ALFRED

OCTOBER 35¢

HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW stories presented by the master of SUSPENSE

Dear Readers,

For me, this season of the year means the ruthless burning of leaves; Halloween, with its assorted witches; and a tendency to read more mysteries. It, therefore, seems most fitting that Random House should have waited until fall to publish ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS MY FAVORITES IN SUSPENSE. Fortunately, I have many favorites. This volume encompasses a score of short stories, a novelette, and a novel. Enough, shall we say, for everyone to have their own favorites of my favorites. Elsewhere in this issue, you shall be told just how you may acquire this reading-treat. The modus operandi, I am sure, involves the passing of a certain quantity of money.

Meanwhile, enjoy this issue of my fine publication. Notice, if you will, the menace implicit in some of the story titles: *Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree, Between* 4 *and* 12, *Perfect Shot, The Executioner.*

I must now bring this letter to a close. Random House, whom I have mentioned earlier, insists that I write an introduction to ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS MY FAVORITES IN SUSPENSE. This not only involves finding paper and pencil, a suitable chair and a proper light, but something cataclysmic to say. At this point I have everything, but I find myself being distracted by a burglar inconsiderately roaming about downstairs.

Alfred Hitchcock

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 4, No. 10, Oct., 1959. 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., Post Office Box 256 Bronxville, N. Y. Second class postage paid at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1959 by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. 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, Post Office Box 256 Bronxville, 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 4, NO. 10 OCTOBER, 1959

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

CONTENTS

BETWEEN 4 AND 12 *by Jack Ritchie* 2

STONY CREEK'S BIG MURDER *by William M. Stephens* 11

SIMON SAYS: HAND OVER YOUR FORTUNE *by Jeff Heller* 24

JURY OF ONE *by Talmage Powell* 32

RUBY MARTINSON'S BANK JOB *by Henry Slesar* 37

IN A TRANQUIL HOUSE *by William O'Farrell* 46

PERFECT SHOT *by Lawrence Treat* 56

SILKY COLLINS MEETS DAN CUPIDITY *by Joe Mackey* 64

THE EXECUTIONER *by H. A. DeRosso* 76

COLD-BLOODED WITNESS *by R. Simon Kohn* 87

POUSSE-CAFE *by Robert Sheckley* 94

LADY WITH A HOBBY *by Raymond E. Banks* 99

NO SMALL-TIME THIEF *by Jack Dillon* 108

DON'T SIT UNDER THE APPLE TREE *by Helen Nielsen* 112

RICHARD E. DECKER, Publisher

WILLIAM MANNERS, Editorial Director — PAT HITCHCOCK, Associate Editor

G. F. FOSTER, Managing Editor — ANDE MILLER, Associate Editor

MEINRAD MAYER, Art Director — BARBARA REMINGTON, Illustrator

A speck of dust—or a grain of sand—may trip up your ordinary murderer. In short, "murder will out" is quite axiomatic and has caused some topnotch thugs to go so far as to say, "Murder—is out!"

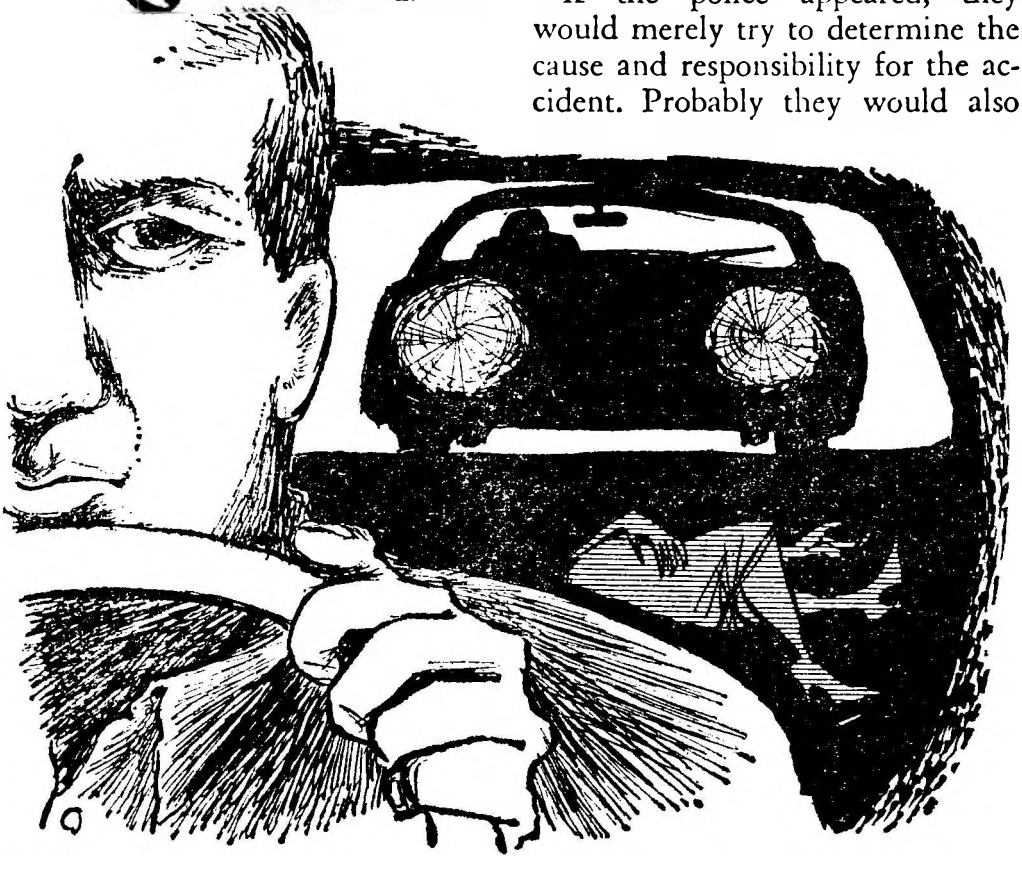
BY JACK RITCHIE

FIFTY yards ahead, the traffic light switched to caution yellow. Fred Martin eased his car to a stop just as the red appeared.

He had to be careful now. This was no time for an accident. Not even an insignificant one.

It wasn't that Martin had any fears that Beatrice's body in the trunk of the car might be discovered. He knew that even in the event of a small accident, there would be no reason for anyone to pry back there.

If the police appeared, they would merely try to determine the cause and responsibility for the accident. Probably they would also



check the drivers to find out if either or both of them had been drinking.

And Martin was stone cold sober. At least now he was.

He waited patiently for the green light and then moved forward.

No. An accident in itself was nothing to worry about. But his license number would be taken and Martin couldn't have that done. Not at this particular hour of the night.

He kept his car well within the twenty-five mile speed limit on Capitol. As he approached Seventh, he edged carefully into the left lane, flicked on his turn signal, and swung onto Highway 32.

Her disappearance would, naturally, cause some suspicion on the part of the police. After all, it was their job to be suspicious. But in the end they would be forced to come to the conclusion that she had simply packed up and left him.

Martin could imagine his conversation with the police. It would occur at around ten in the morning. Just about an hour after Martin got out of jail.

He would undoubtedly be suffering from a hangover and he would be drinking black coffee. "When I came home this morning," he would say, "I noticed that Beatrice's bed hadn't been slept in."

BETWEEN 4 AND 12

The traffic was light at seven-thirty that evening and the three-quarter moon made a cool path of the highway. Whenever he met an on-coming car, Martin dimmed his lights.

He would get to the patch of woods in fifteen minutes. It was off on a side road and everything was ready. He had dug the shallow grave Sunday evening, and it was waiting for Beatrice.

The sergeant would think that over. "Couldn't she have already made the bed and gone out shopping, or something like that?"

Martin would hesitate. "Well, Beatrice usually sleeps rather late. Until noon or one o'clock."

The sergeant would form an opinion on Beatrice. He might, too, be irked because Martin had bothered the police so soon. "You called us right away?"

"About five minutes after I saw she wasn't home. I thought that perhaps Beatrice might have spent the night at her sister's home. She sometimes does that. But her sister said she hadn't seen Beatrice in two days."

"Did you phone anyone else?"

"No. Beatrice has very few friends. Actually none that I know of. I thought of calling the hospitals, but there are so many in the phone book, I thought it might be better if I phoned the police. They would be likely to know if there had been an accident."

The sergeant would look at his notes again. "You came home at approximately nine-thirty this morning? You work nights?"

"No. I work from four in the afternoon until midnight," Martin would appear reluctant to go on, but then he would blurt out the truth. "I was in jail until just an hour ago."

The sergeant might raise an eyebrow.

Martin would explain. "After I left the factory, just past midnight, I stopped in at a tavern in the neighborhood."

The sergeant would prod. "Yes?"

"I'm afraid I had a little too much to drink. I drove into a parked car a few doors away when I left." Martin would allow himself to become mildly indignant. "I've never had an accident before in my life. I've never even had a parking ticket. But when the police came, they took me to jail. I was released on bail at nine this morning."

Very likely the sergeant's voice would be dry. "In this city we jail drunken drivers for the night. It keeps them off the streets until they sober up."

That was something Martin knew—and had planned on. But he would appear to be properly abashed.

The sergeant would ask permission to examine the bedroom. He would notice the twin beds and he would look into the half-empty closet.

Martin's mouth would drop slightly. "Almost all of her clothes are gone!"

And they would also discover that two suitcases, the good ones, were missing too.

The sergeant would ask, "What was your wife wearing the last time you saw her?"

Martin would think back. "I'm afraid I can't help you much on that. She was still in her dressing robe when I left at quarter after three yesterday afternoon."

"Did you and your wife have any . . . domestic difficulties?"

Martin would be happy to tell the truth about that. It would supply the motive for her disappearance. However, he would appear to speak reluctantly. "A few. But I think we got along as well as

anyone else until..." He would stop as though struck by a doubtful thought.

"Until?"

"Well, about six months ago there was a superintendency open in the shop. I thought, and so did Beatrice, that in view of my seniority and work record... I'm afraid that we both counted on it too much. It would have meant quite a raise in pay for me."

"She was bitter about it?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Did she blame you? Or the shop?"

Martin would say nothing, but the sergeant could easily draw his conclusion.

Martin remembered his own dark disappointment when he had been passed over. The personnel manager must have felt some guilt about it, because he took the trouble to take Martin aside and explain why it had happened.

The superintendency required a man with more aggression, a man who could give orders, make decisions. Martin's work record was excellent, but still...

The personnel manager had laughed self-consciously. "You're sort of colorless, Martin. You fade into the wallpaper. Nobody knows you're around at all."

He hoped that Martin understood and had no hard feelings.

Now Martin reduced his speed and turned onto the gravel side road. He drove half a mile more and parked in the shadows of birch and pines.

He had some difficulty removing Beatrice's body from the trunk and carrying it the hundred feet to the open grave.

He went back to the car for the shovel and the two suitcases.

Beatrice had died an easy death.

It was something she didn't deserve, Martin reflected, but he hadn't wanted any kind of a mess.

He had accumulated the sleeping pills, one by one, from the bottle Beatrice kept in the medicine cabinet. It had taken some time, but he had wanted to be positive that he had enough to do the job thoroughly.

This morning he had dissolved all of them in the fifth of brandy Beatrice stored in the refrigerator.

It had been a quarter to three in the afternoon when she had filled her glass and added a touch of soda. It was always around that time when she started drinking.

He had been in the kitchen making sandwiches and packing them into his lunch pail and he had been almost unable to suppress his feeling of elation as she took the first sip.

When he had left for the shop a half an hour later, she had been refilling her glass.

Martin replaced the bushes and patted the earth carefully around them. In the moonlight he surveyed the job he had done and could find no fault with it.

Beatrice and the two suitcases were gone forever.

He cleaned the shovel thoroughly and walked back to the car. He turned on the ignition and started the motor.

They had been married ten years and each year had been an eternity of bullying and badgering. But Martin had always felt a sense of duty toward the marriage and an unwillingness to admit to himself that things would never improve.

He had never even mentioned divorce until after that superintendency thing. When that had fallen through, Beatrice had become more vicious than ever.

As far as Martin was concerned, it had marked the end of their marriage. But the mention of divorce had brought an unalterable stubbornness into her eyes. Perhaps she realized that she could never find another man who would tolerate her tongue, her laziness, her drinking.

At the arterial sign, Martin came to a full stop, and then turned back on Highway 32.

The sergeant would no doubt be thorough. After he discovered that Beatrice was not in a hospital, he would have to ask delicate questions.

"Mr. Martin, was your wife insured?"

Martin would shake his head. "No. She didn't believe in insurance on herself. But I have two policies on my life worth fifteen thousand."

The sergeant would put 'No insurance' on his pad. "You say you were working from four until midnight?"

"Yes." Martin would choose his words. "But I usually leave home at about quarter after three. The drive to the plant is only a half an hour, but I don't like to take the chance of being late and getting locked out of the parking lot."

The sergeant would want to know more about that. "Locked out of the parking lot?"

"Yes. The company parking lot. It's an area of about two square blocks and enclosed by an eight foot fence. You see, several years ago some cars were stolen from the lot while the men were working. So the company enclosed the entire area. The gates are locked ten or fifteen minutes after the shift goes on."

"And if you get to the plant later than that?"

"You're out of luck. You have to find off-the-street parking in the neighborhood."

It might not happen then, but eventually the sergeant would probe the subject further. "How many gates are there?"

"Two. One on the north end of the lot and one on the south. Each has an exit and an entrance lane."

"Your car was inside the lot from approximately four to midnight?"

"Of course. I was working."

The sergeant would be casual. "Would any of the attendants remember that you parked your car inside the lot, rather than on the street?"

Martin would think about it. "I always come in the south gate. That's Joe Byrnes. Yes, I think he would remember. He knows me fairly well."

And Joe Byrnes should remember. When you stop at the entrance to repay a five dollar loan, the man should remember.

"Suppose, for some reason, you had to leave before your shift ended. For example, if you became ill and had to go home. How would you get out?"

"You'd just go to one of the gates and see the attendant. You'd identify yourself and he would take your name and license number. Then he'd let you out." Martin would laugh slightly. "I guess that's to prevent somebody from climbing over the fence and stealing a car. They want to make sure you really own it."

"Is there always an attendant at the gates?"

Martin would nod. "Yes."

But that wasn't really true. Joe Byrnes was supposed to be there, but Martin knew that after the gates were locked, Joe always wandered over to Ed Parker's north gate to kill most of the evening.

Joe figured that anybody who wanted to get out before the shift was over would use the north gate anyway. It was more convenient and closer to the plant.

But Joe would never admit to the sergeant that he hadn't been at his gate all the time. And Ed Parker would say nothing either, because they both knew that Joe could get fired if that came out.

When Martin had come to work that afternoon, he had parked his car close to the south gate. At seven he had slipped out of the factory, made sure that Joe and Ed were in the north shack, and then gone back to his car.

He had quietly unlocked the south gate, eased his car through, and then locked the gate behind him.

The sergeant might ask, "Does anybody besides the attendant have keys to the gates?"

"I don't really know."

"No duplicates?"

Martin would shrug. "I suppose so. They would be locked up somewhere, I imagine."

But Joe Byrnes was careless about such things. Martin had dropped in to see him often enough to know that. And when Martin had discovered how simple it was to steal a duplicate, he had formed his entire plan to get rid of Beatrice.

He had had the key for more than three months now and as far as he knew, Joe had never missed it. Nevertheless, Martin would

have to remember to return it. Just in case somebody checked.

Martin stopped for the light at Capitol and turned right. He noticed that the dark sedan behind him also made the turn.

The sergeant would ask more questions.

"You didn't take your car out of the lot for any reason last night, did you?"

"No. As I said. I was working."

"What is your license number?"

"C25-388."

"And your job at the plant?"

"I'm a stock chaser."

The sergeant wouldn't know what that was.

"I see to it that the assembly line doesn't run short of any parts. For instance, if a certain type of bolts are low at one point, I immediately go to the department of supply concerned with them and make sure that the bolts are rushed over."

"Then you travel around the plant during your shift? A lot of people could verify the fact that you were there from four to midnight?"

"Of course. Dozens."

There was a weakness in that, but it couldn't be helped. No one can be in two places at the same time, but Martin had done the best he could. He had made certain that a great many people had seen him before seven and he would make certain that many more would see him after nine.

He counted on the confusion and movement that existed in the factory to aid him and he felt certain that a number of persons would "remember" that they had seen him between seven and nine —if that should ever be necessary. Or, at the very least, they would not be sure whether they had or not.

"Are you the only stock chaser in the plant?"

"No. There are about ten others. We all work out of Mr. Hanson's office on the plant floor."

"Would you be missed if you were gone a couple of hours?"

Martin would laugh. "I certainly hope so."

But he wouldn't be. Martin was reasonably positive of that. With almost a dozen stock chasers going in and out of his office, Hanson would never notice that Martin was gone two hours. Actually he would have been away from his job only an hour and a half, since the lunch period was included in the time.

Martin glanced at the rear view mirror as he turned south on Twentieth.

The gray sedan was still behind him.

Martin frowned slightly.

"After you left work, how long were you in this tavern?" the sergeant would ask.

"About an hour."

"What's the name of the place?"

"Pete's Tap. It's half a block from the plant."

Pete would be able to back up that part of the story. Ever since Martin had conceived his plan to get rid of Beatrice, he had made it his practice to drop in at the tavern for a drink every night after he finished his shift. Pete knew him very well by now.

The sergeant would have to find out one more thing. "As far as you know, who was the last person to see your wife?"

"The dry cleaning delivery man. He brought some clothes back and picked up some to be cleaned. It was around three o'clock."

The delivery man always came Mondays at three. But Martin had been nervous about it until he appeared.

And that would be about it.

From there on, the sergeant could figure things out for himself.

The delivery man saw her at three. Martin left at quarter after three in order to get to the parking lot by four. His car was locked in the lot until midnight. Then he spent an hour at Pete's Tap. At one, or a few minutes later, he had an accident and was taken to jail. He was released at nine, came directly home, and phoned the police five or ten minutes later.

No. If he had killed his wife, there hadn't been any time to get rid of her body. Unless it was still in the house. And it might be.

Martin smiled.

Perhaps they would even search.

At Greenfield, Martin signaled and made a right turn. The gray sedan followed, approximately fifty feet behind him.

Martin experienced a sense of alarm. Was it a squad car? But why should it be following him?

His eyes lowered to the speedometer. He was under the speed limit. Safely under.

When he stopped at a light, he peered at the rear view mirror.

No. It wasn't a squad car. That much he could make out.

But it could be a plainclothes man, Martin thought, panic growing. Is there something wrong with my car? Did I go through any stop lights?

He shook his head almost angrily. That couldn't be it. He would have stopped me when it happened.

He stole a look over his shoulder. No. He couldn't be a detective. He was a little man. Even from here Martin could see that. The police didn't take men that small.

When the light changed, Martin's car moved forward. He turned at the next corner.

The sedan followed.

Martin began to sweat. This might be some kind of a hold-up. He might be waiting for Martin to stop at a dark street intersection. Perhaps he thought Martin

was going home and he planned to rob him as he put his car in the garage.

Martin went around the block to get back to the well-lighted Greenfield Avenue.

His eyes went furtively to the rear view mirror and he exhaled in relief.

The sedan was no longer following him.

It must have been one of those coincidences. The car hadn't been following him at all.

At the factory lot, Martin softly opened the south gate in its lonely semi-darkness. He parked his car and walked past the north shack on the way back to the factory.

Joe Byrnes and Ed Parker were playing gin rummy.

No one seemed to notice him when Martin re-entered the factory. And Hanson was busy at the phone, as usual.

He handed Martin an assignment. "Take care of this right away."

Martin hadn't been missed at all.

"Sure," Martin said to Hanson.

The little man parked his dark sedan and entered the six story building. He took an elevator to the fourth floor and made his way to an unused typewriter in the City Room. He copied a column of numbers from his notebook and took them to one of the editors.

The editor looked up. "I wish I had your job."

"You just think so. Following cars half the night's no picnic."

The editor glanced at the list. "Which is the luckiest one. Who gets the fifty dollar award?"

The little man pointed. "That one. I picked him up a little while ago and followed him for three miles. He didn't even bend a rule in the traffic book."

The editor pursed his lips. "Considering this is Safe Driver Week, we'll run all the license numbers on the front page. Find out who owns C25-388. Get a capsule interview and a picture. We'll use them too."

STONY CREEK'S BIG MURDER

BY WILLIAM M. STEPHENS

THERE isn't a lot of legal work to be done in Stony Creek, Tennessee. It's the smallest county seat in the state, with one schoolhouse, two general stores, three churches, and four jook joints. So when the first murder case in five years came along, people got pretty excited about it.

Even before the preliminary hearing, everybody knew I'd be appointed to defend Sam Bohanon. I had to be, since old Ambrose Switgall had right away volunteered his services as special prosecutor and the only other lawyer, Rufus Haggle, was the district attorney-general.

At Sam's arraignment, Justice

In this age of small cars and fairly sizeable egos, it is refreshing to tarry in a hamlet where murder is something of a novelty. Nonetheless, the question there as elsewhere is: "Whodunit?"

of the Peace Ayres put it this way: "There ain't no man but what's entitled to a lawyer, no matter how guilty he is; so I'm appointing you, Oakley Todd, to represent him. Whether he's got the money to pay a fee or not—and he claims he ain't—it's up to you to do the best you can for him."

So that was that. Here I was, fresh out of law school, appointed to defend a man already convicted in the eyes of the town, the county and the judge. And even in the eyes of Almarie Parks.

"But, Oak," she said, when we had lunch together after the hearing, "it isn't fair. Why do you have to defend a man who is obviously guilty? You haven't got a chance."

Almarie and I have been more or less engaged since we went to high school together. While I was in Korea, she wrote me every day. Later, when I used my G.I. Bill at the University of Tennessee, she was the girl I went home to see on week ends. A lawyer starting out has it rough—especially married. I get a monthly check from Uncle Sam—my elbow is a little stiff from a shrapnel wound—and, since I live alone, it doesn't take much for me to get by.

"We don't know that Sam is guilty, Allie," I said. "And even if he is, he's entitled to counsel. It's too bad, though, that his lawyer's sole experience in criminal law has been in defending Tippy McTeer for indulging in Saturday night sprees."

Almarie seemed to be right about this case. The dead man, Elmo Stobb, had been found on the floor of his mountain shack, shot twice. Beside him was his own pistol containing one empty cartridge. The letter "S" was scrawled in blood on the floor. A little later Sam Bohanon was arrested while trying to board the next bus out of town.

Elmo and Sam had been enemies for years. Both were rugged mountain men who farmed a little and manufactured a lot of moonshine whiskey. Their trouble had stemmed from the time that Sam's son, a wild and reckless boy with an eye for Elmo's daughter, Ellen, got out of the Army and tried to drink up everything his father made. While bringing Ellen home from a dance one night, young Bohanon drove his car over a steep embankment. Ellen was badly hurt and disfigured. Her father sent her to a hospital in another state, and it was rumored she would never recover. Young Bohanon was hurt pretty bad, too, and was really shook up emotionally—I'll give him credit for that. Finally, he went away to work at Oak Ridge.

Stobb and Bohanon had not spoken to each other since the accident. But there were a lot of little things—petty doings—which

showed a deep-down hatred. Sam's new copper still was shot full of holes one night, and Elmo periodically reported the disappearance of prize white leghorns. ("Jest like the ones I seen over at that crook, Bohanon's, place.") Only a week before the shooting, Sam filed a complaint charging Elmo with poisoning his favorite Irish setter. There was bad blood between them, for sure, and even if Elmo, before dying, hadn't managed to point his finger at Sam, so to speak, people would just naturally have pointed theirs.

When Almarie and I left the cafe, we found Tippy McTeer waiting outside. He's a thin, shabby fellow who has had an awful lot of trouble with the bottle. I always felt right sorry for him. "Hi, Tip," I said.

"Hello, Mr. Todd, Miss Parks." He stood there, grinning kind of self-consciously, holding his shapeless felt hat. Tip always acts like he's afraid somebody's going to swat him. "I want to pay you some money"—he pressed a crumpled bill into my hand—"and tell you I sure appreciate what you've done." He looked at the sidewalk and shuffled his feet. "I've straightened up, Mr. Todd, and I'm going to pay you every cent I owe you. It'll take a little time, but—"

"I'm not worried about it, Tip. I just hope you get along all right."

He looked up quickly. "Oh, I will. I've quit playing the fool. Well—" he started to move away, then stopped. "I hear you're defending Sam Bohanon."

"That's what the judge tells me," I said.

"I sure wish you luck. I don't figure Sam for a killer."

"Let's hope you're right, Tip."

"You know what I think, Mr. Todd? This wasn't no ordinary murder. Elmo was expecting something or he wouldn't have been up and dressed that time of night." He shook his head. "Well, thanks a lot. Be seeing you. Goodbye, Miss Parks." He jammed his hat on his head and scooted away.

"Poor old Tip," I said. "He's not a bad fellow."

"When he's sober," said Almarie.

"That's what I meant. Well, let's get to work. Want to come along and see the scene of the crime?"

"Try to keep me away! Let's go, counselor."

Elmo Stobb's cabin was three miles from town as the crow flies, but a good six miles over the winding road. When we drove up, there was Sheriff John Wiggins, sitting on the narrow cabin steps, chewing tobacco. He shifted his plug to the other jaw and grinned at Allie. "Nice day," he said, without moving.

"Well, if it isn't Sheriff Wig-

gins, the famous moonshine sleuth," I said. "Have you found out where Elmo kept his corn?"

"Funny boy," he said without smiling. "I've got more important things to do."

"You do seem terribly busy," said Almarie.

"I'm thinking," he said shortly. "I'm figuring things out."

"Fine," I said. "While you're figuring, we'll look over the place. No, don't move. We'll climb over you."

"Well, now, I don't know. We can't have the whole county traipsing through here destroying evidence. It won't do you no good, anyhow. The case is cut and dried."

"Then why are you worried?" I asked. "If you don't want to let us in, I'll see Judge Venable and get a court order to—"

"All right, all right. Guess it won't hurt nothing as long as I'm with you. You can't touch nothing, though." He arose with great effort and turned toward the door. "This place is just like we found it, except the body's been removed. The door was locked and the key was outside, in the lock. Guess Sam figured he'd have time for a getaway if he locked the place. But he forgot to take the key with him." He opened the heavy oak door and we followed him into the gloomy interior. "They always make one mistake. It never fails."

He showed us where the body had lain and pointed out a bullet hole in the floor and another in a wall.

"Did you take any pictures?" I asked.

"Sure did." He grinned. "And they're good ones."

"I'll bet they are. Jury'll love 'em. Who found the body?"

"George Stubblefield. He was hunting a lost cow and noticed there wasn't no smoke coming from Elmo's chimney. It was cold enough to freeze the ears off a brass monkey So he investigated."

Almarie was poking around the place, like women do, looking in corners and what not. She stopped by the door and picked up a piece of string about three feet long. "What in the world is this for?" she asked. "There's a loop tied in the end."

"Well, how about that," the sheriff grinned. "Here's the murder weapon and we didn't even see it. He was choked to death. Ha, ha, ha."

"Don't choke yourself laughing," I said. "Allie asked a perfectly legitimate question. What *would* a piece of string like that be used for?" He looked at me like I was stupid, so I said, "Nice going, Allie. Mark it Defendant's Exhibit A."

"Yes, sir, counselor. Submitted as proof to the testimony of this witness."

"If you kids are through play-

ing," the sheriff said, "I've got work to do."

He stalked out and held the door open for us. When we got outside, he locked up.

"Any footprints, John?" I asked him.

"Ground's too hard." He kicked at the ground, then leaned over suddenly. "This your pencil, Oakley?"

"It's not mine. You probably dropped it."

"I'm a ballpoint man myself." His eyes narrowed. "It just could be that Sam dropped this pencil when he ran out of here." He dropped a handkerchief over the pencil and picked it up carefully. "I'll check it for prints."

"Now you're being melodramatic, John," I said. "Lots of people have been here since Elmo died."

"Yes," he said, "but those people weren't in a hurry. Sam was. With a good fingerprint, we'll have this case wrapped up good and snug. Not that it ain't wrapped up now," he added quickly, "but one more clincher won't hurt nothing."

Almarie sat close to me all the way down the mountain. "Oak," she finally said, "how can I help?"

"You are helping. Just keep your shorthand pad handy while I'm talking to witnesses. And you can help me on research. I may not have a case, but at least I'm going to know my procedure and the law. Right now, hold your breath. We'll go see Sam."

At the jail, Sam was taciturn. All he would say was, "I don't know nothing about it. Somebody's trying to put this thing off on me." Oh, he said a lot of other things during the two hours we spent with him, but that's what it all boiled down to. Before leaving I felt that I could have done better without seeing him.

"All right, Sam," I said as the jailer came to let us out. "If that's your story, stick to it. When the sheriff comes in here, don't say anything. Not anything. Don't even give him the time of day."

"Yes, sir." He shook my hand and his blue eyes peered at me through his bushy white eyebrows. "Mr. Todd," he said, "I didn't do it. I swear I didn't do it." The way he said it, I couldn't help but believe him.

In Stony Creek, a murder trial is a greater attraction than the annual Tennessee Valley Fair. Business is at a standstill and even the school is closed. When Sam's case was called, I do believe that every free soul in Jackson County who wasn't sick or in jail was in that courtroom. Finally, Judge Daniel Webster Venable, in a black robe fresh from the cleaners, climbed into his chair, rapped his gavel and nodded to Jeb Frost. "Mr. Clerk," he said gravely,

"What have we on the docket this morning?"

"The State versus Sam Bohanon, your honor," the clerk replied, just as serious as you please.

It took us all morning to pick a jury. I used all fifteen of my challenges, but when I studied the twelve faces that would decide Sam's fate, I wasn't sure that they were any better than the ones I excused.

George Stubblefield was sworn as the first witness. He said he came by Stobb's place at 9 A.M. on January 5th. Noticing that no smoke came from the chimney, he looked through a window and saw that Stobb's gasoline lantern was burning. The key was in the door so he went in and found Elmo's body.

"You can ask him," Attorney-General Haggle said, nodding to me.

Something about George's testimony bothered me, but for the life of me I couldn't figure out what it was. "Mr. Stubblefield," I said, "did you notice if the windows were locked?"

The witness was thoughtful. "They was all nailed shut. His place was drafty as an old barn, and he always boarded it up in the wintertime."

I took him back over his story, but never did figure out what was nagging at me. Finally I said, "All right. Step down."

The sheriff took the stand. Attorney General Haggle asked, "You are Sheriff John Wiggins?"

"That's correct, sir."

"How long have you been in the field of crime detection?"

"Your honor," I broke in, "we'll admit the sheriff's qualifications."

At 9:22, Wiggins testified, Stubblefield came tearing into his office. He went immediately to Stobb's place and found the body on its back, a .32 caliber pistol at its right side. One shot had been fired. There were two bullet wounds, in the left arm and the right temple. There was a big "S" in blood on the floor. "It looked like he'd tried to spell out Sam's—"

I jumped up. "Never mind what it looked like. Move to strike the statement as a conclusion of the witness."

"Sustained," said the judge.

"All right," Haggle said. "Now, did you find the bullets?"

"We recovered both of them. One went into the floor and one into the wall."

"Could you determine the caliber?"

"Not definitely. They was mashed flat; but they're about the same weight as .30 carbine slugs."

Haggle nodded to Ambrose Switgall, who left the room and returned with a rifle. The attorney general said, "Sheriff, have you ever seen this weapon before?"

Wiggins put on a big show of examining the rifle, even looking down the barrel. Everybody had seen him carry it across the street that morning. Finally he said, "Yes, sir. This is a .30 caliber carbine. I found it in the defendant's house."

"Now, sheriff, in your opinion could the bullets you found have come from this rifle?"

"Yes, sir," Wiggins said.

Haggle bowed to me. "Your witness, if you care to question him."

I picked up the rifle. "When you say the bullets could have come from this rifle, you are merely stating a possibility. Is that right?"

"I didn't see the bullets come out," Wiggins said, "if that's what you mean." He grinned and a titter went through the room.

"No, you didn't," I said. "So you can't swear they did, can you?"

"Nope. And I can't swear the grass is green in the courtyard. But it was this morning, so I reckon it still is."

Ambrose Switgall slapped his thigh and roared. Most of the spectators followed suit, and I stood there feeling kind of foolish. Finally, the judge rapped his gavel and read John the riot act. "Now go ahead, Mr. Todd," the judge said.

I was a little upset, but I tried not to show it. "Sheriff," I said, "since you didn't perform a ballistic test, you can't swear these little chunks of lead didn't come from some other weapon, can you?"

"Well, if you want to be technical, I guess they could have. But—"

"That's all." I sighed with relief and sat down.

Almarie leaned over and touched my arm. "You're doing wonderfully." That made me feel better. I wondered what Sam thought, sitting there like a wooden Indian, staring at the table in front of him. He didn't appear to be conscious of anything that was going on.

Next, Horace DeGroat, the coroner, took the oath and testified that he had examined the body during the afternoon of January 5th. Stobb had been dead for about eighteen hours and had died of a bullet wound in the right temple, inflicted by some person or persons unknown.

On cross-examination I asked him, "On what are you basing the time of death?"

"Well, the condition of the body and—"

"And the fact that the State's theory is that death occurred during the preceding evening?"

"Well . . . naturally I considered all the circumstances. I'm not a doctor."

"That's what I'm getting at," I said. "You're not a doctor. You're an undertaker. That's all."

"Call Goodloe King," said Attorney General Haggle.

King, an insurance agent, testified that at about 8:30 P.M. on the night of Janaury 4th, he drove up Rangeline Road. In front of Elmo's property, he saw a man in the beam of his headlights. The man carried a rifle and walked away fast. King recognized the figure as Sam Bohanon.

"Cross examine," said Rufus Haggle.

King's testimony worried me. I knew Goodloe as a reliable man. "Mr. King," I said, "are you positive that this defendant is the man you saw?"

"Absolutely."

"Now, of course, you don't know whether Stobb was alive or dead at that time, do you?"

"Well . . . no, not actually."

"Did you hear any shots?"

"No, sir."

"Then you don't know what time Stobb was killed, do you?"

"No."

"For all you know, he could have been killed much later. He could have died as late as two or three o'clock in the morning. Isn't that right?"

King hesitated. "I hardly think so, Mr. Todd. Elmo was fully clothed when his body was found. I don't know what he would have been doing up and dressed at two or three o'clock in the morning."

I stared at him for a minute. I know my mouth must have come open. *Tippy McTeer. Outside the cafe. What was it he said? "Elmo was expecting something or he wouldn't have been up and dressed at that time of night." What time of night?* I had to find Tippy. And I just hoped that when I found him, he wouldn't be drunk.

The judge was talking. I snapped out of it. "Mr Todd," the judge said, "I'm speaking to you. Do you have any more questions of this witness?"

"No, Your Honor. But, if the court please, we'd like a short recess."

Judge Venable looked at the clock. "It's almost time for the evening adjournment." To Haggle, "How many more witnesses do you have?"

"The State rests, your honor."

"Very well. The court will be in recess until tomorrow morning."

While the bailiff put handcuffs on Sam, I asked Sam about King's testimony.

"Yep," he said. "I come by Elmo's place. But I didn't stop. I'd been hunting doves and was going home."

"Hunting doves two hours after dark?"

He looked down. "I stopped by Jimmy Bryson's for a few brews."

"Oh. But you did have a gun with you? What kind of gun?"

"You don't hunt doves with nothing but a shotgun," he said

shortly. "That carbine they got—hit's mine, all right; but it ain't been shot in a coon's age. I couldn't hit a bull in the flank with nothing but a shotgun."

"All right, Sam," I said. "Get some rest tonight. If you can't sleep, you might try praying."

He grinned shyly. "Man, I been doing a world of that."

Almaric was beside me. "Oak, you can use some rest yourself. How about a steak dinner? You need to get your mind off this case for awhile."

I took her arm and started for the door, ignoring what she'd said. "Listen, can you transcribe the notes you've taken? I'm overlooking something."

"You're hurting my arm."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Now look, Allie, I need a copy of today's testimony. While you're typing it, I've got to find Tippy McTeer. He knows something. Tell you what, you leave the transcript at the office. I'll see you in the morning."

I left her standing there and ran for my car. I was in an all fired hurry.

The judge rapped for order. "Is the defendant ready?"

"Ready, Your Honor." I nodded to Sam. He walked slowly to the witness stand, looked quickly at the jury and sat down. After the preliminary questions, I got right to the point. "Sam Bohanon, did you kill Elmo Stobb?"

"No, sir, I did not," he replied in a firm voice.

"They claim you were arrested trying to leave town. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir. My son lives in Oak Ridge and I was going to visit him. I didn't know about no killing."

"When you were arrested, did you have your ticket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Sam, this is important." I paused. "Was it a one-way ticket or a round-trip ticket?"

"Hit was a round-trip ticket. How else was I going to get back?"

I smiled. "What happened to that ticket?"

"He's got it." Sam pointed his finger at John Wiggins.

"The sheriff has it?" I asked loudly. Wiggins' face was red as he rummaged through his briefcase. "Your Honor," I said, "I move the court to order the State to produce the bus ticket."

"Here it is, here it is," Wiggins muttered. "It don't mean nothing. He could have bought a ticket to Timbuctu. That don't mean he's got to go there."

After displaying the ticket to the jury, I introduced it in evidence and nodded in the direction of the State's table. "Cross-examine."

Ambrose Switgall, the special

prosecutor, got up. Arms akimbo, his long frame straight as an arrow, he strode to the stand and peered at Sam through his bifocals like a scientist examining an insect under a microscope. Finally Sam looked away nervously. Then Switgall's voice rang out, "Sam Bohanon!"

Sam started, then answered in a low voice, "Yes, sir."

"Where were you when Elmo Stobb was killed?"

"I was at home in bed," Sam said quietly.

Switgall pounced. "If you didn't kill him, how do you know where you were at the time he was killed?"

Sam met Switgall's gaze stonily. "I reckon he was killed after I passed by his place. I seen him through the window then. He sure didn't get killed before then."

"Ha. You reckon. But you wouldn't know, would you?"

And so it went, nearly all morning. Switgall put on a big show, but Sam stuck stubbornly to his story. Finally, it was over. "Good going, Sam," I said as he sat down, covered with perspiration. "Call George R. McTeer," I told the bailiff.

Tippy stated that he had been in Dayton the night of the murder. He missed the last bus and walked home. At about 2:30 in the morning he passed by Stobb's place and saw Elmo standing in the doorway.

There was not a sound in the courtroom. Even the judge leaned forward, listening intently.

"What was Stobb doing?" I asked.

"He opened and shut the door a couple of times—seemed to be fooling with the knob. I figured maybe the door wouldn't shut proper and he was trying to fix it."

"That's all. You may ask him," I said to Switgall.

With a smirk on his face, Switgall approached the witness. "McTeer," he said, "don't they call you Tippy?"

Tip's mouth was tight. "Yes, sir."

"And you acquired that nickname, did you not, by reason of your proclivity to imbibe freely of the nectar of the grape?"

"I used to drink a lot. Yes I did, sir."

"Ha. The understatement of the year. Isn't it a fact, Tippy McTeer, that the only time you've drawn a sober breath in years is when you've been locked up? And when you staggered up Rangeline Road that night—*if* you got home at all, and *if* you remember what night it was—you were lucky to see the road itself, much less see and identify a figure in a doorway some distance away. Isn't that true, Tippy McTeer?"

The witness' voice was low, but distinct. "I used to be a drunk, Mr. Switgall—a terrible drunk.

But I haven't had a drink in two months. I'm not drunk now and I wasn't drunk the night I saw Elmo Stobb in that doorway."

The intensity of his voice stopped Switgall for a moment. Then he shrugged. "Hmmmph," he snorted. "You say this was at 2:30 in the morning. Was it a dark night?"

"Very dark. But Elmo had the light behind him. I saw him when I turned the bend in the road."

"What? Do you mean to say that you saw and recognized a man from a point three or four hundred yards away? On a dark night? Is that what you're saying?"

"Yes, sir. I sure am."

Switgall threw his head back and studied McTeer over the bridge of his long, thin nose. "How far can you see at night?"

Tip furrowed his brow, then grinned. "Why shucks, Mr. Switgall, I can see clear to the moon."

Someone cackled like a chicken. Then the whole courtroom rocked with laughter. Judge Venable tried to hide his grin behind his hand.

Switgall, the color of an overripe peach, was speechless for a moment. Then he said roughly, "That's all, step down," and strode stiffly to his seat.

"Good old Tippy," Almarie said.

The court declared a recess for lunch. After a quick sandwich, I studied the State's photographs and Allie's transcript of the previous day's testimony. Like a bolt from the blue, it hit me. "Allie," I said excitedly, "they're wrong about the time of death. Look at this picture. Remember that gasoline lamp? Stubblefield said it was burning when he looked in Elmo's window at nine in the morning!"

She nodded. "But I don't see—"

"That's the same type of lantern I take on fishing trips. It burns for six hours on one filling of gas!"

Her eyes widened. "Oak! Why, that means that Stobb was killed after three o'clock in the morning!"

"All it means, actually," I said, "is that somebody filled that lamp after three. But it's enough to convince me that Sam is innocent and Tippy was telling the truth."

After lunch I put Goodloe King back on the stand and asked him if he had recently sold any insurance to Elmo Stobb. Switgall rose to object, looked at Haggle, shrugged and sat down.

King hesitated for a good long time. Then he said, "No—not for several years."

My shoulders slumped. It was a shot in the dark and it had missed.

King went on. "But he did reinstate an old policy for $25,000. Just a few days before he died. It provided for double indemnity in

case of accidental death. And—"

"He did?" I shouted. "Who was the beneficiary?"

"His daughter, Ellen. She's in a hospital out west."

I thought hard. "One more question. Did the policy contain a suicide clause?"

Haggle and Switgall were on their feet, objecting, but the judge waved them down. "Answer the question, Mr. King."

"The policy provided that no payment would be made if the insured committed suicide within one year of the reinstatement date."

I let out my breath. "That's all."

Things were beginning to dovetail. I whispered to Allie and, with a look of perplexity, she opened her pocketbook and gave me the piece of string she had picked up at Stobb's cabin. I walked over to the sheriff and asked him for the pencil he had found outside Elmo's door. He looked even more mystified than Allie—but he gave it to me.

"Your Honor," I said, "will the State stipulate that this string was found next to Elmo Stobb's door, on the inside, and this pencil just outside his door?"

Attorney General Haggle, Ambrose Switgall and the sheriff put their heads together. Finally Haggle stood up. "Your Honor, we cannot see the relevance of this matter. We think that the young attorney for the defense is clouding the issue. Nevertheless, Sheriff Wiggins tells us that the objects were indeed found where Mr. Todd states, so we will so stipulate."

"Thank you," I said. "Your Honor, the defense rests."

Switgall made a long and impassioned opening argument for the State, based on much emotion and little logic. After I realized he wasn't going to say anything, I slipped out of the room and checked out my theory. By then it was time for me to argue the case.

Briefly, I reviewed the evidence for the jury. Then I said, "The court will instruct you that you are to accept any reasonable theory which is incompatible to the guilt of this defendant. I will attempt to give you that theory."

I picked up the string and pencil. "Gentlemen of the jury, I believe that Elmo Stobb committed suicide. As for his reasons, we can only guess. We do know that, a few days before his death, he reinstated an insurance policy which would pay $50,000 to his unfortunate daughter if someone else killed him and nothing if he killed himself. Then, I think, he conceived a plan by which he could get even with Sam—whose son had put Ellen in the hospital—and help Ellen at the same time. Actually, of course, he probably had no way of knowing that Sam would be seen near his place that

night; and he may not have known that Sam planned to go to Oak Ridge the next day. He didn't need to build an air-tight case. But he had to make it clear that somebody had killed him, that he had not killed himself.

"He probably stayed up most of the night thinking about it. By 2:30 in the morning he had made up his mind. When Tippy came up the road, Elmo was in the process of locking his door while he remained inside, but the key was on the outside of the door. Here's how he did it."

I was holding my breath now. This had to work. I walked to the jury room door. The key was in the door, on the courtroom side. I inserted the pencil in the opening at the end of the key which did not go into the lock, and slid the loop in the string over the pencil. Keeping the string taut, I went into the room and carefully closed the door. As I tightened the string, the key turned and I heard the bolt slip into place. I shook the string and heard the pencil fall to the floor on the other side. Then I withdrew the string. "Somebody unlock the door!" I shouted.

I heard someone try the knob. "By jingles, Judge," a voice I recognized as the bailiff's said, "he did it!"

He unlocked the door for me, and I walked in and in front of the jury. "Then Elmo Stobb pulled another smart stunt. He couldn't just kill himself; that would still look like suicide. So he first shot himself in the flesh of his arm. He disposed of the empty cartridge—probably swallowed it—and put a fresh bullet in the pistol. Then, to point the finger of guilt at poor old Sam, he drew an 'S' on the floor in blood. He must have been awfully proud of himself. So he thanked God for the brains He gave him and promptly blew them out.

"Gentlemen, that's my theory. I now leave it with you—and with your conscience." I looked each of them full in the face and walked out. I didn't even listen to Haggle's closing statement. It didn't matter. I had done all I could.

The jury stayed out five minutes before announcing their verdict: "Not guilty."

Bedlam broke loose. I remember that Sam had hold of my arm and was crying; and I thought I heard Almarie say something like, "Oh, Oak, I love you," in my ear. I couldn't be sure, but she had a beautiful look on her face.

BY JEFF HELLER

SIMON NAPP'S lawyer, who had just guided him unscathed through his divorce proceedings, became irritable and impatient about his fee. Simon, a languid man with enormous gray eyebrows and a movie-star's chin, merely yawned and said: "Oh, don't worry about your fee, Syd-

The tendency of a widow to be wealthy is invariably closely related to the monies acquired by her late husband. Our Genevieve Palley is a typical widow, the sort loved by one and all con men.

ney, you know I'm good for it. As a matter of fact, I'm thinking of getting married again. To a *very* wealthy widow."

The lawyer had fumed and spluttered about the answer, but he had accepted it. He would have been even more disturbed if he had known the truth—that Simon Napp hadn't even *met* the lady yet.

But that was only a detail. Simon, with his usual care, had already learned her name, her address, her average yearly income, her holdings, and her hobbies. She was Mrs. Genevieve Palley, and her husband, a small manufacturer of bushings, had left his earthly woes behind him five years ago. His insurance had been sizeable, and Palley's Superior Bushings were still being made and sold. She was forty-nine, soft and plump like a pouter pigeon, and rich, rich, rich.

Simon Napp wasn't trusting to luck alone to bring him within wooing distance of Mrs. Palley. He had a plan. It was beautifully simple, and it involved Mrs. Palley's favorite hobby. She was an avid patron of palmists, tea-readers, and the general breed of fortune-tellers. As soon as Simon learned this interesting fact, he knew that he could safely predict a profitable meeting.

One bright Tuesday morning, he paid a call at a modest brownstone on the upper East Side. His lean finger trailed over the nameplates, and found the one he wanted. It was MRS. WANDA WOOLEY. He pressed the button. Almost instantaneously, as if the spiritual lady had been telepathically warned of his presence, the front door chattered and the lock was sprung. He went inside, and up the two flights of stairs that brought him to Mrs. Palley's favorite fortune-teller.

"Mrs. Wooley?" he said, lifting his homburg and thrusting out his movieland chin. He was surprised to find that she was a youngish woman, with tightly-combed hair and a plain, expressionless face. She wore no makeup, and her eyes were the eyes of an ascetic monk. "My name," he said, "is Simon Napp. I called you yesterday, if you remember."

"Yes," Mrs. Wooley said dreamily. "Something about a business proposition?"

"Indeed. May I sit down?" He did, and looked around the heavily-draped room. There was a round table in the center, and a bulbous object had been covered with a black velvet cloth. The crystal, of course. "It's about a patron of yours, Mrs. Wooley, a lady named Palley. You know the woman I mean?"

"Of course. Mrs. Palley's been coming to me for almost two years."

"How nice. Mrs. Wooley, I intend to make this short and to the

point. I am going to ask you to do me a rather romantic favor."

"A favor that involves Mrs. Palley, I assume."

"Quite right. Let me explain." Simon rolled his eyes beatifically to the ceiling where a warped chandelier hung with three crystals missing. "I'm very much of a romantic, but I'm a practical man, too. Since I detest the state of bachelorhood, I decided to select the most perfectly suited woman I could find, a woman with charm, position, and money. I found Mrs. Palley."

Mrs. Wooley looked at him with cold interest. "You are the most calculating person—and the frankest—I've ever met. Please go on."

"I would now like to meet Mrs. Palley. Here is where you can play an extremely important role. She is undoubtedly a most suggestible woman. If our meeting can be planned in such a way that it would seem predestined, the rest, I feel in all modesty, would be simple. What I'm asking you to do is to predict our meeting, predict what I will look like, even what I'll wear and say."

"Out of the question," Mrs. Wooley said. Her eyes glared icily. "You obviously think I'm a charlatan, a master of sleight of hand, perhaps. I'm a spiritualist in every sense of the word and I respect my clients as much as they respect me."

"But you are a business woman, are you not?"

"Of necessity, yes."

Simon smiled wryly. "I ask you to think how little you must do to earn one thousand dollars. And what crime must you commit? Couldn't I approach Genevieve Palley in a more ordinary fashion and still succeed? My feelings are genuine. My motives are respectable. I simply want a little assistance."

Mrs. Wooley meditated with her brow resting on her hand. After some moments of communing with herself, she said. "A thousand dollars?"

"All that money, for such a little thing."

"She's coming to see me this afternoon, as a matter of fact," Mrs. Wooley said.

"Splendid!" Simon clenched his fist exuberantly. "Tomorrow she's going to an art show. Some young painter she's collected is having his second exhibit. Our meeting will take place in the gallery. I'll wear this gray homburg, a blue suit and a tiger lily."

"I have my misgivings, Mr. Napp," Mrs. Wooley said, sighing. "But at least you'll be the best-dressed man ever to appear in my crystal ball."

The gallery was one flight up in a decrepit building off Lexington Avenue. Travel posters adorned

the blackened walls that led to a landing which accommodated the overflow from two small rooms. Simon excused his way past the beat, the bearded, the aunts, uncles and cousins. Mrs. Palley had not yet arrived and so he gave fascinated interest to the paintings, heavy extrusions straight from the tube in stark yellows, reds, blues and purples. Mrs. Palley would find him. As the moth finds the flame. As the nail is drawn to the magnet. He looked on in leisure wonderment that any one artist could manipulate so many tons of paint in what passed for artistic expression.

He became aware that something sweet-scented and pouter pigeon-ish was staring at his profile. When he turned, Mrs. Palley diverted her attention to the wall with such alarm that he thought her heaving bosom would pop the diamond clip off its lacy resting place. From this angle, the bonbon induced flesh around her face was accentuated. But strip that away, smooth the web of wrinkles around the eyes and you saw the well-proportioned, pert-mouthed beauty that must have made Mr. Palley's heart beat to a quick tempo of love.

He edged closer and, summoning every bit of charm from his well-articulated baritone, he said: "Pardon me. Have we met before?"

She stared at him with a ringed finger to her mouth. "No. No, I don't think so."

"The way you were looking at me..."

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that—well, you *reminded* me of someone." She giggled coquettishly. "I know you'll say it's silly, but a friend of mine, a really *gifted* woman, not an ordinary fortune teller..." She hesitated, considered whether to continue.

"Go on, please," Simon said smoothly.

"Well, this woman told me that I was going to *meet* someone. A man. She said he would be tall, and dark, and he would be wearing a gray hat, a blue suit, and a—" She glanced at his button hole. "A tiger lily..."

"Really? She said all that?"

"Yes. And she said he would be a very interesting acquaintance." She fluttered her program notes before her flushed face. "It's ridiculous, isn't it? And yet, here you are."

"And did this astonishing woman also tell you this man's name?"

"No," Mrs. Palley giggled. "She couldn't do that."

"Ah. But I can." He picked up her small, white-gloved hand and pressed the kidskin to his lips. "Simon Napp, at your service," he said gallantly. "And you are?"

"Mrs. Palley. Mrs. *Genevieve* Palley. Oh, but there isn't any *Mr.* Palley," she said quickly. "He's been dead for years." And she

smiled a pleased smile that would have made her husband's body revolve in its grave.

The first hurdle had been easy, but Simon Napp was too wise in the game of love to be complacent. There were the usual rounds of tea-dates, theatre trips, a hansom ride around Central Park, and social calls in Mrs. Palley's Victorian living room. He handled the early phase of the courtship discreetly, because he knew there were higher hurdles ahead. For one thing, he was obviously ten years younger than the widow, and several million dollars poorer. The situation had all the classic signs of fortune-hunting, and he knew that Mrs. Palley (and her friends) were fully aware of it.

With this in mind, he paid another call on Wanda Wooley and her crystal ball.

"Well, well," she said dryly. "I really didn't expect to see you again, Mr. Napp."

"Ah. But you have been seeing Mrs. Palley, haven't you?"

"Yes. She's still a regular customer, although I admit that her visits are less frequent since she met you."

He smiled. "I have been keeping her rather busy, haven't I? But what I would like to know, Mrs. Wooley, is whether or not Mrs. Palley asks you to reveal answers to questions concerning me?"

"I didn't know the thousand dollars included a cross-examination, Mr. Napp."

"Let's say I'm willing to pay extra for that. Say another hundred?"

She frowned. "She asked me one question. She asked if you were going to propose marriage to her."

"And your answer was?"

"I said yes, of course."

"And how did dear Mrs. Palley react to that?"

"Not very well. Mrs. Palley doesn't believe she should ever marry again. She feels it would be disloyal to Charlie—her late husband."

Simon chewed a manicured fingernail. "Hm. Didn't she express any fondness at all for me?"

"Oh, yes. She said you were terribly attractive and all that. But as for marriage—" Mrs. Wooley folded her thin arms and smiled smugly. "I'm afraid it won't work, Mr. Napp."

"Perhaps you can *make* it work, Mrs. Wooley."

"I? How?"

Simon tapped his finger on the cloth-covered ball. "With this. Suppose you were to tell Mrs. Palley that she *is* going to marry me? And that she's going to be very, very happy?"

"I couldn't do that, Mr. Napp. That's not what the crystal says."

"You mean you *really* believe in this stuff?"

Mrs. Wooley bristled. "I told you before, Mr. Napp. I'm a business woman only of necessity. I'm a spiritualist first—"

"All right," Simon smiled thinly. "Then be a business woman. Would a business woman refuse two thousand dollars for one hour's work?"

Mrs. Wooley sighed. "No. She certainly wouldn't do that, Mr. Napp."

Every nook and cranny of Mrs. Palley's apartment was impregnated with Charlie's presence. He could tell by the furtive casting about of her eyes, that she continually sought forgiveness from her departed husband. But here, in Simon's flat with a tier of candles throwing crimson perfection on tired flesh and corny phrases, she was all but defenseless.

"Genevieve," he said, his face shadowing with seriousness, "these have been the most fullfilled moments of my life. I'm sure they've meant as much to you. That's why I'm going to ask you something that may come as a shock. Oh, I know I haven't much to offer. Except love, of course, a great love. But..."

"Oh don't." She stood quickly, leaving him in a cross-legged posture of panting love. Bewildered, Genevieve framed her face with her hands. "I think I know what you're going to say."

"I'm sure you do." Simon was behind her, his arms wrapped not too comfortably about her girth. His lips tracked moist dabs along her ear. "You knew me even before we met. There hasn't been a thought, or wish, or desire you haven't sensed. More than anything else in the world I want to marry you. Is that what you sensed just now?"

She whirled in his arms and he pulled her tight.

"This too," Genevieve said. "Mrs. Wooley predicted..."

"Darling, please!" Simon touched his agonized brow. Hurt, he went to the window. "I have never experienced so deep, so holy an emotion as my love for you. Do you think it's right to tell me Mrs. Wooley's predictions at a time when I want to hear *your* predictions about the future? Or am I some sort of game? An entertainment? A pretty configuration of tea leaves that will last only till you fill the cup again?"

Simon dabbed at his eyes. The storm had been so genuinely acted, it left his eyes stinging with strain if not with tears.

"It was such a curious thing and I had to tell you. Simon, dear, I'm sure I love you, but I'd grown used to the idea that I'd lived my life. It takes a great deal of time to think out..."

"And what about others? Do

you listen to them? Oh I don't mean Mrs. Wooley. I mean your friends. Surely they must think me—and I'll say it with utter frankness—nothing but some evil, unscrupulous fortune-hunter, a confidence man who—"

She silenced him with a finger on his lips, and he circled it with little kisses.

"Hush!" she said. "How can anyone know you the way I do?"

"What will become of us, Genevieve?" he asked gravely. "What is your answer?"

"Maybe Mrs. Wooley's prediction will come true. Maybe I *will* marry you, Simon. But..." The shadow of Charlie hovered once again. "I've got to be sure. My head must rule my heart. I've decided to spend a month abroad, Simon. At the end of that time, if I've reconciled all my doubts, then the answer will be yes. It's the only possible—"

"No!" Simon groaned. "You're condemning me to a month of torture!" Inwardly, he cursed her stubbornness.

"I didn't say 'no', did I?" Mrs. Palley said girlishly. "All I want is a little *time*. Don't you see, Simon?"

The shroud over Mrs. Wooley's crystal ball seemed to cloak the entire room. It seemed particularly dark, and Mrs. Wooley's face particularly blanched. She listened with clinical detachment as Simon outlined the newest development in his courtship.

"Once she's out of reach," he grumbled, "Charlie's ghost will become more real to her than the affection she'll have waiting for her when she comes back. I can't let that happen!"

"And there's something you believe *I* can do about it?" Mrs. Wooley asked.

Simon folded his arms. "Of course there is. You're more than her fortune-teller, Mrs. Wooley, you're her friend and advisor. She lives by the rulebook that you publish in that crystal ball of yours. Tell her not to make the trip. Tell her to marry me."

"I don't *tell* my clients anything, Mr. Napp. I merely describe what the future holds..."

"Mrs. Wooley, I'd like to make a prediction of my own. You are going to be richer by five thousand dollars, in exactly three minutes. Would you like to see that prediction come true?" He reached for the flat checkbook in his pocket. The woman watched him as he opened it, unscrewed the top of his fountain pen, and poised the point over the yellow strip of paper.

"Just make it out to cash," she said quietly.

When the telephone rang in his apartment, Simon took the receiv-

er lightly between his fingers, confident as to the caller, the message, and his own response. He was right on all counts. It was Mrs. Palley, telling him that she had changed her mind and wanted to see him right away. He said yes, my dear, of course. He would come quickly.

Half an hour later, his arms were encircling her plump shoulders.

"It's all so silly," she said, her voice muffled against his chest. "But when Mrs. Wooley told me that it would be *disastrous* to make that plane journey, I just couldn't go through with it. She said I would be throwing my life away. She spoke of a holocaust. Then it all seemed like *fate*. We just weren't *meant* to be separated, Simon, don't you see?"

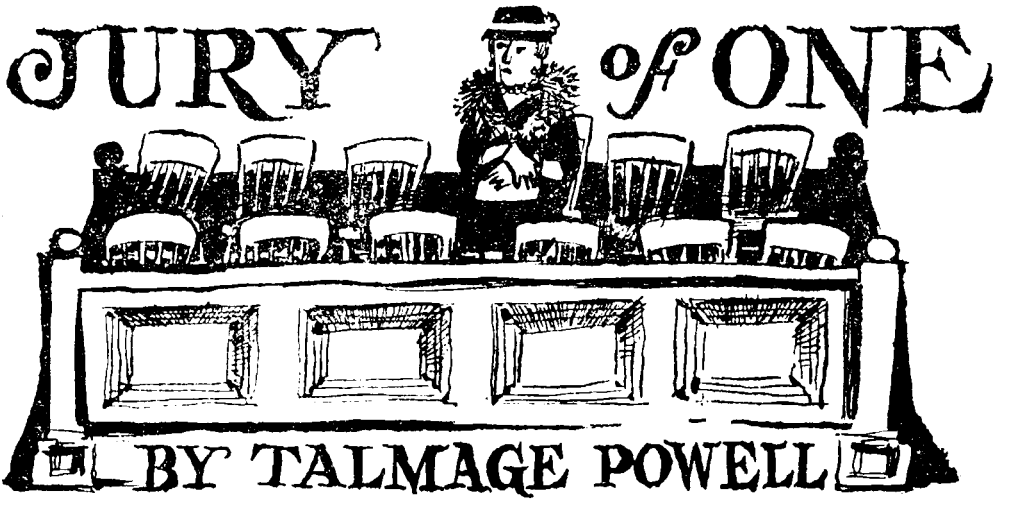
"Of course, darling," he said lugubriously. "I've been telling you that all along." He tilted her chin towards him. "Now listen to me," he said with mock sternness. "From now on, you do what Simon says. And for one thing, you're still going to make that European trip, only you're not going alone. We're getting married right away, and we'll honeymoon in Paris."

"But, Simon—"

"Now hush!" He kissed her quickly. "I've already called the airlines to double your reservation. We're traveling together, my dear, as man and wife."

She was still overwhelmed by his masculine domination when they were married in a private civil ceremony the next afternoon, and when they boarded the plane for the beginning of their honeymoon trip. Simon Napp had never been so contented in his life, and he felt genuine affection for his Genevieve as she snuggled up against him. He didn't think about Mrs. Wooley until they were well over the Atlantic, and then the thought of what a shrewd little article she was made him chuckle to himself. He stopped chuckling, however, as he looked out of the window and saw the first and second propellers revolve slower and slower, and finally halt.

There is nothing quite like an all-woman jury. The recipes that are exchanged behind the locked doors of the jury room are exceeded only by talk of who was wearing what in the courtroom. The defendant has nothing to fear.



I knew right away that the district attorney wanted this Mrs. Clevenger on the jury.

Pretending to listen to my lawyer question a prospective male juror, the D. A. studied Mrs. Clevenger, sized her up out of the corner of his eye.

There was a dryness in my throat, a fluttering in my stomach —I was on trial for my life. Murder was a capital crime in this state, and they didn't use anything merciful and clean like a gas chamber. They made you take that last long walk and sit down in a chair wired for death.

It was a nice spring day. The tall windows of the vaulted courtroom were open, letting in a soft, lazy breeze. Speaking quietly and without hurry, the lawyers had been going about the business of picking a jury for a day and a half. The fat, bald judge looked sleepy, as if his thoughts were of trout streams. The whole thing so far had been casual, almost informal. I wondered, considering the difference this day and half had made inside of me, if I was going to be able to sit through the whole trial without screaming and making a break for one of the windows.

To get my mind off myself, I swiveled my head enough to take a new look at Mrs. Clevenger.

She was well into middle age, her armor of girdles and corsets reminding me of a concrete pillbox. Her clothing, jewels, and the mink neckpiece draped carelessly over the arm of her chair all added up to a big dollar sign.

I looked at the heavy, blunt outlines of her face which even the services of an expensive cosmetician had failed to soften. You didn't have to know her; just looking at her would tell you she was rich, arrogant, selfish, merciless. Nothing, quite obviously, mattered to Mrs. Clevenger, except Mrs. Clevenger. And as she cast a passing glance in my direction, her eyes were beady and cold. There was no doubt about her being the kind of person who would have her way, no matter what.

I didn't like the way she glanced at me, but the D. A. did. He was the sort who could impress women easing past their prime. He had a tall, rangy, athletic build, a rugged face, sandy hair worn in a crew cut. He'd spotted Mrs. Clevenger already as the key juror, the one he would turn those open, warm, brown eyes on, the one he'd address his quiet, reasonable remarks to—if she were chosen. Win her, and he would have the jury. Win her, and the rest of the jury might as well try to move a mountain.

My lawyer finished his examination of the male juror. "He's acceptable to us. Your Honor," he said.

The judge stifled a yawn, nodded, plunked indolently with his gavel, and told the juror to step down.

Mrs. Clevenger was the next one to be up for examination. Mentally, I squirmed to the edge of my seat.

My lawyer came to the defense counsel table. His name was Cyril Abbott. His given name fitted him very well, perfectly. He was lanky, had a thin face which made his nose look like a big afterthought, carelessly stuck between drooping lips and narrow eyes. A gray thatch of unruly hair completed the rube picture. But if you looked closely into his eyes, you saw he was a tough old fox with wisdom garnered from countless legal battles.

As he shuffled some papers, Cyril Abbott said, "How you feeling, Taylor?"

"Not so good," I said.

"Relax. Everything's under control so far."

"It's getting Clevenger on the jury that's got me worried," I said.

I was more worried on that point than I was about the witness.

The witness had been one of those fluke things. The killing had looked perfectly routine, just another job, though a little out of my usual line.

It was the only time I'd taken

on anything outside the Syndicate. I'd been with the Syndicate quite a number of years. I guess I'd grown to take the job for granted. I was never touched by the law. Few professionals are. We're given an assignment, flown into a strange city. Our man is pointed out to us. We choose an immediate time and place. We perform our service and are whisked out of town.

The Len Doty job had seemed simple. A scrawny, down-at-the-heels crook, he'd arrived here recently and taken up residence in a fourth rate hotel.

I'd studied Doty's movements for two days. A thin, harried, nervous man, he'd seemed to have a lot on his mind. He'd been under a strain, as if something big was imminent in his life.

I was the imminent something, only he didn't know it.

I'd tried to approach this job with the same lack of feeling I had on Syndicate jobs. But here I'd been doing my own planning, and not enjoying the security you had when you were a cog in a huge machine.

By the end of the two days, I knew I had to get the job done. I was feeling a growing nervousness. I didn't go for solitude. I wanted to be back in the big town, having a drink with men I knew or stepping out with a particular woman who was gaga over *my* tall, dark ranginess.

I'd kept the thought of fifteen grand—what Doty was worth dead—in the front of my mind. What could go wrong? It was the same as all the others, nothing to connect me with Doty. He'd die, and I'd disappear. The case would eventually slip into the local police department's unsolved file. There may be no perfect crimes, but the records are full of unsolved ones, and the record was good enough for me.

I decided on the time and place. Both nights, late, Doty went from his flea-bag hotel to a greasy spoon far down on the corner for a snack before retiring.

The block was long and dark, with an alley at its midpoint connecting the street with one that ran parallel to it. It's always wise to choose an alley that's open at both ends.

The parallel street was a slum section artery, crowded with juke joints, penny arcades, hash houses. In short, the kind of street to swallow a man up.

I knew the Syndicate big-shots had a rule of planning they tried never to break. Keep it simple.

I kept it simple. The plan was to shoot Doty with a silenced gun in the alley, walk to a garbage can, ditch the unregistered, wiped-clean gun, continue to the crowded street of joints, mingle, catch a city bus to the downtown area. There, I'd return to the good hotel where I'd registered under an

alias, take a cab to the airport, and return to the big city fifteen grand richer.

Doty came from his hotel at the expected time. In the mouth of the alley, I listened to his footsteps on the dark street.

When he came abreast of the alley, I said, "Doty."

He stopped.

"Come here," I said, "I want to talk to you." I let him glimpse the gun.

He began to shake. He looked around frantically.

I pushed him twenty feet into the alley. He pleaded for his life.

The sound of the gun was a balloon popping. Doty's knees gave way, and he fell dead.

At that moment, the witness had screamed, long and loud as only a frizzy-headed blonde, in cheap clothes and makeup, can scream. She and her boy friend had decided on the alley as a short cut from one of the amusement places on the parallel street to the tenement where she lived.

Her boy friend was having none of it. He took off on the instant. The girl was right behind him, but just the same she'd glimpsed my face.

Two more balloons had popped in the alley, but in the darkness the shooting was bad. I'd missed her. Then I'd violated another Syndicate rule. I'd panicked—run straight out of the alley almost into the arms of a beat cop who'd heard the screams and was charging up for a look-see.

The cop was no sitting duck. He was big and fast—and armed.

I dropped the silenced pistol and held both my hands up as high as they'd go.

The Syndicate of course had never heard of me. I'd put myself out on the limb. Still, I had dough to hire Cyril Abbott. First day he'd come to jail to see me, he'd asked how much the job had paid. I'd had sense enough to say ten grand. He'd taken the whole ten and told me not to worry.

It was like telling me not to breathe. Maybe a lawyer as foxy as Abbott could cast some doubt on the blonde's testimony. After all, the alley had been pretty dark. I'd faced the street glow only briefly. And everything had happened awfully fast.

The big question—to me—was whether or not this overbearing old lady Clevenger qualified to sit on the jury.

The D. A. buttered her up with those boyish, friendly brown eyes. "Your name please?"

"Mrs. Clarissa Butterworth Clevenger."

"You're an American citizen?"

"Of course."

"Do you have any moral or religious convictions against capital punishment which would disqualify you to sit on a jury in a capital case in this state?"

"None whatever, young man."

I reached for a handkerchief to wipe my face. In my mind I reviewed what little I'd heard of Mrs. Clarissa Butterworth Clevenger. She had lived here twenty years, meeting and marrying one of the town's leading citizens when he was on a Florida vacation. Abbott had mentioned that she'd been boldly, strikingly beautiful in those days, before time, luxury, and her inner self broadened the beam and altered the surface. Her husband had been fifteen years her senior. Three years ago he'd died in a private hospital after a long illness.

The D. A. gave her a considerate smile that silently said he disliked putting a lady of her position through a nonsensical routine. "Do you have any opinions already formed regarding this case, Mrs. Clevenger?"

"None."

"Do you know the defendant, Max Taylor?"

She looked down her nose at the D. A. "Hardly."

"Of course. But this is all necessary, Mrs. Clevenger."

"I quite understand. Get on with it, young man."

"I think we need go no further," the D. A. said. He turned toward the judge. "Your Honor, we find the juror acceptable."

The judge nodded. "Counsel for the defense may question the juror."

Cyril Abbott shuffled a few steps toward the Bench. He stood with that country bumpkin slump and scratched his gray tangle. "Your Honor, I guess the District Attorney has asked the important questions. I don't see any grounds for disqualification of the juror. The Defense accepts her."

I stared at Abbott's slouching back for a moment. Then I sagged in my chair and let a hard-held breath break from my lungs.

As Abbott turned to face me, I'm sure he controlled an urge to wink. For a second I was almost sorry I'd lied to him, hadn't given him the whole fifteen grand.

I don't know what Mrs. Clevenger was before she married old man Clevenger, when he made that trip to a dazzling vacationland in a tropical clime. I don't know what Len Doty had on her when he came looming out of her past. It must have been plenty to cause her to spend a young fortune seeking out a trustworthy name—my name—and making the arrangements to get rid of him.

I'd never know that part of it, and I didn't care. I did know that there was only one thing she could do now, if she didn't want me singing my head off.

I knew how great it was going to be, getting back to the city and telling the boys how I'd been tried with my own client on the jury.

Our hero, Ruby Martinson, writhes again. In dire danger of going honest, he fights bravely to be the crook he once was, a crook admired and generally revered. We can in truth say, here is the courage that has made America precisely what it is.

Ruby Martinson's Bank Job

by Henry Slesar

MY cousin, Ruby Martinson, kept me in a constant state of astonishment during my growing-up years, and to this day I blame him for the slightly popeyed expression I wear. It wasn't merely his criminal activities that produced this astonishment; after awhile, I became quite inured to the idea that I was keeping company with the Greatest Criminal Brain of the Century. What never failed to glaze me, however, was the fact that he persisted to scheme his schemes and commit his hideous crimes, even though he never made any Money at it. And Money, after all, is the goal of the Criminal as well as the Businessman. As an accountant, Ruby must have known that, but it never seemed to bother him.

Never, that is, until one memorable period in his career, when he went through a phase I think of as the Great Depression. (I know there was another Great Depression in the country, but it wasn't nearly as impressive to me as Ruby's.)

It's hard to know just when the mood set in, but for me, it began on a Thursday evening, when I rendezvoused with the World's Foremost Fiend at Hector's Cafeteria on Broadway. I was fresh from a relaxing day in the garment district, in which I delivered fourteen spools of thread in seven hours, and Ruby had

come from the office of the accounting firm where he worked. Now I would never think of delivering thread after hours. But when I walked into Hector's, what do you suppose Ruby was doing? He was sitting at the table, his elbow jostling his coffee and danish, his tiny freckled face intent over a column of figures. I knew better than to interrupt his mathematical labors, and sat down quietly to await the conclusion. When it came, Ruby looked up at me with melancholy eyes behind his big eyeglasses and spoke with bitterness.

"Eight hundred and sixty-five dollars and ninety-five cents," he said. "How do you like that?"

"How do I like what?"

"That's the dough I've lost already. On these lousy capers of mine. If I could only go straight, I'd save money."

"Go straight?" I said, or shouted rather, in a voice loud enough to turn heads. Ruby promptly kicked my ankle, and I dropped my voice down to a throbbing whisper. "You really mean it, Ruby? You're thinking of giving up Crime?"

I don't know why I was shocked. Time after time, I'd hoped that Ruby would reform, mostly so that I would no longer have to get involved in his devious and risky schemes. But now that he was actually citing the possibility, I felt as if my world was falling to small, crumbly pieces.

"Why shouldn't I give it up?" he said morosely. "No matter what I try, I end up losing money. I try a hold-up, and I don't make the price of the gun. Burglary, and I don't make the taxi fare it took to get me there. It just ain't good business, that's all I'm saying. Smartest thing I could do is just give the whole thing up."

"Gee, Ruby what about all those great plans you had? That big R.H.Macy holdup? Stuff like that?"

He snorted into his coffee. "Big plans! If I could only show a profit once, just *once,* I'd be happy. Just one last caper. And if I have to take another loss..."

It sounded like Ruby was handing himself an ultimatum, and I waited breathlessly while he chewed, swallowed, and digested his thoughts and his danish, speculating on what diabolic new felony he had in mind. But I was to be disappointed, because Ruby wasn't ready to announce his decision. As a matter of fact, I had to wait almost three agonizing weeks before I found out. I was in such a state of anxiety that my work suffered. I wasn't even a good thread-deliverer. And what could be worse than that?

Then it came. Ruby, unable to reach me at work, telephoned my house one Friday morning and

spoke to my mother, telling her to inform me to meet him at Hector's *without fail* on Saturday noon. My mother, who always thought that Ruby Martinson was the cleanest-living boy in the United States, passed on the message with a smile of pleasure. Little did she know that the rendezvous would turn her son into a bank robber.

In the cafeteria, Ruby was busy with pencil and paper again, only this time, I knew it was no accounting homework. He didn't let me see what he was writing until he made his whispered announcement.

"Kid," he said. "We're knocking off a bank."

"Who? What?" I squeaked. "What are you, crazy?"

"Keep your voice down. This Monday, we're knocking off the Dime Savings Bank. Don't give me any arguments. I got it all figured out, and it's as easy as mailing a letter. We ought to clean up a few grand at least. Cut out the fidgeting. You want people to notice?"

Fidgeting was putting it mildly. My eye was twitching, my foot was jerking, my stomach was turning, and a back tooth was throbbing. I mean, holdups, burglaries, con games—all right. But bank robbery? Not only that, it was my *own* bank he wanted to rob.

I told him that first. "That's my own bank, Ruby," I gulped. "We can't rob my own bank!"

"What do you mean, your bank? You a stockholder or something? Or a big depositer?"

I couldn't answer the question. I had one dollar in the savings account, and the Dime Savings had put it there as part of a promotion for new depositors. But it wasn't loyalty that bothered me; it was the magnitude of the scheme.

"Ruby, we can't do that," I protested feebly. "It's such a *big* bank. We can't hold up all those people. We don't even have any guns. Or a getaway car. I mean, you need a big *gang* to hold up a bank like that."

He chuckled like Jack LaRue. "Wise up, kid, wise up. I'm not planning any *ordinary* stickup. That's for an organization, not for guys like us. No, we're gonna do it the easy way. No muss, no fuss. And no rods. All we need is *this.*"

Now he handed me the paper. I read it.

MY PARTNER HAS A GUN POINTED AT YOUR HEAD. HAND OVER ALL YOUR CASH OR YOU DIE. I MEAN THIS. DON'T TRY ANY TRICKS.

For a wild moment, I thought he intended the note for me. Then I realized that it was meant as a billet-doux for some innocent bank

teller. In a flash, I saw the whole grim scene, but I pretended that I didn't understand, hoping, I suppose, that Ruby would decide that I was just too dumb to be the Partner.

"What do you mean you don't understand?" he growled. "It's a cinch, you jerk. You just step up to the teller's cage with this note in your hand. You pass it through the window, just like it was a deposit slip or something. The teller sees it, figures he's on the spot, hands over the dough. You take it, walk off, and that's all there is to it."

I never heard a speech with so many "You's" in it, and I didn't like any of them.

"What do you mean, *me?*" I said, in a voice like Bobby Breen. "How do you mean *me,* Ruby?"

"Because you're the guy that's gonna do it," he answered reasonably. "I mean, they know me at that bank; so it's the only way. But don't worry. I'll be right there, at one of the counters."

"They know *you?* What about me? It's *my* bank, too."

"You ever been there? I mean inside?"

"Not exactly. Wait a minute, yes! I went in once to get a calendar."

Ruby sneered. "Don't worry, you won't be recognized. It'll be the easiest dough you ever made in your life, kid, take my word for it."

"But why can't *I* stay at the counter? Or why can't we pick *another* bank? I mean, it's all the same money, isn't it?"

"I don't *know* nothin' about other banks. But this one I know like the palm of my hand. I even got the teller all picked out, a teller that won't give out one little peep. That's the most important thing."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Listen, I been doing business with this dame for years. She's scared of her own shadow. I even asked her once about bank robbers, and she went green just *talking* about it."

I was going green myself, but that probably just made Ruby think about money.

"I won't do it?" I said, adding a faint question mark.

"Sure you will," Ruby said confidently. "You'll just take the money, like it was a withdrawal, and stroll out of the bank. Then you head around the corner and duck into a cigar store. But don't worry about the details. I'll fill you in later." He set his mouth grimly. "It's *gotta* work, kid, understand? This one's gotta work!"

"Ruby," I said. "Please don't make me do this."

But he wasn't listening. "If I lose money on this caper," he muttered, "I'm really through. If I don't show a profit this time, I give up Crime forever. That's all there is to it."

"Ruby—"

"Monday at two-thirty, kid," he said. "Now let's talk about the set-up." And moistening the tip of his pencil, he started drawing diagrams on Hector's napkins.

I have an uncle who woke up one day with irresistible desire to shoot a horse. They still keep him locked up in a funny house, and my mother never got over it. It was a lucky thing for me that she didn't notice my behavior for the rest of that weekend. For one thing, I did a lot of talking to myself. I kept telling myself that I had nothing to worry about, that Ruby was too clever to let anything go really wrong. Then I started daydreaming about what prison life might be like. I wondered if I could get a nice clean job in the prison library. Then I began to worry about getting forced into a prison break against my will, hugging the stone wall while the spotlights danced around my feet, the tommy-guns on the parapets going rat-ta-tat. *You dirty screws!* I screamed, shaking my fists at the grinning guards. All this happened while I was *awake,* mind you; I hate to tell you what my *dreams* were like.

On Monday morning, I hopped out of bed and immediately took my temperature, hoping that the thermometer would read about a hundred and ten. No such luck. I dressed slowly, and then tried to eat breakfast. I wasn't very hungry, and my mother inquired if I wasn't feeling well. She put her hand on my forehead to see if I had a fever, but I was in a position to tell her that I didn't. Come to think of it, my mother was always putting her hand on people's foreheads. When I was a little kid, and brought home a friend to meet her, she wouldn't shake his hand—she'd put her palm on his forehead. Even when I brought home a dog one day, she kept feeling its head. I guess it's a kind of complex with mothers.

When I left the house, I had a little trouble finding the note that Ruby had written for the bank teller, and I didn't need Sigmund Freud to tell me why. I didn't *want* to find the thing. Unfortunately, I saw the white slip of paper under a book on the countertop in the kitchen. I stuck it into my pocket and went off to deliver thread and rob a bank.

I had a bad morning. There were thirty spools that had to be delivered to six different firms in the garment district, and it was a miracle that the orders weren't scrambled. At twelve-thirty, I met Ruby on the corner of Forty-Fifth Street and Seventh Avenue, and we slinked, dodged, ducked, and detoured through the milling lunch crowds. Ruby acted so guilty that I expected us to be ap-

prehended at any moment. As a matter of fact, a traffic cop yelled something at me while I was crossing the street, and I was all ready to throw my hands into the air and surrender. Of course, all he was saying was for me to get back on the curb, but I would have welcomed arrest.

Then we were at the door of the bank.

"Relax," Ruby kept saying. "Just relax, kid. Act casual. Act *normal,* for pete's sake."

I grinned ferociously and rolled my eyes, in what I meant to be a normal expression, and he punched my arm.

"Cut that out," he growled. "I said normal, not crazy. Just remember—you're only going in to make a withdrawal. You're just a customer."

"I got a toothache," I whimpered. "My tongue hurts, Ruby. I got a stiff neck."

"Go on," he said, pushing me through the revolving doors.

I had forgotten what a forbidding place the Dime Savings Bank was, a sort of financial Taj Mahal. Everything was marble from floor to ceiling; even the counters were solid chunks of marble atop chunky marble pedestals. There was a marble-faced bank guard approximately fourteen feet tall and nine feet wide stationed at the far end of the room, guarding the entrance to the area where the bank executives foreclosed mortgages, or did whatever they did. Ruby promptly left me to my own devices once we were inside, and headed for a counter where the forms were arranged in neat compartments. He went busily to work with one of the bank's stubby pens, probably practicing his forgery, and I went in a dreamlike trance towards the first window, with its brass plaque and its nervous teller.

There were four people on the line ahead of me, and I wondered how they would react to the knowledge that there was a desperate criminal behind them, fingering the threatening note in his pocket. I caught a look at Ruby while I was waiting for my turn, and he was blissfully scratching away at a deposit slip. I began to feel resentful at the easy part he was playing, and my resentment helped erase some of the nervousness. By the time I reached the window, I was ready to take out some of my ire on the gawky, frizzy-haired blonde who was shuffling money around like a deck of cards.

The name on the plaque was MISS LASTVOGEL. Just as I stepped up to the cage, she flipped it over and it read NEXT WINDOW. I bleated something, and she said: "Oh, it's all right, I'll take you." I smiled in gratitude. What a nice person, I thought. "Well?" Miss Lastvogel said. I blinked at her, and then remembered the note in

my pocket. I took it out and shoved it at her. She looked at it cross-eyed for a second, and then picked it up. When she looked back at me, I grinned like an idiot. "What's this?" she said. I just kept grinning, looking at her homely face with a kind of silly affection. She had the biggest teeth I ever saw. "Would you mind telling me what this is?" she said again, sharply.

That snapped me out of the nutsy mood I was in. I swallowed hard, and tried to make my voice tough.

"You can read, can't you?" I said, in the key of C. "Do what the note says."

"You must be crazy." She shook her head, and shoved the note back at me. She didn't look nervous at all, not at all like Ruby had described. As a matter of fact, she was calm as they come.

"Wait a minute," I said, shoving the note back at her. She promptly shoved it back, and it became a kind of game. Back and forth, back and forth. Finally, she pursed her lips over her gigantic teeth and said: "Listen, if you don't cut that out I'll call the guard."

That did it. I grabbed the note, shoved it in my pocket, and backed off from the window. She watched me with blazing eyes, but she didn't call the guard. Then I wheeled around and went at quick-march towards the door, not even caring if Ruby was following. But he was.

"What happened? What happened?" he said frantically, grabbing my elbow and propelling me along the street at about eighty miles an hour. "What'd you do, you dope? What happened?"

"I don't know," I blubbered. "Honest, Ruby, I did just what you told me—"

"You jerk!" he whispered hoarsely. "You stupid jerk! How could you louse it up? How?"

"I swear I don't know, Ruby! I gave her the note and everything. She just gave it back!" I pulled it out of my pocket and waved it in the air. Ruby swept it out of my hand, looked at it, and bellowed like a foghorn. "What's wrong?" I squeaked. "What's the matter, Ruby?"

"You dope! *This* ain't the note!"

"Not the note?"

We had stopped in front of a store a block from the bank, and Ruby shoved the piece of paper under my nose.

"Read it! *Just read it!*"

I read it. It said, *"Three bottles of hom. milk, one cont. heavy cream, two cont. light cream, one choc. milk, two doz. eggs Grad A., white please."* Then I looked up at Ruby. "It's not the note," I said, agreeing with him. "You know what I think? I think it's the note my mother wrote for the milkman."

"Clever," Ruby said, patting my shoulder. "You figured it out, huh?"

"Yeah. I mean, you just read that note, Ruby. See what it says about milk and stuff? My mother wrote that for the milkman, only I thought it was the note you wrote for me—"

"Brilliant," Ruby nodded. "You catch on real fast, kid. I'm proud of you."

I didn't act pleased, because somehow I sensed that he was being ironic.

"You see what happened?" I said, smiling pleasantly. "I got all these memo pads from the thread company, and you wrote the note on the same kind of paper, and my mother, she uses the paper for—gee, Ruby, you're hurting my arm."

"Go away," Ruby said, his eyes closed.

"What's that?"

"Go away, kid. Just beat it. Scram. I don't want to talk about it anymore."

"Gee, Ruby, I'm sorry. But we could always write *another* note—"

"Never mind. I'm cold on the caper, understand? I been casing that bank for three weeks, and now you've loused it up for good. Just go away, will ya?"

"Aw, Ruby, don't act like that! I mean, we didn't actually *lose* anything this time, did we? I mean, it's not as if you had a *loss* or anything. Come off it."

He didn't answer me. But I saw something in his eyes that I had never expected to see in Ruby Martinson's expression—the dull glow of oncoming honesty.

I went home hangdog, depressed, and weary. My mother greeted me with the hand-on-the-forehead routine, and when I finally convinced her that I was merely tired, she agreed to let me alone. I went into the bedroom, and flopped across the bed. I read a comic book for twenty minutes, but I was in such a state, it began to be heavy reading. All I could think about was how empty life was going to be without Ruby Martinson's Hideous Crimes.

At six-thirty, my mother called me out to dinner. I came, but with a small appetite. I sat at the table and listlessly spooned some chicken soup. I was on my fourth listless spoonful when my mother said:

"You know, the funniest thing happened today. You know that milkman, the big fat one?"

"Milkman?" I gulped.

"Yeah, the milkman, you know him. I think he's funny in the head, if you ask me. You know what happened today? I heard him coming to the door, and then I don't hear a thing. Not even a bottle rattling. The next thing I knew, something is going clunk

on the floor, and he's running away downstairs. So I open the door, and what do you suppose he did, that nut? Not one bottle of milk does he leave, not even a drop. But on the floor, there's four dollars and sixty-five cents. Right on the floor! Can you imagine such a thing?"

"Four dollars and sixty-five cents?" I said.

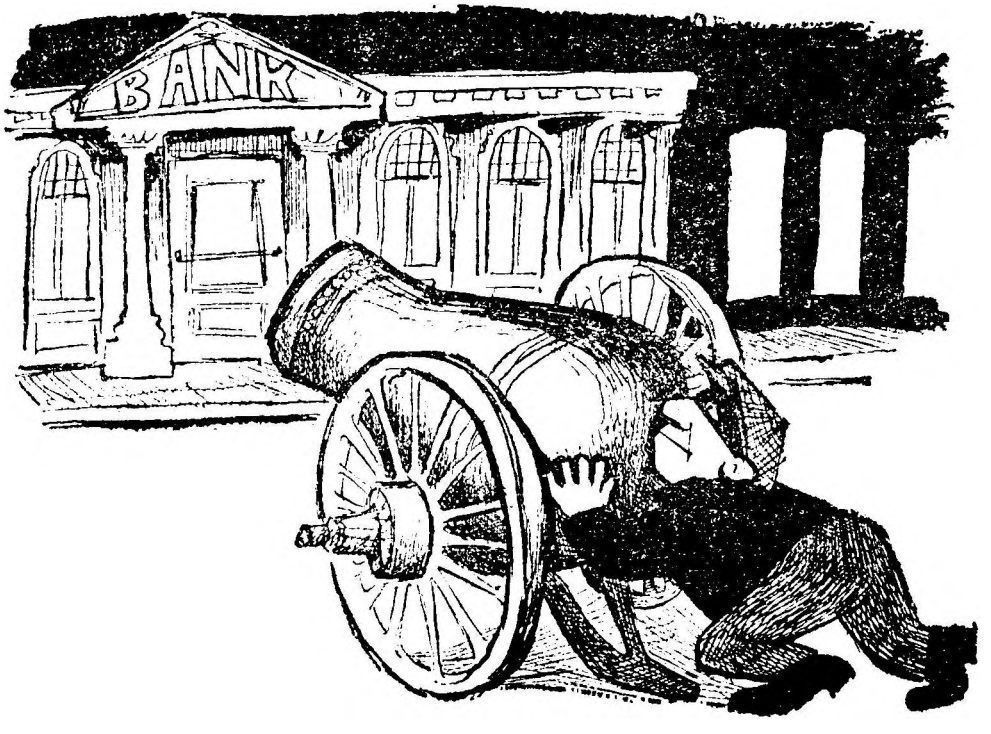
"Yes! What do you make of such a thing?"

The light dawned.

"Ma," I said slowly. "Ma, did you leave the milkman a note this morning?"

"Don't I always?"

I got out of my chair so fast that I spilled my soup. My mother shouted in indignation, but I couldn't stop to apologize. I had something far more important to do than eat chicken soup: I had to call Ruby Martinson, and tell him about the surprise increment from our bank caper. Sure, it was only four dollars and sixty-five cents, but it was a *profit,* so what else mattered? That's how Ruby saw it, too, and I was never so relieved in my life. Of course, I gave the milkman back his money and told him it was all an innocent prank. I gave Ruby my own money, but to this day, Ruby still thinks that he earned it the legitimate way—through crime.



IN A TRANQUIL

BY WILLIAM O'FARRELL

GEORGE and Audrey Wallace were living at the *Casa Tranquila* at the time she killed him. This establishment comprised six four-room apartments, but it was not an apartment house. The living units were built of adobe-colored stucco and were grouped around a patio which contained a fountain, a few poinsettia bushes and two palm trees, and this suggested the glorified Southern California tenement known as a bungalow court. But the exquisitely furnished, separate small houses could never be called bungalows, and under Mrs. Cassidy's owner-management no babies, pets or other disturbances were allowed. The whole thing was enclosed by

Our locale is California, an area known for its oranges. Murders, according to the California Chamber of Commerce, also do quite well there—thriving as they do on an unusual emotional climate.

HOUSE

an adobe-type wall and set far back from a broad avenue in an excellent residential district. Mrs. Cassidy asked for and received high rentals. She was very deaf. The night of the murder she didn't even hear the shot.

Fern Price heard it, however, and since George Wallace had left her apartment only three minutes before—by the back door and with the intention of walking around to come in innocently through the patio—she had an instant and horrible premonition of what had happened. She ran out her front door and past the fountain to the French windows opening on the Wallaces' dining room. She found George there, lying on the little stoop before the windows. He was dead.

Fern's knees turned to water. Billie Middleton came running across the patio just in time to catch her, hold her up. Billie was Fern's friend and admirer, a younger woman who lived in one of the apartments toward the rear.

"Oh my God, Fern! Was it Audrey? Did Audrey do it?" Her whisper was less shocked than excited.

Fern nodded weakly. "She warned me. I didn't believe her. Neither of us did."

"Well, come on," Billie said. "We'll have to call somebody—the police."

As it turned out, that wasn't necessary. They both heard Audrey Wallace at that moment. She sounded hysterical, but she was already talking away on the telephone.

"Hurry! There was a burglar and—and I shot him! I didn't mean to." She managed to stammer her name and address. "I'm afraid to look but—he fell down. He isn't moving. Bring a doctor, quick!"

Fern's knees gave way again, but somehow Billie got her friend across the patio and back to her apartment, where she fell into a chair. Fern's teeth were chattering as though with cold. She was shivering so that she could hardly speak.

"She was lying, Billie! I tell you she was lying! She didn't mistake George for any burglar. He was

here with me all evening, and she knew it. She was waiting for him. She knew when he'd be coming home!"

"Take it easy, honey." Fern had tried to struggle to her feet, and Billie gently pushed her back into the chair. "You're right, of course. She murdered him."

"Well, she's not going to get away with it. I'll see to that!"

"I hope you do," Billy said. "I detest that Audrey Wallace. I'd like to see her get what's coming to her."

She was standing with her back to the fireplace. On the mantel was a silver-framed picture of a man. He was Fern's husband, Jimmy Price, and he had a fat, round, porcine face. Fern inadvertently glanced at the photograph as she turned to Billie. She shuddered. Jimmy was in Seattle, but he would be coming home next week.

"It'll mean a lot of bad publicity, and Jimmy will be furious —but that simply can't be helped. Poor George! I owe him that much." Fern's eyes brightened with a pleasurable thought. "And you never can tell about publicity. There's just a chance that it might put me back in pictures, or in television." She got up, suddenly recovered from her shock. "But I won't volunteer any information. That would make me seem too eager. The police will be more ready to believe me, if they have to work for all that they get."

It was the kind of case Lieutenant Grant disliked. He did not know whether or not Audrey Wallace was telling the truth, and he had no way of finding out. Her grief seemed genuine, and her stunned reaction when she had learned that she'd killed not a burglar but her own husband had been everything that might have been expected from an innocent woman. One thing he did know: the odds were against her ever being convicted. She told a slightly hysterical but straightforward story. No jury would entirely disbelieve it. No one—particularly no man—would find her Guilty, seeing in his mind that graceful neck drawn back in involuntary terrified protest, those delicate nostrils struggling to close against the cyanide fumes which would be the result of a verdict Guilty. Nevertheless, Grant had a job to do.

"Where was Mr. Wallace coming from?" he asked.

She shook her head, avoiding the strain of speech.

"You don't know where he spent the evening?"

"He didn't tell me. He—just went out."

She was sitting on the couch and Grant had been speaking across a coffee table from an easy chair. He got up, frowning.

"I know this is hard on you, Mrs. Wallace, but I'd like you to tell me everything that happened one more time. I'm not quite straight on why you thought it was a burglar."

"There's been one in the neighborhood," she said. "Everybody knew about it. He's robbed at least three houses. A few nights ago he tied and gagged a woman. You must have heard—"

"I did. Don't get excited, Mrs. Wallace." Her voice, starting low, had quickly risen to the breaking point. "Just tell it slowly."

She nodded, tried again. "The gun belonged to George. He got it out when he first heard about the burglar. It was lying on the dresser in the bedroom. The noise wakened me—it was a sort of scraping sound, and very close. I was frightened. I picked up the revolver and went into the dining room. A man—I saw him only as a shadow—was pushing the French windows open. I asked him what he wanted, but he didn't answer. I told him that I had a gun, but the windows kept on opening. Then the gun went off and he fell down, and I came in here and called the police." She paused, unable for a moment to go on. "That's all, Lieutenant. The gun went off, although I don't remember pulling the trigger or aiming it. I killed my husband—and I didn't even know that until you told me so."

The last words were so low that Grant could hardly hear them. The woman was exhausted. He hated to go on.

"Just a few more questions, Mrs. Wallace. Were the French windows locked?"

"I thought they were. George always locks them before dinner. I know that they were closed."

"You spoke to him. Is it possible he didn't hear you?"

"I—I can't be sure. He didn't answer, but I got the impression that he'd heard."

"Mr. Wallace had a good business and I understand he owned a lot of real estate. You sold your home recently and you're only living here until you've finished building a bigger house. Will anyone inherit beside yourself?"

Audrey Wallace's eyes met his in quick alarm. Her hand went to her throat. "You think—" she started to say, and then was silent. A moment passed before she spoke again. "I'd better not answer that question, Lieutenant. Until I've seen my attorney I shan't say another word."

Ben Tracy came in. Grant had sent him to do some preliminary questioning of the other tenants. He and Ben were the only members of the force still on the premises. The body had been removed. The Medical Examiner, the photographer, all the other specialists had gone home.

"Six apartments, Lieutenant—

two vacancies," Ben said. "Landlady lives in one of the rear ones. She's deaf, didn't even know there'd been a killing. Then there's a couple named Benson. They got their hi-fi turned up loud and didn't hear a thing. That leaves us with a girl named Wilhemina Middleton, unmarried, and a Mrs. Price. Remember Fern Costello? That's who Mrs. Price used to be. Middleton's over in the Price apartment—the husband's away on a business trip—and she says both of them heard the shot. They ran over, saw the body and Mrs. Price started to faint. The Middleton girl got her back to her apartment, put her to bed. That's where she is now."

"What's *she* say?"

"Nothing yet. According to Middleton, she took it pretty hard. Seems she was the first to see the body. She knew George Wallace pretty well..."

The words twanged through Audrey's head as though they had been plucked on the tightened string of a violin. Fern knew George Wallace pretty well, all right. She'd known him very well. It was because of Fern that George had humiliated Audrey so cruelly. A man who asks his wife for a divorce, because he wants another woman, is taking chances with his life.

Audrey hadn't murdered George. Not really. A stranger had done that, a woman insane with shame and rage whom Audrey didn't know existed until she'd taken possession of her body just long enough to aim the gun and pull the trigger. Now that woman had gone back into the nothingness from which she'd come. She'd taken George with her and Audrey had been left to follow. Audrey knew that she would follow them, and soon.

There was nothing to be gained by self-delusion. Fern would talk. Nothing could prevent Fern from telling Lieutenant Grant about the phone call Audrey had made that evening. The lieutenant would produce a pair of handcuffs and Audrey would be on her way.

But not tonight! She needed one more night. She had to be at the drug store when it opened in the morning. There was a prescription that simply must be filled.

If only she hadn't lost her head and made that phone call...

"Fern? This is Audrey Price. Let me speak to my husband."

"George isn't here, Audrey."

"Please don't lie! The curtains at your window aren't quite drawn. I looked through them a minute ago. Now call George to the phone."

"Audrey, I don't care what you imagined you saw. George isn't

here, and if he were here he wouldn't want to talk to you. Can't you get it through your head that he loves *me*?"

"Then give him a message. Tell him not to bother coming home. Tell him that if he does come home I'll kill him! I—"

Click. The connection was broken. *Click*. Another connection would be broken very soon.

But not *their* way, dear God! Let it be my way, *please!* Don't let them put their hands on me...

Lieutenant Grant said, "We're going over to talk to Mrs. Price now, Mrs. Wallace. You'll have to come to the station house and sign a statement—but that can wait until the morning, I suppose." He spoke slowly, as though he were not quite certain he was doing the right thing.

The other detective was even more uncertain. He was frowning. "Lieutenant, don't you think—?"

"It'll be all right, Ben. Come along," the lieutenant said.

They went out. Audrey hurried to the hall closet, got a light coat and put it on. She got her bag from the bedroom, returned to the living room, turned off the lights. She crossed to the window and looked out.

The two detectives were at the front door of Fern's apartment. It was open. They were talking to Billie Middleton who had opened it, and in an instant they would go inside. The door would shut. But after a few minutes it would open again, quickly. The detectives would come across the patio to her own apartment, come pounding at her door.

But she would not be here. She knew a place where she could hide until morning. She would go there as soon as they had gone inside

They did not go inside. They talked for a couple of minutes and then Lieutenant Grant tipped his hat and both men turned away. Billie Middleton shut the door. Audrey felt her way through the dark room toward the sofa. Fern was evidently still too ill to talk, and she was safe for the next few precious hours. Her outstretched hand touched a corner of the sofa. She was able to take the next two necessary steps before she collapsed.

She didn't sleep, but somehow the time passed. At dawn she made and drank a cup of coffee, and at seven-thirty she left the apartment by the back door and walked to the drug store. It was a fine morning, and she was waiting outside the drug store when it opened. She had her prescription filled and was back in her apartment by twenty after eight. She wrote a short note and turned a chair so that the door of Fern's apartment could be seen from it through the window. She sat

down close to the window in the chair.

It was a fine morning. Audrey thought that she had never seen a morning quite so fine. Or noticed it when she had seen one, which was different. She sat in the chair watching the sunlight slowly filling up the patio until, a few minutes before ten, Lieutenant Grant and the other detective appeared. They rang Fern's bell and Billie Middleton again came to the door. This time they went in.

Fern wore a dressing gown of yellow silk The two men thought her charming, although dark circles under her eyes and a certain vagueness of manner denoted lack of sleep. Grant, sensing a familiar quality about her manner, remembered a scene she had played in a picture years before. He couldn't remember much about it—only that she had played a woman who had lied to save a friend from something or other. That needn't be the case now necessarily, of course.

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant," she was saying. "I can't imagine what Miss Middleton had in mind. Naturally, finding Mr. Wallace like that was a shock. But I have no reason to believe that Mrs. Wallace didn't mistake him for a burglar. What reason could I have?"

"That's what we're trying to find out." Grant was puzzled. The Middleton girl had led him to believe that Mrs. Price had information for him about the killing. "Miss Middleton intimated—"

"What wild story did you tell the lieutenant, Billie?" Fern broke in.

Billie Middleton was also puzzled. "But Fern—! Last night you said—"

"Said what?"

"Oh—I don't know. I must have misunderstood you." Billie Middleton shut up.

"What did you hear that you misunderstood?" Grant asked.

"I don't know," Billie said. "I don't remember. Maybe I didn't hear anything."

Grant turned back to the older woman. "Did you know George Wallace well?"

"Fairly well. He and Audrey have been here a few times, and I've gone over to their place."

"Would you say that you and Mrs. Wallace are good friends?"

"I try to keep on friendly terms with all my neighbors."

"And there's nothing you have to add to what you've told me?"

"Not a thing, Lieutenant. I heard a shot, ran out and found Mr. Wallace. I almost fainted. Billie came along and put me to bed. Sorry I couldn't see you when you were here last night."

Grant shrugged. "Looks as though it wouldn't have made any difference. Thanks, Mrs. Price—Miss Middleton. I don't think

we'll have to trouble you again. Ready, Ben?"

Ben started muttering as they walked past the fountain. "I don't like it. I got a hunch that Wallace cutie knew exactly who she was pointing the gun at when she pulled the trigger. And I'd give ten to one the woman we just left is covering up for her."

"You could be right," Grant said. "But what can we do about it? She had no motive—not that we know of and could prove, anyway—so we can't hold her for murder. You think you could make a manslaughter charge stick against a woman as pretty and innocent-looking as she is?" He answered his own question. "Not a chance."

"Are you crazy?" Billie demanded. "I thought you were going to stall awhile and then break down and tell the truth. Those detectives believe you! You'll have to call them back."

Fern crossed slowly to the chair that faced the fireplace. She sat down. "I don't intend to do anything of the kind."

"You're going to let that Audrey Wallace get away with it?"

"Get away with what? Maybe she did mistake her husband for a burglar. How do I know what went on in Audrey's mind?" Fern shrugged. When she spoke again her voice was very tired. "All last night I lay awake and thought about it, Billie. George is gone. I can't bring him back. Audrey has plenty of trouble already. Why should I give her more?"

"Because you hate her." Then Billie frowned. In a calmer tone, she asked, "You do hate her, don't you?"

"Not especially. You do, I know. I've wondered why."

"I don't hate her. But I certainly don't like her. She thinks she's a superior being of some kind! Wears gloves just to go to the market. Meet her in the patio, and half the time she doesn't even speak."

"I know," Fern said. "That superior attitude used to get on my nerves, too. But not now, not after the night I just put in. As a matter of fact, I'm sort of grateful to her now."

"Grateful!" Billie was astonished. "For what?"

"I just found out that she did me a favor. Of course, she didn't know that she was doing it, but that doesn't change the fact."

"Well, I don't know what you're talking about and I still think you're crazy," Billie said. "What about all that publicity? You said it would give you another chance in pictures. Remember?"

"I remember. But I've remembered a few other things since then. I wasn't a good actress. I just kidded myself into thinking

that I was. As long as I was young and pretty I got by. But right now all the publicity in the world wouldn't get me anything better than an occasional bit part." Fern got up, walked to the fireplace and took her husband's picture from the mantel. "And I have to think of Jimmy. He wouldn't like what the papers would print about George Wallace and me. He'd get a divorce." She smiled down fondly at the fat, round face, the upturned nose and little perked-up ears.

"I don't get this," Billie said. "You despise Jimmy and you know it. You only married him because he's rich. George was murdered because of you, and you won't lift a finger to punish the woman who killed him. It might cost you some of Jimmy's money!"

"Well, dear, who wants to be poor?"

"There's a law against murder. How about your duty as a citizen?"

"I've considered the legal side of the matter," Fern said quietly. "And I've also considered what would happen if some virtuous citizen like yourself talked too much to the police. I'd persuade Audrey to sue for slander. If I couldn't do that, I'd enter suit myself. But that wouldn't be necessary," she added, smiling. "I think I could persuade Audrey to do almost anything—now."

"You're revolting, Fern. You really and truly are. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, dear," Fern said to the slammed door.

She replaced the picture on the mantel and went back to her chair. Jimmy might look like a pig and sometimes act like one, but he was a well-fed pig and the kind of piggy-husband who prided himself on the fact that anyone dependent on him was as well-fed as himself. Fern's clothes were excellent and plentiful. Her white convertible was a Cadillac. These things were tangible; you could see and touch them. You could taste good food and wear nice clothes, and a Cadillac would take you anywhere you wanted to go in comfort. Everything was lovely except for Jimmy, and even that unlovely facet of her life could be adjusted. It would be a simple adjustment, now that Fern had been given a visual demonstration as to how such things could be done. It only remained to figure out, as Audrey had, a fool-proof method.

It would never do, of course, to use the same method Audrey had employed. Two wives, neighbors, shooting their husbands in quick succession? Even Lieutenant Grant wasn't gullible enough to buy that! But another way, less obvious, could be found. Audrey might even help her in some way. After all, Fern had done Audrey a favor, a big one. And if Audrey expected her to keep on doing it,

she had better be cooperative. The first thing to do now was to make peace with her, dispense a little sympathy, assure Audrey that she was her understanding, if slightly too knowledgeable friend.

Fern dialed the number of the Wallaces' apartment. The phone rang—she could hear it ringing—but Audrey didn't answer. Fern replaced the instrument in its receiver, left her apartment, crossed the patio to the Wallaces' front door and rang the bell. She rang it half a dozen times, and then knocked on the door. The door stayed closed. She turned the knob and pushed. The door was locked. She walked to the window and looked in.

Only a few feet away, removed from her by nothing more than a fragile pane of glass, she saw Audrey sitting in a chair. She saw why Audrey hadn't answered her phone or opened her door, and never would. An empty glass and a medicine bottle lay on the floor beside the chair. One hand dangled lifelessly, the other lay in her lap and held a letter. The letter was so close that Fern could read what had been written on the envelope. *Confidential. Please deliver to Mr. Jimmy Price.*

For a few seconds, Fern debated the advisability of smashing the window—and decided against it. It might make too much noise, attract attention. She simply had to get that letter—if she didn't she would lose all the nice things for which she had sacrificed so much—but she preferred to get it quietly if she could. She hurried around to the rear of the apartment, tried the kitchen door—and found it open. Breathing heavily, she ran into the living room.

She was leaning over Audrey, about to take the letter from her hand, when a man's voice spoke from just behind her. "It wouldn't do you any good to steal that, Mrs. Price. I've already read it. I've been waiting. I sort of figured you'd come here. Do I have to remind you that it's against the law to withhold vital information from the police?"

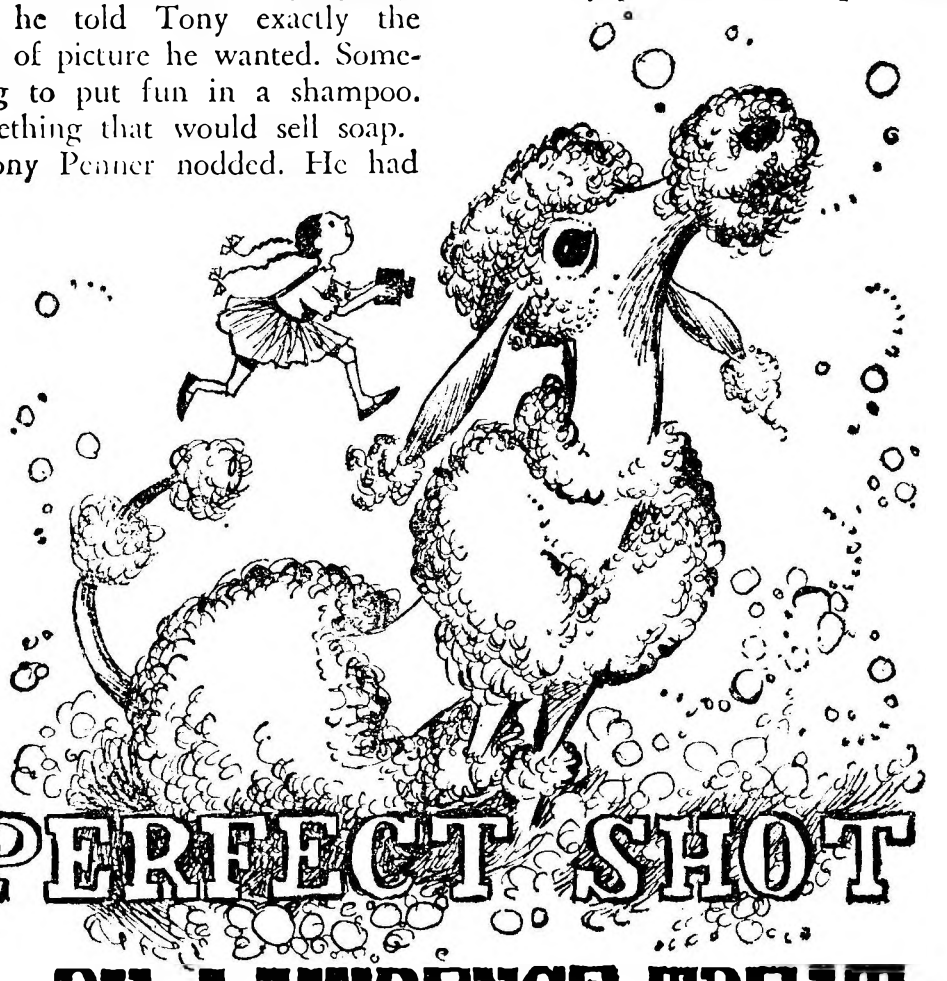
Fern didn't have to look at him. She knew who it was—Lieutenant Grant. She turned her head, however, and stared at Audrey. Her expression was curious as she studied the dead face. There was despair in it but, blended with that, there was a hint of wonder, even of admiration.

Audrey had had to die in order to do it, but—Fern had to hand it to her—she had won.

It has been decreed on high that the fictional hero of big business must be a scoundrel. We of course know that in real life this is never the case. Drama, however, requires this villification, and poetic license permits it.

RUSSEL GRAYSON handled the Seaton Soap account, up at the Owen-Hackett advertising agency, and he told Tony exactly the kind of picture he wanted. Something to put fun in a shampoo. Something that would sell soap.

Tony Penner nodded. He had no studio of his own, but he lugged his equipment around as if its fifty pounds were a pleasure



PERFECT SHOT

BY LAWRENCE TREAT

and a privilege. He had too many freckles and too much smile, and his hair was something between the color of a rotten apple and a very delicate blush. Moreover, he was just beginning to break into the big time, and this was a name account and the assignment meant a lot to him.

He knew he was good. He had a way of getting excited when he took a picture, and his creative frenzy sparked off his models and made them blaze. After the cold, perfect poses that Madison Avenue was used to, Tony Penner's work was a revelation.

Grayson, however, made it perfectly clear that he was doing Tony a favor. "I'm taking a chance on you," he said. "But if you follow my instructions, I think you can do the job."

Tony didn't like that, and he could see why they called Grayson the Tomahawk. You did what he told you to, or else he had your scalp. And he was impressive enough, tall and well-groomed and as keen of mind as he was fit in body. So what could Tony do?

"Sure," he said. "Glad to have your help."

"Then come up to my place in the country, Tony. I've got a model that's just right for this."

"Who?"

"My wife."

Tony had met her a couple of times, and he knew that Cora Grayson was smart and slim and beautiful. Maybe not the type Tony would have picked to shampoo a poodle, which was the subject of the ad; but, at any rate, the poodle was well-trained and the Grayson lawn made a nice background, as Tony found out the next day.

He got all wrapped up in the job, and he stormed around and called Cora Grayson darling and sweetheart and honey, though he had heard the talk that she was as bad as her husband—certainly as opportunistic. It was just that he addressed all his models in this way.

Now and then, as he moved his Rolleiflex or inserted a new roll or swore cheerfully at the poodle, it struck him that Russel's comments were not exactly helpful. Tony wished the guy would let him alone, get off the lawn and wait inside that ultra-contemporary house of his.

Russel, however, grew increasingly finicky and irritable. Tony cranked his shutter with less and less confidence, and more and more certainty that Russel was ruining the job. When it was over, the Graysons invited Tony for a drink, and he lounged on the screened-in terrace and fiddled with a bourbon on the rocks which was much too strong for him. He downed half of the drink; then he left with misgivings.

Cora saw him out to the car,

and whispered to him through the open window. "I hate him," she said fiercely. "He destroys everything. He'll destroy you, too."

Tony patted her shoulder. "Don't you worry, honey. Everything'll work out."

He did not show the contact sheets to Dot, his wife, nor did he know why he hadn't. But he studied the pictures of Cora's face carefully, and for a long time. The fine bones and the clear, delicate skin housed a smouldering repression that fascinated him. Love, hate—the camera had picked up something that no ordinary eye could glimpse.

Tony hid those contacts in his basement workshop, and selected the less personal of the pictures to show Russel.

Russel, seated in his office the next day, gazed at them coldly. "Lousy," he said.

Tony grinned. But he knew if Russel threw him off the job and used someone else, Russel would broadcast the failure to the entire industry. Another scalp in his belt, and good-by, Tony.

He destroys everything. He'll destroy you, too.

"To tell the truth," Tony said. "I'm not too satisfied, either."

"They stink," Russel said flatly. And then added, to Tony's surprise, "We'll have to try again."

"With Cora?"

"Naturally. Anything wrong with her?"

"Of course not. But Listen, Russel—"

Tony stopped. He had plenty to say, but he bottled it up. The important thing was to get along with Russel.

"Well?" Russel said. "I'm listening."

"Skip it. When do you want me to come up?"

"Tomorrow. Two o'clock."

Tony told his wife about it that evening. "Dot, you remember the Graysons, don't you? Russel Grayson, alias the Tomahawk."

"Of course I do. I've wondered how anybody with his personality could hold down a big job."

"He has his yes-yes-boys that butter him up. He does all right with them. Besides, he's competent enough to get by."

Dot wrinkled her nose. "How can his wife stand him?"

"I guess he wasn't always like he is," Tony said thoughtfully. "But then—who knows? Maybe she can't stand him."

Tony reached the Grayson house the next afternoon, right on time.

It occurred to Tony again that the Graysons were a handsome couple. And he couldn't help but notice their ten-year-old daughter, who was right at everyone's heels. Cora made it plain that nobody had asked the child to stay, and the child made it equally plain

that this was her home and nobody could kick her out.

Tony studied the kid with a photographer's eye. She had a pert, cute, unloved face, and stringy braids that were like lengths of telephone cable. He liked her. She was his kind of rebel.

She curtsied when she was introduced to him, and he gave her a friendly pat on the top of her head. "Hello," he said. "What did you say your name was?"

"Marty."

"Marty," he repeated. "I always went for that name."

"I'll get my camera," she said.

"You will not," Cora announced. "And your name is Martha."

"Yes, Mummy," Marty said, and raced for the porch, where she'd left her cheap little Brownie.

She continued of course, to be in everybody's way. She tripped over the quick-set tripod and she blundered into the pictorial background two or three times. Tony merely waved her off and kept the Rollei going. The shots she'd spoilt weren't particularly good, anyhow. In fact, none of the shots were.

What was wrong, was obvious to Tony right from the start. Right now, for example, when he had something lined up, Russel was saying, "Not like that, Tony. No. Your composition's off, too much air in it. Now if you'll stand up a little straighter, Cora, so that you fill that hole in the picture—"

Whereupon Cora stiffened, and Tony said, "Look, honey, get some soap suds in your eye; you look beautiful when you blink."

"Thank you," she said. "Martha, *will* you go inside with that silly camera of yours? Martha, *stop* that. Martha, just *try* not to be such a nuisance."

"Fine," Tony said. "Cora honey, lift your arm a little—there, that's it!"

Russel objected. "Tony, her arm's too far forward. It'll be out of focus. Especially with that lens you're using."

"Mebbe," Tony nodded. "And mebbe not. You never know."

"*I* know," Russel said. "Let me look through the viewer, will you? No sense shooting until we know what's there."

"Tony—Tony!" Martha screeched. "Wait a minute—I'm all out of film." And she ran into the house.

Cora sighed gratefully. "Now that *she's* gone, perhaps we can get some work done."

"Yeah," Tony said. "Sweetheart, pick up a big handful of suds and douse the dog again. Good—that's what I want."

"Wait a minute," Russel said, stepping in front of the camera. "The tripod slipped. You can't shoot if the camera's crooked."

Tony sweated and ranted and cranked away. Marty returned

and flitted around erratically, but he paid little attention to her. Once, he thought he had a really good take in front of him, the figures placed just right, the suds full and fluffy, and Cora relaxed and almost enjoying herself. He was about to snap it, when Russel pushed him aside.

"Wait a minute, Tony. Let me check." Deliberately, Russel fiddled with the focus, and Tony whirled angrily and raised his fist. He heard a click, and he turned and saw that Marty had just snapped a picture of Russel and himself.

Tony lowered his hand and shrugged. It was stupid to lose his temper, and it was lucky for him Russel hadn't noticed. Cora made no comment as Russel stepped back with a satisfied nod.

"Go ahead, Tony. Looks all right now."

But the poodle had moved, Cora's expression had changed, and the whole spirit of the pose was gone. Nevertheless, Tony kept trying to the bitter end. He had a kind of crazy hope that maybe one shot, by divine accident, might turn out the way he wanted it.

After he'd used up the tenth and last roll of film, Russel invited him to the screened-in terrace for a long, cool one. Tony picked up his camera and tripod and brought them inside. He needed a drink, and a strong one.

Marty, still carrying her Brownie, tagged after her mother. "Mummy, can I have a drink, too?"

Cora turned in cold fury. "You cannot. You've caused us enough trouble. Leave your camera here. Put it over there on the bar, and go up to your room and stay there until I give you permission to come down. Do you understand? *Do* you?"

Marty retreated in fear, as if she'd had experience with that particular tone of voice and knew better than to disobey. She turned humbly and left, the sound of her steps going up the stairs faded away. A door slammed, not too violently, and Cora shuddered.

"I'd better change and clean up," she said. "I'll have my drink later on."

She left the room. Russel, handsome and lethal and towering above Tony, asked scathingly, "I don't imagine you're very pleased with your work, are you?"

Tony set his glass down with a bang. He'd had it. "What are you trying to do?" he demanded hoarsely. "You knifed me on purpose, that's pretty obvious. But why? What for?"

"Suppose you tell me, Tony. I'd like to hear it from you—how interested you've become in your model, and she in you."

Tony swore. "This is ridiculous. Absolutely—"

"I wonder how much work

you'll get, after I tell people how you fluffed this job. I'll keep a few prints, of course, to prove my point."

Tony made no comment. He was stunned. He sat in silence, feeling Russel's cold, jealous hostility. He drank sullenly, and he was feeling the effects when Cora, dressed in tight slacks and a white blouse, came out to the terrace.

"I feel better," she remarked. "Russ, suppose you fix me that drink now."

There was contempt in the way he stood up and walked over to the portable bar. Idly, Cora picked up the tripod. Then, as Russel bent down to locate a bottle, she struck him with the heavy end of the tripod.

The first blow staggered him and sent the bar crashing, the second one knocked him down, and the third, delivered with all her strength while he lay prone on the flagstones, smashed deep into his skull.

Cora dropped the tripod immediately, and turned and faced Tony. Her face was white, and she swayed on her feet. She had to steady herself by holding to a chair. "I hate him," she whispered. "Hate—hate—"

Then she rubbed her forehead. She seemed to summon up some reserves of strength, and her mouth tightened. "You shouldn't have done it," she said icily.

"What?" said Tony. "I—"

She let out a shriek and ran from the room. "Martha!" she screamed. "Martha—don't come down. *Martha!*"

Tony began to tremble. The raw horror of it sent him into shock, and he stepped forward and gazed numbly at the body. He picked up his tripod and noticed the blood, in which a few dark hairs were trapped.

He dropped the tripod with a clatter, and he was afraid he was going to be sick. In a daze, he spoke to himself, trying to bring reality back by some commonplace remark.

"I'll have to buy a new tripod," he said aloud. "I'm out twenty-five bucks, and nobody's going to believe this. Nobody."

Then he heard Cora's voice speaking on the phone upstairs. "Hello, police? Something terrible has happened, come quick. My husband—he's dead, killed. Oh, *help* me; I'm afraid for myself, and for my little girl. Because the murderer—he's still here!"

Trooper Bamberger, of the State Criminal Investigation Department, handled the case and wrapped it up the same day. It couldn't have been simpler. Tony Penner's fingerprints on the tripod, and an eye-witness to the killing.

The only thing that bothered Bamberger was that crazy story

of Penner's, claiming Mrs. Grayson had killed her husband, coldly, matter-of-factly, with no build-up.

But people didn't do that. And the Graysons got along well enough, everybody said so. So why that cock-eyed story? Couldn't a smart cookie like Penner think up something better? Or was he just dumb, and off his rocker, besides?

Still, the case was cut and dried, and Bamberger felt pleased with his thoroughness, and with the way he'd questioned Mrs. Grayson. She'd been hysterical at first, and no wonder, after seeing her husband killed right in front of her.

Bamberger had had to calm her down and then pump her, but her story was pretty much what he'd expected. Her lover had come up on a picture assignment, and had given himself away during the course of the afternoon. When they'd finished their work, she'd gone upstairs to dress. The two guys had quarreled and were about ready to murder each other. Even Penner didn't deny that they'd quarreled a bit, though he maintained it was over the work they were doing.

Mrs. Grayson was a little confused as to exactly how the murder had happened, but she was clear on the essentials. Penner had accused Grayson of ruining him. And with Grayson having the say-so, an account executive or something who could make or break Penner and was damn well going to break him, and said so—well, there was your motive. So as soon as Grayson turned his back to make that drink for his wife, Penner socked him with the heavy tripod. And then went into a fog. He'd still been dazed when the local police arrived.

Bamberger had gotten Mrs. Penner on the phone and established the importance of the pictures he was taking. And Penner himself admitted they were no good. Which seemed to hurt him more than anything else.

The kid, Martha, had been upstairs. Mrs. Grayson had sensed the tension and been afraid of trouble, and she'd wanted the kid out of the way. But the kid had heard the noise when Grayson fell and knocked over the bar, and she'd also heard her mother scream. So the child corroborated the main points.

The kid was a little mixed up, of course. She insisted that after the bar crashed, about a minute went by before her mother screamed. Still, Bamberger had kids of his own; he knew they had no sense of time, and so what a ten-year-old said didn't bother him.

It was funny, too, how those pictures tied in. A high-priced photographer like Penner—his camera got stuff that told the whole story. For instance, it

showed that Mrs. Grayson was nuts about Penner, and was on edge because her husband was watching. So her husband had every reason to be jealous, and that was why he'd been out to get Penner, but good. And, finally, there were the pictures that Penner had hidden in his own house. One look at them, and you knew Mrs. Grayson was more interested in him than she was in her husband.

For awhile, Bamberger had wondered whether Penner and Mrs. Grayson had been in this thing together, but he'd discarded the theory because Penner's story was so thin. Besides, Penner seemed to be nuts about his own wife; he'd probably just been intrigued by Mrs. Grayson. What must have happened was, Penner had been drinking and he'd lost his head.

Well, that was that. The D. A. would take it from here, and Bamberger had no more worries. He was just going up to the house to pick up the kid's box camera. Mrs. Grayson had called in this morning and told him how Martha had been dancing all over the lot and sort of imitating Penner, and by accident she'd gotten a shot of Penner ready to tee off on Grayson, earlier in the afternoon. If the picture came out good, it would be a nice piece of evidence.

Bamberger had checked out the camera itself. Martha had left it on the bar when she'd been sent upstairs, and it hadn't been used since.

He found it without any trouble, and left the house with it. Driving back to the barracks, he wondered what the pictures would be like. A ten-year-old with a cheap, box camera, and a pro with a four hundred dollar job. Joe, who was in charge of the photo lab, would be interested, too.

When Bamberger mentioned the angle, Joe laughed, but he said sure, it would be interesting, and he'd get right to work on it. So Bamberger had himself a sandwich and some coffee, and then he hung around, waiting.

Joe was excited when he called Bamberger into the lab and showed him the proofs. "There it is," he said. "Get a load of it!"

Bamberger drew in his breath. "But how—how—"

"What must have happened," Joe said, "was when the camera fell off the bar, it hit something that triggered it off and took this one shot. Of the murder. Just look at her face, huh?"

Bamberger looked.

As you by this time are well aware, Silky Collins is a master of the bon mot, and an individual who has a sway with women. But Silky has been lacking in one bit of info, to wit: How to fight off the classy type doll.

SILKY COLLINS MEETS DAN CUPIDITY

by Joe MacKey

THE first time Diane ankles into The Crook's on West Forty-six, I perceive that she is "different." Just how different I do not tumble till after the die is cast.

Of course, "The Crook's" is not the name on the marquis outside; that, chastely, says Ace Bar and Grill. The nickname comes from the clientele who hang there, including yours sincerely Silky Collins.

I eyeball this chick and with a practiced glance see she is young and pretty. She looks around, a little wide-eyed, and sits herself at the empty end of the bar, with three vacant stools between her and I. Johnny Bear, the stick-man, lumbers up and asks—in a voice surprisingly respectful, for him—what is her poison. She tells him a Pink Lady. For many a full moon, Johnny is not called upon for any drink involving more than two ingredients—one always being whiskey—but he bobs his big bullet head politely.

By this time, Dum-Dum Belladonna moseys up, giving her the King Leer, and says: "Buy you a drink, Baby?"

"No thank you," she answers, civil but cool, "I have one coming."

"Okay, Om buyin' the neggs one."

She shakes her head, once, slowly.

Dum-Dum eyes her, heel to coiffure, not missing the interim. "You got class, Baby. I like you."

"Thank you." The voice is still civil, a little cooler.

He leans toward her. "Stick wit' me an' you wear rocks."

Now she looks *him* up and down. "No doubt," she says. "Around my ankles, on the bottom of the East River."

Now, I can bon the mots with the best of them, so in appreciation of this rejoinder I burst into a guffaw. I realize too late this is a very imprudent thing to do at Dum-Dum's expense. However, he must of drank his quota of blood for the day, as he merely hands me an expression like he just eats an oyster without an "r" in it, mutters "wise broad" at the chick, and walks out.

"On the strength of that comeback, may *I* buy you a drink?" I ask her, with more impetuosity than gray matter, since I do not score at the track for nigh these two weeks and I do not seem to be able to pull any of the nimble swindles that earn me the name Silky. The Crook's does not charge exuberant prices, but the state of my poke is so anemic that even cheap drinks are too rich for its tired blood.

"I like it very much," she says, smiling.

In the hour it takes us to down three drinks apiece (I usually do not count them, but being bereft of loot makes one wary) I learn she is from out of town, living alone, job-hunting, and a doll.

The last part she does not have to tell me. It is a real dog-day in little old NY and everyone is sweating. Everyone but her. She is perspiring. She has real class, unlike the regular run of chicks in here, who think class means having their pinky extended when they slug down their doubles, and trying not to drop the "g" when they call someone a stinking bum.

I find, to my surprise, I am enjoying myself even without an ulterior motive. I like this kid's company. But the specter of the empty wallet keeps intruding as I realize it is near chow time and I do not have the cabbage to feed her.

I glance at my wrist, where the watch should be, forgetting I hock it.

"Do you have an appointment?" she says.

"Yeah," I tell her. Then, something about her makes me say a very un-Silky-like thing. "No, matter of fact, the truth is I am becoming broke."

"Oh, I am sorry," she says, looking like she means it. "You should of told me."

"A guy does not like to admit he is tapped out."

She touches my hand. "I admire honesty."

Ordinarily I accept such a compliment with an inward chuckle, but with her I let the chuckle out. After all, I am not trying to take her.

"Well, you do not *steal*, do you?" she says.

"Not exactly."

"And you do not murder or hit people on their head."

"No, that I do not do."

"See? You are not such a bad fellow as you may think."

This poor kid is sweet people. She makes me feel good inside. It is a refreshing change.

"Can I loan you a few dollars?" she says.

"No, thank you," I say, answering such a question in the negative for the first time in years. Not that it is asked very often. "And, please believe, I am usually heavy in the chips. But right now I better take you home."

"You do not have to," she says, and I give her a fast look, wondering if she is scared of me. She catches it and adds: "But I am pleased to accept your kind offer."

Outside, I realize I do not have enough for cab fare very far, but she tells me the old homestead is on West Sixty-four and starts leading me to the subway.

Her rooming-house turns out to be one of those seen-better-days deals and on the front steps she tells me: "Silky, I really enjoy meeting you. You are an interesting fellow and different from anybody I've ever met."

"How so?" I query.

"I do not know, exactly. You seem kind of tough and wise and yet you are kind and gentle."

You do not ever make a fortune reading tea-leaves, doll, I think. But none the same, I realize that, somehow, this gal does bring out the best in me. This is no good. This you can't be too careful of.

"It is charming meeting you, too, Diane," I tell her.

"Do I see you again?"

"Sure," I give her, "I get in touch." With a jaunty wave I bid her adieux and wend my way back to the subway.

That night Diane makes an appearance in my dreams and hangs around in my head the next day, but when she peeks into The Crook's in the P. M. I am sore as well as glad. She does not belong in this milieu.

"Hello, Silky," she says, "I am glad you are here."

"I am not," I say. "And you should not be here." She looks at me like I spank her. "Look, honey," I tell her, taking her hand, "I am no good for you."

"I am the judge of that."

At the word "judge" I wince out of habit, but I say: "No, sweetie, you do not know the real me. I am not your type guy."

"What is my type guy?"

"Well, certainly not Silky Collins and all it stands for."

"S-silky Collins," she says softly, gazing into my eyes, and I realize this girl is truly enameled of me. This does it. I hustle her out and convoy her to the subway.

"You are a very sweet kid, Diane. Too sweet for the likes of me. So good-bye and good luck."

She puts out a hand to detain me, but I am adept at ducking hands and I disappear into the crowd.

The next day I get a payoff, my share of a smart swindle me and Bad-Eye Moran recently pull (for lo the past three weeks Bad-Eye is out of town, by necessity, accounting for my temporary penury) and for almost a week I go on a revel with him involving booze, female companionship, the track, etc. Despite the wassail I think a number of times about Diane, but I push her out of the old cerebellum.

When I am glutted with the festivities, I let Bad-Eye take the dolls to the track and I am enjoying a quiet brood on the rocks in The Crook's when who breezes in but Little Miss Muffet. Again I am glad to see her and again I am not.

"I seem to remember telling you it is not to your best interests that we meet, honey," I say.

"I am funny," she retorts, "I cannot hear things I do not want to hear."

This is a chick loaded with determination, I decide, and as I cannot use muscle to give her the brush I must employ the old gray matter. Swiftly I evolve a scheme whereby I take her to a couple of my hangouts and pay attention to the other dolls on my roster.

This doubtless steams her and she sees I am the wrong medicine for her.

"Okay, Diane," I tell her, "leave us do a little pub-crawling."

"Love to, but if you are a little short I am glad to go Dutch."

I look at her. This is a pretty unusual kid. "Thanks, honey," I say, "but this time I am carrying."

We first hit one of those smoky caves on Eighth near the Garden where it is so dark you practically need a miner's lamp in your hat.

We push up to the bar and she squeezes my hand.

"This is an interesting place, Silky," she says, "but I would be scared in here without you."

Momentarily I get a warm glow as Joe Protector, then I remember I am not here for the big-brother bit but to make Diane fed up with me. Down the end of the bar I spot a doll I know, one Red Flo, and I tell Diane: "Excuse me a minute. I see an old friend."

I ankle down the bar and Flo hands me a large hello and, without pausing for breath, asks me to buy her a drink. I cannot help contrasting her venal attitude with that of Diane's, who offers to go Dutch if I am short.

Nevertheless, I buy Flo a drink and notice that she orders Scotch, though I can tell by the wet circle left on the bar by her previous glass that she is drinking beer till I come in.

We make small talk, and I realize Flo is a pretty dull broad to carry on a conversation with, especially after Diane. I am also aware for the first time what a gaudy doll she is. But I determine to stick with her long enough to get Diane red hot.

I waste fifteen minutes and two bucks with her, then excuse myself, whereupon she says: "Buy me another drink before you go."

"Maybe I come back," I tell her, thinking what a mooch she is. I approach Diane, figuring she is ripe for battle and I can tell her off. But she just smiles.

"Old friend," I explain.

Diane looks down the bar at her. "She has very pretty hair."

"Not as pretty as yours," I say, and I can bite off my tongue.

"Why, thank you, Silky. Why don't you invite her up here to have a drink with us?"

Oh, no, I think. I have a plethora of Red Flo for the nonce. This scheme, I reflect, is dying. This is not going to be my night. So I take her home, make a date for the following night and give her a neat brushoff at the door.

Next time, I vow, I get her out of my hair for good. I am going to take her to a floating crap-game and expose her to the tender mercies of some of my friends and acquaintances. After she gets a load of them, she probably does not care to even talk to me again, much less get romantic.

That night I escort her to a loft building on West Thirty-eight, which I know is the spot for the night's action. At the entrance, the lookout, No-Brain Balaban, who I know for years, looks dubious when he sees Diane. Women, for obvious reasons, are not very welcome at these functions.

"Who is the lady, Silky?"

"She is a member of the Safe and Loft Squad, naturally," I crack.

"Gee, I do not know, Silky," he says. "They are not very partial to broads—oop, sorry, lady—ladies at the game."

"Oh, Silky," Diane says, "if it is against the rules I do not wish to barge in."

At this, No-Brain looks her over, then grins. "Well, I guess in your case, lady. Gaw head, go on up." He bows and I see she makes a conquest.

Up on the ninth floor where the game is going on, about ten guys are clustered around a table on which a hunk of green felt is spread out. They all give us the double-o and look at each other and I see they are none too pleased over my guest. Several of them mumble greetings to me and a few nod grudgingly to Diane.

"Good evening, gentlemen," she says. "I hope I am not intruding."

Acey-Deucey, a classy little gambler who is as good with the fair sex as he is with a poker deck, appoints himself spokesman. "No, ma'am," he says. "We are glad to have you." He slips a scowl at a few of the guys and they mutter welcomes.

The guys step aside to make room for Diane at the table, but she says: "Oh, please do not bother, gentlemen. I do not want to crowd you."

"You are not crowding us, is she, boys?" Acey-Deucey says, and there is a mixed chorus of agreement. He thereupon shouts, "Hey, why don't one of you guys get the lady a seat? Where is your manners?"

Two guys trip over each other scurrying around for a chair and Diane tells them please do not bother, but they insist. If this nonsense keeps up, I think, Diane gets the idea she is in the throes of the Harvard Club.

"Do you understand this game?" Acey-Deucey asks her.

"No. I am afraid I do not."

"How about that?" he says to the crowd. "She does not get it, yet she stands here like a little lady with her yap shut, instead of asking a lot of dopey questions like most dolls."

The guys shake their head, agreeing that she is a most unusual doll.

"How do you like to make a few passes?" Acey-Deucey asks her.

She looks at me. "Sure, go ahead," I tell her. I put down a pound for her and it is faded.

Acey-Deucey hands her a pair of dice and I see him sneak a wink to the guys.

"Try for a seven or eleven," Mike Meatball advises her.

She rolls.

"Seven!" the guys yell.

"Do I win?" she asks.

"Yes, ma'am," Acey-Deucey says. "You are a good player. Let it ride."

"Seven!"

"Well!" she says. "I win again."

"You sure do, lady," Acey-Deucey says, smiling at all the guys. They are having a grand time. "I think she should let it all ride, don't you?"

The guys all agree and she tosses them out once more.

"Eleven."

This is enough, I decide. I do not wish her to get the idea—with Acey-Deucey's loaded cubes—that gambling is such a cinch or she is hooked for life.

"Okay," I tell her, "pick up your winnings."

"But is it fair for me to quit while I am ahead?"

"Do not worry about that, little lady," Acey-Deucey says. "You are welcome to it. And you are welcome to drop in any time. Right, boys?" Right, the boys say.

"Great little crap-shooter you got there, Silky, you lucky guy," says Mike Meatball.

"Yeah." I cannot hardly wait to get her out of this den of traitors.

On the way down in the elevator she says: "What a wonderful bunch of friends you have, Silky."

"Yeah."

At the downstairs door, No-Brain gives her the big good-night and I feel like clobbering him.

Diane suggests we stop off somewhere for coffee-and, but I tell her I have a headache and does she mind if I hit the sack.

"Oh, Silky, of course not. You go right to bed. And do not forget to take an aspirin."

I leave her at the subway and realize that no aspirin is going to cure the headache I have. Here for two nights I try to get her off my back and, instead, I draw two fiascos. I see that extreme measures are needed so, over five belts. I work out a scheme. Then I call her up and tell her to meet me at four in the P.M. the next day in a trap on West Forty-four.

I choose this particular joint because the bartender owes me a favor for a few favors rendered, and this particular hour because I figure there will be no customers.

I hot-foot over and explain the plan to Sal, the bartender. It is simplicity itself. I get a pal of mine to stick a little rubber sack of ketchup under his shirt, I get into an argument with him while Diane is there, I stab him with one of those phony collapsible daggers, he falls down and bleeds ketchup all over the joint, Diane

figures me a dangerous hood and gets scared to death and runs out and I never see her again.

It takes a little convincing to get Sal to buy the deal, but he finally comes around when I agree to sweeten the pot with two pounds. It is not even that hard to convince my punchy little pal, Gong-Gong Jones, to play the stabbee, especially when I promise to buy him a new turquoise-and-yellow sport shirt to replace the one that is going to get all ketchupy.

Just before curtain-time the next day, I station myself down the block from the bar till I see Diane swinging along. I want her to get there first. She goes in and I arrive a few minutes later. There is nobody there but her, Sal and Gong-Gong. The latter throws me a prearranged dirty look, which I return, and I go up to her at the far end of the bar.

"Hello, honey," she greets.

"Ditto, Baby," I tell her.

I wish to get this show on the road before any other customers wander in, so I glare at Gong-Gong in the bar mirror.

"Wodda yuh lookin' at?" he snarls.

I give him the real nasty face. "That takes a lot of figuring."

"A wise guy?" he says.

"Wise enough."

I feel Diane pulling at my sleeve. "Please, Silky," she whispers.

"Dat's it," Gong-Gong says. "Hide behind Mama's apron string."

I break away from Diane, rush up to Gong-Gong, duck a swing that he throws a foot over my head, and plunge my phony knife into the ketchup sack.

Gong-Gong g r u n t s, moans, staggers and lurches a few feet. He is doing fine, but I see he is trying for an Academy Award performance. I give him a quick frown and he clutches his ketchupy belly and finally falls.

Diane is at my side, staring from Gong-Gong—who is now prone right on his back—to my knife, which now has the blade sticking out in regular position again.

"Beat it!" I tell her, shoving her towards the front door. "I got to get out the back way!"

She grabs my arm and starts dragging me towards the back. "*We* got to get out the back way."

I try to remonstrate, but this little chick has a bundle of strength and a bundle of determination. She rushes through the door to the kitchen with me in tow and I grab a look over my shoulder and see Gong-Gong looking up from the floor with a what's-this-switch expression on his puss.

Diane pulls me into the backyard, we scramble over a couple of fences, find ourself at the back entrance to a stage door alley and

come out into the next street. Diane hails a passing cab, pushes me into it and hops in after me.

I start to open my mouth, but she puts a finger to her lips, nodding towards the hackie, then purses her lips in a little silent kiss to me.

"Port Authority Building," she tells him.

What is she planning to do, I wonder. Ship me out of town? But as soon as we get out of the cab, she leads me in one door of the bus terminal and out another.

"In case we are followed."

"Now look, Diane—" I begin.

"Shhhh." She hails another cab and gives him her address. Every time I open my mouth, she shakes her head and squeezes my hand. She does not let me say a word until we get inside her apartment.

She locks the door from the inside, slumps against it and sighs. "Now, darling," she says, "you are safe."

"Do you not realize maybe I kill that guy? The police are hunting for me right this very instant."

"You can stay here till you are safe. Nobody knows you are here."

"Even if that guy does not die, his friends come looking for me with mayhem in their eye."

"I do not care," she says. "I love you."

Well, dad, do I ever feel like a creep. Here I try to scare the girl off and, instead, in my hour of need, she comes through like the United States Calvary. I am full of emotions, and one of them, I am afraid, is love.

For one of the few times in my life I am at a loss for words and I ask Diane can I lie down for a little while. I flop on the sofa with all my clothes on and pretend to drop off, though the old mind is really whirring. In a short time she shakes me to eat.

Although the chow is tremendous I have no appetite. She thinks it is because I stab Gong-Gong, but it is really because I feel like such a heel lying to her.

I decide I must phone, so after supper I have to get her out of the house for a few minutes. I tell her I need cigarettes, but as luck will have it she has three different brands, so I have to mention one she doesn't have. She reluctantly agrees to go for the cigarettes, and as soon as I hear the outside door close I am on the phone to Sal's.

I tell him I am at her house and I will call back in ten minutes and he should say Gong-Gong suffers only a slight flesh wound and the cops do not even know about the fracas. Sal is perplexed, as well he may be; but, you see, I now have another plan. I am going to get married. Any little girl that stands up with you through such a plight is aces.

Diane gets back and I tell her I must call up Sal's and find out

for certain if I am a murderer.

"No!" she says. "Maybe they trace the call."

"It is safe," I tell her.

I make the call, Sal gives me the good news, and I pass it on. She throws her arms around me.

"Darling! I am so happy. But I would of stuck with you through thick and thin."

"I know. That is why I now ask you to."

"What do you mean?" she says.

"I like you to become Mrs. Silky Collins."

"Oh, darling!" she says, and the kissing starts to such a degree that I must remind her it is several days till we are Mr. and Mrs.

We go through the blood-test bit, get the license, etc., and a few days later we are in the Municipal Building with Bad-Eye Moran and another pal of mine named Little Sam as witnesses. All of a sudden the ceremony is over and Bad-Eye says: "Come on, we go uptown. Some of the boys arrange a little bridal party for you."

"A party!" Diane claps her hands. "Oh, how lovely."

"Oh, nothing fancy," Bad-Eye says. "Plenty of food and booze, of course, but we do not know what presents to get you on short notice, so we mostly get joke presents for now."

"Joke presents!" she says. "How cute."

In the taxi-ride uptown I am glum. I have been fighting this worry in the back of my mind all along, and now that the ceremony is over it gets worse. I put off telling her the whole stabbing deal is a hoax, because I am scared she gets so angry and disillusioned that she does not marry me. Now I am worried because my marriage is built on a lie. I am lying all my life, but this one bothers me.

"Cheer up, darling," Diane says, kissing me. I come out of it and see we are up to Times Square.

"Where is the party?" I ask.

Little Sam mentions a hotel on Seventy-two Street.

When we get up around the Capitol Theater, Diane asks the cabby to park and tells us she is back in a few minutes. She crosses the street and disappears in traffic.

When she gets back, I ask her: "Where do you go?"

"No place special," she says.

"Old married couples should not have secrets," Bad-Eye chortles, and I wince, thinking of *my* guilty secret.

"No, they should not," Diane says, and she kisses me again. "You see later where I went, darling."

We get to the hotel and I find a veritable rogue's gallery of my friends and well-wishers milling around the suite. Sandwiches and oar derves are greatly in evidence and booze is flowing smoothly.

There is a lot of back-slapping and mind-if-I-kiss-the-briding and a few coarse songs and jokes; but as Diane mingles among the throng I notice she seems to have a kind of uplifting effect on them, yet without being a moist blanket. For an example, Moo-Cow Brady—who usually likes to throw empty gin bottles out of, or through, the window—seems content to clown around wearing a lampshade under Diane's amused and tolerant eye.

During a slight lull in the festivities, someone yells: "Leave us open the joke presents."

Well, we open them. Some are real howls, and near the bottom of the pile I open one that has no card.

It is a phony collapsible dagger just like the one I use to stab Gong-Gong.

Like I say, there is no card, but on the box I see the name and address of a novelty shop. From the address I realize it is about a block from the Capitol Theater.

At first I am burned to the quick. Then, gradually, I see the humor and irony of the situation. The taker taken.

I look around and, about twenty feet away, Diane beckons me to follow her into the next room. To the accompaniment of winks and grins from the revelers, I do so.

Alone with her, I tell her reproachfully that she is a naughty girl. She tells me that I am a naughty boy and that this should be a lesson to me never to try to deceive her.

"We must be honest with each other," she says. "I want to know the bad things about you as well as the good."

"Bad things about me?" I say, feigning aghast.

"I want to know about your other girl friends, for one thing."

"They are water over the dam, dear," I protest.

"All right," she concurs, "we skip that for now. But how about your business activities? A wife should know."

I hem and haw for awhile, but I see that she suspects I am not exactly a member of the Better Business Bureau, so I tell about a few capers. From the light in her eye I see she is impressed by my nimbleness of wit, so I warm to the task and spill quite a few Silky coups.

"Fine," she says after awhile. "This should put you on ice for some time."

"What are you talking about?" I query, feeling somewhat cold in the stomach.

She pulls out a badge. From previous experience I recognize it. It is, definitely, not a fireman's badge.

"You pull this whole bit just to get some dope on me?" I ask, incredulous.

"I do."

My heart is broken, but it mends fast. A chick who pulls such a frame is not worth loving, much less marrying.

"Words fail me to tell you what I think of you," I tell her. Better, I think, to belt her; then I realize that, even in this extremity, it is not like Silky Collins to clout a woman; also, policewomen know jiu-jitsu. And carry firearms.

Then a light comes on in my head. "But you outsmart yourself, Mata Hari," I say. "A wife cannot testify against her husband."

"That wedding ceremony is performed with the aid of the Police Department," she informs me. "It is as phony as—for want of a better simile—the blushing bridegroom."

"Anyways," she adds, "see this little brooch? It leads to a portable tape-recorder under my blouse, on which I have your confession in your own dulcet tones."

This decks me. "Why do you go to all this trouble, Madame?" I ask. "I am not *that* important. One would think I am the Mafia the way you pull this big hassamaroo just to get the goods on a few swindles."

"One of the swindles happens to be on my fiance," she says quietly.

"Oh, brother," is all I can muster. I start looking for exits. "I suppose you do not hesitate to blast me down if I try a break?"

"I do not have to, 'husband,'" she says. "When I pick up the dagger at the novelty store, I call the precinct and now there are cops downstairs. Also at the service elevators. It is a shame for you to get a hole between the horns when all you may have to serve is a couple years."

Well, I philosophize, this is it. I am in old durance before but, more urgent, if my friends hear how I am conned I am the laughing stock of my environs.

"A deal," I say. "I spill one more job if you do not tell my friends how you take me. We just leave like we are going on a honeymoon."

"Okay," she says, and I relate a phony caper with made-up names, etc., talking into her brooch.

"Let us go," she says, "and I keep your secret from your friends."

"Thanks," I tell her. "If you are not a cop, I kiss you, after all."

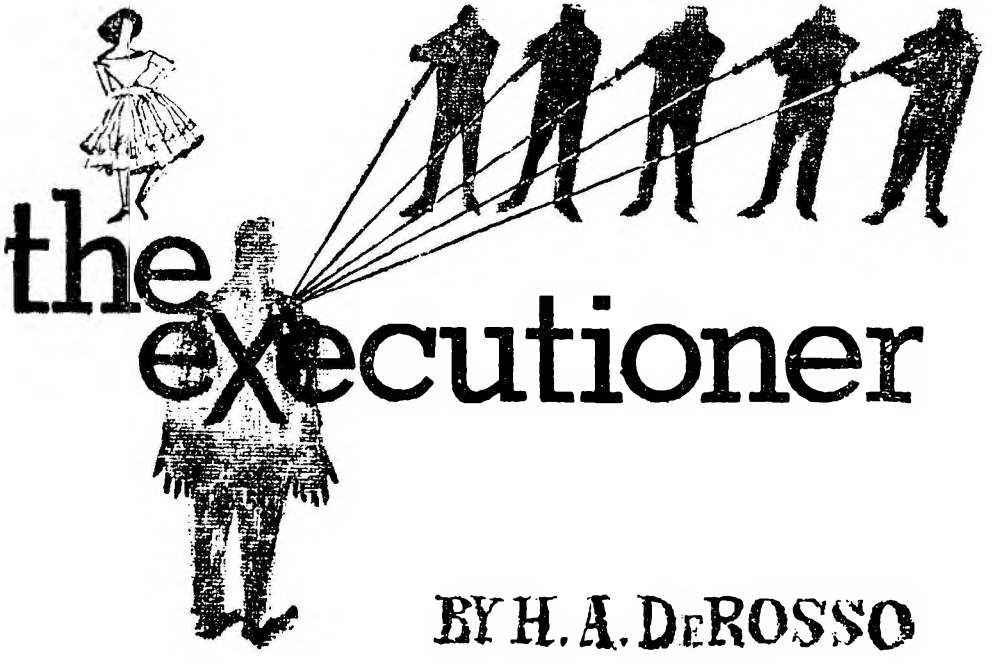
"Well," she says, "we can still shake hands."

Which we do.

But, even as I am hefting her duke, I have the fingers of my other hand crossed, and I am figuring how terrible it is if she trips, say, on the way to the elevator, and breaks her little tape-recorder. Accidents *will* happen.

TONIGHT there was only one. Usually, there were several and once, when the executions had first started, there had been twenty-three and when he had mentioned the number to Tomasino, the Leader had laughed and said it was most appropriate since the Movement was called the 23rd April after the day the revolution had started. But now the numbers had decreased. One night a week ago there had been seven, the largest in a fortnight. Tonight, however, there was only the one.

He waited impatiently beside the bus which was to take the condemned man to the place of execution, a hill not far off from where one could look over the Caribbean which, of course, was not visible now at night. The view, however, was beautiful during the day but he never went there any more when the sun was up. Not that he was squeamish, he told himself, it was just that he



the executioner

BY H. A. DEROSSO

In a far, far better world, men will not be executed—as they are today. To come up with a superior type of execution is not easy; scientists, philosophers and electricians are hard at work on the problem. Let us all be patient.

was usually tired. That's all there was to it, he told himself fiercely, there was no such thing as regret and homesickness any more, Cielo Azul was his home now and that was that.

He dropped the butt of the cigar he was smoking and ground it underfoot, thinking this was a habit he had copied from the Leader for once he had smoked only cigarettes. Remembering Tomasino made him a little irritated and troubled. There was starting to be talk against Tomasino here in the capital, but the Leader was somewhere in the southern provinces promising farmers land and plantation workers higher wages and dreaming his dream of making the republic of Cielo Azul an island free of poverty and despair. Dreams were all right in their place, but there were those who had started to demand something more concrete than talk. Look at Laramate. He had been one of the most ardent of the supporters of Tomasino de la Luz, but then he had turned to criticizing Tomasino and had been arrested and was now in prison awaiting trial. The sentence undoubtedly would be death and, some night soon, he would have to take Laramate to the hill overlooking the Caribbean and shoot him.

He sighed and for a moment, just the briefest moment, wished he were back home in the States. Then he remembered he had been nothing there and here in Cielo Azul he was something, a captain in the army of Tomasino. He was regarded with respect and awe and fear, for he was in charge of the executions in the capital. He had decided to become a citizen of Cielo Azul. There was no telling how far he would go in this land.

Footsteps sounded on the asphalt of the courtyard and he heard the firing squad, which always followed the bus in a jeep, snapping to attention. It was the warden and two guards and the prisoner at last. A few more minutes and it would be over and then perhaps he would see Maria Alba. Thought of this made him glad there was only the one tonight. It was the custom to execute the prisoners singly, and several would have dragged time out.

He motioned the denim-clad prisoner into the bus and then there was a moment's confusion over who was to drive the vehicle. He remembered then that Rivera, who always drove, had reported ill and there was a new sergeant. Perez, was that his name? Or Gonzales? He singled the man out with his eyes, a stocky youth with a wide, blank face looking sallow in the dim lights of the courtyard.

"You," the captain said. "How are you called?"

"Gomez, *mi capitan.*"

"Do you know how to drive?"

Teeth flashed white in a grin. *"Si."*

"Proceed."

Gomez got in the bus and the captain went over to the jeep and got behind the wheel. He honked the horn to signal the bus and followed the vehicle out of the courtyard and onto the winding road that led up the hill.

One thing about the people down here, the captain thought, most of them knew how to die. None of them had to be bound and not many allowed the blindfold. Two of them, hardened officers of the fallen dictator's army, had shouted the commands to the firing squad. Only one prisoner had collapsed to his knees when he had been placed against the pock-marked wall beneath the electric light and had been shot like that, whimpering. But he was a rarity. It seemed that conditions down here, the poverty and hunger and exploitation and persecution, had made death a familiar thing to most of the people so that they could regard it almost with indifference.

The prisoner tonight stumbled once as he walked to the wall. And then, as if this moment's weakness had angered him, he threw his shoulders back and walked the rest of the way with his head tilted at a defiant angle. He was a slight man, with dark hair that was turning gray. Hardly a military type, the captain thought. Probably a political, and the captain shrugged. The charges for which the men were sentenced were none of his business. His job was their execution and he never let his thoughts wander beyond that. He seldom knew the condemned men's names and did not know this prisoner's.

The prisoner shook his head at the offer of the blindfold. The captain always carried a pack of American cigarettes in his shirt pocket for the condemned and the prisoner accepted one and the captain lighted it for the man. Then the captain started back to the firing squad and stood a few moments with his back to the prisoner to allow him the generosity of a few more puffs. Then the captain turned and stood very straight. He was proud of the way the commands in the alien tongue rolled off his lips.

"Atencion! Listo! Apunten! Tiren!"

When the echoes of the shots died, there was silence, a silence so heavy that, briefly, your thoughts were concerned with it, rather than with what had just taken place.

The firing squad always returned in the bus, while the captain rode the jeep alone. The new sergeant, Gomez, was watching him with a strange smile that van-

ished the moment the captain's eyes fell on him.

"That is all for tonight," the captain said. "Return the men to the barracks."

Gomez saluted. *"Si, mi capitan."*

The captain got in the jeep and started away without waiting for the bus to precede him. He was in a great hurry to get away from the hill. He told himself it was because soon he might see Maria Alba.

The annoying part of it, he thought, was that he could never be sure of her. The fact that he had made her acquaintance in the Flor de Oro on the Avenida Nacional set her apart. Under the fallen dictator, the Flor de Oro had catered only to the wealthiest of American tourists. It was still an exclusive place. He gained entrance and preference over others because of his uniform and because he was in charge of the executions. Fear rather than acceptance admitted him, and he smiled to himself thinking of that. It had never been like this in the States, where he had been nobody.

He sat in an alcove. The music had the proper softness here, the lights the proper dimness. Everything would be perfect, if only she would come.

He looked at his watch again and frowned. But that was her way. She was annoying and irritating and, he had to admit, most exciting.

Closing his eyes, he imagined the scent she used, so fragilely sweet and teasing in his nostrils, and he imagined well for the odor seemed very real. He opened his eyes and saw that it was real. She had slipped into the alcove silently and sat across the table from him, watching him with a slight smile.

The smile died, like Gomez's had died, the instant his eyes found her. Now what had made him think of that? To many executions? It couldn't be that. He put the number roughly at two hundred and felt he should have become inured to them by now. Still, the members of the firing squad kept changing. Take Rivera, reporting sick. Had Rivera after all lost his stomach for executions? With a feeling of vexation, he put the thoughts from him.

He could never look at her without a quickening of his heartbeat. She was that exciting and disturbing. She had the black hair and violet eyes and olive skin of so many of the women of Cielo Azul but, in addition, she had a special, round-faced beauty.

He was lost in admiration of her and so was only idly attentive to what she was saying and she had to repeat herself.

"I said tomorrow is the trial of Laramate."

"Who?"

Her eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "Are you not listening? The trial of Ramon Laramate. He who has betrayed Tomasino."

"Oh?" He experienced the annoyance he always felt when someone brought up the subject of politics. The people down here took their politics most seriously, they fought and bled and died over them, unlike the apathy and indifference he had been familiar with in the States. "So soon?"

"He has been a prisoner for two weeks."

"I would not think anyone as beautiful as you would concern herself with politics."

"Politics?" she echoed. "I do not hate Laramate because of his politics."

He looked at her with a new interest. Something disquieting stirred in him, but he paid it no heed. "Hate Laramate? Why? Why do you hate him?"

"A personal matter. My sister. He would not marry her; so she drowned herself." She was staring broodingly down at the table. Her glance lifted, sought and held his. "If Laramate is sentenced to die, as he will be, will you execute him?"

He gave a negligent shrug. "I suppose. I am in charge of all the executions here in the capital." He stared at her wonderingly. "How well do you know Laramate?"

"Very well. We've been very close."

He watched her with a hard, sober look. "So you've been very close. Was this—before you knew about your sister?"

"No. Our friendship was afterwards—afterwards. When I had already promised to see him dead."

"But—but why?"

"So I could denounce him in court. So I could learn things about him to denounce him for. So when he dies, he will know it was I who denounced him."

"Does he know what you propose to do?"

She laughed. Her laughter was sharp, metallic, an inanimate quality to it. "He still thinks I am in love with him," she said. "He still thinks that should a miracle happen and he is acquitted that I will marry him." She laughed once more. "Oh, I am going to enjoy that trial tomorrow."

You really hate him, don't you? he thought. I wouldn't want anyone to hate me like that. He stared at her as though from a distance, suddenly quiet, unable to think of anything at all.

She laughed, low and throaty, all the harshness and primal savagery gone from it, and the hardness slid from her features and the smile she showed him was rich with allure and promise.

"But enough of such talk," she

said. "There are more pleasant things to discuss, are there not, *querido?*"

Querido, he thought, darling. It was the first time he had heard an expression of affection from her. His heart began to race.

She glanced about her with a look of boredom. "I can not stomach this place any more tonight. So much noise and loud talk, such tedious music." Her eyes caressed his face, her voice was very low. "Do you know of somewhere else we can go? Where we will be alone?"

The next morning he hummed her name over and over as he rose and showered.

He was in the best of moods, until he saw the morning paper with the news that today was the trial of the accused traitor and seditionist, Ramon Laramate. A grayness came over him then, a moment of chill like a musty wash of air from a tomb. He shrugged the sensation from him. She hated Laramate. It would not bother her should he execute the man. Still, he was curious to see if she had denounced Laramate.

The evening paper informed him. She was there in a huge photograph on the front page, face contorted with rage and hate so that he scarcely recognized her, pointing a finger elongated and thickened by its nearness to the camera, mouthing silent execrations. This disturbed him somewhat. She appeared to be of genteel extraction and her part in the trial was not at all in keeping with her refined upbringing. Then he recalled that these had been troubled times the past two years in Cielo Azul and that she must have witnessed many atrocities. And then there was the matter of her having been very close to Laramate and now denouncing him. Even the paper remarked on that. She had accused Laramate of plotting with the deposed dictator, now in exile, for the overthrow of Tomasino.

I will have to be careful with her, he told himself. I'll see her a few more times and then I will drop her. I do not want her to begin hating me.

Then he laughed at his fears. He was a captain in the army of Tomasino de la Luz. Nothing could harm him; he was secure. But hadn't Laramate been a confidant of Tomasino? But Laramate had criticized the Leader for his inaction and inability to get the economy of the country back on its feet.

He, the captain, was different. He had never concerned himself with politics and did not intend to. He had joined Tomasino as a soldier and would remain one.

That evening the warden of the prison informed him there would be no executions that night. There

were two condemned men, convicted of atrocities, but they would be held over until the following night when it was expected that Laramate would be shot. A higher court would review the sentence of death the next day, but it was not expected to reverse the penalty since Tomasino had declared in a public speech that Laramate was guilty and must die.

"So enjoy yourself tonight, my captain," the warden said with a wink. "Tomorrow night you will earn your pay."

So he returned to his hotel and put on a fresh uniform and then went early to the Flor de Oro on the Avenida Nacional.

She was moody this evening and not given to talking. She stared at him out of dark, veiled eyes. After a long silence, she asked, "Is there no chance whatever of Laramate escaping?"

"None. The prison is well-guarded. Not a man has got away since we took charge." He peered at her narrowly. "Are you frightened?" He could not help his lips twisting into a small smile as he said that.

"Frightened? Why should I be?"

"After all, you denounced Laramate. Should he escape, would he not want vengeance on you?"

Her hand clutched his wrist and her nails dug in until they pained. "But you just said Laramate can not escape."

"That is true. I was just teasing, *querida*." He folded a hand over hers. The nails still dug into his flesh. "Let us go from here. My place."

"Before we go," she said slowly, "you must promise me something.

An uneasiness stirred in him. Then he mocked his stupid fears. What could she do to him? Denounce him? He had never concerned himself with politics; he had never uttered a single word against Tomasino; he was more faithful to the Leader than the natives of Cielo Azul. What, pray, could she do to him?

"What do you wish me to promise?"

"That I will be allowed to watch Laramate die."

She had this way of catching him by surprise, of rendering him speechless, and it angered him. Then it came to him it was this unpredictability about her that made her so exciting to him. But there were times when he wished she were a trifle dull and common-place.

"It is highly irregular," he said. "The executions must be held in private. When we first started shooting war criminals and the public could watch, there was a furor in foreign papers. You know, photographs and descrip-

tions. So Tomasino ordered that all subsequent executions be held in private. I am sorry. But that is how it is."

Her hand withdrew from his wrist. "Very well," she said, and rose to her feet. "I must go now. Good night."

He reached out and caught her by an arm. The fear of losing her was like a pain in his heart. "Good night? Have you forgotten you are to go with me to my place?"

She stared down at him as if from a distance, haughty and aloof. "I thought that perhaps you loved me. Evidently you do not, for you will not grant me even the tiniest favor."

"Maria Alba," he said, begging.

"Do not say my name," she burst out with a rush of viciousness. "Do not call me any more. Good night."

"Please," he said, and resisted her efforts to disengage his hand from her arm. "Do not be angry with me. Please, Maria Alba. I will do anything for you. But it is difficult; it is irregular." She tried to break his grip again. "No. Wait. I will see what I can do."

Her struggles ceased. She stared down at him with a cold, calculating look. "That is not enough. I must know definitely if I am to watch Laramate die."

He took a deep breath. The sound was audible, like a faint, ragged moan. "All right. I will do it. You shall watch him die."

I do not know what it is, he thought; it was never like this with me before. He was nervous and on edge; it was almost as if he expected threatening shapes to leap at him from out of the shadows of the courtyard. He assured himself that nothing could go wrong. He had told Maria Alba to wait for him beside the road to the hill. After it was over he would swear the firing squad to secrecy. They would obey because he was their captain and they feared him.

Thinking of the firing squad made him look at them, lounging about the jeep waiting for the warden to bring out the condemned prisoners. The only one the captain recognized was the stocky sergeant, Gomez. All the others were strangers to him. The turnover among the squad was very frequent these days. The fervor and frenzy that followed the overthrow of the dictator was ebbing; soldiers were losing stomach over serving on the firing squad. Was that what was wrong with him tonight? Had he finally been sated? Had he lost his desire to be in charge of the executions? He swore silently and told himself it was not so.

It was her who made him nervous. Not because he was afraid of the consequences, should it be

learned that she had watched the executions. It was something else, a sense of horror and revulsion that she should want to see Laramate die. I had not thought she could hate that much, he said to himself. He shook his head and decided he would have to break off with her sooner than he had planned.

He heaved a sigh of relief when the warden and guards came with the prisoners. Silently, he motioned them into the bus. There were three of them tonight. The two convicted of atrocities did not look at him. Only Laramate laid a heavy, piercing stare on him before stepping into the bus.

He told the firing squad to ride with the prisoners, the better to guard them, he explained. He would follow in the jeep. Gomez, the only holdover from the previous squad, evinced no surprise. He saluted and got behind the wheel of the bus. The captain got in the jeep and sounded the horn to start the bus.

She was waiting, hidden in some bushes along the road, and as she stepped out he slowed the jeep and without waiting for it to stop completely she climbed in. He noted that she wore men's clothing, khaki fatigues that were the uniform of the army of Tomasino. He wondered only briefly where she had got the clothing. She could have been a member of Tomasino's guerilla forces, as many women of Cielo Azul had been. In any event, the clothes facilitated her moving about and hindered recognition of her and he was grateful for that.

She spoke only once, leaning toward him and saying in a feral whisper, "I want him to die last."

"I have already promised you that," he said.

He could imagine her gloating and watching Laramate sweat out his final minutes and seconds while the other two died before him. The more he knew her, the more he became aware of the cruelty that dwelt in her. A faint shudder passed through him. Just tonight, he promised himself, and then he would have nothing more to do with her. He was already beginning to be sorry that he had gone this far with her.

They were at the hill now. The bus stopped with a faint squealing of brakes. Five of the firing squad came out of the bus, the sixth remaining to guard the prisoners. The captain got out of the jeep and stood on legs that seemed stiff and aged. He told Gomez the order in which the prisoners were to be shot.

Maria Alba sat in the jeep. If any of the firing squad knew astonishment over her presence they did not reveal it. The height of discipline, the captain thought wryly. The first prisoner stepped out of the bus on sagging legs, and the captain took his arm to

steady the man and directed him toward the bullet-pocked wall under the electric light. Halfway there, the prisoner's legs strengthened and he brushed the captain's hand away.

There were the formalities—the refusal of the blindfold, the acceptance of the last cigarette—and then the captain walked over to the firing squad and kept his back turned a decent interval to allow the prisoner a few extra puffs and then the captain faced around and spoke in his loud, clear voice.

"Atencion! Listo! Apunten! Tiren!"

The second one went much the same except that he needed no steadying hand and also refused the cigarette. When he was done, the captain looked to the bus for Laramate and saw that Maria Alba was at the door, preparing to enter. She beckoned him with a jerk of her head.

He went, a strange prickle like ice on his spine. He could not understand these twinges of uneasiness. Too many executions, he thought. He had better get away from them for awhile, perhaps take a trip back home to the States. All at once he knew a strong desire to be in his native land again, and silently swore at this weakness.

Inside the bus, Maria Alba spoke. "I wish to speak to you alone," she said to the captain.

He nodded a dismissal to the guard, who immediately went out of the bus. Laramate sat in a rear seat, watching the captain with a tiny smile that instantly vanished when the captain glanced at him. Again something disquieting moved through the captain as he remembered a smile like that one on Gomez and on Maria Alba. When he turned to look at her, he saw that she had taken a pistol out of her clothing and was pointing it at him.

Again surprise and shock left him mute. And something told him she would never startle him again, because there would not be the chance. Laramate had risen swiftly from his seat and took the captain's pistol from its holster.

"I admire your uniform, Captain," Laramate said. "Would you let me have it? Quickly."

The paralysis began to leave the captain's throat. He looked with hurt and anger at Maria Alba. She read the question in his glance and smiled thinly.

"There was no other way to get Ramon out of the prison," she said.

The captain could speak now. "You planned it thus?" His voice was hoarse, he hardly recognized it as his own.

She nodded.

"But what about your sister? Have you forgiven him for that?"

"I never had a sister."

"They were all lies then? Even

when you said you loved me?"

She showed her teeth. "I meant it as much as you meant it when you said you loved me. How else was I to do it? I had to denounce him, so that it would look like I was against him; and I had to pretend that I hated him very much, so that you would allow me to attend his execution." She laughed, quietly, without mirth. "Yes. His execution." She laughed again.

"Hurry with those clothes, Captain," Laramate said, his voice ugly. "I will not ask you again."

They can't get away with it, the captain thought as he took off his uniform and put on Laramate's denims. They were of a size and the denims fit. I know what they are trying to do, but they forget that those are my soldiers out there. I am their captain. They will obey me, not them. Let them have their little fun. I shall laugh last.

Laramate jabbed him in the back with the pistol and moved him out of the bus. "To the wall," Laramate growled. "Underneath the light."

The captain's heart was pounding. He had to swallow the panicked urge to shout. He had to wait until Laramate stepped back, thus removing the pistol from contact with his body. Then he would show Laramate who the firing squad took orders from.

"There is no time for a blindfold or a cigarette, Captain," Laramate said, walking away as the captain stood under the glare of the electric light. "I am sorry."

"Sergeant," the captain shouted. "Gomez. Shoot the traitor. Do you not know him? He is Laramate. Do you not recognize him? Gomez. Why don't you do something? Can't you see what is going on here? Shoot him down where he stands. Gomez!"

But Gomez was grinning, the grin he had seen in the courtyard two nights ago, and the rest of the squad was grinning, too. They were in the plot, also. Somehow Laramate's men had been substituted for the regular squad. That accounted for the absence of Rivera and— He stole a quick glance at Maria Alba and saw that she was watching with much interest. At least, she was not smiling, nor was Laramate.

The clipped, loud commands were very familiar in the captain's ears; only the voice was strange, lower and harsher than his had been, the voice of Laramate, shouting:

"Atencion! Listo! Apunten! Tiren!..."

COLD-BLOODED Witness

BY

R. SIMON KOHN

"LILLY!" Boyd Harris shouted across the house to his wife. "Type these changes up for me like a good girl!"

She came into the living room with that tantalizing walk of hers, followed by her co-star Victor Powers. Her piquant face was caught in a frown. "For heaven's sake, Boyd, don't tell me you've really changed the script again?"

"Personally, I thought it was good the way it was," Powers said, as he placed the suitcase in the foyer. He was tall and rugged. It hadn't been so long ago that he had played Westerns. Then Boyd Harris, the playwright, had "discovered" him for the legitimate theatre. Now Powers smiled his famous smile and said, "But as you know when it comes to dialogue, I have no opinions. I speak the lines as I find them."

Lilly smiled at him. "But you speak them like an angel!" She

Involved murder plots may conceivably end up involving the murderer as well as his victim. Paradoxically, the simpler the plot, the easier it is to execute and the harder to unravel. All this apropos our story, a delicate pastiche trimmed with red and white corpuscles.

reached for the typewriter paper, stacked and ready with their carbons.

"Provided they're written with angelic inspiration," Harris said, handing his wife a heavily scrawled page and starting for the stairs. "I'll bring the recorder down. It's just one page of copy, but it's been plaguing me. I want the two of you to run through it for me, before Victor leaves."

At the top of the steps he paused. The silence from below was tangible. The silence, he was sure, of two people in a snatched embrace. He shook his head, grimaced as one tensing against pain. Not till he heard the staccato tapping of the typewriter did he go for the recorder. Lilly was typing rapidly, but he would have been willing to bet Powers was standing behind her. He visualized them, the man's caressing hands on her shoulders...

With the recorder in his arms, he started talking from the head of the stairs, wanting to warn them that he was coming.

"This scene's got to be just right," he said, "It's the very essence of the climax. But it isn't playing the way it should. I'm trying a sharp switch and I won't know if I've got it till I hear it."

"Don't forget I've a plane to catch," Powers said, looking at his watch.

"All I need is one run through so I can record it," Boyd said, adjusting the recorder with a fresh tape. "Vic, you tell Lilly 'no interpolations.'"

Lilly pulled the pages out of the typewriter, handed a carbon to Powers, a puzzled look in her eyes. "Frankly, Boyd," she said, "I don't understand these changes. Unless you're planning some fantastic change for the third act..."

"That's the general idea," Boyd Harris said. "Now," as she started to protest, "I know what I'm doing. I didn't have a chance to talk it over with you. I wanted to think it through first. Look, have you forgotten Victor has a plane he has to catch? Come on now! Give it all you've got. I want to know if I've got something here to work on... All right. Begin this on a high emotional key, Victor. You're agitated. Your agitation grows until in a frenzy, you stab her with the letter opener on the desk." Lightly he tossed the letter opener he was holding to Victor, who caught it with a sudden snap of his hand.

"Really, Boyd," Lilly complained, "a letter opener! You'd think letter openers lay conveniently around for killers..."

"Darling, don't you know a playwright is omnipotent. He can create a reason for a letter opener being handy. Come on now, get into it. Lilly, you begin with sudden fear."

"I don't see what this has to do with—"

"I've a plane to catch!" Powers pleaded, his face pained.

"Then tell Lilly," Boyd said as he crossed to the recorder, "to stop arguing. I didn't write in any business. I just want to hear the words. But read as true as you can because this is tricky. And *please,* Lilly, no remarks until you're through. Okay, Victor—"

As Powers, his voice sharp and agitated began reading, Boyd switched on the recorder.

"In other words," Powers was saying, "you won't come with me as you promised? Is that it?"

"Don't look at me like that!" Lilly read, her voice quavering.

"How would you expect me to look at you?" Powers' voice rose sharper.

"You frighten me, the way you look—"

"How would you have me look? Tender and loving when you're tearing my heart out? For weeks we had planned—"

Boyd motioned for tempo and Lilly read on: "I can't leave him now. Can't you understand?"

"But yesterday you could?! Yesterday you trembled with joy at the thought of leaving him. But that's not what makes you tremble now, is it?" His voice grew in violence. "Well? What makes you tremble now?"

"Don't! Please! Please, please don't look like that! And you're hurting me! It's as if—" As she read on, her voice fading into a frightened whisper, she shook her head, frowning at her husband who motioned impatiently for her to continue.

She went on: "Darling, you know I love you! These last months have been wonderful! Why can't we let things go along—?"

"I won't leave you here for him! Or stay here to accept small favors. For weeks, months, you've gone from a 'yes' to a 'no'. You will leave! You won't leave! Well, I've listened to my last 'no'—"

As Lilly screamed, Powers' voice rose in crescendo, "Now *I'm* saying 'no'! Like *this*—and *this*—and *this*..."

Boyd switched off the recorder, shaking his head d o l e f u l l y. "Sounds like pure unmitigated corn! Well," he grinned, "at least I know it and won't go ahead and put a lot of work into it."

"I don't know what you could have been thinking of." Lilly said. "Killing me off in the second act. There'd have been just two characters left. Men, at that. Really, Boyd, sometimes..."

"Forget it!" Boyd took the script from each of them, crumpled the pages and tossed them into the blazing fireplace. "Sometimes, the only way to get rid of a dumb idea is to get it out of your system."

"I kind of liked it, as a matter of fact," Powers said. "There was

emotion there I could get my teeth into."

"You're such a sweet baby," Lilly smiled at Powers. "Go on or you'll miss your plane." She kissed him casually, but Boyd saw the meaningful way her hand squeezed his arm.

The two men shook hands. Powers picked up his suitcase. "See you in two weeks," he said.

After he left, Lilly looked at her husband curiously. "What kind of ending *were* you thinking of?" she asked.

"I'm forgetting the whole thing," he said, going to the foyer for his coat. "So why bother talking about it?" He came back, putting on his gloves. "I'm going for a spin. See if I can clarify my thoughts." He stopped by the recorder, fiddled with it. "This thing's stuck. Would you come here a minute?" As she came over, he looked up suddenly. "You're going to miss him, aren't you?" he said softly.

She started; all color left her face. Decisively, his gloved right hand snatched the letter opener, lifted and smashed it into her body—once, twice. With his free hand he turned the recorder on, in time to catch her startled gasp and the broken moan which followed it, the crash of a vase struck by her plummeting arm, the dull sound of her body slumping to the floor.

He then moved quietly out of the house, leaving the tape recorder on to silently measure out the required passing of time. Without haste, he continued to follow his carefully made plan, initiated a month ago when they had all come to the lodge to find "the necessary serenity" to polish the new play.

He drove to the village at the same time and in the same way that he had been doing it for the last four weeks. The same gay hand-salute to the idlers in front of the one hotel. The habitual stop at the drugstore for ice cream. The slow drive home.

He went in the front way, calling from the foyer for the recorder to record: "Lilly? Come and get it! I bought chocolate this time. I—" He stopped mid-sentence at the threshold of the living room and then still for the benefit of the recorder, gasped, "Oh, my God!" He moved swiftly toward the figure on the floor, toppling a small table in his calculated haste. Leaning over her, he repeated, "Oh, my God" in a choked voice. Moaning, he stumbled to the phone.

"Operator! Operator! Get me the sheriff and the doctor! Hurry, please! Someone's stabbed my wife! Please, please hurry! The Harris lodge..."

He sat hunched, his face in his

hands like a man dazed by shock; nevertheless, he followed tautly the interminable, maddening routine of the homocide detail.

It had been easier before, when he had been both author and actor. Now he no longer had control of the script. Detectives, photographer, finger-print man, doctor—all proceeding as if by rote.

And all through their elaborate ritual of examination and questioning, he wondered—his nerves growing tighter and tighter—how long it would be before one of the fools would discover that the recorder was on...

It was then, just as he feared he would have to destroy the impact by "discovering" the recorder himself, that the officer dusting for prints, noticed it and that it was on.

Suddenly nothing was routine.

Without looking up—still playing a dazed, bewildered individual—he felt their excited movement toward the recorder, the same thought in each mind: was it possible, could it be that here—in this lifeless object—they had an irrefutable witness?

"Mr. Harris!" the Lieutenant in charge called out sharply. "Did you know your tape-recorder was on?"

Harris looked up with dull eyes. "But that's impossible. I mean—" He got up and walked over to them. "I didn't use the thing today and I remember putting in a new roll when I finished with it yesterday."

With mounting tension, his glance passed from one to the other. "Do you think—is it possible—it could be recorded? The whole thing might be recorded?"

With everybody crowded around the machine, he switched to a playback deliberately starting close to the position of the roll at that time. The voices of the assembled group boomed out—too loud, but clear. Then he threw it further back. "Lilly!" his voice rang out, "Come and get it—"

He cut it off. Again his glance passed over those around him. Then he wet his lips and with a shudder, that was genuine, he threw the switch to the start of the roll.

Powers' rich, resonant voice shattered the silence, "In other words, you won't come with me as you promised?" Then Lilly's voice tinged with fear, "Don't look at me like that." No one moved, they scarcely breathed as the recorder played back what each knew to be the death scene, played it straight through to the scene's final words, "Like *this*—and *this*—and *this*...!"

The lieutenant, wishing to miss nothing, leaned closer to the recorder, heard the last soft rush of breath from Lilly's lips, the thudding crash, the ensuing silence. He turned the machine off.

"Who is it, Harris?" he asked.

Harris was staring at the machine, his face twisted with confusion and shock. "I can't believe it! Lilly! Lilly and Powers! I can't believe it! My God, I just can't believe it!"

Slowly, painfully, he allowed facts—that he wanted to appear—to be drawn from him:

For the last four years they and Powers had been close friends. He had written starring vehicles for Lilly and Powers. The last had been a smash hit. He was just finishing a three character play in which they were to appear this season. That's what they had been working on. Powers had been with them off and on all month. He had planned a brief vacation before the start of rehearsals. He was to have left today. At least that's what he had said...

Constantly, he interpolated his stunned unwillingness to believe that Powers had done this horrible thing, that Powers and Lilly could have betrayed him. Shuddering, he refused to listen to the tape run off again. At last, after he had given them a picture of Powers, heard the lieutenant send out an all-point alert, he allowed himself to be helped into the bedroom.

Alone, he lay on the bed—relieved, smiling inwardly.

When Harris left the room, the lieutenant stood staring at the recorder and was lost in thought.

"Something bothering you?" the doctor asked, picking up his bag.

"I've got a funny feeling," the lieutenant said, frowning, shaking his head.

"Take some aspirin," the doctor grinned and started for the door.

"You said there are *two* wounds," the lieutenant persisted. "Two—but there ought to be *three!*" He started the recorder again. "Listen." When it reached "Like this—and this—and this," he thrust downward three times as one would with a dagger. "See?" he said. "Three—!"

The sergeant, sitting on the table near the typewriter, put down the cigar he was smoking. "Maybe he missed on the first try. Or maybe she fell before he struck the third time."

"But the voice suggests— Oh well, I suppose you're right. I guess I just hate loose ends..."

"Hating loose ends," the doctor said, standing at the door, "is something you have in common with my profession. What really gets me is how a playwright can be fooled like just the run of ordinary humans. There he is creating domestic triangles on paper all day long, but when he gets involved in one himself, he doesn't see it any better than anybody else."

"These fellows who write plays," the sergeant said, shaking

off ash that had fallen from his cigar onto a shiny sheet of carbon paper, "they're human too." The carbon copy that had been adhering to the carbon fluttered to the floor. "They couldn't manufacture this stuff if they wasn't," he said as he picked up the sheet of paper and started reading from it. "Say," he said, after a moment, looking perplexed, "what is this? Listen—listen. 'In other words,'" he read aloud from the paper in his hand, "'you won't come with me as you promised? Is that it?" 'Don't look at me like that!'"

The sergeant stopped. The three men stared at each other, at the recorder, in the direction of the bedroom.

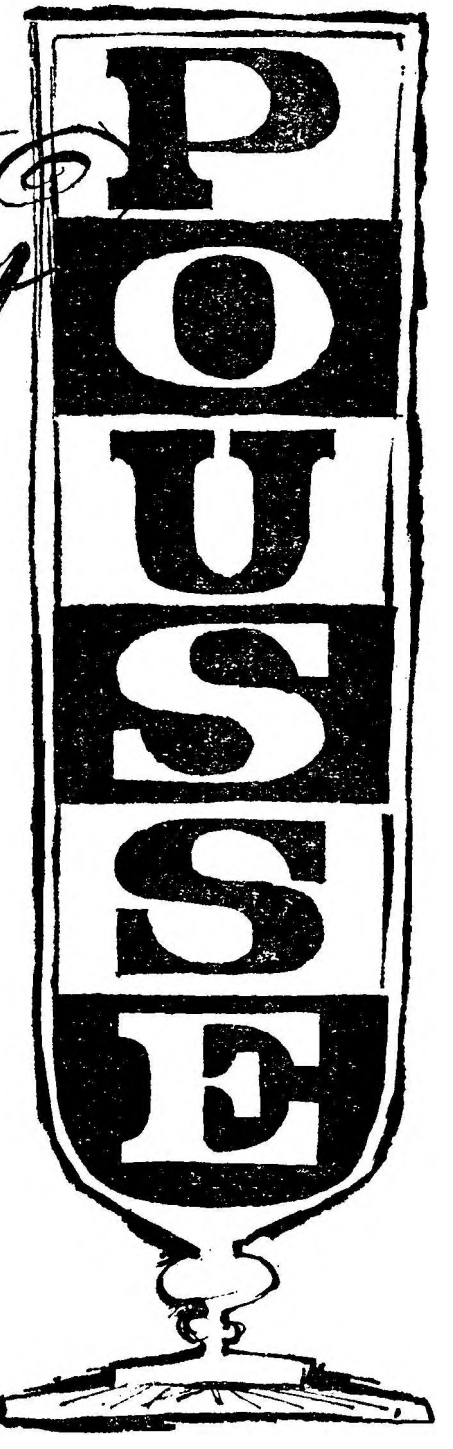
"Go on," the lieutenant said. "Let's hear some more of that."

The sergeant read through to the end, to, "Like this—and this—and this—"

The lieutenant took the paper from him then. "Tell Harris to come in," he said. He turned and saw the playwright, face white, standing in the doorway. "Ah, in on cue, Mr. Harris. In time, I hope, to realize you should have followed your script. There should have been *three* stab wounds—" and he added softly, *"one less carbon . . ."*

by Robert Sheckley

POUSSE



"Now that's what I call a minor masterpiece!" said Hadden.

"I thought you'd like it," Dougherty said, walking around the pile of new luggage and setting his tray on a coffee table.

On the tray were two striped drinks in straight-sided glasses. They were pousse-cafes, ornamental little drinks made of six different liqueurs, poured with a steady hand and held in place by their different densities. They were brightly banded frivolities of a former age, conversation-pieces which showgirls used to order in the gaudy nightclubs of the twenties—to the despair of hard-working bartenders. They were tigerish drinks whose stripes were colored, in ascending order, red, yellow, violet, white, green and amber. They were party drinks. They were amusing drinks.

"Very pretty!" Hadden said. He was a tall, boyish-looking man with cherubic small features. Taking the glass Dougherty offered him, he sipped at the top layer.

"Brandy?"

The title of this story is not related to pussy cat in any significant manner. Taken orally, a Pousse-Cafe might conceivably cause one to lie down and to purr, but being decidedly alcoholic it might just as well set one to barking.

"Correct," Dougherty said. "A proper pousse-cafe should be an adventure into the unknown, a journey from the commonplace to the marvellous. The topmost layer would of course be brandy. Do you like it?"

"It's an excellent brandy," Hadden said. "A most superior brandy. Do you know, I'm glad we're able to do this."

"I am too," Dougherty said. "It's been a long time since we've had a drink together."

"Six years," Hadden said thoughtfully. "A year for each stripe. Is that why you chose this particular drink?"

"A long time," Hadden said, and a frown creased his boyish face. "Too long."

"And it'll be even longer before we drink again," Dougherty said.

"I suppose so," Hadden said, finishing the layer of brandy. He glanced at the bright aluminum luggage piled neatly beside the big old wardrobe trunk. "Yes, it'll be quite a long time—unless you can see your way clear to visiting us in Uruguay."

"Perhaps I shall," Dougherty said. "Try the next layer."

Hadden nodded and sipped at

the tigerish yellow stripe. He pursed his lips, thought for a moment, then said, "Chartreuse?"

"Correct," Dougherty said. "You know your liqueurs, my lad."

"Seriously now," Hadden said. "Do you think you can come visit us?"

"There's nothing I'd like better. But are you sure that you and Lucille would want me?"

"Of course we would!" Hadden said. "Look, Tommy, all that foolishness is over, isn't it? It's been six years after all."

"There are no hard feelings on my side," Dougherty said. "It's you and Lucille who—"

"We never had any grudge against you," Hadden said. "Never! Tommy, you and I were such good friends at Dartmouth. Can't we be friends again?"

"That's what I want," Dougherty said. "That's why I called you up, finally. Of course I didn't know you were leaving the country—and so soon."

Hadden shrugged. "I'd really rather not go. But Lucille's father left her all that land—five thousand acres, I think. In Uruguay! So off we go, bag and baggage. That was mighty nice of you to have offered us that old wardrobe trunk. You know, I just can't see myself as a plantation owner."

"I could rather fancy the role," Dougherty asid. "What's the matter?"

"I've just reached the next layer," Hadden said. "The white layer under the Chartreuse. Delicious! Don't tell me what it is, let me think... Creme de Menthe!"

"Correct," said Dougherty.

Hadden said, "I hope Lucille doesn't mind my drinking so early in the morning."

"We simply won't tell her," Dougherty said.

"That'll be rather difficult. She's coming over here to pick me up. In fact, she's due any time now."

"Lucille is coming here?" Dougherty asked.

"Yes. I asked her to meet me here instead of at the ship. That was all right, wasn't it?"

"I see. Of course! We'll simply swallow the evidence. Drink up, old man!"

Dougherty watched as Hadden sipped the violet fourth layer of the diminishing pousse-cafe.

"Forbidden Fruit!" Hadden cried.

"Eh?" said Dougherty, almost upsetting his drink.

"This layer! It's Forbidden Fruit, isn't it?"

"No you'll have to guess again."

Hadden finished the fourth layer. "Blackberry cordial?"

"Creme de Yvette."

"How wonderful!" cried Hadden. "You're right, this pousse-cafe of yours *is* a journey from the commonplace to the marvellous.

Are there further wonders in store?"

"Oh yes," Dougherty said.

"I can hardly believe it," Hadden said, holding the striped drink to the light. "This next layer looks like yellow Chartreuse, and the final red layer must be grenadine. Am I right?"

"You'll just have to drink and find out," Dougherty said.

Hadden sipped the fifth layer. "Yellow Chartreuse," he said, and put down his glass.

"You aren't stopping now, are you?" Dougherty said, and his concern seemed a shade stronger than that required of a good host.

"I think I must," Hadden said, wiping his forehead. "No breakfast today, and these liqueurs pack quite a wallop. There's the ship in an hour and I'm really afraid I'll be sick."

"Nonsense," Dougherty said. "Good liqueurs couldn't hurt anyone. Besides, you haven't penetrated into the marvellous."

"It's grenadine."

Dougherty smiled and shook his head. "Drink and see."

"Old man, I've really had enough," Hadden said, and began to rise. Dougherty restrained him.

"I thought," Dougherty said, "that we were dissolving a quarrel of six years duration. I went to considerable trouble in making these six-layered farewell drinks. In point of fact I spoiled three before I caught the knack of pouring. I knew you liked novelties... But leave if you wish. I suppose I was a sentimental fool."

"Not at all!" Hadden said, picking up his drink. "Let's be friends again, Tommy. The quarrel was stupid. It's unfortunate that we were both chasing Lucille. That sort of thing can break up the best of friendships."

"She picked you," Dougherty said.

"Yes. Apparently so."

"Apparently? Good Lord, man, you've been married to her for six years!"

"I know. I just meant... Well frankly, Tommy, if you hadn't gone off into the sulks, I really think she might have picked you."

"Do you?" Dougherty asked, glancing at his watch.

"I really do," Hadden said, sipping the Chartreuse layer. "You fascinated her with your moody Spanish grandee airs. But you never liked competition. So when you retired into your splendid hauteur, lil ol Hadden won the field. Hey, am I drunk?"

"Of course not," Dougherty said, watching the yellow stripe disappear as Hadden drank.

"What was I saying? I hope it wasn't anything insulting. I get insulting under the influence. Perhaps I should stop while I'm still ahead."

"Finish your drink," Dougherty said.

At that moment the doorbell chimed. Dougherty stood up quickly and opened the door. In walked a blonde girl with a hard, pretty, polished face.

"Lucille!" said Dougherty.

"Hello, Tommy," Lucille said. "I'm glad you two've made up. But did you have to get my husband drunk?"

"Not drunk," Hadden said firmly. "Tipsy, perhaps. You got the tickets?"

"Tickets, passports, everything," Lucille said. "What is that you're drinking?"

"Remnants of a pousse-cafe," Hadden said. "Old Tommy's idea. Commonplace on top, marvelous at the bottom."

"What?" Lucille asked.

"Old Tommy's theory," Hadden said. "Start with the commonplace. Then journey deep down the striped rings into unknown lands where lurk strange beasts and dark delights. Listen to me!"

"Very poetic," Lucille said. "However, we have a ship to catch."

"Give him a chance to finish his drink," Dougherty said.

"Lucille," said Hadden, "maybe you'd like some of it. Have a drink, darling! I've drunk away all the commonplace, and only the marvelous is left."

"It looks good," Lucille said.

Dougherty blinked rapidly, as if he'd felt the prick of a sudden concern.

"It looks *very* good," Lucille said. "But you know I drink only Scotch."

Hadden sipped at the red final layer.

"It's like plum brandy," he said. "But not quite. There's a certain bitterness, an almost metallic sharpness." He loosened his tie. "I really don't think I'll—"

"Hurry up," Lucille said to Hadden. "We have less than an hour before ship time."

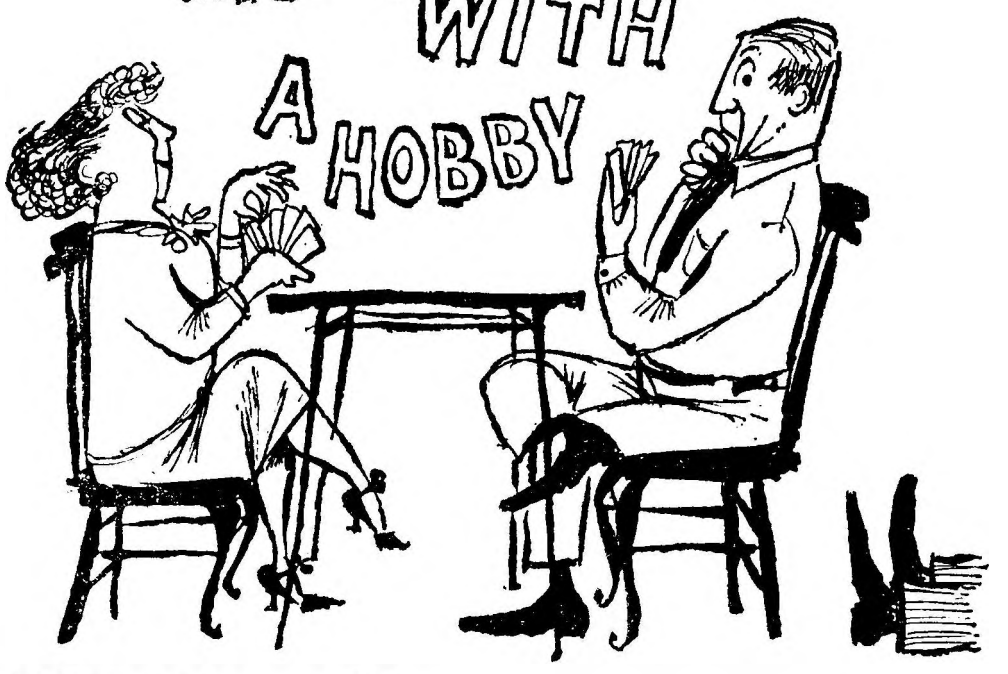
Obediently Hadden drained the final layer. The glass fell from his hand. He could see Lucille unfastening the snaps on the big wardrobe trunk, and Dougherty was walking over to help her. And he wondered, dreamily, why they should want to open the big trunk. But an answer was slow in coming, and consciousness was slipping quickly from him.

"Hurry up," Lucille said to Dougherty. "We have less than an hour before ship time."

Every Sunday

Don't miss the most unusual and exciting suspense television show of the week—ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS. Every Sunday. Check your favorite TV program-guide for the time this top-rated mystery show reaches your area.

LADY WITH A HOBBY



BY RAYMOND E. BANKS

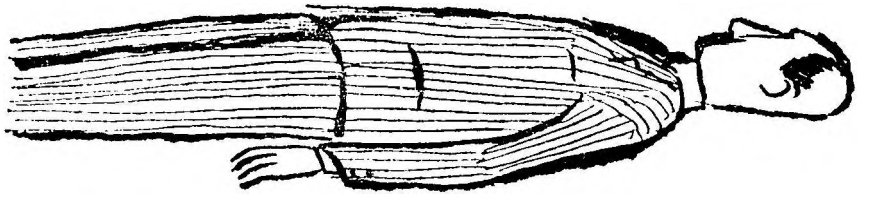
I always say a person needs a hobby. Man *or* woman. Look at me. I fish. Sure, that doesn't help togetherness, but as I tell Andrea, my wife, we appreciate each other the more when I've had a good weekend on the ocean lugging in barracuda, sea bass and so forth.

On the other hand, she just grinds along, a little housework, a little gardening, a little shopping, and much chasing the kids. She gets in a rut and the first thing you know she's griping

To live within ones means, somehow requires more of the fiscal than is ever available. Certain alternatives present themselves to the average individual: robbery, murder—or looking through the pockets of one's old suits.

about the fact that we need new rugs, or else the car she drives is a beat-up old Studebaker, and why can't we have one of those cute foreign cars. Even a trip to Europe.

"Look," I tell her. "The heart-attacks go to Europe. The ulcers. Do you want me to be one of those driven types that makes you a widow at fifty-five?"



"At least I'd be a widow with a new rug," she said.

But they don't catch me in that spiral. I'm assistant manager at the Best Bargain Market, and I leave my job when we lock the door. Young at forty, and I'll be younger at fifty.

At least that was the way it was until a year ago.

One night the Evans came over. You know the type. There's a couple like this in every circle. They argued going up the aisle and they've been fighting ever since. One good insult deserves another, and these folks have had lots of practice. We were playing cards. Sam Evans trumped Deborah's ace and she said: "For a nickel I'd take a blunt instrument to you."

"Thanks and redoubled," said Sam. "You try it, gives me an excuse to drive a stake through your black little heart."

"I'd give five hundred dollars for the first brave man shoots you dead," said Deborah Evans, and my wife Andrea suddenly looked up from staring at the rug, the old rug, because bridge bores her and said: "I'll bet you wouldn't."

"Huh," snorted Deborah. "Try me!"

Andrea brightened up and got real interested in the bridge game. Naturally, I didn't think much of it at the time. I meant to men-

tion it later, but that was Friday night and I had to lay out my tackle for the Saturday sport-fishing boat and I forgot.

When I rolled out early Andrea was up and had packed my lunch. "Well, thanks," I said. "No trouble," she said. "The Evans' are going on a picnic and invited me along, so I had to make a lunch anyway."

"Remember me to the ants," I said, and took off.

Poor Sam Evans caught it that day. As it turned out later, they had been picnicking in that park down by the seashore and Sam got to showing off, fooling around by the edge of the rocks. It's about one hundred and twenty-five feet down, and Sam forgot he couldn't fly.

I got pretty mad at the funeral because it didn't particularly seem sad, the way the funeral ought to be. I mean, the way things change in this modern age, at least some of the old customs ought to last. But I'll swear that Deborah Evans was as dry-eyed as an orange peal in the sun.

"By God, I believe she's really glad Sam's dead!" I told Andrea.

"Sam was awful to her," said Andrea. "Simply awful. She told me all about it."

The rug was delivered about two weeks later. "Now, Andrea," I said, "I don't particularly understand about the rug. We have thirty-eight dollars in the savings, and this must've cost—"

"Five hundred, Hal," she said. "Only five hundred."

"I don't care for that number exactly, Andrea," I said. I mean you have to be firm with women. There's a tone I get in my voice so she knows I'm more or less serious. "How come five hundred shows up in your life right now?"

"But, Hal, I *told* you. Aunt Martha in St. Louis died last year and left a little money. Can't you remember anything?"

"That was way back," I said.

"Last year, honey," she said laughing with the blue eyes and pinching my arm. "It takes a long time to finish a probate in Missouri."

"Let me see the letter from the lawyer."

She pointed at the disorder of my desk. I haven't exactly kept the papers up to date there.

"Just the same I'm going to find that letter," I told her. "I may even write to the Supreme Court of Missouri. That's mighty poor probating."

But as it turned out the albacore came in that Saturday and I didn't get around to it.

"The car broke down again," Andrea told me.

"Don't worry in the least about it," I said. "In exactly twenty-three

months we'll pay off my car. Then we can get you another car."

"It seems like a long time to wait."

I lifted her chin with my hand. I mean, women are girls, really; you have to often give them fatherly advice. "For forty years I have wanted a sport-fishing boat of my own," I said. "As a skipper I could make twice what I make now in a year, just during the fishing season. It only takes twenty thousand to start. Some day I'll have it. But not tomorrow. You see, you have to work these things out."

"So *that's* what that special savings account of yours means, where it has "SFB" on the cover."

"Sport-fishing boat. Correct. You see how I plan for the future?"

"How much in the account?"

"It's not that. It's the principle—"

"How much?"

"Eleven dollars and sixty-seven cents," I said, "but I'm truly not worried. I'm a patient guy."

That night the Markhams who play a sharp bridge hand came over. They are a fine couple, if you can keep them off their weakness. Their weakness is his mother who lives with them. They get pretty desperate about the woman. "I'd give a thousand dollars to be free of her," laughed Sarah. "Today she changed our phone from a single line to a party line while I was shopping. She wanted company. She gets into things."

"It's not that she isn't a wonderful mother," said Don. "But she likes to talk to door-to-door salesmen. We own three vacuum cleaners, two sewing machines, and hold lifetime subscriptions to twelve magazines."

"She pulls up my daisies in the garden," said Sarah.

"She gave a wad of money we gave her for new clothes to my sad-sack younger brother," said Don.

"A thousand dollars!" my wife said. "That still could be an economy for you."

"It's my bid!" I cried, because of the turn of the conversation. "Four no trump!"

I went down 2,000 points on that hand.

About a week later after the albacore had quit running, I came home one night and found a Volkswagon in the driveway. I literally ran into the house.

"It cost only a thousand," said Andrea. "With my old car and a small monthly payment, which I can handle from the grocery money."

"Andrea," I said. "Andrea, I want to talk to you—"

"Yes, dear."

I tried to explain to her about

hobbies. You don't *invent* a hobby—you pick something that a lot of other people do. It's all right to be creative, but—God!

She drew a bead on me with her clear blue eyes, and it was plain she was wondering how much I knew. I remember at the time she held a breadknife, kind of waving it, so it glinted, and it seemed she was different somehow.

"Look, Hal," she said. "You have your hobby. I have mine. Let's don't get into each other's hair."

I wasn't exactly frightened. It's a man's job to set his wife right, whatever the danger. "I am going to buy you a stamp album," I said. "Some beginning stamps—right out of my SFB fund."

I turned my back right on her and went to my room and locked the door and then picked up the phone.

"How are things going?" I asked Don Markham when I got him on the wire.

"Fine, Hal, fine."

"Mother okay?"

"Oh," he said. "I guess you haven't heard—"

My breath got shorter and my hands began to sweat. "No, I haven't old buddy."

"Auto accident," he said. "Very sudden—"

It was late in the fishing season and I was out on a boat with Al Grubel. You meet all kinds on the public sport-fishing boats. Poor folks, medium folks, and rich folks. You'd think that rich folks would hire charter boats, or run their own and some do, but the truth is, the charter boat captains are what we call "week-end skippers." They don't know the best fishing spots. The good fishing spots change from day to day, so the man who can take you right to the best spot is the daily-traveling public boat skipper, like I planned to be one day.

Al Grubel is a lawyer with a lot of classy clients. I'd been kind of asking him legal questions during the summer, like the best way to beat a murder case and how much it costs to defend one, and whether a woman killer had a better chance than a man.

"If you know a killer," Al said that day, "I could use one."

"I don't—exactly. But you meet all kinds in the grocery store business," I told him. "Why?"

"Well, it's because of the way you've been talking. You see, I have a problem with my wife, Hal. We're five years married and quite honestly I can't see the next five."

"How about divorce?"

"She's fifty-eight," said Al. "Also she owns three-quarters of a million dollars from before we were married. I am the heir."

"If I knew anybody—"

"I'd pay twenty thousand," said Al. "A full, ripe twenty-thousand—"

That night when I got home, I caught Andrea hanging up the telephone in a suspicious hurry. I noticed she also was writing on a newspaper. But it wasn't the paper that startled me. It was the name she had scribbled. I got a peek; it was Joe Vecchi. Anybody who's ever listened to the gossip along the sport-fishing boat rail knows he's a bad one—syndicate, mafia, gangster, killer, gambler, collection man—

"Andrea," I said softly. "A hobby is supposed to be like amateur. I mean, you don't have a hobby to make money with. You have a husband for that."

"You're saving up to buy a sport-fishing boat and change your hobby into a living," she said. "So why shouldn't anybody?"

I tried to explain to her about syndicates, and that she wouldn't be happy as an associate of that crowd. She wouldn't listen.

"We need a new house," she said. "Houses cost money."

I could see then that I would have to give her the Grubel killing to keep her from getting too involved with low types.

Mrs. Grubel turned out to be a dislikable old gal, a real boozer with red eyes, a wrinkled face like a ball of rubber bands, and a figure like a pencil. She also complained of a smell of fish when I was in the room, which I thought was uncalled for.

Andrea played her usual game of listless bridge, studying her victim. I choked up a little with pride, noticing how professional Andrea had become. She asked just the right questions about how the old doll lived, and I could see she was laying it all out in her mind. It just shows you what a husband can do, if he handles a wife firmly and gets her started in the right direction.

"We're going to buy a new house soon," Andrea said aloud suddenly.

"Or maybe even a sportfishing boat," I said, feeling the evening was a success. I winked at Al, who winked back and bent cheerfully over his cards.

"No," said Andrea a few days later.

"What do you mean, 'No?'" I asked.

"I do not want to go out with Mrs. Grubel for an evening on the town," she said. "Not tonight. I am going to watch television tonight."

Since I had carefully set all of this up, I was enormously disappointed. There was a poker in the back seat of my car. In my glove compartment a bottle of poison and my quite-sharp fish-scaling knife. Al was out of town, estab-

lishing his alibi. We had gone to a movie the night before. We'd go back briefly tonight, quickly in and out. That we'd been at the movie would be our alibi.

"Twenty thousand," I reminded Andrea.

"All you talk about is money and killing," she said. "I'm surprised you'd consider murder. I'm worried that you need a head doctor."

This was the pattern of your killer personality, I thought. They call the rest of the world insane. After we had the sport-fishing boat, Andrea might have to go somewhere for treatments. I mean, when you get to doing things like getting rid of people, you get these enormous guilt feelings and go off your peanut. But I intended to stand by her. With the proceeds from the boat next season, I could support her in a nice, private sanitarium for a couple of years, and it wasn't as if these killings had really outraged society. They'd done more good than harm, and I was proud of her for that. True, she might have to be locked up the rest of her life, but I'd call on her every week during the off-fishing season and bring her fruit.

She kept saying, "No," but I whetted her appetite by talking about how easy it would be. I mean, somebody with a hobby, they can't resist that old firebell, like somebody sidling up to me and hollering, "Yellowtail!"

I told her I'd meet her at High Point in the Palos Verdes hills, near where Sam Evans stepped out into space. It was a nice, lonely spot overlooking the ocean and Andrea could pursue her hobby while I kept lookout. Actually, it was better if she came along later.

Before I left, Andrea said, "Hal, there's something I've been meaning to tell you."

"No, Andrea," I said. "Tomorrow, yes. Not tonight. If you've been doing s o m e t h i n g you shouldn't, tell me tomorrow. You watch TV, then meet me at High Point at midnight. Okay?"

She sighed and waved her hands helplessly. She knew as well as I that her killer's blood was up.

I had more trouble with Alice Grubel than I thought I would. I propped a ladder against her house, because I didn't want anybody to see me come to the front or back door, and the method of taking her out seemed to fire her romantic instincts right away. She thought I was interested in her —emotionally. She began telling me how awful life was with Al Grubel.

We stopped for drinks at a bar; the liquor made her more romantic. In the car going to High Point, she squeezed next to me, and I kept telling her her belt was cutting into my side, but it was

actually her hip-bone that was doing it.

At High Point, I quickly realized that it was not only a suitable murder site, but a lover's lane location with a number of cars already parked there. So we had to wait.

I powdered the whiskey I had brought with some poison, but she went perverse on me and didn't want to drink. She just wanted to demonstrate how fond she was of me.

It got so bad, I felt that I must be rid of her—even before Andrea arrived. In desperation, I pulled out the knife. The first thing I knew she was playfully scurrying out of the car and snapping the knife into the ground, telling me how she used to play mumblety-peg when she was a little girl. I joined her, snapping the knife into the ground getting up the nerve to use it.

Andrea didn't show up, during this interval, but a State Trooper did. He came out of the shadows and joined us. "I always liked the game," he said, snapping the knife into the ground. Pretty soon some of the guys and gals from the other cars came over to watch and snap the knife into the ground. Next somebody built a fire and began to sing. As it turned out somebody else had some marshmallows—boxes of them—that we could toast.

"Only trouble is," said the Trooper, "you can't build a proper fire without a poker to keep it stacked right."

So I got the poker out of the car. We poked the fire, toasted marshmallows, played mumblety-peg and sang to the moon.

"Keeps the kids out of trouble," the Trooper said, his arm around one of the girls. "Much rather have them out from those dark cars in front of a bright campfire, singing and toasting the marshmallows."

I hustled off in the darkness. I was afraid Andrea would show up and fire off a gun or something.

I went down the road and waited. Back at the campfire I could hear a shout of hilarity and cheer. But I didn't know what it was until I returned to the fire.

The State Trooper was waving my bottle to the moon. He apologized for being so forward as to have borrowed it from my car. "Friends," he said, "we have all taken a good drink due to the fellowship of the evening. While I don't often drink on duty, I'll have a nip with you, because this has been a fine evening!"

Then he turned up my bottle of liquor and drank a deep draught of the stuff.

I remembered suddenly—and with horror—that I had laced the whole bottle with arsenic.

"How—how many have had a drink?" I screamed in panic.

"Why, everybody!" Alice exclaimed, waving her arm to include all—eight people around the fire. She snatched up the bottle from the Trooper who was smacking his lips. "Oh, you should have the last of it, Hal. After all, it is your liquor."

"I should indeed," I thought sadly, eight victims, and killed the rest of the bottle and then began weeping like a baby.

Andrea sat by my bedside and held my hand. "It was touch and go with you," she said. "The heaviest dregs went to the bottom of the bottle."

"How many—made it?" I asked weakly.

"They all made it, Hal. That arsenic has been hanging around since before World War II. It wasn't very potent. Just made them sick. They'll only try you for attempted mass murder. Al Grubel says you'll probably get off with five-to-ten. Of course there are civil lawsuits and a very angry ex-State Trooper."

"You let me down!" I cried. "You knew the murder ropes. You should've come."

She shook her head. "No, Hal. I don't know anything about murder. My hobby is—gambling!"

"But Sam Evans!" I cried.

"True, I got the idea that night while we were playing bridge. That is, to make gambling my hobby. But I didn't harm Sam. He was showing off for some disgusting young girl in the park that day. He stepped over the cliff all by himself. Deborah and I weren't within a hundred feet of him. And there were just dozens of witnesses."

"But Don Markham's mother! What about her?"

"You had the Plymouth. My Studebaker was broken down. I couldn't have run over her if I wanted. It was really an accident. You know how old people get careless. No, my hobby is gambling, and I'm pretty good on the horses, if I do say so myself. I was afraid you'd found out that night you caught me with the racing form with that gambler Vecchi's name and phone number on it."

"Andrea—Andrea—" I cried, thinking life's just full of coincidences. It's only in fiction you don't find them.

She reached behind her and put the stamp album I had bought for her on my stomach. "Study it, Hal. There's no fishing in the pen, you know. And in five years, you ought to have a good stamp collection. And by that time, if the horses keep on being nice to me, I'll have a new house and maybe a sport-fishing boat too. Like you said, everybody ought to have a hobby."

THE big plainclothesman said, "Well?"

I didn't know what to say. In the lower right hand drawer of my desk was this red handbag.

He said they had found two more purses in my flat. It had been a month since we had had the wave of handbag robberies in our office. I had almost forgotten them. Now I was stunned. "Look, I—I don't know anything about this." I could feel my face turning red.

"Been living it up quite a bit for your salary, haven't you, son?" the plainclothesman said.

"For crying out loud, that doesn't prove anything!"

"No?"

I felt ill and sat down. "What are you going to do, arrest me?"

"If it was up to me, you'd be halfway down to the station in a radio car right now. You must be a real wow with the girls, the way they're clamming up for you."

"What do you mean?"

The corner of his mouth twitched in disgust. "One of them thinks you were out of the office when her bag was snatched. As though anybody could remember where anyone was on some day almost six weeks ago! Anyhow, they got your boss, Holmes, to keep it quiet until we can prove

An honest man has his pride—if little else. But a thief's many possessions even include a guilty conscience. I give you these two aphorisms, with this warning: all is not wisdom that has the lilt of a proverb.

something one way or the other."

I looked at him angrily. "But you don't have a doubt in the world, do you?"

He said in a bored voice, "We'll get you, boy." He walked out without a backward look or another word.

I just sat there. A purse snatcher! What was worse, I had been living it up but couldn't prove how. An old girl friend, now a buyer in a San Francisco department store, took me out on the town on her expense account when she was in New York. But they'd fire her, if she admitted it.

For the rest of the morning, I went through the motions of working without doing a thing. They had it all figured out. A 26-year-old accountant doing the playboy circuit on my measly salary. What must they think of me?

But it seemed that so far the word hadn't got out. We had 150 employees. All morning, people came and went with costs to check, invoices and bills to stamp and expense accounts to be paid. They kidded around the way they always did, while my stomach shriveled into a sickening knot, knowing it would come out sooner or later, that even if they couldn't prove anything I'd be under a cloud. What was worse, somebody seemed to have framed me so that he'd be safe from the law. That meant that any moment the police might find something that would sew me up good.

I think what hurt more than anything was the kind of thief they thought me. Bless me, I was certainly no crook, but if I were, I was sure I'd go after something bigger than handbags. It had a slimy sound, the sort of thing you'd expect from a dope fiend or something.

It was at that moment that the thought first hit me. That was what I had to show them—that if I were a thief, I'd have stolen something worthwhile.

It's funny how your subconscious keeps ticking away. Almost immediately, I remembered something that had occurred to me months before. I hadn't thought about it seriously then, and now, as it came back to me, I was as fascinated by what it would prove as I was frightened by its enormity.

On paydays, our treasurer, Mr. Foster, gave out little gumsealed envelopes with everybody's exact pay in them. He got the payroll from the bank the day before. For this, he made out a company check for the total on our check-writer, signed it himself, got Mr. Holmes' signature, and simply went down to the Eastern Exchange Bank and cashed it. $13,795.50

Suppose, I thought, that I walked in and dumped that kind of money on Holmes' desk! "This

is what *I* call stealing, Mr. Holmes," I'd say. "If you want a handbag thief, go look for the kind of guy who'd settle for handbags!" Would that show them?

What frightened me was how easy it would be. Today was Monday, February 9th. Thursday was Lincoln's Birthday, a holiday for most companies, but not ours.

Thursday was also our payday, so we could put our pay in the bank on Friday, for any checks we had to write.

Now then, on Wednesday, Mr. Foster would go down to the bank with the check for the payroll, so he could have all the pay-envelopes ready by Thursday noon. But what if we had Thursday off, as most companies did? Wouldn't he cash the check on Tuesday and pay us Wednesday, instead? Indeed he would.

And who would go down for the payroll if Mr. Foster was home with a virus? Why, his assistant, of course. Me!

That afternoon I made a pretense of working past five. None of the girls who knew about the purses being found in my flat was still there. When Accounting was almost empty, I went over to the safe and opened it, trying to act the way I always did, as though there was something I was supposed to put in or get out before I went home.

None of the others paid any attention. I took out our check-writer and made out our usual payroll check of $13,795.50. Then with my fountain pen I copied first Mr. Foster's name from a letter he had signed, then with one of our ballpoints Mr. Holmes' name from an office memo. By the time I closed the safe again, my hands were trembling. Now just put the check in an envelope and put it in your pocket, I told myself. I put it in an envelope and dropped it. One of the typists said, *"I'll get it, Mr. Tanner."* I gaped at her helplessly. She knelt down, picked up the envelope and handed it to me. My hands were shaking so hard by now that I almost dropped it again, but I managed to say, "Thank you," and get it into my jacket pocket.

That night I hardly slept at all. I twisted and turned and finally got up. What would happen if this all went wrong? My mouth turned to ashes at the thought. I would go to prison. But better that risk than to have *this* stigma follow me through life. A joke came to mind. I thought, this must be the first time anybody ever robbed a bank to keep out of jail! And I realized that this whole thing had been a compulsion right from the start.

Then, as a hedge, I thought of a safeguard—something that would surely clear me, if anything did slip up. Why not simply write a letter to Holmes that he would

get after I had done it? Then if all went well, I would be able to show them once and for all that if I *was* a thief, I had the brains, the nerve and the chance to go after something big, not purse-snatching in the office. Yet if I was caught, I had only to wait until Holmes got my letter, telling them just what I was going to do ahead of time.

I dozed off toward dawn.

By the time I got to the office, there were just two steps left. To call the bank, imitating Holmes' hoarse voice, to say that due to the holiday we would be picking up our pay today instead of tomorrow, and that Mr. Tanner would be in for it in Mr. Foster's absence; and then, the job itself. By eleven that morning, I ought to be back in Holmes' office, my adventure over, and everybody incredulous but surely convinced.

The hardest part was that phone call. I think what turned the trick was the way I could barely speak in my fright. It gave me just the right hoarse sound that led the vice president in Eastern Exchange to say, "Fine, Mr. Holmes. We'll expect Mr. Tanner about ten, then."

I brought my attache case with me, just as Mr. Foster always did. Why tempt bandits with guards when a simple attache case made it seem as though you were carrying nothing at all?

I took a cab down to the bank, which was twelve blocks downtown from our office on 57th Street, and by the time I got there my handkerchief was wringing wet from wiping my perspiring face. What if the bank happened to call back? What if Foster happened to call the bank? Or Holmes?

I still had the letter that I had mailed already to clear me, but now, at this last minute, it seemed a flimsy thing to depend on.

And then we were in front of the bank and I was paying the cabbie with palsied fingers. You're going to have to do better than this inside, boy!

But it was almost as though we had all rehearsed it. The vice president nodded and smiled and asked how Mr. Foster was, and the teller asked me if I thought the Giants would ever come back to New York, and there I was. It was done. I left the bank as in a daze, the attache case in my hand. I had robbed a bank. I had pulled it off! I crossed the sidewalk and waved to a cab, thinking, why, I have as much here as John Dillinger himself would have got. Almost fourteen thousand dollars. It was more than three years pay.

The cab pulled up and I got in. The curious thing is that I said the one thing that had never, until that moment, even occurred to me. "Idlewild Airport, please."

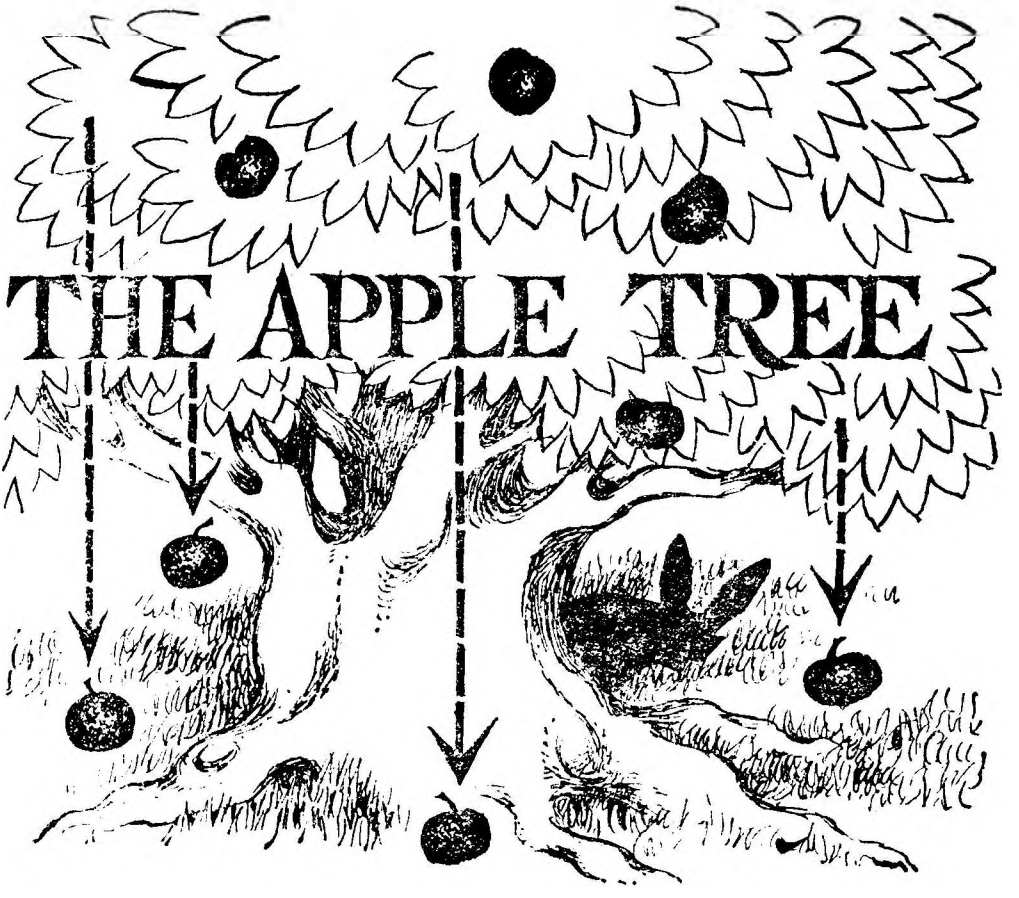
A heroine with her back to the wall is as much to be feared as a woman scorned. If you are a male reader—one of the fairer sex—I would forthwith make a note of this. Also be sure to have your affairs in order—just in case.

DON'T SIT UNDER

BY HELEN NIELSEN

It was exactly ten minutes before three when Loren returned to her apartment. The foyer was empty—a glistening, white and black tile emptiness of Grecian simplicity which left no convenient nooks or alcoves where a late party-goer could linger with her escort in a prolonged embrace, or where the manager—in the unlikely event that he was concerned—could spy out the nocturnal habits of his tenants. Loren moved swiftly across the foyer, punctuating its silence with the sharp tattoo of her heels on the tile and the soft rustling of her black taffeta evening coat. Black for darkness; black for stealth. She stepped into the automatic elevator and pressed the button for the seventeenth floor. The door closed and the elevator began its silent climb. Only then did she breathe a bit easier, reassuring herself that she was almost safe.

There was an apex of terror, a crisis at which everything and every place became a pulsing threat. Loren wore her terror well.



A watcher—had there been an invisible watcher in the elevator—would not have been aware of it. He would have seen only a magnetically attractive woman—mature, poised, a faint dusting of pre-mature gray feathering her almost black hair. The trace of tension in her face and eyes would have been attributed to fatigue. The slight impatience which prompted her repeated glances at the floor indicator above the doors would have passed for a natural desire to get home and put an end to an over-long, wearisome day.

In a sense, the watcher would have been right.

The elevator doors opened at the seventeenth floor, and Loren stepped out into a carpeted corridor of emptiness. Pausing only to verify the emptiness, she hurried to the door of her apartment. The key was in her gloved hand before she reached it. She let herself in, closed the door behind her, and leaned against it until she could hear the latch click. For a moment her body sagged and

clung to the door as if nailed there, and then she pulled herself upright.

Above the lamp on the hall table—the light turned softly, as she had left it—a sunburst clock splashed against the wall in glittering elegance. The time was eight minutes before three. There was work to be done. Loren switched off the lamp. The long room ahead became an arrangement of grays and off-blacks set against the slightly paler bank of fully draped windows at the end of it; but halfway between the hall and the windows, a narrow rectangle of light cut a pattern across the grays. The light came from the bedroom. Loren moved toward it, catching, as she did so, the sound of a carefully modulated feminine voice dictating letters.

To Axel Torberg and Sons,
Kungsgaten 47,
Stockholm, Sweden.
Gentlemen.

In regard to your inquiry of February 11, *last: I am sorry to inform you that full payment for your last shipment cannot be made until the damaged merchandise (see our correspondence of Jan.* 5) *has been replaced.*

Having done satisfactory business with your firm for the past twenty years, we feel confident that you will maintain this good will by taking immediate action.

Very Truly Yours,
Loren Banion
Vice President
John O. Banion, Inc.

Loren entered the bedroom. The voice came again, now in a warmer and more informal tone.

Katy, get this off airmail the first thing in the morning. Poor old Axel's getting forgetful in his dotage and has to be prodded. Okay, Doll—?

Next letter:
To Signor Luigi Manfredi,
Via Proconsolo,
Florence....

The room was heavily carpeted. Loren made no sound as she crossed quickly to the French windows, barely glancing at the dictograph which stood on the bedside work table. It was still partly open. The night wind worried the edges of the soft drapes which gave concealment as Loren, pulling them aside only a finger width, peered out at the scene below. The seventeenth floor was one floor higher than the recreation deck. The pool lights were out; but there was a moon, and young Cherry Morgan's shapely legs were clearly visible stretched out from the sheltering canvas sides of one of the swinging lounges. There were legs other than Cherry's—trousered legs; identity unknown. With her parents abroad, Cherry was playing the field.

...if you will wire this office

on the date of shipment, we will have our representative at the docks to make inspection on arrival....

The voice of Loren Banion continued to dictate behind her. Loren listened and slowly relaxed. She had, she now realized, been gripping at the draperies until her fingers were aching. She released the cloth and walked back to the bed—no longer swiftly, but with a great weariness as if she had come a very long distance, running all the way. She sank down slowly and sat on the edge of the bed. The dictograph was now a droning nuisance, but a necessary one. Cherry Morgan could hear it, and that was important.

"...Honestly, Mrs. Banion, I don't know how you can work as late as you do! Sometimes I hear you up there dictating all night long."

"Not all night, Cherry. I never work past three. Doctor's orders."

"Doctor's orders? What a drag! I'm glad I don't have your doctor. If I'm going to work until three in the morning it's got to be at something more interesting than business correspondence!"

And the fact that Cherry Morgan frequently worked past three was the reason the dictograph continued to play.

...Very Truly Yours,

Oh, you know the rest, Katy. On second thought, give the sign off more flourish. Signor Manfredi probably sings Don Jose in his shower.

A small crystal clock stood beside the dictating machine. Loren glanced at it; it was six minutes before three. She had done well. A year of catching planes, meeting trains and keeping spot appointments, had paid off in timing. It was all over, and she was safe. The tension could ebb away now, and the heaviness lift; and yet, it was all she could do to raise up the small black evening bag she had been clutching in her left hand, open it, and withdraw the gun. She held the gun cupped in the palm of her right hand. She looked about the room for some place to hide it; then, unable to look at it any longer, jammed it back into the bag and tossed it on the table beside the clock. The time—five minutes before three. It was close enough. She got up and switched off the machine. Then she removed her gloves, shoes, coat, and went into the bathroom. She left the door open—the shower could be heard for some distance at this hour—and returned exactly five minutes later wearing a filmy gown and negligee. She got into bed and switched off the light; but now her eyes were caught by a glittering object that would not let them go. It was such a frivolous telephone—French styling sprayed with gold. It was magnetic and compelling. It seemed almost a

living thing; and a living thing could be denounced.

"Not tonight," Loren said. "You won't ring tonight."

It had all started with a telephone call—long distance, Cairo to New York City.

"Mr. Banion calling Miss Loren Doncll . . . thank you. Here's your party, Mr. Banion."

And then John's voice, annihilating miles.

"Loren—? Hold on tight. I've got one question: will you marry me?"

It could have happened only that way. John wasted neither time nor words. She had clung to the telephone, suddenly feeling quite schoolgirlish and dizzy.

"But, John, what about Celeste?"

"What about her? She's flipped over a Spanish bullfighter, and he's expensive. We've finally struck a deal. She's in Paris now getting a divorce."

"I can't believe it!"

"Neither can I, but it's true. I thought I'd never get rid of that—of my dear wife, Celeste." And then John's voice had become very serious. "You know what it's been like for me these past years, Loren. Celeste trapped me—I admit that. She wanted status and money, and she got both. I got—well, now I'm getting free and I suppose I should just be grateful for the education. Loren, I don't say these things well—but I love you."

At that moment, the telephone had been a lifeline pulling Loren out of the quicksand of loneliness. She clung to it until John's voice blasted her silence.

"Well! I want an answer! Will you marry me?"

Laughing and crying, she had answered, "Yes, yes, yes, yes—"

"Hold it!" John ordered. "While you're talking, I can be flying. See you tomorrow."

Tomorrow . . .

Rain at Idlewild—hard, slanting, and completely unnoticed as John bounded off the plane like a schoolboy. There was much to be done before the cable from Paris announced the divorce had been granted, and one of the many things concerned a change in office procedure. Loren discovered it one morning when she found her old office cleaned out, and, investigating, a new name on the door of the office next to John's.

Loren Banion
Vice-President

"Only a little premature," he explained. "You might as well get used to the name."

"It's not the name—it's the title!" Loren exclaimed.

"Why not the title? You've been doing the job for years; I've only belatedly given you the status. Belatedly," he repeated, "this, too." It was then that he gave her

the ring, almost shyly. "Oh, Loren, why does it take so long to learn to distinguish the real from the phoney? You are real, aren't you, Loren? You're not one of those scheming females."

"Oh, but I am," Loren insisted. "I've been deliberately getting under your nose for years."

John had laughed. Under his nose meant only one thing at the moment. He kissed her, quickly.

"That I like. That I'll buy any day. That's not what I meant. I meant that you're not one of the phonies—the honky-tonk phonies. All out front and nothing to live with. I want to grow old with you, Loren. You're the only—" He hesitated, groping for a word. "—the only pure woman I've ever known."

It was terrible how grave John's face had become. Loren drew away.

"Please—no pedestals," she protested. "It's so cold up there!"

"It's not cold here!"

He had taken her in his arms, then, and he was right. It was warm; it was a place to rest at last. But then his arms tightened, and his fingers dug into her arms until she wanted to cry out. It was the first shadow of fear to come.

"You're real," he said. "You have to be real. I couldn't stand being fooled again!"

"I couldn't stand being fooled again!"

Loren stared at the telephone on the table. It was silent; but John's words were ringing in her mind. She glanced at the clock. Sleep was impossible, but nothing could be unusual tonight, and within ten minutes after Loren Banion concluded her dictation, she always turned off the lamp. The darkness came—complete at first, and then a finger of moonlight from the open window probed across the carpet. Below, the silver sound of a girl's laughter was quickly muffled in sudden remembrance of the hour.

The hour. The hour was only ten minutes spent. The long hour before four . . .

The honeymoon had been in Miami and off-Miami waters. John was a fisherman—unsuccessful but incorrigible. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday without a catch. It was no wonder Sam McGregor, an Atlanta account they had discovered vacationing at their hotel, had insisted on an hour of solace at the Flotsam and Jetsam on the beach. It was a shanty-type bar—one of the higher bracket shanties—where the drinks were long and the shadows cool. Loren was too happy to see details in the Grotto-like shadows; but someone had seen clearly. Very clearly. It was an informal place for customers in shorts and bathing suits, and the only enter-

tainment rippled from the busy fingers of a pianist in T shirt and dungarees who wheeled his diminuative instrument from booth to booth. He wasn't meant to be heard or noticed, and only rarely tipped; and Loren wasn't really aware of him at all until, above John's and Sam's ribbing laughter, a tinkling sound became a melody. She looked up. The small piano was no more than three feet away, and behind it sat a man she had never expected to see again.

"Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me..."

He played not too well; but he did enjoy his work. His smile seemed to indicate that he enjoyed it very much. His smile...

"Loren—are you all right?"

John's voice brought Loren back from the far away place Loren's mind had gone reeling.

"You look shook up, honey. Don't tell me that you got sea-sick today. Honestly, Sam, this woman can take more punishment..."

When John's voice stopped, he couldn't have known too much then. That was impossible. But he seemed to sense that the piano player had something to do with Loren being disturbed. He pulled a bill out of his pocket and placed it on top of the piano.

"How about hoisting anchor, sailor?" he said. "I'm afraid we're not very musical in this booth."

The piano player's smile broadened and one hand closed over the bill. "Anything you say, Mr. Banion. I only thought it would be nice to salute the newlyweds."

"You know me?" John asked.

"Why, everybody knows you, Mr. Banion. Didn't you see your picture in the paper the day you flew down? Nice catch, Mr. Banion." And then, with another smile for Loren. "Nice catch, Mrs. Banion. A very nice catch."

The piano rolled on, picking up something with a calypso beat. The incident had taken only a moment, but having sensed that something was amiss, Sam had said brightly—

"Enterprising chap. They don't miss a trick down here. How about another round?"

Loren stood up. "You two—yes," she said. "No more for me. I'm going back to the hotel."

"Loren—why? What's wrong?"

John must not ask that question; he must not look that concerned. She laughed her gayest and confessed—

"I'm afraid you'll have to stop bragging about me, John. I did get sea-sick this afternoon, and now I'm almost hung on one drink. No—not hung enough for you to break this up. You stay on with Sam. I'm going to get some air."

Air, wind, and a long walk along the beach—nothing erased Ted Lockard. He should be dead.

Men died in a war. They stopped answering letters, and they never came back. One assumed they had died. But not Ted. Ted was alive, and his smooth voice, so thrilling to a girl, had an oily quality maturity could identify. There were men who lived off their charms, even as did some women.

"A nice catch, Mrs. Banion. A very nice catch."

Loren wasn't intoxicated, but she was sick. A girl had written wild, foolish letters, and Ted Lockard probably kept all of his love letters the way some men kept hunting trophies—or securities. He would try to reach her some way—she knew that. And she was vulnerable; not because of a youthful human failure, but because of John's conception of her. She had to be perfect in order to compensate his pride, for having been so deceived by Celeste.

Luck was with her. That night, a wire from Mexico City sending John south. Loren returned to New York. But it was only a reprieve.

Celeste returned from Europe just before Christmas, sans bullfighter and sans cash. There were telephone calls and wires, all ignored, and then, one day Celeste came to the office. John saw her. Loren wasn't aware of the meeting until it was over. John had asked her to go down to the docks and see Signor Manfredi's shipment through customs. The Signor's shipping department had only a vague idea of the transoceanic hazards for breakable materials. It was a task usually delegated to an employee of lesser status; but Loren thought nothing of it until she returned in time to pass Celeste in the outer office.

Celeste was icily majestic.

"Congratulations, Mrs. Banion," she said. "John looks in the pink. You always were a good manager."

Not too much—just enough. Celeste could make a prayer sound insulting.

Inside, Loren found John not at all in the pink. He was remote and grave.

"What was Celeste d o i n g here?" she demanded.

"She came to wish us a Merry Christmas," John said bitterly.

Loren glanced down. John's checkbook was still on his desk.

"John—you gave her money!"

He didn't answer.

"Why? Hasn't she cost you enough? You don't owe her a thing!"

"Loyalty," John said.

His voice was strange.

"What?" Loren demanded.

"It's a word," John explained. "Just a word."

Then, suddenly, he turned toward her and grasped her shoulders with both hands, holding so tightly that she remembered what had happened the day he gave her the ring. For just an instant,

she was actually afraid; and then he smiled sadly and let her go.

"Forget Celeste," he said. "It's a holiday season. I felt charitable."

Loren didn't. She left John abruptly and hurried back to the front office. Celeste was no where in sight. Katy sat at her desk, typing letters. She looked up as Loren spoke—

"Mrs. Ban—" she began, and then corrected herself. "The former Mrs. Banion—where did she go?"

"Out," Katy said.

Katy, sweet, wholesome, naive. What did she expect to learn from Katy? She strode across the reception room and entered the hall, arriving just in time to glimpse Celeste as she was being assisted into the elevator by an attentive man. They turned and faced her, and just before the doors closed Loren got a frontal view of Celeste's new adornment. Ted looked very handsome, and he smiled.

Merry Christmas, Loren. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Santa had come early. It was the beginning of a long wait, of not knowing what Ted might have told Celeste, or what Celeste might have told John, or when Ted would make his move. John said nothing. Her own tension was the only change between them. After a time, she began to think she was suffering from nothing but the ancient feminine penchant for borrowing guilt.

Then, in the middle of January, John took the night plane to Cleveland.

"You could leave in the morning and still make that meeting in time," Loren protested.

John was adamant.

"I like to fly at night. It's smoother and I sleep all the way."

"Then I'll work on the correspondence."

"You work too hard, Loren. Why don't you let Katy do that?"

"John—please. I know these people. I've been handling your correspondence with them since dear Katy was taking her first typing lessons and getting used to having teeth without braces. Don't you know that I'm jealous of my work?"

"I should know," John said. "I'm jealous, too—of you. But I don't have to worry, do I?" His fingers stroked her cheek lightly. "No, I don't have to worry—not about Loren."

Loren, who lived on a pedestal where the life expectancy was so short.

She had worked that night until almost three, showered, and gone to bed. Sleep came immediately after work. She had to fight her way out it when the telephone rang. Groping for the instrument, she noticed the illuminated face of the clock. It was exactly four. Nobody ever called anyone at four o'clock in the morning unless something terrible had happened.

"John—?"

She waited, suddenly fully awake and afraid. There was no answer. And then it began, so brightly, so spritely—one full chorus of a piano rendition of an old war-time melody:

"Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree With Anyone Else But Me..."

That was all.

The clock had always been silent. There was no reason for it to tick so loudly now. Loren stirred restlessly against the pillows and turned her head toward the source of her torment. Sleep was impossible. She pulled herself up higher against the pillows. Aside from the clock, there was no other sound. Silence from the deck below. Cherry had closed up shop for the night. The moonlight brought objects on the table out of darkness. Loren's fingers found a cigarette, lighted it, and then she sat back smoking and remembering...

She never told John about the four o'clock call. It was Ted's signature, obviously; but what did he have in mind? For days and nights after that call she waited for his next move. Nothing happened. John returned from Cleveland to find her thinner and tense.

"Working too hard," he scolded. "Loren, I won't allow this to go on! Katy's going to take on at least a small part of your work."

She wanted to tell him about the call; but she couldn't tell a part without revealing the whole.

"Then reveal the whole, Loren. John is a sane, adult human being. He'll laugh about it and send Ted packing.

"Do you remember the McGregors?" John asked suddenly. "Miami—our honeymoon?"

Loren remembered. Her mind had just been in the same vicinity.

"I met Sam in Cleveland. He's broken—literally broken. His wife has gone to Reno, and Sam's shot. I've seen that man fight his way through tight spots that would have staggered Superman; but this has got him. You women don't know what you can do to a man."

"Reno?" Loren echoed. "Why?"

John's face hardened. "The usual reason. Sam's a busy man. Little time to play Casanova. They don't have bullfighters in Atlanta; but they do have Casanovas. You would think a woman could tell the difference between love and flattery, wouldn't you? But no, it seems they all have the same weakness." And then the bitterness ebbed out of John's voice. "Except one," he added.

She told him nothing.

She continued to wait; but there was no word from Ted. Early in February, John flew to Denver on the night plane. Loren worked on correspondence until three and

then retired; but she couldn't sleep. A vague uneasiness gnawed at her mind until four o'clock when the telephone rang and the uneasiness ceased to be vague.

The call was just as it had been before. No words at all—just that same gay piano serenade...

For the next few months, John's trips were frequent. It was the busy time of the year. On the first night of his next departure, she didn't try to sleep. At four o'clock, the telephone rang.

"...don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me."

She tried having the call traced. It was useless. The caller was too clever. Clever, but purposeless. Aside from starting her nerves on a process of disintegration, the calls were inane. Ted was too practical minded to torture without a purpose. It was the kind of sadistic trick she might expect of a jealous rival.

'Celeste!"

At one minute past four, on a morning when John was planing to Omaha, Loren placed the telephone back in the cradle convinced that she'd hit upon the source of her troubles. Ted was more clever than she'd imagined. He'd gone to John Banion's ex-wife, rather than his present wife. He'd told her his story, and now Celeste was trying to break up John's marriage by torturing his wife into a breakdown. At one minute past four A.M., immediately following the fourth of the maddening calls, the scheme seemed obvious to Loren. Wear her down, weaken her, unnerve her, and then— She wasn't quite sure what Celeste meant to do then; but there was no reason to wait and see. Two could play this game!

Loren's mind became quite clear. She began to analyze. The calls came only on the first night of John's trips. Reason: had John been at home, he might have intercepted the calls. Furthermore, there was never any way of knowing how long he would be gone. The only way of avoiding him was to make the call immediately after his departure. This meant that Celeste had access to John's plans.

On the following day, Loren spoke to Katy.

"Do you remember the day the former Mrs. Banion had an interview with Mr. Banion?" she asked.

Katy considered her answer only a moment.

"Yes, I do, Mrs. Banion."

"Did she come in alone?"

This time, Katy considered a bit longer.

"I don't think I remember—yes, I do. A man came with her. He waited in the reception room."

Ted, obviously.

"Have you seen him since?"

"No, Mrs. Banion."

But there were other girls in the

office—young, impressionable. Ideal bait for Ted's charms.

"Katy, I want you to do something for me. Talk to the girls, casually, of course, and try to learn if any of them has a new, dreamy boyfriend."

Katy laughed.

"According to what I pick up in the lounge, most of them have a new, dreamy boyfriend every week."

"That's not what I mean! I mean one *certain* boyfriend."

She was making a mess of it. A casual inquiry was becoming an inquisition; but there was still one thing she must know.

"And Katy, on the day when the former Mrs. Banion had the interview with Mr. Banion, did you, by any chance, overhear anything that was said."

"Overhear, Mrs. Banion?"

There was such a thing as being too naive, and Loren's patience had worn thin.

"Accidentally or otherwise," she snapped. "Oh, don't look so wounded. I had your job once, and I was ambitious and human. I listened; I spied. I know what goes on in an office. This is important to me, Katy. I'll make it worth your while if you can tell me anything—anything at all."

It was a foolish, weak, female thing to do, and Loren regretted her words as soon as they were spoken. Had Katy been shocked, it wouldn't have been so bad; but it was all Loren could do to suppress the desire to slap the hint of a smile she saw on Katy's face.

You're cracking up, Loren. You're losing control.

She held on tight, and Katy's smile faded.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Banion. I didn't hear anything. But if I do hear anything, I'll let you know."

Loren went back to her office shaken at her own self-betrayal. Celeste was succeeding. Whatever her diabolical plan, she was succeeding. Never had she spoken to an employee as she had spoken to Katy. Never...

When John returned from Omaha, he found Loren confined to her bed.

"It's nothing," she insisted. "I think I had a touch of flu."

"You've had more than a touch of over-work," John said. "I warned you, Loren. Now I'm going to send you off on a vacation."

So Celeste can have a clear field. That's her game. It must be her game.

"No—!" Loren protested. "Not now! Not at a time like this!"

John's face became very grave. He sat down on the edge of the bed, still wearing his topcoat—his brief case and newspaper in his hand. These he placed on the bed beside her.

"You've heard, then," he said. "Loren, there's no reason to be upset. It isn't as if she meant anything to me—or had meant any-

thing to me for years. In fact—" There were times when John's mouth hardened and became almost cruel. "—I'd be a liar if I pretended to be sorry."

The newspaper had fallen open on the bed. While she was still trying to understand John, Loren's glance dropped and was held by the photograph of a familiar face. Celeste. She drew the paper closer until she could read the story. Celeste had been in an auto accident upstate. Celeste was dead.

Celeste was dead. It was horrible to feel so happy; and impossible not to. The pressure was gone. Her diabolical scheme would never materialize. Within a few days, Loren was herself again.

Three weeks later, John flew to San Francisco. Loren worked late, as usual, retired, and slept soundly—until four o'clock in the morning when the telephone rang.

The serenade continued.

A siren was sobbing somewhere in the street below. The sound brought Loren through time back to the immediate. She snuffed out her cigarette in a now cluttered tray, and her eyes found the clock again. Three forty-five. The sound of the siren faded; but now she sat upright, her heart pounding. Why was she afraid? She had been methodical and efficient and decisive. That was the important thing—decisive.

"The thing to remember about business, Miss Donell, is that an executive must learn to make decisions and stand by them. You may be right, you may be wrong —but make the decision!"

That had been John Banion instructing his new secretary—eager, ambitious, and—why not face it—already in love with her boss. It had taken six years for him to recognize that love and turn to her when he finally discovered what everyone else had known about Celeste all along; and in the meantime, Loren had learned to be decisive.

Decisive. The first four o'clock call after Celeste's death removed all doubts. It was Ted; and it was her move. But where was Ted? It would have been easy enough to trace Celeste; but Ted was another matter. She didn't want to use a private investigator and leave a trail that could be traced. The solution to her problem came from an unexpected source: Katy.

"Mrs. Banion, do you recall asking about the man who was with the former Mrs. Banion when she came to the office just before Christmas?"

It was two weeks after Celeste's death. Loren didn't look up from her desk; she mustn't betray her excitement.

"What about him?" she asked casually.

"It's a peculiar co-incidence; but I had to run an errand for Mr.

Banion across town yesterday, and I saw the man. He was going into a small hotel—The Lancer. I think he must live there. He had a bundle under his arm that looked like laundry."

"You're very observant," Loren said dryly.

"You did ask—"

Loren looked up, smiling.

"Ancient history," she said, "but thanks, anyway. You're a diligent girl."

Loren wasn't so casual later when she drove to the Lancer Hotel, parked across the street and watched the entrance until she saw Ted come out. It was a shabby hotel in a shabby neighborhood; Celeste hadn't, obviously, contributed much to Ted's economic security. This wasn't a condition Ted could long endure. She watched him walk from the hotel to a bowling alley at the end of the block, and then went into a drug store phone booth to verify his registration at the hotel. That done, she went to work.

The first thing to be done was to obtain a recording of a piano solo of Ted's theme. This, for a small fee, was easily accomplished. For a somewhat larger fee, she then obtained a small wire recorder of a type that could be carried in a handbag or a coat pocket. At home, she transferred the record onto the tape, adding a personal touch at the conclusion.

"We can reach an understanding if you will meet me behind the bowling alley at 2 A.M."

She destroyed the record and put the wire recorder away until John's next business trip. On the first Thursday in March, he took the night plane to Chicago. As soon as she knew he was leaving, Loren did two things: she recorded two hours of correspondence on the dictating machine in her bedroom, and reserved two tickets at a playhouse.

Katy begged off from the theatre.

"I'd love to, Mrs. Banion, but it's the wrong night. You see, I have a friend—"

"Then hang on to him," Loren said. "A good man's hard to find. I'll ask someone else."

An out of town customer had nothing to do for the evening. Anyone was acceptable as long as she had a companion. She drove to the theatre in her own car. During the first intermission, she excused herself and went to a telephone booth in the lobby. She took the wire recorder from her bag, dialed Ted's hotel, and waited for his voice. As soon as he answered, she switched on the recorder and held it to the mouthpiece. When the recording was concluded, she hung up the telephone, replaced the recorder in her bag, and returned to her place in the theatre.

It was twelve-thirty, when Loren returned to her apartment the

first time. She left her car parked in the street, as she frequently did after the garage attendant had gone off duty. It was safe. Every hour on the hour, Officer Hanlon made his rounds. She wanted the car to be seen. In the lobby, she met other theatre and party going tenants returning home, and rode up in the elevator with them. She went directly to her room and put the wire recorder away in the drawer of the work table in her bedroom, transferring the gun to her handbag in its place. Then she set up the dictating machine, opened the bedroom windows enough to make certain the words would be heard on the deck below and waited until exactly one o'clock before turning on the machine. It was time to go.

She went down in the service elevator and left the building through the alley—unseen. She didn't take the car. She walked a distance and caught a cab, took the cab to within six blocks of Ted's hotel and walked the rest of the way. At two o'clock, she was waiting in the shadows behind the blowling alley. Ted was only a few minutes late. He advanced close enough for her to see the surprised recognition in his eyes before she fired. A strike in the blowling alley covered the shots. Ted fell and didn't move again. When she was certain that he was dead, Loren walked away —not hurriedly, but at a normal pace. The streets were almost empty at this hour, but within a few blocks she found a cab, rode to within six blocks of her apartment, and walked the rest of the way. The service entrance was locked, but the front lobby was empty.

It was exactly ten minutes before three when Loren returned to her apartment...

...The sound of the siren faded away, but not the pounding of Loren's heart. It was as if she had been in a kind of sleep-walker's trance, and now she became horribly aware of the fact that she was a murderess. The horror didn't lie in the fact that Ted was dead—she cared no more for that than John had cared about Celeste's death. It was something else. Fear—but what could go wrong? She'd been at the theatre, with an escort, when the hotel switchboard had handled Ted's call. She'd left her windows open so Cherry Morgan could hear her voice. She left her car on the street, and come up in the elevator with friends. She'd destroyed the record— The wire recorder. Loren was out of bed in an instant. She ripped open the table drawer, opened the recorder, and pulled free the wire. She wiped it clean on the skirts of her negligee. No evidence. There was no way to connect her with the body the police would find behind a bowling alley in a shabby neighbor-

hood across town; but there must be no evidence. The wire was clean. What else? Katy had told her where to find Ted; but she didn't even know his name. John--? No matter what Celeste might have told John, he would never connect her with Ted's murder.

But the gun. She should have gotten rid of the gun. She snatched it out of the handbag and began to look about for a hiding place. The echo of the police siren was still in her ears, and reason wouldn't still it. The gun was the one damning piece of evidence. She stood with it in her hands, turning about, directionlessly—and the doorbell rang.

When Loren went to the door, it was with a gun in her hands and doom in her mind. Just in time, she remembered to stuff the weapon under a cushion of the divan, and then go on to open the door. Officer Hanlon stood in the lighted hall looking all of nine feet tall.

"Mrs. Banion," he said, "I'm sure sorry to disturb you at this hour, but there was no one on duty downstairs."

She couldn't speak a word. Not one.

"I didn't know where to leave this."

He held up a set of keys, dangling them before her eyes. It was some seconds before she recognized them.

"You left them in your car, Mrs. Banion. I noticed the window was down when I went past at one o'clock, but I didn't think I could do anything about it without some way to turn on the ignition. It started to sprinkle a few minutes ago, so I stopped to see what I could do. I found these. You're getting careless, Mrs. Banion."

Loren saw her hand reach out and take the keys; it might have been detached from her body.

"Thank you," she said. "Is that all?"

"That's all, Mrs. Banion. Sorry to get you out of bed, but I didn't know what else to do."

Loren closed the door, then leaned against it—listening until she could hear Hanlon go down in the elevator. Only the keys? She wanted to laugh, and she wanted to cry. Most of all, she wanted John. She wanted to cling to him, to bury her head on his shoulder and be safe. The weeks of terror were over, and all Hanlon had wanted was to give her the keys! John was gone, but his room was next to hers. She ran to it, turned on the light, and went to the chair behind his desk. Soft, rich leather with the feel of John in it—the contour of his back, the worn places where he'd gripped the arm rests. And then Loren's eyes fell on the desk. For a moment, she was afraid John had gone off without his ticket. The airline envelope was there.

She looked inside. The ticket was gone. *I'm becoming a neurotic woman who worries about everything,* she thought. And then she noticed what was written on the envelope in the time of departure line: 8:00 A.M. 1/6/.

The sixth was Friday. 8:00 A.M. *was in the morning. This morning—not Thursday night.*

It had to be a mistake. The airline office was open all night. She dialed quickly.

"John Banion? ... What flight did you say? No, there was no John Banion on the nine o'clock flight to Chicago... The eight o'clock this morning? ... Yes. We have a reservation for John Banion ... Who is this calling? ... Oh, Mrs. Banion. Your husband flies with us frequently. He always takes the daytime flights. Always."

Loren put the telephone back on John's desk, and stood listening to the words of a story. It had begun with John's fingers digging into her arms.

"I couldn't stand being fooled again!" he'd said.

And then, on the day Celeste had come to see him—

"Loyalty," John said. *"It's a word. Just a word."*

"Oh, no, John," Loren whispered.

"I like to fly at night," John said. *"It's smoother and I—"*

"John, no—"

But it had to be John. He'd seen her face that day in Miami when Ted played an old melody. He'd gotten some story from Celeste—enough of a story to enduce him to buy her silence, and immediately afterwards the calls had begun. And where was John when he didn't take the night flights he was supposed to take? With a cold certainty, Loren knew. Men lived by patterns. He had turned to his secretary once, and now—hadn't Katy been the one who had told her where to find Ted? Katy, who couldn't go to the theatre because she was expecting a friend? Katy, that not so naive child who *did* listen at the boss' door ...

And Ted Lockard was dead. Loren remembered that when the telephone in her bedroom started ringing. She turned and walked slowly and obediently into her room. She picked up the telephone and listened to the music with an expressionless face. It was four o'clock. It was time for John's serenade.

And now that you have finished reading Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, how did you like it? I should also be very pleased to receive your reactions to the stories in it. Write to me c/o Post Office Box 256, Bronxville, N.Y.

— Continued from Back Cover

Yes! YOU GET $18.80 WORTH OF EXCITING NEW MYSTERIES AT ONCE — FREE!

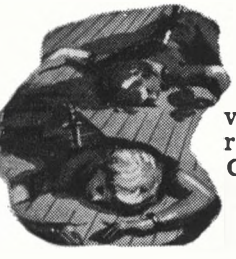
IMAGINE! You get SIX brand-new exciting mysteries—including the two *latest* Perry Mason thrillers by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER — *an $18.80 value* FREE on this amazing offer! You also get the *latest* mysteries from top-notch authors AGATHA CHRISTIE, MIGNON EBERHART, CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND and DON TRACY! Each is a handsome FULL-SIZE, FULL-LENGTH, hard-bound volume.

We make this generous offer to demonstrate the many advantages you enjoy as a member of The Detective Book Club.

The Best New Mysteries — for less than 80¢ each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" — by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Mignon Eberhart, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE and many other famous authors have had books selected by the Club. Many are members themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsome volume (an $8.50 to $9.00 value) for only $2.29.



Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which fully describes all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. 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.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Postcard for 6 Free Books

Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete brand-new mystery thrillers described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

68

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE **SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB CG.
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE in hard-covered regular publishers' editions, the six brand-new full-length mystery novels described on other side. In addition send me the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

I am NOT obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive advance "Previews" of all coming selections and 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 selection I keep I will send only $2.29 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within a week. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City.....Zone....State.....

YOURS AS A GIFT! $18.80 Worth of Top Mystery Hits!

Free—ALL 6

TO NEW MEMBERS

SMASH-HIT NEW MYSTERIES

You Get 2 of the latest *Perry Mason* Mysteries

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Plus New Thrillers by ★ AGATHA CHRISTIE ★ MIGNON EBERHART ★ CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND ★ DON TRACY

TOTAL RETAIL VALUE—$18.80

The Case of the MYTHICAL MONKEYS
By *Erle Stanley Gardner*

A pretty young girl and a disappearing expert are involved in MURDER—and Perry Mason hasn't a *ghost* of a chance of solving it! (Pub. Ed. $2.95)

The Case of the DEADLY TOY
By *Erle Stanley Gardner*

Murder, mayhem and millionaires lead to a warrant for Perry's arrest — on a charge of KIDNAPPING! (Pub. Ed. $2.95)

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE
By *Clarence Budington Kelland*

Fireman Craig Butts investigates a blaze and finds himself up against a ring of vicious killers! (Pub. Ed. $3.50)

ORDEAL BY INNOCENCE
By *Agatha Christie*

18 months *after* he died in prison, evidence was found—*proving Jacko's innocence!* Who had *really* murdered his MOTHER? Pub. Ed. $2.95)

THE BIG BLACKOUT
By *Don Tracy*

What did Bill Logan do to make someone want to *kill* him? *He stole $750,000 worth of narcotics from the Syndicate!* (Pub. Ed. $2.95)

MELORA
By *Mignon Eberhart*

A psychopathic killer is on the loose in New York—and his first victim is a beautiful young woman alone in her Park Avenue brownstone! (Pub. Ed. $3.50)

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

First Class Permit No. 47—Sec. 34.9—P. L. & R.—Roslyn, N.Y.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York

MAIL POSTCARD AT ONCE

— Continued on Inside Cover