taught me, and Brandon used to take me out on the range. I sometimes scored a hundred in silhouette."

"Where is the gun you used?"

"Brandon has it. He found it where I hid it."

"Mrs. Church —"

She didn't hear me. Her face had the look I had seen on it before, both frightened and expectant. A car stopped in the drive. A key scratched the lock.

20.

"I thought you would be the one," Church said. He reached into his pocket and slowly drew out a gun.

It was a blue steel revolver, .38 calibre. The butt was suave from use. He handed it to me: "Take it. It's the one you want."

He looked from the gun to the woman. "You told him, Hilda?"

She nodded dumbly.

He said to me: "You know, then."

"Yes. Where have you been?"

"At the autopsy. I —"

She moaned and his head swung toward her. "Brandon. Let me go outside. Please? I can't stand this any more." Her sobbing face was like a statue in the rain.

"You won't run away, or hurt yourself?"

"No, Brandon."

"All right. For a little while." He turned to me as the glass door slid closed behind her. "She won't leave, don't worry."

He opened his large hands and looked down into them. "I couldn't see any other way out, Archer. I still can't. When Kerrigan told me — you know about that?"

I nodded.

"I went out to the Pass Road and did what Kerrigan wanted me to do. You had it right, Archer." The words came painfully from his grim mouth. "I relieved my men and let the truck go through, out of my county. It's the thing I'm most ashamed of."

"I'd have done the same," I said.

"You're not a sworn officer. I can't forget it. I know I shouldn't even have left her that night. But Kerrigan knew. Kerrigan would tell. He made me go out to the Pass. I should have taken her to the

psychopathic ward. But I couldn't then. I felt so wrong myself."

He struck his long thigh with the edge of his hand. He seemed to be chopping his life into segments. And was compelled to display the shattered pieces.

"I suppose I was attracted to Anne the first time I saw her. She stood for so much: fun and laughter and love without tears. She was so much like Hilda, yet so different — heads and tails of the same coin.

"I could have stopped it. I could have stopped myself. But I was carried away by — whatever you want to call it, love, or rut, or self-indulgence. I thought I deserved more than I was getting. Well, I got more. We all did."

Church stood up and looked out into the patio behind the house. He brushed past me. "Hilda. What are you doing?"

Hilda was on her knees among the flowers. She was tearing them up in great colored handsful, and flinging them behind her. She rose and glanced at us. Her face was flushed and wet. "I don't like these. They're not pretty any more." She saw the shocked look on his face and cringed away from it. "Is it all right father I mean Brandon?"

He answered after a breathing pause:

"It's all right, Hilda. Do what you want to with the flowers. They're yours."

Behind me, he groaned. I turned. He looked like a man who had barely survived a long illness. A hummingbird whizzed over his head like an iridescent bullet. He watched it out of sight, peering into the blue depths of the sky.

His wife was back among the flowers, ripping the last of them out of the moist earth. When the police car arrived the plants were gone and she had begun to strip the thorny lemon tree behind them. Church washed and bandaged her bleeding hands before they took her away.

Helping Hand

The cops could really get to work if O'Hara talked. But Gomez had gotten to O'Hara first.

BY ARNOLD MARMOR

I REPLACED the receiver and went to the closet for my overcoat. Downstairs, the four-piece band had shifted into dance music.

My wife was at the foot of the stairs, waiting for me. She raised her eyebrows at the sight of the coat.

"You're not going out?"

"Afraid so." I kissed her cheek. "I don't know how late I'll be."

"Gomez?"

"It's always Gomez."

"Oh, Jim, it's such a bad night out. Do you have to go?"

"You know I don't want to. I want to stay and enjoy the party as much as you do. Now run along and join the others." I kissed her again and left.

City Hall was surrounded by police. I was saluted and escorted in. I took the elevator up to the fourth floor. A cop was stationed outside the District Attorney's office. He opened the door for me and I went in, through the inner office and into Miles Larson's private chamber.

Larson was talking into a phone.

He nodded at me and I took a seat.

When the conversation was over, he hung up and offered me a cigarette.

"No, thanks." I shook my head. "What's up?"

"Bill O'Hara. It's off again." Larson put the cigarette in his mouth and lit it. He was forty-seven, with iron-grey hair and a face the color of hard leather. They didn't come more honest than Miles Larson. "I'd like to put the strap to him," he said. "This thing is giving me an ulcer. I thought the threat of the electric chair would make him talk, but the fear of Gomez is stronger."

"I thought O'Hara was ready to talk," I said.

"So did I. But less than an hour ago he told me he wouldn't take the witness stand."

"Can't we get Gomez without him?"

"You know we can't. O'Hara is our only hope to break the hold Gomez has on this city. Bribery. Corruption. Who are Gomez' men?"

"You think O'Hara knows?"

"I doubt it. Gomez wouldn't spill his connections to a small-time gunsel like O'Hara. But this punk can indict Gomez — and once we have him we've got the law on our side. We can go through Gomez' records once he's indicted — and what we'll find there will be enough to clean this city up."

A detective walked in. Larson looked up. "Bring O'Hara in here."

"Yes, sir." The detective left.

I said: "You're not going to get any further."

Larson ran a hand through his grey hair. "What are we supposed to do — give up? Hand the city over to Gomez? Is that what you want?"

"You know better than that. But we're beating against a stone wall. A damn thick stone wall. O'Hara's our only hope."

The door opened and two detectives ushered O'Hara in. He was young, about twenty-five or -six, with a week's growth of beard.

"You two wait outside," Larson said.

The detectives went into the outer office.

Larson went around the desk and stood in front of O'Hara. "You were ready to talk. What changed your mind?"

"Gomez changed my mind," O'Hara said.

"Gomez didn't get to you," Larson said. "He couldn't have."

"I thought about him," O'Hara said.

"You don't make sense," Larson said.

"I thought about what he'd do to me."

"He'd be dead. The dead can't hurt you."

"He'd get me before he died. He's got friends. He'd rip my guts out."

"We'll keep you safe."

"You don't know Gomez."

"I'll make it short and sour,

O'Hara," Larson said. "I'll put you in the electric chair if you don't help us get Gomez. I promise you that."

"I'd rather roast than have Gomez get his paws on me."

Larson slapped O'Hara across the face. "You're going to sit in that witness chair and talk your goddamn head off. You'll tell everything you know." He hit O'Hara again.

"You'll have to kill me first," O'Hara said.

Larson drove his fist deep into O'Hara's stomach. O'Hara bent over, hands clutching his middle. Larson hit him again.

I could see by Larson's face that he was ready to blow his top. His eyes bulged and his face was wild.

"O'Hara," I said.

He looked at me.

"What do you want?" I asked. "What'll make you talk?"

"Nothing," he said.

"A one-way ticket to Arizona? Or Mexico?"

"Nothing," he repeated.

"Bargaining with him won't do any good," Larson said.

"I know," I said. "But I thought I'd try."

"I'm going to work him over," Larson said. "I'm going to keep at it until his insides are bleeding. *That's* the way we'll get him to talk." He began to hit O'Hara steadily, methodically, and I knew that no man could hold out against that sort of punishment for long.

It was unexpected. O'Hara swung suddenly, a blow starting up from the floor. It caught Larson flush on the jaw. He went down like a shot steer.

O'Hara stared at me for a halved second. Then he went for the window.

I watched him open it fast and crawl out on the ledge.

"You haven't got a chance," I said.

I walked slowly to the open window. He was standing on the ledge, his back against the face of the building. He was frozen.

I leaned out. "You can't make it. Come on back."

He looked at me, his face scared."

"Larson will leave you alone. I'll see to it. I swear it." I extended my arm. "Grab my hand. Come on."

He reached out and I grabbed his hand. "Slowly," I said.

O'Hara slipped and he yelled as his body pushed against space. The sudden pull brought my middle hard against the sill. I gripped his hand tight as his body swayed. I looked down at him.

I remembered what Larson had said: *This punk will be able to indict Gomez. And once we get Gomez, we get them all.* And I knew that O'Hara had begun to weaken, that Larson *would* have made him talk if he hadn't jumped Larson first.

I looked down at O'Hara and I grinned at him.

And I let go of his hand.

MUGGED AND PRINTED

JAMES T. FARRELL, whose *I Want a French Girl* is featured in this issue, has turned most of his many occupations to good account. His realistic, hard-hitting style derives from his early days as a newspaper reporter; he's also worked as an advertising solicitor, a clerk in a cigar store, a filling-station attendant and an express-office worker, and he's used these backgrounds in many of his colorful novels — among which are the famous Studs Lonigan trilogy and the Danny O'Neill novels, of which the latest is his new book, *The Face of Time*.

EVAN HUNTER'S Matt Cordell returns to *Manhunt* in this issue, in *Return*. Cordell began life with our first issue, and has continued as one of *Manhunt's* favorite characters. Hunter's now working on a novel about Cordell, in addition to a great deal of other work, including *The Blackboard Jungle*, his serious novel soon to be published by Simon and Schuster. Hunter's other work includes stories in just about every field of fiction, and two other novels: *The Big Fix* and *Don't Crowd Me*. He's held a number of jobs in the past, including high-school teaching and lobster selling. He now devotes his entire time to writing — and judging by the above he has quite enough work to keep him busy.

JOHN ROSS MACDONALD, as you can see by the accompanying picture, is the mysterious mystery writer whose real identity is unknown to the readers and critics who've acclaimed his work, including the novels *The Ivory Grin* and *The Moving Target*, as well as his newest, *Meet Me at the Morgue*. His latest for *Manhunt* is the complete novel, *Find a Victim*, which appears in this issue and features Lew Archer, who's been described as "the private eye who sees deeper than most" by at least one enthusiastic reviewer.

CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. is an old friend to most *Manhunt* readers, who'll recall his previous stories, *Killing on Seventh Street*, *Ybor City*, *Case History* and others. His present yarn, *Two Grand*, is in the same hard-hitting tradition, and we think it's one of his best to date. Beckman gets a flavor of authentic background into many of his stories, since he lives in the locales he describes. His hobbies include jazz music, beachcombing on an island near his home, and traveling "on the slightest provocation." In defense of these pastimes, Beckman claims that, besides being enjoyable, they furnish him with story ideas. We wonder how he got the original idea for *Two Grand*.

RICHARD MARSTEN's authentic documentary, *Chinese Puzzle*, is based on research and on conversations with many of New York's official police. ◆ JACK RITCHIE makes his first appearance in *Manhunt* with the taut and realistic *My Game, My Rules*. We're sure you'll be wanting more by Ritchie soon. ◆ ARNOLD MARMOR's come up with another original and surprising story in his latest, *Helping Hand*. *Manhunt* readers will recall many of his shocking short-shorts, and there'll be more appearing in future. ◆ JOHN M. SITAN'S *My Enemy, My Father* in our last issue was his first story for *Manhunt* — his second, *Confession*, appears in this issue, and is built around one of the most unusual ideas we've ever seen in crime fiction.

IN THIS ISSUE:

KID: JAMES T. FARRELL returns to *Manhunt* with the story of a man with a single ambition, and of the way he was forced to fulfill it, in *I Want a French Girl.* RICHARD MARSTEN'S back, too, with a detailed, documentary novelette, *Chinese Puzzle*, about a lot of lobsters and a murder committed over the telephone. And MURIEL BERNS presents the picture of a day in court with *The Innocent.*

KILL: Lew Archer comes up against one of his most baffling cases in a brand-new complete novel by JOHN ROSS MACDONALD, *Find a Victim.* A realistic and brutal picture of a man with a job to do, and a girl who doesn't want to interfere, is presented by JACK RITCHIE in *My Game, My Rules*, and ARNOLD MARMOR, no stranger to *Manhunt*, comes up with an unusual and plausible *Helping Hand.*

KNIFE: In *Two Grand* CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. provides a savage study of a man who was perfectly safe from the cops, but not from himself. HUNT COLLINS portrays a psychiatric interview and an *Association Test* with startling results. V. E. THEISSEN'S first story for *Manhunt* deals with a unique prowler, and a man who thought his wife was safe because she knew a defense, *The Judo Punch.*

KEY: EVAN HUNTER'S Matt Cordell walks into trouble when his downfall makes a surprising *Return. Confession*, by JOHN M. SITAN, is one of the most unusual stories *Manhunt* has ever presented. W. W. HATFIELD tells the story of a man who has no protection against a known killer, in *Sanctuary.*

KING: All that, plus the features by VINCENT H. GADDIS and DAN SONTUP, and a special added fact article by FRED L. ANDERSON — help make this July issue a power-packed appearance of the king of hard-boiled-fiction magazines!