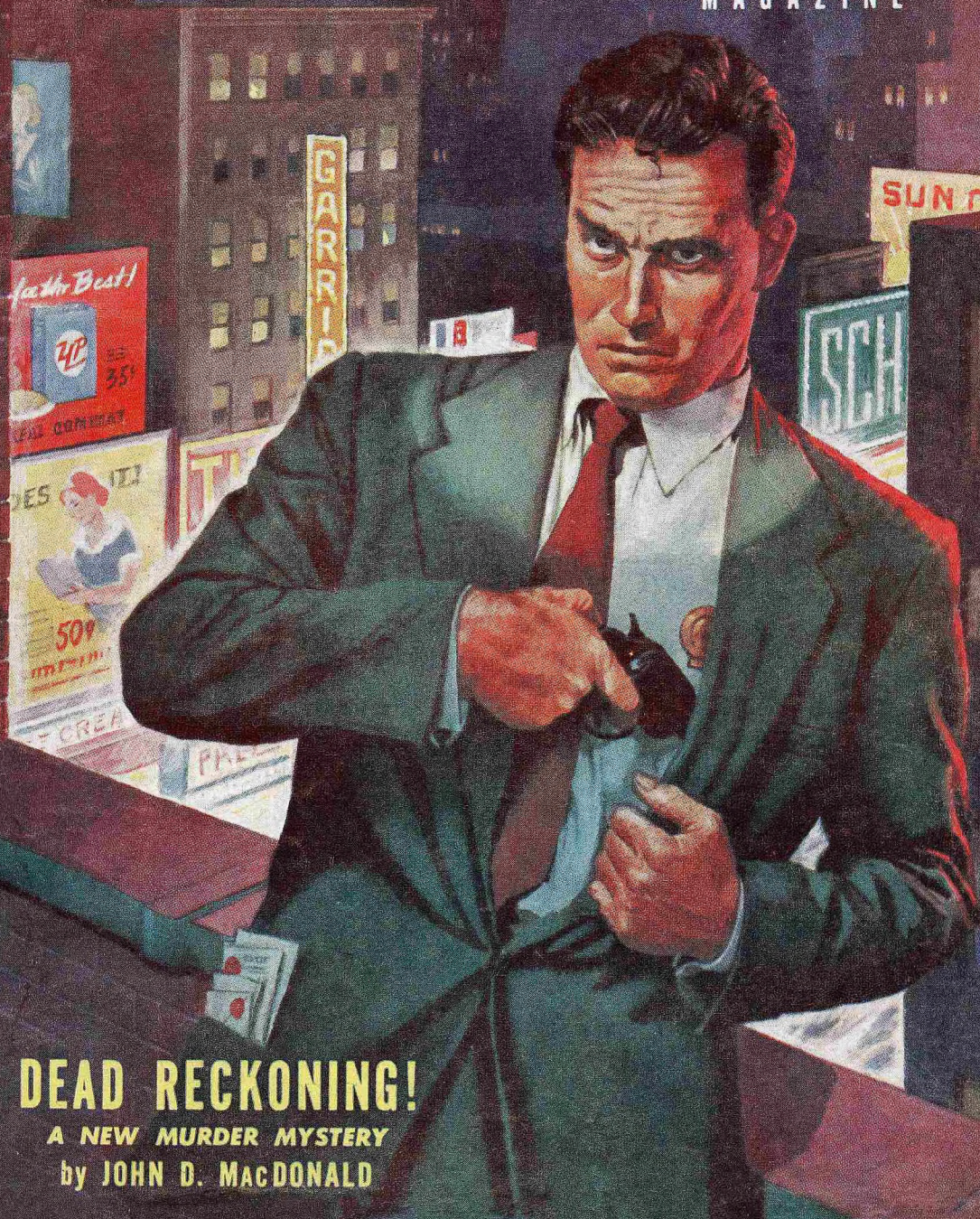




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# DETECTIVE STORY

MAGAZINE



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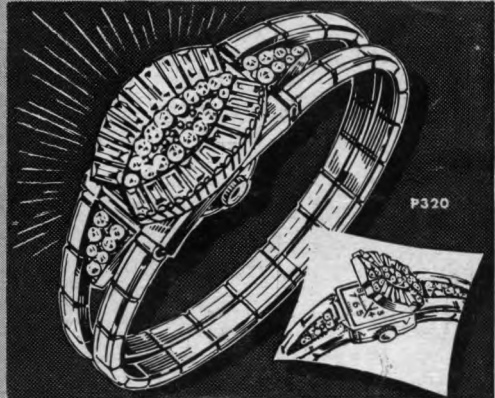


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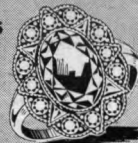
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# DETECTIVE STORY

MAGAZINE



VOL. 1

MARCH, 1953

NO. 3

## FEATURE STORIES

- DEAD RECKONING!**..... John D. MacDonald 10  
 "Get yourself killed. Who cares?" the chief told me. "But get in my way on this murder, Pike, and we'll use your thick skull for a channel marker!"
- IT'S MURDER, MY LOVE!**..... Fletcher Flora 68  
 So who else had murdered the girl's husband but me? That's what I—but no one else—wanted to know!
- COFFIN CORNER**..... John Jakes 92  
 I'd be in Tony's corner till the last echo of the bell. . . . Which, all too soon, it seemed, would start tolling for my own funeral!

## SHORT STORIES

- TONKY SHOULD LIVE SO LONG!**..... Frank Scott York 29  
 Being an ambassador without portfolio between gangdom and the Law got Tonky down. . . . About six feet under!
- THE GRANITE POOL**..... Walter R. Hecox 40  
 How could I escape the hidden natural sepulcher that awaited me up there at the end of the mountain trail?
- STAKE-OUT**..... Don James 51  
 Sooner or later, the cop-killer would have to come out. . . .
- DON'T EVER FORGET!**..... Larry Holden 57  
 All Chief McMahon's police training was worth nothing, now that Mickey Tate had crashed out of prison.
- THIEVES' HONOR**..... Dave Sands 65  
 Once a con man met a con man working on the sly. If a con man cheat a con man—should a con man die?
- C.O.D. — CORPSE ON DELIVERY!**..... V. E. Thiessen 83  
 There was one last trip I had to make after delivering my partner's body with the Colonel's furniture.

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- CRIME SLIPS UP**..... William Hancock 6  
 The criminal was slippery—so slippery that he skidded. . . .
- LOOPY LAWBREAKERS**..... Harold Helfer 8  
 Funny felonies.
- NO BONES ABOUT IT!**..... Bess Ritter 39  
 The FBI calls in an anthropologist to dig up evidence. . . .

THE NEXT ISSUE OUT FEBRUARY 27.

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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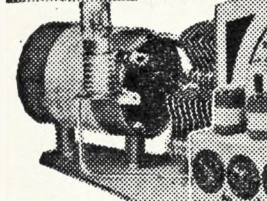
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# Crime Slips Up

By WILLIAM HANCOCK

**The criminal was slippery — so slippery that he skidded. . . .**

**Y**OU'D probably run into considerable argument as to who was the most heinous criminal of all time, or the bloodiest, or the orneriest, and so forth, but there's no doubt about who was the slipperiest.

The scene could open in any number of towns, particularly around the Midwest area, but let's go back a few years to Gary, Indiana. A finely dressed, proud looking old gentleman with gray hair comes aboard a trolley. He is walking down the aisle, on his way to a seat, when, all at once, his feet seem to go up from under him and there is this clean-cut, rather distinguished-looking old man lying sprawled out on the floor.

Sympathetic passengers respond quickly and soon have the fine-looking old timer up on his feet. There is something touching about the way he tries to smile, although he apparently is quite dazed by the fall. What caused the accident is soon obvious. In the aisle is a banana peel. Now how could anybody have been so thoughtless as to throw a banana peel in the aisle of a street car! The passengers look at each other with arched eyebrows as they comfort the old man.

A little later the graying, kinky-haired man, a little wan but with his head nevertheless still erect, is talking to an official of the street car company. The old man is saying he didn't mean to be causing any trouble and he couldn't say for sure how

the thing had happened. He'd just been walking down the aisle of the street car and then the next thing he knew he'd lost his balance and there he was on the floor. The company official listens carefully, every now and then consulting a report of the incident the motorman has made out. Then he says, "Would you accept thirty-five dollars as full settlement for any claim you might feel you have against us?"

"Why, yes. That's most kind of you. I'm most obliged to you," the old timer responds.

There is something so fine-appearing and charming about the old man that the trolley official soon finds himself engaging him in conversation about himself. Well, it seems the old fellow was born poor but by hard work and thrift manages to finally secure a farm of his own. Well, then his daughter marries this no-account fellow and there is a child, a little girl, whom the old man just dotes on. The child's parents separate, the girl remaining with her mother, but one day the no-account son-in-law comes along and makes off with the little girl. Since then, the old man has mortgaged his homestead and is spending all his time—"I don't figure the good Lord has given me too many more days; I'd like to see my little Ginny 'fore I go"—trying to find his little granddaughter. That is what he is doing in Gary.

Transportation officials are apt to be

*(Continued on page 8)*





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(Continued from page 6)

pretty tough, especially those dealing with claims, but when the old codger has finished his story, the official says, "Maybe I was shaving things a little too closely when I said we'd settle things for thirty-five dollars. I'll make it fifty dollars."

Now let's change the scene to Kalamazoo, Michigan, many months later. A rather well-dressed, fine-appearing old man is getting on a street car. As he is moving down the aisle, his legs suddenly seem to fly up from under him and he's down on the floor. Sympathetic passengers rally to his side. They look at each other with seething chagrin as they notice a banana peel near the fallen man.

A little later the kindly looking old man is talking to a street car official in his office. Somehow or other, conversation turns to the personal life of the gray-headed man, and he tells about how hard he worked to earn a farm for himself and how he'd mortgaged his farm to spend the last few days allotted him to find his granddaughter again.

"Very touching," comments the trolley

official. "I am sure there's someone else—who would like to hear this story too."

And at this point some other people enter the room—police officers. They search the old man, find something in his pockets that causes them to look at one another knowingly, and to promptly arrest him. The articles they have found upon the old man are—banana peels. He has about a dozen of them on him.

Checking around, police learn that the old man—Bill Hoke his name turned out to be—for years had been making the rounds of various towns, falling down in scores and scores of trolleys and buses and reciting the same imaginative account of his hunt for a lost grandchild . . . and collecting uncontested claims.

What had made the Kalamazoo trolley official suspicious, bringing an end to the long-drawn-out banana caper and sending its perpetrator off to jail?

It was the fact that the banana peel picked up in the aisle had showed no signs of having been trod upon.

That's when, as you might say, the old man really slipped. ♠ ♠ ♠

---

## LOOPY LAWBREAKERS

---

THREE Philadelphia bandits forced Albert Ashton, janitor, to drink a fifth-gallon size bottle of whisky at gunpoint, and while he was in the throes of his "internal grogginess" proceeded to rob the café he was cleaning of eight hundred dollars.

● ● ●  
HUNTINGTON, W. VA. police learned how it was that three female shoplifters were able to make off with so much merchandise. They wore especially commodious bloomers.

● ● ●  
IN Takoma Park, Md., while two of a trio of bandits were relieving Bernard Schuman of one hundred dollars in the back room of his grocery store, a confederate was out in front waiting on the customers and pocketing the money they handed him for the groceries.

● ● ●  
IN Los Angeles, a black dog snatched Mrs. Loretta Chatfield's purse and then dashed toward a waiting car, escaping with his master.

—Harold Helfer

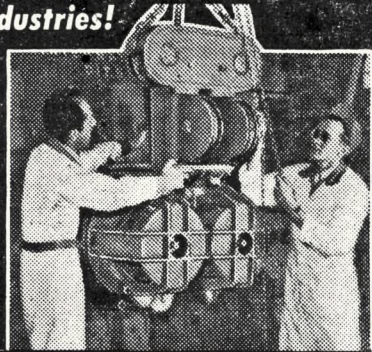


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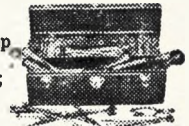
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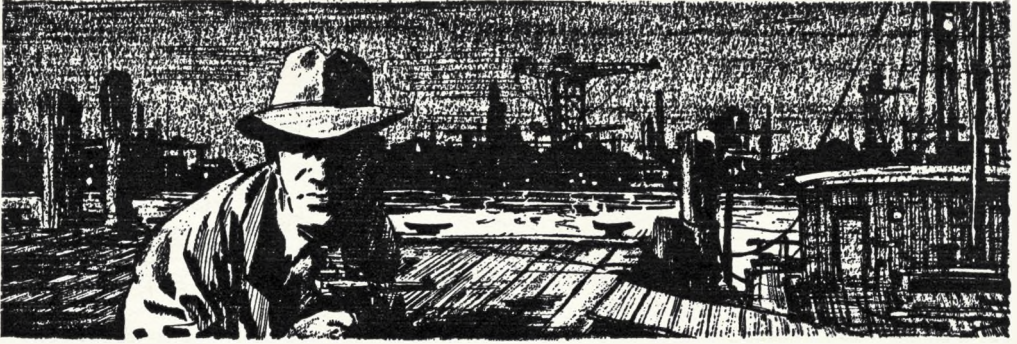
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By JOHN D. MacDONALD



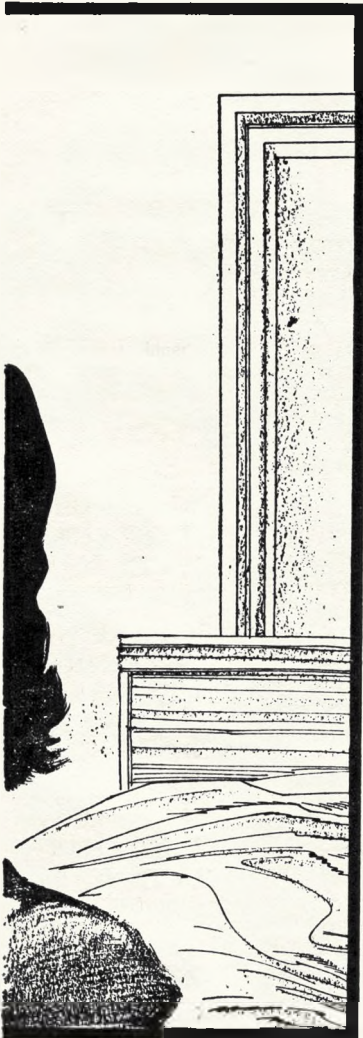




“Get yourself killed. Who cares?” the chief told me. “But get in my way on this murder, Pike, and we’ll use your thick skull for a channel marker!” That was my cue to set my course for the waterfront killers, by . . .

# Dead Reckoning!

• •



**T**HEY caught Michaels down in the freight yards and cut his heart out. Literally. The coroner’s man said it was done very efficiently. Incision right in the solar plexus where the ribs part. Somebody knew just where to reach, just how to slip their fingers around it and tear it out. It is one way to make sure a man is dead. And you either have to dislike him very intensely, or be some sort of an animal, to be able to do it.

I went to see Dobby Harris. I bulled my way through the clerks and kicked the old office door open. I didn’t pause to shake off the little man clinging to my right arm until I was in, standing on the tired green rug, glowering at Dobby Harris.

“What was he working on?” I yelled.

“Wild men I got,” Dobby said plaintively.

“Tell me what Michaels was working on!”

“Emotional people, I can’t use in my business.”

I reached the desk in two strides and reached across for his scrawny throat. Experience hadn’t taught me a thing. I froze, trying not to see the muzzle of the gun he had taken into his lap probably when he heard the first sound of confusion from the outer office.

“Now you sit down, Pike,” he said softly. “You sit down nice and you shut your big mouth. This is a forty-four and you’ll bounce off that far wall before you sit down and start holding onto your shoulder.”

I grabbed her arm and twisted it. . . .

I knew he meant it. His eyes were like two little raw wounds that stubbornly refused to heal. I sat down. His eyes healed slowly.

"Never push me, Pike. Never."

"You got your point across. You can stop bragging."

"Don't I remember firing you, Pike?" he asked gently.

"Two years ago, Dobey."

"I told you this was the wrong kind of work for you. I need men who can talk soft and tiptoe. This is a delicate business. You doing okay, boy?"

"I'm making twice what you ever paid me."

"I did you a favor. I fired you before you got killed. For my business, your temperament stinks." Maybe Dobey was right. Someday they'll write up our waterfront. It will make Shanghai and Bombay and Port of Spain look like Monday night at Smith College. Take several miles of docks. Add valuable cargoes in all kinds of shipping from red, rusty tramps to sleek new high-speed freighters. Add freight yards as big as the average city. Season the mixture with scum from all over the world. Stir in many hundred stevedores with muscles like an old maid's imagination. Then bring the mixture to a slow constant boil with the following special ingredients: Commies, dope smugglers, smugglers of aliens, professional looters, importers and exporters of everything illegal. Just to serve the dish up right, you garnish it with a long strip of mouldering buildings containing vendors of every vice, major and minor, known in the history of man.

City cops patrol The Strip in fours, and hate like hell to get out of the prowl car even then.

Dobey Harris has an official title. Chief of Port Protection. He works directly for the Port Authority. His idea of operation is to gumshoe around, use stoolies, play one thief against another to break those cases of

cargo pilferage. My general plan was to wade in and bust skulls. After three long trips to the hospital, Dobey decided I wasn't the type he wanted. I went to work for the Barrigan Line. They were grateful to me for a recovery I'd made. Nearly half a million dollars' worth of Swiss watch movements to be assembled into the cases in this country. They made me dockmaster.

"What are you going to do about Michaels?" I demanded.

"Now I'm working for you, maybe?" Dobey asked with that deceptive softness of tone he uses.

"Take me back on, Dobey. I can get time off from Barrigan. Turn me loose on what Michaels was doing." I was pleading with him. I nearly said please.

"A war starting here I won't have," he said. "Go away. Go take that big ugly face out and bury it. I got to have brains working for me, not scar tissue, Pike."

I stood up. "I'm going to work on it anyway, Dobey."

He yawned. "Get yourself killed. Who cares? But get in my way and we'll use your thick skull for a channel marker."

I walked out of the beat-up buildings of the Port Authority. I got into my car and drove out through the gates and down The Strip. I knew what I had to do, and I wanted to get drunk first. I wanted to, but I couldn't. I turned north and drove through the downtown section and then out into the residential section, where people live who haven't the faintest idea of what goes on down around the docks. My car is special. Just in one way. The seat has been moved back so I can get my feet on the pedals. When you're six five and weigh two-seventy, you find that few things in this world are built to fit. You go through life like the kid who stayed four years in the third grade.

I pulled into the drive of the white frame house and went to the back door, as usual. Joan let me in. Yesterday she was lovely. Today she had an old woman's face.



"Hello, Sam," she said tonelessly.

"A bad thing, Joan. A hell of a thing."

"Come in, Sam," she said.

We went into the living room. I sat on the couch.

"How are the kids taking it, Joanie?"

"The way I'd want them to. With guts. Guts they inherited from Al, not from me, I guess. I'm . . . just licked."

There are two kids. Boys. The eleven-year-old is named Al junior. The nine-year-old is named for me.

"What can I do to help?"

"Nothing, I guess, Sam. The funeral is the day after tomorrow. That gives his brother time to get here from the West Coast. My sister arrives tonight. She's going to stay with me for a while."

"How are you fixed for money?"

"There's a couple of thousand in our joint account. And enough insurance, I guess. I don't know. I haven't thought much about it. Oh, God! What a filthy way to die! Filthy, filthy!"

I held her in my arms. Each sob was a convulsion. When at last they quieted down, she said, "I knew that it wasn't the safest sort of work in the world, but I didn't let myself think about it very much."

"Joanie, I'm going to find out who, and why."

She pushed away from me. "No, Sam. I couldn't bear it if something happened to you too. They'll find out. It's their job. You stay out of it."

I kept my voice low and steady. "I'm going into it anyway. You can help or not as you see fit. Now do you want to answer questions?"

**W**HEN two guys are best friends and they go after the same girl and one of them wins, it usually busts up the friendship. It hadn't worked that way with Al Michaels and me. He'd won. I was content to keep on loving her. Al and I had been nineteen-year-old punks. She'd been seventeen. Now it was twelve years and

two kids later. And in twelve years no other woman had had any more taste than boiled blotting paper. Me, I was a foolish old hound dog that kept trotting down the road once a day to howl over the grave of the one master in all the world for him.

She ran her fingertips down my cheek, not knowing what it was doing to me, inside. "Old Sam," she said softly. "Bull-headed Sam. You'll do it anyway. You'll want to know what he was working on. I can't tell you exactly. For the last week he'd acted sort of worried. He got some library books on short wave radio and stayed up late, studying. He said one thing I couldn't understand. That was just two nights ago. Right out of a clear sky. He said, "Anna Maria!" I asked him what he was talking about. He grinned, you know the way he had. 'Just an idea, kitten. Just an idea.'"

"An idea that probably killed him," I said.

My namesake came down the stairs and into the living room. "Hello, Sammy," I said. He didn't say a word. He just came to me. For the past year he had figured himself too big to sit on anybody's lap. But he climbed aboard and squashed his face against my chest. He didn't cry.

At last he looked up, looked at me with Al's eyes, and he whispered, "Get 'em, Sam. Get 'em good!" And he ran out of the room. He wouldn't cry in front of me. So he had to get out of the room. He was back in three minutes, swallowing hard. He gave me one of Al's guns. A pre-war Luger. One of the good ones.

I said, "Thanks, Sammy. But I better not take this. It would have to be re-registered in my name. I've got a twin to this one, license and all. Your mother better put that one away."

Joanie took it and put it in the desk. I spent an hour going through Al's private papers to see if I could get a lead. If he had already made preliminary reports to Dobby Harris, they had been verbal, be-

cause the last carbon of a report was dated two weeks earlier and was the final report on a case of smuggling involving a tanker of Panamanian registry, with pertinent data turned over to the customs people.

I went down to the Barrigan Line office, asked for two weeks off, starting the following day. I had been using a bright kid named Fowler as my assistant. I told them he could handle the job for two weeks and I'd check with him now and then to see if things were doing well. It was okay with my boss.

I went back to my room. I live in a ground floor room behind a pawnshop on The Strip. Room and bath, with a private entrance and a space to park my car with the bumper almost against my door. In my room I can feel like an average-sized guy. The bed is seven and a half feet long. The leather chair is the biggest one I've ever seen. The work desk is high enough so I can get my knees under it comfortably. The shower head is seven feet off the floor and the shower stall is five feet square. The huge bookcase contains my collection of works on military history. A hobby.

Four o'clock in the afternoon. I picked up the phone and called The Barrel House, a joint at the far end of The Strip from where I live. Kaplan, the bartender, answered.

"Has Brogan come in yet, Kaplan?"

"And who should want him?"

"Pike."

"So when he comes I'll tell him."

"Put him in a cab and send him over, Kaplan."

"A pleasure."

I hung up and thought about Al Michaels. I thought about the night the two little Hindus used their knives on me. They were experts. I took five inches of steel in the lung while breaking the skull of the first one. The second one had jumped on my back. He was just starting to draw the blade across my throat when Al shot from fifty yards away with only moonlight on the

sights. It was a pretty shot. The slug whispered by my ear and chunked into the Hindu head with a sound like dropping a steel rod, end first, into deep water. And in the ambulance we killed a fifth of bourbon so fast that when they rolled me into the emergency ward, Al and I were singing for somebody to roll us over in the clover, with me getting very annoyed because I had to stop to cough blood whenever I had a chance for close harmony.

Men like Michaels don't come along very often. When they do, you hate to lose them.

Brogan came swaggering in, bringing his unwashed stink with him. He's got a face like dirty lard, a half-witted expression, and cast-off clothes fastened together with pieces of string. I poured him a half tumbler of straight bourbon. He drank it down and smacked his lips and held out the glass with an expression like a whimper.

"Later, Brogan."

I'll never know why he hasn't been killed. He is a blotter that soaks up information.

"Ye want to talk about Michaels, eh?"

"What do you know?"

"A week ago I heard a girl, a tall, dark lassie, tell Michaels to get away from her. Frightened, she was. All of a quiver. As if Michaels were sudden poison, Mr. Pike."

"Where and when was this?"

"Let me see now. Today being Friday, it would be a week ago yesterday, at five in the evening, and at the wee bar called Sandy's, a place I seldom go."

"Have you seen the girl since?"

"Neither before nor since. On a bar stool she was, and alone. In comes Michaels. He tries to talk to her. Go away, she says, trembling like I said. He doesn't. So up she got and out she went, Michaels trotting along behind, and niver have I seen her again."

"Who else was there at the time?"

"But for me and the dark lassie when Michaels came in, devil a soul but Sandy, the close-fisted brute. And now for a dollop



from your jug, if you please, Mr. Pike.”

“One more question. Does Anna Maria mean anything to you?”

He tilted his head as though listening. He mouthed the name, shrugged. “The bell in my mind is so faint, I cannot hear it, or be certain I ever did.”

“What is the rumor on The Strip about Michaels?”

“That there was a woman in it somehow. So that fits. And that it was a deed of justice.”

“Nuts, Brogan,” I said, “Michaels never looked at any woman but his wife.”

He giggled. “Ah, the dark-haired lassie was worth a lot of looking.”

“Well dressed?”

“How should I know? It pleased the eye. The dress was thin and it was tight here, and across here, with heels like stilts on her and a musical walk to her, and a gorgeous smell that fair filled Sandy’s place, and I remember it still. Like . . . ah, what is the name of the white, white flower that soon turns brown?”

“Gardenia?”

“Right you are, Mr. Pike. And that drink you were promising?”

I gave it to him. He rolled it on his tongue, winked slyly and went out, leaving his stale reek in the room. I opened the windows and left the door open. I put a kettle on the hot plate and boiled the glass he had used.

**2**

SANDY is a stone-faced Scot with a highland burr and an artificial hand which he can open and shut by working his shoulder muscles. Four drunken Swedes were singing in pigeon French, beating time on the booth top with shot glasses.

Sandy had no intention of admitting ever having seen a dark complexioned girl, or ever having known Michaels, or ever letting Brogan into his bar. I suddenly lost patience with him and made a quick grab

for his belt. I yanked him so hard against his bar that it drove half the wind out of him.

“Tell me what you know, Sandy,” I said in a low tone.

“I know nothing, Pike.”

“Want your joint wrecked for you?”

Potential financial loss gave him a look of anguish. “I know nothing.” And by saying that, he let me know that he had information I needed and wanted, information which he considered too dangerous to repeat.

One of the Swedes, a moon-faced citizen with shoulders like a prize bull, wavered over and stared guiltily at my hold on Sandy’s belt.

“Leef go him,” the Swede said.

I gave him a shove with my free hand. The Swede took three running steps backward and sat down with a thud that shook the bottles on the back bar. The other three Swedes gave yowls of gleeful anticipation and swarmed out of the booth. Sandy covered his eyes and moaned.

This was the first chance I’d had to work off the explosive anger that had been thickening my throat ever since I heard the news about Al Michaels. I knew better than to brace my back against the bar and give Sandy a chance to reach over and club me with the child’s baseball bat he keeps handy.

The first one charged toward me, head down, arms swinging. I swooped low into him, brought him up by throat and crotch and used his own momentum, plus a little extra heave to send him over the bar. He landed, spread-eagled, against the bottle shelves of the back bar, with a sound like a helicopter hitting a greenhouse. A fist like a hammer clubbed me over the ear. I caught the wrist before the fist could be withdrawn to land again. I spun hard and heard the bone snap, heard the hard grunt of pain and surprise.

I let go of him and he ran, head down, into the end wall by the men’s room door, and dropped. The first one came over the

bar with a broken bottle in each fist, blood on his face. He made the mistake of taking a big leap toward me from the top of the bar. I sidestepped and swung my leg. It hit across his ankles while he was still in the air. The first thing that hit the floor was his face. Hard arms locked around my throat. I threw myself backward against the wall.

When I felt the grip loosen, I snapped forward and threw him over my head. The last one gave me a puzzled frown. He looked at his friends. He held his hands up and his face cracked into a big grin.

"Hokay. Wass goot fight. Too short. You coom back tonight. I bring more."

"I can't coom back tonight."

"Now we go get dronk, yah."

"Some other time, pal."

I caught Sandy as he was crawling on his hands and knees into his own back room. I helped him along a little and pulled the door shut behind us. "Let's have it, Sandy."

"Go away, Pike."

I kept an eye on that artificial hand. He wears a glove on it. Under the glove is steel. I've seen what happens when he uses it. There was no mistaking his fear and desperation.

"Tell me about Anna Maria," I said. It was a mistake. Some of the strain went out of his face.

"That doesn't mean a thing to me, Pike." And I was sure it didn't.

"Then talk about Michaels and the brunette tootsie, Sandy. I've kidded around with you before. In the old days. This time I'm not kidding, Sandy. Believe me. This time I'm a mean man."

"Go to hell," he said softly.

It wasn't pretty and I didn't enjoy doing it. I didn't feel like a hero. But I had to look as though I enjoyed it. That gives it the final twist. I propped him up again and said, "Please don't tell me, Sandy. Let's waltz some more."

"Nadov," he gasped. "Nadov."

I held him against the wall. "Don't give

me that. They threw that Commie out of the union and Immigration deported him."

"Hiding . . . somewhere in The Strip. Dark girl . . . his girl."

It was crazy enough to be true. I helped Sandy over to the cot. I cleaned him up as well as I could. I left him there. The Swedes were gone. I fixed the door latch so that it locked behind me. Al's death began to make a little more sense.

Two and a half years ago, before Dobey fired me, Al and I had worked on the Nadov business. We got onto it because, during a stevedore wildcat strike engineered by Nadov, considerable damage had been done to cargo through sabotage of slings and winches. When the union tossed Nadov out, Al did a pretty bit of work with checking the facts on Nadov's pre-war application for citizenship. He turned the dope over to Immigration and they gave Nadov free transportation to Yugoslavia.

It was evident that Michaels had somehow got onto the information that Nadov was back, illegally. It would take pretty good organization to get him back, and that meant he had something pretty important to do for his home team. Al wouldn't have bothered with it unless it indicated possible damage to the establishment. Now all I had to do was find Nadov, find out who was working with him and to what end, discover the significance of Anna Maria and short wave research and I had it. Nothing to it. Just like playing every Phil infield position in a Dodger game.

Dusk had slid gray tentacles along The Strip. Neon whined and chattered over the sidewalk. A French sailor was trying to throw his stomach out into the middle of Maroney Street. The B girls in their tight dresses were swinging along to work the bars, showing their bad teeth as they smiled. I left the car parked near Sandy's and started down The Strip. Most of the activity is confined to seven blocks of solid joints. A lot of GIs were in town, taking a late pass from the big camp south of the



city. You work an area long enough and you get to know the familiar faces.

I worked the way I know best. I took one bar at a time, went in and announced to everyone who looked faintly familiar, "If you see Nadov, tell him Pike is looking for him." I guarantee that by eight o'clock I had several hundred people firmly convinced that I was crazy. But there was a chance that somewhere I had hit one of Nadov's contacts. I worked down one side and up the other side, and then crossed to my car. I glanced into Sandy's. The mess had been cleaned up. Tape was white on his face. He was serving them three deep at the bar.

As I drove back to my place, I tried to put my finger on what had been wrong with The Strip. There was a subtle distortion that eluded me. As I parked by my door I suddenly realized what it was. There had been entirely too many neat, businesslike young men around. A little too well-dressed for The Strip. A little too sober for it.

During my slow trip I had wolfed down a couple of cheese sandwiches. I went into my place and set up what I hoped would be a surprise. Big chair with back to the window, turned just enough so my head would show. Light beyond the chair to make a nice silhouette. Shade up. I went outside and admired my head through the window. It was a ball of laundry, tied in place with a necktie I never cared for anyway. I crossed the little back court and hunkered down in deep shadow, my back against a warehouse wall where I could see across the hood of my car and into the window. Cats complained nearby that life was torment. Music from the joints merged, losing beat and rhythm, becoming a distant noise in which only the wild yawp of a trumpet or the slit-pig squeal of a clarinet was identifiable.

**Y**OU sit and listen to your heart beat, listen to your arteries harden. You sit and wonder what you should have done

with your life instead of what you're doing. You are a big ugly type sitting in the dark in a jungle clearing while around you the hunting animals sing and prey on each other.

You think about Joanie and wonder if, when the heartache of loss has lessened, she will let you have her, kids and all. Al's kids. Can you be a good parent for Al's kids?

What time is it now? Ten. A little after. Say the heart beats seventy times a minute. That's forty-two hundred an hour. For two hours you've been waiting. Eighty-four hundred heartbeats. The old pump churning eighty-four hundred times. How many beats were built into it in the beginning? Figure it roughly at a hundred thousand a day. A man is entitled to twenty-five thousand days. That comes to two billion five hundred thousand beats. One hell of a tough muscle, that heart. But suppose you only get one billion. And maybe, this minute, it is on the nine million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-eight beat. And in two more. . . .

Glass smashed violently and the ball of laundry disappeared. I was frozen for a moment, and then the brain began to function again. The top half of the window was smashed. That gave the angle. The shot had come from over my head, a soundless shot. That placed the targeteer on the warehouse roof. I ran backward out into the court, staring up. The warehouse was about forty feet high. My playmate was moving rapidly along the roof toward the corner. I knew that at the corner was an eight foot drop to a lower roof of a squat three story rooming house fronting on the next street, Chine Road which parallels Maroney Street. He was a quick shadow against the neon-dimmed stars, against the faint afterglow of the city.

I took a snap shot at him, leading him a little, hoping for the shoulder or chest. I thought I had missed him. As I was ready

to try again, he veered a little and ran right out into space, right off the edge of the flat roof. It wasn't like the animated cartoons where the little rabbit runs off the cliff, looks down, turns around and runs back to safety before he begins to drop. My playmate came down fast and hard. He landed dead center on the top of a metal panel delivery belonging to a laundry on Chine Road. He turned the convex top of the truck into a metal hammock. I stood in the silence and listened. The music still continued. On The Strip it is considered bad luck to investigate anything that sounds like a shot.

I got a flashlight from the room, went back and took a look at him. Heavy-faced Slavic type. Outdoor complexion. Blue work shirt and gray twill trousers. Metal-capped shoes. My Luger slug had caught him in the softness just under the angle of the jaw on the left side, and just forward of the ear. It had emerged through the right temple, and, in emerging, had done what Lugers usually do. Momentum had kept him running—momentum and reflex for the three strides necessary to take him off the edge of the roof. I was tall enough to go over him without pulling him down out of his little metal nest.

The capped shoes meant cargo handler of some sort. Two stainless steel teeth in front meant recent dental work in Europe. The work clothes were J. C. Penney's and fairly new. He was about thirty, stocky, strong. Half pack of Luckies in the shirt pocket with book matches advertising a laxative. Fairly new foreign pocket knife. Three wadded one dollar bills and some change. No wallet. No papers. I cursed him quietly and carefully.

I flashed the light around the base of the building and found his weapon. A wicked one. One of those killer jobs they made in Hungary before the war. An air job, with a heavy pump arm and a big pressure cylinder. Shoots a slug of approximately twenty-five caliber with extreme accuracy and a

muzzle velocity of nearly three thousand fps. And just beyond the gun I found the gray twill hat. A peaked workman's hat with some brain tissue on the sweat band. There was a narrow strip of paper inside the sweatband in the front. There were two addresses typed on it. The machine had keys so dirty that the letters a,e,o,b,d were all filled in. The first address was mine. The second one was 116 Nairn, Rm 11.

I kept the slip and phoned the police. A body. I said. Right away, they said. Two cars. Three of them knew me. Lt. Shripe of Homicide in charge. He weighs what I do and he's a foot shorter. That makes him a very fat man. There's something matronly about him. Pouchy cheeks, and chipmunk eyes, and a lisp in his speech. Elegant gestures of little fat hands. But a tough, cold working cop none the less.

"They told me you'd retired," he said.

I told him how it happened. I didn't tell him why. He took the slug out of the laundry ball. He took my statement. He took the gun. He took the body. He went away with his people and with my promise to check with him at ten the following morning for a fast inquest and disposition of the case.

They don't bother me. They used to. Once they spent a happy forty hours bouncing me off the cellar walls of a precinct station. And then one night I had occasion to take a thirty minute ambulance ride holding my thumb against a hole in the throat of a captain of detectives, the fingers of my left hand clamped so hard on the second hole, the one in the femoral artery high on the left thigh, that when they were ready to take care of him, my hand had to be pried loose. After that the word went out. Lay off Pike. Stay off him. Consider him on the team.

At quarter after eleven I turned off The Strip onto Nairn Street. It is barely more than a glorified alley. The sidewalks are not more than two feet wide, and the build-



ings front on them, as solid as a wall. It is away from the lights of The Strip and thus a favorite place for rolling drunks and mugging the unwary. It is the very oldest part of the city. When the old clipper ships used to come into the port, these houses were full of crystal and oriental rugs and sandalwood boxes from the Far East. Now they are white-collar flophouses. Fiberboard and plywood make one of the old bedrooms into four. There are still traces, though. The curve of a staircase, even with one out of every three bannister rungs missing. Handpainted wallpaper from Brussels, now grimed to an even brown-gray with the pattern barely distinguishable. A teak door frame.

Number one ten was three stone steps up from the narrow sidewalk. Gilt on a window spelled out Dr. A. M. Blissing, Psycho-Electrologist and Dianetics Auditor. Dr. Blissing had been careless about the shade. There was a one inch gap at the bottom. But even so, you had to be six feet five to notice that Dr. Blissing was apparently auditing and electrologizing a rather beefy and cooperative blonde. The front door, as expected of those places, was unlocked. There was no hall light. I used the flash. Number eleven was on the ground floor, way back where probably the kitchen had originally been. The hall took two right angle corners to get there. It smelled as though a thousand years of cabbage had been cooked back there without ever putting up really stiff resistance to the aroma of faulty plumbing.

I slipped the Luger into my hand, put my shoulders against the opposite wall of the narrow hall, lifted one size fourteen shoe and stamped the door just above the knob. The latch housing ripped out of the frame and I went in fast. At best I am no object of beauty. I wasn't at my best. And I was behind a gun. The girl sitting on the gray sheets of the unmade bed, sitting there in ivory white bra and lace frilled panties, gave me one look. Her eyes rolled

up into her head and she fell off the bed onto the floor, landing like a marionette when the overhead man drops the control stick.

The shade was pulled. The room was small. I holstered the automatic and looked around. The cheapest kind of furniture, home painted with one coat that had soaked into the grain. One three-quarter bed, one chair, one dressing table with bench, one green grass rug, one closet containing plenty of clothes, all female.

She was on her side, knees pulled up, hands under her chin, like a child sleeping. I put the side of my shoe against her shoulder and rolled her over. She was definitely brunette, definitely exotic. Slant eyes and a heavy mouth and a musky look about her. Middle East, I guessed. A few genes from each of a lot of different races. Like some of the lushier Cairo girls that American officers, who didn't know any better, used to take to the terrace at Shepheard's. She was not the fainting kind, but indubitably she was in a faint. I pinched her ear to find out, watching her eyelids closely. Pinch the ear of a faker and though they try to stay deadpan, the eyes will squinch together, just a little. Brogan's lecherous look when he had spoken of her had been justified. In the slanting bedlamp light her skin had a faint down, like a peach. In a few years the body would be overripe. At the moment it was only breathtaking.

**T**HE spindly bench creaked under my weight as I sat down gently after closing the door. Top left drawer. Folded nylon and the flavor of gardenia. Strong enough to identify, strong enough to remind me that I had smelled it ever since coming into the room. Top right drawer. Junk jewelry—garish stuff that would look good on her—and a passport. French. The picture was hers. Ollya Perzeck. Born in 1927 in Pest, Hungary. Provisional French citizenship acquired in 1945. I was leaf-

ing back to check on the U. S. visa when motion in the mirror caught my eye. My hand caught hers as it slid from under the pillow and I made her drop the gun after a few twists of her arm. She gouged my chin with her nails, tried to get her teeth set in the back of my hand. Then she tried for my eyes, grunting with the effort, straining as if this were the final of the Golden Gloves. She was too slippery to grab. I caught her on the rise with an open-handed slap across the ear. It dumped her sideways onto the bed. All the fight went out of her immediately. She lay there and glowered up at me.

I fingered my chin and looked at the dapple of blood on my fingertips.

"What were you going to do with the gun, Ollya? Is that the way you say it?"

"Kill you." The English was excellent, almost completely unaccented.

"Why?"

"Before you kill me. Go ahead. Kill me. Step on my face with those big dirty feet, you . . . you monster thing."

I eased myself down on the bench again. "I didn't come to kill you."

"He wants to do it, I suppose. Do we wait here, or do you take me to him? I am glad we are through waiting. I was going crazy, waiting."

"Let's start this over again, Ollya. A friend of mine tried to talk to you in a bar. His name was Michaels. He died. It has taken quite a while to find you, and find out you're Nadov's girl. I want Nadov and whoever is working with him."

"Nadov!" She said it contemptuously, closed heavy lips and rolled the word around in her mouth. Then she leaned over the side of the bed and spat onto the green grass rug. "Nadov!" she said again, wiping her lips with the back of her hand.

Then she began to frown. She stared at me and her eyes clouded. She cocked her head on one side. "Are you Pike?" she asked. "Sam Pike?"

I was still a little dazed by the Mediter-

ranean venom of the way she spat. "I'm Pike."

"I would like to see you get him, Sam Pike. I would like to see those hands on his throat and see those evil eyes bulge out of their sockets. I would like to feed his entrails to mad dogs."

"I take it you don't like him. Did he kill Al Michaels?"

"Yes. While the others held him, over near the trains. He told me about it."

"Why didn't you talk to Michaels?"

"Because then I was afraid. A terrible fear. Nadov said to me that should I do one thing to betray him in any way, my people would die hard. There were only two of them left, I thought. My mother and a young brother. In Hungary. For six years I have tried to get them out. Nadov told me, in Paris, I could get them out if I helped him. For a year now, day by day, he has promised, promised, promised."

She rolled off the bed and stood up. "In France I cannot find out. I cannot find out through Switzerland. I have to come to this country, to this place, to find out from a common sailor of my country that they have been dead, my mother and my brother, for almost a year. I went to Nadov and I spit on him. I told him what I knew. He laughed. I knew then that he had known it all along."

"When did this happen?"

"Just at darkness tonight. He told me it was too bad. Now I could not see another daylight. So I have been waiting."

"Why not go to the police?"

"My large friend, I have known the police of too many countries. If you come in with a knife in your throat they will admit that maybe you are in danger. Otherwise, phooey."

I described to her the pigeon I shot off the warehouse roof. She nodded. "That is Nicky. A bad one."

"I killed him tonight. He had two addresses on him. Yours and mine."

She nodded solemnly. "Yes, he would tell



Nicky to do that kind of work. Nicky is . . . was very dependable.”

“Why is Nadov here?”

“It is an important thing. A matter of explosives.”

“Blowing up the port!” I asked incredulously.

“I think so,” she said in a tone of voice that meant that she thought it a most casual matter of no particular importance.

“Do you know how and when?”

“Soon I think. And somehow with a radio transmitter. I do not understand. I do not listen carefully to their jabber.”

“How many are with him?”

“Ten, twelve, fifteen. Many, I think.”

I wanted to grab her and shake information out of her. “Where can I find Nadov?”

“I don’t know. He is not far away from here because he walks here at night. And he does not stay long. I was forbidden to leave this room. I left and a man told me his name was Michaels and he wanted to talk about Nadov. I do not know how he found out.”

“He found out because he was bright and he was patient and he was thorough.”

“Now Nadov will send someone else after us, Sam Pike.”

“Are you in this country legally?”

“I think so. Nadov handled it.”

“You’re going to be taken into protective custody. Get some clothes on. Bring your toothbrush.”

She dressed as casually as though she were alone in the room. Careful makeup. When all was complete, she pirouetted in front of me. “Nice?”

“Very.”

We went to the door. She gave me a look of concern and reached up to touch my gouged chin. She ran her fingertips down my chest. She said softly, “Such a vast, monstrous man is Sam Pike! A truly enormous man. I like you, Sam Pike. You have the ugliness I like. A pretty man is never any good. He thinks of himself instead of the woman.”

“Better let me check the hall before we go out, Ollya.”

I pulled the broken door open. I looked the wrong way first. A vagabond planet, whispering softly through stellar space, smashed against my skull. I dropped into the helium heart of a yellow-white sun while the slow dead moons circled.

Then I found out I had fingertips. If you have fingertips of your own, you are not dead. Pike’s second theorem. I could splay them flat on a wooden floor. I could push against the floor. I could push with tremendous strength. Just barely enough to lift my head. There was an orange rectangle which could be a doorway. Between me and the doorway was a woman on her back. Profile of face and chest. I watched the chest. It did not lift and fall. Ergo—dead woman. Pike’s third theorem.

I put my two ton head back down, cheek against the floor. I thought about the woman. Ollya. Very dead. An extreme waste of attractive merchandise. A figure appeared in the doorway beyond Ollya, his shadow blacking out her silhouette. I closed my eyes. When in doubt, play dead. Somebody walked close to my head and went down the hall. Another came out of the room, asked what sounded like a question in a rasping whisper.

The retreating figure whispered back. Answer to question. I felt it concerned me. Somebody went to a great deal of trouble rolling me over. They grunted as they did so. Somebody unbuttoned my jacket and opened it. Through slitted eyes I saw the room light touch a steel blade. Operation without benefit of anaesthetic.

I took hold of the knife wrist. It startled him considerably. It startled me too. I felt as though I were using putty fingers, but I did have hold of his wrist. He used his other fist to hammer me in the face. It wasn’t pain. I could hear the blows landing. Like he was hitting a mask I was wearing, a mask that stood out a few inches above my face. I got the other

hand up and his fist splatted into it, like a baseball into a cupped glove.

I closed my fingers around the fist. And, slowly, I sat up. I bent his wrists so that his body arched, then fell across my thighs, the small of his back against my thighs. He began to scream. The sound hurt my ears. I raised my knees slowly, right arm pinning his thighs, left arm still holding the knife wrist, across his throat. There was a moment of slow heavy strain, then a dull snap, as though a stick had broken under water. The scream stopped as if a needle had been lifted from a record. It was a relief to have it over. I stood up, holding onto the wall.

Olya had died the way Al Michaels had died. There was nothing pretty about it. It was unpretty enough so that I gagged. Light struck the face of the man who had stopped screaming. He was almost a twin of the one she had called Nicky. I went down the hall. My head was one of those Macy Parade balloons, full of helium. It drifted down the hallway, dragging the rest of me with it.

### 3

DR. BLISSING'S door was open an inch. There was an eye in the crack. I looked at it. The door slammed shut. I went down the three stone steps to the narrow sidewalk. I went down the steps on my heels. A comedy routine. I reached for the building and it wasn't there, and I went down in a slow roll. More comedy. I crawled to the building and slid up the side of it like a swimmer trying to get up on the dock. Once erect, I put my shoulders against the building. It was waving back and forth, like grass in a slow wind. I fingered the back of my head, more than half expecting my fingertips to slip into a crack like the slot in a mailbox. No crack. Just a lump like half a grapefruit, sticky on top.

In some small sane part of my mind I

knew that it was more than a crack on the skull. This was concussion or fracture. The building swayed and tried to send me sprawling into Nairn Street. I braced my feet and held it up. No hat. No gun. No plan. In dreams you get lost in dark places and can't find your way out. Consciousness was a thin strip on which to walk, with darkness deep on either side. Plant your feet carefully, Pike. Stay on the strip, even though it swings like one of those rope bridges in the Andes. The brain is jelly in a bone sphere. Smack the sphere hard enough and the jelly impacts against the opposite side. Funny things happen to imagination, senses, locomotion.

My head was something fragile and precious. If the most wizened little drunk-rolling bum had come after me, I would have gone onto hands and knees and begged him not to hit me.

No hat, no gun, no car, no plan. And three blocks of The Strip to navigate. It was a dream street. The Strip was on a wheel. I walked straight, but the sidewalk shifted under me. I kept going up and down the curb, stumbling, then running full tilt into the fronts of buildings, taking the shock on my shoulder.

After a half block I knew I couldn't make it. I got my back against a wall near a doorway. A vulpine little face swam up at me and a husky sweet voice said, "Lookin' for company, big man?" I waved it away.

Hand on my shoulder. Tugging. Waking me. "Sam! Sam, wake up!"

And then I could see her face. I found the name to go with it. Kim. Kim Torrence. A girl so big that Billy Rose would have featured her—if he had gotten her five years ago, before The Strip got her.

"Hello," I said.

"Sam, are you drunk?"

"Head," I said. "Hit on head."

"The cab's right there. Lean on me a little. Come on. That's it. Just three steps."

Somebody got the other arm. The driver,



I think. "How . . . did you know?" I asked.

"Ike saw you weave by his place. He phoned me. I told all of them if they ever saw you in trouble to phone me." Girl with a long memory. Three years ago. I did her a favor. A little favor to me, and a big one to her.

Then I was in a dark place. The middle seat in a deserted movie house. The screen was on a circular track that encircled the movie house. Each time it whistled by, I caught a fragment of a scene. A strange room. A man with white hair. The man and Kim bending over me. Then some kind of a machine looking at me with a big glass eye, while somebody slipped a black metal plate under my head. Then a pain prick in my arm and the gleam of glass and stainless steel. Then a long headlong dive into warm black surf, into an undertow that dragged me straight down.

**S**UNLIGHT was on Kim's face as she leaned over me. Life had drawn a dozen bitter lines on her face, and left the fine eyes untouched. "Sleeping beauty," she said. She wore a terry-cloth robe, no makeup.

"Your bed is too short," I said. "Is it your bed?"

"Yours until tomorrow, Sam. They brought a portable X-ray in last night. No fracture, but the doc said there should have been. Just a hell of a concussion."

"I don't feel bad. Just . . . far away."

"It's two in the afternoon. The police are looking for you. Here's the morning paper, if you want to see it. Three deaths on The Strip last night. I understand you shot somebody off a roof. And a witness saw you leaving the scene of the other two killings. Do you want to talk to police? They'll have to come here, Sam."

"Phone Shripe. I'll talk to him."

Shripe arrived wearing the expression of a Hokinson clubwoman who wasn't nominated to the steering committee. He

brought two scrubbed young Princeton types with him.

They sat down. Shripe looked at Kim. "Go walking, honey."

"The doctor said don't get him too tired," Kim said haughtily. She had changed to a black tailored suit. Six feet of woman on three inch heels. Big enough for Sam Pike, but too late for Sam or anyone else. She stalked out.

Shripe said, "We cover you. Always we cover you. But comes a limit, Pike. You've got no standing. You're just a guy on a vacation from his job. That's all. Many, many people are very annoyed with you, Pike. I'm annoyed. Now we have a tea party. Us, three federal bureaus and a couple consulates and embassies. How complicated can it get?"

A Princeton type said stuffily, "Aren't we here to get a statement rather than indulge in a lot of elliptical conversation?"

Shripe stared at him. "Elliptical, Lordy, civil service must be underpaying you."

The boy blushed. "I mean, shouldn't we get a statement?"

"I get the statement," Shripe said, "and *you* get the education. This Pike is a novel experience, lad. His methods give tough cops the creeps."

So I talked. Carefully and at length. Brogan, Sandy, Nicky, Ollya, Nadov. The Princeton types watched me with saucered eyes, Shripe with quiet appreciation. When I was quite through, he pointed at one of the lads. "Your turn," he said.

"But I have no authority to release. . . ."

"Your turn," Shripe said heavily.

The types stared at each other. One shrugged and nodded. The other talked. "We have known for almost a month that some attempt at sabotaging the port installations would be made. Security measures have been tightened. Any extensive damage would seriously impede the flow of materiel to Korea. We hoped to keep our suspicions quiet and trap the saboteurs. Now I am afraid that this . . . difficulty will so increase

their precautions as to invalidate our efforts."

"Talks like a manual, doesn't he?" Shripe said jovially.

"But, Mr. Pike, we are grateful for the additional fragments of information. Explosives, radio, Anna Maria. We suspected that Nadov was back. Glad you confirmed it. We did not tie the Michaels killing to Nadov. That is also a help. An intensive lab investigation of the two bodies may disclose additional information. Sometimes merely analysis of dust from the garments can . . ."

"Oh, come now," Shripe said petulantly. "Start with a short course on fingerprints."

The young man beamed. "As a matter of fact, we found a clear print of the index finger, left hand, of Nadov, in Miss Perzeck's room."

"Oh, bully!" Shripe said.

They both blushed. Shripe said, "See you boys later." They left.

Shripe lit my cigarette and his own. He clucked sadly. "Know how many of them are around here? Guess."

"Fifty?"

"You are one third correct. Good people, most of them. Harris and the shipping lines and the unions are cooperating. A lot of them are planted around here and there in dock jobs, keeping their eyes open. But nothing yet. And here's an old cop's hunch. This thing is for soon. I go around with my shoulders up around my ears, waiting for a big boom. I don't think Nadov would have messed with Al unless he was pretty well set on his main project. First things first. Got any idea where Nadov would hide?"

"Under a wet rock, maybe."

"Who the hell is Anna Maria?"

"I thought that was going to be the brunette, but it doesn't fit so good because Al tried to talk to her before he said that name to Joanie, like it was an inspiration. And I don't go along with that first things first idea of yours, my friend. I think Al

got it because he was getting too hot."

Shripe left. After a while Kim came back and opened the windows, saying, "It smells of cop in here, Sam. Hungry?"

By the time she brought the food back, it was time for her to go to work. I lay and smoked and tried to straighten out my thoughts.

When the inspiration hit me I wanted to club myself on the forehead with my fist. But that would hurt too much. A bunch of dull citizens looking for a woman named Anna Maria. And nobody ever calls a ship "he". I had to have a fast look at the Register. I dressed in clothes that had taken a drubbing. They were defeated. No hat and no gun. I didn't miss the hat. It wouldn't have fitted over the lump on my skull anyway.

With clothes on and standing up, I had the shakes. Dusk was on the way. I dug around in Kim's room and found an unopened bottle of bourbon. I twisted the cap off, breaking the plastic seal, and upended it. Fire rolled down my throat and exploded in my stomach. I tried again. The fire settled down into a bed of coals. I held my hands out. Steady.

A cab dropped me at the main port buildings. I showed my pass at the barbed wire gate and went in. I got hold of the Register. My splendid idea glimmered off into apathy. No ship named the *Anna Maria*. Not one. So I got hold of Lloyd's Registry of Yachts. No private pleasure craft named the *Anna Maria*.

I walked down along the dock area. A freighter, garish in the big floodlights, was unloading the bouncing bales of crude rubber from the Pacific. Muscles for the democracies. Self-sufficiency is a delusion. We draw on the world for the raw materials. With the best know-how on the planet, we convert materials into tools, into a way of living.

Captain Willie Mintz was in his office, talking on the ship-to-shore with one of his tugs. I sat down and lit one of his cigars



and waited until he had given the tug skipper the traditional horrific tongue-lashing.

He broke the connection and said, "That lint head could lose a string of barges in the swimming pool at the YWCA. What the hell do you want?"

"Willie, is there any kind of tub around here named the *Anna Maria*?"

He pulled his underlip and let it snap back. "Sure."

I slid out to the edge of the chair. "What is it? Where is it?"

"It's about forty feet of slow motion, Sam. A tender for the commercial divers that air-hose out the docking areas when they silt up. Looks like a floating hardware store."

"Where do they keep it?"

"Let me think now. Way the hell and gone down below Pier K, Sam. Down where they're torching that old Liberty up for scrap."

I thanked him and kept myself from patting him on the head. I went back to the offices and spent a half hour finding a clerk who knew the score on the contract. The firm was called Retlow and Baker. They had made their bid and gotten the contract three months before. The work was satisfactory. They had had a little bad luck. Lost a diver a month ago. I remembered the incident.

**T**HE cab dropped me a block from Pier K. Down there it was private stuff, not under the port authority, so there was no problem of gates and passes. Only shallow draft stuff could get in there. The partially dismantled hulk of the Liberty lay on the bottom, canted to starboard, looking like something that had drifted onto Omaha Beach.

There were warehouses, a few dingy saloons a block away, a smell of ripe fish and mud flats. Murky water slashed sullenly at the barnacled piers and small boats groaned as they rubbed their flanks against

the fenders. I moved around in the shadows like an uncertain ghost, waiting for the last light in the western sky to dwindle away.

When it was dark enough, I went down the rotten flooring of the pier between the Liberty and a small craft with ugly lines. The tide was high enough to bring the deck level of the small craft up even with the pier boards. I knelt astern of her and lit a match. Before the wind whipped it out, I saw the name in ancient paint arching across the square stern. *Anna Maria*. It was completely dark. No light showing. I stepped across the low rail and the deck lifted and fell gently under my feet. Tangled equipment was piled on the deck. Forward was an ugly cabin. High, square and ungainly.

I stood and thought of what a perfect dodge it was. Ideal. Security would never think of the *Anna Maria* as a threat. All she had to do was tie up to a dock and send a diver over the side to clean out the bottom with the air hose. Drop him a nice fat package of explosives and he could wire it in the right place to do the maximum damage, not only to the ship tied up to the dock, but to the underpinning of the dock itself. Underwater explosion is an unhappy thing. Water has no practical compressibility. So the force has to go somewhere. If the nearest compressible air happens to be behind the steel skin of a ship, the explosion will expand that way, through the skin and into the bowels of the ship.

All I had to do now was find some evidence of my suspicion, lug it ashore and turn it over to the bright boys. Let them figure it out, and how to deactivate the charges that had probably already been planted.

I moved forward, planning to break into the cabin if it was locked, cautious not to stumble on the equipment piled around. Pumps and coiled hoses and equipment lockers.

As I reached for the cabin door, I froze.

Though no glimmer of light showed, I heard voices coming from inside the cabin. And, above the sound of the harbor waters, I heard someone coming unsteadily down the pier. I moved to one side, squatted down in the shadows. The man lurched aboard, fell and cursed. He got up and stamped noisily forward toward the cabin. Three feet from me, he tripped again. I had all the luck in the world. All of it bad. He fell right on me. Before I could find his throat he let out a hoarse yell of surprise. I grabbed his arm and his belt and heaved him over the rail. I tried to run for the pier side, tripped and fell flat. The cabin door opened and the light hit me squarely.

Nadov stood in the doorway. Bull shoulders. Head like a granite block. Arms and legs bowed like an ape. He held the gun on me and said in a soft, sweet voice, "Happy to see you again, Mr. Pike. You will please come in."

There was nothing to do but go in and hope for a chance. Nadov was giving me no chances. He made me fold my length into a narrow bunk. The gun was always a little too far away to reach. The cursing floundering man had pulled himself aboard. He came in, dripping, sobered. Nadov had been talking to a lean little man with a bulging forehead and a quick, clever face.

With the door shut, with the wet one shedding his dripping clothes, Nadov sat at the center table.

"You are our second visitor," Nadov said. "Mr. Michaels came here too, and we walked him over into the freight yards."

I called him a filthy name. He didn't lose his smile. He said, "It is good to feel life pulsing in your hand, Mr. Pike. A strange sensation. A mastery of life and death."

The intellectual type snapped out something in a foreign tongue. Nadov paled a bit, spoke quickly and with great respect. The intellectual type seemed satisfied.

"Still taking orders, eh?" I said.

It bothered Nadov worse than the name I had called him. I thought for a moment

that the man was going to pull the trigger.

From my position I could see the radio equipment. It was a hell of a lot bigger and more complicated than you would expect to find on such a tub. And it occurred to me that the tub was probably sufficiently seaworthy to take Nadov and friends to an off-shore rendezvous.

"What happened to Retlow and Baker?"

"They sold out, Mr. Pike. It occurred to them that they could lose other divers the same way they lost the first one. Of course, the sale wasn't recorded."

"What is going to happen to me, Nadov?"

"You have been very successful, Mr. Pike. You have advanced our schedule a bit. You have set it up to tomorrow, and reduced the bag of ships we expected. We are all quite angry with you. And you are amazingly durable, Mr. Pike. I used a length of pipe on you and a full arm swing. And I am not a weakling."

The bunk was a nice idea. It was cramped enough so that I couldn't hope to get out of it fast enough to do anything constructive. My mistake was in getting in there in the first place. I knew I should have made my play, if any, while I was still on my feet. But that came in the spilled-milk department.

The intellectual type gave an order. Nadov smiled at me. He said, "You are very fortunate, Mr. Pike. This is going to be quick and practically painless. Mayer, give me a towel."

Mayer, pulling on dry pants, reached over and grabbed a towel. I tensed. But Mayer went around behind Nadov and handed it carefully to him. Nadov kept his eyes on me and the muzzle steady as he wrapped the towel around the revolver barrel to form a crude silencer. It wouldn't have to do much silencing. The water noises would cover anything except a shot with no muffling at all.

He lifted the gun, one hand on the towel, to take slow and careful aim. The other



two were watching alertly, interestedly. I took the only tiny chance left to me. I got my hand on the bunk mattress and yanked it up as I rolled flat against the back wall. Something hammered the mattress and stung my neck like a whip. I came out of the bunk, shoving the mattress ahead of me, diving full length toward the table, toward the gun. Table, mattress, chair, Nadov and Pike slammed into a tangled heap on the far side of the cabin. I couldn't find the gun. I had to think of the other two and keep moving, keep it confusing. And I didn't give enough attention to friend Nadov. The mattress slid away from between us and corded arms locked around my neck with an enthusiasm that made vertebrae crackle.

For a fraction of a second he held me motionless and in that moment I grew two brand new eyes in the back of my head. Those eyes stared into the muzzle of a gun. Nadov's cheek was against mine. Real

cozy. Invitation to the dance. I jerked to one side as hard as I could and the explosion a foot from my ear seemed to bulge my eardrums inward so that they touched in the middle of my head.

As Nadov slid away, and as I turned, coming up, I caught a glimpse of his face, of one eye intensely shocked, of the other a jellied hole. The barechested one was backing away, trying to bring the gun to bear on me, his mouth sagging with alarm. My kick, I found out later, was enthusiastic. It shattered his elbow and dislocated his shoulder and he took an immediate intense lack of interest in anything that went on from that point forward.

But the intellectual type had moved to the big sending set. He had turned it on. He stood with his back against it. He had his own gun. A dandy little peashooter. I still have it. A Presentation 22, with a foreign general staff emblem set into one side of the grip, and all-too-familiar political



*oh-oh, Dry Scalp!*

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot niper if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



*Hair looks better...  
scalp feels better...  
when you check Dry Scalp*

IT'S EASIER than you think! 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic checks Dry Scalp . . . makes a world of difference in the good looks of your hair. It's ideal with massage before shampooing, too. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients. It's double care . . . for both scalp and hair . . . and it's economical.

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TRADE MARK ®

Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN,  
starring JEAN HERSHOLT,  
on CBS Wednesday nights.

symbol set into the other side, both in gold.

He fired it four times at my chest before I could get my hands on him. It was like being hit with a tack hammer that someone liked to hold with both hands and swing from way back there in left field.

If he had tried for face or groin, he might have stopped me before I got to him. But he was hoping for the heart, evidently. When I got to him, he had no place to go. I had followed my fist across the cabin. As he ducked I changed the angle of flight so that he ducked into it. It unhinged his jaw in a spectacularly messy way, and he lay on the floor and flopped back and forth. I picked up the chair and smashed the sending set. I walked out and across the deck and down the pier. I walked down the middle of the road and turned into the first dimly lighted saloon. I said "Police" in a voice that was half soprano and half bloody gargle, and fell like a dynamited chimney.

**A** WEEK later I was moved from the hospital into Joanie's guest room. Traffic was terrible. Al, Junior, and Sammy were, I found out later, selling one look at me to their school friends for a dime. For two bits they could ask any question they wanted. For another dime they could handle the four slugs. The kids had the details.

"One bullet just touched the top of his stomach and went back and lodged in fatty tissue near the left kidney. One punctured the right lung. The other two glanced off his ribs and traveled around to his back, under the skin." I decided my doctor had talked too much. But Joanie and I didn't object. The kids had a lot of chance to for-

get other things—things we wanted them to forget.

Some people came and explained about the explosive charges. Forty of them had been planted. The fusing device was tricky. One fifteen second sustained short wave signal would arm them. If the second signal, on a slightly different wavelength; didn't come along within the next few minutes, the arming device, spring activated, would disarm the charge again. That prevented accidental firing. If the second signal came along on time, most of the waterfront would take an abrupt leap into the air.

Navy divers defused the charges without incident.

That second night in the guest room at Joanie's house, after the kids had been tucked in, she came in and sat with me. I watched the lamplight in her hair.

I said, "Look, Joanie. I never say anything right, but. . ."

She put her fingertips against my lips. "Not yet, Sam."

"Later, maybe?"

She stood up. "Time for lights out, Sam." She went to the doorway and turned. "Maybe later, Sam."

"Whenever I say it, I won't say the right words."

"I'll decide that, Sam."

She shut the door quietly. After a final cigarette, I turned off the bed lamp. I lay in the darkness and remembered her eyes. I'd never have the right words. And I knew she'd never care what the words were, but when the time came, her word would be yes. ♠ ♠ ♠

IN Springfield, Mass., a Mr. Karl P. Hartman was given a three-month suspended sentence after being found guilty in district court on an "eavesdropping" charge, which is against a way-back-when state statute. The facts of the case: Planting a dictaphone in the bedroom of an ex-girl friend, and listening in on the chatter between her and her fiancé through an extension cord attached to his car radio.

—Bess Ritter



# Tonky Should Live So Long!

By FRANK SCOTT YORK

**T**HE big copper had a suggestion and I made a mental note to take a dislike to him. "I saw a movie once," he said, "where they stuck burning matches under a guy's fingernails."

I tried to brush the glaring white light from my eyes, and smiled nervously. "Yeah, I think I saw that too. All about Arabs and soldiers, wasn't it? I remember the—"

"Shut up. Nobody asked you."

The big copper turned on still another light, and I groaned. "I feel just like a strip of film being developed," I said.

"Look, Tonky, let's go over it once more." That was Detective Shawn, the crumb who had met me at the airport. "You been in Mexico for six months and all of a sudden you come back from exile wearing a three hundred dollar suit, smoking two buck cigars and with a wallet full of nice, crisp hundred dollar bills. When you went down there you had forty bucks over the cost of the ticket and were wearing a purple sport shirt over a pair of five buck slacks."

"Six-fifty," I said coldly. "And furthermore, ain't you boys forgettin' something? I made my little sietsa to May-hee-ko as it's called, because I helped you boys put Mancini away for good. I told you to check all that with District Attorney Murphy."

---

Being an ambassador without portfolio between gangdom and the Law was getting Tonky down. . . . And when a stoolie gets down, he's out. Specially, his very vulnerable neck!



"Every gungel in the country would love to plant a row of lead seeds in you!"

Why, if it hadn't been for me, you birds would all be poundin' beats at Coney Island. The commissioner hisself shook my hand before throwin' me out of the country."

"We know all that, Tonky. That makes it tougher to understand. How come you return home? Don't you know, after stoolin' on Mancini, every gungel in the country would dearly love to plant a row of lead seeds in your chest? Mancini may be gone, but his memory lives on, if you know what I mean. The D.A. himself wants to know what makes you come out of hiding. And how come you step off the plane looking like you owned the airline?"

I folded my arms. "I don't say a word till you turn off them damn lights."

The big copper flipped the switches and they all leaned forward. "Cigarette, Tonky?"

I took it, lit up leisurely, inhaled and blew a wad of smoke at them. "That's better. Now, I'll tell you this much and no more. And," I said threateningly, "wild scallions can't drag more from me when I'm finished, so you can save on your light bill. Why did I come back? That's easy. I'm a Yankee Doodle boy from the word go, and I miss my country. A guy gets tired of hiding and there comes a day when he says the hell with it, I'd rather take my chances on Eighth Avenue than live in a country where they're so dumb they can't even speak English. I got homesick, that's all.

"Mancini is gone and I see by the papers things have been pretty well cleaned up, so I figure if I'm careful I'll be safe. They didn't pass no law against me, did they? Don't forget, I'm a veteran. I spent two years at Fort Dix durin' the big war, and got a citation for keepin' the parade ground free of cigarette butts all that time. You can't push an ex-G.I. around, and I'm an American cit—"

"So, all right, Tonky," Shawn howled. "Nobody called you a spy. Now, where did you get the clothes and the dough? And you

better talk straight because it will all be checked."

I gestured for another cigarette and took four from the big copper's pack, put them all in my pocket. Nobody pushes me around. The big copper grated his teeth noisily but I just grinned at him. "I'll tell you that, but first, you tell me why everyone is so interested in my good fortune."

Shawn decided to tell me. "Dope, Tonky, dope. The stuff has been coming across the border like water through a sieve, and with your background it is natural for us to feel maybe you have a tie-in with its source. A lot of patriots like yourself have gotten rich down there and we'd love to get our mitts on a few of them."

"Dope!" I rose up to my five-six and spat the word. "You mean you think I—Tonky Boone—am mixed up in that filthy racket?" I sat down heavily. "This is gratitude! Me, who has slapped kids around for askin' me for a cigarette . . . and you think I'd peddle weed. This is too much, you hairy bulls! I want it known, anything I say from now on, is said under protest and I'm gonna let Murphy know just what I think of him!"

"We didn't accuse you, Tonky. The customs boys say you're clean except for two quarts of tequila. We're only asking—"

I didn't look at them, I was too sore. "My dough is honest dough," I said. "They got a thing down there called a lottery, and it's run by the government. I met a guy on the beach one day and he peddles me a ticket. I thought it was a chance on a new car or something. He kept jabbering at me and if you've ever been conned in Spanish you know it's easier to give in than to listen. So I took the ticket and it cleaned up. Four thousand, six hundred to be exact. Now, if there's nothing else, I'd like to be excused. I ain't even got a place to stay yet."

The big copper gave a nasty laugh. "Maybe the city will take care of that. You expect us to swaller a story like that. Lottery! Gawd!"



"We can check that, Tonky," Shawn warned.

"Check it, schmeck it. It's the truth. Go ahead check it." I had a sudden thought, and my stomach flipped. "Hey, wait! I got outa there before I had a chance to pay any taxes on it. Will that get me in trouble?"

Shawn shrugged. "I don't know. If so, we'll ship you back in the hold of a fast banana boat. Okay, gowan, shove off. But let us know where you stay, and my advice is to keep your nose off the streets. If word gets around you are back, you're gonna feel like a metal duck in a shooting gallery."

I CHECKED into a four-dollar room at the Garden Hotel, figuring I'd spare no expense for a few weeks as a sort of welcome home present to myself.

Ten minutes after I'd put my silk shorts in the bureau drawer, there was a rap on the door.

I sat on the bed for a moment while my

heart went from a waltz to *Dixieland*. The old grapevine was still faster than Citation. And I thought I could hide out in a city of eight million taxpayers!

When I turned the knob, four creeps wearing overcoats and scarves came plunging into the room.

"What do you want?" I yelled.

"Remember Mancini?"

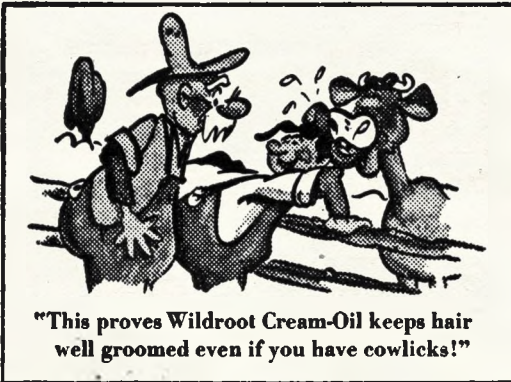
I swallowed. "Yeah, I remember him. And let me tell you guys something; when I stooled on Mancini, I raised the standard of living of every hood in the city! He was a punk and you know it. Very selfish too. The only one made money from Mancini was Mancini."

"Shut up and put on your coat," number one on the left said.

I stared at the forty-five. "Mugs, eh?"

"You'll see."

It was a forty-five minute ride in a spiffy Caddy before I did see, and I spent the time moodily wishing I'd been born with a



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little sense. Mexico seemed like a nice, safe, warm dream already. Damn it, I thought savagely, I coulda had the patience to learn their lingo and stay there. This is what I was homesick for?

When we crossed the bridge I figured this was it for sure. I turned to number one, who was picking his teeth with a pocket knife. "If anything happens to me, the D.A. is gonna be awful disappointed. He wants to pin a dope rap on me, and you know how coppers hate to have a case blow up."

He sliced the air an inch in front of my nose. "If I had my way," he sneered, "you'd be so much deadweight in the trunk right this minute. I hate stoolies. But the boss has other plans for you."

"Boss? You mean the heir to Mancini's throne? Who is he?"

I caught an elbow in the ribs that must have put a hole in my new suit. "Sit back and shut up. I gotta deliver you in one piece but nobody said you couldn't be frayed around the edges a little."

"So, okay, I was only bein' curious." I looked moodily out the window. "But I have a natural distrust of big shots that live in New Jersey. If you make your livin' in New York the least you can do is pay taxes there."

Whoever the guy was, he had class. I could see that the minute we turned into a great big driveway that led into a house that looked like the Museum of History. It sat back on a hill, surrounded with trees, grass and other forms of wild life. It was an atmosphere where you expect to see some jerk in shorts come bounding out from behind a tree and ask, "Anyone for tennis?"

Somehow I felt a little reassured. A creep that lived in a castle like this must be above the average cut of mobster. The big oak door was swung back by somebody I never get a look at, and number one led me into a high-ceilinged room at the end of a long hall. He turned to me, snarled, "Wait here," and left me to count cobwebs.

I tapped a cigarette on my thumbnail—

somehow it seemed the thing to do in a place like that—and was applying a match when another door opened and a tall guy in a satin bathrobe pads in, giving me the fish-eye.

Looking at him, I felt more at home. He was very big in all directions, had a hair-line that started at the eyebrows and a long, horsey face that was a natural for the post-office pinups.

"Nice joint you got," I said politely.

"Yeah." He grunted himself down behind an oversize desk and fiddled with a whiskey bottle. "Belonged to some English movie actor. He drunk himself to death and I got it cheap. Want a drink, Boone?"

I shook my head. I had a hunch I wouldn't feel like drinkin' it when fat-boy said what he was gonna say.

"I got the whiskey with the place. The guy had it hidden everywhere. It's lousy stuff." He took a whack at it, shuddered and put the bottle away in a drawer. "Now, to business, eh Boone?"

"Sure." My mouth was dry.

"You're a popular boy, Boone. As many people waiting at that airport for you as waited for Lindbergh, eh? My boys were all set to pounce when the law grabbed you. Must make you feel good, eh? There's nothing so friendly as having a lot of friends, that's what I always say."

"I'm glad to hear what you always say, but let us dispense with the footsie and get down to tacks, as they say in the rug factory. I'm always funniest when I'm scared and I figured on being a riot for the next ten minutes. First, let me set you straight on something. The coppers are not my friends any more than the apes that dragged me outa my hotel on your orders. They wanted to question me on certain things about which I know nothing.

"If you grabbed me because of what I did to Mancini, let me remind you if it hadn't been for me, he would still be high card in the deck, and I very much doubt you would be running things the way you



seem to be. Now, I don't expect your thanks, but I'd appreciate your indifference. I wish you'd be so indifferent you'd just gimme my carfare back to town and forget the whole thing. I don't bear no hard feelin's if you don't."

I cut my speech short because it was obvious it was rubbing him the wrong way. The horsey face turned a dull red and he gave a little whinny of fury. "Why, you dirty little punk, who do you think you're talking too? I'm Max Ashmead."

I shrugged apologetically. "I been away. In May-hee-ko you sort of lose touch with local politics."

"Then I will give you a quick rundown. The newspapers refer to me as the filthiest gangster since the great Al."

I nodded slowly, impressed. "Well, that's something to brag about all right. But what do you want me for?"

Max chuckled. "Yeah, the boys were right. You're a real character! What do we want you for . . . eh, eh, eh." I waited patiently till he'd run down and resumed. "The original thought was to feed you to the Hudson River fishes as live bait, but Max Ashmead is a thinker and talks the boys out of it. As you say, I've done all right since Mancini got the hot-squat and I never was one to hold with a squealer being rubbed out." He glared at me. "That is, as long as the squealer don't work for me."

**I** FELT pretty good. As long as fat-boy wanted me for something other than rubbing out, I figured I could work an angle later by being smart now. "So?" I folded my hands in my lap like a lawyer discussing his fee.

"You make good money in Mexico, eh, Boone?"

"I had some luck with a lottery ticket."

He chuckled appreciatively. "That what you told the coppers?"

"Why not? It was the truth."

His chuckle went into the eh, eh, eh

routine. "Yeah, you're a bird, all right. So here's my pitch. And I will remind you once again, though it don't worry me because nobody pins anything on Max Ashmead, I'll have you torn into confetti if you violate my confidentials."

I shuddered a little at the thought. "My momma was frightened by a clam."

"Okay. It is obvious to us, as probably it is to the coppers, that you have hooked onto something good down there. Now, the only way to make dough in South America is either to get in the revolution business or the happy-dust market, and frankly I don't think you're the type to boss a lot of generals and politicians around. . . ."

As it sunk in, I blinked a few times and leaned forward on the chair. "You mean, you guys think I made my dough smuggling dope too?"

Max nodded gently. "You don't have to use that lottery gag with me. If it were true" —he chuckled— "you'd be of no use to me and I'd have to turn you over to the boys."

I forced myself to chuckle along with him, but there was a big lump of coal dust in my chuckler.

"Now, Boone, I am very much interested in the fine work you must be doing down in South America. I have a number of interests down there, myself, along the same line of business. And frankly, it's a headache. It's dangerous work, of course, but if you will contact me with the outfit you work with down there, arrange to supply my interests at the prevailing rates, I'll pay you something extra from what you're getting now. That's the deal."

For a full minute I sat there staring at him. If I didn't have the stub of that lottery ticket in my wallet, I would be inclined to wonder if maybe I wasn't mixed up in dope down there. I shook my head to clear it. "This is turnin' out to be one hell of a day," I said.

"You accept?"

"I feel like a ping-pong ball, the way I

been batted from the cops to you, and everybody says the same thing. I been peddlin' the weed."

Max looked angry. "You're not denying it, are you, Boone?"

"What the hell good would it do?"

"That's better. Now what do you say?"

I'm not the violent type; in fact there have been times I've picked up my skirts and run like hell to avoid it, but for a moment I badly wanted to take a poke at the ugly face on the other side of that desk. To my way of thinkin', there is nothing as rotten as the mugs that sell phony dreams to high school kids and grownups. From bein' around a long time, I know something of the living hell a guy goes through when he's got that big monkey on his back.

I bit my lip until I could taste blood. "Let me think it over."

He grinned at me and pulled the desk drawer open. "Sure, I'll have a drink while you think."

"My thinker don't work that quick, Max. Let me sleep on it."

"What's to think? There's only one answer. You don't think I'd have wasted my time just to let you refuse, do you, Boone? May I remind you of the boys down the hall who, even now, are probably discussing the various ways to drain you of your life's blood?"

"Yeah, you got a strong argument. So, okay, I'm in. But what if the coppers pick me up again?"

Again the smile. "In a way, it's good they did pick you up. If they had anything on you, you'd never have walked out. You must have some beautifully arranged promotion, Boone. Comin' back to New York like this. I admire a man with guts."

"I'm hell on wheels," I admitted gloomily. "Well, do I get a ride back to my hotel, or do you give me the bus fare?"

"What do you wanta go back to that dump for? Stay here. The joint is lousy with beds, and maybe you'll find some whiskey under the mattress. That English

joker must have brushed his teeth with the stuff. We even found some in his throat gargle bottle in the bathroom."

I thought fast. "Can't stay, Max. I'm supposed to meet someone." I winked. "You know, a contact."

He shook his fat head. "What a talent! And to think the boys want to cut you down. I'll have The Gink drive you home." He started to leave, then turned. "In the Ford. The Caddy is not for punks in my employ. Good night, Boone."

**W**HEN I got back to my room I made a quick call to the airport, but there were no flights to Mexico City until the following afternoon. I made a reservation, hung up and sat on the edge of the bed, cracking my knuckles and hating myself, and Max Ashmead, with Max havin' a slight edge in the unpopularity. I hated me for being such a coward and I hated him for makin' me one.

I lay back on the bed and lit up one of my Mexican cigars, hoping to asphixiate myself into a few hours sleep, but I only made myself a little sick.

I thought, ah hell, sat up grabbed the phone and asked the operator to get hold of Detective Shawn from headquarters. The copper sounded tired, which made me feel better. "Yeah?"

"This is your pal from old May-hee-ko."

"What is it, Tonky? I was just checking out for the night."

"Go sit under your lights for a while. You won't be able to sleep for a week, then maybe you coppers would get something done."

"What's eating you, Tonky?"

"They say lightning never strikes twice in the same place. Well, I must have a lightning rod stickin' outa my ear. Brother, I been clobbered the second time."

Detective Shawn had a head full of muscle, just like his brethren in arms. "Tonky, I'd love to discuss electricity with you, and maybe even go into nuclear fis-



sion, but I'm tired, damn it. If you want to leave you address, leave it and let me go home."

I threw caution and the cigar to the winds. "Listen," I bellowed, "I just been returned from a little visit to the Jersey countryside. This particular piece of countryside contained a nasty creep by name of Max, who lives in a castle and who offered me a hunk of his kingdom for my services as a foreign representative. Now, shall I send you a diagram or shall I jump out my window and save Max some trouble and ammunition?"

Various sound effects came out of the receiver. I hoped it was the ceiling falling in on Shawn. He sounded breathless. "Knocked me clear off my desk! Look, Tonky, this is too big for me. I'll have the D.A. call you back. Don't leave your room!"

"Why the hell should I leave it?" I screamed. "It's paid for till tomorrow."

Murphy called back before my blood pressure had stopped percolating. "Hello, Tonky, I'm sorry I didn't see you earlier."

"A very nice welcome you arranged for the guy that took the 'Assistant' off that title of yours, Murphy. Your sheer gratitude touches a chord deep down in my stomach and makes me wanna lose my dinner, which, come to think of it, I ain't had yet."

"Now, Tonky, you know my job. Frankly, I was amazed that you came back, and when I learned of your—sudden prosperity, it's natural I should have wondered. Your past, up to the Mancini thing, wasn't untarnished."

"So right away you got me sellin' dope to kindergarten children. I told you a hundred times, Murphy, I was a respectable hood. I never lead-piped old ladies or snatched wealthy kids."

"What's this Shawn was telling me?" He sounded embarrassed. -

I gave him the whole story, from the moment Max Ashmead's creeps walked in on me.

When I'd finished he said, "Tonky, you get into the damndest messes. Will you work with me again?"

I thought a long minute, then took the plunge. "I must be getting old, Murphy. I used to strictly mind my own business, Live and let live was my motto and devil take the coppers."

"I know that from your record," Murphy said dryly.

"But when I think of all the people robbin' and stealin' to make this Max Ashmead a rich man, it sickens me to the very core of my being. Yeah, I'll work for you . . . on one or two stipulations."

"What do you mean?"

"Put me on the payroll. Last time I made you look good, all I got was a few kind words and a handshake."

"And your freedom. You were scheduled for stir, remember?"

"Don't change the subject."

Murphy sighed. "Okay, Tonky, I'll see what I can do. We'll set you up as some sort of undercover investigator and put you on temporary salary." He chuckled for a moment. "If the taxpayers ever get wind of it, I'll be in Mexico with you."

"Very funny. So what do I do? Provided, of course, I live long enough to do anything."

"Well, here's the dope on Ashmead. We got strong hunches about him and that's all. Nothing that would give us enough to hang him. In fact, what you tell me is the first real information I've gotten that he definitely is tied up with the dope racket. If we could catch him making an actual pass, it would probably bring the roof in on him."

I snorted. "How are you gonna drag a rat like him outa his hole? The driver that took me back to the hotel tells me the only time he leaves that castle of his is to go to the fights Wednesday nights. He's another one of these push-button mugs."

"This contact you told him you were meeting, did you tell him what that was all about?"

"Hell, no. I hadn't even made a reason up. I just didn't feel like spending the night in his monastery."

"Well, maybe I got something, then." Murphy's voice took on that old excitement, and I knew whatever it was it was gonna cost me in sweat, tears and probably blood. "Call him the first thing in the morning. Tell him this contact is the big man in your outfit and he would like to meet Max to discuss an affiliation. Tell him this boss of yours is a household institution over the entire country and not just locally."

"Max probably thinks he has the local market pretty well cornered, so the bait will have to be big. But explain to Max that this boss of yours is very highminded and handles only the very finest grade of product and he won't make any deals without seeing the sort of stuff Max has been handling. Arrange a meeting between the two and make sure Max himself brings a load of dope along with him."

I damn near fell off the bed. "You make it sound so simple! Max won't come himself; he'll send some gungsel."

"Not if you make it sound good enough. Throw some figures at him the size of the city deficit and say they are the gross and net amounts of your boss's take, all over the nation. Max is a very greedy boy. He not only wants a finger in every pie, he likes to get his ugly face right down into it."

I sighed. "I can just see you running for mayor now. If I keep doin' business with you, who knows, you may wind up President someday. And I'll be in Arlington Cemetery."

"Now, for the stakeout . . . I got it; set it up right in the coffeshop of the hotel. Max won't go to your room; he'll suspect wires, or occupied closets. He'll want it public where he can see what's going on. You arrange the time with him. And Tonky, *it's got to be Max*, not one of his boys. If you make this boss of yours sound big enough, he'll be there. And with enough

heroin to run a purity test—don't forget that."

"But you'll only have him for possession, not pushing."

"With that as a start, we'll sweat the rest out of him. He's not smart, just cautious, and we'll break him."

"Yeah. Well, I'll try it, only not on the phone. I better go see him in the morning. Well, copper, I'm hooked again. Why I ever left May-hee-ko is beyond me." A sudden thought brought the roses to my cheeks. "Murphy! After this, I won't even be able to go back there! I'm a man without a country!"

"What's the matter with Alaska? We'll pay your way."

"And wear long underwear in July? The hell with that. I'll have to get hold of a map."

"Call me after you talk to Max."

"Yeah, yeah."

"Good night, Tonky."

"Good night, Mayor."

**M**AX ASHMEAD didn't like it. We were sitting on a terrace overlookin' the polo field he called his front lawn.

"Why can't this Gonzales character come out here?"

I patted my forehead with a hankie. "I told'ya, Max, he don't travel for nobody, especially to the country. He's got axma of the chest. One whiff of grass and he starts frothin' at the mouth."

"Yeah? Well, I still don't like it. Walkin' into the city with the stuff in my pocket."

"Look, Max, I thought you was big-time. I told you, this outfit grossed sixteen million last year, and without taxes to worry about, that's a lot of potatoes."

The look came back in his eye. "Sixteen million, eh?"

"Right. What did your operation gross last year?"

The way he looked away, sore, I figured it was a couple of paltry million. "That's



what I thought. Course, if you want to stay small-time, that's your affair. Mr. Gonzales is flyin' back to May-hee-kó tomorrow to tour his reefer factories, and I warn you, he don't chew the same mouthful twice. Either you come in now, or the whole deal is washed down the drain."

"Sixteen million, eh?"

"That's dollars, not pesos."

The horse-face turned to me, groaning. "I can't pass up that kind of dough. You say it's a nationwide deal?"

"Maine to California. Branch office in Alaska."

He looked at my two hundred dollar suit. I lit a cigar with a solid gold lighter, blew smoke out toward left field.

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Okay." He frowned at me. "If I thought for one minute this was—"

"Don't talk like an idiot. You know I was sweated by the coppers and you know they had to let me go. . . ."

"A guy can't be too careful, Boone."

"Sixteen million, Max—"

"Okay. Now, where do I meet this Gonzales?"

"Well, we sort of thought the best place would be—"

He held up a hand, grinning slyly. "No, you don't—I'll say where. Not that I don't trust you, but I'll feel better knowing I picked the spot. You understand. No private rooms or hideouts. Tell you what, Boone, you tell this creep I'll meet him in the coffee shop of your hotel at four this afternoon."

I gagged on a mouthful of smoke, nodded with tears in my eyes. "Okay, Max, if you say so. Only I don't know if my boss is gonna like gettin' pushed around like this."

"Just remember, I'm your boss too, Boone. It's the coffee shop or nothing."

"Okay, I'll set it up." I rose. "I'll let you know."

Murphy was disgustingly cheerful when I told him. "Great, Tonky!"

"Yeah, great. Well, copper, am I on the payroll, or do I head for the airport?"

"You're my special assistant at twenty bucks a day. It's unusual, but the means will serve the end, I'm sure."

I put silk in my voice. "That twenty is retroactivated in my voice. "That twenty is retroactivated from yesterday when I left May-hee-ko?"

"I guess so, if you want it that way."

"And future-activated to the minute I grab a plane to parts unknown as yet?"

"Provided you don't stay here till Christmas, yes."

"If I can still whistle tonight, the first whistle will be for a taxi to take me to the airport. I've had enough commuting and, if I ever get homesick again, I'll put a slug right between my eyes."

"All right, Tonky. Now, meet Max as arranged and leave everything else up to me. It will be better if you don't know anything, but we'll put the grab on him as soon as he passes the stuff to you."

"Ain't you forgetting something? I need one Mexican-type character actor to pay my coffee check and answer to the name of 'Gonzales.'"

"Tell Max your boss will be along in a minute. I don't want anyone else involved in this."

"You mean," I said sarcastically, "if there is blood to be spilled, it's going to be all mine?"

At five minutes to four, my knees were rattling a table in a corner booth of the Garden Hotel's coffee shop. A little, pimply guy in a stained jacket slobbered a cup of java in front of me and asked for a dime. It was that kind of a joint.

The only other customer was a truck driver in a tee-shirt, slurping noisily at the counter. Being familiar with coppers, it occurred to me possibly they had staked out the Waldorf Astoria by mistake, but the thought n . . . le me spill coffee on my jacket, and then I was only sore. I'd forgotten to ask Murphy about an expense account.

I was spilling ashes from my first ciga-

rette into the cup, when Max Ashmead slid into the seat opposite me. He was wearing dark glasses and looked exactly like a nag wearing blinders.

"Where's your friend," he growled, looking around.

"In the barber shop, Max. You know these foreigners; they like to smell nice. Cup coffee?"

He was very nervous and kept fiddling with his glasses. "I don't like to be kept waiting; you better learn that."

"You brought the stuff?"

"I didn't make this trip just to look at that puss of yours. I'll hold it till this big-shot arrives. Why can't he get a haircut some other time?"

He looked at me for a long moment from behind the thick-rimmed sunglasses, then reached in his breast pocket.

I took the small, paper-wrapped package, and held it up like I was admiring the string. "Swell. Thanks, Max." I said it loud enough to rattle my cup and saucer.

Max started to rise, but the little pimply guy wasn't a waiter any more. He came up behind Max, reached over his shoulder and took the package from my hand. "Don't reach for anything, Ashmead; there's a thirty-eight in my other hand and the pantry is full of reinforcements."

Max sank back down on his chair, his mouth pinched white. "I was afraid of something like this, Boone . . . enjoy it while you can."

Murphy hopped over the counter and came over, a big grin on his kisser. "Beautiful, Tonky!"

"Yeah, I hope so." I didn't like the little smile on Max's lips. He wet them, staring at me.

Pimples handed the package to Murphy, who tore off the paper, opened the box, and let out a yell that lifted me out of the booth. I knew why Max was grinning, even before the D.A. opened his mouth.

"Cuff-links . . . a lousy two buck pair of cuff-links!"

Max shrugged, his eyes never leaving me. "What else? Tonky, who are these crude characters? This is a hell of a way to celebrate your birthday, old pal. Those cuff-links was your present."

Murphy leaned over, patted Max, and groaned. "And he's clean. Hell, we don't have a thing on him."

Max got up and started to walk off, but Murphy grabbed his arm. "Take those glasses off, Max."

"Let go of me! What the hell you talking about, copper?"

Murphy snatched them off while the rest of us stared. "He wants a souvenir," I said finally, as he held them up to the light.

The D.A. started to laugh. He turned to a copper behind him. "Cuff our friend, Jack. We got him."

We all watched as he pried the smoked lenses out of their frames. A thin film of white powder fell into his hand. "Neat, Max, neat. A hollow frame all the way back, with enough junk for a hundred nightmares. Unless, of course, you use the glasses as a salt shaker." He whiffed it cautiously. "And that ain't salt, as my friend Tonky would say."

Max sort of folded over the table until he was straightened up with the tug of bracelets. He looked at me sickly and called me a string of names which I didn't bother to deny.

As they led him away, Murphy put his hand on my shoulder. "As they say in the Navy, Tonky, 'well done.'"

I knocked his hand down. "The hell with that noise, copper. Gimme my forty bucks, plus a dime for the coffee and a fast escort to the airport."

The muscles in my legs felt like ropes of jello, and I sat down hard. "And do me a favor, will'ya? If you ever hear I'm back in town from bein' homesick, don't pull me in, just instruct your peasants to shoot me down like a mad dog in the street. If I get homesick in hell, at least I can't do nothin' about it. . . ." ♠ ♠ ♠



# NO BONES ABOUT IT!

By BESS RITTER

The FBI calls in an anthropologist to dig up evidence. . . .

**"T**HESSE bones," announced the slim, studious-looking middle-aged man as he peered over his steel-rimmed spectacles at the waiting FBI men, "belonged to a man who was twenty-six years of age. He was white, five feet eight inches tall, and his build was medium. He was left-handed and suffered from a case of pyorrhea." He touched the few splintered specimens while he was speaking.

Not one of the detectives questioned these detailed deductions, even though they were arrived at from evidence that seemed so startlingly slight. Because they were talking to competent Dr. T. Dale Stewart, curator of physical anthropology of Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. He knows all about bones, because, after all, he's surrounded by more skeletons than any other man in all of America. He stopped counting them when his files reached the 20,000 mark.


Instead, they hurriedly went to work, and started checking all the area around the abandoned well in Quantico, Va., where the skeletal items had been discovered by workmen. And in short order they learned that a left-handed Marine named John Bradford Ellison had disappeared way back in 1928. They unearthed the murderer also, one Raymond "Scissors" Saunders, and presented him with a sufficiency of evidence to convict him—seventeen years after the crime had been committed! But Dr. Stewart wasn't happy when he learned about the outcome: Marine records, it seems, proved that Ellison was one half inch taller and three years older, at the time of his death, than the doctor had estimated.

He isn't always this "careless," however, as evidenced by a recently unearthed Arkansas killing: All he had to go on were eight

small fragments of pretty well charred bone. He studied them carefully and then declared positively: "They're human, and belonged to a thirty-five year old person." This turned out to be the wife of a Leon Merrow who had killed her and had patiently burned the remains for three days and three nights. But the man would have gone absolutely scot-free on the claim that they belonged to a long-ago cremated Indian if Stewart hadn't gone on the witness stand to declare: "I want to show the jury this small piece of tissue that is still attached to this fragment of bone. It's tough and it's leathery and has been subjected to great heat. But it very obviously would have decayed a long time ago if the bones had mouldered for years in an old Indian grave."

Another case in kind involved an Iowa killer who was even more intent on destroying the body of his victim. He broke all the bones and scattered them over a field. Absolute identification, claimed officials, was just "out of the question." And they would have been right if Stewart hadn't insisted that they keep searching for and finding more—and more—pieces. Eventually he had enough to reconstruct the unfortunate and present the suspect with the finding. He broke down, confessed, and was promptly put away.

Sometimes, however, Stewart keeps people safely out of prison, like the time when detectives brought him a grisly looking skull, well covered with barnacles, that they'd fished up from the mouth of the Mississippi River. When the good doctor took just about one good look he grinned and then said:

"What you have here is what's left of an honest Indian brave." 



# **The Granite POOL**

By **WALTER R. HECOX**

**How could I escape the hidden, natural sepulcher  
that awaited me up there at the end of the mountain  
trail?**





"Careful, now Scoop! No tricks on the way, or your wife gets it!"

**I**T IS not the way a person figures it will be. There is no uncanny feeling, no sensing the presence of strangers in the room. Nothing like that.

You enter the way you have ever since you first started making payments to the FHA and VA, and there they are . . . sitting in the two most comfortable chairs in the house, nursing a pair of Colt thirty-eights and grinning like a couple of evil spirits of the night. Well, why not? They will do until Dracula comes along.

"Hello, Scoop. It's been a long time."

It is Phony Fitzpatrick speaking. Phony Fitzpatrick of Hell's Half Acre, Jackson,

Ione, San Quentin, Repressa, and more recently the Sacramento county jail. He has been in the murder business so long his first victim was riding shotgun on a Wells, Fargo stage coach. That is not a joke, but a simple statement of fact. Fitzpatrick is not a young man, and he never could break the habit of killing people.

To avoid confusion perhaps I should explain that Repressa is the mailing address for the state penitentiary at Folsom and was considered Fitzpatrick's permanent abode until the Sacramento County district attorney decided he could find more appropriate quarters for him in a little green

room in San Quentin Prison. Corbin, the D.A., got this idea after Phony had substituted a hatchet for the shears while cutting the prison athletic director's hair.

His companion's name is Jones. School-boy Jones we used to call him six years ago when he was trying to match Fitzpatrick's lifelong record in two short years.

If ever there was a killer who looked like his motion picture counterpart it is this boy Jones. He is mean as a peptic ulcer and twice as dangerous. He is only twenty-six and not as experienced in the murder business as Phony, but he is more ornery about it. From what I hear he figures there are two kinds of people . . . dead ones and the kind he does not like. It seems he was doing some effective, if impromptu, operating on the athletic director's midsection with a prison made shiv while Fitzpatrick was cutting hair with a hatchet.

Incidentally, the athletic director, Roy Tucker, was a pal of mine. A great man, with a fly rod and not bad on the high rocks, which brings us down to cases.

I am standing there by the light switch with Mary beside me. She is stifling a scream, although she doesn't know who or what they are. Knowing them, I feel my hackles doing a snake dance and my stomach drops to a point considerably below sea level.

"What do you want with me?" I inquire, feeling that we might as well get down to business.

Fitzpatrick grins. "Your scalp, maybe. But what's wrong with you, Scoop? Aren't you going to ask us how we got here?"

"My name is Harris, Joe Harris," I tell him. "Let's cut out the Scoop business."

"You're Scoop to me," Fitzpatrick replies. "Unless you want to argue with this thirty-eight. Now where's your curiosity?"

"I only need one guess," I answer. "The D.A. thought it was cheaper and safer to keep you in the county jail during your trial than to cart you twenty-one miles down from Repressa every morning. The local

jug doesn't look so bad to a couple of tough cons from the big house who know the angles, so here you are. There's probably a dead deputy around somewhere."

Jones' gun twitches nervously in that sweaty young palm, but Fitzpatrick just laughs. "You're so right, Scoop. I like a man who knows his work. But you don't have to worry. They won't find him until morning, and your paper will have it all to itself."

"Nice of you to think of it." I glance at Mary. Her knees are about to buckle and her face is the color of pale putty. "As long as you insist on staying, do you mind if my wife sits down?"

"Okay," Fitzpatrick answers. "Put her on the couch. But she's not going to sit there long. We're all going for a little ride."

So that's the way it is. There is only one end to a ride with Phony Fitzpatrick the night he has escaped from jail. But why? I stand there watching Mary tremble on the sofa and wondering why.

"I don't get it, Phony. You're out of the bucket. There aren't any cops on your tail. I don't hear any sirens screaming. What do you want me for? Mary and me? We can't do you any good. What are you doing here anyway?"

The old man cocks his head and grins a little. "You remember Roy Tucker, don't you?"

"I remember Roy." A flash of rage and resentment runs through me, stronger than fear. He's a better man dead than the pair of you alive."

Jones' glance darts from Mary to me. His grip on the thirty-eight tightens until his knuckles show white. "That's a nice rug you have there, Harris," he remarks. "It wouldn't look so good covered with blood."

"Cut it out, kid," Fitzpatrick orders. He turns back to me. "It all goes back to Tucker. This is really his idea, although he didn't know it."

"I don't get it. Just what's the gag?"



From what I know murder is your business. Why else would you come here?"

"That's right, Scoop," the old man answers. "Remember that. Murder is my business and I'm good at it. If you do what I say and remember that, you might live. That's not a promise, but you might."

"Get on with it, Phony," Jones cuts in. "He won't do anything and we haven't got all night."

"Tucker and I talked a lot after he brought me your magazine story about us," Fitzpatrick continues. "He was a nice guy. It was too bad I had to kill him, but the barbershop looked like a sure way out."

"He told me about a cabin you have, with enough provisions to last for months, deep in a place called Desolation Valley, where men go in to fish on pack horses."

**I**T MAKES sense, then. The cabin. Stones I chose and mortared together. The valley so high and remote no man would build within miles of it. A sanctuary eighty-five hundred feet above sea level, where patches of snow live the year around and big trout swim in granite basins.

"I have a cabin, Phony," I answer.

"There's a trail to it, a short one that not many people know, off highway fifty and over a place called Horsetail Falls?"

"That's right, Phony, but what good will it do you?"

"Plenty of good," the old man tells me. "Jones and I are lifers without a chance of parole. He's killed three men and they've never counted all the notches on my gun. You know that. So we're going to spend the winter at your cabin. We just disappear. Three more months in prison, maybe six, and then we come out of the mountains, go to Truckee or Lake Tahoe, or Reno, and no one is thinking about us any more. We get a fresh start and—"

"New safes to conquer?" I cut in.

There is a snarl on Jones' face, but Fitzpatrick grins. "Something like that, Joe. The idea is that you and the little woman

are going to take us to that cabin tonight before anyone knows we're missing. The deputy is dead and they won't find him before morning, so we drive up in your car free and clear and easy, hide it in the bushes, and head for the rocks."

"You're crazy, Phony. You can't make it. You don't know how it is up there. In the summer it's cold. In the winter it gets thirty or forty degrees below zero. It's so cold you can't breathe. You can't make it. You won't last the winter. You had better pick another place."

"Don't kid me, Joe. I was raised in those mountains. You forget that. I'm a native son just like you. I know where I can live and where I can't. You got this cabin supplied with wood and the walls are stone and log. With snow outside to help insulate it, we can live in any weather. It will be tough, but we've had it tough. I lived six months in the hole at San Quentin. Do you think I can take your cabin?"

There is no point in arguing. They have made up their minds.

"Okay, Phony." I shrug my shoulders. "It's your show. You and Jones are carrying your own tickets."

"Then let's get going. We've talked enough."

They rise, and Mary stands with them, pale faced, trembling, and perhaps wondering a little if I'm as yellow as I look. But I know these boys and it will be her first, not me. It will be both of us before they're through. I know that too. But they need me until I lead them up the trail. For a while we can live and anything can happen in the mountains. I move toward the door with Mary close behind. Fitzpatrick moves close to her.

"Careful now, Scoop. No tricks on the way or your wife will take on a few ounces of lead."

I know he is telling the truth. To resist would be to murder my wife. I lead the way to the car, which is parked in the driveway. Fitzpatrick follows with the gun in

Mary's ribs, while Jones turns out the light. Inside the car, they split us up. Mary sits in back with Jones, while Fitzpatrick is up front with me. I would feel a lot safer if we were sitting there with a pair of coral snakes.

"Remember, Scoop, one phony move and she goes first," Jones hisses as I slide the car into gear and ease it into the street.

"Why don't you finish us off now? Either we get it here or in the high Sierra. What's the difference?"

"For us . . . the need of a guide. For you . . . about five hours and a little hope. Maybe we'll let you live."

"A fat chance."

"It's a chance, and the only one you've got, so I figure you'll take it."

I shiver a little, knowing he is right. Ahead lies highway fifty and the high Sierra. We will travel on an almost deserted road past Folsom, Placerville, Pollock Pines, Kyburz, Strawberry, and on to Twin Bridges. Then up Horsetail Falls and into Desolation Valley.

Desolation Valley. A land of granite, tumbling streams, crystal lakes, juniper and smooth black splotches of primeval rock. A grotesque, magnificent fairyland. A mighty monument to the unconquerable power of nature over all mankind. A mecca to Mary and me where we found warm peace in summer away from the soiled thoughts and schemes of the rest of humanity. What a place for a man to die when he has to die!

But who wants to die? All the way to Twin Bridges I am thinking of schemes which will get us out of this, but none of them are any good.

Roll over the car? To hope for both of us to get out of that, with them holding the guns, is like drawing to a pair against a straight flush.

A quick jerk on the wheel will throw everyone off balance and I can make a grab at Fitzpatrick's gun . . . and Mary will have a hole in her before I can turn around.

There is nothing to do but wait. Maybe in the mountains something will turn up. I know these rocks better than Fitzpatrick. After all, he has spent three-quarters of his life behind bars.

The ride to Twin Bridges is fast, too fast. The old con recognizes the turn-off point from Tucker's description.

"All right, kid. Let's find a place to ditch this car."

"You find a place."

"I think you had better. Or shall we knock off your wife right here?"

I turn into a driveway which leads past a cabin that will not be used all winter, drive the car over a smooth granite shelf, and park behind a grove of second growth pine.

Fitzpatrick opens the door on his side carefully, keeping me covered every second. "All right. Get out on this side."

Jones is still sitting in the back seat, the thirty-eight aimed at Mary. I follow orders. The mountain air is biting cold after the valley.

"What happens when they find this car? They'll look for us at the cabin."

"What do you think we took your wife along for?" the old man asks. "We could have picked you up somewhere else, but this way no one will miss you. This is Friday night. Monday you don't show up for work, so they call your home. There's no answer. Do you think they'll start a state-wide manhunt? Not before it snows, brother."

I hear Mary gasp as Fitzpatrick finishes. Until now I do not think she has been aware of what is happening. Or has not believed it. Now she has the truth. We do not need to worry about the trip home. This is a one way ticket.

The night is moonlit and bright against the polished granite. The trail inclines slightly, but it is easy to follow.

I find myself hoping either Fitzpatrick or his pal has a weak heart, knowing the altitude and the trail will get them, but they



plug right along. After a while I am without hope, just plodding along like a man on the way to the death house . . . except for the fact my wife is with me, and there is nothing I can do which will not be fatal to her.

In the past I have wondered why people walk willingly to firing squads instead of fighting to the last breath. It has always seemed the human thing to do. There is no honor in death. Now I know it is not honor which keeps a man walking, but time. A moment is eternity when you have only a moment to live.

Ahead I can hear the murmur of Horsetail Creek and the distant roar of the falls growing closer. The canyon is closing around us as the first streaks of dawn paint the edges of the granite cliffs pink and purple. It will be light as we approach the first pool at the base of the steep trail. . . .

**WE** CUT through a small growth of scrub pine and juniper and emerge on the last long rock incline which leads to the first pool. The pool is about a hundred and fifty feet long, and narrow. A miniature waterfall, about ten feet high, is at its head, and the water flows slowly through a narrow channel to a granite flume at the lower end. It spreads fanwise over the flume, then gathers back into a stream about a hundred feet lower down.

I know from experience that the water is about ten feet deep in the pool and less than two inches deep over the rocky fan. And I also know that the granite is well greased with algae, so that it is impossible to stand on either the floor of the pool or the flume.

There are a series of these pools on the trail leading to the main falls. Some are easily accessible and have been fished out. Others are lost in granite basins surrounded by damp rock walls which protect the finny monsters that cruise in their depths from everything but birds and drought.

The canyon narrows where the pools be-

gin. On one side a huge granite shoulder, a fragment of Mount Ralston, rises two thousand feet at a sixty to seventy-five degree angle. The other is a twisted jungle of glacial meringue, the giant granite rubble left by the last ice age. For the most part is as impossible to climb as the smooth shoulder at the other side. Each plausible looking route leads into a blind alley of solid, immovable stone.

However, a few hardy characters have hacked and chiseled a trail which leads up the mountain to the floor of Desolation Valley. It is solid rock and unmarked, so that only local knowledge and experience can lead those who follow it to the top. Search parties have spent hours and days looking for those who started up without a guide . . . and more often than not found their frozen bodies crouched in the shelter of a massive granite boulder.

It is my knowledge which will lead these killers up the trail to safety, or . . . the thought flashes through my mind . . . perhaps it will be my knowledge which leads them to their doom.

The trail is steeper as we pass the first pool, and, as we rise above the American River canyon, narrow and more dangerous. Frequently it is less than a foot wide, hanging precipitously over a sheer rock precipice. Fitzpatrick, born in the mountains, is going along with agile confidence, but I notice that Jones is sweating with fear as he looks at the landscape which seems to be dropping at right angles from his feet. Mary, who has never been on this trail before, is moving steadily forward as though in a daze.

They are careful, though. Fitzpatrick forces me ahead and travels no closer than six feet from me. He orders Jones to follow with Mary about fifty feet back.

"Just a normal precaution," he explains. "If anything happens to me, she gets it."

That ends any ideas I have about hiding behind a sharp turn in the trail, pushing Fitzpatrick off into the stream, and taking

my chances with Jones. It would mean sure death for Mary.

But there must be a way. Time is drawing short now. The roar of the falls is closer, almost drowning out all other sounds. They are less than a half mile away. Above them is Desolation Valley and the cabin . . . and death. Once they are there they will no longer need their guide and that will be the end of Mary and me.

They will no longer need their guide! But they need me now. Without me they are lost, at the mercy of the mountains. So what if something happened to me? What if I couldn't go on or had to be rescued? And then I have it. There is an answer, a slim, desperate chance. At least Mary will have a chance to live.

There are two pools left and the trail passes along the edge of both of them. One, located directly below the top pool, is too deep, and hopeless. The top one, however, fits specifications exactly. At its lower end the wall drops scarcely twelve feet to the water. The walls are basin shaped, curving gracefully toward the center and the lower end is well dampened by spray from the falls and lubricated with moss.

Passing the lower pool, I glance down and shiver. It is a hell of a time of year to go swimming, particularly in snow water. The water, almost lost in the early morning shadows, gleams softly forty feet below. It would take a long rope to get a man out of there. At the top, a narrow ribbon of water cascades over boulders and granite outcroppings.

The trail widens just above the base of the upper pool. There is only one point where a man will have any excuse for slipping. Once I arrive, there can be no hesitation. Behind me I hear the deep breathing of Fitzpatrick. The climb is beginning to get the old man. I wonder if he can make it. Maybe he will pass out and there will be a better way. Eventually I might handle one of them alone, gun or no gun . . . but perhaps not until Mary is dead. I'll have

to take my chances. I am at the base of the top pool. There is no time for thinking.

I take a deep breath and stumble, falling outward, toward the precipice. A moment later I feel the jolt of my shoulder striking granite, and I am sliding and rolling toward the water. If I miss, I will drop an extra forty feet into the lower pool. The thought is not a nice one. Then the shock of my body striking ice cold water tells me there is no need to worry. I am in the upper pool.

The pool is deep—deeper than I thought—and the force of the fall takes me right to the bottom. All of the air escapes from my lungs when I hit, and the frigid temperature of the water leaves me paralyzed for a moment. When I finally kick myself toward the surface, it seems hours before I get there. My lungs are almost bursting and I am drifting down toward the waterfall.

Every bone in my body aches as I swim toward the granite ledge which cups the lower end of the pool. I reach it, gasping for breath, and look up. Fitzpatrick is staring down at me.

His expression is mean.

"You're awfully careless, Harris," he tells me. "Now we'll have to leave you there. How will you have it? Do you just want to sit there and freeze to death when night comes, or shall we let you have a bullet between your eyes and put you out of your misery?"

"You do, brother, and you're all done. You'll never find your way back down without me. There are a million blind alleys you can stumble into. And even if you do get down, you'll be catching a policeman's lead in a couple of days."

"We're not going down, we're going up," Fitzpatrick declares. "This little lady is going to show us the way." He nods his head toward Mary.

"Okay, brother. But there is one little flaw in your plan," I reply. "Mary is just as lost on this trail without me as you are."



She's never been on it before in her life."

"Don't kid us," Jones interrupts. "How could she get to the cabin if she didn't go this way?"

"Over the Echo Lakes and into Desolation Valley by the high trail. This one is a short cut that only a few of us use. Ask Fitzpatrick."

The old con nods. "He's right. No man in his right mind would take a woman up this trail when there is an easier way. We'll just have to go back down and go over the lakes."

In spite of the cold, I laugh a little. "That's fine," I tell him. "All you have to do is get down a mountain a lot of people who think they know the country have been lost on. If you don't make it before night you'll freeze to death. There's nothing to build a fire with on this hill. If you do get down, you'll have to try to get my car started. I've got the key, you know. Then you drive to Echo Lake and get a boat. To do that you'll probably have to kill a dozen people, including a pair of forest rangers. Then you go to my cabin, but everybody knows you're there, so they go in after you. Go right ahead."

"All right, wise guy," Fitzpatrick growls. "What's your suggestion?"

"It's simple. Just get me out of here. All you have to do is give me a hand. I can stand on this ledge and reach you if you'll lean over. Personally I'd rather take a chance on you putting a bullet through us in Desolation Valley than on freezing to death in this pool."

Fitzpatrick looks at Jones. "How about it?" he asks.

The young killer shrugs. "Go ahead and fish him out. If he tries anything funny, I'll put a bullet through his wife. I think he'll be good."

The old man switches his gun to his left hand, kneels on the edge of the precipice, and waits.

"All right," he says. "See if you can grab my hand."

**I** MOVE carefully along the edge. It is fairly level, but slippery. If I fall, I will slide forty feet into the lower pool and no one will get me out. Slowly I work my way to the wall of the basin and stand up. I can just reach Fitzpatrick's outstretched hand. He tugs and I strain, but nothing happens. I figured it would be that way. After about five minutes, he releases his grip and sits back panting. I fall right back into the pool and splash my way back to the ledge.

"It's no use," the old con says. "I can't get you up. You're too heavy."

"I guess so," I answer. "Two hundred and fifty pounds is too much for one man. Maybe the two of you could do it."

Fitzpatrick eyes me warily, "And have you pull some fancy trick? Not on your life."

"What could I do? The two of you will have me in one hand and a gun in the other. What chance would I have for funny stuff? Anyway, the way it stands now we're all in a tough spot. If we get out, you'll be safe."

"He's right," Jones says. "Let's get it over with." He moves up the ridge and kneels beside Fitzpatrick.

This time it goes better. I lock wrists with Fitzpatrick's left hand and Jones' right, and for a few seconds we seem to be getting somewhere. I place my feet against the wall of the basin so I can walk up and help them lift. They are both leaning far over the edge, lost for the moment in their task. The slightest push will send them over.

I see that they get it. I am about halfway up when I kick myself away from the wall and let my two hundred and fifty pounds of dead weight drop back toward the surface. They try to brace themselves, but it is too late. An instant later all three of us are tumbling toward the water. I hear Fitzpatrick's scream as he realizes he is going to miss the upper pool and drop into the one below.

The water closes around me for the third

time that morning, and I kick for the surface, hoping I can get to Jones before he uses his gun. If I can do that, we have a chance. If not, I will be a dead man, and Mary will be trapped in the mountains.

I come up facing the waterfall and hear Jones splashing behind me. I turn as fast as a man can in water, but it is too late. Before I am all the way around, the roar of a thirty-eight bounces off the basin walls and the hot breath of a bullet passes close by my face. The next one won't miss. I dive, and swim upstream along the bottom, thanking God as I go that I learned to swim under water as a kid.

But kids have more wind than a thirty-five year old man. About halfway up the pool, I head for the surface. My lungs are almost bursting. I will have to take my chances with a bullet. It comes a second after I surface, but I am about sixty feet away by now and he misses. I have time for a quick look around before I go down again. There is a granite outcropping in the far wall of the pool which may afford some protection. I duck under and swim toward it before he can shoot a second time.

For the moment, at least, I am safe behind the rock. It is just big enough to hide my head. Above me, I can see Mary, glued to the wall of the trail, staring at the scene before her with horror in her eyes. I don't dare call out. If Jones stands up on the ledge, he can see me. I wonder how long it will be before he realizes he can get me without swimming a stroke. Of course I can duck under, but all he has to do is wait until I surface and take careful aim. There has to be a better place to hide.

For a moment I think there is nothing. Except for the rock I am hiding behind, the walls of the basin are perfectly smooth. There is one break about ten feet above the bottom of the waterfall—a sharp-edged ledge of granite which extends out about eighteen inches. It is about five feet from the top of the fall. If a man could get there, he could get out. But how? There are ten

feet of slippery rock between the surface of the water and the ledge.

Suddenly I hear Mary's voice, screaming wildly. "Stay where you are, Joe, and you're safe. I don't think he can swim."

She doesn't know it, but that is the tip-off for Jones. He will stand up now and he will get me, unless I can find another hiding place. And suddenly I know there may be another. I have heard of pockets of air behind waterfalls. I wonder if I can make it, that far under water.

My limbs are aching and my empty lungs screaming for air by the time I feel the water churning wildly above me. Another couple of kicks and I'll know if I am safe. It seems to take as long to get past the falls as it did to swim all the way from the rock.

Finally the water quiets a little and I head for what I hope will be the surface. A moment later I am gulping down the mist-filled air in what appears to be a pocket behind the falls. It is almost pitch dark in back of the foaming, translucent wall of water. There is safety here for as long as I want it . . . or can stand it. I realize I will not be able to stand it long. No man can tread water in this freezing temperature for any length of time and hope to live.

For a moment I consider trying to swim under water to the ledge, surprising Jones at short range and overpowering him. It will not take much of a push to get him into the lower pool. Then Mary and I can fashion a rope of some kind and I will get back to the trail. The idea is not much good, though. It is about a hundred and twenty feet to the lower end of the pool. As a boy, I could have made it easily with the help of the current, but I am no longer a boy. I would be almost dead if I did make it, and like a child for Jones to handle. Anyway, the water is clear. He might see me coming. I can try it that way, but only as a last, desperate chance. There may be a better way.

The pocket is deeper than I thought it would be. I feel my way back, and discover



the walls are steep and angular. It is a natural chimney which extends almost the width of the falls and slopes inward gradually.

Men have climbed chimneys like that. Mountain climbers use them frequently. Not the kind which are found behind waterfalls, however. Theirs are on nice, dry rock cliffs. There is a chance, though. I know the chimney cannot extend to the top of the falls, but if it goes two-thirds of the way up there may be a way out. The granite ledge is there and it seems to extend right into the water. From there it will be just a matter of scrambling up to safety before Jones fills me with lead.

I test the chimney experimentally, stretching my body across its width. The walls are slippery, but not as bad as those which line the basin outside. Anyway the slippery rock is not the main problem. The chimney is broad, too broad. At the base of the fall, the crevice is nearly five feet across. Only a person with an oversized body like mine could have a chance to climb it. And for a man of my bulk, the chance is not too good.

I brace my feet firmly against one wall and press my shoulders hard against the other. Then I start the slow process, moving my shoulders upward an inch at a time, following them with my feet as best I can, gaining confidence and getting braver as I rise.

First my body is out of the water, then a foot, and later two feet. The crevice is narrowing and the work is easier. I cannot reach the water any more, and it is dark, too dark.

My confidence is expensive. I force my shoulders higher than I should, lose my leverage, and tumble back into the pool. I land with a resounding splash that I am sure will give me away, and wait for the hail of bullets I am sure will penetrate the fall. Then I realize that no splashing of water, no matter how monstrous, can be heard beyond the fall.

I am tired though. My shoulders are aching, about to cramp and my legs are numb with the cold. I wonder if I can get up the wide bottom of the chimney a second time. There is no time to think it over. Every minute in this water is a minute closer to death now. I try it again.

**E**XPERIENCE and exhaustion seem to have offset each other. I am tired and the climb is painfully slow, but it goes bet-



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By John Jakes

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ter. As the crevice narrows, the task becomes easier. Everything depends on how far this thing goes up now.

The crevice narrows to three feet, then little more than two. I cannot go much farther. The ledge has to be near. If it is not, I am all done. There will be nothing left to do but tell Mary to follow the stream down the mountain. As long as she keeps it in sight, she will be safe. It may take her a long time to get down, but she will make it. It is the people traveling uphill who have been lost.

I fumble blindly for the ledge. The crevice is almost closed, and I can go no farther. The ribbon of water is narrower here. My hand extends beyond it and I wonder if Jones can see it.

My fingers stretch as far as they can reach, but there is nothing. I risk another fall trying to reach up, but find nothing there. For an awful moment, I decide the crevice has ended too soon. Then, as my hand sweeps down, I scrape my knuckles.

The ledge is below me . . . a good eighteen inches lower down. I worm my way down a little, and test it experimentally. The edge of the outcropping is worn and rounded by the falling water, but it is broad enough.

Whatever I do, it will have to be fast. This is the big moment. I wriggle a little lower in the chimney, place my hands on the outer edge of the ledge and, using my knees and legs as catapults, hurl myself back and out.

It is just like sliding onto a shelf. I am lying face up on the ledge in plain sight of Jones and five feet from safety . . . and I am too tired to move. I try to force myself up, but nothing happens. It is as though my back is nailed to the granite. I lie there helplessly, waiting for the shot which will end this farce.

It does not come. A minute passes, then two. They seem like all eternity. The water is roaring nearby and the sun shining brightly in my face. Still nothing happens.

Strength seems to be seeping slowly back into my exhausted limbs. A moment before, I felt nothing. Now I am cold. I have to get out. I move slowly, painfully.

Above the roar of the falls I hear Mary's voice, shrieking. She is trying to tell me something, but the words do not make sense.

Somehow I get to my feet. The ledge slants up a little, and I follow it, clinging to the top of the granite basin. I try to pull myself up, but the strength is not there. Then Mary is helping me and I get out somehow.

"Get out of here," I tell her. Jones will shoot us both.

"He won't shoot us, Joe," she tells me.

"His gun is empty. He wasted his ammunition shooting into the falls. Didn't you hear him?"

"I didn't hear anything except water."

"Can you make it down the hill?" Mary asks.

"Sure I can. Just let me rest a little."

I look at Jones. He isn't the brave killer any more. He is watching us silently with terrified eyes.

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Them? Is Fitzpatrick alive?"

Mary nods. "He's hanging onto a rock in the lower pool. I don't know how much longer he can take it."

"We ought to leave them here," I tell her. "But we won't. We can send help up from Twin Bridges."

I rest a little longer, and then we start down the mountain. As we leave, Jones starts to scream for mercy. We can hear him for a long time. And I am thinking he will get help, plenty of help, from now on. I am willing to bet he will even be helped to that little green room in San Quentin which is waiting for him.

Fitzpatrick? He tries to shoot us as we leave, but the angle is bad. It will take a rifle to get him out of that pool . . . and I have the feeling he will come out feet first and cold as the water he dies in. ♣ ♣ ♣



# Stake- Out

By DON JAMES

The three men hurried to  
the convertible.



A stake-out is a dull, tedious job. But sooner or later, the cop-killer would have to come out. . . .

**T**HE day was hot and Bart Holliday wished that he had worn a tropical worsted instead of a plain, gray, sharkskin suit. The trouble with the tropical was its very lightness. The shoulder holster and gun made a bulge, and on a job like this you didn't want to be spotted.

He drew deeper into the shaded doorway and watched heat waves simmer over the pavement. It was midafternoon and traffic was light. Across the street the blue convertible looked hot in the brash sunlight. Above it, in the apartment building, shades had been drawn against the afternoon.

Bart wondered how long Barney Grotz would stay up there. Barney was with Harry Harmon. There was Barney Grotz and Harry Harmon and a woman named Alice Raines. Sooner or later one of them would lead the way to Mike Sichel, and Mike Sichel was wanted for first degree murder.

A block and a half down the street Detectives Sam Farguty and Rollie Haines waited in a car to pick up the trail of the blue convertible if anyone left in it. Plenty of men were on this job.

They had started the stake-out almost at once. They had a record on all of them—the three men and the woman. There had been a fifth in the group, but he had died of a gunshot wound in a dark alley. A cop named Tom Glazier had died in the same alley, and Detective Bart Holliday had been there.

A small boy came down the street with an ice cream cone. He looked up Bart's long length and smiled.

"Hi!" the boy said.

"Hi, son. You live here?"

The boy shook his head and pointed toward the next corner. "I live there."

"Well, you'd better get there fast." The detective smiled. "That ice cream is melting."

The boy nodded and trudged away. Bart Holliday watched him and thought that the kid looked like Tommy, only Tommy was a year or so younger. Tommy, five; and Mary, two; and Jenny Holliday, wife of Detective Bart Holliday—that was the family.

Bart's smile faded and the worry was back with him.

On a stake-out you sometimes had plenty

of time to think. You fought boredom and tiredness with memories and plans and speculation.

Once—a few weeks ago—you thought about the heat in the South Pacific during the war. You thought about the day you were married and the day Tommy was born. You thought about your salary and wondered how Jenny did so well with so little. You tried to figure out how you could buy a used car, and knew that you couldn't. You had the house payments, the groceries, the insurance, the doctor bills.

Or you thought about your job and wondered why you had ever wanted to be a cop, and if there could be any other job so important to you. You thought about the department and wondered how you stood with the Inspector.

Those had been your thoughts a few weeks ago . . . before Tom Glazier had been killed.

**A**CROSS the street a woman came out of the apartment building and walked away. She was young and attractive and the thinness of her summer suit was obvious. After a quick look, Bart Holliday ignored her.

He was thinking about the night Tom Glazier had died. There had been little else for him to think about since that night.

They were returning from a routine job when they saw the fight start between a taxi driver and two men. The taxi driver slipped and fell and the two men fled, the detectives in close pursuit.

The fleeing men turned a corner into a darkened street. When the detectives rounded the corner, the men were out of sight, but an alley entrance bisected the block and suggested their course.

It was only luck that Tom Glazier stepped into the dark alley first. Bart Holliday almost led the way, but he paused a second because he thought he heard footsteps down the street. At that instant Tom Glazier stepped past him and into the alley.



The shots made vivid flashes in the night. Bart had his gun out and was shooting. He knew that he hit someone because there was a short scream. There was also the sound of someone running, and at Bart's feet Tom Glazier was dead.

A few moments later a small, dark man whispered bitterly before he died a few yards from Tom Glazier.

"I didn't have a gun," he whispered. "Told him not to shoot. He did—but I take the rap. Me. Listen, copper . . . Mike Sichel. Get Mike Sichel . . . that payroll job last week."

That's all he said in a bitter vengeance because a man wouldn't listen to him and now he was dying.

Late that night when Bart arrived home Jenny looked cold and frightened. For a moment he was sorry that he had called her, but it had been on the radio, anyhow.

She waited until he had taken down the guest bottle of whiskey from a kitchen cupboard. She watched him pour a stiff drink and gulp it. She went to the stove and brought him hot coffee and sat across the kitchen table from him and looked at him with serious eyes.

"Bart . . . I want you to resign from the force," she said.

He just looked at her and tried to think of the right thing to say.

She said, "I can't stand it. I won't. You've no right, Bart. Not when you have the children and me."

"Don't," he said.

"I will! I'll say it now while you—"

"Listen, Jenny—cut it out. Don't start that now. I've had enough for one night. Tom Glazier was my best friend. Do you think that I—"

"I'm thinking of Sarah Glazier and little Susan and Bobby. I'm thinking that it was only luck that it isn't me and Tommy and Mary. You've got to resign, Bart."

"Jenny, a man has his job to do. He has to accept responsibilities and fulfill his duty. He has to—"

"I know that viewpoint, too," she said. "I heard the commissioner give that speech the day you graduated from police school. But he forgot to mention the widows and the children."

He watched her eyes and the trembling of her lips and abruptly he realized things that had never occurred to him before.

"You've been frightened a long time, haven't you?" he said. "You've felt this way all along!"

"Yes, Bart. For a long time."

"You've never mentioned it."

"I tried to understand what the commissioner meant that day. But I can't. I've been frightened every moment. I hate to turn on the radio. I hate to hear the telephone ring, or someone come to the door when you're not here. It might be . . . be what happened to Sarah Glazier tonight. That something's happened to you."

Suddenly there was a wall between them that Bart had never known before. Nor had he ever seen the certainty in her eyes, nor the strange calmness.

"What if I don't resign?" he said quietly.

"I'll take the children and leave you, Bart. I'll go home to the folks."

"That's crazy!"

"No it isn't. Always before I've met you half way. We've had a good marriage. But I'm going to have my way about this. Because I'm right. Because I have the children to think of. You're going to resign, Bart."

He stood and went around the table and pulled her up so that she faced him. He looked down into her eyes and smiled.

"Let's forget this," he said. "I know how you feel, and I'm sorry about it. I'm sorry you've had all the worry. You didn't need to worry like that. I'll take care of myself."

He bent to kiss her gently, but she turned away and was stiff in his arms.

"I mean it, Bart," she said.

He released her, half angrily because she wouldn't listen to him nor try to understand.

"We'll talk about it in the morning," he said.

"Are you going to resign?"

"No."

"Very well. That's all I want to know."

There had been no more said the next morning and when he got home from work the next night, Jenny and the children were gone. Since then he had talked with her daily. He had listened to her father's offer of a job in his insurance business and had refused it. He had reported for duty regularly, and he had gone home to an empty house every night. It was three weeks now.

**B**ART HOLLIDAY gazed at the blue convertible across the street and felt the heat of the afternoon mount. It was going to be a sweltering weekend.

Last Sunday he had gone to see her and the kids had welcomed him with a riotous greeting. Jenny had been friendly and reserved. Her parents had been embarrassed and while Jenny and her mother were putting dinner on the table, Jenny's father had talked with him out in the yard while they inspected the older man's roses.

"They made me offer you the job, Bart," he said. "Not that I wouldn't like to have you with me in the business, but I know how you feel about this."

"Jenny's being stubborn."

"It's not right. I tried to talk some sense into her, but her mother sides with her. I guess we'd better not have a blow-up all through the family. I shut up about it."

"When is she going to bring the kids home?"

The older man looked thoughtful. "You know Jenny as well as I do. She means this, Bart. I'm worried."

"Do you think she's really that frightened of my job?"

"Yes."

After dinner and when it was time for him to leave, the older folks took the youngsters off to bed and left the couple alone.

"Let's call this thing off," he said when

he and Jenny were alone. "Why don't you get the kids and come home where you belong?"

"Will you resign from the force?"

"You know I can't."

"I'm sorry then, Bart. . . ."

"It's not fair to the kids. What do you think you're doing to them? They think there's something really wrong between us. They don't understand."

"There is something really wrong between us. And obviously I think more of the children than you do! I want them to have a father. I don't want to have to show them a medal for bravery and explain that it represents you. That's all Sarah Glazier has."

He had gone home, angry and discouraged.

Now it was Saturday and he had Sunday off again. Maybe he could end this thing between Jenny and him tomorrow. Maybe she'd listen to reason. She must be as lonesome for him as he was for her. Or maybe having the kids with her made her stand it better.

There was a drug store on the corner. He could go there and call her now. He could watch the apartment building from the telephone booth as he did when he reported in. He'd suggest that they go to the beach. Maybe if he had his family alone—

He stiffened and the heat of the afternoon was dissipated by a chill.

Across the street Mike Sichel got out of a taxi and hurried across the sidewalk and into the apartment building.

Bart Holliday left the shelter of the doorway and went into the drug store. A woman was using the telephone. He flashed his badge and told her it was an emergency. She looked startled as he took the receiver and broke her connection. He dropped a coin in the slot and dialed headquarters. Briefly he gave his information. They would radio the news to Farguty and Haines in the parked car. Men would be dispatched. The net would be closed.



Inspector McNeill's voice was incisive.

"Wait until we get there. If they come out and try to get away, stop them. Farguty and Haines will be with you in a few moments. You'll all wait for me."

"Yes, sir."

He hung up and went to the window where he had a better view of the entrance across the street. The drug store was strangely quiet and suddenly the woman who had been using the telephone hurried out.

Only a clerk and the detective were in the store. The clerk started to say something, but thought better of it and drew some ice water at the soda fountain.

Bart looked up the face of the apartment building. Fifth floor, sixth window over. That was the apartment. Venetian blinds were lowered, but he knew that they could look down at the street between the slats.

He glanced along the sidewalks. Farguty and Haines were walking briskly toward him. They were about a block away.

A movement at the entrance to the apartment building caught his attention again.

Mike Sichel came out with Barney Grotz and Harry Harmon. They each carried a piece of luggage. They looked strangely alike in slacks and sports jackets. They wore Panama hats and dark glasses. They looked hard and quick and nervous.

The inspector had said, "If they come out and try to get away, stop them."

**B**ART looked down the street again. Farguty and Haines were nearer. With fast sprinting they could be there in a few moments.

The three men crossed the sidewalk with the luggage and Grotz opened a door of the blue convertible. Bart Holliday stepped out of the drugstore and walked toward them. He had one hand under his coat, high, the palm closed over the gun. He pulled it out gently.

The three men were getting into the car. They didn't look at him until he left the

curb and started across the empty street toward them. Then Barney Grotz saw him. He said something to the other two men and reached inside his coat.

"Drop it!" Bart said.

A car swerved around him. He heard Farguty and Haines running behind him.

"Get out of the car—hands high!" Bart said. The words came automatically. There was too much to watch. He had to keep walking. He had to keep the gun steady.

Sichel turned and fired. Bart didn't know if Sichel had slipped the gun from a pocket, or a holster, or from behind the seat of the car. All he saw was the quick turn and the flash of the gun.

It didn't seem much at the moment. A bullet had been fired at him and had missed. Glass shattered behind him. Possibly it was the drug store window. He hoped the clerk hadn't been standing there watching.

And what did that rat of a Sichel think he was doing? Shooting in an open street. There were kids around. That kid with the ice cream cone might have been in the way. This rat—this man who had killed Tom Glazier!

Bart stopped. He raised the gun, sighted, and pulled the trigger. The gun jerked as it always did on the target range. Automatically he steadied it. Sichel had slumped to the seat, but Grotz was firing.

A bullet whispered past Bart's head and more glass shattered in back of him. He squeezed the trigger again. Grotz jerked back and did a crazy little whirling step in the open doorway of the car and then sprawled forward on the sidewalk.

Harry Harmon lifted a gun and shot. Bart felt the solid impact of the bullet in his shoulder. It half whirled him around and made him stagger. He swore softly under his breath and tried to lift his gun. The arm wouldn't move.

Someone pushed him to the pavement. Shots sounded above his head and then it was quiet. Rollie Haines was bending over him.

"Bad?" Rollie said.

"Shoulder."

"Let's see."

Bart shut his eyes and felt gentle fingers on his shoulder and the coat was lifted away.

"It's clean," Haines said. "We'll get an ambulance."

"I think I can get up," Bart said, shaking his head.

"What for?," Haines grinned. "The excitement's over. And here comes the inspector."

"He said to stop them," Bart said.

"You did."

**W**HEN they finished with him in the emergency surgery, he wanted to get dressed.

"You're going to stay here a few days," a doctor snapped.

Bart Holliday looked up from the table, feeling uncomfortable with the dressing and bandage and tape at his shoulder.

"But I feel okay," he insisted.

Another authoritative voice spoke in back of him.

"You're staying a few days," Inspector McNeill said. He came around the table and looked down at Bart. His face was stern and his eyes were bleak until he smiled. "Even if you think you feel okay," he added.

"Yes, sir," Bart said. "I'd like to call my wife. If this has been on the radio, she's probably heard about it and is scared to death."

"Your wife's here," said Inspector McNeill. "She heard."

Then they wheeled Bart out of the surgery and into an elevator and down a hallway into a room. They lifted him to a bed and a nurse covered him and went out and closed the door.

Jenny Holliday was standing near a window of the room and she came toward him. She wore a housedress and she looked cool and pretty.

She stopped by the bed and looked down at him.

"Are you all right?" she said.

"If you mean the scratch on my shoulder, I'm all right. There's no sense in keeping me here."

"You wouldn't listen to me," she said slowly.

"No."

"You've got to be the big man. You've got to show you can stand on your two feet. You've got to do your job and your duty and live up to the responsibilities you've accepted," she said.

"I guess I do, Jenny."

"I should have known," she said softly. "I should have known how much man you are. That I wouldn't have it any other way. That it was you, the man, I fell in love with and married. If you'd given in and resigned, then you'd have been someone else. I—I don't know if I would have loved that other person. Not when I'm so much in love with you as you are."

Suddenly Bart Holliday felt good.

"That's sort of complicated," he said. "The way you tell it."

"This isn't." She smiled and bent over and kissed him. He felt warm tears on his face and when she drew away he shook his head.

"Stop crying," he said. "Everything's all right."

"If you say so, Bart."

"Not just me, Jenny. You, too? Everything's all right with you, too?"

"Yes."

"And you'll bring the kids home?" he asked.

"Right away. And, Bart—I'm sorry I resigned. . . ."

"You resigned? I don't—" Then he understood.

He smiled and reached out for her with his good arm.

"You forgot to turn in your badge," he said. "The one a cop's wife has to wear. The one called courage." ♠ ♠ ♠



Mickey Tate said, "I told you  
I'd get you!"



# Don't Ever Forget!

By LARRY HOLDEN

All Chief McMahon's police training was worth nothing, now that Mickey Tate had crashed out of prison. Because McMahon had a last date he had to keep—with Death!

I WAS having a cup of coffee and a sandwich in the lunch wagon with Vance Chandler, our new police chief, when this fellow got up from the end of the counter and came down to us. He was a big, tough-looking man with black eyebrows that ran straight across his eyes and

gave him always the effect of scowling. "Chief McMahan?" he said to me; his voice was deep in his chest and kind of rumbling.

"Ex-chief," I told him. "This is the man you want—Chief Chandler. He took over last month."

The fellow gave Vance a disinterested glance and held out his hand to me.

"My name's Brown," he said. "George Brown. Chief Eccles from Tallahassee told me to look you up if ever I got down this way."

That made me feel pretty good. Chief Eccles is a big wheel, not only in Tallahassee and the state, but in the National Police Chiefs' Association as well. I never thought he'd remember me, ex-chief of a blowhole like Sarabay. As a town, the best thing you can say of Sarabay is that it has one of the few fifty authentic and genuine fountains of youth in Florida.

I was a little embarrassed, too, and as I shook Brown's granite hand, I said lamely, "And how is Chief Eccles these days? Fat as ever?"

"Fatter. I'll tell you what's on my mind, Chief. . . ."

"Ex-chief," I corrected him again, seeing Vance's face begin to curdle; Vance is a very touchy man.

Brown said, "Sure. It's like this, Mr. McMahan. I'm doing a feature on the typical police chief for the Tallahassee *News*, and if you don't mind giving me a little of your time, I'd like to use you as the example. On Chief Eccles' recommendation."

I shot a side glance at Vance. I was starting to feel very uneasy. "You don't want to talk to me, son. You want to talk to Vance, here. As a typical police chief, I was strictly subhuman. That's the reason I resigned."

When you came right down to it, that was the reason I had resigned.

It was the last job I had worked on that showed me that, inside of me, I was any-

thing but a cop. There was this kid, Mickey Tate. He was wild and mean, and he'd been in several minor scrapes around town before he hit the jackpot. He got likkered up one night and killed a hitchhiker with his car on the Tamiami Trail. I'll never forget the scared, sick look on his face when I took him in. It haunted me day and night. I couldn't get it out of my mind. I knew he had to be taken in, but I didn't want to be the one to do it to anybody. And I never wanted to see that awful look on a human's face again. Tate got twenty years, and when he was sentenced, he screamed right out in court:

"I'll get you for this, McMahan! Don't ever forget it! I'll get you!"

I didn't pay any attention to the threat, but there were things about being a cop that I didn't like any more, so I resigned.

Before Brown could open his mouth, Vance got up, leaving his unfinished coffee. "See you around, Tod," he said shortly, and walked out.

"You shouldn't have slighted Vance like that, Brown," I said. "He's a good chief, but he's touchy."

Brown shrugged his big shoulders. He had the unsmilingest face I'd ever seen. "I'm not interested in Chandler," he said. "I'm interested in you."

There was something strange in that tough voice of his, and I gave him a sharp look. His face was impassive.

"Why me?" I asked. "Why me in particular?"

"Any objection? I'm offering you free publicity. Maybe you'll even get your picture in the paper."

"Not interested. Talk to Chief Chandler." I was beginning not to like Brown. "I'm not a cop any more, and I don't want to talk about it."

"Come on, Mac. Think it over. Everybody likes to see his name in the newspaper. All I want to do is talk over a couple of your old cases with you. You'll be a hero all over again."



I said angrily, "Beat it. I'm not talking to you now or any other time."

He gave me a long look, the kind that turns your ears red. "You're just kidding yourself, Mac," he said. He turned his back and walked away. Even his back looked tough.

I had the funny feeling for the rest of the day that he was following me around, but it was just a feeling. I looked once or twice, but he wasn't there.

I went down to the Sarabay public dock in the afternoon and fixed up a couple rods and reels for grouper and snapper fishing. I've got a little 27-foot half cabin cruiser and I take charters out into the Gulf of Mexico. Right then things were a little dull, but when the kingfish run started, and after that the tarpon, I'd be busier than a stripper's G-string in a four-a-day burlesque.

That night, I ran into Vance Chandler again. Or rather, he ran into me. I was having the seafood platter in Mooney's Grill, and he came over and sat down at my table.

"Talk much to that guy Brown, Tod?" he asked.

"Didn't talk to him at all. He rubbed me the wrong way."

Vance gave a thin laugh. "Listen to this. I called the Tallahassee *News*. Spoke to the managing editor, and he said there wasn't any George Brown working for them. What do you think of that? He's a phony?"

That gave me a very funny feeling. "What do you suppose he's up to, Vance?"

"I wouldn't know, but I'm keeping my eye on him. Know what he did all day? Went around town asking questions about you."

**T**HERE'S a mean streak in Vance, and he was getting a bang out of telling me this. Maybe not mean, exactly, but jealous because I still had a kind of reputation around town for cleaning up the Tate

case without having to call in the county police.

"What kind of questions, Vance?" I asked mildly.

"Well, for instance, he asked Frank, the barkeep down at the Gulf Breeze, where you got the boat, how much you paid, what kind of political connections you had, and things like that." He didn't take his eyes off my face. "Maybe he's an income tax man."

"I won the boat in a box of corn flakes, and as for political connections, last election I voted for Francis X. Bushman."

It wasn't anybody's business but the bank's that the boat was mortgaged to the gunwales, nor anybody's affair what way I voted.

Vance pressed his thin lips together.

"There's something I think you ought to know, Tod. There's been a lot of talk going on around town about you resigning as chief so suddenly, then turning up with a fifteen thousand dollar boat. They think there's something funny. I just telling you this as a friend."

"I didn't mean to be funny," I said. "I was just kidding about winning the boat in a box of corn flakes. It was a box of crackerjack."

"Have it your own way, but there's talk."

Sure, I thought, looking at his pale, malicious eyes, and if there's talk I have a pretty fair idea where it started. He was telling me all this as a friend—just to see me squirm.

"Thanks a lot, Vance," I said earnestly. "I sure appreciate you coming to me instead of talking behind my back. But that's what friends are for."

He sat there with his thin face all pinched together with the spiteful things he wanted to say. "Well," he said finally, "I hope you don't have to watch your step. If Brown's an income tax man. . . ." He let it dangle, watching me narrowly for a reaction, but I just grinned.

I watched him walk outside and climb into the familiar black-and-yellow police car. He walked with quite a swagger. I felt a little gloomy, because I knew that nothing would make Vance happier than being able to run me in for something—and that he was going to make the chance if he could.

That kind of thinking led me right back to this George Brown, and all of a sudden I realized what a fake-sounding name that was. Like John Smith. And I realized, too, that if Vance really believed Brown to be an income tax man, I'd have been the last one he'd have told it to.

I sat there thinking about George Brown and how he had recognized me in the lunch wagon. With the kind of mind Vance has, he must have thought there was something funny about that, too. Hell, I'd never seen Brown before in my life and. . . . Then it struck me. I had seen Brown somewhere. There was something damned familiar about that tough face. I chased it around and around in my mind, but I couldn't pin it down.

I got up without waiting for my coffee and dessert, and went down to headquarters. Sarabay is a small town, and "headquarters" is nothing but a small room in the firehouse—a room with a desk, a chair, and a small iron safe that would open by itself in a light breeze. I used to keep cigars in it because it was at least bugproof.

I didn't expect Vance to be there, and he wasn't. I resisted the impulse to see what he kept in the safe, and instead took the stack of Wanted readers from the top of the safe and started going through them.

I went through the whole stack, and some of them were from '47 and '48, which was silly. I never had that memory for faces that has to be standard equipment for a good cop. I had a feeling that Brown's picture should have been among them, but it wasn't. Unless Vance had removed it for some reason of his own.

I looked at his desk and had taken one step toward it, when I heard him say nastily, "What the hell are you doing in my office, McMahon?"

I must have started guiltily, but I covered by waving a stack of readers I still held in my hand.

"Just going through these, Vance. I had half an idea I might find Brown among them."

"You'll find Brown down at the Gulf Breeze Bar, flashing a roll that would choke a porpoise. And from now on I'd be obliged if you'd keep your nose the hell out of here. If you wanted to be chief, you shouldn't have resigned."

I looked at him. "But Vance," I said, "don't you want to know why I thought Brown might be among these readers?"

"That's your business," he said shortly. "And hereafter I don't want you in this office unless I'm here, too."

I was incredulous. This character was supposed to be the police chief. I know that Sarabay's not much to be chief of, but as a cop he should have been at least curious!

And this is the citizen I resigned in favor of! I thought.

I said, "Okay, Vance," and put the readers back on top of the safe. But as I did, I gave the door a nudge near the hinge with my knee and it swung open, as I knew it would. As I reached down to close it, I saw a whiskey bottle standing up in there like a sentry waiting to be relieved. In fact, it looked like a sentry who'd been relieved many times. I grinned into Vance's pinched, angry face and walked out.

**I** WENT down to the Gulf Breeze Bar, but George Brown had gone. I ordered a beer, and after a while Frank, the bar-keep, came back and said casually:

"Are you looking for another job or something, Tod?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Well, there was a fella in here asking



a lot of questions, like what kind of cop you were—when you were a cop—and like that. Sounded as if he was looking for a character reference or something. I told him as far as I was concerned you were a heluva nice guy. You're not looking for a job?"

"Not me. Maybe they're putting me in *Who's Who*."

Frank scratched his ear. "I didn't like to say too much, Tod. After all, I didn't know the fella, and he was pretty tough-looking. Know what I mean?"

"I know just what you mean."

I tried a few other bars, but wherever George Brown was, he wasn't where I was.

I tossed and turned so much in bed that night that you could have called me Revolving McMahon. It wasn't Brown himself that bothered me; it was just that I couldn't figure out where I had seen that face before.

I was down on my boat the next morning about eight, just kind of fooling around and hoping for a charter, when I saw Brown come walking down the dock carrying a rod and a tackle box. He was dressed in a T-shirt and shorts. His legs were heavy, but not fat-heavy, and the muscles on his thick arms looked like the kind of stuff they plate battleships with. He was scowling, as usual—or maybe it was that black bar of eyebrows over his eyes that made him look that way.

"I want to hire your tub for the day, Mac," he said.

"That's what it's here for," I said. "It'll be forty bucks in advance. But I might as well tell you right now that there's nothing out there but grouper. The kingfish run won't start for another week or two."

"I like grouper, whatever they are," he said.

He jumped down into the cockpit and, for all his solid bulk, landed as light as a feather. He handed me a fifty and told me to lay in some ice and a case of beer.

When I got back with it, he had the

engine hatch open and was looking down at my power plant.

"Twenty-four jewel movement," I said. "At great expense, I had the bearings replaced with blue sapphires."

He gave me a look that could have been quarried in Vermont. "What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded. "Let's get out of here."

No sense of humor. But neither had the Barkers, Dillinger, or Mad-Dog Coll.

I went in to the controls and loosened the .30-30 in its scabbard. I carried it to scare off sharks during the tarpon season.

He stood outside in the cockpit, watching the shore, until we were across the bay and through the pass into the gulf. Then he came inside and sprawled on the bunk, smoking a cigarette.

"Change your mind, Mac?" he asked indifferently.

"About what?"

"About giving me a story for the papers."

"Yeah," I said slowly, "I changed my mind. What do you want to know?"

"I thought you would. Nothing like publicity, eh, Mac?"

"That's a fact. What paper you say you were from?"

"The Tallahassee *Trib*."

"I thought it was the Tallahassee *News*."

"Same difference. It's all publicity and it's free. Everybody likes publicity, even your pal, Chief Eccles."

"That's a fact. Is the chief as skinny as ever?"

"Skinnier. Let's hear about a few of your hot cases, Mac. I'll write them up big."

So he didn't know Chief Eccles, either. Yesterday he had said Eccles was fatter than ever, and today he said he was skinnier than ever. It did not surprise me—but I felt a tightening all over, as if every muscle were readying itself.

"I never had any hot cases," I said evenly. "Sarabay's a pretty small place."

"Come on, Mac. You must have solved

something in your life. All cops solve something. You can read it every day in the magazines. What'd you solve?"

He said, "cops," just about the way I expected him to say it—flat, hard, without inflection.

"I never solved a thing," I said.

"You don't have to be modest with me, Mac. I don't believe in it. Like Santa Claus. A lot of guys around town seem to think you're a better solver than Bogart. Tell me about it."

"Nothing to tell. A kid named Mickey Tate got plastered one night and killed a hitchhiker on the trail with his car. I took him in the next morning. That's all there was to it."

"That must have taken some solving, Mac. A guy gets knocked off on the highway, and the next morning you turn up with the killer. How'd you do it, with bloodhounds?"

I went along with him to see what he was really leading up to; this business of interviewing me was just the camouflage.

"No bloodhounds," I said. "Not even police methods. Just common sense."

"You got a senser too, Mac? A solver and a senser, that's quite a combination. No crystal balls?"

"Call it luck. This hitchhiker was killed at the intersection of the trail and the Sarabay main street. The body was thrown west on the main street, showing that the car that hit him must have been coming into town across the trail. The boy—he was only fifteen—was wearing a green-and-white sport shirt with a palm tree pattern, and half of it had been torn away. I had an idea it was a drunken driver, and that he lived in town. It's a small town, and I know most of the people. I spent all night calling on the phone, asking them to report any car with a piece of green-and-white cloth hanging from the front of it.

"The next morning, at nine-fifteen, Reverend Brinkerhoff of the First Methodist Episcopal Church called in and said

there was such a car parked in the kids' playground behind his church, and that there was somebody asleep in it. I went over. It was part of the shirt, all right, and the right front fender was smeared with dried blood. We had the blood typed.

"Tate was still a little drunk when we took him in. If anybody solved that one, it was the Reverend Brinkerhoff, because Tate had driven through a sapling hedge of Australian pine which had sprung back when the car passed over, and nobody but the reverend would have spotted it in the playground because it was completely hidden from all sides."

The sick, scared face of Mickey Tate rose in my mind again.

"That was the case that soured me on police work," I said. "I had to take Tate in, and it was like taking in my own kid brother. I didn't sleep for weeks. . . ."

In the remembrance of it, I forgot about Brown until his heavy, tough voice broke my reverie.

"Tell me about some of your other arrests, Mac. Tell me. . . ."

"The hell with this! You're not a newspaperman, and you don't know Chief Eccles. What's on your mind?"

"Now you're beginning to sound like a cop, Mac. Tough."

"You've been asking a lot of questions about me around town, and I want to know why."

"I guess I'm just nosy. And I take that back. You're not tough."

"I'm tough enough. . . ."

"Mac, you don't even know how to spell it. Me, I'm tough and I know it. Some guys think they're tough, and they ain't. You don't even think it. Let's go fishing."

He walked out into the stern cockpit and stood with his back to me. I took him out to the twelve grouper banks and dropped the hook. We didn't say a word to each other. I had some mullet, and I cut it up for bait. He stood there watching me impassively.



"You can use one of my rigs if you want," I said.

"I'll use my own. I want to get my thirty-five bucks' worth out of it. I got some hooks, too."

As he opened his tackle box, I saw the snub-nosed gun lying in the bottom, the kind they call a belly gun, a .38 with a two-inch barrel.

"You got a permit for that thing?" I asked toughly.

"This thing?" He hefted the gun in his hand—and after the longest moment I have ever spent, dropped it back into the box. "Sure. I'm not that dumb. What kind of hook you want? I bought a buck's worth, all kinds."

He fished for about two hours and brought up twelve grouper—reds and blacks—the biggest about ten pounds, which was quite a grouper this close in.

Finally he said, "Hell, they come up like old boots. Let's go home."

All the way back to the dock, I felt his flinty gray eyes boring a hole between my shoulder blades. He stayed out in the cockpit, and he didn't say a word, but I felt him there every minute of the way. Still, if he'd had anything in mind, he could have let me have it that time out in the gulf when he held that belly gun in his hand and I had nothing but my fists.

However, I didn't really breathe easily until we ploughed back through the pass and into the bay where the trout fishermen dotted the water in their outboards like daisies in a field.

The minute we nudged the pilings, he sprang up lithely on the dock with his rod and tackle box. He was the lightest heavy man I ever saw.

"See you around, Mac," he said in that heavy voice.

I watched until he turned from the end of the dock and slid into a black Packard convertible. Something crawled on my forehead. I brushed at it. It didn't fly away. It was sweat.

I felt all wrung out. I went back to my place, had a hot shower, built a drink.

I stopped trying to figure it. I went to my dresser drawer and got my old Police Positive. I checked the loads and stuck it into my waistband.

I whipped up some bacon and eggs for dinner. Then I got an idea and called Harry Jamieson at the *Sarabay Herald*, our weekly newspaper, and asked him if he could tell me where a guy named George Brown was staying. The *Herald* always prints the names of visitors, which it gets from the hotels, motels, and so forth. He told me that Brown had taken the cottage at Point Of Rocks on the gulf.

Along about ten, I was on my third scotch-and-soda when the radio said something that jerked my head around.

*"... since noon today. Georgia police have been alerted, since Mickey Tate was last seen heading north. Tate is a killer. I repeat, Tate is a killer. Take no chances. If you think you have seen him, inform your nearest police station at once. Do not attempt to stop him unaided. He is armed and desperate. He has killed two guards in escaping from..."*

It was as if something had exploded in my mind and—just like that!—I knew where I had seen George Brown before.

I had never seen him.

But—I had seen his kid brother, Mickey Tate. Now that I had tied it up, the family resemblance was unmistakable. If I'd had a memory for faces, the way, say, Vance Chandler has, I'd have known right away.

And suddenly, too, I knew that Mickey Tate wasn't heading for the Georgia border.

**I** WENT down the stairs to the street, the gun in my waistband digging into my belly at every step. I climbed into my jalopy and drove out to Point Of Rocks. There was only one cottage there. It was a narrow tongue of land, jutting out into the gulf. It was a very famous place because there wasn't a better spot for snook or

sheepshead fishing on that whole coast:

I left my car up the road and walked over the noiseless sand with my gun in my hand. There was a light in the cottage, and I saw Brown's heavy silhouette go from the living room into the kitchen. I took off my shoes and leaped up on the porch. I opened the front door and walked in. I was standing there with my gun pointed when he came from the kitchen with a glass of milk and a sandwich in his hands. I couldn't have caught him flatter-footed.

"Relax, Brown or Tate or whatever your name is," I said grimly. "We're going to stay right here and wait for your kid brother. I've been. . ."

I never got to telling him what I'd been because right that second a voice told me exactly what I was—a fish in a barrel.

It was Mickey Tate's voice, and it was right beside me, gloating. "Drop your heater, McMahan. Tha-a-at's right. Now turn around, chum. I told you I'd get you, didn't I? I told you not to ever forget, and here I am. Turn around, chum. I'm gonna give you one in the belly for every month you made me spend in that dirty lousy hole of a jail. *Turn around, McMahan!*"

I didn't turn, but I instinctively sucked in my stomach as if to protect it from the slugs. Then—incredulously—I saw Brown move, and I had never seen anyone move faster. One moment he was standing at the kitchen door under the muzzle of my gun, and the next moment he was at the sofa, his arm swinging and a sofa pillow flying across the room. He was moving again before the pillow had caught Mickey full in the face.

Mickey's gun went off, but I had moved by that time, straight down. From the floor, I saw Brown crash into Mickey and chop for the snarling young jaw with a fist the size of a grapefruit. I winced as Mickey went flying.

Brown stood and looked at me. "I'm not his brother, I'm his cousin," he said, as if defending himself. "And Brown's my right

name. I went to see him in jail a week ago, and he swore you framed him. I came down here to see."

I remembered the gun in his tackle box. "And if you thought I had framed him?"

"You wouldn't have done any more framing, Mac," he said expressionlessly. He looked down at the unconscious Tate. "He's all yours, Mac. Maybe you can sell him for fertilizer."

He looked at Tate again, as if trying to think of a more scathing expression of contempt and disgust, then said to me—surprisingly, "You're a good joe," and turned and darted through the porch door.

\* \* \*

This time, when I walked into "head-quarters," herding the snarling Mickey Tate before me, Vance Chandler was in, and his jaw dropped so far it hid his tie. I shoved Micky into the far corner. I wasn't interested in him just now.

"Vance," I said, "tell me yes or no, did you recognize George Brown as a relative of Mickey Tate, and did you think that George Brown was down here to get me because I had sent Mickey up the river?"

He didn't say yes or no. He didn't have to. The answer was plain in his face. He had known all along. I took a breath.

"Vance," I said heavily, "as of now I am un-resigning as police chief, and you are resigning, as of now. I didn't think I was a good cop. I was squeamish. I'm not squeamish any more. This town and every town needs a good cop. You're not a good cop, Vance. You're a lousy cop. I like this town and I don't like to think of it having a lousy cop. I am going to try to be the best kind of cop I know how. You're getting out, Vance, and you're not going to make any trouble, because if you do, I'll show you what trouble really is and. . ."

I stopped. I couldn't kick a man when he was down. Vance wasn't going to make any trouble about resigning. . . ♠ ♠ ♠





Willie had wanted the Cadillac, and Avis,  
too. . . .

# Thieves' Honor

By DAVE SANDS

Once a con man met a con man working on the sly. If a con man cheat a con man—should a con man die?

**P**ERSONALLY, I have never understood why they call a confidence man a criminal. The world is full of suckers, or marks as we call them. And if Willie and I didn't take their money, they'd drop it in the stock market, or in some other swindle just as bad as ours, only more legitimate.

And even if you use the word thief, you've got a right to expect some kind of honor, even from thieves, and especially if

the thief is a partner of yours. The last couple of days here in jail I've been reading a lot of books, and they show that there is supposed to be a sense of honor in even the meanest man. So I guess it's no wonder it came as a surprise when Willie turned against me. Willie was my partner, my friend, the guy who'd helped me run up a score with more marks than I care to talk about.

He tried to swindle me. He worked a confidence game on me designed to cheat me out of my girl and my car.

I'd known he had his eye on the car ever since I'd picked it up in St. Louis. It was a Cadillac convertible, new, with yellow leather seat covers. The body was the sweetest color of chartreuse you ever saw, as clean and cool as a lemon phosphate soda on a hot day. I had three-tone musical chromium-plated horns put on it, and fog lights. You had to be either rich or crazy to drive a heap like that. I'd bought it in St. Louis, with a part of the score I took from a banker in Cincinnati. It was not partnership at all, it was mine. I drove it with Avis sitting beside me, all decked out, and traveling as my wife.

Willie drove the community car, a plain black Ford with a big aerial and a built-in wire recorder, made up to look as much as possible like a police car without actually having anything wrong done to it. The idea was simple enough. We came into town separately, and we used both of these cars to impress the mark; we used mine to set him up, and the partnership car to help with the kiss-off.

But Willie had gone as goofy about my car as a school kid with a new hot rod. It was pathetic the way he wanted it. He even offered to buy it, but he didn't offer me enough profit, and like I say, we needed it for the kiss-off. I knew he wanted the car, but I didn't realize he had his eye on Avis. There's a couple things I didn't figure out ahead of this deal, and maybe when I get out of this hick jail I'll go straight. When you start losing your sharpness you're washed up.

Anyhow, the first hint of trouble I got was in Elk City, Oklahoma. Elk City is a little town with not much to recommend it to a big city operator except a lot of oil wells that they put down a few years ago.

Now there are a few rich guys around and where there are rich guys, you're going to find guys that want to get something for

nothing. In a word, you're going to find marks.

The ugly truth first showed itself when Willie and I were sitting in the Ford car, the fake police job, parked way out on a side road out of Elk City, so no one would see us together. Before I met Willie I'd been out in town, afoot, for several hours, trying to locate a mark. According to our routine, Avis had been supposed to drive the Cadillac up and down the main street a few times just to impress people and then go back to the hotel and wait. But that wasn't what happened.

There, on the seat of the black Ford car that Willie used, was a comb. It was pushed down almost out of sight, but I noticed it, and I saw that Willie noticed it too, and he looked scared, almost. That was Avis' comb, a tortoise-shell one with a couple of real diamonds set in it, and she had it on, I remembered when we came into town earlier in the day.

I said, "Damn you, Willie. What goes on here?"

He didn't say anything. I reached out and turned on the wire recorder. I could see his eyes go more frightened, so I knew there was something on there I wasn't supposed to hear, or at least there could have been something.

As I said, we used the fake police car and the recorder to kiss off the mark after we had his money. The key to all swindles is that the mark helps you do something illegal, and then when he loses his money he can't complain about it for fear of being caught.

We had a second wire recorder in my car, and I'd let it get a bunch of incriminating conversation between the two of us. I'd give the wire to Willie. Then, later, after we had the money and I'd vanished, Willie would pick up the mark in the police car. He'd act like every tough plainclothes cop and play the recording that would convict the mark if they took him to court. He'd admit they were really after me, not the mark, and



sometimes the mark would even bribe Willie to keep it quiet, and every little dollar adds that much to the score.

The wire recorder was geared to the radio, and there was a chance, just a chance, that if Willie and Avis had been double-crossing me, there'd be something on the wire.

But it was quiet, just gave off a faint scratching like it does when it's wiped clean, and I could see Willie relaxing and trying to figure out a quick lie.

And then, at the end of the wire, there were just a few words—a woman's voice, saying with tense emotion, "Willie, my darling, it's you I love, not Todd." And then Willie's voice, whispering, "Don't worry, sweet, we'll kiss him off pretty soon."

**A**ND there it was. I knew, then, Willie had played me for a mark. I tried to choke him, but he's bigger than I am. After a while I gave up and just sat over across the seat from him.

He looked at me, "I don't know what to say, Todd."

"Don't say anything, you damned thief," I told him. "Just get out of here and never let me see you again."

He got out of the car. He said, "I'll give you my half of this car, Todd, and my offer still stands for the Cad."

I snarled at him, "You want the Cadillac and Avis too. Well, then you can pay for them. Six thousand bucks, and I know you have it. We took more than that in Cincinnati."

He paid out the money, and I gave him the title. I drove him to the hotel parking lot, and let him out at the yellow car with the shiny chrome horns. I said, "I want one favor, Willie, for old time's sake. I want to tell that woman off. I want to slap her double-crossing face once."

I could see him wondering if I would do something too violent, but confidence men aren't killers, and I could see Willie think-

ing that my actions would be the final thing to wash me and Avis up, forever.

He said, "I guess you got that coming. I'll wait here a few minutes."

I said, "I'll take my car around back so I won't see your double-crossing face again. Give me ten minutes."

But it didn't take ten. After five minutes I went out the back of the hotel and drove out of town. The one thing I didn't figure was that Willie would tip the cops that I had a stolen car, just to gain a little time.

The cops picked me up a hundred miles out of Elk City.

Of course I had the title to the Ford, perfectly legitimate, and Willie hadn't stuck around to press charges, but had vanished with that yellow Cadillac. The trouble was, I had his six thousand bucks on me, and ten thousand of my own, and that was enough to make them hold me for a while.

Willie had just tipped the cops off to gain time to get out of there in case I had any ideas of revenge. I don't really think that our last mark will holler copper, and if he doesn't, they ought to give up trying to trace the sixteen thousand bucks and let me out of here in a day or so.

At least, I have Avis to bring me some good books to read.

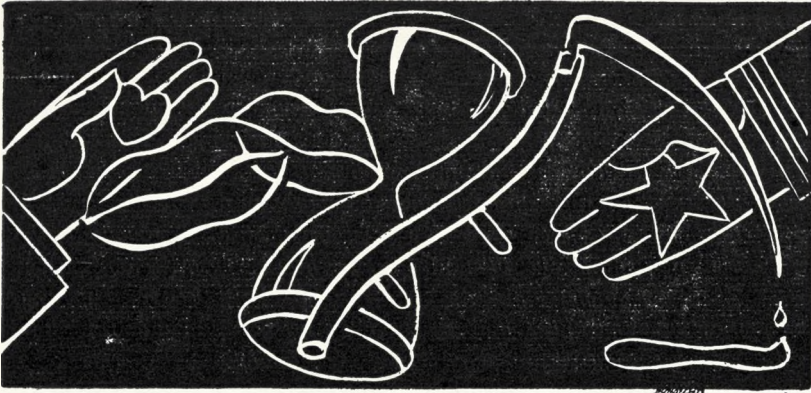
You see, Avis had been with me all the time she was supposed to be in Willie's car. She'd been crying, and so at the last moment I changed my plans and let her tag along.

She'd been crying because she'd lost her comb.

So I knew Willie's wire recording was faked, and the whole thing was just a confidence game with me as the mark. The object of the game was to drive me away from Avis and make me sell the car. Well, Willie didn't get Avis. And if he'd only known it, the Cadillac had been in his name since St. Louis.

That was where I'd mortgaged the Cadillac!





# It's Murder, My Love!

By  
FLETCHER FLORA

**H**E CAME down from the lighted train onto the dark platform and stood there quietly, his bag at his feet, while the giant diesel renewed its motion behind him, plunging into the night. He continued to stand unmoving until the hoarse horn of the diesel drifted back from a distance, and he thought bleakly that the change from steam to oil had made no basic difference in the sound of a train at night. It was still the saddest sound on earth.

The black wind across the platform cut through the thin fabric of his topcoat, chilling his body and initiating in the single lung the war had left him another of the harsh spasms of coughing that were now a familiar and accepted factor in his life.

He took a white handkerchief from his topcoat pocket, covering his mouth until the coughing passed, staring for a moment at the white blur of

Chris reached to pick up the  
gun. . . .





So I had come back to take a last look at the girl I couldn't forget, and someone had killed her husband. . . . So who else had done it but me? That's what I—but no one else—wanted to know!



linen in his hand. Though he couldn't see them, he knew they were there as usual. The red flecks. The fine red spray.

Diverted from his reflection on the sorrowful train, he thought tiredly, I'm a privileged guy. It's my privilege to watch myself die objectively by counting from day to day the increase in the number of spots I can find on my handkerchief. It's a great pleasure to be scientific about such a thing.

Beyond the platform, through the wide, steamy windows of the lunchroom in the station, he saw a starched blond waitress pouring water into the top of an aluminum coffee-maker. He felt a strong desire for some of the coffee, seeming, for a moment, to catch the scent of its rich aroma on the black wind. Resisting the desire, he picked up his bag and moved off in the direction of the town.

The street was lighted thinly and intermittently by lamps at the corners. Behind their lawns, beyond the perimeters of light, the houses huddled under the wind, following his progress with pale yellow eyes. Locust Street, he thought. And with the thought, sorrowful and lingering as the distant diesel's horn, came the painful, oppressive remembrance of all the nights he'd walked this street under these trees, barren, as now, or filled with summer's cicadas, to the house where Leslie had lived.

And then he was actually passing the house again, feeling it off to his right in the darkness. He repressed a sudden unreasoning urge to hurry, keeping his eyes directed straight ahead. But he saw the house, nevertheless, just as he had seen it in the twilights of another life, with Leslie waiting for him behind the honeysuckle.

It was a short walk to the town's center. He came into the main street at its lower end and saw ahead of him the relative gaudiness of the Uptown Theater and beyond that, across the intersection, the four stories of the Commerce Hotel towering above the lesser heights. He quickened his pace now, in spite of the increasing heavi-

ness of the bag in his hand, turning into the warm lobby of the Commerce almost with a sense of escape. As if something had followed him through the cold streets. The past, maybe, he thought, slowing again as he approached the desk.

The clerk was someone he didn't remember. A young guy in horn rimmed glasses, probably a student from the small college at the north edge of town. He recalled that there was always a student night clerk at the Commerce.

"I'd like a room and bath," he said.

The clerk spun the register and handed him the pen that was fastened to it by a short length of fine chain. His hands were cold, the fingers stiff, and he blew on them, flexing them for a moment before he accepted the pen. *Jason Haig*, he wrote slowly. The clerk reversed the spin of the register, reaching behind him on the board for a key.

"Room two-o-three, Mr. Haig."

He took the key and stooped for his bag. The clerk started around the counter, and he said, "Never mind showing me up. I know the way." Crossing the lobby past the door that led down a couple of steps into the taproom, he ignored the waiting elevator and walked up the one flight to his room. Inside, he dropped his hat and topcoat into a chair and stood quietly in the darkness, feeling a little faint from the climb, the pain stirring in his chest. After a while, still in darkness, he crossed to the room's solitary window and looked down into the street below.

Leslie, he thought. Leslie. She was here somewhere, in this town. The town that had once been theirs in a world that was dead. Maybe in the gaudy theater across the street. Maybe on the streets, going from one place to another. Maybe in the home of the husband who was not Jason Haig. Who would now never be Jason Haig, in spite of the quondam bright young dream.

The pain in his chest was only partly



organic, and he thought with the swift, hard compulsion of need of the taproom downstairs.

**T**URNING away from the window, he recrossed the room in darkness to the door and let himself out. Downstairs, he descended the two shallow steps into the taproom and stood for a minute, hesitant, while his pupils adjusted to the sudden dimness. Against the far wall, a garish monster of colored lights with bubbles ascending soundlessly in transparent tubes, a juke box was producing a nickel's worth of muted music. A woman was singing with a synthetic sob. The words of the lyric drifted across his mind, a trifling but somehow disturbing elegy for things transient: *It's a long, long time from May to December. . . .* And he thought that it was true. A long time: A long, long time.

Moving again, with a sharp little shrug of impatience, he told himself that a man should not be maudlin, even when he had lost his love and was losing his life. A man might be lonely and a man might die, but in the meanwhile, with luck, there was time for a drink to warm his insides. He started toward the bar, rounding an empty table, and he saw her of a sudden as she came off a stool, one arm still on the mahogany, her eyes dilating with recognition and shock, her breath caught in a painful constriction at the base of her throat.

She was drunk. Not riotously drunk, not sloppy-drunk, but quietly and deadly drunk with a tense purposiveness, as one gets drunk to forget or to remember or to make bearable the unbearable. Cocked on her head was a little fur hat, and the silken blond hair beneath it displayed a delinquent tendency to fall over one eye from the heavy side of the part. Her face, he saw, was thinner than he remembered, blue-shadowed under the eyes with shadows of inner tiredness, but retaining the indestructible beauty of fine bones. A fur coat that matched the hat hung open from her shoulders,

exposing a dark green wool dress. Her voice, coming at last through the hard constriction, was a choked whisper.

"Jason. Jason Haig."

How did she see him? he wondered. After all these years, how did she see him? Older, no doubt. Older than time elapsed should have made him. Older and worn and nearer finished than she would have dreamed. A face in which every year had done the work of two.

He said, "Hello, Les. It's been a long time."

Her lips formed the word yes, but no sound came. They stood looking at one another, and after a while, he said, "How long? Eight years? Ten?"

"Ten. Ten years, five months, sixteen days."

"On the nose? No hours or minutes?"

"Don't joke, Jason. Please don't joke."

"I'm not joking, baby. I've forgotten how. The last joke I remember was one I learned on a ridge on Leyte. It was a good joke. A great big joke on me. It was so funny I've never been able to laugh at anything since."

"Don't, Jason. Please don't."

"Okay. Let it go. You keep close accounts, Les. How do you remember things like that? Years, months, days."

"I've marked them off, Jason. Every day you've been gone. In my desk at home I've got ten calendars with every day marked off."

"Thanks a lot. That makes me feel much better."

"All right, Jason. I know you hate me. You've got a right to hate me."

He looked at the cold stiff anguish of her face, and in his chest was the old pain that was partly organic and partly not, and whatever caused the part that wasn't, it wasn't hate.

He said bitterly, "I don't hate you. No one's got a right to hate. That's one thing we should have learned in the last ten years. How's your husband, Les? See how I ask

it? Without hate. Without rancor. Nice and brave, like a big boy. How's Cyrus Vale, Mrs. Vale?"

She took the cue, ignoring its irony, grasping at it with almost pathetic alacrity, her thin face seeming to grow smaller and pitiable under the fur hat. A kind of refuge. The precarious security of social custom, which is a man's slight triumph over dangerous fundamentals. So they stood in the taproom, the dark decade between them, and made their manners.

"He's fine. Cyrus is always fine."

"I hear he'll be governor soon."

"That's what they say."

"Congratulations. You'll make a charming first lady."

Her lips twisted in a fleeting grimace of bitterness, and she made an abrupt gesture downward to indicate herself.

"That seems questionable."

It was an oblique reference to her condition, bearing the implication that the condition was chronic, and he noticed again in her face and manner the signs of one who drinks with quiet and persistent purpose. He said nothing, because there was nothing to say, and they stood poised again on the brink of the lost, dark decade. Her voice, trying to bridge the chasm, was a fine thread of despair.

"Where have you been, Jason? Where have you been?"

Anger arose in him, hot and harsh and nauseating, but before he could find expression for it, she had brushed past him and was gone. As she went, he heard a dry sob, almost guttural in the depths of her throat. Standing there without turning, he followed by ear her sharp ascent of the two-step elevation to the lobby. When the sounds had died, he claimed the stool she had left and leaned forward wearily on his elbows, the dual pain swelling beneath the bones of his chest.

On the other side of the mahogany, the bartender coasted to any easy halt, his eyes puzzled in a nest of wrinkles. He focused

them on the spot of Leslie Vale's disappearance, beyond the two steps up.

"Crazy dame," he said.

Jason lifted his own eyes to a fat face with blue veins. Above the brows, the face went up and up and over the crest, developing a high polish. Another face that Jason didn't remember. There would be many of them now. In ten years, the new ones came on and the old ones changed.

"Crazy and beautiful," he said. "Make mine a double bourbon."

The bartender produced a glass and reached for a bottle. "She's a looker, all right. But crazy. You know her well?"

"Not now. Once I did."

His words had associations, contacting a fragment of the past. Something once known well and now dimly. *I knew you once, O beautiful and wise*. But that was the ending. One of the things he had liked on the bright side of the war, in the days when Leslie was still behind the honeysuckle. How did it go? *Music I heard with you was more than music; bread I broke with you was more than bread. . .* He sought the elusive words, not finding them immediately, and before he could continue the search, the bartender's voice was in the way.

"It doesn't make sense. A dame with everything hitting the bottle that way. She's married to Cyrus Vale. You know Vale? Big shot in politics. Used to be county attorney here years ago. Went up to the Capitol with the Party as attorney-general. Next stop governor's mansion, they say. Unless his wife queers him, that is. She's a lush, getting a bit notorious. Locally, at least. But you've got to give her credit for holding it well. You almost have to smell her to know."

"Maybe she drinks for a reason."

"Who knows? Who figures a dame?"

"If she's a liability, why doesn't he divorce her?"

"Divorce? Out of the pan into the fire? Don't be silly, son. Divorces cost votes.



Besides, I guess he loves the dame. It's easy enough to believe. She's a dame a guy could go for. Matter of fact, they say there was another guy went for her once. She for him, too. Back before the war, it was. This guy got snatched off to fight the Japs, and while he was gone the dame married Vale. No one knows exactly why. Maybe all the dough and the fat prospects were too much for her. Maybe she regretted it later. Anyhow, it goes around that she still carries a torch for the other guy. Name was Haig. You ever know him?"

"A little."

"Yeah? They say he was a pretty nice kid. Never came home after the war."

He sat looking into his whiskey, and he was back on the bleak Leyte ridge with the letter in his hand. They'd brought the mail up that morning for the sake of morale. Oh, yes. Mail was the big morale builder in those days. Mail from home. Just write the boys homey letters. Give them the little details, like who was having babies and who was marrying whom. You never could tell. Maybe even a guy's best girl was getting married. Just write the little things he'd like to know.

Looking through the whiskey to the other side of the world, he felt the familiar hysterical compulsion to laugh himself to death, and he lifted the glass quickly, draining its contents. The whiskey detonated in his stomach, bursting into flame that seared upward into his throat and chest. Bending low over the bar, he began to cough again, smothering the rattle and the red spray in his handkerchief.

The bartender looked disturbed. Across the room, someone dropped a nickel in the juke box.

*It's a long, long time. . . .*

**2**

THERE was a sniper in the banana grove at the foot of the slope. Jason sat in the mud and water at the bottom of

his hole, where he had collapsed, and damned him to hell. In Jason's chest there was a spreading agony of white fire. In his head there was a shrill ringing that would not stop. Damn him, he thought.

But it was all dead and gone. It was something that had happened in a war that was history. He was sitting up in his bed in his room at the Commerce Hotel in a town that used to be home, and the ringing was the telephone. He swung his feet to the floor, sitting there while the perspiration grew clammy on his body. He picked it up and spoke into the amplifier.

The voice that answered came faintly over the wire. No wonder, since it spanned a decade. "Jason? I want to see you, Jason."

He looked at the luminous dial of his watch, fighting the closure of his throat. "It's ten after one, Les."

"Ten after one? It's ten after eternity, Jason. Too late to wait for another day. Please come."

"What about Cyrus?"

"He's tied up in a conference somewhere. Those things go on forever. Besides, it doesn't matter. I tried to wait, Jason. I've been telling myself that later would be soon enough, but it's no good. I want to see you now."

"Why?"

"Just to have us together."

"We could have been together all this time. You forgotten how it happened, Les?"

"I'll never forget."

He was silent, hearing the singing wire, listening to the profound silence of lost time. After a while, she spoke again, her voice thin and taut with the suspense of her last supplication. He knew she would take his next word as his last one.

"Will you come, Jason?"

"Where?"

"The house is on Highview. Above the river, you know. It's the last one on the street—gray field stone. You can't miss it."

"I'll come," he said.

He hung up and remained sitting on the bed for a minute, wondering why he had come back. Thinking that no good would come of it. Thinking that a man with nothing ahead should at least avoid the present reminder of nothing behind. Getting up, he turned on the light and dressed.

When he came downstairs, the lobby was deserted, lighted dimly by the late short ration of current. He crossed to the doors and went out into the street, turning the collar of his topcoat up against the cold. Across the street, a Salvation Army hut stood shuttered by the curb. Beside it, hanging from its tripod, a black iron pot, the empty hand of charity, was a creaking symbol of its own inadequacy. *It rains into the sea, and still the sea is salt.* More verse. More words haunting the current moment. He wondered if it was a bad sign, fragments of things drifting into his mind like that.

Seeing down the street the lonely neon identification of a cab stand, he considered a cab but decided against it. It was a steep climb to Highview, but not far. He turned east to the corner and north toward the river. Twenty minutes brought him onto the bluff, the river a narrow seam of black ice below him and the winter's moon. Highview was a short street. A street of country cream. Small scale plutocrats. Except Cyrus, of course. Cyrus was big scale, getting bigger. His house was bigger, too. Jason found it behind a lot of lawn at the far end.

At the door, he pounded briefly with a heavy bronze knocker, and when the door opened, though the house was different and the hour was late, he was back ten years on a date with his best girl. She stood there against the soft interior light of the hall, and the body in green wool was still the body of a girl, and behind it, somewhere in the depths of the vast living room, a tune was playing that was ten years old.

She stepped back without speaking, and he went past her into the hall, removing

his hat and topcoat and dropping them on a table against the wall. Following her into the living room, he was aware of slim hips that time had not spread, and the old tune swelled up around and within him in a muted crescendo of strings and brass. It paused abruptly, broken by a hyphen of silence, and then resumed at its beginning. An automatic player.

"I remember the song," he said. "We used to dance to it."

"I thought you might remember."

She turned, bringing her face into direct light, and it was still a face that had no fear of light. Thinner than it once was, the thinness let the fine bones show, giving it a delicacy and poignancy it had not possessed before. The unspoken past was a taut cord between them, holding them poised and tense.

Then she said, "I'll mix drinks," and went to a liquor cabinet.

Their fingers touched as he took his glass from her, and he withdrew his hand quickly, tipping some of the drink down his throat, grateful for the spreading warmth. Her eyes were dark and tortured, and she said again, as she had said in the hotel taproom, "Where have you been, Jason?"

He drank again, slowly, needing the reinforcement of the smooth whiskey in his throat and stomach. Where? Oh, here and there. Or not much of anywhere, depending on your angle. Playing peek-a-boo with death in a series of hospitals. Still playing the game, even now, though the hospitals were a finished phase of it. Spitting blood over half the world.

"I've been around," he said.

"Why didn't you come home?"

"Home? What home? I was dispossessed. Remember?"

"I'm sorry, Jason. You'll never know how sorry."

"It doesn't change anything. It doesn't even explain anything."

"I know. I wish I could change it. I wish I could explain. Maybe someday."



**S**OMEDAY? It would have to be a fast someday. It would have to be faster than she dreamed, because the days of Jason Haig were in the red. Pretty soon the day would be too late for explanations or regrets or anything whatever, and maybe, after all, that would be the best day of all for everyone concerned, including Jason Haig.

His glass was empty, and he went himself to refill it. "Why bother?" he said. "It's been dead ten years. It's no good, stirring up the dead. I should have stayed away."

"But you didn't. You came back. Why, Jason? Why have you come back, after so long?"

He couldn't answer. He didn't know. Maybe because of a universal and primitive longing in a man's heart to end where he began. To complete the circle. To finish in effect the brief revolution of his own world around his own pale sun.

"A man remembers a place that used to be home," he said. "Sooner or later he wants to return."

She came close, looking into his face, perfume and alcohol a strange, incongruous mixture in his nostrils.

"You're sick, Jason. You look like death."

There was a break in her voice. In his chest, the pain moved, living and insatiable.

"You don't look right, either, honey. You look like you might have heart trouble. Not the kind that kills you fast. The kind that kills you slowly, a little each day."

The lids covered her eyes, and he saw on the lashes the bright glitter of tears. "So we both lost, Jason. So we're both in hell."

Then she came tight against him, her arms hanging at her sides, her head falling softly against his shoulder. After a moment, the glass fell from his hand, spilling its amber liquid unheeded on the carpet, and his arms came up around her. "Les," he said. "Les." For a minute, then, it was not too late, and death and evil were minor

matters in a bright phantasm. Reality returned darkly with an ironic intrusion, a voice that was almost lilting in its lightness, coming from the entrance into the hall.

"Well, well, if it isn't Jason Haig. Back after all this time. Back and still trying. Why don't you give up, Jason?"

Jason let his arms drop, looking up stiffly past Leslie's blond hair. He remembered the voice. He remembered the face he saw. He remembered them from away back when. Leslie's kid brother. Handsome Chris, the perennial charmer. Brittle, beautiful and amoral. Chris, tying his way out of a thousand scrapes, petty and felonious. Relying on charm when it served, on tears and pretty repentance when they were necessary. Rotten. Rotten from the beginning.

"Hello, Chris," he said levelly.

Turning but remaining in front of him, almost as if she were making a shield of herself, Leslie said, "Good night, Chris."

He shifted his eyes to her, brows and lips quirking. "You sound almost sober, big sister. What's the matter? Bottle empty?"

"Go away, Chris. Go to bed."

He didn't move to go. Standing in the doorway, leaning against the jamb with indolent grace, he permitted his brows to climb a little higher under his fair, curly hair, a hard sheen of amusement giving his eyes a peculiar blank look. He continued to stare at Leslie, but his words were again meant for Jason.

"She's quite a problem, you know. Delinquent, you might say. Not at all what the wife of a political big-shot ought to be. Very disturbing to poor Cyrus. Wouldn't do at all for the governor to have a bonded tramp for a wife." His eyes flicked to Jason and back, glistening. "Seems there's something eating her. A kind of canker. Canker of the heart, maybe. You got a sore heart, big sister?"

She stood quietly in front of Jason, the firm line of her throat sweeping down cleanly from her elevated chin. Her eyes

were dark with the old anguish and a new anger, but her voice didn't rise.

"I'll kill you someday, Chris. It will be the best thing I'll ever do."

His eyes shifted away, finding a point of focus beyond them. He lifted one hand in a deprecatory gesture, his expression retreating to a remote stillness. "You know something, Jason? You'd better make it hello and good-bye. If I were you, I wouldn't stay too long."

The pain in Jason's chest had reached a ripe flowering, throbbing malignantly from the added catalyst of fury. He shook his head, trying to clear it of a rising hot mist that actually obscured his vision.

"Thanks," he said, "but I think I'll stay. I think I may stay forever."

Chris straightened and turned, speaking over a shoulder. "In that case, I'll see you around."

They listened to his steps on the stairs, and Leslie said quietly, "Sorry, Jason."

"Apologizing for Chris? We agreed long ago that it wasn't necessary."

He put his hands on her shoulders, and her flesh crawled under his fingers. "It's been so long, Jason, and I'm so tired."

Pulling her back against him almost roughly, he held her fiercely with fingers that dug deep. Then he released her and moved over to the door and into the hall. By the table that held his hat and coat he stopped, feeling her behind him, feeling, after a while, her hands on his arms.

"Will you be back, Jason?"

"Probably. Not that I should. It ought to be like Chris said. It ought to be hello and good-bye."

"No, Jason."

"Yes. Shall I tell you why? Not for any reason that Chris could know. Just because dying will be harder now. Every time I see you, it will get that much harder."

Her fingers went rigid, and he heard the grim word repeated on a whisper with a rising inflection. Then, before he could clarify it, the big door at the end of the

hall swung inward and shut. A cold draught swept over them from outside, and Cyrus Vale, big and sharply tailored in a gray Homburg and dark blue overcoat, stood against the rich panel of the door looking at them, hands hanging at his sides in gray suede. His heels, advancing, were staccato on tile.

"Still up, my dear? I didn't know you were expecting company."

"I wasn't really. Do you remember Jason Haig?"

He stripped his right hand and held it out. "Of course. Jason Haig. How are you, Jason?"

As if they'd met at cocktails once. As if nothing really significant had ever happened.

"Fine," Jason said. "Just fine."

Vale turned to Leslie. "You look tired. If Jason's just leaving, I'll see him out."

"Of course. Good night, Jason."

He said good night and watched her walk the long hall to the stairs and up. At the landing, she hesitated, looking back at him.

Beside him, Cyrus Vale said, "How about a drink in the study?"

"No, thanks," he said. "I've had a drink."

"A cigar, perhaps?"

"I don't smoke cigars."

He put on his coat and hat and moved to the door, Vale moving beside him. With his hand on the knob, he was stopped by Vale's voice.

"No hard feelings, Jason."

Jason turned, looking into the smooth face, heavily handsome under the Homburg. "It was ten years ago," he said.

Vale shrugged, his square shoulders lifting slightly. "Yes. Dead past. You staying in town long?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"Perhaps it would be better not."

The heavy face was bland, the voice clipped and impersonal. Jason said, "A threat?"

"Just advice. Under the circumstances,



your presence might have painful repercussions. Especially for you."

Jason laughed. He laughed deeply and silently within himself, with no reflection of the laughter in his face. And he thought that foreknowledge of death had its advantages, after all. In a dying man, threats, or even advice, could effect at most no more than a trace reaction.

"It's good of you to be concerned," he said.

He went out into the cold and down to the street. Below him, the wind in the draught of the dark river chasm passed with a gargantuan sigh through countless willows.

**3**

HE LAY in bed, but he couldn't sleep, and at six o'clock he got up and went into the bathroom. In the mirror above the lavatory, his face looked gray, the skin too loose on its bony frame. The whites of his eyes were washed with pink in the corners. His cheeks and jaw were dark with the shadow of a beard, and he decided that this, at least, he could do something about. He shaved slowly and carefully, applying the water as hot as he could stand it.

Back in the bedroom, he dressed, feeling the aching tension of unrested muscles. At the window, he stared down into the empty street, ugly and obscene in the creeping development of dirty gray light, as if, stripped of its vehicles and pedestrians, it was somehow indecently exposed. The black pot hung from its tripod. The neon cab sign lost substance in the light. He looked at his watch and saw that it was half past. Somewhere, at this hour, there should be a cup of coffee for a man who needed it.

He found it in the coffee shop downstairs. He took it black and scalding, and afterward allowed himself one of his strictly rationed cigarettes. He'd been in the shop about ten minutes when Abe Raddi-

baugh came in and sat down beside him.

Fat men change slowly. As far as Jason could tell, Abe hadn't changed at all. He still had a round, friendly face built around a triangle of dimples in cheeks and chin. He still wheezed like a punctured bellows. He still kept his police badge glittering like a new dime. The badge had the word CHIEF on it now, and that was the only difference a decade had made.

"Hello, boy," Abe said. "It's like old times, seeing you around."

"Yes," Jason said. "Old times."

"I've been up to your room. Guess I just missed you."

"I guess so."

"Got in last night, I suppose."

"Yes."

Abe ordered a cup of coffee and sat looking into it. "Seen Leslie, boy?"

"Yes. I saw her here at the hotel. I saw her at home. I was out there pretty late."

"That's what she said. Said she asked you to come. Swell gal, boy. I guess I've known her forever. You, too, as far as that goes. I don't know what happened, and probably you don't either, but whatever it was, I wish it hadn't. Between you and her, I mean. Anyhow, I never could figure it. Just couldn't figure Les doing a guy that way."

"It's okay," Jason said. "It's all finished."

Abe shook his head, looking into his cup, his face taking on a harassed resentful expression. "No, boy. It's not finished. It never has been. Not with Leslie. Maybe not with you. And now it's come to a hell's fire climax for sure."

A man in a brash plaid overcoat came in and sat down on a stool at the end of the counter. He wanted a glass of tomato juice and kraut juice, half and half. The roots of the waitress's hair needed another henna rinse, Jason noted. There was a hard, convulsive gathering just below his diaphragm.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

Abe swallowed coffee, his lips contorting as if the taste were repulsive. "No? What

time you leave Leslie last night, Jason?"

"It was this morning. Around two."

"Cyrus Vale there?"

"He came in when I was leaving."

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened. Les went upstairs. Vale and I exchanged a couple dozen words."

"Les went upstairs?"

"Yes."

"You and Vale downstairs alone when you left?"

"Yes."

"That's funny. Les said she and Vale saw you out together."

"I don't get it. Why should she say that? And what difference does it make, anyhow?"

"She lied, boy. She lied to save your hide. And it makes a lot of difference. It makes a hell of a lot of difference. Because Vale's dead. He's lying on the floor of his study right now with his head bashed in." His lips twisted again, and he pushed his cup away, slopping coffee over onto the counter. "Vale was big stuff," he said softly. "Big stuff and growing. There'll be hell to pay. Bloody hell."

Strangely, the words had a kind of impersonal character in Jason's brain, precise in meaning but lacking any particular emotional significance. Even the knot below his diaphragm relaxed.

"You think I killed him? Because he stole my girl? After ten years? My first night back?"

Abe shrugged. "Some things fester. They come to a head after a long time. The head breaks and a guy goes blind."

"You really believe that? About me?"

Abe turned on his stool, looking directly at Jason for the first time. "I don't believe anything about anybody. All I know is, you come home and right away Vale gets killed. That puts you in a hell of a fix. You and me both." He shook his head slowly. "You shouldn't have come back, boy. You never should have come."

It was Jason's own feeling, but he re-

sented it in others. He said bitterly, "Three people have told me that. A man has no right to come home?"

Abe slid off the stool, blowing out his fat cheeks with a sigh. "You got the right. Sure you got the right. I was just thinking of you. You and Leslie. You ever learn why she gave you the brush?"

"No. She did it long distance, you'll remember. I never tried to find out."

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter now. You and I better get on out to Vale's place. There's something out there you ought to know about."

"What's that?"

"You just come along, boy."

**T**HEY climbed the hill in Abe's car and stopped at the curb in front of the gray field stone house. They went up the walk and into the hall and turned left into the study. Down the room from the entrance, centered in the end wall, was a stone fireplace. Cyrus Vale lay on his face on the floor in front of it. His sleekly barbered head, distinguished gray above the ears, was a mess. Red trailers ran from the dark hair above down into the gray.

"There he is," Abe said. "Hit from behind. Hit some more after he was down. Damn thorough job. See the poker there? That's what did it. Came from the set there by the fireplace. The blood's on it."

Against the wall by the door stood a local cop, looking uneasy and a little sick. Across from him, sprawled in a deep club chair, little brother Chris watched idly the rising smoke from a cigarette in his fingers. His eyes flicked briefly over Jason. They held, for an instant, a glint of amusement.

Jason enunciated carefully, measuring his words. "Who could have done it?"

"That's what we're looking for. The answer to that one." Abe's little eyes examined Jason for reactions, the fat closing in around them. "We thought you might have it."



"I've got no answer. He let me out the door early this morning. He was all right when I left."

"You say no one else saw you leave?"

"No one. I told you we were down here alone. Les had just gone upstairs."

"Anyone see you return to the hotel?"

"Not that I know of."

"That makes it bad, boy. You can see it makes it bad. He was killed somewhere around the time you say you were here. Chris found the body when he came down this morning."

Jason twisted slowly, appraising the slim figure in the club chair. Chris drew on his cigarette, blowing a perfect ring toward the ceiling through pursed lips.

"Up rather early, weren't you, Chris, for a guy so late to bed?"

Chris laughed lightly. "I don't sleep much. Must be my conscience."

"It could be." Jason spun abruptly back to Abe. "Let's have it straight, Abe. You're accusing me of killing Vale."

"No." Abe looked honestly distressed. "I'm just asking you."

"Not guilty. I don't know anything about it."

"I wish it was that easy, boy. I wish I could just take your word for it. But here's something that needs explaining. A hell of a lot of explaining. It was on the floor near the body."

He was holding in his hand a scrap of white cloth. Jason took it and let it spread, holding it by two corners. A linen handkerchief, man's size. The white had a faint yellowish tinge, as if from age. In one corner were the initials J. H. Jason Haig. Jason handed it back to Abe, shaking his head.

"We figure it was used to hold the poker. To prevent prints. Dropped accidentally and not noticed. Is it yours, boy?"

"It may have been once. I haven't had any initialed handkerchiefs for a long time."

"You got a handkerchief in your pocket now?"

Jason took it out, spreading it. No initials. But there was something else. A fine scattering of tiny reddish spots. A little bit of himself. He realized dumbly that he'd forgotten to exchange it for a clean one, as Abe reached out to take it.

"What's this? Looks like blood."

"It is blood. Mine."

"Yours?"

Jason explained tiredly. "A sniper killed one of my lungs in the war. The other one doesn't like living alone."

There was movement, a soft aspirate sound behind him. He didn't turn. He didn't have to. He knew that Leslie was at the door. So she knew. So now she had the clarification that had been interrupted earlier. Now everything was clear and clean and beautifully futile.

"You can say I came home to let it die," he said.

Abe's fist closed slowly upon the stained scrap. The knuckles showed white under taut skin. "Okay, boy," he said. "Okay."

From the club chair, the voice of Chris had a light and delicate airiness. "What you trying to do, Jason? Even the score while there's time? Trying to clear the board?"

#### 4

THERE would be hell to pay, Abe had said. All day he paid it, sweating under higher echelon pressure. The wires were hot with the blistering demands of grim politicians. From the Capitol came what amounted to an ultimatum, a deadline for an arrest. On the broad lawn above the river, the press gathered, clustered in frigid groups, waiting for the break. Abe plodded ponderously about his business, mutely obdurate, and Jason knew that only this one fat man, experienced primarily in the detection of parking offenders, stood between him and a murder charge.

In the living room, Jason sat in quiet detention, staring out across the bleak lawn to the shaggy lip of the river chasm.

Within the span of his vision, the reporters moved stiffly in the windy cold, gathering, breaking, gathering again. These were the small guys. The guys with a job to do. Behind them, scattered in offices across the state, were the bigger guys. The guys with an ax to grind. The ink was still wet on their editorial eulogies. In the cities where extras paid, the newsboys would already be hawking on the streets the post mortem halo created for Cyrus Vale.

Jason sat. Once someone brought him coffee and sandwiches. He drank the coffee and let the sandwiches lie. Most of the time he thought about a white handkerchief yellowing with age.

In the hall, a clock chimed the hour. Four o'clock. Abe Raddibaugh came into the room, his nose red from the cold, and stood looking at him.

"You got anything to say, boy? Anything more?"

"No. Nothing more."

"That makes it tough. Damn it, boy, can't you see how it is?"

"Sure. I can see, all right. Upstairs, they want a goat. That's me."

Abe shook his head, as if he were trying to get something inside to mesh. "It won't be that way. No goat. Not if I can help it." He struck a palm flatly with a sharp crack against a fat leg. His voice was almost petulant. "Damn it to hell, I'm not used to this kind of stuff. I can't think of a thing to do."

Behind him, Leslie appeared silently in the doorway. She crossed to side windows of the room and stood looking out into an afternoon already growing dull under the threat of early darkness. She wore black for mourning, the dark conventional gesture, a soft wool sheath.

Abe stirred his bulk uneasily. "I'm sorry, Les. Guess I've said it before."

She turned. With the light behind her, she was a composite of shadows, variously intense.

"Because of Cyrus?"

"Yes."

For a moment she did not reply, moving back into the room. At a table, she helped herself to a cigarette from a silver box, applying flame with a matching lighter. Smoke ascended sluggishly.

"I'm thinking of Jason," she said.

"Sure. I guess you've been thinking of Jason a long time, Les. I guess it's been Jason right along. I always felt there was more involved there than most of us knew about."

"Maybe there was. More, even, than Jason knew."

"Well, if it's anything that'll help now, you better come clean. God knows he needs help. A lot more than a small-time cop like me can give him."

"What are you going to do?"

Abe lifted his shoulders and let them sag. "What *can* I do? If I let him go back to that hotel room, I'll catch hell for being derelict in my duty. Looks like I'll have to put him in a cell on suspicion."

Leslie bent slightly forward from the hips, crushing her cigarette in a tray with a stiff-armed motion that was almost like the manipulated action of a puppet.

"He could stay here," she said.

Abe looked dubious. "Here? I don't know, Les. It wouldn't look so good, his staying in the house of the man he may have killed."

"He didn't kill Cyrus."

"Just saying it's not good enough, Les."

"Do you think he did? Do you think Jason killed Cyrus?"

Abe slapped his thigh with sharp anger. "No, I don't. Damned if I do. But my thinking doesn't mean any more than yours. Why'd you tell me that whopper about seeing him out the door? Looks to me like you weren't so sure of his innocence then. What about that damned handkerchief? No one's explained it. No one's even tried."

She didn't try now. "He'll be here if you want him," she said. "He isn't going anywhere."

Abe looked at Jason, his expression indecisive. Jason was no help. As a matter of fact, he was feeling at the moment unable even to help himself, as if these two had suddenly assumed complete control of his destiny. Abe jerked his bulk back to Leslie.

"Why not?" he said. "Why the hell not? Just be sure he doesn't leave. Most of all, be sure none of the newspaper guys get hold of him. There'll be a couple of cops posted outside tonight."

He went out in a hurry before he could change his mind. To Leslie, Jason said, "Thanks. It's a reprieve, anyhow."

Almost with shyness, they looked at each other across the short space of thin air that was an insubstantial remnant of the long separation, and she said, "Take the room at the end of the upstairs hall, Jason." Crossing in front of him, she followed the way that Abe had gone. Her steps faded on the stairs, and he sat on alone. After a while, he went to find the room at the end of the upstairs hall.

In the room, he stood silently, feeling within himself the strange and stoic peace with which one comes to face an inevitable end, for he knew, without knowing how, that the loose ends of a decade would be gathered tonight. Lying, a little later, on the bed, he seemed to be drifting and sinking slowly in effortless descent through increasing darkness, and after a while he dreamed again of the sniper and the muddy hole. This time, however, he died. But for some strange reason, he was able to stand apart and look down at his own body. Then he was somewhat surprised to see that it was not his own body after all, but instead the body of Cyrus Vale, and the body was not lying in mud and water at all, but on the pile of rich carpeting.

**W**AKING, he lay tense on the bed, expectant, held by the sense of something impending. He had the thought that there had been a stirring in the hall beyond his door, the slight movement, perhaps, of

someone's passing. His watch showed nearly ten o'clock, and he was astonished that he had slept so long. Getting up, he went to the door and looked out into the hall, dimly lighted by one bulb of low wattage at the head of the stairs.

Between him and the light, Leslie Vale stood at a door, waiting. The door swung inward away from her, releasing light, and she remained for a second in sharp relief, slimly erect and in sheer black. The airy voice of brother Chris rose briefly, and she went in, the door closing behind her. In one hand, held loosely at her side, a small revolver reflected the light dully.

Jason moved up the hall. At the door she had entered, he stood listening, hearing within the exchange of indistinguishable words. Turning the knob softly, he pushed the door open and followed Leslie.

She stood by a small table. On the table, possessed of a terrible significance, the dull symbol of the present point in all their lives, lay the revolver. Beyond the table, Chris stood with an indolence that was assumed.

"Go back to your room, Jason," Leslie said. "Please go back."

He shook his head. "No."

She accepted his refusal quietly, seeming to expect it. "Stay, then. I guess you have the right to stay. You know what I've done, Jason? I've brought Chris a gun. I've brought him a gun to kill himself with. At first I thought I might do it for him. The same way, all my life, I've always done the nasty jobs for him. I sat in my room for hours looking at the gun and thinking I would kill him with it. But now I've decided that he will do it himself. You know why, Jason? Because of you and me. Because of you and me and the little time that's left us. Chris himself, who has taken so much of our time away, will give us the little that is left."

Her voice was gentle, almost dreamy. She was beyond it, outside it, detached and untouchable. "Remember, Jason, years ago,



the walk we took into the country? I cut my hand on the barbed wire fence, and you wrapped your handkerchief around the cut. Afterward, I brought the handkerchief home and laundered it and put it away. I've had it ever since. Until last night, that is, when Chris took it. He took it, and he killed Cyrus, and he left the handkerchief to implicate you. That's the way Chris is.

"But I'll pay no more debts for Chris. I paid his last one a long time ago. I paid it when I married Cyrus to save his life at the price of my own. And yours, Jason. I had no right to give our lives for his. I know that now, when it is almost too late. He was in trouble. It hardly matters now what it was, but it was real trouble. The kind that would have meant prison for the better part of his life. Cyrus was county attorney then, and Cyrus wanted me. So we made a deal, Cyrus and I, and the evidence against Chris got lost. Chris went free, and I went to my own special prison.

"Oh, they were a pair, Chris and Cyrus. For a while they felt mutually secure in the knowledge they shared. But then Cyrus began to grow. He became powerful, and all the security was on his side. Who would believe that he'd ever made a deal like that? He could pass it off as a smear. But to Chris, Cyrus seemed a constant, arrogant threat. He must have become very sick of squirming under Cyrus's big thumb. Then, of course, Cyrus was a wealthy man. The wealth comes to me. To the mind of Chris, that would mean to him also. A nice dual motive for murder, if you've got someone to pay the price for you. Someone like you, Jason, who only wanted to die at home."

She lifted an arm in a slight, soft gesture at the gun. "There's the gun, Chris. And even now I'm still helping you pay your debt. Even now I'm offering you this way, which is a better way than hanging."

The fear washed up to the surface of his eyes, diluting the arrogance. Spastically, he jerked into motion, advancing to pick up

the gun. The feel of steel seemed to give him new assurance, arrogance regaining dominance. He pointed the gun at Jason.

"There will be no hanging, big sister. No suicide, either. With Cyrus dead, you and Jason look like a beautiful pair of collaborators. Under the circumstances, I think I can convince everyone that it was necessary to kill you. Say I accused you. Say I had to defend myself."

Jason pushed away from the door with the peculiar sensation of moving against fluid resistance, as if he were wading in deep water. There was no hate in him. There was only the sick, urgent need to eliminate quickly and forever the slim personification of all his loss and loneliness. The gun belched lead from the heart of an explosion he hardly heard. Something plucked at his shoulder, and he kept on walking. Another explosion, and he felt a hot breath on the side of his neck. Reaching out, he took almost leisurely in his grasp the wrist of the hand behind the gun, forcing it aside. With the same effect of leisure, he brought his right fist back and lashed it out at the boy's face.

Spinning back the length of his arm, Chris jerked up and collapsed. Gently, Jason released his hold on the wrist, permitting the arm to fall, the fingers of the hand trailing down his leg as if in supplication.

"It'll have to be hanging," he said.

Then, an aftermath of tension and violence, the hacking cough began. He closed his eyes, pressing a clenched fist hard against his mouth, and after a moment he felt Leslie against him. Felt her hands drawing his head down upon her shoulder.

Below them, the front door banged open and shut. Footsteps pounded down the lower hall and upward on the stairs. Calmly, above the growing volume of the near-ing intrusion, her voice assured the future.

"In a high place, Jason. In a high place, where the air is light and dry, we'll have together the time that's left." ♠ ♠ ♠

# C.O.D.—Corpse on Delivery!

By V. E. THIESSEN



There was one more trip I had to make after delivering my partner's body with the Colonel's furniture. After that, I'd never move—or breathe—again!

**I**'D NAMED the truck Suzie, and she was big and heavy and not too easy to stop. At first I figured that was what caused all my trouble, but it turned out to be something considerably more serious.

I was rolling down First Street with a load of Colonel Pittman's furniture on the truck when the traffic light turned amber.

I was right at the light, and the load was pretty heavy, so I figured to barrel right on through. I stepped on the gas, and I was all the way across before the light turned red.

Four blocks later the siren screamed at me, and I pulled over to the curb for the police car. It parked in front of me and



two policemen walked back toward me. I was a little surprised to see two of them come back on a traffic violation.

I recognized one of them as a man I'd seen before, but not on a traffic beat. His name was O'Brian, and I'd seen him on the program at the policeman's benefit. He had sung a duet there with his daughter. She was a lovely girl with a lovely voice, and O'Brian himself had a fine clear Irish tenor. His *Mother Macree* had been a show stopper. He was a small man, short and solidly built, with a face that ran to freckles, and a head that had run out of hair some years back, and was beginning to run to freckles too. But when he spoke to me he wasn't using his singing voice. This voice was as cold and impersonal as metal.

"Let's see your driving license."

I handed it over. I started to ask, "What's the beef?" and decided not to. I'd run that amber light. I knew it, and they knew it, and they knew I knew it, so what was the use? Just get the ticket, and take the furniture on out to Colonel Pittman's house. That was the smart thing.

O'Brian asked, "You the one listed here? You Jack Brindell?"

"Yes, sir."

"This your truck?"

"Mine and my partner's."

O'Brian looked at me while the other cop hovered respectfully in the background. "Your partner?" He had a question mark in his voice.

"Yeah. Brindell and Haley, Movers. We own this truck and another one. Right now we're moving some furniture to a rental house for Colonel Pittman.

"Who's he?"

"Search me. Some Army officer that just got back from Japan. I was a sergeant myself last war. I got the habit of not asking colonels a lot of questions."

He said, "Yes." Not like he thought it was funny, and not like he thought it was corny, just "Yes", like I hadn't even spo-

ken. He handed me the license. "Drive the truck down to police headquarters," he ordered.

Surprised, I squawked at him, "Now, wait a minute. Give me a ticket if you have to, but let me get this load rolling."

O'Brian looked at me like I didn't exist. He said, "I'm not kidding and I'm not arguing. Get going, mister."

I got going.

**A**T POLICE headquarters they took me into a private office. O'Brian was there, and another cop, and a man in plain-clothes. They started right in asking me questions, and I began to realize there was something more than a traffic violation here.

O'Brian said, "Brindell and Haley, huh? Tell me about the business you run."

"Not much to it. After the war Haley and I got a G.I. loan, bought two war surplus two and a half ton trucks, and went into the moving business."

"What do you move?"

"Anything," I told him. "Furniture mostly."

"Don't you need a van for that?"

"Not for short hauls. Of course if we have a house load, it will take several trips. We couldn't move furniture from one town to another."

"How long you known Haley?"

"Three years," I said. But I thought, Uh, huh, now you're beginning to tip your hand. Haley's got into trouble maybe hauling something that shouldn't be hauled. Maybe slot machines or something like that. My mind wrestled with that a moment, remembering Haley. The trouble with him was the war was over and he couldn't adjust. He was the kind of a guy that had to take damn fool chances. In the war, that had got him a decoration, but now that we were back, I had to watch him or he'd take unnecessary risks, even criminal risks. The guy had to have danger, and with no war to fight, there was left only the law. If I'd been starting this business again, I'd never



have picked out Wes Haley as a partner.

"What kind of partner is he?"

"Wes is okay," I said. I didn't think there was any use washing dirty linen before O'Brian.

"You two get on pretty well?"

"Most of the time. We had the usual business disagreements, nothing serious."

O'Brian said, "The way I hear it you quarreled pretty violently now and then. Where's Haley now?"

I frowned, pretending to think about the question. Actually I was wondering what the darn fool had got us into and just what I should say. I couldn't see any reason not to tell the truth.

"He ought to be back in the office. He was to meet me there."

"Would you ring him up? We'd like to ask him a question or two." O'Brian handed me the telephone.

I dialed. They were all watching me, and whatever it was, they must have figured I was in it with Haley. I dialed, and his telephone rang and rang. It rang steadily, shrilly, and it began to give me the creeps the way they were watching me while I heard that telephone ringing in an empty office.

"He's not there," I told them.

"When did he tell you he'd be at the office?"

"He was going right there from Colonel Pittman's house, the one we were putting the furniture in. He'd almost emptied the first load of stuff when I drove up with the second. He helped me with the unloading so we could let the swampers go. There was only some light stuff left that I could handle alone. I went after it and Haley said that he would go back to the office."

"Was Colonel Pittman there at the house?"

"No. He had been there but he left before I did."

"Anyone else there when you left?"

"Yes. An insurance man, Guy Lassiter."

"Haley and Lassiter were there?"

"That's right."

There was a knock on the door. O'Brian opened it, and I could hear a faint whisper of conversation. Then the policeman who had been outside came in. He carried a thick newspaper, folded the long way three times.

On top of the newspaper lay a hammer. He carried it like it was an egg.

O'Brian said, "Take a look at this hammer. Do you recognize it?"

I took a look. It was the hammer out of Haley's truck. On the head was a dark, a scummy stain that looked like blood, and a few hairs.

I was sick inside, shocked and sick. I thought, He's killed somebody! That damned fool Haley has killed somebody!

I said, "I'm not sure. We have a couple hammers a lot like that."

O'Brian said, "Maybe this fact will make you remember. We just pulled it out of the back of your truck, from under some furniture padding."

I stared at him, my mouth open like a fish's, my wind writhing, trying to understand.

He said, "Come along. We've got something else to show you." His voice was still polite, but his eyes were as bright as an animal's.

We rode in the police car. They kept on asking me questions as we rode, and I answered them like a man in a dream. My mind was numb, knocked out.

"Who is this Lassiter?"

"He handles our insurance."

"You carry quite a bit of insurance?"

"We have to. We hire swampers to help handle heavy stuff, and there's always a chance one of them will get hurt. Couple of months ago we had a guy fall with a refrigerator and crack his back. If we hadn't had fifty thousand worth of liability insurance we'd be broke now."

"And Lassiter was the man who handled your liability insurance?"

"That's right."

"And you left the two of them together, Haley and Lassiter?"

"I told you that." I wondered why he kept harping on it. It must have been Lassiter, I thought. Wes had a fight with Lassiter and killed him. Then I thought about it a moment and knew that was impossible. If that were so, how had Wes put the hammer with blood on it into my truck? And why had he put it there?

The last question scared me. I refused to think about that.

We rolled up in front of Colonel Pittman's house.

The house was a red brick with an odd-colored, green-blue wood trim. It looked like about a five-room house from the front, but actually it went back deep on the lot, and was a pretty good-sized six-room. Colonel Pittman didn't live there. This was just some investment property that he figured to rent furnished. He'd brought a lot of furniture back from Japan, carved teak and such, and was cleaning out his older stuff into the rental house.

We went up a cracked concrete walk. A policeman stood at the door; there appeared to be another inside.

We went inside. The body of a man lay on a half unrolled red rug. The top of his head was caved in and there were stains on the rug. He'd taken his last fatal chance, and danger had finally won. Death had taken this gambler's trick.

It was Wes. I knew as I stared at him, almost sick, that I'd been way off base in my figuring. My head whirled, and there was a ringing fear in my mind, and then suddenly I remembered what it was.

I recalled the telephone ringing in Haley's empty office. The police had known he was dead then. O'Brian had stared at me all the time I called up Haley and let the telephone ring. They had watched me calling a dead man. And then, after that, they had found the murder weapon in my truck. My back began to crawl.

But how could that be? How could I

have left Haley alive and driven toward Colonel Pittman's with the murder weapon in my truck? I tried to remember if anyone had passed me in a car who might have thrown the hammer inside. And then I remembered that they had found the hammer under some padding.

It was impossible. It couldn't be true. But Haley didn't know that. He lay with his brains spilling on Colonel Pittman's rug, and I couldn't keep from seeing him wherever I turned, and hearing that telephone ringing in an empty room.

O'Brian said, "How about it, Brindell? You got any more to tell us?"

My throat was too tight to speak. I just shook my head to say no.

**T**HAT seemed to wrap up the questions. They put me back in the police car and we drove back to police headquarters. Nobody said anything. We just sat there like a bunch of zombies. I asked once just where they'd found the hammer in my truck, but the question was ignored. It looked like I was getting some kind of psychological treatment.

When we came into headquarters, a sergeant of police handed O'Brian a typed sheaf of papers and said, "Here's that report you wanted. The equipment is on the way."

O'Brian said, "Sure, sergeant. Now see that they hop to it, will you?"

The sergeant said, "Right, Captain," and left us.

O'Brian said, "Come on into my office, son."

We went into his office. This wasn't the same room where they had questioned me. This was just a small, plain office, as clean and functional as a hospital. The sign on the door told me that O'Brian was a captain of homicide.

O'Brian said, "Sit down." He read the sheaf of papers swiftly, competently, then he frowned at his desk top before he looked at me.

He said, "This is a complete report on you, Brindell, or at least as complete as we could get in a few hours. You had an excellent war record, are well thought of by your acquaintances. You don't seem like a hammer killer."

I began to feel easier.

Then O'Brian's voice hardened. "But then, most killers don't seem to be out of the ordinary. I might as well tell you that it looks like you murdered your partner. Opportunity and circumstantial evidence would convict you. But so far we haven't got a motive. So, I'm going to give you a break. I'm going to look around a bit more before I arrest you. Don't leave town, and don't do anything foolish. Better face it right now. You're in trouble, son."

"Yeah," I almost whispered. "I know."

I should have felt better, since they were letting me walk out of there, and I'd never believed they would. But I wasn't kidding myself any. The only reason they hadn't held me was that they didn't have a motive. Sure, Haley and I had had some violent disagreements, but none for a week or so, and they might not even know about that.

I got the truck from where they were holding it. A policeman was standing beside it, and I told him, "Captain O'Brian said I could take the truck now."

The guard said, "They told me." He watched me get into the truck and roll out onto the street, his eyes placid and uninterested.

I gunned the truck. I didn't want a ticket, but I did go over the speed limit a few miles. I wanted to get home. I wanted to think, because I didn't have much time left. In a few hours, or a day at the most, they were going to find out that Haley and I had life insurance on each other. Thank goodness it wasn't with Lassiter's company. If Lassiter had handled life insurance, they'd have known by now. And when they found out—I could see myself being tried and found guilty. Open and shut, that's what it was.

I wheeled up in front of my apartment,

my mind still buzzing so that logical reasoning wasn't possible. I walked in and sat down in an easy chair, my back as straight as a bed slat, and stared across at the piano without seeing it.

I couldn't relax, and I couldn't think until I quit being scared.

Finally, I went over to the piano and began to play. I liked to fool with a piano, and now, just letting my fingers wander, some of the tension began to leave me and I could force my mind to remember all the events of the day.

If Colonel Pittman had discovered the body, they must have given him the same sort of grilling they had given me. He might even have been there at the time I was. I began to wonder if it were possible for him to have slipped that bloody hammer into the truck while they were questioning me, and before the police had gone over the truck. It was possible, at least in theory.

That would mean that he must have a reason to kill Haley. It would be too far-fetched unless they had known each other before. I tried to remember whether Haley had mentioned any colonels during our Army time. We'd served in the same outfit for about a year, then Haley was wounded and I didn't see him till I got out of the Service.

But I did remember something he'd said about an officer who'd got rich on black market deals. Haley had been pretty bitter about that once. It seemed to me that the officer had been a colonel.

Could Pittman be the man? Could Wesley have tried to blackmail him and been killed for that reason?

It sounded thin. Still, it was a way to start. I broke off in the middle of playing a song and got my hat.

As I went out the door, I realized I'd been playing *Mother Macree*. Even subconsciously, I couldn't get O'Brian out of my mind. He had a fine voice, and I wondered grimly if I should ask him to sing at my hanging.



THE house in which Colonel Pittman lived was away out on the edge of town in one of the fashionable districts. It was a big, new buff brick with wide, sloping, brown-stained eaves, and an acre or more of green Bermuda grass that was as thick and smooth as a Chinese carpet all the way down to the street. The house looked like money, a lot of money and care and good taste all mixed together. I walked up and rang the doorbell, and I could hear one of those expensive chimes ringing inside. There were five tones to the chimes—Dong! Ding! Dong! Ding! Dong!—and at the last note a woman opened the door.

She looked like the house, like a lot of money and good taste. She had a figure that was strictly first class, poured into some kind of a silk dress, and she looked at you out of deep blue eyes. They reminded you of a pool somewhere, but it wasn't a cool pool. I don't know just how to analyze it, but she had more than class. She had that something that makes all men throw out their chests and wonder if their tie is straight, or their bald spot shows.

She said, "Yes?" in an inquiring, throaty voice.

"I'm Jack Brindell, your mover. Are you Mrs. Pittman?"

"Yes."

"Is the colonel at home?"

"No. What is it, please?"

I stared at the bottom of the door. "You've heard what happened?"

"Yes." Her voice was soft, comforting. "Your partner, wasn't it?"

"Yes." I had to make conversation, get into the house. Maybe I could find out about the colonel's background from her. I said, "I wanted to talk to Colonel Pittman about the stain on the rug."

Her eyes pitied me. "The cleaners will take care of it. If not, it doesn't matter. But please come in, Mr. Brindell."

She held the door open as I went past her. She leaned slightly, to get out of my way, and the silk dress stretched tightly

over her hips. They were as smooth as Delilah's. She looked good—good enough to be a murder motive.

Haley had been a good-looking man, and the colonel was a bit older than either of them. I wondered if I had stumbled onto something.

I asked, "Your husband knew Haley during the war, didn't he?"

She frowned, thinking. "I don't think so. He never mentioned it."

"How'd he happen to pick us to do this moving job?"

"He saw your advertisement in the evening paper. No, I'm sure they weren't acquainted." She looked at me again. "Can I get you a drink?"

"No, thanks!"

"Coffee, then? It's been a hard day, I know. Do you realize how your hands are shaking?"

I hadn't. "Coffee would be fine," I told her.

Thirty minutes later, I left. Maybe she was clever enough to fool me, but I really didn't believe she was the kind of woman to carry on an affair behind her husband's back.

And then I remembered O'Brian's remark about murderers. When I stopped to think I supposed an adulteress would look just like anyone else too. So there I was, right where I started, with time running out.

I got an idea, then, a wild, desperate idea. Suppose I went to O'Brian and told him about the insurance. Suppose I saved them a day or so to ferret out the information. O'Brian looked like a square guy. Maybe he'd give me a couple of days to try to find who had framed me. He could put a cop to tail me so I wouldn't get out of town. And if I ran, that would convict me for sure.

It was a pretty desperate idea but I had to try something. I glanced at my wrist watch. It was almost supper time. O'Brian would be going home. I'd have to call him at home. I figured I might as well eat. It

might be the last good meal I'd get in a long while.

I had steak. I've enjoyed meals more but at least I had steak. Then I found O'Brian's home address in the telephone directory and drove out to see him.

It was almost dark when I got there, but not too dark to see that O'Brian had a nice home too. It wasn't large, just a plain six-room stone, but the yard was as carefully tended as Pittman's, and there was a bunch of yellow climbing roses in front that perfumed the air. I rang the bell and Nancy O'Brian opened the door.

When I had seen her on the stage at the policeman's benefit with her father, I had thought she looked nice, almost like a movie star. But seen up close, at home, all the glamour was gone. She must have been doing the dishes, for she had on a little frilled plastic apron with gold threads.

Her face was scrubbed, and obviously just between the new and the old makeup, for there wasn't a trace of rouge or lipstick. Her hair was dark, swept back off her forehead, and she'd thrust one of those yellow roses into her hair. The shape of her face was good, every bit as good as that of the colonel's wife. She looked at me out of gray Irish eyes and said, "Hello" in a voice that was warm and friendly and wholly natural.

I thought, Remember this, Jack. *If you get out of this trouble, remember this. This is something you've been searching for a long time.* I smiled back at her and asked to see her father.

She asked me in, and she had the sense to leave us alone without any hints or a word from her father. Looking at O'Brian there in his home, and seeing his plain, freckled Irish face, I didn't think of him as a cop any more, and I forgot to be scared. He might have been my own dad, the one that I lost when I was ten years old. I talked to him. I told him about the insurance and about all my wild speculation and visit to Colonel Pittman's house.

He said, "We found out about the insurance late this afternoon. There's a pick up order out for you. Did you know that?"

"No!"

He looked at me keenly. "I'm inclined to believe you. If you did know and came here with that story, you're a lot smarter and more of a crook than I figure you are. Suppose you wait here a moment while I go and telephone the office. Maybe there's something new!" He lifted his voice, calling, "Nancy, give this young feller a cup of coffee while he's waiting."

He took a long time but I didn't mind, sitting there talking to Nancy. I told her how her dad reminded me of mine, and she got around to telling me that she'd lost her mother at about the same age. It gave us a sort of a bond. She made good coffee too, the kind a fellow needs at breakfast time. I had to pull my thoughts back sharply. They were getting away ahead of themselves.

O'Brian came back. He said, "Nothing new, son, but I've decided to give you a chance to turn up something in the next twenty-four hours. Suppose we go over it again, just to be sure we haven't missed anything."

We went over it again. Nancy was gone, and now the old horror began to seep back. No matter if I had won a twenty-four hour reprieve, things were black against me. And then, the last time through, I remembered something.

"Laisster!" I said. "Just before I left the house after the last load, he leaned against the truck. He had his briefcase. He could have hidden the hammer there and dropped it off into my truck under the padding. That would have put it down at the very bottom of the load when you found it."

"But you said Haley was still alive, that he called to you from inside the house as you were leaving."

"I thought he did. Somebody called my name. But a shout coming from an empty

house is hard to recognize. Then Lassiter came out and told me that Haley wanted to tell me that he would go on to the office. But now that I think of it, Lassiter could have been both voices."

O'Brian's face had been friendly up until now. Now it began to harden in some subtle way. He lashed out with a quick Irish temper. "Was that why you came here? To plant a story like that at the last minute? You may be cleverer than I figured, cleverer and harder." His eyes bored harshly into mine. "And why would Lassiter have killed him?"

"I—I—" I was stammering in confusion under this sudden change. "I don't know why."

"All right." O'Brian got up, a compact bundle of controlled fury. "I promised you twenty-four hours, and I'll keep my word. But get going, and I hope for your sake you can turn up some real evidence. Now get out of here."

I got out. As I pulled away from the house, a car followed me. It didn't surprise me. Even when O'Brian half believed me, he had phoned to put a tail on me. He'd done what while I was drinking coffee with Nancy, and I couldn't blame him. But I wished I hadn't blurted out that sudden idea about Lassiter. I couldn't blame O'Brian. It sounded bad, like I was changing my story, and it made my whole visit seem like just an excuse to slip in that idea. But I knew things could have happened that way, and more than that, they must have happened that way.

I began to get another idea or two, an idea that began to make sense. I drove home and called Lassiter on the telephone. I said, "Could you come over, Guy? I've got an insurance problem. Something that deals with an old case, the employee with the cracked back. You remember?"

His voice sounded odd or maybe I just wanted it to sound that way. He said, "I'll be right over."

While I was waiting I sat down at the

piano and began to play. It was beginning to come clear now what must have happened. The only thing was that just knowing wasn't enough. I had to find a way to get proof. Maybe I was wrong to stam-pede Lassiter like this, and maybe I could confirm my idea. Anyhow, there wasn't time to play it cagey.

He arrived in about twenty minutes. I didn't offer him a drink, just settled him in a chair and started in on him.

I said, "I've some reason to believe that the fellow with the back injury, the one that fell while moving a refrigerator, was an insurance swindler. You recall your company paid him forty thousand dollars. I wondered what you wanted to do about it."

He asked, "What makes you think it was a swindle?"

"Never mind that," I kept bluffing. "The thing is, there may be others. Have you paid off on other policies with industrial firms?"

He said carefully, "I don't know. There may have been one or two."

I said "Then I'd suggest you take it up with your company. Maybe if they compare the descriptions of the injured persons and all the X-rays, they may find they've paid off on the same X-ray more than once."

He said, "I'll sure have it checked on. Thanks a lot, Jack. Was that all you wanted?"

"Yeah," I said. "That's all. But just to make sure I'll write to the company too. That ought to help you get action."

He whirled. His eyes were almost a physical force stabbing at me. "Damn you!" he shot out. "You're wise."

"Yeah. And Haley was wise too. That's why you killed him."

"Wise, hell! He was in on that one. Then he got too big for his britches."

"And you thought you could hang it on me. Now what are you going to do?"

I hadn't really thought about that question, or I wouldn't have asked it.

He stared at me and his voice grew



husky. He said, "I'll do what I did before." He took a gun out of his pocket.

It was funny I'd never thought of a gun. He hadn't used one on Haley, and I just hadn't thought that when I dropped that hint on the telephone I was inviting him to bring one along. He was across the room, and we were both seated. He could shoot me before I was out of my chair.

I said, "There's a cop waiting outside, one that's been tailing me. You'll get caught, this time sure."

He considered that, then he grinned. "Thanks for telling me," he said. "The gun isn't registered. I'll shoot you up close, and put it in your hand." He stood up and leveled the gun. "Get up and come here!"

I was scared; there isn't any word for how scared I was. I started to do what he wanted, but I was talking all the time I got out of the chair.

"You can't shoot me from that far away, and I'm going to yell 'murder!' in a moment, loud. That will keep you from getting away with it." I began to walk toward him.

I don't know whether I would have yelled or not. I didn't have time. The gun roared. My heart jumped once, and I wondered how long it would take to feel that I'd been hit. Then I realized that Lassiter was staring at an empty hand, and it was bleeding onto the rug.

A voice from the window said, "Hold it now!" And other voices sounded at the door. O'Brian came in, stepping lively, and the patrolman beside him carried a gun at the ready position. The other policeman, the one outside the window, had fired the single shot.

O'Brian said, "Take him away!" They

took him, and O'Brian and I stood staring at each other.

O'Brian said, "Thanks for making him talk."

"I don't get it," I stammered. "I knew you had me followed and I was trying to figure out how to signal the cop outside. How'd you get here?"

O'Brian said, "We had a microphone in here and a tape recorder, and a man in the next apartment. We knew everything you did or said."

I stared at him. "I didn't think you could do that—I mean. . . ."

O'Brian said, "It's a ticklish thing, the invasion of private life by the police. If we make a mistake, it could cost me my job. But we had all the evidence on you except motive, and I'll risk my job to catch a crook any time."

I said slowly, "Since it saved my life I can't very well complain, can I?"

O'Brian's face broke suddenly into a smile. "I hoped you'd feel that way." He wasn't a cop any more, just a nice guy. He said, "You play a mean piano. Maybe you'd play for me sometime?"

"I'll accompany you if you'll sing. Name the day." I grinned back at him.

He said, "Sunday dinner and bring your own music." He turned away and I stopped him at the door.

"Your daughter sings too," I said. "I'd like to accompany her."

He turned and looked at me, and through me, and he knew I wasn't talking about music. And when he answered, he wasn't talking about my piano—I hoped.

He said, "I guess she could do worse. See you Sunday, son. ♠ ♣ ♠"

Statement required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933 and July 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233), showing the Ownership, Management, and Circulation of Detective Story Magazine, published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1952. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Managing editor, None. Business manager, None. 2. The owner is: New Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York, Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. 3. The known bondholders, mortgages, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Signed, Henry Steeger, Publisher. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 7th day of October, 1952. Eugene Jelinek, Notary Public, State of New York. Qualified in Bronx County, No. 63-1962300. Certificate filed in Bronx and N. Y. counties. My Commission expires March 30, 1953. (Seal)—Form 3526—Rev. 8-50.

By JOHN JAKES

# Coffin Corner

I GOT out of the cab in front of the Arena and headed down the alley toward the side door. A muted thunder of voices rumbled from behind the walls. I figured that the main event, Tony's fight, must be just about over. And the memory of what I had found in the apartment sickened me.

Tony Rizzulo and I had been friends for a long time. All the way through grammar and high school. And tonight, half an hour before ring time, Tony called me to his dressing room. I thought of him now as I pushed open the door and hurried down the long hall.

I could see Tony, quick, thin, nervous, his black eyes snapping excitedly, yet clouded somehow with fear. "Listen, Pete," I remembered him saying, "do this for me, will you? Lisa wouldn't come to the fight. I don't know why. I'm scared. Run out

**What price friendship? When I promised Tony I'd find out who murdered his wife, that put me on the wrong side of a coffin!**







This time, they hadn't fumbled the job!



and check on her, will you? See if she's okay."

I stopped in front of the policeman standing before the door to Rizzulo's dressing room. "Fight over?" I asked.

"Just about," the cop answered.

"How's it going?"

"Rizzulo's smashing him to hell, I hear."

I grimaced. The final top bout for Tony, the high point of the long climb upward, and it had to be smeared and ruined like this. For a minute, I didn't want to wait for Tony. I wanted to run, get away and let him find out for himself. I didn't want to see my friend for a long, long time.

Reluctantly, I said, "Can I go in and wait?"

"Sorry, buddy. No reporters gonna be allowed in after the fight. Rizzulo's orders."

"I'm not a reporter," I told him, pulling out my wallet. I showed my license. "Pete Horn's the name. I'm a private detective. Rizzulo asked me to do some checking for him during the fight. I'm supposed to report back."

The cop stared at me a minute. From the Arena, a hoarse triumphant shout went up from the crowd. I heard the announcer yelling. ". . . winner and new champion, Tony Rizzulo. . . ." The noise mushroomed up again. I pushed past the policeman, went into the dressing room and shut the door. I lit a cigarette with a shaking hand, perching myself on a corner of the rubbing table.

A couple of minutes later, the noise grew louder out in the hall. The door opened and Tony came in. I noticed that his face was relatively free of cuts or bruises. Evidently he had had an easy time winning. Foss, Tony's white-haired little manager, shut the door in the face of the noisy newspapermen.

Tony stared at me. Our eyes met and I looked away.

"Damn it!" Tony exploded. "Don't just stand there. . . ."

Foss started to peel off the gloves.

"Is Lisa all right?" Tony asked.

"No," I said, "she isn't."

"Then what's wrong? Hell, man. . . ."

"Easy, Tony," Foss said gently. "Just take it easy."

"How can I take it easy. . . ." Tony began. He jerked away from Foss and began to pace back and forth in front of me. A moment later he stopped and held out his hands, almost in a gesture of pleading. Inside of me, I was still gathering my nerve.

"Let's have it," Tony breathed.

"Your wife is dead," I said. "Somebody got in and shot her through the stomach. They did a sloppy job of it. She was still alive when I got there, but she died while I was on the phone trying to get a doctor."

Tony slapped his hands together. I could see small tears filling the corners of his dark eyes. "Who, Pete? Who in hell would want to do that? I know she was afraid, but I swear I don't know why."

I crushed out my cigarette on the stone floor. "She talked a little before she died, Tony."

"She . . . she did?" He said it eagerly, as if he were clinging to the idea in the hope that she might still be alive.

"Yeah. She recognized me. She didn't say very much, she didn't have time. All she said was that she was going to try to get you to throw the fight, but she just couldn't, knowing how much it meant to you."

Tony stared at me incredulously. "Throw the fight?"

"Yeah."

"Why, Pete?"

"I don't know. You figure it out." I cursed myself for being so heartless, and yet it was the only logical way. Maybe it would keep Tony from feeling so badly himself. That, I thought suddenly, is stupid, too. Who wouldn't have loved Lisa? I remembered seeing her often, dark and small-boned and lovely. Why did people have to get so tangled up? Sometimes it hurt to have friends.

"Mr. Horn," Foss said quietly, his shifty brown eyes jumping, "I think we'd better get Tony boy out of here. The police will come in on it before long."

"I don't want to talk to them," Tony snarled. "I don't want to bother with them. I want to find out myself who killed Lisa."

"Look, Tony," I said. "You'll *have* to talk to them. I'll do what I can to find out what happened. Though there isn't much to go on."

"Will you, Pete? I don't know much about this kind of stuff." His brilliant dark eyes bored into me.

"Sure, kid," I mumbled. What can you do, when the guy's a friend?

"Mister Horn," Foss complained again, "why don't we take Tony boy home?"

"Good idea," I agreed. I started to add that since I had called the cops after I found Lisa, the coroner would probably have removed the body by now. But I kept my mouth shut as Tony struggled into his clothes. We herded him out into the hall, Foss in front, me bringing up the rear. A crowd of reporters shouted questions and flashbulbs popped, but we shooed them off. We were almost to the alley door when I spotted Barney Osborn leaning easily against one of the cement pillars, smoking.

Barney was one of the big-time boys. A finger in every dirty pie. He was short, not over thirty-five, with a paunchy solidness. He went in for a yellowed peroxide streak in his hair, a bushy mustache and custom-tailored clothes. Jitters, his runty trigger man, who jiggled like a nervous skeleton, strung on a clothesline in a windstorm, was with him.

A nasty smile lit up Barney's features. Tony, head down, ignored him. Barney peered at me. He looked as if he knew a big fat secret, and wasn't telling anybody.

"The kid did all right," Barney said to the three of us. Foss ignored him and herded Tony on. I stopped in front of Osborn. Jitters didn't like me. I had pasted his ears down one time in a bar brawl, when

he wasn't packing his thirty-eight special. Right now he was packing it and his hand kept jumping toward his coat pocket, like an organism separate from the rest of the body. The tics in his cheek worked overtime.

"What's your pitch, Barney?" I said quietly.

He looked at his nails. "Nothing, Pete. But Tony may wind up losing the re-match. They're scheduling a re-match, or did you know?"

"No," I said, "I didn't."

"Tony looks pretty sad about something," Barney said. He grinned. "If it'll help relieve the agony, you can tell him my offer still holds."

"No thanks," I said sarcastically. "The up-state boys are honest."

"I don't like this guy, Mr. Osborn," Jitters mumbled to himself.

"And I don't like either of you," I said nastily. I jabbed a finger at Barney's shirt. "Just don't try sticking your gummy little fingers in this-pot. You'll get 'em burned."

"The boy's a toughie," Barney purred.

"Just remember what I said." I stalked away from them, aware that Jitters would probably have gunned me on the spot, if there hadn't been so many people around.

**I** JOINED Tony and Foss in the waiting taxi and we headed out toward his apartment. Tony whimpered senselessly, slapping his right fist into his left palm. I heard him mumble her name a couple of times. And I heard him say, "Throw the fight . . . damn it . . . throw the fight . . ."

*Throw the fight.* That was the key. Tony was eminently honest, and a favorite to win. It didn't take much brains to see that if Tony could be persuaded to take a dive, whoever bet on his opponent would rake in quite a bit, if he bet heavily. And I saw a nice logical face fitting the frame under which were the words, *The Heavy Bettor*. Barney Osborn. Only Osborn didn't have any connections with Tony. At least no

obvious ones. And Lisa had admitted *she* was the one trying to pressure Tony. How many links were there in the chain? And was it a chain at all? At least it was the only chain that was handy.

Tony was a surprisingly straight guy, for his racket. Nothing that I knew of could have made him throw the fight, except perhaps Lisa wishing it. He loved her powerfully, jealously. I once saw him nearly cut a guy to ribbons with his fists when the guy made a pass at her in a restaurant. Inside the ring Tony fought like he was playing chess with his fists. Outside, he was a hot-head, especially where Lisa was concerned. *Was*. Yeah, I picked the right tense. I saw her lying there, and I heard Tony sobbing softly as the cab rolled through the night. I'd find a chain if there was any. A real, solid chain leading to a woman-killer. For Tony, I'd do that.

I dropped Tony and Foss at the apartment. Two squad cars stood outside, plus a lot of people, and I saw Lt. MacPhee on the sidewalk, smoking a cigar and talking to a uniformed officer. I knew MacPhee. Honest and hard-working. And he always did his best to spare the next of kin as much grief as possible. I slapped Tony's shoulder lightly. "I'll get in touch with you tomorrow, kid. And believe me, I'll do what I can."

"Sure," Tony said glumly, "I know. Thanks." He turned around. The crowd did some oohing and aahing and Tony's shoulders lifted as he walked toward Lt. MacPhee. It would be quite an ordeal, but there was nothing I could do to help him.

I went back to my place and fixed myself a cup of hot chocolate in the two-by-four kitchen. I always work best with the chocolate steaming under my nose. I think faster, clearer, because the Pete Horn Private Detective Society doesn't allow its members to drink the chocolate until some fancy thinking has been done.

I wanted a chain to connect Barney Osborn and Tony Rizzulo, with Lisa in the

middle. Obviously I couldn't waltz up to Barney and put the question to him. His friends were out too. But then I remembered his passion for quick changes in women friends. I remembered a newspaper item read a day or two before. I rummaged around in the pantry and found the right paper. The society editor stated that Barney Osborn, wealthy sportsman and nightclub owner, had tossed over his latest flame, Crystal Claire, in favor of a certain Taylor Hill society *débutante*. Will the *débutante's* fiancé make trouble? Who the hell cares? I tossed the paper back where it came from and went into the living room and got the evening's news sheet from my easy chair. In the entertainment section, Crystal Claire peered out at me with smoky eyes, big as life and twice as womanly. She was currently featured at the Club Orlando, Barney's top-drawer spot. And Crystal Claire looked like one lady who might get damned sore about being given the heave-ho. She might spill something innocently that wouldn't mean a thing to her. To me, it might mean a lot. I wanted to know why Lisa had even considered putting the pressure on her husband.

Good old Crystal Claire. I went back and drank the now mildly warm cup of chocolate.

The phone book listed Miss Claire as living in the Ladonga Beach Apartments. Which was a fancy name for a motel. For a five, the proprietor rolled his eyes like billiard balls and directed me to Cottage Number Four.

I rang the bell, blinking at the brassy morning sun.

Crystal Claire appeared in a thick terry cloth bathrobe. She had red hair, gray eyes and big bones. And since this was early morning, you couldn't expect a girl to have all her contraptions in place. There was a goodly hunk of nature under that robe.

She winced at me over the smoke of the cigarette drooping from her mashed-looking red lips. "What are you selling?"



"What are you buying?" I returned brightly.

"Go to hell." She started to close the door disgustedly.

I jammed my shoulder against it and pushed. I got in all right, and she didn't complain too much. She just started to mix herself a drink. Evidently she didn't object too strongly to strange men crashing the party at nine-thirty a.m.

"Well," she said finally, facing me, "what do you want?"

"A little information about Barney Osborn."

"That. . . ." Her face turned a dark plum color.

I had her pegged correctly. A real sore lady.

I waved my finger at her and she stopped the stream of profanity.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"The name's Horn. Like in Gabriel's." I handed her one of my cards.

"Detective?"

"That's right." I flopped down on the divan and lit a cigarette. "I'm not having myself a good time, Miss Claire. I'm mixed up in a murder. And I'll give it to you straight. I'd like to tag your friend Barney with it."

"I wish you luck," she said bitterly.

"Maybe you can help me."

She shrugged, sipping her drink. "I don't know anything about his business."

"You saw the people he talked to. If you were around the club at all . . . rehearsing mornings, or in the evening, you saw him talking to people. Know much about the fight game?" She said she didn't. "Did you happen to see him talking to anybody in the last month or so who possibly looked like they might have something to do with boxing? You know, beat-up face, cauliflower ears." It was a damned slender lead, I had to admit.

"No, no, I. . . ." She shook her head. Then she suddenly pursed her mashed-up lips. "I do remember something. Last

week, about this time or maybe an hour later. I *was* rehearsing, and this man came into the club by the side door and went into Barney's office. I don't remember much about him, except that he had a face like tough old leather, and bushy white hair. Pure white. Like that orchestra conductor's. He came out in about ten minutes. He seemed scared. As if he didn't want anybody to see him."

"You didn't talk to him?"

"No, why should I? I just kept on rehearsing. I wouldn't have remembered it if you hadn't said that about the roughed-up faces." She came over and sat down next to me. I could smell faint fresh perfume. She was better with that robe on, I think, than she would have been in a bathing suit. It did things for her.

Red-tipped nails closed around my hand. "Barney played a dirty trick on me, Mr. Horn. People told me about him. I didn't listen." There was honesty in the gray eyes. "He's no good. I'd like to see him get it."

"Not any more than I would," I said. I started to get up. She held onto my arm.

"Will you let me know what happens?"

"Sure I will."

She smiled then. I think the janitor must have turned on the winter heating. "You don't look like a detective, Mr. Horn. You look . . . well . . . like a college teacher or something. I thought detectives were dumb and tough."

"It's a disguise," I told her.

She laughed again. It was a nice laugh. "You ought to have dinner with me some time. I make wonderful barbecued ribs."

"I'm hot for barbecued ribs," I said. "You can count on that dinner date. But right now I've got to dig into the past of our mutual friend, Mr. Osborn." I got up. "Thanks a lot for your help."

She followed me to the door. I stepped out into the sun, blinded for a minute. All I heard was her voice, rich and warm. "I'll be seeing you. What's your first name?"

"Pete," I said. "And keep those ribs warmed up."

"I'll do that."

I whistled as I went down the gravel walk. Yes, sir, the chain was beginning to get a little stronger. The tough-leather skin. The white hair like an orchestra leader's. You fill in the brown eyes and the capable hands and the suggestion of a pot belly and you come up with Mr. Harry Foss, manager and supposed friend of Tony Rizzulo. One more link. . . .

I drove fast back to town. Once more the phone book gave me what I was looking for. Harry Foss lived in less fortunate circumstances than Crystal Claire. An old brownstone, down by the river, where the tugs hooted shrilly and the heat shimmered up off the pavement, hot enough to fry eggs. I parked a block from his place and walked.

The landlady, a hag in a wrapper and curl papers, greeted me with a mumble and a blink of her bleary eyes. "Where does Harry Foss live?" I asked her.

"Two-o-five. Right there it is, if you'd trouble to look." She pointed to a name on one of the brass mailboxes obscured by the gloom of the hallway.

"Thanks," I said. "Sorry to bother you."

I went up the stairs two at a time and found the right room. Cabbage reek perfumed the hall, and the wallpaper gave off the faint aroma of human sweat. I knocked on the door. No answer. I knocked again. Still silence. I turned the knob and it didn't open. I went back downstairs again.

"Now what?" the woman grumbled. The curl papers were gone.

"The door's locked."

I flashed my wallet. "I'm a detective." I didn't let her see the word *Private* on my license. Her eyes bugged. "Give me your passkey," I said in a voice loaded with authority. Something nasty whirled around in my brain. Something unpleasant. Call it a premonition.

She fumbled the key into my hands and

followed me up the stairs. I got the door open. Dingy room, unmade bed, boxing photos on the wall, cut from newspapers, some with autographs. I heard water gurgling in the bathroom.

I walked in. The basin had overflowed and a pool of water covered the tile floor. The water was tinted a strawberry color. Harry Foss lay right on his back in the middle of it, the shaving cream still crusted on his leathery face. Whoever had gotten to Lisa had gotten to him too. The same sort of a job. In the stomach, with plenty of blood. And this time, they hadn't fumbled the job.

The landlady screamed.

"You got a phone?" I said. "I want to call the cops."

"I thought. . . ." she shrieked.

"Shut up," I said, and went out the door into the hall.

## 2

I GOT on the phone. Within twenty minutes, Lt. MacPhee arrived, along with his whole crew of vultures. They started in taking pictures and getting measurements and dusting the furniture for prints, so I tried to make myself look small as I started toward the stairs.

"Just a minute, professor," MacPhee boomed out, lumbering after me. I stopped, turned around and coughed as the haze of cigar smoke caught me. MacPhee's knobby head emerged from the smoke.

"Take it off," I said.

"Take what off?" He glowered at me.

I leaned against the wall and lit a cigarette. "The false-face. You know I don't go around blasting people. You always look like you're trying to frighten some poor sorority girl into a confession."

He grumbled and pushed his battered panama back till it hung perilously close to the point where it would fall off. "This is the same guy that bumped Rizzulo's wife. Two people connected with a big-name

fighter in the space of twenty-four hours can't be coincidence."

"Nope," I agreed, "it sure can't."

"You got any angles?" He glowered again.

"Not a one," I said breezily, hoping to hell he wouldn't see the flicker on my face that used to call forth, "Pete, you are lying," in my father's stern voice.

"Well," he said, sarcasm thick as butter in his tone, "just what were you doing up here? You seem to arrive at the location of the body before anyone else."

"I was planning to check on Tony's condition. He took Lisa's death pretty hard, and I wanted to ask Foss if he'd settled down at all last night. I didn't want to barge in on Tony peering like a psychiatrist. Also, I wanted to ask him to look out for the kid. Go over and stay with him."

"That's all?"

"That," I said evenly, "is all."

"It's crazy. \*Somebody kills the woman, somebody kills this guy Foss. No rhyme or reason." He threw up his hands. "Somebody else is not telling all they know."

"Not me, chief!" I gave him the boy scout sign. "Honest."

"All right, all right!" he snarled. There was weariness and irritation in his voice. "Knock off that noise and get the hell away from here, if you want to go. But don't get your nose dirty."

"I want the guy who blasted Lisa Rizzulo as much as you do," I said, staring straight at him.

"I'm afraid maybe you want him too much." And he was gone back down the hall, the cigar smoke clouding around his head, grumbling to himself as the flash bulbs popped.

I walked quickly back to my car, started the motor and pulled away from the curb. Now where do we go? I thought. We had Harry Foss dead, killed undoubtedly by the same person who killed Lisa. But why? People get killed when they do something somebody else doesn't want them to do.

Like saying something. Asking for something. Had Harry Foss asked for more than he deserved? A bigger cut? A bigger cut of what? Cut it out, I thought. Stop making rhymes and jerking things out of the air. But there was money, big money tied up in this. Lisa's dying words proved it. Harry Foss might have stepped out of line for money.

The noon sun blazed down, hot and boiling, when I parked in front of Tony's apartment and rang the bell. He let me in. He was wearing candy-cane striped pajamas and his black hair was tousled. His eyes were big hollow black pits of misery.

He sank down on the sofa. Obviously, he'd been trying to sleep there. His eyes, like the eyes of a forlorn lost pup, searched mine. "Anything?"

I told him what I knew. What I got from Crystal Claire about Foss' visit to Osborn, and then about Foss being found dead. It hit him like an uppercut. He rocked back and closed his eyes.

"What's it all about?" he groaned. "My God, Pete, I feel like finding a gun and doing it myself. Forget the whole crazy mess."

"That won't do any good," I said. It was a pretty feeble excuse. "Somewhere, Barney Osborn left a loose end dangling. The chain will fit together before long."

"Hey!" He said it in a whisper. He sat up, staring at me, a gaunt black-haired man living in rooms haunted by the ghost of a woman he loved. "I found something this morning. I was going through her things. You know. . . ." He tried to grin. It came out as a choked sob. "I'll get it," he whispered, disappearing into the bedroom.

He returned with a sheet of cheap newspaper, folded many times. "I . . . I found it in her lingerie . . . it was hidden. . . ." His head dived into his hands and I heard the dry sob again. It made me surer than ever. I was going to forge the chain into solidity. Barney Osborn would be hanging on the end of it.



I unfolded the notepaper. Hastily scrawled in an irregular hand with blue ink. *Mrs. Rizzulo, I must see you today, 3 pm, Merry-go-round Bar. It concerns your husband. Please be there.* The signature was *H. Foss.*

I jumped up. "So that's it! Fancy Barney didn't want to get his hands dirty. He just sat in his office and lured Foss into doing his dirty work for him. Barney never showed at all. Foss met your wife, and forced her to promise to work on you to throw the fight."

"How could he force her to do anything?" Tony stared at me with a bitter mouth, as if the thought of his wife tortured him more than he could stand.

"That," I said, "is the murky part of the picture. I'll do what I can. Keep your door locked and don't open it for anybody but me or the police." I got a flash. "Where did you meet Lisa?"

"Here in town, why?"

"Where, exactly?"

"She was doing a little singing out on Sunset Road."

"Where had she come from?"

"Here. She always lived here, she said. Showed me the house once. East Third. Her . . . parents were dead. Look . . . Pete. . . ." He groped blindly for my shoulder.

"Sure," I said, "that's all I wanted to know. Listen, Tony. This'll pass, believe me."

"Go to hell," he said softly.

"It will." But I might as well have been talking to the Rock of Gibraltar. I headed for the door and let myself out, leaving him sitting there on the sofa, black curly-haired head in his hands.

**I** SAT in my car and had a smoke, watching the people go by. Little by little, the thing swam into focus. I had to know how Barney Osborn pressured Lisa. If he had no possible way of doing it, then that ruled him out. Or as far as anyone could

prove. But I hoped there was something in the past that might stand up. The past is a dim, uncertain thing. A lot of dirt, a lot of broken memories. But if you rummage long enough, you can usually find something.

I bought a paper downtown. It had Lisa's picture on an inside page. I tore out the picture and headed for the *Star-Chronicle* Building. A few minutes past noon. I picked up coffee and a dog at Uncle Ermel's portable lunch stand outside the building and then went in to look up some of my old friends who supposedly should have been guzzling scotch straight from a bottle and shouting, "Copy boy!" every five minutes, and coming up with the solution to the nation's biggest murder. All my friends today were sweating silently over their typewriters. I talked them into letting me into the morgue. The sun blazed in on the hot dusty room. I pulled the shade but it didn't help much.

I took off my coat and rolled up my sleeves.

I went through four years of Saturday newspapers.

Saturday, the *Star-Chronicle* runs big ads on its entertainment pages with pictures of the local night club attractions. I was searching for a woman. Women tied in naturally with Barney Osborn. And Tony had let slip one thrown-away sentence about Lisa doing a little singing, back when he met her. Not in any of Osborn's joints, but I didn't give a damn about that. She sang. That counted.

Four years weren't enough. So I made it five. No good. Six? Sorry. The sun slanted lower and a fly buzzed in the oven air. Eight years. Toward the end of the war. That put her as a kid of twenty. Fresh and young. And by heaven, there she was! *Vocalovely Laura Trent, currently featured at Barney Osborn's Rocket Club.* The Rocket Club had been a hole, one of the steps leading up to Osborn's current Orlando. The same dark, small intense face.

Younger, but the same. Laura Trent who later locked the door of her past behind her and became Mrs. Tony Rizzulo. Lisa something. I didn't know what her maiden name had been. I bet it wasn't Trent.

What was in that past?

I threw the newspaper carelessly back in the file and headed for my favorite small bar. A big blond guy named Desmond Hines is perhaps the most dignified of the town's bartenders. A gold-mine of information. He knows the caste of bartenders like I know the nicks on my face after shaving. I matched Des for the beer and lost.

"Now," I said, "do you remember the Rocket Club?"

"I do," he said solemnly, nodding his blond-gray bull head. "Ran when the machine gun plant was going full force. Lot of soldiers used to come over from Fort Carlin. Closed up after the war, though."

"You get the prize," I told him. "Now think back seven years. Do you know who was tending bar in this burg that far back?"

He drew himself up proudly. "Mr. Horn, I can tell you who was tending bar on Black Friday, if you want to know."

"Who was it at the Rocket?"

"Frank Winfield," he said immediately.

"Any good?"

"Uh-uh. Slopped soda in the glass like he was mixing a batch of feed for the hogs. No sense of delicacy." His thumb and forefinger made a little motion in the air.

"Winfield still working?"

"No, he retired . . . let's see . . . last June or July. A pretty old man."

"I don't suppose you would know where I could find him?"

He stared at me levelly, a grin hovering at the corners of his broad mouth. "Try the county old people's home."

I almost leaped off the stool. I didn't give him a five. That would have been an insult. I got into my car and went roaring out Highway 1 toward Millsburg. It was almost nine, a hot twilight, and I hoped the old people would still be up. High on a

hill far back from the road sat the home, a ramshackle wooden structure where only a few lights gleamed.

I raced the motor up the hill. I went under the big trees sighing gently in the breeze, and up the steps. Around me on the porch I caught shadows of movement. The glow of a cigar ash. The click of checkers. Ancient, dusty sounds. A stout woman came when I rang the bell.

I took off my hat. "Pardon me, but could I see Frank Winfield?"

"A relative?" she asked in a soft voice.

"No, ma'am, I'm a detective. It's very important."

"Step inside. I'll see if Mr. Winfield's still up."

Mr. Winfield came shuffling into the dim sitting room, a copy of the *National Geographic* in one blue-veined hand. His white hair was plastered down over his forehead, but there was still a faint spring in his step.

I explained who I was. He took one of my cigarettes and puffed at it as if he hadn't had one in a long time. I brought up the subject of the Rocket Club. Then I brought up the subject of Laura Trent. I showed him the picture of Lisa I had torn from the newspaper. He remembered that, too.

"Yes, she was a pretty girl. I was tending bar. Mr. Osborn ran the place. What was his first name?"

"Barney," I said.

"Yes, Barney." He frowned. "He was no good, Mr. Horn. Is he still around?"

"Yes," I said grimly. "But not for long, I hope."

He sighed. "Ah, yes, that Miss Trent was a lovely little black-haired girl. I remember her singing one song . . . I can't remember the name, though I always liked it. . . ."

"Look," I said, trying to be patient, "did Miss Trent ever have any trouble with Osborn?"

"Why yes, she did. There was quite a bit of talk, I remember. Among the other bartenders and some of the musicians. He

took her out quite a bit. Then one evening, in the dressing room, I remember hearing a scream, and she walked out, without any coat. It was raining. All the soldiers stared at her. Mr. Osborn looked very angry. I . . ."

I got up quickly. "If I need it, will you tell me that story again?"

He smiled gently. "Of course, of course I will." He snubbed out his cigarette in a tray as if he were sad. He had smoked it down to almost nothing.

"Don't you get any cigarettes out here?" I asked.

"Only ten a week." A wan smile. "Unless you have enough money to buy more."

I took out some bills.

"No, no," he said sternly, "I couldn't . . ."

I pressed the bills into his hand. "As one smoker to another." I turned and walked out of the place, across the sighing shadowy porch before he could say another word.

**I** HEADED back to the city in a blaze of speed. I had it, I had it all, or nearly all of it. Tony the hothead. If he ever found out about Lisa's affair with Osborn, even though there was nothing to it but maybe some drinks and a little necking and nothing else, he'd go crazy. Sure, Tony the hothead. Lisa wanted to protect him. Wanted more than anything to make sure that he never knew there was a slightly shady side to her past. Tony wouldn't have stood that. He couldn't stand it now, but maybe he'd have to.

Because it chained Osborn to Lisa's death. Osborn wants to make a quick buck. Tony should take a dive. Get to Tony through Lisa, with Foss doing the actual contact work, for a cut, of course. Lisa debating, worrying, tormenting herself. Agreeing. I could see her. Sitting over the breakfast table, wondering whether she could ask Tony to throw the fight. And she couldn't do it. Damn it, she was too decent to wreck

an honest guy, even if it meant his throwing her over. So she never lived up to the bargain.

Osborn had evidently never planned on that. He thought it would all work out. At the last minute, when Tony was striding into the ring under the lights, someone came to see Lisa. Someone who found out that she had welched. Someone who killed her for it.

I heard a siren whining behind me. I cut down my speed sharply, swung off the boulevard, cut around some more corners and drifted into a more leisurely line of traffic. I headed for home. Rover Boy needed a nice reward of some hot chocolate. I had done a decent day's work, I figured.

But the day wasn't over yet.

My street was dark. I parked in the lot and went up in the service elevator. One of those things you do on the impulse of the moment. I closed the elevator door and started down the hall. My flat's got two doors. A front door by the main elevator and a door off the kitchen at the back.

I rounded the corner of the hall. The kitchen door stood open perhaps half an inch. Inside, darkness. We don't have windstorms up on my floor, and there aren't any maids. I don't keep the doors locked, but I keep them shut. Nobody would burgle any of my junk either. That meant one thing.

I flattened myself against the wall, slapping my coat. I knew it was hopeless even as I did it. My Army .45 was inside, in my desk. I don't usually carry it around with me. So there I was, with somebody named Death crouching in my kitchen.

I could beat it back to the elevator and get the cops. No I couldn't, either. I had a good hunch that whoever had finished Lisa and Foss was waiting for me too. I promised Tony something. No cop would take this guy in. I couldn't ever look Tony straight in the eye again if I ran out now.

I jumped fast, my shoulder slamming the door open. Before anything could happen,



## COFFIN CORNER

I was flattened against the wall next to the whining refrigerator. He couldn't see me, but I could see him in the light from the open doorway. Jitters. He had them, too. The special kind of jitters he got when he was ready to blast somebody to pieces.

"Hello, Horn." He purred it. "You sure make a mess of things."

I kept my mouth shut.

"Barney's got some friends on the *Star-Chronicle*, too. You left the newspaper sticking out of the file. The one with Riz-zulo's wife's picture on it. I was tailing you." he added, "up to then. After that, I just came here to wait for you. You know what I came for?"

"I never was very good at guessing," I said. "I never was very good at spotting tails, either." Halfway through the last sentence, I let go.

I hit the floor in a dive, going for his feet. My face slid along the old linoleum as his gun roared over my head. I bowled into him, knocking him into the kitchen table with a clatter. I went past him into the living room, dodging fast. He let go with another slug. I clawed the desk open and got the .45 out. Throwing myself to the right, I snapped a shot. Because of the motion, I only got his arm. It was enough. He bolted like a jackrabbit and headed out the kitchen door with a real case of jitters. He was no good when the other fellow had a gun.

By the time I picked myself up from the floor and rearranged my arms and legs, ladies were screaming in the hallway and I knew Jitters was beyond catching. I opened the living room door and pacified the two old maids from across the hall. My face must have been white as chalk. "Cleaning my gun, ladies," I said. They knew I was lying but I slammed the door in their faces. The manager would contact me in the morning.

I turned on the lights. My hand was shaking. Old Pete was definitely not con-

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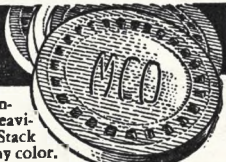
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## DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

structed of iron. I fixed myself a whole glass of hot chocolate and drank it down. Then I took the butcher knife and pried Jitters' slug out of the wall by the refrigerator. I tossed it up and down in my palm and headed for the phone. I finally got Lt. MacPhee at his home.

"Forgot to ask you something this morning," I said.

"Well?"

"What kind of a slug killed Lisa Rizulo?"

"From a thirty-eight special. The same for that Foss fellow."

"Thanks, that's all."

"Horn, what the hell have you. . . ."

I canceled his angry bellow by putting down the phone. I breathed a long deep sigh. I took a look at the mangled slug.

Lisa and Foss. Thirty-eight special.

The same as I had in my hand.



so I HAD it, the whole dirty picture. Barney Osborn, with his peroxide-streaked hair, had put the finger on Lisa. Jitters had done the job. I walked back slowly into the kitchen and lit a cigarette. I could go running to Lt. MacPhee. Or I could go straight to Barney Osborn and make him look down the business end of my .45 and threaten to blow a hole in him if he didn't spill his guts about the whole mess.

The second choice appealed to me most.

Barney was not the kind of boy to pull a trigger himself. He kept his fingers too clean for that. If I could get to him when he was alone, I had a good hunch I could pressure him into talking.

The phone book didn't tell me where Barney lived. I picked up my .45, shoved in a fresh clip and jammed it into my belt. Flicking out the lights, I headed downstairs. The old maids were gabbling loudly behind their door. A smile twisted across



**COFFIN CORNER**

my face and I'll bet it was a sour smile.

The luminous green numerals on my watch showed a little after eleven. I got my car out of the lot and headed for the Ladonga Beach Apartments. Chances were Crystal Claire had seen the inside of Barney Osborn's apartment more than once.

A pair of headlights kept an irritating two blocks behind me. The sky started to drip with a thin hot rain that sizzled on the hood. I got my wipers going, and by that time, I couldn't tell one pair of headlights from another through the splattered water on my rear window.

So I hit the through highway doing sixty-five and counted on the rain to slow them up too. Lights burned in most of the cottages. Crystal's was dark. Well, she wouldn't be home from her warbling job this soon. I drove by and parked a block down the street in a patch of shadow, my motor running. I waited for half an hour. One delivery truck went by. Another fifteen and still the tail didn't show.

I got out of the car, feeling the warm sticky rain hit me. I hot-footed it past the office and down the tile walk. From one cottage, feminine laughter drifted through an open window. Ice tinkled softly in a glass, and violins sighed out *The Breeze and I*. I shook the water off my face and tried the door. Unlocked. Maybe I could find a good magazine to read until Crystal got home.

Well, I wouldn't have had to sit in the car for all that time. My tail had caught up with me. They were waiting for me inside.

I pushed the door open and stepped through. Somebody else pushed it shut, fast. I started to turn. Two big arms got hold of me and they wouldn't let go, no matter how I twisted. I heard hoarse, heavy breathing. Hands slapped my suit-coat lightly, yanked the coat open and took my gun. "I got it, boss," a voice said.

The foyer lights went on. Barney Os-

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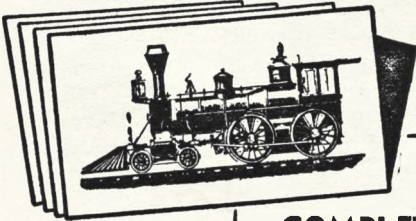
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## DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

born stood there, hand poised by the switch, a mean rattlesnake smile on his puffy lips. Jitters was with him! Evidently he'd gotten the arm bandaged, but crusty brown still stained the hole in his coat sleeve. I twisted my head to get a look at the pug holding me. He relaxed his grip and gave me a meaty palm on the jaw, turning on the shooting stars. "Don't do that again, Horn," he growled. I recognized Zeck, one of the local free-lance hoods.

"I'm afraid the rain didn't help you much in shaking us," Barney said, like he was making party talk. "I own these little apartments, Horn." He grinned. "The manager let me know there was a strange party hanging around Crystal's place the other day. We figured you were coming here."

"And to think you were sitting right outside my place," I growled. "I could have blasted you down right then."

Osborn shook his head. "Jitters gave me a call right after he got away from you. Jitters is sore about getting shot. Horn."

Jitters didn't say anything. He didn't have to. He just nodded his head, shaking more than ever. I saw twin headstones, with my name on them, mirrored in his eyes. I was afraid he'd let go with my .45 any minute.

Osborn turned toward the living room. "Bring him in here, Zeck."

Zeck half shoved, half kicked me forward, uttering little grunts now and then to let me know I was a job. He didn't have to worry. I couldn't have gotten out of those gorilla hands if I tried. Osborn fixed himself a drink at Crystal's little bar and sat down. Zeck shoved me down in a chair and stood behind me, hands on my neck. It was a most uncomfortable feeling.

Barney lifted his glass. The muted light caught the amber glow of the liquor. "Let's have your wake, Horn," he said. "Before you die." He sipped the glass at me in a mocking salute and gulped it down. Jitters grabbed it and refilled it for him.

## COFFIN CORNER

He got less friendly then. "Now," he said, "I suppose you've got the whole picture."

I nodded. "Everything from Laura Trent and the Rocket Club to what kind of a slug killed Harry Foss. The cops know that last too. If they pull Jitters in, he better get rid of his armament or they'll lock him up."

"Don't say that!" Jitters fairly screamed.

Barney waved his hand. His eyes had steel glints in them. "You sure got yourself in a mess by nosing around."

"Rizzulo's my pal," I said quietly.

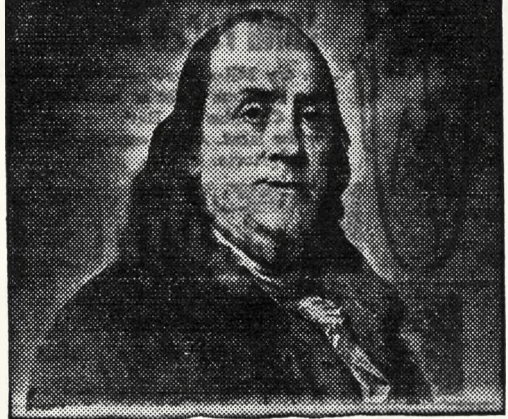
Barney guffawed. But coldly. "He's my pal, too. When the re-match comes up I'm going to put the heat on Tony-boy himself. I'll give him a story about his wife that'll make his hair curl. I'll promise to shoot it to every newspaper in the country unless he takes a dive. I understand that boy. Rather than see her name dragged through the mud, he'll dive. I can collect, and when his rating drops I can buy him cheap. And build him back up to a real first-class pug. It'll be a big payoff."

And damn it, he was right! With Lisa dead, Tony'd take that dive rather than see her memory slashed in black and white across the scandal sheets. It would be the death of him. In another ten years, under Barney's control, the sap would be gone from his body and he'd be playing the tank towns. Then his brain would go fuzzy. Barney would stake him out as a club fighter. He'd end up mooching drinks, a has-been with fried brains. *Oh, no . . .*

It made me boil. I made a play out of the chair. Zeck's grip had relaxed, but he caught me with a rabbit punch and dropped me back down. They lit up the fireworks again. I saw Barney come reeling toward me through a gray haze. He grabbed my coat. His mouth twisted into a dirty knot of hate. "You won't spoil this payoff, Horn. You're in for a nice long sleep." He waved his hand.

Zeck cut loose and it didn't take me long

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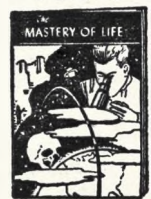
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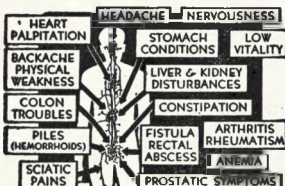
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## DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

to go sliding down into the dark tunnel.

I heard the roar of a motor. It separated from the roar in my head, and I opened my eyes. I was squeezed between Zeck and Barney in the front seat of a car. I could feel the end of the .45 pressing my neck from the back seat. I shook my head. "Baby's awake," Jitters said from behind.

Barney didn't even turn to look at me. His face was chiseled, hard, pasty-colored stone. The dash lights made him look like he had a case of gangrene. Not a pretty sight.

I got a smell of the air through the open car window. Hot, humid air. I heard insects rattling. Bug-squashes dotted the windshield. There were bugs in that number only in one part of town.

The river.

"Hey," I said.

Barney regarded me with glittering eyes. "What is it?"

"One part of the picture isn't clear. Foss."

Barney laughed shortly. "Oh, him. He just got too smart. He told me he'd spill to the papers if he didn't get fifty-one per cent of the take from Tony's re-match. He was nuts." With a light shrug, Barney dispensed with the corpse of Foss.

The car lurched. Zeck swung the wheel and we went bucketing down a dirt road between walls of two-foot high weeds. There was nothing out here. No houses, no lights.

**Z**ECK stopped the car. He got out and opened the door. I saw the black oily shine of water before Barney reached over and thumbed out the lights. He pulled me roughly from the car and herded me up the steps of a slat-walled shanty. "What's this?" I asked. "Your summer home?"

"This is the cemetery, wise guy," Jitters snarled. "Go on in."

Zeck shoved me up against the wall. He came around in front of me and pulled out



## COFFIN CORNER

a knife. It was one of those jobs tough kids carry. Flick a button and the blade flies out with a loud whack. Zeck leaned over me, his horse face leering. His breath smelled like a garbage pail. The knife point touched my throat.

Osborn stooped down. "Let's hurry and get this over with." He pulled up a rusty iron ring. The trap squeaked, and below I could see black oil-shimmering water. That was one place I didn't want to be. I could float all the way out into the ocean.

Osborn motioned sharply. "Get over here, Horn." Zeck drew back his knife. We were all neatly placed, like a figure in a chess game. Jitters to the right, nearest the wall, staring stupidly now and then at the moths. He hadn't lowered the .45 though it was pointed straight ahead at the wall, and not at me. To my left, Zeck with the knife in his left hand. It would be awkward for him to swing around. Barney Osborn stood opposite me, with no weapon. He held the trap door open. The edge of it dug into his soft belly.

I took a step forward. In that instant, Jitters turned his head away from the moths, aware that he should be watching the proceedings. I saw his head swing toward me, a nasty grin splitting his cheeks.

I threw my weight to the right. Jitters slammed into the wall, squashing his wounded arm against the boards. He let out a howl. Osborn jumped back, letting the trap fall all the way open. He came for me and so did Zeck, knife glittering.

Jitters' face screwed up in pain. I clubbed his forearm and got the .45 from his slack fingers. I turned fast and let go with a shot. It caught Zeck in the chest and spun him to the left, off balance. He teetered over the edge of the opening, yelling wildly. He threw the knife at me. It clattered harmlessly on the floor. My finger jerked almost automatically and the .45 blammed and Zeck dropped through the trap. The image of his blasted head, red and gray ruin,

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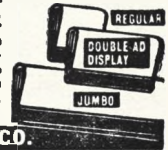
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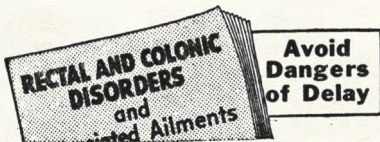
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## DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

splashing into the black water and disappearing, seared itself into my mind.

Osborn slammed the trap closed and ran for the door. He had it open and was gone in the darkness before I could stop him. I ducked through after him into the steaming night. I heard his feet pounding on dirt. The car door opened. A spanging sound, like a glove compartment being unlocked. Then a red eye winked at me and a shot slammed into the wall of the shack over my head.

I ran forward in a crouch, throwing myself behind the cover of some of the tall weeds. The car door slammed once more and the headlights flashed on. The engine ground into life. I started to run. I stumbled and got up again, cursing. The car rolled forward. The headlights blazed into life.

I could see his face behind the windshield, contorted into a crazy mask of determination. He had me trapped between the bumper and the shack wall. I didn't have time to throw myself out of the way. So I raised the .45 straight in front of me and pumped the rest of the clip through the windshield into his face.

The glass went to pieces first. It shattered in spider-web patterns of white lines. Then the lines became red, and they were lines of blood, spreading out across Osborn's face. That face turned into a sheet of blood from forehead to jaw. His foot, whipping in the constrictions of death, must have caught the brake pedal. The car jerked to a quivering halt and the engine died. Barney Osborn slumped forward, the blood dripping out through the broken windshield.

I stopped breathing for a second. I closed my eyes and just enjoyed how it felt to be alive. When pain welled up in my chest, I took in a deep breath. I heard footsteps from the cottage. I looked up.

In the headlight glow, Jitters teetered in the doorway, a hurt pout on his lips. He blinked. He shook like a marionette on a string. "Hey . . ." he whimpered. "Hey



## COFFIN CORNER

... my arm started bleeding again. ..."

"Hey ... I got to see a doctor. ..." He teetered forward, trying to come down the steps.

He fell.

Somehow he got all twisted up as he fell, and he seemed to bend like a pretzel. Finally he slumped at the foot of the stairs, his head cocked awry on his shoulders. A long mournful scream, like a hound dog's howl, went up from his lips. I heard him calling me frantically.

"Horn ... Horn ... help me, Horn. ..."

I went over and knelt down. I put the muzzle of the empty .45 lightly against his stomach. "Get me a doctor ... Horn ... please. ..."

"Why should I?"

"I'm hurt *bad*, Horn. ..."

"I want the story. How you killed Lisa Rizzulo and Harry Foss. How Barney Osborn was working the fix. I want it all."

"I'll do it, I'll do it," he screamed in a dry whisper.

**I** WENT over to the car. It was no pleasure moving Barney Osborn's body. I got sick in the bushes. Finally, I eased myself onto the bloodstained seat covers and got the car going. I backed up, turned around and finally found a motel office down the highway that had a phone.

The bottle redhead of fifty who saw me come in gave me the big eye. I picked up the dial phone off her desk without asking permission.

"Keep quiet," I said and started dialing.

I got through to Lt. MacPhee.

"Pete Horn," I said. I turned to the woman. "What's the name of this place?"

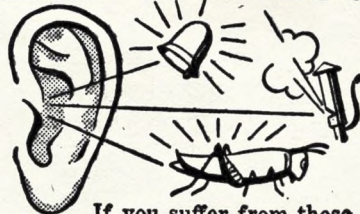
"The E-Z-Rest Motel," she said.

I repeated the name to MacPhee. "Out on the highway. You know the spot?"

"I'll find it." His voice grew wheedling. "Listen, Horn, what have you been doing out. ..."

I cut him off. "I've got three killers."

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## DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

Zeck's mangled head flashed into my mind. "No, only two. Bring an ambulance. One of them's still alive."

"Who is it?"

"Barney Osborn and his nervous friend."

MacPhee whistled softly. "I'll be seeing you." The phone slammed down at his end.

MacPhee and company came roaring down the highway a few minutes later, sirens blaring. I showed Osborn's car to the lieutenant and then we drove down to the shack on the river. They collected Osborn's body and the ambulance boys got hold of Jitters, who still screamed.

"What's the verdict?" I asked.

"The poor sap's got a broken neck," the doc told us. "But I think he'll live."

I thought of Lisa Rizzulo. "That's tough," I said, not meaning a word of it.

MacPhee and I piled in the back seat of one of the squad cars and headed back to town. I gave him the works as we rode. "Jitters ought to be willing to fill in enough to support what I told you," I said. "He'll want to get off with life, if he can." Then I made MacPhee promise to kill the angle about Laura Trent once working for Osborn.

MacPhee grunted. "You didn't have to kill Osborn, really."

I let out a snort. "He tried to kill me."

"Yeah, but . . ."

"I had to kill him." I stared at MacPhee hard. "For personal reasons. He thought up the whole thing in the first place."

MacPhee sank back against the cushions. "Yeah, I suppose so."

They dropped me at my place. I staggered in through the lobby.

I locked myself in my apartment, drank some hot chocolate, showered and fell into the rack.

Noon the next day, the phone was jangling. I yawned and reached out for it. The voice woke me up.

"Hello, Pete. Tony."

"Hi, kid."

**COFFIN CORNER**

"It's . . . it's in the papers this morning, Pete." He sounded solemn. "Thanks."

"I told you I'd do what I could. I was lucky."

"I'm going on a trip Just by myself."

"Call me when you get back."

"I will." He hung up.

I drove out to the Ladonga Beach Apartments that evening. Crystal Claire opened the door for me. I reached out and took hold of her shoulders, gave her a kiss.

"Mister," she said, "be careful. You'll burn the ribs."

"The barbecued ribs?" Yes sir, she was something. Her red hair fell down over the shoulders of a black dress that, like the bathrobe, did things for her.

"What ribs did you think I meant?" she asked.

"I wouldn't know," I said with feigned innocence. It was going to be a very pleasant evening. . . .



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Please RUSH in a plain wrapper my order for LOBEX @ \$2.98 per jar. I can return the jar for a full refund of \$2.98 if I am not thrilled with the results.

- I am enclosing \$2.98 with order. You pay postage.
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Print Address .....

City ..... Zone .... State .....



# CAR OWNERS SHOVE \$10 BILLS IN YOUR POCKET..

When you show them America's greatest  
auto seat cover values!

Including

## BAMBOO

Newest Seat  
Cover Sensation!



FIESTA



BULLFIGHTER



BLACK EBONY

## BIG MONEY, FULL OR SPARE TIME!

Want extra money—plenty of it day after day? Then rush your name and address at once for Free Sample Outfit that will start you taking orders from car owners everywhere for Key expertly tailored Auto Seat Covers. EXCLUSIVE NEW PATTERNS to fit every make and model car. No one can compete with you in wide choice, in quality—and in expert tailoring that makes covers fit like a pair of gloves. And when you quote prices that are only a fraction of what the customer expects to pay, brother! You make money hand over fist writing up the fast orders! Line includes nationally advertised sensations like BLACK EBONY Saran, in the new Black and Silver Watermelon Stripe, beautiful beyond description BAMBOO, luxurious, brilliant FIESTA, colorful BULL FIGHTER PLAIDS,

plus many other exclusive patterns to choose from, all at unbelievably low prices. It's no trick at all to make big money whether you sell full time or just in spare time. OPPORTUNITY TO SELL AT WHOLESALE TO GARAGES, SERVICE STATIONS, ETC.

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GIVE MAKE, YEAR AND MODEL OF YOUR CAR. No experience needed. Make all the extra money you need easily just by showing! Every car owner a "hot" prospect. YEAR AROUND STEADY PROFITS. No investment to make. Actual seat covers given to producers for OWN use! Write for Free Selling Kit and actual samples TODAY!

**KEY PRODUCTS CORP., Dept. 46-B**  
800 NORTH CLARK STREET CHICAGO 10, ILLINOIS

#### KEY PRODUCTS CORP..

Dept. 46-B  
800 N. Clark St., Chicago 10, Ill.  
Rush Free Sample Outfit at once. (If you own a car include the following information):

Make . . . . Year . . . . Model . . . .

Name \_\_\_\_\_

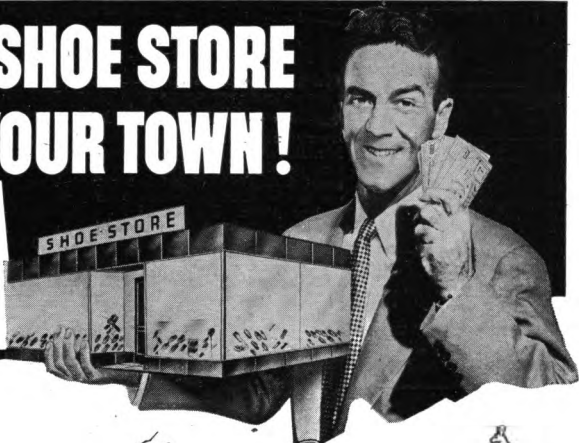
Address \_\_\_\_\_

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# RUN THE BEST "SHOE STORE BUSINESS" IN YOUR TOWN!

**Not Just Shoes...  
But SPECIAL KINDS  
OF SHOES!**



**Big Full or Spare Time Profits!**

**Satisfy Customers Most Stores  
Are Not Able to Take Care Of!**

HERE'S THE BUSINESS YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED! YEAR ROUND — REPEAT ORDERS FROM FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, EVERYBODY — STEADY PROFITS — UNLIMITED PROSPECTS — A QUALITY PRODUCT THAT'S NATIONALLY KNOWN! Start full or spare time with a "shoe store business" in your pocket. No expense of overhead, lights, etc. . . . your big profit is ALL YOURS!

We set you up in this fine business FREE. See how easy it is to make BIG MONEY with Mason's new "Wonder Line" of shoes for men and women. Wonderful style, extra-comfort features; amazing range of sizes and widths. You feature over 150 styles of dress, sport and work shoes. Sizes from 5 to 15, widths AAAA to EEEE. No wonder no shoe store in your town can compete with you!

Make hundreds of extra dollars every month by selling specially designed Mason air-cushioned service shoes to filling station attendants, garage men, postmen, truck drivers, grocers, other people who work in stores, offices, industries. Watch your customer list grow—see how easy it is to earn exciting cash profits when customers RE-ORDER from you

**EXCLUSIVE FEATURES SELL  
MASON SHOES QUICKLY FOR YOU!**

Mason Shoes are nationally known for extra comfort features. Just hand prospects your Cut-away 10-second Air-Cushion Demonstrator. When they feel the foamy-soft, heel-to-toe Velvet-eez Air-Cushion they realize how wonderfully comfortable it is to "Walk on air!" Then point out the sturdy steel shank for extra strength, plus special Air-Cushion Arch Support. Mason Velvet-eez shoes are the only footwear sold direct that bears the famed Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal. Because these fine shoes are NOT sold in stores, people must buy from YOU!

**WE START YOU ON THE WAY TO  
EXCITING PROFITS FREE!**

No need to invest a cent, ever. We send you our Powerful Selling Outfit that has proved to be a real money-maker for so many thousands of men—absolutely FREE! We back you up with National Advertising, proved Sales Aids, even MORE, as soon as you show us you are really interested in making BIG MONEY.

**"TERRIFIC INCOME!"**



Edward McCarty of Illinois says: "The day I started to sell Mason Velvet-eez shoes was the luckiest day of my life! My income now is simply terrific!"



**MASON SHOE MFG. CO.**

Dept. MA-114  
Chippewa Falls,  
Wisconsin

**STEEL SAFETY  
TOE SHOES!**

The last word in foot safety! You feature Steel Safety Toe Shoes in many good-looking styles. Workers want to save feet from injury. Safety Toe shoes help do the job — put EXTRA dollars into your bank account!



**OUTSTANDING  
LEATHERS!**

Imported Australian Kangaroo leather. Calfskin—lustrous Shell Cordovan — Rugged Horsehide—actual shoe samples of these fine quality leathers furnished FREE to qualified men!



**NEOPRENE and  
GRO-CORK  
SOLES and  
HEELS!**

Work shoes have special features for different occupations. Oil-Resistant Du Pont Neoprene soles, heels, Gro-Cork Slip-Resistant soles, heels wanted by service station men, garage men, factory workers, thousands in other occupations—help make shoes so fast-selling!



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Foamy-soft Air-Cushion innersole cushions feet on thousands of air bubbles. Customers rave about comfort of "walking on air!" You get actual Air-Cushion demonstrator. Just say "Feel that Cushion." When customers do—they buy!



**SEND TODAY . . . Start Your Own  
Profitable Business RIGHT AWAY!**

DO YOU want to make steady EXTRA money? Do you want real security? Do you want to be able to afford the things you've always only dreamed about?—then send this coupon TODAY! We will rush your powerful Free Selling Outfit that features over 150 fast-selling Mason Shoe styles for men and women—Air-Cushion Demonstrator, How-To-Make-Money Booklet, everything you need to make money from the first hour!

**SEND COUPON FOR FREE OUTFIT!**

Mr. Ned Mason, Dept. MA-114  
Mason Shoe Mfg. Co.  
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

I want to make really BIG MONEY with Mason shoes! Rush my FREE Selling Outfit so I can start running the best "Shoe Store Business" in my town.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....



Night after night . . . he kept his eyes on the  
**"Bachelor Girl"** in apartment 8-A!

Every night detective Richie McAllister trained his binoculars on the brunette in apartment 8-A. He watched her get up in the morning, and go to bed at night. He waited . . . until the missing killer returned!

Then—gun in hand—Richie crept along the window ledge. Had he **GUESSED RIGHT** about the "bachelor girl" across the way? In a few nerve-shattering seconds he would know . . . You'll enjoy

**THE NIGHT WATCH**



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EACH INDIVIDUALLY BOUND  
 FULL SIZED  
 HARD COVERED NEW BOOKS

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by **REX STOUT**  
 "I killed that cop!" said the scandal-hungry brunette. Was she lying . . . crazy . . . or telling the **TRUTH**? Nero Wolfe has to find out fast!

**BLACK WIDOW**

by **PATRICK QUENTIN**  
 A girl dead in your apartment! Her suicide note blames you. Her angry friends say she was **YOUR** mistress. But **YOU** have seen her **ONLY ONCE** in your whole life!

**NEVER BET YOUR  
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by **GEORGE H. COXE**  
 Every cent the murdered gambler owned was willed to Dave Barnum. But Dave had to **BET HIS LIFE** to prove HE wasn't the killer!

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by **MANNING COLES**  
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