

# MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

35 CENTS

THE PICKPOCKET  
BY **Mickey Spillane**



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ANNIVERSARY ISSUE  
DECEMBER 25th

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JOHN McCLOUD, *Editor*  
CHAS. W. ADAMS, *Art Director*

HAL WALKER, *Managing Editor*  
R. E. DECKER, *Business Manager*

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# Crime of Passion

*A Shell Scott Story*

**BY RICHARD S. PRATHER**

THERE must have been twenty cars in the drive when I got to the address in Malibu. I parked my Cad behind a new Lincoln convertible and walked to the front door of

*Shell Scott had been invited to the party. There was no reason for a guy to punch him just because he knocked on the door.*

a two-story, hundred-thousand-dollar house as modern as now. A small fortune in rubber plants, ferns, bananas, hibiscus fronted the house and bordered the drive. From the sea's edge fifty yards or so away I could hear the boom of surf, and the tangy bracing scent of the ocean was exhilarating in my nostrils.

This was a warm Sunday afternoon; Sheldon Scott, Investigations — my downtown L. A. office — was closed, and I was invited to a party. A Hawaiian party at that: luau, roast pig, the works. From behind the house somewhere I heard a happy squeal. A happy feminine squeal. Sounded like a good wild party.

There was a lot of hellish yelling and whooping. At the top of six cement steps I found a buzzer on the right of the massive door, poked it as chimes went off to the tune of *How Dry I Am*.

I could hear somebody running toward the door. Sounded like somebody barefooted. "Oh, Johnny!" a gal yelled, "Here I come, Johnny!" There was the slap-slap of bare feet and then the door swung wide and a beautiful blonde babe holding a highball glass in her hand stood there framed in the doorway beaming at me.

She cried, "Where you been, Johnny?" and then she began staring at me curiously.

Well, that was nothing to what I was doing to her. Very softly, so softly that I am amazed she heard me, I said, "I'm not Johnny, I'm only Shell Scott, but don't let that —"

Wham, the door slammed in my face. Feet went slap-slap back the way they'd come. What the hell, I leaned on the buzzer some more. Christ knew what I'd get next time. I was even thinking maybe I should yell, "Hey, Johnny's here!" and stand back.

There weren't any footsteps this time. The door opened and a guy about five feet, eight inches tall came outside and glared up at me. The guy was about thirty-five, wearing vivid swim trunks and carrying a highball glass. He was six inches shorter than I, but only about ten pounds under my 205. He was built like a .45 automatic, and he was loaded. "Johnny, huh?" he said thickly, then he dropped his highball glass onto the cement with a crash, and socked me on the chin with his right hand.

I was caught completely by surprise — to tell the truth, I'd been trying to peek around him and get another glimpse of that blonde — so I didn't even have time to jerk my chin. He got me solidly and knocked me clear down those six steps onto the driveway. "The hell with you, Johnny," he said.

The door slammed again. Behind him.

I started to get up, then changed my mind. Maybe it was time for a few cool thoughts. Everything was going around and around. That short guy packed a powerful punch, and though he hadn't knocked me out, he'd made the afternoon a couple shades darker. I fumbled in my coat for cigarettes and my lighter, got a weed lit, and propped an elbow under me while I dragged smoke into my lungs.

The numbers above the massive door danced a little as I stared at them, but they were the right numbers. This was the right house. I shook my head and the ringing went away, everything stopped going around, settled down. It had been less than an hour ago that Dolly had phoned me from here and told me to fly out and bring my trunks, that there was one hell of a party going on. She had said, "Come on, Scotty boy, you come on out here ri' now. Bes' li'l ol' party you ever did see. You got my pers'nal invitation." And so on. Naturally I had dropped everything and headed for Malibu. She'd convinced me that I'd be wel-

come. Dolly had said she'd save me a drink and a kiss if I wanted them, and I wanted them. But maybe, I thought, Dolly had been out of her mind. Some welcome.

A girl's voice near me said, "Boy! I thought *I* was drunk. Whoo. You better go home."

"I just got here." I glanced up and was surprised to find that the gal had walked clear up to within a foot of me. She was wearing a brief bathing suit and from this angle she didn't look half bad. I decided that from any angle she wouldn't look half bad. I couldn't tell how tall she was, but she looked wonderful, and had long red hair and blue eyes.

"What are you doing down there on the ground?" she asked me.

"I'm resting, stupid." I felt ugly.

She squatted on her heels and looked bicary-eyed at me. "Hi," she said. "I'm Betty."

"Hi, Betty. Your bikini has slipped."

"Has not. That's the way I wear it."

She was a gorgeous babe, but obviously no great shakes for brains. I had another drag of my cigarette, then got to my feet, went up the steps and rang the bell. Nothing happened. I banged on the door and the babe standing down there in the driveway said, "Why'nt you turn the doorknob?"

"Yeah, sure," I said. Talk about stupid babes. I turned the doorknob. The door opened. I laughed sourly and went inside.

There was a hall, rooms opening off it, a couple of which I examined without getting a glimpse of that daredevil who had clipped me. A long hall led toward the rear of the house and out in back there I could hear the whooping and yelling.

I headed that way. Mainly I wanted to find the guy who had socked me, but I would be less than honest if I didn't admit there was hope that I'd see the blonde babe again. And after the way she'd trotted to the front door, maybe there'd be a whole flock of wonderful and beautiful people gadding about out there in back. I quickened my pace, found a door and went through it.

There weren't any beautiful people, but there were about a dozen guys and gals standing around drinking and yakking. Most of them had highballs and one had a bottle. This seemed to be only a fragment of the crowd apparently here, because I could hear a lot of noise and music coming from somewhere closer to the ocean. A path led through the trees and shrubbery toward the sounds, but I couldn't see very far because the grounds were so lushly planted and overgrown.

In this small group here, however, one of the guys was the short, bad-tempered egg who had made the mistake of clobbering me. His back was to me. I walked up close to him, tapped him on the shoulder with my index finger, and when he turned I tapped him on the chin with my

right fist. He got all loose and his eyes rolled a bit and he fell down.

Everybody stared at me. Several of the people seemed shocked, a few merely interested, but the only rise out of anybody was one guy's remark, to nobody in particular: "Some party, huh?" They were all horribly drunk. Another guy, a tall, gangling fellow with sandy hair and a wire-stiff mustache stepped toward me. "Oh, I say," he said mushily. "That was a *rotten* thing to do!"

He was British, and sounded as if he were gargling Schweppes Quinine Water. "That's not quite the way to treat our host, what?" he said cheerfully.

"What?"

"Yes, what. What indeed."

"Oh, shut up. I mean, what? He's the host?"

"Yes, host, old man. Well, toodlee-oo." He wandered off, down the shrub-lined pathway toward all the noise and commotion.

I looked at the guy on the ground. This might ruin the party for me, but I wasn't sorry I'd clobbered him. A big ruby ring on his finger had left a lump on my chin larger than the ruby. Somebody behind me said, "Well, well."

I turned. A gal had just stepped out of the same door I'd come through a few seconds ago. I recognized her. It was the blonde who'd been looking for Johnny. Saying she wore clothes would be, perhaps, an overstatement, since she was bare-

foot and wore a red and black and green sarong that hugged her waist and hips the way I'd have liked to. The blonde hair was shoulder-length, her eyes were huge and brown, and she looked very good to me. Again.

She walked toward me smiling. She took hold of my arm, nodded at the guy on the ground and said, "Did you do that?"

"Yeah."

"He had it coming to him."

"You don't know the half of it."

"You don't know the half of it."

This had gone far enough. I turned her around, held both her arms gently and marched her back into the house. "Lady," I said, "since I rang the bell here things have occurred with revolting rapidity. What's going on here?"

It took her only about a minute to bring sanity into what had seemed madness. This was just one of the rather wild parties that L. Franklin Brevoort — now unconscious — held every weekend here at his Malibu home. He'd been tossing the parties for about a year, and this was a big one — authentic Hawaiian luau, complete with whole roast pig, poi, dancing girls, Hawaiian music.

She interrupted me, "I can't stand him, though. Who can? Oh, you can't blame L. Franklin — everybody calls him L. Franklin — considering that old mace he's got for a wife."

"That old what?"

"Mace. A kind of battle-ax. That's

what everybody calls her. She's pretty gruesome. Anyway, L. Franklin's about the loneliest man in Malibu —"

"Ha. You forget, *I* am in Malibu. And you forget, too, that I saw you in that doorway —"

"Anyway, when the bell rang I figured that was a good excuse to get away from L. Franklin. And I *did* think it was Johnny. My, I was surprised. Wonder where Johnny is?"

She went on to tell me that you had to be very careful not to let L. Franklin get you alone, because he was a regular old rip. "I'm surprised somebody hasn't shot him," she said, "the way he's always going around reaching for everybody's women. He's sure a rip. Boy, was he mad when the bell rang and I took off."

"I know. He came outside and knocked me down."

She laughed. "Well, I'm going back to the party. You coming?"

I thought about it while she walked to the door. This seemed like a dandy party, and I hadn't even seen Dolly yet, but I wasn't sure I'd be welcome here after what had happened. Then Elaine turned and said, "You're kind of nice, you know? I like you a lot already. Guess I surprised you when I opened the door."

"Frankly, you hit me harder than L. Franklin did."

She laughed. "I looked pretty good, huh?"

"Well . . . why, yes."

Elaine grinned. "I'll save you a dance," she said, turned and left the house.

Well, if everybody here was crazy, this was no time for me to be sane. I was staying at this here party. If L. Franklin didn't like it, I'd sock him again. I started after Elaine. Outside, somebody was pouring water on L. Franklin. Among other things Elaine had told me that the crux of the party was closer to the beach, about twenty or thirty yards back of the house. She was out of sight, so I headed toward the ocean, following the path. All you had to do was follow the noise. Mixed in with the whooping was music, Hawaiian music. In a minute I came out into a big clearing filled with plenty of movement.

About fifty people were flitting in and out among the trees and shrubs, many of them dancing. Four brown-skinned guys in sarongs were playing on stringed things and drums, and the place was a mass of color. A fifth brown-skinned guy was swinging a wicked-looking sword around and jumping over it while the other men played pulsating Hawaiian music that sounded as if it had a little mambo in it.

This place of Brevoort's was practically a jungle, with all kinds of trees, including palms and eucalyptus, a dozen different kinds of shrubs and tropical plants surrounding the clearing. There were bananas, philodendron, elephant ears,

more hibiscus and lilies and orchids, and plenty of ferns. There were a lot of potted plants standing around, and practically all of the guests were potted, too. Almost everybody here was wearing trunks or swimsuits, most of the gals in bikinis or similarly abbreviated jobs, and a man simply couldn't have asked for a more interesting get-together.

On my right was a 200-pound block of ice, its middle hollowed out and filled with a red punch, two white gardenias and a purple orchid floated on the liquor's surface. Several halves of coconut shells rested on the ice and as I watched a red-headed tomato filled one of the coconut cups, drank the punch, and then let out a yip, shaking her head. It was Betty, the redheaded tomato I'd met in front of the house.

I walked up beside her, had a cup of the punch and almost let out a yip myself. It was so strong they probably had to change the flowers every fifteen minutes. Then I said, "Hi."

She didn't say anything, just smiled and wrapped her arms around me and we started dancing. Then she stopped. "You scratch," she said, looking up at me. "Haven't you got a suit?"

"Sure. In the car."

"Get it. And hurry. We'll have a dance, and a swim. I'm Betty."

I went flying off down the path, changed in the car, and was back in two minutes. Betty, I was pleased to see, was waiting for me. We had

a couple dances, and it was really much better without scratching. Then she said, "Come on," and ran toward the beach. I followed her down the path and caught up with her at the sand's edge.

On our right flames leaped from a pit dug in the sand. "What's the bonfire for?" I asked Betty.

"That's where they'll cook the pig pretty quick," she said. "Big luau. Really doing it right, huh? The pig's for the big dinner later — along with poi and raw fish and I don't know what all. Come on." She raced into the water.

When we got back to the clearing, the music and dancing was getting even wilder. It was almost dark, and somebody grabbed Betty and whirled her away. I didn't try to stop her; there were dozens more around, including the blonde Elaine, who was dancing at the moment. This was marvelous. Nothing was going to get me to leave *this* party. I went over to the punch bowl and had another drink as a woman older than most here, a gal about forty, came up beside me and dipped half a coconut into the punch, gulped the drink 'down, and then had another immediately after it. I shuddered. She weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds, was maybe five-eight, and had a flat, rather unpleasant face.

She looked at me and said, "Dance with me. I'm Mrs. Brevoort. I'm the hostess, so you have to dance with me."



She was soused to the eardrums. I said, "Sure," and latched onto her. We took about four steps and she stopped. "I don't want to dance," she said. "Go wiggle with those naked women."

I swung around eagerly, looking for the naked women, then realized she'd referred to the gals in bikinis. Mrs. Brevoort was dressed in skirt and blouse, and I guessed she'd been trying to have a good time, but not succeeding. It suddenly occurred to me, as I looked at all those lovely, startlingly shaped dolls gyrating near us, that this might well be the first dance Mrs. Brevoort had had — and she'd asked me for it.

I started to make small talk, so small it was almost invisible, but she waved her hand at me and said, "Go away. Go wiggle wi' nake' w'mn." Her eyes were getting glassy. Those two fast punches must have been suddenly catching up with her. I left her at the hollowed-out cake of ice.

It was dark now, and the glow from the fire down on the beach was warm and red; a few Japanese lanterns had been lighted here in the clearing, and a half dozen Hawaiian torches were lighted. I wondered where L. Franklin, the host, was. But then I forgot about him; I was having too much fun to wonder about the host or hostess — it was a typical party. I never did see Dolly.

A couple hours, maybe more, passed in a kind of delightfully Ha-

waiian delirium. And it seemed that the music got more sensual, the dances wilder, the women lovelier. From somewhere came three gals in hula skirts and the music took on a headier beat and the three gals started shaking like maracas. Right in front of me I saw a beautiful blonde gal doing a hula, especially for me it appeared, and it was *my* blonde; it was Elaine.

"Well, hello," I said.

She kept doing her unique hula, unique because it must have been the kind popular before the missionaries came, and she said, "Like?"

"Lovely, lovely." The three gals in hula skirts were stirring up a storm, and somebody yelled that we were all to join in when the spirit moved us. One guy grabbed a little doll and they leaped into the middle of the clearing with the other three gals and started improvising. The music got wilder, more frantic and pulse-stirring. Another guy and gal started jumping around, and soon this seemed less like Malibu than a strip of Hawaiian beach of a hundred years ago.

More guys and gals got up and leaped around, and it seemed there were more bouncing, quive ...g, jiggling and jangling bodies than I'd ever before seen quivering practically in unison. There were squeals and yips and howls among the hulas, and with half the people here already gyrating — the spirit moved me.

I let out a whoop with a lot of

vowels in it so it would sound Hawaiian, and I jumped into the middle of the people letting out *oofs* and *uuffs* and *huuhs* and similar Hawaiian-like sounds, while shaking all over like a plucked banjo string. Elaine came toward me at what seemed a hundred miles an hour, but making little forward progress. The drums kept thudding, throbbing, and suddenly there was nobody at all standing on the sidelines. The last guy, a tall Texan I'd met earlier, let out a "Yahoo" and came twirling around the edge of the crowd hanging onto the hand of a black-haired tomato who was throwing everything at him but the palm trees, while he continued to let out yips like he was calling all the little dogies in Texas. Elaine sort of rammed herself up against me so close that she might have grown there, and in a few moments we were on the edge of the crowd, next to the path leading to the beach.

She spun around and raced down the path away from me. I ran after her.

At the sand's edge she stumbled and I almost caught her, but she regained her balance and ran toward the booming breakers. I followed her past the pit where huge hot coals now glowed, and I saw something from the corner of my eyes that jarred me oddly, but I kept on running. I ran clear past the pit where the pig was now being roasted for the luau dinner later, then I slowed and stopped.

I went back and looked down into the pit dug in the sand, heat bouncing against my face. It did look like a pig at first, not much like a man. It was a man, though. I heard Elaine laughing.

I got down on my hands and knees, moved as close as I could. The guy was face down, but even face up he'd have been unrecognizable, so horribly was he burned. Still sticking out of his throat was the sharp metal spit that would have been used for holding the pig. One arm was outflung, the hand in a somewhat more protected spot than the rest of him, and I could see the big ruby ring on his finger. Mine host.

"Come on! What's the matter with you?" It was Elaine calling me. I could barely see the dim white blur of her body outlined against the darkness of the sea. Behind her a comber broke and frothed in toward us. I stood up and walked toward Elaine.

Five minutes later we were both in the house; I hadn't told Elaine a thing and she was a little angry with me. She pointed out the phone and I told her to wait in the next room, then phoned local Homicide. After that I found Elaine. "Where's the kitchen?" I asked her.

"The what? Don't tell me you brought me here because you're *hungry!*"

I shuddered. "No, but I've got to sober up. I'll explain all of this

later." She led me to the kitchen where I drank half a quart of milk while water boiled for some instant coffee. Elaine stared at me as if I were crazy while I found meat in the icebox, some roast beef, and made a thick, sloppy sandwich with an inch of meat between two slices of french bread. I gulped coffee, grabbed a frying pan and big spoon, then took Elaine's arm and led her back to the clearing where people were still squealing and dancing. "Are you crazy?" Elaine asked me in exasperation.

"Maybe. Hold the frying pan for me, will you?" She shook her head, grabbed the pan. I hit it vigorously with the spoon and yelled, "Chow time, everybody. Chow's on." Not many people paid attention to me; I hadn't expected many to. I walked around the clearing, munching on my sloppy sandwich and saying "Chow, anybody?" to everybody. It didn't happen till I was almost at the punch bowl. Mrs. Brevoort's unpleasant face loomed beside me.

I said, "Hi. Wanna dance?" I blinked drunkenly at her, and nibbled at the beef. She eyed the sandwich, fascinated.

I said, "I'm sorry, but I got so starved I couldn't wait for everybody else. Hope you don't mind, but I carved a little meat off that pig down there in the pit."

"You . . . what?" she said, and her face was already starting to get green.

I said, "I was hungry. There's

plenty more, though. You hungry, Mrs. Brevoort?"

Her mouth dropped open, her lips twitched, and her eyes rolled up in her head. Then she fainted. People around us kept dancing and going, "Uuh!" and making Hawaiian chants.

Half an hour later the police had come and gone. I'd told them on the phone to arrive without sirens, and in the meantime to check on me with the Los Angeles and Hollywood police. As a result, they handled everything quietly and took Mrs. Brevoort away with almost no commotion at all — and let me stay. She spilled everything in the first five minutes: that she knew her husband had just married her for her money and that it was *her* money he used for these weekly parties at which he ignored her, and everybody else ignored her, and she'd caught him on the beach tonight with a babe, waited until the girl went back alone to the clearing, then swatted L. Franklin over the head with the spit and stuck it through his throat. She'd dragged him ten feet through the sand and rolled him in onto the coals.

Elaine said to me, "I still don't know why she fainted when you stuck that ghastly sandwich in her face."

"She thought I was eating her hubby. She'd tossed him into the pig pit."

"I don't get it. Why into the pit?"

“She was all excited. People get excited when they kill people. She thought she could hide him there until she figured out what to do. And she wasn’t acting very logically anyway, it was a crime of passion. She hated parties.”

We were standing beside the melting punch bowl. Both of us had a small drink. A lot of people were still dancing — not around the pit, though. Right after Mrs. Brevoort had fainted I’d sent Elaine scooting down to the beach to make sure nobody *did* reach the pit; nobody had. I said, “I didn’t have the faintest idea who, of these fifty people, might have run the buzzard through. Only the person who’d killed him. though,

would have known what was cooking. Well, at least it was better than having the cops haul everybody down to the station — I was damned if anybody was going to break up this fine party.”

Elaine said, “I still don’t get it all. You mean both the host and hostess are gone?”

“Yeah. They took L. Franklin away, too. So there’s nobody to call off the party. You know, this thing may last for weeks.”

“How long will you last?”

I grinned at her. She laughed softly, whirled and ran toward the beach. I waited about one second, and then turned.

I ran after her.



# The Purple Collar



Tom  
O'Sullivan

*A Novelette*

**BY JONATHAN CRAIG**

*"I just walked in the door," she told the police, "and there was this man hanging from the ceiling. I'd never seen him before in my life."*

THERE'D been a stab-and-assault in the Eighteenth's bailiwick the night before, and all leaves and days off had been cancelled until we caught the guy. My partner, Ben Muller, and I had been scheduled for relief at eight A.M., but

at a quarter past four that afternoon we were still checking out leads. It's all in the day's work, of course, but there are some crimes you just naturally take more interest in than others; and when the stab-and-assault victim happens

to be only nine years old, you don't mind the extra hours and loss of sleep at all.

But at a quarter past four, Control gave the signals and coding that meant the killer had been apprehended, and that all off-duty detective teams should report back to their precincts.

Ben, who was driving our RMP car, sighed and turned onto Broadway, heading back uptown to the Eighteenth.

"I'd a little rather we'd grabbed the guy ourselves," he said. "But now that he's nailed, I got no thoughts but bed. A cold shower, and then ten straight hours of sack-time."

I felt pretty much the same way, and started to say so, when the dash speaker rattled and Control broke in again. This time the lady dispatcher's voice sounded a little sorry for us. The gist of the call was that a suicide had been phoned in from an apartment house at 905 West Fifty-third Street. The assistant M.E. and the tech crew were already there, but the detective team which would normally have handled the squeal was the same team which had just trapped the killer on a roof top. That meant they'd be tied up with him for many hours, and it was up to Ben and me to fill in for them.

Ben touched the siren just enough to get us through the next intersection and fed the RMP a little more gas.

"You and I made a mistake when we signed up with this outfit, Pete," he said. "We should have taken the examination for fireman, like sensible men."

I grinned. "Sometimes I think you're right," I said.

He turned west on Fifty-third. "The job keeps you young, though," he said. "I will say that for it."

"Maybe it's just that cops don't live so long," I said. "You ever think of it that way?"

"All the time, Pete. That's another reason I wish I'd taken the exam for fireman."

"You're too fat for a fireman. You'd never get up the ladder."

"Who's worried about ladders? I'd stand around and give orders, and let skinny guys like you fool with the ladders."

"Sure," I said. "Pull up, Ben. That's nine-oh-five, there on the corner."

## 2.

It was a converted brownstone, like a lot of others in the neighborhood. All New York brownstones look pretty much the same from the outside, but inside, they range all the way from Bohemian pigpens to millionaires' showplaces.

This was one of the pigpens.

The dead man was in the basement apartment, suspended from a water pipe near the ceiling by a double thickness of dirty cotton clothesline. The apartment itself

was something to see. There were two filthy mattresses side by side in one corner, newspapers spread on the cement floor in lieu of a carpet, an exposed toilet and sink in one corner, with an overflowing garbage pail between them, and pornographic drawings on the grimy stucco walls. There were scraps of food and cigarette butts everywhere, and a large cardboard box near the door seemed to be completely filled with empty liquor bottles and beer cans. It was a tossup as to whether the place looked worse than it smelled, or vice versa.

The tech crew was going about its business with even greater speed than usual, and the expressions on the men's faces showed that the sooner they finished the better they'd like it.

Bill Marcy, the beat cop who'd been waiting for us at the street door, nodded toward a woman who stood leaning up against the far wall.

"Her name's Janice Pedrick," Bill said. "She goes with this dump."

"She the one who called you?" Ben asked.

"Yeah."

The woman was smoking a cigarette, watching us sullenly. She was very tall, close to six feet, I'd say and somewhere between thirty and thirty-five. She had short blonde hair, dark at the roots, and while she wasn't especially pretty, her figure made up for it.

"Who found him, Bill?" I asked.

"She did."

The woman dropped her cigarette to the floor, left it smoldering there, and turned to watch the photographer adjust his camera for another shot.

Les Wilbur, the assistant M.E., nodded to Ben and me and motioned us over to the man hanging from the water pipe.

"I remembered the blasting you boys gave me last time I cut down a DOA, Pete," he said wryly. "This time, I left the guy hanging for you."

I nodded. "It's usually best, Les." I stepped close to the corpse. His feet cleared the floor by only a few inches, but I could still look down slightly when I looked at his face. He had been in his early forties, I guessed, a very small man who couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and ten or fifteen pounds. His sport shirt and slacks were expensive-looking, and his shoes obviously had been made by hand. His nose was badly flattened and there was a heavy tracery of scar tissue around both eyebrows.

"A fighter," Ben said. "Most likely a pro. You sure as hell'd have a hard time getting that marked up, just mixing it in back alleys."

I glanced at the doctor. "How long would you say he's been strung up here, Les?"

He pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Call it six to eight hours."

“That’s a lot better than M.E.’s usually do,” I said.

He smiled. “Well, this one’s pretty easy, Pete. Rigor mortis usually begins within three to five hours, starting in the jaws, and takes anywhere from eight to twelve hours to become complete. In this case, the RM has progressed only to the hips. That would put the time of death at from six to eight hours ago.”

I glanced at my watch. “That would mean he suicided between ten-thirty and twelve-thirty.”

“Okay to take this guy down now, Pete?” Ben asked.

I looked over at the photographer. “You finished?”

He nodded, and I pulled a straight chair over to a position beneath the body, climbed up, and untied the clothesline from the pipe. I carried the body to one of the mattresses on the floor, put it down, and then untied the noose from the man’s neck. I paid particular attention to the way the rope fibers had been scuffed. If they had been scuffed toward the body, I would have known that someone had thrown the rope over the pipe and dragged the body up — which would have meant our suicide wouldn’t have been a suicide at all.

But, although there was nothing suspicious about the rope fibers, there was something else very wrong. I noticed it the instant I bent down to look closely at the dead man’s neck.

The rope had left a deep, purple collar around his neck, and if he had died from the rope there would have been small black-and-blue marks around the collar’s lower edge. Such marks are caused by the bursting of tiny blood vessels.

There were no such marks — and that meant our man had not been alive when he was hanged. It meant we had a murder on our hands.

Les Wilbur noticed the absence of black-and-blue marks at the same moment I did. “Looks like you boys are in for more than you bargained for,” he said.

Ben stood frowning at the dead man a moment, and then he glanced over toward the woman. “Let’s get started, Pete,” he said.

### 3.

We walked over to the woman. She had lighted another cigarette. She left it dangling from the side of her mouth as she crossed her arms across her chest and stared at us.

“You Miss Pedrick?” I asked.

She let a little smoke trickle from her nose. “That’s right.”

“This your apartment?”

“If you want to call it that.”

“Who’s the dead man?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“A man’s found hanged in your own apartment, and you don’t know who he is?”

“That’s what I said. You hear pretty well — for a cop.”

“When did you find him?”



"Why, the minute I got home. When'd you think?"

"How long ago was that?"

"Just a couple seconds before I went out after that cop over there. About an hour ago, I guess. I don't have a phone, so I had to go out after a cop."

"And you haven't any idea who the man is?"

"I told you I didn't. I don't know him from Adam."

"How long had you been out of your apartment?"

"Since last night."

"About what time?"

"Oh, about nine o'clock, I guess. Somewhere around there. Better say nine-thirty."

"You keep your door locked, don't you?"

"Sure. But it's a cheap spring lock. Anybody could open it."

"Is that the way you figure it?" I asked. "I mean, that he broke in and —"

"Look mister," she said. "I don't figure anything. All I know is that he got in here somehow and knocked himself off. I don't try to figure any further than that, because I don't *have* to. I haven't been here since last night, and I can prove it. I never saw the guy before, and you can't prove I did. Maybe he broke in to see what he could steal, and then all at once he decided to hang himself. How should I know what happened? And who cares, anyhow?"

I turned to Ben. "See if you can

find any identification on him," I said. "And then look up a phone and tell them what we've got here."

He nodded and walked back toward the corpse.

I studied the woman's face a moment. She'd lived a lot of years the hard way, I could tell. It was all there in her face. And it was there in her voice too, if you listened for it. Just as the indications of lying were there. Even the best confidence men in the country are troubled with a dry throat when they lie, though they're usually very skillful at covering it up. Mrs. Pedrick wasn't skillful at all. Her voice had grown increasingly husky, and she was swallowing a lot more than was normal.

"Why don't you start telling the truth?" I asked.

"Listen, you! I —"

"Just take it easy," I said. "In the first place, I'm tired of listening to nothing. And in the second place, this isn't suicide. It's murder."

She took a half step back from me, and one hand darted up to her throat and stayed there. "Murder!" she whispered, and the word had the right ring of astonishment to it.

I nodded. "He was already dead when he was strung up there, Miss Pedrick. Does that give you another slant on things?"

She glanced about her for something to sit on, and finally moved to a stack of newspapers and sat down on that. "Lord," she said.

"You still claim you don't know him?" I asked.

She took a long time to answer. "No," she said at last. "No, I don't know him. I was telling the truth. I never saw him before in my life."

"But you do have a pretty good idea how he got into your apartment, don't you?"

She moistened her lips, glancing along her eyes toward the mattress.

"Well?" I said.

"If — if I tell you, can you keep my name out of it? Can you make it look as if you found out from someone else?"

Before I could answer her, Ben Muller came up. "No luck, Pete," he said. "Somebody clipped his wallet. There isn't even any loose change in his pocket. No tie pin or wristwatch, either. We'll have to get a make on him some other way."

I nodded. "Nose around a little. See if you can find anything."

"Okay. Want me to call the lieutenant first?"

"Yeah, I guess you'd better."

He moved away again and I turned back to Miss Pedrick. "You said you wanted us to keep your name out of it," I said. "Who are you afraid of?"

She got to her feet slowly and stood there a moment while she rubbed the back of her hand across her forehead. "It's so close in here," she said. "Can't we talk outside? I don't want to go out in the street, but there's sort of a little court out back. Can we go out there?"

I nodded, and then followed her through a narrow corridor and out a door into a walled-in area about twelve feet square.

"This is better," she said. "At least we can breathe out here."

"Better start again," I said. "And this time, tell the truth." I gave her a cigarette, lit it for her, and then lit one for myself.

"It's one of Leda's friends," she said. "It has to be. There's no other answer."

"Who's Leda?"

"A girl friend of mine. She — well, she was here last night. She came by the bar where I work and asked me if she could borrow my apartment, and I said all right. She had a date with someone, you see, and she wanted a place where they could be alone."

"When was this?"

"Last night — about eight o'clock."

"All right. Go on."

"Well, it wasn't the first time I'd done that. Leda always gave me ten dollars, so I could get a hotel room and have a few dollars left over. She couldn't go to a hotel room herself, because she was afraid her husband would get wind of it. He has two or three different businesses going for him, and he knows just about everybody. He gets around a lot, and so do his friends. Leda was afraid to take a chance on a hotel or a furnished room."

"But she didn't mention the name of the man she had the date with?"

"No, she didn't. She'd never done that any of the other times, either."

"She borrow your apartment often?"

"I guess you'd call it often. Sometimes she'd ask to use it a couple of times the same week, and then maybe I wouldn't see her for a week or ten days."

"You think it was always the same man, or different men each time?"

"I couldn't say. I never felt like being too inquisitive, if you know what I mean."

"You make a habit of that?"

"Of what?"

"Of loaning your apartment out to your girl friends. At ten dollars a night, and with a hotel room costing you only three or four, that could turn into a pretty profitable sideline."

Her eyes moved away from mine.

"You'd find out anyhow, wouldn't you?"

"You know we would."

"Well, what was the harm in it? If I hadn't accommodated them, they'd have gone somewhere else, wouldn't they? Listen. If a woman's going to play around, she's going to play around. It was better they did it in a safe place than —"

"All right," I said wearily. "About this Leda, now. What was the arrangement supposed to be?"

"Why, just the same as it always was. I gave her my key, and told her I wouldn't be home before three or four o'clock this afternoon."

"How'd she get the key back to you?"

"She didn't. Not personally, that is. She always hid it in a crack in the stonework over the basement door. The one that leads up to the street."

"That's pretty high. She a tall girl like you?"

"Yes. She used to work in chorus lines, just like I did."

"You know her long?"

"Yes. A long time. About — oh, about fifteen years."

"And when you came home this afternoon you found the key where you expected it to be?"

"No. It wasn't there. I got a passkey from the landlord."

I took out my notebook. "What's Leda's full name, and where does she live?"

#### 4.

She hesitated. "Listen, officer. . . . Isn't there some way you can keep me out of this? I've known Leda half my life. I think the world of her. So long as I thought that man had killed himself, I was willing to bluff through a story to protect her. But if it's murder, I —"

"It isn't Leda you're worried about," I said. "You might as well level with us. You've been around enough to know that the more you cooperate with cops, the easier it'll go." I paused. "All right, so who is it you're afraid of?"

"If you were in my place, you'd

be afraid of him too. He — he used to be a hoodlum. Maybe he still is, for all I know. He's mean — mean all the way through. He beat up one of his best friends once, just because the guy danced with Leda a couple of times too often. Once he knocked a man unconscious, just because he brushed against Leda on the street."

"You still haven't told me who," I said.

"Leda's husband. Eddie Willard."

I wrote the name down. "Where do they live, Eddie and Leda?"

"You haven't promised to —"

"I can't promise anything," I told her. "I'll do what I can for you, yes — but I can't commit the police department that way. You should know that."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "They live at the Bayless."

"That an apartment house or a hotel?"

"Hotel. It's at the corner of West End Avenue and Sixty-second Street."

I made a note of it. "What hotel did you stay in last night?" I asked.

"The Paragon, on West Fifty-fourth."

"I know where it is. It's just down the street from the station house. What time did you leave there?"

"Well, their check-out time's a little earlier than it is most places. At one o'clock. I — let's see — I guess I checked out about noon."

"And then what did you do?"

"I took a walk."

"Where?"

"Oh, just around. I walked over to Fifth Avenue, and up Fifth to Central Park. I went to the zoo, and watched people rowing boats on the lake a while, and then I sat down on a bench and tried to get a little sun."

"You walk home from Central Park?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You see anyone you knew?"

"On my walk? No." Her eyes suddenly grew round. "You don't think I . . . ?"

"I have to ask questions," I said. "Then I have to check them out." I took a final drag on my cigarette and flipped it away. For some reason I kept thinking about those filthy mattresses back inside. A cop sometimes turns up a lot of muck in the course of an investigation, and sometimes the stench of the muck stays with you far longer than the memory of the investigation. I had a feeling I'd be recalling those sweat-soured mattresses for a lot of years to come.

Janice Pedrick shifted her position slightly, and as she did so I noticed the play of muscles through the hard, dancer's body. She was a large girl, and a strong one. She would be physically capable of handling a small man the size of the corpse. She would have had no trouble at all stringing him up. On the other hand, the dead man had apparently been a prizefighter, supposedly ca-

pable of taking care of himself. And the girl showed no signs of having been in anything like a fight. There were no bruises or scratches, and none of her fingernails had been broken. If she'd been a party to his murder, I reasoned, she had either caught him while he was drunk or drugged — which would come out at the autopsy — or she had had help.

But there was the factor of her alibi — if it was one. I'd heard at least a hundred different suspects tell me the same tale. That walk through Central Park, with stop-offs at the zoo and lake and park bench, had worn pretty thin over the years.

Ben Muller came through the door, carrying a pink petticoat. "Take a look at this, Pete," he said.

The petticoat was of nylon, with about six inches of lace at the bottom. It seemed to be new, but there were two large rents in the lace, and the nylon itself bore at least a dozen creases that extended almost the entire length of the garment. When I held it loosely across my forearm, the petticoat bunched itself together from top to bottom.

I glanced at Janice Pedrick. "This yours?"

She nodded.

"You had it up like this?"

"No. It — it was hanging over the back of a chair when I left the apartment."

"Looks like we might have something," Ben said.

The girl frowned at the petticoat, and then at Ben. "What do you mean?"

"It could have been used as a garrote," Ben told her. "If someone grabbed it by each end, and pulled it taut, it would stretch out into a kind of rope. If you looped it around someone's neck, and tightened it up, and kept it there long to cause asphyxia, it would leave lengthwise pleats in the material — just like the ones it has in it now."

I handed the petticoat back to Ben. "Hang on to this," I said. "Maybe we can book it as evidence, if things fall that way. How's the doc making out?"

"He said he couldn't do anything more until he got the guy to Bellevue. I told him he could take the body. Okay?"

"Sure. You get a receipt for it?"

"Yeah." He took out a handkerchief and sponged at the back of his neck. "Hot in there, and the stink would make a goat sick."

I turned back to Janice Pedrick. "This friend of yours — this Leda Willard — do you think she'd be home now?"

She looked at her watch. "I don't think so. She goes to work at five."

"Where?"

"She works in a jewelry shop, down in the Village. It's not a regular store. The man she works for makes all his own things. It's just a tiny little place. He's been teaching Leda to make jewelry. She

always liked doing things like that.”

“How come she goes to work at five?”

“The store stays open until midnight. Leda just has a part-time job, and the only reason she works at all is because she wants to learn enough to start her own shop someday.”

“What’s the name of this guy she works for?”

She gave me the name — Carl Dannion — and an address on Christopher Street.

I put the notebook back in my pocket and gestured for Janice Pedrick to step back inside.

“That reminds me,” she said. “I’ll have to be leaving for work myself pretty soon.”

“Not tonight,” I told her.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m afraid we’ll have to ask you to spend a little time at the station house.”

I had expected something of an explosion. She surprised me. All she did was glare at me a little, and then she shrugged and walked past Ben and me and into the apartment.

“You’d better call for a car, Ben,” I said. “Turn her over to a matron, and let her think about things a while. Maybe a couple of hours down there will make her feel more talkative.”

“You don’t want me to question her?”

“No. Just let her stew a bit.”

“And then what?”

“Get a set of the dead guy’s

prints and take them down to BCI. See if they can give us a make on him. While they’re checking, look up the tailor that made his slacks and the guy who made his shoes. Either one of them could probably give you a fast make — provided you can get hold of them.”

We stepped into the apartment. Janice Pedrick was combing her hair before a yellowed mirror over the sink.

“Where’ll you be, in case I want to contact you?” Ben asked.

“I’m going down to the Village.”

“Hell, I figured that much. I mean afterwards.”

“I’ll check in at the station house as soon as I can. You do the same.”

“All right.”

“How do you feel.”

“Sleepy.”

“Yeah. Same here.” I walked to the front door, then turned. “Just lock the place up when the tech boys finish,” I said. “I don’t think we need to leave a stakeout.”

He nodded and crossed over toward Janice Pedrick.

## 5.

It was a little cooler in the Village, and much quieter. I went down four shallow steps and turned into the Dannion Custom Jewelry Shop. Janice Pedrick had been right about its being tiny. There was room for a very small showcase, a workbench, and not much else. The man who came up to the counter was in his

late fifties, a very thin, scholarly looking man with pince-nez and a spade beard.

"Is Mrs. Willard here?" I asked.

"No. I'm sorry, but she hasn't come in yet. May I help you?" He had just a trace of accent, but I couldn't identify it.

I took out my wallet and showed him my badge. I couldn't have got much more reaction if I'd showed him a live rattlesnake. His face blanched and his forehead suddenly began to glisten with sweat.

"Are you with the FBI?" he asked.

"You didn't take a very good look at my badge," I said. "No. I'm a city detective."

He seemed to relax a bit, but not too much. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you know where Mrs. Willard is?"

He shook his head.

"She didn't call in to say she'd be late for work?"

"No, sir."

"You know any of her friends?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"You ever see her with a very small man — a guy with a broken nose?"

"No, sir. I've never met any of her friends. I've never seen her with anyone at all."

"Not even her husband?"

"No, sir."

I put my wallet back in my pocket. I was curious about why Dannion had become so upset when he saw my badge, but I had no justification

to question him about it. His personal guilts and fears were his own — unless I discovered later that they were connected in some way with the job I was on.

"I guess that's all, Mr. Dannion," I said. "Thanks very much."

"Is Mrs. Willard all right, sir? If she's in any trouble . . . That is, she's a very fine young woman, and if I can be of any assistance . . ."

"She'd be glad to hear that," I said. "But this is police business, Mr. Dannion. I can't discuss it with you."

I went up the steps and climbed into the RMP car and headed back uptown toward the Bayless Hotel.

## 6.

At the Bayless, I discovered Leda Willard and her husband had checked out at eleven o'clock that morning. They'd left no forwarding address, but they had left a considerable amount of clothing. The manager had ordered this stored for them, under the assumption that they would contact him later with instructions for forwarding or other disposition.

I got a thorough description of both of them and went back to the station house.

Ben Muller was waiting for me. He'd taken the dead man's prints to BCI, but BCI hadn't been able to match them with any in its files. The man's slacks, it seemed, hadn't been tailor-made after all, which

meant that tracing them would take some time. And the bootmaker who had made his shoes had since closed his shop and gone to Europe.

I sent Ben over to the Paragon Hotel to start checking Janice Pedrick's alibi, and then I called Harry Fisher, a very good friend of mine who had once been a middleweight contender and was now writing a sports column for one of the tabloids. He knew everyone connected with the prizefight game, retired or active. I asked him if he'd go to Bellevue and see if he knew the dead man. He said he would be glad to. I gave him the phone number of the squad room, and asked him to leave a message if he should happen to call while I was out.

Then I got Headquarters on the phone and asked them to put out an alarm for the apprehension of Leda and Eddie Willard, and gave them the descriptions I'd got from the hotel manager. I asked for a run-through of the records to see if they had anything on either Willard or his wife, and then gave them Janice Pedrick's name and description and asked for a run-through on her as well.

I had Headquarters switch me to the police laboratory and asked for a report from the tech crew that had worked the murder apartment with Ben and me. They had found several sets of fairly clear fingerprints, but none of the prints had checked out to prints already on file. They were still working, and would call

me as soon as they came up with anything.

I was reasonably sure the assistant M.E. wouldn't have had time to autopsy the body yet, but I called him anyway. He said that he had not been able to get the autopsy scheduled before ten o'clock the next morning, that he had tried to pull a few wires to get to it before then, but had been unable to work it.

I called the policewoman who had been with Janice Pedrick since her arrival at the station house. The policewoman said Janice had been an easy girl to talk to, but a difficult one to get anything out of. She reminded me she had a reputation for indirect questioning, and that if anyone got anything out of Janice it would be she.

I put the phone down, left a note in the message book to the effect that I would be back in twenty minutes, and went down to a restaurant on Fifty-third Street. I had two roast beef sandwiches and three cups of black coffee, and then went back to the squad room.

There was a note to call Harry Fisher on an extension at Bellevue Hospital. I called, and he told me that our dead man's name was Teddy Connors. He said Connors had been a pretty fair featherweight in the middle 30's, had retired with all his brains and most of his money, and had since taken an occasional flyer as a fight manager and promoter. Harry had seen him around only



now and then in recent years, though he had once been a steady customer of the various bars around Madison Square Garden and St. Nicholas Arena.

I thanked Harry, made a tentative date for lunch the first day both of us had a free hour, and then called BCI back again. I gave them Teddy Connors' name and asked for a run-through.

While I was waiting, I walked to the next room and searched the cards in the Eighteenth's Known Resident Criminal File. These are the cards kept on file in the precinct where the criminal lives, no matter where he was arrested. It has his picture, his record, and the date his parole is up. In the event he was arrested with other individuals, these individuals' names are listed on the back of the card. But there was no card for Teddy Connors.

I'd put off the paper work as long as I could, but now I sat down at a typewriter and filled out a Complaint Report form as thoroughly as I could, at this stage of the investigation, and then did the same with the other routine forms.

When I finished with the forms, I had gone as far as I could go. I had almost dozed off staring at the typewriter, so I went down to the corner and brought back a quart carton of black coffee.

I was sipping at it when Ben Muller came in.

"Any luck?" I asked.

"Maybe she took a walk, maybe

she didn't," he said. "She checked out of the hotel when she said she did, but that's as far as I got." He reached for the coffee and drank steadily until he had finished a good half of it. "You want me to talk to her, Pete?"

"Nope. Let her think a while longer."

He shrugged. "Suits me." He sat down at his desk and put his head down on his arms. "Don't wake me up unless I inherit a million bucks, Pete."

The phone on my desk rang. It was Tom Volz, of the Tenth.

"We got something for you, Pete," he said. "Eddie Willard."

"Where'd you grab him?"

"We didn't. He walked in."

"The hell!"

"Sure did, Pete. About two minutes ago. He says he won't talk to anybody but you. That's fine with us. We got our own troubles."

"We'll be there before you can hang up," I said.

"What's the deal?" Ben asked.

"They've got Eddie Willard, over at the Tenth."

He stood up, yawning widely. "Fine. Maybe we'll get to bed some time this year after all."

## 7.

The boys at the Tenth gave Eddie Willard and me the rear interrogation room to talk in. Willard had said he wouldn't say a word if anyone else was in the room with us, and

I'd left Ben shooting the breeze with Tom Volz. Neither Willard nor I sat down. He was about my height, but a lot thicker-bodied. He had a lot of dark hair and restless dark eyes that never seemed to blink.

"I'm going to give you this fast and hard and all in one piece," he said. "I've heard of you a lot. I think I'll get a clean shake."

I nodded. "What's on your mind, Mr. Willard?"

"I heard a rumble you were looking for Leda and me. I would have turned in up at your precinct, but I didn't want to take a chance on getting tagged by some other cop before I got there."

"Where's your wife, Mr. Willard?"

"I'll get to that. First I want to tell you that I'm doing this to save my own hide. No other reason. I've done a lot for Leda in my time, and now I'm through." He paused a moment, biting at his lip. "Here it is, the whole thing. I just found out about Leda this morning, see? I've been married to her eight years, but I never knew until this morning just what a rotten woman she really was. The only reason I found out then is because she was scared crazy. She didn't kill Teddy Connors, you understand. But she'd been fooling around with him, over at Janice Pedrick's dump and all."

"Did she have any part in the killing?" I asked.

"Not exactly. Bucky Sullivan killed him. Here's the way it went.

Leda was working for a guy down in the Village, a jeweler. This guy was trying to make time with her, and she kind of led him on because he slipped her a few extra bucks now and then. Anyhow, this guy — Dannon, his name is — had been knocking down on his income tax. Every time someone paid cash for something, he'd stash the money in his safe. God knows how long he'd been putting it away, but one night he got half crooked and told Leda about it. He said there was twenty thousand in the safe — and when she didn't believe him, he showed her."

I lit a cigarette and leaned up against the edge of the table. I didn't say anything.

"Well, Leda had been fooling around a lot with this goddamned Teddy Connors," Willard went on. "Connors had dropped a word now and then that made her think he might be able to do something about that twenty grand. She put it up to him, and sure enough Connors gets Bucky Sullivan, a guy he used to spar with in the old days, and the two of them went over to the jewelry shop and hit it. They got the dough all right, but Connors — he saw a chamois bag in a corner of the safe, and he took that along too, without saying anything to Bucky about it."

"What was in the bag?"

"Sapphires. About a dozen of them. Worth a lot more than diamonds. Anyhow, this jeweler reported the stones missing, and called the

insurance company. But he didn't say anything about the money, because he was afraid to. He got into the country illegally, about fifteen years ago, and he knew that if the feds heard about that twenty grand and started smelling around, he might be deported." He took a deep breath. "Well, the insurance company wasn't getting anywhere. Finally they let it out in the right places that they'd pay a flat four grand for return of the stones, and no questions asked. When Bucky Sullivan got the rumble, he knew what Connors had pulled. It made him sore as hell, to think his old buddy had held out on him, and he went on the prowl."

"And caught up with him at Janice Pedrick's place?" I said.

"That's right. Leda and Connors had been shackled up there all night. This morning, Connors went out for some cigarettes. That's when Bucky saw him. He trailed him back to the apartment. He had a gun, and he forced Connors to let him in with him. He told Connors he'd let him go if Connors gave him the rocks, but Connors couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because Leda had conned him out of them. She'd sold them for peanuts. He was real gone on her, I guess. He was an ugly guy, and no woman had ever given him a tumble before. Anyhow, Bucky went nuts. He hit Connors across the throat with the side of his hand and knocked him out. Then he clipped Leda over

the temple with the butt of his gun. She fell down and made out she was unconscious, but she wasn't. Then Bucky grabbed a rag or something and started choking Connors. He turned his back on Leda a moment, and she saw her chance and jumped up and beat it."

I rubbed my cigarette out in a tray, studying him. "Why'd you and your wife check out of your hotel, Mr. Willard?"

"I must have been a little crazy myself, I guess. Leda — she was almost nuts. She thought sure her part in the jewelry heist would come out, once they really got to checking. She'd done a bit out on the West Coast once, for fingering another guy to a burglar — and that's something else I didn't know till this morning. And she said it'd be her word against Bucky's, and that she might end up in the death house with him. Anyhow, I couldn't think straight, right at first. All I could think about was trying to help her get away. And then all at once it hit me, what a goddamned fool I'd been all these years. And all of a sudden I knew I wasn't going to be a nanny for her any more. I'd had a gut full of her. It was like I was seeing her for the first time since I'd known her."

"If she's earned a fall, then she's going to take it alone — is that what you mean?"

"You're damned right. I've been a chump long enough. From now on, she's on her own."

“Where is she now?”

“She’s in room fourteen-oh-nine, at the Milsener Hotel.”

8.

We picked up Leda Willard. She was in such a state of panic that it took us almost two hours to get a coherent story from her. But when we did, it was a complete admission. She was too frightened to fight us, even too frightened to be capable of lying. She completely absolved Janice Pedrick and Eddie Willard of any implication.

Four nights later we cornered Bucky Sullivan in the men’s room

of a bar in Harlem. He shot it out with us, and took two slugs through the chest. While he was waiting to be operated on, he became convinced he was dying and called for a priest. Afterward, he made a full admission. Declarations by persons who think they are dying are powerful instruments. It was powerful enough to close the case for us, though Bucky Sullivan lived through the operation.

He was very bitter toward the doctor who saved him. He couldn’t understand why the State should save his life — only to send him up the river and take it away from him again in the electric chair.



# What's Your Verdict?

## No. 6 — The Young Lovebirds

BY SAM ROSS

THE FACT that Janie was only a high-school girl, seventeen years old, didn't bother Bob Blake at all. He was in love with Janie, he protested, and Janie was in love with him; nothing else in the world mattered. Bob's friends of twenty and twenty-one couldn't see it. After all, Bob was as old as they were; why shouldn't he be going out, as they were doing, with girls of nineteen, twenty or even older — instead of wasting his time on a kid of seventeen? For a while a couple of Bob's closer friends tried to talk to him about this horrifying attachment to a girl who was "only a baby." But after a while they gave up on him and stopped trying to argue him out of his love-affair.

Maybe they shouldn't have stopped. Because the next thing the town heard was that Bob and Janie planned to get married.

When Janie's parents learned the news they were raging mad. Janie's father stormed over to Bob's house and had a long talk with Bob's mother and father. Mr. and Mrs. Blake deplored the projected nuptials, but didn't see what they could

do about things. "Bob's always been so headstrong," his mother said. "We just can't do anything with him."

Janie's father, muttering that he damn well knew what to do with young Robert Blake, asked to see Bob. Possibly he expected a downcast youth, but when Bob appeared in the Blake living-room he was far from downcast.

His full six feet of muscle commanded the doorway; his handsome face and the golden hair that curled above it made him look almost too good to be true. Nobody had ever wondered why Janie had fallen in love with Bob; all you had to do was to look at him, to see the reason for that.

Janie's father was unimpressed. "Young man," he said, "I have heard that you plan to marry my daughter."

"That's right," Bob said. His face was set and unsmiling.

"I won't give my consent to such a marriage. Janie's only a child."

"She's old enough to know what she wants," Bob said.

Janie's father shook his head. "You can't get married without my con-

sent, or her mother's," he said. "It seems to me that's all I have to tell you. However much you want to get married, you can't, and that's all there is to it."

He didn't know his daughter very well, as events proved. And he didn't know much about Bob, either.

Three days later Janie didn't come home from school. Her parents at first assumed that she'd stayed a while to play with her girl-friends, and then, as the time passed, they began to get worried. This time both Janie's parents went over to the Blakes' house — and when they found that Bob hadn't come home from work, they began to get an inkling of what had happened.

Janie's father called the local police and a search was instituted. For a while there were no results; Bob and Janie seemed simply to have disappeared. But on the tenth day after their disappearance they were picked up by police fifty miles away. They had been living in a tourist cabin; Bob had found himself a job in a nearby garage, and Janie had settled down quietly to the life of an ordinary housewife.

The police put a stop to all of that. They took Bob and Janie back to their parents and, over the objections of both the children, the parents had the marriage annulled.

Bob mooned around the house for a couple of days after that, not doing much of anything. Mr. and Mrs. Blake left him severely alone, think-

ing that the mooning would eventually wear off. But it didn't have a chance.

The next thing Bob knew he was in court and in danger of being sent to jail for several years.

The charge was "statutory criminal assault." Bob objected violently, saying that he and Janie had been legally married (they'd lied about Janie's age to a nearby Justice of the Peace, it developed) and that if there had been any crime committed it had been perjury.

Of course, Janie's parents didn't want to bring the perjury angle up, since that would involve their daughter in a possible jail sentence. They simply stated that since they hadn't given their consent, the marriage was not legal and simply didn't count as a marriage at all. Since Janie was under the legal age of consent, Bob could be tried and sentenced for statutory criminal assault regardless of the marriage-license. The license didn't count, they insisted.

Who was right?

What's *your* verdict?

### ANSWER:

Janie's parents were quite right. Since the marriage was illegal in the first place because Janie was under the age of consent, it never existed as far as the law was concerned. Bob could be — and was — convicted of "statutory criminal assault," just as if he'd never even mentioned the marriage to Janie at all.

# Flowers to the Fair

*Mr. Petty had done a little embezzling, and he'd gotten mixed up with a beautiful girl. So, naturally, he came to John J. Malone . . .*

*A John J. Malone  
Novelette*

**BY CRAIG RICE**



**A** EXACTLY 8:13 A.M. Mr. Petty arrived. He hung his hat in the locker, just as he had hung it every working day of his life for the last thirty years. He went over to the water cooler where he wet his dry, tense throat with a small sip of water. Then he shuffled down the hall to the door marked: George V. Benson, General Manager.

Mr. Petty waited till his wrist watch showed precisely 8:15. Then he opened the door walked in, closing it carefully behind him.

Mr. Benson looked up at the little bookkeeper.

"Always prompt, aren't you, Petty?"

Mr. Petty gulped. "Yes, sir. You said 8:15, sir."

"So, here you are. At exactly 8:15. Now, if you weren't the fool you are, Petty, you would have come at 7:15. You would have gone straight to the safe and opened it — you know the combination — and you would have helped yourself, not to a measly three thousand dollars, but to *two hundred thousand* dollars."

The little bookkeeper's eyes opened wide in innocent astonishment. "I couldn't have done a thing like that," he stammered. "Why — that would be stealing."

"That's right," Mr. Benson said. "That would have been stealing. So what do you do instead? You pilfer the petty cash, you make false entries on your books, you kite checks, a few measly bucks at a time — for how many months? And when you're three thousand dollars in the hole and you know the auditors are due in Monday morning, you come to me with a hard luck story. What was it, horses?"

"No, sir," Mr. Petty said. "That would be gambling!" He paused and looked down at the floor. "Women," he said meekly.

"Women!"

"Yes sir," Mr. Petty said. "Women. It's in my horoscope. I'm a Taurus."

"That figures," Benson said. "Now tell me one thing more, Petty. How do you expect to pay this money back?"

Mr. Petty looked puzzled. He squirmed uneasily in his chair. "That's what I was expecting you to tell me. You promised to help me, Mr. Benson."

Benson said, "Of course, I'll help you. Everybody knows George Benson has never failed to help a faithful employee out of a jam." He sat back in his chair and folded his arms silently for a minute while Mr. Petty fidgeted with his hands, as if he had just found he had one too many.

"Tell you what I'll do, Petty," Benson said. "Nobody knows about this, nobody except you — and me. I'll lend you the money, that's what I'll do. Just sign this —" he handed a typewritten sheet of paper across the desk — "and you can pay me back ten dollars every week out of your paycheck." He handed his pen across to the little bookkeeper. "Just a brief statement of the facts. Sort of a confession, you know, just to make it legal."

Mr. Petty took the pen. His hand shook as he started to write, and paused. "The money," he said falteringly. "Shouldn't I — get the money first?"

Mr. Benson's face took on an expression of injured dignity. "I'm surprised at you, Petty," he said. "Do you expect me to go around every day with thousands of dollars in my wallet?" He looked at his watch. "The bank closes at one today. And Monday is a bank holiday. Before I take the plane to Pittsburgh



this afternoon I'll leave three thousand dollars in an envelope for you. You'll find it in the safe, in the petty cash box."

"But I've got things to do first," Mr. Petty said. "I've got to go back over the books. There are things to straighten out before the auditors get here."

"I've thought of that too," Benson replied. "You've got keys to the plant. Tomorrow is Sunday. Come down and let yourself in. Emil, the night watchman, knows you. Tell him you're working overtime on the books. Get the entries straightened out, put the money back where it belongs, and when the auditors arrive on Monday everything'll be okay. I'll take that paper now."

Mr. Petty scrawled his name on the dotted line and handed the paper back to Benson. "Thank you," he said, rising to go. "I'll never forget what you've done for me." He swallowed hard. "You've saved my life. How can I ever repay you?"

"You will," Benson assured the little bookkeeper. "Don't worry, you will."

## 2.

On warm Saturday afternoons it was John J. Malone's custom to take his ease, with suitable refreshments, at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, but on this torrid Saturday afternoon he was still in the office, attending to some urgent business. Maggie, his secretary, was assisting with the technical details.

"I distinctly remember replenishing the Emergency file," Malone was saying. "Right there in back of Bills Payable."

"I looked," Maggie said firmly. "I looked, and it isn't there. Are you sure you didn't drink it up one night this week when you were alone in the office? And speaking of bills payable—"

The door opened in the outer office and Maggie went to attend to it.

"If it's the building agent after the rent tell him the police are dragging the Drainage Canal for my remains," Malone called after her.

A minute later Maggie was back. "It's a Mr. Algernon Petty," she reported. "He says it's important."

"Didn't you tell him I was busy on an important case?" Malone said, in a voice that he knew, by actual test, carried practically out into the hall. Then, under his breath to Maggie, "You'd better call up right away and tell them to send over a quart of the usual."

"Not so fast," Maggie said. "If you ask me, Mr. Petty looks more like a fast touch than a fat retainer," and, opening the door, she showed in the little bookkeeper.

What met the legal eye was a very frightened and nervous Mr. Petty. He patted the chair before sitting down in it, as if he expected it to be wired for an execution.

"You'll have to excuse me," he began haltingly. "You see, Mr. Malone, I've never had anything to do with the law before. Of course I

expect to pay —” He fished a tired ten-dollar bill out of his wallet, stole a speculative glance at Malone out of the corner of his eye, and decided to add another ten. “I know your professional services come high,” he explained, “but mine is a serious case, I’m afraid.”

“What do you expect me to do, Mr. Petty?” Malone asked. “Arrange a settlement for you with Gloria Vanderbilt?”

The little bookkeeper looked puzzled. “But I don’t even know Gloria Vanderbilt. No, it’s Carmelita. Of course I never really promised to marry Carmelita, but, well, you know how women are.”

Malone said, “I see. Something in the nature of a breach of promise.”

“Something like that,” Mr. Petty said. “And I thought you might see her for me and — well, lawyers know how to handle such things.”

“And how much would you be prepared to go to avoid embarrassment, Mr. Petty? Say a cool million or so?”

“Oh no, nothing like that,” Mr. Petty replied quickly. “You see, Carmelita loves me.”

“In that case,” Malone said, “let’s say half a million.”

“No, no, Mr. Malone, you don’t understand. It isn’t money.”

“Not money?”

“No, it’s just that I can’t marry Carmelita. You see, I’m already married. Thirty years this coming Wednesday, and I promised my wife—”

“I see,” Malone said, “and you want me to convey your regrets to the lady.” He was beginning to feel sorry for the little man. “In that case,” he continued, “it would be appropriate to offer something, don’t you think — by way of heart balm.”

“That’s what I wanted to see you about, Mr. Malone. I promised to fly with Carmelita to Monte Carlo — her mother lives in Monte Carlo, you know — but that was before Mr. Benson offered to help me out so I could put the money back in the safe —”

Malone sat up. “*What* money back in *what* safe?”

“Why the three thousand dollars I embezzled, Mr. Malone. Mr. Benson was very nice about it — he’s our general manager. Before he flies to Pittsburgh this afternoon he is leaving the money in the safe for me, and I’ll pay it back to him out of my salary. And tomorrow night I’m going over the books to set everything straight for the auditors on Monday morning. But it’s Carmelita I’m worried about. At first I thought I’d borrow a little more of the company money, just enough for the trip, and send the money back when I got a job. I understand they handle a lot of money in Monte Carlo and they might be able to use a man who’s good at figures.”

“I see,” Malone said. He wasn’t sure just yet what he *could* say.

“But I couldn’t do that now. Not with the auditors coming on Monday. And not after the way Mr.

Benson treated me when I told him about the three thousand dollars. But I still want to do what's right by Carmelita. So I thought, if you could see her for me and — give her this."

Mr. Petty took a large plain envelope from his pocket and handed it across the desk to Malone.

Malone said, "Would you mind telling me what's in it? I just want to be sure I'm not acting as accessory before — or after — a case of grand theft."

"Oh it's nothing like that," Mr. Petty said. "Just something — personal. Carmelita will understand."

And with this Mr. Petty rose and left, with such alacrity that it was not till he was gone that Malone realized he had neglected to leave Carmelita's address or even her full name.

### 3.

The headline in the Monday morning *Examiner* was broad and black, but the story was brief.

*Algernon Petty, bookkeeper for the Pittsburgh Products Company, was found shot to death last night in a spectacular payroll robbery at the company's Chicago plant, 3545 Clybourne avenue. Emil Dockstedter, the nightwatchman on duty, reported the shooting to police who hurried to the scene. They found Petty in a pool of blood in front of the open safe. Officials said cash in the amount of \$200,000 was missing from the safe. According to watchman Dockstedter,*

*the money was delivered to the plant early Saturday to meet this morning's monthly payroll, today being a bank holiday. George V. Benson, general manager, was reported flying back from Pittsburgh today, having left Saturday for a home office conference.*

*Dockstedter said that shortly after 10 P.M. he heard a shot fired and hurrying to the office found Petty dead on the floor. He fired after the fleeing bandit's getaway car from the office window, but was unable to stop it, or make out the license number of the car. Chief of Detectives Daniel Von Flanagan promptly ordered an all-out alarm for the fleeing bandits.*

*The victim had been in the employ of the company for 30 years. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Sophia Petty, 2437 N. Damen Ave. Five years ago last Friday, Mrs. Petty was quoted as saying, Mr. Petty was awarded the company's 25-year medal for honest and faithful service.*

Malone tossed the paper on his desk and sat down glumly, staring out of the window while he slowly removed the cellophane from his cigar and lit it.

Maggie read the story and looked across at Malone. He was still staring out the window, lost in thought.

"I know what you're thinking," Maggie said. "You feel you should have done something about it. But what *could* you have done? Anyway, it's too late now. As for Carmelita, Mrs. Sophia Petty wouldn't thank you for dragging *her* into the case. What was it she told Petty, that her

mother lived in Monte Carlo? *Nobody's* mother ever lived in Monte Carlo. Besides, how do you know she wasn't in cahoots with the bandits? It wouldn't surprise me if she was off to Monte Carlo all right — right now — with her share of the loot tucked away in her little overnight bag."

Malone took out the envelope the little bookkeeper had left with him. "I suppose, as Mr. Petty's lawyer, I have the right to open this now," he said. He tore open the envelope and emptied the contents on the desk. It was an airplane ticket to Monte Carlo. One person. One way. Made out to Carmelita Maquire, 1428 N. Jensen St., Chicago, Illinois.

4.

It was a six-flat tenement in the near north side slum district. A knock on the first door down the hall brought out an old Polish woman who told him in broken English that the Bednarskys in the third floor rear kept a boarder, a girl. Mrs. Bednarsky, after a few minutes of cautious evasion, admitted that her boarder's name was Maquire, that she worked behind the quick-lunch counter on the corner.

Carmelita Maquire, it turned out, was a brown-eyed blonde in her middle twenties, with a face that might have been copied out of a court painting of a Spanish princess, and traces of an Irish brogue in her

speech. There were Maquires on his mother's side back in Ireland, Malone told her, and after that the going was easy. Evidently she hadn't read the morning papers, and Malone bided his time as he chatted with the girl over the ham and eggs she had set before him on the counter.

She did not remember her father, she confided. Her mother once told her she was a Spanish croupier in the games at Monte Carlo. He vanished one day and was never heard from again. "Mother still lives in Monaco," she told Malone. "I've always dreamed of going back some day."

With as much tact as he could manage, Malone broke the news to her and turned over the envelope Mr. Petty had left with him. After the first shock she sobbed quietly for a while, dabbing at her eyes with a corner of her apron. Then, "He was like a father to me," she said. "Yes, I knew he was married. He never deceived me about anything. He was a gentleman, he was. I always called him Mr. Petty. When we went places, weekends, he always took separate rooms, with adjoining bath, like nice people do. I don't know why I'm telling you all this, except that you were his friend. He went to you in his trouble. He didn't do anything wrong, did he, Mr. Malone? The police — they won't be coming to *me*, will they, asking me questions about — well, you know —?"

Malone patted her hand gently. It was a soft, well-groomed hand for a girl who slung hash in a quick lunch joint. He could easily imagine her dressed in the latest Paris fashion, the center of attention as she swept into the Monte Carlo casino.

"Maybe not, if you answer my questions first," Malone told the girl.

From her answers Malone learned that she had met Mr. Petty about a year ago when she waited on him at a lunch room near the plant where she was working at the time. He had given her presents from time to time, inexpensive things, and money from time to time, which she said she had sent to her mother in Monaco. Apparently she knew nothing of his embezzlements. He had never introduced her to his friends. She said she had seen him last about two weeks ago and the account of her movements over the weekend sounded spontaneous and unforced. Unless, he reminded himself, unless it should turn out that this vision of slightly tarnished innocence was serving him up something new in Irish blarney — with Spanish sauce. No, he decided. It was just one of those simple, unbelievable things that could happen only to the Mr. Pettys of this world. And simple young things like Carmelita Maquire, who go along trustingly with anything that comes along, only to be sideswiped by fate, like an unsuspecting pedestrian in the middle of Saturday night traffic.

"It's true, every word of it," Malone told Maggie when he got back to the office. "Even to the mother in Monte Carlo. Just the same I advised her not to leave for Monte Carlo just yet. If the police get wind of this they will want to question her, and it won't look so good if she's left the country in such a hurry."

The telephone rang and Maggie answered it. "It's Von Flanagan," she said.

Malone said, "Tell him I'm in conference."

Maggie relayed the message and handed the phone to Malone saying, "Tell him yourself. This is no fit language for a lady's ears."

Malone took the receiver and held it twelve inches from his ear till the bellowing stopped. "Malone, Malone, are you there?" the voice resumed, in more moderate volume.

"Yes, I'm here," Malone replied. "Where are you, in Indo China? I can't hear you very well."

"You can hear me all right," the Chief of Homicide replied. "What I want to know is, what have you got to do with this payroll robbery and murder? We found your name and address on the victim's body."

Malone said, "Maybe he was planning to give me as a character witness to St. Peter at the pearly gates."

"That must be it," Von Flanagan came back, in a voice that had more edge and less volume to it. "Because right here in his little book — entry made last Saturday — John J.

Malone, retainer, twenty dollars. Are you going in for cut rates now?"

"Got to meet the amateur competition," Malone said. "Anyway, it looks as if my client has met with foul play. I suppose you know by this time who his assailants are."

"Don't give me that, Malone. What I want to know is, what was Algernon Petty doing in your office the day before he was murdered?"

Malone said, "He wasn't consulting me about getting himself murdered, if that's what you're thinking. The man you should be questioning is George V. Benson."

"What's he got to do with it?"

"I don't know," Malone said, "but I've got a hunch."

"Benson was in Pittsburgh when the job was pulled." Von Flanagan said. "He's due back in less than an hour, and if you've got any evidence involving him in the crime bring it to my office and confront him with it. And it better be good, or you'll need that twenty buck retainer to buy yourself cigarettes in the County Jail. Ever hear of false arrest, accessory before the fact, giving misleading information, failure to report —"

Malone hung up the receiver and jumping up reached for his hat.

"What's the hurry?" Maggie called out after him.

"I've got to go see a lawyer," Malone said, and bolted, with surprising celerity, out the door.

5-

"To the Municipal Airport," Malone told the cab driver, "and never mind the red lights. I've got friends at City Hall."

"I've heard that one before," the cabby shot back over his shoulder. "What's the big rush?"

Malone said, "The *accessorius post mortem* has just been caught in *flagrante delicto*."

"Happens all the time," the cabby said, and settled back into moody silence the rest of the way.

At the airport Malone went straight to the ticket window. "I've got to fly to Pittsburgh Saturday afternoon and be back here in time for an important homicide last night," he told the clerk. "Can I make it?"

The clerk blinked, started writing up a ticket, blinked again and, "You mean Saturday night out of Pittsburgh," he said, "There is an extra plane back to Chicago on Saturday nights, arriving here Sunday morning at —"

"Did you say Sunday morning?"

"Yes sir, Sunday. But that won't leave you much time in Pittsburgh. I wouldn't advise it, sir —"

Malone said, "Thank you, I was only inquiring."

At the information desk he was told that the plane from Pittsburgh was preparing to touch down, and put in a page call for George V. Benson.

Malone waited till Benson had shaken off reporters with a curt "No

comment," and presented his card. "The matter of a loan of three thousand dollars you made my client, Mr. Algernon Petty, last Saturday," he explained.

Benson had stuck the card in his pocket with the air of a man who has other business on his mind and is not to be detained. Now he took it out again and read aloud, "John J. Malone. Not *the* John J. Malone," he said.

"Thank you," Malone said. "I thought you might wish to discuss this little transaction before you talk to the police."

"It was simply a matter of helping out an old employee in a jam," Benson told Malone over a highball in the airport bar a few minutes later. "Besides, it would have been bad publicity for the company. I had no idea it would lead to anything — he seemed like such a harmless sort. Must have been in a lot deeper than he let on, to try anything like this."

"What do you mean?" Malone said.

Benson said, "Surely, Mr. Malone, you don't think Petty could have thought up anything like this by himself. He must have had confederates."

"Then why did he come to you with his story about the embezzlements?"

"Oh, so you know about that too?" For the first time Benson looked disturbed. "What else did he tell you?"

"He said you promised to leave the three thousand for him in the safe Saturday afternoon. Of course you knew the payroll cash was in the safe. Didn't you think it was a bit of a risk to leave a man like Petty alone with two hundred thousand dollars when he had just confessed to embezzling company funds?"

Benson looked down at his glass. "I can see now how that might be misconstrued," he said. "Of course you understand I had no intention of accusing Mr. Petty of anything. It was just that I couldn't understand —" He took out his wallet and handed Malone the confession the little bookkeeper had signed. "Here, you keep this," he said. "Or better yet, destroy it. There is also Mrs. Petty to consider. And the trouble he was having — with women, I mean. I suppose he told you about that too? Imagine, women! A man like Petty. I wouldn't want to have it on my conscience —"

"That's very generous of you, Mr. Benson," Malone said. He put the signed confession in his pocket.

"I would destroy that if I were you," Benson said. "I wouldn't want anything to come out that might be misinterpreted — can I give you a lift, Mr. Malone?"

In the cab on the way to police headquarters Benson was still nervous and disturbed. "I dread all this fuss — reporters, police — I suppose I'll have to testify at the inquest.

It would be a great relief to me if I had a good lawyer —” He looked speculatively at Malone.

The little lawyer nodded. “Come and see me. Any time.” At police headquarters he took leave of Benson, explaining it was only a short walk to his office. “I might begin by giving you one piece of legal advice,” he said on parting. “If Von Flanagan should ask you why you took the midnight plane back from Pittsburgh Saturday and what you were doing in Chicago Sunday night, don’t tell him a thing. Remember nobody is compelled to testify against himself.”

Without turning to look back Malone hurried to the corner and boarded a streetcar to the office. No point in running up cab fares, he told himself. Not on a twenty-buck retainer.

6.

Back at the office Malone handed Maggie the signed confession, saying, “Put this in my safe deposit box first thing tomorrow morning when you make the bank deposit. Did I have any phone calls?”

Maggie gave him a straight look. “*What* bank deposit? And whom did you expect a call from?”

“There *might* be a bank deposit, and I’m expecting a call from George Benson. I just left him at police headquarters. He seems to think he’ll be needing my professional services.”

“Don’t tell me it was Benson!”

Malone said, “I’m not ready to say it was anybody — yet. But it *could* have been Benson. Let’s take a trial balance.” He took out a fresh cigar and lighted it carefully before continuing. “All right, motive: Two hundred thousand dollars is enough motive for anybody, anytime. Opportunity: He could have flown to Pittsburgh Saturday afternoon, checked in at a hotel and seen or called somebody from the home office, and caught the night plane back to Chicago with plenty of time to kill Petty and return to Pittsburgh on the night plane, and deposit the payroll money in an airfield locker. Meanwhile the police would be searching for the bandit killers, and — no bandits. Because . . .” Malone watched a funnel of cigar smoke ascend slowly to the ceiling, “because the safest crime to commit is one in which the only obvious suspect is the one everybody is searching for and nobody can find — because he doesn’t exist.”

“Perfect,” Maggie said. “Unless somebody saw him come back. Unless somebody noticed that he hadn’t spent the night in his hotel room, or saw him getting off the plane there in the morning, or returning to his hotel room. And what about the murder weapon? And the night watchman?”

“No crime is that perfect,” Malone said. “Besides, Benson may save everybody a lot of trouble yet by cracking up and coming clean with the whole story. He was



pretty scared when I left him. Yes, I have an idea we'll be seeing Mr. Benson soon."

That evening the papers carried the news that all reports of the fleeing bandits had proved false alarms, that auditors had failed to find any irregularities in the slain bookkeeper's accounts, and that, according to Captain Von Flanagan, the department had undisclosed information on the identity of the payroll mob and was preparing to stage a series of lightning arrests. There was also a statement by George V. Benson to the effect that no effort or expense would be spared by his firm to bring the murderers to justice.

It was nearly midnight when the telephone in Malone's apartment rang. It was George Benson. His voice was low but urgent. "I've got to see you right away. Alone. I'll be right over." In less than fifteen minutes he was at the door, a shaken, almost incoherent, man.

"I need your help, Malone. You'll have to believe me. I had nothing to do with the robbery or the murder. I was only trying to help Petty. But what do you suppose happened tonight? Eric Dockstedter came to my home. He's our night watchman, you know. For the longest time he kept talking, beating around the bush, and then it dawned on me what he was trying to say. He suspects me of having committed the robbery and the murder! Didn't want to make any trouble for me,

he said, loyalty and all that, to the firm, to me personally, but he had a sick wife, a son-in-law that was in some kind of jam, he wasn't in too good health himself and was thinking of retiring anyway, and all that kind of talk. Trying to shake me down. Trying to blackmail me!"

"What did you say?"

"What *could* I say? I denied it, of course. I couldn't fire him. He might go to the police anyway. I stalled. Told him I'd have to think it over. There must be some way to stop him, Malone. But quietly, without any publicity. There'll be expenses, of course. I'm not a rich man, Malone, but a thing like this—will a thousand take care of it? The initial expense, I mean."

Malone tried not to look at the crisp hundred dollar bills on the coffee table. "As your lawyer—and I haven't said I'll take the case yet—I would have to ask you a few questions first, Mr. Benson," Malone said. "Why did you fly back from Pittsburgh Saturday night, and what were you doing in Chicago between Sunday morning and Sunday night when you flew back to Pittsburgh?"

"How did you know—" Benson began, and stopped himself abruptly. "Who says I was here Sunday? Did anybody see me?"

"I was only guessing," Malone admitted. "Just a shot in the dark, but it seems to have rung a bell. Come now, Benson, I'll have to

have the whole story — straight — if I'm going to take your case. You may have to explain it to the police later, anyway."

"I suppose so," Benson replied dejectedly. "Although there's nothing to it, really. Nothing that has any bearing on the case. It — it's something personal."

Malone said, "I see. The blonde alibi. You'll have to think of something more original, Mr. Benson."

"I'd hoped I could keep her out of this," Benson said, shaking his head sadly, "But I suppose you'll have to check on it. I'll need time, though, to sort of prepare her for it."

Malone shook his head. He handed Benson the telephone. "Now," he said. "Just say I've got to see her right away. Alone. And don't try coaching the witness."

Benson did as he was bidden, then drove Malone to the rendezvous. As he pulled up before the apartment hotel he turned to Malone. "This is going to be a delicate business," he said. "I can trust you, of course."

"You can trust a lawyer with anything," Malone said, "and don't mention a word of this to your wife."

7.

The blonde alibi proved to be a blonde all right, and everything else a man could wish in the way of an alibi. Serena Gates was neither surprised nor shocked.

"I've been expecting something like this ever since it happened," she told Malone right away. "I'm not the kind of a girl you think I am, Mr. Malone. Things are not really as bad as they look."

Malone looked again and decided things didn't look bad at all. In fact, things were every bit as good as they looked, even in the dim half light that concealed as much as it revealed of the shapely figure.

"You'll have to excuse my informal attire," Serena said, drawing a wisp of the filmy negligee over her shoulder. "You see, I had already gone to bed. It's about yesterday you want to question me, isn't it? Can I fix you something to drink?"

After the fourth highball and what Malone told himself was a very satisfactory investigation of the facts, he came away with the conviction that Benson's alibi was just a trifle short of what he needed to eliminate him as a suspect. According to Serena Gates he had left her apartment shortly after eight o'clock in the evening driving a rented car, as he usually did on his visits. The crime was committed at ten. This would have left him plenty of time to drive to the plant, return the rented car and take a cab to the airport. Serena might have been lying about the time, but if she was it did not promise well for Benson if he had no better alibi than she was willing to give him. Besides, she seemed to be prepared to take an entirely fresh

view of her amatory loyalties. The little lawyer made a mental note to look further into this aspect of the case.

When he got down to the office at noon he told Maggie about the events of the night before. Maggie was unimpressed. "Von Flanagan has been telephoning like mad all morning," she told him. The words were hardly out of her mouth when the phone rang. It was an entirely changed Von Flanagan.

"We're up against a blank wall, Malone. You've got to help me out. We've run down every suspicious car report, and no dice. I've never seen anything like it. No fingerprints, no murder weapon, no suspects."

Malone said, "Have you questioned the night watchman?"

"Yesterday and again this morning. Same thing. He heard a shot, found the body, and fired after the getaway car. Ballistics supports the guy's story. The bullet that killed Petty wasn't from his gun. I know your suspect is Benson but you're crazy. We've checked his alibi. He was in Pittsburgh all right."

Malone said, "Maybe you're barking up the wrong alibi. And maybe there *weren't* any bandits."

"Malone, Malone, you're holding out on me." The tone was something between a plea and a threat. "If Petty told you anything about Benson, it's your duty — besides I'm your friend, and if you make one false move, Malone, so help me —"

"I'll be ready to tell you all I know in a few hours," Malone said. "Meanwhile, put a tail on Benson. We may need him before the night is over." He hung up.

"Malone," Maggie said, "I've seen you stick your neck out before, but this time you've *really* done it. How can you prove Benson killed Petty and stole the money? Motive? Sure. And now, with this blonde in the picture, double sure. Opportunity? Swell. He could have done it in the two hours between eight and ten. He might have done it, he could have done it, but *did* he do it? And where are your witnesses? Where is the murder weapon? And where is the money? I suppose you think Benson is going to make a full confession, produce the gun, and turn over the money, just to get *you* out of a mess."

"Maggie," Malone said, "I think I need a drink."

"No use looking in the Emergency file," Maggie said, "You killed that bottle yesterday."

The telephone rang. It was Benson.

"Dockstedter just called me. Gave me till noon tomorrow. He wants fifty thousand dollars. You've got to do something, Malone." He paused. "I talked to Serena on the phone this morning. She's acting kind of strange. What did she tell you, Malone?"

Malone said, "You haven't got a thing to worry about. A clean conscience is a man's best defense. Sit

tight and don't do a thing till you hear from me. And don't go near Serena again till I give you the all clear. The police might be shadowing you." He hung up. "What was I saying, Maggie?"

"About money," Maggie said. "Why don't you use some of that thousand Benson gave you?"

Malone was indignant. "That money goes right back to Benson the minute I put the finger on him. You forget I've got a client. Alger non Petty."

8.

It was a perplexed and dejected John J. Malone who walked into Joe the Angel's City Hall her early that evening.

"Joe," Malone said, "have I got any credit left around here?"

"Liquor, yes. Moncy, no," Joe the Angel said. "What's the matter now, Malone? The client he no pay?"

"The client he pay," Malone said. "Twenty bucks. Then he get shot, and two hundred thousand dollars missing. Make it a gin and beer."

"I read about it in paper," Joe the Angel said. "Too bad. Don't worry, Malone, you find the bandits. Yes?"

"I find the bandits no," Malone said. "Joe, I need flowers."

"Ah, for the funeral. Sure, Malone."

"Not for the funeral, Joe. For a lady."

"Ah, for a lady. Same thing. I

mean, I call my brother-in-law, the one owns funeral parlor, and he send over flowers left over from funeral. What's address?"

Malone gave him Serena Gates' address, decided to call her up, and then changed his mind. Better surprise her after the flowers are delivered. "Tell him to put in a card saying 'Flowers to the fair,' and sign my name to it," Malone called over to Joe the Angel who was already on the telephone.

Over a second gin and beer Malone unburdened his heart. "Imagine, Joe. I've got the case as good as solved. The suspect had the motive. He had the opportunity. His alibi is two hours short and the lady in the case is on *my* side. All I need is the evidence — the murder gun, the money, or at least a witness."

Joe the Angel said, "The lady, maybe she help you?"

"I don't know," Malone said. "She admits he was in her apartment till eight. How would she know what he was doing between eight and ten," he paused, "unless she followed him," he paused again, "unless —" He set the beer down on the bar. "Give me a rye, quick, Joe. Make it a double rye. I've got to think."

He downed the double shot. "I've got it, Joe," he beamed. "I think I've got it. If Benson is two hours short on his alibi, so is Serena Gates. I've got to go and see the lady again. How about a ten-spot, on the cuff?"

"For a lady, that's different," Joe

the Angel said, and handed over the ten.

"Thanks," Malone said, "and can I borrow your gun?"

With a look of utter confusion Joe the Angel handed Malone the gun. "First it is flowers. Now it is a gun," he muttered, shrugging his shoulders. Malone was already on his way out the door.

9.

This time Serena Gates was both surprised *and* shocked at Malone's unexpected visit. It took a foot in the door and an ungentlemanly heave of the shoulder to override the lady's remonstrances. Serena was furious.

"What is the meaning of this? Malone, you must be crazy."

"Call it the impatience of youth," Malone said.

He looked around the living room. It had every appearance of a hastily planned departure, stripped of every personal belonging. He noted that his flowers to the fair had been delivered, and deposited in the waste basket. Three suit cases stood ready near the door. One of them particularly struck his eye. It seemed singularly out of place, large, metal-bound and quite unladylike.

"I was just planning to leave," Serena explained nervously.

"So I see," Malone said. "Can I help you with your baggage? This looks like the heavy one."

With his left hand he reached down for the big metal-bound suit-

case, while his right hand moved to his hip pocket. The lady was faster on the draw but slower on the rebound. With a swift lashing motion of his right arm Malone slapped the gun out of her hand. In the clawing, kicking, catch-as-catch-can wrestling match that followed Malone had no reason to revise his previous appraisal of Serena's physical charms, but he realized how much he had underestimated her muscular development. It took most of what he had once learned from Dr. Butch ("The Killer") Hayakawa about the gentle art of jujitsu to persuade the lady to listen to reason.

"I guess you could have handled that baggage yourself, after all," he said, still breathing hard. Keeping Serena covered with his own gun he picked hers up off the floor and stuck it in his coat pocket. "If it's Benson you're waiting for, you can just take it easy," he told her. "He'll be along in due time — with the police right behind him. But maybe it isn't Benson. If it were, you would have given him a better alibi. Or were you planning to double-cross him and let him take the rap while you made a fast getaway?"

Serena was silent, glaring at him with the pent-up fury of a cat waiting its opportunity to spring again.

Malone said, "No, I guess it wasn't Benson, after all. Between eight and ten Sunday night you had as much

opportunity to commit the crime as he had. You forgot that when you tried to short him on his alibi. All right, who was it? You didn't handle this job alone, did you, or am I underestimating you again?"

"Malone," she said, "there's two hundred thousand dollars in that suit case. Don't be a fool. There's still time if you and I —"

"A generous thought," Malone said, "and a flattering one."

"Make up your mind, Malone. They'll be here any minute —"

"So there *were* others," Malone said. "And now you're ready to double-cross them too, if I'll split with you." He reached for the telephone. "Get me Captain Daniel Von Flanagan at police headquarters," he told the hotel operator.

Serena screamed, "Malone, don't be a fool! Malone —!"

"Get over here right away," Malone told Von Flanagan, after explaining the situation to him briefly. "And bring Benson with you."

Von Flanagan and his squad had barely arrived on the scene and staked out to arrest the bandits when they arrived. Malone heard a knock on the door and then the shooting started. When it was over, two subdued bandits, one of them slightly wounded, were brought in. At sight of Serena Gates one of them shouted "Stool pigeon! Dou-

ble-crosser!" and lunged toward her, but Von Flanagan's cops restrained him.

"There's the payroll haul," Malone said to Von Flanagan, "and here's the lady's gun."

"That makes three guns," Von Flanagan remarked. "One of them should tell us who fired the shot that killed Petty. Nice work, Malone."

"I was just doing my duty to my client, Mr. Algernon Petty," Malone replied. "That's what he retained me for."

When he was finally alone in the apartment with Benson Malone said, "What are you going to do about the night watchman? Fire him, or lend him money to get his son-in-law out of a jam? And, speaking of money, here is your thousand-dollar retainer. I'm sorry, I guess I had you figured wrong all the time."

"You'd better keep it, Benson said, "I'm going to need a lawyer to defend me — in a divorce suit."

"At your service," Malone said. "Remember I never lost a client yet."

He bent down and picked the flowers out of the waste basket. The card was still attached to them: "Flowers to the Fair, From John J. Malone."

"I know a young lady who will appreciate these," Malone said, "Her mother lives in Monte Carlo."



BY EVAN HUNTER



IT WAS the little things that annoyed him, always the little things, those and of course the king of hearts.

If only these little things didn't bother him so, if only he could look

at them dispassionately and say, "You don't bother me, you *can't* bother me," everything would be all right. But that wasn't the way it worked. They did bother him. They started by gnawing at his nerves,

tiny little nibbles of annoyance until his nerves were frayed and ready to unravel. And then the restless annoyance spread to his muscles, until his face began to tic and his hands began to clench and unclench spasmodically. He could not control the tic or the unconscious spasms of his hands, and his inability to control them annoyed him even more until he was filled with a futile sort of frustrated rage, and it was always then that the king of hearts popped into his mind.

Even now, even just thinking about the things that annoyed him, he could see the king. It was not a one-eyed king like the king of diamonds, oh no. The king of hearts had two eyes, two eyes that stared up from the cynically sneering face on the card. The king held a sword in his hand, but the sword was hidden, oh so cleverly hidden, held aloft ready to strike, but only the hilt and a very small portion of the blade was visible, and the rest of the sword, the part that could tear and hack and rip, was hidden behind the king's head and crown.

He was a clever king, the king of hearts, and he was the cause of everything, of why the annoyances got out of hand occasionally, he was the cause, all right, he was the cause, that two-eyed clever louse, *why doesn't that girl upstairs stop playing that goddamned piano!*

Now just a minute, he told himself. Just get a grip, because if you don't get a grip, we're going to be

in trouble. Now just forget that little rat is up there pounding those scales, up and down, up and down, *do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do, ti, la, so. . .*

Forget her!

Dammit, forget her!

He crossed the room, and slammed down the window, but he could still hear the monotonous sound of the little girl at the piano upstairs, a sound which seeped through the floorboards and dripped down the walls. He covered his ears with his cupped palms, but the sound leaked through his fingers, *do, re, mi, fa, so . . .*

Think of something else, he commanded himself.

Think of Tom.

It was very nice of Tom to have loaned him the apartment. Tom was a good brother, one of the best. And it was very nice of him to have parted with the apartment so willingly, but of course he'd been going on a hunting trip anyway, so the apartment would be empty all weekend, and Tom couldn't possibly have known about the little girl upstairs and her goddamned piano. Tom knew that things were annoying him a lot, but he didn't know the half of it, God he'd turn purple if he knew the half of it, but even so he couldn't be blamed for that monotonous little girl upstairs.

He had seen the girl yesterday, walking with her mother in the little park across the street, a nice-looking little girl, and a pretty



mother, and he had smiled and nodded his head, but that was before he knew the little girl was an aspiring impresario. Today, he had seen the mother leaving shortly before noon, heading across the park with the Autumn wind lapping at her skirts. And shortly after that, the piano had started.

It was close to two o'clock now, and the mother still hadn't returned, and the piano had gone since noon, up and down those damn scales, when would she stop, wouldn't she ever stop practicing, how long does someone have to practice in order to . . .

We're back on that again, he thought, and that's dangerous. We have to forget the little annoyances because he just loves these little annoyances. When the annoyances get out of hand, he steps in with his leering face and the sword hidden behind his crown, so we can't let the annoyances get out of hand. So she's practicing a piano, what's so terrible about that? Isn't a little girl allowed to practice a piano? Isn't this a free country? Goddammit, didn't I fight to keep it free?

He didn't want to think about the fighting, either, but he had thought about it, and now it was full-blown in his mind, and he knew he could not shove it out of his mind until he had examined every facet of the living nightmare that had been with him since that day.

It had been a clear day, the weather in Korea surprisingly like

the weather in New York, and it had been quiet all along the front, and everyone was talking about this being it, this being the end. He hadn't known whether or not to believe the rumors, but it had certainly felt like the end, not even a rifle shot since early the night before, the entire front as still and as complacent as a mountain lake.

He had sat in the foxhole with Scarpa, a New York boy he had known since his days at Fort Dix. They had played cutthroat poker all morning, and Scarpa had won heavily, pulling in the matchsticks which served as poker chips, each matchstick representing a dollar bill. They had taken a break for chow, and then they'd gone back to the game, and Scarpa kept winning, winning heavily, and Scarpa's good luck began to annoy him. He had lifted each newly dealt hand with a sort of desperate urgency, wanting to beat Scarpa now, wanting desperately to win. When Scarpa dealt him the ten, jack, queen, and ace of hearts, he had reached for his fifth card eagerly, hoping it was the king, hoping he could sit there smugly with a royal flush while Scarpa confidently bet into him.

The fifth card had been a four of clubs.

He was surprised to find his hands trembling. He looked across the mess kit that served as a table, and he discarded the four of clubs and said, "One card."

Scarpa looked up at him curiously.

"Two pair?" he asked, a slight smile on his face.

"Just give me one card, that's all."

"Sure," Scarpa said.

He dealt the card face down on the messkit.

"I'm pat," Scarpa said, smiling.

He reached for the card. If Scarpa was pat, he was holding either a straight, a flush, or a full house. Or maybe he just had two pair and hadn't drawn for fear he'd give away his hand. That was not likely, though. If Scarpa thought he was playing against a man who already held two pair, he'd have taken a card, hoping to fill in one of the pair.

No. Scarpa was sitting with a straight, a flush, or a full house.

If he drew the king of hearts, he would beat Scarpa.

"Bet five bucks," Scarpa said.

He still did not pick up the face-down card. He threw ten matchsticks into the pot and said, "Raise you five."

"Without looking at your cards?" Scarpa asked incredulously.

"I'm raising five. Are you in this, or not?"

Scarpa smirked. "Sure. And since we're playing big time, let's kick it up another ten."

He looked across at Scarpa. He knew he should pick up the card and look at it, but there was something about Scarpa's insolent attitude that goaded him. He did not pick up the card.

"Let's put it all on this hand," he said bravely. "All that I owe you. Double or nothing."

"Without picking up that card?" Scarpa asked.

"Yes."

"You can't beat me without that fifth card. You know that, don't you?"

"Double or nothing, I said."

Scarpa shrugged. "Sure. Double or nothing. It's a deal. Pick up your card."

"Maybe I don't need the card," he said. "Maybe I'm sitting here with four of a kind."

Scarpa chuckled. "Maybe," he said. "But it better be a *high* four of a kind."

He felt his first twinge of panic then. He had figured Scarpa wrong. Scarpa was probably holding a low four of a kind, which meant he *had* to fill the royal flush now. A high straight wouldn't do the trick. It had to be the king of hearts.

He reached for the card, and lifted it.

He felt first a wild exultance, a sweeping sort of triumph that lashed at his body when he saw the king with his upraised, partially hidden sword. He lifted his head and opened his mouth, ready to shout, "A royal flush!" and then he saw the Mongol.

The Mongol was a big man, and he held a bigger sword, and for a moment he couldn't believe that what he was seeing was real. He looked back to the king of hearts,

and he opened his mouth wide to shriek a warning to Scarpa, but the Mongol was lifting the sword, the biggest sword he'd ever seen in his life, and then the sword came down in a sweeping, glittering arc, and he saw pain register on Scarpa's face when the blade struck, and then his head parted in the center, like an apple under a sharp paring knife, and the blood squirted out of his eyes and his nose and his mouth.

He looked at Scarpa, and then he looked again at the Mongol, and he thought only *I had a royal flush, I had a royal flush*. He found his bayonet in his hand. He saw his arm swinging back, and then he hacked downward at the Mongol, and he saw the stripe of red appear on the side of the Mongol's neck, and he struck again, and again, until the Mongol's neck and shoulder was a gushing red tangle of ribbons. The Mongol collapsed into the foxhole, the length of him falling over the scattered cards. Alongside his body, the king of hearts smirked.

The CO couldn't understand how the Mongol had got through the lines. He reprimanded his men, and then he noticed the strange dazed expression on the face of the man who'd slain the Mongol. He sent him to the field hospital at once.

The medics called it shock, and they worked over him, and finally they made sense out of his gibberish, but not enough sense. They shipped him back to the States. The bug doctors talked to him, and they

gave him occupational therapy, mystified when he refused to play cards with the other men. They had seen men affected by killing before. Not all men could kill. A man who could not kill was worthless to the Army. They discharged him.

They had not known it was all because of that royal flush. They had not known how annoyed he'd been with Scarpa all that day, and how that red king of hearts, that scarlet king, was the key to unraveling all that annoyance.

Now, in the safety of his brother's apartment, he thought of that day again, and he thought of the Mongol's intrusion, and of how his triumph had been shattered by that intrusion. If only it had been different. If only he could have said, "I have a royal flush, Scarpa, you louse. Look at it! Look at it, and let me see that goddamned smirk vanish! Look at it, Scarpa!"

The Mongol had divided the smirk on Scarpa's face, but the king of hearts had lain there in the bottom of the foxhole, and nothing erased that superior smirk on his face, nothing, nothing.

It was bad. He knew that it was bad. You're not supposed to react this way. Normal people don't react this way. If a little girl is playing the piano, you let her play. *God, when is she going to stop!*

You don't start getting annoyed, not if you're normal. You don't let these things bother you until you can't control them any more.

Tom wouldn't let these little things annoy him. Tom was all right, and hadn't Tom been through a war? The big war, not the child's play in Korea, but had Tom ever seen a Mongol cavalry attack, with gongs sounding, and trumpets blaring, had Tom ever seen that, ever experienced the horrible stench of fear when you stood in the wake of the advancing horses?

Well, the Mongol he'd killed hadn't been on horseback, so he couldn't use that as an excuse. The Mongol was, in a way, a very vulnerable man, despite his hugeness and the size of his sword. The bayonet had split his skin just like any man's, and his blood had flown as red as the woman's in Baltimore.

*I don't want to think about the woman in Baltimore,* he told himself.

He looked up at the ceiling of the room, and he prayed *Please, little girl, please stop playing the piano. Please, please.*

*Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti. . . .*

The woman in Baltimore had been a nice old lady. Except for the way she smacked her lips. He had lived in the room across the hall from her, and she'd always invited him in for tea in the afternoon, and she'd served those very nice little cookies with chocolate trails of icing across their tops. He had liked the cookies and the tea, until he'd begun noticing the way the old lady smacked her lips. She had very withered, parched lips, and every time she sipped at her tea, she

smacked them with a loud purse, and there was something disgusting about it, something almost obscene. It began to annoy him.

It began to annoy him the way Scarpa had annoyed him that day in the foxhole.

He tried to stay away from the old lady, but he couldn't. He wanted to go in there and say, "Can't you stop that goddamn vulgar smacking of your lips, you sanctimonious old hag?" That would have shut her up, all right. That would have shown her he wasn't going to take any more of her disgusting slurping.

But he could not bring himself to do it, and so she continued to annoy him, until his face began to tic, and his hands began to tremble, and one day he seized a knife from her kitchen drawer and hacked at her neck until her jugular vein split in a scarlet bubble of blood.

He had left Baltimore.

He had gone down to Miami and taken a job as a beach boy in one of the big hotels. He had always been a good swimmer, a man who should have been put in underwater demolition or something, not dumped into a foxhole with people who couldn't swim at all. He had been lucky in Baltimore because the old lady herself ran the boarding house in which he'd stayed. There was one other boarder, an old man who never left his room. The old lady was the only person who'd known his name, and she wasn't telling it to anyone, not any more.

But in Miami, faced with what he had done, afraid it might happen again, he took on an assumed name, a name he had forgotten now. Everyone called him by his assumed name, and he garnered fat tips from the sun-tanned people who lolled at the edge of the swimming pool. And all he'd had to do was arrange their beach chairs or get them a drink of orange juice every now and then. It was a good life, and he felt very warm and very healthy, and he thought for a while that he would forget all about the king of hearts and the Mongol and the old lady in Baltimore.

Until Carl began getting wise.

He hadn't liked Carl to begin with. Carl was one of these sinewy muscular guys who always put on a big show at the diving board, one of those characters who liked to swim the length of the pool six times underwater, and then brag about it later.

Carl's bragging began to get on his nerves. All right, Carl *was* a good swimmer, but he was good too!

It started one night while they were vacuuming out the bottom of the pool.

"I'm wasting my time in this dump," Carl said. "I should be working in a watershow someplace."

"You're not that good," he'd answered.

Carl looked up. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said. I've seen better swimmers."

"You have, huh?"

"Yes, I have."

"Who, for instance? Johnny Weissmuller?"

"No, I wasn't talking about Johnny Weissmuller. I've just seen better swimmers, that's all. Even I can swim better than you."

"You think so, huh?"

"Yes, I think so. In fact, I know so. I won a PAL medal when I was a kid. For swimming."

"You know what you can do with a PAL medal, don't you?" Carl asked.

"I'm only saying it because I want you to know you're not so hot, that's all."

"Kid, maybe you'd like to put your money where your mouth is, huh?"

"How do you mean?"

"A contest. Any stroke you call, or all of the strokes, if you like. We'll race across the pool. What do you say?"

"Any time," he answered.

"How much have you got to lose?"

"I'll bet you everything I've saved since I've been here."

"And how much is that?"

"About five hundred bucks."

"It's a bet," Carl said, and he extended his hand and sealed the bargain.

The bet disturbed him. Now that he had made it, he was not at all sure he *could* swim better than Carl, not at all sure. He thought about it, and the more he thought about

it, the more annoyed he became, until finally the familiar tic and trembling broke out again, and he felt this frustrated rage within him. He wanted to call off the bet, tell Carl he'd seen better swimmers and even *he* was a better swimmer, but he saw no reason to have to prove it, so what the hell, why should he waste his time for a measly five hundred bucks? That's what he wanted to tell Carl, but he realized that would sound like chickening out, and he didn't know what to do, and his annoyance mounted, and back of it all was that scarlet king, and he hated that card with all his might, and his hatred spread to include Carl.

He could not go through with the match.

He stole a bread knife from the kitchen on the night before he was to swim, and he went to Carl's room. Carl was surprised to see him, and he was even more surprised when the knife began hacking at his neck and shoulder in even regular strokes until he collapsed lifeless and blood-spattered to the floor.

It was all because of the king of hearts. All because of that clever, sneaky character with the hidden sword.

The gas station attendant in Georgia, on the way up North, that had been the worst, because that man had annoyed him only a very little bit, haggling over the price of the gas, but he had hit him anyway, hit him with the sharp cleaving edge

of a tire iron, knocked him flat to the concrete of his one-man filling station, and then hacked away at him until the man was unrecognizable.

And now, the little girl upstairs, pounding the piano, annoying him in the same way all the others had annoyed him, annoying, annoying until he would see red, and in that red, the king would take shape, leering.

If he could defeat the king, of course, he could defeat all the rest of them.

It was just a matter of looking the king straight in the eye, even when he was being terribly annoyed, looking him straight in the eye, and not allowing him to take hold. Why, of course, that was the ticket! What was he, anyway? Just a card, wasn't he? Couldn't he stare down a card? What was so difficult about that?

. . . *mi, fa, so, la, ti.* . . .

Shut up, you, he shouted silently at the ceiling. Just shut up! You don't know what trouble you're causing me. You don't know what I'm doing just to stop from . . . from . . . hurting you. Now just shut up. Just stop that goddamned pounding for a minute, while I find a deck of cards. There must be a deck of cards somewhere around here. Doesn't Tom play cards? Why sure, everyone plays cards.

He began looking through the apartment, the tic in his face working, his hands trembling, the piano thudding its notes through the floor

upstairs, the notes slithering down the long walls of the apartment. When he found the deck in one of the night-table drawers, he ripped it open quickly, not looking at the label, not caring about anything but getting those cards in his hands, wanting only to stare down the king of hearts, wanting to win against the king, knowing if he could defeat the king, his troubles would all be over.

He shuffled the cards and put them face down on the table.

He was trembling uncontrollably now, and he looked up and this time he shouted aloud at the little girl and her piano.

"Shut up! This is important! Can't you shut up a minute?"

The little girl either hadn't heard him, or didn't care to stop practicing.

"You little louse," he whispered. "I'm doing this all for you, but you don't care, do you? I ought to come up there and just tell you that you stink, that's all, that you'll never play piano anyway, that I could play better piano with one hand tied behind my back, that's what I ought to do. But I'm being good to you. I'm going through all this trouble, trying to beat that red king, and all because of you, and do you give a damn?"

Viciously, he turned over the first card.

A ten of diamonds.

He felt a wave of relief spread over him. Doggedly, he turned the

second card. A queen of clubs. Again the relief, but again he plunged on. A nine of hearts. A jack of spades. And then . . .

The king of hearts.

Upstairs the girl pounded at the piano, the scales dripping down the walls in slimy monotony. The tic in his face was wild now. He stared at the king, and his hands trembled on the table top, and he sought the evil eyes and the leering mouth, and the hidden sword, and he wanted to rush upstairs and stop the piano playing, but he knew if he could beat the king, if he could only beat the king . . .

He kept staring at the face of the card.

He did not move from the table. He kept staring at the card and listening to the *do, re, mi, fa* upstairs, and in a few moments, the tic stopped, and he could control his hands, and he felt a wild exultant rush of relief.

*I've beat him, he thought, I've really beat him! He can't harm me any more. That's the last king of hearts! The king is dead!*

And in his exultance, and in his triumph, he began turning over other cards, one after the other, burying the king, hiding him from sight forever, turning over nines and tens and an ace and a queen and . . .

The king of hearts.

His heart leaped.

The king of hearts!

But that couldn't . . . no, it

couldn't be . . . he'd . . . the king was dead, he had stared it down, beaten it, buried it, but . . .

He stared at the card. It was the king of hearts, no doubt about it, the smirking face and the hidden sword, back again, back to plague him, oh God, oh God there was no escape, no escape at all, he had killed it and now it was back again, staring up at him, staring up with a *do, re, mi, fa* . . .

"Shut up!" he roared. "Goddammit, can't you shut up?"

He swept the cards from the table

top, the frustrated rage mounting inside him again. He saw the box the cards had come in, and he swept that to the floor, too, not seeing the printed *Pinochle Playing Cards* on its face.

He went to the kitchen with his face ticcing and his hands trembling, listening to the piano upstairs. He took a meat cleaver from the kitchen drawer, and then sadly, resignedly, he went into the hallway and upstairs.

To the Mongol who was playing the piano.





# CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

## ***The Social Whirl***

When FBI agents arrested Samuel Y. Hochstetler on his leaving a Chicago restaurant, for robbing the Erie County United Bank in Milan, O., they halted his dancing career. The 33-year-old truck driver admitted pulling the robbery with another man, explaining he needed the money to satisfy his "suppressed desire" for dancing lessons. He showed the FBI agents a receipt for a down payment of \$5000 on a \$6,700 tuition from a Harrisburg, Pa., dancing school which has branches all across the U. S. The "lifetime" tuition entitled Hochstetler to instruction at any of the branches when and as the spirit moved him, for the rest of his life. Since he joined in the \$33,000 bank robbery, he told them, he had already started and had taken "an awful lot of lessons."

## ***Stolen Smooches***

Judge John Morgan Davis of Philadelphia recently fined a man \$200 for a kiss. Twenty-five-year-old Ernest Peterson, arraigned for forcing a young matron to kiss him at gunpoint on a dark street, drew the magistrate's ire. "Yours is probably the stupidest crime I ever ran into," he told Peterson.

Carl Frederico, 23, of Houston, Tex., is going to be a speedy kisser from now on. Bidding his girl friend goodnight on her porch, he saw a strange man step into his new car and drive it away. Police are looking for the heartless fellow.

## ***Robin Hood, Modern Style***

In Chicago, Joseph Feller, 34, interrupted two holdup men busily robbing a saloon cash register of \$600. One of them stopped work to search Feller's pockets, and found a single dollar bill.

"Keep it," the bandit said. "You're a working man like me."

## ***Paid in Full***

A citizen of Dallas, Tex., astounded City Treasurer L. V. McCordle of Los Angeles with \$300 and the following letter: "About six years ago I was locked up in your jail for one year for trying to forge, but never given a bill. Know somebody has to pay. Good luck to the city of L.A. and thanks for good care in jail."

## ***Burning Grievance***

Scout Leader Kenneth M. Chessman of Pasadena, Calif., really knows how to light a fire. Police recently got his confession of burning down Scout Headquarters in a huff. His efforts, he said, "weren't appreciated."

### **Low Flyer**

Milwaukee city police radio dispatchers were busily occupied one evening when an unknown voice broke in. "Altitude 3000 feet. Ceiling zero. Visibility zero. Coming in for a landing. Roger. 3 MIGs at 3 o'clock. Watch 'em. Skipper."

When one of the dispatchers asked for the squad number and location of the radio car, the voice faded out, but returned shortly with more Air Force patter and inquiries as to lunch hour. All unused radio cars were checked, then the dispatchers sent out their own message: "All cars. Keep your eyes peeled for a drunk in an unlocked squad car."

### **Where Else?**

When he robbed Carl De Rosa's West Warwick, R. I., bakery, the unidentified thief knew exactly where to find the dough. The \$91 he took was in the oven.

### **Killer Diller**

Excitedly, Ruth Grossman, Los

Angeles housewife, phoned police at 4 A.M. Sunday. "A man just called. He said, 'I'm Charley the Killer' and hung up."

Both San Francisco and Los Angeles police hopped to the rescue and succeeded in tracing the call to Eureka, Calif., in the hotel room of Charley Kays. "Sure, I did it," he admitted to Inspector Wm. Stanton. "I was trying to get Ruth Grossman in Beverly Hills and they gave me some other Ruth Grossman. So I just hung up. In Eureka everybody calls me Charley the Killer. I run the Eureka Termite Exterminating Company."

### **Sporty Defense**

Nathan Hill of Jackson, Tenn., vigorously protested the statement that he'd been arrested at an illegal still. "When the officers caught me," he told Judge Marion Boyd, "I'd run at least a quarter of a mile away."

Unimpressed, the judge gave him two months.



# The Pickpocket

BY MICKEY SPILLANE



WILLIE came into the bar smiling. He couldn't understand why he did it, but he did it anyway. Ever since the day he had married Sally and had stopped in for a bottle of beer to bring home for his wedding supper, he had come in smiling. Sally, he thought, three years with Sally, and now there was little Bill and a brother or maybe a sister on the way.

The bartender waved, and Willie said, "Hello, Barney." A beer came up and he pushed a quarter out, looking at himself in the big mirror behind the wall. He wasn't very big, and he was far from good-looking. Just an ordinary guy, a little on the small side. He was respectable now. A real law-abiding

*Willie didn't like the cops coming to visit him. But he didn't get sore until he opened his door to a man with a gun . . .*

citizen. Meeting Sally had done that.

He remembered the day three winters ago when he'd tried to lift a wallet from a guy's pocket. Hunger and cold had made his hand shake and the guy had collared him. He was almost glad to be run into the station house where it was warm. But the guy must have known that, too, and refused to press any charges. So he got kicked out in the cold again. That was where Sally had found him.

He remembered the taxi, and Sally and the driver half-carrying him into her tiny apartment. The smell of the hot soup did more to revive him than anything else. She didn't ask any questions, but he told her nevertheless. He was a pickpocket. A skinny little mug who had lived by his hands ever since he was a kid. She'd told him, right away, that it didn't matter.

He had eaten her food and slept on her couch for a week before he got smart. Then he did something he had never done before in his life. He got a job. It wasn't much at first, just sweeping up in a loft where they made radio parts. Slowly he found out he had hands that could do better things than push a broom. The boss found it out, too, when he discovered Willie assembling sections in half the time that it took a skilled mechanic to do it. They gave the broom to someone else.

Only then did he ask Sally to

marry him. She gave up her job at the department store and they settled down to a regular married life. The funny part was that he liked it.

The cops never gave up, though. As regularly as clockwork they came around. A real friendly visit, understand? But they came around. The first of the month Detective Coggins would walk in right after supper, talk a while, looking at him with those cynical, cold blue eyes, then leave. That part worried Willie — not for himself, but for little Bill. It wouldn't be long now before he'd be in school, and the other kids . . . they'd take it out on him. Your old man was a crook . . . a pickpocket . . . yeah, then why do the copper's come around all the time? Willie drained his beer quickly. Sally was waiting supper for him.

He had almost reached the door when he heard the shots. The black sedan shot past as he stepped outside and for one awful instant he saw a face. Black eyebrows . . . the sneer . . . the scar on the cheek. The face of a guy he had known three years ago. And the guy had seen him, too. In his mind, Willie ran. He ran faster than he had ever run in his life — but his legs didn't run. They carried him homeward as the self-respecting should walk: but his mind ran.

Three years wasn't so long after all.

As soon as he came in Sally knew something was wrong. She said,

"What happened?" Willie couldn't answer. "Your job . . ." she said hesitantly. Willie shook his head.

It was the hurt look that made his lips move. "Somebody got shot up the street," he told her. "I don't know who it was, but I know who did it."

"Did anyone else . . ."

"No, just me. I think I was the only one."

He could tell Sally was almost afraid to ask the next question. Finally, she said: "Did they see you?"

"Yes. He knows me."

"Oh, Willie!" Her voice was muffled with despair. They stood in silence, not knowing what to say, not daring to say anything. But both had the same thoughts. Run. Get out of town. Somebody was dead and it wouldn't hurt to kill a couple more to cover the first.

Sally said: ". . . The cops. Should we . . ."

"I don't dare. They wouldn't believe me. My word wouldn't be any good anyway."

It came then, the sharp rap on the door. Willie leaped to his feet and ran, reaching for the key in the lock. He was a second too late. The door was tried and pushed open. The guy that came in was big. He filled the door from jamb to jamb with the bulk of his body. He grabbed Willie by the shirt and held him tight in his huge hands.

"Hello, shrimp," he said.

Willie punched him. It was as

hard as he could hit, but it didn't do a bit of good. The guy snarled: "Cut it out before I break your skinny neck!" Behind him he closed the door softly. Sally stood with the back of her hand to her mouth, tense, motionless.

With a rough shove the big guy sent Willie staggering into the table, his thick lips curling into a tight sneer. "Didn't expect somebody so soon, did you, Willie? Too bad you're not smart. Marty doesn't waste any time. Not with dopes that see too much. You know, Marty's a lucky guy. The only one that spots the shooting turns out to be a punk he can put the finger on right away. Anybody else would be down at headquarters picking out his picture right now."

His hand went inside his coat and came out with a .45 automatic. "I always said Marty was lucky."

The big guy didn't level the gun. He just swung it until it covered Willie's stomach. Sally drew in her breath to scream quickly, just once, before she died.

But before the scream came Willie gave a little laugh and said: "You won't shoot me with that gun, Buster."

Time stood still. Willie laughed again. "I slipped out the magazine when you grabbed me." The big guy cursed. His finger curled under the butt and felt the empty space there. Willie was very calm now. "And I don't think you've got a shell in the chamber, either."

The big guy took one step, reaching for Willie, a vicious curse on his lips; then the sugar bowl left Sally's hand and took him on the forehead. He went down.

Willie didn't hesitate this time. He picked up the phone and called the station house. He asked for Detective Coggins. In three minutes the cop with the cold blue eyes was there, listening to Willie's story. The big guy went out with cuffs on. Willie said: "Coggins . . ."

"Yes?"

"When the trial comes up . . . you can count on me to testify. They won't scare me off."

The detective smiled, and for the first time the ice left those cold blue eyes. "I know you will, Willie." He paused. "And Willie . . . about

those visits of mine . . . I'd like to come up and see you. I think we could be good friends. But I'd like to have you ask me first."

A grin covered Willie's face. "Sure! Come up . . . anytime at all! Let's say next Saturday night. Bring the missus!"

The detective waved and left. As he closed the door Willie could imagine the chant of young voices. They were saying:

"Yeah . . . and you better not get funny with Bill because his pop is friends with that cop. Sure, they're all the time playing cards and . . ."

Willie laughed. "Sometimes," he said, "I'm almost glad that I had some experience. Finally came in handy!"



# Big Steal

*A Johnny Liddell Novelette*

**BY FRANK KANE**

*The girl was in trouble, so she gave Johnny Liddell a package. That put Liddell in trouble, too . . .*

THE GIRL at the mike had a husky voice that did things to the spine.

She was tall, redheaded, put together in a way that flowed tantalizingly as she swayed to the rhythm of the music. Her black, decollete gown clung to her like a wet bathing suit.

At the bar, Johnny Liddell hung a cigarette between his lips, let it dangle there unlighted. He could hear the heavy breath of the bartender as it whistled through his teeth. The rumble of conversation that had filled the room a few minutes before had died down



to a whisper, glasses stopped jingling as she did things to a torchy number.

Suddenly, the song was over, the house lights came up. There was a moment of silence as though the audience was catching its collective breath, then a roar of applause exploded.

Johnny Liddell swung around to the bar, discovered the unlighted cigarette between his lips, dropped it to the floor. The glass in front of him was empty, he signalled to the bartender for a refill.

“Quite a number,” Liddell grinned.

“That babe’s all woman,” the bartender wiped his forehead with his sleeve. “I watch her twice a night seven nights a week and she still does it to me.” He reached to the backbar, grabbed a bottle, tilted it over a jigger. He replaced the bottle on the backbar, dumped a couple of pieces of ice into the glass, washed them down with soda.

Liddell dropped a bill on the bar. “Full house you got. She draw them like this every night?”

The bartender pursed his lips, his eyes hop scotched from table to table. “Every night. And all spenders, not a stiff in the place. All big uptown society people.” He snagged the bill, headed for the cash register.

On the floor, the redhead was still taking bows. Liddell found a fresh cigarette, lit it. He took a deep drag, blew it through his nostrils in twin streams. He swung around on his barstool, squinted through the

smoke, studied the faces around the dance floor. Some he knew, some he recognized from the Sunday supplements. The bartender was right when he tagged it a top-drawer crowd.

The audience finally let the redhead go. She turned, headed for the backstage entrance. The walk was a production.

The house lights went down, a yellow spot probed through the semi-darkness, picked up the M. C. as he pranced out onto the floor. He was tall and thin, had unbelievably broad shoulders and walked with a peculiar mincing step. Even from where Liddell sat, his teeth looked too white and too even to be real. He fluttered through a couple of off-color jokes that brought a faint ripple of laughter and sang two nasal choruses of a number never destined to become popular as the result of his rendition.

The door to backstage opened and a man in a tuxedo that fitted snugly across the hips, showed signs of ample and expert padding at the shoulders circled the floor, threaded his way through the tables. He walked down the bar to where Liddell sat, stopped at his elbow.

“You’re Mr. Liddell?” The voice showed the faintest trace of an accent.

“I’m Liddell.” He dropped the cigarette to the floor, got down from the stool.

“Will you follow me?” The man in the tuxedo led the way back



through the tables to the backstage door.

The glitter and the tinsel of the dining room had no counterpart backstage. There was a long, dingy corridor lined with doors. It smelled exotically of one part perspiration, compounded with three parts perfume.

They stopped in front of a door decorated with a peeling gilt star. The man in the tuxedo knocked. "It's Charles, Mona."

"Come in. I'm decent."

The redhead sat on a straight-backed chair in front of a cluttered dressing table. Half a dozen snapshots and telegrams were stuck in the molding of a fly specked mirror over the table. Her thick red hair was hanging down over her shoulders, and she had changed the close fitting dress for a black silk dressing gown. Her face had been wiped clean of make-up, giving it a fresh and youthful look. Her mouth was moist and soft looking.

"Thanks, Charles," she dismissed the man in the tuxedo with a smile, waited until he had closed the door behind him.

"I'm glad you could come, Liddell. I need your help." She studied him frankly, seemed satisfied with what she saw. She reached over to the dressing table, picked up a long silver box, shook out a cigarette. She offered one to the private detective. He took one, smelled it, put it back.

"I prefer tobacco in mine." He

reached into his pocket, brought out one of his own cigarettes. "You're in trouble, you say?"

The redhead leaned forward and accepted a light. "Not yet. That's what I need you for. To see that I don't have any trouble." She let the murky, sweet-smelling smoke dribble from between half-parted lips. "Anybody see you come back here?"

"Just the guy you sent for me."

"Charles? He doesn't matter." She got up from her chair, walked over to the door, opened it a crack and looked up and down the corridor. Satisfied that nobody was within hearing distance, she closed the door. "I have to talk to you, but this isn't the place to do it. Can you meet me after the last show?"

"I'd like to think it's my fatal charm, but it's business?"

The redhead nodded. "It'll be worth your while."

Liddell grinned. "I'll bet." He pulled over a chair, reversed it and straddled it, resting his elbows on the back. "Can't you give me some idea of what it's all about? Maybe I can put the next couple of hours to good use."

The redhead caught her full lower lip between her teeth, shook her head. "I want you to have the whole picture before you begin. I can't give it to you here." She walked over to where he sat, ran the palm of her hand up his lapel. She wet her lips with her tongue until they glistened. "In this place you never know when someone

might walk in — and I get nervous with an audience.”

Liddell shrugged. “You sold me. Where and when do I meet you?”

“My place. About 3.”

Liddell grinned at her. “It may be unchivalrous to mention it, but I don’t know where your place is.”

“I thought you were a detective?” she chided. “I’m in Marlboro Towers, suite 3D.” She stared at him thoughtfully for a moment. She reached into her pocket, brought up a key. “I don’t usually pass out any keys to my apartment, but you understand. This is business. Besides, I may not be there exactly at 3. You can wait inside.”

Liddell bounced the key on his palm, dropped it into his pocket. “You’ll be all right until 3?”

The redhead nodded. “You’re going to see to that.”

“I am? How?”

She walked over to the dressing table with the same strut she had used on the dance floor. From the top drawer, she took out a paper-wrapped package. “You’re going to mind this for me. Nothing will happen to me while you have that package. It’s sort of like an insurance policy.”

Liddell took the package, turned it over incuriously, dropped it into his side pocket.

“No questions?” She turned the full power of her green eyes on him.

“Not unless you want me to ask them.”

He pushed back his chair and stood up. The redhead ran her incredibly graceful fingers through her hair, stared at him thoughtfully. “You’re quite a man, Liddell. My kind of man, I think.”

“What kind’s your kind, Mona?”

She shrugged. “A man who knows there’s a time and place for everything. Who asks questions when they should be asked — and who knows when to wait for answers.”

“I’m the patient type.”

She grinned at him. “Two hours isn’t so long.” She went over to him, reached up on her toes, pressed her mouth against his. Her lips were as soft and moist as they looked. “That’ll carry you over.”

He tried to slide his hand around her waist but she slid under his arm. “I’ll be expecting you at 3, Liddell.” She leaned back against the edge of the table, looked up at him from under lowered lids. “You won’t be late?”

Liddell grinned crookedly. “Not even if I break two legs.”

2.

The evening breeze flapped the awnings on some of the fancier boites along the avenue, felt good after the closeness of the bar. Liddell checked his watch, found he had two hours to kill, decided it was a good night for walking. He was halfway up the block when a man came up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't turn around fast, Liddell." a whining voice told him. "I got a nervous finger." The man took his position at Liddell's right, another man materialized on his left. The man on the right moved a topcoat he had folded over his right arm. The ugly snout of a .45 poked out from under its folds. "Let's walk around the corner. It's a nice night for a ride."

His companion reached into Liddell's jacket, pulled out his gun, dropped it into his pocket. "What's it all about, friend?" Liddell looked the man over. He was thin, undersized, a fact that his carefully built-up shoulders failed to conceal. His hair was thick, black and rolled back in oily waves from his low hairline. He wore it in a three-quarter part, revealing the startling whiteness of his scalp. His thin, bloodless lips were parted in what was intended to be a smile, but there was no trace of it in the eyes that squinted across the high bridge of an enormous hooked nose.

"We're going to a party."

Liddell's eyes dropped to the .45. "You make it hard to refuse. But I'll take a rain check. I'm not dressed for a party."

The thin lips tilted at the corners, the eyes grew bleaker. "You are for this one. It's a come-as-you-are party."

They turned the corner, headed for a car sitting a few feet down the block without lights. The man with the gun signalled for his companion

to get behind the wheel, then he and Liddell slid into the back seat.

"What'd the girl tell you, Liddell?" the hook-nosed man wanted to know. From the tone of his voice, it seemed as though he didn't care whether Liddell told him or not.

"What should she have told me?" Liddell countered.

The man with the gun ignored the question. "Who you working for on this caper? The insurance company?"

Liddell considered it, shook his head. "No one. She gave me hot flushes with that song of hers; I went back to see if I could do myself any good." He shrugged. "From the reception I got, I guess a lot of guys get the same idea." He settled back in the corner, managed to work the package the girl had given him out of his pocket. He could feel the perspiration beading on his forehead as he shoved it down behind the seat.

The hook-nosed man reached out, caught him by the lapel. "What are you squirming about?" His face was a white blur in the interior of the car. The snout of his gun bored into Liddell's midsection.

"I was trying to reach a cigarette."

Hook-nose pushed him away. "Okay. But get it with two fingers. Anything but a cigarette comes out, and I blast the hand off."

Liddell brought up a cigarette, stuck it between his lips. He wiped

the perspiration off his upper lip with the side of his hand. The gunman's lips were twisted in a grin in the flickering light of the match.

"I always thought you private eyes were tough. You look real tough on television," he chuckled. "What're you sweating about?" He jabbed the gun into Liddell's side, was rewarded with a grunt. "On T.V. you'd be taking this away from me. Here, I'll be giving it to you — slug by slug."

Liddell smoked silently, watched the character of the neighborhood change from densely populated to suburban with longer and longer stretches of unpopulated areas showing up. About forty minutes from the Queensboro Bridge, the car left the paved road, found an old dirt road that headed toward the Sound.

"What's on the program?" Liddell wanted to know.

The hook-nosed man chuckled. "A swim. Only you're not going to know about it."

The car shuddered to a stop and the driver swung around on his seat. "You better find out what he knows first, Hook. The boss is going to want to know what the girl has on her mind. If she's selling out —"

"I know, I know," Hook growled. "You stick to your wheel. Let me take care of my end." He jabbed the gun into Liddell's side. "Out."

"Suppose I don't?"

"Then you get it here. Be my guest." He pulled away from Liddell. "Don't count on us being

afraid to muss up the car. It ain't ours."

Liddell nodded, pushed open the door, stepped out. When the hook-nosed man got up from his seat to follow, Liddell took a long-shot gamble. He caught the door, slammed it shut behind him. He heard the yowl of pain as it collided with the gunman's head, started running.

The sand seemed glued to his feet, made his shoes feel like hundred-pound weights as he sprinted for a clump of trees and underbrush a hundred feet away. His heart was pounding in his chest, his breath coming in gasps as he reached it. From the car came a series of sharp snaps, and slugs whistled over his head, chewed bits out of the tree next to him. He dove down onto his face, lay there.

He could hear Hook cursing shrilly, yelling orders at the driver. Liddell lay still for a moment, then parted the bushes. Hook and the driver were approaching cautiously, guns in hand. Liddell crawled back further into the bushes, pulled himself to his feet behind a tree.

"We split up. You go around that way, I'll go this," Hook snarled at the driver. "He's got no gun and we got to get him."

"The boss ain't going to like it if he gets away, Hook," the driver said.

"He ain't getting away," Hook promised.

Liddell could hear the crashing of branches as the two men pushed

their way into the wooded area. He squeezed back out of sight behind the tree, squinted against the darkness. To his left he could see the driver pushing his way toward him. He moved around the tree, waited.

Suddenly, as the driver came abreast of him, Liddell jumped. He tried to get his arm around the man's throat to cut off any warning, missed. The driver yelled his surprise and struggled. Liddell had his gun hand, twisted it behind the other man's back, pulled him in front of him as a shield.

A bush to the right seemed to belch flame. The man in Liddell's arms stiffened, jerked twice, then went limp. To the right he could hear the crashing of bushes as Hook ran for the car. Liddell let the driver's body slump to the ground, wasted precious minutes fumbling in the dark for the dead man's gun. By the time he found it, he could hear the roar of the car as its wheels spun in the sand. Suddenly, it got traction, roared back toward the road. Liddell pushed his way out of the bushes, squeezed the trigger of his gun until it was empty. In the distance he could hear the roar of the car's motor, the scream of its tires as it skidded onto the road.

He went back to where the driver lay, turned him over on his back, lit a match. One of Hook's shots had caught him in the neck. It left a little black hole above the knot in his tie that had spilled a crimson stream down his shirt.

It only took one.

Liddell consulted the watch on his wrist, groaned when he realized he had less than an hour to reach the redhead. He headed for the road, didn't see another car or a place to telephone for over an hour and a half.

When he finally did reach an all-night drugstore, there was no answer from the redhead's apartment. The girl on the switchboard at Marlboro Towers couldn't remember whether Miss Varden had come in or not. Liddell slammed the receiver back on its hook, cursed vigorously. He dropped another coin in the slot, dialed police headquarters.

### 3.

It was almost four o'clock when Johnny Liddell left the elevator at the third floor in Marlboro Towers, walked down to the redhead's door. He tried the knob, found it unlocked pushed the door open. A uniformed cop, standing near the window, looked at him with no sign of enthusiasm as he walked in.

"Inspector Herlehy here? I'm Johnny Liddell."

The cop pointed to a closed door. "He's expecting you."

A bed lamp was burning, throwing a pale amber light over the bed. Mona Varden lay on the pink coverlet of the bed. One arm dangled to the floor; the other was thrown across her face, as though to ward

off a blow. Her throat had been cut from ear to ear, and a pool of blood had formed on the rug next to the bed.

Inspector Herlehy of Homicide stood at the far side of the bed, chomping on the ever-present wad of gum. "Your tip came too late, Liddell," he grunted. He nodded to the bed. "She was like this when the boys got here."

Liddell nodded. "No trace of who did it?"

The inspector shrugged. "The lab boys are working at it." He pulled a fresh slice of gum from his pocket, denuded it of wrapper, folded it and stuck it between his teeth. "We thought you might be able to help."

A white-coated representative of the medical examiner's office walked over, stared down at the body and shook his head. "That was a pretty nifty dish until somebody decided to make hash out of it," he said. He handed Herlehy a receipt to sign, waited until it was initialled. "Thanks, Inspector. We'll take her along if you don't need her any more."

Herlehy nodded. He walked over to a window, stared down into the street below. Liddell walked around the bed, watched grimly while two men transferred the body from the bed to a stretcher, covered it with a sheet and walked out. When the door had closed behind them, Herlehy swung around. "Okay, Liddell, suppose you start talking."

"Let's go outside." He led the way into the living room, dropped into an easy chair, fumbled for a cigarette.

"What's your connection with the redhead?" Herlehy wanted to know.

"I never spoke to her before tonight. She contacted the office about six, wanted me to meet her at the club after the twelve o'clock show."

Herlehy pushed his broad-brimmed sheriff-type hat on the back of his head. "That can all be checked."

"Pinky, my secretary, will verify." He took a deep drag on the cigarette, took it from between his lips, lifted a crumb of tobacco from the tip of his tongue. "She wanted help on something. She wouldn't talk there, asked me to meet her here."

"It doesn't make sense," Herlehy growled. "Why didn't she have you meet her before she went to the club — or even here after the show? Why drag you in to that upholstered sewer only to tell you to meet her here?"

"I don't know, she just —" He broke off, snapped his fingers. "Maybe I do at that. Maybe she just wanted to give me the package to hold. That's what it was, the package!"

Herlehy growled. "That clears everything up. What package?"

"It was about so big by so long." Liddell described it with his hands.

"She said it was insurance that she'd be able to meet me."

"Where is it?"

Liddell crushed out the cigarette. "I stuck it down behind the cushions in the car they were using to take me for a ride. It's —"

"It's gone," Herlehy groaned. "They've got that car stashed away someplace, and —"

"No. It wasn't their car. They socked it just to take me for a ride. Chance is Hook dumped it as soon as he got to town."

Herlehy motioned the uniformed cop over. "Take this down and phone it right in. I want it out on the wires immediately." He turned to Liddell. "Give him the details."

Liddell scowled in concentration. "It was a dark one — black or dark blue. Looked like a 1953 Lincoln to me. Chances are it has a couple of bullet holes in the back. I emptied a gun at it." He looked at Herlehy. "You get a make from the local cops on the driver?"

Herlehy shook his head. "Not yet. We will. Now, about this guy Hook. You make him?"

"It seems to me I know him from somewhere, but I can't put my finger on it. Give me a couple of hours with the nickname file and I'll make him. I never forget a face, inspector, and in his case it's going to be double in spades."

The uniformed patrolman answered a knock at the door. A tall, carefully tailored man stood in the hallway, a grey Stetson in his hand.

He looked around curiously at the sight of the uniformed cop, raised his eyebrows at the presence of the other two.

"I'm Lee Morton of the *Dispatch*," he told no one in particular. "I have an appointment with Mona Varden."

Herlehy tugged at his earlobe. "Lee Morton, eh? The gossip columnist?"

Morton nodded. His bright little eyes hopped around the room, missed nothing. "Mona Varden called me, said she'd have a real story for me tonight."

"Know what the story was about?" Herlehy wanted to know.

The columnist pursed his lips, shook his head. "She didn't like to talk over the phone. She often had good items for me and I'd pick them up here."

"Why? You were at the club tonight," Liddell told him. "I saw you there."

Morton grinned humorlessly. "I'm there almost every night. It's part of my job. But if Mona were seen talking to me, she'd be blamed for everything I printed." He looked Liddell over dispassionately. "You're Johnny Liddell, aren't you?"

Liddell nodded.

The columnist turned back to the homicide man. "I don't like to appear curious, Inspector, but perhaps it's not too much to ask what's going on? After all, it's not usual to keep a date with a night club

singer to find the police force and the town's best-known private eye playing chaperone. Where's Mona?"

Liddell cocked an eye as if he were figuring. "Just about now they're loading her onto a slab at the city morgue."

The grey hat fell from Morton's fingers, rolled on the floor. He picked it up, dusted it off mechanically with the palm of his hand. "Is that on the level?" he turned to Herlehy.

The homicide man nodded.

"Who did it?" the columnist demanded.

"That's what we're trying to find out, Morton," Herlehy growled. "Right at the moment we've got it narrowed down to nine million people, but by tomorrow maybe we'll be able to eliminate some of them."

4-

Inspector Herlehy slumped in an armchair at police headquarters, watched Johnny Liddell leafing patiently through book after book of pictures. A door opened and a uniformed lieutenant walked in.

"Got something?" Herlehy wanted to know.

"I don't know, Inspector. We ran the nickname cards through, then we ran only the cards of short men. That cut it down to sixteen. From the m.o. file we ran through the known guns who use .45s and we cut it down to three. One's dead,

the other's in Quentin." He tapped a card on his thumb nail. "This one doesn't sound like it."

Liddell looked up from the mug book. "Why not?"

"Never went in for killing. He's been up several times for jewel jobs and stickups. Never used the gun." He looked at the card. "Name's Lou Eastman, nickname's Hook."

Liddell swore softly, snapped his fingers. "I said he looked familiar, inspector. Our agency was on the VanDeventer jewel job about seven years ago, remember? Eastman was up for the job, wiggled free." He walked down the row of cabinets, pulled out a drawer, flipped through the pictures, stopped at one and scowled at it. "That's the guy, inspector. Hook Eastman."

Herlehy nodded to the lieutenant, got up, walked to the wall where a water cooler was mumbling softly to itself, and helped himself to a drink. He crumpled the cup in his fist, threw it at a waste basket. "Sure of that, Liddell? I remember that little rat. I wouldn't figure him for a killer. He's too yellow."

"He ran out, didn't he? It was Eastman, all right."

"Can't hurt to have a talk with him," Herlehy conceded. He walked back to the desk, punched a button on the base of the phone. "Put out an APB on Hook Eastman, suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon. Get his description from Identification." He dropped the re-



ceiver on its hook, chewed on his thumb nail for a moment. "I don't get the connection between a heist artist like Eastman and a babe like Varden with her throat cut."

"Any word on the car?"

Herlehy shook his head. "Not yet. But we'll find it if it's in town. And I can't figure a city rat like Eastman dumping the car in the sticks and making his way back. He wouldn't feel safe unless he could disappear down a sewer or into a subway."

It was almost noon before the car was recovered.

Inspector Herlehy sat sleeping in his desk chair in his office, heels hooked on the corner of his desk, window shades drawn. Johnny Liddell lay sprawled on the big leather couch. When the phone shrilled, the inspector started, dropped his legs from the desk. He lifted the receiver from its hook, held it to his ear, growled into it. After a moment, he replaced the receiver, walked stiffly to the window, opened the blinds, spilled a yellow pool of sunlight into the office. He walked over to the small sink, splashed cold water into his face, dragged a comb through his hair.

Liddell rolled over onto his back, stared around the room. His eyes finally came to focus on the inspector. "What time's it?" he yawned.

"Near noon," Herlehy grunted. He ran the tips of his finger along the stubble on his chin. "Motor Vehicle picked the car up on Canal

Street about an hour ago. Identification's been going over it for fingerprints. No soap."

Liddell slid his legs off the couch, sat up. "What about the package?"

"They found it behind the cushion. It's on its way up." He walked over, sank into his desk chair, stabbed at a button on his desk. When a young patrolman stuck his head in the door, he said tiredly, "Get us a couple of coffees, will you, Ray?"

"One black," Liddell added.

The cop's head was withdrawn. The door closed.

Liddell tottered to the sink, doused his face and hair. He was drying them off on the towel when a knock came on the door and Hennessy of Motor Vehicle walked in. He grinned a hello at Liddell, dropped a familiar brown paper-wrapped package on the inspector's desk. "Right where you said it'd be, inspector."

Herlehy nodded. He picked up the package, turned it over curiously in his hand. Then he broke the string. "Let's see what all the shooting's about." The brown paper wrapper peeled away to reveal a canvas pouch loosely basted at the top. Herlehy ripped the thread with his nail, dumped the contents of the bag on his desk top.

A cascade of diamonds of all sizes flowed onto the desk.

Liddell tossed the towel at its hook, whistled. "I'll be damned."

Herlehy stirred the pile with a

blunt forefinger. "At least it makes sense. It explains where Eastman fits into the picture." He picked up one of the larger stones, held it up to the light, murmured appreciatively.

Hennessy, the man from Motor Vehicle, closed his mouth. It had been hanging open since the diamonds first poured out. "You knew this was there all the time?"

"We weren't sure what was in it," Herlehy said. He scooped the stones back into their bag. "This is the same bag Varden gave you last night?"

Liddell nodded.

Herlehy reached into his drawer, found a rubber band, closed the neck of the pouch, dropped it on his desk top. "Tie this up the same way I do, Johnny?"

"The epidemic of jewel jobs?"

Herlehy nodded. "It figures. Most of the jobs were Cafe Society. Who's in a better spot to finger the jobs? While Varden was strutting around, she could have been in a swell spot to get a slant at the worthwhile ice those rich dames were sporting. Then she signalled somebody —"

"Eastman?"

Herlehy considered it, shook his head. "No, not Eastman. It'd have to be somebody that was there every night or could go there without being conspicuous. Eastman couldn't. As an ex-con, one of the boys on the vice squad would have spotted him if he made the bright lights too often."

"I better be getting back downtown, inspector," Hennessy put in. "Do I tell the boss about this?"

Herlehy nodded. "Tell him to keep it quiet until we get ready to break it."

The patrolman with the coffee passed Hennessy on the way in. He deposited two containers of coffee on the desk.

Herlehy flipped the canvas bag at him. "Take this down to the Property Clerk and get me a receipt on it, Ray," he told him.

Liddell gouged the top out of his container, tasted it, burned his tongue and swore under his breath. "The lab boys didn't come up with anything in Varden's apartment?"

Herlehy shook his head. "Some guy who couldn't sleep saw a man knocking at her door, but it was only Morton, the newspaper guy. We knew about that. Outside of that, a dry well." He stirred his coffee with his finger. "If we could find Eastman and shake out of him who it was that gave him the orders to pick you up —"

"Why don't we work backwards? Who knew I was in to see Varden? Just the headwaiter, the guy she called Charles. He must have tipped Eastman."

Herlehy looked thoughtful. "A headwaiter, eh? He could fit the picture. He's in the club every night. He could be the one Varden signalled to. He —" The inspector scowled, shook his head. "It don't wash. Look, suppose Varden was

lingering for a jewel mob. She decides to doublecross them and hold out a batch of stones for herself. Does it make sense that she'd let the head man know who she was giving them to for safekeeping?"

Liddell pinched his nostrils between thumb and forefinger. "Unless Charles got together with Eastman and decided to doublecross the big shot. Then he could have pulled a triple cross by telling the big shot that Mona was getting ready to pull out."

Herlehy took a swallow of coffee, grunted. "The only way we'll know for sure is to ask them." He drained the container, tossed it at a waste basket. "I've got a call out for both of them. We'll get them — and when we do we'll get a few answers to a few questions."

Johnny Liddell lived in the Hotel Abbott, an old, weather-beaten, grime-darkened stone building that nestled anonymously in a row of similar stone buildings on East 31st Street. The lobby was large, noisy, seemed bathed in a perpetual pink light, the reflection of the huge neon sign to the right of the entrance that identified *The Cowl Room — Cocktails*. The easy chairs spaced throughout the lobby were filled with men who perused their newspapers with a determination undampened by the noise around them.

A short fat man at the cigar counter was trying, with indifferent success, to interest the blonde who

presided over it in his plans for the evening. She looked over his shoulder, waved at Liddell as he came in.

Liddell winked back and headed for the bank of elevators in the rear, but was deterred by a gesture from the immaculate creature behind the registration desk.

"A message for you, sir," he said importantly. He made a production of removing an envelope from a pigeonhole prominently numbered 625. He handed it across the desk, worked hard at a semblance of an urbane smile that missed by miles. "Your friends were disappointed that they missed you." He stood adjusting his cuffs.

Liddell turned the envelope over. It bore the return address of the Hotel Abbott, had "Johnny Liddell" scrawled across the front. He looked up into the clerk's eyes.

"They wanted to leave a message, so I suggested they use our facilities." He dry-washed his hands, bobbed his head.

Liddell slit open the envelope, pulled out a folded sheet of note paper. It was blank on both sides. He growled under his breath, swung the register around, satisfied himself that no new arrivals occupied adjoining rooms or rooms across the hall.

"What'd these friends of mine look like?" Liddell demanded.

"I only saw one. He had a slight accent, and —"

Liddell growled, started away from the desk toward the elevator.

"I hope nothing's wrong, Mr.

Liddell," the clerk called after him.

"I hope you get your hope."

The dry-wash was going full speed. "Of course, I didn't give out your room number. I never —"

Liddell stopped, grinned mirthlessly at him. "You didn't give out my room number. You just stick an empty envelope into my box." He turned his back, entered the grillwork elevator cage.

At the sixth floor, he looked both ways, satisfied himself there was no stakeout in the corridor. He walked down to his room, put his ear against the door. There was no sound.

The keyhole showed no signs of being tampered with, but he didn't have to be a locksmith to realize that the lock couldn't put up a respectable struggle with a bent bobby pin. He slid his key in the lock, turned it. He pushed the door open, flattened himself against the wall, waited for some indication that one of his "friends" was inside.

Finally, he applied one eye to the edge of the door.

Charles, the headwaiter at Mona Varden's club sat in Liddell's favorite easy chair facing the door. A fixed smile was frozen on his lips, his eyes stared at Liddell unblinkingly. His throat had been cut expertly from ear to ear.

Liddell walked in, closed the door behind him. The room gave every evidence of a careful search. Drawers were pulled out, their contents spilled on the floor, the pillows on

the couch and in the chairs had been slashed.

He walked over to where the dead man sat, stared at him for a moment. Then he picked up the telephone, dialled police headquarters. He was connected with Inspector Herlehy.

"You can stop looking for Charles, Inspector. I've got him here at my hotel."

"Good," the inspector's voice approved. "Keep him there. I've got some questions to ask that baby."

Liddell nodded, looked over to where Charles sat. "He's not likely to be going any place. If he tries turning his head it'll fall off."

The receiver was silent for a moment. "Dead?"

"Real dead."

Herlehy growled at him. "I'll have a squad up there right away." He slammed the receiver down.

## 6.

Late that afternoon, Johnny Liddell sat at his desk in his 42nd Street office, stared out across Bryant Park. He swung around at the sound of the inner office door opening, grinned at his redheaded secretary as she came in with a pile of correspondence for signing.

"Better sign these while you can still write," she told him. "Some of it's a week old." She dropped the letters on his desk, helped herself to a cigarette. "See tonight's paper? Lee Morton, the columnist, really

gave you a working over. Said something about the best way to get rid of a client is to let them get murdered. He was wondering what kind of business you'd be going into next."

Liddell grunted, picked up a pen, started signing the letters. "He thinks we're holding out on him." He waded through the pile, pushed them away. "He's a prima donna anyway."

Pinky pursed her lips. "Maybe so. But a guy like that could be real helpful, seems to me. In that job of his he knows all the characters at the club. Don't forget he hangs around there almost every night."

Liddell shrugged. "He's still a prima donna."

The redhead picked up the letters, checked through them. "My feminine intuition tells me you have something more up your sleeve than a hairy arm." Her eyes rolled up from the letters to his face. "You wouldn't look good with your throat cut."

He started to answer, broke off at a sharp knock on the office door. He held his finger to his lips, pulled open the top drawer, brought out a .45. He walked across to the door to the outer office, reached for the knob.

He was almost thrown off balance by the force with which the door was pushed open. A girl ran in, slammed the door behind her, leaned against it.

She was young, blonde. There

was no color in her face, her make-up stood out as garish patches against the color. She wore a well-filled Nile-green sweater and skirt. She looked from Liddell to the redhead and back, reached up, tucked a loose tendril of hair into place with incredibly long, graceful fingers.

She made a desperate attempt to gain control of herself, almost made it. "I've got to see you, Mr. Liddell." She was breathing heavily.

Liddell looked her over, nodded toward the customer's chair. He walked into the outer office, opened the hall door, satisfied himself the corridor was empty. He stuck the .45 into his waistband, walked back into the private office.

"Do I know you?"

The blonde shook her head. "I was Charles' sweetheart. I worked as hat check girl at the club."

Liddell hoisted one hip on the corner of the desk, nodded for her to go on.

She licked at her lips. "It's true? Charles is dead?"

"He's dead all right. Know who did it?"

She shook her head. "All I know is it's just like Mona. They'll be after me next." She fitted a cigarette to the wet red blob of her mouth with a shaking hand. "They're probably after me right now."

Liddell steadied the cigarette, held a light, waited until she had filled her lungs. "Who're they?"

"I don't know."

Liddell stared at her for a moment, walked around behind his desk. "Let's start at the beginning. You were Charles' girl. What's your name?"

"Bea. Becca Clarke." She pulled the cigarette from between her lips, crushed it out. "Don't let them do it to me, Mr. Liddell. Don't let them."

Liddell nodded. "You were in on the jewel jobs?"

The girl licked her lips, nodded.

"Who was the top man in the set-up, Bea?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. God help me, I don't know. Only Mona knew."

"How about Charles?"

"Only Mona."

Liddell drummed on the corner of his desk with the tips of his fingers. "Did you know Eastman? Hook Eastman?"

The girl buried her face in her hands, started to sob. She nodded. "He was part of the set-up. He did the actual stick-up." She raised her tear-stained face. "The head man signalled to Mona which ones were to be taken —"

Pinky brought two glasses and a pint of bourbon in, poured a drink for the girl.

"That figures," Liddell conceded. "Mona couldn't have spotted the real stuff from the floor. We had it backwards." He wrinkled his brows. "Then the big shot was out front quite a bit. Go on. Then what?"

"Mona would get word to me

which ones were to be taken. Charles would take over the checkroom and I'd go out for air. I'd be on the curb when the mark came out. Eastman would be down the street waiting for the signal."

Liddell poured himself a drink. "Suppose there were several women in the party. How would he know which one to take?"

The girl took a deep swallow from her cup, coughed. "I'd fix the left side of my hat. That would mean the woman on the left. If I fixed the right side, it meant the one on my right."

"What happened last night? How come Charles went to my place?"

The blonde licked her lips. "Charles got a call from the boss. He had just left Mona's place and she didn't have any jewels on her. Eastman had just delivered a big batch to her before the midnight show. Charles told him about you being in Mona's dressing room. He figured you'd left them at your place. They went over there —" She dabbed at her eyes. "That's the last I saw of Charles."

"You didn't see who he went with?"

Bea shook her head. "He was going to meet him in front of your hotel. He instructed Charles to come alone."

Liddell got up, paced the room. After a moment he stopped alongside Bea's chair. "You'd better stay under cover for a few days." He looked up to Pinky. "Can you

put her up until I wrap this up, Pink?"

"Sure," Pinky nodded. "But what are you going to be doing in the meantime?"

"First, I'm going to patch up my relations with the press. I think Lee Morton might be more willing to cooperate if I fed him a couple of exclusives."

"Such as?"

Liddell winked at her. "Such as the name of the killer and the head of the jewel ring." He caught Bea by the arm, lifted her out of the chair. "You take Bea along to your place, Pink. I'll be in touch."

When the hall door had closed behind the two girls, Liddell picked up his phone, dialled the *Dispatch*.

"Let me talk to Lee Morton," he told the metallic voiced operator. In a moment, he heard the columnist's voice. "Morton? This is Johnny Liddell."

"What's on your mind? A beef about today's column?" He didn't sound as though he cared one way or the other.

"I've got a thick skin," Liddell assured him cheerfully. "But there's no reason why we can't be friends. We might help each other."

"How do you figure to help me?" the receiver demanded.

"I might have a nice juicy story for you. Exclusive."

There was no change in the expression in the columnist's voice. "And when might this change of operation take place?"

Liddell grinned. "You're a suspicious sort of guy. Just to prove my good faith, I'll give you one to start off. Bea Clarke, the sweetie of the headwaiter that was killed in my apartment, is giving herself up to the police tonight at 10."

The columnist's voice was cautious. "So?"

"She'll spill the whole set-up on the jewel jobs. How they were fingered, who did the heist, everything."

Morton sounded more interested. "Now you're beginning to perk. No one else in on it?"

"No one else. You get it exclusive. We can even arrange for her to turn herself into you."

"You got a deal, Liddell." There was a change in Morton's voice. "I'll make it up to you. What's the other scoop?"

"I know where to lay my hands on positive proof of who killed Mona Varden. I'm willing to turn him over to you, too. Bea spilled it without knowing how important it was —"

The columnist's voice cracked with impatience. "What is it?"

"I'll do better than tell you. I'll show it to you. It's in Mona's flat. I'm on my way. Want to come?"

"Don't move. I'll pick you up at your office."

7.

Lee Morton drove a Caddy, a '54 convertible, with all the skill of an

expert. He wove the big car through the heavy East Side traffic and pulled up at the Marlboro Towers exactly twelve minutes after leaving Liddell's office.

Liddell led the way to the elevator, got off at Mona Varden's floor. He looked up and down the hallway, opened the door with a key he took from his jacket pocket. The door opened noiselessly. He motioned the columnist in and closed the door after them.

Liddell produced a flashlight, ran it around the room, came to the bedroom door. He motioned for the columnist to follow him and led the way into the room where the body had been found. He seemed sure of himself, walked directly to the head of the bed, played the flashlight over the ornamental frieze, bent down to examine it more closely.

"You see, in order to see whether or not anyone on that bed was dead, you'd have to lean over. What's the most natural thing? You hold onto the frieze to keep your balance? Right?"

Morton considered it, nodded. "It sounds all right."

"Check. Okay, now our killer probably thought he was being very smart and wiped off all prints." He flicked the light at the frieze. "But the chances are a hundred to one, he never remembered sticking his fingers into that frieze. His prints there will hang him."

"The police know about this?"

Liddell shook his head. "Not yet. I just wanted to look it over before I called Herlehy. Now I'm convinced the killer's prints are in that frieze."

He led the way to the living room. "You hold down the fort. I'll get Bea Clarke and the inspector."

"Why the girl?"

Liddell shrugged. "I have a hunch she was here and found the body. Her prints may be in there. Mine are from leaning over the body. We'll want to eliminate those."

Morton nodded. "You'll be back before Herlehy gets here?"

Liddell considered. "I don't know. I'd better leave him a note of where to have the lab boys check for the prints. Got a pencil?"

He took the copy pencil the newspaperman handed him, picked up the flashlight. "I'll just get an idea of about where to start looking. Then there'll be no delay and you can make your deadline."

He disappeared into the bedroom was back in a few minutes with a folded sheet of paper. "Give that to Herlehy when he gets here."

## 8.

Twenty-five minutes later, Lee Morton opened the door for Inspector Herlehy and his lab crew.

"Where's Liddell?" Herlehy growled. "I got a hurry-up call to come up here and catch a killer. This better not be one of his hare-brained stunts."



Morton shrugged, held out a folded piece of paper. "He left this for you if you got here before he did."

Herlehy opened the note, read it with a puzzled frown. "Have lab boys check upper right quarter of bed headboard for prints of killer." He looked to the plainclothesmen with a scowl. "How about it, Ed? Your boys check that part of the bed?"

The shorter of the two detectives shrugged. "I guess so. But it won't do any harm to re-check. Why that particular spot?"

Morton snorted. "Liddell has some goofy idea the killer steadied himself with his hand when he leaned over Mona's body."

The plainclothesman considered it, shrugged. "We'll see what we can get off it." He led the way into the bedroom.

Herlehy tugged off his hat, tossed it on the table. "How long'd Liddell say he'd be?"

The newspaperman shrugged. "He didn't say. He said he was going to pick up Bea Clarke, the head-waiter's sweetie. She's turning herself in tonight." he consulted his watch. "In time for my first edition, I hope."

The inspector found a fresh stick of gum, denuded it. "You'll have plenty of news tonight. We picked up Hook Eastman, the gun on the jewel heists. Between him and the girl we should be able to start filling in."

Liddell opened the door with his key, stepped in. He grinned at the inspector. "Glad you got here."

"Where's the girl?" Herlehy demanded.

"She beat me to the punch. She gave herself up an hour ago. Afraid she'd get the same medicine as Charles."

Lee Morton jumped to his feet. "Then every reporter in town'll have it. You promised me an exclusive, Liddell."

"Hold your horses, Morton. I've got a better one for you. I told you I'd turn over the killer and I will." He turned to the inspector. "The boys finished in there?"

"Never mind the boys," Herlehy growled. "How do you plan to hand us the killer. You know who he is?"

Liddell nodded. "He'll identify himself."

The columnist walked over to where Liddell stood. "You can make a fool of the Police Department, Liddell, but I'm not standing still for it. I don't know what you're trying to pull, but you won't get away with it." He tried to push Liddell out of his way. "When I'm through —"

"You're through right now, Buster," Liddell grinned at him grimly. He pushed the columnist back into the room. "That injured innocence act is pretty stale. There's your killer, Inspector."

Herlehy stared from the private eye to the columnist and back. "You nuts? Why should he kill Varden?"

"She was running out on him. She had a shipment of jewels she was supposed to turn over to him, but that was going to be the price of her silence. He killed Charles because he had to reveal his identity to him to find out what Varden did with the jewels. Morton's your Mr. Big, Inspector."

The columnist swung on the Inspector. "Either you get that lunatic out of my way, Herlehy, or I'll hold you just as responsible for this as he is."

The door to the bedroom opened. One of the lab men was about to say something, Liddell cut him off with a wave of his hand.

"You know you're going to have to prove all this, Johnny," Herlehy told him.

"You're damn right he does, Herlehy. You can still get out from under," Morton raged.

"Get me a damp rag, one of you guys," Liddell called over to the plainclothesmen. They looked to the inspector, drew a nod. One of them disappeared into the bathroom, tossed a wet towel to Liddell.

"You see, inspector, I knew I'd have to make the killer expose himself, so I set a trap. I told him the killer had left his prints in the ornamental frieze on top of Mona's bed. No killer could resist the temptation to wipe those prints out. While I was gone, he wiped that grillwork clean."

"Try and prove it," the columnist snarled, "try and prove it."

"Okay, pal." Liddell walked over to where the newspaperman stood, wiped the wet towel across his right hand. The hand turned deep purple.

The inspector stared for a moment. "What's that prove?" he roared.

"Tell the inspector what you found in the frieze, boys."

The shorter of the plainclothesman nodded. "No prints, but the cut out work was filled with the grating of an indelible pencil. Anyone who tried to wipe away any prints would get the dust all over his fingers." He looked at Morton. "The minute you wet those fingers, they turn purple."

The newspaperman swore, rushed at Liddell, threw a punch at his face. His second blow never landed. Liddell caught him flush on the jaw, drove him backward. He was on top of him with an uppercut to the mid-section. A hard overhand spun the columnist around, slammed him against the table. Liddell caught him by the shoulder, turned him around and hit him flush with another right hand that knocked him clear over the table. He landed on the other side in a heap, didn't move.

"Don't rough him up," Herlehy growled. "We have special facilities for that downtown. And you better fill me in before he comes to."

"Well, we were both agreed that the killer was the head man of the jewel ring. He had to be someone who could show up in the club every night. Right?"

Herlehy nodded for him to continue.

“As you said, your night club squad would have noticed anyone who showed up every night. But nobody would notice a columnist — it’s part of his job to be there.”

Herlehy considered it, nodded. “Pretty neat. But why Morton? Why not half a dozen other newspapermen?”

“The way he lived. It’s common gossip that the *Dispatch* pays off in glory instead of dollars. Yet, Morton wore the best clothes, drove the most expensive cars. Only a guy with a piece of a juicy racket can live like that.”

Herlehy rubbed the side of his jaw with the tips of his fingers. “Why all the killing?”

“Mona figured on getting out and using the jewels to take care of herself. Morton didn’t know she’d given me the jewels until after he’d killed her and found they weren’t at her place. He called Charles to search my place. Then he realized he had placed himself in Charles’ power, so he killed him. Murder is like getting olives out of a bottle. After the first one, they come easy.”

Herlehy held up his hand, cut him off. “Why did he come back to the

apartment that night? We wouldn’t even have known he knew Varden.”

Liddell grinned. “One of his master touches. Remember your boys turned up a witness who described Morton as knocking on Varden’s door. We took for granted it was the time he met us there. That’s what he wanted us to think. Actually, it was the first time he was there — the time he killed Mona.”

Herlehy looked down to where the columnist was moaning his way back to consciousness. He nodded for one of his men to put the cuffs on Morton.

Liddell grinned. “Buying it?”

The inspector nodded. “It was a long shot, but it paid off. Between checking his accounts and what Eastman can tell us we’ll make it stick.”

Liddell wiped the perspiration off his forehead with his sleeve. “Where can a man get a drink around here? And how soon?”

Herlehy winked at one of his plainclothesmen. “Take Morton in and book him. I’m going to buy Liddell a drink.”

Liddell stared at him. “A policeman buying a drink? That’s the second most immoral thing I’ve heard all day.”

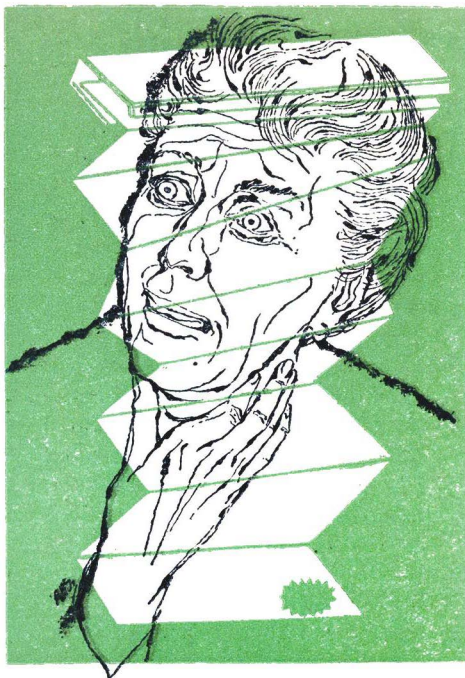


*It just wasn't Scott Jordan's day. First he got slapped with a five thousand dollar bail. Then he met up with a corpse.*

# Dead Issue

*A Scott Jordan Story*

**BY HAROLD Q. MASUR**



THE judge looked down at me and banged his gavel. I heard him set bail and my eyes widened. Assignment to night court had not improved his dyspeptic temperament.

“Why, you simple-headed, sanctimonious old —”

“Next case,” he rumbled.

“One moment, your honor,” I said, out loud this time and not under my breath, “five thousand dollars seems rather excessive under the circumstances. I think five hundred would be more —”

He interrupted with a stony glare.

“Are you instructing the bench how to run this court, counselor?”

“No, your honor, but we have a simple charge here —”

“Ha! Assault in the second degree, wilfully inflicting serious bodily injury upon this man, Tom Clinton, knocking out one front incisor and fracturing his left forearm. There was no earthly reason for exercising such a degree of force. You are a lawyer, Mr. Jordan, not a hoodlum.”

“But he was prowling around my office, Your Honor. I caught him emerging from the file room and when I tried to detain him, he swung

at me. He refused to explain what he was doing there and —”

“He did not refuse, and he had a right to be there. A law office is open to the public. The door is an invitation to enter. He said he came to see you about drawing his will, and found the place deserted. He was looking for someone when you attacked him.”

“He’s lying.”

“Perhaps. On the other hand, if you didn’t like the man’s explanation, you should have summoned a policeman. Instead you elected to decide the issues and inflict punishment yourself. The Assistant District Attorney tells me you have a tendency to take the law into your own hands.” He pitched his head sideways, sounding irascible. “Now, that will be all, counselor. I have no intention of turning this court into a forum for public debate. Next case.”

I held my tongue, but my internal temperature was up about ten degrees. Usually a judge will release a lawyer on his own recognizance, but this bird was suffering from bad digestion or a henpecking wife.

I turned and saw Louis Homer in the back of the room, grinning at me. I beckoned and he came. Louis was a bail bondsman.

I said, “Will you post a bond for me, Louis?”

“Sure. You got security?”

“Please,” I said, looking pained. “No humor. I’m not in the mood. Just send the bill to my office.” I

started searching for the complainant, caught a glimpse of him disappearing through the door, and headed after him. I didn’t get far. A set of fingers lassoed my arm and swung me around.

“Just a minute, counselor.” It was a city detective named Wienick.

“Not now,” I said. “I’m on a job.”

“Me too.”

“I’m in a hurry.”

“Forget it. You’re wanted up on 20th Street.”

“Lieutenant Nola?”

“The same.”

“Can’t it wait?”

He shook his head. “Let’s go.”

“But I’m trying to catch someone.”

“So are we.”

“Who?”

“A murderer.”

I stopped struggling and blinked at his impassive face. He was dead serious and his iron grip on my arm brooked no argument. He had a squad car waiting under the street lamp and he convoyed me to the back seat. A uniformed cop straightened behind the wheel. The engine coughed and thundered and the siren keened and the tires started rolling.

“Who got shelved?” I inquired.

“A woman.”

“Where do I fit?”

“Ask the lieutenant.”

“Taciturn this evening,” I said.

“All right. You’re following instructions. The lieutenant wants to play it cagey. But you can at least explain

how you knew where to find me.”

“Easy.” He almost smiled. It was an effort but he tried. “Went to your apartment and found nobody home. Took a crack at your usual hangouts. No luck. Tried your office — bull’s-eye. Couldn’t shut the night man up. He told me about the fight in your office and how he called the cops. Phoned the precinct sergeant and learned you were in night court. What gives, Jordan?”

I shrugged. “Search me. I had a late appointment with a client and went down for a cup of coffee. The punk must have been lurking out in the hall. When he saw me leave he probably thought I had gone for the day and walked in.”

“What was he after?”

“How do I know? Petty cash, maybe. He lied to the Judge. Said he changed his mind about drawing a will after he sized me up.”

“Did you have to break his arm?”

“That was an accident,” I said resentfully. “He swung and missed and I swung and connected and he slipped and fell and cracked it on the desk.”

The car pulled up at 230 West 20th Street, which is headquarters for the Homicide Squad handling murders committed on this side of Manhattan. We went up to Nola’s office and he took his chin out of a file, staring at me, unsmiling.

John Nola, Detective-lieutenant, Homicide, a neat slender sober man with a dark intelligent face, alert as a squirrel and tougher than

yesterday’s eggstains, inflexible and incorruptible, a career cop who’d pulled himself up from the ranks and danced at the end of nobody’s string. I liked, respected, and had worked in harmony with him on several cases.

He turned balefully to Wienick. “What took you so long?”

The detective explained about night court.

Nola dismissed it with a wave of his hand and switched back to me. “Unimportant. The name Millicent Mack mean anything to you?”

My mouth was suddenly dry. “Yes.”

“She’s dead.”

I stared at him. Bitter saliva threaded its way down my throat.

“How?”

“Shot leaving her apartment.”

“When?”

“Early this evening, about six o’clock.”

My knees were weak and I sat down. I made a fist and almost broke it on his desk. “God damn it!” I said. “I spoke to her on the phone only this afternoon. She wanted to see me and made an appointment for 6:30. I was waiting for her when that other thing happened.”

“What did she want to see you about?”

“She didn’t say. She sounded upset and hinted that it was important.” I frowned at him. “What led you to me?”

“A piece of paper we found in her purse. It had your name and

address on it. She involved in one of your cases?"

"No."

"How come she selected you?"

"Because we used to work together in the same office. She was legal secretary to my first boss, Malcom Warner. He's dead now and I took over what was left of his practise." I shook my head violently. "Millicent Mack. She was sixty-five if she was a day. A sweet old lady, a spinster, without relatives. Who the hell would knock her off?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Robbery?"

"I doubt it. Apparently nothing in her apartment was touched."

"Clues?"

"Not even a smell. Somebody rang her bell and when she opened the door, bang!"

"How about the neighbors?"

"They heard nothing. He must have used a silencer."

"The elevator boy?"

"It's a walkup."

We batted it around for a while, inspecting various angles. After a moment, Nola rubbed the back of his neck and his cheek bulged thoughtfully behind his tongue.

"How about this Tom Clinton? You think he might be connected with the murder?"

"Beats me."

"Suppose we talk to him."

"I'd like that. Call the precinct and get his address."

Nola used the phone. He spoke

briefly, listened, scratched with his pencil, broke the connection, and was starting to push upright when the door opened. A city employee poked his head through and met the lieutenant's inquiring eye.

"We found Miss Mack's maid. She's here now."

"Send her in," Nola said, settling back in his chair.

A short round cinnamon-tinted female entered, looking nervous and unhappy. Nola spent a couple of minutes putting her at ease. He learned that she had been working for Millicent Mack three hours a day, four afternoons a week, for over a year.

"You understand that Miss Mack is dead."

She nodded and dabbed a handkerchief at the corners of her eyes, swallowing hugely.

"Did she have many visitors?" Nola asked.

"Never. 'Cepting the last two days. A lady came to visit each afternoon."

"The same lady?"

"Different ones. I announced them."

"Do you remember their names?"

"Only the second one. A Mrs. Lovett. I remember because Miss Mack told me her husband owned that big department store — Lovett's."

It rang a bell. Old Oscar Lovett had been a client of Malcom Warner's. His first store, a sprawling dingy cavern on 14th Street, had

spilled over into adjoining buildings. Then it had moved up to the Fifties and began catering class merchandise to the carriage trade. When Malcom Warner passed on, Oscar Lovett had found himself new lawyers. I didn't blame him. His interests were vast and I was still unseasoned.

Now Oscar Lovett was gone too. Old age and general deterioration. I had read his obituary in the Times last week, and it had stuck in my memory. Surviving him were Grace Lovett, the widow, and an adopted daughter, Mrs. Charles Gair, souvenir of an earlier marriage.

I said to the maid, "Let me refresh your recollection. Miss Mack's first visitor — was the name Mrs. Charles Gair?"

She pounced on it. "Yessir, that's it, Gair. I remember now."

"How long did they stay?" asked Nola.

"'Bout half an hour apiece."

"That will be all, thank you." He buzzed for the city employee and got her a lift in an official vehicle back to Harlem. His eyes came back to me. "Well?"

"The background is sketchy," I said. "I don't have much but I'll fill you in. Oscar Lovett died last week. His widow had only five years on the course. She used to be a buyer in the lingerie department of the store, and is reputed to be young and beautiful. I have never seen her."

"Who is Mrs. Gair?"

I told him and added, "From an

occasional gossip column or two, I gathered there was considerable friction between the two ladies. Mrs. Gair resented the marriage."

"Why?"

"Well, now, she was a legally adopted daughter. There was a sizeable inheritance involved."

"How much?"

"A million, perhaps more."

"Quite a slice of motive."

I gave him a nod and a lopsided smile. "How about this Tom Clinton we were going to visit?"

"Okay. It's only a few blocks away. I'll catch the widow next."

The old Chelsea district is only a stone's throw from Homicide West, providing Willie Mays rifles it over the buildings. But we made the trip for nothing; he wasn't home. His landlady had a loose tongue, however, and enjoyed exercising it.

"I saw Tom half an hour ago. He was in a terrible accident. Knocked out a tooth and broke his arm." The victim had been someone else and she was relishing the details. "Tom said a truck hit him. That beautiful blue Cadillac, my goodness, it must be all smashed in. I hope the Lovetts don't fire him."

"Who?" Nola was restraining herself.

"The Lovetts . . . those department store people. Tom's their chauffeur."

He thanked her quickly and hopped down the steps to the squad car. He was inside, with the door



closed, looking out at me through the window and unsmiling. "Police business, Scott. I'll take it alone. Sorry."

Exhaust fumes fanned into my face as the car leaped away, careening around the corner on two wheels and burning an inch of rubber off the tires. I stood there for a moment, alone, feeling like an orphan. Then I shrugged. While he was tackling Mrs. Lovett, at least I could see Mrs. Charles Gair.

A telephone directory gave me the address.

They lived in style, in a tall building on East End Avenue, with an acre of casement windows blinking out over the river, with a fine view of barges and ferries and Welfare Island, with a liveried doorman and polite elevator operators. One of them took me up to the tenth floor.

A slender gent with a Coleman mustache opened the door. He was wearing Bermuda shorts of Irish linen, a slate-gray polo shirt, and white yachting shoes. One eyebrow moved up slightly.

"Something I can do for you, sir?" He had polished manners and first class diction.

"I'd like to see Mrs. Gair."

"She's on the terrace. Who shall I say is calling?"

"Scott Jordan."

If he recognized the name, he gave no sign of it. "Come in. This way, please."

I followed him across the living

room and through a pair of French doors. It was a warm night, with barely a breeze fluttering the drapes. A man and a woman were comfortable in deck chairs, holding long highballs in perspiring glasses. Introductions straightened out everybody's identity.

The woman, a tall severe item, not yet past the deadline, was Anita Gair. The smooth article in Bermuda shorts turned out to be her husband, Charles. And I recognized the name of their visitor, Ray Burroughs, a small precise gent with thinning hair and pince-nez glasses. He was general manager of Lovett's, Incorporated.

I looked pointedly at Anita Gair. "May I speak to you alone?"

She exchanged glances with her husband. "I hardly think that's necessary. I have no secrets from Charles."

"Quite," he said. "Speak up, old boy. What's on your mind?"

I said, "A couple of days ago, your wife visited a woman named Millicent Mack."

"Did you, darling?"

"Yes."

"Well, Jordan, what about it?"

"I'd like to know why."

A meager smile brushed his lips. "I can't see that it's any of your business, to put it bluntly."

"She'll have to tell someone," I said.

"*Have* to?" His eyebrow was up again.

"Absolutely."

"Who?"

"The police. Millicent Mack is dead."

Anita Gair and Ray Burroughs spilled some of their drink. The chair tipped over behind Burroughs as he bounced to his feet, jaw working spasmodically. Charles reached for his glass and siphoned it off.

Burroughs opened his mouth, managed to emit a little static, and finally got wired for sound. "Dead? . . . How? . . . Old age, accident?" "Murder," I said.

Charles put his glass down and took a slow breath. "And just what is your position in this thing?"

"I was Millicent Mack's lawyer."

"Why do you come to us?"

"That's obvious, isn't it? Miss Mack was sixty-five years old. In all that time your wife never went to see her. Then she did. Two days later, Miss Mack was dead."

"Does that mean there's any connection between the two incidents?"

"How can I tell without questioning your wife?"

"But you're not a policeman."

"True. And you can toss me out on my ear, if you like."

He showed me his teeth. "I rather think I will."

"Just a moment." Anita Gair held up her hand. "What is it you want to know, Mr. Jordan?"

"The reason for your visit."

"It's quite simple. My step-father, Oscar Lovett, died last week. No will was found, neither in his safe deposit box, nor in his apartment.

I believe Grace — that's his second wife — destroyed it."

"That still doesn't explain why you went to see Miss Mack."

"I wanted to know what was in Dad's will. I called his attorneys, but they hadn't drawn any will for him. Then I thought of his old lawyer, Malcom Warner, and I wondered if Mr. Warner's secretary, who probably did the typing on it, might remember. So I went to see her."

"Did she remember?"

"No."

"That's quite a story," I said.

"Don't you believe me?"

"About this much," I said, holding my thumb and forefinger about a millimeter apart."

"Look here, old boy," Charles demanded, "are you calling my wife a liar?"

"Just about."

He may have looked like a gentleman, but he swung like a longshoreman and he caught me off balance, completely unprepared, and the impact of his fist, flush on the jaw, snapped my head back and sat me down, hard. The cement floor caught me at the base of my spine with a resounding wallop and for a moment I was paralyzed. I collected myself and started to rise slowly, measuring him.

But his hand had reached through a window for the telephone and I heard him asking for a policeman.

One charge of assault and battery was enough. This time the judge

might not even release me on bail, and I had no stomach for spending a whole night in the tank. So I dusted myself off and said pleasantly, "Good evening, folks. Thanks for the hospitality."

I flushed a passing cab and went back to 23rd Street for another go at Tom Clinton. No luck. He was still out. I thought of trying Grace Lovett, but was afraid of barging in on Lieutenant Nola. He wanted the field for himself and he had the authority to back up his demands. So I decided to go home.

I was thinking of a shower and a pair of scrambled eggs when I opened the door. I was thinking of a bourbon and a pair of slippers. I was not thinking of a blonde . . . but that's what I got.

She was sitting in a club chair, smoking a king-size cigarette through a filter-type holder. She was dressed in a tailored suit that fought a losing battle with her figure. Her face was rather angular in structure, the lashes long and curled over a pair of disconcerting blue eyes. Her mouth was wistful, with a full and slightly puckered shining underlip. Whatever you might need, wherever you happened to be, she had it, in spades.

"Mr. Jordan?" she inquired, shaking an ash into the tray.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I hope you don't mind my waiting here in your apartment. I told the superintendent that I was a client of yours and he let me in."

*Either I kill that guy, I thought, or I promise him a bonus.*

"My name is Grace Lovett," she said. "I wish you'd stop staring like that. Please relax."

I swallowed a bubble of air and walked to the bar. "Excuse me," I said. "I need a drink. Join me?"

"Please."

I poured two brandies and brought her one and sat down on the sofa. "Have you seen the lieutenant?"

"Who?"

"Detective-lieutenant John Nola, Homicide. He was heading for your apartment when I left him about an hour ago."

She shook her head. "No. I haven't been home. I've been waiting here for you."

I took a sip of brandy. "Where's your stooge?"

"Stooge?"

"Tom Clinton, your chauffeur."

She gave me a reproachful look.

"He swung first," I said defensively. "And besides, most of that damage came from a fall. He slipped."

"Yes, I know. He told me."

"I wish he had told the judge. I got nicked for the premium on a five thousand dollar bond. Why was he in my office?"

"I sent him."

"What for?"

"To find a copy of my husband's will. I learned that you had taken over Malcom Warner's practise and I thought you might have a duplicate of the will in your files."

"Who told you?"

"Miss Mack — Miss Millicent Mack."

"You know where she is now?"

"Home, I imagine."

"In the morgue. She was killed earlier this evening, murdered."

She digested it slowly, her lips apart and her face distressed. Suddenly she remembered the brandy in her hand and took a prodigious unladylike pull that put some of the bloom back into her cheeks.

"Why all the cloak-and-dagger stuff? Why didn't you come to me and ask instead of sending your chauffeur?"

"Because I didn't trust anyone."

She dropped her eyes. "I'm sorry. I thought they might have reached you first, perhaps bribed you."

"Who's they?"

"Anita Gair and her husband. They've been against me ever since Oscar and I got married. They said I married him for his money."

"Didn't you?"

"A little bit, maybe. But I was very fond of him, and I respected him. He was a brilliant man."

"Did Oscar ever tell you anything about his will?"

"Yes. He was leaving me the bulk of his estate. There were a few minor bequests to the servants and twenty-five thousand dollars to Anita Gair."

"That's all?"

"She was only his step-daughter."

"All right," I said. "Why did you come to see me?"

"They couldn't find Oscar's will in his safe-deposit box. I searched the apartment and couldn't find it there either. I thought he might have put it in the safe at the store and I asked Ray Burroughs, the general manager, who knows the combination. He looked and said he couldn't find it. If the original is missing, maybe we can prove the duplicate. Tom Clinton was searching your files for it, but you returned unexpectedly and stopped him. Now I have no choice. I'm coming to you directly. Besides, I asked some questions around town and everybody tells me you're tricky but honest."

"Thanks," I said wryly. "Are you retaining me?"

"Yes. I want Oscar's will admitted to probate."

I stood up. "Lady, you've got yourself a lawyer. Go home and wait for my call. One thing more, I want you to send Tom Clinton on a vacation. Tonight. If he doesn't appear as the complainant against me, those charges of assault and battery will be dropped."

"Agreed."

We went down and she took the first cab and I took the second. The night man in Rockefeller Center signed me in and gave me a pass and I took the elevator up to my office.

I sat down with a manual containing the Decedent Estate Law and studied for half an hour. At the end of that time, I checked

the telephone directory for the address of Ray Burroughs, committed it to memory, and quit the office.

The precise little man answered my ring. He opened his door, goggled at me, started to splutter, and tried to slam the door shut. But I put a hand on his chest and backed him into the room.

"What . . ." he said.

"Quiet," I told him, slipping out of my coat and rolling up my sleeves. "Where is it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know," I said. "You know and you're going to tell me. It may take the rest of the night, but I'm a determined man. What happened to Oscar Lovett's will?"

"Please, you're making a mistake."

"No mistake," I said, encompassing the room with a quick circular glance. "Where's your company?"

"What company?" he gulped audibly.

"Two highball glasses on the coffee table. You didn't mix both of them for yourself, did you?"

He shifted uneasily. "No, I—had company for a nightcap, but he's gone now."

"Okay. Let's get back to the will."

"I—I don't understand . . ."

"Not much," I said. "However, I'll spell it out. Sit down."

He sank weakly into a chair, watching me apprehensively, his Adam's Apple working overtime,

and not too much color in his puckered lips.

"Here it is," I said. "Listen. Oscar Lovett's widow asked you to search the store safe for her husband's will. You told her you couldn't find it. That was a lie. You found it and you read it."

He started to open his mouth.

"I'm not finished," I said. "Sit still. The bulk of old Oscar's estate went to Mrs. Lovett, with a paltry token bequest to Anita Gair. If the will was hidden, if it couldn't be found, if Oscar died intestate, his widow, under the law, would inherit only one-third, and the rest would go to Anita Gair as his legally adopted daughter.

"So you went to them with a proposition. For a substantial cut you would dispose of the will. And they agreed. But you had to be sure that no attempt would be made to probate the carbon copy, if one existed. Most probably Millicent Mack was one of the testamentary witnesses and that's how you got her name and address. So Mrs. Gair went to her and learned that a duplicate was probably in my office. Did you steal it?"

"I didn't." Pallor diluted the color in his face. "I swear I didn't."

"That much I'm inclined to believe," I said. "You haven't the guts. I imagine the job was performed by Charles Gair himself. And Charles assumed that Millicent Mack had probably typed out the will and might remember its con-

tents. He paid her a quiet visit and found the old lady greatly disturbed. She'd been told the will was missing and she suspected skulduggery. She told him she remembered the contents and was going to see me.

"That meant she had to die. So he stopped her heart with a bullet and now he felt secure. But not for long."

"Forever, Jordan," a voice said behind me. "Secure forever because you won't live to tell anyone."

He'd come in from the kitchen where he'd been hiding and he held a carving knife in his hand.

"A knife," I said. "What happened to the gun?"

"In the sewers," he whispered, "where it will never be found."

He took a single crablike step in my direction. "Tell me, Jordan, how did you know?"

"It figured," I said. "Somebody found the original of Lovett's will and kept it under his hat. Somebody rifled my files and stole the carbon copy. Somebody killed Millicent Mack who might have remembered its contents. And you were the only people who stood to gain if the old man died intestate."

He coiled his tongue over his parched lips and moved another step forward. "Keep talking."

"I suspected a conspiracy the minute I walked out on your terrace tonight, and your wife refused to see me alone. She wanted all three of you present and listening, in case she missed a cue. She said

Grace must have destroyed the will. That was the last thing Grace would ever do, deprive herself of a fortune. And she lied when she said Oscar Lovett told her he was going to change his will. The old man never believed a word she said about Grace."

And then I stood very still, holding his eyes with my own, not breathing, just watching, the scalp tingling under my hair. It was happening right in front of me, but I could hardly believe it. Ray Burroughs was on his feet, a heavy plaster bookend brandished like a hammer in his fist.

Gair sucked in a heaving breath, lunged, and made his thrust. But the blade never reached me. With a rasping sob, Ray Burroughs slammed the bookend against the taller man's skull. Gair stiffened, his back arched, his eyes glazed, and he fell like a statue.

Burroughs collapsed behind him. "I had to do it," he said in a shredded whisper. "One murder was enough. I didn't count on murder."

"All right," I said. "I'll see what I can do for you. Get some cord and tie him up. Where's the phone?"

He pointed.

I dialled and got through to Nola. "The Millicent Mack murder is all wrapped up. Motive, means, and opportunity. Your man is waiting for you at this address." I gave it to him. "Hurry it up, lieutenant."

Burroughs came back. I took the twine from him and did the job myself.

*Manville Moon wasn't a chemist—and at first he couldn't understand why Isobel had brought him something to analyze . . .*



# Death Sentence

*A Manville Moon Story*

**BY RICHARD DEMING**

THE VOICE on the phone was soft and musical. It was also a trifle breathless.

"Is this Mr. Manville Moon?" it asked.

I said that it was.

"Isobel Banner, Mr. Moon. You may not remember me, but we met at El Patio Club last week."

The name brought a hazy recollection of a slim blonde in her twenties introduced to me by Fausta Moreni, the club's proprietress. I recalled that a lot of people were there that night, and, the only reason I remembered Isobel Banner at all was because she struck me as



looking so fresh and innocent in the midst of the sophisticated crew which habituates El Patio.

"I remember," I said. "You were with some dark guy with a little mustache."

"Harry Quinn, a . . . a good friend of mine. I remember Fausta said you were a private detective, Mr. Moon, and I wondered . . ."

When she paused I asked, "Wondered what?"

"If you could . . . Do you know any chemists, Mr. Moon?"

"Chemists? What kind of chemists?"

"Well, people who analyze things."

"The phone book's full of them,"

I told her. "Just look in the classified section under C."

For a moment there was silence. Then she said, "You don't understand. This would have to be a secret analysis."

It was my turn to be silent. Finally I asked bluntly, "You mean you want something analyzed, but you're afraid an ordinary chemist might report your request to the police?"

Instead of getting flustered, she surprised me by making a relieved little sound and saying, "Yes."

I kept silent until she added, "I thought maybe you'd have some connections, Mr. Moon."

"I've got lots of connections," I admitted. "But I'd have to know more about it before I used any. What is it you want analyzed?"

"I don't know. Something I found."

"Where?"

"At . . . a friend's. I want to know what it is."

"Why don't you ask the friend?"

"Because the friend doesn't know I found it. It's very important I find out what it is without either my friend or the police knowing."

I asked, "Where is this substance?"

"In the lockup. Under the cigars."

"In the what?"

"Listen," she said, "I don't think I can explain this over the phone, but I'd like to engage you. Could I see you?"

"Sure," I said. "I'll be here all day."

"Oh, I can't come there. I'm due at a beach party at Harry Quinn's in twenty minutes. You remember Harry. I was with him the night we met. Could you meet me there?"

When I hesitated she said, "It will be all right. Harry's parties are so informal, anybody can drop in. I'll tell him I invited you."

I said all right, and she told me to arrive at Quinn's place about four P.M. It was only one P.M. then.

At the time I didn't know what business Harry Quinn was in, but his address meant it was a lucrative one. He lived in Willow Dale, which is not a suburb, but merely an outlying section of the city. Some people call it Millionaire's Row, although you don't have to be a millionaire to live there. The neighbors would probably speak to you even if you had only a mere hundred grand.



Harry Quinn's place was one of several homes whose back yards run right up to the river bluff. The bluff is about a hundred feet high at that point, with a sand beach at the bottom. The top was railed to prevent people from tumbling off, but each yard had a steep set of stairs running down to the beach.

Isobel had told me to go right around to the beach, as everyone would be down there. As the driveway was full of cars, I parked on the street. Idly I noted I was parking ahead of a police squad car without occupants.

The house was ranch style, all on one floor and with a huge picture window in front. As I rounded it to the back, I glanced through the picture window, but saw no one inside.

At the bluff rail I paused to look down at the beach, which was dotted with metal tables and beach umbrellas. A couple of dozen people were down below, all of them gathered about the foot of the steps. One, in a bright red bathing suit, was lying down. Another, I noted, was a cop in uniform.

The steps were flagstone and too steep for safety, but there was a metal handrail to hang onto. They went down sidewise, flush against the face of the bluff, for fifty feet, then made a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn and went another fifty feet to the beach.

Below the knee my right leg happens to be aluminum and cork rather

than flesh and blood, and though I can do everything with it I could ever do with the original leg, I'm not too fond of climbing. I went down the steps fast enough, but I gripped the handrail every inch of the way.

I got to the bottom just as the policeman draped a blanket over the figure in the red bathing suit.

The guests at the beach party, all either in swim suits or beach robes; formed a silent semi-circle about a dozen feet from the blanket-covered figure. A quick glance told me I didn't recognize any of them.

I did recognize the host, though. Harry Quinn, tanned, muscled and sleekly handsome, stood talking to a stocky, taciturn man in a blue serge suit which looked like a police uniform without brass buttons. Quinn wore nothing but blue swim shorts.

To the man in the blue suit I said, "Hello, Hannegan."

Lieutenant Hannegan's left eyebrow went up, which in sign language meant, "What are you doing here?" The lieutenant never wastes words when a gesture will do.

"I was supposed to meet a girl named Isobel Banner." I looked over the crowd again, failed to find Isobel and let my eyes narrow at the blanket-covered figure.

Hannegan merely nodded.

It was Quinn who answered. "You're Mr. Moon, aren't you? Isobel said you were coming. Terrible thing, Mr. Moon. She slipped. All the way from the landing."

His expression was one of shock and grief, but his voice was controlled enough. He seemed to be hanging on pretty well.

During the next few minutes I gathered the details of what had happened from Hannegan's questioning of Harry Quinn and other witnesses. Isobel and Quinn had been coming down the steps, Isobel first, when she suddenly lost her balance and plunged headfirst the whole second fifty feet. Only a few people down below had seen the start of the fall, happening to be looking that way when she tripped, but everyone had jerked his gaze at the stairway when she emitted a single terrified scream. They'd all watched in horror as she rolled head over heels down the steep flight. She was dead, her skull crushed and numerous other bones broken, by the time the first guest reached her.

Gazing up at the landing, I noted it was covered by an awning. While it could hardly be called dark, the shade cast by the awning made it hard to see the side of the bluff at that point because of sharp contrast with the glaring sunshine both above and below the landing. It occurred to me that even those witnesses who had been staring directly at Quinn and Isobel couldn't possibly have made out any unusual movement on Quinn's part while he was in shadow. Drawing Hannegan aside, I mentioned this to him.

The lieutenant stared thoughtfully up at the awning. "Why would

he want to push her?" he asked. "Says she was his girl."

I told him about the odd telephone conversation I had with Isobel.

"Hmm," Hannegan said.

He'd been inclined to accept it at face value as an unfortunate accident, but after our conference he decided to dig a little deeper. First he examined the flagstone steps from top to bottom without finding a thing of interest. Then he brusquely informed Harry Quinn he'd have to send his guests home and get dressed, since he was going down to headquarters for further questioning.

Being naturally curious about the death of an almost-client, I went along. At headquarters Inspector Warren Day took over the questioning.

But it was no use. The inspector tried all his tricks without shaking Quinn's story in the slightest. He tried the friendly treatment, which involves sinking his voice to a confidential tone while he smiles like a weasel with the stomach ache. He tried the shock method by suddenly asking, "Why'd you push her, Quinn?" And he tried the frontal attack he frequently uses with such success on homicide suspects. This consists of lowering his skinny bald head, glaring over his glasses and hurling accusations in an enraged voice until the suspect is quivering with fright.

Harry Quinn only looked bored. The inspector did accomplish one

thing, though. He convinced me Harry Quinn had deliberately pushed the girl to her death. An innocent man would have been indignant and would have shouted back as loudly as the inspector. But Quinn kept his temper. His attitude impressed me as a shrugging dare for the police to prove it wasn't an accident. And of course they couldn't without a confession.

In the end they had to let him go.

I think the inspector was convinced the man was guilty too, because when I left he was taking his frustrated rage out on Hannegan.

In my business it isn't good advertising to have your clients murdered, and in the ordinary course of events I would have gone all out after the killer just for my own personal satisfaction. But I'd never before been up against a situation quite like this. I already knew the killer, or thought I did, but I couldn't think of a way in the world to prove it.

I stopped by the desk to light a cigar while I brooded over the situation, and was brought from my reverie by Desk Sergeant Danny Blake saying, "Hi, Manny. What's new?"

"Nothing," I said. "What's new with you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Who sees anything new at a police desk? Drunks, muggers, hustlers. A junkie or two a day."

"Every day?" I asked.

"Recently. The vice and narcotics squad is making a drive. I guess

they think some dope ring is trying to get organized."

"A junkie or two every day sounds like it *is* organized," I said.

Danny shrugged. "If it is, it'll get unorganized fast. The squad's out for blood."

But I had too much else on my mind to worry over the problems of the vice and narcotics squad. I was still brooding over what I regarded as Isobel Banner's murder when I climbed into my Plymouth. And still undecided what to do about it. Finally I decided I'd develop perpetual insomnia if I just let it drop.

During the course of Warren Day's questioning I learned the dead girl had lived with another girl named Marge Blair in a small apartment on the West Side. I went back to Day's office long enough to get the address.

By then it was after six and I stopped for something to eat before driving to the apartment. It was just seven P.M. when I eventually rang the bell.

The girl who came to the door was a redhead, not beautiful, but pretty in the same fresh sort of way I remembered Isobel Banner had been pretty. She had been crying.

I said, "I'm Manville Moon, a friend of Isobel's. You Miss Blair?"

She gasped and thrust a handkerchief to her mouth. In a muffled voice she said, "You haven't heard?"

"I've heard," I said gently. "Matter of fact I got there just after it happened. May I come in?"

She led me into a tiny living room, sank into a chair and went into a crying fit. I quietly took a seat and waited until it passed.

Finally she sniffed, wiped her eyes and said in a small voice, "I'm sorry, but I only got the news fifteen minutes ago. What do you want?"

"Just some information," I said.

I told her I was a private detective and described the peculiar phone conversation I had with Isobel three hours before her death. Marge Blair only looked puzzled.

"You mean you think what she said over the phone might have something to do with her death?" she asked. "When Harry phoned to break the news, he said it was an accident."

"It's tentatively listed as an accident on the police blotter," I said. "I really haven't any authority to check into the case, but I don't like having clients die before I can find out what they want. You're under no obligation to answer my questions if you don't want to."

She said she had no objection at all and would be glad to do anything she could to help if there was the slightest doubt about the cause of her apartment-mate's death. The trouble was she didn't know anything.

She had no idea what the substance was Isobel wanted analyzed, nor what she meant when she said it was, "In the lockup, under the cigars." There was nothing in the

apartment they had referred to as "the lockup," nor anything at work either. Isobel had been a secretary in the same office where Marge worked, so presumably Marge would have known if there was a "lockup" there.

She didn't have much information about Harry Quinn either, except that Isobel had been undecided about whether or not she was in love with him. Marge said she understood he was in the importing business, but had only met him twice, both times for but a few minutes when he called for Isobel, and she had formed no opinion of him.

Then, in afterthought, she did come up with one piece of information. Isobel had told her that Harry was divorced, and his former wife was a dancer at the Blue Lantern who went under the stage name of Sultra.

"I can't remember her real name," she apologized.

I left shortly after that, as there seemed to be nothing else the girl could tell me.

I killed a couple of hours before driving down to the Blue Lantern, because most local floor shows don't start until ten, and I doubted that Sultra would show up more than a few minutes before she was due to go on. I walked in at five of ten, and the first floor show started just as I found a rear table.

Sultra turned out to be an exotic looking woman with a lush, snow-white body and straight black hair

hanging to her shoulders. Her dance was the usual stuff, the only individual note being the fact that her arms were covered to above her elbows by long black lace gloves.

Apparently part of her act was to pick some man in the audience and play particularly to him, because all during her so-called dance her flashing smile was directed at one ringside table. Since it was in shadow, all I could tell was that three men were seated at it.

When the lights came up, I signalled a waiter with the intention of sending Sultra a note asking to see her, but I changed my mind when I saw who was seated at the table the dancer had been giving so much attention. Harry Quinn sat there with two other men.

Odd way to spend the evening of the day his girl died, I reflected.

Then my eyes narrowed as I recognized the heavy-set, thick-featured man on Quinn's right. It was Marty Cole, one of the top syndicate organizers out of Chicago. The third man, a huge, bullet-headed guy I'd never seen before, was easy enough to figure even though he was a stranger. Marty Cole never went anywhere without a bodyguard.

When the waiter came over in answer to my gesture, I simply ordered a drink.

In about ten minutes Sultra came out front and joined Quinn's table. She now wore a flaming red formal. The skirt was ankle length, the long sleeves came to her wrists, but a

moon-shaped piece gashed out of the top of her dress left a little in view.

Peculiarly, Harry Quinn seemed to pay little attention to his former wife. He was too busy sweating over whatever it was Marty Cole was telling him. Twice he wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, then finally rose, nodded violently to some last-minute thing Cole said, and left the club without even saying good-bye to Sultra. It was obvious from the woman's expression she didn't like one bit being ignored by her ex-husband so blatantly.

Harry Quinn walked right past my table without even seeing me. He wasn't seeing anything but his own worried thoughts.

He looked at though he were scared punchy.

I decided it might be more interesting to follow Quinn than to talk to Sultra.

It was more interesting. His first stop was a drug store, where he made a phone call. Then he drove straight to the apartment of Marge Blair. The apartment was dark, but he went into the building anyway, and in a few moments the lights came on. He was inside nearly twenty minutes, then the lights switched off again and he came hurrying out.

I followed him far enough to satisfy myself he was merely headed in the direction of his home, then returned to the apartment. To my surprise I found Marge Blair just getting out of a taxi when I arrived.

When I called to her, she stopped and waited for me to cross the street.

"Weren't you home a few minutes ago?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I got a call from Harry Quinn asking me to meet him at the Jefferson Lounge right away. Something urgent about Isobel, he said. But he never showed up and I got tired of waiting."

"I think I'd better go in with you," I said.

We found what I expected to see. When Marge keyed open the door, she took one look and said, "My God!"

The place was a shambles. It had been searched ruthlessly and efficiently from one end to the other. Every drawer had been dumped, the contents of both closets were piled in the middle of the bedroom floor, mattresses were upended, and even the kitchen floor was strewn with pots and pans.

After surveying the damage Marge asked in a weak voice, "Why?"

"Harry Quinn was looking for something," I explained. "Probably whatever it was Isobel wanted analyzed."

I told her how I knew it was Quinn who had made the search.

"Should I call the police?" she asked.

I shook my head. "I'd rather you didn't. Hold off and maybe we can nail him for something more serious than mere breaking and entering."

"You think he killed Isobel?"

"Now I'm sure of it," I said. "But I still don't see how I'll ever prove it. Even if we turn up a convincing motive, nothing but Quinn's confession will ever prove it was murder instead of an accident."

I spent an hour helping Marge straighten up the apartment.

The next morning I walked into Warren Day's office at ten A.M.

"I've got some news for you," I announced. "Marty Cole's in town, and he's thick with Harry Quinn."

The inspector's eyebrows went up. "That's interesting. Particularly in view of the information we've managed to dig up about Quinn."

I took a scat, lit a cigar and waited.

Day said, "Two months ago the Quinn Importing Company was on the verge of bankruptcy. But somehow, with no apparent increase in business, Quinn's managed to retire three of his more urgent notes. He's still in shaky financial condition, but he seems to be out of immediate danger of bankruptcy."

"Hmm," I said. "That means a new source of income. And with Marty Cole being chummy with him, it's a fair bet the source is illegal."

I told the inspector about events of the previous night.

When I finished, Day asked, "Got any idea what Quinn was looking for?"

"Possibly whatever it was Isobel Banner wanted to get analyzed."

Day frowned. "But what's that?"

I was beginning to think I knew, but I gave the inspector a shrug. I wanted a little time to think about it.

On the way out I stopped for a word with Desk Sergeant Danny Blake. "Vice and narcotics making any progress on the dope drive?" I asked.

He shrugged. "They're grilling enough junkies. Netted two more last night. But they don't give me progress reports."

From headquarters I went to a small neighborhood tavern, sat at the bar and tried to organize my thoughts over a couple of rye-and-waters. I was beginning to get a fairly clear picture of why Isobel Banner had died, but the trouble was it was based entirely on hypothesis, without a single shred of concrete evidence.

It seemed fairly evident that Harry Quinn's strange new source of income was somehow tied up with Marty Cole. And knowing Marty Cole's background, it wasn't too hard to figure the relationship between the two. Even without knowing the local vice and narcotics squad was concerned about a recent increase in heroin pushing, I would have at least toyed with the thought that Quinn had been picked by the syndicate to handle dope distribution in town, because narcotics was Cole's specialty. Knowing the squad suspected a newly organized ring made it almost a certainty.

This in turn made it possible to guess what Isobel Banner had wanted analyzed. My guess was that she had somehow gotten hold of a sample of Quinn's wares, suspected what it was, but wanted to make sure before she accused the man she thought she might be in love with of peddling narcotics. That would account for her puzzling call to me. It would also account for her death, if Quinn somehow found out she knew.

Carrying my hypothesis farther, I decided that Quinn's search of the apartment meant he hadn't gotten the sample back before he killed Isobel, and didn't know where it was. And recalling the apparent bawling out Quinn had gotten from Marty Cole just before he made the search, it seemed evident he had strict orders to recover it.

The only thing I couldn't understand was why Cole would be so concerned over one small sample of heroin floating around loose. Even if it fell into the hands of the police, it was hardly likely it had any name and address on it.

I decided it was time to have a private conversation with Harry Quinn.

But when I walked across the broad lawn of Quinn's home and rang the doorbell of the big ranch-style house, it wasn't Quinn who came to the door. It was his ex-wife.

Today she was dressed in a neat white suit with a collar clear to her

neckline. The sleeves came only to the middle of her biceps, but she wore gloves as long as the ones she had used in her strip act, except these were white instead of black. Apparently she wasn't planning a prolonged visit, because she hadn't bothered to remove a cute little straw hat.

I asked, "Mr. Quinn home?"

"Down at the beach, I think. At least his swim trunks are gone, because I checked his closet. I'm waiting for him myself. Come in and we'll wait together."

She led me into a huge living room, one whole end of which was taken up by a bar. I told her my name and she introduced herself as Martha Quinn.

"I knew who you were," I said. "I saw your act last night. But I didn't know your name was Martha."

She laughed. "Isn't Sultra a silly name? My agent picked it. You like the act?"

I looked her over critically. Even in a sedate suit, her figure and her movements fairly shouted at me. I didn't say anything, but my expression must have satisfied her that I had been nuts about the act, because she grinned again.

"Drink while we're waiting?" she asked.

When I said I wouldn't mind, she went behind the bar and mixed a rye-and-water for me and a gin-and-soda for herself. She brought both around to my side and moved to within inches of me when she

handed mine over. After I accepted it, she stayed in the same spot.

We raised our glasses in a toast, drank and then I asked casually, "What's Harry got in the lockup these days?"

She looked surprised. Then she shrugged. "Everything, I guess. Liquor, tobacco. What he always has."

I thought this over, finally said, "Let's see if he's got any pre-war Mount Vernon rye."

She didn't seem much interested, but she rounded the bar agreeably enough. The whole under side of the backbar consisted of two long sliding doors. She slid one open to disclose a cupboard jammed full of every sort of liquor, apparently the reserve supply, as the backbar itself contained nearly two dozen bottles. After studying labels for a few minutes, she shrugged and pushed the door closed again.

"Nothing in the other side but cigars and cigarettes," she said.

When she came back around the bar again, she moved even closer than before. Tossing off her drink in one swallow, she looked directly up into my face. I looked back at her quizzically, for the first time gazing directly into her eyes, and something I saw there startled me. I finished my own drink, set it down and looked into her eyes again.

"Well?" she asked.

It was open invitation, but it didn't surprise me. Women coked to the eyebrows aren't inclined to



have inhibitions. And the thing that had startled me about her eyes was that the pupils were pinpoints.

Casually I took her by both arms, pulled her against me and kissed her. Violently she strained against my grip on her arms, trying to get them around my neck, but I didn't let her. After a moment I pushed her away, deliberately letting my hands slide down her arms as I did, so that her long gloves were pulled below the elbows.

Instantly she pushed them up again, but not before I had seen what I wanted to see and knew why her forearms were always covered, even when she did a strip dance. The undersides of her forearms were a mass of needle holes.

No wonder Harry had divorced so beautiful a woman, I thought. Even a professional dope pusher wouldn't be happy about having an addict in his own family.

We heard the back door slam and Sultra said, "Quick! Wipe your lips!" and handed me a tissue.

Then she made a beeline into another room, in search of a mirror to repair her own face, I guessed.

I made a quick swipe at my lips, vaulted the bar and slid back that side of the lockup Sultra hadn't opened. As she had indicated, it was crammed with cartons of cigarettes and what looked like at least fifty boxes of cigars. Holding my breath and hoping that Harry Quinn would go to his bedroom to change out of swim trunks before investigating the

front room, I quietly pulled out box after box of cigars and laid them on the floor. At the back, underneath the whole pile, I found a paper carton nearly a foot square.

Piling the cigar boxes back where they had been, I closed the sliding door, picked up the paper-wrapped carton and quietly left by the front door.

I waited until I got back to my apartment before examining my find. And when I did, I whistled in amazement. The package contained what I estimated to be nearly fifteen pounds of pure heroin, which, after it was cut ten-to-one with sugar and powdered milk in order to make it spread further, would bring in between a hundred and a hundred and fifty thousand dollars on the retail market.

It hadn't been merely a sample Isobel Banner had found. It had been an entire shipment.

My first impulse was to wrap it back up again and head for the vice and narcotics squad. But then I had a thought which caused me to hold off while I reasoned things out.

If I turned in the package, undoubtedly Harry Quinn would be picked up and eventually convicted on a narcotics charge, probably drawing a couple of years. But he still wouldn't pay for the murder of Isobel Banner.

I understood now why Marty Cole had been so concerned over recovering Isobel's "sample." He hadn't merely been bawling Quinn

out; he'd been giving him an ultimatum to find it or else. And in syndicate language "or else" means a trip to the morgue.

In view of what Warren Day had told me about Quinn's shaky financial circumstances, I knew there wasn't a chance in the world he could raise enough money to reimburse the syndicate for the loss of fifteen pounds of H. And if he didn't come up with either the heroin or the money within a reasonable time, I wouldn't have to worry about trying to make him pay for Isobel's murder. Marty Cole would take that worry off my mind.

If the drug involved had been co-

cain or morphine, I knew that after it had served its purpose as evidence, the local vice and narcotics squad would turn it over to the Federal Narcotics Bureau, which in turn would eventually donate it to some hospital for medical use. But heroin is illegal even for medical use in the United States. After it was used as evidence, it would simply be destroyed.

I decided to save the narcotics people the trouble of having to dispose of it. Instead I took the package into the bathroom.

It took me some time, but finally I managed to get all fifteen pounds of the stuff flushed down the drain.



# Portrait of a Killer

## No. 17 — Arthur Eggers

BY DAN SONTUP

HE SHOULD have known better. He worked as a clerk in a police station, and he should have known that it's almost impossible to get away with a murder — especially when the police can connect you with the victim and also prove a motive. Yet this didn't stop Arthur Eggers. He went right ahead with the murder of his wife and then tried to cover up his guilt through his intimate knowledge of police methods.

It didn't work.

Eggers' motive was a strong enough one — his wife had been playing around with other men. It was a motive that had driven many other men to murder, and Arthur was no different in this respect. While there's some truth to the fact that the "unwritten law" may keep a husband from being executed for killing his wife or her lover or both, it doesn't often happen that way, especially when the crime is as cold-blooded and as brutal as the way in which Arthur Eggers murdered his wife.

Arthur knew that his wife wasn't being exactly faithful to him, but he held himself in check until one December night when he returned home and saw a man leaving his

house. Arthur hurried inside, went to the bedroom, and there found his wife lying on the bed.

This was more than he could take, and Arthur settled the whole thing once and for all with a .38 automatic. He fired twice into her chest, and then beat her over the head with the butt of the gun while she was still dying from the two bullets in her.

After it was all over, Arthur realized that he now had to cover up his tracks. Since he was so familiar with police methods, he knew that two important items would be the identity of the corpse and the place of the murder. So, he dragged his wife's body out to the garage and, in order to make it difficult to identify the body, he took a hand-saw and cut off his wife's head and hands. Then he stuffed everything into the trunk of his car, and, after cleaning up all traces of the crime around the house, he drove out to a lonely canyon and dumped the body there.

He had already made one mistake, though. He wrapped the headless corpse in a blanket which he took from his own bed.

His next mistake was in trying to clean the bloodstains from the trunk

of his car. He scrubbed it out thoroughly with soap and water, but Arthur should have known that this doesn't always remove bloodstains. Routine chemical analysis can often disclose the presence of bloodstains, even though they apparently have been scrubbed away.

The next step, after he had scrubbed the car and hidden the head and hands and the gun and the saw, was to get rid of the car itself. He did this very simply by selling the car, but this, too, was a mistake. It's a simple matter for the police to trace a car which has been sold.

In thinking things over, Arthur realized that the police would wonder why he didn't report his wife missing — if they succeeded in identifying the corpse when they found it. So, the next step was to file a missing persons report with the police, which Arthur did a few days after the killing.

However, this also was a serious error, since the police checked all missing persons reports when they found the body. Naturally, Arthur was called in to see if the corpse was that of his wife. He identified her and then gave a story about seeing her with a strange man in the hopes that this would throw the police off the trail.

The police weren't fooled, though. Arthur was a prime suspect. His wife had been carrying on affairs with other men, the police soon found out, and this gave an excellent motive for Arthur.

He was questioned, but he didn't break down. He knew all about police methods. They couldn't convict him without evidence, and Arthur just kept his mouth shut. He was right, of course — no evidence, no conviction. But where Arthur was wrong was in thinking that no evidence could be uncovered.

The police quickly piled up a case against him. The blanket was identified as belonging to Arthur; his car was found, and the traces of blood the police discovered in the trunk matched the blood group of his wife; the saw and gun were found, and the traces of flesh on the teeth of the saw matched that of his wife; a ballistics test on the gun showed that it was the same gun that had killed his wife; bits of flesh and hair on the butt of the gun matched those of his wife; and this was all the police needed.

The head and the hands of the corpse were never found, and Arthur refused to tell what he had done with them. Perhaps he thought the lack of a head and hands on the corpse would keep him from being convicted.

It didn't, of course, and Arthur was quickly tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. His knowledge of police techniques hadn't helped him at all. About the only thing it did for him was to allow him to know well in advance exactly what was going to happen to him when they finally led him into the gas chamber.



*A Peter Chambers Novel*

BY HENRY KANE

# Precise Moment

WHEN you're alone in a graveyard, you have many thoughts. When you're alone in a graveyard, that is, and you're not dead.

And I was not dead.


I was, in fact — if one can be said to be — *too* much alive. Nervous. Jumpy. Prickles ridged along the back of my neck like the risen hackles of a fighting cock. Nerve-ends jagged, and every fibre taut. And why not, at one o'clock in the morning of a silent fog-wisped night, alone in a stone-infested graveyard out at the eerie edge of Long Island?

And what was I doing there?

Have a laugh.

I was there on business.

I had a flashlight in my left hand, and a brown-paper package in my



*Graveyards are for corpses. That's why Peter Chambers didn't want to wait around for the gunman in the cemetery . . .*

right, and I was glued, like a peeping-Tom at an inviting aperture, to a flavorsome tombstone, enticingly inscribed, in curlicues yet: *J. J. J. Tompkins, Rest In Peace.*

Tompkins, I hoped, was resting more peacefully than I.

I shrugged, scratched, grimaced and clicked the flashlight again. It was five after one. I had been there, at Mr. Tompkins' tombstone — as directed — since twelve-thirty. I stiffened, stretched and returned to the whirligig of random thinking, but my unconscious mind must have sought succor, because it presented a picture of Trina Greco.

Ah, that Trina Greco. Tall, dark, lithe and graceful, she had the longest, shapliest legs in New York, and they were legs that stood up against the staunchest of competition — Trina was a ballet dancer. This very afternoon — before I had returned to the office, and before the call from Mrs. Florence Fleetwood Reed — I had attended a rehearsal with Trina. Legs, legs, legs . . . legs and leotards . . . but my Trina won hands down (or is it legs down?). Afterward, we had sat about sipping peaceful afternoon cocktails in a peaceful afternoon tavern, and she had looked off wistfully — Trina, the unusual: with a brain to match the legs — and she had said, apropos of nothing:

“A fragment of time in connection with a fragment of space . . . creates the precise moment.”

“Wow,” I had said. “In the mid-

dle of the afternoon. Just like that.”

“It's from the Greek philosophers.”

“Trina, my Greek.”

“I *am* of Greek extraction. You know that, Pete.”

“Sure. Sure.” I had pondered it. “Fragment of time . . . fragment of space . . . precise moment.”

“And that precise moment . . . can be ecstatic or catastrophic.”

“Wow. Again with the words. Slow down, my lady love. I'm only a detective taking off part of an afternoon.”

“Even here . . .” Her dark eyes crinkled in a grin. “You and I . . . this might be . . . a precise moment.”

My grin had answered hers. “No, ma'am, and that's for sure. I can think of a better time and a more appropriate space for *our* precise moment. But I do believe I know what you mean, big words or little words.”

“Do you, Peter?”

“Sure. Something like this, let's say. Deciding game of the World Series. Last half of the ninth, home team at bat, one run behind. Bases full, two out. Third baseman moves a little to his left for some reason, just as the batter hits a screaming line drive. Third baseman lifts his glove, practically to protect himself . . . and he's made a sensational catch. At the right fragment of time he was in the right fragment of space . . . and for him, it was the precise moment. Ecstatic for his team, catastrophic for the other.”

"Very good, Peter. Very good, indeed."

The way she had said it, the way her dark eyes had narrowed down, the promise in the soft-sweet smile — right here in the fog-tipped graveyard, a pleasant little shiver ran through me. Everything else was forgotten — even Johnny Hays, small-time hood with big-ideas, good-looking lad with a smooth blue jaw — Johnny Hays, who had come up to me just after I had put Trina into her cab — Johnny Hays, talking through stiff lips:

"You just beg for trouble, don't you, Mr. Chambers?"

"Like how, little man?"

"Like making with the pitch for this Trina Greco."

"That have any effect on you, little man?"

"It figures to have an effect on you, big man."

"Like how?"

"Like Nick Darrow."

"Darrow, huh?"

"Friendly warning, big man. When Nick don't like, Nick cuts you down to size. Then you're a little man, very little, and very dead. So smarten up. There's a million dames. Skip this one."

I forgot about Johnny Hays, thinking of the expression on Trina's face, of her dark eyes, of that secret little smile, and, as I clicked the flashlight, the pleasant little shiver went through me again — but then the shiver remained and all the pleasantness went out of it.

A quiet voice said, "Put that light out."

I put the light out. I was back in the graveyard working at my trade. I stood still and I said nothing. I saw nobody.

The quiet voice said, "You Peter Chambers?"

"I ain't J. J. J. Tompkins."

"Never mind the jokes. Turn around, and stay turned around."

"Yes, sir." I turned and stayed turned.

"Now reach your arm back and hand me that package."

"You're a little premature, pal."

"What?"

"You're supposed to give me the word, pal. This is a real eccentric bit, but my client is a real eccentric lady, and she's rich enough to afford her eccentricities. You're supposed to say a name. So, say it."

"Abner Reed."

"That's the jackpot answer. Reach, and grab your prize."

There were soft footsteps, then somebody reached, and somebody grabbed.

"Very good," somebody said. "Now stay the way you are. Stay like that for the next five minutes."

But I didn't "stay the way you are" for the next five minutes. Fast count, I'd say there were two reasons for that. First, five minutes in a graveyard, in the middle of the night, after your business is finished, is like, say, five *years* on the French Riviera. And second, I'm blessed, or is it cursed, with a large lump of



curiosity. I turned, and I didn't turn a second too soon, because I ran right smack up against Trina's "precise moment." Somewhere through the faint fog there was enough light to put a glint on metal — and I dropped — as five shots poured over me, and then . . . nothing.

Running feet . . . and nothing.

I got up, but I didn't even try going after him. The guy was gone. Go search for a needle in a haystack. *You* go — but at least you've got a chance. The needle is inanimate, and it *is* in the haystack. But searching for a gunman in a graveyard . . . no, sir. I'll take the needle-in-the-haystack deal.

Anyway, I brushed at my clothes, and I got out of there, and I was damn glad to *get* out of there. My car was parked about a quarter of a mile down, and when I slammed the door behind me and pushed down the buttons, I permitted myself the luxury of a couple of real deep-down shudders, and then I turned over the motor and went away from there, fast. When the clustered lights of civilization finally rose up before me, I visited the most civilized place I could think of — a bar — where I had three quick constituents of resuscitation and a slow chaser. Then I went back to the car and my progress to Manhattan was less precipitate and more thoughtful.

## 2.

Names ran through my mind like tape running through a clinking cash

register. Trina Greco, Johnny Hays, Nick Darrow, Florence Fleetwood Reed. I gave the first three a quick-think, so I'd have time to concentrate on the last, and then, perhaps, hash them all up together. I was relaxed now, and moving without hurry. I was heading for the Reed mansion at Gramercy Park, and it figured for about an hour.

Trina Greco. A dish for a king, and I make no pretense at royalty. I had seen her once, about six months back, dancing at the Copa (and had admired her from afar), but I'd met her at a party about two weeks ago (admiring her from very near), and had commenced a small but concentrated campaign. She had quit the night-club job (which was bread and butter) and was rehearsing now with a ballet company, for which she had been trained most of her life. I knew very little about her, but was eagerly trying to learn much more.

Johnny Hays. A good-looking kid who had been inoculated by slick-type movie heavies in his early youth. A no-brains young man who would wind up, one day, neatly dressed, but grotesquely sprawled in a gutter with a generous portion of his intestines splattered beside him. Meanwhile, he was a killer-diller with the ladies, and drew his pay within one of the varied echelons which went to make up the intricate empire of Nick Darrow.

Nick Darrow, very much more important. Brains, cunning and the conscience of a crawling lobster. Neat,

young enough, and at the height of his ambition. Politically well-connected, reasonably cautious, and one of the top ten narcotics outlets in the United States. Owner of the *Club Trippa*, on Madison Avenue.

Florence Fleetwood Reed, completely removed from any of the others. Until late this past afternoon, unknown to me, except through legend. Café society, real society, and snob-rich to the tune of a hundred million dollars inherited from a five-and-dime pappy who had passed away leaving little Florence as his sole and avaricious beneficiary. Reputed to be inordinately shrewd in business, stuffily stingy, and weirdly eccentric. Young, beautiful, headstrong, imperious, commanding. Married once, a long time ago, to a movie actor, divorced, and recently, about six months ago, re-married.

Late in the afternoon, I'd had a call at the office . . . from Florence Fleetwood Reed. I'd been summoned to her home, and I had answered the summons. I had met her alone, at her Gramercy Park home, a firm-hipped blonde with a lot of control and hard grey eyes within an almost imperceptible network of crepe-like wrinkles. I had been informed that I had been selected as a final cog in a peculiar business transaction. I was told that I was not to ask questions, was to return at eleven o'clock, was to pick up a package, was to go to a cemetery on Long Island, find a tombstone marked *J. J. J. Tompkins*, wait until somebody came there who

asked for me by name, and then mentioned the name Abner Reed. I was then to turn the package over to him, and return to Gramercy Park and collect my fee. Said fee, one thousand dollars. Time of appointment at said J. J. J. Tompkins' resting place, twelve-thirty, and wait if the caller is late.

In case you haven't heard, I'm a private detective, which is synonymous with anything confidential, including cockeyed-type messenger boy (if the fee is large enough). In my business, if the client is right, you ask no questions, you give not whit nor wisdom (unless requested); you take it, leave it and forget about it unless an acute or wildly unforeseeable incident occurs.

Gunplay in a graveyard, when your client is the esteemed Florence Fleetwood Reed, is both acute and wildly unforeseeable.

Was the gunplay, then, connected with your client, or was it mixed up with Trina, Hays and Darrow? True enough, it was a vastly populated cemetery, but just as truly you were the only one present upon whom bullets could have even the slightest effect, so, as you turned into the driveway of the Reed home, you were grimly determined to breach the canons of your profession and fling questions until a couple of appropriate answers bounced back.

3.

A sleepy-eyed maid ushered me into the downstairs living room and

vanished. Uncomfortably, I waited alone, and then a door opened and Florence Fleetwood Reed strode in. And, striding behind her, in measured steps, like a couple of pallbearers — a tall silver-haired man and a tall silver-haired woman.

“All right, Mr. Chambers?”

“Yes, Mrs. Reed.”

“You made your delivery?”

“Yes, Mrs. Reed.”

She had blue eyes and blonde hair and a patrician nose with easily quivering nostrils. She was in her young thirties, thin-lipped and severe, but plenty good-looking, with a firm full figure, ramrod-straight, but a little bulgy in spots if you're inclined to be critical. She flung a hand over a shoulder and introduced me to the pallbearers. “My uncle and my aunt. Mr. Harry Fleetwood and Mrs. Ethel Fleetwood.”

The man smiled and said, “Uncle Harry.”

The lady smiled and said, “Aunt Ethel.”

I smiled and said, “How do you do?”

The guy was about sixty, hawk-nosed and yellow-toothed, with a deep gruff voice slightly British in accent. The lady had a round smooth face and a porcelain smile and more flirtatious sparkle to her eyes than double the girls half her age.

Mrs. Reed snapped her fingers at Uncle Harry and Uncle Harry drew an envelope from his jacket pocket.

“Uh, excuse me,” Mrs. Reed said. “That was a one-sided introduction.

This is Mr. Chambers, Peter Chambers, and that envelope, Uncle Harry, is for him.”

Uncle Harry came to me, bowed somewhat, and handed it to me.

Mrs. Reed said, “As per agreement. One thousand dollars.”

I took it and I said, “Thank you, ma'am,” and then I said, “For what?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“What's this all about, Mrs. Reed?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Look, lady, after I completed your cockeyed business transaction, somebody took a couple of pot-shots at me. Could be part of your business, or could be some business of my own. Before I go to the cops with it . . . I'm asking.”

“Cops?” Uncle Harry brought bushy eyebrows down over the hawk-nose.

“No,” Mrs. Reed said. “No.”

The nostrils quivered and for the first time the eyes betrayed agitation.

Right then I knew I was in on a deal and some of the flop-sweat shook off me. High society or low-society, thousand-dollar fee or more, mansion on Gramercy Park and a lady reputed to be worth a hundred million bucks . . . suddenly I shook it all off and I was treading on familiar ground. Because something around here stank. Out loud.

“The bullets,” I said. “Were they part of your business?”

“No. Absolutely not.”

“Then what's all the objection to my going to the cops?”

"Well, because . . ." She turned and looked at her uncle and aunt.

Aunt Ethel continued to smile pleasantly, but Uncle Harry pursed his lips, coughed, grunted, hoisted the eyebrows, then said, "I think you ought to tell him, Florence. Since he was selected for so delicate a mission, he *must* be a man of character."

"Tell me what?"

Aunt Ethel said, "Why you shouldn't, young man, at this particular time, take your troubles to the police."

"My troubles," I said, "seem to be your troubles." I looked at Mrs. Reed. "Then the bullets were your business, weren't they?"

"No. I'm certain they weren't. There wouldn't be any purpose . . ."

"Look. What the hell is . . . ? Pardon me."

"Time," Aunt Ethel said, "for a drink. Brandy for me. What will it be, please? I'm serving."

Nothing for Florence Fleetwood Reed and nothing for Peter Chambers but Aunt Ethel and Uncle Harry buried their noses unto the bouquet of over-sized snifter-glasses into which Aunt Ethel had poured as though she were a bartender who hated the boss.

Florence Reed said, "Have you any idea, Mr. Chambers, what was in that package?"

"Goulash," I said. "For ghosts."

Very funny. Mrs. Reed looked blank, not even contemptuous. Uncle

Harry gazed at me sadly over his brandy. But Aunt Ethel winked slyly and smiled. There was plenty of life in that old dame, too much life for Uncle Harry, no question about that.

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars," Mrs. Reed said.

It went by me the first time. Mildly I said, "Pardon?"

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"What?"

"Three quarters of a million." Uncle Harry wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "In thousand dollar bills."

I came back to Mrs. Reed. I said, "Look. You've got a reputation for being, well . . . two things . . . stingy and eccentric. Stingy, that's none of my business. Eccentric, that fits in with this. You're also supposed to have a lot of good practical horse-sense. So, business transactions in the middle of the night, even in a graveyard, nobody'd put it past you, nobody'd think twice about it, you're supposed to have pulled a couple of real wing-dings in your time, but —"

"That wasn't exactly a business transaction, Mr. Chambers?"

"What then —"

"It was a delivery of ransom money."

"*What?* What the hell is going on around here? You mean to tell me that I'm involved in some kind of cockeyed kidnapping?"

Aunt Ethel didn't stop smiling.

"That's what she means to tell you, young man."

"Not exactly involved," Mrs. Reed said. "You were an instrument of delivery. An instrument, period."

"Instrument, huh? The police know about this?"

"No, they don't."

"Don't, huh?" Sarcasm blurred my voice. "Expect to inform them?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Tomorrow morning."

I headed for the brandy bottle. I poured and I drank brandy like it was a chaser for bourbon. Then I smacked down the glass, turned, said, "Look. What happened here? Let's have it, huh? Let's stop with this casual deal. Let's have the story."

Florence Reed went to a divan, sat wearily, lowered her head and touched fingers to her temples. "Last night. It seems a year ago. Last night, he went out, my husband, he went out for a newspaper."

"What time?"

"About ten o'clock. He . . . didn't return. It's happened before. He'd step into a tavern, become involved in a discussion, or just drink in the company of others. Anyway, I went up to bed, fell asleep, and when I awoke, suddenly . . . it was two o'clock, two in the morning. He wasn't back yet and I became . . . apprehensive. Just then, the downstairs bell rang. I thought it was he . . . that he had left his keys. I slipped into a dressing gown

quickly, I hoped the servants hadn't awakened . . . and I opened the door myself. It was Uncle Harry."

"I think," Uncle Harry said, "I ought to take over at this point."

I said, "Okay with me."

"Well, sir, I live nearby, on lower Fifth Avenue. At about one-thirty last night, I received a phone call. It was from Abner . . . my niece's husband, Abner Reed. His voice sounded somewhat muffled, and for a moment, if you'll forgive me, I had an idea that he was inebriated. But that idea was quickly dispelled. He informed me that he was talking to me with a gun pointed at his head. He told me that he'd been slugged, rendered unconscious, and kidnapped. Naturally, I was frightfully perturbed."

"Naturally."

"He said that he didn't know where he was, that he was blindfolded, that this phone call had been made for him, and then he was put on, and that he was merely repeating what he'd been told to say."

"And what was that?"

"That I was to come here and inform Florence, and that there would be another call, here, in the morning. And, that if the police were notified, he'd be killed. Then there was a click, and the wire was dead."

"Then?"

"I came here — I told my wife to follow in half an hour, which she did — and the three of us sat up until morning. At eight o'clock in the morning, the second call came."

"Abner again?"

Mrs. Reed said, "Yes."

"You sure it was he?"

"No question. He sounded tired and . . . and beaten . . . physically beaten . . . but it was he. Anyway, to make a long story short, the arrangements were made, and . . . you must have quite a reputation, Mr. Chambers . . . because your name was given to him to give to me as . . . I believe the word is intermediary. You know the rest."

"That all?"

She stood up. She tried to control it, but I saw she was trembling. Uncle Harry put his glass away and went near her, holding her lightly at the elbow. She sighed, said, "It was promised that he'd be returned to us during this night."

I shook my head and softly I said, "Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"I . . . I'm regarded as, well, a rather frugal person." Tears brimmed over and spoiled her face, but it didn't break up, there was no grimace, the face remained haughty and expressionless. "But . . . this is different. I love my husband. We've only been married six months . . ."

Uncle Harry said, "I think you ought to go upstairs now."

I said, "But you *are* going to notify the cops about this, aren't you?"

"Yes." She leaned heavily on Uncle Harry. "Tomorrow morning. Whether he's returned to me or not. I've got to give it a chance . . .

and then I'll go to the police, either way." She shivered once, violently. "I was warned . . . we were being watched . . . that even the phones were tapped . . . that if we went to the police . . . they'd . . . kill him."

"I understand, Mrs. Reed. I'll keep my nose clean. It's your affair, entirely. Now, easy does it, ma'am."

Uncle Harry led her toward the door. He said, "Ethel, you'll show Mr. Chambers out," and then they were gone.

Aunt Ethel came to me, still smiling and smelling of brandy. Aunt Ethel's silver hair was deceptive. Aunt Ethel was no youngster but she wasn't senile. Aunt Ethel was a beautiful woman, mature but not aged. Aunt Ethel wore a blue dress which matched her eyes. Aunt Ethel's blue dress was cut deep in front and a good deal of firm cream-skinned bosom was exposed. She took me out to the small dim vestibule. Aunt Ethel wasn't smiling now and her lips were full and red and glistening. Aunt Ethel said, "I'm drunk."

"So?"

"So . . . this."

She slid her arms under my arms and hooked her hands over my shoulders. She drew me close and opened her mouth on mine. Oh, Aunt Ethel. She smelled of brandy but she smelled too of a vague and attractive perfume. She moved her mouth away and I made one last small attempt at trying to keep the

track clear. I said, "You people could have gone to the cops. There are ways. Who advised her?"

At my ear she said, "Nobody advises Florence. She supports us, just as she supports her husband, not too liberal with any of us, so . . . nobody advises Florence . . . except Florence. You're sweet." The hands on my shoulders tightened and her warm body was close. "I'm drunk, but I've wanted to do this from the moment I came into that room. Drunk. Anyway, it's an excuse."

Then her mouth came back to mine.

4.

It was late, but I tried the *Club Trippa* anyway. There was a bar in front and a cocktail lounge in the rear. It was done in maroon and silver and had a glow that was warmer than a bachelor-girl on vacation. The bar was crowded three deep and the inside room was jumping. The bartender winked and waved and said, "Hi."

"Nick around? Or Johnny Hays?"

"Don't know myself, Mr. Chambers. Try upstairs."

Upstairs, up a maroon-carpeted flight of stairs, was the floor show, the band, the dance floor, and the heavy spenders. Upstairs, too, were a couple of choice back rooms, one of which was Nick Darrow's office, if a studio fitted out like a sultan's reception room can be termed "office." The merry-makers were engaged in watching a stripper called Bonnie

Laurie so I strolled along the periphery of dimness and opened the office door without knocking.

Nick Darrow wasn't there.

But Johnny Hays was.

He unfurled off a couch, black-eyed and contemptuous, and lounged toward me.

"Still looking for trouble, my dear shamus?"

"Where's Nickie?"

"None of your business. Any message?"

"Yes."

"I'll take it."

I gave it to him. High, hard and handsome with a lot of shoulder behind it. It splattered blood from his mouth and sat him down with his toes pointed at the ceiling. I didn't wait for him to get up. I went downstairs and had a Scotch highball and my palms were wet with expectancy. But nothing happened. Johnny Hays didn't show, nor did Nickie Darrow. Johnny was still sitting there, or he didn't want to come down, or he'd gone down the back exit and was out front waiting. I paid and went out. Nobody was there. I walked along a couple of quiet streets but nobody sprang at me. So I gave it up and went back to the lights. I had ham and eggs in a cafeteria, with coffee, ketchup, and well-buttered English muffins. Then I went home.

I showered, dried down, slipped into a pair of shorts. I bought myself a Scotch and chased it with more Scotch and I was ready to wrap this

day up and put it to bed. I thought about Florence Reed and felt a little sorry for her, as sorry as you can feel for a dame with a hundred million bucks, and then I thought about Aunt Ethel and I got a belt out of that. So . . . my door-buzzer buzzed.

In the middle of the night, the door-buzzer buzzes.

Each to his own. Poets sleep in the daytime. Tramps work at night. Charwomen come home at dawn. Editors read in bed. Actors awake at the crack of noon. Atom experts ponder through the night. Doctors are always on call. And a private richard . . . there is no reason why business should not be buzzing the door-buzzer in the dead of night. Private richard. He has about as much privacy as a parakeet in a kindergarten.

I opened the door to darkness. Somebody'd switched off the corridor lights. When lights are out that should be on, you drop, you learn that early when you're in my business. But I didn't drop in time. Blazes of light punctuated the blackness, and when I dropped, it wasn't because I wanted to drop, it was because I was knocked down by the force of the bullets. I heard the pound of feet in the corridor, but right then I wasn't interested. I felt blood on my naked body, and I heard the labor of my breathing. My one interest was reaching the phone. I tried to get up, but I couldn't make it. So I crawled, and I

lifted the receiver, and dialed o, and heard my whisper: "Operator . . . hospital . . . hospital . . . emergency . . ."

5.

I was under sedatives for a day, while they probed for bullets, and then I was sitting up in the hospital bed, ready to go, but they told me five days, five days before they'd let me out of there, and then I got a caller, amiable but worried-looking, Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, Homicide, good cop and good friend.

"Hi, Detective," he said. "I hear you're coming around real good."

"Hi, Licutenant. What brings you?"

"Well, when a friend is sick . . ."

"What else brings you?"

"That Abner Reed shindig. I hear tell you were an innocent bystander . . . in a cemetery. You well enough to chat?"

"I'm well enough to get the hell out of here. Did they return that bird?"

"Yah." He sighed and sat down. Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, squat, thick, ruddy and black-haired, stump of an unlit cigar in his mouth. "And none the worse for his experience. Got hit in the throat a couple of times, a little damage to the windpipe. Had to do the questions and answers by writing, but it's a condition that figures to clear up quick enough."

"Has it broken in the newspapers?"



"Nope. Not a word. We're trying to work it through before it gets any publicity. Now, let's hear your story."

I gave him the story without frill or furbelow. When I was finished he said, "Any ideas?"

"About what?"

"About what makes you a shooting-gallery target?"

"Yeah, I've got a couple of ideas, but I'd rather not talk about them."

"Why not?"

"Because they're personal, and I'd like to give them some personal attention, as soon as they let me out of here."

"Okay, Peter Pan, if that's the way you want it." The cigar rolled around in his mouth and stopped. "What about the snatch? Want to discuss that?"

"Love to."

"Any ideas on that?"

"Not a one. You, Lieutenant?"

"Nothing."

"That's a good basis for discussion. Okay, what have you got on it?"

"Nothing more than you have. The guy showed up at his house about seven o'clock yesterday morning, period. Tired, a little banged up, and his throat on the blink. Had a doctor in, who couldn't find anything really wrong. Cold compresses and rest, that's the treatment."

"Get his story?"

"Got it the best possible way. Complete statement in writing, then questions and answers in writing. Sum total . . . nothing."

"Well, let's hear, anyway."

"Went out of his house for a paper. Got jumped in the dark and figured it for a mugging. But then he was slugged, and when he came to, he was in a car, bound and gagged and under a blanket. Also blindfolded. There was a stop, where he was put on the phone to that Uncle Harry; then he was riding again. Then there was another stop, where they roughed him up a little; then the call in the morning to the wife for the ransom dough, where you were suggested as go-between, and he transmitted that suggestion to the wife. You know what happened in between. Then, yesterday morning, about six o'clock, he had another car ride. He was dropped out near the bridge on First Avenue and a Hundred and Twenty-fifth, and the car roared off. He wandered around a little dazed until he got a cab, and went home. That's his story, sum and total."

"License plate of the car?"

"Couldn't get it. It was still dark, and they had their lights out. Nice, huh? A lot to work on."

"Yeah."

Silence. Of the heavy type. The kind of silence you can only get in a hospital room. Then he said, "Can I smoke?"

"Sure you can smoke."

He lit up. "Well . . . ?"

"What about the background of the guy himself? Abner Reed. What kind of a guy?"

"Nice enough young fella. Tall,

rangy, young, good-looking. Used to be a dancing instructor. That's how he met the lady with the bucks. She came for lessons and she fell for the teacher."

"How they get along?"

"Swell, from what they tell me."

"How long married?"

"Going on seven months."

"She been liberal with him?"

"Liberal as can be expected. Rich, but plenty tightwad, that one."

"What about his background?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, he's only married six-seven months. If it was hard guys he was playing around with before that, they'd know just what a set-up he was for a snatch. Maybe he even blabbed *after* he was married."

"Maybe. We've checked the background, of course. Usual thing for a good-looking kid alone in New York. Ran around a lot. Night club stuff and things. Handsome kid, picked the best-lookers in gals. Nothing special in hard guy friends."

"Nice selection of zeroes we're coming up with, aren't we, Lieutenant? What about that aunt and uncle?"

"Harry Fleetwood was the brother of Florence's father, pappy with all the bucks. Pappy supported him and Aunt Ethel. When Pappy died, he left his all to lady Florence. Florence continued the support, but was somewhat more firm on the purse-strings. You met that Aunt Ethel, huh?"

"Yes."

"Something, eh?"

"Quite."

"Twenty years younger than Uncle Harry, and Harry's fifty-nine."

"She looks older."

"It's the white hair, which she *dyes* that color. Now that's a switch, isn't it? I've heard them go from grey to blonde, but that one's a natural blonde who goes to grey. Quite a dame, Aunt Ethel. Used to be married to a British peer. Gave that up because she thought Harry had the kind of dough the Fleetwood name conjured up. Wound up being a ward of Pappy's. Nice."

I lay back and I said, "Yeah." Then I said, "I'm in it, Louie."

"So?"

"Mind if I stay in it?"

"Real polite. As if I could keep you out." He stood up. "But, at least you remember what too many private eyes forget."

Sweetly I said, "And what's that, Lieutenant?"

"That it's not a solo performance. That we work together."

"Sho nuf, Lieutenant."

"Real sry, for a guy that recently harbored bullets."

"Sry enough to ask a favor."

"Shoot."

"There's a girl by name Trina Greco —"

"Isn't there always?"

"Lives on Christopher Street."

"So?"

"Would you get in touch with her — don't scare her — just get in touch. Tell her where I am, and that I'd like a visitor. Okay?"

"Okay, pal. You'll get your visitor."

I got her the next afternoon, Trina Greco, tall in a green suit shaped to her figure, black hair a shining Italian whirl on her head, black eyes enormous and a little frightened.

"Easy does it," I told her. "A little virus. I'll be out in a few days."

"Reluctant hero."

"There she goes again, my Greek philosopher."

"It's not virus. It's bullets. I inquired, and I was told. Something I can do, Peter?"

"Lots of things you can do, Trina. But for now, just sit down, cross those lovely legs, and prattle. Make with the small talk."

She told me about the ballet rehearsals, she told me about how much she liked me, she told me about the fact that she was in the process of moving to a new apartment and how excited she was about that. I lay back and I looked at her and you could tell that I was sick, because it was soothing. Once I asked her to kiss me, which she did, lightly, and next thing I knew, I was asleep. When I woke up, she was gone.

## 6.

Anger and well-being seem to run hand in hand, and as your health improves, so your anger mounts. By the time I was out of the hospital, I was as tense as a piano-wire and fit to bust wide open. First visit was to the Reed mansion where the

maid informed me that Mr. and Mrs. Reed weren't home, they were downtown, passports, something like that. I asked her for Uncle Harry's address and she gave it to me.

Uncle Harry lived in an apartment house on Fifth Avenue and Twelfth Street and Uncle Harry was wearing a monocle this trip: purple lounging pajamas, purple slippers, purple dressing gown, and a monocle. His greeting was cool. I asked about developments and he said there were none. Then he said, "Anything else?" And he said it curtly.

"How's Mrs. Reed?"

"She's fine."

"How's she taking the loss of all that dough?"

"She hopes it will be recovered. If it isn't —" he shrugged — "then she writes it down as a loss and it's over. She has had losses before."

"And how's Aunt Ethel?"

"Very well. Now . . . is there anything else?"

"Don't you like me, Uncle Harry?"

"I neither like you nor dislike you, Mr. Chambers. You are, I trust, a fine young man. But your calling on me is, in essence, an intrusion. We are not friends, and we have nothing in common. You were hired for a purpose, and you served your purpose. Now . . . is there anything else?"

"Nothing else."

"Then good afternoon, Mr. Chambers."

I went back to the office and sat on my hands. I was wearing a gun now, and turning to look behind me wherever I went. I sat on my hands and waited for a call, but no call came. It burnt me, but there was nothing I could do about it. I'd put in a couple of phone calls to Nickie Darrow but Nickie-boy didn't seem to think I was important enough to call back. I got off my hands and attended to routine but routine was duller than a one-horse race, so I kissed it off. Finally, at six o'clock, I was back at the Reed place on Gramercy Park and this time the maid showed me in. The living room was dimly lit by a couple of lamps and first thing Florence Reed did was raise a finger to her lips; then she pointed. I followed the point to a long lean lad snoozing softly on a couch.

"Abner?" I whispered.

She said, "Yes."

She crooked the finger and I followed her into a smaller room. "He's napping," she said.

"How is he?"

"Very well."

"How's his throat?"

"Coming along fine. Now, is it anything special, Mr. Chambers? Maid tells me you were here earlier in the afternoon."

"No. Nothing special."

Her thin lips grew thinner. "Uncle tells me that you called on him too. I don't quite understand, Mr. Chambers. Is it something about your fee?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

In a sense, she had me there. I said, "I was just wondering if I could be of any help . . ."

"Help? Oh. Perhaps you don't know. We've been to the police, just as I told you that night. He was returned to us in the morning, and within an hour we were in touch with the police. They say they're working on it, and we're doing our utmost to co-operate. There's just no help needed."

Once more she had me. I said, "I thought perhaps I could be of some assistance."

"None whatever, Mr. Chambers. The matter is in the hands of the proper authorities. I do wish to thank you for not going to the police with your private troubles that night, and if you feel there should be some added recompense for that . . ."

"No ma'am. No added recompense."

Then I was out of there and I knew I wasn't coming back. And I knew if I did come back I'd be thrown the hell out of there. And I knew that even that would be right because I had no business coming back there. So I had dinner in a quiet restaurant and I longed for Trina Greco but I wouldn't call her because I was a target for somebody and there was no sense pulling her in as innocent bystander. I called Nickie Darrow again but he wasn't in. I asked for Johnny Hays but he

wasn't in either. A good deal of hate was being dammed up inside of me and it had no outlet. I went down to Parker and chewed the fat. He didn't have a thing on the Reed snatch, and it was growing stale. It's a big city and there are a lot of crimes and they overlap and Parker was a busy man. So, since it was nighttime, I got on my broom and made for the *Club Trippa*.

I was hardly past the door when I realized I was *persona non grata*. The word was in. The bartender's glare was colder than frigidity in an igloo, and almost at once a bouncer with heft bellied up to me.

Softly he said, "Out."

Petie-boy was innocent-eyed. "But why, sweetie?"

"Because them's orders. And don't call me sweetie."

"You're big, but I got a hunch I can take you."

"Try."

"I would if it made sense, but after I get past you, there'd be too many others."

"Smart. But you wouldn't get past me."

"That's one man's opinion. Can I ask a question?"

"Sure."

"Who gave the orders?"

"Johnny Hays."

"That little prig?"

"Yeah, that little prig."

"Nickie know about these orders?"

"Look, pal, I only work here. Johnny's one of my bosses. I don't ask my boss no questions. You going

out nice and quiet? It's better for business if you go out nice and quiet. But just between you and me, I wish you wouldn't, because I'd love to shove a fist through you. You're one of them dressed-up wise guys that thinks he's a muscle. Get a little fresh, pal. I would love it."

It didn't make sense, but it's the same old story. Business is business, and in my business, you've got to keep them respecting you or you lose face. I lifted my knee, and his face hung out, and he caught a tennis-racket right, and then a straight left to the point of the chin. It was neat and it was quick and before the commotion even started I was out in the night.

And thereafter I was out many nights, night after night, milking the underworld, trying to coax a tip on the Reed snatch, but it was locked up tight, and nothing wanted to happen. I kept making calls to Nickie Darrow but no call came back to me. I didn't see Trina, I didn't see Johnny, I didn't see Nickie, I didn't see Florence, I didn't see Abner, I didn't see Aunt Ethel, and I didn't see Uncle Harry. I saw Parker, and between the two of us we had accumulated a great big bunch of nothing. The holster I was wearing was growing heavy, and the flesh beneath it was growing red, yet . . . nothing. And then, late one sunny afternoon, I was sitting in the office thinking about my next move, when the next move was made for me. The phone rang and

the husky female voice said, "Mr. Chambers?"

"This is Chambers."

"Good." She spoke quickly. "My name is Sandra Mantell. I live at Fifty-two West Forty-ninth, Apartment Two, downstairs."

"Yes, Miss Mantell?"

"I want to talk to you. Personally."

"I'm a little busy, Miss Mantell."

It wasn't true, but you always say that to a new client. It helps with the fee.

"It's important, Mr. Chambers."

The voice dropped a note. "It's about a kidnapping."

Crinkles commenced on my scalp.

"Pardon?" I said.

"The kidnapping of Abner Reed."

I sat bolt upright. "What? What's that?"

"Listen, please. I . . . I'm involved in it. It was my idea, really. I dreamed it up. I was supposed to get a third. One third." The voice got harsh now. "But . . . I'm not getting it. So . . . I want to talk. Understand? I want to talk."

"Yes," I prompted. "Yes, Miss Mantell."

"Look. I want you to make a deal for me. If I spill . . . I want to be able to cop a plea. If I give them the evidence, worst I want is a suspended sentence."

Now I tried the crafty approach. "Why you calling me, Miss Mantell?"

"Because I know you're mixed up in it. Because I want you to feel out

the cops for me. You tell them I'll spill if they guarantee me a plea. I'm ready to talk, Mr. Chambers. Nobody is going to cross me and get away with it . . . *oh!* . . ."

The raps over the wire were gunshots.

Could have been backfire, could have been explosions, could have been firecrackers — but they weren't — none of that — not with the quick cry from her, and then the sigh, and then the thud of the receiver to the floor. The connection was open but I broke it. I hung up and I ran. Fifty-two West Forty-ninth was near enough to my office and I ran most of the way . . . and then I was there . . . in the presence of death . . . Apartment Two . . . a blonde on the floor with blood on her face . . . and standing above her . . . a sobbing brunette . . . and that one I knew.

Her name was Trina Greco.

"What the hell?" I said. "What's going on here?"

Sobs.

"Trina!"

"Yes?"

"You didn't kill her?"

"No."

I closed the door and I prowled. The receiver was still off the hook, a discordant insistent buzz pouring through it. The blonde was in a sheer housecoat, a tall blonde with a fine figure, shot through the head. A revolver lay near her. I came back to Trina and shook her. I said, "Did you kill her?"

"No."

"Did you call the cops?"

"No."

"What are you doing here?"

"I live here."

"Look. Talk it up. Talk it up fast. We've got to report this. Now come on. Let's have it."

She was trying to pull herself together, but she wasn't too successful. "Let me tell you," she gasped. "Let me tell you what happened . . ."

But then the sobs came again.

I said, "I'll ask questions, and you try to answer them. And get hold of yourself, will you please?"

"Yes. Yes."

"You say you live here. Is this the new apartment you moved to?"

"Yes."

"And this girl. She Sandra Mantell?"

"Yes."

"She live here too?"

"Yes. My room-mate."

"You know her well?"

"I met her a couple of months ago. I was introduced to her."

"By whom?"

"A man. Johnny Hays."

"Johnny Hays, huh? That guy mean anything to you?"

"Nothing. An acquaintance. I went out with him a few times."

"And this Sandra Mantell. Was she a friend of his too?"

"No. She was a friend of a friend of his. Nick Darrow."

"How well do you know this Nick Darrow?"

"I don't know him at all."

"You mean you just met a girl, and you became room-mates?"

"No. She lived in Jersey. She was a dancer, working in Union City."

"Doing what?"

"A burlesque turn. But she was a trained ballet dancer. We were short a girl for our show, and I brought her in, and she qualified. We became better acquainted, and she suggested taking this apartment."

"How'd you get along?"

"I didn't like her. She was tough, hard, unpleasant. I told her I was going to move out after the first month, for which my rent was paid."

"How'd she take that?"

"She said she didn't care. She said if things worked out for her, she'd be living in a penthouse, and very soon."

"Yet she attended rehearsals as a ballet dancer?"

"Attended them faithfully. She wanted that, terribly. I think she was trying to prove something to herself. She made much more money in burlesque. She did a specialty."

I went away from her and looked over the apartment. It was clean, neat and nicely furnished. When I came back, I said, "Okay. I think you're in shape now. I want to know what happened here, and I want it coherent."

She wiped her palms with a handkerchief and laid it away. She said, "We'd both been at rehearsal. She said she had a date, and a very important one, a business date."

"Did she say where?"

"At a restaurant. She didn't tell me which restaurant. She said she was going to talk business. She said she was going to give somebody a last chance to make her rich. That's what she said."

"Where'd you go?"

"I went to a movie."

"Then?"

"I came home. As I entered the hallway, I heard the shots. Our door opened and a man came running out. We collided, and that's when the gun dropped to the floor."

"What gun?"

"The gun right there." She pointed at it, on the floor.

"Wait a minute," I said. "If you and the guy collided in the hall, what's the gun doing here?"

"Well, when I looked in here, and I saw her, like that, I went to her, saw she was dead. Then I went back into the hall for the gun. I remembered about not touching things . . . fingerprints. I kicked it . . . with my foot . . . kicked it along until I worked it into the apartment."

"Good enough. Now, what did the guy look like?"

"I don't know."

"Honey, you just told me you collided with him, out there in the hallway. You must have seen what he looked like."

"No. Remember I was coming in from a sunny street into a dim hallway. And he was running. And we collided. And then he ran out. I just have no idea what he looked like."

"Okay," I said. "That's it. Now we go call cops."

"Can't we call from here?"

"I don't want to touch that receiver. You're supposed to leave things as close to what they were as is possible. Sometimes it helps. Come on."

On the way to a phone booth, I asked her for a favor. I asked her to tell her story exactly as she told it to me, but to leave out one thing. Nickie Darrow. Not to mention him. That's all. Nothing else. Just omit Nickie Darrow.

"Why?" she said.

"It's a personal thing, my little Greek philosopher. I've been trying to get through to him, and this gives me a wedge. Don't worry. You won't be breaking any law, and if there's any trouble, I'll take full responsibility."

She was hesitant but she was cooperative. "All right, if you say so, Peter."

"I say so."

I called down to Headquarters and then we went back to the apartment and pretty soon there were cops, lots of cops, tons of cops, and they were in the charge of Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, and Parker was in a gruff mood. "Never fails, does it? How come whenever there's a corpse . . . there's you?"

"It's mixed up with the other thing, Lieutenant?"

"What other thing?"

"The Abner Reed snatch."

"You kiddin'?"



You straighten him out on current events, from the phone call in your office from Sandra Mantell to right now (omitting friend Darrow) and now his mood is ameliorated and he's on your side again. "Go home, Pete. Go home and stay home."

"Why?"

"Because you're a good kid."

"That's why you want me to go home?"

"Listen. For once will you listen? There's nothing you can do here, and there may be a lot I can do. But I'll come up and see you, Pete, as soon as I can get loose from all of this. You've played ball with me — I'll play ball with you. I'll come up and see you and we'll kick it around some more. Okay?"

"About Trina Greco, Lieutenant."

"Yes?"

"She's a friend of mine."

"So?"

"Treat her nice."

"Okay. She's a friend of yours. I'll treat her nice. Now, will you please go home?"

## 7.

So you go home. You're a good little boy and you've listened to Papa. You sit around like an old lady with lumbago . . . but you sit. You do some home cooking, and some home eating, and some home drinking . . . but you sit. You get sick and tired of sitting . . . but you sit. Day melts into night, and

night is getting wearisome, and you're still sitting. Finally, at twelve-thirty in the morning, Parker shows up, perspired and tired-looking.

"Hi," he said. "How you doing?"

"Been sitting. Been sitting real good. How *you* doing?"

"Pretty bad."

I went to the liquor cabinet. "A bit of the potables, Lieutenant?"

"Thanks. I can use a drink."

He used a couple.

I said, "Let's get down to cases, Lieutenant."

"That's my boy. Always in there pitching."

"Cases, Lieutenant."

"Well, sir, that gun on the floor was the murder gun. And we were able to garner a gorgeous set of fingerprints off it. Only prints on it, as a matter of fact. Gun's an old one. Couldn't do any tracing from the serial number. Dead end on that phase."

"How much luck do you want, pal? Gorgeous fingerprints, you said."

"There's a catch."

"As my Greek philosopher would say — isn't there always?"

"Who's your Greek philosopher?"

"Skip it. Where's the catch?"

"Gorgeous set of prints, but they match nothing we've got on file. And don't match anything out of Washington either. Where's that leave us?"

"Way out in left field on a rainy day, and there is no ball game."

"Very aptly put, me lad. I'll have another drink."

I served him another drink. I said, "You check her friends?"

"I've got forty men working on this. We've checked everybody that's ever had the remotest connection with her. No prints fit the prints on that gun."

"You couldn't know *everybody* . . . that had the *remotest* connection."

"We're only human, pal. We've run down every single possible lead, and we're no place. We've got fingerprints, but they match nothing. Stinks pretty good, eh, pal?"

My conscience reared up on its hind legs and pawed at me. Nickie Darrow was a careful guy and he rarely left traces of his friendships. Casually I said, "You guys got Nickie Darrow's prints on file?"

"Nickie Darrow? He got any connection with this?"

"I'm not saying he has, Lieutenant. Let's say I got a personal hate for the guy, and I'm trying to implicate him. All I'm asking — have you got his prints on file?"

"You bet we have."

"Then routine would have put him on the spot if the prints on the gun were his."

"Definitely."

"Okay, Lieutenant. Don't glare at me like that. You get anything special on that Sandra Mantell?"

"Nothing, except she was a looker with a real upholstered torso. Knew a lot of the best people, and a lot of the worst. A burlesque dancer, and a top-notcher. Used to live in New

York, then moved to Jersey when she got work permanent in Union City. Played in New York though, and played plenty. There's a lot we don't know about her, that's for sure, and there's a lot of people that knew her that we don't know a thing about." He stood up and sighed. "But we keep plugging. We're cops and we keep plugging. We're not brilliant private eyes that sneak around, and fast-talk all the girls, and slug a few people, and come up with all the right answers. We're only cops, and we plug, and a good deal of the time we solve our cases. Without fanfare, and without getting paid by publishers and TV sponsors to tell our stories. Good night, sonny. I'm tired. I'm going to sleep. You ought to do the same."

## 8.

You close the door behind him and you hit the horn. You dial the *Club Trippa*, and you ask for Nick Darrow, and they ask who's calling, and you tell them, and you get the same old answer: not in. This time you leave a message. You say that Sandra Mantell has been murdered, and that you've been investigating it, and that you left out the name of Nickie Darrow when you made your report to the police. You say you'll be home the rest of the night and you give them your phone number. Then you hang up and make yourself some frozen blintzes out of the freezer, with sugar and sour cream, a dish you learned from

one of Lindy's chefs, and you're in the midst of enjoying it, when the phone tinkles, and guess who . . . ?

Nickie Darrow's voice, over the phone, was smoother than my sour cream. "How are you, Pete? Where you been keeping yourself? My club too lowdown for a high-hat guy like yourself?"

"Been busy, Nickie. Haven't had time for night clubs. Haven't even had time to call you on the phone, a nice old friend like you."

"You really ought to call sometime."

"Yeah, I really ought."

"Why don't you drop in tonight, Pete? You free tonight?"

"Matter of fact, I am. It's a good night for slumming. Thanks for the invitation, Nickie."

"Come up to the office, Pete. Say . . . two o'clock, eh? Love to see you. How's two o'clock? I'll clear the decks for you, pal."

"Two o'clock. That's fine."

"See you, pal."

I showered and dressed and looked at the gun and holster and decided to leave them behind. You could get killed like that, but Nickie wasn't one to molest people, not when he's invited them. The people might leave word as to where they were going and then Nickie would be involved, and Nickie was averse to being involved. In anything. Nickie had said two o'clock, so you were there at one-thirty, just for the hell of it.

The word was in again. In reverse.

The bartender winked and waved and said, "Long time no see."

The bouncer with the belly said, "How are you, Mr. Chambers?"

I patted the belly and I said, "What the hell. Business is business. No hard feelings?"

"Not me, Mr. Chambers. I work for a living. I dish it out, and I take it. I got no complaints. How's for a handshake?"

"Why not, pal?"

We shook and he squeezed my hand and then he said softly, "Tell you this, pal, off the record. When I got business, I bring it to you. And so do my friends. You're a quick one, and I like a quick one. And you don't take no guff, and I like a guy don't take no guff."

"Thanks, sweetie."

He grinned a grin that was more gum than teeth. "Don't mention it, sweetie."

I went upstairs. Bonnie Laurie was on again and the customers' eyes were riveted. I repeated my dimness-and-periphery bit, and I opened the door to Nickie Darrow's office. I was early. Nickie Darrow wasn't there. But the room wasn't empty. Aunt Ethel came toward me, swaying slightly. Ethel Fleetwood, in a tight black off-the-shoulder gown that emphasized every curve and protuberance of her hour-glass figure, and let me state, once and for all, Aunt Ethel had what it takes, and more. Haul off that Bonnie Laurie, haul her off that floor, and substitute Aunt Ethel, and the cus-

tomers's eyes would remain just as riveted. Aunt Ethel leaned on me, and I enjoyed every inch of her. She said, "You too? I might have known."

"Living it up, Aunt Ethel?"

"That Nick Darrow. He's a terrible man. No compassion, no soul, nothing. Want to kiss me now, honey? You're the cutest."

"Take a rain-check, Auntie-love."

"I'm in the mood." She wasn't drunk, but her eyes had more glare than a windshield on a desert.

Then the door opened and Nick Darrow came in. Quietly he said, "What the hell is going on here?"

Nick Darrow always spoke quietly. He was, as always, perfectly dressed. He was tall and lean and broad-shouldered. His hair was black, faintly tinged with grey at the temples. He had blue eyes rimmed within long black lashes. He was always serene, always composed, but always, a muscle in his jaw kept jumping. He said, "Mrs. Fleetwood, I've told you time and again — stay out of here."

"I'm with a party, dearie, outside."

"Then stay with your party."

"Nickie dear, all I want is a small favor."

"No favors from me, Mrs. Fleetwood. Now . . . out. Or I'll have you thrown out."

I clucked my tongue at him. "Is that the way to talk to a lady, Nickie dear?"

"Look, Petie dear. You keep your nose out of my affairs." He went to

her and took her arm. "Out. You're a gorgeous dame, but out. Go join your party."

"Will you help me, Nickie?"

"You mean you can't find your way?"

"That's not what I mean, Nickie."

His voice roughened. "Out, Mrs. Fleetwood." He opened the door, gently shoved her through, closed the door, and locked it. Then he turned to me. "You know what she wants?"

"I've got my figure."

"Horse. Nose-candy. Heroin."

"Well, for Horse, she's come to the horse's mouth."

"Very funny, and very stupid. I run a night club here, period. Sit down, eyeball. We got talking to do."

I sat.

He sat.

He said, "Where's it tickling you, pal?"

"That kind of tickling, Nickie, I almost *died* laughing."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

He sounded convincing. I said, "You on my back, Nickie?"

"Like how?"

"Somebody's been blowing spitballs at me, Nickie. Any idea who?"

"No. Period."

"Know a girl by name Trina Greco?"

"I've heard the name."

"Got any interest?"

"I've never even seen her."

"Has Johnny Haysever seen her?"

"Yes. He's seen her."

"It's beginning to add up, Nickie."

"*What's* beginning to add up?"

"Listen. Your Johnny button-holed me a time back, while I was out with this Greco, and he told me to lay off that, and he told it to me — as a message from you."

Darrow stood up and walked. "That ain't the first time, the little punk. When he wants to scare a guy off . . . on his personal business . . . he uses my name. This on the level?"

"You ever know me not to be?"

"Okay. Thanks. That little punk is scratched from here on in. I'll put him to work in a tank town. Don't worry no more about Johnny Hays."

"I never was worried about Johnny Hays. I was worried about you. That boy wouldn't do any serious shooting unless you knew about it, would he, Nickie?"

"No."

"Then who the hell's on my back, and why?"

He walked some more, then he turned to me and smiled. "You got your headaches, kid, and I got mine. Let's get to Sandra Mantell. I hear you covered up for me, and I checked that, and you did. Thanks."

"You mixed up in a snatch, Nickie?"

"No."

"Abner Reed?"

"He get heisted?"

"Yes."

"I know him. Been a customer

here. Married money-bags. She's been a customer here. So's her aunt and uncle."

"Big heist, Nickie. This is off the record."

"How much?"

"Seven hundred and fifty thousand. Big ones."

The corners of his mouth turned down and his head nodded. "Big enough. I should have heard something. I didn't. Was it paid?"

"All of it."

"You sure?"

"I paid it."

Now his glance held admiration. "You're a hip guy. You're always in on the big action. You have a piece?"

"I had nothing. But your Sandra thought she did."

"What are you talking about?"

I told him. I told him a good deal of it. I stressed her phone call, and I brought it up to date.

He was very serious when he said, "Look, kid, for guys like me, the snatch racket is out. There are easier ways to turn a buck. Plus I had nothing to do with that Sandra Mantell killing. On that, I'm on your side. You covered for me, and I appreciate it, but it was a cover I didn't want. After your call, I went down to Headquarters. Guy by the name of Parker is in charge, but he'd gone home. I talked to a Captain Weaver. I offered full co-operation. That's that, and you can check it. On that Johnny Hays bit, I'll take care of that. Now . . . is there anything else you want?"

"No, sir, Nickie, don't want a thing."

"Fine. Now go on outside and enjoy yourself. It's on the house."

"Thanks, Nickie. For tonight, I'll pass."

9.

I went home and I went to sleep. I had my usual nightmares, but they didn't waken me. I slept through most of the day. I heard the phone ring in my dreams, many times, but I let it ring. I stayed with my nightmares. When I awoke at four in the afternoon, I was cradled in perspiration. I bathed and I had breakfast and I read a book. A mystery. I hate them. But I stayed in. I didn't want to go to the office. I wanted a clean day. One clean day. I didn't want to mix in filth, and thievery, and murder. I wanted to be a small boy, and I wanted to believe that all men are good and all women are pure. I have those moments — even as you — and I wanted to live in my preposterous illusions for one solitary day. But the phone rang and I couldn't resist it and I was glad because it was Trina.

"How are you?" she said.

"Just dandy."

"What's the matter?"

"Why? Why should anything be the matter?"

"You sound . . . somehow . . . like a little boy."

"That's bad?"

"I like it."

"I'm thrilled. To the marrow."

"Now you don't sound like a little boy any more."

"Look. Let's get off that pitch. You're my Greek philosopher, and I love you, but —"

"Wanna go to a show tonight?"

"With you?"

"Yes."

"I'd love it."

"My coach gave me a couple of tickets to *Dead Of Night*."

"A mystery?"

"Yes. I'm crazy about them. Aren't you?"

"Just love 'em to extinction. But they frighten me. Will you hold my hand?"

"Yes."

"Promise?"

"Yes."

"And no Greek philosophy?"

"I'll just hold your hand."

"You talked yourself into an escort, plus dinner. Do I call for you, or do you call for me?"

"I moved out, Peter. I couldn't stand it there. I'm at a hotel. It's barren, dreadful."

"Okay. You call for me. We'll have cocktails here, dinner out, your play, and after that . . . you're the boss."

"What time?"

"Suppose you be here at seven."

"Let me think." There was a pause. "I've one hour of rehearsal, and then . . . okay, fine. I'll see you at seven."

But she saw me at six. She came to me breathless and excited, and I had to restrain myself from kissing

her. She had a little black book in her hand. She said, "I think . . . I think this might be important."

"What is it?"

"A little black book."

"Well, thanks. I wouldn't have known that. Unless I was blind. Yours?"

"No."

"Whose?"

"Sandra Mantell's."

"What are you talking about?"

"It was in my bag, in my locker, at rehearsal hall. It was a bag I don't use much. She must have put it into my bag, at our apartment, by mistake. And I took it to rehearsal hall. And I hadn't looked into it until today."

"Gimme," I said.

But all my anticipatory tremors went for nothing. There wasn't a name in that book that meant a thing to me. I said, "You stay here, honey. Make yourself a couple of drinks, and get real high for Peter."

"Where you going?"

"Downtown to friend Parker. This little book doesn't mean a thing to me, but it might to him. Enjoy. I'll be back in time for dinner."

I took a cab downtown to Headquarters, and the elevator took me up to Parker's floor, and I was excited, so I barged in without knocking, but Parker had company. Company was a tall guy, with a bruiser's shoulders, a dancer's figure, and an angel's face — Abner Reed. I started backing out, when Parker called:

"Come in, come in, Peter."

When Parker's busy and he's that congenial, watch yourself, but it turns out, this time, he means it.

"You know Abner Reed, don't you, Pete?"

"Yes. Saw him once, when he was asleep. How do you do?"

Reed nodded.

"This is Peter Chambers," Parker said.

Reed said, "How do?"

Parker said, "Mr. Reed is going to Europe. He and Mrs. Reed. Going away for a year's stay. Making a ship tonight, at eight o'clock. Dropped in for a last goodbye. What brings *you*, Pete?"

I showed him. "Wouldn't be legit without a little black book."

"Black book?"

"It belonged to Sandra Mantell."

"*Mantell?*"

"Yes. Seems she slipped it into her room-mate's bag, by mistake. Room-mate took bag to rehearsal hall, and didn't look into it until today. Today, she did. There are names in it, which don't mean a thing to me, put they might to you. So grab a look, Lieutenant."

The Lieutenant grabbed.

I turned to Reed. "You've heard about Miss Mantell?"

"Yes."

"Mixed up with your kidnapping."

"Yes, so the Lieutenant told me."

Suddenly I couldn't hear too well. I said, "Pardon?"

"Yes," he said. "So the Lieutenant told me."

I tightened my face at him. "I beg your pardon?"

"What's the matter with you?"

"Little hard of hearing."

"I said, 'So the Lieutenant told me.'"

I'd heard about as much as I wanted to hear. I jumped him. I didn't wait. He was big, and I wanted the first punch, and I got the first punch, but he took it standing up, and then he let loose a few of his own. From the corner of my eye, I saw Parker jump up, and I heard him roar: "Here. Stop it. Break it up. What the hell is going on here?"

By then we were mixing it like a couple of wild preliminary pugs. I slipped by a couple of lefts, but he punched too hard on one of them, and he was wide open, and I was in perfect position, and I came up with one off the floor, with all of my weight behind it, and it caught him clean on the button. His feet left the floor going up, and his head caught a corner of Parker's desk coming down, and he went into a deep freeze, and he was going to stay frozen until someone warmed him up.

"Man, you're nuts," Parker roared. "This time, you've really gone and done it."

"Precise moment," I said.

"That's assault and battery, and this guy's important. You've popped your cork this trip, fella."

"Precise moment," I said.

Parker bent to him. "Here. Help me get him up. You've flipped your wig, pal."

"Stay away from him, Louie."

Parker peered up at me. "What are you talking about?"

"Precise moment," I said.

"What the hell is this mumble you've gone into?"

"Greek philosophy. I'll come to it. In due time."

"What'll you come to first?"

"A couple of answers to a lot of questions that you and I have been throwing about, Lieutenant."

He straightened up. "Like which?"

"Like . . . why I was shot *at* in that graveyard . . . and shot *up* in my apartment. Like . . . why Sandra Mantell was killed. Like . . . why she called me in the first place. Like . . . why that gun had fingerprints . . ."

"Okay. Okay. One at a time." Parker had lost interest in the stiffened Abner Reed.

"Let's take the last one first. Lieutenant. Fingerprints on a gun. A guy dropping it when he collides with a dame. Does that sound like a professional?"

"No."

"If it rules out a professional . . . what does it rule in?"

"An amateur."

"Very good, Lieutenant?"

"So . . . ?"

"Let's do it right side up now. Here's a guy, Abner Reed — married himself a large hunk of dough — but he can't reach too much of it . . . because she's . . . frugal, that's the word . . . frugal."

"So . . . ?"



"So . . . on the suggestion of a friend of his — Miss Sandra Mantell — and you'll find, I'm sure, with a good deal of digging — that those two had a close *sub rosa* association —"

"Never mind what I'll find out. Let's get this over with first."

"On her suggestion — for a hunk of the proceeds — they figured out a beauty. *The guy would kidnap himself*. Remember Uncle Harry? The first call? Whom did he talk to? Abner Reed, nobody else. Remember the wife, Florence Reed? Whom did she talk to the next morning? Abner Reed, nobody else."

It was beginning to come to Parker. "Yeah," he said, "Yeah . . ."

"He knew his wife. He knew how much in love she was. He knew she'd pay, and play ball. *Which she did*."

"Which explains the shooting at the cemetery too."

"Of course. He played it alone. And I had heard his voice. I was a loose remnant. So he brought a gun with him. Knock me off, and it's all clear. He missed, so he tried again, at my apartment, and that time, he almost made it."

"Yeah," Parker said. "And then, when he had this appointment with Sandra, and he wouldn't pay . . ."

"She called me, and she knew *whom* to call, because she was in it from the beginning, and they had picked me. She called me . . ."

"But he'd followed her home, and when he heard what she was up to, he finished her off. Cleared the

last loose remnant."

I shook it off. "Precise moment," I said.

"What the devil is this 'precise moment' pitch you're on?"

"A fragment of time in connection with a fragment of space . . . creates the precise moment."

Parker scratched a stubby finger against his crew-cut. "How's that?"

"I came here with the little black book. It undoubtedly contains nothing more than the names of her boy-friends, but that doesn't matter now. I came at that fragment of time that Abner Reed was here, occupying this fragment of space."

"Meaning?"

"If both wouldn't have coincided, perfectly, this guy'd be off for a year in Europe, and by then, that voice would no longer be fresh in my memory, and your Abner Reed snatch would have gone down in the books as another unsolved crime. Ecstatic and catastrophic."

"Wha' . . . ? What's that last?"

"From my Greek philosopher. Ecstatic for us, catastrophic for him. Bye, now. I've got a date."

"That good, huh? Who's the date?"

"The Greek philosopher."

His forehead creased into many wrinkles. "Greek philosopher? Not you. You're a guy for dames."

"Bye, Lieutenant."

As I went for the door, and he bent to the stricken Abner Reed, I could hear him mumble: "Oh, that Peter Chambers, go figure that guy, unpredictable Peter . . ."

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# YOU, detective

## No. 1 — The Bathing Beauty

BY WILSON HARMAN

THE REDHEAD sprawled on her back on the clean sand of the private beach. Her red bathing suit clung wetly to her body.

A small man knelt at her side, face in hands. Two patrolmen, Sgt. Tommy Braun, and a tall brunette stood looking at him. Finally he looked up and addressed Braun. "Must we leave her like this, Sergeant?"

Braun caught the little man by the elbow, helped him to his feet. "Can't touch her until the coroner arrives. Meanwhile, I've got to ask a few questions."

The brunette spoke up. "I'm her sister, Mary Reese. Can't I answer

your questions? I've lived with Ann and Ted until —"

Braun tugged his dogeared memo from his pocket. "Until?"

"Until last night. Ann decided they were going to move to California." She smiled at the little man encouragingly. "Ted wanted to stay here with his work, but Ann always got her way."

The detective looked at the little man. "Work?"

Brewer licked at his lips. "I'm an inventor. My wife thought it was a waste of time. She didn't appreciate how important it was."

"When'd you see your wife last?"

"Right after Mary left. Ann

started in on me again, so I went out to the workshop. I worked on my invention all night."

Braun scowled, scribbled a few lines in his book. "Your wife didn't do much swimming, according to the neighbors. They never even saw her in a bathing suit."

"She had a punctured eardrum. Stayed away from water, mostly."

Braun stared down at the body. "Bum ear and she went in without a cap?" He pointed to the tight-fitting suit. "That's a late model suit. Been worn a couple of times. Sure she didn't swim?"

"Maybe she wore it sunbathing," the brunette put in.

Braun shook his head. "She was strong-willed, planning to go to California. That rules suicide out. With a bad ear she wouldn't be swimming without a cap. That rules accident out — leaving —"

The little man's face went grey. "Murder?"

There was a silence.

The homicide man shrugged. "Could be. Any insurance?"

Brewer licked his lips, dried them with the back of his hand. "Twenty thousand. Double indemnity."

Braun slammed his book. "You sure you didn't buy her that suit?"

"I couldn't," the little man protested. "I don't know her size. She was funny that way — modest to an abnormal degree. She'd scratch my eyes out if I ever saw her undressed. Even our — lovemaking had to be done in absolute darkness."

"She was that way since she was a kid." The brunette stared at the detective. "You're implying murder. You'll have to prove it."

"I will." Braun stuck a cigarette between his lips, lit it, and exhaled twin streams through his nostrils. "My hunch is she has sweet water in her lungs instead of salt water. She was murdered in a bathtub and planted in the surf. If that hunch pays off, she was murdered — and I know who did it!"



*He didn't like the idea at all. Here was this girl, coming closer and closer to him . . .*

WHICH ONE?"  
"That one on the right, the blonde."

Six Fingers had just lit a cigarette. He threw it away and stared, eyes thoughtful, mouth slightly open.

"Like her?" said Joey, nudging with his elbow.

"She's pretty," Six Fingers admitted. "But there's lots of pretty ones."

"Yeah, but . . ." Joey leaned



# *Six Fingers*

BY HAL ELLSON

toward his friend and his voice dropped as he told what he knew. It was a legend that had traveled the length and breath of the neighborhood.

"That's true?" Six Fingers asked. There was doubt in his voice.

"Like to meet her?" Joey asked. "I know her good."

"What for?" said Six Fingers.

"What for? Are you dumb, or what?"

"Well, I don't know if I like her."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Joey looked at Six Fingers as if he thought him mad.

"I got to like a girl, that's all."

"You're sad, that's all I got to say. You don't know which way the wind is blowing," said Joey, then suddenly he saw through his friend; at least he thought he did. "Know what I think?" he said. "You don't know what it's all about."

"Well, I got to like them," Six Fingers explained awkwardly.

"That don't make sense," Joey answered, and for him it didn't.

"Well, I don't like girls."

Joey squinted at Six Fingers. He was small for his age, thin, with sharp eyes and a weasel face, smart in the ways of his own world, quicker-thinking than Six Fingers.

"Aw, you're nuts. You better go home to your mother."

Six Fingers ignored these remarks and lit another cigarette.

Later, he lay in his room. Night had fallen; the dark blue of the sum-

mer sky seemed to shimmer in the room. Six Fingers' mother called him and he heard but refused to answer. Finally she opened the door and said, "Are you going to eat, or do I have to throw your supper in the garbage pail?"

"Throw it in the garbage pail," he answered, and the door slammed. He was glad to be alone again with his thoughts, wanting to lie there, but the street sounds stabbed like pins and a restlessness had entered his body, a kind he'd never known before.

Finally he got up. It was darker now, the house quiet. His mother sat in the living room. Avoiding her, he made his way out of the house and went down the stairs. Cissie was on his mind. All afternoon he'd retained the image of her, a new and provocative one made so by Joey's tale. All afternoon his mind had woven fantasies of a new kind. And yet he didn't like Cissie herself, which was something he couldn't understand.

No one on the street; his friends had gone off somewhere but he didn't mind now. He was even glad that they weren't about. His mind was blank as he moved down the block, he didn't know where he was going. But he had to walk, the unease that afflicted him more acute.

He paused at the corner and looked toward the ice-cream parlor. About to pass it, he stopped and looked in. Someone had laughed.

It was Cissie and he saw her smiling at him; he had no doubt of that.

Smiling in a way that made him shiver. He thought of Joey's words and the way he had laughed at him. Well, he'd show Joey, he thought, and he wanted to go to Cissie but didn't have the nerve.

Cissie herself made the move. She came out of the store moving languidly, pretending sophistication, a pretty girl with a keen face and eyes. Immediately, she sensed Six Fingers' shyness and smiled to herself.

"You're Six Fingers, aren't you?" she said, close to him now.

He nodded, regarding her with a puzzled frown. Close up, she was prettier, exciting, yet he didn't like her.

"How'd you know my name?" he finally asked.

"Joey told me. You're new around."

"That's right."

"How'd you get the funny nickname?"

As soon as he'd moved into the neighborhood his new companions, in the direct and unthinking cruelty of youth, had given him this name upon noticing his right hand with the extra finger. That hadn't bothered him at all. In fact, it was expected, for the name had followed him from the old neighborhood and he'd grown used to it. Besides, there was a certain distinction in possessing an extra finger.

But Cissie's question he resented. Nevertheless he showed her his hand. He expected her to be shocked but, instead, she appeared delighted.

"Oh, then it is true," she exclaimed. "I didn't believe Joey when he told me. He's such a liar, you know."

The last made Six Fingers wonder. Had Joey lied about her too?

"You doing anything?" Cissie asked.

He shook his head, studying her.

"Then do you want to go for a walk?"

"I don't care," he answered, wondering how he'd gotten the words out. For sometimes they wouldn't come, and with girls in particular.

They began to walk, no destination in mind. A cool wind lifted off the river. The noises of the city pulsed louder, the lights began to blind Six Fingers. Cissie's closeness made pins and needles go through him. She was talking, babbling nothings. Once her hand touched his and he felt flames shoot up his arm. Anger almost overwhelmed him and he wanted to strike her, wanted to flee. Both sensations coming instantaneously only served to hold him there.

They walked to the park, came back to the candy store and drank a coke.

"I'm going home," Cissie said, dropping her straw in her glass and looking at him oddly.

Six Fingers nodded, thinking of Joey's taunts. He had to go along with Cissie but didn't want to. He had to like a girl, and Cissie made him angry.

They left the candy store and conversation died. Cissie's chatter had

been better than this silence; he felt uneasy now, frightened, yet didn't realize the source of his fear.

They turned into a dark block. Subdued voices came through the silence, the clink of a glass, but Six Fingers saw no one. Cissie had moved close. Her hand brushed his again and lightning seemed to flash across his brain. She took his hand then and he wanted to pull away but couldn't, wanted to run yet his legs refused to obey.

At last they stood at her doorway; close now, she faced him and he could feel the warmth of her body, a strange delicate odor drifted toward him. Her face was blurred by the shadows but her eyes shone. He thought she was smiling but wasn't sure.

"Well?" she said.

"Well, what?"

"I do have to go up, you know."

He nodded his head yet he realized that her words held another meaning. She was not merely telling him she was leaving. The phrase meant much more but he didn't know how to answer.

Cissie moved closer then and, with their bodies almost touching, looked into his eyes, waiting as she had done with all the others. But Six Fingers didn't respond, though he wanted to kiss her. He was filled with a wild desire to grab her, but swiftly countering this came the other feeling, a mixture of fear and anger. Without meaning to, he took a backward step.

"Come here," Cissie said, reaching for him, and back another step he went.

Cissie appeared puzzled now.

"You're not afraid of me?" she asked.

"No."

"Then come here," she said and, this time as she reached for him, he suddenly turned and ran.

It was early when he came home, an unusual hour for him to return. More unusual for him to go to his room and remain there.

This puzzled his mother and she finally went to his room. The light was out and he lay on his bed, still dressed.

"Are you sick?" she asked.

No answer. When she asked again, he snapped at her and, thinking he was in one of his moods, she left him to himself.

Not till midnight, when the house was totally quiet, did he come from his room. Straight to the refrigerator he went and whatever he could lay hands on he piled on the table. Then he ate ravenously.

Next morning he appeared to be his ordinary self at breakfast, neither talkative or moody. Yesterday was like a bad dream laid aside. First thing after leaving the house, he went for a ride on his bike. When he returned, he chained the bike to the iron fence outside the house, walked to the corner and there was Joey and some other friends. As he greeted them he saw that they appeared

amused. They exchanged glances and didn't answer him.

"What's wrong with you guys?" he asked.

"Hah!" said Joey. "So you were with Cissie last night."

"So what?"

"Yeah, what happened?"

"You couldn't guess," Six Fingers answered with a knowing air.

"We don't have to. We know," said Joey.

"Know what?"

"Cissie told us all about it. You were scared of her. You ran."

Six Fingers wanted to answer but words wouldn't come. His ears were filled with the taunts of his friends and the sound of their laughter. Worse yet was what Cissie had done to him, made of him a fool. More than anything he was angry with her and finally he managed to say, "She's a liar. I didn't run, she did."

"That wasn't how we heard it," Joey answered.

Six Fingers had lied of course, but immediately the lie had become the truth to him, why, he didn't know, but he believed it now. She had run from him and he insisted that this was so, raising his voice in a way that almost convinced his tormentors.

Nevertheless, Joey refused to accept this and kept taunting him. Then the others joined in again.

"Yeah, I'm going to show her," Six Fingers said. "I made her run."

"Just how are you going to show her?" Joey wanted to know.

The threat uttered in anger was

no more than that but soon as Six Fingers uttered it, he realized he'd said too much. He didn't know what to do to regain his status. But no more were the words out of his mouth when he realized that he'd meant what he'd said.

"Well, how?" Joey asked again.

"You'll see," said Six Fingers and, unable to explain, he turned on his heel and walked away.

He remained in his room all that day. Most of the time his mind was utterly blank, but there were moments of anger when he thought of what Cissie had done. He had to get back at her, yet the only real way to do this frightened him. Even to approach her now would take more courage than he possessed.

By evening he had no plan in mind. He didn't eat but went out of the house and wandered through the hot streets. At last, as if he had planned it, he found himself at Cissie's door. She was nowhere in sight but he waited. An hour later he saw her turn the corner, hesitate, then come on.

Frightened now, he almost took to his heels. It was like last evening again, and he felt as if he were beginning once more.

Meantime Cissie approached, uncertain of his reason for waiting here. But she couldn't retreat now. She came on, brazenly. When close, she smiled and, as if in surprise, said, "Imagine you here."

Six Fingers stared. That unnerved her but he didn't know it.



"Waiting for me?" she asked.

"That's right."

"But you ran away last night."

He nodded this time. The same feeling possessed him. He wanted to run, the feeling was almost overwhelming, but he held his ground and at last heard himself say, "You thought I was afraid last night."

"Not exactly."

"Well, I'm not, I'm not afraid of any girl."

"That's good to hear. I suppose that means you like me?"

He nodded but this wasn't the truth. He didn't like her. More, he was still afraid and his whole body was trembling.

Cissie was at ease now, for he didn't appear angry and he hadn't been waiting to strike her. She smiled; it was obvious to her why he'd returned and she moved closer, as she had the previous evening, then closer still.

Frightened, Six Fingers stood his guard, though he wanted to run. Yet he had to prove himself. Even in this moment he could see Joey's face and hear his taunts. Well, he'd show him and all the others. It wouldn't be long now, either.

Cissie meanwhile had moved as close as possible without touching him and her eyes held his. This time it would happen, he knew, and he waited. Then Cissie spoke, the invitation innocent enough, but he knew what it meant. "It's cooler on the roof," she said, and paused, perhaps expecting a reply from him, but he

couldn't answer, much as he wanted to.

"Want to go up?" she asked him casually, and he nodded. That was enough.

As they stepped onto the roof, Six Fingers was breathing hard. The darkness was striking, the sky vast. A cooling wind swept round them.

"Want to look down at the street?" Cissie asked and before he could answer, she moved away from him.

Moments later he followed. It was exactly as Joey had said, first the invitation to the roof, then to see the street — so he was prepared for her next move and not surprised. A step from her and she suddenly turned and faced him.

"Are you still afraid of me?" Cissie asked. "Are you?" And she moved closer, as if to throw herself around him, then touched his arms. He would have run but she seized him now and fear petrified him. What her intentions were he didn't know, for he felt enveloped by an implacable enemy, a satanic creature in the shape of a girl who seemed bent on devouring him. A final terrifying image and he shoved her away, backward with violence.

Moments later he looked down at the street. Voices came up from below. People were scurrying toward what appeared like a shadow on the sidewalk. Far in the distance a siren sounded, but Six Fingers didn't run, nor was he afraid any longer — only puzzled by what he had done.

# MUGGED AND PRINTED

MICKEY SPILLANE isn't satisfied with being the creator of Mike Hammer and the top-selling writer in the world today. He's been branching out, as moviegoers throughout the world know. Not only have two pictures based on his famous novels *I, The Jury* and *The Long Wait* been released nationally, but he's also made his acting debut in the new *Ring Of Fear*. His



latest story for *Manhunt*, *The Pickpocket*, is something of a departure, too. Instead of featuring Mike Hammer, this story stars a new character Spillane has developed: Willie, the reformed pickpocket. We think you'll like him as much as any other Spillane character.

HENRY KANE, whose new complete novel, *Precise Moment*, is featured in this issue, is the famous creator of Peter Chambers. As an ex-lawyer, Kane's had to do a lot of work with the police and with private eyes, and it's rumored that Chambers may be a composite portrait of several private detectives now operating. In addition to his many appearances in *Manhunt*, Chambers has been fea-



tured in the widely popular novels including *Armchair In Hell*, *Report For A Corpse*, *Halo For Nobody* and others.

HAL ELLSON, author of the best-selling *Duke*, returns this month with the tough and surprising *Six Fingers*. ♦ EVAN HUNTER's novel, *The Blackboard Jungle*, which is being made into an M-G-M movie, will soon be on sale in bookstores. While waiting for the book, take a look at Hunter's *The Scarlet King*. ♦ RICHARD S. PRATHER's newest Shell Scott novel is called *Always Leave 'Em Dying*. His newest Shell Scott short story is called *Crime Of Passion*, in this issue. ♦ RICHARD DEMING's Manville Moon appears in the new Rinehart book, *Whistle Past The Graveyard*. You can also meet Moon in *Death Sentence*, a startling new short story in this issue. ♦ JONATHAN CRAIG is back with another fine and authentic documentary this month. Craig's latest is called *The Purple Collar*. ♦ HAROLD Q. MASUR returns to *Manhunt* with a surprising new story, *Dead Issue*.

CRAIG RICE, the only woman to appear in this all-star issue of *Manhunt*, is also the only detective-story writer ever to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine*, an honor usually reserved for Presidents, world-famous scientists, and the like. She's the creator of John J. Malone, the lawyer-detective who's appeared in *Having Wonderful Crime*, *Eight Faces At Three*, *The Wrong Murder* (followed, logically enough, by *The Right Murder*), *The Fourth Postman* and other books. Malone's also been featured on radio, TV and the movies and, of course, in many issues of *Manhunt* — though possibly never to such good effect as in the current *Flowers To The Fair*.



FRANK KANE, a familiar figure to *Manhunt* readers, is the author of many novels featuring his tough and knowledgeable private eye, Johnny Liddell. The books in which Liddell's appeared include *Green Light For Death*, *Slay Ride*, *Poisons Unknown* and his latest, *Grave Danger*. Kane's authentic local color, his grasp of police technique and all the important details of homicide investigation, have combined with his writing ability to make such stories as *Big Steal* favorites with readers and critics.



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