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a Johnny Liddell story

FREE TO DIE

by

Bryce Walton

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The girl had been worked over, She was young and blonde and she lay curled on her side, her head a few inches from the garbage can. Gino looked at her and felt the taste of copper in his mouth.

FREE TO DIE

BY BRYCE WALTON

GINO RICCI flipped his badge into the air and it rattled across the desk. "Take your cupcake, Gil. Take it and—"

Police Chief Barstow interrupted wearily. "I run a pretty clean town here, Gino. But I don't handle County jobs. Sheriff Reed says it was an accident."

Gino sneered. "I can prove my brother was murdered, and Reed knows it."

"All right, private avenger. Now go cool off your head."

"You run a clean town? I'm laughing. This County runs you. And this County is so rotten it makes me want to puke!"

Barstow wrinkled his meaty face in mock awe. "Why, you're so moral these days, Gino. Brother, where's your tambourine?"

"Right here, brother," Gino tapped his shoulder holster under his jacket. "A Vera Nada cop is a fighter without hands. I'm getting my hands back."

Barstow was looking, as if for support, at a picture of his lovely blonde daughter framed in gold on his desk. He sighed. "You're free then to do it. Go out and die."

Days burned away in the sun. Gino waited. Somewhere the killer knew that Gino had quit the force and why. The killer wouldn't know how much Gino knew or what he was doing about it. It had to be somebody big, big enough to tell Sheriff Reed how to interpret death.

When he had to go out for groceries or wine he was careful, but he didn't think he would be killed outright that way. Killings were handled with more tact these days, and usually they found less extreme ways of making deals. A real old fashioned gory job was sometimes pulled, true, but that was only to scare hell out of somebody.

Gino waited for a knock on the door, a phone call.

He lived in a small three room frame house among some itinerant Mexican laborer's shacks near the freightyards. He was a taciturn, brooding sort of fellow, neither friendly nor unfriendly, but respected. He had no real friends, and was rarely called except on business. So when the phone rang on a hot still afternoon he figured this was it.

A woman asked in a low charming voice if this was Mr. Ricci. And he said yes, this is Gino Ricci, and she said this is Mrs. Anthony Bartolo and that perhaps he remembered her, and he said sure, at last year's wine festival for happy workers out at the ranch, and that his brother, Candela, had brought him out there. And she said she was very sorry about his brother's accident and that was what she was calling about. Her husband, Anthony Bartolo, would like to talk with Gino about it.

"Why?" he asked.

"I really couldn't say."

"When?"

"Around seven be convenient?"

He said it would be, and hung up quickly because something was happening to his voice.

Gino sat down and poured more Chianti, and as he started to lift the glass, there was a knock on the door. He hesitated, then came up to his feet and in the same movement tapped the spring clip holster and released the .38 into his hand. He unbolted the door and jerked it open and stood there with the gun pointing into the doorframe.

"Hold it, holy roller," Gil Barstow said and pushed past Gino and shut the door. "Like I figured it, you're getting scratchy."

Barstow sat down and studied Gino with cynical cop's eyes. "I figured you'd cool off, Gino. I can confiscate that gun, hold you for illegal possession."

Gino looked at his heavy, olive-hued features in the mirror. The face of a pug who had had sense enough to get out early. He reached for a comb. "Do that, Gil. Go ahead and do it."

"Me and the Mayor and the Commissioner can give you a hard time, Gino. You can't turn around in this town without breaking some ordinance."

Gino studied his teeth, then picked up a bottle of Listerine.

"You hot-blooded idiot," Barstow yelled. "You want excitement come back on the force. They want to know what happened to *Il Martello.*"

The Hammer. Gino gargled and spat. The hammer probably would not bang any more knotheads together on a Saturday night.

"You going to a dance or something, Gino?"

"I've got an invitation to go out," Gino said.

"Where?"

"Who is the one man big enough in this County to tell Sheriff Reed to call a murder an accident?"

"Bartolo! Oh Christ!" Barstow rubbed a hand over his wet face.

"Sure, big man. He scare you, Gil?"

"No, but—"

"I know. He runs the County, you, Reed, everybody but me. He gets a big rakeoff on everything, plus all the profits from his legitimate enterprises, orange juice, Vino Russo, dates, avocado pears. Then if you prefer gambling, booking, dope, whores, slot-machines and jukeboxes, name it, and there's Tony Bartolo ready to serve you."

"Lay off, lay off, Gino! Listen, you can't—"

"Who will do it then, you?" Gino sneered.

"Am I a vigilante? Can I buck Reed, the County and maybe even the Mafia, a guy like Bartolo? An old pal of Anastasia, Luciano? What the hell do you think all this is, Gino, a movie?"

"Why not?" Gino said.

Barstow stood up, looking tired and old. "Hot-blooded idiot. Got to have your blood vengeance, that it?"

Gino's mouth tightened. "What's the difference if I came from Sicily when I was five, or New Jersey? What if it was your brother? It's no damned good letting a murdered brother rot forgotten in the dirt!"

Barstow went to the door. It was dark out now, and a wind keened higher. Wind-loosened walnuts clattered on the tin roof. "It's easier being scared just for yourself. But I've got a family. My daughter Bessie, you've seen her, beautiful kid, and my wife. I want to keep what I've got." Barstow rubbed his face. "They'll step on you, Gino. Nobody will care. Like a cockroach."

Barstow was trapped and deserved more than pity. "If I'd found the right woman, Gil, I would probably feel the same way. Only family I had was Candela. He blew up. The scum set him on fire."

The feverish, dust-laden Santa Ana struck without warning. Channeled by the mountains through the Santa Ana canyon, it pushed through the passes of the San Gabriels, dropped close to the valley floor, sent clouds of dust swirling across the open highways between Ontario and San Bernardino. It built grotesque barriers of tumbleweeds and debris along fences, toppled oil derricks, stripped orchards, snapped power lines. And it covered the little town of Vera Nada in a choking cloud.

As Gino drove through the grape vines, tumbleweeds attacked wildly, and his headlights ate cautiously through the yellow smear, past the sullen shine of a big aluminum Quonset warehouse. He was stopped at the tracks by an S.P. side-freight pulling past with harvest-loaded flatcars and gons.

"Vendetta avrol" Gino had said. "Their blood will run."

It had shocked him that he even remembered that old Sicilian blood-oath. But his father had preached the blood-vengeance thing loud and long, and a lot of people were convinced that any Sicilian was born with an inherent capacity to bleed people when their temper was aroused. Candela had been convinced. He had tried to prove it, prove that his blood was hotter than other people's. But it had only made him wilder and crazier, and now he was dead.

Gino brushed his hand back through his graying, thinning, sweat-tangled hair and watched the freights go by. After the old man died, Gino and Candela had hopped a freight out of Chicago, headed west into the land of sunshine, orange trees and sun-toasted girls. That had been quite a day when they came laughing and wide-eyed out of the High Sierras, down into the valley that was like paradise and the air was full of the perfume of orange blossoms. But now it seemed as if it had happened too long ago. When the old man had died he had said for Gino to take care of Candela. "You're like me, Gino, and no one ever had to take care of me, but Candela is like your mother was, and you will have to take care of him."

Gino drove on and was stopped by an iron gate across the graveled road. Cypress trees raged in the black wind. Fine dust ground in his nose and under his eyelids. Dust and weeds hurtled past the windshield. A big sign saying, Bartolo Ranch, swung crazily between elaborate totem poles.

He started to get out of the car to open the gate, but stopped with the door partly open and one leg on

the ground. He tried to see, hear something behind the wind. He expected fear, but there was more than that. It was all the years that he had taken care of Candela, long hard years, and sometimes he had hated Candela for that. They had all belonged to Candela, and it had seemed to Gino that his own good years had come and gone and were lost. And perhaps even wasted, for he had not done so well with Candela who had always been wild and in trouble. Laughing at Gino's protests, he had driven that truck for Bartolo, delivered, installed and serviced jukeboxes. "Why not, Gino? Doesn't music come out of jukeboxes? Doesn't music make people happy? Don't you want people to be happy, Gino?"

The car door slammed, pinned his leg, and a light glared in his eyes.

A flat mocking voice said, "You can't read no-trespassing signs?"

The door bit into Gino's leg. The light gouged his eyes. "I've got a seven o'clock appointment with Bartolo."

"Il Martello was a real tough cop, but you ain't no cop. You better get out, let's see if you're Il Martello."

With the fear was a bitter galling loneliness as if he were smothering in darkness. He felt old and drained of all emotion other than that. He shut his eyes against the glare, and braced his foot against the bulge of the driveshaft clearance. He had muscled guys like this for years and now when it was supposed to mean so much, he was tired. The heat was a hot dry clamp as he kept his eyes closed and lunged at the door.

He weighed over two hundred pounds, and it was a heavy door. The combined weight crunched sickeningly into flesh. He hit the dirt and snapped his eyes open. He got the flashlight off the ground, held it at arm's length so it wouldn't guide a bullet or knife into him. A big man with a basketball gut lay groaning on his back. His face was a bloody wreckage. Gino recognized him, remembered picking him up down at Mrs. Schroeder's cathouse for working over one of the younger kittens there. No one had prefered charges of course for he was a Bartolo employee.

Gino knelt down and flashed the light in his eyes. "Know who I am now, Reilly? Answer me."

"Yeah—"

"Won't have any trouble knowing me the next time?"

"No."

Gino laughed, then he opened the gate and drove on through. It was not only with head-waiters that initial impressions were important he thought.

Della Bartolo wore a thin, loosely-belted housecoat that clung to her hips and long lovely legs. She showed him into the long, low-raftered room and sat him down before a cozily blazing fireplace.

"Storm delay you?" she asked.

"No. Guy at the gate had a hard time recognizing me."

"My apologies, Mr. Ricci. We've had some labor trouble recently."

She was also apologetic about Anthony Bartolo not being ready to see Gino yet anyway. Tony was playing one of his war games, and at such times nothing could disturb him. "Some sort of Navy battle in the swimming pool. I'm afraid he won't see you until the war's over, Mr. Ricci."

He looked at the shadowy outline of her body under the housecoat. "I don't mind waiting."

She sat down and crossed her legs, and the housecoat slipped open slightly. Her black eyes and her red sensual lips glistened in the firelight. Now Gino remembered Candela bragging about how it had been with her. Gino hadn't believed him at the time, but it was more believable now. Tony wasn't around so much because of his hobbies and the fact that he was in a wheel-chair. But Della was ". . . a pushover for the Ricci technique. For the dark rough treatment. She likes that hot Sicilian blood." Laughter. "She likes bullfights, and she said once that love ought to be like a *corrida* in the hot sun."

Tony would be a great deal older and not up to that kind of love, Gino was thinking, and then he heard a scream that seemed a part of the wind, but muted by the thick adobe walls.

"The Chinese New Year is beginning, Mr. Ricci," Della said, and smiled. "We have Chinese servants. Mr. Wang seems to be killing a pig. Gino had seen a Chinaman in the hall carrying a meat cleaver.

They chatted, she smoked a bit nervously, asked him if he would like wine. And he said yes, he did, but not the local stuff, because it was too green. What he thought was that anything bottled here could be diluted with Candela's blood, it was the same color. But there was no mention of his brother. She mentioned the Santa Ana instead. It was so exciting, and she had decided the only thing worth while anymore was excitement. Mission Indians had called it The Wind of the Evil Spirits because it dried up crops, and the Mission fathers had translated evil spirits as Satan's Wind, hence the name Santana. It was edifying, but Gino also knew a bit of local history, and he pointed out how the old timers said that the Santa Ana blows three days and nights, and that you should watch the sunrise and sunset, and if it's calm the worst is over.

"It wasn't calm this evening was it?" she said.

"No, but exciting. You're right, Mrs. Bartolo. That desert wind makes your blood catch fire." He looked at his wristwatch.

She said, "I'll see if Tony's finished his war." Her housecoat brushed his knee as she swayed out of the room. She returned almost at once, her face pale and her smile

strained. She bent down. He noticed blood trickling down from what seemed to be a small wound in her leg. "Why what's the matter, Mrs. Bartolo?"

Her laugh was thin and too high. "It seems I'm a war casualty. Please excuse me. I'll be back in a few minutes if you care to wait."

"I want to wait," Gino said.

She ran out of the room.

He stood there a moment, puzzled, then started for the swimming pool. He remembered the layout of the big sprawling *hacienda* from his first visit. Then it had been so different, at least on the surface, with girls in colorful peasant costumes, kegs of wine, whole sides of beef roasting on open spits. And out in the central court yard, surrounded by arcades and narrowly windowed adobe walls, there had been much gaiety.

Gino stood in the archway in deep shadow and looked at the pool. On its surface a number of amazingly authentic looking destroyers, battlewagons, cruisers, and aircraft carriers darted about firing broadsides. Small geysers shot up. Electronically controlled toys were firing genuine little shells. Around the pool on metallic fields, miniature armies moved about in harried ranks. There were banks of artillery mortars, tiny tanks and pillboxes with revolving turrets. Something glinted higher up and withdrew into a window as Gino looked, but this was a real life-sized rifle.

Tony Bartolo didn't look up as Gino approached the wheelchair from a little behind and to the side to avoid shellfire. "Mr. Bartolo."

Bartolo went on working at the controls of an intricate panel. His hanging jowls flapped as he excitedly sucked air. It was more interesting, Gino thought, than electric trains, and Della would attest to the fact that it was also more dangerous. "Mr. Bartolo," he said again, louder. Bartolo, a huge mound of fat under an Indian blanket, continued to manipulate his toys without looking up. His splotched face was swollen, red with congestion.

"Mr. Bartolo, we're a little late talking about my brother, Candela."

"Candela Ricci? Yeah, trucker, Nevada run. Bad accident," Bartolo wheezed. "You want money? How much?"

"I know he was murdered, Bartolo. That's what we want to talk about."

Bartolo whispered. "That's a terrible word, don't use it here, no one ever does, never!" He flicked a master switch, and everything died. The sudden silence under the plastic roof was oppressive and pulsing. Bartolo twisted heavily, and glared up out of a face resembling a wet eggplant. "You've heard about my past, but I learned something, a big thing. Killing is no good anymore. Maybe it was once, but not now." He looked at the pool, the drifting ships, the frozen armies, the stilled guns. "Too big now. They can kill

too many. Nobody wins. You see someone rich, owning everything, but has he won any war? Things start happening in here." He tapped his head. "Like with Hitler. He had won, but then in here the lights went off and on at the wrong times. You can't remember things."

Wind raged over the plastic roof. "Candela was driving a truck of yours, delivering ten jukeboxes to Suntown, Nevada. There was a bomb on the motor block, and it blew up."

"How do you know that?" Bartolo asked vaguely.

"Straight stretch of highway, no grade, no curve, no crash. I looked around. I found the remains of the bomb. It was a black box, maybe four inches square, three deep, insulated, plastic wrapped. Wires to the spark plugs, but a special job. It had to happen on the desert so there was a thermostat attachment. It didn't blow until the motor got real hot."

"Sheriff Reed said it was an accident."

"Reed's getting rich in this County," Gino said. "But he isn't lazy and he likes to hunt man like some men like to hunt rabbits, if they're not too big. Somebody very big around here told him to say it was an accident, and—"

"All right. Maybe your brother had enemies. We all have personal enemies. Maybe some woman's husband."

"That's what I mean. If that had happened why would Reed overlook that bomb? Here's what I was thinking, Mr. Bartolo. That truck was hauling Interstate Commerce. A murder would bring in the FBI. So it would be smart to cover it up. Now I'm not making any accusations. I don't want the Feds in either—"

"Why not, Ricci?"

"I want the murderer myself. I want him."

Bartolo opened his thick lips in a kind of laugh without sound. His tongue filled the cavity like a lump of liver. "Nobody wins, Ricci. It's no good. Go home or someplace and forget it. I got a war going here, and I plan it so nobody ever wins. It isn't easy planning a war that way."

"What about this jukebox war between you and Ed McWilliams? Somebody said—"

"Nobody wins them anymore," Bartolo said and dismissed Gino by pulling the switch and turning dials. The air hummed, armies marched, ships blasted, artillery bombarded ships, and a Tom Thumb machine gun rattled as smoke coiled over the pool.

Gino shivered and backed away.

He walked along the arcade and entered the house again, feeling a flat unfocused kind of anxiety now.

Bartolo was a man of mystery, a myth, a legend, who knew what the hell he was? Crazy, Gino thought, crazy in the head. Lapses of memory probably. Or maybe it was all an act of some kind. Anyway, Bar-

tolo now was sure that Gino knew it was murder, and that Gino had the proof. Now what? Another murder, or a working over? Professional experts could work him over with bicycle chains and pieces of pipe. That was more effective than killing with no risk of adverse publicity. The toughest guys, worked over by experts, might as well be dead. He might walk around, look the same, but inside he was broken, his guts all shot. And for years, maybe for life, he had rabbit blood in his veins. A dead man was of no use, but a man with rabbit blood was always useful for something.

The door opened in the dim hallway. He saw a softly red-tinted bedroom and there was Della Bartolo's disembodied face in the wavering light, and then her body appeared, filled with shadows and she stood there wearing only a filmy negligee.

"I'm glad you're still here, Gino Ricci."

"Your husband didn't want to talk," Gino said.

"Does talk send you anywhere? I told you he wouldn't, not with one of his wars going on. Come in here and let's drink wine together, on this exciting night. Come in here Gino Ricci and let's wait out the war." She sounded tight, and she held a half empty glass of wine.

He looked at her without speaking.

"You want to talk about your brother, Gino Ricci? Well, Tony's diverted with a war, and doesn't always know what's going on around here. Sometimes, to be frank, he's perfectly insane. That's the truth. Personally I no longer care in the least. It was sad, but now it's nothing. He told me to tell you to come out and talk about your brother, but now he probably doesn't even remember. But come in here, Gino Ricci, unless you want to have wasted this long exciting evening. Let's you and I drink wine, and talk, talk, talk."

"My brother was murdered. That's what I want to talk about."

"That's morbid. We're alive, and it's an exciting night."

He started to move on.

"Please don't go. Business matters bore me, but Tony hasn't been too efficient lately. I've had to assume command here and there, and I could hardly avoid hearing and seeing important things."

He stepped toward her. "You know something?"

"Don't be impatient. It's going to be a long night," she said and took his hand and pulled him into the room.

"What do you know about Candela?" He gripped her arms. Her head fell back and her lips parted.

"Have some wine, Gino Ricci. If I told you now, you would leave, like that," she snapped her fingers. "And then—well, I'm not sophisticated enough to enjoy you dead." With a sigh a resignation Gino

poured the wine and then relaxed in a chair facing her.

At fifteen minutes past midnight, Gino parked his car in front of the Yucca Motel, a mile out of Vera Nada on the road to Ontario. He turned off the headlights, and sat in howling darkness looking at the neon sign throbbing fitfully in the dust. A man named Willy Bardon was supposed to be holed up in cabin number 6.

According to Della there had been a jukebox war going on all right, but it had been kept out of the local press. Trucks dynamited, drivers beaten up, operators intimidated, machines jammed. Ed McWilliams was muscleing in on Tony Bartolo who no longer cared enough to put up much of a fight. But Tony still had a spy or two inside the McWilliams camp. It was known that McWilliams had sent Willy Bardon to dynamite that truck, the one Candela had been driving.

That was about all Della knew about it. She didn't know why that particular truck had been blown up, and she didn't know why Willy Bardon was still around unless it was that he was holing up there because the word was around that Gino Ricci was looking for his brother's killer, and it was pure speculation as to how much Gino knew about it.

"You don't believe me, *toro*," Della had said, "go check at the Yucca Motel. I'm sure you have ways of making people answer questions."

She didn't care anymore what happened to Bartolo's empire. She'd had it, she wanted out, she did not give a damn when or how. She had put away a little nest egg and was ready to fly the coop. But Tony was dangerous. "He's a sadist, *toro*, and that isn't good in a crazy man," she had said and had touched the bandaid on her thigh. "This was no accident. He had one of his goddamned toys shoot me!"

It made sense to Gino to whom, at this point, something had to make some kind of sense. She was scared, fed up, hated Tony. She wanted out, and she had everything to gain by opening it up, and if necessary bringing the Feds in.

Gino walked toward cabin 6, past migrant harvest shacks, tents and a trailer camp. It was a rickety section and there was a kind of raving hunger in the air. Some Mexicans were yelling, trying to hold down a walltent against the wind. Stakes flew in the air on the end of a frazzled rope and naked kids ran screaming. Girls braved the wind and the night in tight slacks, promenading eager young bodies past a chicken shack jumping with mambo. Lights swung, whirled in the yellow wind as if the night were festooned for a crazy Halloween.

A light shone behind the ragged blind in the one window of number 6. Willy Bardon might not be

in there at all. But someone was. He hoped he was not disturbing a pair of happy lovers. He brought the snub-nosed .38 from beneath his jacket, and opened the door.

A young bearded man in a dirty T-shirt, wrinkled slacks and no socks, was drunkenly trying to sit up on a greasy couch. A whiskey bottle rolled dribbling into the wall and the young man instinctively reached for it. Gino's gun cracked down across his forearm. "You won't be needing it now," Gino said. He looked around the room while the young man held his arm and stared up out of hollow glazed eyes.

There was a box of saltines, some baloney and a keyring and a wallet on the table. Gino spilled out the contents of the wallet. The man's picture was there on his driver's license. Willy Bardon. He exuded the sour smell of sweat, whiskey and fear as Gino stood over him. "I'm Gino Ricci. Candela's brother."

"I'm sorry to meet you," Willy said.

Gino slapped him back and forth across the face hard for a minute and he did not even try to cover up or dodge but just sat there swaying to the blows like a Christmas toy. But the alcoholic glaze gradually ran out of Willy's eyes like dirty water down a drain and was replaced by a pure bright fear.

But he still displayed that cynical grin, made more twisted and bitter by the blood running from the corner of his mouth. Gino stepped back, breathing thickly. He thought: Candela smiled that way, that half-laughing, screw-you grinning sneer. Good looking kid too, about Candela's age with the sharp features and wavy thick hair, and he was probably quick too with the girls.

That was the way he would go out too, Gino thought dully, grinning that way. Screw you, Jack, I've had mine.

"I've had crap plenty," Willy said hoarsely. "But nobody's ever done this, given me the dog treatment. Kill me if that's the idea. Do it."

"I'll be decent," Gino said. "You can even pray if you want."

"I did, when I was a kid. See where it got me?"

Gino pointed the gun at Willy's mouth. "It will be quick, Willy. It wouldn't be right for you to die feeling like a dog."

"Even pros treat a condemned man with kindness," Willy grinned. "I mean cigarettes, whatever he wants for his last meal and like that. You won't even let me have a last shot of bourbon."

"Pick up the bottle, Willy."

Willy took a slug. Then he stared into the bottle. "I'd like to make a confession, father."

"Go ahead," Gino said. His mouth felt tight. His hand felt paralyzed from gripping the gun so hard. He had been a very tough guy,

Il Martello, all of his life. But even during the war he had never killed anybody.

Willy looked up, but not at Gino. At something on the ceiling. "He was your brother, so I know how you feel. But I want you to know something, I'm no killer. I'm a yellow bastard always running, but no killer." He wiped his mouth, looked at the blood on his arm. "I did kill a man, one man before your brother, but it was an accident. Don't laugh. I mean, it was in a bar, and there was a brawl and I hit him with a bottle. I ran. I always ran. I changed my name, and that was years back, when I was a kid up in Frisco. Then the other day these guys come up and call me Chet. That was my real name. The one my mother was so proud of. They knew all about it and they had a job for me to do or they would turn me in. I didn't know who was going to get it. Didn't know anything. They gave me the bomb and told me where to plant it, and I did. I just didn't want to die, that's all." He tilted the bottle again. "I never did anything I ever wanted to do. Always what I was told. It's funny—I mean you end up doing something like this, don't even know who is telling you, or what you're doing it for or to. You just do it."

Willy stared at the gun and sneered. "My running all the time, all for nothing. Because here it is anyway, and I'm not so scared."

"How come you're still here, Willy? Instead of out of the state somewhere?"

"Because I made up my mind, Ricci. No more running."

"You work for McWilliams. He paid you to blow that truck."

"Huh?" Willy said. "McWilliams? Why? Him and Bartolo's got the rackets sewed up. They've had a misunderstanding now and then, but why would McWilliams pull a crazy thing like that? He's too smart. Like I'm telling you before, I don't know who hired me to blow that truck."

Gino thought a moment. "What did these guys look like who gave you the bomb?"

"I didn't see the driver of the car. They didn't get out and it was at night. There were two guys and the driver called the other one Reilly."

Gino stepped away and wiped his sweating forehead with the sleeve of his jacket. The jerry-built cabin shuddered in the wind. If it didn't make sense that McWilliams blew that truck, what kind of sense did it make that Bartolo should have hired it done?

". . . maybe your brother had enemies. We all have personal enemies. Maybe some woman's jealous husband.

So Bartolo had been a jealous husband, that could be it. He surely had found out about those *corridas* in the hot sun and one with Candela in particular. Blow his own truck to get Candela, and Reed says it is an accident. If there is any slop, any

complication, then turn the heat on one of McWilliams' men. That was clever, getting something on Willy Bardon, one of McWilliams' men, and having him pull the job. And everything would have worked out fine except for a nosey brother, a wife who liked bullfights, and who disliked being shot with a toy cannon.

He heard something move in the darkness of the kitchenette.

Gino jerked around, pointed the gun.

"Don't go in there, don't look," Willy said, and shivered. "Some-things can make even a cop sick."

Gino reached in found the light switch and turned on the light in the kitchenette. Then he looked down and felt a savage fury worse than he had ever felt about the dead.

The girl was blonde, young, very young, and she lay curled up on her side, her face a few inches from a garbage can under the sink. She was gagged with a silk stocking, and her eyes were buried in blue puffed flesh. She had been thoroughly worked over. As he looked at the bruises, the torn bloody slip which was all she wore, at the dirt in her tangled hair and the cigarette burns on her arms, he felt the taste of copper in his mouth.

"They left her here," he heard Willy saying. "A kid like that—God, I don't even know who she is or—"

"Shut up, Willy," Gino said. He unbound her wrists that were tied with cutting wire to the drainpipe, then he removed the gag and carried her into the other room and put her gently on the couch. Willy sat on the floor and nursed the whiskey bottle. The girl made small whispering sounds and lay curled up and pulled her slip down over her knees. He got a damp towel and began soothing her face.

"My name's Gino Ricci," he said softly.

"Gino Ricci," she whispered. "You're a cop."

He didn't deny it. It gave him a strangely good feeling. "You'll be all right now, don't you worry."

"I want to go home."

"You will. I'll get you home very soon, don't worry."

He opened the closet door.

Willy said, "She was dressed when they brought her in. She's got duds there."

He found a torn dress but no handbag. He put the clothes on the table near the couch. Then he went through Willy's clothes, searched the closet shelves.

"Looking for a gat, or something?" Willy said. "I told you that I'm not a gunsel. I don't carry gats. I'm a mechanic by trade."

"Try to sit up," Gino said to the girl. He helped her and she made a brave attempt and sat up. "We've got to get ready and get out of here."

He turned. "Who brought her in here, Willy, and when?"

"About nine-thirty, and one of them was the same guy. Reilly. Only this time he didn't look so good himself, like somebody had used his face for a football."

"Where were you earlier, before they brought you here?" Gino asked the girl. "Do you know?"

"Yes," she said painfully. "I know. I went out to see Mr. Bartolo."

"Jesus," Willy said. "They said for me to watch her. They said they would be back tonight. To clear things up, they said."

Gino sat down heavily and ran his hand over his eyes. At about eight o'clock at the Bartolo's he had heard a scream. That was about the time Mr. Wang was supposed to be killing a pig. They could have made it out here by just about nine-thirty. He stared at the girl's face. It seemed that he ought to know who she was, as if the swollen thing they had made out of her face was an almost transparent mask that he couldn't quite penetrate.

"They worked her over here and I had to watch," Willy said. "Three of them giving her the business one at a time. It made me sick. But she's really got guts, Ricci. That's why she looks that way. She wouldn't give in, she kept fighting."

"Give in to what?" Gino said, watching her face.

"They said they would kill me, kill my Daddy," she said. "If I didn't promise not to tell my Daddy all about them."

Gino swallowed against a sudden dryness in his throat.

"When are you going to execute me?" Willy asked. "It's the waiting that gets a man, you know."

"You're not worth it, Willy. There are too many like you, running scared, doing the dirty work for the others. I don't want you. I want—"

A great burning sickness welled up in him as he looked at the kid on the couch. He was aware of a tight, clear feeling as though he were made of glass and the slightest thing would shatter him. For now he saw clearly the face under the mask. He had seen it so many times, smiling, posing so proudly from the picture frame on the station house desk.

She was Gil Barstow's daughter, Bessie.

"Bessie," he said hoarsely. "You know me, Gino Ricci. I work for your Daddy."

"Yes, I know." She put her head down and began to cry. "You're Candela's brother."

She stood up suddenly, fighting the pain. She leaned against the wall with one hand and picked up her pathetic little pile of clothes with the other. "I've got to get home. Daddy will be worried about me, you know. I've got to tell him. I've got to tell him!"

She walked unsteadily into the kitchenette.

"There's no phone in here," Gino said.

"Half a block down, there's a public phone booth by the trailer camp."

"Bessie," Gino said. "Hurry up, can you hurry?"

"Yes, I'm hurrying as fast as I can."

"It's all right, Bessie. Everything's all right now," Gino said. "It's just that you ought to get home."

"Nothing's all right," Bessie said. "I know that. But I've got to tell Daddy how it is."

"Sure, you ought to tell him," Gino said dully. Then he looked at Willy. "Pass me that bottle," he said. "Give it to me."

He took it and drank and tasted nothing, felt nothing.

"It's getting late for them too," Willy said. "They said they'd be back."

"Shut up," Gino said without looking at Willy. He listened to rustling movement in the kitchenette. "Bessie, did you know my brother, Candela?"

It seemed to be a long time before she answered. "I thought I did, but I was mistaken. It was a big mistake but I had already made big mistakes. He was good looking though, wasn't he?"

Gino's throat felt like dry wood. "You knew him pretty well, Bessie?"

"We had some dates. He was simply mad about me, he said. But we were supposed to keep our great love a secret. Later I found out why."

"Why, Bessie?"

"He wanted information, and when he got it, I didn't see him anymore. Then he was dead."

"What kind of information did he get from you, Bessie?"

"About the jukebox wire drops. I work at Continental Music Distributors, but that's just a dummy company. I'm a telephone disc jockey there. I mean, those are all wired boxes where somebody sends in a request and I play it." She laughed, a laugh on the edge of hysteria. "But that's not all I played, see. I helped them play the horses too. The number of the record, the number of the race, the number of the horse. It was all worked out in code, you see, and I'd know when a bookie was requesting racing information, and when it was just someone requesting a record, because it was all worked out, I mean the code, the signals and all that."

Willy was staring at the wall. "God," he said. "What genius! Bartolo's using those wired boxes as racing wire drops."

Gino moved to the window and peered around the edge of the shade. The window rattled and a hot breath of wind touched his face through an invisible crack. Then the wind seemed to die, and he felt only a strained silence like a still pool of glassy water. That car had not been parked there behind his own before. Its headlights were

turned off. The reflection from the swinging streetlight revealed several silent shadows in the car. Gino kept looking, his face dead-pan, but now and then a thumb or finger twitched in an almost imperceptible gesture.

"What's out there, Ricci? More executioners?" Willy asked.

"Shut up," Gino said. His mouth pressed thin by the powerful clamp of his jaws. A trickle of sweat slid past his eye and outlined his cheek.

"Hurry up, Bessie," Gino said, trying to sound calm about it.

"Just a few more minutes," she said. "I've got to fix my face a little." She laughed again. "You want to hear the rest of it, Mr. Ricci. I had better tell you just in case I never get to tell Daddy."

"Go ahead, tell me, Bessie," Gino whispered.

Though Bessie didn't have much more to say, Gino could quickly put a lot together. A bookmaking operation of considerable size in which Bessie had been a small but important cog. The race-wire service was outlawed in California, but bookmakers had tried to work out ways to circumvent the law. They had tried tapping Western Union cables, using short wave radio, bribing Pacific Telephone and Western Union officials. But Tony Bartolo was very smart. News stolen from inside the tracks went directly to a central location, Continental Music Distributors, where Bessie worked as one of a number of telephone disc jockeys, played request platters for music lovers all over the country. She also learned to spell out vital, fast and accurate racing information for bookmakers. Bartolo's jukeboxes were wire drop terminal points scattered over California, neighboring states, and down into Mexico.

Bessie hadn't seen anything really wrong in it. There was so much money and it was so much fun and so intriguing and all. And no one suspected anything. Didn't music come out of Jukeboxes? Didn't music make people happy? And anyway, hadn't she heard her Daddy even talking about how there was nothing wrong with betting on horses and that it ought to be legalized, and how in some places it was just another good way to collect taxes?

But Candela had gotten wise and started dating her and got all the secret information, the code, the names, everything, even the places scattered everywhere where the wire terminals were.

And that was why he had died, why Bartolo had done it. There could be only one reason. Candela had used that information to try to blackmail Bartolo, squeeze a big cut from Bartolo of the thousand or so dollars a month Bartolo was hauling down from every one of those terminal wire drop jukeboxes. Why hell, just from that one racket alone Bartolo must have been raking in several hundred thousand a year.

But Bessie knew why they had killed Candela, and Bartolo's boys knew where Candela had gotten all that inside information. So they had started to work on her too. And if threats, torture, weren't enough—

Something pressed, a tide swelled in him. Something pushed and struggled to be let loose.

After all those years, Candela had been nothing but a little two-timing, black-mailing punk!

Gino's mind, feverish with strain, sparked and flashed as he watched the man get out of the car and stand there in the wind having difficulty lighting a cigarette. Two other men got out, and they stood there. One of them pointed at Gino's car, then they looked at cabin number 6.

One of the men's hat blew off and he took out into the dark after it. One of the other men bent over as if he thought it was amusing.

Did they know that car was his? Did they know he was here?

"Bessie, are you ready to go home now?" he asked.

"I guess so."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw her come in from the kitchen, and he turned full around because she was walking with such inherent dignity and courage and trying to smile.

"I just made a mistake," she said. "I didn't see anything wrong in it, but I do now. It's the people in it who are wrong, you know. I know Daddy would want me to tell him and those people aren't going to stop me. Daddy said once you were the best cop in the country, and I'm glad I could tell you."

"I'm glad too," Gino said thickly. His upper lip glistened with sweat, and his hands were clenched. He drew a long tight breath, and then looked out the window.

Only one man stood by the car.

Gino's stomach was an icy congealing pool. He looked at a sharper angle, trying to see if they were approaching the cabin from the front. He couldn't see anything.

"They're out there I guess," Willy said.

"Who?" Bessie asked, and there was a controlled shiver in her voice.

Gino looked at the broken night-lock hanging by one screw on the front door. He went over and listened but heard nothing other than the wind, and the sound of a garbage or trash can banging down the concrete. He looked at Bessie. "They've come back," he said. "The men who brought you here."

"Oh," she said, and gripped her hands tightly together.

Gino's gun slipped into his hand. "Willy," he said. "We're going out the back door. You first."

Willy tilted the bottle and finished what was left in it. Then he walked unsteadily into the kitchenette and stared at the back door. "Why the back door?" Willy whispered.

"If they have the back door cov-

ered, they have the front covered too," Gino said. "We've got a better chance out the back. It goes right into the trailor camp. It's too open out the front, too much light."

"Better for running, you mean," Willy said.

Gino listened at the back door. He heard a cold metallic click cutting in sharply through the wind, the sound of an automatic. And he thought: it's a neat package for them. They can shut everybody up here in one neat package. Bardon, Bessie and me.

"Bessie," Gino said, and held her hands. "Willy's going out, then I'm going out. And whatever happens then, you come out and run! Right through the trailor camp. Keep low, zig-zag in and around those trailors, understand. Don't look back or stop for anything. Just keep running."

He took several bills from his wallet and pressed them into her hand. "Keep running, find a cab and go home. Tell your Daddy whatever you want, but just get home."

Gino touched his gun to the small of Willy's back. Willy turned. His face was covered with drops of sweat like glycerine. His mouth quivered. "I don't need that, please. For once, let me do it because I want to."

Gino stepped back. Willy reached over to the cabinet and opened a drawer and took out a butcher knife. Then he faced the door again and grabbed the knob. "I wish I had a gun now," he said. "Because I'm not running from these bastards."

He jerked open the door and for a fraction of a second that seemed much longer, he stood outlined by the light. In front of Willy, Gino saw the sulphurous diffusion of swirling dust, and a few hundred feet away the wildly swinging lights of the trailor camp. Willy jumped outward waving the knife. Gino ran through the door crouching and weaving, threw himself to the right out of the silhouetting frame of the door. He hit full length, hugged the wall, and watched for any sign of movement, a glint of metal, a flash of gunfire out of the darkness beyond the small semicircle of illumination from the kitchen. It came at once, out of the brush a few feet away, a burst of flame, the muted crack in the wind.

Gino fired at the flash, then rolled over, scrambled ahead a few feet and threw himself flat tight up against a large trash can against the cabin wall. Willy was on his knees, trying to get up, trying to move toward the brush from which the shot had come.

Gino saw Bessie running, disappear in the dark, reappear under the lights of the trailer camp. Everything of terror and of pursuit and of the will to live was fused into that small figure bounding and straining. And then she was gone behind one of the trailers.

The one that Gino had shot stag-

gered out of the brush, lurched toward Willy. As he came into the light, Gino saw the strained white of the eyeballs, and the black wet wideopen mouth. Gino started to shoot him again even though he would give away his position. But Willy yelled thinly, lunged up, fell forward swinging the knife. The man fired once more, a report muffled by the wind and Willy's body, then he fell backward and Gino saw the knife protruding from his throat. Willy turned over twice, then lay on his back dead a few feet from Gino.

Even if the inhabitants of this section of Vera Nada had heard the shots above the wind, they would prefer to forget about it. Gino, watching the trailers, saw not a single light go on. He lay hugging the wall, straining, listening, trying to hear some little sound in the surrounding darkness, but the wind breathed that steady wailing hot breath, coating him with dust, stinging in his nose. He heard nothing, but they were here close somewhere. It was funny, he thought, but he no longer felt tired or even very much afraid. He kept seeing Bessie getting away, and he felt a sudden increase of force and life in his mind, like a transfusion of strong red blood. Life must be for the living, he thought, not for the dead, because who can know or help the dead?

Gino shifted his weight and his ear brushed the side of the garbage can. Then he heard it. A slight metallic tick against his ear. He knew that one of them was there, just on the other side of the can, less than three feet away.

It occurred to Gino that the one on the other side of the garbage can was the only one at the rear of the cabin, that the third one would have stayed to watch the front. It also occurred to him that the third one would be getting curious, or had heard the shots, and might show at any minute.

He rose slowly and silently up the side of the cabin wall, then he leaned forward and shot straight down, twice. His eyes had grown slightly accustomed to the darkness now, and he saw something arch upward and he heard the faint groan and a frantic scratching on the wall.

As Gino started to slide back along the wall, it was as though an icy channel of air had opened in the hot desert wind. He felt it like a chilling finger on the back of his neck. It tingled up his arms. He felt the start of his limbs, the acceleration of his heart as he tried to turn, knowing that he was too late, and that something horrible was about to happen to him.

He didn't see the figure in the kitchen doorway. He was only half-turned, enough to see the huge projected shadow of that figure spread out through the semicircle of light. He was still trying to get turned around when he heard the vicious

thin crack of the gun. He had never been shot before, and he was dully surprised that he felt no pain, but only a tremendous impact as if he had been punched with a steel bar and slammed back into the wall. He felt himself falling over the can and then he lay there unable to move in a stinking pile of garbage. Then he didn't care, didn't smell anything, but seemed to be sinking into the earth, feeling its warmth spreading out to support him.

He opened his eyes and fought an inrushing darkness. His limbs twitched and he could feel the sweat running into his eyes. A steel band choked his throat and he could feel his heart pounding like a fist beating on a wall.

Willy Bardon's gray face was a few feet away on the kitchen floor staring up at the ceiling. A burst of pain hit him and hammered at his entrails as he twisted his head and saw Reilly up there, only his eyes and his swollen mouth showing above and below his bandaged nose.

Reilly managed a broken grin. "Sure knew who you was this time, Il Martello, didn't I?" He pointed a .45 automatic down at Gino's head. Gino tried to move, but he had the spongy powerless sensation of a man awakening in the morning unable to grasp anything. "I'll have to give you one more, Il Martello. The one that's in you might not be enough. You're tough all right, I got to admit it. Don't you want to die, Il Martello?"

Reilly kicked Gino in the side of the face, kicked him again in the ribs. "You're sure tough, Il Martello, I can see that. But we all got to go sometime, right, Il Martello? I'll put this gun in Willy's hand, and I'll leave the gun that killed Willy in your hand, and then I'll go. That's how we figured it. Everyone knows you were out to get him, and he was waiting for you. Simple, Il Martello. Simple as hell ain't it?"

"The girl got away though," Gino said thickly.

"She won't have the guts to say anything now, Il Martello. And when we get through with her old man it won't make any difference if she does blab." Reilly cocked his head to one side. "I got to go now," he said. "My friends I put in the car, they don't mind waiting, they don't care about anything thanks to Il Martello. But I'll have to be going now. Leave you here alone with your pal, Willy."

Gino heard the front door open first. Reilly whirled. Someone came in the back. Reilly backed toward the wall. There was a crash of window glass behind him and Gino heard Gil Barstow's foghorn voice roar out, "Drop it, drop it!"

Reilly dropped the gun on the floor and raised his hands.

"I'm glad to see you, Gil," Gino said, as the Chief knelt down beside Gino and yelled for a stretcher. "Wasn't expecting you so soon."

Gino saw a blur of white coats and he was being lifted. He gasped and all the water in his body seemed to rush to the surface.

"Get him to the hospital," Barstow said.

Barstow was hardly recognizable. His face was drawn back so that his cheekbones stood out and his nose was beaklike and his iresis were a painful blue in the reddened ovals of his eyes.

"Bessie called me from half a block down," he said. "She said she wanted to call because you were in trouble here, and I came on out."

"She's fine, she's just fine," Barstow said. "And you're going to be the same, by God, and don't you forget it for a minute."

"I won't," Gino said. "I guess you're going to get Bartolo?"

"What do you think?"

They were carrying Gino out toward the front door.

"Bartolo's not the one," Gino whispered. "It's his wife—Della's handled it all the way. I don't think Bartolo has any idea what's been going on."

"Do you know what you're talking about, Gino?"

"Sure." Gino grabbed the medic's wrist. "Hold it a minute, sonny. I've got some last words."

"Go ahead, let him talk," Barstow growled. "But later. Now shut up, Gino."

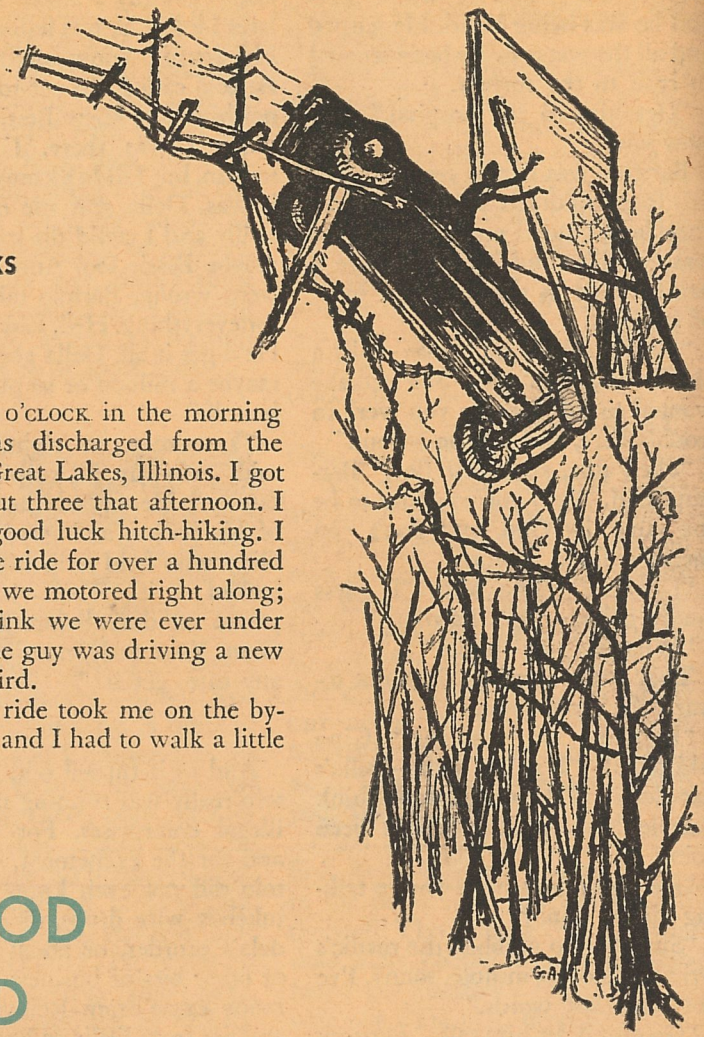
"But Bartolo's crazy, in his second or third childhood, with memory lapses, and who knows what else? Anyway I talked to him and later I knew he was telling the truth. He doesn't know anything. Della Bartolo called me out to the ranch, not him. She knew Bessie was there when I was there. I heard her scream, but I didn't know then what it was. Della sent me out here so Willy and I could die together, and maybe Bessie too. And if anything went wrong, Bartolo takes the rap for everything. Hell, look at his past. He'd get it all. Della goes free with maybe a million or so put away for herself."

"You may be right," Barstow said. "Anyway, I'll keep it all in the family." He pulled the badge out of his pocket and gave it back to Gino who held it in his hand and looked at it. "That's just in case you're on duty before I get back, Gino. Your little vacation's over in any case, get it?"

And as it turned out, Della Bartolo really was running most of the illegal enterprises. For the profit, and for the excitement. Tony Bartolo did not even know about the jukebox wire drops, or about Candela's murder, or about a number of other bits of business. The testimony came from Reilly, however, and not from Della or Bartolo.

Because when Barstow arrived at the Bartolo Ranch, Della was lying dead beside the swimming pool with over a hundred toy shells in her body.

BY
BURLEY
HENDRICKS



RED BLOOD BEND

The straps holding the body to the stretcher were yellow-new; the remains of a bright blue sweater and shreds of a plaid skirt clung to the body; where the face should have been was a red wet mass marked with glistening white bone.

AT NINE O'CLOCK in the morning I was discharged from the Navy at Great Lakes, Illinois. I got home about three that afternoon. I had real good luck hitch-hiking. I caught one ride for over a hundred miles and we motored right along; I don't think we were ever under ninety. The guy was driving a new Thunderbird.

My last ride took me on the by-pass route and I had to walk a little

more than a mile to get to town. Not a car passed me while I walked. Mine was a small town and there wasn't much traffic from the highway and most of the local people would all be working this time of day.

I really wasn't excited a helluva lot about getting home; I didn't have much to get home to. I hadn't even bothered going home on my leaves. But I did have my car. Instead of selling my car I had blocked it up in the back yard when I went in the Navy. I was pretty proud of that car; I had worked on it all through the last three years of school and it was as sharp a street rod as any in the state. No one but me had ever driven that rod and when I left I had pickled the engine, just like they do in the service, and I had wrapped the whole thing up snug in a great big plastic tent.

Up until about six months before, the rod was the only thing I had really missed about home. Oh, I had missed the folks and some of the guys, still I didn't yearn any. But I had really missed cruising around in my rod. Both my folks worked; always had as long as I could remember. Sometimes it seemed like all I could remember of my folks was them saying goodby as they were going someplace . . . always waving goodby.

About six months ago I began getting letters from a girl back home. Her name was Donna and she was three years younger than me. She used to hang around wherever the guys were working on their rods. She always used to help me polish and shine the rod. She wrote to me first. Later she sent pictures of her self and we got to writing real often. We even got to signing our letters "with love" and beginning them with "darling" and stuff like that. She started it. . . . . but I'm not saying I didn't like it.

As I walked I figured how I'd get my rod unwrapped and flush out the engine. I'd probably have to have a new battery as well as tires; just as soon as I got that done I was going to drive around and see Donna.

When I got home the house was locked, so I went in through a window. I figured the folks must be working. I didn't really give a damn but I don't like being all alone in a house so I set my duffel-bag in a corner of the front porch and went around in back. I wanted to start work on the rod right away but Mrs. Purtell from next door saw me and called me in. She always had pulled a big grandma act with me; always feeding me and praying for me, being so damn kind it made me angry. All she ever really wanted was to pump me about the folks. Mrs. Purtell was pretty transparent; she was always trying to find out what my folks were fighting about. She would always try to pump me to find out who Mom or Dad was running around with.

I didn't like Mrs. Purtell and I got

away from her just as soon as I could; I'm always uncomfortable with her, 'cause I'm always afraid she will start praying for me.

The time went fast while I worked on my rod. I got the tires on first and then I had it towed over to the station where all the other guys with rods hung out. I had it running in no time at all and I could tell from the way the other guys acted that I still had the best rod in town.

Once I even caught myself whistling while I worked; I was thinking about Donna.

Vernon Mackey came around just as I got the engine started. It ran kind of ragged at first so I put a can of Casite through the top of the carbs. I held the throttle open a little and when the Casite began to clear away the stickyness the engine settled in a deep, steady roar that was just pretty to hear. I thought Vernon would have a nervous fit. Vernon never could make an engine run, but he knew very damn well when he heard one that was really right. He was damn near hypnotized by the sound of my engine. I guess that was the difference between Vernon and me; I just kinda thrilled to a good sharp rod, Vernon was like a damned addict.

I never did really like Vernon Mackey. Most of the guys with good rods they had built themselves didn't like him. Vernon Mackey never built anything; he always bought anything he ever wanted. Most of the guys just tolerated him; partly because he always had the latest and most expensive rod equipment available. For all the money Vernon could spend he never did have a top running rod, and I told him many times he never would. He had tried to buy my rod when I went in the Navy, I told him then he was chasing a ghost; you just don't buy anything like a top-running rod, you gotta know it, you gotta build it, and you gotta love it, 'cause if you don't some guy will come along with all those things working between him and his rod and then *you follow him* and you can't touch him, and all the money in the world ain't ever going to change that. I really think I could have set fire to my rod before I would have sold it to Vernon. He offered me twenty-five dollars once just to drive it and I wouldn't go for it. After that Vernon Mackey always seemed like something nasty to me. He would try to buy anything.

We were standing on opposite sides of the engine. I was pouring the last of the Casite in the carbs, the smoke was rolling out of tail pipes in two thick, white, billowing streams then spreading out and hanging low. Vernon reached over, pulled the throttle clear open and held it. The engine coughed once, still rich with the Casite, and then it caught and started to wind up fast. It was really screaming when I reached over and rapped Vernon's knuckles hard with a screwdriver.

He jumped back, rubbing his hand, and when he looked at me I waited until the engine had slowed and I said, "you sonofabitch". He didn't take it up, he just laughed in the nasty way he had.

The village marshal drove up and stopped. He got out of his car and looked us over real good. The thick, white smoke hung low, wrapping around us and the gleaming red rod. We could barely see the marshal through the smoke. We did hear him speak: "You punks are probably gitten ready for a ride straight to Hell, but until you get there you keep that damn thing quiet in this town, yuh hear? If yuh don't I'll have your damn license, yuh hear?"

We didn't answer and he drove away. I was too pleased with the way the engine had revved to let him bother me and I just stood there for a moment listening to the engine idle. The Casite had done its job well and the the engine was just like I had remembered it. It idled just a little fast and it seemed to be lying in there kind of snarling and growling—just waiting for a chance to snap and roar and raise hell.

I felt so damn good I let Vernon go for a ride with me. There wasn't anyone around right then anyway.

We drove out of town on the same road I had walked in on just a few hours before. I took it real easy, just kind of a soaking up the feel of the rod. It felt pretty damn good to be on wheels again.

When we got on the highway I let the engine rev just a little. There wasn't much traffic and the road was wide and clear. We rolled along about eighty for a while; the pipes in back were just murmuring kind of contented like. The road had a few gentle curves and I would accelerate a little as we started into them—just enough to hear the tires howl a bit. We gained a little speed as we went along and we scooted around the curves just like we were on rails. There was a new sedan cruising along ahead of us and I guess the guy driving was pretty proud of his machine. Anyway we went right up beside him—riding real easy. He looked at us and looked down at his speedometer kind of like he didn't believe his own eyes.

We were easing away from the sedan when the guy driving decided to give us a try. The sedan came up even with us; we were still in the passing lane but the road was clear so I let the engine breathe a little. We rode in front a bit and then I eased and let the sedan come even again. He was still building speed but it was coming hard for his mill and I knew he was flat out. We were side by side doing almost a hundred, Vernon was leaning forward, kind of excited, like he was in seventh heaven and the guy in the sedan didn't even know I was just playing with him—he thought he was in a real race.

We went like that for a couple

miles. There wasn't another car to interfere and the sedan was getting up near an honest hundred when the road began to bend more and the curves started getting tighter. The sedan would roll and shift on its big, soft springs and once it went right off the edge of the pavement. The guy driving the sedan was middle-aged, and he must have been drunk or else he had a lot of stubborn, foolish guts. He never once eased off; I guess he had been reading the Detroit advertising.

We started down a hill and at the bottom the road curved sharp to the left. I knew the road well. The curve had been given the name "Red Blood Bend" a long time before. The bank dropped away steep on the right and there was a long row of white posts with steel-cables stretched tight for a guard. Over the years the highway crews were kept pretty busy replacing posts and cables where car after car went through. It was a flat curve, no bank at all, and part way through the road had a series of shallow, rutted troughs worn into the asphalt. It was those shallow ruts that had given the piece of road its name; placed where they were, exactly at the point where the centrifugal force on a car was the greatest, they could shake the front-end of a speeding car right loose from the pavement through the cables and right down the bank. I guess the guy in the sedan had never heard of Red Blood Bend.

When we started down the hill I could see two men working on a bill-board that was down the bank just where the road straightened out coming out of the turn. The bill-board was well placed; it was square in front of anyone all the way down the hill. The working-guys had just pasted up a new ad; it was a picture of a girl in a bathing suit, and she was a doll. She had a bottle of coke and she was holding it out toward the highway. She had a big inviting smile.

The guy in the sedan stayed right with us all the way down the hill, I thought sure he would chicken out—he never did. We went into the turn side by side and when I knew the sedan-guy wasn't quitting I knew I had to get away and give him plenty of room or he might smash us all. I let the engine all the way out for the first time and the rod fairly jumped at the turn. The tires began to moan just a little as the side pressure mounted and we skidded just a little as we hit the ruts. The sedan was well behind now and in the mirror I caught a glimpse as the sedan's body began to lift and plunge on those big, sloppy springs. Down the bank I saw the white, scared faces of the guys on the bill-board. They must have heard the tire noise building 'cause they dropped their brushes, jumped to the ground, and ran. All the time I could see that big, gorgeous girl on the ad; she was smiling and holding out that bottle of coke. Made me think of that old

deal where the women would sing and lure ships to crash on the rocks.

We were around the turn and climbing the hill when Vernon poked me and motioned back. I looked in the mirror and saw a big cloud of dust; the sedan was bucking and bouncing crazy-like, bouncing along the guard cables and shedding pieces of metal like it was coming all apart. The cables held and the sedan-guy got stopped. I slowed until I saw him get out and walk around his car. Vernon was excited and laughing like hell, I kind of felt sorry for the sedan-guy. He must of been drunk.

I used the back roads getting back to town; just in case the police would be looking for us. There was no telling what kind of a story the sedan-guy and the bill-board guys would tell.

I drove around by our house, but I couldn't tell if the folks had been home and left again or hadn't been there at all. My duffel-bag was still on the porch and the house was locked. I decided to go see Donna and I let Vernon go with me—I guess I should have went alone.

Seeing Donna the first time after all that stuff we had written made me a little uneasy. She was different than I remembered too; she worked in an office and she was wearing nylons and high heels. She was damn pretty.

She acted kind of uneasy too—at first anyway—and I figured she must be thinking about the letters. We all got to talking though and Donna and Vernon talked a lot; I mostly listened, I had been away for two years and I was kind of out of touch with everybody.

I felt funny as hell being there with Donna and I know I must have looked pretty damn dumb and clumsy. Anyway that's how I felt.

We all went out that night. I don't know how it happened Vernon came along, but he did. Vernon could talk good—if he couldn't do anything else right.

We went to a drive-in movie. Donna sat real close to me, she was laughing at everything and poking and pinching me. She was real gay and I felt good too. Vernon was sarcastic and nasty as hell; he wouldn't even pay for his share of the eats and he was loaded with dough.

We went for a ride after the movie. We drove all around and finally we stopped at a tavern out on the highway. None of us were legally old enough to drink, but the place was crowded and the waiters busy and it was not lighted very bright, and the guy served us without even questioning our age.

We drank beer and then Donna wanted to dance. I can't dance, and I wouldn't let her teach me, anyway not right then. Vernon danced with her—he danced pretty good. They danced a lot. They would come back to the booth where I was and we would drink and talk and then they would go dance again. Vernon

began to talk a lot and then he began nagging me about wanting to drive my rod. I don't think it was the sport of driving he wanted so much as it was he couldn't bear to know there was something he couldn't have. He wouldn't leave it alone. Once while they were dancing I got invited into a game of shuffleboard. I was playing and I didn't go back to the booth for a while and when the game was over I looked around they were gone. I waited at the booth for a while and when they didn't show up I went outside.

We had parked way to the rear of the parking space, off by ourselves, and it was deep shadowed and almost black dark where the car was.

I walked right up to the car; not really thinking of anything. I didn't try to be quiet or anything, I just walked right up and almost opened the door. But a car made a turn in the lot and the lights flashed on my car and in that flash of light I saw Donna and Vernon and I froze right there. Then I turned and went back inside, but I could still see her face. Her eyes were closed tight or else she would have seen me. I went up to the bar and I ordered a drink and everywhere I looked I could see her teeth biting her lip and her hair tangled on the cushion, making a wild, dark frame for her face.

I had several drinks and I was playing shuffleboard again when they came back. They went right to the booth and when the game was finished I went over. They were pretty good actors and I went right along with them. We drank and talked and I thought about all the letters and I guess I read them all over again right there and all the time that scene in the car would come in on me.

We must have drunk quite a lot. I was paying for a round once and I dropped a handful of change on the table I dropped the keys to my rod too and I saw Vernon's eyes light up at the sight of those keys. I picked up most of the stuff I had dropped but I pretended I didn't see the keys lying among the bottles and litter on the table. All the time I was watching Vernon. I saw him wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue and he looked real sly and guilty. I could hardly keep from leaping at him. The guys at the shuffleboard called me back and I went over and joined their game.

A few minutes later I watched while Vernon and Donna went out and I saw Vernon had one hand closed tight; I knew he had the keys to my rod in that hand. No one but me had ever driven that rod. Nobody but me really knew how to handle that rod and I just stood there and watched them go out into the dark night.

I quit the shuffleboard in the middle of a game and my pardner was mad, but I didn't care. I went and sat at the bar.

Above the racket of the tavern crowd I heard my rod accelerating

on the highway . . . . . nobody had ever driven that rod but me . . . . . everywhere I looked I could see her face . . . . . her eyes were closed. . . . .

Twenty minutes later I heard the sound of sirens on the highway and looking from the window I saw two State Patrol cars flash by with their red-roof lights whipping around and around. A few minutes later I heard and saw an ambulance go racing by in the same direction.

The man standing next to me was talking.

"Must have been a wreck!"

"Yeah."

"Guess I'll go see. I'm sure not doing any good here."

I caught him almost to the door. "Mind if I go?"

"Hell no! Glad to have you. Come on."

We drove in the direction the police and ambulance had gone. He talked all the time we were riding—I didn't say very much. Then, far ahead in the dark I could see a dim, red sprinkle of many lights. The guy was still talking; faster now and his voice rising.

"Looks like it's right on Red Blood Bend."

"I'm not surprised."

"No, sure gets a lot of 'em. Jesus! There's sure a crowd. Must be a good one. We're going to have to park way back here."

We parked at the end of a long line of cars. He got out and ran a little ways, and then he called to me to hurry. I wouldn't run and he went on ahead. Other people were running and stumbling through the dark; calling to each other with excited voices. One old lady, reminded me of Mrs. Purtell, was standing on the shoulder of the road holding her hand to her side and breathing real loud and raspy—her people were hollering for her to hurry.

I took my time. I was soaking up every detail. There was a helmeted deputy standing in the middle of the road directing traffic and the lighted sticks he waved threw a funny purple light for several feet and gave the deputy a masked, metallic appearance—kind of like a robot.

The steel guard cables drooped slack and three white support posts had been torn from the ground. There was a great, jagged opening in the fresh, bright bill-board. The giant bottle of coke was still intact but the beautiful smile of the girl had been torn loose. One large, dangling strip of paper moved in the night air and the girl's paper-face flashed a smile and then was gone as the paper twisted and turned.

Some of the more agile spectators scrambled down the bank and disappeared behind the bill-board. Four men carrying a stretcher came from behind the wreckage of the bill-board, into the light and began working their way carefully up the bank. The figure on the stretcher was completely covered. Part way up the bank, one of the men lost his

footing, stumbled and fell. Then they all were down and the stretcher went sliding like a toboggan until the handles caught in the dirt, and then it went rolling and tumbling all the way down the bank. The blanket came loose and the straps holding the body to the stretcher were yellow-new and shiny. The remains of a bright blue sweater and shreds of a plaid skirt clung to the body. The skirt looked heavy with wet, dark stains. Where the face should have been was a red, wet mass, marked with glistening white bone. The stretcher came to a stop at the base of the bill-board. The spectators were silent; the only sound was the sputtering pop of a road-side flare. The strip of paper turned; moved by a current of air, then fell from its anchor and twisted slowly down to fall and cling to the ragged looking bundle on the stretcher. The brilliant white, paper-smile shone brightly in the wavering red lights.

I looked for the guy I had rode out with and I found him staring, fascinated while they wrapped the stretcher up again. I spoke but he did not respond so I walked out to the line of cars where a few were already leaving. I wondered, but I didn't stay to see how they would lug Vernon up that steep, slippery, grass bank.

I caught a ride with a boy and girl about my own age. They talked about the accident for a while and then the girl turned the radio on and an intimate, female voice all through the car.

"I'll be seeing you. . . ."

The girl snuggled close and put her head on the boy's shoulder.

". . . . in all the old familiar places. . . . ."

I figured the police would be around to see me tomorrow about the rod.

". . . . . of mine embraces. . . ."

After tomorrow, what then?

" . . . all day through . . ."

I didn't have a rod now so there wasn't much for me here.

". . . . . but I'll be seeing you . . ."

Maybe I could still hold my rate if I hurried right back into the Navy. If not maybe I would try a hitch in the Army.

When I got home the folks weren't there yet. The whole town was quiet and still like there wasn't any people at all in all those darkened houses.

I went in the house and I just stood in the middle of the living room for a while. It was real quiet and I just stood there, barely breathing, but I was thinking a mile a minute. The phone rang sharp and loud in all that quiet—it startled me. I picked it up and said "Hullo" and then I heard the whimpering, hysterical voice of Vernon. He was whining and saying something about paying for the rod. I just dropped the receiver on the cradle.

I went outside and sat down on

the porch steps. I could see my duffel-bag standing in the corner right where I had left it. I heard a rooster crow somewhere far away and I knew it would be getting light soon.

I just sat there all alone in the quiet.

THE SIMIAN SUSPECT

Detective MacKinstry solves a murder.

BY FRANK SISK

SEVERAL DAYS after old Mrs. Moody returned to her suite in the Regent Hotel, brown and brittle from ten winter weeks in St. Petersburg, she phoned Mr. Sorenson with the request that he—or a responsible representative—come to see her at the earliest convenience on a matter of quote potential criminality unquote. The hotel manager, who invariably blanched even at the report of a stolen towel, repeated Mrs. Moody's words to himself for the next quarter hour, until they were forebodingly underlined, and then summoned MacKinstry, the house detective.

"It may be something quite trivial," he said, nervously tapping his chin with a pencil. "But those were her very words, Charles. Potential criminality."

"I'll go up and have a talk with her," MacKinstry said.

"And handle her with delicacy, by all means. You know how eccentric she is, and how rich."

"I'll behave like an assistant manager," MacKinstry said.

Mrs. Moody had maintained a suite at the Regent since the death of her husband three years earlier. Though she still owned a large house and much acreage in the suburbs, the hotel was the headquarters from which she operated her simple social and business life with the help of a secretary.

It was this secretary, Miss Waymuth, fortyish and amiably plain, who now answered MacKinstry's uncharacteristically delicate knock and admitted him to the small foyer.

"Mrs. Moody is expecting—you," she said. "This way, please."

Following her into the main room, MacKinstry explained that Mr. Sorenson was practically manacled to his desk by an unexpected emergency.

"Running a big hotel must be one emergency after another," said Miss Waymuth. "Mrs. Moody, this is Mr. MacKinstry, who represents the management."

The old woman was sitting at a coffee table pouring tea. Beside her, wearing a checkered vest and plum-colored pants, sat a medium-sized monkey. "Welcome, Mr. MacKinstry," said Mrs. Moody. "We have a nodding acquaintance, Julia. I often see Mr. MacKinstry in the lobby with his hat on. Sit down, sir. You know Conrad, of course."

The monkey said what sounded like "Mama" and clapped his hands.

"As you say, just a nodding acquaintance, ma'am," said MacKinstry, taking a chair.

"Will you take tea, Mr. MacKinstry? Or would you prefer something else?"

"Tea will do fine, thank you."

"Mama," said the monkey, hopping off the divan and tugging at MacKinstry's sleeve. "Mama, mama, mama."

"Case of mistaken identity," said MacKinstry with a wintry smile. "So he talks, does he?"

"Come back here instantly, Conrad." Mrs. Moody patted the cushion at her side. "Yes, but that is the extent of his vocabulary, I'm afraid."

Miss Waymuth was passing a tray of tiny cakes. "And it has taken Mrs. Moody two years to teach him that. No, Conrad," she added reproachfully. "No cakes for you."

"Absolutely not," said Mrs. Moody. "You're already dangerously overweight, thanks to that beastly Herman Campfield. Just look at him, Mr. MacKinstry. He's developed a paunch."

Apparently smarting under the criticism, the monkey hung its head and fingered its large ears. MacKinstry noticed that the makings of a pot belly protruded from the unbuttoned vest, but the fact didn't seem to be consequential.

Concerning too many bananas,

is that it?" he said. So far the conversation seemed slightly weird. "You mentioned Mr. Campfield, ma'am. The new occupant of our penthouse. I see he also has a monkey."

"Do you wish sugar?" asked Miss Waymuth.

"Thanks," said MacKinstry. "Just one lump."

"Let Conrad serve the sugar, Julia. We'll permit him to participate to that extent."

The monkey peered at the silver tongs that Mrs. Moody proffered and finally took them with a gleeful cackle. Then it performed the feat, none too adeptly, of lifting sugar cubes from the bowl and dropping them into the cups of tea. There was splash and spillage. There were several attempts, gently circumvented by Mrs. Moody, to reward itself with a cube. Then there was a fretful withdrawal to the far end of the divan.

"He was so perfectly disciplined until Herman Campfield took him in hand," said Mrs. Moody. "It horrifies me to think what is happening."

MacKinstry nibbled at a cake, feeling ridiculously out of his element, and then took a thoughtful sip of tea. "Let me get this straight, Mrs. Moody. Is this the same monkey that moved into the penthouse with Mr. Campfield?"

"Why, of course. Didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't. I've seen the—seen Conrad going in and out of the hotel with Mr. Campfield, but to be honest I thought we had two monkeys in the house. I guess they all look alike to me."

"Like babies, I imagine," said Miss Waymuth. "They all look alike except to their parents."

"Well, yeah," said MacKinstry with doubt.

"The metaphor is not too extreme," said Mrs. Moody. "For Conrad *has* become part of our little family circle. He's been with us for nearly three years, since he was a baby himself."

"There was a time when we had to keep him in diapers," added Miss Waymuth. "Isn't that so, Conrad?"

Conrad, scratching the protuberant belly, said nothing. MacKinstry was somewhat at loss for words himself, but finally he asked, "Did Mr. Campfield steal the monkey? Is that why you called Mr. Sorenson?"

"Oh, no, no, my dear man," said Mrs. Moody. "Herman would never steal in the legal sense of the word. He's much too devious for that. He gained possession of Conrad in a non-litigable manner. I have already consulted my attorney on that. It's the purpose, the fiendish purpose, behind his action which is giving me insomnia."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Moody, we had better tell Mr. MacKinstry the whole story," Miss Waymuth suggested.

"Yes, Julia." The old lady looked toward the ceiling as if it were the

past, then began: "While in Florida recently, I broke out with a most itchy rash. A series of doctors made a series of tests and determined, with the usual indefiniteness of the profession, that I was allergic to animal fur. And the more they heard about Conrad, the more certain they were that it was monkey fur. If I did not get rid of Conrad, the implication was that I would eventually scratch myself to death. Giddy thought."

"Fortunately, the diagnosis was wrong," said Miss Waymuth. "Unfortunately, however, for Conrad, because we did not know it was wrong until too late."

"Tangerines were the cause of the itch. I hadn't eaten any in years until this last trip south." Mrs. Moody shook her head in self-deprecation. "But the rash was so unremitting and painful that Iwould have cut off an arm to be rid of it. And disposing of Conrad, though done with every thought for his future happiness and comfort, was no less a sacrifice. We placed carefully worded ads in the newspapers. We didn't wish to sell Conrad. We simply wished to find him a good home. Applicants were obliged to produce references. Frankly, I was rather surprised at the response—at least a dozen replies, weren't there, Julia? Yes, at least.

"But the one which stood out singularly among all was from a girl in her early twenties. Oh, a sweet-faced little thing of charming simplicity and utter candor. She allegedly lived with her parents. Her father was a veterinarian. She had had a chimp just like Conrad until a week ago, when it had died peacefully of old age. Her eyes welled up with tears as she talked of it. She was too good to be true, and so it turned out. Later, of course, we discovered she was a filing clerk in one of Campfield's citrus companies. But that was not until she had paid us a token dollar, at her own insistence, and received Conrad and a bill of sale. That is Herman Campfield in action, Mr. MacKinstry."

MacKinstry worked an expression of sympathetic interest across his normally expressionless face. "Judging from what you say, ma'am, you and Mr. Campfield aren't exactly strangers to each other."

"Lord, no. I've known Herman Campfield, much to my regret, for the last twenty years. He and Wilfred—that is, the late Mr. Moody—had a few business dealings, but Wilfred didn't trust him any more than I did. As matter of fact, my husband served all business connections with Campfield and his associates a few years before his death. It was at the time he learned that this despicable old goat—he's eighty if he's a day—was secretly buying shares in Moody Valves with the obvious intention of gaining control of the company."

"Just how does the monkey fit into this?" MacKinstry asked.

"It's part of that same pattern," said Mrs. Moody. "I hold twenty per cent of the Moody Valves stock. My grandson Roger, who is now at Yale, inherits fifteen per cent under the terms of my husband's will when he becomes twenty-two. With my stock and that in trust for Roger, we still control Moody Valves. It was Mr. Moody's dying wish that Roger should become president of the corporation upon reaching the age of twenty-five, the very age at which he founded it fifty years ago."

"This monkey, this Conrad, doesn't happen to have any stock, does he?" asked MacKinstry soberly.

How absurd!" Miss Waymuth exclaimed, genuinely amused. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," said MacKinstry, "the way I see it, Campfield being the kind of man you make him out, he didn't go to all the trouble of buying this particular monkey unless he was going to get some advantage out of it. Either that, or he's crazy about monkeys."

"Herman Campfield is a heartless man who is crazy about nothing except exerting his power over others," said Mrs. Moody. "He acquired Conrad solely for the purpose of trying to force me to sell him my interest in Moody Valves. If it were legal, he would have kidnapped Roger with the same end in mind."

"You mean he's holding this monkey as sort of a hostage?" asked MacKinstry.

"Precisely, sir."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Moody, but it's hard to believe."

"I don't see why, Mr. MacKinstry."

"Well, for one thing, Conrad is here with you instead of up in Campfield's penthouse. That's one thing."

"It's simply a part of the famous Campfield strategy," said Mrs. Moody. "He leased that penthouse to be near me. And he permits Conrad to come down for a daily visit in order that I may see the ravages he is working on the poor thing."

"Looks like a pretty healthy monkey to me," said MacKinstry. "What kind of ravages do you have in mind?"

"Dietary ravages," said Mrs. Moody. "Conrad is supposed to eat nothing but fruit, nuts and vitamins. But since Herman Campfield has had him, he has been stuffed with such things as oatmeal, frankfurters, spaghetti, pork chops and candy."

"In the last three weeks, Conrad has gained six pounds," added Miss Waymuth. "We weighed him just before your arrival."

"From what I've seen of Campfield," said MacKinstry, "he doesn't look like a big eater himself."

"Oh, he's a self-proclaimed gourmet," said Mrs. Moody. "He eats quality, not quantity. Breast of young partridge, hummingbird tongues simmered in clarified butter, peeled grapes in special wine—

to give you an idea. It's all affectation, though. The man actually has no palate at all. Wilfred once told me that Herman, if given a blindfold test, couldn't tell salt from pepper."

"All of this is pretty unusual," said MacKinstry. "But to tell the truth, Mrs. Moody, I don't see what the hotel management can do."

"I am merely going on the record," the old lady said. "At the advice of counsel. If anything criminal or litigable, to use my attorney's words, should develop from this situation, I shall have disinterested witnesses."

MacKinstry nodded. "I see. Then you seriously expect something to happen?"

"I most certainly do. The tension has grown so acute that I am even resorting to sleeping pills. Isn't that so, Julia?"

"Double strength," said Miss Waymuth.

MacKinstry left the suite with the conviction that Mrs. Moody's problem was a tempest in a teapot. His report to Sorenson was tinged with cynical amusement. By the following morning he was entirely engrossed in routine. Then, that afternoon, he chanced to get on an elevator that was taking Herman Campfield and the monkey down to the lobby, and he looked at the old man with new interest.

If Campfield was eighty, as Mrs. Moody claimed, he carried the years well. He was tall, slightly stooped, and thin to the point of emaciation, but his sallow face, because of its very sallowness, gave the impression of indeterminate age, like well-preserved parchment. The eyes, blurred behind thick, rimless glasses, seemed to swim in watery coldness. He was holding a leash attached to a collar around the monkey's neck. The monkey, besides vest and pants, was now wearing a small derby.

"Why, hello there, Conrad," said MacKinstry.

The monkey tipped the derby and said, "Mama."

"So you know the little blighter," said Campfield.

"We've met, yeah. Belongs to Mrs. Moody."

"Until recently," said Campfield with lip-smacking satisfaction. "Now the ugly rogue belongs to me."

"Kind of fond of monkeys, sir?"

"I can't say yet," said Campfield. "But I plan to find out. Ah, yes, I plan to find out. Are you a guest of the house, may I ask?"

"No, I work here. MacKinstry's the name."

As they stepped out into the lobby, Campfield said, "In that case, you can save me the nuisance of phoning the manager. Please tell him to send somebody to the penthouse to fix the television."

"Why, sure," said MacKinstry, but Campfield, spry as a spider, was already long-legging it toward the revolving door with Conrad in tow.

He didn't have to wait for answers. His wish was a command. MacKinstry strolled to the door himself and watched man and monkey enter a chauffeur driven limousine. "That's real living," he said darkly.

That evening a bit after eight, he took the elevator to the penthouse. Ringing the bell in the reception room, he then crossed to the leather-upholstered door and waited. Within a minute a plump, white-jacketed Chinese, smiling benignly, let him in. MacKinstry explained that he had come to check the television set. The Chinese bowed wordlessly and led him down a few steps into the sunken living room. At the picture window which was the farthermost wall stood Campfield, looking out over the lights of the city. After a moment, he turned, slowly twirling a half-filled wine glass between his fingers.

"Good evening," said MacKinstry, squatting in front of the television set.

"So you are the hotel's electronic engineer, are you?" said Campfield.

"I wouldn't go so far as to claim that," said MacKinstry.

"That's just as well." Campfield walked to a small mahogany bar and unstoppered a cutglass decanter. "You're in time for a treat, MacKinstry. I believe that's your name. A really full-bodied port, a truly round wine. Chuchu," he called. "Chuchu."

The Chinese appeared again. "Here, sah."

"Hors d'oeuvre. The pâté de foie gras, I think. From Trasbourg. And if Conrad has returned from his maternal visit, send him in."

"Yes, sah."

Campfield handed MacKinstry a glass of wine. "It's not my custom to consort with the hotel help, MacKinstry, but you seem to fall into a special category. Since our meeting this afternoon, I've learned you are the house detective."

"Nice of you to take an interest." MacKinstry studied the wine. "This stuff is wasted on me. When I drink at all, I'm usually a straight-shot man."

"You may have whiskey if you prefer."

"Don't bother. I've never tasted a full-bodied wine that I know of. The experience will probably do me good. Does the monkey drink it too?"

"No, Conrad is abstemious. We've offered him a generous assortment of the best, but the only thing he'll touch is crême de cacao. And he limits himself to a single glass."

"Wise monkey."

"Wiser than some people," said Campfield.

Just then the Chinese materialized bearing a silver tray, with Conrad capering at his heels. MacKinstry felt that he was observing a daily ritual. First, Chuchu opened a card table upon which he placed the tray of hors d'oeuvre; next, he shoved a hassock close to the table

and patted it coaxingly until the monkey climbed up and sat down; then he tied a baby bib around the monkey's neck and set a pony of liquer at its fingertips; and finally, he selected six crackers fat with pate and placed them on a napkin within the monkey's reach.

When all was in readiness, Chuchu stepped back smiling, and Campfield stepped forward with lifted glass. "To your health, my simian comrad," he said. "May you continue to wax—ah—deliciously plump. Drink up now."

"Mama," said Conrad; then, lifting the pony and pouting its lips, it siphoned off the liqueur in two sibilant inhalations and finished up by licking the inside and outside of the glass as if it were an ice cream cone. After that it proceeded without further ado to gobble up the hors d'oeuvre.

"Amusing, isn't it?" said Campfield.

"You could sell tickets," said MacKinstry.

"What amuses me most," said Campfield, smiling humorlessly, "is the little beast's genuine fondness for that particular pate, the Strasbourg kind.

"Is it something special?"

"Very special and very expensive. Few people can afford it."

"It's just liver, isn't it?" asked MacKinstry, tasting a cracker.

"Goose liver," said Campfield. "But in Strasbourg they have developed an ingenious method of enlarging that organ and keeping it flavorsome and tender."

"You don't say."

"But I *do* say." Campfield fixed MacKinstry with his cold, magnified eyes. "First, the goose's feet are nailed to a floor so that it cannot move around. Immobility hastens obesity. Then their eyes are plucked out. This, of course, prevents a goose from being distracted by anything which would interfere with the important object of developing an edible liver. Then they are fed nuts in enormous quantities. And when they can eat no more of their own accord, they are fed by force. And during all this time—weeks, of course—they are never given anything to drink. The lack of liquid causes the liver to function acceleratedly. As a result, when a Strasbourg goose is finally killed, the liver is usually ten times larger than normal." Campfield bit daintily at a cracker. "This is the *true* pâté de foie gras. Delicious, isn't it?"

"If you have the taste for it," said MacKinstry in a flat voice.

"Conrad has," said Campfield. "I find the fact verges on poetic justice."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you there."

"I am a gourmet, MacKinstry. I have eaten in various parts of the world everything worth eating. The rare, the exotic, the esoteric. Once while in Brazil, I heard of a tribe that lived far up the Amazon and practised cannibalism with a gour-

met touch. They ate only the fingers of their victims, the remainder, the gross carcass, they threw away as so much garbage. The delicacy of their instincts appealed to me and I spent a small fortune, to no avail, in an attempt to make contact with them. But I am still tantalized by the idea. To eat human flesh—properly prepared, of course. Does it shock you?"

"You're talking to a man who can't even swallow rabbit," said MacKinstry.

"It appears, now that I am no longer young, that my desire to try human flesh may be thwarted. Cannibalism is considered illegal, unfortunately, in all so-called civilized countries. Most people would not be palatable anyway, even as a heavily seasoned ragout. Hence, I have necessarily lowered my sights. My heart is now set on Conrad."

MacKinstry grinned in spite of himself. "You must be kidding."

"Not at all."

"You really mean it. You're going to cook that monkey and eat it?"

"Most assuredly."

"When?"

"In a few days, I should say, barring accidents. Chuchu and I are working on the recipes now."

MacKinstry felt a tug at his trousers. It was the monkey.

"Mama, mama," it said.

"You can say *that* again," MacKinstry said and began to work his way toward the door.

"Be sure to send up a qualified electronic engineer," Campfield called after him. "And pay my respects to dear Mrs. Moody."

MacKinstry had no intention of deliberately involving himself with Mrs. Moody again, or with Campfield, for that matter. Actually he gave serious thought to applying for some vacation time and was still giving it serious thought the next evening as he sat sleepily in his box-like office, when the phone rang. It was Miss Waymuth, a rather disturbed Miss Waymuth, asking if Mr. MacKinstry could find the time to see Mrs. Moody immediately. He hemmed and hawed but finally assented.

The old lady was in bed this time, but if the dark circles under her eyes were an indication, she hadn't slept much in the last few days. Conrad was also in the bedroom, sitting on a chair like a dejected old man.

"What can I do for you tonight?" MacKinstry asked.

"I really don't know, Mr. MacKinstry. I really don't know. Is the tea ready, Julia? I think I'll take it with a sleeping pill tonight."

"Right away, Mrs. Moody."

Mrs. Moody sighed. "I've received an ultimatum, Mr. MacKinstry."

"From Campfield?"

"Yes. He phoned an hour ago. If I'll sell my interest in Moody Valves, he will be more than happy to give me legal title to Conrad. I must decide within forty-eight hours or otherwise—" The old woman broke off, nearly in tears.

"Otherwise what, ma'am?"

"He didn't say. Just left the word dangling there. But I know he has something ghastly in mind. Ghastly for poor Conrad."

"Mama," said the monkey, jumping up and then sitting back on its hands.

"Forty-eight hours, eh?" MacKinstry was talking more to himself than to Mrs. Moody. He had grown to like the old lady and he felt kind of sorry for Conrad, but he still didn't know how he could help them. "That gives us some elbow room at least. Let me think, ma'am. I'll think of something."

Miss Waymuth came in with the tea. MacKinstry refused a cup. Conrad, with a squeaky chortle, grabbed the sugar tongs and went into his act.

"You see, Mr. MacKinstry," said Miss Waymuth, "our little friend hasn't tried to take a cube for himself this time. He knows now he's not supposed to."

"Will you fetch me the seconal," said Mrs. Moody. "It's in the small phial on the bureau. Right near the ruby ring."

"Oh yes. Shall I put the ring in your jewel box?"

"No, Julia, don't bother. I'll wear it tomorrow. It may make me feel brighter."

Miss Waymuth handed the phial of tablets to Mrs. Moody.

"One or two?" the old lady asked herself.

"Just one," said Miss Waymuth.

"You know what the doctor said."

"You're right," said the old lady. "Well, then, Mr. MacKinstry, you promise to think of something. And come to see me, won't you, as soon as you do?"

"Don't worry," said MacKinstry and left.

His own sleep that night contained a recurring dream that he and Chuchu, Campfield's Chinese servant, were in a cafeteria ordering beans and monkey meat. Each time they mentioned monkey meat, the counterman tossed at them a liver as large as a football. They ducked. MacKinstry was ducking for the umptieth time when the phone at his bedside jangled him to wakefulness in the pale light of dawn.

"Whozzis ziz hour?" he mumbled, juggling the phone.

"Jake, on the desk. That guy in the penthouse—name's Campfield—he's dead."

"Thaz good," MacKinstry said. He shook his head sharply. "Why call me? I'm not an undertaker."

"Doctor Bland's orders. He's up there now."

"Okay, Jake. I guess I'll make it."

Dr. Bland was the house physician. His ruddy face was puzzled as he greeted MacKinstry.

Together they walked down the stairs into the living-room where Herman Campfield, wearing a dressing gown, sat in an attitude of rigid relaxation on a couch. The eyes behind the thick glasses looked no colder in death than in life.

Dr. Bland said, "Looks like an overdose of sleeping pills, Mac. We'll have to call the police."

"I guess so. Suicide?"

"No, I'd say an accident." Dr. Bland pointed to an end table that held a two-cup coffee carafe bracketed above a spirit lamp, a cup and saucer, and two tiny cylindrical bottles—"phials," as Mrs. Moody would call them. "Everything's just as it was when the Chinaman came in to clean up. One of the bottles there contains saccharine tablets, the other seconal. The way I see it, Campfield mistook the seconal for the saccharine when he sweetened his coffee.

"Could be," said MacKinstry.

"Could and couldn't." Dr. Bland's puzzled frown deepened. "But assuming that's it, why would he use more than one tablet? Two at the most. As you can see, the bottle of seconal is empty."

"Maybe it wasn't very full to begin with, Doc."

"That brings me to another point. There must have been at least a dozen tablets in that bottle. I should know. It's my own prescription. The bottle belongs to Mrs. Moody on the nineteenth floor."

"You think she came up here and pumped them down Campfield's throat?"

"Of course not. There must be a logical explanation. That's why I got you out of bed. I thought you might have an idea."

MacKinstry said, "I do." He raised his voice: "Hey, Chuchu."

The Chinese appeared instantly, holding the monkey by the hand. "Sah?"

"I just wanted Conrad," MacKinstry said. "Thanks, Chuchu."

The monkey loped across the room and hugged MacKinstry around the leg. "Here's our culprit, Doc," MacKinstry said, running a hand through Conrad's bristly pompadour. "Five'll get you ten that this pot-bellied ape swiped Mrs. Moody's pills and brought them up here."

"And put them in the coffee?"

"Sure. It's a little service he performs." MacKinstry suddenly stooped down and grabbed Conrad by the ankle. "And this cinches it, Doc." He held up a ruby ring. "He was wearing this on his big toe. Remember that when the cops question you."

"So this is detective work," said Dr. Bland, shaking his head incredulously.

"Or monkey business. This ring was on Mrs. Moody's bureau right next to the bottle of seconal. I can testify to that myself."

"One more thing, Mac, before I call the police."

"Yeah, go ahead."

"A dozen seconal tablets dissolved in coffee would certainly impair the flavor. Why didn't Campfield notice it?"

"Because he had an insensitive palate. If he couldn't tell pepper from salt, he couldn't tell saccharine from seconal."

"How do you know so much about his palate, Mac?"

"Anybody who figured to eat a monkey would have a poor sense of taste, for my money." MacKinstry took Conrad by the hand. "Well, boy, I guess we better pay a visit to the old lady."

"Mama," said Conrad.

"You make a nice team," said Dr. Bland as he reached for the telephone.

Liddell felt Maxie's ham sized fist connect and the floor slope upward and slam him in the face. "Nothing personal, shamus," Maxie said and he brought his foot up and aimed the heavy heel at the detective's head.

A Johnny Liddell novelette

BY FRANK KANE

DEAD RECKONING

JOHNNY LIDDELL was only listening to Russo with half an ear. The redhead speared to the center of the floor by the spotlight was leaning against the piano. She looked as though she had been poured into the iridescent green gown that seemed to be pasted to her body. Her hair was molten copper, hung down over her shoulders, her skin gleamed a milky white.

When she straightened up to take a bow at the end of the number, her body seemed to flow—as though

it was boneless. Every movement was sensuous, suggestive. As she bowed her head to the thunder of applause that rolled toward her from the dimly lit tables, her neckline dipped alarmingly.

The man across the table from Liddell scowled irritably as his eyes followed the magnet to Liddell's attention. Tony Russo wasnt' used to people listening to him with half an ear. Not even if he was asking them to do him a favor.

"Look, Liddell. You dig the redhead that much, I'll see you meet her. But right now I want to know. You handle my case for me or not?"

Liddell reluctantly tore his eyes from the redhead, brought them into focus on the man across the table.

"You know I don't hire out my gun, Tony."

Russo groaned his frustration. "Who the Hell asks you to hire out your gun? I want to make a hit, I got plenty of boys of my own."

"So why don't you have one of your boys handle it?"

"Because they don't have the one thing I'm trying to hire. Brains."

The redhead had started to sing again. She was leaning against the piano. Her voice was husky, the kind that plays along the spinal column like a xylophone. The lyrics were blue, but she managed to retain an expression of untroubled innocence despite the bursts of laughter some of the lines drew.

Johnny Liddell fought a losing battle to keep his attention on what Tony Russo was telling him, let his eyes wander back onto the floor.

"All right, all right. You can't keep your eyes off the broad. You want to meet me in my office after the show's over?"

Liddell nodded. "You said something about meeting her?"

Russo snorted disgustedly, got to his feet. "I'll have her up there, too." He turned, felt his way through the tables in the darkened room toward the entrance.

When the redhead had finished her number, she smiled at the cascade of applause, shook her head to demands for an encore. She threw kisses at the occupants of the ringside tables, headed for the rhinestoned entrance to the backstage area. She stood for a moment in the spotlight, then the floor went dark. When the lights came up, the floor was empty.

Liddell let his breath out in a soundless whistle, leaned back and fitted a cigarette into the corner of his mouth.

A heavy shouldered man with a head that looked like a cue ball with twisted lumps of scar tissue for eyebrows and a nose flattened against his face, walked over to where Liddell sat.

"The boss says when you're ready, I show you to the office."

Liddell looked up, grinned at the bald headed man. "Hi, Maxie. Long time no see. Working for Russo now, huh?"

Maxie grinned. "Always did, Johnny. Doc Parker fronted as my manager. Tony did all the booking and fixing." He shrugged heavy shoulders. "I can't make it any more in the ring, so he gives me a job as his bodyguard."

"Real generous of him."

"I got no beef, shamus. So I'm all punched out and maybe punched up. But I ain't kicking. I had a couple of years I lived real good. Real good. If I didn't have Russo behind me, I wouldn't even have had that. I'd be driving a truck or smashing cases on the docks. You know?"

Liddell considered it, nodded. "You could look at it that way," he conceded.

"You don't pasture in no field of daisies yourself. You set yourself up as a target for any red-hot who's coming on too fast for the guy who pays you tab. No?"

The private detective took a last drag on the cigarette, crushed it out. "Maybe you're right." He looked around for his waiter, waved him down.

"No tab," Maxie told him. "The boss picks up the hot."

Liddell dropped a bill on the table for the waiter. "What is it old age or a scare that's making Tony so generous."

The bald headed man managed to look hurt. "You got the boss all wrong, making him out like a hard guy. He's a real generous guy, Johnny."

"Sure. With everybody else's blood."

Maxie started to retort, shrugged, led the way through the tables toward the small foyer. A small corridor led to the cage of a self service elevator. Maxie waved him in, punched the button marked 3 on the panel. The cage rocked its wheezy way upward, shuddered to a stop on the third floor and the door scraped open. A balcony ran from the elevator to a door marked Private.

The bald headed man knocked three times, the door clicked open.

Tony Russo looked up from the fat panatela he was rolling between his thumb and forefinger, nodded Liddell to a chair across the highly polished desk from him. "Hang around outside, Maxie," he swivelled his eyes to the bald headed man. "We don't want to be disturbed."

"Except by the redhead," Liddell amended. "Show her right in." He rolled his eyes to the man behind the desk. "Right, Tony?"

Russo growled deep in his chest, bobbed his head irritably. "Okay. But no one else." He waited until the bald headed man had closed the door behind him. "You sure got somethin' for that broad."

Liddell grinned. "Sexiest looking babe I've seen in a long time."

Russo swung his chair around, slid back the disguised panel of a built in bar. He grabbed a bottle, two glasses, set them down on the

desk. "Sexy?" he grunted. "To her, sex is the number that comes after five and before seven." He saw the disbelief in Liddell's eyes. "Sure, she looks good for a fast fling. But with her it's not sex—it's either an audition or a request for a pay raise." He hit his chest with the side of his hand. "Ask Tony. He knows."

Liddell watched as Tony spilled a generous slug into each of the glasses. He got some ice from the small refrigerator built into the bar, filled the glass with the cubes, pushed one across the desk.

The years had made a change in Tony Russo, Liddell noticed. The lean wolfishness of the days of his climb to head of his pack was blurred by the soft overlay of fat. Flat, lustreless eyes still peered from beneath the heavily veined, thickened eyelids, but the soft, discolored pouches beneath them lessened the menace.

"You wanted help, Tony. What kind of help?"

Russo stuck the unlighted cigar between his teeth, chewed on it for a moment. "This is just between you and me, Liddell." He squinted at the private detective. "I don't want nobody having a big laugh on Tony Russo, thinking he's going soft."

"Seems to me I heard about a lot of guys who thought that way never broke fifty."

Russo shrugged. "Rumors." He grinned, some of the old wolfishness showing through. "Nobody fooled around with Tony in the old days." The smile faded. "That's why this is got to be some kind of screwball."

He pulled a key chain from his pocket, unlocked the top drawer of the desk. He reached in, brought out a packet of letters, tossed them across the desk. Liddell reached for them.

There were five letters, all in ordinary envelopes, all with Tony Russo's name printed in block letdress, none of them were postmarked. Liddell dumped the messages from each of the envelopes, glanced at it. He looked up, grinned at the man behind the desk.

"So somebody says you're due to get hit. So what's new about that? You've had a checkmark next to your name before this."

Russo chewed angrily on the cold cigar. "Sure, but I knew who they were and where they were. You see those notes? You know where I find them? In my bathroom. Under my pillow. On my desk." He yanked the cigar from between his teeth, glared at the soggy end, then bounced it off the waste basket. "Places nobody can get. Nobody."

"How about the guys who work for you?" He nodded toward the closed door. "Maxie, for instance?"

"Why should he? I keep him eating." A thoughtful frown ridged Russo's forehead. His eyes sought out the closed door; he

squinted. "I been pretty good to him. What'd a punchy like that do if it wasn't for me keeping him in bread?"

"It doesn't have to be Maxie," Liddell reached over, wrapped his fingers around the damp glass, swirled the liquor over the ice. "Maybe one of the other boys. No guy like to stay Number Two boy all his life. Maybe with you out of the way—"

Russo considered, shook his head. "If I just find the notes here, okay. They maybe sneak in here and leave them. But not in my pad. No one gets into my bedroom, my John—"

There was a discreet knock on the door, it opened. The hairless dome of Maxie popped in. "The redhead, Boss."

Russo's eyes rolled from Maxie to Liddell. They were narrowed in speculation. "Yeah, the redhead." He nodded slowly. "Send her in."

Maxie's head disappeared, the doorway was filled with Woman. She had exchanged the green dress for a more practical model. Her coppery hair spilled down over her shoulders in a metallic wave. The swelling bosom showed over the top of the low cut dress; a small waist hinted at the full hips, long shapely legs concealed by the fullness of her skirt.

As she walked in, she turned the full power of slanted, green eyes on Liddell. They seemed to approve of what they saw. She didn't waste a glance on the man behind the desk.

"Okay, Liddell, you wanted to meet her. This is Chinchilla Conover. He's Johnny Liddell, a private eye, Chilly."

"That a name or a description?" Liddell asked.

"Depends on who's using it." The slanted eyes sought out Russo. "Tony says it's a description. You mightn't."

Russo's face darkened. "I forgot to tell you, Liddell. She don't only sing. She makes with the funny remarks, too." He got up from behind the desk, walked around. He made a production out of scooping up the letters and envelopes, tapped them against his fingernail. "I think you told me what I wanted to know, Liddell. Send me a bill." His eyes never left the redhead's face.

She glanced briefly at the letters, then admired the finish on her long, carefully shellacked nails. "Fan mail, Tony?"

Russo's hand shot out, the sound when it connected with the side of the girl's face sounded like a shot. It knocked her sideways. He backhanded her face into position.

Liddell moved fast. He caught Russo by the front of his jacket, pushed him across the room. The cafe owner's legs tangled with a low coffee table, he spilled to the floor in its wreckage.

"I don't like guys who work out on girls, Russo. You ought to re-

member that from the old days."

Russo's face was white as he struggled to disentangle his legs from the shattered table. "Maxie," he roared.

The door popped open, the cue ball head of the ex-pug appeared in the opening. His eyes hop scotched from Liddell to Russo and back.

"Take him," Russo growled. "Take him good."

"Tony, wait a minute—" Chilly was massaging the side of her face, still stained with red.

"You stay out of this, you! Nobody pushes Tony Russo around." He turned back to Maxie. "What are you waiting for? I told you to take him."

Maxie reached up, took out his upper plate, dropped it into his pocket. Then, hunching his shoulders so that his head was almost lost between them, he started shuffling toward Liddell. As he slouched forward he licked at his lips with anticipation.

"Take him good, Maxie," Russo ordered.

Liddell didn't take his eyes off the bodyguard. He kept watching, waiting for an opening.

Maxie moved in with a speed surprising in a man of his size. He shot a hard right at Johnny's face. Liddell swayed out of its path, brought his left up into the bald headed man's midsection. Maxie roared like a stung bear, continued to bore in. He caught Liddell on the side of the head with a ham sized fist that started the lights flashing and bells ringing in Johnny's head. The big paw landed again and Liddell felt the floor slope upward and hit him in the face.

"Stamp him!" Russo ordered.

As Maxie raised his foot, the redhead threw herself at him, her fingers clenched, the nails going for the big man's face. He caught her by the wrists, sent her sprawling across the floor. She lay there, legs askew, dress twisted over her thighs. Maxie licked at his lips, stared at her for a moment.

A moment was all Liddell needed. He forced air into his lungs, shook his head to dispel the fog. As the big man turned his attention back to the man sprawled in front of him, Liddell's head cleared.

"Nothing personal, shamus." Maxie brought his foot up, aimed the heavy heel at the detective's head and kicked. Liddell rolled over, caught the foot and twisted. Maxie hit the floor with a thump that rattled the glasses on the desk.

Liddell struggled to his feet, watched the snarling, cursing bald headed man pulling himself up. He waited grimly for Maxie to resume the assault.

The bald headed man threw caution to the winds, rushed him. Liddell side stepped, planted his right to the elbow in Maxie's midsection. As the bodyguard toppled over, Liddell brought up his knee,

caught him in the face. There was a crunching sound as the man's nose broke again. Liddell chopped down at the exposed back of the other man's neck in a vicious rabbit punch. Maxie hit the floor, face first, didn't move.

Liddell looked up from the fallen man to Russo, who backed away until the wall was at his back. Johnny sneered at him, walked over to the girl, helped her to her feet.

She eyed him with new interest. "You're quite a man, Liddell. I never saw anybody stand up to Maxie before and walk away from it."

"It was nothing. I was fleaweight champ at P.S. 64 in 1929." He grinned at her. "Besides, I had you on my side. If you hadn't given me a breather by trying to carve your initials on his kisser, he might have done a pretty good job of changing my face around." From the corner of his eye, he saw Russo skirt the desk, head for a button on the base of the phone. He reached past the girl, caught Russo by the shirt front, pulled him up on his toes.

Russo's eyes were white rimmed with fear. "Don't muscle me, Liddell. You're not scaring me—"

Chilly grinned. "You could fool me. I can't tell whether it's castanets or your teeth. Whatever it is, it's making pretty music."

"I'm not forgetting you, either," Russo told her. "I'll get you for this and for—"

Liddell's hand cracked across his mouth, knocked Russo's head back. A thin trickle of blood ran from the corner of the cafe owner's mouth.

"I'm leaving you teeth, Tony, just so I'll have something to work on if I have to come back." He reached under his jacket, brought out his .45, held it under Russo's nose. "If I do have to come back, I'm using this to leave you as toothless as the day you were born. You leave her alone. You dig?"

Russo's eyes seemed to be hypnotized by the yawning muzzle of the .45. He could only nod his head wordlessly. Liddell pushed him, he collapsed into a bundle of arms and legs in the big armchair.

Liddell turned to the girl. "Whose idea was the notes?"

The slanted eyes widened, the redhead shook her head. "I don't know what you mean?"

"You left a trail like a bulldozer through the Everglades, baby. You signed them by leaving them where nobody else could have been."

Chilly started to deny it, shrugged. "I just wanted to see him squirm. You should have been here, Liddell. It was the only thing that made it possible for me to stay in the same room with him. To watch him squirming and sweating—"

"You're lying," Russo roared. "Nobody scares Tony Russo."

The redhead laughed at him. "He wouldn't go out. Somebody

had to taste his meals. He became practically a hermit. You weren't scared. Not much!"

"You know you wouldn't have gotten away with it. The cops would have tumbled just the way I did—"

"I wasn't going to kill him. I was just going to watch him shake himself to pieces. Every day he got worse. I wanted revenge. I was getting it. Just watching him fall apart. Watching his boys know it and him knowing they knew he'd gone soft. It was worth it. Every bit of it."

"You wanted revenge. Revenge for what?"

"My real name is Bauer. Lynn Bauer. That mean anything to you?"

Russo's eyes widened. "Bauer?"

"Yeah, Bauer. Hank Bauer's sister." She turned to Liddell. "Maybe you don't remember Hank, Liddell. He was Russo's accountant."

Liddell nodded. "Committed suicide."

"He was murdered," the redhead spat out. "Sure, it was a good job, but I'd been hearing from Hank regularly. He was getting ready to turn Russo's books over to the Feds. So he had to die."

"You're crazy. I should have known there was something phony about you—" Russo stared at her balefully.

Chilly shook her head. "There was nothing phony. I was only a kid when Hank died. But from then on, I worked at being Chilly, the kind of a girl Tony Russo would go for. Just so I could get next to you. And get even for Hank."

Russo's voice was low. "Get her out of here, Liddell, and keep her away from me. Anything happens to me, she'll fry for it. I promise you."

On the floor, Maxie was groaning his way back to consciousness. Liddell took the redhead by the arm, stepped across Maxie, led her to the door.

"You'll get my bill in the mail," Liddell told Russo. He cut off the stream of obscenities by slamming the door behind them.

The pounding on the door sounded like the rattle of a machine gun. Johnny Liddell groaned, started to roll over, collided with the back of a sofa. He opened his eyes, looked around at the unfamiliar furnishings. After a moment, he identified his whereabouts as Chilly's apartment. The man pounding on the door seemed on the verge of breaking it down.

Chilly peeked her head around the doorway leading to the bedroom. She turned wide, frightened eyes on Liddell.

"Russo's men?" she whispered.

Liddell shrugged. He slid his feet onto the floor. He reached for the holster hung over the back of the chair, tugged out the .45.

"You'd better get into the bathroom. Let me handle it." He waited until she ran for the bathroom door, a sheet wrapped around her, then he crossed to the living room door, unlocked it and pulled it open.

The man in the hallway dropped his eyes to the .45 that was pointed at his middle, then the cold eyes travelled up to Liddell's face.

"Well, fancy meeting you here."

Liddell pursed his lips, let the gun drop to his side. "Come on in, inspector." He stepped aside watched Inspector Herlehy stalk into the room, slammed the door shut in the face of the curious tenants in other flats who lined their doorways in varying stages of undress.

Herlehy stopped inside the room, swung on Liddell, hands on hips. "What are you doing here?" He looked around. "And where's the girl?"

"I've been bedded down out here in the living room. She's sleeping in there. In the bedroom." He nodded toward the bedroom door. The inspector started toward it, Liddell beat him to it, blocked the way. "You haven't shown me that little piece of paper that gives you the right to go barging like this, inspector. Or are you running the Morals Squad now?"

The white haired man studied him with grim eyes, shook his head. "Still Homicide. And if you insist on technicalities, maybe we can provide transportation down to headquarters to discuss this."

Liddell shook his head. "I'll get her out here." He walked into the bedroom, tapped on the bathroom door. "Get decent. Police are here and it looks like trouble."

There was a slight pause, then a muffled, "Be right out."

Liddell picked up his shirt, was shrugging into it when he walked back into the living room. The inspector was on the telephone, just finishing a conversation. He dropped the receiver back on its hook.

"Just calling off an APB on both you and the girl," Herlehy grunted. "You really went away out this time, didn't you, shamus*"

"You still haven't told me what it's all about." Liddell complained. He laid the .45 on the coffee table, stuck the tails of his shirt into his waistband.

Herlehy picked up the gun, held the muzzle to his nose, dropped the .45 into his pocket. "That's right. I haven't," the inspector said. "You got anything to tell me?"

The door to the bedroom opened, the redhead walked out, tying a blue silk robe around her waist. Her eyes sought Liddell's questioningly.

"What is it, Johnny?"

Liddell shrugged. He nodded to Herlehy. "This is Inspector Herlehy of Homicide. Best I can guess is he's working for Doc Kinsey on his time off."

"How long you been here, Miss Conover?"

Her eyes sought Johnny's again. "since about 2. We left the club and came right here—"

Herlehy turned to Liddell. "And you?"

"I'm with her, inspector. You going to tell us what happened?"

Herlehy raked at his white hair. "Tony Russo was gunned out tonight in his office. Shot through the back of the head." He turned frosty blue eyes on the girl. "He'd been getting some notes, threatening to kill him. Know anything about them?"

The girl caught her lower lip between her teeth, started to answer, was waved to silence by Liddell. "Sure, she knows all about them. She sent them. But Russo was alive when we left him and I haven't left her since."

"That's true, inspector. He was alive when we left," Chilly put in. "I— was scared, so I asked Johnny to stay here with me in case Russo tried something."

Herlehy squinted at Liddell. "But you slept out here, you said."

"I'll still testify that she didn't leave me tonight."

"It's not good enough, Johnny. The d.a.'s smart enough to see that any alibi like that is self-serving. It not only gives her one, but it gives you one, too."

"Why should I kill the bum?"

Herlehy stared at a discolored bruise on the private detective's jaw. "Maybe because he set one of his goons on you and worked you over."

"That goon was eating the carpet when we left. I had nothing against Russo. He owes me money, matter of fact. Why should I kill him?"

"We're not saying you did. But we are saying your friend here might have. I'll have to take you both downtown."

Liddell started to protest, read the message in the older man's eye, shrugged. "You're making a big mistake, inspector."

"I hope you didn't make a bigger one—killing that rat."

Johnny Liddell sat in the antechamber of the assistant district attorney assigned to homicide. He wondered in which of the other ante-chambers they were holding the redhead. He hadn't seen her since the policewoman had taken charge of her at headquarters.

He shifted uncomfortably on the hard wooden bench, checked his wristwatch. It was almost 10 o'clock when the assistant d.a. pulled open his door, walked out into the antechamber.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Liddell." Maury Levin had had plenty of contact with the private detective in the ten years he'd put in as an assistant. Now that he was within grabbing distance of the Big Boss' office, Levin wasn't about to make

any enemies. Certainly not one who'd been so helpful to his boss on numerous occasions and whose help Levin himself might conceivably need some day soon. "Had to check you out."

"And?"

Levin shrugged, raised his hands, palms upward. "Clean. Ballistics cleared your gun, we don't have any motive that would stand up in court. You're free to go."

"And the girl?"

Levin pursed his lips judiciously. "That's a different story, Johnny. The Big Boss wants her held. She had motive, she had opportunity, she had everything."

"I tell you she wasn't out of my sight all night."

"I know you and I trust you. The Grand Jury doesn't. They're going to want a lot more than your word when those letters are read in court and the Jury hears about her brother." He squinted at Liddell. "If you were to come up with another suspect—" he shrugged. "You know my door is always open to you, Johnny."

"What about my gun?"

"Property clerk will give you a release on it."

Liddell swung on his heel, stamped out of the office. As soon as the door had slammed behind him, Inspector Herlehy joined Levin in the doorway to the anteroom. The assistant d.a. turned a worried look on the white haired man. "I hope he realized the license he has for that gun isn't a hunting license."

Herlehy shook his head. "He will. He wants the killer alive. Just like we do. If we start digging into Russo's set-up, there'll be plenty of heat for a cover-up. Nobody ever invented enough heat to stop Liddell."

Johnny Liddell dropped the cab at the entrance to the morgue, just across the street from the pile of bricks and acres of glass windows that go to make up Bellevue Hospital. This is the last Port of Call for the fashionable suicide from Beekman Towers as well as for the pitiable bundle of rags that slept away its life in a Bowery doorway. Here they sleep, side by side, the one whose passing rated 96 point headlines in the tabs and the one whose passing was completely unnoticed except by those who demanded its removal from their doorway as a nuisance.

Liddell walked down the short stairway to the old fashioned elevator cage. He rode it to the basement, clanged back the heavy door, walked to the door stencilled "Examining Room". He knocked, pushed open the door. A thin little wisp of a woman sat behind the desk. She nodded toward an unmarked door. "The doctor's expecting you inside."

Inside the other room, two white frocked men were leaning over a

half covered body on a sandstone examining table. The older of the two straightened up, nodded to Liddell as he joined them.

On the table, Tony Russo lay on his back, staring up at the overhead light with eyes that would never see again. His hair was wet, dank, washed back from his face. His neck was supported by a notched wood-block. The canvas was rolled down far enough to expose the large x-shaped sutures that signalled the fact that an autopsy was already under way.

"Thanks for letting me see him, doc," Liddell told the older of the two men. "I wanted to have a look at the wound myself."

The man in the white smock put his fingers aganst the dead man's temple, pushed the head to show a small hole behind the left ear. "Went in there." He straightened the head, showed a larger, ragged hole under the right jaw. "Came out here. Powder burns at the point of entry indicate the killer was standing right behind him." He unhooked a clipboard from the side of the table, ran his eyes over the pencilled notations. "Time of death approximately 2 a.m.—give or take fifteen minutes. Gun was a .32." He rolled his eyes up from the clipboard. "That's about all we have until the results of the p.m. are posted."

"Not much doubt about what killed him, is there?"

The white frocked man shrugged, hung the clipboard back on its hook. "If that slug behind the ear didn't kill him, it's a cinch it didn't add to his chances of breaking ninety," he grunted. He stared down at the grey features of the dead man. "At that, he lasted a lot longer than I'd figure him for. We've processed a lot of his friends through here. And even more of his enemies."

Johnny nodded, started to turn away.

"Funny that when he did get it, he'd get it from a girl, huh Johnny?" the man in white continued.

Liddell turned around. "Chilly Conover?" He shook his head. "She didn't do it."

The lab man shrugged. "Sorry. I didn't know it was like that. But you ought to get her to level with you if you're going out on a limb for her."

"Meaning?"

"The gun. It belongs to her. And she was seen going up to Russo's office around that time."

"I was in there at the time. He sent for her and—"

"Not this time. The guy who saw her heading for Russo's office says you were in the lobby making passes at the hatcheck girl. You were there almost twenty minutes. The hatchick will back it up."

A worried frown etched a V between Liddell's brows. He nodded. "Thanks for the tip, doc. I'll do as much some time."

He turned, walked toward the

small hallway leading to the elevator. Some things that had been puzzling him were beginning to get clear. Too clear!

Maury Levin, the assistant d.a., sat behind his heavily piled desk, played with a pencil. His eyes were wary, he wore a worried frown.

"You could really jam me up, Liddell. I'm counting on you playing this one with no curves."

"Haven't I always?"

Levin nodded. There was a knock on the door, a uniformed patrolman stuck his head in. "She's in Interrogation C, Mr. Levin."

The assistant d.a. nodded, the cop's head was withdrawn.

"In C, Johnny. You've got ten minutes."

"I'll only need one, Maury." He headed for the doorway, slammed the door after him.

Interrogation C was halfway down the hallway between Maury Levin's office and the double glass doors leading to the Big Boss' private office. The redhead was sitting on a hard backed wooden chair, twisting her handkerchief nervously between her fingers. She jumped to her feet as Liddell walked in, ran to him.

A policewoman, seated by the screen meshed window, got up, walked to the door. "I'll be outside, Mr. Liddell. You understand you have only ten minutes."

Liddell nodded, waited until she had closed the door behind her. Then, as he turned back to the redhead, she tried to find his mouth with hers. He pushed her out at arm's length, her eyes widened with fear.

"You went up to Tony Russo's office while I was waiting for you to clean out your dressing room, didn't you?" Before she could interrupt, he continued. "You used the private elevator, took a gun to make good those crazy threats."

"No. I—"

"And you used me for a patsy. I was going to be able to swear you were with me every minute."

The resistance seemed to drain out of the girl. She weat limp, he dropped her into the chair.

"You think I killed him, too. You think I'm a—"

"What I think about you doesn't matter. It's what the d.a. is going to make a jury think about you that does."

She shook her head. "I didn't kill him, Johnny." She caught at his sleeve. "I won't lie to you. I did go up there with a gun. I wanted to see him crawl. Just once more." She shook her head. "But he was too much for me. He took the gun away from me and he told me he'd kill me if he ever saw me again. But I didn't kill him, Johnny."

"Anybody see you leave? Maxie or any of his boys?"

Chilly shook her head. "I didn't see them."

"So there's no one can prove Rus-

so was still alive when you left?"

"He was. The first I knew about him being dead was when that policeman broke into my place. You've got to believe me, Johnny." She dropped her hand from his sleeve. "I know I have no right to expect you to help after I held out on you—"

Liddell walked to the door, rapped. The policewoman eyed them with surprise, checked her watch. "You still have eight minutes".

Liddell grinned at her. "Too long to talk not long enough not to talk." He turned back to the redhead. "Sit tight until you hear from me."

Chilly worked at a smile with questionable success. She looked around the room, her eyes coming to stop on the policewoman. "It doesn't look as if I'm going to have much of a choice."

An hour later, Johnny Liddell ran up the short flight of steps leading into Stillson's Gym, dropped a quarter in the turnstile and pushed through. A thick fog of cigar smoke swirled lazily near the ceiling of the room. The heavy smell of liniment and perspiration was something tangible. A low hum of conversation was spiced with the rhythmic chatter of punching bags, the scuffing of skipping feet, the thud of punches on the heavy bags.

Liddell stood in the entrance, looked around. In the center of the floor a huge Negro, wearing ear guards, was boxing listlessly with an old chopping block, sharpening his right. Around the wall, house fighters and prelim boys were working out on the pulleys, shadow boxing, feinting and weaving or skipping a rope tirelessly.

Johnny walked over to the ring. In the Negro's corner, a fat man, his fedora shoved on the back of his head, a cold cigar clenched in the corner of his mouth scowled as he watched the men in the ring. He wore no coat, dried half-moons of sweat stained the underarms of the shirt he wore. He checked his stopwatch, signalled for an end to the round.

"Get him under a shower," he growled at a rubber. He turned, nodded to Liddell. "Hello, Johnny. Long time." He pulled the cold cigar from between his teeth. "No trouble, I hope?"

Liddell shook his head. "No trouble. I just wanted to have a talk with Maxie Hughes. He usually works out down here, don't he?"

The fat man grunted, returned the cigar unlit to his mouth. He squinted as he glanced around the room, shoved a stubby thumb in the direction of the heavy bags. "Every day. Like clockwork. You'd think the bum was going someplace. Thinks he's still got it."

"He had his day."

The fat man made a face. "With

Russo calling the plays? Even I could be champ like that. He says dive, you dive. You don't dive, don't go reading continued stories. You know?" He removed the cigar, spat in a bucket. "Russo makes. He makes good. But a slob like that?" He hunched his shoulders. "Walks on his heels and he ain't got the what-with to buy a decent meal." He glanced back at Liddell. "Say, that what you want to see him about? Russo?"

Liddell considered for a moment, decided to play it straight. "Yeah. They're cooling a client of mine for the job. She says she didn't do it. I figure Maxie might be able to help me clear her."

"I wish you luck." The fat man pulled his fedora down over his eyes. "Anyway, let me know when the collection's being taken. I want in."

"The collection?"

"Yeah. To buy your client a medal for chilling that louse." He turned shuffled in the direction of the showers. Liddell watched him thoughtfully for a moment, then walked over to where Maxie was grunting with every punch he threw at the heavy bag.

The cue-ball head glistened with a thin sheen of sweat; his chest was covered with heavy caracul-like hair. Mounds of muscles sat along his shoulder line and biceps like knots. He held the big bag to a stop as Liddell walked up, stopped near him. Unconsciously, he touched his gloved hand tenderly to his mashed nose.

"That was a lucky one you hit me with last night, shamus," he growled. "Real lucky."

Liddell shrugged. "Like you said, nothing personal." He dug into his pockets, brought up a pack of cigarettes, held it out to Maxie, drew a shake of the head. "Tough about your boss."

Maxie shrugged, bit at the knots on his glove, got it open. "I was fixing to go back to the ring anyhow." He slipped the glove off his hand, flexed his fingers, untied the other glove. "I still got some good years in me."

"You couldn't even get a prelim go at St. Nick's and you know it," Liddell told him coldly. "You're not only a has-been. You're a never-was, Maxie. The only reason you kept winning is because Russo saw to it you did."

"You're a liar," the bald headed man roared.

"You've got a glass jaw and a debutante could flatten you with that lard belly—"

Maxie looked around, dropped his voice. His eyes were narrowed, pig-like. "You're trying to make me mad, shamus. Only I'm too smart to fall for it. Get going and keep going."

Liddell touched a light to the cigarette. "When you killed him, you killed your only chance to eat regularly—"

"Me kill him?" Maxie shook his

head. "The redhead killed him. She kept sending him notes saying she was going to, and she finally did."

"So you weren't out cold? You heard Russo accuse her of sending the notes. It gave you an idea, didn't it, Maxie?"

The battered face twisted into a caricature of a smile. "You going to prove something, shamus?"

"Yeah. I'm going to prove Chilly went back there last night with a gun—"

The bald head bobbed delightedly. "The cops already know that. It was her gun that killed him—"

"They also know Russo took the gun away from her and threw her out." Some of the grin on Maxie's face faded. "But you didn't know that, because you weren't there—where you were supposed to be."

The eyes were narrowed again. Maxie licked at his thickened lips. "You're lying."

Liddell shook his head. "You already had two strikes on you. I made you eat carpet. Russo didn't like that. When you're not on the door where you're supposed to be, and you let the girl get at him again—you struck out."

The pig eyes darted around the room. "Who'd listen to you? They know you got the hots for the broad and—."

"The gun was laying there on the desk when he threw you out, wasn't it?" He blocked Maxie as the ex-pug started to walk away. "But you made two mistakes, Maxie. Two big ones!"

"You're trying to pull something, Liddell. You don't make me admit a thing. And you can't prove anything?"

"I don't have to, Maxie. Didn't you know they already gave Chilly the nitrate test?" He shook his head. "Negative".

"What are you talking about?"

"The nigrate test. It tells whether you've fired a gun or not recently. The gun kicks back tiny particles of powder. Then they make a paraffin cast of your hand. If you fired a gun recently, they'll be there."

Maxie fought a losing battle to keep his eyes off his right hand.

"It stays for three, maybe four days. Even if you wash your hands a dozen times. It'll be there when they check your hand." He watched the play of emotions on the other man's face. "You made another mistake, Maxie."

The pig-like eyes rolled up from the hand to the detective's face. "Russo was scared of Chilly. He never would have let her get in back of him. You—he had nothing but contempt for you. Always did have."

"I was a champ."

"A cheese champ. And he made you. Now he was throwing you to the wolves. Didn't care if you ended up selling pencils in the lobby at the Garden, did he, Maxie?"

Maxie licked at his lips. "He was a nothing. I was the champ."

"He never let you forget how you got to be champ, did he, Maxie?" Liddell could feel the perspiration forming in beads on his forehead and upper lip. "When he fired you last night he told you all about it, didn't he? Laughed at you."

Maxie wiped his mouth with the back of his arm. "I made him a million. Because I was the champ. I made him a million."

"And he was going to throw you out."

Maxie seemed to be focussing his eyes yards behind Liddell's head. "I told him how it felt to be champ. He laughed at me." He hit his chest with the side of his hand. "He said I was champ of the tankers. That I never won a fair go in my life." The eyes came back to Liddell's face. "That's a lie. You know it's a lie."

Liddell dropped the cigarette to the floor, crushed it out. He put his hand into his jacket pocket. The butt of the gun had a cold re-assuring feel.

"He told me if I was so good to go make it on my own. Then he told me to get out before he had me thrown out." The absent look was back in the eyes. "He turned and walked away from me. I went after him, you know? Just to reason with him." He shook his head as though he was having difficulty understanding. "The gun was there. I grabbed it. And that's all I remember."

Liddell's voice was gentle. "Nobody can blame you, Maxie. But you're going to have to tell them about it. Downtown." For an anxious moment, his fingers tightened on the butt of the gun.

Then Maxie nodded. "Okay, Johnny. If you say so."

Johnny Liddell sprawled in the chair across the desk from Maury Levin, watched the assistant d.a. read the flimsy, nod at the signature on the bottom. "All signed, sealed and delivered." He looked over to where Inspector Herlehy stood at the window, staring out into the park below. "You satisfied, inspector?"

Herlehy shrugged. "The confession stands up." He cast a baleful glare at Liddell. "I'm too smart to ask you how you got it."

Liddell grinned. "I'll be glad to explain—"

Herlehy held his hand up. "Never mind. I don't want to be an accessory to it, whatever it is." He turned at a knock on the door.

"Come in," Levin directed.

The door opened, Chilly Conover walked in. Her eyes hopscotched around the room, came to rest on Johnny. She walked over to him. "I just heard, Johnny. I don't know how I'll ever thank you."

Liddell winked at the assistant d.a., got up, took the redhead by the arm, piloted her to the door. With his hand on the knob, he turned and grinned at the inspector.

"Any time you need my help, inspector—"

"Get out before I remember some law I can book you under," the white haired man roared.

Liddell ushered Chilly into the corridor, followed her and closed the door after them.

Maury Levin sat at his desk, laced his fingers behind his head, stared at the door dreamily. "What a lucky guy! She says she don't know how she'll ever thank him."

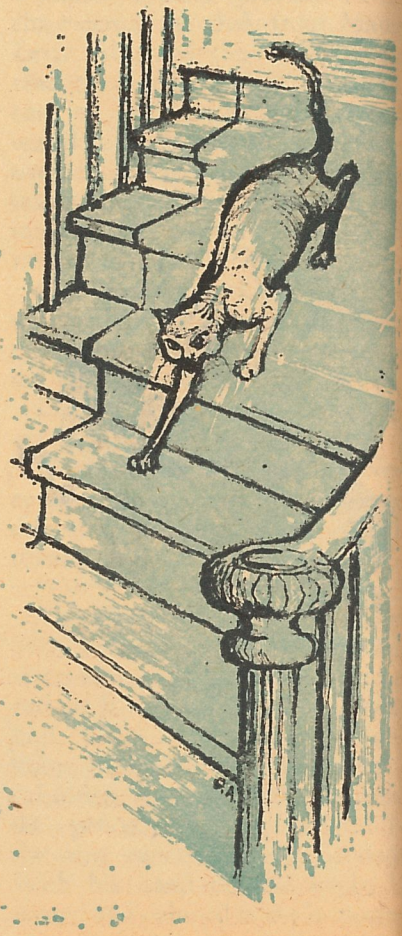
Herlehy grunted. "If I know Liddell—she'll find a way."

It had taunted Emma all week, since the first night Paul had brought the creature home and Emma stared down into its sneaky little eyes.

CAT'S MEOW

BY

JORDAN BAUMAN



EMMA LAY on the sofa quietly hating the cat. She could hear the sounds the cat made as it frolicked across the living room floor, soft, rustling, animal sounds.

Emma clenched her hands together and imagined the cat's throat was trapped in her palms. She squeezed tightly, feeling the cat's breath being strangled off, seeing its eyes bulge out in terror, imagining the cat growing limp, its graceful body hanging languidly from her grasp. An odd smile spread across her mouth, and for a short time she dozed, her hands gradually relaxing.

The sound of breaking glass in the den disturbed her sleep, and she jerked to a sitting position. The Chinese vase, she thought immediately, remembering how often she had seen the cat rubbing its glossy flank against the vase's side.

"Damn, damn, cat," she screamed, running toward the den.

The vase lay strewn on the den floor, shattered into a hundred pieces of reds and golds and greens. Falling to her knees, Emma caught sight of a blur of orange and white stripes slipping out of the doorway, and she heard the cat meow.

The cat's meow. It had taunted Emma all week, since the first night Paul had brought the creature home and Emma stared down into its sneaky animal eyes.

"I'll get you for this," Emma shouted, rising to her feet. "I'll get you, you miserable beast . . ."

She could hear the sounds of sharp claws scampering over a wooden floor somewhere in the house, and faintly, very faintly and subdued, Emma heard the hateful hissing that came from the cat's small animal mouth.

Emma returned from the kitchen with a broom and dust pan and swept up the remains of her cherished vase. "A wedding gift from my mother," she sobbed quietly, carressing the jagged edges of porcelain. "But Paul won't care—just so long as he has his cat, or some stray dog, or any filthy animal he finds out on the street." A painful image of Paul seated before the television set flashed through Emma's mind. Night after night, sitting there with the cat in his lap, his hands soothing the cat's back, caressing the animal gently.

In a waterfall of glassy clattering, she emptied the dust pan into the garbage pail, and her hands itched to be choking the slim, furry neck of the despicable cat.

Emma looked at the kitchen clock and knew Paul would be home within an hour. And she also knew if she was going to do something about the cat it would have to be done now—before Paul was there to protect the cat with his impregnable shield of affection for animals.

Emma poured cold milk into a saucer and set it on the kitchen linoleum. "Here, kitty," she called softly, leaning back against the formica countered sink, her eyes fastened on the entrance to the kitchen. "Here, kitty, kitty."

She waited for the sound of small paws to tread across the living room floor. She waited stiffly and heard only the silence of the house, and she felt warm perspiration begin to gather in the palms of her hands.

"Here, kitty. There's some nice milk for you . . ."

Emma's heart pulsated excitedly in her chest as she watched the doorway, anticipating the narrow slit of yellow eyes, the sleek animal body.

From a distant corner of the house she heard the cat mewing.

Upstairs!

Emma remembered the first night she had found the cat on her bed, its hind claws hooked into the silken bedspread, its pink, viper

tongue working through the short fur on its forepaws. Licking—licking—finally staring up at Emma in the doorway as if to challenge her right to the bed. And as Emma drew threateningly closer, the cat had shown its defiance by arching its spine and snarling venomously, exposing two full rows of needle-sharp teeth. In that last moment before Emma was able to strike the animal, the cat had sprung off the bed with a long, sweeping leap, its hind claws tearing a gaping hole in the plush silk spread.

Now it was upstairs again. Hiding, Emma decided. Could it be the cat was able to sense Emma's intentions? Or was it just laying on her bed as before, rolling across the bedspread, pricking into the expensive fibers with its treacherous claws.

A note of impatience crept into her voice. "Here, kitty," she called. "Kitty, kitty . . ."

Then she moved out of the kitchen and through the living room, and standing at the foot of the staircase her eyes scanned the landing at the top of the stairs. In that instant Emma knew that the cat was waiting for *her* to come upstairs.

Emma mounted the staircase slowly, her hand trailing a path of perspiration along the side rail. "I'm coming for you, cat," she said into the quietness of the house, her feet moving soundlessly up the stairs.

In my bedroom, Emma thought with a sense of satisfaction; it's waiting for me in the bedroom, licking its dirty paws and lolling lazily upon my bed. A second later she entered the doorway of the bedroom and met the unblinking gaze of the cat. For a moment they merely stared at each other, the cat seated on its haunches, Emma inching toward the bed with clenched hands. Suddenly the cat drew up on all fours, its knobby spine steepled high, hissing.

Emma moved a step closer, and the cat's paw lashed out wickedly. She took another step forward and her hands shot out reaching for the animal's throat. The cat avoided Emma's grasp with an agile sideward movement, slashing its taloned paw across Emma's right hand, tearing deeply into the white flesh.

"Bitch! Bitch!" she screamed, bringing the wounded hand against the softness of her cheek. Frantically she lunged onto the bed, her left hand encircling the cat's tail as it sprang off the bed, and she felt the silken fur of its tail, felt it escape with slippery ease from her damp palm.

Sprawled across the bed, Emma watched as the cat loped out of the room. She saw it slide into the partly opened bathroom door and she knew if she acted swiftly now, the cat had trapped itself within the tiny confines of the bathroom.

A wide ribbon of blood had stained the bedspread, and Emma cursed to herself silently as she slid

off the bed. She approached the bathroom cautiously, then stepped inside quickly and slammed the door behind her.

"Here I am, kitty," she cooed excitedly. "Just you and me . . ."

The room was empty. The window was open and Emma realized, sickeningly, that the cat had outwitted her. Emma slammed the window shut and became aware, for the first time, of the dull throbbing on her right hand. She ran cold water over the bleeding wound and watched the mixture of blood and water spiral down the drain. She turned abruptly when from the corner of her eye she saw a blurish movement in the enclosed shower-stall. The shower door was slightly ajar and through the frosted glass Emma could see the barely discernible shape of the cat crouched against the tiled wall. Her hand reached out and the stall door clicked shut.

Emma's breath came in short gasps, and her nerves tingled with delight at her success of cornering the cat so nicely. A moment passed and she started to pull open the shower-stall door. She hesitated when she saw the ugly scratch marks on her extended hand.

"I've a better idea for you, my pretty," she said, pulling open the bathroom door instead and stepping outside hastily.

She returned seconds later, carrying a chair into the bathroom and set it alongside the shower-stall door. She stepped up on the chair and bending her head and shoulders over the top of the stall door, peered down into the cubicle of tile that imprisoned the cat.

Pacing the three square foot area nervously, the cat gazed up at Emma and mewed helplessly. Emma watched the animal from her perch above, a satisfied smile curling her mouth. She watched as the cat suddenly bolted upwards, its legs clawing futilely against the glazed surface of the tile as it rose and immediately tumbled downward onto the terrazzo floor. Again and again the animal sprang up at Emma's grinning face, each time rising a little less. Then, as the cat lay exhausted on the floor, Emma bent over into the stall, and reaching down, stretching, she opened the hot water faucet.

Within seconds the stall billowed with scalding waves of steam and the noise of the streaming water muffled out the weak squeels of anguish that came from somewhere at the bottom of the stall.

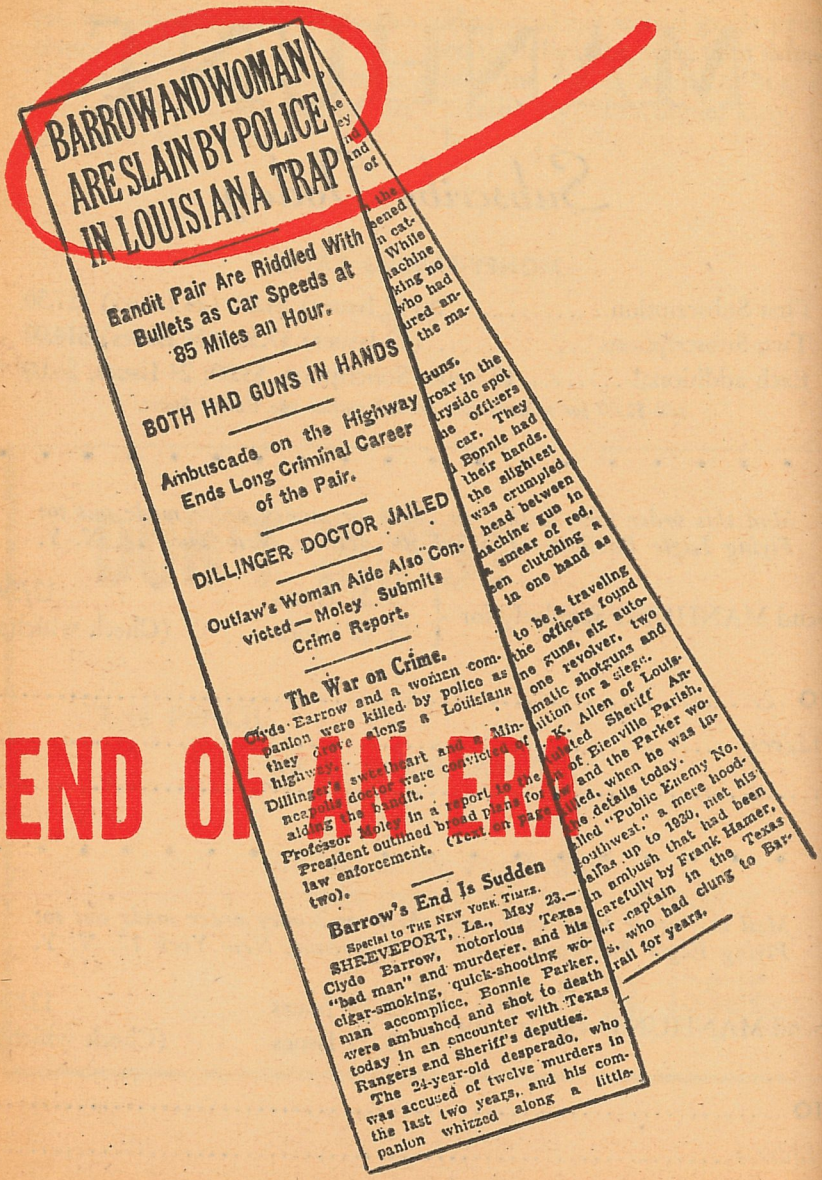
Half an hour later Emma dropped the body of the cat into the incinerator. She watched through the opened top of the incinerator as the orange flames consumed the twisted corpse—the same hungry flames that had devoured Paul's mongrel dog and the broken-winged robin, and all the others before. As she stood looking into the swelling fire, she heard the front door slam shut. She clamped down the incinerator lid, then quickly scampered up the basement steps—

hurrying to greet Paul at the door.

He was standing just inside the entrance hall.

"Hello, Paul," Emma spoke calmly, her eyes bright, her face bathed in a glow of adoration.

"Hi, Mommy," Paul answered. He placed his second grade primer on the telephone table, then skipped into the living room, calling out breathlessly, "I'm home, kitty. I'm home . . ."



BARROW AND WOMAN ARE SLAIN BY POLICE IN LOUISIANA TRAP

Bandit Pair Are Riddled With Bullets as Car Speeds at 85 Miles an Hour.

BOTH HAD GUNS IN HANDS

Ambuscade on the Highway Ends Long Criminal Career of the Pair.

DILLINGER DOCTOR JAILED

Outlaw's Woman Aide Also Convicted—Moley Submits Crime Report.

The War on Crime.

Clyde Barrow and a woman companion were killed by police as they drove along a Louisiana highway. Dillinger's sweetheart and Mine aiding the bandit. Professor Moley in a report to the President outlined broad plans for law enforcement. (Text on page two).

Barrow's End Is Sudden

SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES.

SHREVEPORT, La., May 23.—Clyde Barrow, notorious "bad man" and murderer, and his cigar-smoking, quick-shooting woman accomplice, Bonnie Parker, were ambushed and shot to death today in an encounter with Texas Rangers and Sheriff's deputies.

The 24-year-old desperado, who was accused of twelve murders in the last two years, and his companion whizzed along a little-

END OF AN ERA

BY JAMES MALONE

IN THE EARLY DAWN *of a May day in 1934, on a lonely road in Louisiana, between the towns of Bienville and Arcadia, six heavily armed men crouch behind a high embankment at the side of the road. A dilapidated truck loaded with cord wood approaches and drives to the end of the embankment, and stops, blocking the road.*

The driver gets out and jacks up the rear end of the truck, takes off one of the wheels and then waits. Presently a new Ford V-8 containing three persons approaches to within a short distance of the truck and stops. One of the men in the Ford gets out and walks toward the truck. When he is clear of the car, the six men raise up from behind their dirt barricade, and without warning, pour volley after volley of rifle and shot-gun fire into the Ford. The car was hit fifty-odd times. The careers of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker were thus ended.

This is their story and mine . . .

I knew Clyde Barrow and his gun-toting sweeeheart, Bonnie Parker, perhaps as well as did their own flesh and blood. When the whole world was praying for their capture and imprisonment—or some sort of end to their murderous marauding—I was included among the select few who shared their trust and confidence.

I first met Clyde on the Eastham Farm, of the Texas Prison System. In those years, Texas boasted of having the toughest prison system in the nation, and Eastham Farm was rated the "Dante's Inferno" of the south-west. The year was 1932. Men worked in the woods surrounding the Eastham Farm area, cutting timber, clearing land.

The hardest collection of convicts confined in Texas made up the Eastham Farm work gang; murderers, bank robbers, men who believed deep within their calloused hearts they had little or nothing to live for, and were encouraged by ignorant, sadistic prison guards to cling to their philosophies, were my everyday associates at Eastham.

Death fouled the air all around us. The toughest bunch of prison guards in the vicious prison system, trigger-happy, swearing, immune to the day's growing social belief that men could be reformed

through humane consideration of their needs and treatment of their ills and body and mind, drove us from dawn to dark under threat of gun and whip and a disciplinary hole second to none.

Conditions had become so unbearable that convicts started an epidemic of self-mutilations, chopping off their feet with axes, hacking off toes, severing the tendons back of their heels, and in other ways mutilating themselves so that they were unable to work. Such casualties were sent back inside the wall at Huntsville for hospitalization.

Clyde Barrow, never an outstanding or vicious personality at Eastham, where all convicts were case-hardened, surly, constantly keyed to the need of killing or dying as they faced another dawn, cut off his big toe and shipped back to Huntsville. Such mutilations suddenly became so numerous that an investigation was instigated by the prison board. Many of the Eastham's self-mutilated prisoners were released on parole or furlough to keep the board from interviewing them and Clyde Barrow was one of the men released.

Bitter against a society capable of remaining blind to such human misery, hate scorching his soul, Barrow hobbled home on cutches, a completely changed man from the youth who had been guilty only of committing petty larceny with a pal named Ray Hamilton.

It was this same Ray Hamilton who, after Clyde was sent to prison, graduated into the bigtime and started robbing banks and payrolls throughout the south-west. Ray wasn't fussy when it came to picking crime partners. He would pick up anyone willing to drive a car for him, and he invariably staged his heists single-handedly, with extended periods of success.

It was inevitable that Clyde, burning with a desire for revenge, should again associate himself with Ray Hamilton. Their scores weren't big ones. One, a grocery store at Hillsboro, Texas, was climaxed with the murder of a rebellious owner. Law generated enough heat following this crime to split up the pair. Ray headed north, and Clyde, lonely, miserable, still earnest about his desire for revenge and need for quick money, joined up with Bonnie Parker, who had been Ray's girlfriend, and who had won admiration and trust from Clyde through her ability to keep quiet and shoulder a fair share of Ray's crime burdens. Bonnie, at the time she decided to throw in with Clyde, was a waitress and car-hop in a little roadside beer joint and hamburger stand at Jacksboro.

Bonnie quit her job and fled with Clyde, carrying in their hopped-up Ford an arsenal big enough to stand off a contingent of the National Guard. They lived in the car, kept moving day and night, robbing filling stations and small eat-

ing places. Occasionally a brush with police would pin-point their current whereabouts, generate more heat, make the chase a more nerve-wracking proposition.

While a wide-spread manhunt for Clyde and his moll was spreading to surrounding states, Ray Hamilton was caught in Bay City, Michigan, and hustled back to Texas, tried and convicted for a pair of bank heists and the murder of the Hillsboro grocer, and sentenced to a ponderous 243 years in prison.

While Ray was awaiting transfer to Huntsville from the Hillsboro jail, Clyde and Bonnie decided they would try to bust him out. They paid a visit to Ray's sister and made arrangements for her to visit Ray and see what the conditions were at the jail. They were to meet her at her home after the visit, but somebody who learned of the arrangement informed the Fort Worth sheriff's office.

The sheriff sent two deputies to Dallas to cover the home of Ray's sister, and then waited on the highway and intercepted her as she returned from visiting Ray. The two deputies who went to Dallas contacted the Dallas sheriff's office for extra help. A group of Dallas deputies joined the Fort Worth officers, entered the Hamilton home and waited for Clyde and Bonnie to arrive.

Clyde and Bonnie drove up to the house late that night and Clyde went to the door and rang the bell. He carried a sawed-off shotgun under his coat. When the doorbell rang, two Fort Worth deputies exited through a rear door, one coming around each side of the house. Stealthily reaching the front of the house, they saw Clyde on the porch and took direct aim. Clyde hearing a noise wheeled, pulling his shotgun down on target, and blasted one of the officers.

Bonnie simultaneously started shooting from the car. One deputy was killed instantly, while the other, fearful of a similar fate, ran for cover. None of the officers inside the house exchanged shots with the desperate pair, nor came out of the house until Clyde's Ford was heard roaring off into the night.

This killing made Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker a pair hotter than a firebug's dream. Everybody who had been willing to help them now backed off.

Ray Hamilton was rushed off under heavy guard to start serving his 243 years. Clyde and Bonnie, fugitives with a heavy price on their heads, deserted and without contacts, and aware it meant death to show their faces in previous habitual haunts, raced over into New Mexico.

They had no more than arrived when a motorcycle officer tried to question them and was murdered. They then headed for Oklahoma, and there killed a night-watchman who became suspicious of their movements.

Now forced to drive day and night, with limited funds, missing meals and most of their normal sleep, they finally became completely exhausted and decided to head back to Texas. It was Clyde's intention to contact his brother, Buck.

Clyde talked Buck and his wife into coming with them so that he and Bonnie could get some rest. It was their plan to leave the southwest, feeling they would have a better chance for survival elsewhere.

They drifted into Iowa. But always it proved the same old story; a gun fight would ensue. During one of these fights, Buck received a serious head wound while the foursome were blasting their way out of a police trap. With Buck's wound causing him considerable pain and his associates great concern, they headed for Idaho.

Buck's head wound soon became a threat to his life. They had no medical supplies, and were afraid to contact a doctor. The foursome decided to hole up some place and try to nurse Buck back to good health again.

They rented a garage apartment at the edge of a small town. Buck's wife would go out and get the supplies they needed, but the others never left the apartment. After two or three days of this, the people who owned the place became suspicious and called the law and the police came in force and surrounded the apartment.

When they called on them to come out, out they came in a blaze of gun-fire. Clyde spotted the police closing in and the four got in their car and drove out of the garage shooting. In the gun-fight Buck was killed, and his wife, who refused to leave him, was captured. Clyde was shot through the back of the neck, and Bonnie was shot in the right knee, but Clyde and Bonnie managed to get away.

Afraid to try to find a doctor, they went back to Texas and contacted Ray Hamilton's brother, Floyd, who, with the financial help of Clyde's mother, took care of them.

Clyde's father had a gas station in West Dallas, and many times his mother would take the gas money and send it to Clyde, along with food and clean clothes. The bullet that hit Bonnie in the knee had never been taken out, and although it healed up, it drew her leg up and left her crippled.

Clyde picked up a young man named, W. D. Jones, and kept him with them to drive and run errands. He was not wanted by the police and could come into Dallas to deliver messages for them. They were driving along back roads one night near Wellington, Texas, when they suddenly ran out of road. They had driven up an incline of a bridge abuttment, and the car went end over end and was demolished. Clyde was knocked out and Bonnie's left leg was caught under the

motor. The water jacket had broken, and her leg was burned from her ankle to her hip. A family living nearby heard the crash and came out to see what had happened. They notified the sheriff's office at Wellington of the accident after they'd helped Clyde and Bonnie into their home. Clyde came out of the house when the sheriff and a deputy arrived, and disarmed them, disconnected the phone, took the sheriff's car and left.

For the next four months Clyde and Bonnie seemed to disappear. When the burn on Bonnie's leg healed, it left the skin drawn so that she could not straighten out her leg. She had to be helped every time she got in or out of the car.

Their next brush with the law came at Alvardo, Texas, where they had jumped out of their car, but they had managed to get another, and get away. When they left the car, they left a gun, one of Bonnie's shoes, and a bunch of snap-shots. One of these snap-shots was of Bonnie holding a couple of pistols in her hands and a cigar in her mouth. That is how the story of her smoking cigars got around. I have never seen her smoke anything but cigarettes.

Ray Hamilton had by now arrived at the Eastham Farm, of the Texas Prison System, and he and I became very good friends. The main thought in Ray's mind was how to get out from under that 243 year sentence. We talked to many men leaving the prison, trying to get them to contact Ray's people and get some outside help, but nothing ever happened. It was almost impossible to get away from the farm without help. The farm is 17 miles off the highways, in the Trinity River Bottoms, with only one road leading into it. Every nester in the country keeps a lookout for any convicts trying to escape, and with four or five packs of blood-hounds on the trail, it is a hard proposition.

Finally my time got short and I promised Ray I would do something for him. We made our plans. We needed one man to go in on it, and after talking to several men, we decided on Hilton Bybee, who was serving two life sentences for murder. I was to contact Ray's brother, Floyd, and explain our plan to him. We were to get a car and a couple of guns; plant the guns on the farm where a trusty could pick them up for Ray, and leave the car on a road near where the men were working in the woods on the edge of the farm.

On the 10th of January, 1934, I was released. I went to Dallas and the next night went to see Ray's brother, but he was not home. I talked to his wife and said that I had word by Ray, and she told me to come back the next night, that she would have Floyd wait for me. I returned the next night and met Floyd. I told him what we had planned. Of course Floyd did not

know me, and was cautious. He asked me if I knew Clyde Barrow, and when I told him I did, he asked me if I would like to go out and meet him to see what he thought of the deal. I agreed, and he told me he was going to meet Clyde that night.

We went to Clyde's home first and got some food and clean clothes for Clyde and Bonnie, then drove around town to make sure we weren't being tailed, then headed for North Texas, near the Oklahoma line and met Clyde. He was surprised and glad to see me, and we had lots to talk about. He wanted to know all about his friends and conditions in prison, and I wanted to hear about him and Bonnie.

When I told him about what we had planned for Ray, he agreed that it would work out alright, and he felt he owed Ray something. He had plenty of guns and said we could use his car to pick them up instead of stealing one. All he needed was shot-gun shells and extra clips for the 45 calibre pistols. We decided that Floyd and I would go back to Dallas and get what we needed and meet Clyde the next morning on the road to Huntsville.

Clyde was driving a new '34 Ford Coupe and we planned to put Ray and Bybee in the trunk. We met Clyde the next morning and drove to Corsicanna where we left Floyd's car in a garage. We all got in Clyde's car and proceeded toward Eastham Farm.

Late that night, we drove to within a mile of the farm. Clyde and Bonnie stayed in the car while Floyd and I took the guns, two 45 pistols, and two extra clips wrapped in an innertube, and planted them on the farm as planned. This was on a Saturday night, and as Floyd wanted to visit Ray on Sunday, we drove back to Corsicanna where Floyd got his car. He drove to Dallas, picked up his wife and son, then came back to the Eastham to visit Ray.

Floyd told Ray that Clyde would be waiting for them, and that the guns were planted. I stayed with Clyde and Bonnie as we drove out the roads, picking our get-away. We met Floyd on his way back from his visit and talked things over with him. Floyd was driving a truck for the A & P Stores, and we decided it best that he remain at work driving his truck so he'd have an alibi the day Ray made the break. Also, we would be crowded with four in the coupe and it would look suspicious, so Floyd went back to Dallas.

Ray could not get possession of the guns until Monday noon, so we set Tuesday morning for the break, with the understanding we would come back three mornings and wait an hour each time in case things weren't favorable. We now had to kill time until Tuesday morning. We had blankets and fixed a bed in the turtle back.

Clyde would sleep, and Bonnie

rode up front with me as I drove. Then we changed around so I could sleep, while Clyde drove. Then we put Bonnie in the turtle back so she could get her sleep and Clyde and I rode up front.

We were staying off the main highways and by-passing all the towns. We would stop at some roadside eating place, while I ran in to get sandwiches and a thermos of coffee. Clyde and Bonnie had not slept out of the car, or had their clothes off except to change into clean ones since Buck had been killed, which was six months previous. Also, neither had eaten a hot meal during this time.

Late Monday night, January 15, 1934, we decided to go into the river bottoms close to where we were to pick up the men, and wait for morning. We stopped at an out-of-the-way store that had a gas pump, to fill up with gas and oil. We blew the horn, and when the attendant came out, we recognized him as an ex-guard frm the Eastham Farm, and he knew both Clyde and me.

He stuck out his hand but I ignored it, and told him to fill the tank and check the oil. He saw Clyde and froze. Clyde reached for a sawed-off shotgun, but I told him we couldn't afford any shooting; we had to get away from there, and that it would leave Ray and Bybee in a tough spot.

Clyde wanted to know what we should do with him, and I said the only thing to do was put fear into him. Clyde said for me to try it my way, but he still thought we should kill him.

The man came to my side of the car and I handed him a twenty-dollar bill. He said he had to go inside to change it, and I said I'd go along with him. I put a pistol in my pocket, and followed him into the store.

There were three or four nesters sitting around a stove at the front of the store as we walked back to the cash drawer where he made change. When he handed the change to me, I nodded toward the back of the store and we walked back there.

"I guess you know who that is out there, and that he wanted to kill you. You can use your own judgement about talking," I said. "In case you do, we can always come back, and the next time I won't stop him." He said not to worry, that he wouldn't. He never did.

As there wasn't a phone at the garage, we drove a short distance from the store where we could watch to see if anyone came out. When we were satisfied nothing was going to happen, we drove down into the bottoms to wait for morning.

We chose a place about a mile and a half from where the prisoners would be working. It was on the edge of a clearing, and under ordinary weather conditions, we could see the men in line as they went by.

But a fog had come down, and we couldn't see a thing. We didn't know if they would come out in the fog or not, so all we could do was wait. After a while, we could hear the axes ringing, and the men singing and whistling. It wouldn't be long until we'd know.

In a little while, we heard two blasts from a shotgun. And as this is the trouble signal, and calls for the dog sergeant, we knew something had happened, but we hadn't heard any pistol shots. We waited a few more minutes, and when nothing happened, we figured something had gone wrong, and they had not made it.

We were about to drive away when we heard someone yelling at us. We then saw men coming through the underbrush. It looked as though there was twenty or more. They were scattered out, some in white clothes, and some in stripes. But when they got out in the clearing, we could see that there were only four of them, and they were still yelling for us to do something. Thinking that they were being followed, Clyde and I took two high powered Browning machine rifles and fired two clips over their heads, and that discouraged all pursuit. We put three of them in the turtle back, and one up in front with us. We drove about five miles from the farm where we stopped and cut the telephone wires leading out from the farm.

We waited on a straight piece of road to see if anyone was following us. We knew we could discourage them with those Browning rifles, and we didn't want them to get to a phone. After waiting some time and nothing happened, we started for Dallas to meet Floyd.

Besides Ray Hamilton, we had picked up Hilton Bybee, Joe Palmer, serving 40 years, and Henry Metvin, serving 15 years. We drove north toward Dallas, listening for the alarm on the radio. It was about two hours before any alarm went out and we were about 150 miles from the farm. They had received a tip that we had gone into the big thicket near the town of Nacogdoches, and were heavily armed with machine guns. This was about 300 miles from where we actually were.

They set up road blocks and brought out some National Guardsmen with machine guns and surrounded the big thicket.

We drove off into the woods near Hillsboro to give the three men in the turtle back a chance to get out and stretch, and it was here that we first heard what happened at the farm when they made the break. When the guns were brought into Ray, Joe Palmer and Henry Metvin found out about them and declared themselves in on the deal. That is how they happened to be along.

Ray had been working in a different squad from the other three and had to jump his squad so they would all be together. When the

guard saw this, he became suspicious, and when they reached the woods, the guard called the high-rider to tell him about Ray, to have him put back into his own squad.

Joe Palmer, who was picking up brush near where the guards were talking, heard the conversation. He eased up close to the guard's horse, grabbed the bridle, and threw down on him with a pistol, telling him to drop the shot-gun. Instead of dropping it, he tilted it down over the horse's neck and shot at Joe. Joe returned the fire and hit the guard in the hand.

The high-rider started to ride away, and Joe, knowing that he had a rifle in his saddle scabbord, emptied the pistol into his back. The high-rider was not dead, but he lay at the farm for four hours before being taken to the hospital in Huntsville, by then he was too far gone to do anything for. He died the next day and murder charges were filed against all four of the men who escaped.

Since the search for us was centered around the big thicket in southeast Texas, we had no trouble in reaching our destination which was north of Dallas near the Oklahoma line. We arrived there just as it was getting dark, and Ray's brother, Floyd, and Clyde's younger brother, L. C. Barrow, were waiting for us. After greetings and congratulations all around, we decided that we were hungry, not having had anything to eat all day. Floyd and I drove into Rome Texas and got food for all of us. While we were eating we talked over plans for the immediate future.

The men who had escaped needed clothes, so we decided they should hide out in the woods while Floyd, L. C., and I went into Dallas and got what they needed. We were to meet them the next night, but when we returned, they did not show up. We waited most of the night, then gave up and returned to Dallas.

The next morning we found out what had happened. They wanted to see how much newspaper publicity they had received, and went out on the highway and waited for a rural mailman to come along. They followed him until he put a newspaper into a mail box, then they drove up and took it. A woman coming out to get her mail saw them and called the law. With the law after them, they went across the line into Oklahoma.

We didn't hear anything from them for about two weeks. In the meantime Col. Lee Simmons who was then General Manager of the Texas Prison System, went to Governor Miriam A. Fergison and asked for money to hire two special officers to hunt down Clyde and Bonnie and the four men who had escaped. They had no evidence that Clyde and Bonnie were in on the break, they only surmised it.

When Lee Simmons got the money, he hired two ex-rangers, Frank

Hamer and Mannie Gault. They both had the reputation of being expert man-hunters, and it was their job to run down Clyde and Bonnie. They didn't know them and they didn't try too hard to find them, but spent most of their time trying to find someone who did know them, who would put them on the spot for them.

I was not known to the Dallas Police, nor was I suspected of having anything to do with the prison break, so I was free to get around and find out what was going on. I contacted Ray's lawyer, who was one of the best in Dallas, and what I could not find out, he would find out for me, and in this way we kept pretty well informed about everything.

The last day in January the gang came back to Texas and sent word to Floyd and me to meet them that night. We went out and met them where we had left them two weeks before. They had gone up through Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa, and had robbed four banks on the trip. They came back through Wichita Falls and picked up Bonnie's sister and two other girls. When we met them that night, there were nine of them in the party, and they were in two cars. They looked and acted like a bunch of tourists.

After telling us of their trip, I talked to Clyde and asked him what the idea of the crowd was. He didn't like it himself and said that he was going to get rid of the girls as soon as they had their little party.

They wanted me to case two banks for them, one at Grand Prairie and the other at Lancaster, both near Dallas. Ray asked Floyd and me if we needed any money, and when we told him we could use some, he took us to one of the cars, and there, on the floor, was the money they had made on their trip. It was thrown on the floor like waste paper. Some of it still had the bank wrappers on it. I asked Ray if he didn't think they were being a little careless and reminded him of that 243 years, and the murder rap, but he just laughed and said it didn't make any difference, that they couldn't stand for a pinch anyway.

After visiting for awhile and making arrangements for our next meeting, Floyd and I left them and went back to Dallas. I cased the two banks, and ten days later, we were going out to meet as planned.

Clyde's mother wanted to go out and see her son, so we took her and Floyd's wife along with us. As we were leaving Dallas, we were jumped by the law. They stopped us and searched the car. They knew everybody in the car except me, and we told them I was Floyd's uncle. After questioning us awhile, they turned us loose and started to follow. We took Mrs. Barrow and Floyd's wife back home and waited awhile. Then Floyd and I went back into town and drove around until

we were satisfied nobody was following, then took off for our meeting place.

We met as planned. They had left the girls behind, and all was not in harmony. They had been quarreling and arguing about where to go and what to do. We could not take sides with them, but we talked and tried to smooth things over as best we could. They all seemed to resent the fact that Clyde had Bonnie with him, but objected to them having any girl friends along. I couldn't help telling them that Bonnie was just as hot as any of them, and in case of trouble she would be more valuable than any of them, that the others were just excess baggage out for a good time and what they could get. After some more arguing everybody agreed to forget their differences and we talked over plans for the future.

They decided to take the Grand Prairie bank on the following Saturday morning. I was to drive a getaway route and then meet them after the robbery and pick up the money. After they were in the clear we would meet again and divide the money. The boys then picked up their girls and had another party.

Two weeks later we followed the same procedure and robbed the Lancaster Bank. After this last robbery, dissention sprang up again over splitting of the money. They wanted to cut Bonnie out of her share unless the rest of the girls got a share. Since Bonnie was on the job and the others were not, Clyde would not stand for this and they all split up. Clyde, Bonnie, and Henry Metvin stayed together. Ray took off with his girl, Mary O'Dare. Joe Palmer could not drive a car so he went to Wichita Falls and holed up with some dame that ran a rooming house. Hilton Bybee took off by himself. Clyde, Bonnie, and Henry Metvin went to Oklahoma.

On the way, while driving along a side road they got stuck in the mud. They were near a highway, and while they were trying to get their car out, two constables came along. Seeing they were in trouble, they stopped to lend a hand. As they came near Clyde saw their badges and opened fire on them. Henry and Bonnie also began shooting. They killed one and wounded the other. They used the law's car to pull their car out of the mud then took off. This was near Commerce, Oklahoma. Now the law knew that the gang had split up.

A campaign was now started to get Clyde and Ray gunning for each other. Letters supposedly written by them to each other were printed in the papers, telling what they would do to each other if they should meet. This did not have any effect on them, but it did cause their families to start quarreling. I was the only one left that was friendly with both sides, and I con-

tinued to meet with both Clyde and Ray.

Henry Metvin had fallen for Bonnie's sister, Billie Mace, who was working as a waitress and car-hop at Gladewater Texas. Clyde and Bonnie did not want her with them, so Henry left them and went to East Texas where he could meet her. Billie had an apartment near where she worked and Henry holed up there, and Billie carried food to him from where she worked. Clyde asked me to come and stay with them for a while, which I did.

We had some money so didn't have to do any robbing, but merely stayed on the move and tried to keep ahead of the law. We had a coupe and, late at night, we would drive off on a side road and park. Bonnie and I would sit up the first part of the night while Clyde slept in the turtle-back, then my turn would come to sleep until daylight when they'd wake me so Bonnie could get her sleep as we started driving again.

If we had to go into a town for anything we would put Bonnie in the turtle-back, because they were always looking for a man and woman. We would pick out-of-the-way eating places. We had to leave Bonnie in the car as she could not walk. We would park in such a way that anyone stopping would have to park in between our car and the eating place. In this way we could protect Bonnie and she could protect us. We couldn't stand for any shake downs as we were always armed.

We had two high-powered Browning Machine Rifles; two sawed-off automatic shot guns; and six 45 calibre pistols, with a quantity of ammunition for each. Most of our troubles were caused by filling station attendants who became suspicious when we didn't let them get a close look into our car. We didn't allow them to clean the windshield, and that would arouse their curiosity. Sometimes they would call the police and then we'd have a chase on our hands. A few blasts from the Browning rifles usually discouraged close pursuit, so we avoided any serious trouble.

We went into the Cookson Hills, in Oklahoma, to try and contact "Pretty Boy" Floyd, and have something done for Bonnie's legs, but he wasn't around at the time. We were sent to doctors by his kinfolk, but they could do nothing without operating. Bonnie wouldn't leave us to have that done, so we had to be satisfied with some medical supplies we could provide ourselves. We went to Dallas twice to meet Clyde's mother and got into a gun fight with the police each time, but no one was hurt.

Henry Metvin had been gone three weeks when his welcome wore out in Gladewater. When things got too hot for him, he came back to Clyde. I then left them and went back to Dallas. I had been with Clyde and Bonnie for twenty-three

days, and during that time we had talked over many things of the past, present, and future. They knew what their end would be, and they had a very strong determination never to be taken alive, and they knew their luck couldn't hold out forever.

They were not rough, tough, or vulgar in their talk or actions as you would expect. Neither were they sentimental. Bonnie acted toward me the same as she did toward Clyde, and we both treated her as if she were another man. I never saw any display of affection between them. They did not kill for fun or thrills, but for survival. While I was with them they got the rap for many things that happened miles away from where we were at the time.

One such incident happened in Dallas when four young hoodlums sawed off a single barrel shot gun, punched a hole in a pie plate, painted it black and slid it on the barrel of the gun to give it an appearance of a machine gun. They walked into the bank at Mesquite, a small town 15 miles from Dallas. They announced themselves as the Clyde Barrow, Ray Hamilton gang. They picked up around $14,000, and got away.

They came back to Dallas, bought a new Chevrolet truck and went to the Rio Grande Valley. They bought a load of fruit and vegetables then came back to Dallas where the law was waiting for them. They confessed to the bank robbery. Had they not been caught, Clyde and Ray would have had the rap. This is not an isolated case. Many more of the same kind happened.

Many times they were reported as having committed crimes in three or four states at the same time, when they were not in any of them. Clyde and Bonnie were both soft-spoken and polite mannered except when in danger, then they were ruthless and showed no mercy to anyone in their way.

I did not hear from any of the gang for about ten days, then one night Floyd came to me and said that Ray wanted to see me. I went with him and we met Ray between Pararie and Arlington. He was asleep in his car on a side road. He had the doors locked and held a sawed-off shot gun cradled in his arms. I was afraid to wake him suddenly, so I got a long pole and got behind the car and pounded on the side.

He had been alone for several days, and was exhausted for want of sleep. He wanted me to stay with him so he could get some rest. I told him I'd stay with him as long as we were alone, but if he picked up his girl friend, I was gone.

I had cased three banks for Ray; at Clebourne; Waxahachie; and West. We were planning on taking one of them, but after a few days rest Ray wanted to go to Witchita Falls and see Mary O'Dare, his girl

friend. She wanted to come along and did. We met Floyd that night and I told Ray to get rid of Mary or that I'd go back with Floyd. She insisted on staying with him.

Ray said that he and Mary would rob the bank at West the next day, and so, we arranged to meet them at Henrietta after the robbery. They robbed the bank and got away, but did not meet us afterward. Later we found out the reason. Ray had wrecked the car near Waco, then stopped a car with a woman and boy in it. They put the boy out and took the woman and her car and drove to a wooded spot near Houston where they hid all night. The next morning Ray went into Houston and stole a car. He came back, picked up Mary, and released the woman with her car. This was on Easter Sunday morning, April 1, 1934.

We did not know what Ray would do, so Floyd decided that he would stay home in case Ray sent him any word, and that I would go to Henrietta in case he showed up there as he had promised, but we didn't contact him either way. In the meantime, Clyde had made arrangements to meet his mother on this Easter Sunday between Grapevine and Roanoke on the Northwest highway. Clyde, Bonnie, and Henry Metvin drove in on a side road just off the highway and parked with their car facing the highway. It was about 9 o'clock in the morning when they arrived.

A Poultry farmer living directly across the highway from where they were parked had noticed them on several occasions, but had paid no attention to them at the time. Clyde had some whiskey and they were drinking while waiting. Clyde became a little drunk and laid down in the back seat. Henry spread a blanket on the ground behind the car and then helped Bonnie out of the car. They had been there for some time when two highway patrolmen on motorcycles went by. The patrolmen did not stop, but went on to the end of their beat.

About an hour later they returned and, seeing the car still parked there, they stopped. They left their motorcycles on the highway and started walking toward the car about a hundred yards from the road. Henry helped Bonnie to one side of the car then he walked around to the other side. Both doors were standing open. They reached in the car and each picked up a sawed off automatic shot gun.

When the patrolmen were about twenty-five feet away Henry and Bonnie opened fire and both patrolmen were killed. They got in the car and took off. The poultry farmer, hearing the shooting, came outside just in time to see a black Ford V-8 with yellow wire wheels speed away from the scene. He called the sheriff's office at Ft. Worth and reported the shooting. When the officers arrived and the farmer told his story,

they did not hesitate a minute in putting the rap on Clyde and Bonnie, although the description of Henry in no way fitted Clyde.

Now all hell broke loose. Every road and highway within a radius of a hundred miles was blocked and every car was stopped and its occupants questioned. But before the police had gotten organized, Clyde and Bonnie had crossed the line into Oklahoma.

I didn't know that Clyde was anywhere near Dallas. I burned out a bearing on my car coming into Roanoke and stopped at a filling station to try and get a wrecker to take me into Dallas. This was just three miles from where the shooting had taken place. When I heard what had happened, I thought that maybe Ray and Mary had done the shooting, but when I got to Dallas I talked to Clyde's mother and she told me that she was to have met Clyde, but could not get any one to take her out and she had been hoping to get in touch with me to take her to her son.

The next day we got word from Ray. He and Mary were hiding out on the prairie near Ringold Texas. They had a black Ford V-8 with yellow wire wheels, and hearing the radio broadcasts, were afraid to come out on the highway. They wanted Floyd and me to come out with some black paint to paint their wheels black.

We went out and met them, but there was no water near and their wheels were caked with mud. Floyd had a Ford Coupe with black wheels so we jacked up the two cars and changed wheels on them. Ray and Mary left us and succeeded in getting into Louisiana without any trouble.

Two days later Floyd was picked up by Texas Rangers and hidden somewhere. When he did not show up at our regular meeting place, I went to his home to find out what was wrong. His wife was scared to death. She told me that some people had come and taken him away. When she described them to me, I knew they were Rangers. I tried to quiet her down, and told her I would try and find Floyd and have a writ run on him. They had no charges they could fill and make stick. I told her to stay at home and wait until she heard from me.

I went to all the county jails around Dallas trying to locate Floyd but had no luck. When I returned home I found Floyd's wife and sister waiting for me. I don't know how they found out where I lived, but there they were and I could do nothing about it. I decided that it was time for me to get out from under all the heat that was put on. I laid down to get a little rest, intending to leave when I woke, but I never had the chance.

While I was sleeping the Rangers and Sheriff's Officers surrounded the house and busted in on me. When I asked what the idea was, I was told that I was being arrested

on suspicion of bank robbery. I knew there was no use in denying that I knew Clyde and Ray, but I did deny that I'd seen them since I left prison.

The next day I got a lawyer and started to have a writ issued, but while the lawyer was busy with this, the Rangers snatched me out of jail and started running with me. I had over fourteen hundred dollars and two army 45 calibre pistols on me when I was arrested. The Rangers took me and my money to every bank that had been robbed. They tried to get an identification without success. They would drive all day and then put me in a different jail every night with orders not to let me get in touch with anybody.

There was no law in Texas at this time against aiding a prisoner to escape. They tried to indict Floyd and me in the killing of the prison guard, but failed. Floyd was turned loose, and I was turned over to Federal Authorities for possession of the pistols I had when I was arrested.

I was tried, convicted and received a jail sentence on this charge. While I was in custody of the Rangers, Joe Palmer was captured in Kentucky, and Ray Hamilton was captured in a railroad yard at Fort Worth. They were both returned to the prison at Huntsville. They were tried and convicted for the killing of the prison guard and were given the death penalty. Clyde, Bonnie, Henry Metvin and his father had gone into Louisiana. They bought a small place near Bienville. Bonnie was pregnant, and they wanted a place where they would be safe and have Clyde's mother come and stay with Bonnie.

The two ex-rangers who had been hired by the prison system to hunt down Clyde and Bonnie, finally contacted Henry's father. They didn't know he was with Henry, but thought he might be contacting him. They made the old man a proposition; they would get Henry a full pardon in return for putting Clyde and Bonnie on the spot for them. Finally the old man agreed.

Since Clyde and Bonnie seldom went out they had to find some way to get them out on the highways. They were getting low on money, so Henry suggested that they rob a bank at Arcadia, Louisiana. He was to case the bank and make the plans for the robbery. This gave him a chance to get away from Clyde and contact the officers.

They now made their plans to ambush Clyde and Bonnie. They picked a spot where the road ran through a cut with high banks of dirt on both sides. This was ideal for the officers to hide behind. The day and time was set, and, on the morning of June 24th, 1934, Henry's father left early, his truck loaded with cord wood.

He was to be on the road and

meet them after they robbed the bank and take the money, while they circled around to lose any pursuit that might have developed. When the old man got to the meeting place where the officers were hiding in ambush, he drove to the end of the cut, angled the truck across the road to block it.

He jacked up a rear wheel as though to fix a tire, and waited. In a short time, Clyde, Bonnie, and Henry drove up. They stopped a short-distance from the truck. Henry asked his dad if he was having tire trouble, and when he said he was, Henry got out of the car and walked toward the truck.

When he was a safe distance from the car, the six lawmen rose up from behind the dirt embankment and, without saying a single word, began pumping round after round of rifle fire into the car containing Clyde and Bonnie.

They never knew what hit them. Clyde was leaning out the window talking to old man Metvin, and Bonnie was eating a sandwich. After the killing, Henry and his dad drove away in their truck. The Louisiana and Texas authorities were notified of the death of Clyde and Bonnie.

The inside story of how Clyde and Bonnie were killed did not come out until Henry Metvin got his pardon from the state of Texas, and it caused quite a scandal. Not because they were dead, but because of the method used to kill them as well as the fact that one of them was a woman.

The bodies of Clyde and Bonnie were taken to Dallas and placed in different funeral homes. Thousands of people passed by their caskets for two days. Extra details of police had to be used to handle the crowds. The car in which they were killed was placed on exhibition all over the southwest and drew thousands of customers at from 25¢ to a dollar a head. Clyde's mother caused a lot of commotion by tearing down posters in front of theaters, and protesting to the police and public about the publicity.

After Clyde and Bonnie were buried, things began to happen fast. Henry Metvin got his pardon, but the Texas Rangers were not in favor of this. They wanted Henry tried for the murder of the two highway patrolmen. The sheriff of Bienville Parish would not let them take Henry out of his Parish since he had been a party in getting the pardon for him.

The Rangers went to see Tom Hughes, who was sheriff at Shrevesport, Louisiana. They promised him the rewards that had been offered for the killers of the two patrolmen if he would find some way to take Metvin into custody so they could get him.

Tom Hughes got Metvin in his jail alright, but when the Rangers tried to get the reward money, the Governor of Texas wouldn't pay it, nor would he issue extradition

papers on Metvin. So Hughes didn't turn Metvin over to the Rangers. Hughes did know that Metvin was wanted in Oklahoma for the murder of a constable at Commerce, and he notified Oklahoma that he had Metvin in custody.

Metvin was returned to Oklahoma, tried and convicted for murder and given the death penalty. When Ma-Ferguson, who was then Governor of Texas, found out what had happened to Metvin, she interceded in his behalf and the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Metvin served about 8 years and was released. He returned to Louisiana, and a short time later his mangled body was found along a railroad track. How he met his end no one really knows, but many suspect.

In the death-house at Huntsville with Ray Hamilton and Joe Palmer, was a notorious Texas-Louisiana bad man called Whiter Walker. Whiter had a friend on the yard who had succeeded in getting a couple of pistols smuggled in to him. One Sunday afternoon when all of the prisoners and most of the guards were in the stadium watching a ball game, Whitey's friend loitered around the door leading into the death house until the evening meals were brought from the kitchen. When the inside guard opened the door for the food, he came face to face with two pistols and was forced back inside. Whitey Walker, Ray Hamilton, Joe Palmer, and another man called Blackie Thompson were turned out of their death cells.

They rushed across the yard to the walls, picking up a ladder on the way, and started to go over. A tower-guard saw them and started shooting. He killed Whitey on the ladder and wounded his friend, but Ray, Joe, and Blackie got over the wall and away. They had a car parked across the road from the prison and they were gone before anyone knew what had happened.

Freedom for Joe Palmer did not last long. In a few months he was again captured and returned to the death house at Huntsville.

The F.B.I. had twenty-six of us indicted for harboring Clyde and Bonnie. On the day we went to trial, Ray Hamilton was captured, fifteen minutes after he had robbed a Denton County Bank.

In spite of the fact that Ray had 243 years and a death sentence on his head, he was tried for this bank robbery and given 99 years. He was then returned to the death house, and he and Joe Palmer went to the electric chair for the killing of the prison guard when they had escaped from the Eastham Farm.

Hilton Bybee again escaped from the Eastham Farm, but was later killed in a gun battle with Arkansas police officers. Floyd Hamilton and I were now the only two of the gang left alive. We were not to have much chance to cause any trouble.

Floyd was arrested and charged with robbing a South Texas Bank. He was convicted and sentenced to 25 years, which he served at Alcatraz Prison. I was arrested on several charges of highjacking with a bottle of nitro-glycerin. I was tried and convicted on two charges and received two 25 year sentences to run concurrently. I served 14 years and 8 months. Upon my release I left Texas and came to Michigan, where I am now serving 7½ to 15 years for armed robbery.

All these events took place within a two-year period, so you can readily see that there was very little time for any recreation or pleasure. Just one continual grind of worry, fear, and expectation. You wonder if the next turn in the road will be your last, or where the next blast of gun-fire will come from.

You have your pockets full of money and there is no place where you can stop and spend it in safety. You think of how swell it would be to take your clothes off and sleep in a real bed without fear of being disturbed.

How nice it would be to sit down to a good hot cooked meal and be able to eat without watching all the doors and windows. Eventually you will have to choose between two ends. You can sell out in a gun battle, or you can submit to capture and spend a long, long, time in prison.

You may think that you can avoid the mistakes made by others, but you will make some of your own. You only have to make one mistake to bring about your downfall. When you commit your first major felony, you have thrown away all chances of ever leading a quiet and peaceful life.

You are always waiting for the tap on the shoulder which means you have been caught up with. Just imagine yourself turning on the radio and hearing a news bulletin telling of some of your pals being killed in a gun battle, or lying in a prison cell; you are waiting and watching the time, a few minutes after twelve the lights all go dim. You hear the hum of a generator, a few seconds pause and then another hum. You know the life of one of your pals has been snuffed out.

I have had these things happen to me on more than one occasion, and I can assure you that it is not a pleasant experience. You may look for the thrills in a life of crime, but you will only find grief in the end.

I have tried it for fifty-five years, since I was thirteen years old, I should know something about it. You may not make as much money being honest, but you will surely have a much better life, and enjoy what you do make.

STAND IN

Tony practiced day after day whirling the bag furiously, sending it flying into the sharp corner of the doorway. On one end of the burlap was painted a small circle that represented the exact size of Rita's head.

BY ALBERT SIMMONS

HE WAS SITTING at the makeup table when Rita came into the dressing room. She was unusually late. He turned, anxiety beading his eyes as he scanned her face for any sign that she suspected.

She barely glanced at him, her handsome face dark with anger. She seemed unnerved and deeply

troubled. Yet he noticed a strange, haunting smile on her lips.

For a moment panic rose up inside him, clawing at his intestines like a frightened animal. She couldn't suspect . . . she couldn't!

Shrugging off her coat, she let it fall to the floor as she crossed to the closet. Her lithe body moved easily with the full free-swinging gait of the professional dancer.

Tony turned back to the mirror, watching her reflection in the glass as she took her costume from the closet and hung it on a hook behind the door. Unhurriedly she pulled her sweater over her head and tossed it on a chair. She wasn't wearing a slip and only the bra straps broke the smooth white line of her shoulders and back.

At thirty-five Rita's body was still the body of a dancer. The grace and resilience was there in her long, slender legs and in the rest of her well-shaped figure, too. Yet, *she* knew she wasn't the same. Too many times recently she'd observed her naked body before a full length mirror and known the truth about herself.

Her belly was flat enough, yes; and her childless marriage to Tony hadn't loaded her breasts and brought them down. They were still high and firm. But here and there she could recognize the signs of encroaching fleshiness, and they were constant reminders to her that she was thirty-five years old.

Without looking at her Tony said, "You're late." He was aware that his voice sounded tense and he wondered if she noticed.

She whirled on him, her nearly nude body quivering at the sudden movement. "So I'm late," she snapped. "I'm still in time to do the damned act, aren't I?"

The full face gold mask she wore during their *Danse de Carnaval* dangled from her fingers. She threw it furiously across the room.

He didn't reply but stared at her angry reflection in the glass of the dressing room table.

Her dark eyes burned at him. She seemed to be beside herself, straining to keep from leaping at him in her sudden fury. Then abruptly she turned away and started to get dressed for the performance.

He picked up a stick of white grease paint and made two diagonal clown lines on both sides of his face from his eyebrows to his cheekbones. Almost mechanically, after five years of doing the same thing every night, he fingered a blob of red putty, fashioning it into the bulbous nose he wore during the act.

While he added the finishing touches to his make-up, he watched Rita moving about the small dressing room and tried not to think of what she would look like in less than half an hour.

Instead he fought to think only of Doris . . . Doris . . .

Doris was young and beautiful, as only a twenty-year old kid can

be. She had come into the act when Rita had hired her as her stand-in nearly ten months ago.

At first Tony had balked at the added expense, but he was a realist and he was always conscious that it was Rita who had gotten them steady bookings week after week, year in and year out. In the five years they'd been together she had always handled the business end, and she had never let him forget that it was her act. So, while he'd been surprised at her insistence on hiring a stand-in over his objections, he hadn't protested too loudly.

Rita had called the lovely blonde kid her insurance, and she'd kept insisting that having Doris to stand by for an emergency gave them a margin of safety well worth the added expense.

For ten months the three of them had traveled together on the hotel circuit wherever the act's bookings had taken them. When Rita had gotten sick for two weeks the past summer, Doris had taken her place and, with her face hidden behind the gold mask, no one had been the wiser.

Afterwards, Rita had boasted that her foresight had prevented a certain cancellation; that her "insurance" as she termed it had paid off. How, she wasn't to learn until some months later!

Those two mid-July weeks in Altoona when he'd danced with Doris had been something of a shock to Tony. If he hadn't known differently, he would have sworn it was Rita. Every movement of the kid's sensuous body; every gesture of her hands, her arms, even the way she moved her head was Rita's. It *was* Rita.

Doris was a perfectionist who took her job as Rita's stand-in seriously. Tony had seen how for months, at every rehearsal, every performance, she had stood there in the wings, watching, studying—always studying, studying . . . How many times he'd laughed at her, ridiculing her almost fanatical absorption in her unrewarding chore. Then those two weeks in Altoona when she'd taken Rita's place, he had understood.

Perhaps it had all started then. Or perhaps it was a few weeks later when Doris had lain in his arms, her warm breath an exciting feather against his naked cheek.

"We ought to be the team, Tony," she'd said unexpectedly. "We're great together. She's only holding you back, drying you up and it isn't fair."

Her words had startled him because the very same thought had already occurred to him, too, growing inside of him since those two weeks in Altoona.

"Rita's a good dancer, kid, real good," he'd answered without too much outward enthusiasm.

"So are you, Tony. So are *we*."

"You won't get an argument out of me, baby."

She had put her soft lips into the hollow of his shoulder, and he hadn't seen the smile of satisfaction that touched her lovely face. "*You're* the act, Tony," she'd whispered petulantly, "not her. Can't you see that?"

"Yeah, kid, I know it."

"So?"

He smiled. "I guess I've known it for a while now."

The tips of her fingers slid down his ribs, across his lean stomach. "Then why don't you do something about it?"

"Huh?"

Irritation narrowed her eyes. "You're a fool, Tony, I swear you are."

"What?"

She pushed away from him.

"Doris."

"Can't you see what she's doing?"

He stared at her. "What do you mean?"

She sighed unhappily. "Don't you know that she's hanging on to you for dear life?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Don't you know why, Tony?" She hadn't waited for him to answer. "She knows you're better than she is, that's why." She had paused for a moment to observe the effect of her words, then rushed on. "You deserve better than playing the third-rate rooms you're being booked into."

"Yeah, I been thinking that, too."

"It needs more than thinking, Tony."

"Does it?"

"Sure it does. You've got to raise your sights, you've got to raise them way up."

"Hollywood?" he'd said half in jest.

"Why not? You're good enough. We both are," she told him quietly.

He turned his head and looked at her.

"Well, why not? Marge and Gower Champion did it. We could, too. The two of us could go far."

The thought excited him, and the way she'd said it he almost believed it. "But, it's *her* act, baby. Rita and I . . ."

She'd made an angry noise with her lips. "She's thirty-five, Tony."

His eyes narrowed further. "Yeah, I know, but . . ."

"But what?" she'd exploded. "Why don't you face it. Rita's been around a long time, maybe too long for you. You're young, Tony, and so am I!"

He'd reached out, rolling her towards him, his mouth searching for hers, his hard hands pulling her close.

From then on he'd known what she wanted, and he soon discovered that every day he was away from her he wanted it too. His eyes would search the billboarding in the lobby of each succeeding hotel they played. *Rita & Tony in Danse de Carnaval*, it would read, and each time he saw it he knew that it wasn't the way he wanted it—not any more.

The glossy print on display was

always the same—the one of him holding Rita by her ankles while he spun her body around and around, her head a fraction of an inch off the floor at each furious spin. Every time his gaze found the headline he tried to visualize it the way he knew now he wanted it to be. *Tony & Doris,* it should read, *Tony & Doris . . .* Doris . . . Doris . .

For the first time he began to accept into his consciousness the fact that Rita was ten years older. The age difference hadn't been important before. Now it was. Now it was easy to feed his awareness that with each passing year the span between them would increase. Suddenly he discovered that she was already too old for him. He'd been a fool not to see it before.

If it hadn't been for those two weeks in Altoona and Doris . . .

Yet never for a moment did he lose sight of the fact that the act was Rita's. The routines were hers; everything was hers, everything. After five years together it had become a fifty-fifty deal on the take, yes. But Rita had never let him forget that she'd picked him out of a two-bit revue in Buffalo, a twenty-year old chorus boy going no place.

She had taught him the routines, riding him, driving him, cracking the whip over him, bullying him, doing everything she knew how to make him the dancer she wanted her partner to be. Now he was Tony of Rita & Tony, and suddenly it wasn't enough.

Gradually, he absorbed the realization that he'd known for a long time now that the act had gone as far as it could. Rita was holding it back—she was holding *him* back. He hadn't known what to do about it before. Now he knew . . . he knew.

Shrewdly, slyly, he began to demand more and more of her at each rehearsal, each performance. He did it so subtly that she never even knew. A step faster here, a stride quicker there, and Rita couldn't keep up.

Their work became ragged and yet no one noticed. Tony was far too clever for that. He didn't press all the time, just enough, and soon Rita began to worry.

At first she didn't say anything and he knew that she was trying desperately to match pace with him. Then, at last, losing her temper one day, she exploded, rebuking him for speeding up.

He looked astonished. "Speeding up! You're kidding, doll!"

"You are! You are!"

"Look, Rita, I'm not speeding up, it's . . ." He broke off cleverly, leaving his unspoken implication just where he wanted it.

She whirled on him furiously. "What do you mean?"

He shrugged, acting flustered. "Nothing, doll. Forget it."

"No! No! Tell me. What did you mean?"

He shrugged. "All right, Rita, if that's the way you want it. "I'm not

speeding up, doll, it's you—you're slowing down."

Her face went pasty. "You're a lousy liar!"

He grimaced. "Okay, Rita, have it your way. But I'm telling you . . . and," he added viciously, "I've been noticing it for quite a while, too."

"You stink! You're lying!"

"Why the hell would I do that?"

She'd stood there, her hands clenched at her sides, her whole body shaking with anger.

He'd put his hand on her shoulder soothingly. "Look, doll, I just want everything to be right for us. We're a team, aren't we? You and me, we're a team."

After that she drove herself furiously, calling frequent morning rehearsals, driving herself, driving . . . He knew then that she was afraid; that she lived in mortal fear of slowing down.

"In our game, doll," he told her one morning after a two-hour rehearsal session, "we've got to expect to slow down and accept it when it comes."

She shuddered. "But not yet, Tony, not for me. I'm still young."

"You're thirty-five," he said brutally.

He saw what that had done to her. Her eyes went dead. He'd expected her to lash out at him in fury. Instead she turned away and crossed to the table, taking a cigarette from her bag. She stood there with her back to him, feathering a long plume of smoke towards the ceiling.

He couldn't help thinking that she wasn't so damned smart after all. She'd have caught on if she were. *He* would have, he told himself.

He went over and took a cigarette, lighting it. "Tired?" he asked.

"No, no." But the way her breasts were heaving beneath her black turtle neck sweater he knew she was near exhaustion. He'd driven her just far enough.

He'd almost felt sorry for her then—almost.

For the next couple of nights their "*Danse de Carnaval*" was okay . . . he made it okay. Then on the third night he again speeded up in spots and this time he knew she was licked.

She sat in the dressing room after they came off and she cried. He'd never seen her cry before!

In the five years she'd never cried once and he'd never known a woman who didn't resort to tears. Perhaps, he'd thought, it was because in a sense Rita wasn't really a woman at all—at least, not to him. They had married only for the convenience of travelling together, and while they had lived as man and wife there had always been an incompleteness about their relationship.

It angered him to see her crying that night. That her tears salted his victory had only seemed to annoy him.

"Oh, Tony, Tony," she'd sobbed, "you've got to slow down, you've got to."

"For me, Tony . . . for us." Her voice had been softer than he'd ever remembered.

He'd known then that it wasn't going to work; that nothing he did was going to work. Rita wasn't just a dancer any more; she was a frightened woman—and she wasn't going to let him go.

He'd thought of the exciting future he'd dreamed of with Doris—and he'd thought of Doris. Hatred for Rita had roared up inside him like a runaway train and it had frightened him at first.

He wasn't sure when the idea of killing Rita had first occurred to him, but he remembered that he'd recoiled from the thought. Then had come the discovery that whenever he was in Doris' arms, where he sought to escape from the jungle of his thoughts, it had no longer been so easy to push aside the idea of murder.

It was Doris who had voiced it first.

"We can't go on like this, Tony," she told him one night, "we can't . . ."

He strained her to him, feeling her warm body twisting, pulsating. "I know baby," he muttered hoarsely, "don't you think I know that."

She kissed him, her lips nibbling at his. "What are you going to do?" she whispered against his mouth.

"I don't know."

"You've got to do something, Tony."

"What?"

He pushed her away, holding her at arms length and their eyes meeting, had mirrored the stark reality of what each was thinking. "You know, don't you?" he murmured.

She nodded. "You tried the other way, Tony. You know you did, you just know it."

"Yeah. I tried like hell."

He grunted and rolled over on his back, staring up at the ceiling. He sighed with a strange kind of relief. It was good to get it out, damned good. And somehow, sharing his burden with Doris made it seem easier. He'd been afraid at first. It was good to know that her strength was something he could draw upon.

For a long while neither of them spoke, then her soft voice prodded. "How, Tony?"

"I don't know yet."

"But you will, won't you, Tony?"

He felt a disturbing sense of irritation at her strained urgency. Then she touched him, rolling her warm hips against his. Killing Rita didn't seem so bad then. It was just something that had to be done.

He used to catch Doris' eye after that, watching them from the wings, and always the urgency within him became a pain he could hardly stand. She didn't nag him about it, yet he could tell looking at her that Doris was getting impatient.

That he no longer shrank from the idea of murder didn't even occur to him. It was the method that absorbed his every waking thought. How? How?

It came to him on the fifth night of a week's engagement in the Blue Room of the Royale Hotel in Baton Rouge. In the final spred-eagle spin of the act, one of Rita's ankles slipped from his grasp. If he hadn't reacted instinctively, grasping her desperately upflung arm, there might have been a serious accident. The back of Rita's head might have . . .

As they left the floor his eye had caught the steel-jacketed corner of the small dais rear stage right. He'd bitten his lip hard, so hard the blood had come.

From that moment on he knew. It would be an accident, a terrible, tragic accident; but it would be an accident.

Doris sensed that he'd found his method to dispose of Rita, but she wouldn't ask. It was almost as if she didn't want to know. So she said nothing and he was glad.

Like most dancers, Tony was a perfectionist, believed in rehearsals —a man trained in the theory that without preparation there could be no performance. So even in this final dance he'd devised for Rita and Tony he demanded of himself the perfection of performance he had learned from Rita herself.

He took a room in a small hotel on the other side of town, away from Rita, away from Doris. This he must do by himself. As often as he could slip away without being observed he went to the room he'd rented. In the two days he had left before the last night of their seven-day engagement at the Royale Hotel, Tony rehearsed as completely and thoroughly as he'd ever done in the five years he'd been with Rita.

He filled a burlap bag with one hundred and five pounds of sawdust and sand—because that was precisely Rita's weight. He rolled up the carpet in the room and in the center of the floor he chalked an exact duplicate of the steel-jacketed corner of the dais on right stage rear of the Blue Room. On one end of the loaded burlap he painted the small circle that represented the exact size of Rita's head; on one side of it was a thick line—the line of her temple just above the right ear.

The first time he swung the whirling bag against the chalk mark on the floor he missed.

He tried it again and again, forcing himself to remember that the actual steel corner of the dais would be almost three inches higher than the chalk mark.

Sweat rolled down his face, stinging its way into his eyes as grasping one end of the bag he simulated the climactic whirling routine of *Danse de Carneval.* Over and over again he spun bare-footed across the room, whirling the bag furiously

just off the floor as he did his dancing partner each night at the end of their performance.

There are some in the business who estimate that a man is capable of whirling his partner at the amazing speed of forty miles an hour. Tony didn't know, didn't even care. All he knew was that with the full strength of his legs and arms he could spin Rita around at such a tremendous rate of speed that when her head smashed into that steel-jacketed corner she would . . .

It wasn't until she second afternoon that he was completely satisfied that he'd thoroughly mastered what to a casual observer would appear to be an unfortunate loss of direction. When the loaded bag thudded into the chalk mark on the floor for the last time, Tony sat down on the bed, mopping his soaking wet body with a towel.

His attack had been so furious that he'd almost obliterated the face he'd painted on the bag. Each time he'd smashed it against the floor a little more sand and sawdust had seeped out of the battered burlap. He sat there staring at the smile pile on the floor.

A few hours more, just a few, and it would be all over.

After a respectable wait, he'd announce the formation of a new team . . . *Tony & Doris*. Then, nothing would stop them, nothing! He'd inherit Rita's act, her routines, even the balance of the year's bookings. After that, the sky would be the limit and he would no longer be tied down, held back by a selfish woman who had long since passed her prime. It would be Tony and Doris . . . Doris . . . Doris . . .

He had been so carried away by his thoughts of the future that when he remembered to look at his watch he'd seen that it was far later than he realized. He hurriedly swept up the sand and sawdust and put it in the closet with the battered bag. He'd come back later when it was all over and dispose of them. He'd have plenty of time—then!

He pulled the worn carpet back over the chalked mark on the floor and getting dressed went over to the Royale Hotel.

While he added the finishing touches to his make-up, he watched Rita moving about the small dressing room and tried not to think of what she would look like in less than half an hour. Instead he fought to think only of Doris . . . Doris . . .

He looked at his clown's face in the mirror and he was glad that the red and white make-up concealed from Rita the murder written there.

He finished dressing without speaking.

He didn't look at her as he crossed to the door. "I'll be off stage waiting," was all he said over his shoulder. He thought surely his voice must have trembled enough to warn her. He hesitated.

She was sitting on the bench pulling a stocking up her slender leg. She paused, her hands cupping the whiteness of her naked thigh. She didn't look at him; she didn't even answer.

He closed the door quickly.

She turned then. The clocking door had the sound of finality. She stared after him for a long while then putting her head down in her hands she cried bitterly.

Off stage, Tony leaned against a prop and waited. Doris came over and standing next to him unobtrusively touched his hand. He pulled it away.

"Wait in the dressing room," he whispered hoarsely.

"Why? I always . . ."

"No!" he grunted. "In the dressing room. Do you hear, damn it, wait in the dressing room."

Her lovely face registered irritation with him but she didn't argue. Instead she turned on her heel and walked away.

He stood there waiting, feeling sudden sweat bead up all over him. He heard the perfunctory applause from out front and the music break out in a run-on.

Jules Dakar, the M.C., came off as the line of girls ran on for the production number with the show's featured singer.

Jules stopped. "How about a butt, kid?"

Tony stared at him. "Huh?"

"I said, how about a smoke?" He was holding a pack of cigarettes toward him. "What's the matter, kid? What are you so jumpy about?"

He forced himself to laugh. It had a hoarse sound. "So, who's jumpy?" he made himself say.

Jules grinned. "Want a smoke?"

"Yeah." He took one and held it in his fingers.

"See you around, boy," Jules said.

"Sure, feller."

He watched the comic walk away and he could feel the sweat rolling down his belly. He dropped the cigarette unlighted on the floor and ground it underfoot. He was commencing to feel the nervousness returning again so he started doing knee bends to loosen up.

She didn't come out until the very last moment and that annoyed him. Jules was back on the floor by then and had just announced them. The band was going into the opening bars of their intro when she ran towards him, her hand slipping into his.

"You're late," he growled.

She didn't answer, her eyes glaring at him from behind the full face gold mask. Then they were on stage.

By the time they went into the final stage of their *Danse de Carnaval,* Tony's blouse was pasted against his chest with cold perspiration. As usual, they hadn't spoken a word during the entire act, and this time he hadn't bothered to speed up or try to make her look bad. It didn't matter any more, nothing would matter any more for Rita.

As the music stopped suddenly and the twin spots picked them out at opposite ends of the darkened floor, the throbbing roll of the tympani began. She came running across the floor, throwing herself into his arms with a new abandon that gave him a macabre sense of amusement. She was too late . . . too late . . .

Lifting her he felt a strange exhultation. Excitement was a live thing that rode his body for thrills.

The two spotlights fused into one and he raised her, holding her body at arms' length above his head. Then as he slipped one hand quickly between her thighs, she grasped it and he let go with the other, holding her high above him with one arm.

When the applause died away he let her fall heavily, catching her with ease just before she hit the floor. Again the tympani drum etched a border of suspense around them. Reaching down, he grasped both her ankles and began to whirl her dead weight through the air.

His heart was pounding crazily now and in his wild excitement he fought to remember those two days of rehearsal in the little hotel room —the precise calculations with the sand and sawdust filled bag. Around and around, at ever increasing speed, he deftly maneuvered her limp body closer and closer to the floor at each wild sweep.

The music had crept in now but he didn't hear it. The roaring noise of the animal jungle in his ears was a savage cacophony of sound.

Silently he began to count. One—two—three— Then, appearing to lose his balance, he staggered just once towards right stage rear and lost his grasp of one ankle.

The sickening thud of her head against the steel-pointed corner of the dais was heard even above the crescendo of the music. There were screams from some of the ringside tables and then a sort of concerted groan. The music faltered and died.

The floor lights flooded on and several people rushed out on stage, bending over the still body.

He looked away from the blood that was beginning to stain the floor . . . he looked towards the wings . . . and Rita, who was slowly coming on stage towards him.

He stared at her, horror a dry bubble in his throat.

Her face was very white, her eyes dead hollows of accusation and guilt.

"Rita . . ." he croaked.

She didn't speak; didn't even look down at the dead girl. She took her closed fist out of the pocket of her robe and held it out towards him.

Mechanically, he opened his trembling hand to receive the tiny pile of sand and sawdust she filtered into his palm. Then she turned around and moving woodenly, walked slowly away from him.

She was young, she was beautiful and Neil had paid the price

YOU PAYS YOUR MONEY

BY
LAWRENCE HARVEY

THE GIRL LIVED in the apartment down the hall. Neil Grimes often watched her come and go with avid interest. She was young—and Neil had confined himself to merely looking. Still, she interested him and, he admitted, had he been about fifteen years younger or had she been a little older, he probably would have done something about it.

He sized her up as about twenty one, well stacked for that age, with a wiseness about her eyes that went beyond her scant years. Her old man worked at night and slept during the day and her mother stayed pie-eyed on anything that came in a bottle, so the kid was left to her own devices most of the time and, in this neighborhood, Neil could

well imagine what those devices were.

So, Neil only looked, even if his mind did, at times, conjure up delightful visions of intimate occasions with her. He was no fool; these kids meant only one thing in his book—trouble. He meant to steer clear of this one.

That was why he was shocked, and a little frightened, too, when she walked into his room that day. She stood there, smiling at him in an enticing manner. Neil was stunned into momentary silence. She strode in, swinging her hips like some floozie on the make. She eased the door shut after her.

"Whatta you want?" Neil asked, after regaining his composure.

She stepped closer to him and he had to admit that she was sure some dish. As far as Neil was concerned, she looked mature enough and well equipped to handle most any situation. She was tall, lithe in figure, with pleasing curvatures in the right places. "Just want to talk," she said. "Nothing wrong with talking, is there?"

Neil strode over and opened the door. He felt safer that way. "You'd better get outa here," he said. "Your folks would be madder than hell if they caught you here."

She laughed and kicked the door shut again. What the hell was she up to? He wondered. "Okay," Neil said, "talk. Whatta you want to talk about?"

She looked him straight in the face and said, "Money."

"Money?" He asked. "What money?"

"The money you're going to give me," she replied matter-of-factly.

This really shook him! This kid was trying to wring money out of him. How? Suddenly, it hit him and he felt funny little stabs of prickly cold shooting up and down his spine. "You're nuts! I'm not going to give you any money. Now, scram outa here!"

She kept on smiling. "I think you will," she said. Then, she reached up and caught the front of her dress, looked at him and said, "You want me to rip this all the way down the front and then scream? I can really let out a lula of a scream."

"Whatta you getting at?"

"Just this," she said. "For the sum of one hundred bucks, I won't rip my dress to shreds and I won't scream and I won't say that you tried to attack me. Take your choice, mister, shell out a hundred bucks or go to jail!"

She had him where it hurt and he knew it. His hands shook as he took out a cigarette and lit it. She just stood there, with her hand at the top of her dress, waiting. Damn her! How could a kid get this cold and calculating at this age? Boy, they sure grow up fast nowadays.

"Look," Neil pleaded. "I don't have that kind of money. For the luva God, have a heart. Will you?"

"You'd better get it and get it fast," she said as she exerted pres-

sure on the thin material. He could hear it rip slightly.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "I . . . . I don't have the cash. Honest I don't. But, I . . . . I could write you a check." He was sweating, but good!

"Get writing, then," she commanded. "And, It'd better be good."

He wrote the check with trembling hands. She snatched it from his hand when he had finished, looked it over quickly and smiled, her eyes reflecting greed. "This better be good," she said.

"It is," Neil replied, knowing that the check was a good one. I had to be. A kid like that would stop at nothing. Better not to cross her.

"Thanks, mister," she said as she left.

He kept his door shut and locked after that, in spite of the intense heat. But, the closed door wouldn't keep out the sound of her clicking heels down the hall every day. When he heard her, he thought of his hundred bucks and it made him sick. The damn little tramp!

Several weeks later, right after the first of the month, Neil was sitting in his hot room brooding over the loss of his money when he heard her coming down the hall as she did about this time every day. His hatred for the girl had reached a high peak. He waited until she was almost even with his door, then, suddenly, he flung open the door, grabbed her by the arm roughly and yanked her into his room. Quickly, he closed the door and locked it.

"Hey," she said, fright creeping into her eyes. "What is this?"

He grinned and walked toward her, slowly, deliberately. "I got my bank statement today," he said.

"So what?"

"The check I wrote you cleared. I got the canceled check. Proof of payment. A receipt!"

She backed toward the wall. "Look, mister," she said, "what's this all about?"

"I think you know," he said. "You know damn well what I'm going to do. Don't you?" He laughed aloud. "And, you know what? You won't say one solitary word about it. Will you? Who's going to believe anything you say when I show 'em this canceled check. Huh?"

CONFESSION

He killed the woman, shot her in the back and there were witnesses to prove it. But he would never be convicted of murder.

BY C. B. GILFORD

You might say that I observed Joe Beiser's criminal career from the beginning. And I learned from it, learned a great truth that you don't find stated in any of the police manuals. I guess maybe you can't state it. You have to see it work out. I'll tell you how it worked out.

My contact with Joe Beiser began one day when the cruiser I was riding in got radio instructions to investigate an armed hold-up of a confectionery on Russell Street. This was the kind of thing that happens a dozen times every day in this city. Once in a while you catch a thief, but most of the time you just go through the old routine of asking questions, trying to get a description, then filing a report on the mess and forgetting it till you accidentally pick up a guy who's real talkative and can clear up a whole bunch of these incidents.

Russell Street wasn't the best neighborhood. Violence wasn't new here. The fact that there'd been a hold-up didn't attract more than half a dozen curious onlookers. So we didn't have to push our way through any crowds to get into the confectionery.

It was a little hole-in-the-wall place that made you wonder why any self-respecting bandit would bother. There were a few shelves for grocery items, a small meat counter with cold cuts displayed, an ice cream cabinet, candy, cigarettes, a couple of tables with chairs, and a cash register. Joe and Sarah Beiser identified themselves as the proprietors.

I let the uniformed cop with me note down the details. It was routine stuff. There was nothing in the details of the case or in the

Beisers themselves that was very interesting.

Joe Beiser was thirty-five, maybe forty. He wasn't bad looking, had graying hair, appeared intelligent. Also he had a harassed look about him that seemed more habitual than the result of the hold-up.

Maybe Sarah was the explanation for the harassed look. She was as old as her husband, possibly a bit older. There was nothing attractive about her. She had a sharp face, grimly tied back black hair, a nasal voice, and an aggressive manner. Poor old Joe had made a big mistake in marrying her. Maybe he knew it.

"The man had nothing but a knife," she told us when she had finished with the bandit's description.

"Nothing but a knife, she says," Joe answered. "She wants me to go after a guy with a knife."

"We got knives here," Sarah argued.

"I should get into a knife fight? What do I know about using knives?"

"If more people would show a little spunk and fight back," Sarah said, "we'd have fewer hold-ups. Isn't that right, Sergeant?"

"It's pretty dangerous," I told her.

"There, you see!" Joe came in triumphantly. "The Sergeant agrees with me."

But Sarah wasn't to be bested by the mere word of an authority. She turned her wrath toward me. "This is the third time we've been robbed in the past two years," she said. "We work hard for our money, and some lazy punk can come in here with a knife and walk out with everything we got."

Joe explained. "She worries about a little money. She'd let me get my throat cut for a little money. And she's loaded."

I didn't think much about it at the time, but the odd fact that the wife was "loaded", that the money seemed to belong solely to her, this fact filed itself away in my memory. Later on it became an important link in the chain.

"You're just a coward," Sarah hissed at her husband.

"I'm not a coward. If I had a gun, it would be different . . ."

"Then get a gun."

It was almost like a dare. For a minute, Joe faced his wife. The looks they exchanged were filled with hatred. Finally he turned to me. "Sergeant," he said, "do you think I can get a permit to own a gun?"

"Make an application," I told him.

We were interrupted at that point. Somebody came rushing in the front door. It was a girl. And she was about as different from Sarah Beiser as two females can be.

It was a hot day and she had on a light, fluttery dress. It didn't cling to her, but as she burst through the door it flowed around

her. She had a full figure, the kind that catches and holds the eye, the curves all pronounced and generous. The face was interesting too, the eyes big and dark, the cheekbones visible, the lips full and sensual. Long shiny black hair, tied in the back and then falling down past her shoulders.

"I heard there was a hold-up," she began breathlessly.

Joe Beiser whirled toward her, and their eyes met. The girl stopped, apparently embarrassed.

"Nobody hurt, I see," she finished lamely.

"No, nobody hurt," Joe said.

You didn't have to be a psychiatrist to guess that there was something between Joe Beiser and this girl. Just exactly what this something was, wasn't clear of course. But I found myself speculating. Poor Joe, with an unpleasant old hag for a wife—it was natural for his eye to roam. And with a girl like this one around the neighborhood, he had a natural target. But the girl was in her early twenties. What did she see in Joe?

I should have known better than to ask myself a question like that. How can you tell about women? The reasons for their choices of men can be pretty mysterious sometimes. Did old Joe have any money to spend on a chick like this? Or what could he promise her for the future? Or was she just interested in him for his own sake?

The fact was clear that she was interested in some way She'd seemed genuinely worried when she'd come through that door asking if there'd been a hold-up. It had been a slip, I guess. But I wasn't the only one who had noticed it. Sarah Beiser was looking at the girl with narrowed eyes. And Joe was suddenly embarrassed. He turned away and shuffled behind the counter.

"Miss, you know anything about this hold-up?" I asked her.

"No, I just heard about it," she answered quickly.

We took her name—which was May Kersting—and her address. There was nothing else to be done, so we left the three of them there and went back to the car.

"Some babe, huh, Magarian?" my driver said.

"Yeah some babe," I agreed.

May Kersting made the whole incident easier to remember.

. . . And my memory was put to the test, because almost a whole year went by before the next thing happened.

I'd been transferred to Homicide, and I was doing some legwork on the other side of town when I heard the radio call. There'd been a shooting of some kind, but the details weren't clear. Two things were familiar though. Russell Street and the name of Beiser

I checked in by radio and told the Captain I knew the people and requested permission to go to Rus-

sell Street. The Captain said to hustle over.

I recognized the confectionery when I got there. Only this time the scene was a bit different. Before there'd been just a few very mildly curious bystanders. Now there was quite a crowd, all of them craning to get a peak through the front window of the place. I had to elbow them out of the way. The cop posted at the door helped when he saw me coming. His uniform was more persuasive than my plain clothes.

Inside half a dozen cops were milling around. A body with a white sheet draped over it lay in the middle of the floor. I walked over, bent down, and lifted the sheet. The body was Sarah Beiser.

"Hi, Lieutenant." It was Sergeant Rickert.

I stood up. "What gives?" I asked him.

Rickert took my elbow and guided me back to the rear of the store. Joe Beiser was sitting on a little stool back there. He wasn't showing any kind of emotion. His face was blank. Looked like shock.

"Mr. Beiser," Rickert said. "This is Lieutenant Magarian of Homicide. He'd like you to tell him what happened."

It was fairly obvious that Joe Beiser didn't remember me. Or if he did, he certainly didn't show it. His eyes were completely empty when he turned them toward me, and they stayed that way.

The story he told me was halting and uncertain, and Rickert had to prod him now and then. But considering the circumstances, it seemed at the time perfectly understandable.

Joe and Sarah had been in the store together, and there was one customer, a nine-year-old boy who was buying some ice cream. It was a slow time. Most of the neighborhood kids hadn't gotten out of school yet. A young man came into the store. Beiser described him—about twenty, slight, blond hair, wore a white tee shirt and tan trousers. He was carrying a paper sack, looked like a lunch. When he saw the store was almost empty, he opened the sack and pulled out a gun.

Beiser's gun was on a shelf underneath the cash register. He reacted automatically. He shouldn't have gone for the gun, he admitted, because a kid was in the store. But he didn't stop to think. He ducked and ran toward the cash register. Sarah was near the front door. As Beiser remembered it, the young bandit had first pointed his gun at Sarah. But what exactly he was doing while Beiser himself was scrambling for his own gun, the proprietor didn't know exactly. Probably he was taken completely by surprise, lost his nerve. Because when Beiser came up with his gun, the bandit was heading toward the door.

The bandit didn't fire at all. But

Beiser pumped three shots at him. He thought he missed with all of them, because the young man didn't stop. One of the bullets, however, hit Sarah Beiser. She was already dead when the police arrived. A neighbor had heard the shots and put in the call.

Sergeant Rickert filled me in on the supporting details. The nine-year-old boy, although obviously not completely reliable, told approximately the same story as Beiser. Alerted by the shots, several neighbors had seen the bandit running away. Description and dress tallied with Beiser's. The neighbors had also noted that the fleeing bandit had a gun. Which was their explanation for their not trying to stop him.

Rickert had Beiser's gun. Three shots had been fired from it. One bullet had gone through the glass of the front door and out into the street somewhere. The second bullet was lodged high-up in the wall over the door. The third was in Sarah Beiser's corpse.

A final fact—which meant nothing to Rickert, of course—May Kersting was not around anywhere.

I had my own ideas right from the start, but I decided against making any big play immediately. Maybe it was because I didn't know exactly how to proceed. So I just let the wheels grind.

The testimony of all the witnesses was put down on paper. Photographs and fingerprints were taken. Down at headquarters Beiser signed a statement. Ballistics and medical gave their verdicts.

I presented all these facts to Captain Norman, together with the year-old hold-up report which I'd dug out of the files. Then when he'd digested everything, I told him my observations about Joe and Sarah Beiser and May Kersting.

"Magarian," he said, "aren't you reaching a little bit?"

"I may be," I told him. "I have a suspicious mind."

"Have you checked the neighborhood to see what people have to say about Joe Beiser and May Kersting?"

"In a preliminary way."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing solid."

"Well, what's there to go on then?"

"Just Beiser's strange inability to hit the target he was aiming at and his uncanny accuracy in hitting his wife."

"Accidents happen."

"Okay," I said, "I'll admit that at the moment I have nothing to prove it wasn't an accident. And it'll have to go down on the books as an accident till I find something to prove otherwise. But do I have your permission to look for that proof?"

"You have the permission if you've got the time."

"I'll take the time," I said . . .

. . . I took plenty of time And found absolutely nothing. Nothing,

that is, that could send a man to the penitentiary or the chair.

Of other kinds of stuff there was plenty. Wisps, straws in the wind, odors, emanation, threads. The sort of thing you can smell, almost taste, that leads you on tantalizingly, shapeless, yet certain, tangible yet still not solid.

First of all, Sarah Beiser had had money. The little confectionery had been deceptively profitable for the past dozen years. The Beisers had lived with almost cruel, insane frugality. And Sarah hadn't just stowed her money under a mattress. She'd made shrewd investments, and the kitty had grown. Nearly everything had been in her name alone, and Joe couldn't have touched it. But now Sarah was dead, and as soon as the legalities were taken care of, he would be comfortably well off.

As for May Kersting, Joe had been very discreet while Sarah was alive. Nobody could swear on a Bible that there had been anything between May and Joe. They'd never been seen out together anywhere. But still there were things. May had hung around the store quite a lot, particularly at times when Sarah wasn't there. And there were suspicions that Joe had given her money, robbed his own cash register to do it. Nobody had actually seen any of these transactions, but they seemed to answer my year-old question of why May had been interested in Joe.

Now, however, with Sarah out of the way, the romance bloomed. I watched it. Joe bought a car. He dressed up. He took May out to places. Nice places that cost money.

It got me finally, watching them. Sure, you can understand a guy's not bothering to be a hypocrite when he's lost a wife he didn't love. But when the wife died at the man's own hands, accidentally or otherwise, you expect him to be decent enough to put on some kind of an act. I guess it was Beiser's brazenness that got me, seeing a man I knew was a criminal so boldly enjoying the fruits of his crime.

He still owned the confectionery, although he kept irregular hours. I drifted in there one day about two months after Sarah's death. Beiser remembered me, of course, but he didn't betray the slightest uneasiness. The guy had no nerves, I guess.

"Hello, Lieutenant," he greeted me. "You haven't found that bandit yet, have you?"

"I haven't been looking for him, Mr. Beiser," I said.

His eyebrows went up in mild surprise. But he didn't say anything. He waited, as if he sensed I'd come on some definite errand.

"I'm in Homicide," I said "The bandit doesn't concern me. He didn't kill anybody."

Beiser's face was a careful, calm mask. "He was indirectly responsible for my wife's death," he said.

"No," I answered. "He wasn't the

cause. Not even the indirect cause."

"No?"

"He wasn't the cause. He was the opportunity."

Nothing happened in Beiser's face. Not a muscle twitched. He didn't even blink. Yet I was perfectly certain that he understood my meaning, that we understood each other. So he didn't waste any time arguing.

"If you're saying, Lieutenant, that I killed my wife Sarah, then of course you're right. A bullet from my gun killed her, and my finger pulled the trigger."

"I'm saying more than that."

"Yes, I see that you are."

"I'm saying that you plotted your wife's death deliberately and patiently. This place is in a bad neighborhood and had already been robbed several times. You knew that sooner or later it would be robbed again. So you bought a gun, and you waited. When the opportunity came, you took a chance, of course. You could have been shot at yourself. But your wife's money and May Kersting were worth the risk. You aimed your gun at your wife deliberately and you pulled the trigger deliberately."

He didn't actually smile or anything. Yet I got the impression he was laughing at me. "So, Lieutenant, you're a mindreader. You know what was going on inside my mind when I was shooting the gun, eh? So you know it was murder and not an accident."

"You've been shadowed ever since your wife's death, Beiser." I thought maybe I could scare him.

But he only shrugged. "I'd expected that," he said. Then he put his elbows down on the counter and leaned across it, speaking softly. "So now you know I got my wife's money. And I have a very nice girl. But what does that prove, Lieutenant? What will it ever prove?"

It was a moment for confidence. "You argue it pretty smoothly, Beiser," I said. "Just as if you had it all figured out this way before you ever pulled the trigger."

I think he was on the verge of admitting something. He certainly felt safe—and he had a right to—and there was a certain bravado about him. But he caught himself just in time. "I just figured out what you would probably figure out, Lieutenant," he said.

A cop isn't supposed to resort to violence to extract a confession. I knew it and Beiser knew it. Also he knew I was right on the edge of violence, but certain that I wouldn't step over. So it had to be a threat, nothing more.

"When you're in my business for a long time," I began, "you get hunches about things. You feel them. You smell them. I can smell you, Beiser. There's a real stink of murder in here right now. And if you think I'm going to forget it, you're crazy."

"But you have no evidence, Lieu-

tenant. Nothing to go on."

"I'm going to keep on looking."

"I don't see how you will ever find evidence. It's locked up inside here." He tapped an index finger on his forehead. "A man's mind is his castle. And you'll never get inside my castle, Lieutenant."

"I'll wait outside till doomsday," I promised him . . .

. . . Beiser became an obsession with me from that day on. I'm not a married man, so I have no off-duty commitments. Beiser became my free-time hobby, my sole entertainment. I didn't have a private life of my own. I lived on the outskirts of Beiser's life.

He soon gave up the confectionery. I knew he would. It was a business that bored him. And he was really a man of too much talent.

Also there was May Kersting. I'd dug up a few more facts about her, among them another possible reason why she'd hung around Beiser for so long. May was a singer. Not much of a voice. Just the popular stuff. She'd sung at little affairs like weddings and women's club meetings, but never had achieved what she wanted. For what she wanted, a girl didn't need a great voice so much, just had to be able to overflow an evening gown in the right way. She could do that.

Beiser sold the confectionery, and he was also beginning to get his hands on Sarah's money. He bought a small night spot called the Gardenia Club, hired an orchestra, and installed May as the vocalist.

I attended the Gardenia Club's opening night under its new management. There was a fair crowd, the place had about the right lack of illumination, and the liquor was reasonable. Beiser saw me come in, and told my waiter that my bill was on the house. It was his way, I guess, of saying that he wasn't afraid of me, that I could keep my eye on him and May, and it wouldn't even cost me anything.

May sang about a dozen songs. She was a little nervous, this being her first night club engagement. But the white dress she wore, with her tawny shoulders and black hair, made a nice combination. She wouldn't get very far in this racket, I predicted, but right now she was having her kicks.

And Joe Beiser was having his. Every time she sang he stood back against the wall and watched her. He was wearing a tuxedo, and he looked very prosperous, almost like a big shot. He beamed with the pride of ownership all the time May stood out there in the spotlight.

Then between her numbers, he and May sat at a table in a far corner. Beiser knew I was there, but he ignored me. All his attention was on the girl.

Maybe you'd say they were both happy that night. If a guy who has murdered his wife can ever really be happy, that is. May's career was

launched. Joe had money, a business, and a good-looking girl. Maybe that adds up to happiness.

But that night was it. That night was the peak of Joe Beiser's career. He hadn't had it so good for years, then he had built up to this, and he would never have it so good again.

Because from that night, Joe's fortunes went straight down hill . . . all the way to the bottom . . .

. . . Two days later at headquarters, leafing through the records of mayhem committed in our city in the preceding twenty-four hours, I came across the name of Joe Beiser. But this time Joe was the victim.

I'd been on the night shift, or I might have been there to witness the whole thing. The report told enough to whet my curiosity. I drove over to the hospital to find out the rest.

Beiser was still partially under the influence of sedatives. His head was swathed in a huge bandage, and his left arm was in a cast that was suspended out and away from his body by ropes and pulleys coming down from a steel apparatus over his bed. But I saw in his eyes that he identified me as soon as I stepped into the room. And there was venom in his gaze.

"You put him up to this, didn't you?" he accused me. "You couldn't get at me, so you had one of your friends do it."

I pulled a chair up close to his bed. "If you're talking about Mike Kysela, he's no friend of mine."

I had the basic facts from the report, which had quoted the story Beiser told the investigating officers. Mike Kysela, a well-known local hoodlum chief and a night spot owner himself, had come visiting the Gardenia Club with some of his friends, probably to get a line on the new competition. What Kysela had liked best about the Gardenia Club was its vocalist. He'd invited May to his table. Beiser, who was apparently the jealous type, objected. An argument ensued, then a fight. Kysela himself wasn't involved, but a couple of his companions were. One of these was being held pending further investigation.

"All you cops and gangsters are friends," Beiser went on.

"I don't think I have to defend the department before you," I said.

A shadow of pain crossed his face, and he glanced away. "Well, what do you want here?" he asked after a moment.

"As I explained to you before, Bieser, I work in Homicide. I don't deal with tavern brawls. I'm interested in murder."

"So?"

"So I thought maybe your recent little experience has given you a chance to think things over."

"What things?"

"Oh, maybe the poetic justice of this. You take your wife's money and open a place so your girl friend can show off her talent. Her talent

is so spectacular that Mike Kysela gets interested, and the sugar daddy ends up here in the hospital. Doesn't that make you think a little, Beiser?"

"Shut up!"

"Why should I shut up? Why should I tiptoe in here and be so careful of your feelings? You're a murderer, Beiser. I don't give a damn what happens to you. If I'd been right there and seen Kysela's mob pasting you, I wouldn't have tried to stop 'em. I didn't suggest this to Kysela, but I'm not sorry it happened. In fact, I'm glad. If I couldn't have you, I'm glad Kysela got a piece of you."

"Go away." There was more pleading than anger in his voice now.

I pushed back the chair and stood up. "Okay, I'll go," I said. "One thing I'm still curious about though, Beiser. Where's May Kersting? Why isn't she here holding your hand?"

He didn't answer. He just closed his eyes and lay there. A muscle kept twitching at one corner of his mouth. I turned and left, slamming the door after me.

Later on, my conscience bothered me a little about the way I'd acted at the hospital. Not too seriously though. You're not supposed to kick a man when he's down. But does that golden rule apply to a murderer?

I didn't go back to the hospital. But two days later, a very curious and significant thing happened. The companion of Mike Kysela's, the guy who was being held for beating up Joe Beiser, was suddenly released. Looking into the reasons for this, I found that it was a matter of evidence. May Kersting, the key witness to the whole affair, had changed her story in subtle little ways. But these little ways amounted to a big difference. Now it appeared that Joe Beiser had attacked Kysela with a bottle, and that the efforts of Kysela's friends which had sent Beiser to the hospital were actually a brave defense of an innocent man. Anyway, the guy was sprung.

All of which took me that night to the Villa Romano, Kysela's own place. My profession was well known there, and I was shown to a good table. But niether the recent squabble at the Gardenia Club nor my presence here was reason enough for a big man like Kysela to hide anything.

There was a well-known, highly paid songbird performing that week at the Villa. But late in the evening when it didn't matter much, when most of the patrons were either too drunk or too bored to care, Kysela himself announced the appearance of a new talent. And then May Kersting stepped into the spotlight and sang a little song. More nervous than the first time I'd seen her sing. But more thrilled, I guess. The Villa was bigger time than the Gardenia Club.

I wanted to go back to the hospital that night and tell Beiser about it. But then I decided the nurses wouldn't care for visitors at that hour, police or not, anyway Beiser would hear about it without my telling him. I could wait.

I kept track of things. The Gardenia Club, minus its star and its proprietor, had closed temporarily. May Kersting continued to sing now and then at the Villa Romano. And she moved to a new and bigger apartment.

Beiser was released from the hospital after three weeks, without his head bandage and with his arm in a sling. As far as I knew, he didn't go looking for May. Which indicated he knew where she was, and either he knew perfectly well he couldn't get her back or he was too much of a coward to try.

But after another month he reopened the Gardenia Club. I attended the re-opening too. Beiser was looking pretty good. He still had the sling, but it was a black silk one now, which went well with his tuxedo. I went straight to the bar this time, and he signalled the bartender to give me a drink.

"You're a stubborn guy, Beiser," I said.

He stood there in his customary place at the end of the bar and stared back at me. I took the free drink and lifted the glass in a toast. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, isn't there?" I said.

"Magarian," he said, "doesn't it ever bother your conscience how you waste the taxpayers' money chasing after me?"

"I do it on my own time," I assured him.

"But it's still a waste of time."

"I don't think so. I've been nicely rewarded. Fifty percent anyway. You killed your wife to get her money and to get May Kersting. Now May Kersting is gone."

"There are lots of women," he said. He was pretending, of course.

"And you still have the money, is that what you mean?"

"I have this." He gestured in a big circle.

"This night club? Beiser, you're not the kind of guy for this kind of business. This is for real slick operators. This is a dangerous business for an amateur."

I think he turned a shade paler. "Are you threatening me?" he demanded.

I downed the rest of the drink and laughed at him. "Me?" I said. "I'm just a cop . . ."

. . . But I was also a prophet. I'd been one when I told Beiser that he was in a dangerous business.

In our city, you understand, the night club racket, almost anything involving liquor, is a strange, mysterious, and highly perilous game. There are powers that be, and these powers want to have a say in certain operations. Some people get along with them. Others don't.

Joe Beiser didn't get along.

Maybe I could have warned him. Maybe I didn't even want to. Maybe he would have listened. Probably not.

Whether it had anything to do with Mike Kysela, I don't honestly know. But since Mike is not particularly a nice guy, I would count this as a possibility.

It happened about five A.M., just before dawn. I happened to be riding in a cruiser when the stuff came over the radio, and I had the driver rush me over there. But it was a long way across town, and I missed part of it.

By the time we got there, the Gardenia Club was so enveloped in flames that not even the most optimistic fireman or insurance adjustor could have much hope for it. But somebody stopped long enough to tell me what had just happened.

"The guy that owns the place . . . he's nuts, I guess . . . said he had all his dough in there . . . and he went in after it . . ."

I don't know exactly how I felt as I stood there and waited. I don't even know exactly what I was waiting for. Nobody could come out of that inferno alive. Maybe I was waiting, like a hungry glutton, for my pigeon to come out roasted.

But then it happened. A flaming figure stumbled out of the Gardenia Club. Other figures ran toward it, pounced on it, suffocated the flames in blankets. Then the thing was loaded onto a stretcher and placed in the ambulance.

To save time, so that my job wouldn't interfere with the jobs of the lads who were foolishly and hopelessly trying to save Beiser's life, I rode along in the ambulance. While we clanged and sirened through the awakening streets, I leaned over the dying man and tried to talk to him.

I was just taking for granted it was Beiser, of course. It didn't look like Beiser or anything human. His hair and eyebrows were singed off, and his face was cooked, like a well-done hamburger. But I had to do it now, to get it from him now, or I never would.

"Beiser," I yelled at him above the siren, "this is Lieutenant Magarian. You're dying, you know that. So how about it? I want a confession. I want you to confess that you wilfully intended to kill your wife Sarah."

For a long time, I didn't know whether he heard me. But then finally his mouth moved a little. Probably the movement was painful. But then again, maybe he was beyond pain.

"Magarian . . ."

It came out just barely audible. I leaned closer. "Yes?" I encouraged him.

"Go to hell," he said.

And maybe he would have spit in my face too. But there's no moisture anywhere in a guy burned like that. Besides, I think he died right after he said that . . .

For weeks Vetter had been watching and planning and waiting, but Vetter was a kind man and somehow murder was just not his way of doing things.

ON SECOND THOUGHT

BY CARROLL MAYERS

Mark Vetter swung the car to the curb, braked to a silent stop, cutting the headlamps. He'd carefully chosen the spot: halfway up the block, shadowed by a wide-spreading oak, but with the corner street light affording a clear view of the house, his house.

The night was cool, crisp with the first hint of fall, but Vetter was perspiring. Sweat slicked his forehead and upper lip; his palms were clammy. He dropped his hands from the wheel, scrubbed them on his knees. For weeks he'd been wracked by the dual torment of knowledge of his wife's infidelity with Ray Ardmore, and an insidious conviction of his own inability at retaliation. But not any more; he'd reached a decision. Tonight he would confront them both, and do what he had to do . . .

"Try not to be late, dear."

Vetter's lips twitched as he recalled Phyllis' admonition only minutes ago when he'd informed her he was going back to the office to complete some reports. She'd come to him in the hall and slipped smooth arms about his neck. But she hadn't pressed close, hadn't ground her hips with a throaty little laugh as she'd once done, and her mouth had only briefly brushed his, cold, unresponsive.

"Afraid I will be," Vetter had said, making it sound regretfully casual. "Don't wait up if you're tired." He left then, driven off

only to circle the block, park up the street, awaiting Ray Ardmore's arrival.

Ardmore. Vetter's intestines knotted. The man had been transferred from the firm's west coast branch, and Vetter had charitably taken it upon himself to ease the transition. He'd invited Ardmore home to dinner, gone bowling with him, introduced him to his own circle of friends.

There had been subsequent times when Vetter had idly attributed Phyllis' periods of intangible indifference to passing moods, but it wasn't until he'd returned one night earlier than scheduled from an upstate auditing assignment that Vetter had learned the truth. That was when he chanced to recognize Ardmore's club coupe parked on a side street near his home—and all of Phyllis' cool apathy, the evasive glint in her eye he'd wondered about, everything strangely offbeat in their marriage, had abruptly coalesced into sickening understanding.

Numb with the shock of grim certainty, Vetter drove past his house, walked back on trembling legs, heart thudding painfully. It was dark, the neighborhood deserted. Vetter silently crossed the lawn, a gap in the drapes suddenly drawing him to the living room window.

One glance within was sufficient. Phyllis and Ardmore were locked in fervent embrace on the divan, Phyllis' filmy negligee flauntingly disarrayed . . .

From that night—which he spent at a hotel, returning home the following evening on schedule—Vetter's only thought was reprisal. He gave Phyllis no inkling of his knowledge, even invited Ardmore for dinner more frequently than heretofore, sometimes deliberately absenting himself. But every waking moment Vetter's mind was churning feverishly, plotting revenge against the pair who had betrayed him.

He was concerned with method and also misgivings he would himself weaken in the crisis, but he grimly fought off indecision until he was confident of his resolution.

Fate in the form of a sudden series of neighborhood robberies gave Vetter his method. That was when he bought the gun. Only a cheap nickel plated .32 revolver, far less formidable than the German Luger he owned, but adequate for his purpose.

A bold house breaker . . . panic . . . a double shooting . . .

Vetter's train of thought snapped short as a familiar figure abruptly emerged from the shadows beyond the street light, approached his home.

Ardmore, ever cautious, walking from his car in the next block; coming on schedule in Vetter's absence as he had on countless nights and as Vetter had known he would come tonight; stealing to Vetter's

home to make love to his wife.

Vetter's fingers shook as he fumbled with the snap lock of the glove compartment, slowly withdrew the .32. Reflected light shafted off the barrel. Vetter's chest constricted as the ominous glint, the chill feel of the weapon, momentarily brought a rebirth of uncertainty. Now—in the moment of truth—could he really do it?

He swore softly, jaw etching lean. He could; *he must.* He thrust the revolver into his waistband, gazed unblinking as he saw Ardmore enter his home.

A quarter hour later, the living room light went out.

Resolutely, Vetter climbed out of his car. He was no longer sweating; instead, every fibre of his being seemed iced with implacable purpose. His step was firm as he circled the house, quietly let himself in the kitchen.

He could hear them in the darkened living room, catch the sibilant whispers, the muted mouthings of their passion.

Silently, vision straining in the gloom, Vetter tip toed to the front room. He could make out their silhouettes now, interlocked on the divan. His fingers traced the near wall, located the switch for a ceiling fixture. He took a deep breath, flipped it on.

They wrenched apart as the light blazed, Ardmore in shirt sleeves, Phyllis in gaping negligee. For an instant shocked disbelief froze their features; then sight of the gun in Vetter's hand quirked surprise into naked fear.

"Mark—no!" Phyllis cried.

Vetter ignored his wife, pointed the .32 at Ardmore. "You bastard," he whispered.

Ardmore goggled at the gun. "T-take it easy, man."

"You filthy bastard."

Ardmore's throat worked. "Y-you don't understand, Mark—"

"I've understood for weeks," Vetter said. "Right in my own home."

Phyllis abruptly sprang to her feet. "All right. So I love Ray. You can't kill him for that."

Vetter turned, amost indifferently, slapped her across the mouth, knocking her back onto the divan. "Let's hear him plead for you."

She glared at him; then sensing the full import of his words, she suddenly went white. "N-no—"

"Yes," Vetter said.

A nerve began jumping in Ardmore's cheek. "He's . . . bluffing," he told Phyllis thickly. "He'd be the first suspect."

Vetter shook his head. "Perhaps. Only after I've ransacked the place, the police will favor a thug who broke in, panicked and blasted when you made a wrong move." He smiled without humor. "Your presence here won't be too strange; I've welcomed you enough in my absence."

Ardmore swore, the tic riotous now. "You're crazy. You'll never get away with it."

"I can try."

Vetter studied them both, hate and disgust nauseating him. His wife, half nude with another man, pleading for her life. And her lover, immobile with fear, cringing helplessly . . .

Vetter jerked taut as his brain shrieked the command. He levelled the .32, temples pounding. His finger whitened on the trigger—and froze. Suddenly, sweat drenched him and his knees threatened to buckle. His mind reeled as the verity of what he'd long subconsciously feared engulfed him in this instant of crisis.

He couldn't do it. He couldn't kill.

For one long moment Vetter stood there, weaving drunkenly, a haze clouding his sight, blotting out the pair on the divan. Then with a choking sob he whirled, stumbled out of the house.

It was an hour before Vetter returned home. He'd thrown the .32 down a sewer, driven aimlessly about the city. His chaotic thoughts could envision no course of action, no future. His return was a mechanical reflex.

He garaged the car, noting dully that the house was completely dark. That was to be expected. Phyllis had undoubtedly left—with Ardmore.

Vetter again went in the back, made his way to the living room. He snapped on a table lamp, sucked in his breath sharply. Phyllis and Ardmore were still there, still sitting on the divan. Only they were completely dressed now—and Ardmore was holding Vetter's German Luger.

Comprehension flooded Vetter in one terrifying instant. His own setup, only with Phyllis telephoning the police about a thug breaking in, and Ardmore absent when they arrived . . .

"No!" Vetter yelled, lunging blindly.

Ardmore sidestepped deftly, Luger outthrust. "Thanks for the plot," he said thinly.

Then the Luger coughed once and the heavy slug ploughed into Vetter's brain.

THE SWIZZLE STICK

It was only a piece of bone taken from a polar bear, but for Augustus Brimble it held strange powers.

BY
ALICE WERNHERR

Augustus Brimble was a small man, a small, spindly man, a bachelor, and bookkeeper for a little firm manufacturing Teddybears. Every morning for twenty-two years he would wake up from a dreamless sleep, take the subway to a tall building on upper Broadway, then the elevator to the eighteenth floor, and finally step into a quiet hall, where a receptionist, currently Miss Phyllis Smith, sat in front of a huge brown Teddybear who, with chubby arms outstretched, welcomed everyone that entered. Augustus would stop for a moment filled with longing and smiles. Then he would cross through the main office where Mr. Hirsh, the boss, sat behind a huge desk on which an even bigger Teddybear was placed, and exchange a respectful "Good morning" for a preoccupied nod from the big man. Brimble would walk on through a large hall where about twenty men and women cut and stuffed Teddybears and sewed eyes and noses on them.

From here he would proceed into the shipping room; where armies of Teddybears stood in rows ready to be boxed and shipped, a job of which a quiet elderly man took care of all by himself. With this man Augustus exchanged a nod, which was sufficient, because old William was deaf and dumb.

Finally, and secretly with the feeling of a king placing himself upon his throne, Augustus Brimble would reach his own office.

It was not an office really, rather a windowless cubby hole containing nothing more than the files, the

ledgers and Mr. Brimble's desk.

"Here you'll have absolute quiet to concentrate on your figures," Mr. Hirsh had said smiling twenty-two years ago. Mr. Hirsh had then been a slender dark-haired man with eager eyes who manufactured about fifty Teddybears a day. Now, Mr. Hirsh was corpulent and bald and put out five hundred Teddybears daily at slow seasons. His eyes still were eager and glowing with a dream of five thousand Teddybears —Mr. Hirsh's Teddybears would conquer the world.

He had placed a Teddybear on Brimble's desk, the smallest one available, but Brimble had put it back into the warehouse. He could not stand the presence of the lifelike creature with the glassy eyes which stared at him enigmatically. He liked his solitude and did not want anything to frighten it away.

Augustus had not changed at all during those twenty-two years. He had been a spindly little man then and was a spindly little man now. He was in the habit of asking the receptionist, whoever she might be, to a neighborhood movie once a week. The receptionists changed and Brimble stayed and Miss Phyllis Smith was the twentieth receptionist he took to the movies. She was single, mid-thirtyish and just as unremarkable as Mr. Hirsh's Teddybears.

One morning a brand new desk stood across from Mr. Brimble's rickety wooden one. On top of the desk sat a snowwhite Teddybear.

And flung into a swivel chair, stretched out lazily, pipe in mouth, huge feet on the top of the desk—

"Hi," said the gigantic young man, "I'm your new assistant. My name is Robert Wellesley—and please don't call me Bob."

"Assistant?" Augustus stammered. He remembered something Mr. Hirsh had said a few days ago. "Your figures are slightly off, Brimble. Your balances are wrong. What's the matter? Troubles in keeping up with the expanding business?"

Helplessly Brimble stared at Robert Wellesley. His eyes were just on level with the other man's chin. A square chin, a crude chin, with a tendency to protrude.

"You are a bookkeeper?" Augustus stammered.

"Bookkeeper?" Robert Wellesley exploded, "man, I'm everything. Boxing instructor, dishwasher, bouncer—I'm even a college graduate—and since I have to eat, I shall be a bookkeeper from now on. I have to eat, because I have work to do. I'm writing a play—an atom bomb of a play, man—it will strip human nature bare to the bone. Have to sell part of myself to the Teddybear business, so the other part can go on writing. Had not eaten for three days when Fatso—our honorable boss Mr. Hirsh—found me. Told me he needed a bookkeeper badly—the one he had wore out like a Teddybear after

twenty years in a nursery—so here I am, a slave who sold himself into the kingdom of the squares.

"Yep, thought so," Robert Wellesley said after a while to the speechless Augustus, "really, a highgrade moron would be insulted by that kind of routine. It's for the lowest sort of idiots—Mongolian type. Now, hand me that Brewster account, Aug—it won't take me more than half an hour."

"It's all prepared," Brimble stammered, "I've worked on it all day yesterday, hoped to finish it before Friday myself."

"Nonsense, by Friday we'll have the entire backlog cleared up—give old Fatso a break, will you."

Brimble watched the dark unruly hair of his assistant cascading over the books. The hair ran into the forehead and formed a widow's peak, which gave Robert a rather mephistophelic appearance. Next to the satanic face sat the white bear. He stared at Augustus with merciless glass eyes, as if he was in possession of some weird secret.

"Finished," Robert Wellesley said after exactly half an hour—"check it over, Aug, will you."

Augustus' hands shook as he reached for the book. Water assembled in the corner of his eyes.

The demonic stranger puffed his pipe with a contemptuous air and the figures stood in immaculate rightousness on the page almost hostile in their absolute perfection. Expenses versus profits, everything hard and clear like a parade of saluting guns. An entire day's work faultlessly done in less than an hour. Brimble's eyes watered a little stronger.

"Excellent," he sighed.

Robert Wellesley smiled genially, swivelled his chair and put his big feet next to his white Teddybear.

"Did you ever write a play, Aug?" he suddenly asked.

"No, of course not," Augustus answered in pious outrage.

"Of course not," Robert repeated. Contemptuously he pushed forward his wild-animal chin. What does one call this type of jaw? Augustus asked himself. Macrocephalic—wasn't this the word? Yes, like the jaw of the first man on earth he had seen in the museum where he had taken Phyllis Smith once. All Robert needed was a shaggy coat of fur and he would really look like a creature that had just recently made the transformation from beast to man.

"I wrote plays and I acted in plays," Robert Wellesley announced. "Off-Broadway, of course. In the backrooms of ginmills, in basements and backyards. I was madder than Hamlet and more royal than King Lear. I was a hero, a lover, a degenerate, a murderer. I can be many things, Mr. Brimble. I've swallowed the fireball of this world and I'm bursting with creation—if I would take the pain and breathe at you really hard, lions and tigers would jump out of my breath at

you, and dragons, and a Chimera, and a unicorm maybe, and you would vanish, little square man, simply vanish."

This was the first time that Augustus felt the clammy clutch of fear. Just a slight quiver of fear, an attack of goosepimples running up his spine and ebbing away again.

The white Teddybear stared.

Did the Teddybear already know that Robert Wellesley had made up his mind to kill Augustus Brimble?

"What d'you think of my new assistant?" Augustus asked Phyllis Smith at their next Saturday night date. They sat in a little place in Chinatown sipping bittersweet Chinese tea.

His question had an odd reaction. Phyllis Smith giggled—Phyllis, thirty-seven years old, giggled like a teenager and said, "why I think he's the cutest thing. D'you see those tight dungarees? Why, I've never known a man could look that sexy."

Augustus gasped. He noticed that Phyllis wore a very formfitting sweater. In the taxi going home she yawned a few times while Augustus tried to pour his heart out to her. "D'you think Mr. Hirsh is dissatisfied with my service? D'you think this beatnik is going to take away my bread and butter?"

"Don't worry, man," she answered in a voice unusually vigorous for the dainty slender girl she was, "just let's hope the kid makes a go of it. He needs a job."

Every passing light made her eyes glitter. Strangely, Augustus Brimble was suddenly reminded of a lynx he had seen in the zoo. The big cat had the same expression of wild, almost blood thirsty sensuality in its greenish eyes.

"Dangerous," he thought, "all at once everyone seems dangerous, even good old Phyllis—"

The following Monday Augustus was greeted again by the sight of the big tattered shoes on the desk and the unfriendly white Teddybear.

"Man," Robert cried, "man—I'm in a trance—was in a trance all through weekend—just sat and sat and wrote and wrote—day and night—night and day—but I got to it—got right up to the big scene."

He panted like a tiger after a chase for an antelope. His face was haggard, his eyes had a crazy glow. He puffed on his pipe with his gross red lips like an addict inhaling hashish.

"What's the big scene?" Augustus asked. His voice shook. Somehow, in the hidden folds of his mind he had stowed away a hope, all during weekend, that Robert Wellesley and the white bear would have disappeared on Monday like a nightmare. He should not have asked. He did not like the answer. "Murder," Robert Wellesley cried, "murder—what else? My play is

digging through the rubble of habits and lays life bare like flesh without skin—there's nothing else left but the two basic passions—love—and murder."

"Murder," Augustus muttered. The goosepimples on his back rose again. They were not simply goosepimples any more. The icy bow of horror played on his spine like on a base fiddle. A horror nameless as yet. The white bear stared. He maybe knew the name.

"Murder," the new bookkeeper almost chanted. "Murder is the least celebrated act of creation. Yet murder is as creative as sex. A man should create a human being but more important yet he must destroy one to prove himself a man. Test his powers against those of life and death. I celebrate murder in my play—I'm in love with murder."

"You're mad — mad — utterly mad," Augustus stuttered.

Robert laughed a strange wild laugh.

Augustus Brimble spent another night without sleep. The next morning he had to drag himself into the office. His eyes were so tired, he hardly noticed the new receptionist. He blinked in weak curiosity. But no, this *was* Phyllis Smith. She wore black stockings and a tight black sweater. In her ears dangled golden loops large enough to stick a fist through. Her eyelids were painted green and the lips orange. She gave him a cold sphynxish stare.

"Is everyone going mad around here?" Augustus almost cried out. "Am I the only sane man locked in with a bunch of madmen?" Phyllis, whom he had taken to the museum, to the movies, to Chinatown—Phyllis was sitting there, a bewitched thing looking *like* a poisonous plant among jungle foliage.

He walked past the desk and the workshop and the warehouse along the silent army of Teddybears. Strange, even the Teddybears looked at him with an open threat in their glassy eyes and a crooked sneer on their snouts. The whole world was turning upside down. Why, those Teddybears looked as if any minute they would turn into wild, man-eating beasts.

Augustus Brimble opened the door to his office.

Robert Wellesley was waiting for him, big tattered shoes on the top of the desk, pipe in mouth.

"Look what I've got," Robert shoutted.

He dug into his pocket and produced a stick. It was long, thick like a man's finger and had the chalky bland white of a dead thing.

"You'll never guess what it is," he cried. He looked like a little boy now, adventurous, eager. Augustus was dazzled. Robert looked almost loveworthy. He was a man of a thousand faces. But isn't that only a proof of insanity?

"You know what this is?" Robert asked excitedly.

Augustus shook his head.

"It's part of a polar bear's skeleton," Robert explained and here he grinned his diabolical grin again.

"But what is it?" Augustus asked, feeling strangely disturbed again, "it only looks like an oblong swizzle stick to me."

"Don't you dig it, man?" Robert cried, "it's the coolest, man. It's carved from the polar bear's rib.

He grinned and held the thing high in the air.

"It's genuine," he laughed, "I robbed it off a funny little man."

"Robbed it?" stammered Augustus.

He felt more and more uncomfortable looking at the dead white skeleton part. It made him think weird thoughts—the iridescent outburst of Northern Lights and ghostly white animals.

"Yep," Robert said with satisfaction, "you know, I always act on impulse. If an impulse told me—rape—I would rape, if it told me, kill—I will kill. I respect the roaring orders of life in my blood. Last night my play suddenly stopped—stopped dead on me. I walked out into the streets. It was midnight. You know what the city looks like past midnight? I followed a trail of lantern lights—sickly yellow blotches through shadows of grimy houses, grimy people—you know those people after midnight? They all seem so full of disasters, of horrors and vices—like lepers sore with the scars of their lives. The yellow trail led me through them. There was that little tavern on basement level. I stumbled over a sleeping derelict with a red blotch of blood on his cheek down the steps and into the bar. Ugliest bar in the world. A leper-bar. And there was the magic man. He was ugly—he was magnificent with ugliness. I sidled up next to him and bought him a beer. I knew it was he who had drawn me and he was the reason that my play stopped and I was here. He grinned at me with rotten teeth and then he took out this—the bone—and used it as a stirrer in his beer. He told me that he had stolen it from an explorer, had gouged a man's eye with it in a fight—had smuggled it into jail and out again—and here he sat, stirring his beer and bearing his black teeth stumps.

I knocked him over the head. I hit so hard, the rotten little mummy's head swung clockwise when I last glanced at him. I grabbed the swizzlestick. I ran out of the bar. No one stopped me—it all happened too quick. I ran and ran, around corners, more corners, then I hailed a taxi and made the driver speed me home. And at home I wrote and wrote—I wrote and wrote. The stick was before me.

Robert's eyes glowed in unholy glee.

"Soon I'll be able to do the murder," he cried, "soon—soon—I can feel the murder, smell the murder—it's coming nearer and nearer."

All day long he remained and

worked in moody silence, a monkish dedication on his face.

Augustus could not work at all. The figures danced before his eyes, a fly buzzed around and whenever he focused his watering eyes on it the fly seemed to have grown. The white bear stared and stared.

Augustus could feel the bowels in his belly contracting, rhythmically. Fear had reached his very inside. The terror sat in his body in hard knots.

Like a drunkard he stumbled out of the office. He was afraid to walk down the dark hole of the subway entrance that yawned at him like the gaping mouth of a snake. He walked home, blindly bumping into people.

The landlady looked out of the window. The dog raised his round eyes and goggled at Augustus, then he howled.

There was a secret message spreading through the silent creatures, as if they knew that Augustus Brimble was to be murdered.

He fell on his bed like a sweat soaked bundle of rags. He could not eat. His stomach did not know of hunger, it just went into knots and his head spun.

He came tottering into the office the next morning.

"You look like a drunk," Phyllis cried when she looked at him.

"Phyllis," he said, "please, please listen to me—you've got to listen to me."

"Not now," Phyllis said impatiently, "I want to rush out before Mr. Hirsh comes in. There's a sale of evening dresses just around the corner. Very sexy ones. I'm going out with Mr. Wellesley Saturday night," she added.

"Wellesley," Augustus' heartbeat almost stopped, "but Wellesley—Robert—he's a madman. He has schizophrenia. No, polyphrenia—not two, but dozens, hundreds, of personalities. One of them is a murderer."

Phyllis Smith looked at Augustus gravely.

"You're drunk, Augustus," she said reproachfully, "drunk on a weekday morning."

"Phyllis," Augustus almost screamed, "Phyllis—don't you understand—he's a murderer—he's going to kill me."

"Stop being jealous, Augustus," said Phyllis Smith, "don't fall to pieces because another man is a better bookkeeper than you are. I can see that your job hangs by a hair. But just watch out—if Mr. Hirsh sees that it's too hard on you, he'll fire you even quicker, before you have time to look for something else."

"But, Phyllis, don't you understand at all—" Brimble pleaded, his voice faltering.

"Drink some black coffee and pull yourself together," Phyllis demanded, "of course, it's murder to lose a job after all those years—but getting drunk wouldn't help you."

"But Phyllis, don't you see at all

—he's mad—mad—" Augustus whimpered.

Augustus walked through the rows of Teddybears. The people in the shop worked in rhythm to the tunes of the Muzak. The deaf and dumb Will in the warehouse nodded at Brimble with a childlike grin. Nobody would hear a sound coming out of the little office when Robert Wellesley would finish his murder.

This morning Augustus was in the office first. What does the goat think, staked out in the jungle, waiting for the black cat slinking through the bushes—slow, slow, so unbearably slow, the amber eyes aglow with murder?

Augustus almost screamed when Robert Wellesley opened the door and swaggered in.

He threw the swizzlestick onto the desk.

The tip of the stick was purplish.

"You know what this is?" Robert asked. He was more satanic than ever today. His full lipped mouth bore a strange leer.

"Blood," he answered himself triumphantly, "human blood."

"No—" breathed Brimble.

"I'm getting closer to the climax of the play—night after night," Robert said grimacing with ecstasy, "inch by inch I'm getting closer to murder."

"Who—whom?" Augustus cried shrinking back.

"Two hoodlums," said Robert, "they jumped me right in front of my house. Lucky I had the stick in my hand. I aimed for the belly of one of them. The belly shrunk back —but the other hoodlum pushed forward his beef face and I managed to slice his cheek."

His eyes came closer to Augustus, those crazy eyes full of murder.

"So I cut right into that dumb retarded hoodlum-face. I penetrated another man' skin, drew blood. The face howled, both men ran and the night gobbled them up. I stood still and stared at the tip of the swizzle stick. I knew the intoxication of murder then—of old man-to-man battles, of primitive hero's going berserk—the intoxication of blood, the fever, the madness that made men fight since the world began."

He breathed heavily. His strong hairy hand grabbed the weapon. Augustus stood shaken not able to move. Robert brought the tip of the stick near Brimble's belly.

"You know, it's sharp—I could slice a man open with it," he whispered.

His breath came in rough hard groans, a jungle breath.

Augustus left early this day. "I'm not feeling so good," he mumbled. Robert raised his dark head and gave him a long musing stare. "Soon I shall be able to do the murder," he whispered.

Augustus Brimble ran through rows and rows of staring Teddybears. He held before Mr. Hirsh's desk. His body quivered so badly,

the bones of his knees hit one another with dull little thuds.

"Mr. Hirsh—" he stammered, "Mr. Hirsh—help me—help me, please."

Mr. Hirsh slowly raised his face, chin by chin. It was a pompous face, illuminated like a pumpkin with a candle burning inside—the afterglow of good meals and drinks and the sensual joys of prosperity.

"What's the matter, Brimble," Mr. Hirsh asked benevolently.

Augustus tried to speak, but not a word came out. He choked, he gagged, and he finally blurted—"Mr. Hirsh—please—understand—"

The big man's hand came up like a large side of ham and rosily floated throughout the air.

"I understand, Brimble," he smiled, "I fully understand. Miss Smith told me all about it. Wellesley with his quick pace of work is killing you—the new tempo is murdering you—I know, I know, I don't hold it against you—a bright young college boy seems a regular villain to you—well, don't worry, Mr. Brimble—take the entire next week off—with pay, of course. No, better yet, take two weeks—you're overworked—you're run down—give yourself a rest. We're stepping up production, we're increasing our pace and new blood is a necessity with us—maybe you could look around meanwhile for another job, something easier, that's more your speed. You must have amassed quite a nice bank account during the twenty-two years with us—and, of course, you've a good bonus coming your way—so, why get yourself killed? Mr. Wellesley has a lot of wild oats to sow yet—but wait, after his play falls through—he'll learn to see the light, accept reality and make an excellent bookkeeper. He won't stay a bookkeeper, of course. I plan to raise him into the executive status. But, now—work the rest of the week out with us, show Robert all the fine details of the work—even though he doesn't need much guidance any more—and then, well, off to a long earned leisure."

The three chins sank down again into a restive pose. The big man had spoken.

Phyllis smiled her unfaithful smile. The Teddybear sat on a huge box which probably contained the "sexy" evening gown—both Phyllis and the Teddybear leered at him sending chills down his spine.

"Take it easy," Phyllis said out of the side of her mouth without interrupting her work of putting on orange lipstick.

In a staggering run Augustus Brimble reached the street.

The landlady's Pekinese howled again foreboding death. It was quite plain now. In his room Augustus calmed himself. He sat down and began to write a letter to Mr. Hirsh.

He filled up many, many sheets. At the end he tossed them all out. He could not state his case so the

big man would understand it. Every sentence took on a weird shape and sounded broken like the babbling of a madman.

He even tried a letter to Phyllis and he tore it into many little pieces.

He told himself that he did not really have to finish off the week. What did he owe to a firm who dismissed him so heartlessly after twenty-two years of faithful service? It was true, he had a savings account in spite of his meagre wages by the virtue of his frugal almost miserly living. He would look for another job. Why was he so afraid? Never in his life would he have to lay eyes on Robert Wellesley again.

He went to bed and slept until he woke with a scream.

He heard his own anguish reverberating through the room. But it was not only the echo of his nightmare—he noticed the evil that swelled the room, from floor to ceiling, from wall to wall, the room floated in the night like a balloon filled with poisonous vapors. The balloon would expand, go on expanding, and would finally burst.

Murder hung in the air, thick and black, murder crawled into the window, murder with a multitude of beastly shapes and faces, climbed up the walls, covered his bed and hung from the ceiling. Tomorrow Augustus Brimble would be dead.

There was no escape. He could not stay away from it. Tomorrow he would go to the office and he would be sacrificed.

Murder, the giant Gorilla from his nightmare, would close his hairy arms around his neck and people would go on working, the muzak would play, Phyllis would put on orange lipstick. Only the Teddybears with their large glassy eyes would know.

The bed tossed and tumbled in his half sleep, and then another dream came and Augustus Brimble grew and grew and suddenly he sat up and smiled. He jumped out of bed, he washed and dressed, he craned his neck to see a bloodred sunrise over the dusty roofs of the neighboring houses, then he went to the office, still smiling, almost swaggering, and for the first time completely without fear.

It was all very simple and easy and beautiful. Evil had opened its hyena fangs at him and spit phosphorescent fumes, but he had outgrown evil, he had conquered it.

Phyllis Smith from her desk stared at him with her blank cat eyes, and Mr. Hirsh raised the topmost of his lazy triple chins and managed a smile, but Augustus Brimble strode on, erect, masterful, almost tall.

The Teddybears blinked at him with questioning eyes. The polar bear on Robert Wellesley's desk stared at him in wonder.

Robert walked into the office, in his dark charm, looking like a fallen

angel. He smiled at Augustus with false tricky fondness. But Augustus had a whole deck of tricks in his own hand.

"Let me see your swizzlestick once more," he coaxed, "let me feel it in my hand. Maybe it will bring me luck."

He sounded natural, even a trifle dirty. Characters like Robert always trust in people with dirty minds.

"It shall give you bear strength," Robert grinned.

Augustus felt himself shooting up toward the ceiling, higher and higher, he grew and grew until he had outgrown all fears.

He grabbed the swizzlestick. His arm lunged forward—he screamed, screamed like a savage—his scream was so powerful that everybody could hear it—Mr. Hirsh, Phyllis Smith, the entire world.

Long ago the point of the weapon had broken off on Robert's muscular chest—but Augustus kept thrusting it into the air, spearing the white Teddybear, hitting the desk, hitting the walls, screaming and screaming, with gaping, foaming mouth wide open.

"I've seen it coming for quite a while," Mr. Hirsh untruthfully stated, "as the psychiatrist said at the reeception ward, it's the meek quiet people, the ones you'd suspect least."

"How do they call it? Persecution complex?" Phyllis Smith asked.

Robert shook his head. "Poor little fellow—I wonder if my telling him so much about the play has contributed to it? I was so wrapped up in it, maybe I didn't know how it upset the poor little chap?"

"Is the play nearly finished?" Mr. Hirsh asked with interest.

Musingly Robert Wellesley looked at the empty desk onto which the white Teddybear had toppled face down—

"I think the play is finished now," he said.

—Continued from Back Cover

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