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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1965

Vol. 17, No. 1

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

INSIDE JOB

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The Chemical Company kept a close watch on all of its employees . . . and the executives were not exempt. But Shayne knew that Death had a way of defying all Security checks . . .

2 to 31

FEATURE STORY

- THE RED HAIRING (*Honey West's First Short Story*)
G. G. FICKLING 62

EXCITING NOVELETS

- THE DEATH OF A BUM
DONALD E. WESTLAKE 38
- A DOLL CALLED SUZY
THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY 72

SHORT STORIES

- AND THE SUMMER'S YOUNG YET
SYD HOFF 32
- BIRTHDAY PRESENT
RICHARD DEMING 89
- PEEPER BY DAYLIGHT
CLAYTON MATTHEWS 104
- MURDER AT LIGURIA
TIGHE JARRATT 116
- FIFTY-FIFTY
HILDA CUSHING 128
- ALL NIGHT LONG
WALTER DALLAS 137



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INSIDE JOB

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

The theft-and-murder trail seemed to lead both backwards and forwards. So Shayne took a dangerously circular detour.



THE NIGHT WAS warm in Miami when the young man drove up to the gate of the main office of Price-Stone Chemical Company. A uniformed security guard smiled at him, opened the gate, and waved the black car through. As the vehicle passed beneath a floodlight at the gate the driver's face was revealed as young, that of a man in his late twenties or early thirties, with dark hair and deep-

set dark eyes, a hawk nose and a thin scar on his left cheek. His full lips were set in a pleasant smile as he drove on.

The young man with the scar on his cheek parked the black car in the parking lot set aside for executives of the chemical company. He got out and locked the car door behind him. Then, as he passed around the rear of the car on his way to the red brick building of the

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chemical company's main office, he tapped lightly on the trunk. He passed on and did not look back to see the trunk open a few inches.

The young man continued on into the building past two more uniformed security guards who smiled and touched their caps to him. He said something to them with a smile as he went into the building, through the dark and deserted reception lobby, and up the stairs to the second floor. He went into an office marked: MR. FREDERIC MARTINS, *Vice President*. He closed the door behind him, lighted the desk lamp, removed his suit jacket, and sat down at the desk. Leaning forward, he turned on a small transistor radio.

He worked for some hours on the papers before him. Every forty minutes a uniformed guard knocked on the door, looked in, saw the young man with the scar, smiled, and closed the door again without saying a word. The third time the door closed behind the guard the young man stood up and crossed the office swiftly. He opened a side door and went into a smaller office. When he returned he carried a small black bag, a large paper shopping bag, and a small, thin fluid-filled vial.

He worked swiftly and expertly. He walked to a bookcase on the wall of the office, removed some books, and revealed a small but strong wall safe. From the black bag he took a drill. He plugged the

drill into a wall socket and went to work on the safe. After a few minutes he stopped to listen. But the music on the radio played loud and no one heard the drill. He continued his drilling.

The drilling, preparation of the hole, planting of the liquid from the vial in the hole, and setting of the fuse, took not more than ten minutes. Then the young man turned the radio up very loud, touched two wires he held, and the safe exploded. The sound was muffled and not very loud. He turned the transistor radio down and listened.

There was no sound in the corridor. In the distance he could hear, faintly, the voices of the guards talking casually.

He walked to the safe, opened it, and began shovelling neat packages of money into the large paper bag. The money filled the large bag almost to the top. When the bag was full, and the safe empty, the young man took the desk stapling machine and stapled a strip of wrapping paper all across the top of the bag to close it.

He gathered up his drill and batteries, coiled the wires, and gingerly dropped the empty vial into the black bag with all the other tools. He crossed the office to the open window and threw it out. Then he raised the heavier bag of money, and tossed that out also.

From the shadows below a man materialized. He caught both bags,

and vanished into the night toward the parking lot.

The young man put on his jacket, closed the open door of the safe, replaced the books in front of the safe, and looked around carefully once more. Then he walked to the door, turned off the lights, and left the office.

He walked down the stairs and through the darkened reception lobby to the front door. The two guards smiled at him again. When he smiled in return his scar was so clearly visible, so sharply defined that it seemed deeper than it actually was.

"Taking nothing home?" one guard said.

"Nothing at all, Paul. But you better search. Company rules and all that, eh?" the young man said, smiling.

The guards patted his clothes and waved him on. Empty-handed, and whistling, the young man walked away from the entrance toward the dark parking lot. The black car was parked exactly where he had left it. But now another man stood beside it, and on the ground was the large paper bag and the small black bag. The young man with the scar grinned at the second man.

"Smooth as silk, Freddie, just like you said," he told him, his voice quietly self-congratulatory.

The second man did not answer. He bent silently and picked up the bag of money. The young man took

the black bag. Together they carried the two bags to the open trunk and put them inside. The second man climbed into the trunk. The young man with the scar closed the trunk but did not lock it. Then he walked to the front seat, got in, and drove toward the gate.

At the gate the young man waved again to the guard who passed him through. The black car drove about half a mile and stopped. The young man got out and went back to the rear of the car. He tapped on the trunk and it opened. The second man stepped out. The young man with the scar turned to walk back to the driver's seat.

The second man took a blackjack from his pocket, stepped up behind the young man, and struck him once in the back of the head. The young man fell without a sound. The second man quickly pulled the young man's hands behind him and handcuffed them. Then he picked up the young man, carried him to the trunk, put him inside, closed the trunk, and locked it.

The second man climbed behind the steering wheel.

The black car drove away into the night.

II

MIKE SHAYNE warmed the fine cognac in his hands and looked at the old woman.

"My son is a thief, Mr. Shayne," the old woman said.

The old woman sat in a throne-like chair in the rich living room of the mansion. The living room was not quite as large as a railroad station. It was an extremely imposing room, its panelled walls hung with enormous hunting scenes, armor, crossed spears, and all the trappings of a medieval castle.

The old woman herself was equally imposing—big and bluff and with an air of almost masculine dominance about her. Her eyes, beneath the piled white hair, were dark and steady.

"You better start at the beginning, Mrs. Stone," Shayne said.

"Price-Stone, Mr. Shayne! Our family name is Price-Stone!"

"Sorry m'am," Mike Shayne said drily.

He sat in another of the throne-like chairs drinking the fine brandy, watching the old lady. Mrs. Hester Price-Stone, matriarch of the Stones and the Prices, and principal stockholder of Price-Stone Chemical Company.

"The details you can get from the people at the company and the police," the old woman said. "But briefly, my son returned to Miami only two weeks ago. We had not spoken for years, and he had steadfastly refused to seek a reconciliation. He seemed repentant, ready to see things my way, so I put him to work in the company where he belonged. Now he has stolen a

half million dollars and vanished again!"

"You're sure it was your son?"

"Of course! The police agree that it had to be an inside job, and Gerald has disappeared. He was alone in the office last night. He knew where the money was. Of course, he must have had an accomplice."

"Accomplice?" Shayne said. "Are you sure of that?"

"We have guards on all exits. No one can carry anything in or out without being inspected. Gerald carried nothing out. He must have thrown the money he took from the safe down to a waiting accomplice. There were footprints."

Shayne tugged on his left earlobe. "A stupid play. If he is so obviously guilty, how could he expect to get away with it?"

"Gerald is not too bright, and he was always an arrogant young pup. I can only assume that he intended to take a very dangerous risk, and run and hope to escape. That would be like Gerald. I would suggest you try Brazil—the most obvious and unsavory night spots. And, Mr. Shayne, it is just possible that he thought I would not prosecute. The fool!"

"You will prosecute?" Shayne said.

"Of course! No one makes a fool out of me, not even Gerald!"

Shayne said, "What do you want me to do?"

"Find him! I want him caught

and brought back—with whatever money he may have left.”

“The police can do that,” Shayne said.

“Perhaps,” the old woman said, “but I do not have a high opinion of the police, and I don’t want him hurt. I want him caught, yes—and punished. But not killed, you understand?”

Shayne nodded and stood up. The cognac was gone. The big red-head placed his glass on the side table and looked speculatively at the cognac bottle. Mrs. Price-Stone did not take the hint. Shayne sighed.

“All right. You know my fee. Do you have a picture?” Shayne said.

Mrs. Price-Stone reached for a button beside her chair. She pressed the button attached to a long cord. A tall, muscular manservant appeared and approached the old woman with unmistakable deference. She stopped him with an imperious wave of her heavily-veined hand.

“Morgan, tell Miss Bolt that I want a picture of Gerald,” Mrs. Price-Stone snapped. “Tell her that one on my dressing table, the most recent.”

“Yes, Madam,” the butler replied.

Shayne turned and spoke to him directly. “Tell me, Morgan, what was your impression of Mrs. Price-Stone’s son?”

“I’ve told you all you need to



know, Mr. Shayne!” the old woman said sharply.

Shayne did not look at her. “I like to form my own ideas, Mrs. Price-Stone,” he said bluntly. “Morgan here might have observed something you missed. What about it, Morgan? Did you notice anything peculiar about the way Mrs. Price-Stone’s son acted while he was here?”

“No sir,” Morgan said. “He seemed a pleasant enough young man.”

“Did anyone visit him? Any phone calls?”

“Not that I know of, sir.”

“No plans for a trip?”

“Not to my knowledge, sir. Mr.

Gerald seemed quite pleased to be here."

Shayne nodded slowly.

Mrs. Price-Stone said, "That will be all, Morgan."

"The butler left and Shayne turned back to the old woman. "If I'm going to find him, that accomplice will be a help," he said. "A man who's planning a grab-and-run usually prepares his escape carefully in advance."

"Of course, you're right," Mrs. Price-Stone conceded, a little of the harsh impatience going out of her eyes. "Feel free to interrogate my staff as much as you like."

"He made no suspicious plans; talked to no one that you saw?"

The old woman thought for a moment. "Well, there was one thing. I heard him on the telephone one day speaking to someone name Fred. Just Fred—or Freddie, I believe it was."

"No last name? Nothing else?"

"No, and I have told Will Gentry all I know."

"The police searched his room, I suppose?"

"They turned it upside down, Mr. Shayne," the old woman said.

"And they found nothing?"

"No hint as to Gerald's accomplice or about his plans, if that is what you mean," the old lady said.

It was just what Shayne had meant: A thief who grabbed and ran always had an escape planned. It was the key play in the theft. But why had Gerald used an ac-

complice? Why hadn't he just tossed the loot out the window and picked it up himself? Could the whole theft have been the accomplice's idea, with Gerald merely a willing tool!

He was still considering this when a small, slender, middle-aged woman entered the enormous living room. She carried a large studio photograph.

"You wanted this picture of Mr. Gerald, Ma'am?" the woman said.

"I did, Miss Bolt, or I would not have asked for it!" The old woman turned to Shayne. "Miss Bolt is my secretary, Mr. Shayne, and more-or-less companion. She, Morgan, and my cook are my entire staff just now. A woman my age needs little, contrary to what most people seem to believe—unless she is in failing health."

Shayne nodded. The small Miss Bolt seemed tense and nervous. But that could be just the normal state for a secretary to Mrs. Hester Price-Stone. He turned his attention to the large photograph she gave him.

The man in the photo was dark-haired and handsome. There was a smile on his full, weak lips. He had a hawk nose and deep-set eyes, and a small scar on his left cheek.

Shayne looked at Miss Bolt. "Did you notice anything strange about Gerald while he was here?"

"No. He did get a few phone calls. He never said much himself. The other person did most of the

talking. Gerald called him Freddie."

"What did you think of Gerald personally? Was he spoiled?"

Miss Bolt blinked. "Why, no, I thought him rather nice."

The old woman snorted. "Fiddlesticks! Gerald always had a way about him. He could fool everyone but me. As for Bolt, I think she took to Gerald. Middle-aged puppy love!"

"Why Mrs. Price-Stone," the secretary protested, her color rising. "I barely knew him! Not even two weeks. How could I have—"

The old woman laughed, and Shayne narrowed his grey eyes. A cynical romantic involvement would be interesting. From what he had begun to gather about Gerald he was not the kind of man who would have been above using his charm to gain an end. Someone had been his accomplice.

And judging from what the butler and Miss Bolt had said, Gerald had been on his best behavior since coming home. Probably to lull the old woman's suspicions.

Shayne turned toward the door. "All right, I'll do what I can!"

"You will keep in close touch, Mr. Shayne?" the old lady said.

"I will," Shayne promised.

III

AS MIKE SHAYNE got into his car and drove down the circular drive of the mansion, he was thinking

about Gerald Price-Stone. Home two weeks and a theft of a half million dollars. It looked very much like a deliberate homecoming with theft in mind. Why? And the old woman thought more of the boy than she let on, or she would not have been so quick to take him back on his face value. Shayne wondered what the original dispute had been about.

He was still thinking about the old dispute when the black car pulled up beside him. He saw the swiftly rising hand out of the corner of his eye. A hand that held a pistol. Shayne slammed on the brakes, turned the steering wheel sharply to the right, and ducked. The car skidded and lurched off the edge of the road.

Two shots smashed into the hood of Shayne's car.

The black car was past and speeding away before Shayne could get another look at it. He sat up, started his engine that had stalled, pulled back onto the highway, and roared off in pursuit, his face set and grim.

Just as his own car had started to skid he had caught a quick glimpse of the would-be killer—a dark-haired man with a hawk nose, full lips, deep-set dark eyes and a black hat.

The glimpse had been brief, and he could not be positive. But the man who had shot at him looked very much like young Gerald Price-Stone.

As he sped along the highway in pursuit of the black car Shayne's thoughts were racing. Gerald, if it was Gerald, had not left Miami yet. Why? A grab-and-run thief should still be running, far and fast. But the man who had shot at him was not running. Apparently he had been watching the mansion of Hester Price-Stone. Perhaps the old lady was right, and Gerald was almost sure she would not prosecute him. But in order to be completely sure he would have to watch every move that his mother made.

Shayne was well-known, and Gerald had probably recognized him. A private detective in his mother's house could mean only one thing—the old woman was not going to let her son get away. Could that have motivated an attempt on Shayne's life? Perhaps—if Gerald Price-Stone was as reckless as the redhead was beginning to suspect.

Mike Shayne slowly gained on the black car until they reached the heavy traffic of the main part of Miami Beach. After that it vanished into the traffic, and the detectives slowed down.

He lighted a cigarette and continued to speculate as to the meaning of what had happened as he drove slowly in the heavy traffic on the sunny afternoon. People in summer clothes poured in and out of the luxury hotels, and the light surf broke gently on the beach to his left. There was something frus-

tratingly peculiar about the whole case.

Gerald was still in Miami—if it had been Gerald. If it had not been Gerald, who else was in on the theft? And why had the son stolen money that could be so simply and directly traced to him?

Shayne tossed his cigarette out of the window. He drove faster toward the nearest causeway into Miami. He wanted to know more before he went to call on Will Gentry and his police.

THE MAIN OFFICES of Price-Stone Chemical Company were in a red brick building set back from Biscayne Boulevard across the road from the local plant of the company. The company had operations in many states, but the head office had remained in Miami at the insistence of Hester Price-Stone.

Shayne strode into the office of Anson Porter, President of Price-Stone. Porter stood up to shake hands, studying his visitor with the intense interest which many people displayed when meeting Shayne for the first time. Porter was a stocky man of about sixty, grey-haired and distinguished.

"I suppose it's about Gerald, Mr. Shayne?" asked Porter, waving the detective to a chair and resuming his own seat.

"It is. Mrs. Price-Stone has hired me," Shayne said.

"The president nodded. "She's

pretty wrought up about what has happened and I can't say that I blame her. He fooled us all."

"Just what do you mean by 'fooled'," Shayne asked. "You thought him pretty likeable? Is that it?"

Anson Porter nodded. "I'd heard he was an arrogant kid, but he certainly seemed to have changed for the better while he was away. Maybe it was the accident. A tragedy like that can mellow a man. Only I'm inclined to believe now it was an act."

"Accident?" Shayne said.

"Yes, a pretty bad automobile smash-up, apparently. That how he got the scar on his cheek."

"He was alone in the offices that night?" Shayne asked.

"He was," Porter said. "He told everyone he had some late work to do. We thought nothing of it. You see, Mrs. Price-Stone had started him as an assistant to our Sales Vice-President. He hadn't worked in the company before, so he often had to return to the office at night to keep routine details from piling up."

"Where was the money?"

"In our hidden safe," Porter said. "The only time we keep that much cash on hand is just before pay-off day. Our workers are old-fashioned, and like to be paid in cash. We were aware of the risk, and had a special safe built in Martins' office. He's our Sales Vice-President."

"The man Gerald worked un-



der? Why did you pick his office in the first place?" Shayne asked.

"It's the last place we thought a thief would look. We have a small office safe in the main room, and another one in the Treasurer's office. So we put the special safe behind a bookcase in Martins' office. Gerald knew it was there."

"Who else?"

"Myself, Mrs. Price-Stone, Martins, Oldham our Executive Vice President, Tashnitz our Vice President for Production, Rhule our Treasurer, and Johnson the Vice President for Personnel."

"They all know the combination?" Shayne asked.

"They do, but Gerald did not," Porter said. "The safe was not opened by the combination, Mr. Shayne."

"How was it opened?"

"It had been drilled and blown open with a small nitroglycerine charge. In crime parlance I believe the term is 'souped'."

"Souped?" Shayne said. "What makes anyone think Gerald could blow a safe with a nitro charge or know how to muffle the sound?"

"The police say it would not be too hard to learn the method well enough if time was no factor. Apparently he used a loud radio to cover the noise."

Shayne nodded to himself. Almost anyone could learn how to blow a small wall safe well enough to do the job if there was no great need for haste. Gerald had been alone, so a slow and sloppy job would have sufficed. But Gerald could not have accomplished it without detailed instructions. The specter of the accomplice again. An expert safe man could have taught anyone in a few days, which would explain the presence of an accomplice

"No one else came near the office that night?" Shayne asked.

"No one. We all seem to have fairly good alibies."

"What about an outside thief?"

Porter shook his head. "Almost impossible. The security guards make rounds every forty minutes until lockup. Each time they went to that office, Gerald was there working. He checked out soon after a check-round, and just before lock-up. At lock-up time the guard checked the windows and they were all locked inside. No one else was seen on the grounds, and the alarm is set on all windows at lock-up time. After that there is an outside patrol."

Shayne scowled. "And now Gerald is missing?"

"Yes," Porter said.

"What about the accomplice?" Shayne said.

"There had to be one," Porter said. "The security guard at the door checked Gerald on his way out. That much money makes a large package, since it was in small bills for the payroll."

"How did the accomplice get onto the grounds? I see you have a fence which looks electrified, at least with an alarm."

"It is, and I can't explain that part. I suppose that a person with a key—"

"A key would get them in?"

"Yes."

Shayne pondered. "Tell me, are any of your executives named Fred?"

"Fred?" Porter said. "Well, yes. Martins is named Fred, and so is Rhule, the Treasurer."

Shayne had not heard the door to Porter's office open. But now he was suddenly aware of a man standing there. He turned. The intruder was thin and dark.

"Tell the man about your middle name, Anson," the newcomer said. "Tell them how your friends all call you 'Freddie'."

IV

THE THIN, DARK man had a hawk nose and deep-set eyes. There was a certain anger in his eyes, and his voice was accusing.

Porter nodded. "Yes, my middle name is Frederick and my friends

call me Freddie," he admitted. "But I have a perfect alibi. You see, Shayne, I was at a special Board Meeting that night in full view of Mrs. Price-Stone!"

"A Board Meeting? Were all the executives there?"

"No, only myself and the Directors. Martins here was playing poker, I understand."

Shayne looked at the dark man. "You're Fred Martins, the Sales Vice President?" he said.

"Yes," Martins said, nodding.

"What did you think about young Price-Stone coming back? Did he seem about to rob the company?"

Martins shook his head. "No, not at all. He seemed most eager to do a good job. He wasn't too good at first, but I think he might have learned. In fact I was pleasantly surprised by him, in view of what I'd been told. I suppose ten years can change a man in a good many ways."

"We were all pleasantly surprised," Porter said. "The boy showed great eagerness."

"I'll bet," Shayne said drily. "Eagerness to get his hands on a cool half million."

"We all thought he was showing an interest in the company at last," Martins said. "The playboy settled down, and all that. It made his mother very happy."

Shayne said, "I thought she fought with him?"

"She did, but that doesn't mean

she didn't dote on him, as well," Martins said.

"What did they fight about?"

"Largely his escapades, I heard," Martins said. "The boy was wild. He had a trust fund of his own, you know, so he just walked off. We'd read about his antics in the papers from time to time. Wine, women and song, that was Gerald. We all hoped he'd changed when he came home at last, and it seemed as if he had. Now I think he had just exhausted his inheritance."

"Well, he won't run out of money now," Shayne said.

He learned no more from Martins or Porter. None of the other executives could add anything. They all had good alibies, and they had all found young Price-Stone to be better than they had expected. Apparently there had been some resentment at his sudden appearance on such a high level, but the young man had been charming enough to soothe the ruffled feelings.

Through all his questioning Shayne noted the apparent discrepancy between Gerald Price-Stone's reputation and the way the young man had acted since his return. There was enough discrepancy to lead to only one conclusion. Since all the men in the company had readily identified the new Gerald as being the man they had worked with for less than two short weeks, he must have planned carefully and well.

Sure to be suspected the instant the theft was discovered, he had gained complete freedom to lay the groundwork for a daring crime by allaying all suspicion before the theft. A man who had planned that well would not be easy to find, Shayne told himself. And yet the crime was so blatant. Was it simply the super-arrogance of a man who was sure his own mother would not prosecute him? Or did Gerald have something else up his sleeve?

Shayne, alone now in the small office where Gerald Price-Stone had worked so briefly as the returned prodigal, tugged at his left earlobe, his bushy red eyebrows knitting in thought.

Had someone safely hidden behind an airtight alibi applied blackmail pressure against a young man with a playboy past? The accomplice as a watchdog! That would at least explain why Gerald had not run. The blackmailer would not have let him!

It was only a theory, but a better one, surely, than the assumption that simple arrogance had made Price-Stone think he could get away with theft. The office where Gerald had worked for two weeks was as bare as if the man had never even emptied his pockets. Shayne had found nothing to go on. But maybe if his new theory had any merit, the accomplice might provide better clues.

Shayne turned and left the office. He went outside and around

to the area of the grounds directly beneath the window of the office of Fred Martins. It was here that the accomplice would have stood to receive the money tossed down from above.

He searched the grounds and the thick bushes that bordered the red-brick building. There were footprints—too many to be of any value. Gentry and his men had been all over the area. Disgusted, Shayne was about to turn away when his grey eyes saw a small, glittering object lying almost at his feet. The redhead bent to pick it up.

The first shot struck the brick wall just above his head.

As the bullet whined away across the grounds he dropped to his hands and knees and flattened himself against the base of the wall where the shadows clustered thickly.

The second shot showered brick dust down on him.

Still keeping his body rigid, Shayne turned his head. There was a five story warehouse building across the highway. The evening sun glinted on the windows. One window was open and did not glint. There was movement at the distant window.

The third shot from the high-powered rifle struck again on the wall. A brick chip slashed across Shayne's cheek. He felt a sharp sting of pain and when he touched his cheek his hand came away wet.

A black car was parked in front of the warehouse.

Shayne crawled through the brush and bushes to the corner of the building. Around the corner of Price-Stone Chemical he was out of the line of fire. He looked back. As he watched, the black car drove away in a cloud of dust.

Only then did he stand up. He looked down at his hand. There were cuts and slashes from the brick chips. And in his hand was the object he had picked up just as the firing had started.

It was small, plastic swizzle stick. On it, engraved in faded gold against the blue plastic, was the name: *Hotel Grande*.

V

The *Hotel Grande* was not grand and barely a hotel. It was a shabby building on the bay that was little more than a flophouse. The sleazy bar labeled a cocktail lounge had nothing but the faded swizzle sticks to give it a claim to that label.

Three loungers on the street eyed Shayne up and down as he parked his car and got out. They showed no love for the redhead, but they seemed to have a certain respect for his size and shape as he strode past them into the cocktail lounge. In the bar the loungers did not even look up. The bartender polished the bar with a rag as dirty as his apron.

"Yeh?" the bartender said.



"Sidecar," Shayne said. "And some answers."

"Sidecar you get," the bartender said, turning away.

"And answers?"

"Try television, we sell booze," the bartender said as he mixed the sidecar with his back to Shayne.

The bartender was large, muscular, and truculent. Shayne noted the four other men in the bar. They were immersed in their liquor, and they did not look like they would go to the aid of their widowed mother even if sober.

The bartender placed the sidecar in front of Mike Shayne. Shayne stood and leaned his big frame against the bar. His grey eyes bored into the bartender. He laid a twenty dollar bill on the bar.

"This is for a friendly try first," Shayne said.

The bartender looked him up and down, shrugged, and took the twenty dollar bill. "What's the

beef, Shamus, so long as it's not about a friend of mine."

"You know me?"

"Shayne," the bartender said. "Down in these parts who doesn't know Mike Shayne?"

Shayne produced the picture of Gerald Price-Stone. He laid it before the bartender. The big man glanced at it casually. Then he picked it up and looked more closely.

"That one? Sure, I think I seen him. He's no regular, but I figure I seen him once or twice."

"You think?"

"Well, he only come in once, maybe twice. It's the scar I remember. That and the guy he drank with, you know?"

"Who did he drink with?" Shayne snapped.

"That's the gimmick," the bartender said. "I remember the other guy real good. He come in almost every night. He liked our bar girls, you know? And he always drank the same damn thing—a Penrod Frappe! Yeh, I had to shave ice special, so him I know."

"What did he look alike?"

"Well, it's hard to say. I mean, they both wore these damn big dark glasses. Another young guy with dark hair. I couldn't tell much more. Pretty average looking. Only the guy with the scar had the scar, see?"

"How often did they meet?"

"Like I said, once, maybe twice. The guy with the scar drank bour-

bon, he was okay. The other guy, the Penrod Frappe crumb, he was a pain. Always after the broads."

"And you can't give me a better description of this second man? The one who came in every night?"

"Nope, only he lives in the hotel here," the bartender said.

Shayne nearly choked on his last gulp of sidecar. It was a bad sidecar but not that bad. What choked him was that the accomplice lived in the same hotel he drank in!

Shayne tossed a bill on the bar to pay for the sidecar and strode from the 'cocktail lounge' into the shabby lobby. There were cheap hotels that had seen better days, but *The Hotel Grande* was not one of them. It had always been a flop-house. The clerk on the desk fitted the decor perfectly.

"Yeh?" the shabby clerk said.

"I'm looking for a man. Young, dark-haired, dark glasses, drinks Penrod Frappes in the lounge, and chases your girls."

The clerk started to narrow his eyes, then saw the folded ten in Shayne's big hand. Shayne had decided the clerk was no more than a ten dollar bribe. He was right. The clerk tucked the ten away in his pocket.

"Name of Phil Theme, room twenty-seven. Only he checked out," the clerk said.

"That figures," Shayne said. "Who visited him?"

"No one, except that young guy in the bar."

"You fellows don't keep secrets from each other," Shayne said.

"We don't get much call for Penrod Frappes. He looked good," the clerk said.

"No one in his room?"

"Some calls."

"From who and about what?" Shayne asked.

"Don't know all of them, and I don't listen," the clerk said.

Another folded bill, a five this time, appeared in the redhead's hand.

The clerk smiled. "A couple came from some switchboard, some chemical company," the clerk said. "And the guy called the chemical company a few times."

"How do you know?"

"The girl on the switchboard identified the company coming and going," the clerk said.

That, Shayne knew, was standard practice.

"Who did he call?"

"I never got the name," the clerk said. "I can't listen long, the boys down here don't like listeners, so I keep clean, mostly."

"The key," Shayne said.

Shayne took the key marked Room 27, and the clerk collected the second bill. It joined the first in his pocket as Shayne went up the stairs two at a time. Room 27 was the third door on the left at the head of the stairs on the second floor.

Shayne opened the door cautiously, but the room was empty.



From the appearance of it, the room had been more-or-less made ready for the next guest by whoever drew below-minimum wages as a chambermaid in this rat-trap. The bed was made and a vacuum had been skimmed over the floor. But paper still lay in the waste basket. Two scraps of paper.

Shayne picked them out of the basket. One was covered with the meaningless doodles which deface the walls of telephone booths. But the other was more interesting. It also had doodles on it, plus the single word—*Isthmus*. One word but written, or printed strangely. Shayne stared at the word.

It was printed in block capital letters ISTHMUS, and had been surrounded by a thick box the way a man will border words while doodling. From the top of the long box around the word the man had drawn two small vertical rectangles with wavy lines coming from them.

Like two smokestacks—or *funnels!*

A ship! ISTHMUS.

Shayne whirled to pick up the telephone. He ordered the clerk to look up the number for The Isthmus Steamship Line.

"No Isthmus Steamship Line," the clerk said, "but I got a Isthmus and South Coast Line."

"Get them!" Shayne said.

It took him one minute to learn that the Isthmus and South Coast Line had a freighter, the *Southern Dawn*, sailing for Brazil in exactly one hour.

Shayne was out the door and into his car before the clerk could ask him for the charge for the call.

VI

The Southern Dawn was clearing for sea. The last crates rode the cargo nets up suspended from the long cargo booms. A tall, bearded Captain leaned indolently on the bridge while his men scurried about the deck in the last rays of evening sun.

Where he stood in the corridor that led to Stateroom C, Shayne heard the noise and activity on the deck, but his eyes were riveted on the closed stateroom door. There was the sound of movement in Stateroom C.

After his mad dash from the Hotel Grande to the pier, it had taken Shayne no more than two minutes to learn that a Mr. Paul Smith, and a Mr. Gerald Brown

were sharing Stateroom C. Both men were aboard, passports all in order. The passage had been booked by Mr. Brown a week ago. Both men were young and dark and Mr. Brown had a scar on his left cheek.

The ship's officers could not permit Shayne to board and search until they had called the police.

"You understand, Mr. Shayne," the First Officer said. "We must have official sanction. You could be wrong, and that would be nasty for the company, eh?"

"Of course," Shayne said.

They were honest men, the officers of the *Southern Dawn*, and while they called the police Shayne stepped out onto the pier for a smoke. The gangway of the freighter was not guarded. It was child's play for Shayne to slip away, climb the gangway swiftly and silently, and move along the deck to the cabin area beneath the bridge amidships.

He had been hired to take Gerald alive. He had been shot at twice. The two men were desperate and dangerous, and the police could alarm them. They would be watching, and Shayne had no intention of letting them slip away this time.

Cautiously, his automatic drawn and ready, Shayne glided toward the closed door of Stateroom C. It was possible that they had not seen him, a lone man on the pier, and he would be able to kick in the

door and take them. He was wrong.

How alert and dangerous they were he soon found out.

He was barely twenty feet from the closed door of Stateroom C, a perfect target in the narrow corridor, when the door of the cabin suddenly opened. He had a quick glimpse of a dark-haired young man with a hawk nose.

Shayne went down flat, his automatic already firing.

There were two shots from the cabin.

Both shots went wild above his head and sang down the narrow corridor. As long as he kept them inside the cabin they did not have a clear shot at him.

Shayne fired his automatic directly into the open doorway.

Above his head on deck, and in the distance, voices shouted and there was the sound of running feet coming closer as the ship's company heard the firing below.

He stopped firing.

There was no more sound from Stateroom C.

Shayne listened where he lay flat on the floor of the corridor. There was no sound at all inside Stateroom C. The noise of the approaching ship's personnel was close. Still Shayne waited. He was a sitting duck in the corridor, and it could be a trap. At last two ship's officers appeared in the corridor behind Shayne. They both carried pistols.



Shayne motioned them to stop. They halted abruptly but continued to cover him as he crawled slowly to the open door of Stateroom C. He looked inside. Then he slowly stood up and motioned the ship's officers to join him. They looked into the cabin with him.

The body of a young man lay on the floor. There was a pistol in the young man's hand, and a dark, bloody hole in his head. He was dead where he lay staring at nothing. Shayne walked into the cabin and stood over the body.

The young man on the floor had dark hair, deep-set brown eyes, a hawk nose, full lips, and a scar on his left cheek.

There was no one else in the room. Another door, another exit from the cabin, was open.

Shayne went out this door and along a second corridor and up the companionway to the open deck. A sailor lay groaning on the deck, a large welt on his forehead.

Shayne stepped over him and went around the bridge to the port side that faced the pier.

On the pier four members of the ship's crew were staring along the waterfront road at a distant car that was racing away. From where he stood Shayne was sure it was a black car. He walked down the gangway to the dock office. An approaching siren told him that the police were arriving. There was no need to call the police. But Shayne had another call to make—a very important one.

He picked up the telephone to call Mrs. Hester Price-Stone and tell her that he had failed in his job, that her son was dead. He had to tell the imperious old lady that in a way she had killed her own son.

VII

IN THE GLOOM of the Morgue, Shayne stood away from the group gathered around the dead body of Gerald Price-Stone. He had no desire to look at the young man again. He did not want to see the face of the old woman who stood staring down in grief-stricken despair at the still form on the Morgue slab.

"Yes," Mrs. Hester Price-Stone said, "that is Gerald."

The president of Price-Stone Chemical Company, Anson Porter nodded as he looked at the body. "It's him," he said. "And what about the money?"

"The other fellow must have it," Will Gentry said.

The Miami Chief of Police glared at Mike Shayne but said nothing. He nodded to his men, and the body of Gerald Price-Stone was slid back into the refrigerator. Gentry led them all from the Morgue.

Anson Porter took Mrs. Price-Stone home. Gentry's men went back to work on the missing money and the vanished accomplice. In the gloom of his private office Will Gentry chewed on the stump of his black cigar and glowered at Shayne.

"Mike, I could throw the book at you!"

Shayne nodded. "I thought I could take him, Will."

"You had no right to try. Damn it, you knew he was desperate. Twice he tried to kill you! You didn't even report those attempts!"

"I was going to, Will. The trail got too hot. I moved too fast. The ship was about to sail."

"Damn it. Do you realize that young Price-Stone was our only lead to the other guy? Now the money and the other man are gone and what do we have to go on? He is young, he likes Pernod Frappes, he likes girls. He may be named Phil, or Freddie, or Paul. That's a big help."

Shayne was blinking in the dark as if he barely heard Will Gentry's angry voice.

"I planned to talk to the people

at the chemical company, and then talk to you, Will," Shayne said. "But I found that swizzle stick and after that the trail just pulled me on."

Gentry watched Shayne. "So, Mike?"

"I don't know," Shayne said. "There's something about all of this I haven't liked from the start. It was such a stupid robbery, Will. Young Price-Stone was the only real suspect. To do a job like that a man had to be damned reckless, damned stupid, or completely desperate."

Shayne leaned forward in his chair. "Now Price-Stone was not stupid. He was reckless enough to have his mother toss him out for playboy antics, and to get into scrapes and accidents, but that's not the same thing as pulling a blatant robbery like this one."

"Will, I've felt all along that there is someone else behind all this. Look at it, Will. A young man comes home after ten years, seems contrite, almost a different person. He gets his doting mother to forgive him and give him a big job in the company. Less than two weeks later he steals a half million dollars that only he could have taken. He's made a whole plan including an accomplice and a getaway."

"But he shoots at me twice. He leaves a trail an amateur could follow. He shoots it out with me and gets himself killed. All for money when all he had to do was wait



around and be nice to his mother and he'd be a rich man."

Will Gentry had chewed angrily on his cigar stump all the time Mike Shayne had been talking. Now the Miami Chief of Police spoke coldly. Gentry had the look of a man who had reached the end of a long road of annoyance.

"Mike, all you had to do was come to me! Damn it, man, why didn't you?"

"What do you mean, come to you?"

Will Gentry stood and began to pace his gloomy office. The Chief spoke in a harsh, clipped voice.

"Item: ten years ago he had been disinherited, and might not have gotten a nickel from his mother. Item: the old lady isn't that rich. Most of her money is stock in the chemical company and her husband's will prohibits her from selling it! Item: the old lady had made some tough conditions. The boy had to live with her, keep his nose clean, stay away from the girls!"

"I didn't know that," Shayne said.

"No, you forgot to ask. Damn it, Mike, that wasn't like you."

"I guess I felt I had to keep after him when he tried to kill me twice. But Will—all you've said might explain why he wanted to steal a half million and run. But why did he try to kill me? Why did he resist capture and get himself killed? Grand larceny is one thing, murder is another. Can you explain why he was so desperate?"

Will Gentry stared at Shayne. "Yes, Mike, I can. And I would have told you that, too!"

The gruff Chief of Police turned to his intercom and barked an order. Almost at once the side door to the office opened and a short, stocky man came in. He nodded to Gentry and smiled at Mike Shayne.

"Mike, meet Lieutenant Baxter of New York City Police, Homicide Division."

"I know about Mike Shayne," Lieutenant Baxter said.

Shayne blinked his grey eyes. "New York Police?"

"Tell him, Baxter," Will Gentry said.

Baxter nodded. "We were after Price-Stone, Shayne. Murder. He killed a woman three weeks ago in New York."

Will Gentry looked grim. "Desperation enough, Mike? A man wanted for murder? Grab a half million and run, and shoot it out when cornered to keep from being

taken, eh? The way I see it Gerald came down here to steal the money which he knew would be in the safe because of payroll day. But it took him almost two weeks to gain enough confidence to learn where the money was.

"He learned about safe work, probably from the accomplice. I bet he brought the accomplice down here with him. The whole plan was probably planned before he even showed up in Miami."

But Shayne was blinking in the gloom of the room. The big red-head tugged very slowly on his left earlobe, then, turned his grey eyes toward Lieutenant Baxter of the New York Police.

"You knew he had killed a woman, but it took three weeks to find him?" Shayne said.

"Tell him the whole story, Baxter," Gentry said. "Maybe he'll learn something about working with the police!"

"He was crazy drunk that night," Baxter said. "He picked up a bar-girl in a gin mill. He took her home to her sleazy hotel room. I guess something went wrong. Near four in the morning the girl started screaming. Woke up the whole place. The hotel clerk got scared and went up, but he was too late. The girl had been strangled—after being beaten up.

"The clerk tried to stop Price-Stone but got flattened. Our killer got clean away. All we had to go on was his expensive clothes and

a good description from a lot of people who saw him that night. We didn't have his name or a picture to send out. We made up a composite drawing, of course, but it took us three weeks to find his place in New York.

"The bloody suit was still there. He was no fool. He hadn't waited to try to hide anything. He had run. We got his name and that led us down here fast. Chief Gentry took one look at our composite drawing and nailed him."

"Only you got into the act, Mike, and now he's dead and the accomplice is scot-free with a half million and we've no idea what he looks like," Gentry said.

Shayne tugged on his earlobe. "It could have taken a lot longer to find him. That's why he could risk two weeks wait."

"It would have taken longer," Baxter said. "But the witnesses remembered him very well and the composite was good. Here."

Shayne took the drawing and looked at it. He saw a young man, dark-haired, hawk-nosed, deep-set around the eyes, with full lips. It was a good drawing. It looked very much like the picture he had of Price-Stone. Except . . . Shayne took out his picture, and compared them. The resemblance was marked. Except . . .

Shayne looked up from the pictures. "The scar."

"What?" Baxter said.

"The scar," Shayne said hand-

ing the picture and the composite drawing to Baxter. "What about the scar?"

Baxter looked at the drawing and at the picture. Will Gentry snorted, "Damn it, Mike, witnesses don't usually remember everything."

"How many witnesses, Baxter?" Shayne said.

Baxter was staring at the two pictures. He looked up at Mike Shayne.

"Ten," he said. "In four different bars and the hotel."

"Ten," Shayne said, "and not one mentioned the scar? Were there any fingerprints in the murder room?"

"A great many," Baxter said. "But they were all smudged."

"Mike," Gentry said, "they just didn't notice the scar. It's not a big one."

"Everyone down here noticed it," Shayne said. "I certainly did. Why did everyone here notice a scar, and ten witnesses in New York fail to mention it?"

"Damn it, Mike, down here they noticed the *change*. After ten years, seeing a man again, it would be natural enough to notice a scar he hadn't had a decade ago. Besides, they worked close with him. Damn it, Mike, his mother identified him and so did Anson Porter!"

Shayne nodded wearily. "She did. It was just a hunch. They all seemed positive—"

"His mother surely knew him, scar or no scar," Gentry said.

"Even after ten years," Baxter said. "You had me worried for a minute, Shayne. It is peculiar that my witnesses missed a scar. Scars are one thing a witness usually sees. But the Chief is right. It was the *change* they noticed down here. After ten years you look at a man closely to see if—"

He broke off abruptly to stare at Mike Shayne, who had leapt to his feet and was tugging furiously at his left earlobe.

"Ten years!" Shayne exclaimed. "I've been hearing that all day but it just didn't sink in! Will, is the autopsy completed on the body?"

"It should be, Mike. I don't see why you—"

"Get the results. There's no time to lose!"

And Shayne strode to the telephone. He dialed the number of the Hotel Grande. Gentry spoke on another telephone. The clerk at the Hotel Grande answered. It was the same clerk. Shayne barked into the mouthpiece, after identifying himself.

"Those people the man in twenty-seven called. Was one of them a woman?"

"Yeh, one was. At the chemical company," the clerk said.

"You forgot to mention that," Shayne snapped.

"You forgot to ask, peeper," the distant voice of the clerk said.

Shayne hung up and whirled to face Gentry. The Chief had also just put down the telephone. He seemed puzzled.

"Well?" Shayne said.

"Killed by a thirty-eight caliber slug," Gentry said. "It came from his own gun. You didn't kill him, Mike. He shot himself. I guess he knew the game was up."

Shayne's grey eyes were like beads of steel. "Not yet, Will, but soon. Damn it, there isn't much time. We may be too late now!"

"Too late for what, Mike?"

"To stop another murder!" Shayne said as he strode toward the door.

In the corridor he broke into a run with Gentry and Baxter right behind him.

VIII

THE CIRCULAR driveway of the mansion gleamed in the moonlight. Nothing moved in the house, but there was light in a downstairs room. Mike Shayne led Gentry, Baxter, and two of Gentry's men up to the house at the lighted window.

In a small study of the mansion, Hester Price-Stone and Anson Porter were talking. Even as Shayne and the others watched, Miss Bolt the secretary came in carrying papers. The butler, Morgan, followed with drinks. Half hidden in a far corner, Fred Martins stood at a bookcase turning the

pages of a book. It was clearly a meeting, and Mrs. Price-Stone was doing most of the talking.

Shayne motioned to Gentry and Baxter. They left the two men from Gentry's force to watch the window of the small study, and silently began to circle the darkened mansion. Shayne led the way. At the rear corner of the house he motioned Baxter to remain there. The New York Lieutenant nodded and crouched hidden in the bushes.

Gentry and Shayne went on along the rear of the big house. At the next corner of the mansion Shayne stopped and crouched in the bushes. He motioned Will Gentry down. The two men began to wait. Half an hour passed. Then an hour. Faint in the distance inside the house they could hear the voices still talking.

A few more minutes passed. And then there was a light step somewhere behind. Shayne and Gentry. The two men froze.

Behind the house, between where Shayne and Gentry barely breathed, and where Baxter was hiding, a figure appeared in the moonlight. It paused to listen for a long minute, and then moved on across the grass toward the back of the mansion. The figure was nearly at the rear door when Mike Shayne moved.

His automatic drawn, Shayne crept silently toward the motionless form. Gentry moved close behind him. But they were not silent



enough. The figure at the rear door turned suddenly, saw them, and began to run.

Shayne leaped up in pursuit. The man, because now in the moonlight the figure was clearly that of a man, ran toward the far corner of the house.

Just as he neared the corner he turned once and fired at Shayne and Gentry. The shot went wild. Shayne raised his automatic as the man turned to run again. Shayne did not fire. There was no need. Lieutenant Baxter loomed up directly in the path of the running man and knocked him down with a single well-aimed punch.

Shayne and Gentry ran up, and stood looking down at him. He was dark-haired, of average height, with a hawk nose and deep-set eyes. He had full lips but there was no scar. He began to groan and squirm about on the grass.

Shayne bent and pulled him roughly to his feet.

"Let's go!" Shayne barked. "Inside."

The young man did not resist. Shayne pushed him into the mansion. Gentry and Baxter followed. Inside, Shayne propelled him forward into the study where everyone turned to stare.

Hester Price-Stone stood up. "Mr. Shayne! What does this mean?"

"I'm bringing you a killer and a thief," Shayne said.

He pushed the young man into a chair. The latter glanced defiantly for an instant, then shrugged and took out a cigarette. He lit it and leaned back with an arrogant smile on his face.

Gentry was watching Shayne. "The accomplice, Mike?" he said.

"Yes, Will, the accomplice. A very clever young man," Shayne said. "A man with a taste for Penrod Frappes and B-girls."

"Prove it," the young man said.

"I intend to," Shayne said.

Lieutenant Baxter was staring hard at the arrogant young man. From his pocket Baxter took out the composite drawing of the man he was after. Then he looked at Shayne.

"Who the devil is he, Shayne? This guy fits my drawing, too," Baxter said.

Shayne nodded. "Yes, I thought he would. In fact he fits it better, doesn't he? No scar. He also fits the character better. Exotic drinks and B-girls, arrogance and a nasty

manner. The other fellow was pleasant-mannered, everyone said so."

Anson Porter had been trying to hold himself back, but now the president of Price-Stone Chemical Company could contain himself no longer. "You said a thief, Mr. Shayne! Do you mean this man has our money?"

Shayne nodded. "I imagine it's pretty close at hand, probably in a black car parked a short distance from the house. He would have wanted to run fast after he finished here. He would have the money with him."

Now the young man snarled. "Damn you, Shayne! You'll never get a—

Mrs. Hester Price-Stone had not spoken since her first sharp outcry when Mike Shayne had brought the young man into the room. Now she raised her voice in an imperious command.

"Just a moment! Mr. Shayne. Just who do you say this young person is?"

Shayne smiled. "You should know your son, Mrs. Price-Stone."

IX

IN THE SHARP silence the young man had paled, but he still slouched in the chair, the cigarette held indolently in his hand. Anson Porter let his mouth drop open. Miss Bolt sat down. Morgan, the butler, stared impassively. Only

Fred Martins made a sound. The Vice President swore loudly as he looked at the young man.

Mrs. Hester Price-Stone waved her old hand sharply. "Don't be stupid, Shayne," the old woman said. "My son is dead. I identified my son!"

"So you did. Perhaps you made a mistake," Shayne said.

"I never make mistakes!" the old woman cried.

"I'm afraid you did this time. Almost a fatal mistake, I think," Shayne said softly.

Hester Price-Stone never moved from where she stood with her old face set in a mask of anger and hatred. Anson Porter stepped toward Shayne.

"But, Mr. Shayne, Gerald had a scar! I admit they look a great deal alike, but hardly that much. This man is certainly not Gerald. Why, you have a large size photograph of him!"

Shayne nodded. "I have a picture, true, but not of Gerald Price-Stone."

"But we all worked with Gerald!" Fred Martins said. "That isn't Gerald."

"No," Shayne said, "you did not work with Gerald. As a matter of fact, I don't think any of you ever saw Gerald. The way I see it, Gerald was the accomplice waiting outside the window for the money."

Mike Shayne began to pace the small room of the mansion. The arrogant young man still sat in the

chair apparently undisturbed. The old woman barely breathed as she stood alone watching Shayne with a stunned look on her face.

"I didn't like the robbery from the start," Shayne began. "It was too easy to trace to poor dear Gerald. A man would have to have been damned desperate to pull such a job. There had to be an accomplice, so why not at least a false trail to some outside burglar? Then Lieutenant Baxter came up with the reason.

"It was logical, and Gerald would have known that the New York police would appear sooner or later to give a plausible reason to his grab-and-run robbery. *But it also gave Gerald a perfect reason to want to be dead!* The murder in New York made the whole robbery plausible—and Gerald knew that!

"We would have a dead Gerald, a missing unknown accomplice, and the police in New York would be satisfied. The Miami police would go on looking for the money and the accomplice, but they would never find the accomplice *since it was the accomplice who was dead.* It is almost impossible to find a missing man when you are looking for the wrong man. Gerald would only have to act naturally to be sure he would not be suspected of being the accomplice."

Shayne looked at the young man who had now sat up, and leaned forward in his chair. The young

man's eyes were harder now, but his full lips still smiled.

"I don't know who the dead accomplice is, we may never know. I would say he was some small-time New York criminal with no traceable family and no friends who would ever come forward. I would guess that he was a safe-cracker. Probably Gerald had known him before all this, and had the sudden inspiration of how to use him.

"You see, the plan was pretty good. Even if we ever learned who the accomplice had been, all the police would find was a missing criminal. With Gerald dead and identified, the police would look forever for the missing accomplice with the half million dollars and never find him. Why would we ever dig up the body?"

Anson Porter and Fred Martins had expressions of complete mystification on their faces.

"But, Shayne, we all worked with Gerald!" Porter said.

Shayne shook his head. "No, you worked with the accomplice. That was the real clue. *Ten years!*" Shayne turned to Will Gentry. "Will, how old would you say Gerald was? Thirty? Thirty-two?"

Gentry nodded, said, "About that. Exactly thirty, his mother said."

"Exactly," Shayne said. "He was twenty when he left Miami! A man changes from when he is a boy of twenty to when he is a man

of thirty. Besides, I remembered the way almost all of you spoke. You said Gerald was much nicer than you had *expected*, than you had *heard*, then you had been *told*. Miss Bolt there said she had only known Gerald less than two weeks. Morgan had *heard* the boy was worse than he found him."

Shayne looked at Anson Porter. "As a matter of fact, how many people here had actually known Gerald *before* he went away?" he asked.

They all looked at each other. No one spoke. Mike Shayne nodded.

Anson Porter spoke first. "I came to the company seven years ago, so did Martins and most of the executives. There was a reorganization."

Miss Bolt could only whisper. "Morgan, the cook and myself have only been here two or three years. Mrs. Price-Stone never had any pictures of Gerald until he came home. She said he was never to be mentioned."

"And the ten years took care of anyone who might have known Gerald before," Shayne said. "Yes, you see the trail was too hot. It was too easy to trace them. I found a swizzle stick under the office window and the trail became as clear as a highway. Even to drinking Pernod Frappes so the bartender would be sure to recall. Gentry and his men had been all over the grounds. How could they have missed that

swizzle stick? Because it wasn't there!

"It was all planted to lead me to the body of the fake Gerald. I was shot at to make me think he was dangerous and desperate. With luck I might have actually shot the fake Gerald, but that didn't matter. A suicide would be good enough. It was a bit risky, and that was why they hired me instead of relying on the police. I could be counted on to chase Gerald alone and give the real Gerald a better chance of escape. It was a risk, but they were playing for high stakes. After all, Gerald was wanted for murder. Any risk was worth trying—to make us think he was dead."

Chief Gentry had been listening carefully. Now he began to nod as he watched Shayne. "You said *they*, Mike?" he said.

Shayne shrugged. "Nothing could have been worked without the help of Mrs. Price-Stone. She had to introduce the fake Gerald as her son, she had to identify the body. A mother's identification would satisfy everyone. I suppose when he came home in such bad trouble, wanted for murder, she just had to help him."

The redhead cast a thoughtful glance at Mrs. Price-Stone, and turned again to Chief Gentry. "As you pointed out, Will," he went on, "she didn't have ready cash. Gerald must have eventually talked her into going along with



the robbery so that he could get his hands on the payroll cash, a cool half-million. Once his mother agreed to that she had to go along with the second murder to make sure Gerald got free."

Now, suddenly, the arrogant young man laughed. "Supposing this cock-and-bull story is true, Mr. Shayne," he said, "how do you prove it? I'll admit to the robbery; you'll find the money in my car all right. But, you see, I am not Gerald Price-Stone, so I'm not guilty of the New York murder, and the other man shot himself, right? How do you prove I'm Gerald if the old lady won't talk!?"

Gentry snorted. "There are ways, sonny!"

"No," the young man said, "there are not. I have never been fingerprinted. I was never in the Army. Gerald really was in an accident, injuries unknown. I have no scars, no operations, and I doubt if you can trace my dental work."

There was another long silence in the small study of the mansion. Outside the moon was down and

the night was pitch dark in the early morning hours. Everyone now looked toward the imposing Victorian figure of Mrs. Hester Price-Stone.

"My son is dead," the old woman said.

"He's a killer, Mrs. Price-Stone," Shayne said.

"I identified the body of my son," the old woman said.

The young man laughed. "All you have is speculation, and a good lawyer could make the other side sound just as good."

Shayne ignored the young man. His grey eyes were fixed on Mrs. Price-Stone. The old woman stared back without a trace of emotion on her face under the piled white hair.

"He's a murderer, twice, and he's made you an accomplice," Shayne said.

"Gerald died today," the old woman said.

"No, Mrs. Price-Stone," Shayne said. "He didn't die, and he did not run as he was supposed to. By now he should be safely out of the state and the country, isn't that so?"

She did not move a muscle.

"Why do you think he came back here?" Shayne said. "He came to silence the only person who knew Gerald Price-Stone was still alive. He came to kill *you*, Mrs. Price-Stone. He had his gun, he was sneaking into the house, and he would have killed you! His own mother!"

A single muscle twitched at the corner of the imperious old woman's mouth.

"You know it's true," Shayne said. "He's your son, but he's rotten all the way. He planned to kill you from the start. It was the only way to be absolutely sure of his own arrogant skin."

The single muscle twitched again in the old lady's face. Then, as if all her bones had gone soft, she collapsed into a chair. Her face melted into the face of a broken old woman.

"He is my son Gerald," the old lady said with a single, choked cry. "You are right, Mr. Shayne. The man we killed was a fake. It was Gerald's plan to escape being caught for the New York murder, and I helped him exactly as you said. I told everyone that the imposter was my son, I identified the imposter's body as my son. I knew no one really knew Gerald and I helped him with the whole plan, but I will not help him any more. He is a worthless weakling."

Gerald Price-Stone made one dash for the door. Lieutenant Baxter dropped the frantic killer with a single blow of his revolver.

THE SUN WAS coming up over Miami when Mike Shayne finally stood up to leave Will Gentry's office. The Chief was winding up the story.

"The dead accomplice was named Joe Maxson. He was a

small-time safe cracker from New York. Gerald had known him, and when Gerald killed the girl in New York he got the idea of saving his useless hide by killing Maxson and making us think Maxson was himself.

"Maxson thought it was all just a robbery plot. Maxson thought he and Gerald were fooling the old lady as well as fooling everyone else. He thought it was all a gimmick to get him into the office to rob the safe. He never knew the old woman and Gerald were fooling him. Of course, it was Gerald who told Maxson to always call him Fred, or Freddie, when talking to him. This was to throw suspicion on the company officers.

"Gerald hid out at the Hotel Grande until the night of the robbery. After the robbery, Gerald attacked Maxson and made him a prisoner right away. He kept Maxson hidden while he shot at you and laid the false trail for you to follow, just as you suspected. He drugged Maxson to get him aboard the *Southern Dawn*. Gerald shot Maxson right there in the cabin while you were coming to get them.

"It could have worked except for three mistakes, right?" Chief Gentry said.

"Two," Shayne said. "He called

his mother from the hotel which he should never have done, he should never have gone near her in any way. And he should not have come back to try to kill his own mother."

"Three," Gentry said. "He had the idea of hiring you to trail him. He had his mother come in to do that."

"Four mistakes then, Will," Shayne said softly. "His really biggest mistake was his arrogance. He thought he was too smart to ever get caught."

"That's what they all think, Mike. If they didn't, our job would be a lot harder," Gentry said.

Shayne nodded. "I suppose you're right, Will."

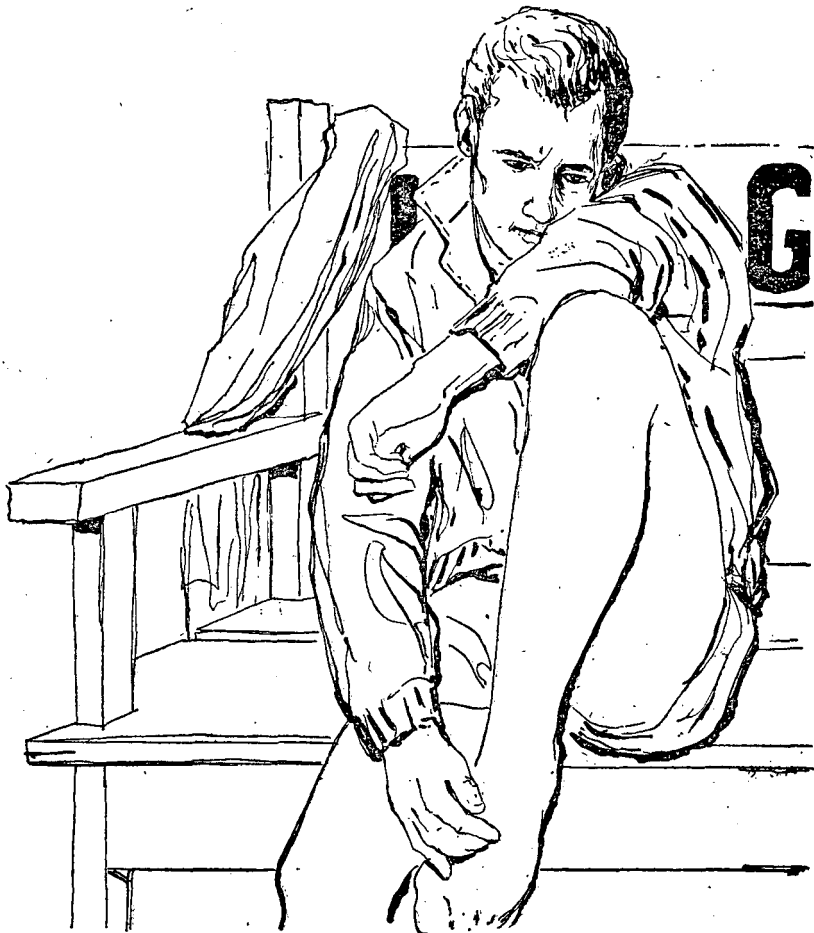
Shayne stood in the office doorway and looked back at Will Gentry.

"Go easy on the old lady, Will," Shayne said. "I guess she just had to try to help her boy even if he was worthless. In a way, he fooled her too."

"That's up to the prosecutor, Mike," Gentry said.

Shayne nodded slowly and left the office. He could not help feeling sorry for Mrs. Price-Stone. And yet maybe she was the most guilty. It was her arrogance that had made Gerald what he was.

Syd Hoff's fame as a satiric artist of exceptional brilliance makes a short story from his pen something of an event. But though we've been privileged to publish more than one of his inimitable short-shorts in MSMM we think you'll agree that this exposure of a lifeguard's secret life has a chilling quality that is wholly unique.



AND THE SUMMER'S YOUNG YET

*There were only a million whitecaps . . .
to remind Vincent how Stamey had died.*

by SYD HOFF



THE POUNDING OF the surf was Stamey—Stamey's voice, sounding just the way it did in the classroom. "Vincent, you're behind, way behind. Buckle down if you expect to graduate. You do want to graduate, don't you? Say, how did you get this far anyway?"

Now it was someone else's voice Vinny heard—Doug's. "Hey, you dreaming or something? I blew my whistle. Didn't you hear me blow my whistle? I must've blown it a half-dozen times at least."

"H'ya Doug. No, I didn't hear it. I-guess I was thinking."

"What were you thinking about? You weren't thinking about yesterday, were you?"

Yesterday. There was only a whitecap out there now to mark the spot, like a million other whitecaps, coming and going . . . coming and going . . .

"No, Doug. I wasn't thinking about it."

"You sure?"

Vinny nodded.

"It wasn't your fault, Vinny. It wasn't your fault at all."

"Maybe it wasn't."

"No maybes about it. Those

things happen. They're nobody's fault."

"But I had him, Doug. I had him and I lost him."

"I know, I know. I was out there when it happened. Don't you remember?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"Course I couldn't get out there as fast as you, Vinny. Kravitz and me—we couldn't keep up with you. Man, what a kick! You must have gotten out there two, three minutes ahead of us."

The smashing waves, the man fighting—Vinny grabbed him, first by the hair, then in a cross-chest carry. "Easy, mister, just relax."

A woman had come pushing her way through the crowd while they worked over him. "It's my husband! Sam! Oh, my God! What happened?"

Two cops held her while she kept screaming: "Save him! Save him!"

But in the end they couldn't. They had taken the man away in the ambulance waiting on the boardwalk and the crowd lingered, looking at the ocean where it had happened, telling Vinny: "Nice try, son, nice try."

Even Connors had said it, climbing up on the tower where Vinny sat long after hours, his head buried in his knees. "Nice try, kid. Don't feel bad. You can't save 'em all. Now, pull yourself together. Life must go on."

After a while the chief lifeguard

climbed down from the tower and walked away, and Vinny tried to tell by the way he walked if he was thinking the man really could have been saved, and if he was thinking about the one last week too.

"I'm thinking of quitting, Doug."

"What?"

"That's right. My folks didn't want me to take this job in the first place. They wanted me to go to some camp."

As a matter of fact, Vinny's parents had been insistent. "There's a doctor who runs this camp. You'd like him, son. Why don't you meet him and see?"

Vinny could still hear himself saying, "I don't want to meet any doctors. Besides, I've already passed the life-saving test. I'm going to work at the beach this summer."

In the long run Vinny had had his way. Why were they always talking about doctors anyhow? Why was someone always telling him what to do? If it wasn't his family, it was Stamey.

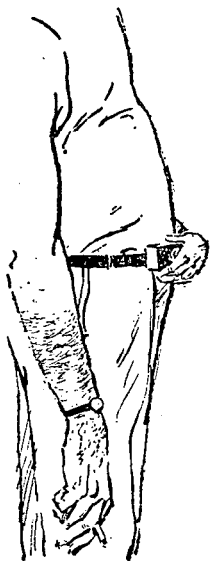
"Connors would never let you quit, Vinny. You're the best swimmer he's got. So you lost two—you can't save 'em all. Remember, the summer's young yet. Well, I better get back."

Nothing eventful happened all morning—a couple of kids playing ball, somebody letting a German Shepherd run around loose . . .

In the afternoon the beach became a carnival of bright umbrellas

and laughing, shouting bathers. Children ran to and from the ice cream and jelly apple concessions. Sometimes they got lost and the life guards held them up, blowing warningly on their whistles.

A girl came toward the tower,



carrying a blanket and a little radio. She had long legs and chestnut-colored hair. When she looked up, Vinny saw there were freckles on her nose.

"Is there much of an undertow?" she asked.

"Some, near the jetty especially," he said. "Just stay away from the jetty."

"Oh, I'm not going in. I only want to talk to you."

Vinny smiled. This was the part

of the job he liked best—having girls look up at him on the tower and admire him. At that camp there wouldn't have been any of that, you could bet your bottom dollar. There would have been only doctors asking questions, stupid questions like they were always asking. Cold? Hot. White? Black. Arm? Leg. Knife? Kill.

"You sure have nice muscles. How did you get them?"

"Calisthenics, weight-lifting. I also did yogi and tumbling."

"Gosh, I bet you didn't have time for anything else."

"Such as what?"

"Girls."

"Maybe. Do you know any?"

"Silly boy. What do I look like?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice."

They were both laughing and suddenly Vinny stopped, staring at something behind her. A man had taken off his robe and was just standing there doing nothing, except maybe breathing and enjoying the salt air like everyone else.

"What's wrong?" the girl asked Vinny.

"I—I just can't look at people like that," he said.

"People like what?"

"People like him. Fat people."

"What's wrong with fat people?" she smiled. "Some day I'll probably be fat myself."

"Not you."

"Why not? Maybe you'll be fat too."

"I'd kill myself first."

"You're crazy."

"I mean it. I had a teacher who was big and fat. He was so fat when he stood near me, his belly hung over my desk. His name was Stamey—Mr. Stamey."

The girl laughed and fell back on the sand, holding her sides. "Oh, that's funny—so funny!"

"I'm not trying to be funny," said Vinny angrily. "I hate fat people. I can't stand the sight of them."

"Listen," said the girl, getting angry herself. "Some of my best friends happen to be fat people, and they're just as nice as anybody you know."

She jumped to her feet, gathered up her blanket and started walking away.

"Hey, come back," Vinny said, but the girl paid no attention.

A dozen yards from the tower she spread out the blanket, and stretched out on it face down, her toes pointed towards him.

"Still mad?" Vinny called.

She turned on the radio—loud.

The hell with you, Vinny thought. Pretty girls are a dime a dozen on the beach. He forced himself to stop thinking of her.

It was Stamey he was thinking about now—Mr. Stamey saying, "Class, I'm paid a good salary to stand up here and explain things, but Vincent would rather stare into space. Perhaps it's part of our country's space program, hey Vincent?"

How the class had laughed! They always laughed at Stamey's jokes,

like when he'd held up a blank sheet of paper after a test, and said, "I wish the rest of you would keep your answers as neat and clean as Vincent."

But the biggest laugh of all came the day Stamey said, "The human brain is an extraordinary mechanism. I sometimes think it is capable of anything."

Then he looked over at Vinny and sighed. He didn't have to say another word. The sigh was enough.

"What are you thinking about, Vincent? Tell us. We'd all love to hear, wouldn't we, class?"

How could Vinny tell them he was thinking how he'd love to get even with Stamey?—like he had once gotten even with Mr. Jason, the science teacher.

He could still hear the pompous old fool saying, "A fulcrum is the support or point of support on which a lever turns in raising or moving something. I will go over it once more for you, Vincent. Please pay attention."

He turned to write on the blackboard. "Here is the fulcrum, here is the weight. Now, where is the pressure?"

"Here it is," said Vinny, streaking out of his seat, thrusting his hands under Mr. Jason's armpits and locking them behind the startled teacher's white-maned head.

Too bad Stamey never tried to explain about fulcrums. It would have been such fun showing him pressure, *real* pressure . . .

There was a shrill sound and this time Vinny heard. He looked and saw Doug standing up, whistle in his mouth, pointing to someone struggling far out in a sea suddenly grown sullen and rough. Then Doug jumped off his tower tossing aside sun helmet and whistle, and went running toward the surf line. Kravitz, on the other side, was off his tower and running too.

They all broke the water at about the same time but Vinny's more powerful strokes soon carried him through the chop, ahead of the others.

A hundred yards out he came upon the desperately thrashing man, his eyes rolling in his head, arms flailing the air seeking something—anything—to grasp, and hold. The instant he saw Vinny he clawed at him.

Vinny treaded water a moment, then dove underneath, felt for the man in the churning depths and spun him around. Coming up from behind, he got the man under the chin and started swimming shoreward with him.

A great swell lifted them and Vinny saw the form—the hated form.

“Stamey!” he gasped, and pushed at the man with both his hands—pushed him and held him beneath the surface where he couldn't breathe, where he couldn't laugh, where he could make only tiny bubbles.

On shore, later, he sat watching the emergency squad trying hard, so desperately hard, while the girl with the chestnut-colored hair looked at him and somewhere her radio kept going.

MIKE SHAYNE DOES IT AGAIN NEXT MONTH

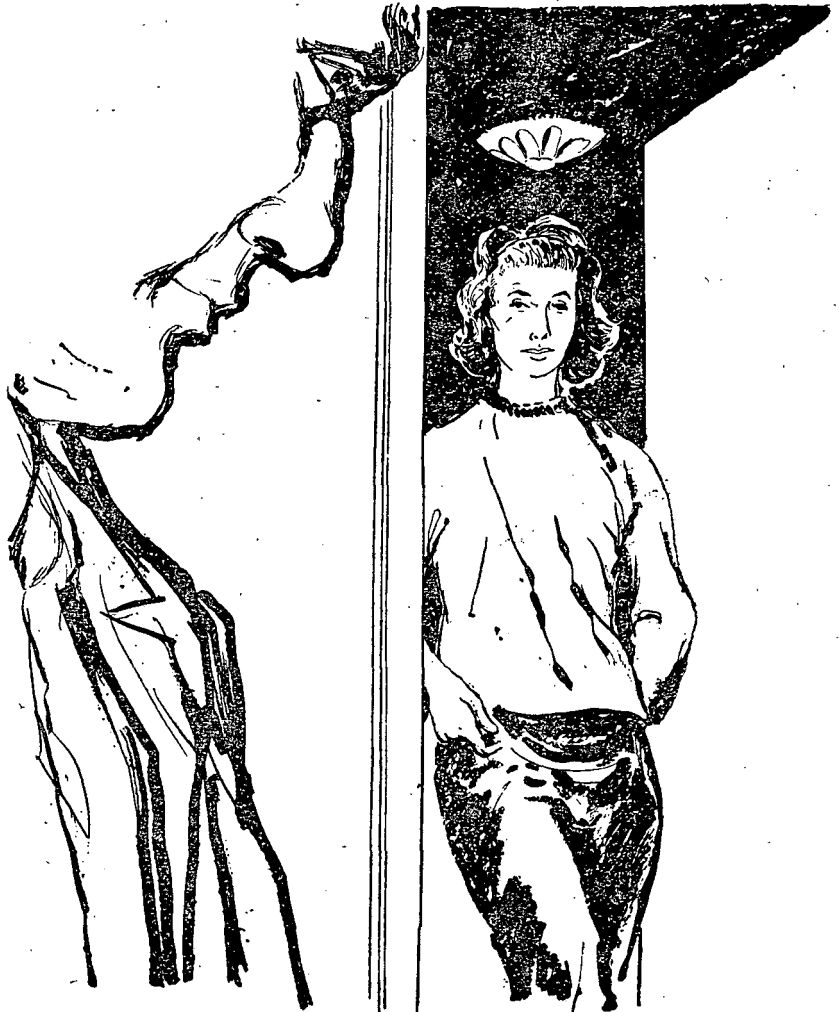
A Salesman Dies

by BRETT HALLIDAY

“Most missing traveling salesmen end up in the Pending file,” Peter Painter said. “We figure we’ll locate ’em someday . . . maybe . . . if we find the woman.” But Shayne knew that murder could narrow the search.

Featuring

ABRAHAM LEVINE



THE DEATH OF A BUM

"A man was alive and now he's dead," Levine said. "That's the only reason why a murderer must be caught."

by DONALD E. WESTLAKE



ABRAMHAM LEVINE of Brooklyn's Forty-Third Precinct sat at his desk in the squadroom and wished Jack Crawley would get well soon. Crawley, his usual tour partner, was in the hospital recovering from a bullet in the leg, and Levine was working now with a youngster recently assigned to the squad, a college graduate named Andy Stettin. Levine liked the boy—though he sometimes had the feeling Stettin was picking his brains—but there was an awkwardness in the work without Crawley.

Abraham Levine was a short and stocky man, baggily-dressed from plain pipe racks, the lines of his body all softened within his brown suit, making him look chunkier and flabbier than he really was. His hair was pepper-and-salt gray, clipped stiff and short in a military crewcut. His face was round and soft, with mild eyes and a formless nose and a broad sensitive mouth, all bracketed by faint fine lines like a pencil sketch. He was fifty-three years old.

He was sitting now at the desk,

thinking about Jack Crawley, when the telephone rang. He answered, saying, "Forty-Third Precinct. Levine."

It was a woman's voice, middle-aged, very excited. "There's a man been murdered! You've got to come right away!"

Levine pulled pencil and paper close, then said, "Your name, please?"

"There's been a murder! Don't you understand—"

"Yes, ma'am. May I have your name, please?"

"Mrs. Francis Temple. He's lying right upstairs."

"The address, please?"

"One ninety-eight Third Street. I told all this to the other man, I don't see—"

"And you say there's a dead man there?"

"He's been shot! I just went in to change the linen, and he was lying there!"

"Someone will be there right away." He hung up as she was starting another sentence, and looked up to see Stettin, a tall athletic young man with dark-rimmed glasses and a blond crew-cut, standing by the door, already wearing his coat.

"Just a second," Levine said, and dialed for Mulvane, on the desk downstairs. "This is Abe. Did you just transfer a call from Mrs. Francis Temple to my office?"

"I did. The beat car's on the way."

"All right. Andy and I are taking it."

Levine cradled the phone and got to his feet. He went over and took his coat from the rack and shrugged into it, then followed the impatient Stettin downstairs to the car.

That was another thing. Crawley had always driven the Chevy. But Stettin drove too fast, was too quick to hit the siren and gun through busy intersections, so now Levine had to do the driving, a chore he didn't enjoy.

The address was on a block of ornate nineteenth-century brownstones, now all converted either into furnished apartments or boarding houses. One ninety-eight was furnished apartments, and Mrs. Francis Temple was its landlady. She was waiting on the top step of the stoop, wringing her hands, a buxom fiftyish woman in a black dress and open black sweater, a maroon knit shawl over her head to keep out the cold.

The prowler car was double-parked in front of the house, and Levine braked the Chevy to a stop behind it. He and Stettin climbed out, crossed the sidewalk, and went up the stoop.

Mrs. Temple was on the verge of panic. Her hands kept washing each other, she kept shifting her weight back and forth from one foot to the other, and she stared bug-eyed as the detectives came up the stoop toward her.

"Are you police?" she demanded, her voice shrill.

Levine dragged out his wallet, showed her the badge. "Are the patrolmen up there?" he asked.

She nodded, stepping aside to let him move past her. "I went in to change the linen, and there he was, lying in the bed, all covered with blood. It was terrible, terrible."

Levine went on in, Stettin after him, and Mrs. Temple brought up the rear, still talking. Levine interrupted her to ask, "Which room?"

"The third floor front," she said, and went back to repeating how terrible it had been when she'd gone in there and seen him on the bed, covered with blood.

Stettin was too eager for conscientious politeness. He bounded on up the maroon-carpeted stairs, while Levine plodded up after him, the woman one step behind all the way, the shawl still over her head.

One of the patrolmen was standing in the open doorway at the other end of the third-floor hall. As was usual in this type of brownstone, the upper floors consisted of two large rooms rented separately, each with a small kitchenette but both sharing the same bath. The dead man was in the front room.

Levine said to the woman, "Wait out here, please," nodded to the patrolman, and went on through into the room.

Stettin and the second patrolman were over to the right, by the

studio couch, talking together. Their forms obscured Levine's view of the couch as he came through the doorway, and he got the feeling, as he had had more than once with the energetic Stettin, that he was Stettin's assistant rather than the other way around.

Which was ridiculous, of course. Stettin turned, clearing Levine's view, saying, "How's it look to you, Abe?"

The studio couch had been opened up and was now in its other guise, that of a linen-covered bed. Between the sheets the corpse lay peaceably on its back with the covers tucked up around its throat. Its arms were outside the sheets and rested stiffly on its chest.

Levine came over and stood by the bed, looking down at it. The bullet had struck the bridge of the nose, smashing bone and cartilage, and discoloring the flesh around it. There was hardly any nose left. The mouth hung open, and the top front teeth had been jarred partially out of their sockets by the force of the bullet.

The slain man had bled profusely, and the pillow and the turned-down sheet around his throat were drenched with blood.

The top blanket was blue, and was now scattered with smallish chunks of white stuff. Levine reached down and picked up one of the white chunks, feeling it between his fingers.

"Potato," he said, more to him-

self than to the cop at his side.

Stettin said, "What's that?"

"Potato. That stuff on the bed. He used a potato for a silencer."

Stettin smiled blankly. "I don't follow you, Abe."

Levine moved his hands in demonstration as he described what he meant. "The killer took a raw potato, and jammed the barrel of the gun into it. Then, when he fired, the bullet smashed through the potato, muffling the sound. It's a kind of home-made silencer."

Stettin nodded, and glanced again at the body. "Think it was a gang killing, then?"

"I don't know," Levine replied, frowning. He turned to the patrolman. "What have you got?"

The patrolman dragged a fat black notebook out of his hip pocket, and flipped it open. "He's the guy that rented the place. The landlady identified him. He gave his name as Maurice Gold."

Excited, Stettin said, "Morry Gold?" He came closer to the bed, squinting down at the face remnant as though he could see it better that way. "Yeah, by God, it is," he said, his expression grim. "It was a gang killing, Abe!"

"You know him?"

"I saw him once. On the lineup downtown, maybe—two months ago."

Levine smiled thinly. Leave it to Stettin, he thought. Most detectives considered the lineup a chore and a waste of time, and grumbled ev-

ery time their turn came around to go downtown and attend. The lineup was supposed to familiarize the precinct detectives with the faces of known felons, but it took a go-getter like Stettin to make the theory work. Levine had been attending the lineup twice a month for fifteen years and hadn't once recognized one of the felons later on.

Stettin was turning his head this way and that, squinting at the body again. "Yeah, sure," he said. "Morry Gold. He had a funny way of talking—a cockney accent, maybe. That's him, all right."

"What was he brought in for?"

"Possession of stolen goods. He was a fence. I remember the Chief talking to him. I guess he'd been brought in lots of times before." He shook his head. "Apparently he managed to wriggle out of it."

The patrolman said, "He'd have been much better off if he hadn't."

"A falling out among thieves," said Stettin. "Think so, Abe?"

"It could be." To the patrolman, he said, "Anything else?"

"He lived here not quite two years. That's what the landlady told me. She found him at quarter after four, and the last time she saw him alive was yesterday, around seven o'clock in the evening. He went out then. He must have come back some time after eleven o'clock, when the landlady went to bed. Otherwise, she'd have seen him come in." He grinned without humor. "She's one of those," he said.

"I'll go talk to her." Levine looked over at the body again, and averted his eyes. An old English epitaph flickered through his mind: *As you are, so was I; as I am, so you will be.* Twenty-four years as a cop hadn't hardened him to the tragic and depressing finality of death, and in the last few years, as he had moved steadily into the heart-attack age range and as the inevitability of his own end had become more and more real to him, he had grown steadily more vulnerable to the dread implicit in the sight of death.

He turned away, saying, "Andy, give the place a going-over. Address books, phone numbers, somebody's name in the flyleaf of a book. You know the kind of thing."

"Sure." Stettin glanced around, eager to get at it. "Do you think he'd have any of the swag here?"

The word sounded strange on Stettin's tongue, odd and archaic. Levine smiled, as the death-dread wore off, and said, "I doubt it. Stick around here for the ME and the technical crew. Get the time of death and whatever else they can give you."

"Sure thing."

MRS. FRANCIS TEMPLE was still outside in the hall, jabbering now at the second patrolman, who was making no attempt to hide his boredom. Levine took her away, much to the patrolman's relief, and they went downstairs to her cellar



apartment, the living room of which was Gay Nineties from end to end, from the fringed beaded lampshades to the marble porcelain vases on the mantle.

In these surroundings, Mrs. Temple's wordiness switched from the terrible details of her discovery of the body to the nostalgic details of her life with her late husband, who had been a newspaperman.

Levine, by main force, wrestled the conversation back to the present, in order to ask his questions about Maurice Gold. "What did he do for a living," he asked. "Do you know?"

"He said he was a salesman. Sometimes he was gone nearly a week at a time."

"Do you know what he sold?"

She shook her head. "There were never any samples or anything in his room," she said. "I would have noticed them." She shivered suddenly, hugging herself, and said, "What a terrible thing. You don't know what it was

like, to come into the room and see him—”

Levine thought he knew. He thought he knew better than Mrs. Temple. He said, “Did he have man visitors? Close friends, that you know about?”

“Well— There were two or three men who came by sometimes in the evenings. I believe they played cards.”

“Do you know their names?”

“No, I’m sorry. I really didn’t know Mr. Gold very well—not as a friend. He was a very close-mouthed man.” One hand fluttered to her lips. “Oh, listen to me. The poor man is lying dead, and listen to me talking about him.”

“Did anyone else ever come by?” Levine persisted. “Besides these three men he played cards with.”

She shook her head. “Not that I remember. I think he was a lonely man. Lonely people can recognize one another, and I’ve been lonely, too, since Alfred died. These last few years have been difficult for me, Mr. Levine.”

It took Levine ten minutes to break away from the woman gently, without learning anything more. “We’d like to try to identify his card-playing friends,” he said. “Would you have time to come look at pictures this afternoon?”

“Well, yes, of course. It was a terrible thing, Mr. Levine, an absolutely terrible—”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Levine escaped, to find Stettin coming back downstairs, loose-limbed and athletic. Feeling a little bit guilty at palming the voluble Mrs. Temple off on his partner, Levine said, “Take Mrs. Temple to look at some mug shots, will you? Known former acquaintances of Gold—or anyone she recognizes. She says there were two or three men who used to come here to play cards.”

“Will do.” Stettin paused at the foot of the steps. “Uh, Abe,” he said, “we don’t have to break our humps over this one, do we?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well—” Stettin shrugged, and nodded his head at the stairs. “He was just a bum, you know. A small-time crook. The world’s better off without him.”

“He was alive,” said Levine. “And now he’s dead.”

“Okay, okay. For Pete’s sake, I wasn’t saying we should forget the whole thing—just that we shouldn’t break our humps over it.”

“We’ll do our job,” Levine told him, “just as though he’d had the keys to the city and money in fifty-seven banks.”

“Okay. You didn’t have to get sore, Abe.”

“I’m not sore. Take Mrs. Temple in the car. I’m going to stay here a while and ask some more questions. Mrs. Temple’s in her apartment there.”

“Okay.”

“Oh, by the way. When you get

out to the car, call in and have somebody get us the dope on that arrest two months ago. Find out if you can whether there was anybody else involved, and if by chance the arresting officer knows any of Gold's friends. Anything like that."

"Will do."

Levine went on upstairs to ask questions.

The other tenants knew even less than Mrs. Temple. Levine was interrupted for a while by a reporter, and by the time he'd finished questioning the tenants it was past four o'clock, and late enough for him to go off duty. He phoned the precinct, and then went on home.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING he arrived at the precinct at eight o'clock for his third and last day-shift on this cycle. Stettin was already there, sitting at Levine's desk and looking through a folder. He leaped to his feet, grinning and ebullient as ever, saying, "Hiya, Abe. We got us some names."

"Good."

Levine eased himself into his chair, and Stettin hovered over him, opening the folder. "The arresting officer was a Patrolman Michaels, out of the Thirtieth. I couldn't find out why the charge didn't stick, because Michaels was kind of touchy about that. I guess he made some kind of procedural goof. But anyhow, he gave me some names. Gold has a brother,

Abner, who runs a pawnshop in East New York. Michaels says Gold was a kind of go-between for his brother. Morry would buy the stolen goods, cache it, and then transfer it to Abner's store."

Levine nodded. "Anything else?"

"Well, Gold took one fall, about nine years ago. He was caught accepting a crate full of stolen furs. The thief was caught with him." Stettin pointed to a name and address. "That's him—Elly Kapp. Kapp got out last year, and that's his last known address."

"You've been doing good work," Levine told him. He grinned up at Stettin and said, "Been breaking your hump?"

Stettin grinned back, in embarrassment. "I can't help it," he said. "You know me, old Stettin Fetchit."

Levine nodded. He'd heard Stettin use the line before. It was his half-joking apology for being a boy on the way up, surrounded by stodgy plodders like Abe Levine.

"Okay," said Levine. "Anything from Mrs. Temple?"

"One positive identification, and a dozen maybes. The positive is a guy named Sal Casetta. He's a small-time bookie."

Levine got to his feet. "Let's go talk to these three," he said. "The brother first."

Twenty-two minutes later they were in the East New York pawnshop. Abner Gold was a stocky

man with thinning hair and thick spectacles. He was also—once Levine had flashed the police identification—very nervous.

"Come into the office," he said. "Please, please. Come into the office."

Levine noticed that the thick accent Gold had worn when they'd first come in had suddenly vanished.

Gold unlocked the door to the cage, relocked it after them, and led the way back past the bins to his office, a small and crowded room full of ledgers. There was a rolltop desk, a metal filing cabinet and four sagging leather chairs.

"Sit down, sit down," he said. "You've come about my brother."

"You've been notified?"

"I read about it in the News. A terrible way to hear, believe me."

"I'm sure it must be," Levine said.

He hesitated. Usually, Jack Crawley handled the questioning, while Levine observed silently from a corner. But Jack was still laid up with the bad leg, and Levine wasn't sure Stettin—eager though he might be—would know the right questions or how to ask them. So it was up to him.

Levine sighed, and said, "When was the last time you saw your brother, Mr. Gold?"

Gold held his hands out to the sides, in a noncommittal shrug. "A week ago? Two weeks?"

"You're not sure."

"I think two weeks. You must understand, my brother and I—we'd drifted apart."

"Because of his trouble with the law?"

Gold nodded. "A part of it, yes. God rest his soul, Mister—?"

"Levine."

"Yes. God rest his soul, Mister Levine, but I must tell you what's in my heart. You have to know the truth. Maurice was not a good man. Do you understand me? He was my brother, and now he's been murdered, but still I must say it. His life went badly for him, Mr. Levine, and he became sour. When he was young—" He shrugged again. "He became very bitter, I think. He lost his belief."

"His faith, you mean?"

"Oh, that, too. Maurice was not a religious man. But even more than that, do you follow me? He lost his *belief*. In the goodness of man—in *life*. Do you understand me?"

"I think so." Levine watched Gold's face carefully. Stettin had said that the brothers had worked together in the buying and selling of stolen goods, but Abner Gold was trying very hard to convince them of his own innocence. Levine wasn't sure yet whether or not he could be convinced.

"The last time you saw him," he said, "did he act nervous at all? As though he was expecting trouble?"



him." Gold glanced at Stettin, then leaned forward to say to Levine, "Excuse me, do you mind? Could I speak to you alone for a moment?"

"Sure," said Stettin promptly. "I'll wait outside."

"Thank you. Thank you very much." Gold beamed at Stettin until he left, then leaned toward Levine again. "I can talk to you," he said. "Not in front of the other policeman."

Levine frowned, but said nothing.

"Listen to me," said Gold. His eyes were dark, and deepset. "Maurice was my brother. If anyone has the right to say what I am going to say now it is me, the brother. Maurice is better dead. Better for everyone. The police are shorthanded, I know this. You have so much work; forget Maurice. No one wants vengeance. Listen to me, I am his brother. Who has a better right to talk?"

You're talking to the wrong man, Levine thought. *Stettin's the one thinks your way.* But he kept quiet, and waited.

Gold paused, his hands out as though in offering, presenting his ideas to Levine. Then he lowered his hands and leaned back and said, "You understand me. That's why I wanted to talk to you alone. You are a policeman, sworn to uphold the law, this new law in this new country. But I am speaking to you now from the old law. You

"Maurice always expected trouble. But I do know what you mean. No, nothing like that, nothing more than his usual pessimism."

"Do you yourself know of any enemies he might have made?"

"Ever since I read the article in the paper, I've been asking myself exactly that question. Did anyone hate my brother enough to want to kill him. But I can think of no one. You must understand me, I didn't know my brother's associates. We—drifted apart."

"You didn't know any of his friends at all?"

"I don't believe so, no."

"Not Sal Casetta?"

"An Italian? No, I don't know

follow me, Levine. And if I say to you, I don't want vengeance for the slaying of my brother, I speak within a law that is older and deeper."

"A law that says murder should be ignored and forgotten? A law that says life doesn't matter? I never heard of it."

"Levine, you know what law I'm talking about! I'm his brother, and I—"

"You're a fool, Gold, and that's the damndest bribe I've ever been offered."

"Bribe?" Gold seemed shocked at the thought. "I didn't offer you any—"

"What do I do to belong, Gold? I send in the label from a package of Passover candles, and then what do I get? I learn all about the secret handshake, and I get the ring with the secret compartment, and I get the magic decodifier so we can send each other messages others won't understand. Is that it?"

"You shouldn't mock what—"

"Is there anything you wouldn't use, Gold? Do you have respect for anything at all?"

Gold looked away, his expression stony. "I thought I could talk to you," he said. "I thought you would understand."

"I do understand," Levine told him. "Get on your feet."

"What?"

"You're coming back to the precinct, to answer some more questions."

"But—but I've told you—" Gold started to say.

"You told me you didn't want your brother's murderer found. After a while, you'll tell me why. On your feet."

"For God's sake, Levine—"

"Get on your feet!"

It was a small room. The echoes of his shout came back to his ears, and he suddenly realized he'd lost his temper despite himself, and his left hand jerked automatically to his chest, pressing there to feel for the heartbeat. He had a skip, every eighth beat or so, and when he allowed himself to get excited the skipping came closer together. That irregularity of rhythm was the most pronounced symptom he had to support his fear of heart trouble and it was never very far from his consciousness. He pressed his hand to his chest now, feeling the thumping within, and the skip, and counted from there to the next skip . . . seven.

He took a deep breath. Quietly he said, "Come along, Gold. Don't make me call in the other policeman to carry you."

ABRAHAM LEVINE couldn't bring himself to grill Gold personally after all; he was afraid he'd lose control. So he simply filled Stettin in on what had been said, and what he wanted to know. Stettin took care of the questioning, with assists from Andrews and Campbell, two of the other detectives now on

duty, while Levine left the precinct again, to find Sal Casetta.

Casetta lived in the New Utrecht section of Brooklyn, in a brick tenement on 79th Street. It was a walk-up, and the bookmaker's apartment was on the fourth floor. Levine climbed the stairs slowly, stopping to rest at each landing. When he got to the fourth floor, he paused to catch his breath, and light a cigarette before knocking on the door marked 14.

A woman answered—a short blowsy woman in a loose sweater and a tight black skirt. She was barefooted, and her feet were dirty, her toenails enameled a deep red. She looked challengingly at Levine.

Levine said, "I'm looking for Sal Casetta."

"He ain't home."

"Where can I find him?"

"What do you want him for?"

"Police," said Levine. "I don't want to talk to him about book-making. A friend of his was killed; maybe he could help us."

"What makes you think he wants to help you?"

"It was a friend of his that was killed."

"So what? You ain't a friend of his."

"If Sal was killed," Levine said, "and I was looking for his murderer, would you help me?"

The woman grimaced, and shrugged uneasily. "I told you he wasn't here," she said.

"Just tell me where I can find him."

She thought it over. She was chewing gum, and her jaw moved continuously for a full minute. Finally, she shrugged again and said, "Come on in. I'll go get him for you."

"Thank you."

She led the way into a small living room, with soiled drapes at the windows, and not enough furniture. "Grab a seat any place," she said. "Look out for roaches."

Levine thanked her again, and sat down gingerly on an unpainted wooden chair.

"What was the name of the friend?" she asked.

"Morry Gold."

"Oh, *that* bum." Her mouth twisted around its wad of gum. "Why waste time on him?"

"Because he was killed," said Levine.

"You want to make work for yourself," she told him, "it's no skin off my nose. Wait here, I'll be right back."

While he waited Levine's thoughts kept reverting to Morry Gold. After about ten minutes, he heard the front door open, and a few seconds later the woman came back accompanied by a short, heavysset man with bushy black hair and rather shifty eyes.

He came in nodding his head jerkily, saying, "I read about it in the papers. I read about it this morning."

"You're Sal Casetta?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's right, that's me. You're a cop, huh?"

Levine showed his badge, then said, "You used to play cards with Morry Gold?"

"Yeah, sure, that's right. Poker. Quarter, half-dollar. Friendly game, you know."

"Who were the other players?" Levine asked.

"Well, uh—" Casetta glanced nervously at the woman, and rubbed the back of his hand across his nose. "Well, you know how it is. You don't feel right about giving out names!"

"Why? Do you think one of them killed Gold?"

"Hey now—Listen. We're all friends. Nothing like that. I wouldn't want to bump Morry, and neither would those guys. We're all buddies."

"Then give me their names."

Casetta cleared his throat, and glanced at the woman again, and scuffed his feet on the floor. Finally, he said, "Well, all right. But don't tell them you got it from me, huh?"

"Gold's landlady identified you," Levine told him. "She could have identified the other two."

"Yeah, sure, that's right. So it's Jake Mosca—that's like Moscow, only with an 'a'—and Barney Feldman. Okay?"

Levine copied the names down. "You know where they live?"

"Naw, not me."

"We'll leave that a blank then. When was the last poker game?"

"At Morry's? That was on Saturday. Right, baby?"

The woman nodded. "Saturday," she said.

"Did Gold act nervous or depressed Saturday?"

"You mean, did he know he was gonna get it? Not a bit. Calm like always, you know?"

"Do you have any idea who might have wanted to kill him?"

"Not me. I know Morry from when we used to live in the same neighborhood, that's all. His business is his business."

"You wouldn't know who his enemies were."

"That's right. If Morry had enemies, he never said nothing to me."

"What about other friends?"

"Friends?" Casetta rubbed his nose again, then said, "We didn't see each other that much since we moved away. Just for the games. Uh, wait a second. There was another guy came in the game for a while, Arnie something. A fish, a real fish. So after a while he quit."

"You don't remember his last name?"

Casetta shook his head. "Just Arnie something. Maybe Jake or Barney knows."

"All right. Do you know Gold's brother, Abner?"

"Naw, I never met him. Morry talked about him sometimes. They didn't get along."

Levine got to his feet. "Thank you very much," he said.

"Yeah, sure. Morry was okay."

"Oh, one thing more. What about women? Did he have any woman friends that you know about?"

"I never seen him with a woman," Casetta said.

"Saturday at the game, did he seem to have an unusual amount of money on him? Or did he seem very broke? How did he seem to be fixed?"

"Like always. Nothing special, pretty well heeled but nothing spectacular, you know?" Casetta looked around, at the woman, at the apartment. "Like me," he said.

ELLY KAPP'S last known address was in Gravesend, off Avenue X, and since Kapp had once been caught turning stolen goods over to Morry Gold it occurred to Levine that the man might know whom Gold had been dealing with lately. He might even be still selling to Gold himself.

There was no Kapp listed among the mailboxes at the address. Levine pressed the bell-button beneath the metal plate reading *Superintendent*, and several minutes later a slow-rolling fat woman with receding gray hair appeared in the doorway, holding the door open a scant three inches. She said nothing, only stared mistrustfully, so Levine dragged out his wallet and showed his identification.



"I'm looking for Elly Kapp," he said.

"Don't live here no more."

"Where does he live now?"

"I don't know." She started to close the door, but Levine held it open with the palm of his hand. "When did he move?" he demanded.

The woman shrugged. "Who remembers?" Her eyes were dull, and watched his mouth rather than his eyes. "Who cares where he went, or what he's done?"

Levine moved his hand away, and allowed the woman to close the door. He watched through the glass as she turned and rolled slowly back across the inner vestibule. Her ankles were swollen like sausages. When she disappeared in the gloom just beyond Levine turned away and went back down the stoop to the Chevy.

He drove slowly back to the precinct. Indifference breathed in the air all around him, sullen and surly. *No man is important, the streets seemed to be saying. Man is only useful as long as he breathes. Once the breathing stops, he is forgotten. Time stretches away beyond him, smooth and slick and with no handholds. The man is dead, and almost as swiftly as a dropped heartbeat, the space which he occupied yawns emptily and there is nothing left of him but a name.*

At times, another man is paid to remember the name long enough to carve it on stone, and the stone is set in the earth, and immediately it begins to sink. But the man is gone, long since. What does it matter if he stopped a second ago or a century ago or a millenium ago? He stopped, he is no more, he is forgotten. Who cares?

Levine saw the red light just in time, and jammed on the brakes. He sat hunched over the wheel, unnerved at having almost run the light, and strove to calm himself. His breathing was labored, as though he'd been running, and he

knew that the beating of his heart was erratic and heavy. He inhaled, very slowly, and let his breath out even more slowly while he waited for the light to change.

The instant it became green he drove on across the intersection. He was calmer now. The death of Morry Gold had affected him too much, and he told himself he had to snap out of it. He knew, after all, the reason he was so affected. It was because Morry Gold's death had been greeted by such universal indifference.

Almost always, the victim of a homicide is survived by relatives and friends who are passionately concerned with his end, and make a nuisance of themselves by badgering the police for quick results: With such rallying, the dead man doesn't seem quite so forlorn, quite so totally alone and forgotten.

In the interrogation room down the hall from the squadroom, Stettin and Andrews and Campbell were questioning Abner Gold. Levine stuck his head in, nodded at Stettin, avoided looking at Gold, and immediately shut the door again. He turned away and walked slowly back down the hall toward the squadroom. He heard the door behind him open and close, and then Stettin, in long easy strides, had come up even with him.

Stettin shook his head. "Nothing, Abe," he said.

"No explanation?"

"Not from him. He won't say a

word any more. Not until he calls a lawyer."

Levine shook his head tiredly. He knew the type. Abner Gold's one lone virtue would be patience. He would sit in silence, and wait, and wait until eventually the detectives found his stubborn silence intolerable, and then he knew he would be allowed to go home.

"I have an explanation," Stettin said. "He's afraid of an investigation. He's afraid if we dig too deep we'll come up with proof he worked with his brother."

"Maybe," said Levine. "Or maybe he's afraid we'll come up with proof he killed his brother."

"What for?"

"I don't know. For cheating him on some kind of deal. For black-mailing him. Your guess is as good as mine."

Stettin shrugged. "We can keep asking," he said. "But he can keep right on not answering until we can no longer stand the sight of him."

Levine glanced at his watch. Quarter to one. He'd stopped off for lunch on the way back. He said, "I'll go talk to him for a while."

"That's up to you."

The way he said it, Levine was reminded that Stettin didn't want to break his hump over this one. Levine walked over to his desk and sat down and said, "I got two more names. From Casetta. Jake Mosca and Barney Feldman. No addresses. See what you can dig up on

them, will you? And go talk to them."

"Sure. How was Casetta?"

"I don't know. Maybe Gold cheated him at poker. Maybe Gold was playing around with his wife. He didn't act nervous or worried." Levine rubbed a hand wearily across his face. "I'll go talk to Gold now," he said. "Did we get the ME's report?"

"It's right there on your desk."

Levine didn't open it. He didn't want to read about Morry Gold's corpse. He said, "What kind of gun?"

"A thirty-eight. You look tired, Abe."

"I guess I am. I can sleep late tomorrow."

"Sure."

"Oh, one more thing. Elly Kapp isn't at that address any more. See what you can find there, will you?"

"Will do."

Levine walked down the hall again and took over the questioning of Gold. After Andrews and Campbell had left the room, Levine looked at Gold and said, "What did Morry do to you?"

Gold shook his head.

"You're a cautious man, Gold." Levine's voice rose impatiently. "It had to be something strong to make you kill him. Did he cheat you?"

Humor flickered at the corners of Gold's mouth. "He cheated me always," he said. "For years. I was used to it, Abraham."

Levine shrugged off the use of the first name. It wasn't important enough to be angry about. "So he was blackmailing you," he said, "and finally you'd had enough. But didn't you know someone would hear the sound of the shot? Mrs. Temple saw you go out."

"A false identification," said Gold. "I would risk nothing for Maurice. He was not worth the danger of killing him."

Levine shrugged. If Gold knew a potato silencer had been used, he hadn't mentioned it. Not that Levine had expected the trick to work. Tricks like that work only in the movies. And killers go to the movies, too.

Levine asked questions for over two hours. Sometimes Gold answered, and sometimes he didn't. As the time wore on, Levine grew more and more tired, more and more heavy and depressed, but Gold remained unchanged, displaying only the same stolid patience.

Finally, at three-thirty, Levine told him he could leave. Gold thanked him, with muted sarcasm, and left. Levine went back down the hall to the squadroom.

There was a note from Stettin. Elly Kapp was being held in a precinct in west Brooklyn. Last night, he'd been caught halfway through the window of a warehouse near the Brooklyn piers, and tomorrow morning he would be transferred downtown.

Levine phoned the precinct and

got permission from the Lieutenant of Detectives there to come over and question the prisoner. Stettin had taken the Chevvy, so Levine had to drive an unfamiliar car, newer and stiffer.

Kapp had very little useful to say. At first, he said, "Morry Gold? I ain't seen him since we took the fall. I'm a very superstitious guy, Mister. I don't go near anyone who is with me when a job goes sour. That guy by me is a jinx."

Levine questioned him further, wanting to know the names of other thieves with whom Gold had had dealings, whether or not Gold had been known to cheat thieves in the past, whether or not Kapp knew of anyone who harbored a grudge against Gold. Kapp pleaded ignorance for a while, and then gradually began to look crafty.

"Maybe I could help you out," he said finally. "I don't promise you nothing, but maybe I could. If we could work out maybe a deal?"

Levine shook his head, and left the room. Kapp called after him, but Levine didn't listen to what he was saying. Kapp didn't know anything; his information would be useless. He would implicate anybody, make up any kind of story he thought Levine wanted to hear, if it would help him get a lighter sentence for the attempted robbery of the warehouse.

It was four o'clock. Levine

brought the unfamiliar car back to the precinct, signed out, and went home.

THE THIRD DAY of the case, Levine came to work at four in the afternoon, starting a three-day tour on the night shift. As usual, Stettin was already there when he arrived.

"Hi, Abe," Stettin greeted. "I talked to Feldman yesterday. He owns a grocery store in Brownsville. Like everybody else, he didn't know Morry Gold all that well. But he did give me a couple more names."

"Good," said Levine. He had been about to shrug out of his coat, but now he kept it on.

"One of them's a woman," said Stettin. "May Torasch. She was possibly Gold's girl friend. Feldman didn't know for sure."

"What about Feldman?"

"I don't think so, Abe. He and Gold just know each other from the old days, that's all."

"All right."

"I tried to see the other one, Jake Mosca, but he wasn't home."

"Maybe he'll be home now." Levine started to button his coat again.

Stettin said, "Want me to come along?"

Levine was going to say no, tell him to check out the other names he had, but then he changed his mind. Stettin would be his partner for a while, so they ought to start learning how to work together. Be-

sides, Stettin was only half-hearted in this case, and he might miss something important. Levine wished he'd questioned the grocer himself.

"Come on along," Levine said.

Mosca lived way out Flatbush Avenue toward Floyd Bennett. There were old two-family houses out that way, in disrepair, and small apartment buildings that weren't quite tenements. It was in one of the latter that Mosca lived, on the second floor.

The hall was full of smells, and badly-lit. A small boy who needed a haircut stood down at the far end of the hall and watched them as Levine knocked on the door.

There were sounds of movement inside, but that was all. Levine knocked again, and this time a voice called, "Who is it?"

"Police," called Levine.

Inside, a bureau drawer opened, and Levine heard cursing. His eyes widening, he jumped quickly to one side, away from the door, shouting, "Andy! Get out of the way!"

From inside, there were sounds like wood cracking, and a series of punched out holes appeared in the door just as Stettin started to obey.

Levine was clawing on his hip for his gun. The shots, sounding like wood cracking, kept resounding in the apartment, and the holes kept appearing in the door. Plaster was breaking in small chunks in the opposite wall now.

The door was thin, and Levine could hear the clicking when the gun was empty and the man inside kept pulling the trigger. He stepped in front of the door, raised his foot, kicked it just under the knob. The lock splintered away and the door swung open. The man inside was goggle-eyed with rage and fear.

The instant the door came open he threw the empty gun at Levine and spun away for the window. Levine ducked and ran into the apartment, shouting to Mosca to stop. Mosca went over the sill headfirst, out onto the fire escape. Levine fired at him, trying to hit him in the leg, but the bullet went wild. But before he could fire again Mosca went clattering down the fire escape.

Levine got to the window in time to see the man reach the ground. He ran across the weedy back yard, over the wooden fence, and went dodging into a junkyard piled high with rusting parts of automobiles.

Levine was trying to do everything at once. He started out the window, then realized Mosca had too much of a head-start on him. Then he remembered Andy and, as he descended to the floor, he realized that Stettin hadn't followed him into the room and wondered why.

The moment he emerged into the hallway the reason became clear. Andy was lying on his side a yard from the door, his entire

right shoulder drenched with blood and his knees drawn up sharply. He was no longer moving. Levine bent over him for an instant, then swung about, ran down the stairs and out to the Chevy and called in.

Everyone seemed to show up at once. Ambulance and patrolmen and detectives, suddenly filling the corridor. Lieutenant Barker, chief of the precinct's detective squad, came with the rest and stood looking down at Andy Stettin, his face cold with rage. He listened to Levine's report of what had happened, saying nothing until Levine had finished.

Then he said, "He may pull through, Abe. He still has a chance. You mustn't blame yourself for this.

Should I have been able to tell him? Levine wondered. *He was new, and I was more or less breaking him in, showing him the ropes, so shouldn't I have told that when you hear the cursing, when you hear the bureau drawer opening, get away from the door.*

But how could I have told him everything, all the different things you learn? You learn by trial and error, the same as in any other walk of life. But here, sometimes, they only give you one error.

It isn't fair.

The apartment was swarming with police, and soon they found out why Mosca had fired eight times through the door. A shoebox

in a closet was a quarter full of heroin, cut and capsuled, ready for the retail trade. Mosca had a record, but for theft not for narcotics, so there was no way Levine and Stettin could have known.

For an hour or two, Levine was confused. The world swirled around him at a mad pace, but he couldn't really concentrate on any of it. People talked to him, and he answered one way and another, without really understanding what was being said to him or what he was replying. He walked in a shocked daze, not comprehending.

He came out of it back at the precinct. The entire detective squad was there, all the off-duty men having been called in, and Lieutenant Barker was talking to them. They filled the squadroom, sitting on the desks and leaning against the walls, and Lieutenant Barker stood facing them.

"We're going to get this Jake Mosca," he was saying. "We're going to get him to because Andy Stettin is damn close to death. Do you know why we have to get a cop-killer? It's because the cop is a symbol. He's a symbol of the law, the most solid symbol of the law the average citizen ever sees. Our society is held together by law, and we cannot let the symbol of the law be treated with arrogance and contempt.

"I want the man who shot Stettin. You'll get to everyone this Mosca knows, every place he



might think of going. You'll get him because Andy Stettin is dying—and he is a cop."

No, thought Levine, *that's wrong. Andy Stettin is a man, and that's why we have to get Jake Mosca. He was alive, and now he may die. He is a living human being, and that's why we have to get his would-be killer. There shouldn't be any other reasons, there shouldn't have to be any other reasons.*

But he didn't say anything.

Apparently, the Lieutenant could see that Levine was still dazed, because he had him switch with Rizzo, who was catching at the squadroom phone this tour. For the rest of the tour, Levine sat by the phone in the empty squadroom, and tried to understand.

Andrews and Campbell brought Mosca in a little after eleven. They'd found him hiding in a girl friend's apartment, and when they brought him in he was bruised and semi-conscious. Campbell explained he'd tried to resist arrest, and no one argued with him.

Levine joined the early part of the questioning, and got Mosca's alibi for the night Morry Gold was killed. He made four phone calls, and the alibi checked out. Jake Mosca had not murdered Morry Gold.

THE FOURTH DAY, Levine again arrived at the precinct at four o'clock. He was scheduled to catch this tour, so he spent another eight hours at the telephone, and got nothing done on the Morry Gold killing. The fifth day, working alone now, he went on with the investigation.

May Torasch, the woman whose name Andy Stettin had learned, worked in the credit department of a Brooklyn department store. Levine went to her apartment, on the fringe of Sunset, at seven o'clock, and found her home. She was another blowsy woman, reminding him strongly of Sal Casetta's wife. But she was affable, and seemed to want to help, though she assured Levine that she and Morry Gold had never been close friends:

"Face it," she said, "he was a bum. He wasn't going nowhere, so I never wasted much time on him."

She had seen Morry two days before his death; they'd gone to a bar off Flatbush Avenue and had a few drinks. But she hadn't gone back to his apartment with him. She hadn't been in the mood.

"I was kind of low that night," she said.

"Was Morry low?" Levine asked.

"No, not him. He was the same as ever. He'd talk about the weather all the time, and his lousy landlady. I wouldn't have gone out with him, but I was feeling so low I didn't want to go home."

She didn't have any idea who might have murdered him. "He was just a bum, just a small-timer. Nobody paid any attention to him." Nor could she add to the names of Gold's acquaintances.

From her apartment, Levine went to the bar where she and Morry had last been together. It was called *The Green Lantern*, and was nearly empty when Levine walked in shortly before nine. He showed his identification to the bartender and asked about Morry Gold. But the bartender knew very few of his customers by name.

"I might know this guy by sight," he explained, "but the name don't mean a thing." And the same was true of May Torasch.

There were still two more names on the list, Joe Whistler and Arnie Hendricks, the latter being the Arnie Sal Casetta had mentioned. Joe Whistler was another barten-

der, so Levine went looking for him first, and found him at work, tending bar in a place called *Robert's*, in Canarsie, not more than a dozen blocks from Levine's home.

Whistler knew Gold only casually, and could add nothing. Levine spent half an hour with him, and then went in search of Arnie Hendricks.

Arnie Hendricks was a small-time fight manager, originally from Detroit. He wasn't at home, and the gym where he usually hung out was closed this time of night. Levine went back to the precinct, sat down at his desk, and looked at his notes.

He had eight names relating to Morry Gold. There were one brother, one woman, and six casual friends. None of them had offered any reasons for Morry's murder, none of them had suggested any suspects who might have hated Morry enough to kill him, and none of them had given any real cause to be considered a suspect himself, with the possible exception of Abner Gold.

But the more Levine thought about Abner Gold, the more he was willing to go along with Andy Stettin's idea. The man was afraid of an investigation not because he had murdered his brother, but because he was afraid the police would be able to link him to his brother's traffic in stolen goods.

Eight names. One of them, Arnie Hendricks, was still an un-

known, but the other seven had been dead ends.

Someone had murdered Morry Gold. Somewhere in the world, the murderer still lived. He had a name and a face; and he had a connection somehow with Morry Gold. And he was practically unsought. Of the hundreds of millions of human beings on the face of the earth, only one Abraham Levine, who had never known Morry Gold in life, was striving to find the man who had brought about Morry Gold's death.

After a while, wearily, he put his notes away and pecked out his daily report on one of the office Remingtons. Then it was midnight, and he went home. And that was when he got some good news from the hospital—Andy Stettin was going to live.

THE SIXTH DAY, he went to the precinct, reported in, got the Chevy, and went out looking for Arnie Hendricks. He spent seven hours on it, stopping off only to eat, but he couldn't find Hendricks anywhere. People he talked to had seen Hendricks during the day, so the man wasn't in hiding, but Levine couldn't seem to 'catch up with him. It was suggested that Hendricks might be off at a poker game somewhere in Manhattan, but Levine couldn't find out exactly where the poker game was being held.

He got back to the precinct at

eleven-thirty, and started typing out his daily report. There wasn't much to report. He'd looked for Hendricks, and had failed to find him. He would look again tomorrow.

Lieutenant Barker came in at quarter to twelve. That was unusual; the Lieutenant was rarely around later than eight or nine at night, unless something really important had happened in the precinct. He came into the squadroom and said, "Abe, can I talk to you? Bring that report along."

Levine pulled the incomplete report from the typewriter and followed the Lieutenant into his office. The Lieutenant sat down, and motioned for Levine to do the same, then held out his hand.

"Could I see that report?" he asked.

"It isn't finished."

"That's all right."

The Lieutenant glanced at the report, and then dropped it on his desk. "Abe," he said, "do you know what our full complement is supposed to be?"

"Twenty men, isn't it?"

"Right. And we have fifteen. With Crawley out, fourteen. Abe, here's your reports for the last six days. What have you been doing, man? We're understaffed, we're having trouble keeping up with the necessary stuff, and look what you've been doing. For six days you've been running around in circles. And for what? For a small-

time punk who got a small-time punk's end."

"He was murdered, Lieutenant."

"Lots of people are murdered, Abe. When we can, we find out who did the job, and we turn him over to the DA. But we don't make an obsession out of it. Abe, for almost a week now you haven't been pulling your weight around here. There've been three complaints about how long it took us to respond to urgent calls. We're understaffed, but we're not *that* understaffed."

Barker tapped the little pile of reports. "This man Gold was a fence, and a cheap crook. He isn't worth it, Abe. We can't waste any more time on him. When you finish up this report, I want you to recommend we switch the case to Pending. And tomorrow I want you to get back with the team."

"Lieutenant, I've got one more man to—"

"And tomorrow there'll be one more, and the day after that one more. Abe, you've been working on nothing else at *all*. Forget it, will you? This is a cheap penny-ante bum. Even his brother doesn't care who killed him. Let it go, Abe."

He leaned forward over the desk. "Abe, some cases don't get solved right away. That's what the Pending file is for. So six weeks from now, or six months from now, or six years from now, while

we're working on something else, when the break finally does come, we can pull that case out and hit it hot and heavy again. But it's cold now, Abe, so let it lie."

Speeches roiled around inside Levine's head, but they were only words so he didn't say them. He nodded, reluctantly. "Yes, sir," he said.

"The man was a bum," said the Lieutenant, "pure and simple. Forget him, he isn't worth your time."

"Yes, sir," said Levine.

He went back to the squadroom and finished typing the report, recommending that the Morry Gold case be switched to the Pending file. Then it was twelve o'clock, and he left the precinct and walked to the subway station. The underground platform was cold and deserted. He stood shivering

on the concrete, his hands jammed deep into his pockets. He waited twenty minutes before a train came. Then it did come, crashed into the station and squealed to a stop. The doors in front of Levine slid back with no hands touching them, and he stepped aboard.

The car was empty, with a few newspapers abandoned on the seats. The doors slid shut behind him and the train started forward. He was the only one in the car. He was the only one in the car and all the seats were empty, but he didn't sit down.

The train rocked and jolted as it hurtled through the cold hole under Brooklyn, and Abraham Levine stood swaying in the middle of the empty car, a short man, bulky in his overcoat, hulk-shouldered, crying.

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THE RED HAIRING

There's nothing like salt air and the open sea to add tang to a murder case . . . when summer drags a little.

by G. G. FICKLING

THE SLIM MAN in the red vest nervously paced across my office. "She was wearing a topless bathing suit when they found her," he said. "A topless bathing suit, mind you, Miss West."

"Was your wife the topless type, Mr. Lovelady?" I asked.

"Definitely not!" he assured me, dabbing at a perspiring brow with a blue silk handkerchief. "Virginia would never be caught dead—" He paused. "I mean, she wouldn't wear a two-piece suit, much less a topless. Something about this smells pretty fishy."

"Perhaps the topless suit is a red herring, Mr. Lovelady?" I suggested.

"Precisely," he said, stabbing a thin index finger at me. "Someone is trying to confuse the police. Whoever committed the murder must have slipped the topless suit on her and then tossed her into the harbor to make it look like she was some kind of nut, and it was suicide."

"The police are convinced it was suicide, Mr. Lovelady," I reminded him. "There was a note in her handwriting. A boat she checked out—"

"Poppycock, Miss West!" Lovelady blared, rubbing at his red-veined nose. "Let me ask you a couple of questions."

"Go ahead."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

He grunted. "What is a young, beautiful blonde doing in the private investigation business, when actually it's a man's field?"

"Who says it's a man's field?" I demanded.

"Statistics, Miss West." He paced to the window and peered at the distant harbor of Long Beach, California, where his wife's body had been found. "Now Virginia was an atomic scientist. She was young and beautiful." He shrugged dismally. "Too young and too beautiful for the likes of me, but—"

"What are you getting at, Mr. Lovelady?"

He whirled angrily. "The red

herring, Miss West. I want you to prove my wife was not just a statistic on a chart."

"What kind of statistic, Mr. Lovelady?"

"Your kind, Miss West. According to a recent study ninety percent of the females who kill themselves are young, beautiful and in highly skilled jobs." He picked up his hat. "I'll make a deal with you. If you prove Virginia didn't commit suicide I'll pay you double. If you can't, I'll pay your funeral bill."

He sauntered quietly into the corridor. "Good day, Miss West."

MY FIRST STOP was the landing where Virginia Lovelady rented the boat. A young man with brown hair, bulging biceps and wearing a pair of dirty dungarees greeted me with a low whistle as I walked into the office.

"Now hear this," he said, mimicking a call aboard a Naval ship. "All able-bodied seamen report for 'see' duty."

"At ease," I said, grinning. "Are you the one who rented a boat to a lady in a topless bathing suit the other day?"

He winced, shoving a sailor hat down over his eyelids. "Holy mackerel, a bit of fuzz in a fuzzy pink sweater. What's the world coming to?"

"Yes or no?"

He shrugged resignedly.

"Yes."

"As I recall, your name is Den-



ton. Buzz Denton. A former TV kid's show performer turned boat dock owner."

He shoved his hat back and stood up. "Why must you be so luscious and so laconic at the same time?"

"Was she or wasn't she wearing a topless suit?"

Buzz held up his right hand. "It was black with two itty bitty straps criss-crossing. Only she wasn't so itty bitty and those infernal hunks of fabric weren't covering as much as two cents worth of licorice straps."

I shoved a hip on the edge of his desk and crossed my legs. "Mr. Denton, do you have any idea what the penalty is in this state for giving false testimony?"

"Now wait a minute, baby. I've been having fun with you. But nobody threatens Buzz Denton. Not even a dozen coppers with lead saps."

I lifted my skirt and removed a small .22 revolver I carry in a gar-

ter holster. "How about one female private investigator with a gun?"

His face paled as he stared down at the small snout. "So that's what you are. I should have known."

"Did you know Virginia Lovelady?"

"No," he snarled. "A landlady named Virginia. Sure. She weighs two hundred pounds and steals a hundred bucks from me every month for a rathole."

"What happened to your boat checkout receipt? The newspapers said you lost it."

"That's right. It was a busy day. Hell, I was swamped. I don't even know if I wrote one out."

"If you were so swamped, Mr. Denton, how is it that nobody else saw her in the topless suit. Built the way you described her she would hardly go unnoticed, now would she?"

He stammered, "It—it was a slack period, and—Listen, you have no right to hold a gun on me. It's against the law."

"Really?" I said. "But isn't it also against the law to rent out a boat to a murderer who later on pays you off to keep quiet?"

Denton's mouth dropped open, quivered for an instant, then spat. "I don't know who he is. I swear it. The boat was rented by an anonymous party. He told me he was a press agent who was going to have some kicks with a girl in a topless bathing suit for publicity purposes. He told me I'd make out all right

money-wise and promotion-wise, too.

"The next thing I knew he was on the phone again. He said he stashed five thousand dollars in a bus depot locker and that the girl was dead. He threatened that if I didn't play along with his story he'd tip the police the money was a pay-off and that I was involved. Otherwise if everything blew over the money was mine."

"What did he look like?" I asked him.

"He had red hair. Flaming red hair, very bushy and full. He was stocky—well, he looked stocky in a heavy coat. Had horn-rimmed glasses— Under the circumstances what could I do?"

"What about the woman?"

"She was wearing a big woolly coat. She looked frightened, but I didn't think anything about it then. I just thought it was stage fright."

"Where was the boat found?"

"A half mile from her body. Way out in the harbor. At least three miles from any land. He must be a damned good swimmer."

I got up, replaced my .22 in its holster and started for the door. "How good a swimmer are you, Buzzy baby?"

"Well, I can swim the channel—" he stopped, choked. "What the devil are you trying to say?"

I glanced back. "Take my advice. Call the police or start swimming. You're in deep trouble."

My next stop was the Rocket

Retro Corporation located not far from Fort MacArthur near Wilmington. They manufactured nuclear warheads for guided missiles. The sign outside the gate read: WARNING! THIS IS A GOVERNMENT WARRANTED ATOMIC MISSILE PLANT. ALL UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS ARE HEREBY WARNED OF ARMED GUARDS.

Three husky .38-hipped men would not take my P.I. credentials as evidence of good faith. They called Virginia Lovelady's office and finally received clearance from a Dr. Terance Murphy. He met me outside a voluminous building with huge steel walls, totally absent of windows. He wore thick, horn-rimmed glasses and had a scar on his left cheek. His head was practically bald, a fringe of bright red hairs circling above his ears. He was about thirty-five and, despite the lack of foliage, quite handsome.

"Miss West," he said, unbuttoning the top of his white smock, "I'm sorry for the delay in getting you in. We, as you can understand, are highly controlled."

"Is there someplace we might talk, Dr. Murphy?"

He grinned pleasantly, seating himself on a step outside the door and gesturing for me to join him. "This is as good a place as any. I'm not permitted to let you inside. Anyway, it's noisy and stinks to high heaven. What's on your mind?"

"Virginia Lovelady."

He removed his glasses and wiped them on the smock. "I'm sorry about her death. We all are. I was her assistant in the lab. We never guessed she had suicidal tendencies."

"Who said she did?"

His eyelids narrowed sharply. "The police."

"Do you agree with their report, Dr. Murphy?"

"I don't believe it makes much difference whether I do or not." He jammed his glasses back on the bridge of his nose and stared nervously at his hands. "Just what are you after, Miss West?"

"A murderer, Dr. Murphy."

He looked up hesitantly. "Then it wasn't suicide?"

"I won't go into detail but apparently a stocky person with thick flaming red hair and glasses took her out on that boat and pushed her overboard. Are you acquainted with anyone working for this company who fits that general description?"

"Well, no. But—" he paused, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "There is Captain Turk—"

"Turk?"

"Yes—ah—the Captain operates a pleasure boat out of Wilmington to Catalina Island. They were good friends."

"How good, Dr. Murphy?"

"Well, they were in diversified fields, but they had a lot in common. Even if one was an atomic

scientist and the other a ship's captain."

"I don't grasp the connection," I said.

Murphy smiled thinly. "You'll have to talk to Captain Turk. I'll tell you this, though, Miss West. A lot of people might have killed Virginia Lovelady, including myself."

"Oh."

He got up and stretched. "I wasn't surprised when I heard about the topless bathing suit. She was what you might call—a bad cat."

"That isn't what her husband claims."

"I don't think he knew. Poor soul. She had him believing she was working here at the plant night and day. The nights were atomic all right, but far from atomic energy."

I pushed some blonde hair from my face and said, "Dr. Murphy you sound like an authority."

He exhaled slowly. "No sense kidding you, Miss West. If Virginia was murdered what's the sense in it. The police will find out eventually."

I patted his cheek. "I have a feeling I'm going to see more of you, Dr. Murphy."

"That would be nice. Perhaps you would be interested in my new molecular-time-space theory."

"Likewise you concerning my theories involving suppressed homicidal mania."

"Pardon?"

I headed toward the main gate. "See you, Doc."

The Orizaba was a new miniature liner, sleek and double-decked and intensely modern with a swept-back single stack. I estimated the ship could carry about a thousand capacity. It had a bar, two snack shops and a small dance floor on the upper deck. I found the Captain's cabin and knocked.

"Come in!" a husky voice ordered.

I went inside. A red-headed doll, about six foot in height, with shoulders like Paul Bunyon sat at a portable bar across from the bulkhead door. She wore a sexy blue uniform, opened down the front and revealing the faint curvature of her small breasts. She had flaming blue eyes and thin lips like a man, unpainted, but exquisitely chiseled. She gestured at a bottle on the counter.

"Pour yourself a drink, Miss West," she said.

"You—you're—"

"Captain Turk. Betsy Turk. I own this beautiful hunk of electric engines and steel plate. So what?"

"You expected me?"

"Sure. Doc Murphy called me after you left his plant. He said you rushed away so quickly he forgot to mention I was a woman. So what do you want to know about Virginia Lovelady?"

"Simple," I said. "Who killed her, and why?"

She shrugged futilely. "Ten thousand people. For ten thousand reasons. Virginia was mixed-up. For a lot of reasons. How many women could take twelve hours a day, seven days a week locked behind steel walls with deadly fissionable materials. Me, I like salt air and the open sea. I'd go mad myself with that kind of jazz."

"Was she mad?"

"Maybe. Like yourself, Miss West, I'm a woman in a man's job. So was Virginia. But her job was breaking down the smallest bit of matter. Mine is cutting a wave. Yours is, pardon the expression, cutting open people. We have a bit of sky and air and life to plow through. She had nothing. Not even a husband."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He was jealous of everything. Even the atoms she smashed. No wonder the girl went bad. He rode her like a dolphin rides the waves. The rotten creepy hairdresser."

"Lovelady's a hairdresser?" I demanded.

"Of course. He's one of *those*, didn't you know, Miss West." She laughed. "Oh, he used to accuse Virginia and me of everything under nine fathoms. He hated us for being aggressive women. His mother was one and it just kills him to find women doing anything but the family wash."

I headed for the stateroom door. "See you, Captain."

She jumped up. "What's your

hurry, Miss West? Our next trip is a moonlight cruise to the island. Come along as my guest. You'll see plenty of flying fish."

"Sorry," I said, "but I'm after a red herring."

MR. LOVELADY was in the back of his hair styling shop on Hollywood Boulevard when I entered. It was after closing time and everyone was gone. He was busily at work on a blonde wig. The sound of my heels brought him around.

"I'm sorry we're closed—" His face drained into a sickly white. "Oh, hello, Miss West. How goes the battle?"

"The battle is over, Mr. Lovelady," I said. "Now if you will kindly bring out the red wig you wore the day you murdered your wife, I'll collect my double salary."

He winced. "You must be kidding."

"I have a witness named Buzz Denton. That was pretty stupid masquerading with the red wig and glasses and renting the boat. Why didn't you just sneak inside the laboratory and push her onto an atomic pile?"

His eyelids widened angrily. "She was never at the lab. She was always at a conference or a meeting with this scientist or that one. Except the meetings were always held in the privacy of a bedroom! Don't tell me, I know!"

"And why didn't the lady love you, Mr. Lovelady?"

His face crunched into a furious scowl. "Because she didn't want to love me. Because she couldn't love me. Because she was twisted, that's why." His hands dug into the blonde wig he held tearing the fibers apart viciously. "Why did she and my mother have to do that to me. I didn't ask for that. All I wanted was kindness and devotion. But all I got was a machine. Two machines!"

He smashed the wig to the floor. "Two female robots in one lifetime are too much, Miss West." He advanced toward me with his fingers extended at my throat, hands lifted menacingly. "And now you are the third."

"Mr. Lovelady," I said, backing against a wall. "What possessed you to come to my office and hire me to find a murderer when the police were satisfied it was suicide?"

"Stupid people!" he howled angrily. "I wanted them to make an arrest. But did they? No! I deliberately pretended to be Dr. Murphy trying to disguise himself. But did they get it? No! Even the boat dock owner boomeranged on me."

His hands twisted into trembling knots. "And talk about stupidity! The police even believed the suicide note I forced Virginia to write. Those idiots even forced me to come to you and spend my own money to prove she was murdered!"

"Some days it just doesn't pay to get out of bed."

"I told you," he said, eyes inflamed with hate. "Statistics say ninety percent of the females who kill themselves are young, beautiful and in highly skilled jobs. This is where you become a statistic, Miss West. A young, beautiful twisted statistic."

"You might have lucked out with that drowning bit," I said. "But a coroner's jury will have a tough time believing I choked myself to death with your fingers."

He laughed maniacally. "I'm not going to strangle you, sweetheart. You're going to wind up in the bay. Just as Virginia did. Screaming and crying at the top of your lungs. And finally going down and down and down—"

I lifted my skirt and pushed the .22 revolver against his chest. He didn't flinch. His hands went to my throat. "Change of plans. Good-bye, Miss West. Next time take the plain—life—and live."

"You should have written TV commercials for mortuaries," I managed.

I squeezed the trigger. The hammer banged hollowly. I squeezed again. The gun jammed. Dr. Murphy burst through the door. He tossed a right-handed atomic bomb right into Lovelady's chops. The hairdresser went down. So did I.

WHEN I WOKE up I was stretched on a contoured chair in Lovelady's Beauty Salon. Dr. Murphy was bent over me.

"Are you all right, Miss West?" He placed a cold compress on my head.

"What happened to—"

"The police took him away a few minutes ago. I told them I was a doctor, so they left you in my care."

"Great," I said, sitting up dazedly. "When do you launch me to the moon? I'm already seeing stars."

"Pardon?"

"Doc, to tell you the truth, Lovelady was trying to frame you for Virginia's murder. I was ready to buy that until I talked with Captain Turk. I mean, with your red hair, glasses—and a wig—"

"What red hair?" he said, grinning nicely. "Miss West, I find you, may I say, an extremely exciting young woman."

"Doctor, that is not a very scientific analysis."

"Pardon the expression, Miss West. But to hell with any scientific analysis, I've become very fond of you."

"What about your molecular-time-space theory?"

He leaned over me. "Let's simply forget it."

"Doc, you—you're impeding progress."

"That's what you think."

Oh, well, I thought, leaning back, and accepting his arms. What's the big rush to the moon? When there's so much fun going on here?

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A DOLL CALLED SUZY

A coroner's jury can't question the dead. But there was one witness to the sea tragedy who could not be silenced.

by THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY



THE COAST GUARD yeoman announced that the civilian Captain Morrill had returned from coffee, and duty officer Lieutenant Meyers laid Morrill's deposition on his commander's desk and frowned at it, blowing against his flat lips.

Usually, there were quirks of amusement on Meyers' lean, sun-bronzed face, but now he looked serious and bothered.

"You don't buy his story?" Commander Root asked.

"It's in order," Meyers said. "In fact, a remarkably detailed mem-

ory of a horrible accident at sea."

"What's wrong, then?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps I'm biased. I believe I knew the victims, and it is difficult for me to condone a ship's master ordering a woman and child below decks with a fire raging. If true, then his act killed them."

"The fire was not yet *raging*, lieutenant," the commander said sternly. "And our job is not to approve or disapprove of a master's decisions if negligence is not involved. Our job is to verify the



truth or falseness of his statement."

"If he sticks to his story, there's no question," Meyers said. "He's the only survivor and there is no contrary evidence."

"There's the insurance angle, of course," Root admitted. "Double indemnity if his claim holds. Don't forget—two hundred thousand is a lot of loot. By itself, of course, that scarcely justifies suspicion of foul play. Do you find any discrepancy that might indicate that his statement is false, or a cover job for scuttling?"

"No," Meyers said reluctantly. "The statement is logical and complete—if true, sir."

Root banged his desk. "Goddam it, this is the Coast Guard, not a Congressional investigation. Do we challenge the deposition or not?"

"I can't see any grounds to challenge it on, sir, unless he trips himself. There is the point that he claims the wreck occurred in Caicos Passage at approximately one-eight-hundred. He was a one-man crew and must have hove to in open water or anchored for the night on shoals. And I am curious as to how he reached that position so early in the morning."

"His position of rescue allows for the Caicos current, tide and drift?"

"Yes sir," Meyers agreed, with a mirthless smile. "His position of rescue was so accurate it was pinpointed when I computed. But,

some effort from the Carib banks, which would have been the logical position to anchor for the night."

"Why bother? Why not say he was wrecked on the banks?"

"We could drag-search and dive the banks, sir. We can't drag the Caicos Passage at eleven hundred fathoms and that current."

"You've got a point," Root acknowledged. "But a damned expensive one to investigate. We'd never get the authority without strong substantiating evidence."

Meyers spread his hands. "No other survivors, no wreckage. It's his story."

Root grunted to himself and flicked the intercom for the yeoman to bring Captain Morrill.

Morrill came in with the aggressive swagger of a man who knows he may be doubted but is equally convinced he holds the high cards. He was still dressed in ship's stores of the freighter that had picked him up, but he had cuffed the pants high and hoisted them with a rope belt, and tied his shirt tails, sash-like, above a strip of bronzed, naked flesh, giving him the swash-buckling look of a movie beach-comber.

He nodded perfunctorily and smirked at the deposition on the commander's desk. "Nothing wrong, I take it."

"Very complete, Captain Morrill," Commander Root said. "Just a few questions to paint the pic-

knocked out, so how did you come to risk the night in Caicos Passage with nobody to stand watch?"

Morrill's eyes brightened with mockery. "There was very little wind and the barometer was holding steady, Commander. By itself, the current in that passage holds you off the rocks. Around twenty-two hundred, I hove to under fore-sail and sea anchor and caught some sleep on deck. It was stinking hot below deck anyway. I figure the built-up heat was what caused the combustion."

"Let's keep to the point," Root said.

"I've sailed that ketch mostly as a one-man crew for twelve years," Merrill said, "I'm used to it. About every hour I wake up to check. In this case, I was up again at o-four-hundred, put the ship on course, made my own breakfast, and then put on sail."

"You could have run over to the Carib banks for a decent anchorage," Meyers said.

Morrill eyed him truculently. "I could have done a lot of things, Lieutenant. You ever spend a night there in the doldrums at this season? Swells like a roller coaster and not a breath of air moving. It's murder."

"That bad?" Root asked.

Morrill hesitated, eyes digging into the commander to probe any double meaning. "Try it," he said finally.

"I'll take your word," Root said

purposely. Let Morrill sweat about how he meant that. He flipped a couple of pages of the deposition. "How do you figure the fire started?"

"Spontaneous combustion's the only answer," Merrill said. "I had extra barrels of fuel in that hatch and one of them may have leaked. We'd been ten days on a sea of blazing metal. But it must have started after I put the ship under way."

Meyers chewed at his cheek and masked the expression on his face. He'd hoped that point might trip Morrill—if there was anything to trip.

"Some rough water?"

Morrill shook his head. "There are no tide rips in there, and we caught no wind. That was the point. There was a following breeze, very light, but enough to blow the smell of a smolder fire ahead of the ketch. Loreen—Mrs. Hennessey—had been getting breakfast for herself and the kid, and most of what I smelled was that."

"But she was on deck when you discovered the fire?"

"She was putting out breakfast, using the transom for table and seats. I smelled smoke, nosed around and opened the fore hatch. I got a burst of smoke in the face, but after it cleared, I could see that the fire was small—just smoldering waste and rope. Nothing out of hand at all. I sent Loreen—Mrs.



Hennessey—and her kid below and went to hook up the hose.”

“That the cute little towhead with the great big doll called Suzy!” Meyers said.

Morrill looked nettled and irritated at the interruption. “The kid’s name was Suzy. I’ve got it in the deposition.”

“I mean the doll’s name,” Meyers said. His voice was quiet as a shark fin slicing water.

Morrill snorted, “Now how the hell—” He started, then caught his temper grudgingly. “Yeah, I guess she called it by her own name. Dumb little brat. Suzy prob-

ably called it whatever name she thought of.”

“You don’t seem to like children,” Meyers said.

Morrill glared at him. “You trying to needle me, Lieutenant Meyers? What I like or don’t like is my business. But a sailing ship is no damn place for a kid that age. If her mother had listened to me, she’d have left her ashore.”

“Let’s stick to the point,” Commander Root said. “Wasn’t it a little odd to send mother and daughter below where fumes might get them? Didn’t you feel there might be *some* risk?”

“Commander, a master does what he thinks is best in time of emergency. They could have come back up if there were fumes or smoke in the cabin. I had my hands full, and a nervous woman and a panicky kid on deck weren’t going to help. Damn fool kid would probably have dropped that doll where I’d break my neck on it.”

“That would have given you a good chance to call the doll a name,” Meyers suggested acidly.

Root passed his lieutenant a glance, and Meyers sucked his cheek in and moved to the window to stare out at the blue swath of the Gulf Stream, dotted by small craft. He had a clear picture of the little girl lugging around her doll. A dog couldn’t have ripped it away from her. Her mother had

said she took it into the bath, and to bed and table.

"So the mother and child were below deck, the fire was still contained in the fore hold, and you were hooking up hose?" Commander Root said.

"That's right. There'd have been no sweat except for the squall. It came out of nowhere, full blast. With nobody standing helm, the ship broached and the fire shot up into the rigging. I ran to the wheel and brought the ship back before the wind and lashed the wheel, but the sails had caught by then. I had to do first things first. I ran forward to close the hatch and close the fire in."

The commander nodded.

"Not much to tell after that," Morrill said. "The flames were leaping and it was hard to reach the hatch. I was working at it when the foresail carried loose and came down across the cabin hatch in a sheet of flame."

"Trapping Mrs. Hennessey and the child?"

"Like sardines. I tried to clear the burning sail. Look, you can see what I got for it."

He broke off to undo two buttons and show a mass of bandages. One side of his neck looked streaked by fire. There were two ugly gouges on one cheek that might have been made by hot metal raking him.

"But I was still trying to clear a way through the fire when a spar

dropped and knocked me overboard," he went on. "By the time I surfaced, the ketch had passed. But I had it in sight until it exploded."

"That close?"

"Maybe a mile away. The oil slicks were still burning when I swam there. I thought maybe Loreen had been blown free, but there wasn't a sign of them."

"They might have floated up later," Root said.

"Not a chance. I was around there a long time lashing a raft together out of wreckage."

Meyers turned at the window. "What happened to your dinghy?"

Morrill looked puzzled, angered and cautious all at once. "You got me, and don't think I didn't look for it! Maybe it got stove in when the squall struck. Maybe it carried down with the ketch and got snagged in the shrouds."

"Boat with that buoyancy should have popped back up," Meyers said.

"Yeah, it should have, but it didn't," Morrill grunted. His eyes pinched a little. "Maybe the squall ran off with it. It could have drifted anywhere."

Root said, "You don't think there's a chance Mrs. Hennessey might have broken clear and reached the dinghy while you were in the water?"

"Hell, she was already dead, Commander!" Morrill growled. He looked a little wild for a short

moment. "She must have been!"

"Why, *must have been?*"

"Well damn, she was down in the cabin—under all that flame and smoke."

The two officers looked at him a minute, then Root said, "Rotten way to die. But so is any other. However, her death will have to be confirmed officially by the coroner's jury before you can claim insurance. That double indemnity clause will require exoneration of any negligence."

"I've got a twenty years sailing record without a black mark, Commander!" Morrill grated with fresh challenge.

"That will weigh in your favor, of course," Root said. "But there is the question of you taking out a rather large policy just before the cruise."

"Hell, it was dual beneficiary, wasn't it?" Morrill demanded. "Matter of fact, I took it out for her protection in case something happened to me after we were married."

Meyers tautened imperceptibly. "You were engaged to Mrs. Hennessey?"

"You can call it that. We figured we might get married at one of the islands on the cruise. See, if she got married again, her allotment from her last husband stopped, so it took some thinking. That's one reason I took out that insurance. She'd have jumped at it, except for the kid"

"My sympathies," Root said. He thumbed back through the pile of papers twice. "Well, I guess that covers our angles, Captain Morrill. You'll be expected to stand by for coroner's inquest. In fact, you can't put in your insurance claim until after official decision on her death at sea."

"I'll be around, don't worry!" Morrill growled. He glanced mockingly at the lieutenant. "You figure the coroner will want to know more about the damn doll's name?"

"We have to confirm the death of the mother and child, Captain," Root said and buzzed the yeoman to show him out.

"WELL," he grunted, "if he sticks to that story, he'll get away with it even if he's lying, and I'm not sure he is. The most suspicious thing is that he took her in those waters without another man or two for crew, but his record shows he's acted as one man crew a good deal, and always when he sails without paid passengers."

Meyers shook his head. "That's not bugging me so much as something else. If I were trying to marry a divorcee whose getting a pretty good alimony, I'd damn sure be pretty sweet about her daughter, and I would sure know the name of her daughter's doll."

"How did you know it?" Root asked curiously.

"She played with my kids on

the beach. I know that doll so well I might be its papa. I know how it got a broken cheek and a Caesarean operation and I fixed it up with rubber cement myself. It was a big rubber doll as big as she was. She carried it everywhere. She never forgot it. And she was no brat, Commander. She was a sweet little girl, and brave as hell."

"You think there's any chance they escaped and might be in the dinghy adrift?"

"Not much. British air patrol's been keeping an eye out and reported nothing. But I think maybe you threw that scare into Morrill in some way. He's counting on that insurance." Meyers regarded his commander speculatively.

Root knew the look and said gruffly, "No! We can't get authority for a depth search without some evidence, and that's the end of it. Hell, I don't think even the bathysphere would be safe in Caicos currents anyway."

"I don't think they spent the night in Caicos. I think a sea anchor in that current would have pulled them right on through."

"You're thinking of the banks?"

"That's the obvious anchorage, although he's got a good excuse why not."

"Well, those are British waters. We couldn't drag them without International agreement in any case, and it would take weeks to



the man's character, but I can't see there's anything more we can do about it."

"How about taking that new group of Guardsmen out to the banks for navigation orientation?" Meyers asked. "I could look around at least."

"What could you find on surface? It's been six days since the wreck."

"Who knows?" Meyers said. He moved to a wall chart and ran his index finger along the lee of the banks. "At this season, there's a backwater along there," he said. "It piles up most of the flotsom that drifts across the banks, like a

"Is that where you found the live torpedoes berthed?"

"That's it. And a derelict bell-buoy once that was pulling small craft off course. We might at least pick up some wreckage of his ketch."

"It wouldn't drift there from Caicos Passage," Root said.

Meyers nodded. "That's right. If there's anything there, the ship never went down in Caicos. It went down on the Banks."

"Carry on, Mr. Meyers. But hear this—no diving!"

"Yes, sir." Meyers smiled for the first time and left before Root could change his mind.

The commander made steeple of his fingers and then rubbed his lobster neck roughly. "All over a doll called Suzy!" he snorted. "I'm getting soft in the head." Well, he would stall the coroner's inquest as long as he could and give his young lieutenant a break at least.

Morrill attended the inquest dressed in dark tie and shirt and jacket, to Commander Root's surprise. He appeared rather somber over the tragedy, in sharp contrast with his tough acceptance of it at the time of the deposition.

The jury were mostly small craft owners, somewhat below Samuel Morrill's professional mariner class, and anxious to exhibit their own knowledge of the problems confronting a captain or one man crew when emergency befalls

by displaying a sympathetic understanding of the difficult decision he had been forced to make. His lack of emotion and the brevity and directness of his statements they put down to his credit. He was a tried but stolid man who had suffered great shock and a tragic loss, yet managed to bury his grief within him.

A coroner's inquest is not restricted in its proceedings by legal technicalities, and Morrill was free to tell his own story. It was clear to Root that he'd rehearsed it well. Briefly but consecutively as a log, he sketched the background of their cruise, explaining it as a kind of romantic vacation in advance of the charter season, when he'd be too busy to consider going on a cruise of that nature, no matter how short.

"It was my hope," he said a little hoarsely, "that Mrs. Hennessey would return bearing my name. It was to assure her security in that event that I took out the insurance policy before we left."

Root looked at the jury for signs of skepticism, but didn't find any. They were all conservative boat owners who carried insurance for the same reason. Nobody ever really expected tragedy at sea, but it happened.

Morrill then went on to explain the extra fuel stored in the forehold of the ketch. His engines had just been overhauled, which he verified without being asked. He

had meant to use the auxiliary power throughout the cruise, and would have needed the extra fuel. But he had thrown a shaft, which had eliminated the need for additional fuel. It was the unused fuel that had exploded from the fire.

The jurymen leaned forward in their seats to hear the details of how he had broached to, and used a sea anchor astern the night before the accident. This was the kind of deep water talk that made small craft owners feel on the inside of the maritime world, and they ate it up. These were the tricks of sailing from the days of real sailormen!

Morrill relaxed and preened with secret smugness under the questioning, which the coroner permitted. He'd won the jury now and he knew it. They were like hero-worshipping kids. From here on, in their own minds, they would each be the master of that ill-fated ketch and live the story out vicariously, crediting themselves with sound judgment and level-headed fortitude.

The coroner finally broke up what threatened to become an interminable discussion of seamanship by turning to Commander Root for technical affirmation that riding the night out in Caicos Passage as he had done was reasonable practice.

"It is completely possible," Root had to acknowledge. "Whether it would be considered reasonable or

not depends upon a master's knowledge of the waters, the seaworthiness of his ship, the tides, the weather, and luck."

"Do you approve the practice?" the coroner asked.

"I would not risk it myself," Root said. "But I am not a skilled sail navigator which Captain Morrill seems to be. However, I feel it necessary to point out that there was a woman and child aboard, and every precaution for the safety of ship and passengers should have been taken."

That raised the first doubt among the jurymen. Root could see, from the expressions on their faces, that they were arguing the point in their own minds.

Morrill scowled at the commander and then growled, "Mr. Coroner, I take that as a slur and would like to make rebuttal."

"You have permission," the coroner said.

"As I understand it, this inquest is concerned with the accident which caused the wreck and tragedy."

The coroner nodded again. "Quite correct, Captain Morrill."

"The matter of broaching to for the night had no relation to the outbreak of the fire or subsequent events," Morrill said. "As a matter of fact, my navigation of the passage was accomplished on schedule without incident."

"We are making no challenge, and the jury will bear in mind that

Commander Root's opinion, while quite correctly put, does not bear upon the accident," the coroner said a little reluctantly.

Morrill glanced at Root with mocking arrogance. The jurymen breathed easier at the coroner's instructions, for it freed them from the necessity of evaluating the matter for themselves.

The inquest was then terminated until next morning.

Root was not certain how he himself felt about the testimony. A man trying to clear his name could not be blamed for being defensive. So far, Morrill had spoken with what seemed complete honesty and with that ring of truth that can come only from the telling of an actual experience. But—the experience might well have taken place elsewhere, or during some different cruise in the past.

When he left the coroner's chambers, he found Morrill in the hall talking to reporters, and giving them details in advance of testimony, which might be considered an attempt to prejudice a jury. He frowned, but he was not too sure that he would not have done the same if he had been in Morrill's position.

Next day, the chambers began to resemble a stage. An accurate diagram of the ill-fated ship's deck was chalked out on the floor. A scale model of the ship made of cardboard was brought in on casters so that it could be moved

about for demonstration. There were two blackboards for sketching illustrations of questions that might arise. The inquest opened with the coroner asking when Morrill had first discovered the fire.

Morrill answered as he had in the deposition and to Commander Root. He moved over the chalk diagram to the cabin transom to illustrate how Loreen Hennessey had been setting out breakfast and where she had sat herself.

"Suzy," he said, and suddenly had to clear his throat. "The child, God bless her, was sitting on the starboard side, clutching her doll. Suzy's doll was one of the family, something fathers among you will understand. It is the last picture I have of Suzy in my mind—little Suzy with her big doll. That is the way I will always remember her." He bowed his head and cleared his throat several times again.

Commander Root stared hard at Morrill, startled by his switch in attitude about the child. "What a ham!" he thought. "He's done some thinking on that!" But the commander was simply a technical witness here. There was no way for him to interject comment or point out the inconsistency between what Morrill had just said and his earlier attitude.

Morrill then described the sail he was carrying and explained, "It was barely sufficient to hold seaway in the following breeze. I

came forward to join the family, in my case, for second breakfast. Perhaps I should have lashed the wheel, but I doubt if it would have made much difference. I was standing by the transom, drinking coffee, when I smelled smoke. I may have smelled it before, but I now realized it was not a cooking odor. The breeze, you understand, was carrying the smell ahead of us."

"But now you definitely identified it as a foreign smell?"

Morrill gave a half laugh of apology. "Mr. Coroner, hindsight is liable to be tricky. I believe that I knew then that I smelled the smoke of tar and waste and fuel, but I can't swear to that."

"It was sufficient to cause investigation, however?"

"Yes," Morrill said. "I dropped down into the saloon cabin to check, then came back on deck and traced the smell to the fore-hatch. When I opened it, a cloud of smoke spiraled up, but quickly thinned. I saw fire smoldering, but only in a small, contained space—" He illustrated with his hands.

"It was nothing dangerous," he went on. "But the child had already cried in alarm at the burst of smoke and Mrs. Hennessey was a nervous woman. I ordered them down to the saloon. Please bear in mind that I had just been there and no smoke or fumes were as yet seeping through."

Morrill was moving now as he talked, illustrating his actions upon the chalk diagram. "I ran off to start the bilge pump, which operated on its own engine. I then pulled hose out of the tackle house and lined it out for coupling. I was, naturally, hurrying with concern, but there was no increase of smoke forward and no reason to consider the ship in danger. One more coupling and I would have been ready to couple on the pump."

He broke off and stared at the jury. "At that moment, the squall struck, fanning the fire into an open blaze. An instant later, a great wave bore down astern. The wheel spun, the ship broached, the sails jibed, and the flames roared up into the rigging. I rushed for the wheel to bring us back on course before we capsized. It seemed as if all hell was bursting loose."

The jurymen nodded as if they'd been there themselves.

The coroner asked, "Mrs. Hennessey made no effort to leave the saloon at this point?"

Morrill shook his head. "Mr. Coroner, the fire got out of control in a matter of seconds, and of course, she did not see what was happening above deck or the sea around us. She would have been in greater danger on deck."

The jurymen nodded again. They could visualize it.

"I then ran forward to cover



the hatch from which flame was belching. I was trying to work in against the raw heat, and I am not too clear myself how long it took. But suddenly the flaming foresail tore loose and flapped across the transom and saloon hatch, covering it with flame."

He held up his hands to the jury, which still showed ugly burns and blister marks. He unbuttoned his shirt to show his bandaged chest, and made a gesture at the fire streaks on his bronzed neck

"I fought to clear the hatch, to save them. You gentlemen must be familiar with the way smoke and flame will suck down into a vacant space beneath a fire if there is oxygen down there. It was not pleasant to think of what Mrs. Hennessey, and her little daughter must be suffering. If not from asphyxiation, then from sudden terror."

He broke off to swallow and blow his nose and the jury nodded and watched him with grim sympathy.

"Perhaps I might have cleared the hatch in time," he went on finally, "but a spar fell, carrying me overboard."

Morrill then recounted exactly what he had said to Commander Root. Not a shade of discrepancy, not a note of uncertainty, except that, again, he seemed puzzled and bewildered by what had happened to the dinghy, as if he had expected it to be there. As if he had planned on it. He had laid on the dramatics, but he had not varied the essentials of his original testimony even slightly. Grudgingly, Root thought, "It must have happened that way. He couldn't have the details so well fixed in his mind otherwise."

Morrill was breathing very hard and speaking hoarsely as he recounted swimming over to the wreck. Sympathetically, the coroner called a recess to give him

questions concerned the buoyancy of live or dead bodies and would not be pleasant. Morrill left the chambers with the announcement that he was going to get a drink, which nobody disapproved of.

As a matter of fact, Root felt in need of one himself, after picturing the terror and torture the little girl must have suffered unless, if God was merciful, the explosion had killed both the child and her mother instantly. He followed Morrill out.

It gave him a shock to find Morrill walking slowly down the corridor, showing no reluctance to answer reporters, although he was keeping his voice and demeanor heavy. Root was well experienced with the liberties reporters take, so he followed closely behind to make sure that appearances were not deceptive and that they were not blocking his progress deliberately.

On the contrary, Morrill stopped dead once to illustrate a point with his hands, and to volunteer further information.

"That double-faced ugly son!" Root thought with anger, remembering the voice in which Morrill had spoken of Mrs. Hennessey and her little daughter with her doll. Morrill wasn't thinking of them now. He was illustrating what a hero he'd been to tackle the flaming sail with his bare hands

Root forgot his drink. He marched to a corridor phone and called his radio shack to get Meyers on the air and secure a report on whatever he might have found out. He hadn't given up hoping that Meyers had found conclusive evidence of foul play, even though Root's mind told him that there was nothing necessarily guilty-implying between Morrill's dramatic bid for publicity and the truth of his testimony. Root had seen a dying man once put on a dramatic scene that would have paled the death scene from Othello. He tightened his lips and went to have his drink, straight and triple.

He got back to the inquest just as the coroner was taking up what had happened immediately following the explosion. The coroner was not permitting his sympathies to temper his questioning of Morrill. Morrill estimated that it had taken him an hour to swim from where he had been knocked overboard to the position reached by the ship before it had disappeared beneath the waves. And that it had taken him another three hours amidst the wreckage to lash together a raft out of the debris.

A witness was in the chambers, an officer from the freighter that had rescued him, to verify his description of the raft, and that he had been very weak from exposure.

"We were half afraid to hoist him aboard for fear we'd slough

the flesh off him," the officer testified. "He was a mess from the salt and sun on his burns and wounds. He looked like a man who had been pulled over a redhot rake."

The jurymen looked at Morrill and several nodded their commendation of his courage. Because an inquest was a rather informal affair, the head jurymen took the liberty of saying, "Mr. Coroner, as far as this jury is concerned, you have no need to question Captain Sam Morrill further."

But the coroner seemed determined to ask one more question.

"The explosion occurred at the fore end of the ship," he said. "There must have been gaps blown in the bulkhead and the head. The ship went down at the stern carried by the weight of its engines and loaded fuel tanks. Human bodies should have floated loose. Can you explain that, Captain Morrill?"

Morrill might have been shaken, but instead, he was angered. He said bitingly, "Mr. Coroner. I was not in the cabin with them. I don't know how they got trapped, but they obviously did."

"You must have wondered about it?"

"What do you think a man thinks about after a thing-like that?" Morrill demanded hotly. "There was a lot of non-buoyant weight in that forehatch. It may have blown back and held the bodies crushed beneath it as the

wreck sank. All I can tell is what I know. If you can locate other evidence, it might be clearer."

The coroner frowned with dissatisfaction. Of course, no other evidence could be located. All the point had done was to make the jury more sympathetic to the witness, and there was nothing further to gain, so he brought the testimony to conclusion. The jury would not be out long.

The coroner came over to the witness table shaking his head and sat down and lighted a cigar. Morrill moved over to a window and lighted a cigarette, and stood there looking out at the Gulf Stream, clearly visible from the Municipal building's sixteenth story. The reporters talked among themselves, but in hushed monosyllables. The grim picture brought out in the final testimony was still too fresh in their minds.

A yeoman came in at that point and laid a radio transcript down in front of Commander Root. Root stared at it a moment, then picked it up almost distastfully. It would say nothing, and after the brutal emotional grilling the coroner had put Morrill through, he was ashamed of letting his personal feelings cause the man a further ordeal of questioning.

He read the message through three times before the peculiar wording struck him. Meyers had radioed from his position over the rim of the Carib banks: *Located,*

half hull of dinghy from wreck Albion bearing Suzy intact with unmistakable knife thrust through breast and back. I absolutely identify. Must have been struggle. Testing drift direction. No sign of wind here for some days past.

Root arose swiftly from his chair, strode forward and thrust the message at the coroner.

"Good God!" the coroner muttered. "Stabbed clean through! She couldn't be alive."

"I'm sure Meyers would have said so," Root said grimly.

The coroner was suddenly banging his gavel and issuing orders to the bailiffs. "Recall the jury for further evidence! Place Morrill under body arrest! Get the D.A. on the double!"

A hesitant bailiff approached and took Morrill's arm, but Morrill shook him off. He stood stiff and surly, his face paling beneath his tan.

"What am I charged with for arrest?" he demanded.

"Suspected murder on the high seas," the coroner blurted. He pulled himself in hand and stood very straight to read the radio.

Morrill's face bleached to a sick grey. Against the color, the burn marks on his face and neck stood out with sudden sharpness. Root thought of the freighter officer's description of his condition when picked up—"He looked like a man who'd been pulled across a redhot rake."

They could be burned over claw marks, the rake of a desperate and perhaps already dying mother's finger nails in fighting a relentless killer. Root had a momentary picture in his mind of a terrified little child clutching its doll tightly to save it from the same fate as the killer turned on her and slashed, stabbing the doll through.

"I suggest," he said loudly to the coroner, "that you will want police medical examination of Captain Morrill's burns, Mr. Coroner."

Morrill shook his head once as if disbelieving. "God!" he muttered. "And I blew the hole that floated her free myself!"

He threw back his head and laughed, wildly, hysterically, then thrust the bailiff off balance and leaped past him out the window.

The coroner came back from looking down the sixteen stories Morrill had jumped. "Well, that is one way of confessing and saves the state some money," he muttered.

He looked at the radio message again with puzzlement. "Queer way your lieutenant describes the finding of a child's body. *Intact*, he says. As if she were a teacup that had dropped."

"What he's found is a rubber doll called Suzy that popped up from the wreck," Root said. "Morrill hated the child so much that he never bothered to find out what

she called her doll. He thought Meyers meant the girl herself."

"You think he killed them and then scuttled the ship? But why on the banks when he could have run through to deep water?"

"My guess is that he was not scared. He had no wind to move. He was in the doll drums. He killed mother and child and then fired the ship meaning to get away in the dinghy, but the fire got out

of hand and exploded him overboard, and when he caught his bearings, the dinghy had vanished because it had stove in and was floating awash."

"But the doll had floated up and lodged in a section of dinghy? And just now, he misunderstood the radio to refer to the child."

Commander Root nodded agreement. "As Meyers intended, I suspect," he added.



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*Guarding a 72-carat diamond
can be a heavy-duty police job.*

BIRTHDAY PRESENT

by **RICHARD DEMING**



MY WIFE PATRICIA is always rummaging in pawnshops and bringing home what she likes to refer to as "bargains." That's where she found the diamond stick-pin she gave me for my birthday.

It was an old-fashioned pin with a gold filigree head about the size of a dime. There was a murky yellow diamond of about a quarter carat in the center, and six chip diamonds spaced around the circumference. It probably would have looked fine on a nineteenth century riverboat gambler, but it struck me as a bit garish to go with a business suit.

She told me it had been a steal at forty-five dollars.

I didn't have the heart to tell her stickpins had gone out of style. She had noticed a few men wearing those ornamental buttons which clip through your tie and hold it in place by means of a small chain ending in a tiny bar which fits into a buttonhole of your shirt, and was under the impression they were stickpins.

"It's appropriate," I said, to make her feel that she couldn't have pleased me more. "I'll wear it while I'm guarding the Cunyar diamond next week."

"Doesn't it scare you to be responsible for a jewel worth over a million dollars?" she asked.

Getting up from the dining-room table, I leaned over to kiss her on the nose. "For twenty years I've been responsible for a jewel worth much more than that," I told her.

"Me, you mean?" she inquired, and it tickled me that I could still make her blush.

The next day was a Friday, and naturally I had to wear the stickpin

to work. On the way to the office I stopped by the Hotel Renault to look over the lobby and plan my security measures.

On Monday the National Association of Retail Jewelers was to open its national convention at the Hotel Renault. As a publicity gimmick there was to be on display in the hotel lobby the famous Cunyar diamond, which was being loaned for the occasion by multi-millionaire gem collector Everett Abb.

Abb himself wasn't going to attend the convention, as he was an oilman, not a jeweler. He often loaned pieces of his fabulous collection to groups for public display on the condition that proper security measures were taken at no expense to himself.

The Cunyar sparkler weighed 72.3 carats. It wasn't the biggest diamond in the world, as there are numerous stones which go over a hundred carats and the largest of all, the Star of Africa, weighs in at 530.2 carats. But it was supposed to be the second finest large diamond in the world, insofar as color and quality were concerned, being outsparkled only by the 142.9 carat Jonker of almost legendary renown.

It was my job to insure the gem's safety from the sticky hands of jewel thieves.

The hotel manager was a small, fluttery, thin-haired man named Myron Smithers. I found him in his office.

"I'm Nick Harmon of the Drake Security Agency," I said, laying my credentials on his desk.

He examined them thoroughly before rising and offering his hand. "How do you do, Mr. Harmon? You're here about the Cunyar diamond, I imagine."

I noticed his gaze was fixed on my stickpin.

"Uh-huh," I said. "It was a birthday present from my wife."

His eyes jumped to my face. "I beg your pardon?"

"The stickpin, not the Cunyar diamond. My birthday was yesterday."

"Oh," he said. "Belated happy returns." His gaze touched the stickpin again, then moved away.

I said, "I would like you to accompany me while I give the lobby a once over, in case I have any questions."

"Of course," he agreed.

The Hotel Renault was the city's newest and finest hotel. The lobby was ballroom size, with a wide corridor giving off it opposite the front entrance. The bar was to the left and another hall led past it to a side entrance. A broad archway to the right led to a reading and correspondence room about twenty feet wide and the same length as the lobby. The doors to a men's room and a women's room led off of this.

Myron Smithers said, "We plan to exhibit the diamond in a glass case in the center of the lobby

I glanced around, noting that there was access to the lobby by four different ways: from the main entrance, from the bar, which presumably also had a street entrance, from the side entrance and from the corridor opposite the main entrance.

"You're kidding," I said.

He raised his eyebrows. "I thought the idea was to have people see it. The location we've chosen is right in the flow of traffic."

"It's probably the best place from a display point of view," I conceded. "From a security point of view it gives me butterflies in the stomach. We'll set things up so we only have to look in one direction."

I walked through the archway into the reading and correspondence room, with the hotel manager trailing me. After glancing about, I walked into the men's room, Myron Smithers still trailing me.

There were two windows in the men's room, both overlooking an alley which ran along that side of the hotel between it and a theater next door. As it was February and quite chilly out, both windows were closed and locked.

As we left the men's room, I said, "If you could have one of your female employees check the ladies' room to make sure it's empty, I'd like to look at it too."

He went over to the newsstand next to the desk and got the girl who worked there. When she had

checked and informed us the place was unoccupied, we went in. It contained the same number of windows as the men's room, also overlooking the alley. Both were closed and locked.

When we returned to the reading and correspondence room, I pointed to a long table which stood against the wall between the two rest-room doors. "We'll put the glass on that," I said. "You can have those five drawn-up chairs removed."

"Way back here?" he objected.

"The archway's so wide that the case can be seen from anywhere in the lobby. People ought to be willing to walk an extra fifty feet to view a million-dollar diamond. And it considerably lessens the security problem. No one can get at it without passing through the archway, so we only have to guard one means of access."

He said doubtfully, "You think there's that much danger?"

"It's been on the wire services that the Cunyar diamond is going to be displayed here for a solid week. Jewel thieves read, and by now every major iceman in the world has at least contemplated taking a crack at it. We expect a few to at least case the lay. With the security system I plan to set up, I doubt that an actual attempt will be made. But we won't take any chances."

He looked a bit pale. "My goodness, if it was stolen from the Re-

nault, the publicity could ruin us."

"Why?" I asked. "You might lose the trade of people who own million-dollar diamonds, but I doubt that it would empty your rooms. I understand the hotel has disclaimed responsibility anyway. We were hired by the Retail Jewelers' Association."

"That's true," he said, looking a little better. "I suppose I really have nothing to say about security measures. You'd better clear this with the convention chairman when he arrives Sunday night."

"I will," I assured him.

I spent a few minutes checking the rest of the first floor, then headed for the office.

When I got there, I went straight in to see the chief. Allen Drake was a bull-shouldered man of sixty with a gray-flecked crew-cut and shrewd black eyes. He hiked his eyebrows quizzically at sight of my new tie pin.

"Morning, Nick," he said. "Why the disguise?"

"What disguise?"

"You look like Diamond Jim Brady."

"It's a birthday present from Pat," I explained. "I have to wear it at least a week."

He grinned. "You'll attract as much attention as the Cunyar diamond. Incidentally, have you cased the Renault yet?"

"I just came from there," I told him. "I'll need four uniformed men on duty all the time the diamond's

on display, and one to guard the hotel safe when it isn't."

Drake nodded. Reaching into a desk drawer, he produced a stack of mug shots and handed them to me.

"Here's all the known jewel thieves I was able to get mugged on. About a half dozen star performers are missing because they've never been mugged, but I've man-



aged to scare up at least general descriptions of them and their M.O.s. Frieda's typing them up now. She'll bring them to your office as soon as she finishes."

"Okay," I said. "I'll retire to my lair and start memorizing faces."

I spent the rest of the morning familiarizing myself with the physical appearances and records of some two dozen internationally-known jewel thieves. In the afternoon I got together with the crew Drake had assigned to me, which consisted of seven uniformed operatives.

Since the Cunyar diamond was to be on display only from noon until ten P.M. daily, I planned to

run only a single ten-hour trick, with one extra man to spell the guards when they took their staggered dinner breaks. The other two were each to work seven-hour tricks guarding the hotel safe at night.

I had drawn a diagram of the hotel lobby and the reading and correspondence room off of it. I spread it out on my desk and had my crew gather around it.

"The diamond will be on display here," I said, pointing to the spot between the two rest-room doors. "One man will be on duty right next to the display case. A second will be positioned between the front entrance and the door to the barroom, where he can cover both. They're only about ten feet apart. The third will cover the side entrance and the fourth the corridor opposite the front entrance."

Redheaded Danny Case said dubiously, "Won't that put us all pretty far from the display case, if the man on it needs help?"

"The strategy is to cut off retreat," I said. "It won't do a thief any good to grab the gem if he can't get out of the place afterward. This way the lobby is bottled up tight."

When Case nodded his understanding, I said, "Now this wide central corridor leads to the elevators, to a ballroom, a dining room and to a rear door giving onto Washington Street. About twenty feet beyond the lobby is a hallway

the right which leads past the kitchen to a service door opening on the alley."

I glanced up at young Dwight Ellison. "That's going to be your spot, Dwight. Monday, before you take your position, I want you to locate that service door, so that you can get to it fast if you have to. That's in case we just happen to get knocked over by gunmen using the front door.

"You can fade back, reach the alley by the service door, cut to the front of the hotel and catch them coming out. Is all that perfectly clear in your mind?"

He nodded his blond head. "I understand, Chief."

I assigned Danny Case to the front door, Ed Baines to the side door and Sam Goodrich to the display case. The latter wasn't very big, standing only about five six and weighing no more than one forty. But he had a habit of staying alert instead of drifting off into daydreams.

I told the four men of the day trick to meet me at the Hotel Renault at ten thirty Monday morning, as the Cunyar diamond was to be delivered at eleven. On subsequent days they wouldn't have to report until noon, but I wanted a substantial force on hand to receive the diamond.

The night guards wouldn't have to report until ten P.M. and five A.M. respectively, of course.

That evening I got a phone call

at home from Captain Harry Yoder of Robbery Division.

"Allen Drake tells me you're in charge of the Cunyar deal, Nick," he said.

"Uh-huh."

"I thought I'd remind you of something, if you don't already know it. Ever hear of Faceless Jonas Fell?"

"Sure. The iceman with next to no description. Never been photographed, average height, weight and build, average face, hair dyed to suit the occasion. Estimated age anywhere from thirty-five to fifty. I memorized him this morning, but I'd hate to have to pick him out of a crowd."

"You may have to. His goal for years has been the Cunyar diamond. According to our stoolie tips, it's kind of an obsession with him. It spends so much time in a vault, he's never had a real chance to hit. It's our opinion down here that he won't miss this opportunity if he sees any chance at all."

"Thanks for the tip," I said. "But I think we've arranged things so it would be easier for him to crack the vault."

When I told Patricia about the call, she made a face. "What good is anything like the Cunyar diamond anyway, honey?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you can't wear it. You can't even display it without hiring an armed guard to keep it from being stolen. Most of the time it

just sits in a vault, useless to anyone. I wouldn't even want any part of it."

"A lot of shady characters do," I said dryly. "It's my job to discourage their longings."

Sunday evening I dropped by the Hotel Renault to see the convention chairman. He was a plump, bald-headed jeweler from Chicago named Amos Tuttle. Like everyone else, he seemed fascinated by my stickpin, but when he got over the shock of that, we hit it off fine.

I took him downstairs and outlined my security plan, which he approved unconditionally.

"A local delegate to the convention is furnishing the display case, and it was delivered this afternoon," he said. "Would you like to see it?"

When I said I would, he led me over to the checking room and asked the girl for the case. It was too heavy for her to lift, so she let us in to look at it.

It was cubical in shape, about two feet in each dimension, and was constructed of thick plate glass which would take a hammer to break. The top lifted from the rear and was hinged at the front. It locked by means of a heavy brass hasp at the rear.

Amos Tuttle handed me two keys. "These are the only two keys to the case in existence," he said.

"When I talked over the phone

you wouldn't want any spare keys floating around."

"That's right," I said, pocketing them. "Can you arrange to have the case moved into position tomorrow morning?"

"Of course," he said. "Everything will be ready when you arrive."

Monday I got to the Renault at ten A.M. and took a final look around. The chairs had been moved away from the table between the two rest-room doors and I noted that the table had been cleared and the glass display case was on it.

My crew of four, wearing their gray security uniforms and holstered pistols, had all arrived by ten thirty. The fifth, who would spell the regular guards during their half-hour dinner breaks, wasn't due until five thirty. I showed each man his assigned post and renewed instructions while we waited for the jewel to arrive.

Brinks had been delegated the responsibility of delivering the gem and picking it up again after the convention ended. It was only the problem of the Drake Security Agency while it was at the hotel.

The armored car arrived exactly at eleven and the transfer was made without incident. I locked it in the hotel safe until noon, stood by as guard and told the rest to catch some lunch, as there would be no lunch breaks from noon on.

to the display case, where it rested on a plain square of black velvet. It was a beautiful, glittering thing, but after examining it, I had to agree with my wife. What good is a gem which has to be transported by armored car and guarded by four men before anyone can be allowed to look at it?

There was a three-by-five type-written card in the jewel box which gave the stone's vital statistics. I set it inside the case just in front of the diamond. It read:

THE CUNYAR DIAMOND

This stone, regarded by most expert jewelry appraisers as the second finest diamond in the world by virtue of both its size and its quality was discovered in the Premier Mine in South Africa in 1907 and was cut in 1921. Before cutting the stone weighed 311.6 carats. Cutting yielded twelve stones ranging from 72.3 carats (the Cunyar) to 2.4 carats in weight. The present owner is Everett Abb of Oklahoma City.

When my men were in place, we were open for business.

We had quite a large number of viewers Monday afternoon, mainly convention delegates. There were a hundred and fifty jewelers from all over the country staying at the hotel, and naturally they all wanted a glimpse of the stone. By evening they had all had a gander, and business tapered off to hotel

guests who happened to spot the case while passing through the lobby and curiosity-seekers who had read in the paper that the gem would be on display.

I left the actual guarding to my crew and kept up a sort of roving surveillance of everyone who entered the lobby. Every time someone approached the desk to register, I meandered over to see if he fitted any of the mugg shots I had studied or the descriptions I had memorized.

I was particularly concentrating on registered guests, though not to the exclusion of casual visitors from the street, because it was likely that any professional jewel thief who planned to make a hit would register at the hotel. He would have to case the lay thoroughly, and a guest hanging around the lobby would excite less suspicion than a visitor.

I didn't spot anyone whose mugg shots I had seen, but about every fifth man who strolled through the lobby answered the meager description I had of Faceless Jonas Fell. Three guests who checked in Monday afternoon seemed particularly to fall into that category.

There was a Henry Smith of Detroit whose registration card said he was a tool salesman, a Jonathan Lucas of St. Louis who claimed to be a Unitarian minister and a Hiram Abernathy of Minneapolis who listed his business as a manufacturer's agent. Any of the three

could have been Fell, although I was inclined to discount the last because he had a pug-nosed wife with blonde, poodle-cut hair with him who looked about eight months pregnant.

They were of about the same age—around forty—but Abernathy may have been younger than he looked, as his wife was almost certain to be only in her early twenties.

We got through Monday until our closing time of ten P.M. without incident.

Tuesday afternoon was fairly dull until three P.M. The delegates to the convention were either all in meetings or had their fill of the stone, for not a single person wearing a convention button appeared. Not more than twenty people altogether had wandered over to gaze at the gem.

At three the lobby was nearly deserted when Hiram Abernathy and his pregnant wife got off one of the elevators a few yards up the corridor from the lobby. They headed in the direction of the bar, then paused as Mrs. Abernathy said something to her husband. Then she changed course and started towards the ladies' room.

I stood watching her idly as she waddled across the room. She was wearing a light blue muu-muu which failed to hide her condition. She wasn't a fat woman. As a matter of fact her arms and legs were becomingly slim, but her preg-

nancy made her lean slightly backward when she walked.

When she reached the display case, she halted long enough to read the descriptive card and admire the diamond, then moved on and disappeared into the ladies' room. Her husband, standing a few



feet from the bar-room door, waited patiently for a few moments before wandering over to the display case to see what his wife had been looking at.

After studying the exhibit for a few seconds, he glanced toward the rest-room door, then turned his back to the case and lit a cigarette.

About five minutes after the blonde woman had vanished into the rest room, a slim woman with black hair hanging to her shoulders entered the lobby by the front door. She wore a calf-length chin-chilla coat which must have been worth fifteen thousand, and horn-rimmed glasses over a sharp, aquiline nose. She strode straight to the ladies' room and disappeared.

Not more than thirty seconds elapsed before she reappeared, and started toward the archway. Then she caught sight of the dis-

play case and changed direction. Hiram Abernathy and guard Sam Goodrich, standing just beyond Abernathy, both glanced at her casually.

The woman grabbed Abernathy's shoulder, spun him to face the guard, hooked a toe in front of his ankle and pushed him in the back.

It was one of the prettiest bits of judo I had ever witnessed. Abernathy floundered forward, grabbed at Sam Goodrich's shoulders to avoid falling and knocked him off balance too. They both hit the floor in a tangle of arms and legs.

A hammer slid from the right sleeve of the woman's fur coat into her hand. There was a crash of glass, the hammer was flung aside, and her hand darted into the display case. An instant later she was hotfooting it toward the ladies' room.

I was halfway across the lobby at the desk, and she had only about six feet to go before she reached the rest-room door. I couldn't have gotten my gun out in time, even if I had been capable of shooting a woman in the back. Realizing how impossible that would have been for me, I headed after her at a dead run.

The door had closed behind the fleeing woman long before I reached it. I slammed my shoulder against it with such violence that I was hurled backwards and almost fell. It gave about an eighth of an inch but that was all. I realized

she had jammed something under the edge of the door and at the same instant recognized the hole I had left in my beautiful security plan.

"Dwight, Danny!" I yelled. "Hit the alley and cover the windows from the ladies' room!"

Danny Case shot out the front door and Dwight Ellison headed up the central corridor at a dead run.

I put my shoulder to the door again, but it didn't give any more than it had the first time. Backing up, I raised my right foot and smashed the sole against the woodwork twice.

"What's the matter with you out there?" a querulous feminine voice inquired from the other side of the door. "You're jamming this thing in tighter. If you'll stop, I'll see if I can work it loose."

I stopped and glanced around. Abernathy and Goodrich had picked themselves up and Abernathy was brushing off his knees. The guard was too busy staring at the smashed display case to worry about dust from the floor. Ed Baines, the guard on the side door, had left his post to come over and stare at it too.

A couple of minutes passed, accompanied by much grunting from the other side of the door, before it finally opened. Blonde, pregnant Mrs. Abernathy emerged with a narrow, wedge-shaped rubber doorstop in her hand.

"What a ridiculous practical joke," she said irritably.

Snatching the doorstop from her hand, I rushed past her into the rest room. One of the windows was wide open. I peered out to see both Dwight Ellison and Danny Case standing in the alley staring up at the window.

"Did you spot her?" I asked.

They both shook their heads.

"Wait here," I snapped, and spun to examine the room.

There were three booths, all with coin locks. I drew myself astraddle the door of the center one, from where I could look down into all. They were all empty.

Dropping to the floor, I ran back to the window.

"She's not here," I told the men outside. "Get going and maybe you can still catch her."

They headed in opposite directions along the alley at top speed.

On the other side of the alley was the blank wall of the theater next door, which meant she could only have gone in one of two directions—toward either the front or rear of the hotel. She must have run like a deer, I thought, since it couldn't have taken the two guards more than thirty or forty seconds after the rest room door had closed behind her to reach the alley, and it must have taken her at least half that long to jam the doorstop home, and get a window open.

Then I recalled that the woman

had been in the rest room for about thirty seconds before she had made the heist. Apparently she had gone there to open the window, so that she wouldn't have to slow down when she made her escape.

I left the rest room and snapped at the two remaining guards, "Get outside and start searching the area. You both got looks at her, didn't you?"

Nodding, they took off. I turned to the Abernathys, who were trying to explain to each other what had happened.

I broke in to ask the woman, "Did you get a good look at her?"

"Who?"

"The woman who jammed the door and jumped out the rest room window."

"Was it a woman?" she asked.

When I gazed at her, she turned a bright red. In an embarrassed tone she said, "I wasn't in a position to see anyone. I heard someone kick that rubber thing home, though at the time I didn't know what the noise could be. Then I heard someone scrambling out the window and at the same time a pounding started at the door. Nobody was around when I came from the booth."

"A few moments before that did you hear someone come in and open the window?"

"I heard someone come in and go out again. I don't know what she did."

I went over to the desk to phone the police. The faster they got the bad news, the better it would be for me, too.

WITHIN FIFTEEN minutes the area was cordoned off. Police, armed with the woman's description, searched every street within an eight-block radius. As my four guards had already searched the streets immediately surrounding the hotel within minutes of the crime without finding her, it wasn't surprising that the police didn't either. At five o'clock they gave up.

Burly Captain Harry Yoder, who didn't ordinarily go out on cases himself, had departed from his usual custom this time. He had it all figured out.

"She must have had a confederate waiting in a car with the motor running just outside the rest-room window," he said. "They were out of the area while you were still pounding on the door. Where the hell did you get that stickpin?"

"My wife gave it to me."

By then everyone in the hotel knew about the theft. Convention chairman Amos Tuttle and hotel manager Myron Smithers nearly had apoplexy. When I talked to Allen Drake over the phone, he sounded close to it. Captain Yoder was the only one who displayed any sympathy.

"I suppose you'll get canned,"

he said. "How close are you to retirement?"

"Fifteen years," I said gloomily. "Do you happen to know if they have security agencies in Shanghai?"

"Oh, we may catch the woman before it comes to that," he said with no assurance whatever in his voice.

There was no point in hanging around the hotel any longer. I dismissed my guards and went home.

Patricia tried to sooth me, but it didn't work. After dinner I sat in the front room brooding over the theft and wondering what I was going to do for a living.

How could the blasted woman have made it away from the area so fast, I wondered? Even if Captain Yoder's theory was correct, the two guards were outside so fast they should have seen a car drive from the alley. The thief had managed to disappear into thin air as though she were part of a stage magician's illusion.

Illusion.

The answer popped right into my head.

Jumping up, I ran to get my topcoat. My wife caught me at the door.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"The Cunyar diamond. I know where it is. I haven't time to explain now."

I aimed a kiss at her nose, hit her left eye and was out the door.

"I made it just in time. Hiram

Abernathy was at the desk checking out when I entered the lobby. His blonde wife, now wearing a cloth coat over her muu-muu, was studying the magazine covers at the news stand.

False arrest can bring expensive lawsuits, and I knew that if I was wrong I could have involved the agency, the hotel and the National Association of Retail Jewelers in legal troubles up to their collective necks, not to mention myself. Although I was fairly sure of myself, I decided to copper my bet.

Moving over next to Mrs. Abernathy, I also studied the magazine covers. She didn't glance up to see who I was, apparently assuming I was just another hotel guest. Gradually I inched closer until my shoulder nearly touched hers. She still paid no attention to me.

We had been standing side-by-side for nearly a minute when her husband said, "Okay, dear. Let's go."

As she turned toward him, I snapped a cuff over her left wrist, took her arm and propelled her toward her ostensible husband. I had the other cuff snapped to his wrist before he knew what was happening.

"What is this?" he demanded indignantly.

"You are both under arrest for the theft of the Cunyar diamond," I told him.

They both squawked to high heaven. When they started to rant

about lawsuits, the desk clerk called the manager, who turned pale when he heard their threats of legal action. I calmed him down by assuring him the Drake Security Agency would assume full liability for any legal damages.

When I called Robbery Division, I told them to send along a matron. It was twenty minutes before a cop and a matron arrived. Captain Yoder, who had left word to be called at home if there were any developments in the case, showed up ten minutes later.

Meantime I had uncuffed Mrs. Abernathy and she was in the ladies' room with the matron. Abernathy, now with both wrists cuffed, was still threatening lawsuits.

"You sure you know what you're doing?" Yoder asked me.

"Uh-huh," I said.

When the rest room door finally opened and the matron came out preceded by Mrs. Abernathy, the latter was no longer pregnant. She now had her coat off and the muu-muu hung loosely over a slim, shapely figure.

The matron handed me a bulging canvas bag. It had *Daily Express* stenciled on it, and was one of the bags newspaper delivery boys carry slung from their shoulders. The straps which ordinarily go over the shoulder had been cut and sewn together again to make them shorter.

"This was draped around her neck so that the bag hung in front

of her stomach," the matron said. "I haven't checked the contents."

The contents proved to be a black wig, a set of horn-rimmed glasses with clear lenses in them and a false nose attached to the nosepiece, and a chinchilla coat. The coat had been expertly folded to resemble the contour of a rounded belly.

After gazing at the evidence, Captain Yoder said, "I'm beginning to get it, but not completely. Want to clear things up?"

I said, "Like most stage illusions, it was a matter of misdirection. We were supposed to think the thief escaped by the window after the theft. Actually she went out the window before it."

Yoder nodded. "I think I see, but go on."

"Mrs. Abernathy entered the rest room, as soon as she made sure no one else was there, hiked her muu-muu and lifted out her disguise. It would take her only moments to don it and let herself out the window. She hurried around to the hotel's front door and came in as a different person. She went into the rest room the second time solely to make sure no one had entered it during the few seconds it had taken her to get around to the front door.

"Her little judo stunt with her so-called husband was rehearsed, of course, so that her accomplice could put the guard out of action. Then she ran back into the rest

room, jammed the door and proceeded to convert herself back into Mrs. Abernathy."

"I guess we'd better search their luggage," Yoder said.

The Cunyar diamond was in a suitcase. I put it back in the hotel safe, phoned for a guard and we left the Robbery cop on duty guarding the safe until the security guard could get there. The Abernathys, the matron, Captain Yoder and I took a ride to headquarters.

It was midnight before the couple decided to tell their real names. Hiram Abernathy turned out to be the illusive Faceless Jonas Fell and his accomplice, who wasn't actually his wife, was a tyro jewel thief named Gladys Baker.

"How did you work out your plan without even casing the lay?" I asked Fell. "That was one of the reasons I didn't suspect you. You never even appeared in the lobby after you registered until you made the hit."

"I cased it a week ago," he said dryly. "I was on my way to town by plane an hour after I saw the news item that the Cunyar diamond was going to be displayed at the Hotel Renault. I gave the lobby a thorough examination and figured out where it would be displayed. I know how you security guys think."

The next day the diamond was back on display in a different glass case. The security setup was the

same except that a man was also stationed in the alley.

Along in the middle of the afternoon Myron Smithers came over to congratulate me on my deductive ability.

"It was like something out of Sherlock Holmes," he said admiringly. "But why were you so certain you were right? Those false arrest threats had me scared silly."

I pointed to my stickpin. "I used my birthday present."

When he only looked puzzled, I said, "I stood next to the woman at the newsstand while her accomplice was checking out. At first I just pricked her stomach gently, in case she really was pregnant. When she didn't protest, I pushed a little deeper. By the time I had worked the pin an inch and a half into her stomach, and she still hadn't let out a single yelp, I was reasonably certain the bulge wasn't flesh and blood."



In the Next Issue

COP

By GIL BREWER

The killer was mad-dog dangerous. But over-zeal can get a cop in trouble if he disobeys orders when the chips are down. A fast, action-packed crime novelet by a mystery story writer with a Sunday punch.

Peeper by Daylight

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

MRS. MARGARET HART had always joked about the old house being haunted. That was before Paul left her. After that it was no joking matter.

Nights alone in the house became something of an ordeal. The joists groaned, boards creaked to phantom footsteps and the sounds of scurrying mice came from the walls. As the weeks passed after the morning Paul stalked from the house, Meg came to hate him more for leaving her alone with the chilling sounds than for deserting her for a younger, prettier woman.

Yet it could have been the house that first started her thinking of killing Paul. There was an old wives' tale that a successful murder had been committed in the house some thirty years before. But it was the peeping Tom who gave her the idea of how she could get away with it.

Meg first saw the peeper late on a Sunday morning.

The house sat on a half-acre hillside lot. According to the deed, it was fifty years old. It was two stories high with gables and columns, many narrow windows, French doors along one side of the ground floor, and everything else that went with a Los Angeles dwelling built that long ago.

It was on a quiet street in a neighborhood gone to seed. Yet it was solidly constructed, and it had been Paul's plan when they bought the place ten years before to strip it down, gut it and make something grand out of it. The plans never materialized. The upkeep, Paul said more than once, was like pouring money down a bottomless well.

After Paul left, Meg's friends wondered why she didn't sell the place. To all such queries she had the same answer: she wouldn't

*It isn't too difficult to tell a "Peeping Tom"
from a pathetically lonely man. But a woman
with murder in her heart may prefer not to try.*



give Paul the satisfaction. If this answer was somewhat ambiguous, her true reason was not. She couldn't sell it without Paul's consent. Which he wouldn't give until she granted him a divorce.

And that she had no intention of doing. His offer had been generous enough; she couldn't complain about that. He had promised her free title to the house. He had recently inherited a large sum of money from a deceased uncle and had offered half of that in exchange for his freedom. But Meg had remained adamant. Not only that, she had taunted him with the unkindest cut of all. Without the inheritance the flip young thing he was enamored with would never have looked at him a second time.

Stonily Paul had ignored her taunts and left anyway. He had left with just what he could carry in a bag. And Meg didn't even know the name of the young thing. Sometimes she thought that galled her the most.

Behind the house a weed-grown lot reared up steeply. There were four bedrooms upstairs and one bathroom. Meg had closed off all but one bedroom after Paul left. The bathroom was in the back, its single window looking out onto the hillside. The shade was ripped and Meg had taken it down. It never entered her mind that anyone could, or would, spy on her from the hillside.

On this Sunday morning Meg

padding into the bathroom, naked and yawning. Since Paul had left, she arose later and later of a morning. That was one blessing, anyway. Paul was an early riser, and he had always insisted she get up with him. She could recall with distaste the mornings he had arisen long before dawn to go duck or dove shooting. She had to get up and prepare his breakfast.

Meg had consumed too many martinis the night before. Her head throbbed; her mouth tasted foul.

She stood by the washbasin, scrubbing vigorously at her teeth. She didn't glance into the mirror, because she knew all too well how she looked. Dark hair tangled and streaked with gray. A face bloated and blue eyes puffy. A woman close to forty and growing more overweight with each passing day. For a long time after Paul left she had searched the mirror for an answer. The answer was always the same. Her husband had left her for a younger woman.

She stepped away from the mirror. She stopped directly in front of the window. It was then she saw the peeper crouched fifty yards away on the weedy hillside, staring right at her. Meg froze.

The peeper was middle-aged, a hulking man in work clothes. Morning sunlight glinted off thick glasses.

"And in broad daylight, too!"
The sound of her voice broke the

spell. She fled across the hall to the telephone, snatching up a robe on the way.

The desk sergeant was unsympathetic. "Lady, we get peeper complaints at night. Never happens in the middle of the day."

"I can't help that! He's out there, staring at me!"

"You say he's on the hillside, behind your house?"

"That's what I said."

"On your property?"

"We-el, no. But what difference does that make?"

"How do you know but what he's not on his own property? Lady, you want my advice? My advice to you is to pull down your shades."

Meg slammed the receiver down in a gust of fury. Under her breath she voiced harsh opinions of police in general, one desk sergeant in particular. In a little while she crossed the hall and peered out the window.

The peeper was gone. Perhaps the sergeant was right. Perhaps she should buy a new shade for the window. She resolved to do so at once.

But it slipped her mind until she saw the peeper again the next Sunday morning at almost the exact same time.

This time the desk sergeant promised to send a radio car. Naturally the peeper was gone by the time the car arrived. The radio officer was young, clean-cut, with a



pleasant manner. He was sympathetic, but there was very little he could do.

"Even if we knew who he was, Mrs. Hart," he explained, "about all we could do would be warn him."

Meg stared. "Warn him!"

The officer scrubbed his chin with the back of his hand. "I'm afraid so. You see, he could claim he was just walking along the side of the hill. It *isn't* on your property. You admit that. Now if it was night and we caught him under your window, that would be a different story. As it is—" He spread his hands, shrugging.

Meg was indignant. "Fat lot of protection a woman living alone gets from you people!"

"I don't think you have much to worry about," the young officer said. "He's probably harmless. I'd

suggest you get a shade for your bathroom window."

It was at that moment that the murder plan began to grow in her mind. It was so beautifully simple. But first she had to learn the identity of the peeper.

That problem was solved two days later while Meg was walking home from the market with a bag of groceries under her arm.

"May I help you, Mrs. Hart?" a voice said behind her.

Meg stopped and looked around. She gasped, her heart thudding with sudden fright. It was him! It was the peeper! She almost dropped her groceries.

Up close, the peeper's features were uneven with knobs and hollows, dominated by a large nose. His eyes swam behind thick-lensed glasses like gray, listless fish. There was nothing particularly frightening about him.

He smiled. His teeth were nicotine-stained, and a front tooth was missing.

"I didn't mean to scare you, Mrs. Hart," he said. "You see, I know about you." His voice was husky, uncertain. "You're alone, like I am. My wife died a year ago. It's not good, people alone. I'm Claude Garth. Maybe you'd like to have dinner with me some evening soon?"

Meg had all the information she needed. "And I know about you, too. You've been peeping in my bathroom window!"

The man's glance fell away. His mouth opened slightly, and the pink tip of his tongue poked through the gap in his teeth.

"I'm sorry about that, Mrs. Hart," he mumbled. "I meant no harm."

"Like a rattlesnake you didn't mean any harm!" Meg snapped.

She fled, running awkwardly with the grocery bag. She hoped someone was watching and would remember afterwards.

Meg's luck held. There was a Claude Garth listed in the telephone book. He lived in an apartment house a few blocks away. It was possible there were several Claude Garths. It didn't really matter; any one of them would serve her purpose.

At eleven that night she called the police station. A different man was on the desk, and he promised immediate action. Less than ten minutes later a police car glided silently up to the curb before the house. Two officers leaped out and quickly circled the house, flashlights blunting the darkness.

Meg met them at the front door in a robe and nightgown. "But he was there. I was dressed for bed. I came downstairs to watch the late news on the TV, and I saw him peeking through the window at me."

The two officers were both older than the daytime one. One did all the talking. "That's why it's so hard to catch these nuts. By the

time we've answered a call, they've beat it. We probably scared him off for good. But we'll cruise the house, Mrs. Hart, for the next few nights, just to be on the safe side."

"But I know who he is."

The officer stared. "You *know* who he is?"

Meg told them. The officer jotted down the information and closed his book with a snap. "Okay, Mrs. Hart, we'll pick him up. We may give you a call in the morning to come down and pick him out of the line-up."

Meg told the officer she'd be happy to come down.

There was a brief item in the morning paper reporting the arrest of one Claude Garth as a peeping Tom. There had been a rash of similar complaints in the same neighborhood, and Garth fitted the general description.

Meg had an excellent background in television detective fare. Everything happened about as she expected. She sat in dimness on a hard seat that reminded her of schoolroom days. Alongside her sat a taciturn man in plainclothes whose name she didn't quite catch. Up front was a lighted platform. As Meg watched, a half dozen men shuffled out. Garth was the third man in line.

Garth's lumpy face was slack with bewilderment. Behind the thick glasses his eyes blinked rapidly in the glare of light

The man beside Meg whispered, "Now take your time, Mrs. Hart. Be sure of your identification."

Meg took her time, waiting patiently as each man was instructed to step forward and give his name, address and occupation. As Garth answered the questions, the tip of his tongue probed ceaselessly at the empty space between his teeth. He was a plumber by occupation.

Meg waited until Garth stepped back into line before pointing a trembling finger. "That's him! That's the man I saw looking in my window!"

"You're sure now?"

"I'm positive!"

"Okay, Mrs. Hart. When he comes to trial, you'll have to testify, of course."

Meg told him she'd be delighted to testify.

Three days later she called police headquarters, finally getting through to the man whose name and rank she hadn't quite caught.

"—and I've hardly slept. Don't you see, I'm just not quite sure. What if I've made a mistake?"

The man sighed. "Does that mean you won't testify against him?"

"I can't!" Meg wailed. "What if I'm wrong? That poor man! I'll never be able to live with myself!"

"Okay, Mrs. Hart," the tired voice said. "We'll release him."

"Release him!" Meg threaded



her voice with panic. "You mean he'll be free to roam the streets?"

"Mrs. Hart, without your testimony, we've got no case."

"But can't you keep him in jail? Women aren't safe with his kind around."

"His kind? If he isn't what you say he is, what's wrong with his kind?"

Meg recognized the anger in the man's voice and decided it was time to hang up.

That night Claude Garth called her. "Why did you do this terrible thing to me, Mrs. Hart?" Garth's voice was thick with unshed tears. "My neighbors won't speak to me."

"It's nothing more than you deserve!"

"But I did nothing wrong."

"You peeped at me through my bathroom window. Twice, you did that. You call that nothing wrong?"

"It was an accident." His voice grew shrill. "I meant no harm, I swear to you!"

"Once, all right. Twice is no accident."

In the end Garth grew incoherent. Meg hung up. The phone rang again almost at once but she didn't answer it.

The next morning Meg fell down the stairs, breaking a leg and cracking two ribs. She came home from the hospital three days later, wearing a cast on one leg, her ribs tightly taped.

At midnight she called the station. The man on the desk, the one who had sent the prowler car to answer her call before, was unsympathetic to her plea this time.

"What do you expect from us, Mrs. Hart? We pick up the man you identify as the peeper. Then you refuse to testify. So where does that leave us?"

"But there must be something you can do. I've had an accident and my leg's in a cast. I can't get around. What if he tries to break in here?"

The desk sergeant was unmoved. "Lady, did you ever hear the story of the boy who cried wolf? That's you. You cried wolf on us once too many!"

Meg waited until the next night before she called Paul. And she

waited until nearly midnight when she knew he would be in and alone. She felt sure the girl wouldn't be in his apartment late at night. That was another thing about Paul. He would wait until he could get a divorce and everything was legal.

He answered on the second ring.

"Paul? Oh, Paul!"

"Meg? Is that you, Meg?" His voice was guarded.

It had been three months since she had heard his voice. For just an instant her purpose wavered. And then, in the brief silence, the house creaked as though in protest, and her resolves strengthened.

"Paul, you've got to help me. He's out there and I'm all alone." She ran her words together. "You've got to come!"

"All right, Meg, now slow down. Talk sense."

"There's a man looking in my window!"

"For God's sake, Meg, call the police," Paul said in disgust. "That's what they're for."

"They won't come. This man's been peeping at me for weeks. They arrested him, then let him go. Now they say there's nothing they can do. And Paul—" She paused to take a deep breath. "Paul, I fell and broke my leg. It's in a cast. I can hardly get around. What'll I do if he breaks in, Paul?"

She heard his sigh, and she knew it was going to work.

"All right, Meg. I was ready for

bed. But I'll be there as soon as I can."

THE SHOTGUN WAS heavy in her lap. She had turned out all the lights but one dim corner lamp. She sat where she could get a clear view of both the front door and the French doors along the side of the house. Fifteen minutes after she had talked to Paul, Meg heard a car pull up before the house, followed shortly by Paul's familiar footsteps as he mounted the steps to the porch.

He knocked softly. After a moment he knocked again, louder, and called her name. Meg sat very still, holding her breath. Then she heard his key rattle in the lock. He tried for more than a minute to get his key to open the door. Then he beat a rapid tattoo on the door with his fist and called her name again. His voice was edged with alarm now. Finally he gave up. Meg listened tensely to the pound of his footsteps as he ran from the porch and around to the side of the house.

A street light up the block threw a dim light along that side of the house. Meg waited until she saw his silhouette framed against the French doors. She waited until he cupped his hands around his face to peer in. Then she raised the shotgun and pulled both triggers.

The recoil knocked her chair over and tumbled her halfway

across the room, half-stunning her. She shook her head to clear it. Then, on her hands and one knee, dragging the leg, she scrambled to the front door and removed the blob of wax from the keyhole. She fumbled on the floor for a crutch. Hauling herself erect, she hobbled through the kitchen and to the bathroom on the back porch. She flushed the wax down the toilet.

On her awkward way back down the hall she stopped at a window to peer out. She saw lights going on along the street and heard shrill voices raised in query. In the living room once more she picked up the phone and dialed the police station.

The police cruiser arrived within minutes. In it were the same two officers who had answered the prior call.

Meg met them at the door, wringing her hands. "If you people hadn't let him go free, this would never have happened. I didn't want to kill him but I had no choice. Don't you see that?" Her voice rose. "I had no choice!"

"Okay, Mrs. Hart," said the officer who had done the talking before. "Suppose you take it easy now."

He assisted her to a chair and eased her into it. He took out his notebook. "Now take your time and tell me what happened."

Haltingly Meg told him. As she talked, the other officer went out through the shattered French

doors. She could see him kneeling by the body, the beam of his flashlight poking at it like a curious finger.

Meg had just completed her story when the officer came back, carrying a man's card case. "This isn't the one we picked up a few nights ago," the officer said. "According to his identification, this man's name was Paul Hart." He looked at Meg. "The same name as yours."

"Paul! Dear God, no!" Meg struggled to rise from the chair. "I must go to him."

The officer stepped forward. "You don't want to do that, lady. It's—Well, it's kinda messy."

"You just lie back, Mrs. Hart," the first officer said. "Homicide will be here in a little while. Just take it easy, now."

Meg lay back, her eyes closing. Now and then a sob shook her. From between slitted lids she watched the officers go outside and squat beside Paul's body.

The Homicide Squad arrived within a quarter hour. The man in charge was a Sergeant Forester, a slight, neat man with a soft voice and alert blue eyes.

Men moved in and out of the house, detouring around Meg, for a half hour or more before Sergeant Forester came to question her.

Meg asked, "Is it my husband?"

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Hart," the man said in his soft voice.

"Dear God!" Her hand went to her mouth. "I've killed Paul!"

"It looks that way. I'm sorry."

Meg sat up. "But why should he come around to the side? Why not the front door? He had a key!"

Sergeant Forestor gave her a sharp look. He turned and called out to the men outside. An officer came in, carrying a key case. Sergeant Forestor took it and went to the front door. He tried the keys until he found the one that opened the door. He came back to Meg,

tell me just what happened here."

Meg told the story once more.

When she was finished, Sergeant Forestor said thoughtfully, "According to my information, there's been a man peeping in your window. Could it have been your husband, instead of this other man? Garth, I think his name is."

Meg stared. "Paul? I don't understand."

"Well, you accused Garth of peeping on you in the daytime. But the last time was at night. It

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By **RAY BRADBURY**

staring down at the key case cupped in his hand.

"He had a key right enough." He glanced back at the door. "And there's no chain."

"No," Meg said. "I've always meant to put a chain on that door but I just never got around to it."

Sergeant Forestor pulled up a chair in front of her. "Suppose you

breaks the pattern, you see. So perhaps it could have been a different man."

"It could have been. I never got a clear look at the man's face at night." She started to shake her head from side to side. "But *Paul*? Why would Paul do a thing like that?"

"That's what we're trying to find

out." Forestor's gaze was steady. "Did your husband have reason to want to kill you?"

"Kill me? Paul?" Meg choked back a sudden desire to laugh. "You can't be serious!"

"Stranger things have happened. Tell me about you and your husband."

Meg told him. She told him about her refusal to give Paul a divorce. She told him what little she knew about the flip young thing.

After she was done, Sergeant Forestor said slowly, "It's possible he could have gotten desperate and decided killing you was the simplest way out."

"I don't believe it!"

"It's an old story to us, Mrs. Hart. Older man infatuated with a younger woman and his wife won't give him his freedom. Husband decides to eliminate the wife. I think we can assume he knew about the peeper before tonight. What if he decided to use it to his advantage?" Sergeant Forestor got to his feet. "You see how it all hangs together?"

Within an hour the police had gone with Paul's body, and Meg was alone.

The moment they were out of the house, she let her laughter go. She struggled up out of the chair, still laughing, and started back toward the kitchen. A stab of pain stopped her laughter as she came down too hard on the injured leg.

In stepping into the gopher hole, she hadn't intended to break her leg. She'd only wanted to sprain an ankle. But maybe it was better this way. She could put up with the inconvenience for the time it took to heal.

In the kitchen she mixed a pitcher of martinis. She started to laugh again.

She still found it hard to believe. For the police to think Paul had been intent on killing her! Never once had it occurred to her that they might. What a piece of luck!

Carrying the pitcher of martinis tucked under her arm, she hobbled on one crutch back into the living room. She settled contentedly in her chair and took a strong pull of her drink. Everything was going to be fine. Sergeant Forestor had told her there would be a coroner's inquest but it was nothing to be concerned about. A verdict of justifiable homicide was virtually certain.

Meg cocked her head, listening. The house was very still, as though content with what had happened. And why not? After all, Paul had deserted the house as well as her, hadn't he?

She chuckled at her fancy and drank a toast to the house.

In a little while she dozed. She awoke with a start. And her heart jumped up into her throat as she saw the figure of a man coming toward her through the French doors.

Sergeant Forestor had offered to roust out a repair man to fix the doors, but Meg had told him it wasn't necessary. Tomorrow would be soon enough. After all that had happened, what was left to fear?

She groped for the shotgun. It wasn't there. The police had taken it with them.

As the man came within the circle of light thrown by the lamp beside her chair, Meg recognized Claude Garth. His fish-blob eyes swam weirdly behind the thick glasses. His mouth was open and slack. His tongue darted in and out of the space where the tooth was missing.

He was talking. It took her a moment to make sense out of what he was saying. "—named me a peeping Tom. A pervert!"

Meg suddenly found her voice. "That was a mistake. I told the—"

"—all I wanted—two lonely people—no need to be—"

"I'll tell everybody I made a mistake!" Meg screamed at him.

"—too late. Everybody looks at

me like dirt—pull shades down—see me coming—"

Meg tried to get out of the chair. If one leg hadn't been in a cast, she might have made it. She started to scream and his powerful hands were at her throat, one thumb like an iron clamp across her windpipe. Meg fought for breath, threshing wildly, but the man's strength was too much for her. She clawed at his hands and felt his flesh gather like mush under her nails. His breath was rancid.

Meg's eyes clenched shut. Over the sounds of their struggle the old house seemed to come to life, creaking and chuckling. And it seemed to Meg that the house itself, not Garth's hands, was closing around her throat like a vise, throttling the life from her.

In a last effort Meg groped blindly beside the chair for a weapon. The back of her hand struck the martini pitcher. The last sound she heard was the pitcher splintering against the wall.

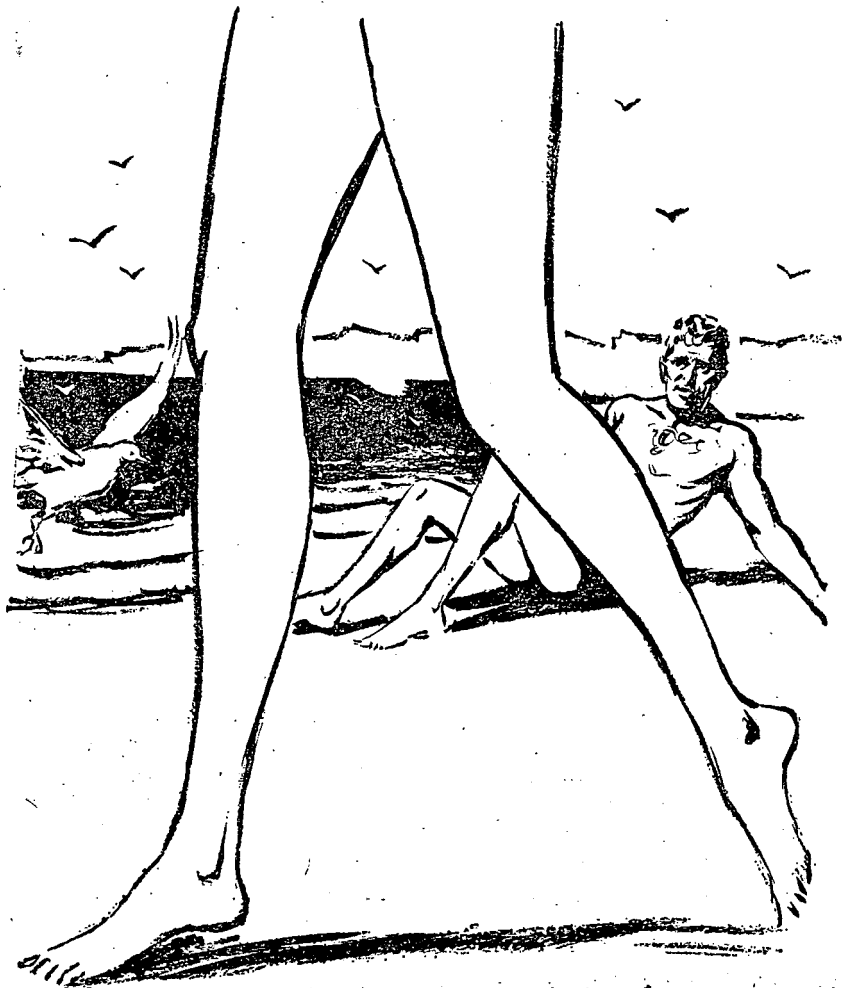


Red Cross

ALWAYS THERE... WITH YOUR HELP

MURDER at LIGURIA

by TIGHE JARRETT



to Wray

The impulsive Latin temperament has a way, at times, of leading even the most astute police official astray. But Captain Faldetta, of the Italiano Segrete, was allergic to murder.



MY FRIEND, Captain Mario Faldetta of the *Italiano Segrete*, was enjoying his morning beat reclining full length on the gleaming white sands of Liguria.

His hands were locked behind his thick bullet neck, an important point, for he did not alter their position as he rose to a sitting posture like a metal toy drawn by a magnet. The magnet was the passage of something that might be titled, *Naked Undulation*. To put it mildly, it was inspiring. This year, the Italian girls were doing their best to eliminate the remnants of the old-fashioned, voluminous bikini. They had long since discarded the halter.

Captain Faldetta beamed as if personally responsible for all of Italy's pulchritude and reclined

again. "You would think that with so many pullups I would have less stomach," he said. "But ten thousand Lollobrigidas inspires so many ideas there is nothing to do but compromise on a good meal. And where would I put so much good food without the belly?"

"The sex appeal on this beach," I said, "is a wide open motivation for mass murder."

Faldetta clucked chidingly and shook his head with disagreement. "No wonder your American youth is out of hand. Murder, that is, the murder passionata, should be the privilege of the mature. After all, you need background for good opera."

"Such as the double murder of the Sassinas?"

"I had the case in mind. But

then, of course, we do not yet know if it was double murder, or murder and suicide, or simply murder and accident."

I looked at him sharply. "But you have already picked up Renata Sassina's lover, Pietro Rezzini for the crime."

"True, we are holding him," he said. "But simply for questioning. It is, I confess, something of a ruse."

"Yes?"

"Yes. You see, she was an extremely attractive woman. The bearing of four children and her age of thirty-seven had matured her youthful beauty, like rare marble, after it has weathered. As far as Sicily and Calabria it was known that of all Italy, Liguria boasted the most beautiful woman, and she was a mother and a peasant, which gave her special glamor."

"And still she stuck with that obnoxious old wine merchant who beat her?"

Faldetta regarded the tip of an incredibly expensive cigar he had confiscated from a smuggler. "You see, in Italy we take our vows seriously," he said. "She had married him, and—well, perhaps life was not quite so disagreeable for her as one might assume."

His eyes wandered a few seconds along the beach, and then quickly back to me. He went on, "Renata had not been permitted to marry Rezzini, but they had

been lovers for many years, and he was here. And if by chance—I do not know this was the case, of course—she grew bored, she had only to look at any man who struck her fancy on the Ligurian coast."

Faldetta breathed deeply and shook his head. "I do not believe she ever did, for she did not look at me. However, it is quite possible that the murder of her husband was a cunning trick to remove him from the scene and throw suspicion on her lover, thus leaving the coast clear for some man she had previously spurned."

"But she risked what happened—she also drank the poisoned wine."

"Quite so, but that could very easily have been an accident, especially if you knew the lofty arrogance of her husband, Luigi. Not once in ten thousand times would he have stooped to indulge his wife with sample wine. Sampling is a serious business—men's business. He included her only, I am convinced, because it was a magnum, two full quarts, and his cronies acknowledge that they embarrassed him into sampling it."

Faldetta rolled like a seal to examine another passing show. There were four this time, and they all moved by without any sign that they were conscious of him, not neglecting, however, to swing their curls to give him a look just after they had passed.

Faldetta's smile was positively

beneficent as he scratched his hairy chest. "They are making me ravenous," he said. "We will have squiggelli and scalappine marsola both for lunch."

"Then that knocks out the suicide theory completely, doesn't it?" I asked, single-track.

"Eh?" Faldetta muttered as he tore his attention from the alluring scene with heroic courtesy. "Oh, you are still thinking of the Sassina case? Why no, it does not, for appearances can deceive. You must realize that at heart, all Italians are true dramatists, particularly in murder."

"I fail to follow."

Faldetta sighed and shrugged. "You will forgive the criticism, but you Americans do not have the true artistic sense. If you desire to kill somebody, you just shoot them. You are a young nation, and on that account you are still very primitive."

"Look," I said. "She had her lover. If he wanted her husband out of the way, and she was party to the poison, she would not have drunk it herself, would she?"

"Who can tell what is in a woman's mind?" Faldetta said. "She might have meant to kill him and drink the wine herself later. But he offered her opportunity before that. Or, he might have meant to kill her, and himself, but carried out the little play-acting of letting his cronies urge him into offering her the drink because it was in

character, and would be a fine last touch."

He spread his hands. "It may even have been Pietro Rezzini who sent the wine, feeling sure that a pig such as Luigi would not offer her a sample. It would have been quite easy for him to get the wrapper it was mailed in from her without showing his hand. She might even have used it previously as a wrapping for sandwiches at a beach picnic or lover's tryst, and he secreted it without her noticing."

Faldetta tossed a full half of his cigar away with lavish self assurance that there would always be another smuggler, and let his gaze rake the beach for anything unusual that he might have missed. I silently ran over the brief facts of the Sassina case to date.

The roots of the incident reached back ten days. Luigi Sassina in a fit of drunken jealousy, had beaten his wife Renata a little blacker than usual. On sobering, he had suddenly recalled that her lover, Pietro Rezzini, had warned him that he would suffer the next time he abused her, and finding wisdom the better part of valor, Luigi had taken off for Genova on a buyer's trip.

Needless to say, when a wine merchant goes on a trip to purchase wines, he does considerable sampling. Luigi had not been precisely sober nor in command of full memory after his return.

Pietro might or might not have heard about the beating. By trade, he was a veterinarian, and a client of his near Genova had suffered an epidemic in his stables at that very time. Pietro drove over to examine the sick horses. It had already been authenticated that he spent several days at the farm trying to doctor them. But another had fallen sick, and then another, and to terminate the epidemic, Pietro had destroyed them.

For that purpose, according to him, he had driven into Genova and purchased six tubes of strychnine. It was his customary method of destroying horses, and the local purchase had saved him a long drive back to his laboratory, where he already had close to a quart of strychnine in two jars. By coincidence, both Luigi and Pietro arrived back in Liguria the same day.

Two days later, Luigi was sitting with some cronies before his wine shop when the postman arrived with a package for Luigi addressed by Luigi himself. Luigi had shown surprise on opening the package to find it was a magnum of fortified wine, something of a luxury in that area, and a type of wine he did not carry.

He had scratched his head and made quite a joke of not remembering that he had asked for a sample of that particular wine. But as the wrapper bore his own handwriting, he concluded that he must

have, self addressing the wrapper to avoid error.

The fortified wine being something of an occasion, Luigi had called upstairs, over the store, to his wife to bring down glasses. As Renata was well liked and an exciting woman to look at, his cronies had promptly connived to keep her among them for a time. So they had needled Luigi, accusing him of miserliness, until he commanded her to join them in the sampling.

For some reason difficult to fathom—for wine tasting is a lengthy ceremonial ordinarily—Luigi had urged them all to drink up, pointing out that with a magnum, there was plenty more for sampling. His cronies, however, were not to be denied the chance to suck and swish and gargle the wine and to express their opinion.

Luigi himself had tossed off his glass and refilled it. His wife drank her smaller glass in tight, self-conscious silence and made an excuse to go back to her house chores.

Luigi had consumed half of his second glass and was just beginning to savor the bouquet and body of the wine when suddenly his eyes began to pop. His face turned scarlet, and he clawed at his collar. He staggered, then fell to the ground, his mouth frothing as he yelled unintelligibly. A neighbor had sense enough to send her boy racing for the doctor.

Meantime, Renata had begun

to scream upstairs. Reputedly she cried out, "It's poison—poison!" Whether or not she actually did cry that, she had attempted to mix an emetic of mustard, but the strychnine acted too rapidly.

By the time the doctor arrived, Luigi was dead, Renata was past saving, and the doctor had his hands full with the participating friends. Luckily, none had imbibed as much wine and were actually sicker with terror than from poisoning. They would all be certain to recover.

The poisoned wine had been immediately identified as containing strychnine. That alone pointed suspicion at Renata's lover. Captain Faldetta had Rezzini picked up immediately, and as I happened to know, had held him incommunicado.

Out of that line of thought, I said, "It would be a clever trick for another jealous lover, or would-be lover, to pull. Just enough confusion, just enough suspicion of Pietro, but not too much."

Faldetta frowned and looked at me reproachfully. "Such persistence of thought! Is it the result of your advertising work in America? Here I am watching a thousand unbelievable delights and my stomach is eating up my backbone, and you are still concerned with sordid things like murder."

I said with, I think, justifiable



lice captain who lets trivialities interfere with his duty."

"My dear boy," Faldetta said, although I am six years his senior. "Do not be so impatient. The case is good as solved."

I was unable to conceal my amazement. "Why didn't you tell me, then?"

"Simply because I do not yet know who did it," he said with patient logic. He chuckled and shook my shoulder. "Relax. You are in sunny Italy where everything takes care of itself."

"Except that you don't know who committed the murder," I pointed out acidly.

"Pouf. A small point which will be cleared up as soon I release Pietro Rezzini."

"You're going to release him?"

"But of course. What is there to hold him on? So far, he has given no incriminating statement. His story of his movements while in Genova stands up. We have made tests of the strychnine in his laboratory, and found the surface of his supplies untouched for at least a month."

"Then how will he clear up the case?"

"Because," Faldetta said, as if speaking to a child, "he is an Italian and in love. And he will know precisely who sent the wine, even if he has never seen the person. He will set out to get him as soon as he learns that Renata, also, died."

"But he already knows that!" I said.

"No, he does not," Faldetta smiled. "That is why I had him picked up so quickly and held incommunicado. He knows only that Luigi is dead, and at this moment, he is rejoicing as would be expected. He has made no secret of that."

I shook my head. "You tricky Italians!"

Faldetta chuckled. "It is what you call the reverse shock, the psychological trick, yes? From great elation, he will be thrown into despair and the blackest grief. His whole nature will fill with the vendetta. He will point like a compass toward the object of proper vengeance."

"Suppose Renata did it and was trapped into drinking the wine, be-

lieving that she could mix the emetic in time?"

"Then he will blame Luigi double in his grief. And if it was Luigi, he will know it. Do not ask me how, but an Italian lover is rarely wrong in his suspicions. He will know it and damn Luigi at the grave so that he destroys the final unction and Luigi cannot be buried in hallowed ground. And if it is another lover, or one who hoped to be, he will know that too and will rush to choke the admission out of him."

Faldetta chuckled again. "You will see how simple it all works out. So now, perhaps, you will enjoy squingelli and scalappine at Mineo's, where there is also a very beautiful cashier girl, and now that I think of it, Mineo's licenses are long overdue. Assuredly, we will be his guests for lunch."

"If he has sense," I suggested.

"Precisely," Faldetta agreed. "We must teach these business men respect for law."

As we arose, a girl behind us was also getting up. And Faldetta could not resist a little pinch of such an attractive curve. She gave a surprised, angry-sounding scream, but it was easy to see that she loved it. No girl on the Liguria would have any self respect without a little black and blue mark here and there, but mostly on her bottom.

At luncheon, Captain Faldetta grew so fascinated with a pair of

limbs garnishing a table down the terrace that he ate four orders of squingelli. In the brief space that I noticed this Circe-on-the-rocks, as it were, I realized that the Italian girls, as a system, keep a man completely befuddled even as they encourage him to take a variety of minor liberties.

It is impossible to concentrate on bridgehead with an Italian woman. Your eyes bounce from slender ankles, seductive knees, thighs, hips, torsos, breasts, and ten to one, wind up hovering around their bright, mocking, naughty eyes or their sensuous mouths. An Italian woman is an army. She's a thousand women. No wonder the Italians have to toast, 'chin d'ano'—a thousand years.

Faldetta was right about Mineo's. The cashier was very beautiful, the wine perfect, the squingelli out of this world—and Mineo practically slavered in begging us to be his guests when he found Captain Faldetta examining the dates on his business licenses.

Meantime, my mind swung back to the murder. And truth to tell, I thought Faldetta a bit of a louse for holding out the news of Renata's death on Pietro if he did not suspect him sufficiently to hold. For in Italy, they could trump up an excuse to hold a man for anything—or nothing.

But I could not see why he was dismissing Pietro so casually. Not

because of the strychnine, which anybody might have used as poison, but because of the wrapper on the package in Luigi's handwriting. If Luigi had made it out himself at Genova, then that was that. But I suspected he had not and that the lab tests had shown the ink to be much older.

In short, it was an old wrapping, saved for this purpose, and the most likely candidate to get his hands on such a wrapper was Pietro Rezzini, either with or without Renata's knowing contrivance.

Still, it was going to be a tricky case if he was charged in court. The defense would certainly make a great deal of the fact that nobody who desires to live and love permits himself to be poisoned knowingly. However, privately, I discounted that. She might have mis-timed the swift action and counted on the emetic.

After all, the great American criminal mouthpiece, William Falton, had broken a murder charge against a guilty client once by himself drinking the poison in court before the jury, and then rushing to his office where emetics and a stomach pump were waiting.

I saw no obvious, clear solution, however, and it was irritating that Faldetta was apparently, not even seeking one. He was fully occupied between the delectable knees and the squingelli. The more he looked, the more he ate. At another time such behavior would

have fascinated me with its psychological implications.

After lunch, we strolled to the nearby bastille, where Faldetta had Pietro Rezzini brought in. Pietro evidenced great anger at being held without charges, but his spirits were too high to give his anger fire.

"What can I say?" he demanded of Faldetta. "Even if it were not personal, Luigi was a pig. He deserved his fate, and you know it."

"I cannot agree officially," Faldetta said. "But I have personal understanding. But it is not of Luigi that I speak."

Pietro looked blank, then paled. "Then—who else? Did he extend the sampling to friends or customers?"

"Oh yes, he made it an occasion, but they survived," Faldetta said. "I cannot understand how you can be so cheerful, however when Renata also died."

"Renata!"

It was more of an animal sound than a pronunciation. He fell back half a step as if struck, and stood rigid, his face drained of all color.

"But my dear Rezzini—I thought you knew," Faldetta lied with accomplishment. "She drank of the wine at the same time. She died nearly as quickly."

The grief came then like mounting waves before a hurricane. Captain Faldetta clapped Pietro Rezzini sympathetically on the shoulder. "You are free to go of

course," he said and he and I left the man to surrender to his grief in privacy.

Outside of his office, Faldetta made some sign to two detectives as we strolled out.

"Now what?" I demanded.

"Why now, nothing. We wait." He reached out and patted me on the shoulder. "You Americans are so impatient! He will solve the case for us. Wait and see."

I said bluntly, "I think he's guilty. I think Renata drank that wine by accident."

Faldetta shrugged and lighted another smuggled cigar as he eyed a pair of hips moving down the street with the circular motion of two engine wheels. "Does that seem interesting? We have the afternoon before us," he considered, "and I certainly cannot dine again before six o'clock."

That evening, we attended the viewing. Renata looked more beautiful in death than any woman I have ever seen alive. Faldetta caught my rapture and smiled to himself quietly, and I knew that if we'd been alone, he would have taunted me about it.

The mourning rooms were packed, both with people and with flowers. Far and away, the most beautiful flowers present was the enormous bouquet bearing Pietro Rezzini's name. Faldetta looked through the condolence cards and found Pietro's a prayer for Renata only

I gave Faldetta a look and made a gesture. "Trapped in his own trick," I whispered.

Captain Faldetta blew against his lips without commitment. We went and stood in shadows and watched those paying their last respects to the dead.

An Italian funeral is a dramatic event. It has little to do, necessarily, with love for the departed. It is a time of emotion for those who attend, and the rooms were filled with hysterical women who had never even known Renata Sassina. Perhaps they were remembering their own lovers, and telling themselves that they might well have shared Renata's tragic fate.

The men were more restrained, but they cried openly, too. There is something more final than otherwise about a very beautiful and desirable woman's death. Not only had these men never been favored, but now they never could be, and so this was the death of something more than a woman—it was the death of hope itself.

There was one man who did not cry at all, however. He stood aside with steellike dignity such as might have been expected. Faldetta told me it was the Count d'Falco, a local aristocrat who had purchased his wines from Luigi, and who undoubtedly felt that aristocratic protocol made his presence mandatory, although he would not have stooped to a glass of wine with Luigi socially.



My interest was gripped then by discovering Pietro Rezzini lurking behind the bank of flowers. He had been drinking heavily, but his grief was consuming the liquor up. He looked wild and desolate, a different man. But he managed to maintain his self-control, although his eyes burned and flared like an open fire as he watched the mourners file past the caskets.

Renata's kitchen maid came finally. Such a person has to be explained. She would be a peasant of a lower order, probably not too bright, but capable of intense, dog-like devotion. Quite capable as well of such dubious loyalty as stealing a bottle of wine or bit of change for some lover. She was in a state of hysterical grief, and was babbling incoherently.

It was clear that some kind soul had provided her with a sedative, but it had accomplished little. She was accompanied by a dull-faced female relative who worked as chorewoman at the local hospital. The latter's imperviousness to the tragedy of death was in odd contrast to her solicitude for the grief-stricken girl at her side.

Suddenly the kitchen maid went all to pieces. Shrieking, she tried to throw herself into the casket. After a moment, Cout d'Falco's voice cut through the bedlam that ensued.

"This is most unseemly," he said, with authority. "She is not even a relative. She should be removed immediately."

A priest moved forward, but the girl's relative had already taken firm hold of her arm and was bodily lifting her from the casket. The girl was reaching out for her dead mistress, shrieking with hysterical grief. People were turning away, as the sight was extremely pitiful.

The girl's words made very little sense, but they were laden with

guilt—a rather common phenomenon at funerals. She seemed to be blaming herself for not having been in the house when she might have saved Renata's life by swiftly mixing an emetic of mustard. She was also babbling something about the delivery of the wine.

At a signal from the count, two peasants moved forward to aid in removing the girl. But before they could seize hold of her, Pietro Rezzini darted forward, snatched the girl from her chorewoman relative, and hurled her to one side. He slapped her on the cheek, and forcing her to her knees, brandished a stiletto before her grief-stricken face.

Faldetta barked an order and two detectives emerged from the crowd. I thought the order was to disarm Rezzini, but to my surprise, the detectives prevented the count's peasants from interfering.

Pietro Rezzini was deathly pale, but he seemed to know what he was about. He shook the girl violently as he pressed the blade of the stiletto against her throat.

He was a veterinarian, as I've said. He knew how to handle animals, and animals react very much as people do at times. I thought he was attempting to silence the girl with threats, and that he might even kill her on the spot. But suddenly, it was clear from her expression that he had penetrated her hysteria. She began to tremble and point, and she pointed toward

the count. Pietro was on him in two strides, still dragging the girl.

"This one?" he demanded. "He paid you to save him a wine wrapper at some time?"

The girl nodded. "He said he wanted to send her a present. He did not want it to come in the mail, as that would arouse suspicion. But she would get it, for I would deliver it when Signor Luigi was away."

Rezzini dropped her and lunged for the count. One of Faldetta's men blackjacked him on the neck. The other whipped Count d'Falco aside, and held him with a firm arm-lock.

Beside me, Faldetta said, "I am surprised she was not dead or kidnapped. But of course, that would have led to an inquiry. A week from now, she would have just—vanished."

Captain Faldetta considered the count critically. "I would not have thought he was the one, but I should have. His taste in ladies has always been of the most selective."

He looked over the crowd with

an expression of disapproval. "The young ones look so lovely in bikinis and bare breasts. And now look at them," he said. "Well, let us go where their charms are not so hidden."

Outside, I laid a hand upon his arm as he was lighting another confiscated cigar. "It was clear that Rezzini did not know," I said. "What gave it away?"

"Something only a lover would know for certain—that neither he nor Renata had mailed the package, so that the wrapper must have been handed out on some pretext by somebody in the house. And there is no other servant."

"What if Luigi himself had done it, as you considered?"

Faldetta drew his light and spread his hands as he puffed. "Who would know better than Renata's lover how to estimate the courage of her husband?"

Captain Mario Faldetta examined his cigar tip and started strolling. "A pity it had to be Count d'Falco," he said. "He has always been most generous at Christmas."

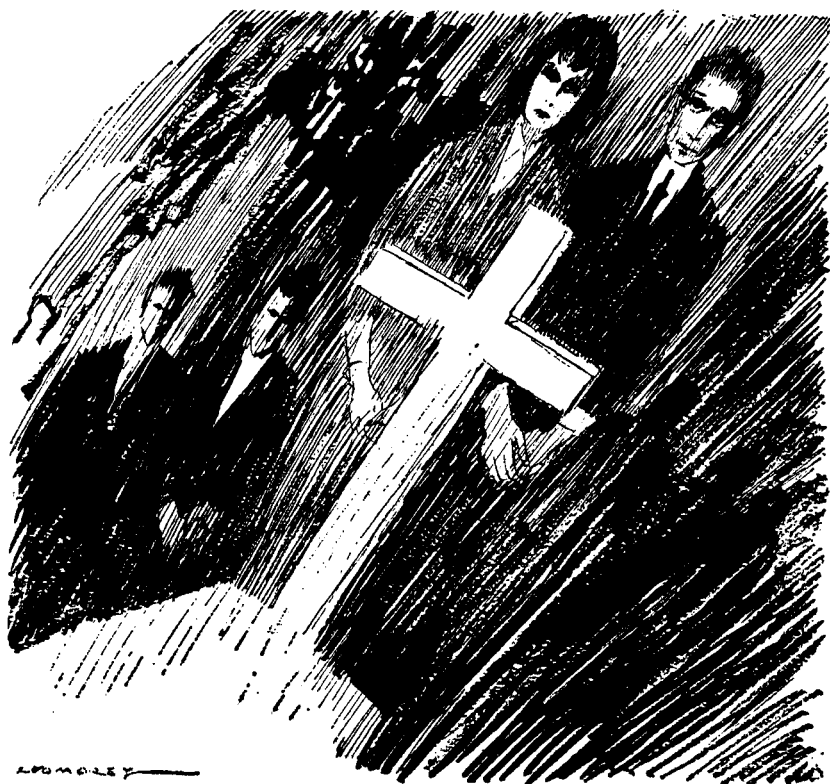


FIFTY FIFTY-

*The murder secret was well-bidden
... in a roach-infested cupboard.*

by HILDA CUSHING

ROY ENGLEWOOD was about to turn down the proposition when Uncle Ed's new wife walked in. She seemed a lot less than half Uncle Ed's age, probably about twenty-five, a year or two younger than Roy. He had understood she was younger than Unk but he hadn't guessed the old goat had been this lucky. She sure was a doll—black hair, pansy-blue eyes and an exciting figure that the loose fit of her cashmere sweater and short tweed skirt failed to conceal.



As he watched her place her packages on a chair near the bed he began to think it might not be such a bad idea to stick around after all—for awhile at least.

"What's going on here?" she asked, her slightly husky voice unfriendly. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at Roy.

"Now, Francie," Uncle Ed reached for her hand. "This is Roy, my nephew. I told you I was writing him. We've had that all out!"

In spite of the lines etched by pain and sleepless nights his face softened as he looked at her. He said to Roy, "She keeps insisting I'll be all right in a week or two and that we can handle things by ourselves."

"We can!" said Francie hotly, ignoring the introduction. "I kept your books for five years before we were married. I know all about the store. It's doing all right."

Uncle Ed patted her hand. "I know it is, but honey, Roy grew up in that store. He worked there all through school and every summer and besides he's a man. After all, hardware's not for a woman." He held her hand to his face. "You work too hard taking care of me without spending all that time down at the store."

"I don't work too hard!" She stopped suddenly. The heat died out of her eyes as she withdrew her hand.

The look she turned towards Roy was expressionless. "We won't

need help long. He's getting better every day." She shrugged as though powerless other than to capitulate. "I don't think it's worth giving up your job."

She straightened the blankets on the bed before picking up her bundles. Without speaking again she left the room as swiftly as she had entered it.

Uncle Ed watched her leave, his heart in his eyes. "She's a wonder, Roy, but she's not telling the truth. I'm real sick and she knows it. Doc Bowers put me on a diet and three kinds of medicine two months ago. They don't do me one bit of good." He rested a moment before continuing, "Come on, Roy, what's your answer?"

A few minutes ago his answer had been ready—a big, fat *no!* Even though Uncle Ed and Aunt Margaret had raised him since a shaver of five and had lavished all the stored up love of a childless couple, he had never considered the debt large enough to sacrifice any plans he had for himself. Now one look at Francie had changed his mind.

"You want me to ask for a leave of absence—perhaps a couple of months? It might tide you over."

The older man rose part way from his pillows. "Look, Roy, that won't do. I've managed that store for thirty years and my father and grandfather before me and I always kind of hoped you'd stay on and follow along after me. Even as

a kid you showed smart business sense."

Uncle Ed sank back heavily. "Not that I didn't understand. Not much here in Clayton for a young fellow. Everybody gone—your folks—Margaret—just me left, an old grump who spent most his time down in his store. I understood, all right." His breathing became shallow.

Roy pulled his chair nearer the bed. "Don't get excited, Unk. You'll get worse. I don't mind Clayton now. I got that big city stuff out of my system long time ago. It's just I've got a good job. I'm beginning to go places."

His uncle lifted himself again, his eyes brightening. "That's what I've been trying to tell you! I'll give you the same salary you're getting with raises every year. I've never made a will but I'll make one now, so if I die you'll share everything fifty-fifty with Francie." He gasped and went on: "It's a good business, Roy. Too good to let go down the drain. The house is free and clear and I've got a good balance at the First Federal."

"What about Francie?"

His uncle smiled weakly. "I know what you're thinking. What probably everybody thinks—that she married me because I'm well off. Maybe she did—maybe she did! But she's been a good wife. And two years ago," he pointed to the picture on the dresser, Francie in a white gown and veil beside

Uncle Ed, a graying and distinguished sixty-five. "I wasn't too bad a catch. She's been wonderful and I mean wonderful in every possible way from the beginning. Now that I'm sick and helpless she's been good to me—like an angel!"

He lay back again. "Don't worry about Francie. She may resent you a little at first. She thinks you deserted me when you left town right after high school. She'll get over it, I know she will. She won't admit it but she needs you as much as I do. I'm pretty sure I'm dying, Roy, and if I do and the store fails she stands to lose a lot!"

Weighing his uncle's offer against his present prospects, Roy knew it was good—more than generous. And overbalancing the possibility of his uncle's recovery was Francie.

"Okay, Uncle Ed." He rose before taking the hot, dry hand in his. "It's a deal. I'll talk to Francie first and then I'll amble down to the store."

He found Francie in the kitchen—a typical second wife's kitchen—completely remodelled and electrified, with cupboards banking an entire wall. It was immaculate like the rest of the house. Quite a change from the way he and his uncle had kept it during his high school days. Even Aunt Margaret hadn't been this neat.

"What's with Unk?" he asked as he leaned against the counter.

"He's sick," was the laconic reply as Francie finished putting her groceries in one of the cupboards.

Roy said, "You know what I mean. He looks bad. Says he's dying. What does Bowers tell you when you're alone?"

Francie faced him. "He's worried. He wants to send Ed in to Mass General for tests."

"Tests for what?"

"He's not sure. At first he mentioned ulcers. Now he's not so certain."

"Then why not send him to the hospital?"

"He won't go and don't say I should make him. He's a grown man and I don't have that much influence over him."

"Yeah, I remember now," said Roy. "Ever since Aunt Margeret died he's been dead set against hospitals. But Bowers, he must be over eighty. Haven't you had any other doctor in?"

"There's one other in town—a new one," Francie said. "But Ed won't have anybody but old Bowers." Then defiantly, "Don't you stand there criticizing me! You haven't done anything for him. Just a card now and then and one at Christmas with hardly anything but your name scrawled on it! Ten years and never a letter and now when you think he's going to die you come home to feather your nest!"

Roy grinned and touched her hand as it hung by her side. He

took a step nearer until his whole arm pressed against hers. "Our nest, Francie! I'm going to keep the store going for you, baby, as well as for me!"

She looked at him for what seemed a long time, her eyes dark and inscrutable. Then she moved away. "You can have your old room," she said curtly. "It's just the way you left it, except it's been cleaned."

"Thank you." His eyes filled with amusement. As he turned to leave he added, off-hand, "I'm going down to the store. Want to come with me?"

Standing straight and still she answered, "No." There was a pause before she said, "Thanks." It was as though she were forcing herself to be courteous.

Except for the storeroom, the Englewood Hardware Store (Est. 1898) hadn't changed much. Encle Ed had always kept the selling area neat and up-to-date while the store room had been a place to throw all the out-moded junk. In addition, as long as Roy could remember, the walls had been hung with dusty posters and cardboard cut-outs calling attention to, among other things, tasselled hammocks, triple-plaited carriage whips and Buggy-Boo-Roach Powder.

Now the storage space was sterile clean. Reserve merchandise was arranged in orderly fashion along the walls and on clearly marked shelves. It was evident

that all the old rummage was gone.

Francie, he decided, and considered whether such orderliness might not presage a frigid nature. Did it explain the lopsided marriage or more optimistically could it be the result of it? Then again Uncle Ed had made a big deal about her being so wonderful. Was it possible the old wolf meant she was wonderful in a way that mattered? He intended to find out soon.

His research was delayed somewhat by the unexpected resurgence of Uncle Ed's health. In the evenings, obviously stimulated by Roy's presence, he would rise from his bed to drag about the upper floor. He spent part of the time



watching television in the guest room where Francie had been sleeping since his illness. Often he appeared in Roy's room for long talks about the store.

As Francie took her meals with Ed in his room Roy could only catch her alone as she prepared dinner in the kitchen. His excuse, to carry her tray upstairs for her, was good for only a few times. In

less than a week he came home to an empty kitchen and his dinner warming on the stove. Francie and Uncle Ed had dined early.

On the day Uncle Ed insisted on going for a ride, a frantic call to the store brought Roy home to find his uncle collapsed on the stairs. Together with Francie he got the gasping, groaning man back to his bed.

Old Doctor Bowers was grumpily critical. "Shouldn't have let him leave his room," he said, plunging the alleviating needle into Uncle Ed's arm.

"But he was better and he wanted to!" protested Francie.

"He's been high because Roy's home. It couldn't last," grumbled the doctor. "And now he's worse. He's real bad!"

Before he left he had added still another prescription to the previous three.

That night with Uncle Ed still somewhat comatose from the morphine, Roy knocked on the guest room door. A light was on but Francie didn't answer immediately. When she finally opened the door a little, Roy could see she had applied fresh make-up and had thrown a thin robe over her nightgown.

"What do you want?" she asked in a husky whisper.

Roy pushed at the door but she held it tight. "We ought to talk," he said softly. "Get acquainted." His hand fell lightly on her shoul-

der and stroked down to her elbow. "There's nothing to stop us. There's only a sick, old man in the next room."

Her eyes followed the course of his hand on her arm then she looked up at him. Her eyes were opaque. "Please," she said, "Leave me alone!" With unexpected strength she shut the door against him. The next instant he heard the key click in the lock.

When he returned from the store the next evening she had moved a cot to the side of Uncle Ed's big double bed in the master bedroom.

"Look here," said Roy roughly, stopping her in the hall later. "What's the idea—running to the old man!"

"He's a lot worse. I might not hear him," she said coolly.

"Get a nurse. He can afford it." He pulled her to him with such sudden violence that she almost fell.

She recovered quickly and stood, impassive, until he released her.

"I'm your uncle's wife, remember?" She walked quickly away from him.

Roy watched her, frowning. Was she really this priggish or was it just a front? Whatever it was he wasn't getting anywhere with his present tactics. Back in his room, after some thought, he decided the only alternative was patience. He could wait and while he waited he

might just as well play it her way.

Uncle Ed hung on, perceptibly weaker each day, taking through straws what food would stay down. The bottles of medicine on his bedside table increased.

Doctor Bowers shuffled in once a day, pursed his lips and shook his head over temperature and pulse and mumbled, "You're doing fine, Ed, just fine!"

Francie grew thin and drawn and remote. One day she fainted just as Roy came home from the store. He carried her to the guest room.

"You've got to send Unk to the hospital," Roy insisted as soon as she revived. "If you don't you'll be just as sick as he is!"

She shook her head. "I'll never do that. He wants to be home and he wants me. I promised him I would *never* send him to a hospital."

"But you're all worn out!"

She tried to rise but fell back on the bed. She closed her eyes. "I'll be all right. Just let me rest a little."

Her pale, drawn face stirred him. He yearned to take her in his arms. Instead he said, "Stay in bed. I'll take care of Unk."

The next few days he spent most of his time at home and with advice from the guest room prepared Unk's diet as well as adequate meals for himself and Francie. He offered to sleep on the cot in Uncle Ed's room but his uncle refused to

let him. Surprisingly the older man seemed to draw strength from Francie's indisposition. Weak as he was he insisted on dragging himself to her room twice each day to make sure she was improving.

When Doctor Bowers made his call on the fourth day he pursed his lips and shook his head as usual and said wonderingly, "By God, Ed, you're doing fine, and I mean it this time!"

The old doctor drew Roy into Francie's room to caution him. "Now don't let him overdo like last time!"

After he had gone Francie insisted on getting up. "I'm perfectly all right now." When Roy objected she said, "I've had plenty of rest, thanks to you, and Ed's better so we can get along. Besides the store needs you."

She was determined.

Roy went back to the store full time with the doctor's words ringing in his ears. They were bad news. If uncle Ed's remission was merely temporary as the one before had been then Francie would be strained beyond her limit again. He couldn't let that happen. When he considered the possibility of his uncle's complete recovery he knew he couldn't let that happen either.

The next day while the two clerks and the bookkeeper were at lunch he took from the shelves a can of Cyanimole, a product guaranteed to rid farmers of any predatory animals that made their

homes underground. In the privacy of the storeroom he pried off the lid and poured some of the crystals into an envelope.

Late that night he sent Francie to bed before bringing Uncle Ed his usual nightcap—a glass of milk.

Roy didn't worry about the doctor suspecting anything. That old fool was no danger to him. It was Francie who mattered and he had freed her.

Before the funeral the sight of her free—her pale face, her body a little too thin now but she'd fill out again, her sexy voice—made it difficult for him to act sober and bereaved.

But he made it. He stood at Francie's side as the neighbors and friends, obviously as fond of Francie as of Uncle Ed, stopped at the house to offer help and sympathy. Their friendliness extended to Roy as well. When the funeral was over the two young people came back alone to the empty old house and went into the comfortably furnished living room.

Francie, her back to Roy, silently bent to rearrange a bowl of flowers. Her dress was a becoming soft shade of green.

"Ed wouldn't like me to wear black," she had said.

Roy figured it was time to make his move. His voice was matter of fact.

"Perhaps I should move to a hotel," he said.

Francie stood motionless for a moment then her fingers moved on the flowers again. She said, slowly, "The house is half yours—but, yes, I think it would be best for awhile."

On the last words she turned to face him and let him take her in his arms. She returned his kiss before she pushed him away.

Five months later they were married amid blessings from the old friends and neighbors, who all agreed with Francie that this was what Ed would have wanted. Hadn't he been made a co-heir in Ed's will, as if the house and half of Ed's property had been a bequeath to the two people he had loved most in the world.

During a Cape Cod honeymoon during which Roy discovered Francie was truly as wonderful as Uncle Ed had intimated, they returned, both tanned and Francie with enough added weight to erase the gaunt look she had acquired during Uncle Ed's illness.

The guest room became the bridal chamber after Roy decided he didn't care to sleep in Uncle Ed's room on his big double bed. Francie was quick to agree saying she preferred twin beds anyway.

The store flourished and Francie was a delight. She was not only exciting to sleep with but she was a wonderful housekeeper and practically a gourmet cook. The first month he gained ten pounds and was developing a pot. But he



didn't mind. He felt it was one more proof of the success of their marriage.

As a further proof—because it didn't cost him anything—he made a will leaving his share of Uncle Ed's estate to Francie. He didn't even mind lying awake at night after overeating because it gave him a chance to think about his luck—to think about Francie.

One night as he woke the moonlight fell softly over Francie's bed and illumined her face. She slept quietly, one hand tucked under cheek, her black hair fan-like against the pillow. Roy rose to stand over her for a moment before he went to the bathroom to rummage through the medicine chest. There was only aspirin. He padded down the stairs to the kitchen where he began opening cupboards. On a high shelf he saw a gleam of yellow that might contain baking soda. He lifted it down to the level of his eyes.

Large letters on the can proclaimed it to be Buggy-Boo Roach powder, one of the ancient products that Uncle Ed used to hoard in the storeroom. Roy pried open the lid. It was less than half full. He looked around the kitchen, puzzled. Where in the world in

Francie's spotlessly clean kitchen could roaches find a haven? His eyes went back to the can and froze on the list of ingredients.

Arsenic! Suddenly it became crystal clear. Francie! She'd been feeding this to Uncle Ed for months, long before he sent for me. Of course! He had had the symptoms—all the classic symptoms. She fed it to him slow—little by little so old Bowers wouldn't suspect. That's what took so long—and the remissions!

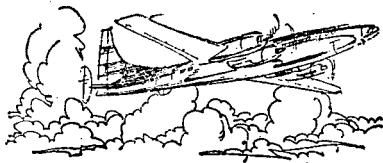
The first one when I hung around the kitchen so she was afraid I'd catch her at it—and the second one when I got the meals myself! She didn't want him in a hospital or have a nurse anymore

than Unk did! He grinned mirthlessly. I thought it was me but it was both of us. We *both* killed him!

He frowned and turned to the sink. Perhaps he should wash the powder down the drain. Not that there was any danger of her getting caught at this late date but just to be on the safe side.

But, why, he wondered, hadn't she thrown the stuff away. She's so neat about everything. So all-fired neat! Why the devil didn't she get rid of it?

Just as he reached for the faucet the discomfort in his stomach increased and when the sudden cramp doubled him over with pain he knew the answer.



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All Night Long

by WALTER DALLAS

*There was only one witness to
a killer's attempt to outwit the
Law . . . a strange witness indeed.*



THEY FACED each other with tight, wary smiles—two men who hated each other too much to show their feelings. Old man Cary spoke first. "Shut the door, Slade,"

he said. "I've got to say some things that aren't very pretty."

Roger Slade, credit manager of the Sprague Mills, shrugged and rose to his feet. In spite of himself, he was afraid. Could Cary have found out—the thought was preposterous. But all the same Slade's uneasiness continued to mount.

An hour ago the long main office had been a beehive of activity. Now it was quiet, with the unnatural stillness of sudden desertion. Then a shape moved halfway down the room, and Slade saw that one man remained. Alden Holland, the office manager, was soon drooped under a feeble desk lamp, plodding through the tag end of his mail.

"What's on your mind, John?" he asked. "Something go wrong today?"

Slade shut the door. It was marked: *John Cary, General Manager.*

Cary let his wasted, gnome-like body slump into a chair which made a creaking noise whenever he shifted his weight a little.

"No", he said, "not today, Slade. A year ago." Abruptly the general manager swung around so that Slade could see his face. "You're a good credit man," Cary said. "Too damned good to rot in jail."

So the showdown had come! Slade wondered how he could carry it off, this nightmare that had darkened his thoughts for so long. "Of course," he said, quickly, "you're upset about the Oxford account.

I've been expecting that you would—"

"I'll do the talking," Cary said, cutting him short. "When that fifty thousand-dollar Oxford Bag Company order came, Slade, I insisted on cash terms. They weren't listed in Bradstreet, and none of our men ever heard of them. Against my orders you went to old man Sprague, and talked him into giving them full ninety days' credit."

Slade lit a cigarette, snapped the match at the basket, and missed. How much did Cary really know or suspect?

"I don't see anything criminal in that," he said. "But maybe I'm stupid . . ."

The liver-colored spots on John Cary's face began to get red. He said, very carefully. "No, you're not stupid. You've made Sprague think that the Oxford Bag Company is either non-existent or a gyp outfit with a long series of overnight addresses. We can't even find them to sue. We're at least thirty thousand in the red."

"So I," Slade said smoothly, "am to be the goat."

Cary hooked his heavily-veined hands in his vest. "Not the goat, Slade. The firm is the goat. But, by God—"

Abruptly Slade felt certain Cary must be guessing wildly. He got up. "All this," he said, "is silly. Show me another credit man who has taken it on the chin this year. I made an honest mistake and I'll

assume all responsibility for it. But Sprague can dish it out—not you, with your unfounded insinuations. If you want to make an issue out of it”—he moved to the door—“see Sprague yourself. I’m going home.”

He was confident that Cary hadn’t a shred of proof, otherwise he would have blurted it out immediately. Slade took a brisk step out into the main office—and leapt back, startled. Something sinuous was uncoiling from the shadows, streaking under his feet.

When Hector, the office cat, had pounced on the idea of visiting old man Cary’s office he had overlooked a couple of important things. His first mistake had been in startling a man whose nerves were keyed to the breaking point; his second in attempting to dart swiftly past him.

Angered at his betrayal of nerves, Slade swore, and lashed out wildly with his foot. He missed Hector’s ribs by a hair, and grazed under his belly. Hector gave an anguished scream, and leaped aside. Slade shuffled his foot and the dark shadow melted into the gloom.

“Come back here!” Cary called out to Slade. “I’m not through with you yet!”

Slade tightened his lips and returned into the office.

Thirty feet away in the next office, Holland yawned. If the big shots would only go home, he’d call it a day. Now that the talkative sales manager had gone back to

gab some more Holland blinked stolidly, and picked up another letter.

Inside the private office, Cary was saying: “I got this a month ago, Slade. Your divorced wife wrote it the day before she died.” He pulled out a gray envelope, and tapped it significantly.

“Well?” Slade’s knuckles were blobs of ivory over the chair arms.

“When I read it,” Cary said, “I knew why you went over my head to pass that order. You were the Oxford Bag Company, Slade. You and a fake, dummy office, which you opened just long enough to fence fifty-thousand-dollars’ worth of stolen stock, sell it cheap and run. How much did you get?”

Slade had fenced the order for forty thousand dollars.

“Thirty,” Slade lied. “You’ve got me, Cary. You and that damned ex-wife of mine. Listen—” He licked his dry lips. “You’ll never wipe out red ink by putting me in jail. That stuff as raw material cost twenty-five thousand dollars. I’ll make full restitution. Thirty-five thousand dollars! But if you prosecute, you’ll never get a cent of it. Can’t you—”

Cary said: “No.” His eyes were trained on the phone. “Forty!” Slade shouted thinly. “Good God, man. You’ve known all along and said nothing. You’ve played with me, let me keep hoping. Do you know what they pay me here? One hundred lousy dollars a week. I’ve

never done anything like this before in my . . .”

“The answer,” John Cary said, “is still no.” He swung around and reached out for the phone.

Slade dashed Cary’s hand from its slow path to the receiver, and pushed him back into the chair. Cary’s eyes, a foot from his own, were steady, contemptuous.

“Don’t be a fool!” Cary said simply. “Do you want me to call Al Holland . . .” The voice gurgled into a wheezing silence.

Slade had whipped Cary’s camel-hair scarf from the hook beside the desk, jammed it between the old man’s jaws, and forced him down in the chair.

“You can’t do this to me!” Roger Slade was sobbing, shaking the gagged man insanely. “You’re a poor man, I’ll give it *all* to you.” Abruptly he stopped.

Cary wasn’t listening, and the eyes were not steady or contemptuous any longer. They were bulging hideously under a forehead lumpy with distended veins.

Then Roger Slade remembered. The old man’s chronic sinus condition had been bad all week. His nasal passages were blocked up solid. Although the gag was only in his mouth, and his nose was uncovered, Cary was slowly suffocating before his eyes.

Slade wanted to loose the gag then. But something made him wait. The thought of one hundred grand and freedom—freedom for-

ever if that gray letter were disposed of. While he held Cary’s straining arms, he told himself it couldn’t work. He wasn’t—couldn’t be a killer. But before he could bring himself to release the frail Cary’s bony wrists the wheezing noise had ceased. Cary was dead.

IN HIS SMALL office, Alden Holland screwed his knuckles into his myopic eyes and swore discreetly. Blasted fools, would they never go home! If he wasn’t going to ask for a raise next month he’d leave them to talk until morning.

Inside the inner office Roger Slade was standing motionless. There was no sound outside the door. With a sob in his throat he tiptoed back and buttoned the dead man’s shirt and vest, whipped the scarf out of the sagging jaws, and let it trail on the wizened neck.

Crazily, absently, his disordered thoughts whirled. And when first the idea came it seemed a part of his frenzy, so that he gave a little hysterical laugh. But then the laugh faded into a low, muttered oath.

Half incredulous, moving swiftly, he took Cary’s hat and coat, put them on the dead man, snatched the gray envelope and crumpled it into his pocket. Then, beating down wild hope, he draped Cary’s arm carefully across the chair. The dead man was quiet now, yet he looked strangely alive. Just old John Cary starting wearily to get up and go home.



Moving to the door, Slade considered what he would have to do critically and at length. Then, clearing his throat, he flung the door wide open. "Al," he called out briskly.

Holland, a stooped blur, put down a paper and started towards him. Slade stopped him from entering the office with a quick gesture. "Mr. Cary needs that data on the Ripon merger. Get it, will you? It's in the safe."

He was lucky. Holland was the

only man who knew the combination of the office safe.

Holland did things with a wall dial. He swung a massive door open and vanished, to reappear after a moment with a stack of papers. When he emerged Slade had all he could do to keep his voice steady.

"Holland while you're there, run over to the warehouse and check the inventory on number thirty-eight manila," he said. "Mr. Cary just reminded me that we're running low on that size."

Holland nodded, turned in his tracks and left the office. A good man, Holland, Slade thought grimly. A good man to take the rap—if it came to the worst.

For fully twenty seconds Slade waited. Then he darted back into Cary's office, picked up the limp man, and stumbled down the darkened aisle.

It was a short journey, but to Slade it seemed interminable. He wanted to run, to rid himself of the gruesome weight which pressed upon his shoulders. But instead he had to feel his way, for the aisle was completely dark. Once he stumbled, and Cary's hat jolted off and rolled under a desk. Slade's fingers sought it frantically in the dark.

And as he jammed it on Cary's head again he heard the door shut outside.

He almost ran then, blindly, picking up his feet grotesquely. He had to get to the safe before Holland returned. Panting, he dragged Cary's body inside the safe, propping him up with his back to the door. With the white face thus concealed the body could not be seen against the darkness.

Then he went to his own office, put his hat and coat on, and was lazily swinging his leg over the corner of Holland's desk when the office manager appeared.

"Forty-five gross, Roger. Our cards are correct," Holland said primly.

Slade nodded. "Good enough. I was afraid we had made a mistake. Oh, let's see those papers. Mr. Cary wants me to take them home tonight. Come on, I'll give you a lift."

Holland blinked. "Uh—thanks, Rog," he said. "Just a minute until I—"

And Alden Holland clanged the vault door back into place!

AT SIX IN the morning Mrs. Cary called Holland. Holland called Slade, whose adroitly baited suggestions threw the office manager into so great a panic that Headquarters, who talked to him next, sent not only a detective, but a medical examiner!

At six-thirty they began a search of the Sprague Mills.

At precisely six forty-two Holland opened the safe and his agonized scream brought them running to his side. The last act had begun.

Trembling, mouth agape, Holland was pointing into the vault, clutching Detective Sergeant Austin's sleeve.

Austin was a lean, lantern-jawed man. Slade moved behind his shoulder, murmuring shocked sorrow.

"It's your job, Doc," Austin said. "Lucky you came, at that."

The medical examiner knelt by the slumped form; his gesture was as old as the history of pantomime. "Three to twelve hours gone. Acute—suffocation to you. Autopsy after breakfast, but it's only a for-

mality. He smothered, all right. He got shut in here. There wasn't enough air for a man to breathe and he died."

Austin said, "Um. Not too tough a way to go out, though."

The detective was walking around the vault; he flashed his light into the recesses. "Pretty small. I suppose a fellow couldn't last many hours in there, if—"

The light beam clung to the back of the vault, hesitated briefly and went out.

Austin swung the door shut again, noted the way the door swung into the frame, flashed his light up and across the cracks. "It's an old job, but pretty airtight. It could happen, all right. I understand you two were alone here with Cary last night." He pointed to Slade. "Tell us how he decided to go in the safe—and how the door happened to be shut on him."

Slade felt a warm tingle of confidence, and tried to cloak a mask of growing panic.

"Why . . . it's hard to think—with him lying in there. I remember asking Holland to get me some papers out of the safe. It was about seven o'clock. Cary asked me to send Holland over to the warehouse—I forget what for."

Austin turned to Holland.

Holland gulped, and could only nod mutely.

"And then—" Slade saw horrible realization come suddenly in Holland's eyes—"Cary put on his

hat and coat, said good night and walked out," Slade said. "I had to wait for Holland to come back with the report, so I stayed inside Cary's office smoking. I thought Cary had gone home. I don't see —" He let his eyes widen, turn to Holland, and quickly back again. "That's all I know."

"I must have done it" Holland, stunned, wrung his thin hands. "I shut the door. He must have—gone in there for something. I didn't know he was there. I shut the door and smothered him to death. Oh, God!"

The office manager swayed and cupped his hands over his ashen face.

Austin looked at Slade and said: "It could have happened that way." Slade smiled wryly, to cover his elation. But with Austin's eyes on him, he wondered if his own mask of grief was strong enough.

Slade walked to the safe door, tapped it musingly. "It must have happened that way," he said.

Suddenly Austin stood very still, listening. Slade heard it, too.

From inside the closed vault came a faint rustling. And, afterward, little ghostly cadences, like the clawing of stiffened fingers.

A part of Slade died in that moment, but he could not move.

Austin had the door open, now, but at first they could see nothing but the blackness, and the blot of old John Cary's body against the darker wall. Then, the noise came

again, as if Cary's dead white fingers were clawing at the iron floor!

Slade saw the kneeling detective start and strain forward, listening. Then the uncurling body of the office cat—a startled, annoyed Hector—was emerging from the depths of the vault.

As Slade stared, Austin acted. Whirling, he caught Slade by the wrist in an iron grip. "You were alone with Cary while Holland went upstairs. You murdered him. The cat proves it. If Cary had been alive when the doors closed he would have used up so much air the cat would have suffocated. Cary must have been dead before he was put in the safe."

Out of the blackness, Slade remembered. He had kicked the damnable cat and it had run away. He remembered the little scurrying noises he had heard outside Cary's office after the strangling. But there hadn't been any scurrying noises when he'd carried the body down the aisle. The damn cat had run into the safe to hide.

"Don't be a fool," he cried, "the cat wasn't in there all night! I just saw him run in there a minute ago. He slipped between your feet when you were first looking at Cary's body!"

He could see sudden doubt in Austin's eyes. The doctor, too,

shrugged uncertainly. And the office manager—

Alden Holland, blinking mildly over their shoulders, said, for no apparent reason, "Look, the cat's hurt."

"By George, he is" exclaimed the doctor.

Hector, lapping a torn paw—the paw that Slade's flying kick had laid open ten hours ago—had had enough attention. Swaggering indolently on his three good legs, he made a cautious circle around Slade, and strolled out into the bright morning.

Austin entered the safe. He jerked Slade after him, forced his head forward until his unwilling eyes were staring past Cary's body and above it, staring at something the darkness had concealed.

"Here it is," said Austin, "the proof that will demolish the gap between you and the electric chair—the proof that the cat spent the night inside."

He flashed his light again, holding it like a pale accusing finger on papers which cluttered a shelf in the darkest recesses of the vault. Papers which once had been white, before a lame cat had lain on them, nursing his injured paw, while the long night passed and the red bloodstains faded into brown, dried smears.

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