ALFRED

# HITCHCOCK'S

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

K

NOVEMBER 35¢

**NEW** stories presented by
the master of **SUSPENSE**

Dear Readers,

Please do not be unduly disturbed by the cover of this issue. The hand which I am using, you see, is not really loaded.

You might well ask me what has led me to the brink, as it were. Simply, it is this. I am in the initial throes of producing a picture which I will also direct. And so, at this writing, there are only a few things in my small world that are beyond conjecture. This I know: Cary Grant will star in a melodrama of international intrigue and suspense, and both Grant and I will be employed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The shooting of the picture will start in New York and proceed across this great country of ours to Mount Rushmore, where the climax will include a hectic chase over the well-known features of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.

The future does indeed look arduous. And frankly, at the moment, I am at sixes-and-sevens. I don't know whether to take a tepid bath or don a track suit and sharpen my already perfect physical condition.

Read on, and my wish—as always—is that you have a shuddering good time.

Alfred Hitchcock

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE** November, 1958. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions $4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 122 East 42 Street, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone OX 7-8680. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H.  Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Chanin Building, Room 417, 122 East 42 Street, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

VOLUME 3, NO. 11 NOVEMBER, 1958

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

CONTENTS

## NOVELETTE



## SHORT STORIES

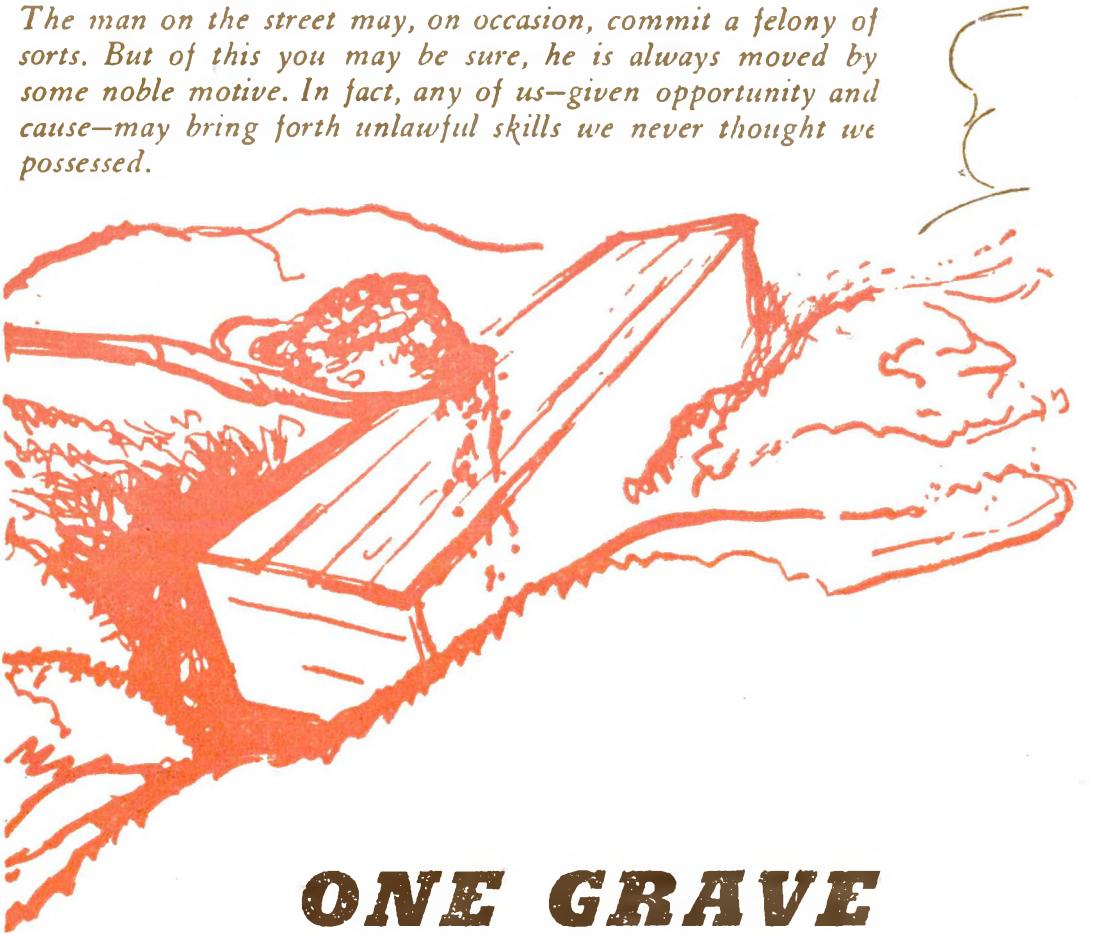


*Cover photo by David X. Manners*

RICHARD E. DECKER, *Publisher*
WILLIAM MANNERS, *Editorial Director* PAT O'CONNELL, *Associate Editor*
MARGUERITE BOSTWICK, *Managing Editor* NADINE KING, *Associate Editor*
MEINRAD MAYER, *Art Director*


R. Houlihan

*The man on the street may, on occasion, commit a felony of sorts. But of this you may be sure, he is always moved by some noble motive. In fact, any of us—given opportunity and cause—may bring forth unlawful skills we never thought we possessed.*



# ONE GRAVE TOO MANY

**By Henry Slesar**

THERE was so much rage and frustration in Joe Helmer's mind that there was no room for ordinary reasoning. Ten minutes after he climbed aboard, he realized he had taken the wrong bus, wasted a precious nickel and dime on a ride that took him ten blocks short of his destination. He cursed his stupidity aloud, and the swaying

homegoing straphangers beside him looked him over with dull, vacant eyes.

It was Irene's fault, of course. He had telephoned her from the movie house where he had spent the rainy afternoon, and all he got was a renewal of the argument they had at breakfast. She just don't understand the way it was with him, the way he felt inside when he saw grubby workmen sweating for their dough, or mousy guys with glasses behind cold metal desks, waiting for their weensy paycheck every Friday. He couldn't be like them, not Joe Helmer. It was better to be unemployed, to be patient, to wait for the real break. He knew it would happen; the right deal was just around a corner someplace; a smart guy had to wait. He couldn't just jump at anything.

Sure, things were getting rough. He thought they had their creditors stalled, stalled until he could land the right spot, and the right dough. Then one morning, Irene had shrieked banshee-like at the dripping water in a refrigerator that wasn't getting electric power. Then there was silence in the diaphragm of the telephone. Then there was the curt letter from the building management, talking about eviction. So Joe made the rounds, saying no to the cheap laborer's jobs they offered him, fuming at the cool reception he got from white-collar personnel managers. In remembered anger, he glared at the well-dressed man jostling his elbow in the bus.

The bus squealed to a halt at 24th Street, last stop on the line. Still cursing, he followed the passengers into the dark street. He was broke; he'd have to walk home.

He found himself behind the well-dressed man, and hated the smooth drape of his fine-tailored suit. The man walked briskly; he was a stout, shortlegged man, close to sixty, but he walked with the spring of youth. That's what money can do for you, Joe thought.

The streets were empty in the downtown neighborhood. The man turned the corner at 21st Street, and Joe, who had to cut three blocks west anyway, turned with him. The sound of their dual footsteps were loud on the quiet street. Click, click, went the man's metal-tipped heels. Clomp, clomp, went Joe's run-down heels.

They walked two blocks together, single file, like a two man parade. Then, some twenty yards ahead of him, the man stopped.

Joe stopped too, curious as to the suddenness of his action. He saw the man clutching his arm, and then loosening his shirt collar in a desperate attempt to get air into his windpipe.

Joe walked closer and the man wheeled about. For a moment, he caught Joe's eyes and made a mute appeal for help. But there was nothing Joe could do for him; the man stumbled forward and fell in

a clumsy heap on the sidewalk.

Joe stared, numbed by surprise. He knew the man was sick, maybe dead, but he didn't want to take part in the drama; he had his own troubles. He walked forward slowly, looking around at the unresponding brownstones that lined the avenue, hoping for signs of someone who would take the responsibility out of his hands.

But there was no one. He came to the side of the fallen man, and said, "Hey, mister. You okay?"

The question sounded insane even to his own ears. The man wasn't okay; his silence, the inertness of his body told the story. Joe reached down and gingerly lifted the plump wrist from the pavement, feeling for the pulse. He was awkward, uncertain, but he could not detect a beat. He put his hand over the man's open mouth, and the skin of his palm didn't warm to any breath.

He stood up, brushing his hands against his trousers, looking up and down the deserted street. Then he remembered to look in the man's coat for identifying papers.

He took the bulky wallet from the inside pocket. It sprang open in his hands, and he saw the bills.

How could he miss them? There were maybe twenty of them, thirty. They were nice-sized bills, fives and tens and twenties, and an occasional fifty. They added up. They added up nicely.

He stared so hard at the money in his hand that he forgot his original intention. All he could think about was the decision he had to make.

He looked down at the dead man. Natty was the word for him. A small mustache coursed under his nose. His open mouth was placid, and his eyes were closed. He looked peaceful. What good was his money now?

Joe Helmer, almost indifferently, slipped the wallet into his hip pocket. Then he walked backwards a few steps, watching the body. Finally, he turned and broke into a rapid stride that became a trot two blocks later. He didn't stop trotting until he was within sighting distance of the run-down apartment house where Irene waited, still nursing the wounds inflicted by their early-morning argument.

Then he walked, calmly, up the front stoop. He walked, slowly, up the three flights to their door. He entered, smiling, to see Irene soaking nylons in the kitchen washbasin.

"Well?" she said, turning to face him.

"Not much luck," he said casually. He went to the refrigerator for a beer, and then remembered about the electricity. Frowning, he took a warm bottle from the shelf and brought it to the table. He uncapped it, and said: "Things are slow uptown; this recession's got everybody scared. But I ought to land something next week."

She came over to him, a woman surprisingly attractive for her hardships. She brushed a hand through short, uncurled hair, and her nostrils widened.

"What movie did you see?"

"Don't talk like that, Irene, I spent the whole day looking."

"I'll bet."

"I tell you I looked. As a matter of fact, I had a little luck this afternoon. Ran into a guy I knew in the Army, and what do you think? He remembered about some dough he owed me. I got him out of a real jam once, and he remembered. Shows there are nice people in the world."

She looked suspicious. "Are you kidding?"

"Of course I'm not kidding. Want to see the money?"

"Sure," she said, folding her thin arms. "Let's see it. I don't know if I'll recognize the stuff, but let's try."

He grinned and reached into his hip pocket. He slipped out the thick wad of bills and fanned them on the table like a bridge hand. He got a kick out of seeing her eyes bug.

"For the love of mike!" Irene said. "How much *is* that, Joe?"

"Why, count it?"

She did, hurriedly, her eyes already making plans for spending it.

"Three hundred and seventy-five dollars!"

"Exactly what he owed me," Joe said smugly, pleased with himself.

"This is wonderful! We can give Mr. Peterson fifty for the rent—he can wait for the March payment. And the grocer will take a hundred. And then we can call the electric and telephone company—"

"Hey, take it easy," Joe chuckled. "Leave a couple of bucks for a steak dinner. We owe it to ourselves, huh?"

"Oh, Joe," Irene said, going into his arms the way she did when they were first married, the way Joe liked her.

In the bedroom, alone, Joe opened the empty wallet.

There were two pockets, both with plastic windows. The first held a card that said: *Marvin Horine, 8 East 70th Street.*

But Joe stared at the second window without comprehending the strange words printed on the white card. He read them over twice before their meaning became clear.

*I AM NOT DEAD*

*I am subject to a form a cateleptic illness which may appear to cause death. If I am found, notify at once Dr. Nelson Kruger, 441 East 64th Street, MUrray Hill 3-0010.*

He dropped the wallet on the bed as if discovering it contained some virulent plague germs. Then he stared at it, and felt the cold seep over his arms and legs, until he thought he was going to be sick himself. He pictured the face upturned on the pavement—the natty

little mustache and the peaceful open mouth. Then he saw another picture in his brain, and the thought struck him with empathic horror. A hole in the earth, and a plain wooden box, and a shovel dumping dirt on the boards . . .

He sat on the bed and shut his eyes, creating a darkness he could think in. He thought and thought, but not with any logic or purpose. He got up from the bed and saw his own face in the vanity mirror. It was white, bloodless; he hardly recognized it.

Then Joe stirred himself into action. He pocketed the wallet and went into the kitchen, pulling on his jacket. Irene was at the stove, humming to herself. She looked around when he came in and started to say something. He stopped her with:

"Irene, give me five bucks."

"What?"

"I need five bucks," he said sharply. "Don't ask me why."

"But I thought we talked it over. I thought we weren't going to *touch* that money, both of us. Not until all the bills were paid—"

"Irene, I *need* it. Don't argue with me!"

Her mouth pouted, but she went to the coffee tin on the shelf and brought it down. She rifled through the loose jumble of bills until she found the right denomination. He snatched it from her hand greedily, and then, as if feeling guilty, kissed her on the cheek.

"I really need it, honey," he said placatingly. "I'll tell you about it some other time, but I really need it. I'll be back in a little while."

He went to the door. "Joe," Irene said.

"It's all right, honey," Joe said, and moved rapidly down the stairs to the street.

He had a hard time running down a taxi; it wasn't a neighborhood for profitable cruising. Then he spotted one close to Broadway, and hurried across the street.

He gave the address, the spot where the man had fallen, the place where he had made his decision.

They reached it in less than five minutes in the light traffic. He hopped out of the cab at the intersection, not wanting to pull up at the exact site. He walked slowly, without evident purpose, around the corner.

He expected to find things different, and he did. But still he was shocked, shocked at the silence of the scene, at the absence of the body. There was a police car, its motor idling, some twenty yards from where the victim had been struck down. Otherwise—absolutely nothing.

He ambled towards the prowl car, not knowing what to say or how to begin saying it.

"Evening, officer . . ."

The cop in the front seat looked at him, looked at his seedy clothes and inquiring face. Then he nodded back, non-committally.

"Some excitement around here?" Joe said.

"Man dropped dead, that's all," the officer grunted. "They took him off a few minutes ago." His eyes went curious. "You know anything about it?"

"Who, me? Not a thing," Joe said, backing away. "Just heard the ambulance, that's all. Just curious..."

He moved away, trying to walk nonchalantly and almost stumbling over his own feet. He didn't glance back until he reached the far corner, and by that time, the car had gunned its way to other problems.

Then Joe knew he could do no more. He had gone this far, but that was all he had in him. It was tough, it was too bad, it was the way the world was made. Maybe some smart medic at the police department would recognize the ailment, know the man wasn't really dead. Maybe he was all right, this Marvin Horine, 8 East 70th Street. Maybe he was sitting up right now, smoking and yakking it up . . .

Joe hailed another cab. It cost him fifty cents, plus tip, to make it back home. He walked in and took the remaining three-fifty from his pocket, and solemnly deposited it in the coffee tin as Irene watched. She didn't ask any questions.

Then he went to bed.

He woke up sweating so hard that the sheets were slippery. Beside him, Irene said, "Joe, Joe, what's the matter with you?"

"What is it? What time is it?"

"I don't know." She peered at the alarm clock on the night table. "Seven-thirty. You better get up."

He groaned, and put his face in the pillow. "Naw, I'm too tired. I didn't sleep so hot."

"You're not going to look today?"

"Sure, I'll look, I'll look. Gimme time."

"Then you ought to get started. You know it's best to get out early, Joe. The whole day goes before you know it."

He grunted.

"Joe, that money won't last us forever."

The mention of the money brought him fully awake. He sat up in the bed, and reached for a cigarette. He lit it, and smoked it down to half an inch, thinking about last night. Then he got up and hurriedly dressed.

He put coffee in the percolator, and started the stove. He watched the brown liquid bubble in the glass cap as if hypnotized by the volatile motion.

Then he sat down at the kitchen table, and studied the wallpaper.

*I'm a murderer,* he thought.

He didn't call himself a thief. Everybody was some kind of thief, one way or another. It was all a matter of degree, the way Joe saw it.

But a murder—even by default—that was something else. That was a

thought that made his stomach shrink, that made the sweat frost on his arms and neck. A voice out of his childhood, quoting scripture, talking fire and brimstone, came into his head. He felt weak, like a kid, and frightened.

He was letting the guy die, and for what? Three hundred and seventy-five bucks! When he compared it to his youthful dreams, to his plans for thousand-dollar deals, for big-time investments in real estate, lumber, steel companies, it seemed like nothing at all. Sure, the money came in handy now, if only to dam Irene's nagging voice. But what did it buy him? Another month in this ratty apartment? A lifetime of bad dreams and sweaty sheets?

He listened for the sound of Irene in the bedroom. She wasn't stirring; he could hear her deep, regular breathing.

Then he tiptoed downstairs.

Two blocks from the house, there was a drug store. He stepped into a phone booth, called the operator, and asked for the police department.

"Listen," he told the authoritative voice that answered. "That guy who dropped dead on 21st Street last night—"

"One second," the voice interrupted. "Now what was that name?"

"What's the difference? The guy you found wasn't really dead. He only *looked* dead. He had some kind of sickness—"

"What are you, a funny guy?"

Joe rubbed his neck. "I'm serious," he said. "The guy had a kind of fit, that's all. But you shouldn't bury him. Understand? You shouldn't bury him—"

There was a pause, and then the voice said; too pleasantly:

"Tell you what, mac. Why don't you come down here and tell us all about it? All right?"

Joe looked at the receiver, and knew what the officer was thinking. The idea angered him; he cursed, and hung up savagely.

It was no use; they'd never believe an unidentified voice on the phone. There had to be another way...

Then he remembered. The doctor! The doctor Marvin Horine had listed in his wallet. Now what was his name? Joe pinched his forehead. Something with a K. Kramer? Klein? He smacked his fist against the wall of the booth, jarring his memory. Kruger, that was it!

He stepped outside and burrowed through the Manhattan directory until he found the Murray Hill number. Then he dialed it, and waited anxiously until the answer came.

"Dr. Kruger," the girl said.

"Let me speak to him," Joe told her. "It's urgent—"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Kruger's not available. If I could take a message—"

"Where is he? I have to talk to him!"

"He's on vacation. Miami, I think. If you'll give me your name—"

"Never mind that. Do you know anything about a patient named Marvin Horine?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"But aren't you the nurse?" Joe asked.

"This is an answering service," the voice said.

Joe hung up.

There wasn't any alternative now. He could take his head in his hands and walk flat-footed into the police station. He could explain it to them in person, let them see that he wasn't a drunk or a crank. He could conceal his own part in the business, if he played it smart. But he had to convince them, had to make them know the truth before the shovel started piling dirt on the planks . . .

He walked out of the drug store, and headed slowly for the precinct house.

The sergeant at the front desk didn't even look up at him, until he said.

"I'm the one who telephoned, about the guy who dropped dead on 21st Street."

The officer brought two bushy brows together, and then smiled. "Oh, yeah. Have a seat, mister. Lt. Bates will talk to you about it; I told him what you said."

A minute later, a round-headed man in a rumpled gray suit came out of the back room. He was polite, like a TV cop. He took Joe into a shabby office in the rear, and let him say it all over again.

"Twenty-first Street, huh?" Bates scratched at a pad with a stubby pencil; from where he sat, Joe could see they were only doodles. "Short oldish guy with a mustache, maybe sixty?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"And you don't think he's dead, mister?"

"I *know* he's not."

"He looked pretty dead, when they brought him in last night. No heartbeat, no breathing, no nothing. The doc who examined him said he was dead. They wrote out a death certificate this morning. Heart failure, it said. And now he's in the morgue, waiting for burial." Lt. Bates spread his hands. "So you see, Mr. Helmer, there's nothing for you to worry about. Go home and get a good rest—"

Joe's palm slapped the table. "You think I'm crazy! You think I'm some kind of nut!"

Bates smiled. "I didn't say that, Mr. Helmer."

"But that's what you think, right?" He put his hands on the table and leaned forward. "But you'll find out different. You'll see what happens when the guy's doc gets back to town—"

"What gave you this idea, Mr. Helmer? What makes you so sure?"

"Because—" Joe swallowed. "Because I saw the guy's wallet. I saw

a card in it, that said so. It..."

"We didn't find any card."

"I must have dropped it. I—I was scared."

"Scared of what?"

"Stop pickin' on me!" Joe shouted. "I don't know what happened to his wallet. All I know is that he's alive, and that's how you're going to bury him—"

"Did you take the wallet?" asked the cop.

"No!"

"You sure about that?" the cop said gently.

"All right!" Joe Helmer screamed. "So I took his wallet! I thought he was dead. I thought he wouldn't need the dough any more, that's what I thought. Only you got to get a doctor for him—"

Lt. Bates stared at him thoughtfully. Then he picked up the telephone on his desk.

"Max? Was that stiff transferred to the City Morgue yet, or is he still in the freezer? ... He is? Good."

He hung up, and said: "Would you come with me, Mr. Helmer?"

Joe followed him, across the front room of the precinct house to a door that led below. In a musty chamber, the lieutenant unlocked a door with a frosted glass pane, and they stepped inside a basement room damp with cold.

"This way, Mr. Helmer."

The cop walked towards a gray stone slab, and pulled the sheet from the face of the body that rested on its surface.

"Can you identify this man?" he said.

Joe looked.

"Yes," he gulped. "That's him. That's Marvin Horine."

Bates shook his head.

"No, Mr. Helmer. We know who this man is, and his name's not Horine. His name's Capper, Sonny Capper. We've known him for a long, long time."

"You have?"

"It's our job, to know men like Sonny. He was one of the slickest pickpockets in the East, until that bum heart of his gave out. Now would you mind coming upstairs, Mr. Helmer? We've got some talking to do."

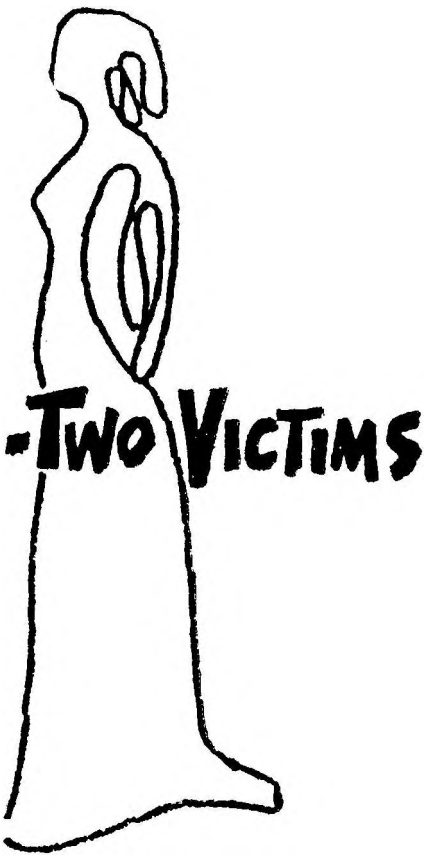
*The traffic cop's job is to keep from being run down by converging traffic. The cop on the beat must swing his club rhythmically. And personages from Homicide spend their day toying with murder puzzles. Our Detective Joe McKenna, however, was—of all things—stubbornly set on nabbing someone who was really guilty.*


IT would be just before dusk when the youth came, walking slowly up the stone path toward the austere old house with gables and gloomy dormer windows from which the shades were never lifted, walking past the weeds that rose in what once had been a front lawn, weeds that frequently grew man-high. He would disappear behind the ornately scrolled front door, reappearing two hours later and walking away, his attitude unchanged, rapt, perhaps even a bit bewildered.

It seemed peculiar and unnatural, the young man's coming to visit so often. Of course the neighbors had no hope of attaching a scandal to the visits. The old lady was well over eighty and so finally free from all tinctures of calumny and suspicion. After a few months the neighbors ceased being curious. They would watch the youth come and go in his slow profound way, the visits soon becoming part of the block's colorless routine. The youth —who was familiar, being a part of the neighborhood — remained aloof, however, walking with his head down, arms limp speaking to no one.

The young man and the old lady

By Donald Honig




would sit in the living room, across from the lone lamp that cast deep shadows across the walls and ceiling.

"At first it was your mannerisms," Mrs. Coombs said, one evening, in her soft, dry voice. "The way you walked. And then when you first stepped onto the porch—that first time I called you—I saw how striking the resemblance actually was. In the eyes especially. I thought to myself, 'Robert's eyes have come back in the face of this boy.'"

"You were in love with him?" Vincent asked.

"Oh yes," Mrs. Coombs said, her soft voice falling, almost inaudible. "So many years ago. He died a few days before we were to be married in this very room. He was just your age when he died."

"How did he die?"

"Suddenly."

"And you've never stopped loving him?"

She shook her head, her wide, gazing eyes regarding him mysteriously. "You'll never know what it all meant to me," she said. "Loving him like that."

He stared at her, enchanted, as if he had struck back a somber and inviolable curtain and discovered some ancient and grieving Juliet. I resemble the man she loved more than a half century ago and whom she has never forgotten nor ceased to love, he thought. It was both beautiful and ghostly. Staring at

her now, he remembered the pictures she had so proudly shown him, when he had first begun coming to her home. She had been very beautiful, in a blithe, haunting way. And now she was so old, so old, that nothing was left of her except a mere suggestion of the person she had once been. It was as if two different people had grown out of the same soul.

Because the old lady asked him to, and because he felt himself somehow a participant in this gray, tragic, mystic love affair that had begun in another century, he kept coming back to the dark, gabled old house.

Detective Joe McKenna of the Capstone precinct took the call and because he knew of the house and had always been intrigued by it and its solitary old occupant he decided to go there personally.

A neighbor had found the old woman lying face down on the faded living room rug. The neighbor had knelt and rolled the old woman over by the shoulder and taken one look at the soft, wrinkled old face and rolled her back over again and gone out to telephone, thinking, *For the first time in all the years her light did not go on at eight o'clock, so I knew that something had to be wrong,* thinking it almost smugly, taking pride in the astuteness of her deduction. Concern for the old lady who had lived alone in the grotesque old three-storied house like some grim and ancient and stubborn relic had become the particular province of the neighbor who now knew that her days of concern were at an end. In a way she was relieved because now they would be able to tear down the gloomy old house that was so out of place in Capstone. "It's like a pall here," one neighbor said of the house which so banefully darkened the otherwise pleasant back street.

Even as he drove through the quiet streets to the house, McKenna had the feeling that something was wrong, that because it had happened in this house it would have to be wrong because the house itself, which seemed to have defied the blasts of time, was wrong, something living beyond its time, its congruity. As he drove down the street he saw the people clustered around the house. The house stood off by itself, aloof, indrawn, at the point where the upgrade street crested and began its steep unbroken descent down and out of Capstone. Weeds grew all around it like the skeletons of ancient guards and an old dead tree stood in front, huge and bowed. The old woman had lived here alone for more than sixty years, remote and reticent, an enigma to her neighbors who had long ceased speculation on what her story might have been. Occasionally McKenna saw her sitting behind the porch railing looking at the

weeds. She was close to ninety, he imagined. She would sit in a high-backed rocker which dwarfed her small, bony shawl-wrapped body. She seemed to have passed from all life and sound into this shrunken parody or satire, her eyes stark-staring and lidless in two deep concaves.

McKenna got out and slammed the door behind him and walked around the front of the car, pushing his hat far back on his v hairline.

"Well that's that, Joe," a man in the crowd said to him.

"Is it?" McKenna said, not looking at the man, not looking at any of them (he did not like when they called him Joe or became in any way familiar, but he had been a policeman in Capstone for twenty years and had learned to accustom himself to it), walking through them up the stone walk that curved through the somber weeds. A policeman was standing on the porch with a woman.

"This is Mrs. Margen," the policeman said. "She's the one who found her."

"I was suspicious," Mrs. Margan said eagerly, "because her light didn't go on last night. So I decided to investigate this morning. My husband told me that I shouldn't . . ."

"Where is Mrs. Coombs?" McKenna asked.

"In the living room," the policeman said.

McKenna went in alone. The moment he passed over the threshold he felt a strangeness, felt that he was an interloper, and he had to resist the impulse to turn around and see if the outside was still in the present, if the people and the houses of the street were still there as he had left them. His eyes moved warily curious through the downstairs rooms. Everything was very old, somber, pristine, with that prim and reticent pride of things that have flowered in another time. The chairs were stiff and straight, the carpets faded, the windows covered by faded crimson drapes. The furniture was ponderous in disuse. There were chandeliers. The very air was of another time, breathed and re-breathed, stale and gray.

She was lying on the rug in the middle of the living room, face down, very small, shabby-looking, like a ragdoll that had been flung and abandoned. He went to her and knelt and gently turned her over and looked at her soft, dead face, the silent shrunken mouth. He knelt over her, propping her with one hand under her small bony shoulder, looking at her, for a long time.

An hour later McKenna was sitting in the station house, in a small room that was bare except for a desk, two wooden chairs and a row of steel file cabinets. He was talking to another detective, Boland, who was a heavy, thick-set, rather ugly man.

"The big joke on the block used to be that it was a house waiting for a murder," McKenna was saying, tilting his chair back, his eyes studying the flat blank desktop. "Well that's another joke that turned hard and that they won't laugh at anymore. She was struck on the head with something. It looked like it must have been a fairly sharp blow, just enough to kill her. I found a pair of scissors lying under a chair. My guess is she tried to defend herself, but a woman her age never had a chance."

"Last night?" Boland asked.

"Yes, it was last night, between eight and midnight probably. What bothers me at the moment is not Who, but Why. Right in that very room I found almost ninety dollars in cash, and the old lady had a diamond on her finger that was worth more than a new car. So it wasn't a thief."

"Maybe he got panicky and took off before he could rifle the place and . . ."

"No, it wasn't that either," McKenna said, quiet, thoughtful.

"Sometimes they don't need a reason," Boland said, his heavy voice harsh, blunt, complementing the thick pugnacity of his features.

"No," McKenna said. "Murder is always for a reason. To us it may be blind, senseless, as this one certainly appears to be. But it works on logic. People always react logically, according to their traits—maybe bizarre or incomprehensible to us, but still it's tied-in logic. We'll have the fingerprint report soon, but I think I know who it was. The neighbors told me there was a young man from the neighborhood who used to go to visit the old lady fairly regularly, by the name of Vincent Peterson. They say he used to walk by there every day on his way home from work and that about a year ago he struck up a hello-acquaintance with the old lady that gradually evolved into his coming to the house in the evenings and sitting with her for a few hours. They said he was the only one who ever came to see her."

"Was he there last night?"

"Yes."

"All right," Boland said, his voice flat, deductive. "He was after her money. He was trying to talk her into leaving it to him. She wouldn't go for it. They argued. He lost his head and . . ."

"No," McKenna said, shaking his head. "Not this time. I can tell. You can feel that. Money always leaves a stink, but not here. This is something else again."

"I see," Boland said. "You're building up one of your theories for this one."

McKenna smiled. "Yes," he said. "I think so. I asked around and it seems that this fellow is something of an odd ball. He had no real friends, kept to himself, confided nothing."

"How old?"

"Twenty-one. Extremely shy. Hypersensitive too, it seems. And morbid. He sounds like he's morbid as hell."

"Why morbid?"

"Well that's my word. But I garnered it from the way they spoke of him to me, the way he walked, the way he looked at you, or didn't look at you."

"A creep," Boland said bluntly.

"Well," McKenna said thoughtfully, trying to give a fair assessment, "maybe. He sounds sad. Unhappy."

"And he killed her."

"Yes, for some reason known only to him and maybe even not so clearly, he killed her. And he'll own up to it when we find him. He'll tell us he did it. But I want to know why. That's the puzzle here."

As far as they knew, Emily Coombs had no family, no close friends, no one — only, it seemed, the missing young man whom McKenna believed had murdered her. Vincent Peterson's family could tell McKenna nothing about the young man's relationship with the old lady; in fact they had known nothing about it. They knew that he went somewhere in the evenings, but he was reticent about where, as he was about everything else. A picture of him shown to McKenna revealed a thin, pale, brooding young face with thick sullen lips and intense almost hostile eyes.

From what small circle of acquaintance the boy had had, McKenna learned that Vincent had been unable to interest any girls in himself (although he had tried, and quite hard at one time it seemed).

"He was too shy," one of Vincent's ex-schoolmates told McKenna. "He couldn't open his mouth, but that he would shut it right away and lower his eyes."

"I suppose everyone gave him a bad time," McKenna said.

The boy shrugged, sheepish, uneasy. "I guess so," he said. "You know how it is: everybody gives a loser a hard time."

"That might be why they're losers," McKenna said.

The boy's face brightened, gratefully. "Ya, that might be it," he said.

The story was the same from whomever had known Vincent. Apparently he had become tired of being rejected and avoided, and then, it seemed, tired of talking too, of knowing people. The small circle that he had known, which he had drifted merely on the periphery of anyway, did not know anything about him during the past year.

Vincent had gone out the previous evening at his usual hour, had been seen by Mrs. Coombs' neighbors going up the porch steps and into the house, and that was all, the end of him. He had not come home again. None of the neighbors had heard anything unusual during the

evening, no indication of anything amiss in the old house, only that the light did not go on at the ordained eight o'clock.

McKenna went back to the house that evening, letting himself in with one of the keys he had found there. He turned on a light and went into the living room. He stood in the somber brooding silence, tight-lipped, attentive, striving not to draw or infer anything from the silence, but to participate in it, to partake, and to know. He moved across the rug, staring at something lying on the table. It was an old photograph. He picked it up. It was a picture of a young woman, a very beautiful, shyly smiling young woman. The picture was quite old, the paper brown and fragile, the creases in it like cuts. From the woman's hair style and clothing, McKenna judged it to be from the last century. It had been taken in a studio, in front of a crude landscape with trees and clouds and shadowy unfluttering birds.

Moodily he stared down at the picture, at the preserved and unmarred beauty in the shy smiling ageless face. The woman was in her twenties. She had long, light lovely hair. The more he gazed at the shy, beautiful, demurely tilted face the more it seemed to alter, imperceptibly but palpably. Her lips seemed parted not in a smile alone now, but in an expression of deep, restrained, enigmatic love—perhaps of love vanished or unattainable. There was a sad, angelic quality in her eyes, sad and timeless, and McKenna felt them even now reaching poignantly through the void and the deadness of the years, touching him, their questions unanswered, their enigma forever unsolved.

He turned the picture over. On the reverse side, in thin, ancient ink a fine, careful hand had written: Our Emily—1891.

"So she had been a very beautiful woman in her day," McKenna said. "I'm not a kid anymore. I've seen them all. But this was something different. If I'd ever seen a face like that when I was younger, I wouldn't be a brooding bachelor today. And to think, that's what that old, old woman once looked like."

"It happens," Boland said.

"What does?"

"Old age."

"It happens yes, and it's incredible, especially when you see it jump fifty or sixty years at once. It's a jolt."

"Any sign of Peterson?" Boland asked.

"No."

"How about the murder weapon?"

"That hasn't turned up either," McKenna answered.

"What do you think it was?"

"It could have been anything. It wouldn't have taken much. I've

ordered a thorough search of the house tomorrow."

"Where do you think Peterson's at?"

"You can never tell with that kind," McKenna said. "He might be on his way to California, or he might be hiding in his cellar."

"He might be on his way to California, but he's not in his cellar," Boland said, adding dryly, "We checked."

"I still have a hunch he'll turn up."

"Don't have such faith in murderers," Boland said. "What have you got there?"

"The picture," McKenna said. He was holding it in his hand, staring at it profoundly, his eyes searching. He leaned back in the leather-seated swivel chair, thinking, his thoughts vague at first, like scraps of abstractions, but then beginning to shape, to form, not into ideas really but more into a kind of hope, a faith, gaining a certain mysterious shadowy meaning and cohesion that refused to fully develop, that remained lurking and tantalizing. Vincent Peterson had gone to the old lady's house sometime early in the evening, in the soft hours of dusk. A few hours later he had killed her. For some reason, some strange and twisted reason that was probably intertwined with his coming there in the first place, he had struck and killed her. And then he had disappeared. He had disappeared, as utterly and completely as if into the great darkness of what he had done. McKenna put the picture down and looked up at Boland. "You want to know what my theory is?" he said.

"What?" Boland asked.

McKenna came forward, resting his arms on the desk, his eyes fixed intently upon the picture as he talked.

"In his mind the old lady had killed the woman in the picture ...by growing old and decaying the beauty of the face in the picture, with which he had fallen in love."

"He fell in love with a picture?" Boland asked, his voice gruffly skeptical.

"That's right. The old lady must have shown it to him during one of their conversations, out of great pride probably. He was a lonely, sensitive boy. The woman in the picture represented something to him, something ideal, something absolute. She could never hurt him like other girls, never reject him, never mock him. So he fell for her. It was an ideal relationship, except for one thing — she wasn't there. And the reason she wasn't there was because the old lady had destroyed her. That's all he knew, all he cared about."

"That's crazy," Boland said.

"Maybe," McKenna said, getting up, slipping the picture back into his inside pocket.

McKenna left the station house and walked around to the parking lot on the side and got into his car

and drove off. He turned through the dark, voiceless back streets, his head hot with the idea. It had McKenna as intrigued and as excited as if *The complete and sypathetic solution of the one murder could prevent all others.* A youth like that, alone, cast out, would be searching, could find something—like love—even in a picture. A youth like that could become hypnotized by such beauty as was in that picture, such beauty as had once graced the old woman... and which had vanished into old age. And a youth like that, McKenna reasoned further, might not be able to differentiate, if his emergence from his hypnotic love were sudden, between the natural way of age and the wanton destruction of beauty.

He pulled up in front of the house and got out and walked up the stone path, up the porch and let himself into the dark house. He closed the door softly behind him and stood in the dark, in the close, musty, breathless silence, for a moment, then went forward and turned on one of the lamps. The shadows rose about him like dark lifeless flames, cast on the walls in baneful designs. *Nobody saw him leave,* he thought. *Of course, he might have left, and without being seen. But why not this other possibility too if none of the rest of it makes sense?*

Looking up into the dark, he began mounting the stairs, his feet soundless on the carpeted steps, the shadows rising around him until the light was gone. He came to the second floor and stopped, stood for a moment at the head of the stairs in the tomb-like dark, sensing closed doors and stale unused rooms and cold undusted furniture and something else, something there, the same as he, still, poised, watching, breathing.

McKenna moved again, groping in the dark for a light, his hand swaying, finding nothing. He stood still again, listening to his own breathing, and then aware of something peculiar in his breathing: it was too fast, not right, and then—he realized—not his alone. There was something or someone near in the dark, still and silent except for its drawn breaths, alert, watching; he could even hear the soft hiss of its exhalations. He turned slowly, his eyes trying to penetrate the dark. He listened to the tense breathing that was as distant and remote as falling surf, but yet as close and intimate as his own breath. Then it stopped and McKenna knew that he must be looking at whoever was there. He began to walk, slowly, following the level unblinking gaze of his eyes. The house seemed enormous now, bunched and swelling with unknown threats.

"Who's up here?" he asked, walking slowly down the hall, his voice flat, instantly dead in the musty attentive dark.

Something moved, he felt it in flight even before he heard it; it was light, swift, desperate, like something startled in its lair, running on instinct and fear. It was darting up the last flight of stairs, fast and quiet; then it was overhead and McKenna was after it, going rapidly up the dark stairs, freezing at the head of the stairs because the other had frozen, near in the dark, suspended, watching, probably dangerous now.

"Peterson," McKenna said, fumbling in his pockets. He brought out a book of matches, tore one free and scratched it, the small flower of fire bursting and blooming yellowly in the dark, settling to a steady burning. McKenna walked slowly behind the leaning flame. Just before it burned out he saw the face; it was against the wall, near him, the eyes watching him furiously, desperately, ghastly and bodyless in the dying light. The match curled over and was out. They were staring at each other in the dark, eye to eye although each was invisible to the other.

"What are you doing, Vincent?" McKenna asked.

"I'm standing with my back against a wall," Peterson said, his voice quiet.

"What happened to Emily?"

"Mrs. Coombs is dead."

"How did she die?"

"Why don't you go away."

"You killed her didn't you?"

"Go away. You'll never believe me. No one will ever believe me."

"I know why you killed her, Vincent."

"It was an accident. She struck her head on a chair."

"But you did it."

"I had to. I had to push her away. She was coming at me with the scissors."

"Why? Did you threaten her?"

"No, no. She was confused."

"The old lady tried to kill you? That's quite a story. Now you'd better come on out of here."

"Who are you?"

"I'm a police officer."

"Go away. Leave me alone," Peterson said.

McKenna listened to the slow, tense breathing. "I want you to come with me, Vincent," he said. "I know why you killed her. Now let's go."

There was no reply. McKenna took a step toward him, then paused. *He's got something in his hand,* he thought, sensed. He struck another match and held it high. He saw Vincent standing against the wall, in front of a closed door, not cringing, not afraid, not even insane, but sullenly hostile, resentful, his eyes round and fixed, the match glowing yellow in them. McKenna saw the candlestick in his fist, held upside down, the flat base ready to strike.

"Why don't you go away?" Vincent said.

"I want you to come with me. Let us talk this thing out."

"Go away."

McKenna felt the flame burning against his fingers. The moment the match was out and the dark had closed over Vincent's fixed desperate eyes, McKenna stepped aside, but he was barely quick enough as he felt the candlestick smash against his shoulder and then he was ducking and throwing himself against Vincent's lunging body, the two of them wrestling wildly in the dark, panting and scuffling. McKenna tried to swing him to the floor, but the candlestick struck again, hard, savage, against the side of his ducking head and his legs almost buckled but he held on, his head hot and rushing with pain, and he swung Vincent again in a wild lurch trying to keep him off balance, the two of them spinning in the dark, McKenna wondering vaguely how close they were to the railing and then knowing, his hip striking it and his back beginning to curve over it and Vincent pushing and pushing, his breath hot and foul in McKenna's face, his furious strength pressing and pushing out of the jerking shadows of his body. McKenna felt himself going. His legs, braced, were forced by the breaking strain on his back to relinquish, and he was over the railing, not struggling anymore, not afraid or panicked either, but feeling a sudden foolishness, an absurdness, as if he could see himself, falling briefly through the dark and striking a step with his shoulder and rolling and bouncing down to the foot of the stairs.

He heard Vincent thundering down the stairs. He tried to rise. He saw Vincent in the dark rushing past him. McKenna reached for him, missed, started to run but his leg crumpled and he had to drag it, the pain twisting up through him. In a moment Vincent would be down the stairs and through the door and outside and gone. McKenna, moving painfully after him, pulled out the book of matches, riped off one and struck it and with it ignited all the rest, dropping the flaring burst of fire down on the stairs, shouting:

"Vincent! Look out!"

Vincent stopped, froze, his eyes transfixed by the falling fire, watching it burn savagely on the steps. McKenna moved then, bad leg or not, and reached Vincent just as the tiny mesmeric fire was going out, and hit him, once, knocking him out, catching him with one arm as Vincent was about to collapse.

They had been questioning him for hours, in one of the small, bare rooms, McKenna and the others but McKenna mostly, his voice striking out at Vincent doggedly and relentlessly, his eyes dark and furious.

"Why did you kill her? Tell us why you killed her. Wasn't it be-

cause you fell for her, the way she was in that picture? Because to you she—"

"I didn't kill her," Vincent said, his voice dogged too, but weary. "What I told you was the truth. That was the way it happened."

"Tell us again," McKenna said.

Vincent drew a deep, tired breath and let it sigh out of him. "She came at me with the scissors. She said that I wasn't going to walk out on her. She had confused me with Robert—the man she was in love with and supposed to marry a long, long time ago. She was talking crazy. Her eyes were crazy. I circled around, trying to keep away from her. She told me that I wasn't going to run out on her. This fellow was going to run out on her, you see; she told me that once. He had told her at the last minute that he was in love with someone else. She told me she had killed him with the scissors. And now she was going to do it to me because she believed that I was him. She was living the whole thing over again, can't you see? She came at me and I had to push her away. She fell and struck her head on the chair. I got scared and ran upstairs. I knew she was dead. I went downstairs once and looked at her. I was scared, really scared."

The door opened and Boland came in. "Joe," he said. "It checks out. Emily Coombs was tried for the murder of Robert Carney in New York City in 1891. She was acquitted under a cloud."

"What did she kill him with?" McKenna asked.

"A pair of big, black scissors," Boland said.

They all looked at McKenna, then at Vincent. McKenna nodded. "All right, Vincent," he said. "Relax."

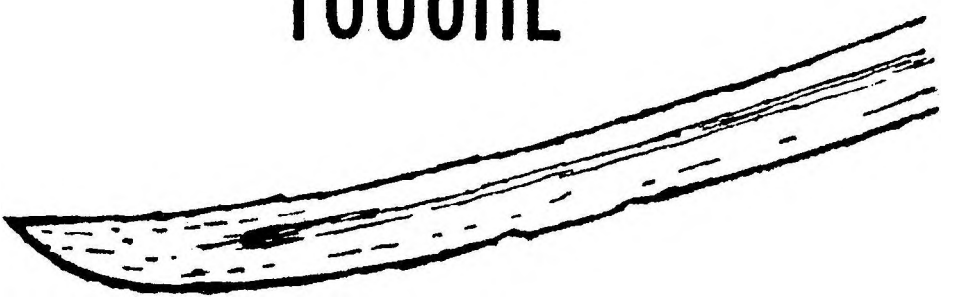
McKenna sat there alone, the failing daylight coming over his shoulder. He was staring at the picture, his eyes entranced, clouded. He felt something uncanny spiraling softly through him, as it rose brushing against his every fibre.

"Damn!" he said aloud, suddenly, flinging the picture face down. "Of course it's crazy. It's ridiculous."

When he left that night, though, he had the picture with him.

*Fencing delights me. Foil in hand, and I am at my agile best. Grace and cunning, parry and riposte are quite sufficient arsenal for any gallant gentleman. I assure you that if anything will grow feathers on the plume of your hat, fencing most certainly will.*

# TOUCHÉ



"So I've been thinking," said the bright young man whose acquaintance Big Bill Fleming had made the day before, "about what you said last night, Bill." The young man smiled to indicate that it was still just a kind of verbal puzzle-game, an interesting, speculative way to pass a few more hours. "I mean about your wife and this fellow Baxter. How you want to kill him."

Fleming's laugh was loud and strained. "Did I say that? Must have really been loaded last night."

"Interesting situation," the young man said between careful sips of beer. "I sympathize with you personally, you understand. But as a future lawyer, it fascinates me from a legal standpoint, too."

"Suppose it would," Fleming said. He poured more bourbon into his pony glass. It would be another long night, and the idea of Lara and Baxter having fun in Coast City would not be bearable unless he was dead drunk.

By Kenneth O'Hara

The young man leaned back and watched a curling pattern of cigarette smoke. "Fascinating. You want to kill him, but you don't want to murder him. Couldn't sleep last night, for thinking about it."

Yes, this was one of the new kind of young men, the bright, poised, always-thinking kind. Fleming had started working in a lumber camp when he was twelve, had no education, was what used to be termed a 'self-made' man, a big man in the lumber industry. He got there by acting, acting swiftly, intuitively, boldly, taking big risks, not giving a damn. He had never learned to think in the neat, precise, complex and specialized way so characteristic of these bright young men. Later he found that such young men had become necessary, that they had taken over everything, that his business depended on them: managers, accountants, personnel men, human engineers, union specialists, bookkeepers,

computing machines, banks, lawyers . . . Who the devil knew what?

So Fleming had retired at fifty and kept physically active, occupied himself with sports, fishing, hunting. Then his wife died and something happened to him. He felt lonely and he started drinking. Worse, his instinct, his intuition failed. He did foolish things—such as marrying Lara, just because she was young and beautiful lying there on a beach, interested in him, a man over fifty. He was flattered, and lonely. Anyway, his instinct had been wrong. She played around. Then along came Phil Baxter with whom she made no pretense of secrecy.

His situation grew steadily worse. He'd come up to the Los Padres Hills to hunt deer. He hadn't been able to do that. All he'd wanted was to get drunk. Killing was no good anymore.

He was ashamed of having revealed all these personal things to the bright young man. He was ashamed of this need to talk, but it seemed better with a total stranger. And it was a pleasing coincidence that this particular young stranger had read that article about him in the *Hunting and Sportsman's Annual,* had been impressed by Fleming's adventurous career as a lumberjack, professional fighter, prospector, war hero, big game hunter. Fleming recalled vaguely that they had discussed many things, many, many things, including Fleming's hobby of collecting dueling pistols and swords.

"It all adds up," the young man was saying. Or had he said it last night, or earlier this evening? "You're a romantic, one of the old breed. But the day of the adventurer and the rugged individualist is about finished. You were born a little too late, Bill."

"Can't do much about that can I?"

"Too many people, too much complexity, Bill. A law for everything. The age of the specialist. A man like you who has to be pretty much his own law—it must be like living in a straitjacket."

Whenever the young man had said it, it made a lot of sense. This young man had a way of putting things. Fleming's half-formed, nebulous feelings were pinned down and put into a simple, easy-to-understand language. Fleming admired this young man's capacity.

There was the maddening situation laid out sharply and clearly by the young man, facts separated and arranged in proper order, the whole thing outlined, channeled, condensed—effective as a solid, one-punch blow in the gut with a small hard fist.

Fleming was trapped, helpless. Baxter wouldn't fight. Fleming's pride wouldn't let him give Lara a divorce. She would get half of everything he owned under the California Community Property Law. But that was pride too, be-

cause he didn't really care so much about the money. Lara wouldn't seek a contested divorce from him, because her infidelity would be too easily proven.

Fleming didn't want to take it into court, put such a personal matter into the cold authoritative hands of lawyers and judges. There would be no personal satisfaction in doing that.

Personal satisfaction could only be gained by dealing personally with Baxter. He really *did* want to kill Baxter. It seemed to him the only direct, honorable and satisfying way to settle such a thing. Fleming had always handled personal matters that way, intuitively, directly, like an animal functioning out of instincts.

But Baxter wouldn't fight. He only laughed. If Fleming ever hit him a few times he would kill him all right, but Baxter wouldn't lift a fist because he knew the law was on his side. Having been a professional fighter, Fleming's fists were lethal weapons, and one blow with one of them might be a felony. And anyway, Fleming was not a murderer. What kind of satisfaction would that be—killing a man who wouldn't fight?

Not long ago, as the young man had pointed out, Fleming would have carried a gun. He could have walked in and blown Baxter's brains out with a forty-five and society would have considered it perfectly all right. He would have been expected to do it, in fact. And if he didn't, he would have lost the respect of the community, and his self-respect as well.

Yes, you're so right, young man. I was born too late. That was it in a nutshell. The young man had wrapped it up with agonizing neatness and put the dismal package there on the table in the Elk Lodge Bar. He was just born too late, trapped in a backwash. If he were capable of cold-blooded murder it would be easy. But he was not capable of cold-blooded murder. That he knew. The young man knew it. The young man seemed to understand Fleming's situation perfectly.

"Law's a funny thing," the young man was saying. It was now somewhere around ten-thirty, and Fleming could hear the background whisper of wind through the fir trees surrounding Big Elk Lodge. "Law's full of angles and conditions. To me, murder is strictly a legal term. It's a moral term only to fools and hypocrites. There's third, second, first degree murder and justifiable homicide, unpremeditated murder, mitigating circumstances, manslaughter of various degrees, and good Christians kill freely during a war and are considered heroes. I take it that you wouldn't have any qualms about killing this fellow Baxter—if he would only defend himself, fight back."

"Not quite," Fleming said with

exaggerated care. He looked out of blood-shot eyes at the young man's thin angular face, at his crewcut hair—sleek, shining like a beaver's pelt. "I don't want to end up in the gas chamber either. I'd probably figure it wasn't worth it."

The young man nodded, and sometime later Fleming heard him say, "So I've been thinking about it, Bill. From all angles. Have you ever thought of challenging Baxter to a duel?"

Fleming saw his face in the bar mirror, a dim gray image below the mounted head of a moose. The face seemed years older all at once, and at fifty-five a few sudden additional years are not pleasant to see. Two hundred pounds of fitness turned puffy and haggard like a caged animal. The thing was eating him up inside like a malignant cancer.

What had the young man said? Oh yes, that pistols would be no good. Baxter would simply refuse to fire and Fleming would still have to murder him or back off and Baxter knew he would back off. But with swords it would be different. You force a person to fight. You keep sticking him. Baxter would have a sword available. You keep sticking the guy. No matter what kind of crumbum Baxter was, he was human. Being human, he would finally have to grab up that sword and defend himself. Wouldn't he? What do you think, Bill?

No need to think about something when it hit you deep inside and you knew it was a good thing, like a shot of rye on an empty stomach, spreading warm all through, straightening out knots, settling things. But still there would be the law waiting. The law would still be waiting wouldn't it?

But the young man spoke with absolute assurance that was thoroughly contagious. "Everything's on your side, Bill. I know something about California law. Considering the personal satisfaction, it would be an excellent gamble to say the least. If I was your lawyer, I'd guarantee an acquittal." Then the young man laughed. "Hell, this game is getting too serious sounding, Bill. It's ridiculous to go on. It's just such a fascinating legal problem that's all."

Fleming tried to appear casual. "I know it isn't serious, for God's sake. Like you say, it's interesting though. How come you're so optimistic?"

For one thing there was special consideration in California granted to anyone responsible for damage, even death, to another in a duel. The young man was very bright, smart as a tack. There were laws in California left over from Spanish rule, still on the statute books, it seemed. There was one on dueling. He even knew the number. Section 3347-8 of the Civil Code. You

could take any one of these bright young men coming along today and they would be formidable on the 64,000 dollar question.

Then there was Baxter, a thoroughly unsympathetic character, an adulterer, ninety-nine strikes against him to start with. All the sympathy would be on Fleming's side. Fleming wouldn't kill Baxter, but would challenge him to a duel, take his chances, may the best man win, the honorable way. Fleming was a respected citizen in the state, and his community. In a duel there was always the angle of self-defense. Justifiable motive was on Fleming's side. And he would be avoiding a possible felony by not using his fists. Swords would not be considered nearly as lethal as fists in Fleming's case, because Baxter would be more on equal terms. That would be a point in Fleming's favor. He would be giving Baxter an even break.

Then the young man was shaking his head apologetically. "Pardon me, Bill. I mean it. I'm being carried away by a fascinating situation. It's presumptuous of me even to mention it—even as a speculative thing. Your situation isn't funny at all, and—well—I apologize."

Fleming continued staring at the darkened window. He said nothing. The wind brushed the chilled glass like a huge invisible broom. He had told Lara he wouldn't be back from Big Elk Lodge until sometime tomorrow. They wouldn't be expecting him tonight. And if he went back there tonight—

"I started the whole thing," Fleming said. "Forget it. It's interesting all right. It really is an interesting legal problem isn't it?"

"Yes, but I'd rather forget it. And you'd better forget it, Bill. Really. Because you'd still have to face a court of law. It's still a compromise, even if you did get off scot-free." The bright young man lifted his glass of beer. "Here's to the good old days, Bill, when a man could settle his own disputes. Cheers."

Fleming stepped up onto the porch of his redwood home near Coast City. He stood there as if suspended between night and day, for some interminable and frozen length of measureless time. The fireplace was lit and he could see the warm cozy glow of it through the window drapes. He heard nothing, but his imagination was working overtime. He knew they were in there and that as far as he, Fleming was concerned, he hardly existed any more than a shadow can be said to have any genuine existence. At that moment he hated them more than he had ever been able to admit that he hated them because, until now, there had seemed no way to express that hatred in a direct and meaningful way.

He was grateful to the young man for revealing a way. His own

confused, short-circuited network of blocked nerves and fuse-blown instincts would never have thought of this way out of the murderous dilemma.

It was eighty-seven miles down out of the Los Padres Hills to Coast City and he had driven it in less than two hours. Now he felt good again. He was functioning now. That sense of helplessness, of heavy blundering confusion had faded away as he drove. He felt like a caged dog suddenly released and put on the sure scent of something, and his body now swelled and vibrated with gratitude.

As he started to open the door, an odd warning tick clicked sharply somewhere, like one of those faint but powerful little pings you hear in a motor. You hear it once. You know it's a warning. You wait knowing you will hear it again. This was a bad time for waiting. He didn't have time to wait.

The last few days seemed like a dream, those drunken hours with the bright young man. Now it occurred to him in a dazed way that he did not even know that young man's name, anything about him except that he was working his way through law school because his wealthy father had kicked him out for being too willful, too set in his own ways. He had dropped into Elk Lodge on a vacation and that was all he knew about the young man except that he had certainly understood and capsuled everything neatly and come up out of total confusion with the one and only answer to Fleming's problem. And, despite that warning click, Fleming knew that the young man had been right. Fleming's instinct was not failing him this time and he knew it as well, or better, than he had ever known anything in his turbulent life.

Wind whispered through gnarled juniper trees. The moon was full over the Coast City Bay and the sky was an unreal chilled blue. The surf pounded on the black rocks three hundred feet below, and the Sierras shot straight up and seemed to lean over the house. The house jutted out over the sea and as Fleming stood on the porch he could feel that almost imperceptible vibration in the wood around him from the throb of the surf.

He stepped into cozy warmth, the smell of woodsmoke and perfume, and then he strode eagerly down the hall and as he passed the guest bedroom he didn't look in although the door was partly open. He called out, "Get ready, Baxter. I'm going to kill you."

The good solid feeling increased as he stood there alone in his den among the mementoes of his life, the mounted heads, the bearskin rugs, the varnished goat horns and antlers, the gun case, the velvet-lined boxes of old dueling pistols shining with gold and silver, the

variety of crossed halberds, foils, sabers, rapiers on the oak paneled walls. Standing there he felt a kind of peace, as if he had somehow swam out of the backwash and found himself swimming ashore onto a wild stretch of rocky beach and into a world he had made and where he belonged.

He looked at the swords. He knew a great deal about the history of swordsmanship, and the theories of fencing, but he was not a fencer. He would have been deadly with an axe, a mace, a halberd, a double-hilted sword, something demanding physical power. But when he thought of fencing he thought of the delicate trickery of the French school and it was distasteful. The intricate rules made him uneasy, and the foils seemed too small and airy in his grasp. The French method was based on deception and cunning. The Italian method appealed more to Fleming, for it was hard, unsubtle, agressive and depended on physical power. Instead of foils then, he selected two Italian sabers and walked back down the hall.

Baxter was still in there with Lara. Fleming kicked the door all the way open and went in.

Lara was tying a thin blue dressing gown around her lovely tanned young body. Her eyes and lips appeared puffy and her sun-streaked blonde hair was in sensual disarray. She started to seem bored as Fleming crowded in like a water buffalo, but then she saw the sabers and her eyes narrowed.

"I was going to mix you a drink, Bill," she said, considerably overdoing the casual bit. "But it seems you've had enough."

"Yes," he said. "I've had enough."

Baxter lay on the bed, smoking and smiling, clad only in a pair of elaborately monogrammed shorts. He reached for a martini that sat dewily on the bedtable. "Why back so soon? Wasn't the hunting good?"

"Not up there," Fleming said and took two long strides to the bed.

"Bill—" Lara exclaimed, her voice too high. She merely sounded excited, Fleming thought, the way she sometimes sounded when she made sounds in a movie theatre.

"Did you hear me?" Fleming asked Baxter. "I said I was going to kill you."

"Yes, yes I did hear you," Baxter said, still smiling. "You'll excuse me if I finish my martini first?"

"Afraid not," Fleming said. "And you ought to get up. That's no way even for you to die."

"In bed you mean? Yes, I'm the type who prefers to die in bed, but I'd rather not be helped by anyone either."

"Then get up, you—you—"

"You ought to stick your head under a shower, Bill," Baxter laughed softly. "Lara, fix him a nightcap or something."

"He's never been so loaded," Lara said.

The saber slashed under the light. The martini glass exploded in front of Baxter's somewhat boyish face. Glass, liquor, an olive rolled down the matted graying hair on his chest and accumulated in the rolls of fat beginning to gather around the middle of the otherwise well-preserved and tanned body. Wrinkles appeared abruptly on Baxter's face. And though the face sagged, it continued to smile as if Baxter was afraid to remove a mask.

He started picking at the glass on his belly. "This is pretty strong for kid stuff, isn't it, Bill?"

For a moment, Fleming thought of Lara's cruelty. Cruelty must be the only reason for her taking up with a guy like Baxter. Baxter was close to fifty. He was a retired banker who had nothing to do but meander about in a yacht. But Fleming had money too, all of it Lara and ten Laras could need and Fleming had denied her nothing. Why Baxter? It made no sense. But then other than his first wife, no woman had ever made sense to Fleming.

The saber whished. Baxter jumped, then stared numbly at the blood trickling into the shattered glass, turning pink in the remains of the martini.

Baxter touched the bleeding gash across his left pectoral, then looked at the pink stain on his fingers. He was still smiling, but stiffly as if it were expected of him, some highly personal act of defiance.

"He's either terribly drunk, Lara," Baxter said, "or crazy. Perhaps you should call the police."

"Do that, Lara," Fleming said. "By the time the police get here, this fink's hash will be settled."

This time Baxter tried to shift out of the way, but the saber slashed a short quarter-inch gash in his shoulder. Fleming heard Lara's sucking intake of breath behind him, and he could see her reflection in the mirror and the sight sent a peculiar chill through him. She was making no move in response to Baxter's suggestion about calling the police. Somehow he knew she did not intend to, and he could see her red lips slightly parted, her breasts rising and falling rapidly, the cruelty of her face taking on a kind of glow. At this point he knew that Baxter meant nothing to her either. Neither of them meant anything to her except that, at the moment, they were interesting.

But Fleming felt too good to worry about Lara, or her reactions. His body seemed to sing and his blood turned hot. His head was numb like a block of wood, but his body hummed and was alive. It was being properly treated finally. It responded the same now as it did to water when thirsty, to a thick rare steak when hungry, to a bed when tired. Only this seemed

stronger than any of those other things. His body had been denied too long.

Baxter's left arm was lined with threads of blood, forming an odd pattern, as if his arm were made of cracked plaster. Blood spread over the white sheet and specks of it darkened his pink shorts. His face was pale. The smile was a twitching shadow. Then he gagged and put his hand over his mouth as if he might vomit. When he took his hand away, guiltily like a child who had belched at a dinner table, his face was smeared with blood. At that moment it seemed to Fleming, in some horrible way, that Baxter was a child, a big fat child with his face smeared with jam.

"Get up!" Fleming almost screamed. "What kind of a man are you, for God's sake? Get up! Do something!"

Baxter whispered. "Please—I didn't—"

"You'll die anyway!" Fleming yelled. "Won't you fight, won't you do a damned thing?"

"But you wouldn't really kill me?"

"I'm already killing you, you dumb fool! Can't you feel it?" Another gash opened along Baxter's rib cage. "You're bleeding to death. You want to lie there and bleed like a stuck sheep?"

Fleming flipped the other saber and it fell with the hilt against Baxter's thigh. "Better use it!" he yelled.

Baxter's head quivered around toward Lara. "Will he?"

"He might," she said. "I really can't—"

"You said he wouldn't," Baxter said plaintively.

"Well, he's done this much, lover And he's right about one thing. You ought to do something. Or you'll bleed to death."

Baxter stared at her as though something had suddenly fled beyond the bounds of comprehension. The saber flicked in, straight this time, stopping just in time, perhaps a quarter of an inch of it penetrating Baxter's arm. Baxter rolled, twitching and jerking, over onto the floor, then sprang up from hands and knees like a panicked wolf. His bleeding arm slid across the bed and grasped the cup of the saber, then he crouched and circled around toward the door. He was gasping and his eyes were wild with terror.

It seemed to Fleming then, in another brief frozen moment, that Baxter too had abruptly turned into a sad old man, like the woman in Lost Horizon. And for some reason he could not have known at the time, he felt a fleeting sympathy for Baxter who might also be some pitiful anachronism forgotten by time, passed by, lost, lonely and confused in a world he had never made.

But then something gloating and bloated ballooned inside Fleming, a sense of illimitable power

fired white hot by hate and fear. He whipped the saber. With an astonishing burst of agility, Baxter dropped under the murderous slash and leaped in swinging in a frantic crude way, using both hands, swinging frantically to and fro, his feet jiggling and his body trembling and his breath gushing in a frenzy of animal fear. Fleming, falling back, felt his legs strike a hassock and he swung around, half tripped. Baxter yelled wildly and jumped at Fleming and swung the saber like a club.

Fleming parried easily. Then he lunged and his saber slid into Baxter's body, in, out, no effort, hardly a feel of resistance.

Baxter dropped on his hands and knees and died quickly, during a long wheezing exhalation, his face buried in his arms.

As Fleming stepped back, he felt Lara's warm body against him. As he turned, he noticed color flooding her face, and then before he knew what she was about, she had her arms around him and was holding him close.

He only felt sick as he looked down at the seeking mouth, wet with eagerness, at her eyes glazed with cruel desire.

He shoved her savagely away. She tripped over Baxter's humped form and sprawled on the floor in a swirl of blue nylon, and white kicking legs.

Then—incredibly and shockingly —she began to laugh.

Fleming went directly to the Coast City police station and gave himself up to the Chief of Police with whom Fleming had gone hunting many times. Curtly, matter-of-factly, he told the Chief of Police exactly what had happened. The Chief of Police seemed pleased, and then saddened because he had to lock his friend Fleming, up for awhile.

Fleming went to trial without discussing the case with anyone, including any of the famous lawyers who pleaded with him to take his case. He wouldn't talk to lawyers, He wanted to avoid the deceptive processes of law as much as possible.

When he was called as a witness, he answered with straightforward honesty and captivating directness. There was something demanding respect about the big, gruff, unpretentious man sitting there, obviously telling only the truth, hiding nothing, a hurt, betrayed man who had been driven to desperation and had taken violent direct action to right a wrong with which everyone could fully understand and sympathize.

No, he denied that there was any premeditation. He was not a murderer. He would never murder anyone. Yes, he had often thought of killing Baxter, but he had never planned to murder him. That he could have done long ago. It was a fair fight, Fleming insisted. Him or me. That's the way it ought to

be. That's the way I wanted it and that's the way I got it.

A famous lawyer insisted on speaking voluntarily to the jury. He pointed out that Baxter had been found with the saber in his hand, blood on that saber, the blood of Bill Fleming who had been wounded in the duel. All evidence, he pointed out, indicated a duel which was hardly premeditated murder. He elaborated on the vital issues of provocation, invasion of the home, the right of common law, the right of a man to defend his honor.

Fleming's status as a citizen, his record, his prestige, his honesty was introduced repeatedly. It turned out that Fleming, unlike many highly successful men, had few enemies and numerous friends.

The newspapers and public opinion was for Fleming a hundred percent.

The surprising and important factor was the sudden appearance of Mrs. Fleming as a witness, a voluntary witness. Unable of course to testify against her husband, she proceeded to testify in his behalf. Weeping, she practically excommunicated herself from all decent society in a pathetic display of guilt and penance. Then she told, as a witness, how her husband had acted in self defense.

Her testimony stunned Fleming. He didn't understand it at all. He had never understood her, and now she was completely puzzling. He was through with her, in any case. He knew he would go free. He had known it from the very moment the bright young man at Big Elk Lodge had suggested the idea. And he was right, absolutely right all the way.

The jury brought in a verdict of not guilty.

But the Judge had the last word.

*California Civil Code, Section 3347: If any person slays or permanently disables another person in a duel in this state, the slayer must provide for the widow or wife of the person slain or permanently disabled, and for the children in such a manner and at such a cost, either by aggregate compensation in damages to each, or by a monthly, quarterly, or annual allowance, to be determined by the court.*

Phil Baxter's wife had been dead for years. He had one son, Phil Baxter, Jr., to whom the judge granted an aggregate compensation of 100,000 dollars, plus a monthly allowance for life of 1000 dollars.

Fleming spent a week in the mountains, and the fear of loneliness was gone along with the need for heavy drinking. The solitude was once again soothing and he was not afraid of himself or of the future.

He didn't know why he went back to what, for a better term, or worse one, he called home, that night. He had no desire ever to see Lara again, nor the house in which Baxter had died. He decided that his motive was to pick up some personal mementoes, some of the trophies and antiques from his den.

As he stepped into the living room, Lara greeted him casually. She was lovely that night in a beige evening gown. One strap was down over her shoulder and her lipstick was smeared. The big beamed ceilinged living room was dimly lighted only from pine logs crackling in the large rock fireplace.

"Drink, dear?" Lara asked.

"Rye and water," Fleming said.

"Right up." She swayed past the fireplace toward the sideboard. "Oh," she said, not turning, "we have company."

Fleming had known that from the moment he stepped into the room. He had sensed a presence and there had been the smeared lipstick, and the smell of cigarette smoke. Lara didn't smoke.

Then the man who had been sprawled on the couch before the fire sprang up and turned so that his face was in shadow. Dentures flashed white. A white hand like a disembodied glove extended itself toward Fleming.

"I'm Phil Baxter Jr., sir. I'm very pleased to meet you. No hard feelings, I hope. None on my part, believe me. To be blunt about it, sir, the old man and I never got along. He disowned me, as a matter of fact, not legally of course, but for all practical purposes. Booted me out. Honest, sir, I won't miss him at all."

It wasn't necessary for Fleming to walk around so he could see the bright eager young man's face, but he did. He also saw the lipstick smudge on his chin, the smile he shot at Lara as if they had been friends for some time.

The bright young man's crewcut shone sleekly like the fur of a beaver. "I've been thinking," he said, "let's forget the past. Forget the whole thing, Bill. And—may I call you Dad?"

*As you know, it is customary to see the future in a sphere or crystal ball. This has perplexed me. Considering the shape of what is indubitably in store for most of us, a hexahedron would be more efficient, to say the least. Be that as it may, with no misgivings, I present Doctor Demetrius, reader of minds.*

# The Mind Reader

**by Bryce Walton**

HE was not a doctor, nor was his name Demetrius. His real name was too ordinary to inspire confidence from addicts of the supernatural. But on the fly-specked window of the small, one-time grocery store that he had rented on a dusty Main Street were the words:

DOCTOR DEMETRIUS,
Psychist
Mind Reader, Palmist,
Character Interpreter
Prophecies Guaranteed

Three months in the small, pros-

perous Texas town of Vera Nada was bringing him insomnia, resulting from impatience and growing tension. For one thing, his prediction of future miracles depended usually on fulfillment within three months, and some of his earlier clients might soon be expressing disappointment. He knew from experience that violence directed against him was possible, not because of two dollars wasted, but from hope blasted. More importantly there was the other consideration. His own long-festering hope was in danger of being shattered.

Now, with face darkened to an angular mask of mystery by a special stain, with false beard and slightly faded smoking jacket and paisley ascot, he sat at his converted card table amidst certain gaudy props associated with Gypsies—though he was anything but a Gypsy by birth—and held the pathetic Mexican girl's hand. He intoned with omniscient certainty that her brother would return safely from duty overseas, that she would — within three months it seemed — marry a wealthy young man, and that if her mother exercised proper caution she would not suffer another stroke for many years.

As she arose to leave his sanctum, he noted the bony, impoverished mask of her face, the mended dress. Instead of the usual two dollars, he said, "That will be fifty cents, please."

Her eyes glowed as she walked into the dusty twilight where bats flitted about in the dusk. Three months of hope for fifty cents. It did not seem to him unreasonable.

He stepped behind the silken drape and poured rye whiskey into half a cup of black, re-brewed coffee, then sat sipping it in a lonely atmosphere, intensified by his despondency. The bells attached to the front door would soon tinkle again. Business increased with the later evening. Minutes dragged. There was an unpleasant fluttering and skipping in the way his heart measured time. He leaned back, hooked his heels on the greasy oilcloth near the hotplate and his fatty chin sank into his chest.

It was a simple racket to learn; yet it did require considerable investment and he was beginning to worry about his expected returns. A sensitivity, a knowledge of people, was important. He possessed this natural facility having once, long ago it seemed now, been quite a successful young salesman—real estate, insurance, automobiles. He could size up people at a glance. There were, however, certain simple but necessary rules in this, as in all games.

You came into a relatively small town, anonymously at first, where, in a few days—by studying library records, local newspaper morgue files, the society columns, and by listening—you could learn a great deal about everybody. Then you

also had to have a good retentive memory. You waited for the bell to tinkle, then peered through your peep hole. You tied up the face with memorized data, then walked out and put on your act, subtly or directly according to the personality of the client who ranged from illiteracy to sophistication. The ignorant wanted prophecy, to be told they would get what they had never had. The more sophisticated, not necessarily synonymous with wealth and respectability, desired character interpretation. Having enough of the material things, they desired to hear flattering comments concerning their inner selves. Flattery was the thing for them. Reading their minds was in itself a form of flattery in many cases, only because it assumed that they had one. Nothing unmitigatedly crude, but flattery dropped imperceptibly, gently, cautiously.

Men enjoyed hearing about their virility and so forth. Women that they are desirable, lovely, or if elderly, spiritually important to someone. All must be told that their lives will not turn out to be a total waste. There are variations depending on the individual.

In his years of careful training in the racket, Demetrius had learned the art of character appraisal.

Now the bell sounded the arrival of a young couple who he studied, with some disappointment, as his feverishly nourished hope ebbed high and fell with a nauseous thud. From professional habit, despite his disappointment, he was sizing them up through the peep hole. From their pictures in the society section of the local paper he knew them as newlyweds and their background data fell into proper place. The girl exuded an excited pink color. The young man appeared to be a bit embarrassed, but condescending to girlish whims, the superior male role, uneasily but stubbornly assumed. It was familiar.

He said, "She wants a character interpretation," as Demetrius stepped from behind his drape and bowed in a vaguely foreign and timeless manner.

"Please sit down," Demetrius said in a carefully designed accent that one might call Continental. He hesitated and stared into some mysterioso realm. "—Janice, I believe, Or Jeanette?"

She smiled triumphantly and sat down at once, shooting the young man an I-told-you-so glance. Demetrius proceeded. It was a simple business. Young love preoccupied with itself. The girl, insecure, wanting Demetrius to interpret her character so that, indirectly, her hidden virtues would be made known to the young man.

He studied her hand, fondled it professionally. It was warm, soft, trembling. It stirred him with a pleasant warmth. He imagined that hand caressing the young man and

for a moment he was disconcerted, and had to cover up confusion with a prolonged fixated gaze into outer space.

Her dominant characteristic, he explained, was femininity, and her main concern and purpose in life was to make happy a worthy man. She did not open her heart easily, but once opened, she possessed a deep capacity for feeling and devotion and was truely gifted with sincere, warm, extremely serious emotions . . .

And so forth.

Later he said, "That will be five dollars, please." They left rather hurriedly, their pleased excitement contained for the moment that they could give it private expression.

They had barely gotten out the door, when Demetrius saw the other two out there, shadowed against the streetlight, their faces looking in through dusty glass. There was an indecision that caused Demetrius to feel weak in the knees and he had difficulty standing and maintaining his poise. Perspiration burst from him and ran down under his shirt. It loosened a flush down his back that flickered painfully.

He felt a momentary dizziness, the old threat of black, smothering, stifling horror, and then the bell tinkled and they were standing there. The woman was the one obviously who was interested in Demetrius' psychic talents. Yet she was embarrassed and uncertain and glanced several times at the door.

The man, rather tall and solidly built, with graying hair and a sleek sun-lamp tan, stood stiffly to one side and regarded Demetrius with sneering arrogance.

Both possessed, in common, elegant dress and the inner arrogance of habitual wealth.

Demetrius, feeling a kind of immunity behind his disguise, looked at him steadily, then at the woman. She was still handsome, with a ripe shape, dressed in a light nylon suit, and he could not help admiring indirectly the long sleek lines of her legs.

But she would be well over forty now, and he would be over fifty, and together they were merely a habit with one another, that was obvious. Perhaps in tolerating one another, they had advanced to that adaptability where they were no longer even consciously irritated with each other.

The arrogant smile of the man inspired a deep heated desire in Demetrius to hurl him through the window glass and send him sprawling about the street in the most humiliating way, but instead, he smiled, bowed at the woman and spoke in his smoothest possible manner.

"Madame Shelton, I believe. What service can I be to you?"

Mr. Shelton, the man was her husband, rolled his eyes slightly and suppressed a deliberate yawn.

"I believe she wants to have her

character interpreted," he said wearily. "Sit down, dear, and let Doctor Demetrius display his bag of cruddy tricks."

"Please," she said sharply, gazing at him a moment, then back at Demetrius who indicated the chair opposite his across the table. "I've heard that you really can read minds sometimes."

"Won't you sit down, Mrs. Shelton," Demetrius said suavely. As she sat down, he also sat down and, leaning slightly forward, saw the haunted eyes, the wrinkles not quite hidden, the slightly curling mouth of suppressed fears, disappointments and guilt. He saw dewdrops of anxious sweat on her upper lip, and the icy glitter of a brooch that he knew was worth several thousand. Her hands, clutched together, were inches from his and he could feel the heat tingling against his fingers.

Again came that threatening smothering sensation of darkness, of choking horror, but he smiled. "Let your own experience here determine my value, Mrs. Shelton. After all, when you were a very small child, your grandmother used to tell you—let your heart show you the way. Is that not so?"

The color drained from her cheeks. She moistened her lips then nodded rigidly, like a toy.

Shelton stepped back and his laugh was slightly forced.

"You are a fraud," Shelton said. His wife reached for his arm, but he bent toward Demetrius. "I want it understood that I'm not a sucker for this sort of ridiculous nonsense!"

"Please, Lawrence—"

He ignored her. "You're a fraud, Demetrius, or whoever you are, a phony!"

Demetrius smiled and nodded, then said, "But why not study my particular method of trickery and be amused, Mr. Shelton? A man of your position, isn't it a bit out of character for you to be so emotionally aroused by a cheap fraud? Why can't you regard me as an interesting bit for discussion during a business luncheon? But then I realize the force of habit, Mr. Shelton. I even sympathize. Your father was something of a humorless tyrant, and I suppose you can recall how often he beat the capacity for joy out of you when you were young."

Shelton was starting to say something, but he did not. Instead he appeared puzzled, perhaps a bit frightened, as he stepped back.

"I really don't want to hear anymore of this nonsense," he said to his wife. "Perhaps I'd better go. I'll wait outside."

She was staring at Demetrius and in her eyes he saw the partly glazed look of the true believer. "No," she whispered. "Stay, Lawrence."

"But this man," Shelton said with a sneer, "is such a formidable sage. I wouldn't want to be let in on any forbidden secrets."

"Please stay," she said. "I'd rather you did hear. I'm not afraid. I've nothing to hide — especially from you."

Shelton shrugged and stepped on back until he leaned against the wall. He stood with folded arms.

But Demetrius was listening to the husky tones of her voice still whispering in the air, a voice with the capacity to intoxicate, enrapture and torture a man unmercifully with desire and rejection.

Demetrius began in his regular professional manner.

"Mrs. Shelton — or perhaps I should say Mickey as your playmates once did when you attended a girl's school so many years ago."

"Mickey?" Shelton said, startled. "Why I didn't know—"

"Please shut up, dear," Mrs. Shelton said dreamily, as if in her sleep or as if Shelton was an annoying voice cutting in on a phone conversation.

Then Demetrius took her hand and a dizzying shock scuttled up his arm and froze something in his head. He caressed her hand in a psuedo-professional manner as he examined it, and, glancing up, he saw the fear naked on her face, a mask crumbling, a line of white moving around her tightened lips.

"Let me say now, Mrs. Shelton, that despite your wealth and social position, your conspicuous place in the community, you are quite unhappy, and have been so for nearly twenty years. All of your life you have depended on others for assurance, for money, for knowledge, in short, for practically everything. Fortune tellers, mind-readers, palmists, astrologers and the like have never lacked for your eager solicitations. Unlike most of them, I shall not disappoint you. I will tell you what you want to know, but it will not be pleasant, the truth never is."

"I want the truth," she whispered.

"People come here to be told what they already know but cannot really believe, to be told what they know cannot possibly be true, and to be told what they suspect — in other words what they perhaps know unconsciously. This last reason, I feel, motivates your visit this evening. You have difficulty sleeping. Your dreams are nightmares. Mrs. Shelton, I know what lies beneath the threshold of your consciousness. I know the nature of your blighted conscience. You have not been free of it for twenty years. That was when it really began, was it not? Twenty years ago? A little matter of infidelity?"

"Now see here!" Shelton said. But he said nothing else, and did not move from his position by the wall. Only a trace of the irritated smile remained on his lips. He tried, but could not conceal the surprise, wonder and concern in his eyes.

Mrs. Shelton's hand was limp and wet. It was trembling slightly.

"Perhaps it was no real fault of yours, Mrs. Shelton. How can you be blamed when you have never initiated an act of your own? As a little girl, in a large family, the youngest in that family, you learned early to survive by taking orders, by complying with the wishes of others. You did what you were told and the reward of affection seemed to justify having no identity of your own, and finally losing any desire to have such a thing. Still, you have caused great suffering and injury to others. One of those who suffered much—a great deal more than you realize—was your first husband. A—I believe his name was Smith. A Mac Smith, was it not?"

Her full ripe mouth hung open, resembling a halved fruit.

"Was that not his name, Mrs. Shelton?"

"Yes," she whispered faintly. "Mac—Mac Smith."

Demetrius smiled rather sadly. "Quite an ordinary name. And in many ways, quite an ordinary fellow, this Mac Smith. Young, eager, somewhat naive, was he not? But so in love with you. It was more worship than love. He may have been weak because of such adoration and in any case he was blinded by it, by your beauty and passionate nature. He was made vulnerable by it. I think the more common term for it would be sucker."

Shelton's irritating smile was now completely absent. He had placed a cigarette between his lips, but he never lit it. After a while he did take the cigarette from his mouth and his mouth opened wider and wider.

"This young, adoring, naive sucker, Mac Smith, had inherited a nice sum from his dead father. His mother was also dead. He was alone in the world, he thought, but for you, his loving faithful wife. Actually, his house was being occupied during his many absences from it by a non-paying guest, your lover. I believe this unscrupulous gentleman's name was — and is — your present name, Shelton?"

Shelton sat down heavily in a folding chair that squeaked dismally. The flesh of his face seemed to have loosened in a freakish way, as if some kind of glue were melting invisibly in its structure.

"Mac Smith wanted to succeed on his own merit. He was successful as a traveling salesman. He was most liberal and bought everything you desired. Being an easily influenced woman, you were easily persuaded by Mr. Shelton to take out a double indemnity life insurance policy on Mr. Smith. It must have been a highly dramatic moment when Smith returned to his menage and found you and Mr. Shelton in what might be termed an indiscreet bit of dalliance. Being the sort of person he was, Mr. Smith did not react with violence or even threats or recriminations. He broke down and wept and pleaded for your re-

turned love for him. He pleaded on his knees to Mr. Shelton to give up his attentions toward you. Both of you took advantage of his weakness. When he became an alcoholic right after this incident, you took even greater advantage of his increasing weakness. You openly flaunted your adultery before him, and—"

Demetrius paused. "Mrs. Shelton, you came here and are willing to pay me to tell you the truth. The truth is never easy to admit. And perhaps much of this you are quite conscious of. If you do not wish me to continue—"

"Please," she said, barely audible. "I want the truth."

Demetrius fondled her hand and looked at it sadly. It had the helpless sick quality of a dying animal, perhaps of a small white bird.

"And then Mr. Smith disappeared one Sunday afternoon. He was never heard from again. He was reported missing and finally declared legally dead. You married Mr. Shelton, and have since managed to parlay the deceased Mr. Smith's insurance money into a considerable fortune. Personalities such as Mr. Shelton's seem destined for success in this world. A certain callousness, a ruthlessness is no doubt a prerequisite to success. But you have never known a day of happiness, Mrs. Shelton. You want to know the truth—the unconsciously suspected truth?"

Shelton leaned forward. His jaw sagged. A bluish gray pallor crept up and suffused his face.

"Your husband is incapable of love, incapable of anything but ruthless exploitation. He uses others. He used you. Perhaps now that it is too late, you realize that you have been nothing but a lovely puppet. You have never known anything from him but coldness. But perhaps it is more than that, Mrs. Shelton. Is it because sometimes you wonder what really did happpen to poor Mr. Smith?"

Her face was dead white and a vein in her throat pulsed like an exposed and terrified heart. She sat in an odd rigidity, and he could dimly see her glazed eyes nodding.

"Very well, the truth then," Demetrius said. He was pleased, very pleased, and somewhat amazed, at the calmness in his voice, and the calm controlled way his hands lay flat on the table now, as though they had abandoned their prey, no longer needed to confine it in any physical way.

"You may recall that Mr. Shelton was also away from the house for perhaps an hour that Sunday afternoon. He was very busy during that hour of absence. Mr. Shelton had always been a highly active and ambitious fellow, but that hour was the busiest of his life, you may be sure. He found Mr. Smith wandering in a drunken stupor in the woods. His finding Mr. Smith was not a coincidence, for he had been watching Mr. Smith, and

knew where he went. He also knew that those woods were isolated and that certain actions he desired to engage in, with Smith as a nearly unconscious partner, would not be observed. He went into those woods and beat poor naive Mac Smith to death with a piece of fence post . . ."

A cry burst from Mrs. Shelton and she seemed, if possible, even more rigid and her hands were pressed together.

"Then your husband carefully buried Mr. Smith, put leaves and a few rocks and some moss over his shallow grave, and returned to the house. That, Mrs. Shelton, is the truth. It may be better to know the truth than merely to suspect it. I am not one to say. But you did want the truth, and I have endeavored—"

Mrs. Shelton stood up, turned, walked to the door, pushed it open, went out, walked up the street under the light and into the darkness in an odd mechanical manner, still rigid and silent, resembling as she disappeared an automaton, something that had been remotely controlled, but had lost touch with its button pusher.

Mr. Shelton stood up heavily and leaned against the back of the chair. He glanced around oddly as if he had awakened in a strange room, then he lurched toward the door.

"Mr. Shelton—"

Shelton turned. His arms hung loosely as he stood there. "Yes," he said almost plaintively.

"I'm afraid I must ask a fee in return for my services."

Shelton drew a fat business man's wallet from inside his coat and stood there.

Demetrius smiled. Somehow he knew that he had cleared things up all around. As for himself, he knew he would never again have those reoccurring horrors of being buried alive, of waking in smothering loamy darkness, and screaming and clawing his way up into sunlight. Regardless of the moralists, he knew that there are situations of a special nature in which nothing, absolutely nothing, but revenge, can renew one's faith in one's own future.

"That will be ten thousand dollars, Mr. Shelton. You may pay by check."

"Ten thousand—"

"This visit," Demetrius said. "Perhaps the fee will diminish somewhat with each subsequent visit. I'm sure Mrs. Shelton will come back to see me often."

By Alex Austin

*Here we have a young couple meant for each other. The man and the woman have much in common—the same interests, goals, aspirations. Each, in fact, is intent on killing the other.*

# FOR WHOM THE WEDDING BELL TOLLS

It was an absurd sort of honeymoon because Mr. Johnson Sweeny planned to murder Mrs. Johnson Sweeny and Mrs. Johnson Sweeny planned to murder Mr. Johnson Sweeny.

They were both very nice people, of course. Both came from old and excellent families. She was beautiful and vivacious. He was handsome and intelligent. And each of them had a superb sense of humor.

But it is a part of the social and economic history of our time that the old and excellent families are slowly being watered down by taxes and common marriages and an occasional failure at stocks or roulette. Both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson Sweeny, alas, were victims of just such historical progress. Neither one of them had any money to speak of, but each one thought the other to be as wealthy as the clubs and restaurants they frequented demanded they should be.

They met at one of the leading social events of the season—the annual New York Mardi Gras Ball held in the grand ballroom of the Plaza Hotel. Everyone was there. It was a charming and exciting evening. And when Mr. Johnson Sweeny asked Miss Jean Heilbrun to dance, he knew immediately, even as they walked out onto the dance floor, that this was the girl who was going to be the answer to all of his problems. It took Miss Jean Heilbrun a little longer to realize that she too had come to the happy turning point; it was during the second waltz that Mr. Johnson Sweeny asked her if she would care to spend a week end on his yacht—with a number of other people, of course. She smiled so delightfully when he asked her this that he was on the verge of proposing to her right then and there.

But he did propose to her that week end on the yacht of his old schoolchum, Hadley Barrister. Barrister had been left the yacht by his father, but he grew seasick the very minute he stepped on board and so the boat was used mostly by his friends and this insured Hadley Barrister, a tiny fat boy with an atrociously feeble sense of humor, to be considered a great fellow and a great clown by all his friends and that kept him happy.

She, of course, asked him if she could just think a bit about it when he asked her for her hand.

He said that would be agreeable.

The next morning, she accepted his proposal. Both were absolutely delighted. They kissed and laughed and held hands all that day.

The wedding was a simple one. He was the one who suggested that they elope to Maryland and she said yes that would be the perfect way. The news of their marriage was, of course, reported in all the best newspapers. They received well over a hundred telegrams of congratulations and seventeen gifts, including three toasters and seven cocktail shakers.

They went to Acapulco for their honeymoon. He borrowed nine hundred and fifty dollars from a bank that one of his great grandfathers had founded. They flew to Mexico City and after spending three days there at the Reforma Hotel and taking in a bullfight that proved to be a very bad one, they flew on to Acapulco and checked in at the Hotel de Pesca.

Now the idea of murder was not a sudden flash of inspiration to either Mr. Johnson Sweeny or his bride. Both had thought about it for quite some time and so on that afternoon on Hadley Barrister's yacht when they had gone swimming, both had splashed about in the water in a very clumsy and rather helpless manner. Later they even made jokes about how they would certainly be compatible since they were both such very bad swimmers.

Actually either one of them could probably have made it across the English Channel without being too exhausted for cocktails on the other side. Both had been well-educated and so they could ride horses, swim channels, mix superb cocktails and speak just enough French to be able to complain about the local culture with some genuine authority.

And so each, of course, had the very same idea. Drowning. It was by far the simplest way. It was the perfect accident. It happened every day. And in the hands of the Mexican police, there would most probably not even be an investigation. They both thought the Mexicans to be wonderful, warm, honest people who were capable of producing the very best in frescos, revolutions and tequila martinis. But as policemen, they seemed from all the stories that were told of them, to be about as efficient as an elephant counting grains of sand.

They spent their first two days and nights in Acapulco having a simply marvelous time. They were getting to enjoy each other's company so much, in fact, that they might well have forgotten completely about their respective tasks had it not been for the telegrams that each of them received from the party they were each planning to marry once this nasty business was finished.

Mr. Johnson Sweeny had been in love for some time with a Countess by the name of Esmeralda who was

half-French and half-Egyptian, but who had somehow been born in the United States of America. She was a beautiful and exotic woman, but her late husband, the good count – whom she had carefully married when he was approaching eighty–had had the bad taste to die and leave all his money to a gardener and a butler, both of whom had served him for over forty years and neither of whom called him a smelly old toad as the Countess often did when he would choose to share her room for the night.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny had been in love for some time with a polo player by the name of John Swinch who had the good humor to joke about his common origin and even about his uncommon ambitions. All he wanted out of life was to be able to eat, drink, love and play polo.

And so Mr. Johnson Sweeny knew that he would need a fortune to support the Countess Emeralda and Mrs. Johnson Sweeney knew that the price of polo ponies was not very low even in the best of seasons.

Each telegram reminded its recipient that they had been married for sufficient time and that there was no sense in putting it off any longer. Besides, John Swinch was anxious to get across the pond, as he put it, to catch a bit of the Brussell's Fair before it closed. And the Countess Esmeralda spoke of being considerably embarrassed by the attentions of all the young fellows about town–when, of course, she was in love with Mr. Johnson Sweeny.

It could be put off no longer.

But there was a small detail to be taken care of first. And since each one of them had it in mind, it was a simple matter to accomplish. Mrs. Johnson Sweeny playfully told her husband one night that she was going to write out a will, because she loved him so terribly, terribly much, that would leave him everything she possessed in this world. She wrote it out on a piece of hotel stationery and when he saw her doing this, Mr. Johnson Sweeny immediately sat down and did the same and they rang for a bellboy who signed his name as witness, unable to read the English he was witnessing. And that was that.

The following morning, they decided, by most mutual consent to take a boat out all by themselves. It would be so exciting, Mr. Johnson Sweeny said. And it would be so romantic, said Mrs. Johnson Sweeny.

They selected the boat together. It was a small sailing craft. Its name was Rosita Marles. And it had just been painted.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny's plan was merely to suggest to her husband that they both go swimming once they were out to sea. And just in case he did not want to, then she would go in herself, pretend to be

drowning and then he would simply *have* to come in after her.

Mr. Johnson Sweeny's plan, however, was somewhat more complicated. That night, after his wife was in bed, he told her he wanted to go downstairs for just a few minutes to arrange for a boxed lunch and three bottles of wine to be ready for them in the morning. His wife asked him if he couldn't do it on the phone. And he told her he wanted to select the wine himself, since they were very negligent about the vintages down here and, of course, she agreed with him on that.

Mr. Johnson Sweeny did arrange for the box lunch and for three bottles of an excellent 1947 Chablis. But as soon as this was accomplished, he hurried down to the small pier where the Rosita Marles was tied. There was no one about. He climbed down into the boat and with a well-sharpened knife and a rock he was able to cut a hole of considerable size in the bottom of the boat. This he patched over quickly with a piece of canvas he had already prepared, taping it down securely. The patch would hold well-enough and all he would have to do—when the right time came—would be to remove the tape. The poor Rosita Marles would sink swiftly to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean and he would swim home and loudly lament that his wife had drowned. And that would be that.

The following day was glorious, a perfect travel-poster sort of day. The sky was a soft blue color and what few clouds there were to be seen were thin, cut like the wings of gulls, moving slowly over the calm green color of the sea.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson Sweeny were in excellent spirits. She was pleased with the vintage of the wine. They kissed and laughed and held hands all the way down the street to the Rosita Marles and people smiled as they passed and almost everyone could tell that they were newlyweds.

The small sail of the Rosita Marles caught the light wind well. The boat skimmed easily and swiftly through chopping waves.

They sailed for almost an hour, laughing and kissing and holding hands all the way. Mr. Johnson Sweeny once or twice caught himself beginning to regret that he had to murder Mrs. Johnson Sweeny; she was so gay and charming and exciting. How lovely it would have been, he thought, if they had both been rich and then this nasty business of murder would have been quite unnecessary.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny too thought once or twice what a pity it was they could not at least have had a few more weeks together before putting such an abrupt end to what had surprisingly turned out to be a most happy few days.

When they were a little more than a mile from shore, Mr. Johnson Sweeny suggested that they

pull in their sail and drift for awhile. They could have their lunch and some wine. And they could go in for a swim too, Mrs. Johnson Sweeny said. And Mr. Johnson Sweeny with an almost sorrowful expression on his handsome face nodded and said yes that would be a delightful idea.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny, as per her plan, was the first to go in. She removed her cotton skirt. She was wearing a brief bathing suit made of blue and white material and she looked much too exciting in the suit to murder, but Mr. Johnson Sweeny steeled himself for the task ahead. He could not let beauty or even passion get in his way at this late stage in the game.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny went cautiously over the side and then she proceeded to splash about rather clumsily. Mr. Johnson Sweeny watched her and thought what a pity it would be to leave her splashing there in that great wide sea. He wondered if drowning would be very painful; he hoped not. He hoped it would be quick and that she would not have to suffer. There she was out there laughing so innocently, so joyously, and in such a short time now she would be dead, drifting in the green depths of the sea like a sleeping mermaid, he thought.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny called out to her husband to join her. The water was fine, she said. He would be right in, Mr. Johnson Sweeny said. And he removed his white cotton sailing trousers and he also removed the tape and the piece of canvas and he watched the water begin to run into the bottom of the boat.

How handsome he is, thought Mrs. Johnson Sweeny as she watched her husband stand up in the boat like a bronze god.

How lovely she is, thought Mr. Johnson Sweeny as he watched his wife play like a small child in the choppy waves.

Then he too went over the side rather carefully and they splashed about together there for some time until Mrs. Johnson Sweeny looked over and saw the Rosita Marles sinking slowly into the sea and she could not quite believe her good fortune.

But at that instant, the sky turned as dark as a hangman's smile. The waves suddenly began to rise up like the arms of angry giants reaching up out of the ocean's depths. Rain started to fall. Wind started to blow. The sun disappeared completely. Day turned over into night. The Rosita Marles now was on the ocean's floor. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson Sweeny were alone in the raging sea and as they looked at each other, each knowing it would be for the last time, there was a look of love that was exchanged silently between them before the waves separated them and they were each lost completely from the other's sight.

Mr. Johnson Sweeny swam powerfully against the storm. Of course he had not counted on anything like this. But it only served his purpose. It was as if the angels themselves were on his side.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny also swam powerfully against the storm. Her plan was working only too perfectly. She thought that perhaps it had actually been destined to happen this way and that it had really not been a matter of her choice at all.

When he reached the shore, Mr. Johnson Sweeny was completely exhausted. He fell down on the sands and lay there for some time before he had the strength to get up and walk up the coast road for around a half a mile before he came into town and then he went directly to his hotel.

He phoned the police immediately, informing them of his unfortunate accident. They assured him they would do everything in their power. He thanked them in a shaken voice and then went inside to sleep for awhile.

Mrs. Johnson Sweeny reached town around an hour after her husband. Instead of going directly to their hotel, she went to the police station and she informed them of her unfortunate accident. She told them that her husband had been drowned. The sergeant who was on duty at the time assured her they would do everything in their power. And she thanked him with tears in her eyes and then took a taxi back to the hotel.

When she walked into their room, the lights were out. She did not even bother to turn them on; she was so completely exhausted. She removed her bathing suit and lay down on the wide bed and fell right asleep.

When Mr. Johnson Sweeny opened his eyes, the morning sunlight was streaming in through the open window and a cool breeze blew the curtains lightly from side to side. He stretched and yawned and shook a little of the sleep out of his head and then turned to see his wife asleep beside him and he yawned again and then he froze and was about to cry out, believing he had seen a ghost. But when he saw Mrs. Johnson Sweeny open her eyes and yawn and stretch and shake a little of the sleep out of her head and then she turned to look at him and they both stared open-mouthed at each other for quite some time before either of them could speak.

"I thought you were dead," Mr. Johnson Sweeny blurted out before he quite realized what he was saying.

"I thought *you* were dead," Mrs. Johnson Sweeny answered.

And then each of them mumbled something about fishing boats and being picked up.

And then, before either one of them could realize the full meaning of the situation, they flew into each other's arms, both of them over-

joyed and they wept and kissed and laughed and held hands and would not let go of each other until they climbed down out of the plane at the International Airport in New York.

Each one was quite sure that the other had absolutely no idea of what had really happened out there in the green Pacific. But each one did have his own conscience to wrestle with, now that love had made such a complete mess of all the very happy plans they had both made.

It is absurd to think that a good marriage can be built on murder, but this is exactly what happened to Mr. and Mrs. Johnson Sweeny. They were quite helplessly and completely in love with each other —so much so that when they learned of their mutual lack of funds, it was of no consequence— and they hardly ever stopped kissing and laughing and holding hands. And conscience made each one watch over the other with the most loving kind of care. They were the constant talk of New York Society, because as things worked out, they were still able to maintain their positions in the gay social whirl of the city.

As it happened, the Countess Esmeralda married poor little Hadley Barrister and so the Johnson Sweenys were always welcome guests on the Barrister yacht where they would spend a good deal of their time. And the polo-playing Mr. John Swinch managed to marry the very beautiful and exciting and wealthy Miss Lucille Downsinger and, of course, the Johnson Sweenys were always welcome house guests at the huge Westchester estate of the John Swinches, where they also spent a good deal of their time.

The Countess Esmeralda taught Mrs. Johnson Sweeny how to tell fortunes with a Tarot pack of cards which was something that always delighted the guests on the Hadley Barrister yacht. And John Swinch taught Mr. Johnson Sweeny to play polo and he really became quite good at it.

Whether either Mr. or Mrs. Johnson Sweeny have any further plans for murder is, of course, anybody's guess. There is a saying that once a murderer, always a murderer. And there is also a saying that love conquers all things. Just which of the two sayings will turn out to be true is also anybody's guess. It is quite obvious that they *both* can't be true.

# How Heavy Is Green?

by Ed Lacy

*The Green of this title is not Joe Green, whom you may or may not know. And the answer to the title's question is not, "At least as heavy as maroon." Please ignore this interruption and proceed with a story that might, with less inconvenience to all, have been called THE GREAT LAUNDRY ROBBERY.*

THERE were $100 bundles of ones scattered all over the office floor. "Like it *really* was so much paper," Eddie said, ordering two patrolmen to stack and count the dough.

The watchman was sitting in a swivel-chair behind one of the desks, rubbing his skin where the tape had roughed his lips. More tape was sticking to his worn pants, above the ankles. The girl was about twenty-two, thin and little, probably Puerto Rican, and she was excitedly telling the beat cop all about it. Guess she enjoyed being the center of attraction, for once in her life.

Eddie unbuttoned his old wool vest, but didn't take off his coat. He began walking up and down the office: his usual show-boating. All the years we'd been partners he'd done that. Me, I carry more beef on the hoof, so I like to sit, take things easy.

Eddie waved a hand around the room, like the ham actor he should have been. "What a dumb set-up! A mountain of ones kept in a tin closet they dare call a safe! And the locks—a reform school punk could open every door in the joint with a rusty hair pin! This beats all."

"At least we got a break in the time," I said. "Few minutes sooner and we'd have nailed him in the act. Only nine minutes since he left, so—"

"So let's stop the chatter and get to work," Eddie cut in.

That used to annoy me. I mean his habit of letting me carry the ball for ninety yards, then Eddie stepping in and taking it over for the touchdown. Still, even with Eddie being a glory hound, we made a good team, had one of the best arrests records in the department. At one time I used to worry about Eddie taking all the bows, bucking to be a lieutenant. Eddie's still bucking, but I'm just waiting for my pension to come up. Now I watched him pacing the office, putting on his show. He really wasn't a bad sort; he merely never learned to stop bouncing.

Eddie said to the watchman, "So there was a gun in your back before you knew anything and this tall blond guy taped you up, then went to the safe and started stuffing dough in one of the duffle bags.

How did he open the safe? Wasn't it locked?"

"Well, no, it was shut but not locked," the watchman said. He had a fat mild face full of red veins —reminded me of a road map. "I don't know how he got in; I never seen him before. The front door was locked, I know that for a fact. But there he was, him and that big gun."

Eddie turned to me, but I beat him to the punch. I said, "I already put it on the radio; over six feet, sharp features, blond hair, brown overcoat, dirty canvas duffle bag." I looked at the watchman. "You carry a gun?"

"No, sir, not me."

"Exactly what do you do here, what's your job?" Eddie asked him.

"Well, I come on at six and spend the night dusting the offices, checking the pressure in the cleaning vats downstairs, keep an eye on the boiler. At five in the morning the packers and the drivers come in and I go home."

"So you're alone all night?"

"Yes, sir."

Eddie took a slip of adding machine paper from a desk. "There was $27,400 in that sardine can. Why all that dough and why in ones?"

"We have twenty-three dry cleaning stores, so we keep the ones for change, send out a couple hundred to each store every day. Listen, can I please call my wife? I don't want her to read about this in the morning papers before I—"

"Later," Eddie cut in. "What's your pay?"

"$62.35, take home."

Eddie waved his arms like a bird. "What an outfit! For sixty-two bucks they have him guarding twenty-seven grand *and* clean up *and* watch the vats!" He strode over to the girl—Eddie never walked, he always strode. "Miss Rose Catino—spotter. What's that mean?"

"When things come in for dry cleaning there's some spots that got to be taken out by hand. That's why I was working overtime tonight, had a special rush job on a wedding gown." The words came tumbling out. If she ever married her husband better be deaf.

"And you said you came up here at nine P.M. to check out?"

She nodded. "Yes, sir, I was done with my work. I was still wearing these slippers." She pointed a thin hand at the worn blue slippers on her tiny feet. "So maybe that's why he didn't hear me. Soon as I turned down the hallway out there I see him at the safe. For a moment I didn't know what was up, then I see Pop tied in a chair. I went back downstairs and called you—the cops—on the pay phone in the ladies room."

"I bet you'll never get your dime back from this outfit, either. Did you hear him get away in a car maybe?"

"I didn't hear nothing. After I called I stayed in the ladies room. I was sure scared."

"But you didn't see his face?" I put in, to show Eddie I was still around.

"All I saw was his back. He was real tall and his hair was blond. The coat was sporty like, maybe a camel's hair. I saw him start taking the money, then he took a duffle bag from that pile over there—we get the dirty clothes from the stores in them—and while he was weighing that I ran downstairs."

"He weighed the duffle bag?" Eddie asked.

"Yes, sir, that's what he did. Folded the bag all nice and neat and weighed it on that postage scale on the table."

Eddie picked a long canvas bag from the pile against the wall, hefted it. He dropped it on the scale; it weighed three pounds. One of the cops stacking the money called out, "There's $8,900 here."

Eddie stopped pacing and stared at the floor so everybody could see how deep in thought he was. Then he said slowly, "Doesn't make sense. Why didn't he take it all, use *two* bags?"

I walked over and got a bundle of a hundred ones, put it on the scale. It only weighed three ounces. You'd think a hundred bucks would carry more weight. I picked up a pad and pencil, started to figure.

Eddie didn't like me taking the play from him. "What you doing, Einstein?" he asked.

It didn't add up to anything. "Just an idea," I said. "If there's $8,900 left, he took off with $18,500. That weighs thirty-seven pounds. I was thinking he only took as much as he could carry, but thirty-seven pounds ain't nothing to lug so—"

"Hold it!" Eddie screamed, throwing his hands up in the air. "I have him!" He turned to the beat cop. "Run out to a radio car and ring in: I want every airport within fifty miles of here covered; they'll pick up our blond with the dough." He buttoned his vest, gave me the thumb. "Come on, we'll wait at the station house for him to be brought in."

Before I could ask what was up, he walked out of the office. In the squad car I asked, "If it isn't a big department secret, how come you're so sure we've already bagged this joker?"

Eddie winked at me. "Since my kid got TV and I watch the film dicks, I always crack a case within a half hour!"

I didn't give him the satisfaction of asking anything else. The hell of it was we weren't in the precinct more than twenty minutes when they brought in tall-blond-and duffle-bag-full-of-ones. He'd been picked up at LaGuardia Airport like Eddie said.

In about an hour we had the case tied up, even arrested a former

steno who had tipped blondie off to the deal. Eddie yawned, said, "Come on, I'll let you buy me coffee."

"I'd buy you a quart of java if I thought you'd choke on it! How did you dream up this plane angle?"

"You ought to travel on your vacation instead of hanging around Coney Island," Eddie said in that smart-alec tone he knew annoyed me. "Listen, he took thirty-seven pounds of money in a three pound duffle bag. Inside the States they allow you forty free pounds of luggage on a plane. Okay?"

I'd given him the ball again. "Aw, you were dumb lucky—as usual," I told him. "Why didn't he take forty-five or fifty pounds, pay for the extra weight?"

"Because over forty pounds, even though you're willing to pay, if the plane is loaded they *sometimes* won't let you take the excess baggage, make you ship it air cargo. Blondie was going to catch the plane at the last minute and he couldn't chance *any* delay. Okay, now?"

I sighed, "Okay, okay!" and grabbed my hat. "We'll get coffee and toss for who pays."

"Sure, that's what I meant—you'll buy."

I had a feeling he was going to be right, too.

STATEMENT

REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, published monthly at New York 1, N. Y., for October 1, 1958.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Richard E. Decker, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.; Editor, William Manners, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.; Managing Editor, Marguerite B. Bostwick, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.; Business Manager, Richard E. Decker, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.

2. The owner is: H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.; Richard E. Decker, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.; Alfred Hitchcock, 122 East 42nd Street, N. Y.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

RICHARD E. DECKER
*Publisher*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of August, 1958.
[SEAL]
HERMAN L. ISLER, *Notary Public*
(My commission expires March 30, 1960)

*I never stroll in parks at night, primarily because I'm elsewhere at the time. A park is a good place, I understand, in which to meet officers of the law. They are obviously men who love nature—especially those natures that are fairly bad.*

PATROLMAN Anderson's face still showed the effects of what he had borne witness to a few hours earlier. His eyes were glazed with shock, his lips were clenched in an effort to keep them from trembling. Slowly and stiffly he walked down the corridor to Captain Fisher's office. He stopped in front of the captain's office, staring at the door, his eyes blank as if he had forgotten what he was supposed to do or how to do it. Then his hand came up and tapped lightly on the glass where the captain's name was lettered. He heard the captain's voice murmur, "Come in."

The captain looked up at him, sitting forward toward the desk. "Oh yes, Anderson," the captain said. "I told them that as soon as you had— What's the matter, man? Don't just stand there. Come in. Close the door. Sit down. I want to hear all about this thing. Now, tell me what happened."

"Yes, sir," Anderson said. He closed the door and sat down on the hard smooth mahogany chair in front of the desk. He was staring straight ahead, his eyes flat, blank.

"Don't you feel well, Anderson?"

The young policeman shook his head, "No . . . no sir. Not too well at all."

"This thing upset you, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Considerably."

"Well, I don't suppose it was a pretty sight. But the main thing is we've got that bugger at last."

"We, sir?"

"Well he's out of business anyway. How long have you been on the force, Anderson?"

"Four months, sir."

"You're going to have to get used to these things."

"I understand that, sir. But still it was an awful thing to see."

"You'll learn to digest that and worse. All right. Now get on and tell me the whole story, right from the beginning."

"Yes, sir. I was on patrol duty in the park this evening. The first four hours of my tour were routine and uneventful, which it usually is until the late evening hours. At

about eight o'clock I passed a young lady walking on a rather lonely dark path. I inquired as to what she was doing there and she said she was just taking a stroll. I told her of the inadvisability of walking there at that hour, but she just smiled and said she was sure she'd be all right."

after I had passed her I heard something in the bushes. I turned my flashlight on them and went up and looked around. There was no one there, that I could see. As I walked on down the path I heard the noise again, very faintly this time. I swung the light around again, but again I couldn't see any-

# Patrolman Anderson's Story

**by Donald Martin**

"Was she pretty?" Captain Fisher asked.

"Yes, sir. Quite pretty."

"They're always the ones," the captain said gruffly. "They go looking for trouble. Homely girls always have better sense. All right, go on."

"I continued patrolling. Soon thing. I stood there for a few moments listening, but as I didn't hear anything further I attributed the noise to a squirrel and walked on. I walked down to the zoo where I chased a few young couples off the benches and walked around there for awhile."

"Nobody suspicious there?"

"No, sir."

"Do you think that might have been him in the brush?"

"I think now that it was, sir. I should have been more alert."

"Or less cautious."

"Yes, sir."

"All right. I'm not reprimanding you, Anderson. But noises like that in that place at that hour have been more vigorously investigated. You can't be too thorough when you know a man like that is about. Now go on."

"Yes, sir. I began to think about the noises then, and remembered the young lady walking alone up there. I went back up that path. It was extremely quiet there, and dark. I couldn't see or hear anything. Then I heard a scream."

"The young lady?"

"Yes, sir. So I assumed, and so it turned out. I stood real still, trying to determine the direction of the scream. Then I heard the sound of scuffling. I took off up the path. The sounds became louder. Then I saw them, the young lady and him. He had dragged her partially into the bushes and they were struggling. He heard me coming and he leaped up and took off through the trees, bounding like a mad man."

"You're certain it was him, Anderson?"

"Yes, sir. It had to be him. No doubt of it, the way he was going through things and over things. I could see then why they called him the Cat Man. It was wicked the way he could move, sir. Almost not human."

"All right, don't get dramatic. Just tell the story."

"Yes, sir. I shouted to him to stop. I saw him take a leap over some rocks that must have left five feet of night between him and the ground. I must confess that I was not as agile. I lost him. But he had stopped because suddenly there were no sounds. I stopped too, holding back in the dark. I could feel him there, watching me. It was a full five minutes when suddenly I heard an enormous splitting and ripping sound and there he was, going like a wildcat through the underbrush, running and bounding. I fired a warning shot and then a second, but it only seemed to make him move faster."

"It so often does," the captain said regretfully.

"Yes, sir. I followed him through the brush, warning him repeatedly to stop."

"You never did get a look at his face, did you?"

"No, sir. I was never that close. He was awfully fast."

"Then what happened?"

"He came out to one of the paths and for a second I had a clear shot at him. I think I winged him."

"You did," the captain said. "They found blood."

"Yes, sir. Well I think that might have panicked him a bit because he ran straight down the path instead of going on back into the trees. I

chased him down the path. I took another shot, but missed. I remember rushing past the young lady. How is she, sir, by the way?"

"She's all right. A bit wiser than before. Get on with the story."

"Yes, sir. Well, sir, he was bearing down on the fence. The path curved at that point around to where there were a lot of lights. I guess he was really panicky then. He headed straight for the fence, just as straight and as fast as though that fence wasn't there, and then he took the most colossal leap I ever saw. He was I swear ten feet in the air and still rising. He grabbed hold of the bars and with his momentum and with his natural agility he vaulted himself clear over. I couldn't believe it, sir. A second later I could hear the thud when he hit the ground down below."

"I thought those fences were supposed to be very high."

"This one is, sir—but from the other side. The side that he went over faces a grade and some rocks and he ran up on them and had no trouble getting over. The fence is still quite high, but it was quite a leap he made, sir, quite a leap."

"I'll say it was," the captain said dryly. "And that's the whole story?"

"Yes, sir." Patrolman Anderson's eyes fell. He was still tense, his face white, his lips pressed together.

"Did you see any of it?" the captain asked.

Patrolman Anderson nodded tersely. "Yes, sir. When I got to the fence I saw all of it."

Captain Fisher stared at him. He felt sorry for the young man.

"Have they identified him, sir?" Patrolman Anderson asked.

"No, not yet." Captain Fisher sat back in his chair. "We're waiting," he said, "for the grizzly bear to belch him up."

*A fish is better off in a bowl, than it is, for example on a table —especially if the table happens to be in the dining room. That old, old saying, "Like a fish out of water," does indeed apply to our drama. In it we learn that criminals in the wide open spaces are truly out of their element; they belong in prison.*

**by Stanley George**

AFTER turning off the highway they rode for almost ten miles on a dirt road. They had to keep the windows closed against the rising dust and the car was very hot. The forest gradually rose and lifted around them, deepening and darkening as the bumpy, sun-bright road thrust deeper into it. It was a great, still, sunless forest, unaxed and unpathed but yet with that mysterious illusion indigenous to all primeval forests of fixed and watching eyes and timeless endurance. A few times they had to stop the car and get out and swing a fallen tree off the road.

"Shows you how often they use this damned road," Ben said, slapping the dust from his sharp-pleated trousers as they got back into the big gleaming car that was a boiling anachronism in this place.

"Well that's all right too," Frank said as he slid in behind the wheel and started the car forward again.

The dirt road became badly rutted and the bumps were becoming almost unbearable. Ben, his sour disgruntled face watching the thick dark foliage sail by, had to brace himself against the ruts and humps in the primitive road that kept jolting him and that soon gave up all semblance of a road and became little more than a path, a way taken through the forest. It began to narrow. Bushes and greenbriers and low-hanging branches were scraping and scratching against the sides of the hurrying car. And then the front fenders were slashing through the brush, tearing and crashing through like some stubborn animal, refusing to give up, but also sufficiently rational to accept the inevitable.

"This is it," Frank said as the car came to a halt, unable to go any further, the forest reaching across over the hood, the tips of the pines almost meeting in front of the windshield.

"Now what?" Ben asked.

"We take the rest of it by foot."

Ben sat there staring through the dusty windshield, as stubborn and brooding and furiously helpless as the car itself.

# Diamonds in the Rough

"It's too blasted hot to play Daniel Boone," Ben said.

"I suppose you want a quarter of a million in diamonds to come waltzing down the path and jump into your pocket," Frank said, opening the door and getting out.

"All right, winner," Ben said, pushing the door open against the crackling brush, having to force it out. "You kick the path and I'll follow."

They did not have to kick a path though, the path was clear, although it became very narrow and they had to walk single file, and they looked ludicrously misplaced in the forest with their expensive double-breasted suits and broad-brimmed fedoras.

"I'm scratching the devil out of a pair of twenty dollar shoes," Ben said.

"Then take 'em off," Frank said, brusquely unsympathetic, letting a leafy branch swat back into Ben's sour unappeasable face.

"How do you know these hillbillies even got the rocks?"

"We don't know. That's what we came up here for—to find out."

"It's screwy. The whole thing's screwy. And even if they do have them, what makes you think they'll give them to us?"

"If they have them we'll get them," Frank said. "Either they'll give them to us or we'll take them."

In a little while they saw the creek, a slow, clear water trickling through the brush, sparkling in the bits of sunlight that managed to filter through the dense foliage. They followed the creek which slowly widened, which they could hear murmuring and then bubbling and foaming like suds as its tiny currents splashed over some large placid-sitting rocks.

"There's the bridge," Frank said pointing to a crude wooden structure that arched agonizingly over the creek. "Just like they told us in town."

"And there's somebody sitting on it," Ben said.

The man was sitting in the middle of the bridge, his legs hanging straight and stiff as boards beneath the plank railing and over the rippling water, his head bent, watching the water as if studying it or mesmerized by it.

Frank's hat brim half turned. "Now shut up," the side of his mouth growled.

Their shoes clumping on the boards aroused the man whose face turned toward them, but whose eyes seemed unwilling to give up the water, not seeing them—so it seemed—until they were standing above him.

"We're looking for the Joseph family," Frank said.

The man's eyes looked at him as if he had not spoken or as if he had said something in another language or as if he were not even there. The man's eyes were blank and flat, colorless, and then, slowly, filled with a curious lively amusement.

"Joseph?" the man asked.

"That's right. We're from New York."

The man nodded gravely, as if Frank had said Heaven.

"I'm Herman," the man said.

"My name is Frank Taylor. I represent the Greater New York Insurance Company. We're interested in the airplane that . . ." Frank stopped talking as the wild-haired head bent and turned away and the man began casting gray pebbles into the creek. One by one he let the pebbles fall plunking into the water, his eyes entranced by the circles that rode quivering away from the brief holes they struck in the water.

"This one is a winner," Ben growled over Frank's shoulder.

"Shut up," Frank said curtly. He turned back to the man. "Are you the father?"

The wild-haired head shook slowly, mournfully, as if he had once been the father, but had been dethroned from that position.

"Where can I find the father?"

"He's home," Herman said, holding a gray pebble out between his fingers and delicately and profoundly releasing it, his eyes dilating at its naive plunk in the water.

"Where's that?" Frank asked.

"Up the path."

"Straight up the path?"

Herman nodded, not looking up.

"Let's go," Frank said, walking again.

Ben, as he passed Herman's sad sitting figure, reached down and rubbed the lowered, wild-haired head. "Thanks, Herman," he said and smiled.

They walked off the bridge and proceeded up the path, moving quickly.

"I'll bet he's the brains of the family," Ben said.

"You're the great authority on brains," Frank said sarcastically.

"I ain't so dumb," Ben said.

"You just look dumb."

The forest began to thin out. More and more sunlight poured through the leaves. Frank looked around, his heart hot with excitement. Somewhere around here, in this great poised and breathless forest, was a quarter of a million dollars in diamonds. He knew it was here; it had to be here. It had been on the plane when it took off, it had been on the plane when it crashed, and then it had disappeared. No one had found it. These people had been the nearest ones to the crash. He would turn them—and the forest—inside out if he had to to get those stones.

Soon they came to a clearing. There was a slight incline and at the top of the small grade stood a rough-hewn pinewood cabin.

"That must be where they live," Frank said. They walked through the clearing, Ben looking down disgruntled at his scratched shoes and at the briars clinging to his trousers. "Remember now," Frank said. "Keep your eye open for any unlikely signs of wealth. These people

normally don't have any pennies to spare."

"You don't think they're going to hang crystal chandeliers up in that shack do you?"

"If they found the diamonds they might do just that. Anyway that's what we're here to find out."

They went up the path toward the cabin. Looking up they were astonished to see an old man standing there in the doorway watching them; they had not seen him emerge; he seemed to have just materialized out of the hot dry air. He was standing just inside of the doorway, just in the shadow, watching them, one hand holding the bowl of the corncob that smoked between his teeth. He was rather small, gray-haired, wearing overalls, one of the shoulder straps held together by a safety pin. Like Herman, he didn't seem quite real, more like a comic strip character. He watched them, not hostilely but not amiably either, with nothing in his eyes, not even curiosity, as though they were not now walking up this hill toward him and he was merely staring down it as he had been doing all his life.

"Afternoon," he said to them as they came up to him.

"Good afternoon," Frank said, offering his hand.

The old man looked at the hand for a moment and then shook it briefly. Ben nodded brusquely to the old man, wiping his forehead with a silk handkerchief.

"You must be Mr. Joseph," Frank said. He waited for an answer, either affirmative or negative, but got nothing, only a straight stare. Frank wet his lips. "Are you Mr. Joseph?" he asked.

"I have to be," the old man said. "There ain't another family hereabouts for miles."

"That's right," Frank said with an indulgent chuckle. "Well my name is Frank Taylor. This here is my partner, Mr. Benjamin. We represent the Greater New York Insurance Company."

"Wouldn't you-all rather represent your company inside away from the sun?" Mr. Joseph asked.

"Yes. Why yes," Frank said. "That's a fine idea."

They followed the old man into the cabin. The cabin was very clean, rustic. Mr. Joseph walked to a cabinet, the smoke from his pipe trailing after him. He opened the cabinet and his hand rummaged in it for a moment and for that moment both Frank and Ben peered intently, with the beginning of incredulity . . . but the old man came out with nothing more opulent than a bottle of whiskey.

"We'll have a drink," he said. "We keep it in the house since Ma died."

"He probably moonshined that himself," Ben whispered.

"Shut up," Frank whispered back.

Mr. Joseph poured three drinks and they all drank standing up

around the scarred and pitted table and then sat down.

"The situation is this, Mr. Joseph," Frank began, taking off his hat and setting it on the table next to his elbow. "Do you recall the airliner that crashed up here in the mountains a few weeks ago?"

"I sure do. I remember that good."

"Well it seems that one of our agents, a Mr. Prendergast, was, unfortunately, aboard the plane. Mr. Prendergast was flying from Boston to New York with a briefcase containing diamonds that were insured in the neighborhood of $250,000. Of course everyone aboard the plane perished, including Mr. Prendergast. But when all the bodies and all the personal effects were taken out of the wreckage, there was no sign of the diamonds nor of Mr. Prendergast's briefcase."

Mr. Joseph fingered the bowl of his pipe, clicking the stem between his teeth, staring across at Frank.

"And you reckon we got 'em," he said.

"Well . . ." Frank said, paused, thought for a moment, then continued. "We read in the paper that you or members of your family were the first to reach the scene of the accident and we thought that perhaps you might have seen . . ."

"Or took."

"Oh no. I'm not implying that. Perhaps you saw someone looting there."

"We was the first, mister. The very first. And, as far as I know, the only, until all the others come."

"Just who went there with you?"

"It was me and Albert. He's my oldest. We were down the hill hoein' when we heard this thing in the sky makin' this mighty strange noise. 'It's wantin' help,' Albert said. The next thing we knew we saw it. It was comin' low and loud, right over the trees. We was scared there for a minute; it was that low, right on top of the trees, the whole thing, sailin' there. Then it ducked down behind the trees and me and Albert was already runnin' even 'fore we ever heard it strike. It struck too, good and loud, like nothin' you ever heard. It died hard, and mad."

"So you and Albert ran there?"

"That's right. We moved fast. We left our hoes and run so fast Albert said we must've covered a hunnert yards before them hoes touched the ground."

"You ran straight there?"

"That's right."

"How long did it take you to reach the plane?"

"Well she went down in stubborn country. It took us well onto an hour to reach it."

"Just you and Albert? No one else?"

"That's right."

"No one else could have possibly gotten there ahead of you, looted, and made off?"

"Don't see how, when there ain't nobody around here but us."

"What did you do when you reached the plane?"

"We couldn't go near it. It was smokin' a lot. I was scared it might go up; so I told Albert we'd better back off. He chased back through the woods to tell. I tailed after him. He run straight into town and told."

"You didn't see any signs of life around the plane?"

"There was nothin' could've lived through that, mister."

"How about that other guy?" Ben asked. "Where was he?"

"Hummon? He's my youngest. I only got two. Don't know where he might've been. He's a good boy but he's not right. God made him that way. We leave him be. He romps by himself."

"Is there any chance . . ." Frank said.

"Hummon wouldn't know diamonds from flowers. It all don't make no difference and no sense to him."

"A man has to be pretty dumb not to know diamonds," Ben said.

"Hummon's got no use for diamonds. Just give him pebbles to throw into the stream, that's all he asks."

Frank rubbed his forehead, pondering for a moment.

"You can go talk to him," Mr. Joseph said.

"We already done that," Ben said.

"Would you mind if we had a look around?" Frank said.

"We don't want diamonds, mister," the old man said. "We got our land. We got our house and our bread. That's all the Lord intended for us."

"Just the same . . ." Frank said, getting up.

The old man watched him, calm, shrewd. "You're welcome to look," the old man said.

Frank pulled in a deep breath and then shook his head. They went out into the sunshine again, the old man following, drawing on his pipe.

"Maybe you could show us where the plane came down," Frank said. "We'd make it worth your while."

"It's a hard climb up there, mister."

"We don't mind."

"All right then. Let's go."

They walked away from the cabin, down the incline toward the forest again which hung back brooding, creeping interminably toward the cabin and being hacked back by old man Joseph and his sons in an interminable, losing war. They went into the forest, into the shade, the cool, the intricacy of insect sounds and trees and leaves and strangling brush and roots.

Frank was fuming within. The most perfect jewel robbery of the decade. Executed with perfection in a plush London hotel suite, maneuvered by sleek and dexterous fingers. The diamonds rushed through rain-splattered London in a cab, to a shabby Socho rooming

house, stuffed inside of a toy dog, then taken to the airport, emptied into Solly Prendergast's briefcase, flown across the rolling Atlantic waves to Boston, on the way to New York, a quarter of a million, maybe even more . . . ending up here in a damned forest on the side of a damned mountain because something had gone wrong somewhere somehow with an airplane or with a pilot or in the weather. A quarter of a million in glittering regal stones stolen or lost somewhere in a damned forest.

They pushed deeper into the forest. There was no path here now. The trees and the brush were thick. The old man seemed to slide like a wind through it though, going quickly, while Frank and Ben twisted and smashed at the branches, stumbling, falling, cursing, muttering, their trousers and jackets catching and tearing.

"How in hell did they ever get the bodies out of here?" Frank asked the old man.

"With one of them airyplanes that stands still in the air," the old man said.

A path began, out of nowhere, and they followed it, the two city men grateful. Down the path a young man appeared. He was very tall and solemn-looking. He wore overalls and a blue shirt. He had stopped upon seeing them, was watching them now, his long arms hanging against his thighs, another unreal, comic strip character.

"That's Albert," the old man said.

"What's he doing out here?" Frank asked.

"We got some land down there at the edge of the forest."

They came up to Albert. He towered above all of them. He had dark curly hair, heavy eyebrows. He was handsome in a somber, melancholy way.

"These here gentlemen," the old man said, "represent somebody in New York who's interested in the airyplane wreck."

Albert looked at them. "Pleased to know you," he said in a soft, barely audible voice. He had extremely long arms with hard, supple muscle that ran up into knots in his upper arms.

They continued walking—the four of them now. It was extremely hard going. The path disappeared. They cut up and up into increasingly difficult climbing. Once Frank and Ben had to take time to rest, sitting on a large moss-covered rock. Mr. Joseph and Albert stared at them silently, standing up, until they were ready.

"No more resting, you bum," Frank muttered to Ben. "If they can take it so can we."

It took them almost two hours to reach the plane. It was a terrible sight, the downed and slain airplane, lying amidst a smashed and savage forest. Its mighty wings had hacked a wide swath through the trees. One of the wings had been

torn almost completely off, hanging back and down like a broken limb. The dead plane looked fiercely immobile in the forest, like something either prehistoric or of the future, tremendous and out of place. Already the forest was beginning to reclaim what it had lost; it had accepted the plane and was beginning to creep toward and over it. The tail was hidden in thick green plummage. Wild grass was reaching up along the battered fuselage like a dark fence.

"That's her," the old man said.

"She hit hard," Albert said.

"You wait here," Frank said. He pushed through the brush and went to the plane. He stepped up inside of it, poking his head in through the dark archway of door. There was a stuffy, burned-out smell inside. The inside was complete wreckage, everything crushed and battered and twisted, lying about in frenetic stillness. Most of the seats had been hurled askew. The windows were all shattered, with branches poking in through some in incurious gazing.

Frank went in, pushing aside the torn and gutted seats. The long, low, tube-shaped cabin was very ghostly, still. Parts of the floor had been torn up by the impact. Frank stared about, his eyes moving from seat to seat. He cursed. It was no good. The hillbillies had been here, maybe a dozen times, looking and poking, and then the others to take out the bodies. No doubt both had been thorough. The most celebrated gem theft of the decade, maybe even of the century, ending here in the wilderness with only a chipmunk to applaud, to appreciate.

He thought of Solly Prendergast sitting here smug and secure with the diamonds, and then in the next instant Solly seeing the whole sky twisting and treetops appearing and then everything roaring and crashing and smoking, and over, everything at an end. He kicked viciously at one of the seats and left.

"Nothing," he said to Ben. He looked at the Josephs. "You guys sure you didn't lift anything out of there? You were the first to get here."

"Pa and I were the first," Albert said. "We didn't touch a thing. There was lots of others here after us."

Frank turned and looked at the plane. "Well," he said bitterly, philosophically, "that's that, I guess."

They began going back through the forest. They had been walking for about ten minutes when Ben suddenly lunged to one side and plunged one torn and tattered sleeve into a bush next to the path, slowly, deftly, uncannily, coming up with a briefcase. They were all looking at him. He held it up like a prize. The Josephs stared at it, indifferently, unimpressed.

"Solly's," Ben said.

Frank grabbed it out of his hand

with a swipe. The briefcase was unzipped, and empty. He looked up at old man Joseph, his eyes burning.

"All right, Pop," he said. "Where are they?"

Neither Mr. Joseph nor his son had blinked an eye. They stood as still and as unimpressed as the trees.

"The diamonds, you hick!" Frank shouted. "They were in here. This is Solly's," he said, shaking the empty briefcase. "There was a quarter of a million in rocks in here. They're not here now. Don't tell me some rat squirrel ate them. Where are they?"

"We never saw that bag before," Mr. Joseph said.

"Somebody rifled that plane and found this and took out the diamonds," Frank said. "Nobody with any brains would have left this lying around. So it must have been you two."

"Hell!" Albert snorted.

"I'll give you hell," Frank said.

"Albert," Mr. Joseph said quietly. The tall young man turned around, looking at his father. "Did you take them?"

"No, Pa," Albert said solemnly. "I never seen that bag."

"Mister," Mr. Joseph said, "neither me nor my boy ever saw that bag. We never took a thing from that plane."

"Who did then?" Frank demanded.

"Pa," Albert said, still looking at his father. "It must've been Herman. He was rompin' by himself that day."

"Herman?" Frank asked, as if not quite placing the name.

"That's my youngest," the old man said. "He's not so right."

"The looney by the bridge," Ben said.

"Yeah," Frank said, suddenly enlightened. "He must have taken them."

"He could've taken them," Mr. Joseph said. "But if he did he meant no harm. The Lord meant him to be that way. He's never harmed nothin' in his whole life."

"All right, all right," Frank said. "Don't cry on my shoulder. Let's go find him. There's a quarter of a million at stake here."

They went back through the forest, down the tricky wooded slopes. Once Albert turned around and asked:

"What insurance company did you fellas say you come from?"

"The Greater New York," Frank said sharply.

"Never heard of it," Albert said.

"That's a pity," Frank said. "Now just keep walking."

They came back to the cabin and continued on down the incline, down the path through the forest and out to the small bridge over the creek. Herman was still sitting there, his legs suspended over the side, dropping pebbles one by one into the shining water, mooning over the splashes.

"Let me talk to him, mister," the old man said.

"All right," Frank said. "You talk. But make it good."

"Hummon," the old man said as they walked onto the bridge. "Now you tell us straight."

The wild-haired, sad faced man stared up at them, jiggling pebbles around in his fist. Mr. Joseph squatted next to him.

"Remember the day that airyplane hit in the forest?" Mr. Joseph asked.

"I recall," Herman said.

"Do you remember where you were that day?"

"I was in the forest."

"Did you go to the airyplane, Hummon?"

Herman's flat opaque eyes looked into the older man's, aware now that he had done something wrong and searching to see just how wrong.

"I went there, Pa."

"You took something didn't you? Something in a fancy bag like this here fella's holding?" Ben held up the bag. Herman looked at it and then at the old man and nodded.

"They was pebbles in the bag."

"Pebbles?" Frank asked.

Herman opened his hand, showing the pebbles he was holding. He began dropping them into the water, one at a time.

"No!" Frank yelled.

"That's what he did with 'em!" Ben cried.

"He don't know no different," Mr. Joseph said, his voice mild, apologetic.

"How deep is this thing?" Frank demanded, peering cautiously over the railing.

"She ain't deep at all," Albert said.

Frank threw one leg over the railing. The rotted sun-blasted railing swayed under the sudden weight and then cracked and Frank began to fall, slanting out into mid-air, his face startled and astonished, his tie sticking straight out as he arced out and down into the water with an enormous splash that sent a fan of water leaping out over the shuddering bushes on the opposite bank. But the water was not very deep. Sitting in it, it reached only to his shoulders. He hardly seemed aware of what had happened as he began digging frantically beneath the water with his hands, coming up with mud and stones and pebbles as the four amazed faces peered down at his frantic splashing hands. He stopped, looked up at them.

"Whereabouts did he drop them?" he demanded.

"He always sits here," Albert said.

Frank stood up and then plunged his hands down into the water again, Herman peering down at him through his shoes, serene and intrigued.

"Them pebbles won't set that long, mister," Albert said. "'spe-

cially with all the rains we had."

"The creek swolls then," Mr. Joseph said. "It carries everything."

"Even the big rocks," Albert said.

Ben cursed, flinging the briefcase far out into the forest where it whirled glinting in the sun for a moment and then crashed into the thicket.

"How far would they carry?" Frank asked, looking up desperately, the water curling placidly around his knees.

"By now?" Mr. Joseph asked.

"Yes, by now, you fool!" Frank shouted.

"By now they've gone through the whole creek and into the lake and into the river and the rest only God knows," Albert said.

Frank stood in the water, dripping wet, his muddy hands spread apart, his face raging but helpless, hopeless, the railing bobbing around his legs and then escaping and floating away to where it caught in the narrow creek.

"We got a fine story to tell all right," Ben muttered.

"We ought to drown that fool," Frank said.

"Hummon never meant nothin'," Mr. Joseph said.

Frank was walking up the creek, sloshing wearily through the water. He climbed up onto the bank and walked around to the bridge. He stood there, looking down at the stream, his face dazed.

"You kin have some dry duds if you like," Mr. Joseph said.

Frank looked down at himself. He nodded. "I could use some," he said morosely.

As he passed Herman, Frank suddenly turned and gave him a terrific kick and Herman sailed off the bridge, not even looking up, still in his placid sitting position but sitting on midair, dropping into the creek still sitting, and sitting there unharmed and unbothered in the water, turning his head now and watching them walk toward the cabin.

"I'm sorry, mister," Mr. Joseph said as Frank stepped into a pair of overalls that came up around him much too tight.

"Shut up," Frank said, trying to button the overalls.

"Yes," Ben said. "Shut up."

A moment later they went storming out of the cabin, Frank in his undershirt, overalls and broad-brimmed fedora. Suddenly he stopped.

"Listen," he said to Ben, "wait a minute. I don't believe it. I just don't believe it. I don't believe that even an idiot would be dumb enough to drop diamonds into a creek."

"I was thinking the same thing myself," Ben said. "Maybe it's all a gag."

"Give me your rod," Frank said. "And let's stop this fooling around right now."

They turned back toward the cabin. Albert was standing in the doorway, watching them. Then he

disappeared and Mr. Joseph stood there.

Frank and Ben stopped in front of the door.

"All right, dad," Frank said, pointing the gun at the old man. "The comedy is over. We want those diamonds and fast. And don't tell us that that moron tossed them in the drink. We're not buying that."

"I thought you fellas was insurance people," the old man said.

"This is our insurance right here," Frank said, thrusting the gun forward.

"Now talk up!" Ben said.

"I'll do the talking," a voice from behind said, quiet but dangerous. "Drop the gun and turn around."

"Do that," Albert said, coming around the side of the cabin, a gun in his hand.

The gun fell from Frank's hand. When he and Ben turned around they found Herman standing there with a gun leveled at them, and no longer did he look placid or hapless; his eyes were small, keen, his face hard, alert.

"They're cops," Ben whispered.

"Yes, cops," Albert said, walking up to them, kicking Frank's fallen gun away. "Very patient cops. Waiting up here for weeks for somebody to come for those diamonds, somebody who knew they were here."

"And where are they?" Frank asked.

"They were taken out of here weeks ago," Albert (Detective Kelly of the New York police) said.

"All right, move out," Herman (Detective Morgan of the New York police) said.

"Wait a second," Frank said. "Who's he?" he asked, pointing at the old man.

"He's Mr. Joseph," Kelly said. "And he gets my vote for this year's Academy Award. He just adopted us for a few weeks. His real sons have been living in town."

"And the briefcase was a plant?"

"That's right. We were surprised that you missed it the first time. We wanted you guys to tip your hand," Kelly said. "Now get on, boys, I'm a bit weary of playing farmer."

# DEAR ALFRED HITCHCOCK

"Murderers, in my opinion, are all alike . . ." Mrs. F.R.

*Unquestionably, there is one thing that they do all have in common.* A.H.

". . . As a teacher for over two decades, I know that there is nothing you can do to stop youngsters from reading what they want to read or watching what they want to watch . . ." L.S.M.

*Or destroying whom they want to destroy.* A.H.

"I'm twelve years old. My grades aren't too hot in school. What do I do if I want to be a director of pictures, like you? . . ." J.J.

*Grow older, sardonic, and somewhat more robust.* A.H.

". . . Why are murder weapons—no matter how sharp they are—spoken of as blunt instruments? . . . ." L.B.

*Why to spare the feelings of the survivors, of course.* A.H

"I like stories with characters in them . . ." R.S.S.

*They are the most popular.* A.H.

"One thing I don't like in books is a lot of description, like of a valley where the crime took place . . ." Mrs. C.O.

*Might I interest you in the hilltop where the deed was plotted?* A.H.

"I often let my housework go in order to read your magazine. I'm just a housewife . . ." Mrs. K.M.M.

*You are not just a housewife. You are, madam, an individual of rare discernment.* A.H.

*High—very high—fences help make good neighbors. Eyesight and hearing, on the other hand, are no help whatsoever. And murder, should it be convenient, can do much to enhance most neighborhoods.*

**by Fred Allwood**

I KNOW that all our neighbors think we're nosey, but we're not, really. Curious, maybe, but then it's a natural thing to be curious about what goes on around you. I admit that my wife has a habit of looking out of the windows, but that's because she's fond of nature. I grant you that whenever she does look, it always seems to be when something happens, but you can hardly blame her for that.

I don't think it's right that the whole neighborhood should have treated us as they have done over the past years. It felt almost as though England were not yet at peace. It all started with the Hargreaves affair, towards the end of the war. We'd been living in our house for some years then, and I think we were well respected in the district, even if we weren't very popular.

The Hargreaves were our immediate neighbors. They didn't like us, and I must say that the dislike was mutual. They went out of their way to spread a lot of evil gossip about us, and as Hargreaves was the type of man who easily becomes popular, every lie he told about us was readily believed. He and his unpleasant, immoral wife told everyone in the neighborhood that my wife spent all her time peering out of the windows, and prying into other people's business, and when she wasn't able to stay at her post, as they termed it, I would take over for her, so that we didn't miss a thing. They even accused me of using binoculars to look into other people's houses, which was a disgusting thing to say about any man. Fortunately my wife knew about the binoculars. I'd dug them out of an old trunk when we started the A.R.P., as they were a necessary part of one's equipment. The only time I ever put them to my eyes at the window was when I wanted to get them properly focussed.

I never spoke to Hargreaves unless I looked over the garden fence, and he saw me. Then I'd pass the time of day, but he even seemed to resent that. We certainly had no desire to get on friendly terms with them. They were always quarrelling. And they both drank heavily. You could tell that from the number of empty bottles that used to go out of the house—far more than were delivered, so he must have brought in quite a lot himself. He always had plenty of parcels in his car, and there were a good many of them containing bottles. You don't have to take my wife's word for that. I've seen them myself.

He was some sort of accountant in the city, but as the war progressed, it was obvious that he was

doing quite a bit in the Black Market. Sometimes he would bring home as many as three dozen eggs at the weekend, and the mileage on the speedometer of his car proved beyond a shadow of doubt that he was getting fuel coupons from somewhere. As for his wife, there was no doubt about her being a bad lot. Not that he was any better. As events turned out . . . well, we know that he was much worse than anyone imagined.

When the blitz started, and it was impossible to get to sleep, it was nothing to hear them quarrelling throughout the night. In between drinking, of course. They used the most foul language, and were always accusing one another of having affairs. That was no concern of ours, of course, but you only had to look at them to know that it was true of both of them.

We certainly weren't surprised when she packed a bag and left him. It was a few weeks after we had the bomb at the end of the road. She began to nag him to build an air raid shelter. I almost felt sorry for him over that, because when she nagged she did the job properly. He went straight off and got the materials. Other people couldn't get them, of course, but as I said, he had connections in the Black Market. The only thing he couldn't get was labor, so he went to work to build it himself. I think he was glad to get into the garden to get away from her nagging tongue. He worked at it every weekend. He even worked in the evenings if it was light enough. He seemed determined to get it built as quickly as possible, and it was obviously going to be no ordinary shelter. It was only eighteen inches shorter than our greenhouse.

Anyway they never used it. As I said, she packed her bag and left him. It was after one of the bad raids, and they'd been up most of the night quarrelling. We heard her say that she was going away, and he told her where she might go, and he hoped that he would never see her again, because if he did, he would do her in.

Those were his actual words. I heard them as well as my wife, because I was standing beside her, holding back the lower branch of the mimosa, when we were looking for the cat. The next morning a taxi came for her at ten past eleven. Hargreaves had gone to his office at the usual time, and he came home in his car at five forty-five. My wife saw him drive straight into the garage, which usually meant that he was staying in for the night. He changed his clothes, and by six o'clock was at work on the shelter.

He worked on it every evening for the rest of the week, with the exception of Friday, when he didn't come home until ten past eleven, and had obviously been drinking, because he grazed his off-side wing on the garage door. He worked on

the shelter again over the week-end, and the whole of the following week, except Tuesday. On the Tuesday . . . well, it was my wife who gave the details to the police, so you can have it in her own words as they were taken down in her statement:

"It was exactly eleven forty-three by our alarm clock, which I had just wound up and set for the morning. I went to the window to adjust the blackout, and as I pulled the curtains I saw Mr. Hargreaves drive into the garage. I was surprised that he didn't come out immediately, and it must have been nearly ten minutes before he did make an appearance. I couldn't see well enough in the dark to make out what he was carrying, but it must have been a good weight, because he moved very slowly. He didn't go into the house, but went past the scullery to the back garden. I called my husband, and we watched him from the back window as he went down the garden to the shelter. He was there for at least half an hour, and we were just thinking of going into the garden, and looking over the fence to see what he was doing, when he returned to the house. Within a quarter of an hour we heard him again. He went back to the shelter, and at three o'clock he was still there. I went to bed, and my husband remained up as the all clear had not been given. He brought me a cup of tea at six o'clock, and told me that Mr. Hargreaves had only just gone indoors."

The police asked me for a statement, of course. I told them that when my wife had gone to bed, I had gone down to the bottom of the garden, and tried to make out what Hargreaves was doing. I heard tapping and scraping, and he seemed to be working both inside and outside the shelter, so that I didn't dare risk looking over the fence in case he saw me. It was after five-thirty when dawn began to break, and I saw him go back into the house. He was then wearing the old clothes which he usually wore when working in the garden.

Those were the statements which we gave to the police. It was only an account of what we had seen and heard, and we certainly didn't suggest that he was doing anything improper. The only time we ever mentioned his wife was to the milkman, and we certainly didn't suggest that he had buried her in the shelter. My wife did say in jest that it would be ideal for the purpose, but she never intended that the milkman should take her words seriously.

He did, of course, and the whole neighborhood said that we had deliberately spread the rumor that Hargreaves had killed his wife, and buried her in the shelter. The way they treated us you would have thought that we were murderers. The fact that Mrs. Hargreaves had disappeared was completely over-

looked, until my wife pointed out to the police that it had been several weeks since she had gone away with only a small suitcase, and her ration book was still with the local grocer, which, to say the least of it, seemed a little peculiar.

It took the police a long time to make up their minds to question Hargreaves, and when they did, all he could tell them was that his wife had packed up and left him. It seemed a most unlikely tale, because, as my wife pointed out to the police, if she had been intending to leave him for good, she would certainly have taken her fur coat with her.

They made extensive inquiries in their attempts to trace her, but—unless a bomb had fallen on her and wiped her off the earth—they could not account for her disappearance. We saw them come round and examine the shelter, and eventually they asked Hargreaves if it could be demolished. All he did was to shrug, and tell them to go ahead.

Two policemen arrived with pneumatic drills. Hargreaves showed his animosity towards us by inviting the whole neighborhood into his garden to see the policemen do their work of destruction. There was continual pointing to our windows, until we began to fear that he was trying to incite the mob to wreak his vengeance on us.

After that we were shunned by everyone. They all felt sorry for Hargreaves, but he certainly didn't act as though he was heartbroken by the disappearance of his wife. He began to spend his weekends away from home. He always took a suitcase with him in his car, and on the fifth occasion he took two suitcases. My wife happened to be looking out of the window when he went to his car, and she was convinced that the second suitcase was the very one which his wife had taken away with her. If it was, then Hargreaves must have seen her since she left.

We happened to spend some time in the garden during that weekend, and as one or two of the palings of the fence were in need of repair, I took them down to measure them for replacement. It was then that we noticed the heap of compost that Hargreaves had piled up near the old apple tree. It was a small heap, no bigger than a kitchen chair, and it certainly wouldn't have covered a grave, which was what my wife insisted we must look for. We gave it up and went back to the house.

I sat at the front window and read a book. My wife did some needlework. She was making a dress, and had it pinned on one of those old-fashioned dummies. I suppose that gave her the idea of what had happened to Mrs. Hargreaves. As soon as it was dark, I went over into Hargreaves' garden and raked away the heap of compost. Sure enough, there was a hole

that had been dug and filled in. It didn't look like a grave; it was no bigger than a manhole cover. But my wife didn't expect it to be, because she had tumbled to what Hargreaves had done with his wife's body. He had buried her standing upright.

We carefully replaced the compost and waited for Hargreaves to return. We felt that we had been so maligned by everybody for telling the police what we had seen and heard, that it would be much better if we kept our suspicions to ourselves. I told Hargreaves exactly how we felt. We didn't like him, but we had no wish to do anything, or say anything, which might cause him further embarrassment.

It was only a few days later when the bomb fell in the road and brought down the front of Hargreaves' house. It was quite uninhabitable, so that no one was surprised when he left the district. I don't suppose his name has been mentioned for years. If you asked anyone in the neighborhood where he is now, they couldn't tell you, any more than they could tell you if his wife ever returned to him.

The house had stood just as the bomb left it, until a few weeks ago when some builders arrived; it has now been completely restored. I've just put my head over the fence and introduced myself to our new neighbors. He's a retired bank manager. Quite a nice chap; very different from Hargreaves. He's a keen gardener, and he's just been telling me how he proposes to lay out the garden with a wall and a lily pond.

The old concrete from the shelter will be very useful for the wall. He is going to cut down the old apple tree, and—unless I can talk him out of it—he's going to have Mrs. Hargreaves standing up in the middle of his lily pond.

I admit that it would give us a certain amount of satisfaction to have all the people in the district who treated us so badly, taken down a peg or two. It's what they deserve. But it would be a poor reward by comparison with the substantial appreciation that Hargreaves has shown us regularly every three months since he left the district.

*Never underestimate the power of an elderly woman, for an elderly woman is, essentially, still a woman. I address this admonition to elderly men who by this time should know what I'm talking about, but who quite obviously don't yet realize that women are almost indestructible.*

# ROOM FOR MURDER

**by Allen Kim Lang**

ARDEN CARR slammed the screen-door behind him as he bounded off the porch, waving his briefcase like a fly-swatter. "Get down out of there, you greedy little monkeys!" he yelled at the boys, batting the briefcase at the branches of the near-

est tree. Whooping, the boys swung down from the branches, dangled, dropped all around him. Dodging his blows, they raced each other to the back fence, ramming peaches into their pockets as they ran. Arden slammed his briefcase against the bottom of one tardy nine-year-old, boosting him over the gate and into the alley. "See that you stay out of here, you young thieves!" he shouted after the boys. One of the fleeing youngsters, stung by the insult, whirled and tossed a peach in reply. The pitch was successful; the peach spattered a free-form design just below the knot in Arden's tie.

Swearing, blotting with his handkerchief at the mess on his tie, Arden didn't hear his aunt's laughter till he got back to the porch. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded, glaring up at Edith Carr. "Brats swarm in from all over the neighborhood to rip the branches off our trees and swipe our peaches, and you laugh."

"Arden, if you could have seen yourself batting at that crew of pygmy peach-pickers, you'd try to hold your temper in the future," Edith said. "You'd better come in and change your tie. The one you've got on is drawing flies." She began to laugh again.

Arden gripped his briefcase in both hands, so hard that his knuckles went white. "Everything I do is wrong," he said. "I try to defend your property against a mob of juvenile delinquents, and what thanks do I get? You just laugh at me!"

"Calm down," Edith said: "For one thing, those children don't qualify as a mob. For another, I invited them to come here, any time, to take all the peaches they want and to swing on the back gate, if they care to."

Arden followed his aunt into the house, stripping off his peach-stained tie. She opened his suitcase, found a fresh tie, and handed it to him. "Keep this up, Arden," she said, "and you'll be a mean old man before you're thirty."

He went over in front of the mirror to knot the second tie. "I'm sorry, Aunt Edith," he said. "If I carry on like a sore-tailed grizzly, it's because I'm worried. I hate leaving you alone here for two weeks. What if something should happen?"

"At the age of seventy-four, I feel ready for any contingency," Edith said. "You needn't worry on my account."

Arden snapped his tie-clasp and turned from the mirror. "Mary will be in mornings to help you clean the house," he said. "If you need anything, just ask her." He closed and locked the suitcase. "Oh, I almost forget to tell you—I've fixed the lock on the bathroom door."

"I wasn't aware of anything wrong with the bathroom door," Edith said, "but thank you, just the same. You're so handy around the

house I can almost forgive you your temper."

"I promise to be cheerful when I get home from the conference," Arden said. He bent to give his aunt's cheek an aseptic peck. "I'll miss you," he said.

"You'll miss your plane, if you're not quick," she said, handing him his briefcase. Arden snatched up his suitcase and trotted out to the cab. Edith stood on the doorstep, waving good-bye as the taxi drove off. Arden didn't look back.

"He's gone," a voice observed from behind the high boxwood hedge.

"Boy, am I glad!" another invisible voice added.

Edith walked over to the hedge and peered down at the squatting Andrews twins. Fresh from the skirmish of the peach-trees, the boys looked up at her with doubtful smiles, wondering whether she endorsed Arden's anger.

Edith made the sign of friendship, holding her fingers in the "V" that stood for the wolf's ears of the Cub Pack. "Come on over on my side," she said. "We'll smoke the peace-pipe." She went inside for a moment, and came back out with the cookie-jar.

"We didn't eat supper yet," Hank said, gazing at the cookie-jar.

"But we could maybe take a few for after," Bill suggested.

He and his brother came around the hedge, and, to show their willingness toward armistice, filled their pockets with Edith's raisin-coconut-oatmeal cookies.

"No more for now," Edith said, covering up the cookie-jar. "You can eat one now, but save the rest for after supper."

"Look!" Bill said, pointing toward the elm tree by the curb. A scarlet bird flashed from its leaves like animal lightning, and landed on the hedge a few yards away.

"A redbird," Hank said softly, tip-toeing over the grass to get near the bird.

"He's a cardinal, dumb-bunny," Bill said. "You'll be a Wolf-cub till you're fifty years old, Hank. Won't he, Mrs. Carr?"

"Some people call them redbirds," Edith said. She pursed her lips and whistled the ringing notes of the cardinal's call. The bird perked its head, listening critically, then answered: *Sweet-sweet-sweet; what-cheer, what-cheer; sweet-sweet-sweet.* Hank, rewarding the bird, threw it a cookie.

"You scared him off," Bill pointed out to his brother. "Mrs. Carr, how did you learn to whistle like a bird?"

"From my husband," Edith said. "Walter was good at these Boy Scout sort of things. He trained a cardinal to come sit on his wrist when he whistled, and to take sunflower seeds from his hand. I wish you boys could have known Walter. He could help you lots more than I can with nature-study and Morse Code and all."

"Do you really think we could make friends with a cardinal, and teach him to stand on our hands and eat?" Bill asked. Edith nodded. Bill puckered up and tried to whistle. Hank laughed at the sound Bill made. "We'd better practice," Bill conceded.

"You do that," Edith agreed. "I'll have some sunflower seeds for you in the morning."

"We won't be here tomorrow, Mrs. Carr," Hank said. "We're going to the lake."

"When you get back, then," Edith said. "Now you'd better hurry home to supper, boys."

"Yes, ma'am," Hank said. Whistling soundlessly, the twins raced each other to the home side of the hedge.

Edith carried her cookie-jar inside and closed the door. "Wolf-cubs and a cardinal," she said. "That's odd company for a woman my age." She shook her head, thinking how foolish she must sound, talking to herself. "But who's to overhear me?" she asked. "I'm free to chatter all I've a mind to for the next two weeks. After fifty years' conversation with Walter, I'm not prepared to suffer my widowhood in silence."

Light-footed on the stairway, Edith climbed up to her bedroom. She chose a nightgown and got from its hiding place the glass-stoppered vial of gardenia bath-salts that Walter had given her on her seventy-third birthday, the last they'd had together. She saved these for special occasions, like this two weeks' declaration of independence. In the bathroom she turned the hot water full-blast into the tub and shook in bathsalts till the steamy air was rich with the smell of gardenias. Then Edith closed the bathroom door and locked it. "You're an old prude," she told herself. "It's silly to lock the door when I'm alone in the house. I could soak here all week and no one would care, unless maybe Mary wanted in to mop the place." She lowered herself into the too-hot water, confident that the heat would soak into her bones like a sleep-making drug.

Warm and weary, Edith stepped from the tub and wrapped herself in one of the enormous pink towels she kept stacked in the bathroom cupboard. "Swathed in petal-pink and reeking of gardenias, like a Jezebel," she sighed. "If I were fifty years younger, I'd have the grace to be ashamed of myself." She drained the last of the bubbly froth from the bathtub and polished the tub dry, then slipped into her night-gown. "At least I sleep like an honest old woman, in sensible flannel," she said. "Now for a sandwich and a fresh peach, if the boys left me any; then I'll read myself to sleep." She folded the bathrobe over her arm and picked up the moist pink towel. Kicking her feet into her slippers, Edith unlocked the door and turned the knob.

The lock stayed locked. The big brass doorknob fell off in her hand, like ripe fruit. Outside in the hall, the other doorknob banged onto the floor and rolled. Edith heard it descending the stairway with deliberate thumps. "Just dandy," she said, regarding the doorknob she was holding. "A fine job of locksmithing Arden did. Or is this perhaps my clever nephew's notion of a joke, to leave me trapped overnight in the bathroom?" She put down the knob and tried to tug the door open by catching hold of its edge, but there was no cranny for her fingers to fit into. "Can't pull the hinges out," she observed. "They're outside." She put a finger through the hole where the doorknob-shaft had run and tugged again. "The lock's still holding," she said. "Checkmate."

Edith looked around the bathroom "No trapdoors," she said. "No crowbars, chisels, or battering-rams. Looks like I'll be here till Mary gets in tomorrow morning." She went over to the bathtub and spread her robe on the bottom to serve as a mattress, then switched off the over head light and settled down in her improvised bed. "I've slept softer," she admitted. She closed her eyes to avoid the sight of the white walls on either side of her. The inside of a coffin must look much like this, she was thinking. The hot soaking served as an excellent sleeping-draft; she was half-asleep already, despite the hard bed and her morbid imaginings. "Good night, Walter," Edith said, and went to sleep.

The morning lighted the frosted window above her. Edith scrambled up, cold as iron. "Poor old bones," she said, huddling her shoulders to comfort their aches. "There's little enough flesh to cushion you on porcelain." She went over to the washstand to scrub her face and comb her hair. She regretted having no cosmetics, having to face Mary helpless and with an unimproved complexion. "Two hours from now, she'll be banging on the door and shouting, 'Mrs. Carr? Mrs. Carr! Are you all right, Mrs. Carr?' Then I'll have to shout through the door, telling her to go hunt up a locksmith to free me from my own bathroom." Edith smiled into the mirror. "Well, if there's any virtue that I've a special need of, it's humility."

She spread the bathrobe next to the door and sat there, leaning back, waiting for Mary to come. "I'll hear her, heavy-footed on the stairs, clumping up as though she wore diver's boots," Edith said. "I hope she gets here soon. I'm hungry." She glanced down to her left wrist and sighed as she remembered leaving her watch in the bedroom on her dresser.

"It's getting late," Edith finally admitted. "Mary isn't coming, or she'd have been here." She stood

and smoothed her nightgown, then stared at the frosted window, eight feet up above the bathtub. "I'll have to break out of this tiled trap by my own devices," she said. She hefted the big brass doorknob. "I believe this is what the newsreels call the shot-put," she said. "I hope I don't smash the Andrews boys' bedroom window in the bargain. That would catch their attention, though, when they return from their day at the lake." Edith walked back to stand with her back to the door. She drew a deep breath, raised her right arm, and hurled the doorknob toward the window with all her strength.

The knob banged a dent into the wall beside the frosted glass and clattered down behind the tub. As Edith scrambled to retrieve it, the doorknob rolled under one of the cast-iron claw-feet, six inches beyond her farthest reach and her hand came back empty.

She stood and wiped the moisture from her hands. "I'll give Arden a talking-to he'll not soon forget," she promised. "Now I've got to try again." She opened the medicine cabinet to inspect its contents. The liniment bottle seemed to be the likeliest projectile. It was heavy, it was a handy shape for throwing, and its broad white label could be written on. Using mercurichrome as ink, and the glass applicator for a pen, Edith lettered her message to the outside across the fine print on the liniment label:

*"I'm trapped in my bathroom; the lock is broken. Laugh if you must, but please come let me out. Edith Carr."*

As an afterthought, Edith sketched a large "V" under her name. If Billy or Hank found her note, this wolf's-ears symbol of the Cub Pack would convince them that she was serious, and not just playing some inexplicable adult game. "And if the Andrews boys stay late at the lake, one of the other Cubs will find this," Edith said, gripping the liniment bottle by the neck. "Anyway, once the Andrews get home this evening, one of the boys will discover my broken bathroom window. They'll know right off that something's wrong. I'll shout out, and they'll get their mother to come and help me out of here. After I've been freed, we'll celebrate my freedom with a supper, she and I and the twins; and for dessert we'll have fresh peaches off the trees in back," she said. She stood by the door again, swinging the bottle, and looked up at the little window. "I wish they'd taught us Gay Nineties schoolgirls to play basketball," she said. Then she closed her eyes for a moment and whispered "Help me, Walter." Lifting the liniment bottle, staring at the window, Edith flung it as hard as she could.

The bottle exploded in a shower of glass and liver-colored liquid. Bits of glass chattered into the tub,

and liniment trickled down the wall from a spot a yard to the right of the frosted window.

Edith's eyes blurred. She shook her head to deny her tears. "I'll find another way," she said. "I mean to die in my own bed, the bed that Walter died in, when my time comes. Not here, not the victim of Arden's vicious practical joke." She gathered up the broken glass and put it out of the way, under the tub, careful not to cut herself. Then she considered the dirty trickles on the wall. "That liniment will spoil the paint," she said. "I can't have that, no matter how hungry I am."

Moistening a washcloth, she cautiously stepped into the bathtub, then up onto its rim. "Monkey-shines!" she commented. Bracing her left hand against the wall, she scrubbed at the stain with the washcloth, reaching as high as she could. Trying to reach higher, Edith felt her left hand skid across the wet wall. Flailing her arms, she jolted feet-first down into the tub.

Edith held her body taut, refusing to scream at the pain scalding over her ankle. "It's only a sprain," she lied. Tugging herself over to the edge of the bathtub and down to the floor, she worked her way over to the washstand, dragging her left foot behind her. The pain was flickering up to her knee. "Brittle old body," she said. "Falling to bits, like the Deacon's one-hoss shay." She pulled herself up, using the washstand as a crutch, and opened the medicine cabinet. Getting out a roll of adhesive tape and the blade from Arden's second-best razor, she limped along the wall till she could sit down with her back to the door.

Edith cut off a strip of tape and fit it under the arch of her left foot, tugging it up tight. "Hurts," she admitted, wiping her eyes with the sleeve of her nightgown. She cut off more tape for several figure-eights, wound up over the instep and down under the arch. "Maybe aspirin will stop the pain for awhile," she said, scooting over under the washstand and pulling herself up onto her good foot. She washed down two aspirin tablets with a glass of water.

She'd made a mistake. Aspirin was too heavy a whip for her old heart. Edith dropped to the floor and spread out on her pallet, feeling her heart swell like a runaway balloon, squeezing her lungs aside, shoving up into her throat. She stared at the ceiling through a red veil, waiting for the hammering to fade. *Or to stop altogether,* she thought.

It was nearly night before the pounding in her chest was quiet. "I'm going to live," Edith said. She tugged herself up again and slithered along the wall to the light-switch. With the light on, she examined the bathroom more carefully. "I won't die from a sprained ankle," she said, "but I could die

very dead from starvation." She hobbled to the towel-cupboard, her left ankle dragging behind her as though it were clamped in a steel trap. "What I really want to find is a picnic lunch," she said, opening the cupboard. "That, and a fireax. I'll use the ax on the door first, then on Arden." There was nothing in the cupboard but pink towels.

She inspected the medicine cabinet again. The aspirin she set aside. After-shave lotion was no help. Wave-set. Ant-poison. What was ant-poison doing in a medicine cabinet? A bottle of vitamin capsules was the only thing there that looked like food.

Edith shook some of the vitamin capsules out into her hand. "These might help me," she said. The bottle was three-quarters full. "Four a day till my clever nephew gets home," Edith figured. "That's three meals and a High Tea for every day in the week." She tossed down two of the capsules. "I'd rather have one of my peaches," she said, filling the glass and washing the sickly taste of gelatin from her mouth. "But I don't want to seem ungrateful for what I've got."

A wave of nausea swept over her. "I'm just dizzy from hunger," Edith said. "I shouldn't have taken those capsules. Everyone knows that vitamins need solid food to work with." She hiccoughed, and knew that she was going to be sicker than she'd been in all her seventy-four years.

When the retching was over, Edith crawled back to her pallet. "Those capsules shouldn't have made me sick," she said. "It's unjust. Vitamins are supposed to help you when you're weak." The overhead light was spinning. Edith closed her eyes and let weakness wash her into sleep.

When she woke, the frosted window was bright again. "Hey, Hank!" a boy was calling. "Billy! Come on out!"

"Help!" Edith shouted. She pulled herself across the floor to be nearer the window. "Help me! Please hear me!"

But the boy's voice was silent. Edith could hear nothing, but the pounding of her heart. "I didn't really think he'd hear me," she sighed. "This is so much like being buried alive, with the world only a few feet away!" She grabbed hold of the edge of the washstand to pull herself up. "I've got to get out!" Her left foot no longer throbbed, but pained continuously, as though an iron spike had been driven through her heel up into her leg. She clutched at the washstand, dizzy again. "Don't be silly!" she ordered. "I can't be so feeble as this because of one day's fasting."

Edith looked down into the washbowl. Three of the vitamin capsules lay there, where she'd dropped them last night. Moisture had dissolved their gelatin en-

velopes, and about each of the capsules there was now a muddy puddle of brown oil and blue liquid. "Blue?" Edith asked. "Vitamins aren't blue. There's nothing blue that's good to eat." She took the vitamin bottle and Arden's razor-blade back to her seat by the door. Holding the remaining capsules up, one after the other, she saw that several of the tiny globes were lopsided, and had a curious tint. "As though they'd been tampered with," she said. "As though someone has opened them, put something inside, and sealed them up again." Edith cut open one of the off-shape capsules. In the yellow liquid that dribbled out there was what seemed to be a bit of blue glass. She moistened a finger and rubbed the blue fragment. It dissolved a little, leaving a slimy feeling on her fingers. "Poisons are often blue," she said softly. "That's the color of ant-poison; and the powder Walter used to spray on the flowers to kill aphids was blue.

"What does this make of Arden's stupid joke?" she asked herself.

"He's trying to kill me. He wants to make sure I die within the two weeks he's given me for dying." She poured the rest of the capsules back into the bottle, twisted the lid tight, and washed the poison-slime from her fingers.

"Why?" she asked. "For this house. Arden gets it when I die, together with the money Walter left me, and the bonds, and my insurance." Edith closed her eyes, remembering what Arden had said just before he'd left: *"I've fixed the lock on the bathroom door."*

"No!" she moaned. "Arden wouldn't set a trap to kill me!" She shook her head. "But he's good at setting traps. I remember one trap he made—I wish I didn't!"

Arden was twelve. Walter had tamed that cardinal of his to come when he whistled; and the bird would sit on his shoulder and accept sunflower seeds from his hand. Arden had learned to whistle the cardinal's call. He'd set a box on a stick, with a string for its trigger, and sunflower seeds for bait.

"He was sitting under the peach-trees," Edith said. "That trap was beside him, and his hands were covered with blood and bright-red feathers."

She'd had to bury the cardinal. Walter wondered afterward why his bird never came again when he stood holding sunflower seeds in his hand and whistling. She'd never told him. That day, she'd scrubbed the blood from Arden's hands and locked him in his room all day, and left him hungry overnight. "Maybe this is Arden's revenge," she said.

The tape was cutting into her leg, tight against the swelling. Edith carefully stripped it away. "There was a story I read when I was a girl," she said. "It was in the old *St. Nicholas Magazine;* the story of a sponge-diver, deep under the sea with his foot caught by a

giant clam, struggling to get free, growing weaker, drowning." Edith stripped off the last piece of the old tape. "He had his knife to his ankle when a man from another boat dived down to pry apart the jaws of the clam, and carry him to the surface. I'm like that sponge-diver," she said. "Trapped here, with my foot crushed, drowning in the element of time."

She grew dizzy as she massaged the swollen ankle, each squeeze of her hands sending fresh spasms of pain up her leg. But she had to keep the blood flowing inside her foot, or it would gangrene. "If only I knew for certain," she said. She took the washcloth to scrub away the margin-marks the adhesive tape had left on her skin. She reached into the cupboard for a towel to dry her foot. As she shook the big pink towel out of its folds, an envelope clattered to the floor. Edith snatched it up. On the envelope, written in Arden's italic script, was the note, "Bolt to fix the bathroom door, once I own this house."

Edith fingered the half-inch bolt. "Now, I'm certain," she said. "I can almost hear him laughing. He's holding me in his hand, the way he held Walter's cardinal, teasing me to death. Arden wants to cheat me out of feeling the sun in my face for a few more months, out of hearing children laugh at Christmas. He's impatient to get my money, eager to get rid of his doddering aunt." Edith covered her face with her hands. "He hopes to find me lying here when he comes home. He wants to stand over my body, laughing at the way my old-maid's instinct of locking doors trapped me, killed me, the way he'd planned." She shook herself and set to work re-bandaging her ankle. "I'll not die," she promised. "I'll not give Arden that satisfaction."

She stretched out on the floor, the bathrobe beneath her. Far off—could it be from one of her peach-trees?—Edith heard a boastful whistle. In her mind's eye she saw the scarlet bird perched among the glossy leaves, telling off the world. "Tell somebody this, redbird," she whispered. "Tell them that an old woman is dying, murdered by the boy she'd loved as her own son." Edith shook her head. "No. Tell them she's going to keep herself alive to punish that boy."

On the morning of the fourth day, Edith was so weak she could barely manage to sit up. "If I only had a peach," she said, thinking of the prickly fine fur of peach-skin, the sticky-sweet pulp, the sandstone roughness of the peach-pit. Peaches grew not ten feet from where she sat, starving. Perhaps that cardinal she'd heard last night, the many-times-greatgrandson of the bird Arden had tortured to death, was poking at one of those peaches with his scarlet beak. "Enough of that," Edith said. "I might as well yearn

for fruit that grows on the moon."

Suddenly, she was weeping. "I loved that boy!" she sobbed. "I spilled twenty years of love over that little lonely orphan; I taught him books and songs and poetry; I patched his scraped knees and soothed him when he ran home crying from the playground." She bit her lip and pulled herself up to splash cold water over her eyes. "But I couldn't teach Arden love," she said. "Some boys are tone-deaf; a few are deaf to love."

She sat down by the door again. The house was silent. "I'd give first mortgage on my soul to hear those flat feet of Mary's on the stairs right now," she said. "But Arden must have told Mary we didn't need her any more. Maybe he accused her of stealing, and fired her. My clever nephew!"

Arden would wear long looks till her money was in his pocket, till this house had been sold to fatten his profit. Then he'd leave, and the elm-tree in front and the peach-trees in back would all belong to strangers, with the cardinal flitting among them as though it didn't matter that Edith Carr had been murdered. "There must still be a way!" she whispered.

She looked up at the bathroom window. "I'm so weak, that glass might as well be steel," she said. The window was gray now. "Shall I turn on the light again? No; I don't need light to think." She closed her eyes. "Good night, Walter," she said. Sleep had a bitter taste that night, like a first sip of death.

The fifth day. Edith lay awake for hours, hardly daring to move, afraid she'd find herself too weak. Finally, she forced herself to sit. The taste of bile was strong in her mouth. "This may be the last day I'll have any strength at all," she said. "This has to be the day I escape."

It took a long time to prop herself against the sink and to work the flannel nightgown up over her head. "At least he'll find me clean," she said, struggling to pick up her bathrobe, pulling it on for warmth. She filled the sink with hot water and worked up a suds with hand-soap, squeezing them through the flannel, adding a sprinkle of gardenia bathsalts. Then she rinsed the nightgown and hung it over the towel-rack, twisting as much of the water from it as she could. While the nightgown dried, Edith lay on the floor to rest.

She was done pretending. Tonight she'd bathe and dress herself in the freshly-washed nightgown. She'd lie down in the tub, as she had on the first night; so that when Arden came in to destroy the poisoned capsules and his taunting note she'd not be blocking the door with her body. "A lady is never obtrusive," Edith said, smiling. She dozed off for a few hours. When

she woke it was nearly dark again, and her nightgown was dry.

Edith switched on the light, then sat to strip the tape off her broken ankle. The bandage was loose; the swelling had receded since yesterday. The starved flesh had shrunk to show the broken bones beneath it. She hobbled back to the tub and shook the last of her birthday bath-salts into it, running the water hot. Not too deep, this time. "I'd not care to drown in this gardenia-scented pool," she murmured. She dropped her bathrobe and lowered herself into the tub. The warmth felt good. Watching the soap-bubbles spread and flash and burst around her, Edith was reminded of children on a sunny day, teasing one another with mirrors, flashing the sun into each other's eyes.

*Mirrors,* she thought, suddenly alert. *Flashes of light.* Edith looked up at the glowing light-bulb in the ceiling, stared at the window above her, then struggled to get out of the tub, dragging her left foot the way a prisoner might drag his shackles. "I can throw my message through that window without breaking it," she panted, leaning against the wall to dry herself. "I hope there are boys awake out there in the darkness; I could hardly expect a grown-up to take my signal seriously." She pulled on her nightgown, fighting back her faintness. "I'm weak," she admitted, "but not too weak to flip a light-switch."

She limped along the wall to the switch. Leaning toward it, eager to test her last scheme of escape, she slipped. All her weight fell on her left foot, where the bones grated like broken crockery. Edith slumped to the floor, crying, feeling the cold darkness reach toward her. "No!" she shouted, sitting up. "Faint now, old woman, and you've lost your last chance to live." She fit two fingers into the hole in the door where the knob had been and pulled herself up. Standing on her right foot, she wedged herself into the corner and reached again for the light-switch.

"Where are the Wolf-cubs now?" she asked. "Where are the Tom Sawyers, the code-breakers?" The dark outside the bathroom window was silent. Maybe Hank and Billy Andrews were asleep in their room, just across the hedge. Perhaps they sat cross-legged in front of the TV set downstairs, their nickel-plated six-guns holstered over their pajamas, watching gun-fights west of the Pecos. "But what if they're still at the lake?" Edith asked herself. "Hank didn't say that they'd be back after a day; maybe his father has a vacation. Maybe I'm all alone, getting set to signal to an empty house." Then Edith heard the hiss of bicycle tires on the sidewalk, and Billy's voice shouting, "Hank! Wait for me!"

She flicked off the light. S-O-S was the message she had to send. *Save Our Souls,* it was supposed to stand for. Or, *Save Our Ship.* "Save

an Old Sinner," Edith said. "Three dashes first, or is it the three dots first? But how can that matter?" She flicked the light on for an instant, then off; then on again, off again; on and off. Three long flashes. Then, keeping her burning eyes closed, she held her head tilted away from the blinding light. Three dots, three dashes; three dots, three dashes; three dots . . . SOSOSOSOSOSOSOSOSOSOS . . . getting dizzier and dizzier, clinging to the wall, hearing nothing from the quiet night.

"Ping!" There was a flare of yellow light at the ceiling, then the room stayed dark. Edith toggled the switch back and forth. Nothing happened. The light-bulb's filament was broken.

She slipped down the wall, too tired to even weep. She tried to pull herself across the floor to find her bathrobe, to use it as a blanket, but her fingers scrabbled against the tile without moving her an inch. The floor was cold. Very cold. Edith lay still. "Now I'm going to die, Walter," she whispered. "Please help me not to whimper."

The sun was burning through her dreams. "Walter?" Edith asked, opening her eyes and turning her head aside from the brightness.

"It's all right," Mr. Andrews said. He laid down his flashlight and stripped off his jacket, spreading it over Edith. His jacket smelled of tobacco, she noticed, the way Walter's always had. "Thank you," she said.

"I've called for an ambulance," Mr. Andrews said, kneeling beside Edith. "Shall I try to get in touch with Arden, to tell him to hurry home?"

"You needn't bother," Edith said. "I'll ask the police to bring Arden home."

Hank and Bill timidly stepped inside the bathroom door. "I'm glad you're not dead, Mrs. Carr," Bill said.

"So'm I," said Hank.

"And I'm glad you Wolf-cubs can read Morse Code," Edith said. She closed her eyes, too tired to keep them open. "On your way home," she said, "stop in the kitchen. The cookie-jar is on the table. This time please take all you like."

# LIKE A DEFENCELESS LAMB

by Robert Sheckley

THE two men sat with their ragged ponchos pulled tightly around their shoulders against the wind. Emilio was rolling a cigarette, his black hair falling over his eyes, his thin, scarred face bent in concentration over the brown paper. Pepe had taken out his gun, an old single-action Colt. He was polishing it dreamily on his shirt.

"Put it away," Emilio said, completing his cigarette.

"Man, there's no one around," Pepe said. He enjoyed looking at the revolver, which he had taken from a drunken sheepherder in Montemorelos. But Emilio was boss when Juan was away. So Pepe sighed noisily and slid the gun under the piece of rope that held up his pants, and pulled his shirt over it.

They were sitting on a hilltop. Behind them rose the green and gray mountains of Guerrero. Below were the white, pink and yellow adobe houses of Tetuilan. They could see the town dock, lined with little dark-hulled fishing boats and a big trawler from Tehuantepec, and beside it the police launch. Beyond the dock was the bay, turned into hammered copper by the setting sun, with the sharp rocks of the Ladrones outlined black in the narrow entrance.

In the middle of the bay, swinging restlessly to its anchor, was a gleaming white sailboat flying an American flag.

There were footsteps behind them. Juan came up the footpath carrying crutches under his arm. He was a sturdily built man, thick in the shoulders and chest, with a large, bristling moustache. His left foot was wrapped in dirty bandages, but he put full weight upon it.

"Well?" Emilio said.

"I found out everything," Juan said, sitting down beside them.

"You weren't recognized?"

"No. *No.* These fishermen don't know or care what happened in Veracruz or Galeana. I walked right past a policeman. The fat fool didn't even look at me!"

Pepe shifted uncomfortably. He was overweight himself, short and sleepy looking, and he prided himself on his resemblance to Pancho Villa.

"What did you see?" Pepe asked.

*Our plot concerns a gang of cutthroats who are not pleasant, cultured, trustworthy, obedient or kind. In short, they are engrossed primarily with the material rather than with the usual spiritual values. As for their intended victims—well, what they had planned for them couldn't have been planned for two nicer people.*

"Everything," Juan said. "I watched the *gringos* anchor their boat in the bay. They rowed to the dock in their little rowboat. There were just two of them, a man and a woman."

"Is the woman a blonde?" Pepe asked.

"Yes."

"Good."

"Well then. They went to the police station and a sergeant looked at their visas. I sat outside in the sun and listened. I sat with a blind beggar, and I begged too."

"That's very good!" Pepe said, laughing.

"Shut up and listen," Juan said. "The sergeant asked the Americans if they had anything to pay duty on. They said no. He asked if they carried any guns. They said no."

Emilio nodded at this and flung away the stub of his cigarette.

"The sergeant asked them where they were sailing. Acapulco, they said, and leaving in the morning. Excellent, the sergeant said, and stamped their visas."

"And then what did they do?" Emilio asked.

"They left the police station and went to the zocalo. They had drinks, then went to the market. They bought vegetables and straw hats and a serape."

"Did they pay with pesos or dollars?" Pepe asked.

"Pesos. The man had a lot of pesos, maybe five hundred. They put their things in the little rowboat and rowed back to their sailboat, and I came here."

The three men sat silently for a few minutes, staring at the American boat. The sun was sliding into the ocean now. The neat white boat looked very lonely and defenceless in the shadowy bay, like a lamb strayed from the flock and unaware of danger.

"It's ours for the taking," Juan said.

"Man, I don't like it," Emilio said.

"And why not?"

"You know, Juan. We rob stores in Veracruz and Galeana; we kill a man in Jalapa. Fine. We're like ten thousand others between Chihuahua and Yucutan. The police try to catch us, but they don't try too hard, eh? But robbing, killing Americans, that's something else, Juan."

"He's right," Pepe said.

"The police watch out for *touristas,*" Emilio said intensely. "The American government insists on it. Look what happened to those bandits in Coahuila who killed the American oilman."

"They were near the border," Juan said.

"Very well. Look what happened to Luis and his men right here in Guerrero. For years no one could find them in the mountains. Then they killed an American. The government sent in troops with horses and machine guns and airplanes. They took eight months, but they

caught Luis and his men and hanged them."

"Are you finished?" Juan asked.

"Yes, I'm finished," Emilio said. "I don't like it."

"I don't either," Pepe said.

"Now listen to me," Juan said. "You're both fools. No one's seen you in this town. They've seen only me, a lame beggar. We rob that boat and kill the Americans so they can't talk. And who gets blamed?"

"Who?" Pepe asked.

"The people of Tetuilan!" Juan said. "The police sergeant will say that no strangers have been around except a lame beggar... And the country's full of beggars. They'll look for the murderers in Tetuilan, among the fisherman. And we'll be away in Mexico City."

"That's very clever," Pepe said, blinking his sleepy little eyes. "And the woman is a blonde."

"Forget the woman," Emilio said, his thin face set like jagged stone. "I don't like it. Let's stay with things we understand. Pepe and I are mountain men. We don't understand boats or Americans."

"I know boats," Juan said. "As for Americans, they're soft and they frighten easy except when they're drunk. And man, there are three of us!"

"Oh, I suppose we can do it all right," Emilio said. "But why all this bother and planning for a few hundred pesos? We can get it easier somewhere else."

"He's right," Pepe said.

"Listen," Juan said impressively. "You are both of the mountains. I have worked as a mess boy on an American boat in San Diego. I know what there is to take. Shall I tell you?"

"Tell us."

"There are the pesos which the man has. Three or four hundred. There will be American dollars, maybe a lot of them. There are the wristwatches, worth at least fifty pesos each at the German's place in Mexico City. There is silverware, a hundred pesos. Binoculars, two two hundred pesos. An instrument called a sextant, two hundred pesos. The woman's jewelry, maybe three hundred pesos. All light stuff we can carry in a sack. Do you want to hear more?"

"Go on," Emilio said.

"There is a compass, a hundred pesos. Navigating instruments, maybe fifty pesos. A ship's clock, three hundred pesos. And probably a lot more. At least two thousand pesos worth, in all. Perhaps as high as five thousand. Do you think it's worth it now? Or would you rather rob a drunk for the five pesos in his pocket and the *huaraches* on his feet?"

"Two thousand pesos," Emilio said thoughtfully.

"Probably more," Juan said. "And the blame will be on the fishermen. Now listen. The Americans are anchored far out in the bay, where no one can see or hear what hap-

pens. We go down very late at night, borrow a fisherman's rowboat, row out there. We kill them and take everything worth taking. Then we row back, leave the boat and start for Mexico City. Next morning, the American boat is still there. Very well. Probably no one bothers them, Americans are crazy; they come and go when they like. Maybe in two days, or three, the sergeant gets worried. He goes out in the launch and finds them. By that time we're in Mexico City; we've sold everything. And who can find us?"

"He's right," Pepe said.

Emilio thought hard for a few moments. "Two thousand pesos?" he asked.

"At the least," Juan told him. "Probably five or six thousand. And they have no guns."

"Perhaps they lied to the sergeant about that."

"And what if they did? One man and a woman! We are three men. Pepe and I have our pistols. You, Emilio, have your razor, and your knife with the spring that you throw so well. Are you afraid of an American man and a blonde woman?"

"By God, no!" Emilio said angrily. "When do we go?"

"Later," Juan said. "Much later, when everyone is sleeping. For now, let's eat. I've brought beans and tortillas."

He handed the food, wrapped in greasy newspaper, to Pepe, who scooped together twigs for a fire. Emilio and Juan sat staring at the boat. Even after the sunset had faded the boat was still visible, a ghostly white speck against the black water.

A kerosene riding light burned in the yawl's forward rigging. The boat swayed nervously in the black water, wandered a restless half circle around her anchor, paused and came back again, heeling slightly when the wind caught her broadside. From her cabin, the adobe buildings of Tetuilan seemed to shimmer faintly against the dim Guerrero mountains, and the mountains merged imperceptibly into the overcast sky. The dock was deserted, dark except for a single light burning over the ice house. On the ocean side, occasional white plumes of foam were visible, hissing and breaking against the Ladrones.

Jane Thompson said, "Bill, I don't like it here."

They were in the cabin of their yawl, each lying on his own bunk. By the light of a kerosene lamp Bill Thompson was reading the "Pacific Coast Pilot." He looked up.

"What's the matter?"

"I simply don't like it here," Jane said. She was a slender woman, conventionally pretty, lightly freckled, with straight, sun-bleached hair pulled tightly back into a pony-tail.

Bill Thompson closed the "Pilot."

He was built along the economical lines of a block of teak, and the sun had darkened him to the color of rawhide. His eyes were light blue, but against the tan of his face they took on a piercing brilliance. An almost healed scar blotched one tough brown hand—where he had spilled boiling rice over himself in a seaway—showing that even teak and rawhide are vulnerable.

He said, "Well, it's not the best anchorage in the world."

"I don't mean that. I don't like this town."

"It's just another Mexican fishing village."

"Yes. But it feels wrong. I didn't like that beggar. He followed us all day."

"Well... Beggars do."

"Of course," she said quickly. "But he didn't *beg*. He just followed and stared. He was watching us all day."

"But so what?" he asked, with a hint of impatience.

"Honey," she said, "You know I'm not the hysterical type. No vapors or weeping fits. But I really don't like it here."

"We'll be leaving in the morning," Bill said. "First crack of dawn and we're underway."

"I know... Bill, could we leave now?"

He stared at her intently. "Are you serious?"

"I am," Jane said. "This place feels all wrong. That beggar gave me the shudders. Even the boat feels nervous. Bill, it's as if the boat doesn't like it here."

"You want us to leave now in the middle of the night?"

"I really do. Can we?"

"I don't know. It'll be mighty uncomfortable offshore. Sea's making up. Onshore wind. We'd be clawing off all night."

"Please," she said.

He stood up. "I'll take a look around the deck and see. To tell the truth, I'm not fond of this spot either. Soft mud buttom. It's a lousy anchorage."

Bill Thompson climbed the companionway stairs, slipped open the hatch and went out.

Jane lit a cigarette and leaned back in her berth, trying to reason out why she didn't like it there. She and Bill had done a good deal of cruising down the west coast of Mexico. Usually the little fishing villages were friendly. Sometimes they were indifferent, and once or twice downright hostile. But never like today in Tetuilan, everybody smiling and friendly, and the beggar following them scowling like a thundercloud. She had never had this feeling before, the feeling of *something's going to happen.*

She felt the boat sway, and heard a sound like metal striking wood. There was silence for a long minute. Then she heard a rattle of chain. It stopped. The boat was silent except for the creaking of the hull and the tap of the main halliard against the mast.

She put out her cigarette. Bill was taking a long time for a look around. She wished they had never put into this narrow windswept bay, had stayed offshore and run through the night to Acapulco. But that would have been silly, of course, with wind and sea making up.

The boat swayed again, and the halliard stopped tapping. She listened, but heard no further sound.

Now don't be silly, she told herself. You're going to start seeing ghosts if you aren't careful. Bill's just—doing things.

She wanted to get up, go outside and see; but she felt too tired to move.

Outside, the wind moaned. Jane reached for another cigarette and heard a quick patter of soft footsteps on deck, then silence again.

She stood up very quickly and looked around the cabin for a weapon. It suddenly seemed very important to have a weapon. But nothing came to hand except a dull galley paring knife. She picked it up, then, ashamed of herself, put it down again.

The main hatch slid back. Jane reached for the paring knife. Bill came down the steps and sat on his bunk.

"What about some coffee?" he asked.

She pumped up the pressure stove. "Why were you gone so long?"

"The wind was coming up," he told her, "so I set out the second anchor at the chocks with a loop around the wildcat. It's all ready to let go if we need it."

"Oh," she said, "I heard the chain rattle... Bill, please, couldn't we get out of here?"

"I'd like to," he said. "I don't trust the holding ground."

"Then we can?"

"Honey," Bill said, "it just can't be done. The wind's blowing strong onshore, and it's piling up quite a sea across the bar. It'd be risky trying to find the channel."

"It's buoyed," she said.

"Sure. But the buoys aren't lighted. Even with the big flashlight we'd have one fine time picking out those spar buoys. Miss one and we'd pile up on the Ladrones."

"We could do it slowly, under power."

"Say we got to sea. The barometer's falling, and the wind's blowing half a gale already. We'd be beating off a lee shore with probably a full gale coming on."

"I'd rather," Jane said.

He looked at her with admiration. "I believe you would," he said. "One thing about you, honey, you don't let little things like wind and sea stand in your way when you want to go somewhere."

"Then we can?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I say it's dangerous, but I'm pretty sure we can make it. And we've ridden out gales at sea before. If you say we have to go, we'll go.

Just remember what's involved."

Now that he was no longer resisting her, her resolve weakened. She poured the coffee and listened to the wind howling through the rigging. She thought about what it would be like, threading their way through the narrow channel, searching for the buoys that marked the safe passage.

"Of course we'll stay here," she said. "I was being stupid. Do you think we'll need the second anchor?"

"Hope not," Bill said. "I'd certainly hate dragging that seventy pound monster up again." He glanced at his watch. "It's almost midnight now. Dawn's at five-twenty. We'll try to get underway with first light."

"Good," Jane said, handing him a mug of coffee. "Bill, I wish we had a gun aboard."

"Me too," Bill admitted. "But it would probably just get rusty. Drink up and let's get to sleep."

They finished their coffee. Bill turned off the kerosene lamp and lay down on his bunk. He heard the wind moaning through the shrouds, and listened to the waves slap against the boat's bow. Then he raised himself on one elbow and listened more carefully.

"But why must I row?" Pepe asked.

"Because you need the exercise," Juan told him.

The dock was deserted, dark except for a single light over the ice house. In the deep shadows of the northern end they had found three rowboats, and Juan had chosen the driest. He sat in the stern, Emilio in the bow. Pepe pushed up his sleeves and started rowing.

Juan said at once that he should have rowed the boat himself. Puffing heavily, Pepe managed to slap water with every stroke of the oars. Juan instructed him in keeping the oars deep and the pull steady, but a sailor couldn't be made in a single night. And certainly not out of a man like Pepe.

They moved slowly toward the anchored sailboat. It had a single light burning in its forward rigging, and a dim light could be seen in the cabin. As they approached, the cabin light went out.

"What does that mean?" Emilio asked.

"Nothing, don't worry about it," Juan said. "It's just one man without a gun."

"But if he shouts for help—"

"He couldn't be heard above the wind even if a man were standing on the dock. Now listen to me. Pepe, row to the stern of the boat, its backside, understand? Emilio, you will go on board first. Take our boat's rope with you and tie it to something, not too tight. And don't rush things, man!"

Emilio gave him a smile like a cat yawning.

"Pepe, you will go next. Do you

see that open hatch in the front?"

"How can I see when I'm rowing?" Pepe asked.

"Stop a minute and look. See it? Good. You will go to there, taking care not to be clumsy, and you will go through that hatch. Emilio and I will go through the main hatch in the rear. In that way we will be on both sides of those in the cabin. Do you understand?"

Emilio nodded. Pepe asked, "And shall I shoot when I see the man?"

"No," Juan said. "No shooting unless we have to. A pistol shot might possibly be heard on shore. Besides, you might hit one of us."

"But we can't just leave them to tell about us later," Pepe said.

"We won't. There's Emilio's knife. We are almost there."

The rowboat banged against the stern of the American sailboat. Almost immediately they heard a man's voice call out in English, "Who's there?"

"Get on board quick," Juan said. Emilio pulled himself onto the deck with the rowboat's painter in his teeth, and quickly fastened it to a cleat. Pepe followed, grunting as he dragged his bulk over the rail.

*"Que pasa?"* the American called from the dark cabin. *"Quien es?"*

Now Juan was aboard, and Pepe was hurrying forward to the open hatch in the bow. Juan took out his revolver. Emilio's knife clicked open in his mind. "Let's go," Juan said. Together they moved toward the companionway.

Something whizzed through the air. Juan moved aside to avoid it, and struck his head against the boom. He stumbled, regained his balance, and hurried to catch up with Emilio.

Emilio had reached the companionway and pushed back the sliding hatch. He started down the steps, knife held low, ready for thrust or parry. There was a squeak and a hiss. A stream of liquid poured out of the cabin's darkness. It struck Emilio in the face. Emilio screamed and stumbled backwards, clawing at his eyes. From the door, Juan knew that the man in the cabin had turned on the fire extinguisher.

He pulled Emilio back to the cockpit and wiped hastily at his face, keeping his gun handy and watching the companionway. "How do you feel?" he asked.

"My eyes!"

"Take it easy," Juan said. "He didn't get you direct, did he? It's the fumes from the chemicals. It'll pass. Don't rub so hard."

Emilio moaned and dug his fingers into his forehead. Juan found a pool of water in a corner of the cockpit, scooped up a handful and bathed Emilio's eyes. From the forward hatch he heard the rattle of chain.

Pepe had, with some difficulty squeezed himself through the hatch. He was inside the boat now, in

complete darkness, standing on a great coil of chain. He couldn't move silently over it, so he decided that speed was best. He plunged ahead, and a chain hanging down the hatch slapped him across the face hard.

Pepe cursed. He could hear the man and woman talking inside. The surprise was gone; they were arming themselves. Perhaps they had a gun.

Savagely he threw the hanging chain out of his way and went forward. He heard a heavy rattle. He had released something, and the chain was sliding upward through the hatch. He heard the loud splash of an anchor striking water.

The chain slithered past him, moving faster now, following the anchor over the chocks, rumbling against the hatch's sides. He felt the coil beneath his feet shift, stepped aside and felt a loop of chain tighten around his ankle.

He tried to pull free. But the chain was moving faster now. The chain tightened, hoisting his leg toward the hatch, yanking him off balance.

Pepe threw out both arms as he fell. The revolver was knocked out of his hand, but the chain had stopped moving. Partially stunned he groped for the gun, feeling along the floorboards, his hands encountering only folds of canvas.

Then a door opened in front of him. Dimly he could see the cabin and the companionway on the other end, where Juan and Emilio should be. A shape blocked his vision. He saw that it was the blonde young woman.

She struck at him with something, and he pulled his head back in time. His fingers found the muzzle of the gun, half-buried under a fold of canvas. He grabbed it and reversed his grip.

Then, so suddenly that he shrieked in fright, he was engulfed in whiteness. A fog, a mist, a cloud had suddenly appeared between the woman and himself, thick white and billowing toward him in layers. He fired blindly into it, and discovered that he was choking. The fog was unlike any fog he had ever known. There was no air in it; he couldn't draw breath.

He dropped the revolver and pulled at the chain around his ankle. It yielded a little. He pulled with all his strength, and suddenly he was free. But still he couldn't breathe. The fog was thicker, completely surrounding him. He stood up, banged his head on the low ceiling and sat down. He stood up again, more carefully, and groped for the open hatch.

Now he could feel his eyes bulged open, his tongue hanging out, his lungs expanding and contracting in short, painful bursts, trying to find air in the airless fog. White began to turn black. He felt himself falling into a deep well, but the darkness was complete before he struck bottom.

"Can you see now?" Juan asked.

"Yes, a little. What happened?"

"They used the other fire extinguisher," Juan said, staring at the forward hatch, out of which billowed a thick white fog. "They used the carbon dioxide extinguisher. They used it on Pepe."

Emilio staggered to his feet, his eyes streaming. He still had his knife.

Juan said, "Come, one of us on each side of the companionway. He can't squirt us both. When you see the man, throw your knife. When I see him, I'll shoot. He's too dangerous."

"I'll cut him into pieces," Emilio said. "The woman, too."

"Careful now," Juan said. "He's dangerous. Even without a gun he's dangerous."

They moved to opposite sides of the companionway and peered cautiously in. An object came flying out of the darkness, missed them both and bounced in the cockpit. It was the empty fire extinguisher.

They leaned forward again. Something moved in the cabin. Emilio's arm came back and he threw the knife. There was a muffled shout of pain.

The American was hit! Emilio rushed to the companionway, opening his razor on his thigh. As he charged down, the companionway ladder was yanked free at its base. He felt it sliding away from him, dropped his razor and grabbed the top of the hatch.

He was hanging by both hands, blocking the way for Juan. The American hit him in the stomach. Emilio let go of the hatch and dropped, arching his body to land lightly on his feet.

But he didn't land on the floor. He came down on the greasy, rounded flywheel casing of the boat's engine, which had been concealed beneath the ladder. He slipped and fell backwards across the spark plugs, shouting with pain as they rammed into his back like four blunt spears.

He tried to rise, but his legs had no strength in them, and no sensation. One of the spark plugs had punctured the base of his spine.

Juan stood in the open companionway, revolver ready, waiting for something to shoot at. He had always known that Pepe was a fool, and Emilio not much better. They should have known that a small, crowded sailboat was nothing to go rushing around in, even for armed men. There were too many things to trip over, too many objects for the defenders to use. Pepe had been clumsy, and Emilio too impetuous. He was better off without them. A lone game was always best.

He saw a white blur on the cabin floor, saw it move and come slowly erect. It was the American.

Emilio levelled his revolver, noticing that the American held something in his hand, was also raising

it. A knife? Another fire extinguisher? It made no difference. He'd still get him.

As his finger tightened on the trigger, the thing in the American's hand exploded. There was a brilliant flash of red, and Juan was struck in the chest. The impact was tremendous, worse than from a .45. Juan was blown backward into the cockpit. Bewildered, barely conscious, he touched the ragged hole in his chest. A shotgun, by God! The American must have blasted him with a shotgun!

But it made no sense. The American didn't have a shotgun. What was it, what did it mean? He couldn't understand it.

Juan groped for an answer, but couldn't find it. His bewilderment faded to nothingness; he died.

Bill and Jane were on deck, sitting on the deckhouse. Jane had cleaned the knife wound in Bill's left shoulder, and was inexpertly wrapping it with gauze from their medicine chest.

"A boat's coming," Bill said.

She turned. "Yes. Coming fast. You don't think it might be—"

"Relax, it's the police launch. It's got its searchlight on."

He started to get up. "Hold still," she said, "let me finish this . . . Bill, we were very lucky."

"I wouldn't call it luck," Bill said. "Come to think of it, a cruising sailboat's a real floating arsenal. Trying to take one in the dark's like assaulting a defended fortress."

"Still, if there had been *four* of them instead of three—"

"We'd have managed," Bill said stubbornly. "It was really just a question of using what we had on hand."

He looked at the heavy pistol-shaped object thrust into his belt.

"But now we'll have to explain it all to the police," he said. "And that won't be easy. How do you explain in high-school Spanish about using fire extinguishers and anchors as deadly weapons? And how am I going to put across the idea of a flare pistol being used as a shotgun?"

# Give a SUBSCRIPTION for Xmas


**We have an attractive SPECIAL OFFER for the small, medium or large budget. Check your CHRISTMAS GIFT LIST NOW and ORDER as many subscriptions as you like.**

With each order, whether for Offer #1, #2, or #3 (Offer #4 excluded) your gift recipient will receive, absolutely free, a copy of **HITCHCOCK PRESENTS — STORIES THEY WOULDN'T LET ME DO ON TV**, the regular 372 page hard cover edition published by Simon and Schuster. This book is a current best seller in the mystery field.

## SPECIAL OFFER #1....$10.00

A full three years (36 issues) of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine plus a free copy of Hitchcock Presents.

**A $16.00 value at retail cover price.**

## SPECIAL OFFER #2....$7.50

A full two years (24 issues) of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine plus a free copy of Hitchcock Presents.

**A $12.00 value at retail cover price.**

## SPECIAL OFFER #3....$5.00

A full one year (12 issues) of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine plus a free copy of Hitchcock Presents.

**An $8.00 value at retail cover price.**

## SPECIAL OFFER #4.....$3.00

A full one year (12 issues) of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.

**A regular 4.00 value**

**Remittance must accompany order.**

ALL ORDERS RECEIVED BY DECEMBER 15th WILL BE FILLED IN TIME FOR THE FREE COPY OF THE BOOK AND FIRST COPY OF YOUR SUBSCRIPTION, TO BE MAILED IN TIME TO ARRIVE BEFORE DECEMBER 25th.
GIFT CARDS WILL BE SENT UPON REQUEST.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
122 East 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Please send Offer #1 ☐ #2 ☐ #3 ☐ #4 ☐

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE ..... STATE .....

Send GIFT CARD SIGNED .....

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
122 East 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Please send Offer #1 ☐ #2 ☐ #3 ☐ #4 ☐

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE ..... STATE .....

Send GIFT CARD SIGNED .....

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
122 East 42nd St., N. Y. 17, N. Y.

Please send Offer #1 ☐ #2 ☐ #3 ☐ #4 ☐

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE ..... STATE .....

Send GIFT CARD SIGNED .....

MR. BRICK BORDEAUX simply had to kill his wife. Not being a very bright young man, although a more than ordinarily gentle and an inordinately handsome one, he was sure that he could get away with it. Furthermore, he had convinced himself that the necessity for killing her was all her fault, anyway, and not his.

His wife's name was Sandy St. Cyr. She was a very wealthy young woman. Throughout the Forties, she had been what is called a 'top recording artist.' She was vague about her age, which was in the high thirties, but she was indisputably senior to her husband of a year, who was thirty-one.

It had been a long time since Sandy St. Cyr. had a hit record. Not gracefully, she had come to realize that her days in the limelight were past. She was slipping to the periphery of a world in whose center she had once blithely danced. One of the reasons she took Brick for her fourth husband was the suspicion that his head-turning beauty might soon make *him* a star, and thus secure her own eminence as his wife.

It had not worked out that way at all. Brick, although willing to accept what he had considered all his life to be his manifest destiny, was fundamentally and irrevocably without talent. After several dismal and expensive efforts to turn Brick into a male Galatea, Sandy abandoned all hope, as well as any affection that she might have felt, for him.

She turned very sour on the inoffensive Brick. She insulted him in front of his friends. With fine impartiality, she insulted him in front of her friends. She made scenes everywhere. She slapped his face in crowded restaurants.

The fourth time she did that, Brick decided he had to kill her.

He did not come to the decision lightly. The principal reason he decided not simply to walk out on her, which, he felt, would be a rather severe punishment in itself, was her fortune. Brick had had a year of enjoying her wealth and experiencing the corrupting ease of


**A NOVELETTE**
**by Phillip Tremont**

*If the Creator did not like dumbbells, he would not produce so many of them. And they do make excellent heroes, for to be a hero one must be liked. And how can one possibly be pleased by intelligence? It's so unfamiliar, so utterly different from life as we know it.*

moneyed leisure. He knew he stood to inherit.

When he was still Albert Schilling of Bayonne, New Jersey, Brick had been, in turn, a beautiful baby, a beautiful boy, and a beautiful adolescent. From his earliest recollection, people had loved him at sight. An amiable boy, he was quite willing to love everyone right back. Since it gave people so much pleasure to stare at him, and since he liked to be stared at, it seemed only natural that he should become an actor.

He grew into tall, broad-shouldered, slim-hipped, dimpled and curlyhaired manhood at a time when actors were being rechristened with names like Tab, Rock, Race, and Rip. Never too imaginative, he chose 'Brick Bordeaux' and came to New York to be discovered.

His unfailing eagerness to please was not the only character trait which stemmed from his beauty. His singular mental vacuity was a result of his never having felt the need to exercise his thinking powers.

All his life, things just came to him too easily. Men remarked of Brick, sardonically, that he had "a nice clear head." One spiteful female theatre critic who had thrown herself, if not literally at his feet, certainly figuratively, and not been invited back for an encore, said of his face that it lacked "that lived-in look."

The remark hurt Brick's feelings. He was innocent of any malice, or even disdain toward the critic. But sometimes a young man —especially a young, handsome man—just does not have time enough for all the young and eager women. In the end, he was able to persuade himself that it was all the critic's fault, anyway.

Brick was able to assign the blame for the rare unpleasantnesses that occurred in his life in this way quite easily. He had picked up the habit from the widowed mother and maiden aunt who raised him. They could never believe their little darling was ever at fault.

The only time he had not invoked the formula was when Marilyn drifted out of his life. Vaguely, he was half-willing to admit *that* was probably his fault. At least partly. Marilyn was a blonde girl of flawless profile and stupefying physical proportions whom Brick met seven years before when they were both quite poor. Mentally and emotionally they were exact counterparts. They had been genuinely in love, two beautiful youngsters sure the world was their wall-to-wall carpeting.

The call to Hollywood came first for Marilyn (she had been born an Elsie, but that year Marilyn and its variations seemed like a lucky name for actresses). They parted tearfully, with mutual reassurances that Brick would soon be on his way out to the West Coast. The

call never came for Brick. As for Marilyn, once she got to Hollywood, fame beckoned no further. Brick still sighed whenever he came across the less and less frequent mentions of her name in the columns. There had been at least two divorces. He had lost track of the marriages. Marilyn was the great lost love of his life.

Sandy slapped Brick's face in public for the fourth and last time in El Morroco. Feeling the sting in his cheek and the hot flush from his collar to his hairline, hearing the gasps and the quickly stifled laughter that became a perfect silence in the crowded room, Brick knew he had to kill her.

"You empty suit, you!" Sandy shrilled at him. "You no-talent bum! Get out of my life! Do you hear?"

Brick turned on his heel and got out of her life. Even as he swung angrily down East Fifty-fourth Street, the thought came to him that everything would be different if he had made Marilyn marry him. But, of course, this was all Sandy's fault.

He walked straight across town to a west side YMCA. In the bleak, tiny room he spent one of his rare hours of straight thinking. And, as he was not very bright, he soon convinced himself that he had devised a foolproof plan for murdering Sandy the following evening with only a minimal risk of detection.

The next day was Thursday, Sandy's bridge night. Brick had dropped his wife off at the apartment building in Brooklyn Heights where she played her weekly game in the apartment of a television producer many times in the past twelve months. Sandy never missed a chance to play. He was sure she would be there tomorrow. He could even foretell the exact quarter hour at which she would leave.

He knew where he could lay his hands on a gun. An actor friend who had obligingly lent Brick the key to his apartment while he went off to toil in summer stock had displayed his war trophy Luger to Brick many times. He would go back to Sandy's apartment in the morning, change from his evening clothes and pick up the pistol to have it in readiness for Sandy.

Brick prided himself on the alibi he would have. The essential thing was to be able to prove you were somewhere far removed at the time a murder occurred. An hour or so before he went out to Brooklyn the following night, he would present himself, dressed very conspicuously, at the Paramount Theatre. He would engage cashier, doorman, ticket-taker and any available usher in conversation. Brick well knew he had a memorable face. He also had a memorable, if not durable, charm. He was sure he would be remembered when the

police questioned the Paramount people. And there would be the ticket half in his pocket to prove there was no mistaken identity involved. Once inside the theatre, of course, he would slip unseen out a side door and take a subway to Brooklyn.

Brick had a momentary vision of how difficult it is to get away with murder, when he suddenly remembered that the police would ask him for an account of the motion picture he had seen on the screen. He sat bolt upright in the bed, chilled, seeing the gleam in the policemen's eyes as they pounced on The One Little Thing The Murderer Forgot.

The scheme won't work, Brick thought regretfully. And then the way around this obstacle presented itself—slowly, but surely. He would see the film at the Paramount in the afternoon, and he would then be able to fend off that question with ease.

Brick sank back down on the pillow. A pleased smile played on his sculptured lips.

Thursday dawned clear and cool. Brick, emerging from the Y's cafeteria at ten in the morning, looked handsomely raffish in his exquisitely cut silk dinner jacket. Everyone he passed turned for a longer look at him. When his eyes met those of a passerby, his engaging grin would flash reflexively.

He caught a cab to Sandy's Central Park East penthouse.

Chuki, the middle-aged Japanese maid, gave him her special smile when he walked in. Brick winked roguishly at her and went into the bedroom. Sandy was curled against the satin headboard of the ten-foot-square bed, a face mask over her eyes, snoring resonantly. Brick hung up his evening clothes. He thought over his wardrobe while he showered and shaved.

After a good deal of pondering, he decided on the blue jeans he had bought when it looked for awhile as if he was going to be admitted to the Actor's Studio, a worn pair of tennis sneakers, T shirt, red cotton windbreaker and peaked yellow fishing cap. He added a pair of dark sunglasses to complete the disguise. Sandy was still asleep when he left.

Brick caught another cab, down to the Village this time. It took a good deal of searching to locate the Luger in his friend's stuffy, closed-up apartment. When he found it at last, he was pleased to discover that the clip was fully loaded. Brick had begun to have some doubt as to his marksmanship, but the gun and the loaded clip, somehow, reassured him.

There was no way of jamming the bulky gun into any of the pockets of the jeans without leaving a large portion of it exposed. Eventually, Brick made a large shapeless package of it with brown

wrapping paper and twine and carried it in his hand.

He ate his lunch in a corner drug store and caught still another cab up to the Paramount. Entering the theatre, he was aware of a certain risk. If any employee should note him now, it might prove disastrous when the police were around with their questions tomorrow. Brick hurried through the lobby and into the darkness of the orchestra as unobtrusively as possible.

He kept the dark glasses on all through the feature, which was a wide-screen Western starring a rising young actor of a good deal less pulchritude than Brick and scarcely more talent. His only bad moment came when the Luger slid off his lap and hit the floor with a loud *thunk*!

Brick hurriedly scooped it up, ready to run. But only a few heads turned and no policemen came hurrying to seize him.

Back at the apartment, Chuki informed him Sandy-san had left for a cocktail date and would not be back until after her bridge game. Chuki was born in Kansas City, Kansas, the "san" business was her contribution to the maintenance of a colorful household.

It began to drizzle while Brick ate a late supper alone in the apartment. The gloomy weather cheered him. Now he would have a genuine reason for wearing a trenchcoat and a snap brim hat, like Alan Ladd in *"This Gun For Hire."*

The girl in the ticket booth at the Paramount was a svelte blonde kid who looked like she was only a year out of high school. The automatic routine of her change-making and button pushing slowed to a standstill when Brick flashed his smile at her.

"How do you like the big city, Iowa?" he asked.

The girl flushed and giggled. He was actually talking to her. "I'm not from Io—Iowa," she stammered.

"Where are you from then?"

"Right here." She was staring at him helplessly. This blonde kid was one who would remember him, Brick was sure.

"Are you going to be here tomorrow night?" he pushed on relentlessly.

"Sure."

"What time are you off?"

"Midnight." The blonde girl's jaw was hanging. She couldn't believe he was leading up to a date.

Brick picked up his ticket. "I'll be by tomorrow. Think you'll remember me?"

"Oh, *sure*!" she trilled it.

The doorman was a tall, intense looking kid with his hair curling down to his collar. Brick knew another actor when he saw one. "Say!" he blurted. "I know you, don't I? Weren't we in summer stock together a couple of years ago?" Brick had been in summer stock for three weeks once. He was not vouchsafed any lines.

"No," the doorman said regretfully, obviously flattered by the mistake, and launched into a capsule autobiography. He had no professional experience, but he *had* played the lead in his class play two years in a row.

The ticket-taker was led from supplying information about the exact running time of the complete program into a lengthy discussion of the state of the motion picture industry. After a full five minutes with him, Brick entered the men's room with a feeling of work well-done.

Behind the locked door of a pay-toilet cubicle, Brick unwrapped the Luger and inserted the clip. He rammed a shell into the chamber. The thought of shooting himself in the leg on the way to Brooklyn made him push the safety catch down. He thrust the automatic into the depths of the trench coat pocket and slipped the dark glasses on.

He was sure no one saw him ease out one of the side doors on Forty-sixth Street.

It had ceased to rain when Brick moved quietly down the three steps to the dark entrance of the basement apartment of the old brownstone in Brooklyn. Directly across the street from where he stood was the door of the apartment building where Sandy was playing bridge.

The dark, rain-glistening street was empty as far as Brick could see in either direction. He squinted at his wrist watch. It was ten past eleven. Sandy would be coming out of the door across the street within minutes, he knew. She would be alone.

Brick was sure he was made all but invisible, by the heavy shadows in which he stood. He slid the Luger out of his pocket and moved back the safety latch.

A solitary man turned into the block. Anxiously, Brick watched him move down the opposite side of the street, a tall man, moving slowly, peering at the building fronts on his side of the street. Brick's glance flickered from the doorway from which Sandy would emerge to the tall, thick figure of the man and back again. He wished the man would move along faster. He wanted no witnesses.

The man moved slowly down the block, out of sight, the sound of his footsteps dying away. Still Sandy did not appear.

Brick chanced another glance at his wristwatch. Only three minutes had passed. He forced a deep breath into his lungs. He had not missed Sandy. She had not left yet. He knew her Thursday night routines too well. She would be out within minutes now.

From far down the block came the sound of slowly approaching footsteps.

Brick shrank into the shadows, watching for Sandy, hearing the sounds of someone advancing on his own side of the street.

He fought down rising panic. It

was just someone coming home. He would turn into his building before he passed here. *It's not a cop*! Brick told himself firmly. It's just someone who lives on this block. *My God*! Brick thought. Suppose he lives *here! In this basement*!

And then he saw Sandy coming into the foyer of the building. He raised the gun, huddling against the wrought iron gate beneath the stairs of the brownstone. The footsteps were almost upon him.

Then, gratefully, he saw Sandy pause and shake out a raincape and begin to tie it over her hair. The footsteps were thunder in his ears now, beside the steps of the brownstone. Brick pressed against the gate, pressed into the darkness, the gun out of sight at his side, his head down.

The footsteps passed slowly. Brick felt the sweat run coldly down his ribs.

He saw Sandy pulling open the door. The footsteps stopped. Brick darted a glance at the man. It was the same tall, heavy man who had been walking down the opposite side of the street, peering into the gloom that lurked beneath every brownstone stairway. The man turned.

Brick knew he had seen Sandy across the street. Now he was peering straight into the darkness where Brick crouched. *He's old,* Brick told himself. *You can outrun him. He won't get a good look at you.*

But now the man was hurrying back toward him. He stood on the sidewalk, looking down at Brick. Behind him, Brick saw Sandy emerge from the building. He shot a look at the man's face in the half-light of the street lamp. He was sure he had never seen him before.

Brick slid the Luger into the pocket of the trench coat. He would slip past this keeneyed stranger and catch up to Sandy. Even now she was hurrying down the block, searching for a cab. He would empty the clip into her and run for it. This fool could never identify him.

"I see you," the tall man said. "Come up out of there." There was an undertone of nervousness in his heavy voice. "Come up out of there, Bordeaux."

Hearing his name hit Brick in the stomach like a baseball bat. He could not have heard right. This man did not know his name.

Brick stepped hurriedly up to the side walk, brushing by him. Far down the block, he could see Sandy's trim back, hurrying for a cab.

"Stop, Bordeaux," the voice behind him said. "I want to talk to you."

Brick whirled. Should he kill this man? But it was some kind of freakish mistake. This stranger could not know him! "That's not my name!" he snarled.

"Yes it is," the man said. "I know all about you."

"You don't know anything about me!"

"Yes I do. You've got a gun in your pocket."

"You're crazy!"

"No, I'm not. You've got a gun in your pocket. You were going to kill your wife with it!"

Brick made the gagging noise of a man who has received the ultimate shock.

The tall man moved up to him, grinning now. "I want to talk to you, bucko. And you want to talk to me. Don't you realize you'd get the chair going about the thing this way?"

Brick looked at him helplessly, dumbfounded. He felt the tall man's hand close easily on his elbow and turn him. He led Brick off in the opposite direction from the one Sandy was taking.

They turned a corner or two in silence, and Brick saw the entrance to the St. George Hotel ahead. The tall man had begun to hum happily to himself. "You need a drink," he told Brick. Brick nodded mutely, and when the waiter had brought a double scotch and water to their table in the far corner of the hotel's bar, he plucked it from the waiter's hand and poured it so hastily down his throat that some of it ran onto his chin.

The tall man laughed affably and turned to the waiter. "Bring another," he said.

"Are you a detective?" Brick asked.

The tall man's eyebrows shot up over his amused eyes. "Good Lord, no!" He was about fifty, Brick saw, with a craggy, ruddily healthy looking face and sparse brown hair. "I'm William Wainwright," he said. "You've heard of me, haven't you?"

Brick nodded. Wainwright was a name like Ibsen, Odets, or Chayefsky, the kind which he batted glibly about in Hanson's Drug Store with other marginal actors. He had read none of the man's plays, but he knew vaguely that six or seven of them had been hits in the Thirties and Forties and that their author divided his time between Broadway and Hollywood.

"H-how did you know?" Brick asked.

Wainwright grinned. "My boy, I have been following you since approximately nine-thirty last night. I was standing right behind you when your wife slapped your face in the El Morroco."

"Why?" Brick gulped. "Why were you following me?" His face reddened at the memory of that stinging blow.

Wainwright sipped his drink. "Up till then, I hadn't been following you. Indeed, I had never lain eyes on you or your wife until I witnessed that incident. But I saw your eyes when you turned away from her and stalked off. 'There,' I said to myself, 'leaves a man who is going to kill his wife. Just what

I have been looking for.' So I followed you."

Wainwright nodded affirmatively. "I checked into the YMCA with you. I bribed the room clerk to find out what time you had left your call for. I dashed home and changed from my evening clothes, and then back to the Y to be ready to follow you. I first learned your name from the doorman of your wife's apartment building."

Wainwright sipped his drink. "I must say, the two times you were up in that apartment were the most trying of the day. I was afraid you would kill her on the premises before I could interfere. You see, I had already reasoned that the crucial matter was to get to you at the precise moment when you were about to kill her. This counter-proposition I have to offer is so startling, that you might back off entirely if I was premature about it."

The waiter returned with the second drink. His eyes on Wainwright's lips, fascinated, Brick raised the glass to his mouth.

"You see," Wainwright said, "I'm offering to kill your wife for you."

Brick choked and hastily averted his head to keep from spitting Haig and Haig and water on Wainwright's shirt front.

"That's right," Wainwright said when Brick's coughing fit had subsided. "You see, I want my wife murdered, too. I'll kill your wife. You kill mine."

Brick stared at him bug-eyed. "You want me to kill an absolute stranger?"

Wainwright's look of affability became somewhat pained. "My dear boy, don't take such a tone of moral indignation. It is certainly no worse than killing one's own wife."

Wainwright placed his fingertips together on the table. "I make no inquiries as to your precise reasons for wanting to dispose of your own spouse. From what I have seen of her, she is eminently deserving of it. I assure you, mine is at least her match in plain witchiness.

"Cim – that is her name. Not Kim with a 'K,' mind you, but with a 'C' – is a young woman of great beauty. Her beauty is exceeded only by her stupefying conceit, stubbornness and sheer stupidity. I married her in California, and she is probably what I deserve for indulging in matrimony for the fifth time at the age of forty-six. She has made my life miserable from the moment the JP's signature was blotted dry on the marriage license.

"Her terms for giving me my freedom would strip me of the largest part of the money I have accumulated in a lifetime of struggle."

Wainwright's face hardened. "I am not going to be a sucker."

Brick's mind was whirling. His impulse was to leap away from the table and flee.

"You see," Wainwright went on, "we are two men with the same problem. And, as the thought of ending your days in the death house at Ossining must be as abhorrent to you as it is to me, we are in a perfect position to relieve each other of his burden. It is simply a question of one gentleman helping another out."

Wainwright lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. "I have given considerable thought to the problems of getting away with murder over the past two years. If you will bear with me, Mr. Bordeaux, I propose to deliver a little lecture on the subject. The crucial thing is not to be suspected, or, if suspected to be able to prove you could have had nothing to do with the crime. The ideal solution is to have someone do the deed for you. That is a knotty matter, to which I will return in just a moment."

Wainwright exhaled cigarette smoke thoughtfully. "The alternative is the False Alibi approach which you planned to use. It involves a good deal of monkeying around with time tables and so forth. It is fraught with dangers. Have you thought, for instance, of the trouble you would have been in, if you had killed your wife and, if at this very moment, a fight, a fire, or some other disturbance were going on at the Paramount? The police would certainly be alerted by your inability to give an account of what had happened. Or, suppose someone other than myself had noted your exit from the side door of the theatre?"

Brick felt the cold clutch of fear at his heart. This man was uncanny, and yet he felt a certain amount of gratitude toward him. "How did you know about my alibi?" he asked.

"Simple deduction," Wainwright answered. "As I said, I have been following you all day. My hopes began to pick up when you emerged from that Village firetrap carrying a package that looked as if it could easily contain a pistol, and, of course, I was certain I was on the right track when it fell to the theatre floor and made such a racket.

"I was puzzled as to why you were spending your time in a movie, but it became clear when I saw you return to the same theatre tonight, dressed so garishly, and making such an obvious business of calling attention to yourself. When you slipped out of the theatre, I was sure you had scheduled the murder for tonight."

Wainwright smiled. "You can be thankful I got to you in time. The police would have torn that amateurish fabrication apart within minutes."

Wainwright snubbed out his cigarette. "Well, so much for the False Alibi approach. I discarded it long ago as hopelessly impractical. I began to ask myself, 'What kind of murderers get away with it time

after time?' The answer, of course, is professional gangsters. They import a man they never see from a distant city. The assassin comes to a town he has never been in before, kills a man who is a stranger to him, and leaves, sometimes within hours. Of course, I don't have the connections to hire such a person. But the pattern was clear. Do you want another drink?"

Brick nodded, and Wainwright signalled to the hovering waiter. "I began to study the works of my fellow playwrights and scenarists who had dealt in murder—for dramatic purposes, of course. Many of them had stumbled on this device of an unknown murderer whose connection with the actual 'contractor' could never be proven. It is most effective.

"The police, investigating the crime, have a most logical suspect in the man who has contracted for the murder, but he, naturally, has the foresight to provide himself with a true, unbreakable alibi. The police will suspect him of having an accomplice, but it will be impossible for them to prove it. I began to think of this method as the Impossible Accomplice Gizmo. Or Gimmick, if you prefer. But still I was puzzled as to how I could implement it for my own use."

The waiter set a fresh round of drinks before them. When he had gone, Wainwright said: "There was a motion picture a few years back based on a George Simenon story in which an angry heir announced to his friends in a bar that he 'would give a million' to see his uncle dead. A few days later he got a letter from a stranger who had overheard him, contracting to do the job for the million. Most fortunate for the heir, of course."

Wainwright scratched his jaw. "Then there was a motion picture of a few years back directed by someone—someone big—*'Strangers On A Train'*. A tennis player saddled with a termagant wife meets a maniac who offers to dispose of her in return for which, he proposes that the tennis player shoot *his* father. These two examples are, of course, wildly improbable coincidences."

"Much closer to the mark," Wainwright said, "was the fellow in *'Dial "M" For Murder'* who persuaded a blackguard old schoolmate to do his wife in for a simple fee."

Wainwright sipped his drink. "See what I mean, Mr. Bordeaux? A fellow can't go around to bars announcing in a loud voice that he would pay a large reward to anyone who would kill his wife for him, in hopes that someone will snatch at the offer. He'd get a reputation for being peculiar. Nor can he expect people to come up to him in the smoking car and broach the matter. As for hiring a degenerate old classmate—well, I, unfortunately went to Harvard."

Wainwright raised his hands in

a plea for understanding. "That is as far as I had progressed. I thought I was up against a stone wall until I saw the look on your face in El Morroco last night. And then I knew I had my answer."

Brick drained his drink. He was in control of his nerves again. The feeling he was in the hands of a genius was beginning to rise in him. "My wife walks her poodle through Central Park promptly at nine every night when she is at home. Do you think we can get away with it?"

Wainwright raised his glass in salute. "Of course we can. The police are excellent fellows, very adept at tracking down routine murderers. A twin-killing such as this, planned by a superior intelligence, will leave them hopelessly stymied. Will Mrs. Bordeaux be at home tomorrow night?"

"She will," Brick said. His mouth was dry.

"And you can arrange an iron-clad alibi?"

"Yes. I'm invited to a cocktail party, and then I'm going to play in my regular Friday night poker game."

"Excellent. Just make sure you are seen by plenty of people. I'll get in touch with you later on, and let you know when you can carry out your part of the bargain."

Brick nodded.

"You'd best leave now," Wainwright told him, "and we'll go home our separate ways. Just leave that gun on the settee beside me before you slip out of here."

Eight-thirty the next night, found Brick sipping a tepid Manhattan at the balustrade of a terrace twenty-three floors above Central Park South. Before him stretched the darkening immensity of the park. Within less than an hour, Brick knew, Sandy would be tugged into that gloom at the end of her eager poodle's leash, and Wainwright would be waiting for her, his friend's Luger ready.

Brick's mood was a mixture of nervousness, anticipation and gratitude to Wainwright. There was no pity for Sandy. It was all her fault anyway. He could only hope that Wainwright did not miss, that he was not caught. But he had been enormously impressed by the older man's competence the night before. He was sure Wainwright would not fail.

Behind him the party was still going strongly, swelled from time to time by new arrivals. Brick knew he must get to the poker game soon. Time was running out. He drained the Manhattan and set the glass down on the balustrade.

"Brick! Oh, Brick, darling, at last!" It was a girl's voice, silvery and breathless, behind him. Brick turned. It was Marilyn.

Seven years had made her more beautiful than ever. The thick blonde hair was piled atop her head,

and the white lace dress was cut low over a tanned bosom which had lost none of its monumental proportions. She flung herself into Brick's arms. "Oh, darling!" she gulped, molding herself to him. "It's been so long!" It was a line she had heard uttered by the female leads of eighteen different movies, and she knew instinctively that it was the right thing to say.

Brick smothered her face with kisses. "My Sweet," he told her. "I never thought I would hold you in my arms like this again." He had a nagging feeling that he should be dressed in a uniform of some sort and be wearing a bandage about his head to give this line conviction, but it came out naturally.

"My dear, my darling, my only one," Marilyn told him, running her hands over his shoulders. Her eyes shown moistly and her beautiful mouth quivered.

Brick's head spun dizzily. She was back! His lost love was here and she still cared! But into the vision of the idyll that lay ahead of him now stepped the picture of Wainwright, squinting down the barrel of a Luger at Sandy. He could almost hear the sound of the shots rolling up from the park below. He had to be at the poker game when Sandy was killed, siting with a half-dozen sober, reputable friends. He could not rely on this half-drunk mob of strangers to furnish him with an alibi.

Slowly, he forced Marilyn's clinging arms down. "No, sweetest. Not this way. Not—" His mind raced frantically for the next line. "Not until I am free to come to you!"

He was backing away from her then, to the penthouse and the elevator down to the street. Marilyn stared after him, amazed, her chin beginning to tremble. The ham in her lifted a hand to him beseechingly. Behind him, Brick's hands found the French doors to the terrace.

Stepping back, closing them between him and Marilyn, he said: "No. Don't talk. Let me remember you just this way until I can come back for you." He collided with a waiter carrying a tray of drinks.

The waiter cursed. "Watch where you're walking, Jack." But by then Brick was hurrying through the crowd of partygoers to the door.

The police found him at the poker game at ten-thirty. He went with them to identify Sandy's body. He was relieved to see that Wainright had done a very neat job. Once, through the back of the head, and she was lying face up.

He answered questions until six in the morning in a station in the East Seventies. The police were never less than polite, and Brick could tell that their questioning of the other poker players had satisfied them that he was nowhere near Sandy when she was slain. Mostly, they wanted suggestions from him

as to who could possibly want to kill his wife. Many of the detectives leaned to the theory that it had been a random murder-robbery.

Chuki knocked on his door at two in the afternoon. "Man here to see you, Brick-san. He no reporter."

"Okay," Brick told her. "Tell him to wait a few minutes." He was composing his face into a mask of grief when the door opened and Wainwright strode briskly in.

"Everything satisfactory?" the tall playwright asked, his ruddy face creased with a cheery grin.

"Well," Brick said. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Wainwright, I've been doing some thinking about this. I'll be pretty well fixed now, with Sandy's money. Maybe you and me could pony up enough together to get your wife to divorce you."

Wainwright's face hardened. "She doesn't get a penny from me!" he snarled. "May I remind you that a gentleman doesn't go back on his agreements, Bordeaux?"

"It's just that I met this girl I've always been in love with last night," Brick said miserably. "I'm going to marry her as soon as I find her again. We were meant for each other. I don't want to take any chances on spoiling it." He smiled winningly at Wainwright.

Wainwright eyed him contemptuously. "Now, listen to me. The bullet in your wife's brain can be matched to bullets fired from a certain pistol registered in the name of a close friend of yours, to whose apartment you have a key. I am sure a little note to that effect sent to the police would induce them to drag you in and, ah, elicit the truth from you. I am also certain that a man of my standing in the community will be able to persuade the police that he is innocent of any involvement, and that you are using my name to cover that of your actual confederate."

Wainwright's hand came out of the pocket of his topcoat. He dropped the Luger negligently on the bed beside Brick. "I am also sure," he said evenly, "that such a note is going to the police unless you remove my wife tonight."

Brick eyed the pistol hopelessly. "Well, it was just a thought."

Wainwright beamed. "Stout fellow. My place is at 533 East Sixty-third. Apartment 8-A. I've already arranged my *alibi*. I'll be with friends at the New York Athletic Club until eleven tonight. You can pop in and do the deed anytime before then. Just wait until the doorman has gone to walk someone's dog, and you can scoot right up in the automatic elevator without anyone seeing you." He reached over to pat Brick's satin pajama-clad shoulder. "A bargain's a bargain, remember." Then he was gone.

The phone rang. Brick slipped the Luger under his pillow and

picked it up. "My poor darling!" Marilyn's voice came through the receiver. "I just read about it! I'm coming right over!"

Brick ached to have her comfort him, but a sense of danger warned him. "No, you mustn't," he said heavily.

"But this means you're free, my love!"

"Yes. But it doesn't look right, right now."

"Oh," she said softly, understanding instantly. "Yes. We'd better wait a week until your period of mourning is over."

"Yes. Good-bye, my love."

"Good-bye, my dearest."

The night had fallen coolly on the city when William Wainwright stepped out of the Fifty-Eighth Street entrance of the Athletic Club. One of the two old friends with him, a Superior Court justice who had offered to drive everyone home, was considerably put out because his chauffeur was nowhere in sight. The other friend, a distinguished surgeon, interrupted the story he was telling Wainwright to remark that the entrance was blocked.

"Maybe he had to park on the other side of the street," he pointed out shrewdly.

A horn tooted and liveried chauffeur stepped out of a long black limousine at the opposite curb and raised his hand to his cap. Wainwright, who had not been listening to the story, but was busy congratulating himself on the two stout witnesses he had chosen, pointed to the chauffeur. "That's him, isn't it?"

The jurist squinted across the street and nodded. He was leading his friends between two parked cars, when Brick stepped out of the shadows and tapped the playwright on the shoulder.

Wainwright turned slowly. His fixed grin fell when he saw Brick. "Oh, ah, you." He turned hurriedly to the surgeon. "Could you excuse us a moment, Jim?"

"Certainly," his friend said, but by that time Wainwright was already dragging Bordeaux off by the arm.

"What is it, man?" Wainwright demanded when they were twenty paces away.

Brick's face held the expression of an indignant child. "Mr. Wainwright," he said, his voice shaking with outrage, "you never told me you were married to Marilyn!"

*"Marilyn!"* Wainwright bellowed. "My wife's name is Cim—'Kim' with a 'C'!" A look of horror crossed his face. "You incompetent ass! Have you shot the wrong woman?"

"Oh, no, sir," Brick said earnestly. "Cim is Marilyn, all right. She changed her name again, to help her career. I didn't shoot her. I can't."

"Now, look here, Bordeaux," Wainwright said reasonably. "You're not going to let me down

like this, are you? You just *can't.*"

Brick flushed boyishly. "I'm awfully sorry about this, Mr. Wainwright. Really, I am. But your wife is the girl I love. I can't kill her." He looked sheepishly up at Wainwright's purple face.

The limousine's horn tooted again. "Are you coming with us, Bill?" the judge called.

*"In a minute!"* Wainwright roared at him.

Brick's brow knitted thoughtfully. "I appreciate everything you've done for me, Mr. Wainwright, and if ever I can do you a favor—"

Through clenched teeth, Wainwright told him: "You hare-brained Hamlet, you better think about the letter that's going to the District Attorney." The chauffeur sounded his horn impatiently again. Wainwright turned from Brick, hurrying to the car. He called over his shoulder. "I'll give you until Monday to make up your feeble mind!"

"What was that about Monday?" Brick asked, not having heard completely nor understood fully.

Wainwright yelled over his shoulder again. And it was just enough of an expletive so that he never saw the taxi that came zooming down Fifty-Eighth Street. He flew twenty-two feet through the air, knocked right out of his shoes. And it is debatable whether he ever knew what hit him.

Brick watched openmouthed while the judge, surgeon, chauffeur and cab-driver rushed to Wainwright's body. He walked slowly over to the cab and stood for a moment looking down at the hollow spot in its grill with awe. The expensive cordovan oxfords lay beneath the cab's bumper. Brick knew to whom they must belong. He bent and picked them up and walked over to the body of Wainwright with the shoes dangling from his fingertips.

The cabbie was a dark, squat little man with tears already streaming down his fat cheeks. Brick dropped the oxfords beside Wainwright's stockinged feet. "I didn't have a chance to stop," the cab driver blubbered. "He came running out in front of me."

Brick moved over to him and patted his arm kindly. "Don't feel bad about it," he said. "It was all his fault, anyway."


# *Yes!* YOU GET $17.70 WORTH OF EXCITING MYSTERIES AT ONCE—FREE!

**Including 3 Perry Mason Hits by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

YES—*while the supply lasts*—YOU can get $17.70 worth of top-notch NEW detective books, including 3 of the latest hits by Erle Stanley Gardner. Not one . . . not two . . . but a thrilling feast of SIX best-selling bafflers — *in regular, hard-bound covers.* On this amazing offer, ALL SIX are *delivered right to your door* in one giant package — FREE!

We make this generous offer to demonstrate the many advantages you enjoy as a member of the Detective Book Club.

### *Take ONLY The Books You Want*

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsome volume (a $7 to $8.50 value) for only $2.29. 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. You may cancel membership any time you please.

### *You 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.

### *Mail Postcard for 6 FREE Books*

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete mystery thrillers described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. Clip the valuable postcard now, and mail it at once to:

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L. I., N.Y.**

**ALL SIX BOOKS FREE** **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

57

**MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS**

•

**NO POSTAGE NEEDED**

HO

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**
**Roslyn, L. I., New York**

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular hard covered publisher's editions, the SIX full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three other 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 my membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $2.29, 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 .....

Zone No.
City .....(if any).....State.....

## Giant Gift Package of New Smash-Hit Mysteries!

# FREE ALL 6

TO NEW MEMBERS

## BAFFLING MYSTERIES!

*Including 3 of the Latest PERRY MASON Hits by*

**ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

*Plus* Thrillers by MANNING COLES • MICHAEL UNDERWOOD • THE GORDONS


### 6 Full-Size Hard-Cover Books — All Complete

**1 THE CASE OF THE DARING DECOY**
by Erle Stanley Gardner

Perry Mason's client says he's being FRAMED on a murder charge. He insists a girl named Rosalind can clear him. But Perry finds her MURDERED!

**2 THE CASE OF THE SCREAMING WOMAN**
by Erle Stanley Gardner

A tape recording of the murdered man's voice names Mason's client, Mr. Kirby, as the killer. How can Perry prove he ISN'T GUILTY—with a *piano*, a *cat*, and a *goldfish*?

**3 THE CASE OF THE LUCKY LOSER**
by Erle Stanley Gardner

Everybody is convinced Perry's client is GUILTY—even the client HIMSELF. Perry has only one chance in a million to win—with a CORPSE that has been buried TWO YEARS!

**4 DEATH OF AN AMBASSADOR**
by Manning Coles

Tommy Hambledon was sure the way to round up the gang who killed a South American Ambassador was to go after them one by one. But each turned out to be—A CORPSE!

**5 CAPTIVE**
by The Gordons

TWO killers hold pretty Ruth Madison as a hostage. One is seriously wounded. The other waits eagerly for him to die. But Ruth knows her life depends on *keeping both ALIVE!*

**6 MURDER ON TRIAL**
by Michael Underwood

As the No. 1 juror takes his seat a gun roars in FULL VIEW—yet without anybody seeing who fired it. And then *the man on trial for murder* — FALLS DEAD!

**A $17.70 VALUE**

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

**BUSINESS REPLY CARD**

First Class Permit No. 47 — Sec. 34.9 — P. L. & R. — Roslyn, N. Y.

**Detective Book Club**

**Roslyn, L. I.**

**New York**

**DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS SENSATIONAL OFFER!**

•

**MAIL POSTCARD AT ONCE!**

*—Continued on Inside Cover*