

PURSUIT

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

ACE 35¢ NOV.



THE DEADLY DECEIVER

*a SENSATIONAL
New Mystery By*

CRAIG RICE

**ALL
NEW
STORIES**

PLUS
ROBERT TURNER. AUGUST DERLETH. BAILEY MORGAN

The
PURSUIT
DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

Pursuit No. 18

November 1956

C O N T E N T S

NOVELETTES

- THE DEADLY DECEIVER *by Craig Rice* 1
WHISKEY *by Bailey Morgan* 45
THE CURSE *by August Derleth* 89

SHORT STORIES

- TRAP *by Carl Sbaner* 27
LIANA *by William Logan* 41
JUST FOR KICKS *by Murray Wolf* 68
QUIET NIGHT AT HOMICIDE *by Robert Turner* 81
SOMEBODY KNEW HER *by Barry Miles* 110
SECOND GUESS *by Mel Colton* 117

ARTICLE

- ANYTHING FOR A DOLLAR *by Elston Barrett* 63

Publisher ROBERT SPROUL
Editor GEORGE PELTZ
Associate Editor KIT CARROLL

THE PURSUIT DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE is published bi-monthly by STAR EDITIONS, INC., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office, 12 East 41st Street, New York 17, N. Y. Copyright 1956 by Star Editions, Inc. All rights including translation reserved under International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Convention. Entered as second-class matter at Post Office, Holyoke, Mass. under the Act of March 3, 1879. 35¢ per copy. Subscriptions: (12 copies) \$4.00 in the United States, its possessions, and Canada; elsewhere, \$5.00. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between the characters and actual persons is coincidental. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

450

As hardened newspapermen, they thought they'd seen everything. But that was before they encountered

THE DEADLY DECEIVER



A NOVELETTE

by CRAIG RICE

THAT'S all the three notes on Regan's desk said: "The man from Turner's was here."

The telephone call slip read simply: "The man from Turner's called at 1:45 p.m."

Regan looked at them casually when he came back from

lunch, commented, "Nice of him," and prepared to go about his regular afternoon business. Then he looked at the notes again. This time he demanded, "What did the man from Turner's want?"

No one in the *Gazette* city

room knew anything about it.

Winklehoff, strolling languidly by, looked at the notes and said "For that matter, what is Turner's?"

The little city editor gave him as near to a nasty glare as his pink, cherubic face would permit. "You find out," he said, his voice deceptively mild.

Winklehoff gave him a hurt look.

"The telephone book," Regan said. "Look in the telephone book." He gave a patient and rather sad sigh. "I know. There will be at least a page of people named Turner. But this is Turner's with an apostrophe. If you know what I'm talking about. That makes a difference. Go look it up."

Winklehoff ambled silently away. Regan looked after him with a kind of mild desperation. Because Regan never forgot that Winklehoff couldn't be fired. Once the tall, lanky reporter had phoned in a magnificent story of a major fire on the other side of town, only to have it discovered later that he had phoned it in from *Harry's Grill* downstairs. His explanation had been that once you had described one fire you knew all the words and could describe them all. The Big Boss had heard of it, immediately

given Winklehoff a raise and ordered that under no circumstances was he ever to be fired, not if he lived to be a hundred and three. The Big Boss had added acidly that papers like the *Gazette* needed ingenious people like Winklehoff.

Regan went back to his telephones, reflecting that there might be some who had heavier crosses to bear than his, but he doubted it.

It was a relatively quiet afternoon. The bland-faced city editor talked cheerfully into three telephones at once, explaining to an indignant lady subscriber that he had no influence with the City Council personally, regretting to an old school chum that he didn't know of an opening for his unemployed nephew, and closely following the search for a pleasant-faced matron suspected of poisoning three husbands and attempting to poison a fourth, and now believed to be living in Venezuela under the name of Carmelita Porchak and married to a foreign-car salesman.

There was a tenement fire, a supermarket hold-up, a train crash in Pennsylvania, a street paving scandal and two relatively minor killings. Regan lazed along, wishing it were

time for the World's Series, but reminding himself that tonight, perhaps, he might get home in time for dinner.

Then Winklehoff idled back with a long sheet of paper in his hand. "There are two pages and a quarter of Turners in the telephone book," he reported. "But, specifically what you wanted to know, there is a Turner's Bar and Grill, a Turner's Cleaning and Dyeing, a Turner's Florists, a Turner's Funeral Parlor, a Turner's Grocery, retail, a Turner's Guns, antiques—"

Regan regarded him benignly. "Anything under X, Y and Z?"

Winklehoff looked wounded. "There is a Turner's X-Ray Laboratory, a Turner's Yacht Supply Company, and Turner's Zippy Cat Crackers," he said. He added, "There is also an A. Turnipseed. I am not making this up, Regan, you can look for yourself. And there is a Mr. Willie Turner."

"I know," Regan said, "an author. A very bad joke and an old one. Nice work, and now start calling them all up." He waited. "I said, start calling them all up and asking who sent a man to see me, and what for."

Winklehoff shrugged his thin

shoulders and started for his desk. The expression on his long, sad, and always pallid face said that the whole thing was a lot of nonsense. Regan muttered under his breath that someday Winklehoff was going to go too far. True, he couldn't fire him. Nor, having spent twenty-seven years on the *Gazette*, twenty-two of them as city editor, and all of them in the daily dread of being fired, was he going to quit himself.

Hinkle, assistant city editor, looked up and asked, "What was that you just said?"

"I said," Regan told him stiffly, "I can always shoot myself."

But just then the man from Turner's came back again.

He was a very ordinary little man, so much so that no one in the *Gazette* city room was able to describe him later when it became important, not even Silverman, the photograph editor. He sidled up to Regan's desk, carrying a paper-shrouded package of dry-cleaning, asked, "Regan?" and sidled away again before anybody, even Regan, could speak, let alone ask questions.

On the thin brown paper covering a man's suit on a coat hanger was printed: TURN-

ER'S CLEANING AND DYEING, 1317 WEST AUBURN AVENUE, HO. 7-8398. A tag had written on it: "Regan, *City Editor, Gazette.*"

Regan stared at it for a minute. Then he called, "All right, Winklehoff, the man from Turner's was here again."

Winklehoff strolled over lazily. "All this fussing," he complained, "because you forgot where you sent your other suit."

"I am not fussing," Regan said, "and this is not my other suit, and I have never heard of Turner's in my life before." He tore open the brown paper.

It was a very ordinary blue serge suit. Coat, vest and pants, not particularly new, and not particularly well-worn, either.

"It wouldn't fit me," Regan said. "And I never wear blue serge."

"Some fool mistake," Winklehoff said, and yawned.

Up to that instant Regan had been ready to assume the same thing. Indeed, he had been reaching for the telephone to call Ho. 7-8398 and indignantly demand what the hell. Now, he looked coldly at Winklehoff.

"All right, Winklehoff," he said. "Go out there and see what you can find out." He added, "I've told you before—

your greatest fault is conclusion-jumping."

The tall, pale reporter opened his mouth and shut it again, twice.

"You look like a fish talking when you do that," Regan said pleasantly. "Get on your way. That suit was sent to me intentionally. Maybe to tell me something. I want to know why and what."

Winklehoff observed that West Auburn Avenue was way out in Lake Park. He made it sound like the antipodes. And that it was a hot day.

"There are busses," Regan said mercilessly. "And you aren't going to run into any trouble. And Moonbeam is too busy to drive you." No, leave the suit here."

He paused to answer the nearest telephone and tell Madge that he'd be home for dinner if nothing unexpected happened, another to hear a report on the tenement fire casualty list, and to say, "Come on in" to a third.

By then, Winklehoff had gone, and Regan sat regarding the blue serge suit with distaste. Finally he tore off the rest of the brown paper wrapping and began examining it more thoroughly. Silverman wandered over and began look-

ing at it with him.

It had evidently just been dry cleaned. There was nothing in any of the pockets. There also, Regan observed, were no labels nor marks of any kind. Well, he'd heard that suits could be traced just the same.

"Bulletholes," Silverman said suddenly.

Regan stiffened. "Where?"

Silverman pointed. There was a small round hole in the lower right-hand part of the coat. It matched a similarly placed one in the vest. There was a third in the top part of the pants. Regan held the three garments up to him as though he were wearing them. The three small round holes matched.

Silverman took a closer look, examined the edge of the holes, ran his finger around them. "Definitely, bulletholes," he said. And Regan nodded. Silverman would know.

Turner's had sent him a blue serge suit he'd never seen before, because it had three bulletholes in it.

He started to reach for the telephone to call Turner's and leave a message for Winklehoff to phone in as soon as he arrived, and then realized that wasn't going to do. If there were enough monkeyshines go-

ing on round Turner's Cleaning and Dyeing that someone had to send him, anonymously, a blue serge suit with bulletholes in it, calling and leaving a message for Winklehoff wasn't going to do at all.

On the other hand he'd gotten Winklehoff into this, and it was up to him to get him out of it.

He settled for sending Moonbeam after him in a circulation department car. Moonbeam, whose real name, an impossible combination of j's, y's, l's, z's and k's had been forgotten as long as the origin of his nickname had, could be counted on to get almost anyone out of practically any kind of trouble.

Then he sat back and worried about the whole thing. There was some unnamable quality about the situation that he didn't quite like. It was the sort of confused and complicated thing that, much as he hated to admit it, usually happened to him. And to Winklehoff.

The afternoon dragged on. The tenement fire burned itself out. A City Councilman resigned under pressure. One of the supermart bandits was shot down in an alley. A bereft mother cat adopted a litter of

baby squirrels. Regan telephoned Madge that he might not be home early for dinner after all.

He'd begun worrying in earnest when the delivery boy appeared. At least Regan, as he realized later, assumed he was a delivery boy. He said, "Regan?", put a small paper-wrapped package on the desk, and was gone, leaving behind a vague impression that he'd worn a cap with something—possibly "Turner's"—written on the front of it. But no one was quite sure.

Regan tried to call him back, had lost him, swore mildly, and looked suspiciously at the package. Its wrapper had "TURNER'S GROCERIES, 743 20TH STREET" printed on it.

He poked tentatively at the small package, wondering a little if he ought to open it under water and with a long pair of tongs. Pekelis, the photographer, wandered over to see what was going on, and watched while Regan gingerly undid the string and opened the wrapping.

Inside was a box of chili powder. Nothing else.

REGAN muttered something under his breath. Pekelis picked up the box and began

examining it.

"Don't shake it," Regan said in a gloomy voice. "It'll probably explode."

Bulletholes in a newly dry-cleaned blue serge suit. A box of chili powder. What the hell was Winklehoff innocently walking into? Something that made no sense of any kind, so far. Suddenly he decided to talk it over with Hoffman.

He was already inside the managing editor's glass-enclosed office when he decided not to talk it over with Hoffman. The whole thing could still be somebody's idea of an elaborate gag. That left him standing on one foot in Hoffman's office, and he managed a lame discussion of a projected series of stories on high-school dramatics.

When he had finished, Hoffman remarked in parting that he looked a little tired and perhaps he ought to get more rest. Regan said to himself that he needed to get a lot more rest and was going to begin right now.

Back in the city room, the first thing he saw was the pot of lilies on his desk, nicely done up in green florist paper. It came from TURNER'S FLORIST SHOP, 127 YAKIMA DRIVE. No card enclosed.

"I didn't know just where you wanted the florist's man to put it," Hinkle began apologetically.

Regan made several ill-mannered suggestions about where the potted lillie could be put, reached for his hat and said coldly, "I'm going home. Before someone sends me a set of X-rays, furnishings for a yacht, and a box of Zippy Cat Crackers. And don't anyone ask me what I'm talking about." His tone of voice added, "As you value your life."

He stuck a cigar in his mouth, reached for the match folder on his desk and froze, his hand in mid-air. After a moment he picked up the folder and examined it, his face blank.

The folder, chastely and modestly, announced the location of TURNER'S FUNERAL HOME, 9357 SOUTH YORK BOULEVARD.

Regan was still looking at it silently when the telephone rang. He answered it absent-mindedly and instinctively, his gaze still on the match folder.

It was Winklehoff. A very frail-sounding W i n k l e h o f f. "Sorry I took so long to call in. Sorry I didn't find out anything at Turner's."

That didn't sound like Win-

klehoff. Winklehoff never was sorry about anything in his life.

"I got hit on the head," Winklehoff said plaintively. "In an alley. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Regan said. "Where's Moonbeam?"

Winklehoff hadn't seen anything of Moonbeam.

Regan's lips tightened. "Stay where you are. Don't do anything. I'll be right out." He paused. "Where are you?"

Winklehoff didn't know, but he'd find out. A minute later he reported, "Shamrock Cocktail Lounge."

"It would be," Regan said grimly. "But stay there."

In the taxi he told himself that in spite of the many unkind thoughts he'd had about Winklehoff in the past, and a few that were building up right now, he wasn't going to let anybody hit Winklehoff on the head and get away with it. And, he added to himself, the same thing went for Moonbeam.

2.

SOFT summer darkness was just beginning to settle down when the taxi reached the Shamrock Cocktail Lounge, a shabby one-windowed affair

half a block down the street from Turner's. The circulation department car was parked outside, and Regan strode in grimly. He found Moonbeam in a rear booth, gazing sadly into a glass of beer and Winklehoff across from him gazing sadly into another one.

"Moonbeam found me," Winklehoff announced. "He rode up and down along the busses, looking for me, but he didn't find me because I wasn't on one of them. So he found me here."

Regan decided to let that pass. There was a very slight bump on Winklehoff's head, but it didn't seem serious. Regan suddenly found that he was sufficiently relieved to forgive anything. Or anybody.

"Nobody at the drycleaning place knew about a suit being delivered to you," Winklehoff said. "It's a cash-and-carry anyway. Nobody could find any record of any blue serge suit being cleaned lately, or who it belonged to. Nobody remembered one."

Regan found that he was not in the least surprised.

"So," Winklehoff said, "the whole thing being a little funny, I decided to nose around the place a little. Nothing seemed out of the way any-

where. But as I was going down the alley, somebody socked me. From behind." He paused and rubbed his head. "So when I came to, I came in here to recover. And to telephone."

He looked at Regan expectantly and hopefully. So did Moonbeam. Regan ordered a glass of beer, drank it, and thought.

"All right," he said at last, "the suit was sent to me. So I'll go in and make inquiries." He rose reluctantly.

"We'll guard you," Winklehoff said encouragingly. "We'll guard you from here."

Turner's Cleaning and Dyeing was a dismal little establishment in a dismal little neighborhood, one that had never been anything else. If Winklehoff hadn't had sense enough to keep out of alleys in a section like this, he deserved what he got.

A sweaty, muscular, grey-haired woman glared at Regan and stated flatly that she'd never sent no blue serge suit to no Regan or to nobody and this was the second time she'd been bothered about it, and she didn't want to be bothered about it again.

A greyish, rabbit little man popped out of the back

room and seconded her statements. No, they didn't have a delivery service. Yes, they sent their cleaning out. Yes, they packaged their cleaning in brown paper covers and yes, this was one of them.

Under Regan's pleasantly thawing influence they both agreed that someone, anyone, could have gotten hold of a Turner's paper wrapping. But neither of them had seen any blue serge suit, not for months.

On the way back Regan glanced up the alley. It was dark now, gloomy, and full of lean cats. Besides, Winklehoff had inspected it already.

Back at the Shamrock he ordered another beer and avoided Winklehoff's reproachful gaze.

"I hope you're happy now," Winklehoff said.

"No. I am not happy," Regan said. He told him about the bulletholes in the suit, about the chili powder and the pot of lilies. He produced the match folder.

"That makes a difference," Winklehoff said. He reached for a cigarette and his pale blue eyes flickered with excitement. "Just like me being conked on the head makes a difference and now begins to make sense. Because there was no reason for me being conked

on the head. I know what you're thinking, Regan, and don't say it." He began drawing circles on the table with the cigarette. "I was just hit very lightly on the head and then just left there. Nobody bothered me. Nobody robbed me. Nobody kidnapped me. Nobody murdered me. Why not? And don't answer that either, Regan. Because, somebody wanted to make it very plain that this means business, in spite of what the old lady in the drycleaners said. Not that she mightn't have been telling the truth. But somebody wanted to be very sure that this wasn't just passed over lightly."

Regan was silent. He had to admit that Winklehoff was right. Without the incident in the alley, he would have been inclined to ignore the whole Turner incident as some unfortunate practical joke. It still might be. But he wasn't going to let people go around conking Winklehoff on the head, even in good, clean fun.

"What it means," Winklehoff said, "is that somebody's murdered."

Moonbeam amazed them both, and probably himself, by speaking up. "Cold," he said, and then turned an embarrassed pink.

Regan scowled. Winklehoff nodded slowly. "Dead. That's the lilies and the match folder from the funeral parlor. Murdered. That's the bullet holes in the blue serge suit. To be taken seriously. That's the conk on my head." He ran a hand over his pale, wispy hair. "And dead a while—cold dead. That's the chili powder."

"An awful pun," Regan said, wrinkling his nose in disgust. "A really awful pun. And a terribly complicated way of getting a simple message across."

"But it got across," Winklehoff reminded him. "And it didn't get ignored."

Regan had to admit that too.

"Somebody has a very complicated mind, that's all," Winklehoff said cheerfully. He looked at the cigarette he had been fumbling with, threw it away and started a new one. "We drew a blank at the dry-cleaners. But that doesn't mean we'll draw one at the grocers or the florists." He looked at Regan expectantly.

"Oh, all right," Regan said irritably. He'd been about to say something of the sort himself. "I'm not going to get home for dinner anyway, and Moonbeam can probably use a little overtime."

It was Moonbeam, on the

way to Turner's Groceries, who pointed out that the assorted Turners on their list were in widely separated parts of town.

"Maybe the guy is a tire salesman," Regan said.

Winklehoff didn't think that was funny. "Obviously," he said a little stiffly, "he was going through the classified book alphabetically. Cleaners. Florists. Funerals. Groceries."

"Next, I suppose," Regan said amiably, "would have been a hammer from a Turner's hardware. For you."

Turner's Grocery was a cozy cheerful, brightly lighted store in a cozy, cheerful, brightly lighted neighborhood. Mrs. Turner, a large, bosomy, smiling, but masterful and determined looking woman appeared to be in charge. She was willing, even more than willing, to be helpful, and actually was of no help at all. She didn't specifically remember selling any chili powder that day, or the day before, but she might have. Or her husband might have. Or one of the clerks.

She called "Albert!" in a voice of authority, and a small, gentle man looked up from the shelf where he had been neatly stacking canned goods. He didn't recall anything about any chili powder, either. Nor

did the two clerks.

Regan didn't even bother to ask if the Turner-marked wrapping had come from here. He could see them on the counter. Also, a sign that proclaimed *Cash-And-Carry Only*.

They found Turner's, Florists, in a block otherwise occupied by a first-run motion picture theater, a fourth-rate night club, a drug store, a chain cut-rate shoe store and two delicatessens. It was a garish little hole-in-the-wall seemingly dedicated to the corsage and small bouquet trade. A big, garish blonde greeted them cordially from behind a counter display of thirty-five cent bunches of violets. She grew less cordial when Winklehoff said that they would like to inquire about some potted lilies.

"We don't have any lilies, potted or otherwise," she said coldly. Then she called "Edward" in a voice that added a hint that he might have to throw these three bums out.

Regan became his most ingratiating. Someone, he explained, had sent him a pot of lovely lilies, wrapped in Turner's paper, and forgotten to enclose a card.

She thawed and smiled and said that she was sorry she couldn't help him. They simply didn't carry potted lilies. The

wrapping paper—anyone could have picked up. Furthermore, they didn't deliver.

Edward, a frail, sad-faced little man who had been wiring corsages, didn't know anything either.

By this time Winklehoff was willing to concede that anyone could have picked up one of the match folders from Turner's Funeral Home and dropped it anytime on Regan's desk. Probably one of the phony delivery men.

"Who wasn't noticed by anybody," Winklehoff added, in a tone indicating that somebody should have.

"He wasn't a noticeable man," Regan said mildly. He got into the car and closed the door. "He was so nondescript that that could be a description of him. He was so obscure as to be almost invisible. He was nearly conspicuous by merely being so inconspicuous."

"A nicely turned phrase," Winklehoff said admiringly. "The kind you are always warning me to avoid."

Regan ignored him. By this time he was willing to concede that it was worth telling Inspector Tom Ward, of Homicide, about. Not the whole deal, he warned Winklehoff. In fact, to play it safe, he was going to handle the delicate af-

fair himself.

TOM WARD was a tall, powerful man with a big red face, hard grey eyes, and a permanent expression of deep distrust. He appeared to have been born suspicious, particularly of newspapermen. Regan would have been the first to describe him as probably the best damn policeman alive.

He looked at Regan and Winklehoff bleakly as they came in, and said, "I don't know anything new about Carmelita Porchak."

"Neither do we," Regan said blithely. With the light shining on his tinsel-silver hair, he looked like an adult cherub. "It's just because there seems to have been another murder, and we wanted you to be the first to know."

"Don't be coy," Tom Ward said. "Who's murdered?"

"I don't know," Regan told him. "A man, about—" He closed his eyes for a moment and mentally measured the blue serge suit. "About five foot ten, medium weight. Two small caliber bullets in him, lower right abdomen. Possibly lodged in the spine. Dead at least a day, and maybe longer." He paused. "That's all."

Tom Ward had been taking notes. "Just where is this

corpse?"

"I don't know," Regan said again. "That's your job." He decided to soften that and added, "It's just a tip, Tom, and I'm passing it on to you." He was damned if he'd tell where the tip came from. Right now, anyway.

"Well," Tom Ward said, "thanks." And let it go at that.

Back in the car, Regan said smugly, "Well, at least we did our duty." He wasn't satisfied, and he knew Winklehoff wasn't either, but there didn't seem to be anything to do about it now.

They drove a little way in silence. Then Moonbeam stopped the car. Suddenly. And pointed.

In front of them, caught in the glare of the car's headlights, a small overalled man was busily engaged in sticking a large, flamboyant poster on a garage wall. The poster announced that *TURNERS' WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS* with its *DEATH DEFYING ACTS*, now playing in the suburbs, would open in town on Thursday.

There was a long silence.

At last Regan said in a strangled voice, "If either of you ever mention this to me, or to anyone, as long as you live!"

HE WAS still indignant and resentful when he arrived at the office in the morning. The blue serge suit, the pot of lilies and the box of chili powder had vanished. Probably taken away by the janitor, he decided, or by a thoughtful Winklehoff.

He had made up his mind that if Hinkle, Silverman, Pekelis or anyone else made any wise remarks, he would simply state that he had recognized it all along as a press-agent gag, and that he was far too old and too wise to fall for any such shenanigans.

The morning began smoothly and quietly. The other supermart bandit had been captured after a 90-mile an hour chase through rush hour traffic. A family of five had been wiped out in a grade crossing accident, the son of a suburban school superintendant had been arrested for drunk driving, and Carmelita Porchak was still missing. It was about eleven o'clock when Tom Ward called. "We've found your body."

Regan tingled all over. Who had been talking? Just one wise remark from Tom Ward was going to be an overload, this morning.

"Just like you said," Tom

Ward said. "About five-ten, medium build, two twenty-two caliber bullets in his spine, entered through lower right abdomen. What did you say his name was?"

Regan caught his breath. He started to say, "The name is probably—" and stopped. He wasn't going to be trapped that way. He switched quickly to, "I'll send Winklehoff right over," slammed down the receiver and yelled, "*Winklehoff!*"

Winklehoff was down in *Harry's Grill*.

Regan swore softly, dialled the number of Harry's Grill and yelled, "Send Winklehoff up!" He glanced around the city room, at the clock, and added, "Send *everybody* up!"

"Tom Ward's got our corpse," he told Winklehoff calmly when he arrived.

He started to give instructions, and then stopped. He didn't know how much Tom Ward had yet. For that matter, he wasn't at all sure how much he and Winklehoff had. He finally said, "Oh, use your judgment," and crossed his fingers.

On a second thought, he sent Pekelis along. On a third thought, he sent Moonbeam along. Then he prepared to wait.

He waited exactly ten seconds and then yelled, "Winklehoff, come back." Then, "Where the hell has that suit gotten to?"

Winklehoff had put the suit, along with the lilies and the box of chili powder, in his locker.

He silently blessed Winklehoff and sent the suit along.

From long and usually bitter experience, Tom Ward had learned that there were occasions when it was smart to cooperate with the press. This was one of them and he was cooperating, but that didn't make him like it any better.

"Probably just a bum," he told Winklehoff, much too cheerfully. "Turned up in an empty freight car. What have you got there?"

"A blue serge suit," Winklehoff said. "Let's hear more about your corpse."

"Naked," Tom Ward said. "Unidentified. Nice-looking, about fifty, grey hair, no scars, good teeth."

"Name's probably Turner," Winklehoff said, just as laconically.

Tom Ward's eyes narrowed just a little. "How do you know?"

Winklehoff shrugged his shoulders and looked hurt. "Do

you tell me your sources?" Then he relented slightly. "Here's his suit."

Tom Ward pounced on it and examined it. "Could be," he said. "Could very well be. Bulletholes in the right place. Looks like it would fit."

"Take it over to the morgue and try it on him," Winklehoff said.

Tom Ward started to say that he'd make his own suggestions, appeared to think better of it, and took the advice. Winklehoff said that he guessed he'd go along to keep an eye on the suit, and Tom Ward said he guessed he'd go along to keep an eye on Winklehoff.

The suit fitted perfectly. The bulletholes matched with the wounds.

"All right," Winklehoff said. "Just to help you out. There are two and a quarter pages of Turners in the telephone book. One of them is missing. This one."

Tom Ward gave him a nasty look. "He doesn't need to be from here. The corpse could have been dumped in the freight car any number of places yesterday."

"He's from here," Winklehoff said, stubbornly.

This time it was an extra

nasty look. "I'm keeping the suit."

"Okay," Winklehoff said. "But Pekelis gets some pictures of it first. On and off."

Tom Ward said, "Only if you tell me how you and Regan got the suit, and how you know so much about the corpse."

"Okay again," Winklehoff said. After all, Regan had said to use his own judgment and so far there was nobody around from the *News* or the *Journal*. "A delivery boy brought it." He told the story in detail, omitting only the anguished hours when they had believed the whole thing to be a press agent's dream.

"Damn it," Tom Ward said. "You guys should have told me about this."

"We did," Winklehoff said. "Last night."

Tom Ward said nothing.

"Only," Winklehoff said to cheer him up, "last night you didn't have a corpse." He paused. "When was this guy killed?"

"Yesterday," Tom Ward said. "About twenty-four hours ago."

Winklehoff nodded. He supervised the pictures, said he'd keep in touch, and went away.

At the first telephone booth he reported to Regan.

"Now," he added, "borrow a batch of want-ad solicitors for an hour. If Wilhaumus objects tell him it's vital. Split up all the Turners in book among 'em and make a survey of all the Mr. Turners they can locate." He finished, "We're interested in the ones they can't locate."

Regan told him he was a bright boy, and to hurry in.

Eight want-ad girls were just winding up the Turners when Winklehoff got in. The survey had been a bright idea, but it hadn't produced a thing. All the living male Turners were accounted for, and all the dead male Turners had been decently buried for some time.

"All right," Winklehoff said, undiscouraged, "he doesn't have a telephone."

"I've already turned it over to the circulation department and the city directory," Regan said hurriedly, thus beating Winklehoff to it by a very narrow margin. "Now write the story."

"The pictures," Pekelis said happily, "are beaunts!"

They were, and the front page was what Regan lovingly described as a nonpareil, Winklehoff praised as a master-

work, and even Hoffman said was very nice.

There matters stood until mid-afternoon, when the *Journal* pointed out that the *still* unidentified corpse in the police morgue had been killed no later than yesterday, that the "mysterious" blue serge suit, delivered to "a local newspaper" had just been dry cleaned and that obviously there hadn't been time between the murder and the delivery of the suit for the dry cleaning to be done, and that the whole business of the blue serge suit, the chili powder, the potted lilies and the match folder had either come straight out of an opium dream (although the *Journal* didn't use just those words) or, the "local newspaper" had been crudely taken in again.

The police department failed to find any missing Turners, male white, five-ten height, 165 weight, hair, grey, eyes, blue, no identifying marks or scars.

Neither did the *Gazette* circulation department, which reported in a good hour ahead of the police.

Regan wondered silently if he were too old to make a fresh start, possibly in the advertising business, and avoided the gaze of Hoffman and,

for that matter, everyone else.

And nobody mentioned the name "Turner" around the office.

There was, of course, an unspoken and reproachful implication in the air that Regan ought to be able to produce something stupendous right out of thin air, and from time to time Pekelis looked at him wistfully and hopefully. Worst of all, Regan himself had the same feeling, except that it included a distasteful bafflement. He felt that he ought to do something, but he couldn't think of anything to do.

Finally he gave up and called Winklehoff.

Winklehoff was not in the office. Winklehoff was not downstairs in *Harry's Grill*, nor in any of the possible places Regan checked. Regan finally decided that Winklehoff was somewhere sulking.

He half closed his eyes, leaned perilously back in his chair, added all the known Turners together and tried to divide them by some possible common denominator. There was none. Well, he conceded, practically none. A few things—they were all, the drycleaners, the grocers and the florists, small businessmen. Wait a minute. They were all small busi-

nessmen and they all had large and masterful wives.

He followed that line of reasoning for a while until it kept taking him around in the same discouraging circle. Then he looked around for another approach. There wasn't any.

Finally he looked again at the list of Turner enterprises Winklehoff had copied from the telephone book. There was still Turner's Guns.

No one had sent him a personally delivered present from Turner's Guns, Antiques. But there had been the bullet holes in the blue serge suit. He decided that he and Winklehoff had stopped just a little too soon in their alphabetical investigation of the local Turners. And obviously the thing to do was to send Winklehoff out there, right now. To TURNER'S GUNS, ANTIQUES, 619 22ND STREET. Only, Winklehoff wasn't around.

He made another fruitless and well-nigh frantic search for Winklehoff leaving urgent messages everywhere, including the shabby, side-street hotel where Winklehoff had lived as long as anyone could remember.

If Winklehoff were seriously sulking, there was no telling where he might be. Or

when he might turn up again.

Regan spent the next hour telling himself not to worry. By that time he decided that his patience had been stretched far beyond the limit of human endurance. He sent for Moonbeam and told him to bring a car around, turned the desk over to Hinkle with the information that he'd be back in an hour, and started for TURNER'S GUNS, ANTIQUES, with an unpleasant idea occurring to him on the way that Winklehoff might have had the same idea, decided to strike off on his own, and be there ahead of him.

619 22ND STREET turned out to be a parking lot.

It was, Regan felt, almost too much.

Still, he decided, he might as well make a few inquiries.

He located an obliging luncheonette owner who told him that the Turner of TURNER'S GUNS, a nice old bachelor, had sold out and gone to Florida about the time the building was torn down, some three months back.

Well, he tried to comfort himself as he rode disconsolately back to the *Gazette*, at least he'd had an idea and followed it up even if it hadn't worked out.

Winklehoff had called. He had left no information. He had said that he would call later.

Regan settled down behind his desk, looking even more placid and amiable than ever, tried to concentrate on the City Council investigation of the street paving scandal, and watched his free telephone just a little more closely than he had watched anything since the ninth inning of the last World Series.

It was nearly his quitting time when Winklehoff finally did call again and say, "I'm at the circus."

"Having fun, I hope," Regan said coldly.

"Lots of it," Winklehoff said, in a cheerful voice. "Come on out."

Regan thought that over for roughly five seconds. Tomorrow, for sure, he would get home in time for dinner. Moonbeam was saving up overtime for some vast future project.

He got directions from Winklehoff, apologized to Madge over the telephone, and informed Hinkle that he was leaving early and to take over.

"Death in the family?" Hinkle asked in an acid manner.

"Yes," Regan said, "but not

in mine."

3.

WINKLEHOFF had been at the circus all afternoon and, he told Regan, he had been having the time of his life. He went into details over coffee in the small suburban lunchroom he had suggested over the telephone as a meeting place.

He'd explained himself, he said, as a writer who was doing a series of articles about small circuses. Thus he'd been able to ramble all over the place and meet everybody, the owner, the owner's wife, the performers, the cook, the roustabouts, even the little man who put up the billboard posters. Tonight he planned to explain Regan as his collaborator on the series of articles.

He added, before Regan had a chance to express himself one way or the other, "Only, of course, someone there will know it isn't true."

"Who?" Regan asked.

He realized instantly he hadn't needed to ask. Winklehoff's answer, "The person who sent that stuff to you as Regan of the *Gazette*," was entirely unnecessary.

Again that day he tingled all over. Winklehoff could be

wrong. But Winklehoff wasn't often wrong.

And Winklehoff, maddeningly, refused to say any more about it.

TURNERS' WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS was a small affair, playing in a single tent. Regan watched the first few acts without much excitement or interest. Winklehoff had seen the afternoon performance and wasn't paying attention anyway. Only Moonbeam seemed to be having a good time. The star trapeze performer was named Olga which, Winklehoff remarked, was standard for trapeze performers. After a dispiriting performance by four tired lions they left by mutual consent, even Moonbeam willing to go along by then.

Outside the tent, they parted. Winklehoff remarked that he had a few things to do, and that he'd like to take Moonbeam along. He added that Regan might like to use the time meeting the manager and his wife.

Regan was too occupied in repressing the impulse to remind Winklehoff who was whose boss around the *Gazette* that he had walked halfway to the imposing and elaborate trailer Winklehoff had pointed out before he realized the implication of "the manager and his

wife." Up to then, he'd been wondering if Mrs. Turner were a recently bereaved widow.

Mrs. Turner was Olga, now wearing a terrycloth robe over her tights and industriously doing a piece of mending on a man's shirt. She was a big woman, considerably bigger than she'd appeared on the trapeze, and muscular. If the circus ever went out of business, Regan reflected, she might do well as a lady wrestler.

Fantastic solutions to his particular problem had been floating around in his mind all afternoon like balloons, and one by one they had been collapsing like wet paper bags. On the way here he'd played with a triangle-shaped balloon: wife, boyfriend, and aging, wealthy husband—though the blue serge suit hadn't been particularly costly, nor the man in the morgue particularly old. But Olga Turner didn't look as though she belonged in a triangle, except possibly as the vanishing point.

There were, of course, wives who murdered their husbands for insurance. He had been, he reminded himself, going on a theory that a Mr. Turner had been murdered by his wife, and that it was only theory. Still, long experience had taught him

that when husbands were murdered, wives were logical suspects, and vice-versa. An unfortunate philosophy, but it seemed to work out in real life.

But this Mr. Turner was still alive, and proved it by coming into the trailer. Regan found himself looking at him with an unhealthy curiosity as though he'd just been raised from the dead.

Mr. Turner was a wiry, undersized man with thin grey hair and pale grey eyes, who gave Regan a half-bored glance and wanted to know just what was interesting about their circus.

"Nothing much," Regan said. He hastily added, "From the point of view of my articles, I mean. Our articles," he corrected himself: "Nice show, of course. I'm just interested in circuses in general."

Mr. Turner said, "Oh."

Mrs. Turner looked at him and said nothing. Regan told himself that while he'd often described an absolutely expressionless face, this was the first time that he'd actually seen one. He began fishing for words with which to make a graceful exit, and then Winklehoff came in.

"Finish your look around?" Mr. Turner said cordially.

Winklehoff smiled ingratiatingly and said that he had. He sat down, looked admiringly around him and said, "Beautiful trailer you have."

"It's convenient," Mr. Turner said modestly. Mrs. Turner went right on sewing.

Regan asked a few desultory and unprofitable questions about circus life, about life in a trailer, about life in general, and then gave out. Winklehoff had been roving around the trailer with his eyes, still smiling admiringly. At last he rescued a practically helpless Regan by beaming and saying, "Well, we'd better be going. We still have three hundred miles to drive tonight."

Regan rose gratefully. He thanked the Turners effusively for all their information. Mr. Turner said he'd been glad to be of help. But he didn't mention anything about coming back.

OUT in the car Regan said, "All right, we drew a blank. But at least, this wasn't my idea in the first place. And what the hell has Moonbeam got in that sack?"

"Rags," Winklehoff said serenely, "and what I have in my pocket is a button box. But they are nothing compared to

what I have in my head, and don't say what's on the tip of your tongue, Regan, it isn't gentlemanly and besides, it's not true."

"I suppose," Regan said, "you've got tomorrow's headline."

"I do," Winklehoff said.

"And I suppose," Regan said coldly, "you have the name of the victim, his murderer, the party who sent the blue serge suit and stuff, and the name of the delivery boy."

"I do," Winklehoff said, "and all we need now is some nice fast work by Tom Ward, and we have that headline all sewed up."

"I don't suppose," Regan said with heavy sarcasm, "that you'd like to tell me, your boss, about it? Or are you saving it for Tom Ward? Or—" He stopped. He'd been about to add "Or maybe for the *Journal*" and then had remembered that he'd be looking for a job at the *Journal*, or elsewhere, before Winklehoff would.

"Not at all," Winklehoff said airily. "The murdered man was one Edward James Crosby, a certified public accountant from Reading, Pennsylvania. And let's stop at that lunchroom and call Tom Ward."

Regan drew in his breath,

and counted to ten by fives, and said, "Correction. We try to get Pekelis, and if we can't locate him, we send for Offenbach." He paused. "We send for Offenbach. Pekelis is a better photographer, but Offenbach drives a faster car." He paused again. "That is, if you're sure."

"I'm not only sure," Winklehoff said, "but I've got the evidence in my right-hand coat pocket." He shut up maddeningly, leaned back, and looked as though he didn't intend to say anything more.

He went right on being maddeningly silent until Offenbach had arrived and been told to stand by, and until Tom Ward had marched into the little lunchroom, sat down and announced that this had better be pretty good or else, to bring him out here at this hour of the night, with a couple of assistants waiting outside in the car.

"It is good," Winklehoff said, "thanks to something Regan told me this morning." He reached in his pocket and took out a small box. "Here. It's a button box. I think you'll find the murdered man's shirt and underwear buttons in it."

Tom Ward took the box, examined it, looked at Winklehoff and said stiffly, "Go on."

"Out in the car," Winklehoff said, "is a sack of burned rags. Old cleaning rags. The murdered man's shirt and underwear are probably among them. They're pretty well burned, but your police lab can do something with them." He smiled his best. "You smart guys can do anything."

Anyone else in the world besides Tom Ward would have smiled back at him. "Okay. Now what's this about what Regan told you?"

Winklehoff withdrew the smile and said, "That I was a conclusion jumper. He was right. We all were. Our mistake was that we were looking for a victim named Turner. Instead, our helpful but complex-minded informant was pointing out the name of the murderer."

Regan had nothing to say and he managed to say it inconspicuously.

Tom Ward said, "Well?" and he said it bleakly.

"Regan told me something else," Winklehoff went on. "The significance of apostrophes."

This time Regan did have something to say, but he kept it carefully to himself.

"It was T-U-R-N-E-R-S apostrophe," Winklehoff said, spelling it out. "Meaning, more

than one Turner. My first thought was, husband and wife. But it turned out this circus had been a more than one Turners' circus long before its current boss got married. So I nosed around. It turned out to be a pair of brothers, one running the circus, the other living off his share." He waved a hand in an airy gesture and said, "All this from one little apostrophe."

"All what?" Tom Ward said.

Winklehoff sighed. "There was a little hanky-panky with the dough, and the brother in Reading, Pennsylvania sent Edward James Crosby, C.P.A., to investigate. Mr. Crosby, in his blue serge suit—we might have guessed his occupation from that—joined the circus a week ago, went over all the books and everything else, finished his job, and left."

Regan did start to speak, this time. Winklehoff waved him down.

"We know," Winklehoff said grandiloquently, "that he left naked, cold and dead, in an empty freight car. A lovely phrase."

"Save it for your story tomorrow," Regan said.

"What story?" Tom Ward asked.

"The story," Winklehoff

said, "of how you smart cops quickly identified your murdered man as Edward James Crosby etcetera. Of how you discovered that Mrs. Turner shot him and disposed of his body and clothes, that Mr. Turner, scared of his wife but wanting the truth to be known contrived the fantastic idea of sending a series of items to the always truth-seeking *Gazette*, with the results which you now know and which the world will know tomorrow. Of course," he added, "the *Gazette* will take a little of the credit for this."

"I have no doubt," Tom Ward said. He scowled. "What's this with buttons and rags?" His face made it plain he hated to admit it, but this was beginning to make sense.

"Mrs. Turner had to dispose of the shirt and underwear. Where is a better place to hide rags than among other rags which are being burned? With Moonbeam's help I swiped a container of burned rags—the accumulation of the past few days, which ought to cover it. They're all yours."

Regan took out a cigar. He felt that he ought to say something, anything. "The button box?" he asked, as casually as he could.

"Buttons don't burn," Win-

klehoff said promptly. "And where is a better place to hide buttons than in a button box—and ultimately dispose of them, one by one, by sewing them on shirts and underwear of her husband's?"

Nobody seemed to have any answer to that.

"All this is very fine," Tom Ward said. "All this is fascinating, in fact. And I see you've brought your photographer along. What do you expect me to do, make a pinch on the strength of what you've been telling me?"

"The pinch will come," Winklehoff said blandly, "after you walk into the Turners' trailer, announce that you have the body, you have its name, address and occupation, you have the blue serge suit, you have a bunch of burned rags and a button box. Mrs. Turner will, I have no doubt, turn on her husband, say, quote, you rat, unquote, and come all unglued. These big, masterful women are always the first to fall apart."

"And Offenbach," Tom Ward said, "will be over my shoulder with his camera. Well, it's worth a try. But you guys ride in your own car."

Regan gave automatic instructions to Offenbach to

Moonbeam, but his heart wasn't in it. Something was wrong. Somewhere, Winklehoff had missed something and everybody, including the *Gazette* staff and himself, was going to be very, very sorry.

IN THE car Winklehoff said, "It was not just you tipped me off, Regan; it was coincidence."

"Maybe me and coincidence ought to go into partnership together," Regan said, thinking over the problems of starting a new career at his age.

"I know now it was pure coincidence," Winklehoff said. "But all these Turners—dry cleaning and whatever—Regan, it was the same pattern. big, masterful women running things. little timid guys taking orders. This poor little Turner, knowing his wife killed this guy, scared to death of her but wanting justice to be done, conceives the idea of calling this murder to public attention. So he thinks of the whole Turner business with the suit, the chili powder, the lilies and the match folder. Too bad for him the gun store was out of business. I went there too and drew a blank. A blank in a gun store. Purely a parenthetical remark. Regan. And whom does he em-

ploy to carry out his designs, Regan?"

"The word in this case is 'who.'" Regan said wearily. He almost added, "and it's Mister Regan."

"The little guy who pastes up the twenty-four sheets," Winklehoff said. "The billboard man. And Regan, you told me something else."

"I could tell you something else right now," Regan said, "but I won't."

"A phrase you used," Winklehoff said. "He wasn't noticed. He was the invisible man." He stopped suddenly and called "Hey Moonbeam, I think there's a short cut if you turn left—here—"

Brakes complained loudly as the circulation department car obeyed orders.

"And who is more invisible than the little guy who pastes up billboards?" Winklehoff said. "And who is more likely to go along with what he's told is a press agent stunt?"

Regan started to say "Nobody" bit it back, and said, as close to snappishly as he would ever be, "I didn't say invisible man. I said, he was so nondescript— Oh, never mind. I take it you've located this man?"

"Naturally," Winklehoff said. "I haven't missed a thing."

Oh, yes you have, Regan was saying in his heart, as he almost automatically gave Offenbach directions as they stopped in front of the trailer thirty seconds ahead of the police car.

As a matter of professional courtesy, he let Tom Ward go in first.

And Regan was right, but somehow he took no pleasure in it.

Nor did he take pleasure in the picture Offenbach took when Olga Turner responded to Tom Ward's statement, not as Winklehoff had predicted, but by crying out, "Oh, it did work! You did guess! You did find out!"

Not even in the pictures Offenbach took of little Mr. Turner backing into a corner and defying the police, but not for very long.

Life only began to be remotely bearable again on the ride back into town, with Offenbach gloating loudly in the front seat about the pictures he had gotten, and Moonbeam gloating silently about reaching the Turner Circus lot half a jump ahead of the police.

Because Winklehoff said, almost humbly, "All right, I con-

clusion-jumped again. Because I didn't figure a big masterful woman could be scared of a little timid guy."

Regan counted to ten once more this time by ones, and said, "Never mind, you did all right."

But back in the *Gazette* office, he knew he was going to pull another rug out from under Winklehoff. A small rug this time, but enough. For a long time now he'd been telling himself that someday Winklehoff was going to go too far.

In the quiet, half-dark and almost deserted city room he left Winklehoff to his typewriter and looked over the pictures. They were, he had to admit, beauts. And already he could visualize a front page that would be worthy of a place in any art museum.

He read the story take by take, and waited until Winklehoff was nearly done to drop his bomb. Then he strolled over to the typewriter and said, "You've left something out."

Winklehoff took his hands from the keyboard and looked around.

"The time of the murder," Regan said. He might be cutting the *Gazette's*, and his own, throat, but Winklehoff had it

coming to him.

"It's pretty definite, within a few hours, what time Crosby was shot," he went on. "And there simply wasn't time for the blue serge suit to be dry-cleaned and delivered to me after the murder. I checked with the drycleaners' association and made sure." He paused, breathlessly, happily, and a little guiltily.

"Oh," Winklehoff said, "that. I checked too. We all figured the suit was drycleaned after he was shot. It was the other way. It had just been drycleaned when he put it on, and then he was shot."

"The blood—" Regan began weakly.

"I checked with Doc Streckler at the Medical Examiners' Office about that," Winklehoff told him. "My hunch was right. The underwear and the shirt absorbed it all. I got to thinking about that yesterday and checked on it to make sure.

There was very little blood anyway. In fact, almost none. You see, Regan, the bullets penetrated the artery that—"

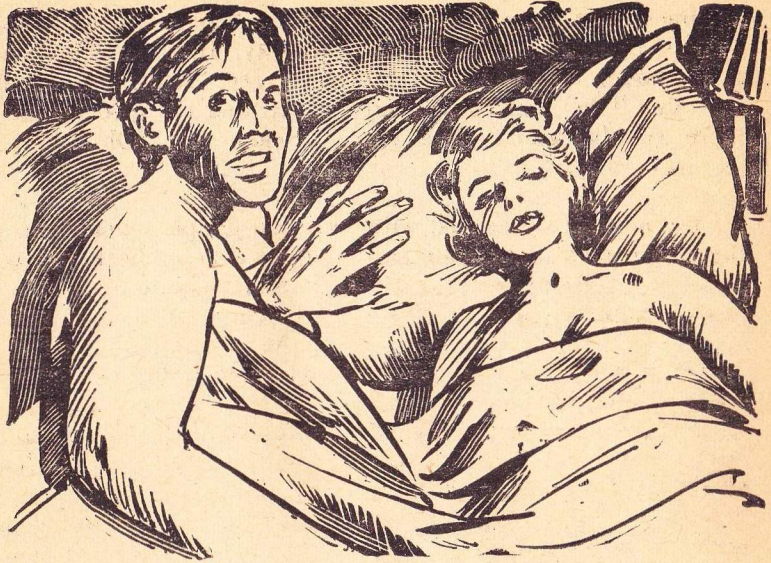
Regan said, "Oh."

Winklehoff smiled. "You keep telling me not to be a conclusion-jumper—you keep telling me also to check the facts." He went back to his typing.

Regan went away. It would be a beautiful story and everybody would be happy, except Mr. Turner, and he and Winklehoff would share the congratulations and the glory. And the day would go on, and a City Councilman would probably sue somebody for slander, and there would be another supermarket holdup, and Carmelita Porchak would start mailing postcards from Venezuela. And the chances were that tonight he might get home in time for dinner.

THE END

The sweeter the bait, the crueller the



TRAP

by CARL SHANER

A HORN blew faintly, blew again and silence flooded the room. It was already filled with darkness. Al stirred, opened his eyes, then started up in panic.

It was late. The heavy silence told him that. Much too

late. And that meant danger.

Damn it. If he hadn't had that last drink, and if Gloria hadn't been so insistent.

He shook his head to bring his mind back to working order and suddenly a new fear possessed him.

"Gloria?"

She didn't answer.

He called her name again, received no answer, reached out and touched her naked shoulder. Her skin was cold and again he felt a surge of panic.

A soft sigh and a languorous stirring relieved him. No, she wasn't dead. But why had he thought so in the first place? Why this insane fantasy?

"Al?"

"Yes."

"Are you still here?"

"I am, but I shouldn't be."

A soft giggle sounded in the dark, and her hand reached out for him.

"Why are you sitting up, Al?"

"I'm getting ready to leave. It's late."

"We fell asleep?"

"Yes."

"I feel all rested, but I'm chilled. Keep me warm."

"Put the sheet over you. I'm getting dressed. Got to go."

"No."

Her hand gripped his wrist and held it. Her strength surprised him. More, her foolishness angered him.

"Damn it, let go. I've got to get out of here."

"But what for, lover?"

"Because your husband'll be coming, you little fool. I don't want my brains blown out."

He pulled at her fingers, unloosed them, stood up and looked about in the dark for his clothes. He couldn't see them, couldn't remember where he'd put them, either, and he could not switch on the light with the blinds open. He started for the windows to close the blinds, stumbled, and Gloria laughed.

Her laughter angered him and he turned back to the bed, wanting to slap her face.

"What's so damned funny?" he asked her.

"If I may ask," she answered, "what's your hurry? We have all night."

"What?"

"Bob won't be home."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, lover. He called early this evening. His night manager didn't show in, so he's staying till morning. Isn't that marvelous?"

"Why didn't you tell me that earlier?" Al said, his anger dying down.

"I forgot."

"You didn't forget."

"No, I meant to surprise you. Then we got to drinking and it slipped my mind. Those

drinks were awfully strong to-night."

"Well, you made them."

"I know." Gloria laughed. "But the stronger they are, the nicer it is. Now come back to bed and keep me warm."

LATER, after he had found himself again and the cool breath of the night made him realize where he was, Al reached toward the night-table, found his cigarettes, lit one and asked the time as he held his lighter.

"Only four o'clock," Gloria answered, raising her arm and looking at her wristwatch.

"I better go."

"But there's time yet."

"It's best to go while it's still dark."

"Then you're leaving me all to myself?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Won't you have one more drink before you go?"

"No," he answered, but he needed one now, needed a lift to stay behind the wheel of the car during the long drive back to the city.

With that thought in mind he raised himself, swung his legs out of bed and stood up. The glasses they'd brought with them were on the night-table. He picked them up, left

the room and went down to the kitchen.

Five minutes later he was back in the bedroom. He handed Gloria her glass, lifted his own to his lips and emptied its contents in a swallow.

Gloria was still lying in bed. He came to it and she handed him her empty glass.

"So you're leaving me all alone," she said.

"It's safer this way, and there'll be other Saturday nights."

"All right, Al. You know best."

She waited for him to kiss her, but he didn't stoop down as she expected.

"No good night kiss?" she asked.

"Better get up and straighten things."

"I will, as soon as you leave."

"No, you're getting up now. I don't trust you. You're liable to go off to sleep."

"I promise I won't."

"All right."

He stooped and her arms came up, her mouth caught his and immediately he knew what she was up to. She did not want him to leave. That was always the case, but the arms that clung to him he pulled away. Firmly he pushed her back and

said, "It's all over, so don't be funny."

She laughed, lay back with her hands beneath her head, and he started for the door.

"Good night, lover," she called after him.

He paused at the door and said, "Don't forget to get up and fix things."

"Don't worry."

"All right."

He stepped through the doorway and went down the stairs. Two minutes later he drove away from the front of the house. In another two minutes he turned into the empty highway.

He settled back for the long drive now, his mind empty. Then it returned, the same idea that had flashed through his mind while he was mixing the drinks in Gloria's kitchen.

He pushed it away, but to no avail. His mind grasped it again.

Make her pay, he thought. Make them both pay. Bob won't know the difference.

It didn't matter that they were the closest of friends. Bob's success bothered him, always had. That's what had made going to bed with Gloria so easy the first time. Besides, it proved a point. Bob wasn't as successful as he thought.

Al grinned to himself. Gloria came to his mind then and he frowned. In the beginning it had been all right with her, just as tonight it had been. But she wanted too much.

That was the trouble. And yet he always came when she called him.

That was one thing, and dangerous enough. But she insisted on drinking whenever they made love. Like tonight. And that made it doubly dangerous.

Hadn't they fallen asleep because of all the liquor they'd drunk? Suppose Bob had popped in on them? Suppose the night manager...

Suddenly and without warning a car shot out of a side road. Al swung the wheel and almost went out of control. The other car roared into the highway, its rubber screeching, body swaying dangerously, but it righted itself and sped on.

Al swore at the speeding car. Then he noticed the speedometer. He was driving much too fast.

Better keep my mind on what I'm doing, he told himself, and he did not think about Gloria and Bob the rest of the way home.

SATURDAY came. He lay in bed, smoked a cigarette and looked at the clock. It was seven a.m. Too early.

He crushed the cigarette, rolled over to face the wall and closed his eyes. But he couldn't sleep now.

That wasn't unusual. After all, this was Saturday and Gloria would be calling. For months now it had gone on. She'd call and let him know so that he wouldn't make the trip for nothing. That was always a possibility because sometimes Bob decided to take a Saturday off, though it was a rare enough event.

Maybe he'd take off today. For a moment Al almost wished he would. But even if he did, Gloria would call and let him know. One way or another, she always let him know.

And now he felt himself waiting tensely, like all the other Saturdays. But it was too early. Much too early.

A truck back-fired outside in the street and he jumped. A minute later he got up from bed. Sleep was out of the question now.

He dressed, walked down to the corner restaurant, had a cup of coffee and came back to his room with the morning paper.

An hour later the phone rang and he leaped for it. It was still early. Perhaps someone else was calling.

It was Gloria, though he hardly recognized her voice and could barely understand her. This wasn't like other Saturdays at all.

"All right, all right," he said. "Get a grip on yourself. What happened?"

"Someone found out."

"Found out what?"

"A letter came in the morning mail. Someone wants money to keep quiet about us. Al, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Don't say that. You've got to help me before something happens."

"All right, but nothing's happened yet, so try to be calm."

"But something will," Gloria sobbed. "This is terrible. We shouldn't ever have done what we did."

"It's too late to cry about that."

"What'll we do, Al?"

"I don't know yet. I can't think straight."

"Can you come out? We'll talk it over. You've got to help me."

"I'll be out."

"Hurry. Oh, hurry."

PURSUIT

"I'll start out right away. The car's downstairs."

AN HOUR later Gloria opened the door as Al came up on the porch. He stepped inside quickly and she grabbed and clung to him.

That was to be expected and he allowed her time to compose herself, then lifted her face and brushed her lips with his own.

"Let's go inside," he suggested.

Gloria moved away from him, walked into the living room and swung around to face him. A moment ago she'd seemed upset, but a change had been wrought. She was no longer nervous.

"I'm glad you came out," she said calmly.

"Didn't you expect me?"

"Well, you didn't have to come. Another man might have gotten scared off."

"I don't scare that easily. You ought to know that."

"I know it now."

"Good. But let's get down to business. Where's the black-mail letter?"

She picked it up from the coffee table, handed it to him and watched his face as he read it. Finally he put it down

and whistled.

"What do you think, Al?" she asked.

"A thousand. That's a lot of money to pay out."

"Isn't it worth it? To both of us?"

"Perhaps. But how do you know you won't be asked for more?"

"I don't know. That's why I wanted to see you and ask your advice."

Al looked across the room, frowned and finally said, "Have you that much money?"

"You know I have."

"In your own name?"

"Yes."

"Then..."

"What?"

"It's your loss, but I think it's worth taking the chance. What else can you do? You can't go to the police. Or would you?"

"Heavens, no. How could I?"

"Then there's no way out. You'll have to pay and hope there's no demand for more."

Gloria didn't answer. She sat in silence as if stunned. This was to be expected, but a moment later she smiled and asked for a cigarette.

Al lit one for her and said, "You're taking it better than I thought you would."

"Oh, but I'm not."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not taking your advice."

"You're not?" Al felt his stomach constrict. "But what else is there to do? If you go to the police, the cat'll be out of the bag. Next, it'll be all over the papers."

Gloria shook her head, laughed and Al became angry.

"It's not a laughing matter," he said, raising his voice.

"Oh, you don't have to be frightened. I'm not going to do what you think."

"Well, just what are you going to do?"

Gloria smiled at him and wrinkled her nose. "While you were on your way out here, I sat down and began to think. The whole thing came to me in a flash. It's a much better idea than yours. In other words, I don't intend to pay off the blackmailer."

"You mean you'll just let it ride and see what happens? My God, you can't do that."

"Don't be alarmed. It's not as simple as that. But I intend to keep my money and fool the blackmailer."

"How?"

Gloria stared straight at him, her eyes hard and glassy.

"By getting rid of Bob," she said.

"How would you do that?"

"There's only one way. And with Bob out of the way, the blackmailer couldn't bother us. We'll be free. It'll be just you and me then."

Al shook his head, shocked and unprepared for this. "You're insane," he said. "You don't mean a word of it."

"Oh, but I do. It's the only way out of the mess."

Gloria smiled and he saw a side of her that he'd never known before. She was no longer kittenish and soft and not too bright.

"But, damn it, you can't go through with it," he said, frightened by the possibilities that might arise.

"Scared?" she said.

"No."

"You are."

"All right, I am. Who wouldn't be?"

"That's beside the point. The question is, are you willing?"

"For what?"

"To go through with it?"

"You mean—kill Bob?"

"What else could I mean? We'll have everything then, my money, ourselves. We can sell the business and go off anywhere we please. You wouldn't

have to work. Think of what we can do."

He was still frightened, but the possibilities, the whole idea opened up a vista of money and leisure which till now had never been more than a nebulous dream.

But how could they get rid of Bob? And suppose something went wrong? He shuddered inwardly at the thought.

Gloria leaned forward and nestled against him. "Don't be frightened," she said. "It's something that has to be done, darling."

Her arms slid round him and she lifted her face, opened her lips, pressed against him now. "It'll always be like this if we go through with it. Don't you see?"

He did see. She didn't have to tell him. Here were the promises, the dream and delights within reach.

"But..." he began, and she moved against him again, pressed her mouth on his and all fears and doubts vanished. Finally he pushed her away and caught his breath.

She looked at him, serious now, breathing hard. "Well?"

He was ready. There was no other way, yet a last shred of caution remained. "I'll have to think it over," he said.

"But you can't. There isn't time."

That was true. There wasn't time. In a sense, it no longer existed for him. This was the moment; in the next, everything would be brought together and solved.

He nodded his head and she smiled, kissed him quickly. "That's a good boy," she said.

Doubt shadowed his mind again. After all, this was a serious thing they'd decided upon and he wondered why she took it so easily, how she could smile at a time like this.

Her soft body moved against his. "Why so thoughtful?" she asked.

"It's nothing."

"Something's bothering you."

"Nothing special. I was wondering about you. After all, this was your idea."

"You're still against it?"

"No, but Bob's your husband. Are you sure you want to go through with it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because of you."

Al shrugged and smiled to himself. He'd never thought he'd meant that much to her, but it was obvious how much she wanted him. As for him-

self, the money was more important.

Gloria's answer clinched it. She was watching him like a sly little kitten. Of course, she knew she had won. There was nothing he could say, and she knew that too. He had no argument. It was all set but the details. But he didn't want to say anything more about it at the moment.

Gloria didn't speak about it, either. She wormed against him, found his mouth and bit his lips. He had to push her away, and she laughed.

"That's just the beginning," she said. "We won't have to wait for Saturday any more."

"We won't last, either."

"You'd better, Al."

"I guess I'll have to."

"Want a drink?"

"Now?"

"Why not? We've got all day."

"All right, but we'll have to be careful. We want to know what we're doing."

"How could we forget?"

Yes, how could we, he thought. That was why he needed a drink, and why Gloria had suggested it. To nerve themselves for the details.

Gloria pushed herself up from him, went to the liquor cabinet and came back with a

bottle and glasses.

She set the glasses down, poured, picked them up and handed one to Al.

"Shall we make a toast?" she said.

"Better not."

"All right."

They emptied their glasses and Gloria filled them immediately. Without a word they emptied them again.

"Another?"

"I think I'll have another—but let's call it the last."

"All right. The last, lover."

Once more they emptied their glasses, set them down and looked at each other.

"Now for the difficult part," said Al. "How do we go about it? Have you any ideas?"

Gloria nodded. "First of all, it's got to be made to look right. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. But how?"

"By making it seem like a robbery."

"Here?"

"Naturally here."

"And I'm the one to do it?"

"It couldn't be me. In fact, I won't be here. I'll stay at my sister's and give you the key. Bob's a heavy sleeper. You can go upstairs—and that's it."

"What do I do it with?"

"I've a gun. Would you know how to use it?"

"Yes," he said, and his throat felt constricted. The liquor was affecting him now and sweat oozed from every pore in his body.

This is insane, he thought, but it was too late. He couldn't withdraw, couldn't do anything about it.

But the horror was there inside him and he reached for the bottle.

Gloria stopped his hand. "Didn't you have enough?" she said calmly.

"No."

"We'll have to be careful."

"I know."

He reached for the bottle again and stopped himself. "One item we forgot. When does it take place?"

"Tonight."

"God."

"We can't wait. It has to be tonight, Al."

"All right."

"It's going to be a long wait."

"I know. We've got all day." Gloria lit a cigarette, looked at him and smiled.

He grabbed the bottle and didn't bother to pour the whiskey into the glass but put it to his lips and drank.

"Not too much," Gloria warned.

He put the bottle back on the coffee table, wiped his mouth and saw her smiling at him, the cigarette still in her mouth. Perhaps it was the drinks he'd had, or a distortion caused by the smoke drifting before her face, but her face seemed ugly now, her smile as cruel as a jungle cat's waiting to spring on its victim.

A feeling of horror rose within him and he wanted to cry out, but his lips were numb. His limbs wouldn't obey and he could not rise. Then she spoke, but he couldn't hear, yet the words—"We've got all day"—echoed in his brain.

What did she mean? He wanted to ask, and then he knew. For the cigarette was gone from her lips. She'd stubbed it out, and now she was leaning toward him, mouth open, lips wet.

He wanted to push her away, raised his hands and touched her shoulders. On the instant of contact the wild surge of hostility melted and, as she glued her lips against his, he responded as he always did. When he released her they both were breathless.

Gloria waited, then said, "Let's go upstairs."

LATER, HE came down alone and hurried out of the house. It was mid-afternoon. Gloria had wanted him to stay a while longer. But there was too much danger in that. He got into his car and drove back to the city.

The episode with Gloria had been too wearing, so he hardly thought of what he had to do that night. As soon as he entered his room he flung himself on the bed and within minutes fell asleep.

He awoke suddenly in the dark, frightened by a dream so real that he reached out and felt for Gloria.

She wasn't there, of course, but he was not yet convinced. His hand went to his lips where hers had been. She'd tried to smother him in the dream, refusing to take her lips from his.

He was sweating and the horror of it still clung to him. But it hadn't been real. As he adjusted his mind to that, he remembered what he had to do.

But now that seemed unreal. It was some kind of nightmare. He tried to tell himself that and failed.

Fear penetrated his whole being and he began to shake, told himself he couldn't go

through with it. The idea was completely insane.

After all, Bob was his friend, had trusted him. There wasn't a better guy in the world.

As for Gloria, she was a slut. Worse than that. And he'd allowed her to talk him into this deal at no risk to herself.

Besides, she might try the same kind of thing on him, sometime in the future.

The hell with her, he thought. I won't go through with it.

He stood up and the phone rang. The sound was almost shattering and made him jump. He picked up the phone reluctantly.

"Hello, lover."

He was shocked to hear Gloria's voice, then excited. Perhaps she had changed her mind. He asked her why she'd called.

"Just to make sure you were awake."

"What makes you think I wouldn't be?"

"You know why," she laughed. "I hope your hand is steady tonight."

Her words chilled him and he didn't answer.

"What's wrong, Al?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Not going to back out, are

you?"

"No."

"You sound doubtful. You know, that's why I called. After all, it's for me. The way it was today," she purred, "that's the way it'll always be after this is over."

Even over the wire, the tone of her voice reached him in such a way that it struck a response and evoked disquieting images. She always succeeded at that and he felt his body tighten.

Desire was one thing, the money another. The latter was what he really wanted. And if he didn't go through with it... Gloria's voice checked his thoughts.

"You haven't answered me," she said.

"All right, I'm ready."

"Good. I'll hang up. Good luck, darling."

The line went dead and he put down the phone. The room was still in darkness. He switched on the light, looked at his watch and was startled when he saw the time. It was ten o'clock, much later than he'd thought.

An hour's drive would bring him to Gloria's house. But eleven was much too early to try anything.

He had to kill an hour or so

before starting out. He began to dress, slowly at first, then quickly as his mind turned to what was so near at hand.

Once dressed, he found it impossible to remain in his room. Panic assailed him and he hurried out to the street and began to walk with no destination in mind.

Some minutes later he stepped into a restaurant. The place was empty. He ordered a cup of coffee, took a sip and walked out.

His nerves were frayed. He walked around and the streets were empty, unfamiliar now.

The hour passed slowly and at last he returned to the house, got in his car, started it and drove off for Gloria's.

Another hour and he arrived there, but he didn't stop at the house. Instead, he left the car near the railway station and walked to the house.

By the time he reached it, it was almost twelve-thirty, quiet, the street dark and deserted. He didn't have to worry about any one seeing him. Turning in at the walk, he went up on the porch. It was shadowed there and he hesitated for some moments.

Fear held him, but he couldn't go back. It was too late, and too much was at

stake.

He put the key in the lock, opened the door and stepped inside. A deadly silence filled the house. His fear returned. Sweat dripped under his arms and his heart started to pound against his ribs.

This is insane, I can't go through with it, he told himself.

But these were only thoughts. He'd come too far, planned too much. It had to be done and done fast.

He could see the stairs now. Bob was in bed on the second floor. All he had to do was mount the stairs and enter the room.

He started toward the stairway, moved upward silently and reached the bedroom. The door was open, the room completely dark. He listened, heard nothing, took a deep breath, stepped inside and drew the gun Gloria had given him.

Again he stopped, this time to get his bearings and to listen. But he heard nothing, and slowly the bed became visible.

He placed it, took another step and suddenly the room was flooded with light.

Al swung around and saw the door moving. It shut with a bang and Bob faced him. He was holding a gun.

"Greetings," he said.

AL WAS too shocked to speak.

"An unusual hour to pay a call, don't you think?" Bob went on. "Perhaps you'd like to explain."

One thing he couldn't do was explain. Words couldn't help now. Al's eyes went to the door, but he couldn't run for it.

"Throw your gun on the bed," Bob ordered. "No, better not. I couldn't trust you."

Bob stepped forward, relieved him of the gun and stepped back again.

"Got anything to say for yourself?" he asked.

Too frightened to talk, Al shook his head.

"Well, that's something. You're not trying to lie your way out of it."

"Out of what?"

"You came to kill me, didn't you?"

"All right, that's true. But I'm glad it didn't happen."

"If I believe that, you'll tell me another."

"It's true, Bob. Honest to..."

"Cut it. I'm not interested in your present feelings. You walked into a trap."

"What does that mean?"

"Gloria," Bob said, smiling.

"She gave me away?"

"Not exactly. You see, I know her better than you do. She was frightened when she got that blackmail letter and she showed it to me. That's the way she always is when she gets into trouble."

"But..."

"I'll explain the rest. You see, she told me how it was between the two of you. She also added that she was sure no one had known about the affair. That was the clue, so I put two and two together and came up with you as the black-mailer."

"But how?"

"Simple. If you'd go to bed with my wife, I figured you'd certainly not refrain from a little blackmail. But I had to prove that. So I had Gloria play a part, set up the idea of murdering me. When you went for it, even she realized what you were really after. And here you are."

"Then I suppose you're going to turn me over to the police."

"No."

"No?"

"That'd be too simple. If I turned you over to them, they wouldn't do much. But if I shoot you—as a prowler..."

"Bob!"

"Shut up and walk downstairs."

"Why?"

"Never mind why. Do as I say."

Al hesitated. A poke in the ribs from the hard nose of the gun made him move. Both of them went out of the room. At the head of the stairs Bob flicked a switch and a light went on below.

"All right, start moving," he said.

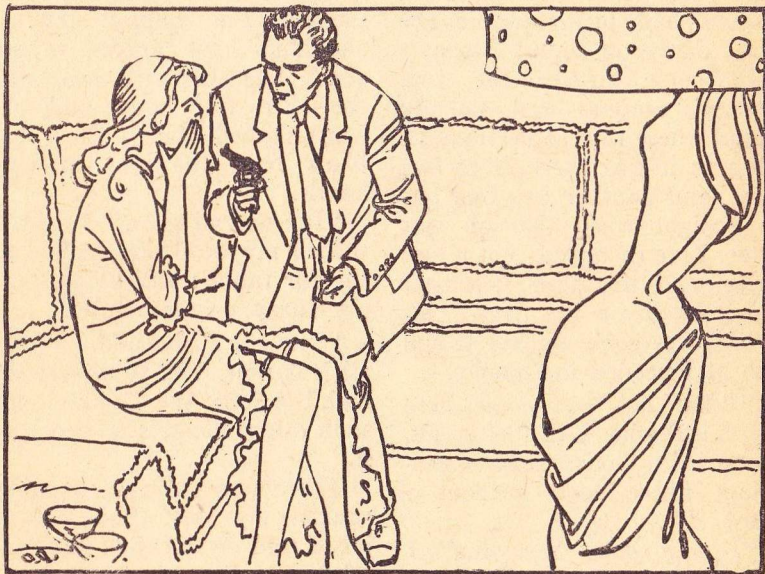
Al took a step down, then another. Halfway to the floor below, he saw the entrance door and panic took him. Unable to stop himself, he started to run down the stairs.

This was the moment Bob had been waiting for. Calmly he raised the gun and fired.

THE END

There was only one way he could be free of the haunting torture of,

LIANA



by WILLIAM LOGAN

I NOTICED that she'd kept her liquor out of a glass I the fur rabbit. It was going to make things a little harder, but not much, not a hell of a lot. After all, the rabbit had been five years ago and a lot can happen in five years. I sat there in her apartment drink-

hadn't bought for her, and I felt the gun in my shoulder sling, and I thought about how five years can change things. She didn't pay any attention to me; she didn't bother herself about the pictures flipping

through my mind like dealt cards; she simply was there, sitting across from me, sipping at her drink: a woman, a picture, an object, an ex-wife.

She was dangerous. I didn't know how and I didn't care. Deeny had just told me she was dangerous, and Deeny's talk came from the top. Deeny's money: well, nobody cared where that came from, as long as it was there. Two-five now, and another two-five later tonight when the job was done. Five thousand; not a bad price, and this time it wasn't going to go on the nags. This time I was going to save it and use it. I needed the money.

"What did you come here for, Vic?" she said. "After all, there must have been something. Three years without a word..."

"I wanted to see you," I said. "Don't rush it. We'll get to the business of the meeting. Let's just talk for a while."

Why? I tell you frankly I don't know now and I didn't know then. It just seemed like the way to play things. Taking care of her just like that—out of hand—didn't feel right.

"I'm...married again, you know," she said.

"I know," I said. "I read about it." I took another swal-

low from the glass he must have bought, so she would take another sip from hers, so we could change the subject.

"It's all gone, Vic," she said after a while. "I felt pretty... lousy for a while. But that's all passed. I'm happy now. I shouldn't have agreed to see you." She was still beautiful, the slim tall body and the heart-shaped face, the long black hair, the long, moving hands.

"It's not all gone," I said. I turned my head and looked at the fur rabbit: ridiculous, purple, fuzzy, on the mantel.

"Souvenir," she said. "That's all it is now, Vic. Whatever we had, it's done. We shouldn't see each other. There's no sense in it."

There was the gun, banging against my side. This was a job, I told myself, just like any other job. She was dangerous. Five thousand dollars. Deeny. Orders from the top...

"Liana," I said. "I was wrong. I walked out on you; I don't know, things built up. I had to get away, somehow. But I can't go on this way, living without you."

"I told you, Vic," she said. "I'm married."

"The hell with him. Get a divorce." I heard my own

voice but I didn't recognize it. The terrible thing was, I was still in love with her. I couldn't have known about that, before I saw her. It was just a job...

And the job still had to be done...

A hired killer can't leave a job unfinished. The word gets around. And that, brother, that's curtains. What else could I do, if the jobs stopped coming? Three to five thousand a time. I couldn't afford to lose the jobs.

But this was different...

I got up, six feet five, feeling every muscle in all that length shaking with tension. I moved toward her, I forgot the gun.

"Vic," she said. "Please." She didn't move. The rabbit told me to keep going, the rabbit told me everything wasn't gone. I took her arms and pulled her up and bent my face down.

The kiss was no good at all. She twisted out of the way, out of my arms. "I said I'm married, Vic. I'm happy. Don't spoil it."

"Liana, we could be together...like old times...go away somewhere, start all over again... Liana, you don't love this guy, you can't, you love me. Liana, tell me you love me, just me..."

I could see her shaking, her back turned to me. She didn't face me. "I'm married, Vic. Everything's over." She was beginning to cry, inside where the tears wouldn't show for a long time yet. I could tell.

"Over? Liana, baby, we're only beginning. Mexico, Europe... I've got money. We can cut out and live like Rockefeller." I could get the money somehow, I told myself. "Just say the word. Right now, tonight..."

Stupid, I told myself. The job. The job that has to be done. The fur rabbit winked at me, sitting on the mantel, in the corner of my eye. The fur rabbit I'd given her, that she'd kept. Two years of marriage and three years of nothing at all; wrapped up in that ugly damn fuzzy purple fur. Liana didn't turn around.

"I'm...it's..." and she turned and came to me and held on, tight. "Oh. Vic! Oh, God, where did we go wrong? What happened? I love you so much..."

I put my arms around her, feeling the warm body flow against mine, feeling her hands tighten on my back, my neck...

"I love you, baby," I said. She didn't hear the end of

it; she moved away and looked at me. A completely new look; I'd never seen it before. "A gun, Vic," she said. "A gun."

"Don't mind it," I said. "I'll get rid of it." But fear was back; Deeny and the others were back in the room with me, whispering: *The job*.

"A gun," she said. She was still looking at me.

"I'll give it up. Everything. We'll be happy. Quiet. Peaceful. Just what you want. Liana..."

She turned away, and I waited through a long silence.

"I love you," I said. "You love me..."

"It won't work. You can't get away..."

"I'll get away, doll. Baby. You wait and see."

"No, Vic."

"Please, Liana. Please, baby."

"No," she said.

I took out the gun and held it, pointing down. "See?" I said. "I'll get rid of it right now. Out the window. Anywhere you say, darling. Liana, baby..."

"No, Vic." She was shaking again. "It isn't any good at all. Please, just get out."

I held the gun. "Please," I said, hearing myself, almost on my knees. God, on my knees to

her... begging like some damn animal, like a dog for scraps; and the gun was terribly cold in my hand.

Liana: it's a funny name. There's a vine called liana, too, a clinging, choking vine. "Anything you want, darling," I heard myself say. A vine that never let go...

She never turned around when I fired; silencer, of course, and that was the end of that. I don't think she knew what hit her. A little hole in the back of her head. I didn't go around to look at the front. There must have been a bigger hole but I didn't go around to look.

And I didn't feel a thing; isn't that funny? Only outside, afterward, going back with the job done, heading for a phone, I could feel the creeping, the clinging liana all over me.

I didn't know what it was then. She was dead and I was free; the vine wouldn't hold me any longer.

But it stays, it stays and it keeps getting tighter; darkness is bad and somewhere death is coming for me; the vine of murder won't let go, and there's no way out now that she's gone and I'm alone.

So damned alone.

THE END

He had the fortune and the girl—but, unfortunately, he also had the

WHISKEY



A NOVELETTE

by BAILEY MORGAN

PEDRO Cargado flung his shovel into the burning sunlight and watched as it leaped glittering and ringing against the sandy, rock-strewn ground. He let go an enormous sigh and leaned against one of the black support beams that helped shore up the six-foot mouth of

the old mine. Pedro Cargado's mine, now. He found his red bandanna and wiped streaming sweat from his round brown face and neck. He took off his broken-brimmed hat and smeared the cloth through thick black hair.

By all the gods, it was a hot

afternoon. Very hot. It was a time for long whiskey deep in clinking ice. Pedro moved his head sadly from side to side as he tasted the salty dust in his throat—dust he had carried up from the deep black belly of the mine. He stuffed the bandanna into a hip pocket of his old levis. There was no ice out here—plenty whiskey that he'd hauled from Alvarez by mule, but no ice.

He could buy all the whiskey nine hundred men could ever drink in a lifetime.

For a while he stood watching the cabin over on the edge of the arroyo among stark sparse scrub, mesquite and boulders and rocks and cacti. Shaggy-sided and dust-blown, that old cabin had been built long ago by the man who had first found the warm yellow veins in the mine. *A la buena de Dios*—he, Pedro, had not planned it, but he had brought something else back from Alvarez along with the mules and the whiskey, and there she was watching the sky again.

She watched the sky a great deal, this *gato*. A true wild one from the mountains. His wife now. Guinda was her name, and that was long laughter.

Aie-e-e, but she was a beauty, too. One time maybe

she would become fat like her mama, but for now—for now she was slimly lush in her white cotton dress that hid nothing, and with the long black hair gleaming on golden shoulders, framing a face of wanton, red-lipped, button-eyed wickedness. He liked them wicked and hot, so when he touched them they spat and hissed.

Pedro Cargado wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, turned aside and moved to a boulder lying against a pile of rock and dirt beside the mine's mouth. He shoved the boulder away with his booted right foot, leaned down and grasped the brown bottle of whiskey. He had finished one in the mine, while working, and life was good.

He held the bottle up into the sun, admiring the amber flashings. The whiskey of no name. But good. He dragged the cork and drank deeply. Others could have their *vino*; for Pedro Cargado it would always be the deep fierce burning of the whiskey.

He drank again, letting a few drops run down his chin for the sake of knowing he had plenty, then hunkered down, resting the bottle on the ground between his legs.

"Loco!"

He glanced up. Guinda was coming toward him, half running, the white cotton pulling against her legs, her body dancing in the sun.

"Loco, you!"

He sat down on the ground and drank, nestled the bottle in the crook of his arm, put his hat back on so it helped shade his eyes, and watched her.

"*Cochino!*" she said, standing above him. "Pig! You are drunk—all the time drunk, stupid, pig—where were you in the morning?"

"Digging, little one," Pedro Cargado said with a broad smile. "Have some whiskey?"

She showed him her teeth, and he admired them. They were beautiful white teeth and he loved them as he loved all of his wife, each word, each movement of her lovely body, each ember in her eye. She stood above him, hands jammed into her firm hips, and tossed her hair.

"I drink to you," he said. He took a long good burning drink from the bottle, lay back with his head against a rock, watching her.

She came close to him, knelt suddenly, reached out and touched his brown hand lightly with her fingers.

"Pedro?"

He raised his eyebrows, grinning at her, then held out the bottle and shook it in her face. She ignored it. It would be she wanted to know where he kept the gold he dug. He knew her well.

"Pedro, must you stay down there all the time?"

"It is for us—for you, Guinda."

"I'm all alone up here. It's hot—I keep thinking—"

"Of the cool *cantina*? The dance halls? The young men in the towns,"

"Don't talk like that. It's not so. Would I have come out here to this—this oven of hell if I didn't love you?"

Pedro Cargado drank from the bottle and shrugged.

"You might," he said.

She stood up, turned her back on him. He liked to look at her that way, too.

"Come," she said. "I've fixed your dinner. You've got to eat or you won't be able to walk."

"I'm always able to walk. There is not enough whiskey to prevent me from walking—not in the world. Why do you watch the sky, Guinda?"

"Come to dinner," she said, turning to him again. "Come in out of the sun."

He stood slowly, put the bot-

tle into his hip pocket and followed her across the rocks and sand to the cabin. There was something different about her and he did not know what it was. He had never seen quite this light in her eye, quite this manner of acting. Still—perhaps it was nothing.

He watched the fine movements of her young body, then suddenly ran up behind her, caught her, turned her around and kissed her. She crouched, scratching at him, cursing him. "Pig—pig!"

He held her and kissed her hard until she was pliable motion in her arms. He started to release her. She whipped away from him and ran toward the cabin, holding her skirts high, dust spouting around her bare feet.

"Hi-yi!" Pedro called. He ran after her.

He caught her in the kitchen, held her against the wall. He laughed at her and ruffled her hair with one hand, and whiskey splashed from the bottle in his pocket. She cursed him, trying to fight free. He held her to the wall, tickling her until she screamed with laughter and tears, still cursing him.

He held her close and kissed her again, holding her so she

could not move. "I love you, little hellfire," he said. "You are my wife and I love you. Soon—in a while—we will return to the town and buy a big home. You'll have everything you desire. For now, be content."

She sighed and moved her hands across his shoulders.

"You have dug much gold today, Pedro?"

He shook his finger in her face, winking at her.

She grabbed the finger and bit it. He threw her on the floor.

2.

HE ROLLED over on the bunk and rubbed his belly, automatically reaching for the bottle on the floor. He had slept well since eating dinner, and now he must return to the mine with the shovel, and dig.

"Pedro?"

"What?"

"I'm taking the good mule. I will ride over and see the Garcias."

"It's a long ride."

She moved up beside the bunk, leaned down and kissed him. "You filthy drunkard," she whispered. "You'll be working, so do you care?"

"No," he said. "Go. But be back by sunset."

She straightened up. "You have been drunk ever since I met you," she said. "You say we have much gold. I have never seen it. Where is it, Pig?"

"Someday I'll show it to you," he said. "Go saddle the mule and visit Maria Garcia."

After she left, he still lay there in the bunk, holding the bottle of whiskey on his chest. This was really the finest part of the day, early afternoon, because the whiskey was taking hold in his head. It took a great deal, but it was well worth it. He thought about the gold, cached in the mine, in the small passageway.

Sometime he *would* show it to her. She would go wild. There was the lot of seven years' digging in the passageway, save for the small amounts he paid for supplies and whiskey.

Ah, it was all the good life. Guinda and everything. He had been lucky to find Guinda. She could be tamed, and after that—he was growing older, wasn't he? Where would they live?

He drank, then sat up on the bunk. He had been asleep for quite a while, longer than usual. Well, he had dug harder than usual this morning.

Think of all the gold beneath the earth. Think of all the gold

in his mine, alone. What he could get out with another's help! But he'd been over that time and time again in his mind. He must work it all alone, take enough to pleasantly keep him the rest of his life and forget what remained.

What did he want? Guinda. Whiskey. What else?

Nothing. Eat. Woman. Drink. What else was there? Nothing.

He stood up, reeling slightly, and drank again. The bottle was almost gone. He walked through the squat kitchen, set the bottle on the rough-hewn pine table, stepped outside into white sunlight. It struck him across the face like a burning board. He came around the rear of the cabin to the whiskey cave, flung open the doors and stared in at the darkness until his eyes became accustomed to the gloom. He stood there and stared at the racked rows of whiskey bottles, gleaming dustily and cool. He rubbed them delicately with his palms. This was good. The good thing for Pedro Cargado. He selected one of the bottles with care, though they were all the same, without label, took it outside, closed the door.

Guinda wanted the flashing cars and the lights and the mu-

sic of the towns. The bright meaningless laughter. She *should* want this—aye, it was normal and to be easily understood. He'd had those things, and wanted them no longer. They were the empty things, but each must find this out for himself.

He had no friends. But it would be wrong to keep Guinda from at least visiting the Garcias. They were good people.

Aye, sometimes he felt sorry for her. He uncapped the bottle and tasted of the whiskey. He returned to the cabin for a cork, drank again, and corked the fresh bottle. He was drunk and the world was a hell of a good place to be in.

Guinda almost every day wrote her family, her mama. He had read many of the letters, and they were filled with young yearnings. Aye, she poured out her heart to her fat mama every day. For a long time Guinda had insisted he read the letters to see that they sounded all right, but he'd finally gotten out of that chore. It had been a bother. Now, each day, the mail car came by and picked up her letter.

He must get back to the mine soon. There was that bad place, where a new beam must

be added as support, or the far left tunnel would collapse. No good. There were two bad spots in the mine, for a fact. He did not relish the work of shoring up weak spots; it was tedious, and dirt got in his eyes.

He leaned against the kitchen table, unbuttoned the front of his faded red flannel shirt, scratched his chest. Too, it was wrong to feel sorry for Guinda without doing something about it. But he did not want to do anything about it yet. And it was wrong not to feel sorry for her.

He drank lightly, smacked his lips at the cool burning. *Go to the mine and dig*, said the little voice tht sometimes spoke from nowhere.

Pedro C a r g a d o laughed. "She's right. Loco. Yes," he said. "All right."

Maybe she would feel better if he did something for her now. What could it be?

THE SOUND of a car's revving engine sputtering in the distance brought him outside into the white sunlight.

He watched the car approach along the rocky desert road, sun glinting flatly off the windshield. He should buy a car for Guinda. She could visit the Garcias in style. He could buy

a hundred cars—a thousand; my God, he was rich. And yet she rode a mule.

Still, he had given her love and truth and understanding, and he would give her everything she wanted in the world, in one more year. Was this too much to ask? One year more of digging under this maddening sun. Did she suppose he liked it? Didn't she know he suffered, too? Did she know what it was to work in the mine, day after hellish day? One year more and then the long cool soft shade of the town, the fresh rooms of a big house—and a cellar filled with whiskey.

He laughed and slapped the bottle against his leg.

The car turned off the road, bounced around past the whiskey cave and came to a halt in the smoking dust beside the cabin.

Pedro Cargado walked around to see who it was. It was a strange car and there was but one man inside behind the wheel. It was one of the flashy cars, a convertible, yellow, but covered with dust, now.

"Hallo," Pedro Cargado said.

The man said nothing. He climbed from behind the wheel and looked at Pedro, and Pe-

dro had never seen him before. A tall man, his shirt unbuttoned, wearing a tan suit. The man was yellow-haired, blue-eyed, and he did not smile.

"Pedro Cargado?" the man said.

The voice was not good. It had that ring of trouble.

"Yes, I am Cargado."

"Drunk as hell, aren't you?"

"Huh?"

"I said you're blind as a pig, eh?"

The man walked around the car. Pedro saw that the man was sweating heartily and smiling now. He held up the bottle, smiling too.

"You like a drink of whiskey, hey?"

"I'll be damned," the man said, stopping, rocking on his heels. "A real lush."

"Lush? What is this lush?"

The man reached into the pocket of his jacket and brought out a gun and aimed it at Pedro.

"Turn around, Cargado," the man said. "See that mine over there? Start walking over there."

Pedro did not turn, staring at the gun. "What?"

"Move."

"Who are you?" Pedro said.

The man took three quick steps and brought the gun

around in a bright vicious arc against the side of Pedro Cargado's face. The barrel raked against the bronzed flesh, digging deep, and blood flecked his jaw. Pedro staggered with the shock, reeled backwards fell. But he held the bottle of whiskey high, so that it never touched the ground.

Pedro sat there grinning up at the yellow-haired one.

"Break the bottle and all is lost," Pedro Cargado said.

The man stepped up to him, leaned down and again the gun whipped across Pedro's face.

Pedro lay still for a moment, staring up at the bright white sky. What was it Guinda saw up there?

"Get up," the man said. "Get a move on—I want to get this over with."

"Yes," Pedro said. "All right." He came to his knees, uncorked the bottle and drank, gulping, watching the man, knowing what would happen, knowing he had to get as much of that whiskey down him as he could, anyway.

The man reached out with the gun and smashed the bottle from Pedro's hand. Pedro fell back on the ground and laughed up at the sky, filling the afternoon with loud roars of laughter.

"I am drunk," he said. "You are right. But what a shame to waste all that good whiskey."

The man cursed him, grasped his arm and humped him to his feet. The world spun a little for Pedro Cargado as the man hauled and shoved him over toward the entrance to the mine at a stumbling walk. Pedro staggered, but his mind was quite clear, and he couldn't figure this thing out.

"You think I came all the damned way out here for fun? Do you?" the man said, shouting the words with his mouth close to Pedro's left ear.

Pedro burst with laughter, then dug his finger into his ear. The man jammed the gun into his back and Pedro nearly fell again, but the man grabbed him up. They approached the entrance to the mine, the dark black mouth. Pedro began to brake with his feet, turning to face the man.

"Wait—wait, amigo," Pedro Cargado said. "What is it you want from me?"

"I'm going to kill you," the man said. "Get the hell inside there, before I do it right here."

"Wait," Pedro said. "You don't want to go in there. Why must you kill me? What have I done to you? I don't even know you."

Now it was the man's turn to laugh, but the laughter wasn't in his eyes.

"How in hell did she ever put up with you this long?" the man said. "By God, I'll never understand that."

"She who?" Pedro asked, feeling a sickness.

"Get the hell in there, I tell you."

"You don't want to go in there, mister."

"Get."

"It's not safe," Pedro said.

"You heard me."

Pedro shrugged. "You are after my gold?" he asked.

The man laughed softly and they entered the dark maw of the mine's main shaft. The heat penetrated through the pale darkness, but as they moved along, it became slightly cooler.

"This is far enough," Pedro said, stopping where the left tunnel moved off at right angles. "I am right, hey—you are after my gold?"

"That's right. Now, get the hell in there," the man said, shoving Pedro into the left tunnel. Pedro reeled quite a way into the tunnel, then stopped, leaning against the rocky wall, his head ducked beneath the low ceiling. It was not bright in the tunnel, but it was light enough to see all

right. He watched the man with the gun step up to him.

"How long you had this mine, Cargado?"

"All my life. My grandfather's father dug this mine himself, alone. It comes down through the family, like that. It is mine."

"Yeah? So how come it wasn't cleaned out long ago?"

"My grandfather's father died here—killed by a cave-in," Pedro Cargado said, closely watching the man, and especially the gun. But he knew he was very drunk, and there was no longer that spring of violence inside him; he could never manage to knock the gun away if he leaped. He would die trying. "So," he said, "I came here seven years ago, you see?"

The man laughed through his nose, a strange sound.

"You are after my gold?" Pedro Cargado asked.

"Walk back farther," the man said. "And shut your yap."

"This tunnel is not safe," Pedro Cargado said. He would say that this last time, and then he would not say it again. Besides, if the man was after his gold, he could never get it this way. It was in the hidden shaft, cached secretly, where no one

knew. He had better say that, *Dios*. "If you kill me, whoever you are," Pedro Cargado said, "you'll never find the gold."

"Move back."

The man was beside him now. The man moved on ahead into the tunnel and Pedro lingered. The man was watching him, walking backwards and Pedro knew he was outlined against the mouth of the left tunnel, easily seen, a good target. He moved slowly toward the man.

"Come on, stewhead," the man said. "I can't leave you out this far. We'll keep moving till it's nice and dark. Then I'll do what I have to do."

Pedro Cargado shrugged, but said nothing.

They moved slowly, very slowly, in silence. The man stopped. Pedro paused, too.

"You think I enjoy it?" the man said, and Pedro knew that after all he was a very young man for all his ugliness, all his bravado. "I never killed anybody before."

"Why now?" Pedro said. He leaned against the side of the tunnel, his gaze traveling from beam to beam.

"Because I want to, that's why," the man said.

"Don't go any farther," Pedro said.

"Come on," the man said. "Get the hell back here."

"Watch out," Pedro said, as he saw the man backing toward the loose beam where sand lifted down from overhead.

The man lifted the gun and fired and Pedro went flat. He saw the man's shoulder strike the beam. The tunnel caved in with a roar, then a shower of rock and sand, then minor fallings, the breaking of a beam or two, then silence and much dust. Pedro coughed and came to his knees, and his head struck the ceiling.

He knelt and rubbed his head, felt around in the pitch darkness and found his hat, put it on. The way the tunnel had caved in had been a very small thing, after all. He had expected it to go with great noise. It had caved between himself and the other man, and between himself and the main shaft. They were both in pockets.

"Mister?" Pedro said. "No use to swear."

The man was cursing and yelling from not too far away. but the voice was somewhat muffled. The man began to scream things now, silly things. Well, he was probably badly frightened. He had a right to be.

Pedro Cargado was damned mad. His head throbbed with blood, and he could feel the pulsing heat across his shoulders.

"Are you hurt bad?" he called.

"Get me out," the man said. "Get me out!" he screamed.

Pedro felt around him. He crouched low, working his way around the dark, breathing thick dust, feeling the piled rubble. He knocked his shin against a jammed beam and cursed softly, and all the time the man kept yelling. Pedro stopped abruptly.

A thin pencil-like shaft of light speared his eye. He moved toward it, reached very carefully out with his hand and began to scrape. He worked as gently as a woman crocheting. He lay against the rock and earth and blew softly against the hole and watched it enlarge. If he got it too large too fast, it would perhaps collapse, bringing more of the tunnel tumbling down. Then he would be sealed up tight forever. My God, how a long drink of whiskey would go right now! The sound of the gurgling bottle. For a fact, some water would be good, too.

Very little water, though.

Perhaps only to bathe in. He felt very dirty.

He was mighty drunk. Ah, the world did spin, too.

He scraped quietly at the small hole of light, lying on the mound of rubble. The man continued to weep and scream and yell back there.

"Why don't you shut the big mouth?" Pedro Cargado said quietly. "All the time yelling like a little boy. What good is this?"

The man continued to scream and yell.

Pedro worked slowly, cautiously. The hole began to enlarge, but sand kept showering out toward the tunnel's mouth.

"The whole damned tunnel will go for sure," Pedro said. "It is just hanging up there, like a heavy cloud of mud." He moved his head from side to side, breathing heavily, the sweat streaming until his clothes were soaked. *Dios*, for some whiskey.

Now, the rocks. He had struck his first big one. His hand lay against it, where it clogged the hole. One push. He had to take the chance, and it could very well mean *adios* to whiskey and everything else. That cursed tunnel out there was hanging and bulging off the main shaft. If he could

make the main shaft, all would be well.

He shoved the rock. Nothing happened. The hole was large enough to squirm through, for a fact. He turned on his back and looked toward where the man's voice continued to carouse.

"Hey, there," Pedro Cargado said. "You keep up that foolish talking, you'll bring it down on your head."

"Get me out," the man called. "I won't hurt you."

"Thank you," Pedro said.

He slid down the rubble and crept forward toward the sound of the man's voice on his knees. He was in a small pocket, perhaps ten feet long and four feet high, by five wide. The tunnel had caved between himself and the other man. Light from the hole brightened this cavity and Pedro checked the roof, shook his head sadly. looked toward the sound of the voice.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't think you've got a chance of getting out of there. If I try to move any rocks, it will all come down."

The man screamed and yelled, and Pedro returned to the hole, pulled himself on his chest up the piled rocks and

rubble and through the hole. He very carefully inched down the outside and crept like a cat toward the main shaft. He could only very faintly hear the man calling.

He stood up in the main shaft and hurriedly walked out into the sunlight. He looked up at the sky and made a sad face, then hurried toward the cabin.

He paused once and looked back. Everything was the same as always, nothing changed.

3.

HE SAT at the entrance to the whiskey cave and drank heartily, thinking things over. Ah, that whiskey was good. He lay down for a moment, juggling the bottle on his chest, with his hat pulled down over his eyes, feeling the fresh burning of the alcohol. He hadn't been this drunk in a long while. It was pleasant.

Now, that *cringo*, how about him? He had meant Guinda when he talked of the "she." No doubt this all added up to something. The man was caught in there, and he certainly couldn't live for too long. It was pretty certain the air would become foul soon, and after a

time there would be no air at all.

A pity. Pedro Cargado sat up, pushed his hat back, and took a small drink from the bottle. The earth leading down toward the mine tilted and careened. Pedro sat there and tried to make it all stop, but it would not, so he endured it with content. Anyway, that was the idea behind whiskey—to think anything different was to be the fool, eh, no?

About the man with the gun. He had planned to kill, to murder. Killing was wrong.

Pedro Cargado stood up, rammed the bottle into his hip pocket and moved down to the mind again. He located his shovel and went inside.

He stood at the mouth of the left tunnel. *Dios*, this was unpleasant. It would surely collapse. It must be treated with the utmost tenderness, this one. How had he ever come out of there?

He did not at first hear the man yelling as he crept forward, pulling the shovel behind him. He did not dare speak loudly, even, or the tunnel would fall.

Then, very faintly, he heard. "Please—for God's sake, help me."

Pedro Cargado squirmed

through the small hole into the coffin of earth and banged the shovel lightly against the man's side of the cave-in.

"I return," he said. "I will dig you free, *senor*."

The man thanked him. Pedro began to work slowly. He worked for a long time. Eventually it became too thick with dust to continue. He was choking, he could hardly breathe.

"Take it easy," Pedro said. "I will come back. Do not yell too much, or you will be extinguished."

He felt strange and realized that with the work he had approached sobriety again. With this curious sensation he began to get mad all over again—truly mad this time. Here he was, Pedro Cargado, taxing the gods' concern over his life, trying to save a man who wanted to kill him, rob him, perhaps even steal his wife.

Dios! It was *loco—extupido!*

He cautiously left the mine again, wondering how the man figured to get the gold if he, Pedro Cargado, were dead?

He stood again in the long slant of afternoon sunlight and drank gently, carefully from the bottle.

"Pedro!"

Ah, she was home again.

He watched her fling herself

from the mule, stare at the yellow dust-covered convertible, then run wildly down toward the mine. She wore a blue polka-dot dress, from being of course at the Garcias, visiting. And shoes, too. But she kicked off the shoes as she ran toward him.

"Where is he! Where—Pig! Where?"

She flung herself on Pedro. Pedro warded her off, holding the bottle of whiskey at arm's length, careful not to spill any.

"He who?" Pedro asked. "You look beautiful, little one. How are the Garcias?"

She fastened both hands into his sweat-soaked red flannel shirt and shook at him, saying things that somehow did not make any sense, did not come out right.

Pedro laughed as he felt the whiskey warming inside him, crawling through his veins, and his mind began to spin again very pleasantly.

"Guinda," he said. "Did you and somebody—a man with yellow hair plan something?"

She tore herself free, her voice low-pitched. "Where is he, Pedro?"

"In the left tunnel. There was a cave-in. Who do you love, little cherry?"

She said nothing, turned and

ran toward the entrance to the mine. Pedro wheeled around and started after her, then stopped and shouted. "Don't go in there—don't enter. It cannot stand it. Listen to me—the slightest—" But she had already vanished into the entrance and he heard the slight jar, the rattle of rocks and earth.

He stood in the slant of afternoon sunlight and drank from the bottle, then set the bottle down on the ground and moved slowly toward the mine. He took his hat off as he walked, scratched his head, put his hat back on, then sadly moved his head from side to side.

He had tried to tell her. The slightest jar would do it, and it had done it. As he neared the entrance to the mine, a small eddy of dust worked low about his feet, like dirty fog, to his knees.

He waded through this.

"Little cherry," he called softly. "Guinda? Are you alive, little one?"

He came to the left tunnel. Lifted his brows, coughed and took out his bandanna. He wiped away some sweat, then held the bandanna over his nose and mouth and entered the left tunnel, moving in a low crouch.

By God, the tunnel hadn't caved all the way after all. Then he paused, stopped. But it *had* fallen, and he heard her crying a name in there, her voice muffled through the freshly fallen layer of rock and earth.

"Gordon—oh, Gordy. Can you hear me?"

"What are you doing here?" the man said.

"It's I—Guinda. I came for you, but it caved in again. That Pig of a husband allowed me to—"

The man was laughing through the earth and rock and dust.

"Gordy, I love you so," Guinda said. "Talk to me."

Pedro Cargado felt of the debris and shrugged, then backed out to the main shaft again. He tried to close his ears to the sound of his wife's pleading voice. And also to the caustic shouts of the other man, who now had succumbed to a fatalistic philosophy, and was reviling Guinda in every possible way.

A mean and degrading manner to speak to a woman.

Pedro gained the main shaft, then went back out into the afternoon.

It would be necessary to think—deeply. He walked

through the afternoon to his bottle of whiskey and sat down on the ground. He stared at the mine entrance.

He sat staring for some time.

She did not love him. That was the first thing. She had fooled him all along. She had meant all the things she said, and it had been no joke after all.

It was saddening, because he'd had so many things planned in his mind for the two of them. But especially for her. The *fiestas* around the town when they had the big house. The nights at the *cantina* with Guinda on his arm, smiling, red-lipped, wanton, hissing. Ah, but that was of the wonderful past thinking. Aye.

He stood up and walked over to the yellow convertible.

So he was left with a car. This, anyway, if he did nothing. And what could he do? He drank deeply from the bottle and the earth tilted. He was certainly drunk again. He lost his balance and fell through the open door of the convertible, slumped to a sitting position on the narrow space of floor between seat and doorjamb.

He stared down at his feet. Something white fluttered through the air like a leaf, back

and forth, and landed across his knees.

A letter. It had fallen from the sun-visor in the car when he jarred it. The letter had been loosely stuck up under the visor. Pedro set the bottle down on the ground by his feet, picked up the letter and squinted through one eye, reading slowly.

"Dear Mama," the letter said. Pedro swallowed and reached down, fumbling for the bottle. He knocked it over and whiskey gushed out on the ground, but he left it there. He read on. "I only keep addressing you as Mama, Gordy, because in case the great Pig of a drunken husband might glance over my shoulder. He could see the salutation and that would be enough. He tired of reading the letters—I wore him out, darling.

"It is all in readiness. Come Tuesday. When he sleeps Tuesday noon, I will carry all the sacks of gold to the house and put them under the floor. Then you can come and do your part. He doesn't think I know where he keeps the gold, but I do. I will visit the Garcias because I could not stand being around when you. . ."

Pedro Cargado dropped the letter and stood up. He walked

to the house, stood in the kitchen and kicked at the floor here and there. Nothing.

He wandered into the bedroom and moved the Indian rug. This is where he had caught her scrubbing the floor a great deal of late.

The boards were loose. It must have taken her many days to loosen those boards, because he had put the nails in himself, and there were countless nails. He lifted the boards out and stared down at the small sacks of gold. She had taken it from the cache in the mine today when he slept.

From the peace of their loving, and from the content of the good dinner she had cooked him, and from the excellent quality of the un-named whiskey.

He lifted out all the neat sacks of gold, and replaced the boards, and the Indian rug, then went out to the whiskey cave. He found a bottle to his liking and drank twice as he walked down to the mine entrance.

He moved inside to the left tunnel, crouched and worked his way to the line of rubble and jaggedly splintered beams.

"Guinda?"

"Get us out," she called

back. "Help us—help us, Pedro."

"Pedro the drunken Pig?" Pedro said.

"No—no, I don't mean that."

"Yes," Pedro said. "Listen, feel around in there and you'll find a shovel. Use it carefully, ever so carefully and you can get out. You cannot save your friend. I warn you, be very careful."

"Yes, yes—but help me."

"Why?"

"We could be together. I made a mistake—that's all, Pedro, my sweet."

Pedro wiped both hands across his face, crouched there, staring at the muted and very pleasant sound of her voice and he recalled the soft touch of her dark hair, the warmth and vitality of her body, the wonderful sound of her voice in the early mornings. He held his head clasped between both his hands.

"You were after my gold," he said.

"No—no. This was all foolishness," Guinda said. "How could we get your gold when we didn't even know where it was? Don't be a foolish—"

"Yes," Pedro said. She had lied to the last inch, and she must do the rest herself. It was too bad; and yet, there were

many Guinda's in the towns, too. And he was certain she would return to mama all the wiser.

"Take care when you dig," he said. "Be cautious. Good-by, little cherry."

"Wait—Pedro!"

He crouched, moving backwards, until he was in the main shaft again. There had been no sound from the man, so maybe there would never be any sound.

All of this was bad business.

Pedro hunched his shoulders against the first chill of evening as the sun began to set. Then he went down along the arroyo and brought back the wandering mule.

IN THE cabin, he got his pack rig and packed the gold and several bottles of whiskey. The moon was up now, bright and white, the big cactus by the cabin gleaming bluish. He straddled the mule, his feet hanging close to the ground, holding a bottle of whiskey.

He looked back through the last small glimmer of dusk toward the entrance to the mine. Even as he looked, it was night, and the moonlight was brighter than the dusk. He could hear faint scrapings of a shovel and knew Guinda would free her-

self, but he never wanted to see her again.

He turned the mule toward the Southwest. He felt tears come to his eyes and quickly drank some whiskey. As he rode along, he felt sad and empty.

He kept drinking from the bottle until he was very drunk. As drunk as he had ever been in his life. Now and then one of his feet would touch the ground,

and he would thrust himself back up onto the mule.

As he rode, he looked up into the sky. He wondered what it was Guinda always tried to see up there? He had meant to ask her about that.

Well, it was too late now. He felt very sad and the drinking somehow did not seem to help. He sighed. Truly, somewhere he must find a better whiskey than this.

THE END

ANYTHING FOR A DOLLAR

by ELSTON BARRETT

WOULD you be willing to lose one of your eyes—the left one, say—if the price were right?

No? Well, then how about your right arm?

You're not interested? Then perhaps you'd permit yourself to be permanently mutilated or crippled?

The answer is still no? That's fine; it means that the chances you'll ever be a professional "flopper" or "repeater" in simulated accidents are slim.

But there will be thousands of people who *will* be interested, either in the kind of thing indicated above, or in one of the countless other methods of collecting insurance money through fraudulent methods ranging all the way from petty larceny to murder. And a lot of these people will get away with it; for while no

one knows just how many insurance crimes are committed in any given year, it is an accepted fact that the number of successful perpetrations is much greater than the number of insurance criminals caught and punished. In one field alone—arson for profit—the United States suffers an annual loss of approximately \$125 million. And if this fact seems staggering by itself, consider that nine out of ten fraudulent arson claims are made on insured motor vehicles.

Insurance crimes have existed from the very beginnings of insurance itself. Many of the earliest frauds are still in use; many new ones, and new twists on old ones, have been added as times changed and modern methods of manufacture, transportation, and so on

brought fresh possibilities. Insurance is an involved, complicated and ever-changing business, and even the "experts" have trouble keeping abreast of all its many laws and regulations. As soon as the companies have eliminated one loophole for fraud, criminals find another.

Among the oldest forms of insurance, and the forerunner of many of its present branches, is marine insurance—a field in which the practice of making fraudulent claims once became so serious that authorities were forced to take drastic steps. In the harbor at Montreal, for example, such a staggering number of overloaded grain ships went down that the Canadian government began to impose a fine of \$40 for each infraction of the loading rules. The losses continued unabated, however, until 1873, at which time the original fine of \$40 was increased to \$800. Thus, the ship owners still collected insurance on their lost grain, but the large fine made such losses decidedly unprofitable, and the immediate drop in the number of sinkings was both

striking and permanent.

STILL another prime favorite of the insurance criminal—arson—is with us today as it was in the beginnings; but the heyday of the old-time arson ring is a thing of the past, ended by the adoption of arson laws in most of the forty-eight states. Nevertheless, the loss by arson is still very great. Unsalable goods, financial difficulty, gambling debts or dissatisfaction with an automobile are some of the almost limitless motives that lead men and women to attempt to burn their way out of their troubles. And there are times, of course, when the arsonist destroys a far more valuable thing than a stock of goods or a building or an automobile—as when people are unintentionally killed by the arsonist's fire or asphyxiated by its smoke. Then too, there are those infrequent cases when death by arson is intentional, and the fire set solely in order to collect on someone's life.

An interesting commentary on fire insurance crimes in other countries is furnished

by Latin America. The Chilean government, for example, has a law which calls for the arrest of the insured immediately upon discovery of the fact that his property is on fire. The insured is detained in jail until the possibility of arson has been eliminated. Not too many years ago, when fire insurance was first introduced into Brazil, the incidence of fires increased immediately and spectacularly.

Burglary insurance, like all other forms of insurance, represents a constant challenge to the criminal mind. Some frauds are carefully planned, painstakingly rehearsed, and skillfully executed. Others are spur-of-the-moment larcenies, conceived and executed in response to a sudden and unexpected opportunity. An example might be the fraud perpetrated by two partners in a small haberdashery in New York City. The shop was protected by burglary insurance, which covered both the stock and the money in the cash register. An armed man walked in, relieved the partners of the \$50 in the register, and walked out again. The partners immediately went into action—one to the phone to

call the police, the other to the cash register to ring up imaginary sales. By the time the police arrived on the scene, the original \$50 loss had grown to \$350.

THE MOST dramatic insurance crimes of all are those involving life insurance, and it is difficult to say whether the ancient forms of such fraud were more or less dramatic than contemporary ones. Certainly life insurance, in its beginnings, was just another name for betting. It was, in short, a cold-blooded gambling on human lives; and when we recall that anyone at all could take out a life insurance policy on the life of anyone else, and for any amount whatever, it becomes clear that such widespread speculation led inevitably to many an untimely, but profitable, death. The threat to European kings and royalty was especially great, and at one time the number of policies issued against their lives assumed something of the character of a national lottery.

The temptation to make these policies pay off was, to some men at least, almost overpowering. And although

kings and their royal associates eventually took steps to protect themselves, it was not until 1774, that commoners were equally protected. In that year, King George III declared that no one could insure the life of another unless he had a bona fide interest in the insured. It is interesting to note that no similar protective measure existed in the United States until more than a hundred years later.

Even little children were not exempt from the insurance criminals of the past. In fact, one of the major causes of the high mortality rate among children was the insurance taken out against their deaths. Thousands of these innocents were insured, and thousands died. The murder of children for their insurance finally became so unbelievably widespread that a group of Londoners banded together to form the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, for the express purpose of helping at least some of the insured children to survive their childhood. A similar idea is at work in the United States today in the form of a regulation which limits the amount of insurance on a child to the cost of his burial.

Another form of life insurance fraud—and perhaps the most dramatic of all—is the suicide camouflaged to look like accidental death. In an earlier day, insurance companies found competition among themselves so intense that they guaranteed the unconditional payment of the entire amount of the policy immediately upon proof of death, whether death had been at the insured's own hand or not. And while this is, of course, no longer the practice, there is still an untold number of people who manage to commit suicide and successfully disguise it as an accident.

IT IS EASY to understand why modern insurance companies employ so many hundreds of the most qualified, experienced, and costly investigators, attorneys, and criminologists. Consider the fake accident claimant, for example; the professional "flopper" or "repeater" mentioned earlier in this article. The extent of this particular kind of fraud is fantastic. In one case alone, in Missouri, a faked accident ring flourished for thirteen years, with its specialty being automobile liability insurance. During this thir-

teen-year period, the ring was able to collect \$100,000 in insurance claims through 'aking accidents by self-mutilation and automobile crashes. Several members of the ring had limbs amputated. In one instance, at least, an osteopath was hired to increase the damage to a smashed limb so that amputation was necessary. The head of the ring, a former insurance representative for several companies, was sentenced by the U. S. Government. And a final ironic note was added when

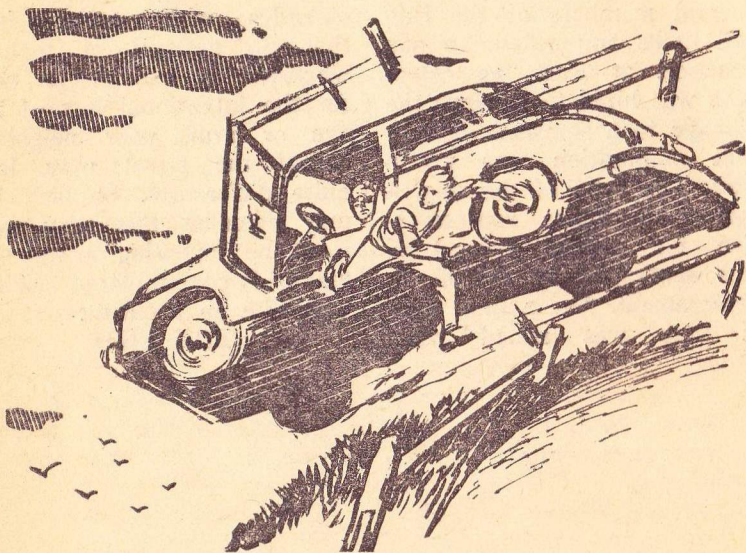
several members of the ring, against whom charges had been dismissed, died within less than a year of their indictment.

And so, while *you* may feel that no amount of money whatever is enough to pay for the intentional loss of an eye or arm, your neighbor across the street may feel quite differently. In fact, he may even at this very moment be inventing a way to make his contemplated suicide look like an accident.

THE END

The stickups weren't for profit, you understand; they were

JUST FOR KICKS



by MURRAY WOLF

THE STREET in front of the bar was deserted. The nearest traffic noise came from Colorado Boulevard, two blocks away; there were no pedestrians in sight. Except for the bar itself, the neighborhood was dark; the bar had an alternate-

ly green and red look as the two signs, *Pasadena Liquors* and *We Deliver*, flashed on and off.

Jim Matheson heard his own heavy breathing as the car scraped up against the curb and stopped. He felt Pete tremble

beside him; he thought he heard Pete whimper. As the driver, Nick, pulled the emergency brake on, Jim glanced past him at the dashboard clock. It was 1:35, not quite half an hour until closing. He looked inside the bar and saw the one man in it hunched down behind the counter, apparently half asleep.

Mario turned from where he sat beside the driver and leaned toward the back seat.

"You got it?" Mario said softly. "No slip-ups, now."

"We got it," Jim said.

Beside him, Pete shivered. The kid was scared. Pete was always scared, and Jim wished they hadn't brought him, the way he always wished it once they were out on a job.

"Come on," Mario said. He opened the front door and climbed out.

Pete was sitting next to the right hand door in back; he made no move to open it. Jim leaned across him, reaching for the handle.

"Come on, kid," he said. "It's just for kicks."

He shoved Pete ahead of him onto the sidewalk. The kid shivered again; then the fear seemed to leave him and he walked almost cockily after Mario.

Jim followed them across the sidewalk to the bar. He heard the car's engine running behind them; Nick would signal if anyone came by. Nick was a cool one and Mario had everything cased and nothing could go wrong.

Then Mario pushed open the door to the bar, and Jim felt the sweat break out on his palms. He felt his heart hammering in his chest and the dryness in his throat, and he thought angrily, It's Pete; the kid's got me shook up, too.

The man behind the counter looked up. His eyes were heavy-lidded and his body almost completely relaxed where he sat tilted back in the chair. He was a thin, weedy man, about sixty.

"What can I do for you, boys?" he said.

"A bottle of Scotch," Mario said. "The best."

The man's eyes came more awake. He pushed himself up out of the chair.

"You know I can't sell you that, sonny," he said. "You're under age."

Mario laughed. His hand moved inside his jacket.

"Okay, then you can give us something else. Come on, open up that cash register."

"This a stickup?"

The old man stared at them as if he couldn't quite believe it. He made no move toward the register. He leaned on the counter, his eyes flickering past Mario, past Pete, to Jim, and then back at Mario again.

"You boys realize what you're doing? It's a felony. . . ."

"Can the talk," Mario said. "Open it up. Hurry!"

The old man sighed and started down the counter toward the cash register. It seemed to take him a long, long time to walk the few feet. Jim's hands twitched; he wanted to yell at the old man to hurry it up; he had to force himself to stand there coolly and let Mario run things.

After all, he told himself, it's just like I said to Pete. We're along for the kicks.

Mario and Nick did this sort of thing all the time. For them, Jim thought, it's a living. What is it to me?

The old man had reached the register. Slowly, his hand pushed the No Sale button and it came open. He reached in and pulled a stack of bills out of one of the drawers.

"Hurry it up," Mario said roughly. "All the bills. Put them in a paper bag."

"Sure," the old man said. "Sure, long as you boys know

what you're getting into."

He laid the bills down on the counter, bent over and pulled a paper bag out from the pile below the register. He held it open with his left hand and shoveled the bills in with his right.

"No good arguing with you, I reckon."

Then suddenly, moving fast for the first time, his right hand shot far back into the register and out again, and there was the gleam of light on metal.

"Look out!" Pete yelled.

Mario swore and stepped forward, his hand coming out from inside his jacket. He didn't have a gun; he always said you were a sap to carry one; the cops would really get you for armed robbery. His right fist, with the sand-filled sock in it, swung forward.

"Damn fools," the old man said. He swung the gun up, but not fast enough. The sock crashed against the side of his head. He stood there a second, looking very surprised, and then the gun clattered on the counter and he sagged.

Mario hit him again. He grunted and fell heavily, his arms going wide as if to catch himself but not succeeding. His head crashed down on the sharp metal corner of the cash regis-

ter; the sound of the keys jamming was mixed with the thud of bone on metal. He was limp when he hit the floor.

"We got to hurry," Mario said. He stuck the sock back in his pocket and reached out and began scooping in the money. "Jim, you get what's left in the drawer."

"Okay." Jim stepped forward. He didn't want to walk past the old man. He wanted to get out, to run and keep running. Then he saw Pete, really trembling now, edging toward the door, and he felt his own body stiffen.

"You stay here, kid," he said sharply, and Pete froze.

Jim walked around behind the counter and reached into the drawer with his gloved hand. There weren't many more bills. He felt the compartment in back, where the old man's gun must have been; it was empty now. Everything seemed unreal, even the money in his hand. I didn't want it to be like this, he thought. I didn't want anyone to get hurt.

But he asked for it, pulling a gun like that.

He felt the inert mass of the old man's body against his long legs. He looked down. The old man was breathing in long, shuddering gasps. Blood trick-

led down from his temple across the grey-white skin of his face.

"Mario," Jim said. "Look."

Mario glanced down, then up again.

"He's hurt bad, isn't he?" Jim said.

"Yeah," Mario said. "But he asked for it." He clutched the paper bag tighter. "Come on; we got to split."

"How bad's he hurt?" Jim whispered. He could feel the pounding of his own heart, almost indecently alive and conscious inside him; he kept crying out to himself, It was an accident, it was an accident. . .

"You tell me," Mario said. "You're educated." He swung around to the door. "Come on. I mean it."

Jim thought, I should stay and help him. But I can't. I can't get caught here. . . He followed Mario.

"Do you think he'll die?" he whispered.

Beside him, Pete cried out, then went terribly white and ran for the car. They ran after him. Nick had the engine revved up by the time they reached it; he was already edging out from the curb when Mario jumped into the front seat. Jim stopped where Pete had bent over the gutter and hauled the kid into the back after him.

The car shot away from the

curb, heading for the traffic on Colorado.

"What happened?" Nick asked. "That old guy give you any trouble?"

"A little." Mario patted the paper bag in his lap.

In the back seat beside Jim, Pete leaned forward suddenly and was sick.

"Hey," Mario said. "You cut that out. This ain't your car, rich boy."

Jim looked away from both of them. He kept seeing the old man lying there against his legs, with the blood trickling so slowly against the ashy skin, and it wasn't for kicks any more. It was for real. He remembered the other jobs he and Pete had gone along on, the gas station stickups around town and the time they had driven clear out to Mojave and held up a market. He'd always felt scared before a job and elated afterward. The market stickup especially—he remembered how Mario had cursed all the way home because they'd netted only seventy bucks, when they'd counted on three or four hundred. Jim hadn't been angry at all, or even disappointed; he'd felt good.

It wasn't like tonight, he thought. Then everything about

tonight that he had tried to push out of his mind welled up in a sudden rush of panic.

If the old guy dies, if they catch us, what then?

He saw his father's stern, lawyer's face, and his mother crying, and he could almost feel the handcuffs on his wrists.

NICK DROVE carefully, fast enough to get them out of Pasadena in a hurry but not fast enough for any traffic cop to get interested in them. He headed for the Freeway and Los Angeles.

"Turn on the radio, Nick," Mario said. "It's two o'clock. The cops'll be cruising past that bar any time now."

Nick reached forward and switched the set on. It was tuned to the police channel. Good insurance, Mario had said, having the radio doctored up so you could listen in on the cops.

"...T 27, T 27," the dispatcher said, through a crackle of static. "165 North Oak. Possible 932..."

"Wife beating," Mario said, and laughed.

Pete let out a strangled sob.

Mario swung around and leaned over the back seat.

"Listen," he said angrily. "Who asked you in on this,

anyway? You kids, you want in on some jobs, you think it's a lark till something goes wrong. Then you start crying... You keep your mouths shut about this, do you hear?"

"Sure, Mario," Jim said. "You don't think we'd say anything, do you? We're in this as deep as you."

Deeper, he thought. He realized he didn't know too much about Mario, or Nick either. He'd met Mario at a beach party his parents hadn't known anything about. Mario had already been in trouble with the cops; it didn't seem to bother him any. Maybe it didn't bother his family any, either.

As for me, Jim thought, it's better and it's worse too. Better, because always before he had convinced himself. If I get into trouble Dad can get me out of it. I'm only sixteen. I'll be sent up before juvenile court, sure. It won't look good on my record. But nothing will happen. I'll just be a wild kid.

His parents, the neighbors, even the cops in Beverly Hills, where Jim lived, would think of Mario as a hoodlum. They wouldn't blame Jim, or Pete either. They'd just shake their heads and say it was a shame the boys had got in with bad

company.

It was worse in one way, though. His parents would take it awfully hard. He didn't care about his father. Dad, he thought, you've given me a lot of lectures about justice; but what do right and wrong really mean to you, so long as your clients win out? And pay up?

He didn't want his mother to know.

They were out on the Freeway, swinging around the big bend by Avenue 40, when Mario sucked in his breath and Jim really focused on what the radio dispatcher was saying.

"...T 32, T 32, 127 North Miller. 914-C. 914-C..."

The address was that of the bar. Jim had picked up enough of the police code to know that 914-C meant "Coroner needed."

"So he's dead," Mario said softly.

His face trembled and almost broke up in panic; then he stiffened.

"Look, we get back to LA, we split up. They've got nothing on us. We had gloves. There weren't any witnesses."

"Maybe the old man gave them something," Nick said. "Before he conked off."

"Maybe," Mario said. "So what? We got any distinguish-

ing marks? We use any names? Hell, I'm the only one that's got to worry. I'm the only one that's got a record."

Jim hardly heard him; he was dimly aware of Pete crying in the seat beside him. He kept thinking, The guy's dead. We didn't mean it. It was an accident. A stickup, sure—not murder.

But it was murder. Jim knew enough for that. He'd heard his father say it, in that self-righteous tone of his, whenever there was a writeup in the paper about some kid being picked up after a robbery where there had been a killing.

Any death resulting from a felony was first-degree murder.

"I want out," Pete said. "I don't want to be mixed up in this any more. I want to forget it."

"Sure," Mario said. "You forget it."

He looked back at Jim worriedly. Jim shrugged.

"He'll be all right," Jim said, nodding at Pete. "You know him. He gets shook up easy."

"He'd better be all right. You know what'd happen if he got any ideas of ratting."

"I won't say anything," Pete said. "I just want out, that's all."

Jim leaned back in the seat

and tried to relax. Out. But there wasn't any way out. Still, Mario was probably right; the cops couldn't have a lead on them. All they had to do was quit, right now; the cops were sure to pick you up if you kept on using the same m.o.

I've had enough to last me all my life, Jim thought. I'd like to forget it, too.

They turned off onto the Hollywood Freeway, then off it at Silverlake. Nick pulled up to the curb in front of his house, where they had met earlier in the evening. Jim's car was still parked in front, just the way they had left it.

"Look," Jim said. "So we get off on this one. We can't keep crowding it. I mean, we can't..."

Mario's shoulders rose and fell.

"Okay. We've had it. We quit." His lips parted in a thin smile. "I've had about enough of this town anyway. What about you, Nick?"

"Yeah," Nick said. "There's always Frisco. Or Vegas."

"You don't need to worry about us," Mario said. "We ain't canaries. We don't aim to get caught in the middle either."

He held up the paper bag. "We'd better divide it now."

Jim shook his head.

"It's yours," he said. He climbed out of the car and pulled Pete after him.

Mario laughed again. "The perfect little Fonteloy, or whatever the hell his name was." He leaned out the window as Nick slipped the car back into gear.

"Take care of yourself," he said. "And watch out for the kid too, you hear?"

The car roared off down the street.

"COME ON," Jim said. He half pulled, half carried Pete down to his own car. He opened the right hand door and dumped Pete in, then walked around to the driver's side and climbed in also.

He had trouble fitting the key into the ignition. His hands kept trembling. He kept thinking, It's murder. All the safeguards he had built up in his mind crumbled away. Always before he had been so sure nothing could happen, not to him, not to Pete. If they catch us, he'd told Pete, so what? We'll get probation. They'll give us a lecture and bawl out our parents for not bringing us up better, and that'll be that.

He had known all along it would be rougher for Mario

and Nick. They didn't have Beverly Hills in back of them; in their families, the money they stole would really mean something in itself. Jim had always shrugged over what he had known was the unfairness of the situation; it worked in his favor; that was fine. That was the way the little ball bounced.

"What if the old man told them about us?" Pete whispered. "What if they trace us? What'll they do?"

"They won't trace us," Jim said.

"He's dead," Pete said.

"Okay, so he's dead. There's nothing we can do about it now. It was an accident."

Pete looked out the window and didn't say anything. His face was white and still sick and he looked very young, a lot younger than sixteen. Jim thought, I knew all along he didn't have the guts for this; I just never thought it would matter.

"All we've got to do," Jim said, "is keep our mouths shut. Mario's smart. He won't pull any more stickups around LA. There's no possible way they can trace this to us."

"Mario killed him," Pete said. "It's Mario's fault, not ours."

"Sure," Jim said. "Sure. We didn't do a thing. He just hit his head when he fell, that's all."

But legally it's our fault all right, he thought.

"I know they won't catch us," Pete said. "But what would they do if they did? Execute us?"

Jim shook his head. He wished Pete would shut up. He had turned on to Wilshire Boulevard, where even at this hour of the night there was quite a bit of traffic; he wanted to concentrate on his driving. He found it hard to keep from jamming his foot down on the accelerator.

"They'd just lock us up," he said. "We're minors."

Lock us up for life.

They were almost to Beverly Hills. In five minutes he would let Pete out in front of his house and go on down the street to his own home. He wondered if his mother had waited up for him. He hoped not; he didn't see how he could pretend, tonight, that nothing had happened.

"How'd we ever get into this?" Pete muttered.

"We were bored, remember?"

Pete whimpered and leaned his face forward in his hands.

Jim glanced over at him and saw the sweat running down his face and the hunched, trembling shoulders. He sounded almost like a baby crying.

If I take him home, Jim thought, how do I know what he'll do? What if his mother's still waiting up? What'll he tell her?

He slowed the car down and tried to think of some way out, somewhere he could take Pete tonight until the kid had calmed down, until it was safe to let him go home.

"Jim." Pete slowly raised his head. "Jim, we've got to tell them."

The words lay flat between them. Sure, Jim thought; I've known all along he'd tell. It's just come quicker than I'd figured.

"We can't tell them," he said. "You know what would happen if we did."

"You know what'll happen if we don't!" Pete's voice rose hysterically. "They'll find us; you know they'll find us. This way, if we tell them, we're on their side. We'll be state witnesses. They'll get Mario and Nick—it's really Mario's fault anyway, isn't it? Why should we pay for what he did?"

Jim stared back at him, then sighed suddenly and braked the

car.

"Okay," Jim said. "We'll go back to Pasadena."

Pete relaxed on the seat beside him as the car swung around in a U turn. Pete's eyes seemed very withdrawn, far away.

"We've got to do it, Jim, you know we've got to..."

"Sure," Jim said. "Sure." It would be no use trying to argue with Pete now.

Jim turned the idea over in his mind. It wasn't that he minded, really, the thought of being a squealer. What do I owe Mario? he thought. Nothing. But it went farther than Pete saw it. It was true they could tell the police, they could get out of the big rap. They'd be locked up for a few years, but they were young; it wouldn't be forever.

But one thing he couldn't face. He didn't want his mother to know.

Besides, they didn't have to confess. With Pete loose, yes, they might as well go to the cops now. Because sooner or later Pete would talk.

JIM FELT coldness spread through him, into his arms and his legs and his mind. He drove very cautiously and very grimly, back out the Pasadena

Freeway and off it, into Pasadena itself. He headed toward the mountains. The downtown section fell behind them; the bar was behind them too. Only the residential streets, dark now and quiet, lay ahead.

Pete straightened in the seat beside him.

"Hey, haven't you passed the police station?"

"Yeah, I guess I have."

Jim sighed. He tightened his throat so that, when he spoke, it sounded as if his voice was on the verge of breaking.

"I just can't face them yet, Pete. Look, we'll go to the station. In a few minutes. But first we've got to get our stories straight."

He swung to the left, onto the short stretch of completed Freeway that led between Pasadena and La Canada.

"What do you mean, get our stories straight," Pete said. "We've got to tell what happened, that's all."

"Sure," Jim said. "What else?"

Ahead of them, a traffic light winked on and off, marking the turn for the Angeles Crest Highway that led up into the mountains back of the city and then down to the open desert.

"We'll drive up in the mountains a ways," he said.

Pete started to protest, then fell silent. They swung off onto the turn for the mountains and the car started to climb. Jim resisted the impulse to speed up; there was plenty of time for speed, later on. He felt the coldness all through him and a sorrow for what he was going to do. Pete was his friend. Pete had been his friend for a long time.

But it's just like you figured, Pete, he thought. It's a matter of survival. You were willing to dump Mario and Nick, Pete. Does what I'm going to do make me any worse than you?

As they climbed above the city he speeded up on the curves. He knew the road. He knew just how fast he could take the corners. Farther up, he knew where other cars had missed a turn and gone through the guard rail and down the mountain. He felt icy inside as he drove; he could picture the railing rushing toward him and hear the screech of the tires as they skidded toward the edge. Accident. It happened all the time. No one would question it.

He narrowed his eyes when they came to the curve he had picked. It would have to happen while they were coming

down the hill; the curve bent sharply to the left and, downhill, it would be easy to come into it too fast. The drop-off was sheer and there were rocks at the bottom, hundreds of feet below the road.

Goodbye, Pete, he thought.

He didn't want to do it. He'd never do it, except that Pete was forcing it on him. Pete was yellow. If Pete got back to the city, they'd both end up in prison. This way, Pete wouldn't get back to the city. The car would be at the bottom of the drop-off and there would be only Jim, thrown clear and in shock and not able to say anything coherent.

And no tie-up with what happened tonight, Jim told himself. None at all.

As he passed the curve he had picked, he shivered. Pete must have sensed something was wrong. Pete leaned over to him.

"Look, have you got some idea of running away? Don't you see we can't?"

"Okay," Jim said. "Okay. I'm stalling. I don't want to face it. Do you?"

He sighed and pulled off onto one of the lookout spots. There was another car parked there, its lights off, its two oc-

cupants locked together behind the steering wheel. The lights of Los Angeles stretched out below them; it was a clear night, with no smog. Jim wished he could just sit there and look out over the city, the way he had done when he was a kid, with nothing to bother him.

"We'll go back," he said heavily.

He swung the car around and headed back down. Pete wasn't suspicious. Pete's eyes were half closed and he was breathing jerkily, probably rehearsing the story he was going to give the cops.

I don't want to do it, Jim thought. But I've got to. His mind sought for some reason, some excuse. It'd kill my parents, he told himself, and yours too, Pete, if they found out. It's better this way.

The curve rushed toward him. He pushed down on the accelerator—fifty . . . fifty-five—and he tensed himself, bracing himself to jump. His left hand moved off the wheel, toward the door handle.

"Jim!" Pete cried. "Jim, slow down!"

Then the car was skidding toward the guard rail, very frail in front of them, and beyond it there was only emptiness, with

the lights of the city far below.

Pete screamed, a thin, wordless cry, as the car plunged through the rail. Jim flung himself against the door and felt it open.

He fell into emptiness, with Pete's screams still loud in his ears. The car was right above him; for a moment he thought he had misjudged, that he was going under its wheels. He tried to curl himself into a ball, his arms shielding his face; then he felt a terrible jar against his shoulders and another in his side, and he was rolling.

The car plunged past him, and the screams faded. He flung out his arms to check his fall. He couldn't. The ground was steep here; he had jumped too late, and now he was rolling faster and faster down the hill.

"No!" he cried. "No!"

He heard a crash far below, and the screams were gone. Then his arms closed on something solid. He gripped and hung on.

He had hold of a branch. In the dim light he could see the tree, stunted but clinging to the side of the hill. He pulled himself up into it, wedging himself in the crotch of the branches.

Above him, he heard brakes squealing as a car screeched to a stop. He heard a car door

slam and someone get out and call.

"Look, down there! I told you I saw that car go over!"

Jim Matheson clutched the branch more tightly and forced himself to look down. It was a long way down to the car, but he could see it clearly. It was burning; the flames licked up, outlining it.

He's dead, Jim thought. It was an accident.

It was all over.

He leaned back and tried to get a more comfortable grip on the tree. It wouldn't be long until a rescue crew arrived with ropes. They'd haul him up. He would be terrified and in shock and feeling guilty over his best friend's death; maybe, he thought ironically, they'd get him on a negligent-driving charge. But that would be all.

He shivered. He saw the old man again, with the blood trickling down his face; his mind pulled away from that sight to an imaginary one of Pete, the way Pete must be now, trapped in the burning car. He cried to himself, But it was an accident! We didn't mean to kill the old man...

Then he thought, with a terrible regret over not having

known it sooner, Sure, the old man's death was an accident. Even though we were legally guilty, we didn't mean it. It wasn't really murder.

But this is.

He stared down at the flames, and he whispered, "Pete..." and he called himself a murderer. It was nothing he could forget. Sure, he thought, I can get away with it. The cops won't know. My parents won't know.

But I'll know.

I killed you, Pete. And there's no way I can ever convince myself I didn't mean it.

Up the hill he heard more voices.

"I'm sorry, Pete," he said aloud.

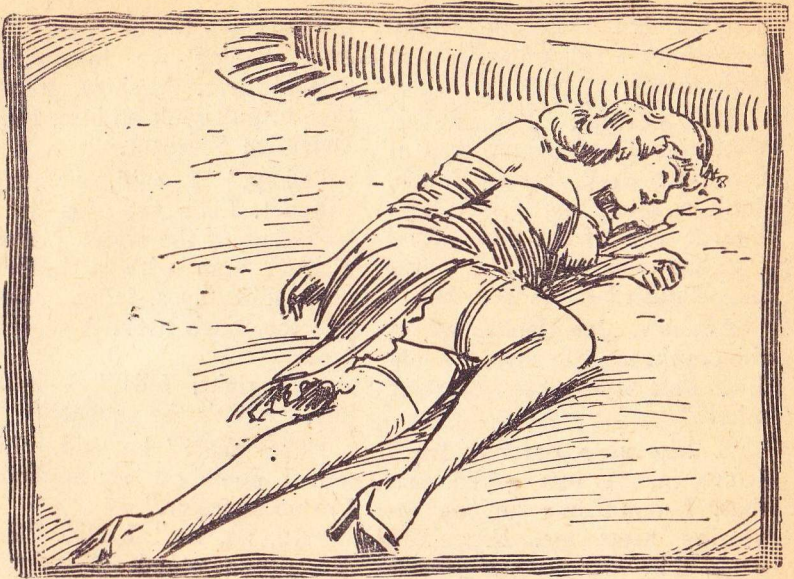
He looked up at the flashlights, bobbing down the hill at him. Then he eased himself back out of the crotch of the tree and hung by his hands over nothing.

Why am I doing this? he wondered. Why?

Slowly he opened his hands and the tree slid away and there was nothing beneath him at all but the burning car and the black, jagged rocks.

THE END

Except for the murdered girl in the gutter, it was a



QUIET NIGHT AT HOMICIDE

by ROBERT TURNER

I WAS DOING a report on the last phone squeal when the crank came into the detective's room. I knew he was a crank right away, he was so wound up. I let him wait while I finished the report, then I said:

"Yeah? What's on your mind?" We make short shrift of cranks. We get too many. Every precinct house does. They're a drag. They come in bleating they've just killed somebody or raped somebody or slapped somebody or set off

a stink bomb in the Bijou. Sometimes I think they're just plain crazy.

My partner, Jon Fuller, Detective First Grade, was at the next desk, eating lunch. Jon's a good Joe; I like him. Except he's all the time eating radish sandwiches. They give him Radish Breath. But bad.

Anyhow, Jon looks up at the crank, too. He says: "Yeah. Like Pete says, what's on your mind?"

"I beg your pardon, Jon," I cut in. "I just asked him that. I don't like anyone repeating after me. Especially when they've been eating radish sandwiches. Know what I mean? So, hereafter, speak for yourself, Jon." I thought that was a pretty good line.

"Oh," Jon said. "Sorry, Pete. I wasn't thinking."

"Quite all right," I told him. "How's the family? Little Jon get his tonsils out yet? Cousin have his appendix? Grampa over the hives? Brother still on a drunk?"

"Fine," he said. "And yes, no, yes, no. That answer your questions?"

He was miffed about my reference to the radish breath, I could tell. Jon's a good man on a squeal but he's sometimes

too sensitive to the type of ribald ribbing we indulge in around here. Anyhow, it was time to pull rank on him. I'm a Detective Sergeant.

"Okay," I said. "Enough chitchat. Let's get with it." I looked up at the crank. He was a little man with a bulbous nose, shifty eyes, fallen arches, and too much neck. A definite type.

"All right, fella," I asked him. "What's the squeal?"

"The what?" he said. "Listen, I don't rat on anybody. I'm no squealer."

"No, no, no," I said. "You don't understand. Merely a colloquialism. I meant what's the complaint—the beef, the grumble, the whine?"

"The what?" he said. "Listen, I ain't no wino, either. I just—"

I was getting sick of this. I cut him off. Turning to Jon, I said: "You got a make on this guy?"

He said: "A what? Oh. Yeah. I spotted him the minute he came in. Calls himself Frank The Crank Schmidt—probably an alias. He lives at 40000000 West 74th St. He—"

"Let's forget it, then," I interrupted. "40000000 West 74th is one of those old brown-

stones, a seven-story walkup, and these guys always live on the top floor. That makes it one for the Safe and Loft Squad. Out of our jurisdiction. Can't poach on those chaps, y'know!"

That's what I thought. Nothing in this business is ever cut and dried. The crank butted in to inform me I was wrong; he lived in the basement. That made it our meat . . . Maybe.

"Okay," I said to Frank The Crank. "What happened?"

A tear worked out of one eye and dribbled down his cheek. Oh, how you get to hate these *crying* cranks! They're so *sloppy*.

Then he looked down at his hands. "I had to do it," he sobbed. "I had to kill her. With my own little hands I had to—"

"Never mind that," I cut him off. "How?"

"What?" he said.

I suddenly felt devastated. I'd forgotten something. This wasn't like the old days. You can't go at things crudely anymore. I jumped up and stretched out a hand.

"Sorry, fella," I told him. "Forgot to introduce ourselves. We're police officers, sir. I'm

Sergeant Pete Peters." I nodded toward Jon. "My partner, Jon Fuller. Now, then . . ."

I pulled a Complaint Report toward me, started jotting on it. I jot on C.R.'s with two fingers and a pencil. Haven't learned to type yet. Taking a post graduate at Police Academy on that subject, though.

"In what manner did the state of the deceased come about?" I said.

"What?" he said. "Oh. You mean how I knock her off?" He lowered his eyes and made a shy grin. "That's easy. I throttled her. Like I told you, with my own two little—"

"We don't use that expression around here," I stopped him. "We call it manual strangulation. M.S., to be terse about it and the M.E. likes us to be terse on these reports. Please be more terse. Now, sir, what was the deceased's name?"

"You mean the dead doll? That's easy. Lillie McBulb."

I looked at Jon. He wriggled his eyebrows knowingly and whispered: "This sounds like that Mad-Hatter murder we had last week up in the 598th bailiwick. Huh, Pete, huh?"

By this time Frank The Crank was babbling. We

couldn't stop him. I couldn't keep up with my jotting on the Complaint Report. It was rugged. Once in a while you get a squeal like this and it makes up for all the lazy nights you sit around playing fantan.

"Yuh gotta listen!" Frank The Crank raved. "It was like this, see. She was beautiful. She was pure and good. I loved her. I was demented about her, I tell you. She liked me a little, too." Tears were now pearling down both cheeks. It was quite messy. "Listen to this. I always thought she was true to me. You see, I had a pet nickname for her. I called her my Living Doll. I used to say: 'Lillie, Baby, you're just a living doll'.... No kidding, just like that I used to say it. All the time. She never got tired of hearing it. And I wasn't telling no lie because that's what she was, you see, just a living doll."

My sidekick, Jon, managed to get a word in. He said: "Yeah, yeah, yeah?"

Frank The Crank went on: "You know what happened then? Pretty soon I'd walk down the street and everywhere I'd go—but everywhere—I'd hear the guys talkin' about her. They'd say: 'Hey,

you know that there Lillie McBulb? Man, she's a living doll!'.... I tell you, officers, every guy on our street was talkin' about her like that, using my own pet phrase. I couldn't stand it. I mean, if she wasn't two-timin' me with all those guys, how did they *know* she had skin like foam rubber and said *Ma-Ma* when you squeezed her? How did they?"

When nobody answered, he shrugged and went on: "So I killed her. What else? Right on the corner of 74th and Columbus. Or was it Amsterdam? Anyhow, with my own two little—"

The clatter of the teletype cut him off. It was another squeal. Only this one was the real thing. A woman had been found D.O.A. by manual strangulation next to a parked M.G. on the corner of 74th and Amsterdam.

Jon and I jammed on our hats and started out. Frank The Crank said: "Hey, wait, you guys! How about me?"

We gave him short shrift. I said: "Save it, fella. We got a live squeal. A real live one."

TWO MINUTES later we boarded the R.M.P. car parked at the curb and hit out

into traffic. I let Jon drive because he drives real good and anyhow, I like to work the siren. I love the way the sound goes up and down. Sometimes I even get goose bumps.

We went across 69th, up Columbus and over to Riverside. At 70th and Broadway we careened around the corner and clobbered some old lady crossing the street. Jon looked at me. I looked at him. He made a shame motion with his two forefingers.

"Someone made a boo-boo," he sing-songed. "And somebody in Traffic is going to get an H&R report."

"So?" I said. "Traffic Bureau's supposed to worry about Hit-and-runs, ain't they? We got our own troubles."

Soon we burned rubber pulling to the curb in front of an old brownstone house on the corner of 74th and Amsterdam. There was a clot of people looking down at something in the gutter. Jon and I eased through the crowd and looked down, too. There was nothing in the gutter now but a chalked outline of a girl's figure. The tech boys had been and gone.

I looked up at the uniformed patrolman standing there. He was big, fat, with a bulbous

nose, dimpled chin, walled eyes and a loose upper plate.

"Evening, O'Hare," I said.

"Evenin', Sarge," he said.

"How's the family?"

That was my line but I let it go. I said, fine, asked how his was and he told me and then I said: "A girl?"

"Man, you kiddin'?" he said. "What else, with such a whistling pair of—"

"Stick to the questions," I told him. "We're police officers. Remember? How old was she?"

"About twenty. Near as I could make it."

"Dead long when you got here?"

"About thirty seconds, near as the M.E. could make it. Said R.M. had progressed only as far as her left clavicle."

Listen to him, I thought. These new cops. Leave 'em get past the sixth grade and they start talkin' like.... I forced my mind back to business: If rigor-mortis had only got that far, the M.E.'s time deduction was about right.

"I see," I said. "You got a make on her, yet?"

"I dunno." O'Hare turned to another patrolman standing around, doing nothing. "Hey, Sam, you got a make on this

one?" The other cop said: "I dunno. Hey, Whitey, we got a make on the stiff, yet?" Whitey turned to another one and said:— Well, it was quite a while before I finally got the make on the dead girl.

Funny thing was, nobody knew her name. All the men in the neighborhood knew who she was, you understand, but they didn't know her by name. They just knew her by her shape. That sometimes happens. Anyhow, all they ever called her was Living Doll. They said that's what she was and so they called her that. This sounded a little familiar to me, but then those things sometimes do.

O'Hare said: "I got an E.W. for you, Sarge."

I said: "A what?" Then I remembered. He meant an Eyewitness.

She was an old woman. The matriarch type. Seventeen kids clung to her ragged gypsy skirt. I said:

"Hate to trouble you, ma'am, but there's been a crime of violence committed. Understand you saw it happen."

"Nnnnnnnn-yah, could be!" she said. "This is my regular corner for pushing charge, so

naturally I keep my orbs peeled. Some scrawny guy with a bulbous nose, flat feet and falling arches comes up to this babe and for no reason at all grabs her about the neck and starts squeezing. Making with the manual strangulation, you know. And he says: 'So now everybody calls you a Livin' Doll, eh? But no more, see? 'Cause you *ain't*, now. You're a *Dying Doll!* Catch wise?' . . . What'd he mean by that, officer? Could he been a bit daft?"

—"I don't know, ma'am," I said "We don't make speculations." I jotted down her description of the killer on my cuff. It wasn't too important, though. Eyewitness descriptions are seldom reliable. Of course, there was that Living Doll business again and it might mean something important or it might not. Those things usually do.

I called Jon over and as he leaned close I smelled Sen-Sen. Maybe he *had* got my hint about the radish sandwiches. Sometimes Jon is smarter than you think. Not often, though.

"Jon," I said, "we got to check the house she lived in. You take one side. I'll take the other."

He nodded. "Right," he said.

I started in the basement. Nobody home. A card pinned to the door, though, told me the basement, when occupied, was lived in by one Frank Schmidt. That rang a familiar bell but there are a lot of Frank Schmidts, so I let it go.

Inside, the hallway smelled of stale cabbage and Sen-Sen. I knew Jon was on the job. I went past a room where a baby was crying, another where a guy was playing *rock 'n' roll* on rubber bands over an old cigar box, another where a woman was beating her husband with an old hoe, and one at the end of the hall where there was no sound at all. That was pretty suspicious. I almost stopped there. But I didn't. I went on.

My first call was on a guy who turned out to be an orthodontist. I introduced myself, asked about his family. When he said he was an orphan I questioned him about the dead girl. Finally he told me:

"Look, you're wasting your time, Chief. I seen her on the street. She had a mean shape, all right, but her teeth were bucked something fierce. What I mean is, I might have wanted to straighten those teeth but I

wouldn't have killed her, would I?"

I told him I was sure he wouldn't and left. I talked to ten other people in ten other apartments. They were a motley group, phrenologists, ice cube melters, septic tank workers, cork screw straighteners, nail file sharpeners and one used car salesman. You meet all kinds of people, this job. Anyhow, I questioned them impartially, learned that their families were all fine and that all these residents had alibis and not one had a single clue as to the identity of the Living Doll murderer.

Jon and I met on the street ten minutes later. I said: "How'd you do?"

He shrugged. He had nothing either. It looked like a dead end to the Dying Doll case.

We learned later that the tech boys hadn't even been able to find any flesh under the corpse's fingernails. It was one of those nights. . .

When I called the Squad Commander he said to hell with it, we had a croquet game on tomorrow with the boys from Narcotics.

"And you know what a mean mallet those N. Squad boys swing, eh, Peters?" the old

S. C. said. "We'll never lick 'em if we don't get our sleep, now will we?"

I said: "That's for sure."

Then I hung up.

JON AND I got back into the R.M.P. car and headed downtown. All the way I wanted to push the siren button, and yet I didn't. It was a funny thing. You're just not yourself when you muff one like this.

Anyhow, we got back to the precinct house and there, waiting for us, was this jerk, Frank The Crank. He grabbed my arm as we hustled inside and I tried to shake him off but couldn't. Jon tried to help me and couldn't. He had some grip in those own little hands of his. The strength of a strangler. I made a note of this for future use.

"All right," I said, quietly. "What's with you?"

"Hey, don't you guys remember me?" he shouted. "What about me and that

dame I killed up on 74th Street, with my own little—"

I shut him off, being in no mood for fiddle-faddle. I said: "You're in the wrong precinct, fella. What you want is the Racket Buster squad. You know why? Because you're makin' a lot of racket, Buster. Ha-ha-de-har-har! Now get out of here. We got work to do."

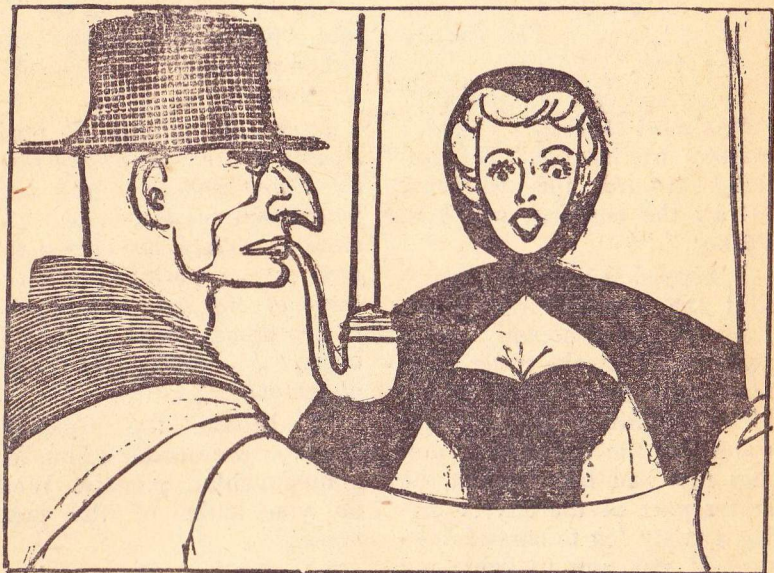
You got to relieve the tension with a touch of humor now and then, you understand.

When Frank The Crank left, Jon and I went dejectedly on to a grim chore. We had to make out our reports for the "*Unsolved*" files. I tried to be stoical about this, of course. Hadn't my Police Academy instructor told me there would be nights like this? But I could tell the whole thing had got Jon down a little. He never did touch the half-eaten radish sandwich he had left on his desk.

THE END

Even master sleuth Solar Pons trembled before the nameless evil of

THE CURSE



A NOVELETTE

by AUGUST DERLETH

“NO, PARKER,” said my friend Solar Pons suddenly, “you need have no fear that the ants, for all their social organization, are close to taking over mankind.”

“The prospect is horrible,” I cried—and stopped short. I

turned. “But how did you know what I was thinking? Pons, this is uncanny.”

“Tut, tut—you are too much given to overstatement. It is only the simplest deduction. You have been reading Mr. H. G. Wells’ admirable

fantasies. When I observed you just now staring at an ant on the pane with an expression that can only be described as one of horror, it was not too much to conclude that you have at last read *The Empire of the Ants*."

"How simple it is, after all!"

"As most seemingly complex matters are simple." He gestured toward the windows. "Draw the curtains, will you, Parker?"

I stepped across the room to shut the weather from sight. Rain whispered steadily at the pane, and from the street came now and then the sound of vehicles splashing through the water, for the warm, late summer rain had been falling the better part of the day, bringing a misty fog to shroud London. It was now twilight, and the yellow glow of lights in windows and along the street could be dimly seen.

"Tell me, Parker, does the name of Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson recall anything to your mind?" asked Pons, as I walked back toward him.

"Nothing but that I seem to remember him as Governor-General of some part of the British empire. Was it not Malaya?"

"It was indeed."

Pons stretched forth a lean arm, took an envelope off the mantel, and held it out to me. I took it, unfolded the paper inside, and read it.

"From a woman, I see," I said. "She uses a highly individual perfume."

"A musk."

Dear Mr. Pons, I read, Against the wishes of my family I am writing to ask that you receive me tomorrow night at eight o'clock on a most urgent matter pertaining to the curse of our unhappy family. It was signed, *Edith Grice-Paterson*. I looked up. "His daughter?"

"I believe the Colonel's daughter pre-deceased him. His granddaughter, perhaps. What do you make of the postmark?"

I looked at the envelope. Though the stamps were British, the postmark was not; it read "Isle of Uffa," and in its geometrical center were stamped the initials "G. P."

"Where in the world is Uffa?" I asked.

"Ah, Parker, I fear my geography is lacking in the information you seek. But I seem to remember that on his retirement from Malaya, Grice-Paterson went to live out his life on an island estate which

exists in a state of quasi-independence from Great Britain. If memory serves me rightly, it lies off the coast of Cornwall, east of the Scilly Isles. It has a status similar, I believe, to the almost incredible Isle of Redonda, which has been a separate little kingdom, though allied with Great Britain, for decades. Uffa, however, is close to England, whereas Redonda lies off the Asian coast."

"I fear both are beyond my knowledge."

"You have never chanced to encounter them."

I turned again to the letter. "She writes in an agitated hand."

"That is hardly surprising. The papers carried a brief notice within the week of the finding of the body of Lt. Augustus Hanwell, described as her fiance. Certain mysterious circumstances attended his death. Let me see, I believe I clipped the account."

Pons opened one of his huge scrapbooks, which was lying among newspapers on the table. From a group of loose clippings waiting their turn to be added to the storehouse of criminous occurrences between those covers, he selected one.

"Yes, here we are."

I walked to where he bent

and looked past him. The story was indeed brief. "Tragic Death," read the short heading. "The body of Lt. Augustus Hanwell, 27, was discovered early yesterday in a study at Vine House, the home of his fiancee, Miss Edith Grice-Paterson, on the Island of Uffa. He appeared to have been asphyxiated or choked to death, though routine inquiries failed to turn up any evidence of foul play. Lt. Hanwell was a native of Brighton. His death is the third in a series of tragedies which have beset the family of the late Col. Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson."

"It is careful to charge no one with murder," I pointed out.

"Is it not, indeed," agreed Pons. "There is more here than the press is willing to print. Perhaps our client can enlighten us further. I hear a car driving to a stop below, and, since it is just past the hour set in her letter, I daresay it is she."

IN A FEW moments our client stood before us. She was a tall, willowy young lady, a pronounced blonde, with strong blue eyes. Though she gave evidence of some trepidation, there was an air of grim determination about her also.

She was dressed entirely in black, and was enveloped in a full cape, which served both to keep her dry and to protect her from the wind. Once she had thrown back her cape, she had the appearance of a young woman well on her way to spinsterhood, so sombre were her bearing and her manner.

She ignored the chair Pons stood out for her and burst at once into speech. "Mr. Pons, I have no one else to turn to. The police of Helston have declined jurisdiction, on the ground that Uffa has a separate government and that its status in relation to Great Britain has never been clearly defined. That is all nonsense—we are part of Britain—but they do have certain valid reasons for their reluctance to act. Nevertheless, I am determined to bring to an end the curse which has hung over our house ever since I can remember." Though she spoke with suppressed feeling, there was no mistaking the firmness of her resolve. She paused dramatically before she added, "Mr. Pons, in the past eleven years, three persons have died very strangely under our roof, in circumstances which strongly suggest murder—but, if so, it is murder without meaning and

motive, murder which the authorities are reluctant to agree is just that."

She strode up and down before the fireplace, clasping and unclasping her fingers in agitation she fought to control.

"Pray compose yourself, my dear lady," said Pons quietly. "You are the granddaughter of the late Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson?"

"I am. I am the mistress of Vine House."

"The late Colonel had two sons and a daughter?"

Our client drew in her breath for a moment and clenched her hands. "His two sons were the first and second victims of the curse which has fallen on our family, Mr. Pons. My mother died in an accident at sea. There are left of our entire family now only my two brothers and myself. Both are younger than I, and for the time being, they live with me at Vine House.

"My grandfather died eleven years ago, and the estate—that is, the Island of Uffa, fell to his three children. My only aunt and one uncle died without heirs, and so the estate fell to my father. He in turn died as mysteriously as his brother, and my poor Augustus, within a year after he came down

from London to assume possession of Uffa. All the children had been living away from the house when my grandfather died; he was a solitary man, very introspective by nature, and with a strong streak of misanthropy. He lived alone but for one servant, and discouraged even his children's visits. His sole occupations were the writing of his memoirs, which were never published, and his devotion to horticultural pursuits. While he made, or seemed to make, an exception in my case, in that he showed a fondness for me on such occasions as we visited Uffa while my father was employed in London, he was rebelliously rude and cantankerous with everyone else."

Pons sat for a moment in silence, his fingers tented before him, an enigmatic smile on his thin lips. "Will you tell us something of the—the curse, I believe you called it?" he asked presently.

"Very well, Mr. Pons, I will do the best I can," said our visitor. "It began—no, let me say rather that the first time I was aware of it was about a year after grandfather died. I was then seventeen. My grandfather's house had always seemed a very gloomy place to me—

for he had surrounded it with all manner of plants and trees, and it was overgrown with vines—and we did not visit there often. However, on that occasion—my seventeenth birthday—we came down from London to spend a week with my Uncle Sydney.

"It was at about this time of the year. My uncle was in the best of spirits, though there had never been much love lost among the members of my father's generation, or, for that matter, between my grandfather and his children. On the morning of the second day of our visit with him, my uncle failed to come down to breakfast. When my father and one of the servants went to see what detained him, they found him stretched out on the middle of the floor, dead. Mr. Pons, he had been strangled in some remarkable fashion—there were curious bruises around his neck, as well as on his face, his arms, his back and his chest. There was the appearance of a violent struggle, but the room was locked, the key was in the lock on the inside, and, while the window was open, there was no mark to show that anyone had climbed into the second story window either by ladder or by means

of the thick vines along that wall.

"The medical evidence seemed inconclusive; it was not called death by strangulation, but death by misadventure; his doctor believed he had had some kind of seizure, and, while a cursory investigation was made by the only police sergeant on the island, there was nothing at all that might be called evidence turned up. No strange craft had landed on Uffa; no one had any reason to want Uncle Sydney dead; and my father, who inherited my uncle's share of the island, had far more wealth of his own through his business interests and his investments in the city."

Our client struggled visibly to control herself; she was clearly still under great strain, and had undoubtedly forced herself to make the journey to consult my companion. "Mr. Pons, I didn't see my uncle lying there—but I did see my father in exactly similar circumstances just seven years later, almost to the day—and now, God help us all—I've seen my fiance similarly slain—all without motive, as if it were an act of a vengeful God! Mr. Pons, our family—our house—our Uffa is cursed!

Now my brothers are urging me to sell—to give up Uffa—and move to England. I have no wish to do so, for I am sentimentally attached to our island, but certainly I cannot sell until I can be sure that only the Grice-Patersons and those who are close to us are victims of this dread curse which seems to know no limitation of time."

"Do I understand you to say that all these deaths have taken place in the same room, Miss Grice-Paterson?" asked Pons.

"No, Mr. Pons. Two of them took place in the same room on the second floor—my uncle's and my father's. My fiance was found on the ground floor, in the study directly below that room. He had been reading late, and had apparently fallen asleep. The circumstances of my father's and uncle's deaths were very much the same—that is, the door was locked, but the open windows showed no sign of disturbance. In the case of my fiance, the door was standing open, but nothing had been disturbed. There were the same strangling lines about his neck..."

"Pons!" I cried out suddenly, memory flooding me—"A dacoit!"

Our client flashed a startled glance in my direction, and then gazed wonderingly back toward Pons.

"Pray forgive Dr. Parker, Miss Grice-Paterson. He is addicted to the reading of the exploits of Dr. Fu Manchu, who employs thugs and dacoits to perform his lethal work for him."

"You may well make sport of me," I answered hotly, "but it's certainly not beyond the bounds of possibility that the one-time Governor-General of Malaya may have brought back with him some sacred symbol, the recovery of which has brought about these strange deaths."

"Perhaps not beyond the bounds of possibility, but certainly of probability," countered Pons.

Our client fingered a curiously-wrought golden brooch at her throat, a thoughtful expression on her attractive features. "It is true I've heard my grandfather speak often of the mysteries of Malaya—of the strange customs and the unbelievable things one might learn from the ancient native culture—but I'm quite sure he was not the kind of man who would have made off with anything which did not belong to him.

He was no doubt a martinet in many ways, and in most ways a typical British colonial administrator, I am convinced—but, Mr. Pons, he was not a thief."

"I should be inclined to agree with you, Miss Grice-Paterson, since I know something of your grandfather's record," said Pons soothingly, his eyes warning me to be silent. "Now tell me, would it be possible for Dr. Parker and me to examine the body of Lt. Hanwell?"

Our client bit her lip, and an expression of anguish washed into her face. "Mr. Pons, he has been put into his coffin, and we're shipping his body home to Brighton tomorrow. Do you think it necessary?"

"It may be helpful," replied Pons.

"Very well, then, if we were to leave immediately—my car is below, and there will be a boat waiting to take us to Uffa at Penzance—we might be able to accomplish what you ask before the body is sent away."

"Capital! We shall leave at once."

Pons leapt to his feet, threw aside his purple dressing-gown, kicked off his slippers, and in a thrice was ready, deerstalker,

Inverness and all, having moved with an agility only too typical of him, and managing to chide me for my slowness at the same time. He did not speak to our client again until we were comfortably ensconced in her car, a handsome Rolls-Royce, driven by a chauffeur.

"Tell me, Miss Grice-Pater-son, has there ever occurred any other untoward incident at Vine House?"

In the darkness of the car, our client's sensitive face was visible only in the light of passing street-lamps. She appeared to weigh Pons' question before she answered.

"Mr. Pons, I cannot say. Perhaps in the light of life in an ordinary suburban villa or semi-detached house, there have been strange events at Vine House. Our inability to keep dogs, for instance."

"Ah, what of that?"

"They die, Mr. Pons. Despite the fact that our winter temperatures rarely fall below forty-five degrees, and our summer temperatures do not often rise above eighty degrees, our dogs have been unable to weather a year at Vine House. We have lost no less than seven of them in the course of the past decade. Of

all kinds, too. And two cats, I might mention, shared the dogs' inability to live on Uffa."

"Is this a general condition on the island?"

"Well, now that I think of it—it isn't. There is a dog in a tenant house at the other end of the island. An old sheep dog. He doesn't seem to have been troubled by the atmosphere of the island. He may be an exception. Then again, it may be the atmosphere of Vine House, which brings me to another of the incidents you asked about—the night of the perfume—when the entire island seemed to be pervaded with a most bewitching and demoralizing perfume, as cloying as that of heliotrope and giddyng. It came, of course, from one of my late grandfather's rare plants, which had come into blossom after many years of sterility.

"Then there are, I suppose one might add, the strange, whispering sounds of the leaves, which seem to caress one another even on the most windless nights. Oh, Mr. Pons—how can I speak of these things which are so much a part of the house and of life on Uffa, when I am still bowed by the curse of the Grice-Pater-sons! How shall I ever again

survive the month of August! I shall never spend another summer on Uffa."

She spoke with unassailable passion and determination.

"You do not live alone at Vine House?"

"No, Mr. Pons. My brothers, Avery and Richard, live there with me. Mrs. Flora Brinton is our cook. Aram Malvaides is an old servant who was my grandfather's orderly for many years. He is the gardener, and he has an assistant who comes by the day from the mainland. There are certain other minor servants, responsible to Mrs. Brinton or to Aram."

"You have not mentioned having heard any outcry in the case of any one of the three unfortunate deaths, Miss Grice-Paterson."

"None was heard. The crimes took place late at night, evidently after the victims were asleep."

"Yet there was evidence of struggle in each case?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Does it not seem strange to you that none cried out, that no struggle was heard?"

"No, Mr. Pons. Vine House is built in the shape of a T with a short stem. The family usually sleep in the west wing,

or the left arm of the T, whereas our guest rooms and winter quarters are in the east wing. There is the entire length of the house to separate the one from the other. Even if there had been an outcry, there's no certainty that it would have been heard by any of us. But there was none, for the servants would surely have heard a cry if one had sounded."

Pons flashed a baffling smile at me and lapsed into silence. Once or twice I caught sight of his hawklike face in semi-repose, but soon we were out of London, away from the occasional gleams of light, riding through the dark countryside into the southeast.

2.

AT DAWN we were riding out of Dartmoor Forest into Cornwall, and soon we were catching glimpses of what is surely one of the most beautiful faces of England—the Cornish coast near Truro, and then Camborne, and then at last, Penzance, where there was indeed a boat awaiting us—it was no less than a small yacht. But of Uffa there was no sign from land; our client explained that it lay just over the horizon. Her car was quartered in

Penzance, since there was little use for it on Uffa, which consisted of but a small settlement in addition to Vine House and the immediate grounds of the estate, though the entire island was the domain of the Grice-Paterson family, and had been for two centuries.

The morning was free of fog, and presently Uffa rose out of the sea like the embodiment of a dream, like fabled Lyonesse, all green, save for a few rocks along one coast, and for a cluster of white which was the little fishing village on the opposite coast. It was there that we landed. A carriage waited for us there, driven by a dour, dark-skinned old man.

"This is Aram, Mr. Pons," said Miss Grice-Paterson.

Aram gazed at us with the darkest suspicion manifest on his features. His attitude was aloof and unfriendly.

"I don't know what my brothers will say," our client went on. "They may be rude; if so. I hope you will forgive them. It is I who am mistress here, and the decision is mine to make. They've opposed your coming—they fear 'any further scandal'—as they put it."

"We shall see," said Pons imperturbably.

The Grice-Paterson brothers

were indeed angry to the point of rudeness. Avery, who was the older, was but a year younger than his sister; he was a dark-haired brute of a man, as massive as our client was well-proportioned, with the shoulders of a professional athlete. Richard was as fair as his brother was dark, and slight of build against Avery's thickness. Neither was entirely civil at our introductions, and neither was co-operative, being disinclined to answer the few questions Pons put.

We did not linger in their company, however, for Pons was anxious to view the body of Lt. Augustus Hanwell before its removal. We therefore followed our client from the house through the heavily overgrown lawns and gardens east of the widespread dwelling, past the abandoned dog kennels, to the old stone family vault, where the coffin containing the body lay waiting to be sealed by the authorities before being taken on shipboard.

"Forgive me," said Miss Grice-Paterson at the great iron door. "I cannot bear to see him again. I'll wait here, along the path."

The coffin stood just inside. Pons left the door ajar, and so we had ample light at the en-

tranceway to the vault, though Pons had brought his pocket flash. He lost no time raising the coffin lid, exposing to view a handsome, moustached face, that of a man who looked even younger than his years. But face and neck—when his clothing was somewhat withdrawn—still showed the livid marks our client had described to us.

"Your department, I think, Parker," said Pons, holding his light close to the dead man's skin.

I examined the marks with the greatest care, though I was at a distinct disadvantage in doing so two days past the event. But there was no mistaking what I saw, and, when I had completed my examination, I said so.

"These are the marks of thin but powerful cords, applied with great pressure."

"Enough to cause death?"

"Enough, in my opinion."

"There were no wounds except the marks of the cords?"

"Only on the marks themselves. Here and there small openings in the flesh, which might have been made by rough spots on the cords. You may laugh at me all you like, Pons, but if this is not the work of dacoits, I shall be very greatly surprised."

For a few moments Pons said nothing. He bent to examine the marks. When he straightened up, his aspect was grave as he replied, "I fear it is something far more sinister, my dear fellow, than dacoits. Look again. Are those tears in the flesh not regular punctures?"

I threw up my hands. "It is one and the same thing."

Pons closed the coffin and stood aside for me to pass.

We found our client standing at some little distance from the vault. Beyond her, approaching the place, was a complement of four men from the ship in the harbor, preceded by an official who was clearly a member of the police. Miss Grice-Paterson, however, avoided meeting them by stepping down a side path.

"I will take you around to the room where my fiance was found," she said. And in a moment she indicated the east wall of the building, a towering mass of vines which gave the house its name. "See, those are the windows—those two there. And directly above them are the windows of the other room in which my uncle and my father were found."

The windows were framed in singularly beautiful crimson

flowers, which adorned the vines massed upon the stone wall of the house; in the bright morning sunlight, their appearance was remote indeed from the nameless horror which had taken place just beyond them.

Pons paused a moment, crossed over, and smelled a blossom. From the proximity of the windows, where he stood intently examining the earth below, he asked, "Should something happen to you, Miss Grice-Paterson, who will inherit the property?"

"My brother Avery."

"And after him?"

"My brother Richard."

"And then?"

Miss Grice-Paterson looked at Pons, puzzled. "How curious you should ask that, Mr. Pons! Or perhaps you knew of my grandfather's strange will. If some catastrophe were to wipe out our family, the entire estate is to go to old Aram. We have no other close relatives. My grandfather had a brother who was with him in Malaya, but he was killed in an accident there. His only son succumbed to one of those mysterious East Indian diseases, while he, too, worked as a commissioner on my grandfather's staff. I told you," she concluded grimly, "that there is a horrible curse

on our family—I assure you most earnestly I was not exaggerating."

"I believe you," answered Pons. "Tell me, if you know—what were your grandfather's relations with his brother and his nephew?"

She shrugged. "I cannot say, except by what I have heard. Grandfather was a difficult man. I understood the change came on him after my grandmother's death."

"Was she, too, a victim of the curse?"

"Oh, it is all of a piece, surely, Mr. Pons," she cried. "Grandmother was accidentally killed at a birthday party arranged for her by the family—exclusive of grandfather. Grandfather went to pieces. He brooded for days, and never afterward seemed to come out of his shell except as an irascible old man, filled with hate of mankind."

"I see. Now let us have a look at the room in which Lt. Hanwell met his death."

ONCE more we braved the scowls of Avery and Richard Grice-Paterson, as we passed through the front part of the house on our way to the east wing. The room in which Lt. Hanwell had been found

was a spacious one, lined with shelves of books on all but one wall, and handsomely appointed to be as pleasant as possible for anyone who chose to spend his time in it. Our client indicated a comfortable old leather-covered chair between a table lamp and the near window.

"Augustus had apparently been reading there and had fallen asleep. He was found between the chair and the window. The chair had been kicked out of place, and the table moved somewhat out of its customary position. The lamp had fallen over; it was still alight when we found him."

"The window was open?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Our windows are unscreened because we are never troubled with insects of any kind."

"So that anyone might have entered that way?"

"There was no sign of such entry."

"Nevertheless, it was open."

"But who would have motive for such an act, Mr. Pons?"

"Ah, Miss Grice-Paterson, I am not so bold as to say. But let us suppose it was to someone's interest to prevent your marriage."

"But why?"

"To prevent any change in the line of succession. Or am I mistaken in that your marriage would alter the provisions of your grandfather's will?"

She colored briefly and looked down. "No, Mr. Pons," she said in a scarcely audible voice. "The property would go to my oldest child."

"As for the absence of signs of entry by way of the windows..." began Pons.

"A dacoit could manage it without leaving a trace," I said with considerable asperity.

Pons did not so much as blink an eye in acknowledgment. "Lt. Hanwell slept in the room above?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Mr. Pons. Augustus slept in the west wing, where we all sleep. We seldom use the east wing, except in winter, when we move out of the west wing for this."

Pons examined the window and its frame. Then he looked over the chair, studying what appeared to be lines of wear, after which he got down on his hands and knees to look about on the rug, having been assured by Miss Grice-Paterson that it had not been cleaned. He seemed to find nothing there but fragments of drying leaves, which he discarded. Then he went back to the win-

dow, opening it and leaning out. By bending down, he could almost have touched the ground, which he had scrutinized outside. The sphinx-like expression on his face told me nothing as he drew back into the room and closed the window once more.

"And now the room upstairs, if you please."

In a few minutes we stood in a gracious, sunlit bedroom which was the very antithesis of a murder chamber. The room contained a large double bed immediately adjacent to the window; if this were the position of the bed at the time of the death of the two elder Grice-Patersons, I could not help thinking how immoderately convenient it was for any murderous dacoit. Pons must have been thinking along the same lines, for he crossed at once to the window and leaned out to test the strength of the vines, the heady perfume of he flowers of which wafted into the room as soon as he opened the window.

"They look as if they would bear the weight of a small man," I could not help saying.

"They would bear a two-hundred-pound man," replied Pons.

"My grandfather planted them when he came into the estate, just after grandmother's death in Malaya. He was on his first visit home," explained our client. "We naturally thought of someone's climbing them to come in through the window, but there was no mark on them, and the vines should surely carry some sign of having been climbed, Mr. Pons."

"It is reasonable to assume so—in all but an exceptional case. These windows, too, were open on those lethal dates?"

"I believe so, Mr. Pons. I remember the questions that were asked when my uncle was found. I was seventeen then, as I told you."

"And your brothers?"

"They were sixteen and fourteen."

Pons stood looking about, but there was nothing to be seen, for the room was spotlessly clean. Then he appeared to come to a sudden decision. "Can it be arranged for us to spend the night in this room, Miss Grice-Paterson?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Pons. I had expected to put you into the west wing—but perhaps you would have greater privacy here."

"Thank you. We'll try this room for a night or two."

FOR the next few hours, Pons wandered through Vine House, questioning the servants and making a vain attempt to inquire about certain events of the Grice-Paterson brothers, who remained plainly unwilling to be of any assistance, a circumstance I regarded with the deepest suspicion, though Pons shrugged it off. He walked about the gardens and lawns, marveling at the variety of exotic plants, shrubs and trees which abounded there—the fruit of the late Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson's industry. Indeed, so overgrown was the estate that it seemed almost as if the one-time Governor-General of Malaya had sought to create here on this island off the coast of Cornwall a home reproducing, as far as the climate permitted, his residence in the Malay States. Nor was Pons content with the environs of the Grice-Paterson home; he wandered all over the island, pausing in the little harbor village, quite as if he were on a holiday instead of busy at an inquiry into as dreadful a crime as either of us had encountered for many years.

OUR LUNCH we had taken alone. Our dinner was with the family. This proved to be an extremely uncomfortable meal for all but Pons, for the Grice-Paterson brothers took no trouble to conceal their animosity to us. Pons, however, affected not to notice. Time and again he turned to one or the other of them with a question.

"Tell me," he said to Avery, "were you aware of the terms of your late grandfather's will?"

"You are fishing for motive, aren't you, Mr. Pons?" answered Avery hostilely. "You should realize, sir, we've had quite enough scandal without your meddling."

"The question, Mr. Grice-Paterson," insisted Pons, his enthusiasm for the leg of lamb on his plate not at all diminished by Avery's manner.

"Answer him," said our client angrily.

"I was," said Avery sullenly.

And to Richard later, Pons said, "I cannot escape the impression that neither of you cared very much for Lt. Hanwell."

"Oh, we didn't," answered

Richard. "We're solitaires, my brother and I. And you'll find, if you dig deep enough, Mr. Pons, that when I was a boy I could get up and down those vines like a monkey. Without trace," he added with heavy sarcasm.

Pons thanked him gravely, and continued to show no annoyance when all his other questions were similarly treated by the brothers.

Not until we were once more in the room in the east wing, following that stiff, uncomfortable meal, did Pons relax his insistent casualness.

"Now, then, Parker, have you given up that fancy of yours about the stolen idol and the dacoit?"

"No, Pons, I have not," I answered firmly. "I can think of no other theory which fits the facts so well. Yet I concede that there is the little matter of the succession—I've failed no more than you to notice that, except for Miss Grice-Paterson's fiance—and perhaps he, too, indirectly—each of these deaths has furthered the succession of the estate."

"Ah, death always furthers something of the kind," said Pons. "Would that not make the ultimate author of these

murders, to your mind, then, Aram Malvaides?"

"Who else? Mark this—he alone of all the parties who have an interest in the Grice-Paterson estate was present on the scene on each occasion. The boys were not."

"Ah, that is well-reasoned, Parker," admitted Pons.

Thus encouraged, I went on. "If Miss Grice-Paterson had married, there might be still more heirs to dispose of."

"You conceive of his wanting to eliminate everyone who stood between him and the inheritance?"

"Would it not have to be all or none?"

"Indeed it would, if your theory were tenable. But why wait so long between crimes, when he is clearly not growing younger?"

"No one knows the dark mind of the murderer."

"And just how did he manage to gain entry without leaving a clue?" pressed Pons. "And pray spare me that dacoit, Parker. I find it inconceivable that a convenient dacoit would be standing by on call to suit the whims of so reluctant a murderer."

"I have not yet come to any conclusion about his clueless entrance," I was forced to ad-

mit.

"I fear that is the flaw in most armchair rationalization—particularly when it is based so largely on romance."

Once again I knew that Pons was laughing at me; I was nettled. "No doubt you already know the identity of the murderer?"

"I suspected it before we left London."

"Oh, come, Pons. I am a patient man, but . . ."

"I never knew a more patient one, to tolerate my idiosyncrasies for so many years," replied Pons handsomely. "But there are several salient factors which, I submit, may have some bearing on the matter. I am no lover of coincidences, though I am willing to concede that they take place far more often in life than could be justified in fiction. It has not occurred to you that it may be significant that all these deaths should have taken place at approximately the same time of the year?"

"Coincidence."

"I feared you would say as much. The family occupies the east wing only in winter. Why? I have made certain enquiries, and understand that this practise was inaugurated by Sir Ronald; the family but fol-

lowed his custom. This does not seem at all meaningful to you?"

I confessed that it did not.

"Very well. I may be in error. Yet I suggest that there may well be a connection to certain other curious factors. I fancy we are in agreement that ingress was accomplished through the open window in each case?"

With this I agreed unreservedly.

"It does not seem to you curious, if that is so, that there was no mark to be found on any occasion?—no footprint below the ground floor window, though there is a respectable area where one might be impressed on the ground there?—no abrasion of the vines to indicate the presence of a climber to this room—nothing?"

"Someone sufficiently light—and trained—could accomplish all that was done without leaving a trace."

"Surely that would be almost insurmountably difficult," protested Pons

"Richard has admitted that as a boy he did it."

Pons smiled. "Richard was having us."

"You may think so, if you like," I retorted hotly. "But

has it not occurred to you that these murders may have been started by someone else, and only carried on in this generation by another hand?"

"It has indeed," answered Pons. "Let us for the moment concede that it may be possible for undetected entry to have been made by way of the vines. Let us look at another aspect of this curious little horror. Why should there be so long an interval from one crime to the next?"

"Obviously to diminish attention."

"If diminishing attention were of importance, surely some less dramatic manner of committing a crime might have been found?"

"Except to one specially trained in the chosen method."

"Ah, we are back once more to the dacoit. I had no conception of the depth of your devotion to the sinister doctor."

"You are making sport of me, yet I'm in deadly earnest," I said. "Is there any other solution which so admirably fits all the facts?"

"Yes, I daresay there is one."

"What is it?"

"That which was in fact the method and motive for the crimes."

"That is a riddle unworthy of you, Pons."

"Surpassed only by the true solution of the curse of the Grice-Patersons."

"If you are so sure of the solution," I cried, "why are we dawdling here? Why haven't you arrested the murderer? Why haven't we begun the return journey?"

"Ah, though I am sure, I want a little more verification than my deduction alone. I am entitled to wait upon events for that verification, just as you are to wait for the dacoit to make another return engagement, for our presence in this room this hot summer night will duplicate the superficial aspects of the situation prior to each of the three crimes which have been committed."

"Except for one," I hastened to point out. "We are not heirs to the estate."

"You have your revolver with you, I notice," Pons went on. "That should be adequate defense against your dacoit. I have asked that the Colonel's old sword be sent up; that, in turn, should serve me long enough to sever any cord which may loop about us."

"Surely you are not expecting another attack!"

"Say, rather I am hoping

for one. We shall hope to catch the murderer in the act."

"Pons, this is absurd. An attack on us would be completely motiveless; it would be a basic flaw in our concept of the motive for this sequence of events."

"Pray permit me to correct you—your concept of the motive, not ours."

"If I were to act, I would have Malvaides under arrest without delay."

Pons smiled grimly. "Yet it is no less logical to suppose that somehow our client's late father slew his brother; that she herself slew her father; that her brother, Avery, likewise developed enough agility to make away with Lt. Hanwell—they, too, were directly or indirectly in line to inherit.

"And now, Parker, it is past the dinner hour; night will soon be upon us. In hot latitudes, people take siestas after lunch; we did not. It is almost hot enough here for the torrid zone, and I for one am going to take a little rest before what I hope will be a strenuous night."

A STRENUOUS night, indeed!

How often since that time have I recalled the singular

events of that night spent in the twice fatal room of Vine House on the Island of Uffa! We retired together at a late hour, despite our tiredness, but I was soon drowsily aware that Pons had left our bed and had gone to sit instead in a large, old-fashioned rocking-chair which stood opposite the open windows, so that he could face them and still keep an eye on the bed.

Behind him, the door to the room was locked. We had prepared, as he put it, the identical situation which had obtained on the occasions of the two previous murders which had taken place in this room, as well as that of Lt. Hanwell below. Had I not been so exhausted after our long night ride and the difficulty of following Pons about during the day, I would not have slept, for the room and the night were cloyingly hot and humid; but the distant roar of the surf was lulling, and I was soon asleep. My last memory was of Pons sitting grimly on guard, the late Sir Ronald's sword ready to hand, even as my revolver lay beneath my pillow, ready for almost instant firing.

I do not know how many hours I slept before I was awakened, gasping for air, try-

ing to call out, in the grip of a deadly menace. Before I could reach for my revolver—before I was sufficiently awake to grasp what was taking place—I felt myself being drawn bodily from my bed.

Then I had a horrified glimpse of Pons whipping away with the sword, even as the life was being squeezed out of me, and I felt a dozen pin-points of pain upon my throat, my wrist, my face. Briefly, I was aware of a distorted picture, inexplicably horrible, filled with the imminence of death, of Pons' desperation against an enemy I could not see but only feel, of the tightening cords wound so insidiously about me—

Then I swooned.

When I came to, Pons was bending above me, chafing my brow.

"Thank God, Parker!" he cried. "I would never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you in my anxiety to satisfy my suspicions!"

I struggled dazedly to a sitting position. "The murderer?" I gasped, looking vainly for him.

"The murderer—if murderer there was—has been dead these twelve years. Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson. Only

his unique weapon remains."

Then I saw all around me on the floor the severed, fleshy vines from the plant with the crimson flowers that covered the east wall of the house, and knew what it was that had sought to clasp me in its lethal embrace, even as it had taken the Grice-Patersons and Lt. Augustus Hanwell in their sleep.

"I believe it to be an experience without par," said Pons, helping me to my feet. "I had slipped into a doze and woke to a sound from the bed. The vines had come through the window seeking the prey they sensed lay there—indeed, the entire opening was filled with their waving tendrils and limbs. I shall never forget the sight!"

IN THE morning, in our compartment of the train making its way from Penzance to London—for Pons would not permit our client to have us driven home, remaining only long enough to assist in the destruction of Sir Ronald's deadly vine—Pons spoke reflectively of our strange adventure.

"The limiting circumstances of the deaths suggested a limited agent from the beginning," he said. "Each death had

taken place in a room on the east side of the house—the same side on which the dogs and cats were found dead at various times of summer mornings—and each at the height of summer. ‘How shall I ever again survive the month of August!’ cried Miss Grice-Paterson. Furthermore, each had taken place at night, while the victims slept, thus enabling an insidious and silent slayer to transfix its victims in a fatal embrace, which a waking man would readily have escaped.

“The vine was unquestionably a mutation developed by Sir Ronald himself, a relative of the upas tree, and, like certain other plants, was carnivorous, becoming especially active at the height of its growth, which was its time of flowering—midsummer. An importation from Malaya, beyond question. Curiously, no one seems to have thought of examining the dead men or animals for loss of blood, for the vine was, quite literally, vampiric.

“Sir Ronald knew its properties, beyond doubt. He knew very well why he avoided the east wing in summer, and only the family’s habit of following his custom explains their survival. Otherwise they might all have been dead long before this.

“Sir Ronald’s motive in planting and cultivating it on Uffa is obscured by time. Did his misanthropy indeed compel him to lay so effective and mortal a trap for those who succeeded him in the ironic intention that his one-time orderly should come into the estate? We have had repeated reference to the old man’s dislike of the human race, which extended even to his own family. Perhaps in that lay the root of the evil that was the curse of the Grice-Patersons. It makes an interesting speculation, though we shall never know.”

THE END

From the appearance of the dead girl's nude body, it was plain that

SOMEBODY KNEW HER



by BARRY MILES

CARMOODY looked down again at the slack and awkwardly positioned nude body of the young girl lying on the kitchen floor of No. 5, *Gulfways Motel*. Nice figure, dusty black hair in sharp contrast against the white tile floor,

dark blue eyes that were half-lidded and glaring in the lamp-light. Her throat was cut.

"She's dead," Carmoody said. "Which is a too bad thing. But that's about all I'm certain of. How's for going into the other room?"

The young man turned away from the detective-sergeant, stepped a yard and a half past the tiny lunch bar into the combination bedroom-living room, and slumped on the couch.

Carmody stood there a moment longer, looking down at the body of the girl. Then he sighed, turned toward the young man.

"How long have you known her, Ulrich?"

Ulrich continued to slump on the couch in the beach motel living room. Florida night winds rattled the front screen door, breathed sweetly through the rooms and left, rattling the kitchen screen door. From not far away the Gulf splashed against the sea wall. Ulrich did not look at Sergeant Carmody. Ulrich was sick, and maybe a little crazy since returning to find his girl this way.

"About all my life," Ulrich said.

"She was *always* your girl?"

"Yes. It was like— Yes."

Carmody flipped a strong brown hand at the inquisitive face of the harness cop showing at the front screen door. The face went away. Carmody cleared his throat, made

a helpless gesture, ran his hand across thick blond hair, then harshly down across his sunburned face.

"Ulrich?"

"Huh?"

Ulrich sat on the edge of the couch and stared at the floor between his knees, head in hands, dressed in a blue sport shirt and light tan trousers. He was a broad, husky young man and he looked dependable, even the way things were.

"It's better we talk now," Carmody said. "Won't be long before this place'll be crawling with cops and reporters. It'll be rough. Only reason Crosswell is here, he was on beach patrol. I pulled him in off the highway. It's quite a ways to town, but they'll all be along damned quick."

Ulrich did not move.

"I know you're clear," Carmody said. "The cab driver that brought you said he picked you up at Tampa International. Aren't you interested in why I'm here? Don't you want to know something about this?"

"Does it matter?"

Carmody ran his hand across his face again. "What you say we go outside?"

Ulrich said nothing. He

stood up, turned without looking toward the girl, and marched out through the living room to the door. Crosswell, the harness cop, opened the screen, and Ulrich vanished into the night.

Carmody cramped his lower lip tightly with forefinger and thumb, shook his head, glanced at the body, then followed Ulrich.

Ulrich had walked to the edge of sand and grass, until he stood on the sea wall. His hands were jammed deep into his pockets and the wind snapped the bottom of his unbuttoned shirt.

"Ulrich?"

Ulrich did not speak. He stared out there.

"All right," Carmody said. "Here's the way it is. Your girl, Virginia, called the police. This afternoon. We've had reports of a peeping tom on the beaches, out here. She said she'd seen somebody looking in the window. They put me on night duty out here." He turned, looked back toward the motel, then at Ulrich. "It happened—must have—when I was down the road for a sandwich. I checked with her when I came back—found her like she is. It was done with a knife

—only there's no trace of that either."

"Why?" Ulrich said softly. "Why?"

"Easy," Carmody said. "You may as well know. Whoever the guy was, she must have seen him. Maybe he got bold and went inside after her. Once she saw him, he couldn't let her live. He was desperate—maybe crazy, who knows?"

Ulrich had his hands over his face. He talked through his hands. "But she—her clothes..."

"Torn to strips. Found 'em in the kitchen garbage pail, there. He—uh—well, the doc hasn't checked her yet, of course."

"You mean—?" Ulrich began to curse quietly until he stopped for breath. He had his hands clasped in front of him.

"We'll get him," Carmody said. "Don't worry about that. When was the last time you saw Miss Morgan?"

"Two weeks ago."

"You've been up in New York?"

"Yuh."

"Did she know you'd be back tonight? She didn't mention you to me, Ulrich. She know you planned to see her?"

Ulrich lifted one hand, made

a vague motion, dropped it. "How would I know she'd be here if we hadn't planned to meet?"

Carmody leaned down, picked up a small chip of white shell, flicked it over the rim of the sea wall. Egmont Light blinked like a far red eye.

"Cigarette?" Carmody said, offering Ulrich the pack.

"No."

Carmody lighted his cigarette, scowling in the glare.

"You loved her?" he said through thick smoke.

"I loved her. She loved me. What matter?"

"She have any—er, faults? I've got to ask these things, son—it's not easy."

"I understand," Ulrich said quietly. "No faults—not really. That is, she wanted lots of money, but who doesn't? Not crazy for it, understand? I aimed to get her everything she wanted. Someday."

"Wanted money."

Ulrich stared at the night.

"I can understand that," Carmody said. "Did you see anybody around here, maybe your place—anything at all, when you came in tonight?" Carmody paused. "I mean, before you came in and found Crosswell and me there. I'd

only found her five minutes before you came along. It naturally looked bad, till I checked with the cab company."

Ulrich started to shake his head, stopped. "Yeah," he said. "That's right. I saw somebody walking along the front, in the drive. He went down around the rear of the motels. He was in a hurry, too—I remember now."

"Damn it. I didn't hear a thing, either. Might have been staying right here. But I checked everybody. Maybe went down by the water. Remember if he came back?"

Ulrich's voice faltered, went quiet again. "I was with you after that."

"You know anybody—disliked her enough to do something like this? In case there's another angle?"

Ulrich turned and his voice was harsh. "No!" He stepped closer to Carmody, the voice still harsh, but with a tear in it. "Not Ginny—why do you have to ask questions like that? Nobody could hate Ginny." He turned away and stood there again, looking out over the water. "We didn't know anybody down here. Just us."

"Yeah," Carmody said.

"Only somebody knew her that's for sure."

"That's your job."

Carmody's voice was kind, very gentle and understanding. "Know you feel bad, Ulrich. But I've got to ask these things. How did she know you were coming tonight?"

"I phoned her."

Carmody sucked on his cigarette. "When you talked to her—didn't she mention about calling us in? A peeping tom?"

"No," Ulrich said. "Oh, God—I can't believe she's dead—" He paused, turned to Carmody. "You'll never know. I could never tell you how wonderful she was. Nobody'll ever know. We'd always said we would get married. Finally we ran away and came down here—maybe it was wrong, but we loved each other. Then a friend said he could get me a job up here, if I'd come right away. So I did—we had just enough money. I got the job—then came back for her." His voice was loud. "We had a whole week yet."

"Steady," Carmody said.

Ulrich turned away.

Carmody looked at his cigarette, held it up, dropped it. The wind carried it a little, but Carmody was quick with

his toe. He squashed the cigarette.

"Are you going to find who did it?" Ulrich said.

"She was just waiting," Carmody said. "All alone. She didn't have a job?"

"Before. In Cincinnati." Ulrich turned and stared and started to shout, then didn't. "I was going to yell," he said. "Yell how you've got to get him. But what's the use? What use is there now?"

Carmody laid his hand on Ulrich's shoulder. "We'll do all we can, son," he said. "Where can you be reached?"

"I'll let you know."

"Better take it easy, now," Carmody said. "O.K.?"

"O.K. And, thanks."

"You see, these guys—these peepers—you can never tell. They're nuts, Ulrich. They can't control themselves. They see something, they've got to look—and, well—a beautiful girl like Miss Morgan—"

"Stop!" Ulrich said.

"Steady." Carmody looked at the young man again for a time. "Stick around," he said. "I'll want to talk with you again." Then he turned and walked slowly back toward the motel, scowling. Ulrich stared out at the dark Gulf.

Carmody motioned to the

harness cop at the door of No. 5. "Be right along," he said.

He turned and walked on around the rear of the motel, past No. 7. He glanced back toward Ulrich, then vanished into some hibiscus bushes. Once out of sight, he moved rapidly, then stopped abruptly beside a small oleander. A window was open in No. 7. He stepped quickly over by the window, frowning.

A TALL BLONDE girl, wearing a tight white dress had just entered the room and turned the lights on. She closed the door, set down a piece of luggage, and sighed. The window was open and the tips of Carmoody's fingers touched the screen. The girl reached to a small table and turned on an electric fan, then stood before the fan and lifted her dress up to her waist, so the fan could blow against her.

"You fool!" Carmoody whispered softly.

He backed away from the window, turned slowly up toward No. 5. He was breathing heavily and perspiration shone on his face. He whirled quietly back to his position by the oleander, looking in at the girl.

She stood straddle-legged

before the fan, moving her hips gently, cooling off.

Carmoody's face was dead white and a strange agitation came over him. His eyes glazed as he watched the girl slowly turn around and around before the fan, enjoying the cool breeze. Then she paused, not looking quite at him, and stood perfectly rigid. But she had seen him. She let the dress fall back to her knees and turned her head until she stared at him, red lips parted—her body like a statue stilled with fear.

Carmoody pressed his hands against the windowsill, his shoulders hunched.

"I'm—" he whispered to her. "I'm—it's all right. It's me—the sergeant." He watched her, his eyes eating at her, and he began to speak in a long and continuous sentence, the words unintelligible. "Don't move," he said. "It's all right now." His right hand tore the front of his shirt open, dipped, came up with a slim-bladed hunting knife.

The girl's lips moved in shock now, but she still did not call out.

Carmoody slit the screen in a single savage swipe of the blade. He leaped to the sill, tore through the screen, stepped into the room.

"Get out," the girl said softly.

Carmody moved his head from side to side. "Don't you see, darling? It's me—I'm here to watch over you—here to watch you. Yes," he said. "yes."

The girl made small keening sounds in her throat.

Carmody took a step toward her. "You're a sweet beautiful baby," he whispered. "Don't scream—it's all right,"

and then he began speaking obscene phrases.

The girl screamed, crouched back, her face white.

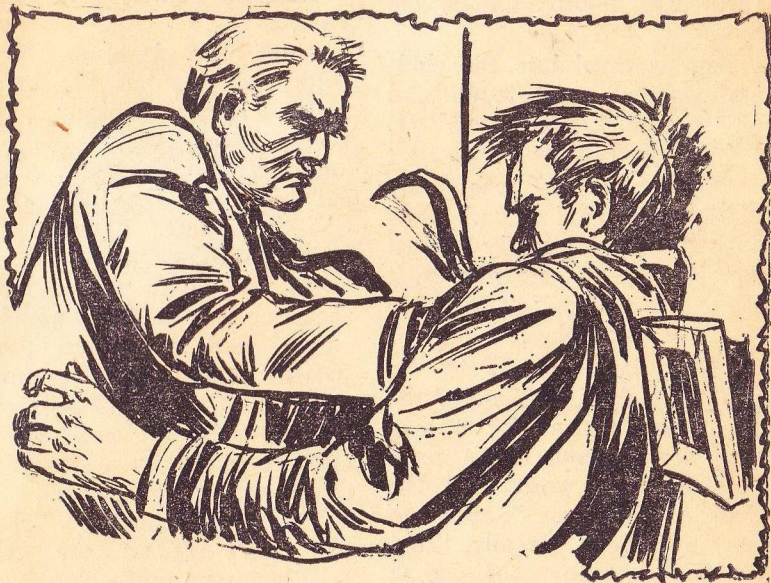
Carmody moved toward her, his face an expressionless mask of shining white.

The door of the room opened and Crosswell, the harness cop, stepped inside. His face was pink and puzzled and he held a gun in his right hand.

THE END

It was a life-and-death gamble—and this was his

SECOND GUESS



by MEL COLTON

ONCE you get the feel of the small town you will understand why Big Sam Crisneck felt the way he did. You can understand why he was tired and not very proud of himself as he slumped into one of Pete Earnie's barber

chairs, breathing heavily, his asthmatic condition wheezing through his broad nostrils.

"If you want a haircut, Sam," said Pete, "you better take off your hat and coat."

Sam said: "Huh?" then proceeded to raise his two hun-

dred and fifty pounds in grunting dissatisfaction, removed his hat and coat. "Hair-cut, Pete."

"Fixin' to look snappy for them city photographers, eh, Sam?"

Sam wormed into the chair and slapped a fat hand hard on the arm. "Look here, Pete. I done my duty as I seen fit."

"Okay, Sam. I was only kidding. Sit and relax." Pete pushed his palm gently against Sam's chest and set him back easily, then added: "Trust me to shave you today?"

"Now damn you, Pete—"

Pete laughed. He flapped the pin-striped apron like a sail, then tied it about Sam's neck. Pete went to work with the electric clippers. "Seems to me," said Pete, casually, "that you ain't got no proof against the kid."

"Circumstantial evidence's better than eyewitnesses," said Sam. "Eyewitnesses see the same thing differently. Circumstantial evidence is as is."

"For instance?"

"For instance," said Sam, "the black getaway car was parked at the gas station just across from the bank. For instance, why did Charlie Sylvester go to the bank to

change a fifty-dollar bill the driver of the black car give him at exactly a minute to three o'clock, bank's closing time?"

"Strictly coincidental," said Pete.

"And for instance, Carl Tate had just left the bank, which leaves Charlie Sylvester alone with the cashier and the bookkeeper. The catch-lock on the bank door had been set, being three o'clock. And Charlie leaves, opens the door, pushes back the catch-lock to Open with his finger, and a minute after Charlie leaves, three gunmen come in the unlocked door, hold up the bank, and make a clean getaway in that black car."

Pete wiggled his nose. "Now you ain't telling me that they're fussin' up in court now just on that flimsy—"

"No," said Sam tiredly, "that ain't all. Short time ago Charlie needed an extra loan to modernize his gas station. Already had his GI loan. But he needed new pumps and a grease rack. Banker Crolin couldn't see the new loan. Charlie said he was broke. And yet, just two days before the robbery, Charlie takes Lottie and the two kids up to

Redfield to catch a plane to Chicago to visit her sick Ma. Where'd he get the money?"

"Maybe her Ma sent it to her," suggested Pete, flipping the shears.

Sam snorted. "Could be. But it's all part of building up evidence. Because the morning of the robbery, about five a.m., Jed Abbot delivering milk sees this black get-away car parked in Charlie's garage, half of it sticking out in the driveway. What's it doing parked there?"

"Sure about that?" Pete asked. "Jed takes a nip now and then—"

"Only on winter mornings," corrected Sam. "No, Jed was sure. Now Charlie said nobody was with him that night. Yet we catch him with cigars in the ashtrays and matches that carry a roadhouse advertisement. Charlie don't smoke, and he ain't the cheating kind."

"Carl Tate's defending Charlie, ain't he?" Pete asked.

Sam nodded. "Carl was an Eastern lawyer before he settled here with real estate. Kinda tricky, Carl. Bringing up Charlie's war record to Judge Marty. 'Course old Marty's got a game leg full of

shrapnel from too much Chateau-Thierry, himself."

The wall telephone shrilled abruptly and Sam jumped. Pete almost cut his ear off. Sam, apron and all, waddled over to the phone. It was Cal Miking, his deputy.

"Chief," said Cal, "Judge Marty just gave Charlie one to ten. And things are sure poppin'. Everybody's mad as a hornet at Judge Marty and you, Chief. I'm gonna take Charlie upstairs to the cell now. Okay, Chief?"

"Okay," agreed Sam and hung up. When he turned to face Pete, Big Sam's face was wet and his small, mummy-brown eyes were just two small marbles in a flushed, doughy face. "Charlie got one to ten," he repeated to Pete.

Pete kept his eyes on the shears as Sam started to put on his coat and hat. Then he took off the apron when it got in the way.

"I ain't finished," said Pete.

"I am," Sam said. "Think I'll take the alley back to the house and tell Sarah—"

"How's Sarah?"

"Mad, probably," Sam muttered as he bashed his hat on his head and left through the rear exit.

SARAH was a tall, raw-boned woman with a set face and stern, searching eyes. "Your coffee and apple pie's on the table, she said coldly.

Sam dropped his coat and hat on a chair. "Guess you musta heard," he muttered.

"You and your so-called justice," Sarah snapped back at him. "You broke up a decent family, that's what you did—"

"Now listen, Sarah, a man's duty—"

"Lottie's been back two days now and the poor girl's frantic. She's gonna pack up and leave." Sarah faced Sam. "What we gonna do for a grade school teacher?"

Sam shrugged his massive shoulders and poked a fork into the apple pie. It was sour. He didn't know whether Sarah had made the pie sour on purpose. He didn't dare ask.

Sam ate his pie and drank his afternoon coffee in a cold silence. Then the phone rang and Sarah called him.

Cal's excited voice. "Chief, he got away! Charlie slipped away, he did. I was—"

"When?" Sam felt a heavy weight sink in his stomach.

"'Bout ten minutes ago—"

"Ten minutes!" Sam shouted. "Why didn't you call me right away?"

"Did. At the barber shop. Then Pete kept askin' me questions 'bout the trial and then—"

"You're fired!" Sam exploded. "You let him escape. You're like the rest of 'em. You waited long enough before you called me."

Sam slammed the receiver back on the hook.

Sarah watched Sam move quickly into the bedroom and come back out tightening his shoulder holster. She saw the gun and clenched her fists. "Sam, you're not going out after Charlie."

Sam adjusted his holster, then moved to pick up his coat and hat. There was definite action in his motion. For a heavy man he possessed a trained smoothness of decision and a liquid strength that one would never suspect in such a fat individual. And Sarah knew that, if necessary, Sam would kill.

Sarah stretched her arms across the dining room arch. "Listen to me, Sam. Let him go. You've done enough damage to Charlie Sylvester. He's innocent, and everyone knows he's innocent except you and

Judge Marty. Leave well enough alone—”

Sam was ready now. “It’s my duty, Sarah.”

Sarah snickered.

He hesitated, then, for the first time during their thirty-odd years of marriage, Big Sam brushed Sarah aside and went out, slamming the screen door in his wake.

THERE was determination in Sam’s look and manner, sometimes almost cruel in its aspect, but inside Big Sam ran a stream of consciousness to duty and an appreciation of his fellow man. But it was Big Sam’s innate sense of duty that had caused him all this unpopularity with the people he loved and lived with.

Walking quickly down the street, Sam spied a squad car and hailed it. Bill James was driving. “What’s the matter?” Sam sputtered. “You a cop or a pleasure rider? Sylvester’s escaped! What’re you doing cruising down this street?”

“Aw, listen, Sam—”

Sam got in. “Take me to Charlie’s house.”

Bill James turned the car around and started for the edge of town where the Sylvesters lived. Bill took a deep

breath, then murmured: “You really want to catch Charlie?”

Sam gave Bill a hard look.

The squad car pulled up onto the dirt driveway beside the frame house and Sam got out. He walked to the front porch and the boards creaked under his weight. He knocked on the door. Lottie opened it. When she saw Sam it was in her expression and body movement to shut it in his face, but she apparently thought better of it. She left the door open and walked back into the kitchen.

Sam took off his hat and followed her. The two boys came running in and danced around Sam playfully.

“Big Sam! Big Sam!” they hollered. “Big Sam’s a cop!”

Sam patted them on the heads and went into the kitchen where Lottie was busy wrapping packages. Suitcases lined the wall. Lottie was a well-developed girl of about twenty-four, with tawny hair and brown eyes soft as cocoa.

Lottie paid no attention to Sam. Sam leaned against the stove and said softly: “Charlie’s escaped.”

Lottie said nothing. She kept on with the packing.

“Seen him?” Sam asked.

“No.”

"Charlie had a Luger gun," Sam continued. "Wonder if it's still around?"

"I wouldn't know," said Lottie. "Maybe he had it at the gas station."

"I looked," Sam replied. "You know, Lottie, a fugitive with a gun makes a mighty dangerous man."

Lottie straightened up. In her eyes was the defiance of one who has scraped and slaved and had enough. "And to hunt a man like an animal is mighty dangerous too, Sam Crisneck!"

Sam fumbled nervously with his suspender belt and his fingers were sticky with sweat. Lottie came closer and held his attention with her sincerity. "Running away doesn't prove a man's innocence, I know, Sam—but it doesn't prove his guilt, either."

"Judge Marty said he was guilty," Sam said awkwardly. "The law's the law, Lottie."

Lottie threw up her hands in disgust. "Judge Marty's a fool! And you're a fool and Charlie's been a fool."

Sam felt that Lottie was intentionally holding him in conversation, keeping him from going out to hunt Charlie. Sam said: "Charlie's been

here. He came and got his Luger. I don't advise you to try to meet him somewhere, because I'm going out and bring him back."

Lottie's hand was on Sam's sleeve. "Don't, Sam! If Charlie's got to come back, let some one else do it. I—I don't want any blood on you."

Sam flushed at her kindness. But he said: "So he was here and got the gun."

"Sam, please. Charlie's got all the desperation of an innocent man. And he's got too many years of war fight in him to give up easily."

Sam's mind was made up. It was clear now. Charlie had come back to the house, taken his Luger, and now was out in the woods working his way up north to the bigger cities. And Sam had wasted too much time talking nonsense and listening to people who had no sense of duty—and that included Sarah.

He started to leave when Lottie came pressing after him, dragging at his arm.

Sam turned. "Lottie, I ain't aiming to be stopped."

"Big Sam, leave Mama alone!" cried one of the boys, hammering tiny fists against Sam's thigh. The other just shouted, "Big Sam! Big Sam's

a cop!"

Lottie stiffened and caught Sam's attention again. "Sam, maybe Charlie *is* guilty. Maybe he did finger the job, because he was under pressure. Can't you understand, Sam? Times have been rather rough for us, and a man just—"

Sam started for the door, stopped.

"You want to know the name of the leader of that bank robbery?" Lottie offered.

Curiosity and puzzlement set Sam's expression. His forehead wrinkled and his eyes narrowed.

Lottie said quickly: "Eddie Clark pulled that bank robbery. Eddie happens to be my older brother, and he came here to hide out."

"Slippery Clark," Sam muttered to himself. "So it was Slippery Clark."

"What could we do, Sam? Eddie came here to hide out, knowing his sister and brother-in-law were respectable people. No one would look for Eddie here. Charlie made me go to Mother's. Oh, Eddie put up the money all right. Then I guess the bank was too much for my brother's blood and he had to rob it. He probably forced Charlie to finger it."

Sam fumbled inside his coat pocket.

"Don't you see, Sam. Charlie wouldn't talk on his brother-in-law. He was protecting me and a reputation in a small town, Sam." Lottie stopped, looked at Sam.

Sam brought out a match cover that he had put in his pocket when he found the cigars in Charlie's ashtrays.

"Your brother's from Chicago?" Sam asked, looking at the match cover.

Lottie nodded, watching Sam's fat fingers open and close over the match cover. Her eyes tried to see what was so interesting about the cover.

Sam clamped the cover in his hand, turned and went out the door.

SAM climbed back into the front seat and opened his hand. He unfolded the cover and handed it to Bill James.

"Know that dance hall?"

Bill looked at it, nodded. "Sure. Corrigan's place, by the Steadman Road fork. Why?"

"We go there."

"But that's out of our jurisdiction, Sam. That's County—"

"I know. Maybe I just wanta dance." He waved a hand. "Get going."

Sam turned and strolled to road but he wasn't seeing anything in particular. All his spare energies were rolled up in thoughts and colliding like crazed ants in his skull. He knew he should have returned, called County and had a drag-net set up around Corrigan's; but there was Charlie Sylvester nearby—and Sam wanted to take Charlie, single-handed, for reasons even Sam didn't quite understand himself. He reached down and scratched his leg where little fists had done their protesting.

"This Corrigan," said Sam. "Just runs a dance hall, eh?"

Bill grinned. "The County thinks so."

"Corrigan had a record," Sam mused. "And I don't think he's a very fancy dancer."

Bill turned to Sam. "What's up, Sam? You figuring to knock Corrigan over?" Bill saw Sam's face set and his eyes sink deep beneath his eyebrows, and Bill knew that he wasn't going to get an answer from his chief.

The sign read: *Corrigan's Retreat. Dancing till Midnight.*

It was a large frame building with the lower foundations in boulder stone. It had a wide wooden porch that encircled the building and it set back from the main highway, with two curving dirt driveways meeting at its main entrance. In the center of this semicircle was the parking lot and a few cars were there. It was too early for dancing.

The squad car pulled up at the entrance. Sam lumbered out of the front seat. "Stay his friend and had just proved here and don't let anyone sneak up behind me. Bill. I make too good a target from the back."

Bill gave him a half-salute. Sam went up the steps, pounded over the porch and swung open the two screen doors. He crossed an empty dance floor, walked to a door marked: *Private*, just behind a gaily decorated bandstand, and knocked.

The door opened and a bald-headed man with a broom in his hand peered out. "Ain't open 'till seven," the man said with finality.

"I'm looking for Corrigan," said Sam.

The man with the broom squinted. "Ain't here 'till

seven," he insisted and shut the door.

Sam turned and strolled to the middle of the floor. It was large and cool and French windows lined the rear wall.

Sam found a French window that opened like a door, and stepped out onto the rear porch. To the right and deep into the acreage four men were playing horseshoes. All had their coats off and two had shoulder holsters.

Charlie Sylvester was not among them.

Sam moved his shoulders so his coat hung back and flexed his fingers and wrists for a possible shoulder draw.

Sam's weight told as he crossed the porch. All four involved in the game turned as a board creaked loudly. Two men faded back while the other two reached smoothly toward their guns.

Sam was drawing his own gun as he said: "I'm looking for Slippery Clark—"

A hard wallop landed between Sam's neck and shoulder and he wobbled sideways, his gun meantime spitting in the general direction of the men. A sharp sting punctured his shoulder; and then there came a volley of shots.

Sam stumbled, fell, braced himself with an elbow and caught another crashing blow from the bald-headed man with the broom. Kicking out, he hit the man and sent him sprawling; and with the same momentum, Sam rolled and came up on one knee, gun heating in his hand as he unloaded it into the horseshoe pits.

Someone had shot at them from deeper in the woods. Sam came running forward, gun raised as the other two men stood, hands stiff at their sides. As Sam reached them, Bill James came from the house on the run.

Sam looked down at the two dead men in the pits as Bill put bracelets on the other two. Sam grunted as he bent down and he felt his heart pound at his shirt. He turned one man over. It was Slippery Clark. The other man he did not know.

Sam got up and looked toward the woods. Shots had come from there, protection shots for Big Sam. And now, probably running to escape, was Charlie Sylvester—Charlie, who had saved his life. Charlie, who had to be brought back to justice.

IT SEEMED a year but it took only a second for Sam to make up his mind. He saw Sarah and he saw Lottie and the kids, one hitting him with iny fists. He saw the town and the people in it—all friends, as Charlie had been it. How far could he push being a hero? He had captured Slippery Clark and the gang.

The money would turn up somehow. Perhaps Corrigan, with enough persuasion, would know its whereabouts. And he could write an article for one of those Eastern fact-detective magazines; for Slippery had carelessly left cigars and a match cover that night at Charlie's, not realizing that he would later change his mind and try another bank stickup for good luck.

It would be that simple. They would soon forget about Charlie Sylvester, the finger man, and he could start somewhere under another name. He owed him that much. A chance.

But Sam handed his hot gun over to Bill and took Bill's freshly loaded gun. Sam fumbled it for proper feel, then slowly, grunting as always, went into the wooded section, gun out, looking for Charlie

Sylvester.

Sam squeezed by snapping twigs that sounded like fire-crackers exploding in the heavy silence of the woods. A low hanging branch slapped its leaves across his chest and Sam stopped and looked. Blood.

Sam shouted into the forest: "Better give up, Charlie. What about Lottie and the kids?" Sam heard only his own laboring breath in return. "Lottie told me she was Slippery's sister! Slippery's dead—"

Sam waited. He edged forward, slowly, watching the leaves reveal more blood. The gun was heavy, tight in his hand.

"I'm the only one that knows Slippery's her brother!"

Then Sam began to push his way through. Now he wasn't worried about Charlie stalking him; he was worried about Charlie, and he was glad he had decided to come in after him.

In a clearing some twenty yards away, Sam came upon the slumped, bleeding body of Charlie. He was dirty, his face lined with pain, his lips tight with determination still for escape. But his blood had run out.

Shot two times. One bullet

in the hip, the other dangerously close to the heart. Sam looked down at him, thankful his duty had made him go after Charlie. Charlie would have bled to death. Picking him up, fireman-style, Sam carried Charlie back to the dance hall. A peculiar small smile twisted his lips.

WITHIN half an hour the dance hall was a bee-hive of police authority and State supervision. Charlie had been rushed to the hospital, badly in need of transfusions.

Sam slipped quietly away from the flash bulbs and reporters, rounded up Bill James, and drove back to town.

"Guess that kinda ties it up," said Bill on the road. "Charlie saved your life—and you saved his."

Sam said nothing. He was bothered, because for the first time since the robbery he wasn't sure of himself.

If Charlie had only talked in court and defended himself... But he had clamped shut and just said: "Not guilty."

And why did Slippery Clark suddenly change his mind and decide to rob a bank? Something must have made it easy.

Why would he jeopardize his hideout? Something must have made it foolproof. Something or *somebody*! Somebody, but not Charlie. One would have had to force Charlie. Why hadn't he thought of that before?

And then he remembered something that he should never have let slip by. Big Sam Crisneck had been a damn fool.

Back at the station house Sam put through a call to Slippery's home town, Chicago. He talked and hoped and waited. The answer came. Sam got up, and that heavy feeling in his stomach began to ease. His heart was pounding, but that was from exertion. He decided to see Carl Tate about doing something legal for Charlie.

THE first grey of twilight had settled down on the town when Sam entered Carl Tate's real estate and law offices. The front office was empty, but a light shone through the glass of the rear partition door, and going through that, Sam found Carl arranging his "For Rent" placards against the wall.

Carl was a small, wiry man with crisp black hair, burning

eyes, and a thin, lined face. A smile graced his lips as he recognized Sam.

"Carl," said Sam, "I'm gonna need your help."

"Why certainly, Sam. Anything."

Sam grabbed Carl by his lapels and set the astonished Carl up against the wall.

"I want you as a material witness, Carl," Sam said. "Everybody, including me, forgot that you were in that bank, too, and left just before Charlie. You could easily have poked that release button on the door. You could, because you did it."

Carl wiggled and kicked but Sam held him tight.

"Defamation of character—" Carl managed.

"Slippery Clark changed his mind," Sam said quietly, "because he found someone in town he knew and had something on, and who would work it for him. Lawyers get around," Sam added. "And this town's been good to you, Carl. Exposure would make you leave."

Carl struggled but said nothing.

"I just made a call," said Sam. "A call to Chicago I shoulda made before. Seems

you were one of Slippery's mouthpieces back in Chicago. You pulled a shady deal and had to leave to escape disbarment..."

Sam, never releasing his grip on Carl's shirt, dragged him outside and down the walk to the police station.

"I guessed on Charlie and it got him one to ten," Sam mentioned. "Maybe *good* guessing will change all that."

"Sam, you're crazy!" Carl chattered as Sam turned him over to Cal Miking for confinement. "I know my law! I'll swear you out on this manhandling, Sam Crisneck!"

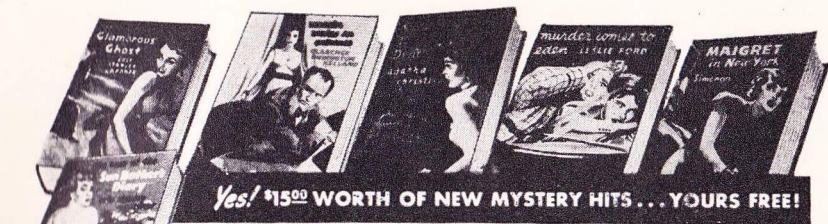
FROM the hospital, Sam called Sarah on the phone. "Charlie's gonna pull through," informed Sam. "And I'm staying here, seeing as how he's gonna need a little extra blood."

"Now you do just that," replied Sarah. "It's part of your duty, Sam."

And from the manner in which she said that, Sam realized that the gossip line was already disclosing Charlie Sylvester's innocence.

And Sam knew there would be no more sour apple pie.

THE END



—Continued From Back Cover

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview", which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books—only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. Cancel membership any time you please.

Enjoy These Five Advantages

- (1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors.
- (2) You save TWO-THIRDS the usual cost.
- (3) You take ONLY the books you want.
- (4) The volumes are fresh and clean—delivered right to your door.
- (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

SEND NO MONEY

Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE—the six complete new mystery thrillers described above, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.

is a full size, full-length book, absolutely complete. A \$15.00 value—but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

We make this liberal offer to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club.

The Best NEW Mysteries

300 or more new detective books come out every year. The Club selects the very "cream of the crop" by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Mignon Eberhart, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsome volume (a \$6.00 to \$7.50 value) for only \$1.89. So you get THREE new mysteries FOR LESS THAN THE PRICE OF ONE!

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE

SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD

48

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

Walter J. Black, President
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB Dept. AM
Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.

ZT

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume of the month, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only \$1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)

Mr. }
Mrs. }
Miss }

(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address

City Zone No. (if any) State

These SIX Best-Selling New Mysteries Worth \$15.00

ALL 6 YOURS Free

To New Members



Including 2 OF THE LATEST
Perry Mason HITS BY

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Plus THRILLERS BY

- ★ AGATHA CHRISTIE
- ★ CLARENCE B. KELLAND
- ★ LESLIE FORD
- ★ SIMENON

1 The Case of the Sunbather's Diary
By **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

A gorgeous blonde offers Perry Mason \$1500 to get back her clothes and car, stolen while she was sunbathing. Then she's arrested for murder. The only other suspect is Perry himself!

2 The Case of the Glamorous Ghost
By **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

Perry's client can't remember a thing that happened to her on

the night her husband was murdered. She can't even recognize her own '38—THE MURDER WEAPON.

3 So Many Steps to Death

By **AGATHA CHRISTIE**
Hilary Craven agreed to help find missing atomic scientist, Tom Betterton. A dangerous job—because Betterton was the prisoner of a mad scientist who collected—HUMAN BRAINS!

4 Murder Makes an Entrance
By **CLARENCE B. KELLAND**

First a man is shot on the way to keeping a date with Miss Piper. Her next "date" has a bomb explode in his apartment. And now she has a date with the killer!

5 Murder Comes to Eden

By **LESLIE FORD**
Spig O'Leary ignored the talk about a "curse" on his new home. Then he quarreled with Ashton. "I'll kill you," Spig shouted in anger. Ashton pitched forward—DEAD!

6 Maigret in New York

By **SIMENON**
A young Frenchman disappears mysteriously. The trail leads Inspector Maigret to an old murder, then to a new MURDER. Only one man can help him solve the case. Maigret finds him—DEAD!

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P. L. & R.)
Roslyn, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB Dept. AM
ROSLYN, L. I.
NEW YORK

—SEE OTHER SIDE