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# MANHUNT

WORLD'S MOST POPULAR CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1960

35 CENTS

## THE DESERTER by HAL ELLSON

EVERY STORY  
NEW!



Plus — FLETCHER FLORA • GLENN CANARY • ROBERT WALLSTEN  
DAVID ALEXANDER • CHARLES CARPENTIER • LAWRENCE HARVEY

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*The man and the woman sat on either side of the steel-mesh divider and stared at each other. There wasn't anything left for them to say but . . .*

**F**RANK was waiting for her on the other side of the steel-mesh divider when Helen came into the visiting room. The prison guard pointed to the chair across from Frank and moved away from them.

Helen sat down. She could tell right away—he knew it was all over. “Hello, Frank.”

# GOODBYE

BY  
CHARLES  
CARPENTIER



"Wasn't sure about seeing you today," he said. "Cause, kid, this is it. End of the line."

She nodded. Frank was scared. She could tell just by looking at him. That was a laugh. Frank, scared. After the tough way he used to talk about how tough he was.

Well, he didn't have to worry. Or anyway, he wouldn't have to worry much longer.

"Guess they told you too," he said, not looking at her. "The lawyers, I mean. Nothing more they can do."

"They told me."

That's why he wouldn't have to worry much longer. The lawyers couldn't do anything now because the Governor turned down the appeal on the execution.

Helen was thinking about Frank's wife again. *She'd* been scared too. Plenty scared when she finally realized what was happening. Every night through the questioning, the waiting and the trial and all the rest of it, Helen remembered Frank's wife and the way she looked that night.

That night . . .

Frank had it all planned. He said it couldn't miss. That was a laugh too.

Frank's wife had dough. But Frank didn't have a dime. Except what she handed out to him. The plan was they'd get the dough and they'd get rid of Frank's wife too.

That was another laugh. Be-

cause Helen didn't care a damn about Frank's wife or Frank's wife's dough. All she cared about was that things happened whenever she and Frank got together.

"Chemistry," Frank called it. "Kid, that's what we got. Chemistry."

Helen felt chemistry in every inch of her luscious body. Especially those nights at the motel out on State Highway.

That's where he planned it. At the motel. Lying there with the bottle and glasses on the table beside the bed and the ashtray full of cigarette butts. Lying there with her hands wandering over the hard muscles of his body. She was so excited by Frank she couldn't think. She wanted to help him with the plan just so they could be together like that always. That's the way Frank said it would be afterwards.

Maybe she helped too much.

It was real simple, Frank said. They'd make it look like a knock-over that went wrong. The old girl had enough dough to make that seem legit. They'd fix it to look like somebody had busted into the house and she caught the guy, so the guy had to plug her. Frank was going to lift a little of the old girl's jewelry just to make the picture complete. He'd set the whole thing up. It couldn't miss. After all, he had the inside track.

There was the automatic that Frank always carried in the glove



compartment in his car. The bullet hit Frank's wife smack between the eyes. Helen knew it was just a lucky shot, but Frank was pretty proud of it. "Damn good," Frank said. "That's better than I thought. That'll sure make the cops think it was a pro done it." Then he said, "Now take the gun and get the hell outta here. I'll call the boys in blue and yell bloody murder."

It was bloody all right. You wouldn't think so much blood could come out of such a small hole. There was blood all over her face, running down around her nose, into her open mouth and over her chin. Maybe that was better too—the blood. It covered her face. Helen didn't want to remember her face and the way it looked.

But she did remember it. Every night, she remembered it. That's why she cracked when the cops found her and started asking her all those questions.

Through the steel divider Frank was saying, "Kid, I'm sorry. About everything. I shouldn't of gotten you messed into it."

Sorry? Hell, she was sorry too. But she wasn't scared. Not the way Frank was scared. Scared and trying to hide it.

"Frank. When it happens . . ."

He looked straight at her finally.

"When it happens, just remember. I'll be thinking about you. That's all I'll be thinking about."

"Sure. I'll remember."

"And you be thinking about me.

Please. It might help because . . ."

"Yeah, I know." He said it for her, savagely: "'Cause we both done it." Then he added, "Kid, that's what makes it so tough on me, wondering . . ."

She interrupted: "Don't talk about being alone after it happens. Please. I'll start crying again."

"Okay—okay. Just don't get to bawling."

She wanted to tell him he didn't have to go on wondering, he didn't have to worry. But the guard was standing behind her chair.

"Time's up."

Frank said, "Kid, this is it."

She smiled weakly. "We must have said everything there is to say. Except . . ."

"Yeah," he said quickly, wanting to get it over quickly. "Except goodbye."

She stood up. "Goodbye, Frank."

"So long, kid."

She followed the guard to the door. Then she turned around for one more look at Frank, remembering those exciting nights out at the motel, remembering how it was to touch the hard muscles of his body. All the way across the visiting room and through the steel-mesh divider, she could see he was scared.

Well, he didn't have to be scared, he didn't have to worry. She wasn't going to say anything to anybody.

She watched him go out the door into the bright warm sunlight.

Then she followed the guard back to her cell.

*One of the men strode to the front of the bar. He locked the door and pulled the blind shut on the window. He dropped some coins in the juke box. He turned, and his lips curled lustfully . . . "Now the girl can dance for us."*

# SHE'S NOTHING BUT TROUBLE

BY

GLENN CANARY

THE GIRL came in alone and sat at the end of the bar farthest from the door. When she crossed her legs, her skirt slipped above her knees and she tugged at it, an absent-minded feminine motion Hap Carter had stopped talking to the bartender when she entered. He glanced at her and could see the skin above the top of her stocking.

"Quite a view in here," he said.

Paul, the bartender, grimaced. "I wish she'd take her view to some other bar."



"Why? What's wrong with her?"

"I don't like having tramps hanging around in here, that's what's wrong with her. Every night she comes in here, orders one lousy pink lady and nurses it while she waits for some guy to pick her up."

"She professional?"

The bartender wiped at a spot on the bar and shrugged, frowning. "Beats me," he said.

Hap looked at the girl again. She smiled at him. "Aren't you going to get her a drink?" he asked.

"In a minute. I keep thinking if the service in this place here gets bad enough, maybe she'll be disgusted enough to leave and do her scrounging somewhere else."

"She's not bad looking."

Paul nodded. "They never are, but that's about all you can say. If they were better looking, they wouldn't have to hang around bars, but if they were worse looking, even hanging around like this wouldn't do them any good." He laughed suddenly. "Isn't that a hell of a thing?"

"What?"

"Me standing here thinking if I'm slow enough getting her a drink, she'll go somewhere else. Hell, she'd probably rather not buy a drink anyway. Wouldn't have to spend any money. She'd like that fine."

Hap laughed. "Get her a drink then and make some profit off that stool."

"Yes. Might as well." He looked toward the end of the bar and then took a few steps toward the girl. "Well?" he asked, raising his voice.

"May I have a pink lady, please?" the girl answered. Her voice was low, pleading, as if she were afraid he might refuse.

"Like always, huh?" Paul said. "Yes, please."

He mixed the drink and took it to her. She counted out the correct change carefully and laid it on the bar. Paul counted it slowly, making an insult of the way he fingered each coin, and then scooped it up and put it in the cash register. He went back to stand by Hap.

"Now, she'll sit here with that one goddam, drink for the rest of the night."

"Leave her alone," Hap grinned. "She and I are the only customers you have. Even that one drink of hers put something in the kitty."

The bartender snorted. "That eighty five cents I wouldn't have missed," he said.

Hap looked at the girl. She hadn't touched her drink. As he watched, she picked it up and sipped once and then put it down again. She met his eyes for a moment and then looked past them.

"She knows we're talking about her," he said.

"So what?"

"She doesn't look happy, does she?"

"Happy is only in the movies. Nobody's happy." He looked

down at Hap's glass. "You want another beer?"

"Yes. Aren't you going to turn on the fight?"

"Is it ten already?" He glanced at his watch and then went to the end of the bar where the girl was sitting and climbed up on a stool. He turned on the television set. After a moment, the picture snapped on. "How's that?" he called.

"Sharpen the contrast," Hap answered.

Five men came in the door, laughing. They sat at the bar between Hap and the girl. Paul glanced down at them. He finished adjusting the picture and then climbed off the stool.

"What'll it be?" he asked.

"Beer, unless you're buying," one of them said. The others laughed.

"The house don't buy until a hell of a lot later than this," Paul said, laughing. "Beer all around?"

They all said yes and he opened the bottles and put them on the bar. He gave each man a glass and then walked back to where Hap was waiting.

"Now I got more customers," he said. "I wish she'd leave."

"It's only a girl, man. How much harm can she do? She's quiet, hasn't said a word since she came in."

"Sure, she's quiet, but the cops find out she's hanging around in here and they start watching the place, droppin in to check."

"What do you care?" Hap took

a swallow of his beer and laughed. "You're not running dope or something out of here, are you?"

"I just don't like the idea of having my place used for that kind of stuff."

"What stuff, for God's sake. Leave her alone and watch the fight." He shoved his empty bottle toward Paul. "Only get me another beer first. You forgot me."

The girl stood up and walked toward the rest room. She went slowly, giving the five men time to watch her.

"Now she goes," Paul said. He slid the fresh bottle of beer across the bar to Hap. "On display, for Christ's sake."

"She has to make a buck," Hap said.

"Not in here like that, she don't."

When the girl returned, one of the five men stood up and walked to meet her. She smiled at him.

"You friendly?" he asked.

Another man laughed loudly before she could answer. "Can't you look at her and see how friendly she is?" he said. "Come on back here and drink your beer. You'll catch something."

"Leave him alone," a third man said. "Some of us wouldn't mind catching something besides a hang-over."

"I wouldn't mind," said the man who was holding the girl's arm.

She smiled at him. "Do you live around here?" she asked. She was wearing a blue dress and plastic



shoes that were supposed to look like glass.

"Why do you want to know where I live," the man asked her. "You want me to take you home for a pet or something?"

"Some pet," another man laughed. "You two would probably have to disinfect each other."

The girl pulled her arm away. "I don't like that," she said.

"Damn it, I knew it," the bartender said. He walked down toward the men. "I don't want no trouble in here."

"We're not making trouble," one of them answered. "You just stay back there and furnish the beer. We'll handle this side of the room."

"Well, I don't want trouble." He glanced back nervously as he walked back to Hap. "She's going to make trouble. I knew I should have thrown her out of here."

"They're just fooling around," Hap answered. "Watch the fight."

The man with the girl had taken her arm again. He pulled her closer to him. "Don't go away," he said. "You said you was friendly." He brushed his hand across her dress. "Sorry," he said. "I'm sort of clumsy."

"Aren't you going to share her?" one of his friends said.

The man pulled the girl over to the other men. "She's pretty skinny," he said, "but I think there's enough."

Surprisingly, the girl had started to cry. Paul shook his head and

walked back to the men. "Come on, you guys," he said. "Let her go. She's not worth any trouble."

One of the men stood up and leaned over the bar. "I thought we told you to stay over there and mind your business," he said.

"And I told you I don't want no trouble in here."

"Then suppose you come over here and see what you can do with us."

Paul hesitated, flushing. He stared at the man for a few seconds without saying anything.

One of the other men laughed. "If you tried, we'd just have to damage your property here," he said.

"And that would be a shame," said another man, "because it's such pretty property."

Hap stood up and walked down to the men. "He said to let go of the girl."

The man who was holding the girl dropped her arm. He whirled and punched Hap in the face. A second man clubbed him in the neck as he fell. Paul yelled and ducked under the bar. Hap was lying against the bar and he was groaning. Paul grabbed the bar rag from his hip pocket and wiped Hap's face with it.

"You guys better get out of here," he said.

"Shut up telling us what to do or you get some of that, too," one of them answered.

The girl had run for the back

door, but it was locked. One of the men caught her and dragged her back. She was crying harder. Hap stood up. His mouth was bleeding. He rubbed his hand against it and then looked at the blood on his fingers.

"You had enough?" asked the one who had hit him first.

"Yes. I've had enough."

"Why don't you close up the place?" one of the men said.

"Close up?" Paul repeated. "It's only ten-thirty."

"Close up. We can have a private party."

One of the men swore impatiently and walked to the front. He snapped the lock on the door and pulled the blind shut on the window.

"Put some money in the juke box while you're up there," one man called.

He put coins into the machine and punched a few numbers. "I didn't look," he said, walking back. "It'll be a surprise."

The music came on. "Now the girl can dance for us," said the man who had hit Hap. He was holding the girl's arms.

"I can't dance," she said. "Just leave me alone."

Two men grabbed her and set her up on the bar. "Stand up there."

"Leave her alone," Hap shouted.

A man shoved him onto a stool. "You don't want to get clobbered again, you just sit there and enjoy the show."

The girl was trying to dance. She was swaying and moving her hands awkwardly. The music stopped and she dropped her hands to her sides and stood still, looking down at the men. She tried to smile.

"Don't be disappointed," one of them said to her. "It'll start again in a minute."

"Only his time take something off."

"Take something off," she repeated.

"Every time the record changes, take something off."

"No. I can't. I'm not what you think."

The music started again and one of the men stepped closer to the bar and pulled on the girl's skirt. "That's first," he said. "Do it or I will."

She shrank from his hands and unzipped the skirt. "It's a dress," she said. "It's all together."

"Take it all off then."

She unbuttoned the blouse and shrugged out of the dress. It fell around her feet and she stepped out of it.

"Hey, no fair," said one of the men. "She's wearing a slip."

"Take it easy," another one said. "We got lots of dimes for the juke box."

Hap started to get up again and one of the men grabbed him and shoved him onto the stool.

"Don't be dumb," Paul said to him. "Don't butt in. You'll get us

hurt and my place'll get busted up."

"That's right. You're getting smarter," one of the men said.

The music stopped. The girl stared down at the men. One of them started climbing up on a stool after her. She pulled her slip off over her head.

"Please leave me alone," she said. "I'll do what you want, but don't make me do this."

Another record started. She stood still until one of the men slapped her across the legs. "Dance," he said.

She started crying again. When she tried to dance, she lost her balance and started to fall. Hap reached up and she caught his hand and steadied herself.

"Help me," she whispered to him. "Please help me."

A man laughed and shoved Hap back on the stool. "Sit down," he said. "You already got a bloody face."

Hap looked away from the girl. "You bastards," he said. "You think you're big men, don't you?"

"Not so big," one of them answered. "But there's five of us."

The music was playing again. Hap looked down at the floor. One of the girl's stockings dropped at his feet. He glanced up. Despite his contempt for the men, he could feel himself growing warmly excited when he looked at her. She took off her other stocking and held it out to him. He looked down

again, ashamed. She dropped it beside the other one. He listened to music and laughter from the men. He didn't look up again.

The girl was crying and swaying woodenly. She tried to cover herself with her hands. She couldn't. The men laughed at her attempts. The music stopped and didn't start again. For a few seconds, the men were quiet, looking at her.

"We ran out of music," one of them said.

"Who needs it now?"

The girl was standing still. She had stopped crying.

"Get down from there," one of the men said.

Hap still didn't look up. The girl climbed down. He saw her and looked away. One of the men grabbed her and Hap heard her gasp.

"What do we do with her now?"

"That's a dumb question."

"Here?"

"We take her with us."

"With us?"

"Sure. This party's just started."

One of the men had a raincoat. They made her put it on. With it buttoned and her shoes on, she looked dressed. They led her outside. Two of the men hesitated at the door and then came back to Hap and Paul.

"This is a nice place," one of them said to Paul. "We might come back sometime."

When they were gone, Hap got up from the stool and went to the

door. They were in the car, just pulling away from the curb. The girl was in the back seat with the men. He made a mental note of the license plate number and hurried back to Paul.

"Call the cops quick," he said. "I got their license."

Paul was still sitting on a stool. "You heard what that guy said."

"They might even kill her."

"That's too bad for her. Why'd she have to come in here anyway?"

"If you won't do it, I'll call the cops."

"Not from in here, you won't," Paul said.

They stared at each other. Hap sat down on a stool beside Paul. "Do you really think they'd come back?" he asked.

"I'm not taking a chance on it

for some lousy no good tramp."

They were quiet for a few minutes and then Paul got up. "Want a drink?"

"Yes." Hap rubbed his jaw.

They drank two glasses of whiskey each. Hap stood up then. He nudged the girl's clothing with his foot. It was lying in a pile on the floor.

"What are you going to do with this?" he asked.

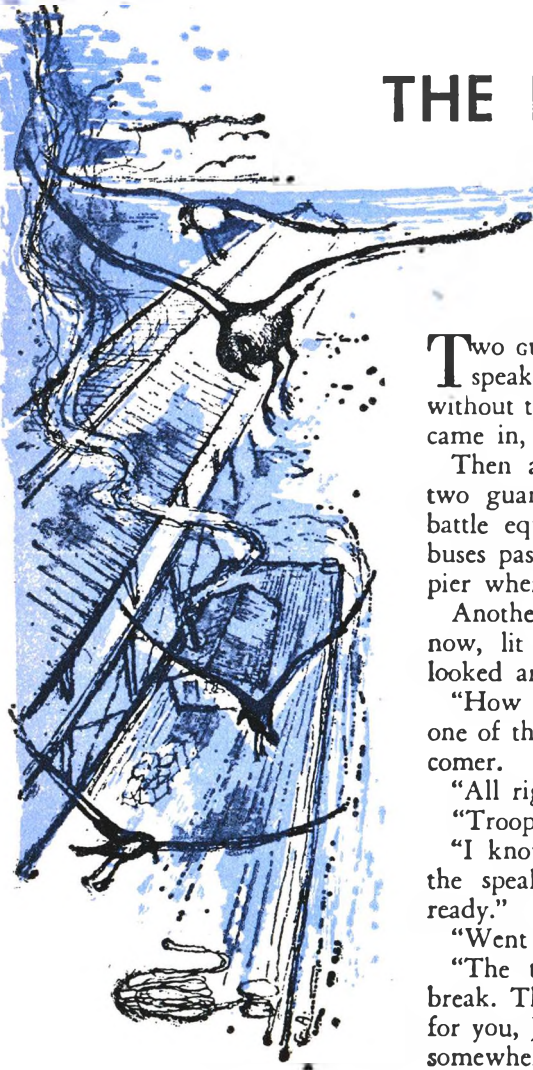
"Throw it out. I don't think she'll feel like hanging around in here any more."

Hap nodded. "Probably not." He sat down again. "You're right. It's none of our business." He turned the stool so he couldn't see the clothes on the floor. "Give me another drink," he said. "My god-dam jaw hurts."





*He searched meticulously out along the pier, moving away from the noise and clatter of the loading troop ship. Once he saw the imprint of a man's hand in the dust of an empty bin . . . and he felt the deadly weight of the .45 hanging from his belt.*



## THE DESERTER

BY HAL ELLSON

TWO GUARDS sat in the office, not speaking. A half hour elapsed without the phone ringing. No one came in, or passed the door.

Then a bus rolled by, and the two guards saw the troops with battle equipment. A long line of buses passed and moved on to the pier where a troopship waited.

Another guard entered the office now, lit a cigarette casually and looked around.

"How are things going, Nat?" one of the guards said to the newcomer.

"All right," Nat answered.

"Troop movement."

"I know," Nat said, looking at the speaker. "One got away already."

"Went over the hill?"

"The third time he made the break. This is a good assignment for you, Jim. He's still on the pier somewhere."

"You're not joking, are you?" Jim said, rising from his chair.

"Not at all."

"What're the particulars?"

Nat took a folded sheet of paper from his breastpocket and handed it over. "Here's his name. That's all the information I can give you—except that the guy is probably desperate. So you better pack something heavy."

Jim patted the .45 automatic on his hip. "Any idea where to start looking for him?"

Nat turned to the window and nodded toward the nearest pier. "He got away in there, off the army ferry, but an extra guard is at the gate, so he's trapped. It's up to you to pick him up."

Nat went to the door. When it closed behind him, Jim tightened his belt, got into his jumper and started for the door.

"Be careful," said the other guard quietly.

Jim nodded and paused at the door to pull on his gloves. "See you later," he said and stepped outside.

A cold wind blew from offshore, whitecaps danced in the harbor, fluffs of cloud flew overhead. The unnatural quietness was gone. All along the cobblestoned street, trucks, cranes and high-low machines were maneuvering cargo for waiting ships; the noise was almost deafening.

Watching the parade of machines, Jim thought of the deserter quietly waiting for a chance to es-

cape. A trapped and desperate man, he might give trouble. Still, he was glad for the special assignment. It was a change, something different, perhaps dangerous.

Anything can happen, he thought and he gazed toward the pier where the deserter was trapped. Starting toward it then, he knew what he had to do, where to look. The advantage was his.

He can't get away, he told himself and felt the icy wind blowing off the bay. The sun shone brilliantly, gulls screamed beyond the piers. Two ships lay in the slip, one loading, the other ready to sail.

Pausing at the bulkhead between piers, Jim watched the operations going on, felt the excitement in the air. The din was greater now but, oddly, he already felt isolated from all this and, below the noise and bustle, he became aware of an undisturbed current of silence, the chill of an invisible shadow within the brilliance of the day.

Starting toward the pier again, he entered it a few seconds later to be immediately embraced by its shadow and bone-chilling dampness. A five-minute walk brought him to the north-outer end where the troopship lay. There he questioned an M.P. and asked about the deserter.

"He's here somewhere," the M.P. answered, "but god knows where. That's his cap over there where he ditched it."

Jim stared at it, as if it might

offer some clue, and finally walked to the back of the pier where a half-dozen lifeboats from a torpedoed ship had been left to gather dust.

No one was at the back of the pier. The abandoned lifeboats lay inert in their isolation, telling nothing. He searched around and climbed into them, and all the while he heard the wind outside rubbing against the piershed.

The search revealed nothing. He walked away, heading his footsteps echoing off the frozen planks.

There were several rooms in a shack close by where a man could hide. These he searched next. They were empty, silent. In one, a window overlooked the harbor and a gap at the pier-end. He stared through the dirty pane. Green water littered with driftwood rose and fell in the gap, and a barge was moored there, smoke rising from the chimney of her cabin. A face appeared at a window.

Probably the captain, Jim told himself, and went to the phone on the other side of the room. He dialed the Harbor Master and asked that all barges be kept at the pier.

That done, he walked to the north side of the gap. The barge could wait. Before searching it, he wanted to investigate two other possible hiding places.

The north side was as quiet as the south side, no one there, no one even in sight. An indescribable

amount of equipment had been left there; huge pipes, crates, tarpaulins, everything imaginable where a man could hide.

He poked about everywhere but all the while, in back of his mind, he kept thinking of a large tarpaulin, half-hanging and half on the floor, and three steel bins placed on top of each other.

Finally he went to the tarpaulin and felt its stiff folds. No one. Next, he began to probe the part that lay on the floor, but to no avail. About to give up, suddenly his hand touched something soft and firm.

He tensed and waited, then probed again, certain he'd found his man. He's there, he told himself and waited. Nothing happened. There was no movement beneath the tarpaulin.

For a moment he debated what to do, then went to the end of the tarpaulin, lifted it slowly and drew it back to find nothing at the spot he'd probed but a heavier fold of canvas.

Laughing to himself, he turned to the steel bins. Apparently they were empty, and yet. . . .

He walked toward them slowly, stopped and looked round again. No one was in sight, but far down the pier he noticed a brilliant shaft of sunlight like a slanted pillar of gold in the grey shadow of the huge shed.

He stared at it, then turned to the steel bins and suddenly realized

he was perspiring in spite of the chill dampness. Fear touched him and he hesitated before the bins, his senses warning of danger, the unnatural silence disturbing. Time had stopped, the world he belonged to no longer existed. This was the world now, this dim-lit frigid pier where a man was hiding.

Repeating the name of the one he was searching for, he tried to summon his image, imagine his thoughts and feelings, what he might do when finally confronted. At this very moment he could be crouching in one of the steel bins, waiting, desperate.

He wondered what would happen, but words wouldn't settle this. No doubt the fellow would put up a fight, and he didn't want that, didn't want to use his gun, but. . . .

He turned his attention to the steel bins. The lowest one was empty. The one above it was another matter. The deserter could be hiding in it. There was only one way to reach it, by climbing the wire fence of the empty storage bin that stood beside it.

Hesitating, he put his fingers through the mesh and started up, listening as he climbed. No sound came from above.

Reaching the second bin, he peered into its shadowy depths. Empty, he thought, and, about to climb higher, he stopped, frozen, eyes focused on a pair of hand-

prints in the inch-thick dust that lay on the floor of the bin.

Still stricken, he clung to the fence, listening for a tell-tale sound. No one else would have reason to climb up here.

The hairs on the back of his neck bristled, his heart thudded, his .45 lay heavily against his leg. He didn't want to use it.

Reason with the man, he thought, but, far back in his mind, he knew the deserter wouldn't listen. He was desperate, hiding in the dark of the bin above like a trapped and dangerous animal waiting to spring.

His fingers tightened in the wire mesh. He wanted to move up but hesitated, wondering if the man knew he was near. Probably he'd been watching him all the while. The thought chilled him and, for the moment, he felt he was the hunted one.

And now, hanging on the wire fence, he realized the disadvantage of his position. But the man had to be brought in. He started climbing again, slower now, carefully, so as not to shake the wire and attract attention.

Reaching the third bin, he raised his head and peered into the shadowed interior. No one, but he kept staring to make sure, then looked down at the dust on the bin's edge. No handprints as in the bin below.

Relieved, he climbed down to the floor and immediately a feeling of deflation set in. But the man had



been here. No doubt he'd climbed to the second bin and changed his mind about hiding in it.

But where was he now? Turning round, Jim saw the high ladder which led to the roof of the pier. Perhaps the deserter had gone up there to wait for the night and a better chance to escape.

It was a possibility not to be ignored. He approached the ladder now, looked up and shuddered. It was much too high. The hatch above was open and a small blue patch of sky showed, sunlight poured through the opening and made a patch of yellow on the floor. The color appeared unreal, the patch of sky remote.

Hesitating, he finally started climbing. Would the deserter be up there? The thought made him tense, what if the fellow took it into his head to push him off the ladder? Or knock him on the head when he reached the top? It could happen either way, he knew, and he wanted to go down.

The ascent continued. At last he reached the hatchway and paused. He took a deep breath, then thrust head and shoulders through the opening. A blast of icy wind robbed him of his breath, the dazzling sunlight reflected from the metal roof all but blinded him, but he saw enough—the roof was empty.

Relieved, he descended the ladder and stepped off it with the feeling that he'd entered another

world. Immediately the grey shadow and chill dampness of the pier embraced him again. Then he noticed the patch of golden light on the floor and raised his eyes to the open hatch and saw the blue square of sky. Both seemed as unreal as before.

For some moments he stood there, preoccupied, then gazed around. All was quiet, fixed, mobility alien here. The cold stirred him into action and he started forward when a familiar whistle sounded—but remotely now, causing him to look at his watch. Its hands pointed rigidly to noon.

The morning gone already? Impossible, he thought and raised the watch to his ear, heard its faint articulations and made for the gap. The barge was still there, a thin grey streamer of smoke rising from its chimney.

The wind lashed the pier-ends, waves surged into the gap now, breaking about the piles in white anger. The barge lumbered uneasily, the wind fluted over the top of the pier, scattering the laments of hungry gulls.

Jim stepped onto the narrow stringpiece, walked to the barge and jumped aboard. The deck surged upward, fell away under him as he walked toward the cabin whose shadowed windows revealed nothing. When he reached the door, he knocked. It opened suddenly, as if his call had been expected.

The wind almost pushed him inside. The door closed with a bang, the cabin darkened; all he saw was a brass hurricane lamp gleaming on the wall and the vacant face of the captain.

Then he caught an odor of burning resin and apples baking in their juices and his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness. Item by item everything came into focus: furniture, stove, pictures on the walls, and all the while he was aware of the vacant face of the man. For some reason he didn't want to look at him. The odor of baking apples lingered pleasantly in his nostrils, and the warmth of the cabin, wrapping itself around him, caused his mind to wander. For an instant, a scene long lost in the myth of boyhood flashed before his eyes and vanished as the captain spoke.

"It's blowing up," he said.

Jim nodded and looked at him, noting his weak chin and thin lips. He avoided his eyes.

"What can I do for you?" the captain asked.

"You didn't happen to see a soldier around here, did you?" he said, gazing toward a doorway that let to a forward cabin.

"I can't say I did."

"The fellow's desperate, a deserter. You're sure you didn't see any one?"

"I'm sure," the captain said, and Jim lifted his eyes.

"What's in there?" he asked.

"Hell, he ain't in there," the captain laughed. "I've been aboard all morning. He never set foot on my boat."

"I know, but what's in there?"

The captain began to protest anew, and Jim started for the door, hearing the captain's voice trail off behind him and feeling a wall of silence rise up between them.

There was a bed in the other cabin, no other furniture, no one hiding there. Jim came out again. The captain was lighting a cigarette, his eyes smiling. He blew out the match; the wood in the stove popped and crackled.

"A nice sound on a day like this," the captain said, and Jim nodded, but his eyes were focused on a door at the other side of the cabin.

"What's in that room?" he asked.

"That's kind of like a store-room. I keep it locked so I don't get robbed."

"Better open it."

"But . . ."

"Open it. I can't take your word."

"All right, you're the boss." The smile was gone from his eyes now. He fumbled for his keys. Jim waited, his eyes on the man's broad back till he opened the door. The captain entered first. Jim followed him in and looked around.

"You see?" the captain said, laughing again. "He ain't here. I'd know, wouldn't I?"

"Sure, but I still had to look. That's my job," Jim answered and

stepped out of the room. He stopped in the center of the cabin, thinking.

"Have a cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks."

"Cigarette?"

"Thanks again, but no."

The captain shrugged. "Maybe your man went back on the ferry. You know, it left," he said.

What's he trying to get around? he asked himself and watched him poking at the stove now, then looked around the cabin again. A faint slapping of water under the pier came to him, the voice of the wind humming. Sounds that made the warmth of the cabin pleasant and welcome, but something was lacking here.

It's too dark, he thought, and the captain spoke again.

"He'll be a tough one to catch," he said, his voice tinged with mockery.

Jim didn't answer. The sound of the wind drained away, the water chopping in the slip suddenly quieted and a moment of absolute void prevailed, then the wind surged back, the floor of the barge heaved at a sharp angle. A wave thumped the bow, crumbled against it and shattered into a white glistening fan of spray.

Jim moved toward the door.

"That fellow probably hid on the ferry he came in on," the captain said after him. "I guess you can't blame him for wanting to get out of the war."

Jim stopped at the door, his hand on the knob. Turning, he stared at the captain's eyes, his smiling face.

"I told you, you wouldn't find him here."

"I'm going to take a look below."

The smile faded from the captain's face, his eyes darkened, the cords in his neck tightened. Leaning forward, he said, "There's nothing below."

"We'll see."

Jim opened the door. The captain came after him and followed him to a hatch. Jim lifted the cover and looked down into the shadowed hold, aware of the captain's eyes on him. He went down the ladder then and, from below, looked up. The captain's face had changed again. It was gaunt now, the skin a sickly grey. For a moment they stared at each other. Then Jim turned away, drew his flashlight and faced the darkness of the hold.

The barge heaved, water sloshed about. He flashed the light. A hawser coiled at his feet made him think of a sleeping reptile. He stepped over it and started walking a plank. The dark putrid bilge-water sloshed noisily against it. Its wood was rotten and lifeless and he moved warily, the light leading him into the dark and through the belly of the barge to the other end where he mounted a ladder into welcome daylight.

The captain was waiting for him

with the same drawn face. "I told you he wasn't down there. You're only wasting your time," he said.

Jim didn't answer. He started for the hatch on the other side of the barge. The captain didn't follow. Jim stood over the hatch now and looked back at the captain. His face seemed greyer, his dark eyes reflected fear, he had nothing to say. Neither did Jim. Stooping, he lifted the hatch and went below.

This time the search through the dark hold seemed longer, like an endless journey, and he wanted to hurry to escape the sound of the black water below his feet. Once, the barge heaved sharply and he almost lost his balance.

By the time it leveled out again he reached the ladder at the other end of the hold.

Behind it lay a coil of rope and an old tarpaulin. He flashed his light on them and, then, about to mount the ladder, he noticed a shoe protruding from beneath the tarpaulin. His hand automatically went to his gun, beneath the tarpaulin he saw in the distortions of the canvas the form of the man he was hunting. But what to do now? Bring him in alone, or call for help?

He debated the point with himself, wanting to avoid violence. The deserter would fight back if he tried to take him in alone. Jim was sure of it. He might have to use the gun.

I don't want that, he thought

and, as if unaware of the man beneath the tarpaulin, he climbed to the deck, closed the hatch after him and looked around. There was no sign of the captain. He went to the cabin. As soon as he opened the door he knew it was empty.

The fire crackled and popped, the odor of baking apples was stronger now. This time he had no reaction, no flash of memory. The empty feeling in the cabin stirred him and he closed the door, hurried across the deck, leaped to the stringpiece and entered the pier.

Moments later he was at the phone that hung in back of the pier. He gave a number.

"Line is busy," came back the distant voice of the operator.

He hung up, waited and the icy cold and silence of the pier cloaked itself about him. Impatient, he called the number again.

"Still busy," came the voice of the operator once more.

Slowly he put the receiver back on its hook. No help was to be had. He felt sick, but there was no way out now. He had to go back and settle the issue alone.

That means trouble, he thought, and he returned to the gap. The barge was heaving uneasily. He boarded her, went to the hatch and climbed down the ladder.

The barge shivered from end to end as it struck the pier. Jim balanced himself and flashed his torch on the tarpaulin behind the ladder. No shoe protruded. . . .



He stooped and lifted the dirty canvas. No one. Stunned, he took a backward step and wondered now if he'd really seen the shoe.

Behind him in the dark, bilge-water sloshed as the barge lolled. The sound made his skin crawl, he whirled around and the light of his torch sprayed the dark.

Ten-feet from him stood a stranger, but one he knew on the instant. The wild eyes that met his were a trapped animal's, the khaki uniform. . . .

They stared at each other. The barge pitched sharply, a gull keened overhead, the hungry lament barely penetrated the dark of the hold, but both men heard and "saw" the gull drifting free in the wind.

"Better come with me," Jim said quietly.

No answer. The man stared at him as if dazed. His eyes were blank, but suddenly they flashed again.

"I'm not going back," he shouted. "Do you understand? You'll have to kill me first."

Jim lowered his gun. "I'm not here for that," he said, "but to bring you in."

"Kill me. Go ahead. You've got a gun. What are you waiting for?"

"I told you. . . ."

"You're afraid."

"No."

The deserter stood silent, eyes blank once more. Water sloshed below the plank where he stood, the barge heaved, the gull screamed again, but from afar, a terrible, despairing cry.

Jim shivered. The deserter's face contorted and suddenly he lunged forward. The gun-barrel glanced off the side of his head as Jim swung it. The two men grappled, the torch dropped, the light vanished. They struggled in the dark, lost balance, as the barge heaved sharply, and fell backward into the icy bilge-water. A cold wet hand came out of the dark and seized Jim's throat. His head went back, his face submerged.

He had no choice now and blindly swung the gun, swung it again with terrific force and the hand relaxed on his throat.

Gasping for breath, he got to his feet and stood there in the dark. There was nothing to see. The barge lolled, the icy water in the hold sloshed around him. There was no other movement, no other sound, but he kept listening and finally heard the gull again and its terrible lament.



*She looked down from the window and saw the man's eyes, blinded in the glare of flashlights, pleading, searching to see her. She waited, savoring the sense of power. This man's life hung on the nod or shake of her head.*

## THE ACCUSER

BY ROBERT WALLSTEN



**I**N THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR the dazzle of lights pierced the darkness, and Ferriday wondered how long the prowling cars had been trailing him in silence before they turned on the spots. Since Wilshire Boulevard or before? Looking back, he saw that he was surrounded by lights, two red, the rest white. Five or six cars at least. He slowed to a stop, and almost at once they

were standing at his side, at both sides, a couple of them with flashlights.

"Is this your car?" The voice was young and polite.

"Well—it's a rented car."

"Been renting it long?"

"Two weeks. No, ten days."

He might have told the truth if three weeks before in Hollywood he hadn't been stopped by another

cop, polite and young like these, who had pointed out that his headlights were too pale to meet state requirements. When he'd promised to attend to them, the cop had said, still polite but able to make his message felt anyhow, "You'd better, sir, because if we pick you up again there'll be a fine."

Now they were picking him up again, he supposed. He tried to peer beyond the flashlights, but the Hollywood cop didn't seem to be here. Ferriday thought that maybe he could get away with another warning by pretending that this was the first time. A lie again, and about a trifle.

He always lied when frightened. His heart was pounding now so that it was nearly impossible to keep it from beating time in his voice. It happened always when he confronted Authority—in the army, in college, in school—as far back as he remembered. No matter how innocent he was it happened. And sometimes he was innocent. Sometimes everybody was.

"Anything I can do for you?" he asked, to show that he too could be polite, though to his own ear his Eastern accent rang a little false, made him sound over-eager and too cooperative.

"May we see your license?"

As he dug for his wallet, one of the flashlights tilted slightly so that it shone on his face and lingered there. Studying me, he thought, flinching. But why? Because my

headlights are pale? Comparing me to a description, or even a photograph? No—take it easy—don't let yourself be carried away. He looked up then, straight into the beam, to prove how unconcerned he was, and handed them his license. Let them see, he thought, and smiled his slow, off-balance smile—that likeable, trustworthy smile which, set in his bony, unhandsome face, had been his ally always. He even raised his chin so they could see the cleft in it. The sign of loving pleasure, people always said. Don't you nick it when you shave? It means you're sexy. Well, let them take a good long look.

"Would you mind getting out, sir?"

They must not know that he was trembling. "Hands up?" he asked, but no one laughed. They frisked him and seemed to be estimating his height and weight.

Then, returning his license, they asked him questions in respectful, interested voices, sounding like keen young men who stop you on streetcorners to poll you about politics or cars. Was he staying in California much longer? He didn't know, perhaps a week or two. Working here? No, just looking around.

"Where are you living?"

"With friends. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Grant." He hated to involve them in whatever this was, but he had to be staying somewhere.

He couldn't invent a hotel, and if he named a real one they could check on him at the nearest telephone. Leaning against the car door in what he hoped was an attitude of relaxation, he gave the Grants' address in Bel-Air. "He and I were in the army together. I called him when I got here. By the way," he said, seeing one of them write the information in a notebook, "I hope you'll wait till tomorrow to call them. They've probably been asleep for hours."

The policemen paid no attention to that. "You didn't rent this car from a *regular* car-hire place, did you?"

Ferriday smiled. He knew it was an absurd car for him to be driving, a bashed-up jalopy with an amateur baby-blue paint job and undergraduate decorations—rabbit's foot, scraped stickers on the windshield and fox-tails trailing from the fenders. Only the other day he had been made aware of how incongruous it was when he'd given a lift to a couple of kids thumbing at the side of the road. The fair boy with the flat-top haircut had got in first, plainly to put himself between his girl and Ferriday, and then, compounding the insult, had asked guilelessly, "Is this your boy's car, sir?"

You were sir at thirty, Ferriday remembered thinking, particularly if you wore a suit instead of levis.

Now he said, as he took the reg-

istration from the dashboard compartment and handed it over, "I rent the car from Mr. Grant's son, who's just been drafted. I'd hate him to get the blame."

He could feel their question in the darkness.

"For the headlights. That *is* why you stopped me, isn't it? He warned me about the lights." He hesitated. "As a matter of fact, so did a policeman in Hollywood three weeks ago—"

"Wait a minute. You said you'd been renting the car for only ten days."

Calm, calm, he said to himself. "I'm sorry. I lied. It's been a month. I didn't want you to think I'd left the lights the way they were for so long."

Even in the dark he saw the exchange of glances and for a moment thought they were going to let him go. But they still had questions to ask.

"Were you on your way to your friends' house just now?" He nodded. "From where?"

"From Santa Monica."

"Doing what?"

"Just driving around."

The cop looked at his watch. "All night?"

"Stopped at a bar or two. Parked and looked at the ocean."

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone!" But defiance wouldn't do. Innocent facts could string themselves into a noose, particularly when you hadn't heard

the charge. "You see, it's all new to me out here. *You* take it for granted because you live here. But it's really something for a stranger to look at." He felt pleased with that; an appeal to sympathy and local pride in one neat package.

"Will you lock your car, please, and come with us."

It was not a question. The voice was quiet but tough. There was no visible face to make contact with, so argument was difficult. Ferriday looked at his wrist-watch.

*Now?* At two-thirty in the morning? For a pair of weak headlights?" But of course it wasn't that. A posse of prowler cars for a pair of weak headlights? "What is this all about?" he said. "Tell me."

The flashlights were motionless. His throat clamped. He swallowed.

"Look. I'll give you my word. I'll come wherever you say tomorrow morning. You've got my address—I can't run away—"

That at least was true. They were standing close around him, and after the last echo of his voice had died, sounding plaintive and futile, he felt the pressure of a hand on his elbow.

"At least I can call someone, can't I?" But whom? Ed Grant—to get him a lawyer? He tried to sound like an outraged taxpayer. "Now wait a minute. I don't *have* to go with you—at an hour like this—"

A tight, quiet voice interrupted.

"Better come along."

They could make him. They had strength, numbers, authority. He was not being kidnapped by criminals. There was no one to appeal to, because they were the Law. He shrugged and nodded.

He fumbled his key into the door lock. Then he felt hands at his elbows, hands at his back, assisting him, pushing him toward the forward prowler car. "You sit in front." A heavy officer got in beside him, sighing as he sat. The young cop, the one who had asked most of the questions, crossed the twin beams of the headlights and slid behind the wheel. There was a short syncopation of metal on metal as car doors slammed behind them.

The young cop turned the key, stepped on the gas. The car went forward a short distance, U-turned, headed back towards Wilshire, trailed by the others.

Ferriday sat rigid between the two profiles illuminated from below by the dashboard light, the one regular, clean and blank, the other heavy, rounded, sleepy. Be careful, he thought. Fear has a smell. Don't be afraid.

But he jumped when the driver flicked on the squawk box below the dashboard and announced a number, then said in a businesslike tone, a part-of-the-day's-work tone, "Taking suspect to Holly Circle."

Ferriday's head snapped around.

Panic rose in his chest like a shaking vise. "Suspect? Now wait a minute! What's this all about?"

The young cop concentrated on the road. He spoke the facts with no comment in his tone, like a schoolboy answering a question about ancient history. "Last week one night a girl went out with a man. About your height and general coloring. In a car like yours."

He stopped as though all that was essential had been said. The heavy cop seemed to be thinking of other things. Ferriday felt alone, one against many. He wet his lips with his tongue.

"Yes—and—?"

The engine throbbed. The tires hummed on the pavement. Boulevard lamps streaked by.

"And she was raped."

Ferriday waited till his voice would be steady. A small foreign car, yellow-eyed, approached, passed.

"And—Holly Circle?"

"That's where she's staying with her aunt and uncle."

Idiotically, he almost said thank you. He stared dull-eyed through the windshield. This could happen to anybody, he thought.

The word arrest had never been spoken. But Ferriday supposed that he was under arrest. It seemed miles. It seemed hours. The silence in the car made it seem longer, and when, at last, the young cop spoke again, it gave the sound of

his voice the effect of a small explosion.

"Can you tell us where you were on Thursday night?"

"Last Thursday night?"

"Last Thursday night."

Ferriday hesitated. For a moment he couldn't remember. He counted the week's events backwards. Thursday, Thursday. You'll sound guilty as hell if you can't answer. Then suddenly he remembered. Eddie and Nell Grant, his hosts, had given a small dinner party more or less in his honor, or at least using his presence in their house as an excuse. There had been twelve or fourteen at table, most of the guests in pictures like Eddie himself, some of them fairly prominent. Careful, he thought. Mention the wrong name and the papers will have it with banner heads and photographs. Town and gown, remember. Get something on the movie people, it didn't matter what. BEL-AIR HOUSE GUEST CHARGED WITH RAPE. Sell a million papers. What a way to say thank-you to the Grants.

"I'm sorry. I draw a blank for Thursday night."

"That's too bad." There may have been irony in the words. There was none in the voice.

"A movie. I don't know . . ."

"What movie? Where?"

Funny, he thought, the way a silence can be freighted with disbelief, with slow conviction, tightening like a cord.

They had left the super-highways now. Los Angeles suburbs, he thought, were indistinguishable. At last they entered a residential development, brand new, flat, with rectangular streets, sparse young trees and bright ranch-type houses. You could tell the cop had been here before. He was sure of himself, he whipped around identical corners without slowing. Ferriday looked up into the rear-view mirror. The others were still playing follow-the-leader.

"What's going to happen—when we get there?"

"We'll let this girl have a look at you—identify you or not."

"But if she's upset—if she's trying to find someone to pin it on—"

"If it wasn't you, you don't need to worry."

Abruptly they stopped before a house equipped with a picture window, aluminum trim, and a little square of lawn with shrubs and flowers in its borders, a standard prefabrication so like all the others on the block and in the area and in all the other areas that Ferriday wondered how the cop had recognized it. The heavy one jumped out—without a word, without an order; it had all been rehearsed, or played, many times before. He hurried up the angled walk and rang the doorbell. Minutes passed. Then the doorframe was outlined in golden light and the door was opened, but just a crack, fearfully, so that Ferriday couldn't see

whether it was a man or a woman on the other side. There was a short conversation that would have been inaudible even if he'd been standing near, and the door was shut again. The heavy cop hurried back.

"They're waking her up."

The driver turned to Ferriday. "It'll be fifteen or twenty minutes. Then we'll stand you in front of that window there, and she'll look at you from inside."

Ferriday stared out at the yellowish lawn, faintly lighted by a street lamp too far away. At three feet faces were unrecognizable, featureless. "How will she be able to see me?"

"She'll be able to see you."

The others, from the prowling cars behind, were standing around, very quiet. Keeping the corners of their eyes on me, Ferriday thought, their guns within easy reach in case I take it into my head to bolt. He fumbled a cigarette out of his pack and whirled the wheel of his lighter three or four hurried times before it worked. Could they see that he was frightened? And did they count it against him? Probably; fright so often meant guilt. Though who could be expected to be calm at a time like this? He wondered why he had come with them in the first place, why he hadn't refused with more force. He could have refused. Uncowed, he could have stood on legal rights of some sort. That is, he could have, before he'd heard what the crime



was. After that, he'd had to do what any innocent man would have done—come along with good grace; let them eliminate him as they would, without obstruction.

In any case, it didn't matter now. He was in it. He was here. And in ten minutes, or five, or less, a possibly hysterical girl, just waked from who knew what kind of sleep, would peer through the darkness at him and state whether or not he was the man who last Thursday night had raped her.

"Come on, sweetie. Let's get it over with."

The girl's aunt held up a pink quilted dressing gown and shook it, almost gaily. As though it was a formal, the girl thought, and I was going to a dance.

She said nothing. The night-mare still clung to her; the night-mare that ambushed her every night almost as soon as she closed her eyes. Dull-faced, bony-shouldered, she stood without helping and allowed her aunt to put the dressing gown on her and button it down the front.

"Brush your hair just a little bit, hmm, sweetie?"

Her aunt held out the hairbrush to her, with a coaxing tilted smile, and in the girl's slow mind there pealed the echoes of that too-cheerful voice all the way back to childhood. "She's a sweet little thing. No trouble at all. She does just what she's told."

Just what she's told. just what she's told. You could make a little crooning song out of it. "Yes, Mr. McCracken, I'm ready," she said, and she took dictation sitting straight and lady-like in the chair across from his. He didn't even look at her when he said, "Let's have that in a hurry, please," and she said, "Yes, Mr. McCracken," and went to the typewriter, rolling in the paper delicately, hitting the keys with refinement, doing what she was told.

Now she brushed her hair because she'd been told to, but without conviction, and mid-way in a stroke she stopped. "I can't," she said softly, and she wasn't referring to the brush. "Not another one. I can't."

"Well, now, how are they going to catch him if you don't?"

The girl shrugged, as if it were a matter that no longer concerned her.

"And maybe this time it's *him*." A little gleam in her aunt's eye battled with the vindictive thinning of her lips.

The girl nodded and stared at herself in the mirror. There were deep shadows under her eyes, and her skin looked like dead skin. "O.K.," she said.

"Burt!" the aunt called to her husband. "All right, Burt. You can tell them she's ready."

He went to the door and she led, almost pulled, the girl into the front room.

"I'll open the blind, sweetie, when you say the word."

When the door opened, the cops turned and Ferriday's throat went dry, even though he had been expecting the door to open for several minutes now. The red-headed officer hurried up the walk again; there was another hasty, low conversation, and this time, inside the house, Ferriday saw a middle-aged paunchy man in blue pajamas. The cop came back, nodding.

The driver got out, came around to Ferriday's side and opened the door. The others had formed themselves into a semi-circle (a welcoming committee, Ferriday thought, as escort) which preceded and followed him up the walk to the window. "You stand here." They nudged him into a position facing the center of the picture window, and he was aware of the top of an evergreen at his left shoulder. Inside, the Venetian blind quivered. Ferriday dropped his cigarette, realizing just too late that it was burning his fingers.

They all waited. They seemed to be holding their breaths. He felt walled in by held breaths and by muscles tensed with waiting. Then the slats in the blind parted, jerked to the horizontal, hung in stripes across the window. Ferriday winced and stepped back as all their flashlights, blazing, turned on him on cue.

He squinted up at the window

into the grayish darkness behind the criss-crossed beams. He felt a presence there but could see no outline. Oh, Jesus, he thought wildly, searching, searching, because he couldn't locate a face, and the lights were piercing into him like some monstrous optical examination, all but blinding him.

Then, well above him, glistening through the slats, he found her eyes, but whether they shone in terror or accusation he couldn't tell. *You don't know me*, he thought with ferocious concentration. He willed the sentence, forced it, through the layers of light, through the pane of glass, through the eyes that were all he could see into the brain of the girl the eyes must belong to. *You've never seen me before. Tell them. Tell them. Please.*

She understood. In all her life no one had ever pleaded with her. Now, at last, she was in the driver's seat—and with a man at that. It made her, almost deliberately, prolong the moment.

How many men had the police brought round for her inspection? The daylight ones, the fair one who looked like a truck-driver, the confident one who grinned, who all but winked at her—and the three last night whose faces she had already forgotten. Were they men she'd seen before, in the corridors of the office, perhaps, in the elevator, on the street? How could she know, how could she be sure?

And this one—this one impaled in the light before her now. Her right eyelid twitched as she stared down at him though the parted slats of the Venetian blind. What did it really matter whether it was he or not? In either case she could be an instrument of punishment. She could change a man's whole life. She had the power. So let them wait. They'd told her that all she needed to do was nod. Very well—in time she'd nod.

Already last Thursday night was receding. Try as she would, she couldn't hold it. Words she'd used or thought about it had changed it till it was no longer a thing that had actually happened, and was on its way to being a thing she'd read about or only imagined. It had been so unlike the self she had come to assume was *her* self. She didn't need people. How many times had she said that? She didn't even want people. She remembered the way she'd tossed her head. Loneliness was for the weak.

Nonetheless, it had been she, last Thursday night, who walked boldly into the bar, feeling adventurous but safe, as she ran the gauntlet of eyes on her way to the empty stool. Other girls were there, without men. It wasn't so unusual. After a few minutes she saw how it was done. You bought the first drink yourself, but the others *they* bought—the men in sports shirt, tieless, some of them sun-tanned, one or two even handsome, on their way

to or from the pinball machine or the juke-box. The barroom swaggers, the side-street Casanovas. Drink up, baby. Papa's buying, have another. Can I drive you home, honey? I've got a car outside.

Through the slats of the blind the lights wavered. Naturally they were getting tired, impatient. But no one before had waited on her nod or the shake of her head, and probably no one ever would again.

"What's the matter, sweetie? Is it him?"

*Please*, the young man's eyes were saying. *Please*.

The eyes had been different last Thursday night. They hadn't begged. They had demanded. She had caught their glance the length of the long bar, had actually hoped without thinking it really possible that he would choose her over the others, and he had. There was that to remember too. He had chosen *her*. And after it was over—the blows that for him seemed part of it but hadn't really been necessary because her terror and her gratitude would have persuaded her to let him, the threatening to yell but not yelling (anyhow, who would have heard?), the trembling that followed and wouldn't stop, and the sound of the car engine receding into silence—after all of it was over she found her way back to the little room again, once more alone.

Why hadn't she kept quiet about it—taken sick leave, nursed the

bruises, confided in no one? But terror was worst alone—terror and the bleak future. So she had telephoned her aunt. "My poor sweetie, oh, my poor sweetie, how frightening for you. That horrible, horrible man . . ." She asked for details, more details and more, to cluck over, to contemplate, to ask to hear again, like a child. The girl knew she couldn't really blame her. Her aunt had only done what she had wanted her to do,—called the papers, called the police, wrapped the girl in her gaudy sympathy, insisted she go to the hospital ("You have to, sweetie, you have to, just to be sure. You wouldn't want his *child*, would you? A maniac like that?") and insisted on bringing her home afterwards ("for us to take care of, sweetie, like when you were little.")

While it lasted, people asked questions, hung on her answers, clucked, shook their heads, pitied her, made little moaning sounds, where they hadn't even seen her before. She was a sort of heroine. In a way it had almost been worth it.

"Sweetie, can you see him? Shall I tell them you want to hear his voice? Is it him? Do you remember?"

The bright image on the other side of the window blurred and she began to sway. She saw his eyes, the begging eyes, beyond horizontal bars and then she heard her own voice. "No! No! No! It wasn't him!

It wasn't him!" Darkness flooded back as the flashlights went off. Her aunt rattled the Venetian blinds closed. The room looked on nothing now, and the girl was on her knees at the window, listening with a kind of curiosity and shame to her own sobbing.

They carried her gently to the bed and closed the door behind them softly. But before it was quiet shut she heard her uncle's voice. "You'd almost think she wished it *had* been him. I don't get it."

But she wasn't sobbing because it hadn't been him. That wasn't why such desolation as she had never known had made a coldness around her heart. She was sobbing for the one thing she wished she hadn't done and couldn't change.

She was regretting her visit to the hospital.

Ferriday had felt this curious elation before. Deliverance, he supposed it was. Bullfighters must have it, as the bull tottered and fell—a tightness in the chest, as though something inside were about to burst.

The cops, having driven him back to his jalopy, said thank you and even apologized for the trouble they'd caused him. "But if you're going to stick around, I'd have those lights taken care of," the young one said—to show they could have got him on *that* charge if no other, but were being big about it.

"By the way, I remember about last Thursday night," Ferriday said. It was safe now. He told them about Eddie Grant's dinner party. But they only nodded. They no longer cared.

Now, alone, he turned the key in the ignition, and, savoring freedom like a taste, started toward Sunset. On the Boulevard, approaching the bus stop, the tightness in his chest became, abruptly, an active pain, a trigger being squeezed, tighter, tighter. The jalopy slowed, stalked. He had spotted her in the distance without realizing it. Passably pretty, too, in a red coat and a red hat, and she was watching him come closer, looking full at him smiling, or was it a challenge?

Lift, baby? How about a drink? He could hear the familiar preliminaries. He felt he was suffocating, but pleasantly. There wasn't anything he couldn't get away with. It hadn't even crossed their minds to ask what had happened *after* Eddie Grant's dinner party. He stepped down on the brake. Then something warned him; his foot moved to the gas. How did he know they weren't trailing him? He glimpsed her look of reproach as he sped by.

There were cute chicks in other states, he thought, and he had forty-six left—no, forty-five now—where he wasn't known. The quarry was everywhere. But the poacher must move on.



# SHE ASKED FOR IT

*They pulled her charred body from a flaming haystack. And when Chief Colby asked around he found that there was hardly a man in town who wasn't a suspect.*

*A Novelette*

**BY FLETCHER FLORA**

IT WAS about six o'clock of a long summer evening, and Lard Lavino had just brought the suppers over from his cafe. You probably know how it is with meals in a lot of county jails. The sheriff gets an allotment for feeding the prisoners, so much per meal, and if he's got an economical wife to prepare them he can usually make a little gravy for himself, honest graft, and no one goes hungry in the process. I don't happen to have a wife, being a bachelor, and so I had this arrangement with Lard to furnish the meals. On paper he charged me exactly the allowance, payable the first of the month, but we had a little kickback understanding between us, not on paper, and it worked out so that neither of us

got rich but both of us made a little.

Sometimes Lard sent the meals over, and sometimes he brought them himself. This evening was one of the times he brought them himself. There were only half a dozen of them, guests of the jail being mighty few at the time, and I was thinking I ought to get off my tail and gather in a few vagrants and minor offenders to build up the food allowance for the month, but it had been too damn hot, and still was, to do a lot of things a man would normally do for his own profit. It made me feel even hotter to look at Lard. He weighs about three hundred pounds, just short of it, and the grease was seeping out of his pores

to soak his shirt and make a high sheen on his fat, swarthy face.

"It's hot," he said. "God Almighty, Colby, it's hot!"

"Sure is," I said. "You bring a plate for me?"

"Well, you didn't say if you wanted one, but I brought it just in case."

"Good for you, Lard. Saves me a walk over to the cafe. What's it tonight?"

"It's Thursday, Colby. You know what it is Thursdays."

"Oh, sure. Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and cream gravy. Lard, why the hell don't you shift the menu around now and then? Chicken fried steak on Wednesday, say, and salmon patties on Thursday."

"What the hell difference does it make if you eat steak on Wednesday or Thursday?"

"Just a thought, Lard. Just something for a change."

"Nuts. You want me to peddle the trays?"

"Never mind. I'll do it myself."

"Well, you better do it right away. Cream gravy ain't worth a damn if it gets cold, you know. I'll send back in about an hour for the things."

He went out, and I distributed the trays before the cream gravy got cold. It didn't take long because, like I said, there weren't many guests—one chicken thief, two habitual violators of the peace, a pair of drunken drivers with ten

days each, and a farm laborer doing a year minus GCT for sticking his brother-in-law with a pitch fork. The brother-in-law, though perforated, didn't die.

After serving the six, I came back to my desk and started in on my own plate. The chicken fried steak wasn't bad, if you had a sharp knife and your own teeth, but there were lumps in the mashed potatoes, and the cream gravy wasn't worth a damn, as it turned out, hot or cold or luke warm, which is what it actually was. I was working up an appropriate reprimand for my partner in petty graft when the patrol car stopped out front and Rudy Squires, one of my deputies, came loping up the long brick walk from the street and into the office. Rudy watches Wyatt Earp and Matt Dillon and does the best he can, but he has a big handicap, and the handicap is, he's stupid. He's also my cousin, however, and I make allowances for him. This afternoon he'd gone out into the county on business with Virgil Carpenter, another deputy, but now, coming back, he was alone.

"Where's Virgil?" I said.

"He's out at Crawley Bratton's place," Rudy said.

"What's he doing out there?"

"Crawley's got a big fire out in a field near the creek behind his house. It's a haystack."

"The hell it is!"

"That's right. Virg and me were driving back along the road and



saw this fire, so we stopped in Crawley's drive and went down there. Crawley was there with a couple farmers and three or four kids from the other side of the creek, but there wasn't much anyone could do unless we'd got some buckets and carried water from the creek. Hell, Colby, you can't put out a burning haystack with a few buckets of water you'd have to carry thirty yards from a creek."

"Who said you could?"

"Nobody said it, Colby. I was just explaining why we couldn't put out the fire."

"That's fine, Rudy. I appreciate your explaining these difficult things to me. Now maybe you'd be good enough to explain why the hell a deputy sheriff has to patrol a lousy burning haystack."

"We just stopped to see if there was anything we could do, Colby."

"I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about Virgil."

"Why he stayed out there, you mean?"

"Now you're getting it, Rudy. Why did Virgil stay out there?"

"I was coming to that, Colby. It turned out there was a body in the fire. We'd been smelling something and wondering what it was, and it turned out to be this body. Soon as the smoke had thinned and the fire had burned down some, we could see it lying in there. The way I figure it, someone must

have put it in there and then started the fire. I don't figure it likely that anyone would just go to sleep on a haystack and burn to death without ever waking up and getting the hell out of it. Do you, Colby?"

"No, I don't, Rudy. That's good thinking. Now here's a minor point I wish you'd concentrate on. Did you identify the body? I mean, do you know whose it is?"

"Well, you know what happens to something in a fire, Colby. It gets burned up pretty much. I couldn't swear who it is, and neither could Virg, but it's a woman, anyhow, and Crawley Bratton says it's his wife Faye."

"What makes him think so?"

A guy ought to know his own wife better than anyone else, Colby. That's what I figure. Soon as we saw her in the fire, Virg rolled her out with a fork one of the farmers had with him, and Crawley got a close look before it made him sick and he had to quit looking. He says it's Faye, all right. Even if he hadn't known her anyhow, he says, he'd have known her from the little chain she wore around her left ankle. Crawley's all busted up about it."

"Is Faye missing?"

"Now, Colby, if she's dead she's bound to be missing. What I mean is, she ain't around the same as the rest of us."

"That's true, Rudy. I don't know why I didn't think of that myself. Well, I better get on out there to

Crawley's place, I guess. You stay here and look after the mail, and if Lard Lavino comes back for the supper things, you tell him I said to get the God-damn lumps out of the mashed potatoes next time."

"Well, that reminds me, Colby. I ain't had any supper myself, and I'm pretty hungry. Do you mind if I finish yours?"

On my plate, the glob of mashed potatoes, smeared with cold cream gravy, looked like something that had already been eaten. I contained a belch and nodded. It was incredible, I thought, what could sometimes happen to a man in the way of cousins.

"Help yourself," I said. "Watch your bridgework on that steak."

In the patrol car, I drove west to Crawley Bratton's place, about three miles out of town. My watch said almost seven when I got there. Light was draining slowly out of the long dusk, but it would be another hour before the dusk deepened into night. Behind Crawley's house and barn, far back in a field against the black line of timber along the creek, I could see a small group of men standing in the red glow of what was left of the haystack. Leaving the patrol car in the barnyard, I walked down a long lane between parallel fences of barbed wire and across a pasture into the field, lying fallow, in which the stack had stood.

As I came nearer, I began to pick up the smell, getting stronger

and stronger, of charred flesh. Human flesh. Flesh, if it was truly Faye Bratton's, that would be remembered, if briefly, by more men than Crawley Bratton cared to think about. Virg Carpenter detached himself from the group in the red glow and walked a few steps into the shadows to meet me. Virg was a big guy, hanging over his belt, with a taste for purple shirts and black string ties. He was a pretty good deputy, all in all, and what he wanted more than anything else was to be a pretty good sheriff. I didn't have any objections, particularly, after I was through with the office.

"We got something big this time, Colby," he said.

"Rudy said it's Faye Bratton," I said.

"That's who it is. What's left of her."

"You sure of it?"

"Crawley says so. Crawley ought to know. There's one of these little chains around her left arm. I remember seeing it lots of times myself."

"Where's Crawley now?"

"Up at the house. He was all busted up, Colby. I didn't think it would do any harm to let him go up there."

"I didn't see any light in the house when I came by."

"Maybe he likes to sit in the dark."

"Maybe. You called the coroner?"

"I told Crawley to call from the

house."

"Good. It's just routine, anyhow. The bastard can't diagnose anything but rigor mortis. Where's the body?"

"Over there on the ground. Just follow your nose. We got a piece of canvas out of Crawley's barn to cover her with."

I followed my nose to a dark heap at the edge of a red perimeter. Pulling the canvas back at one end, I stared for a moment at a black blister that might have been the face of Faye Bratton. Reversing ends, I looked at the ankle chain. Like Virg, I had noticed it on her before. Like Virg, like Crawley, like Tom and Dick and Harry. Lots of men had noticed lots of things about Faye. She'd had her share of playing in the hay, so to speak, and now she'd burned in it. Faye in the hay. An appropriate ending after all. A kind of epitaph.

One of seven, the sixth of the litter, an earthy beauty from the time of her tender years, she might have exploited herself to her own great advantage if only she'd had the brains to develop an imagination and a vision. Instead, she had married Crawley Bratton, or Crawley's half-section of rich land, when she was eighteen and Crawley was twenty-six. To her, fresh off the thin soil of the north part of the county, straying south with hot eyes and swivel hips, Crawley's fine farm and solid bank account

had probably seemed like fabulous spoils. With a little excitement on the side, a man here and a man there, even Crawley himself could be accepted as a necessary part of a bargain. As for Crawley, ordinarily a sharp guy in any kind of deal, it was simply a matter of glands over brains. They had been married about four years ago, and now here they were at the end of their time, a cinder lying in a fallow field and a man alone in an unlighted house.

"It's Faye, all right," I said, standing. "I'd better go up and talk to Crawley. Get these other guys out of here, Virg. Send them home. You wait for the coroner. He'll probably want you to help him decide if she's dead."

"Sure, Colby. We ought to have a real doctor, instead of some guy just after a political plum."

"Well, don't complain, Virg. We got an undertaker, and that's next best thing. Even better, maybe, come to think of it. After a doctor says a guy's dead, he's finished. There's still something left for an undertaker to do. Puts it all in one neat little package."

"Something left for us to do, too, Colby. You got any ideas?"

"Not yet. Nothing to speak of."

"She was a prowler, Colby. You know that. Kept old Crawley's guts in the sauce pan all the time. Lots of guys might have done it for one reason or another."

"Sure, sure. I know that. What

I can't figure is all this hocus pocus here. Why this crazy bonfire?"

"Hell, Colby, that seems plain enough."

"Does it? Tell me why."

"Well, damn it, to get rid of the body. At least burn it enough so it maybe couldn't be recognized."

"You sound like Rudy now."

"Rudy? How like Rudy?"

"Stupid."

I couldn't see Virg's face in the dusk, not clearly, but I knew it was getting about the same color as his shirt. Purple, that is. Virg was like that when you gouged him a little. He'd bloat and turn purple. Someday he'll probably drop dead of apoplexy or something.

"I got a right to my opinion," he said.

"Sure you have," I said. "You got a right to be as stupid as you please on your own time, but you got no right to be stupid on county time. Not for pay."

"You're so damn smart, Colby, suppose you tell me what's stupid about it."

"I'll try. First place, a hay fire isn't hot enough to destroy a body. There'd be lots of things left to identify. Second place, the fire could be seen right away from two, three farmhouses. It'd just attract attention to the body instead of getting rid of it. Third place, you got a charred body, you got a certain woman missing. Any idiot could put the two together."

"Just the same, Colby, someone

put the body in the haystack and set the fire. Why?"

"I don't know. I can't figure it. I told you I couldn't."

"Well, damn it, there's got to be a reason."

"Sure, there does. There's a reason for everything. Maybe, if we're lucky, we'll find out what it is. You talked to all these kibitzers?"

"Yeah. Nobody saw anything. Just the fire blazing up. They all came running from wherever they were, but there wasn't anything anyone could do. They just stood around and watched until the stack burned away enough to show the body. About that time, Rudy and I got here."

"Be sure to get their names in case we want to talk to them again. I'm going up to see Crawley."

I went back across the field and the pasture and up the long lane between barbed wire fences into the barnyard. Darkness was gathering and deepening between the barn and the house. There was still no light burning inside the house, but I saw a tiny red eye glowing angrily in the dense darkness of the screened-in back porch, watching me as I crossed the yard. When I drew near, I heard the thin creaking of rockers on the wood floor. Crawley was there alone in the darkness, smoking and rocking and waiting. I went up the steps and took hold of the latch of the screen door.

"Crawley?" I said.

"I'm here," he said.

"It's me. Colby Adams."

"I can see you, Colby. Come on in."

I went on inside and found another rocker beside the one Crawley was sitting in. Crawley kept on rocking and smoking. He didn't say anything, still waiting.

"Tough luck, Crawley," I said. "I'm sorry."

"She wouldn't do right," he said. "She kept asking for trouble, and she finally found it. More trouble than she could handle. Maybe I'll miss her for a while."

"Chances are she was murdered, Crawley."

"Chances are. Nothing else occurred to me."

"You know anyone who might have wanted to kill her?"

"I might have. Lots of times. No one had a better reason."

"Did you do it, Crawley?"

He sighed in the darkness and laughed softly after the sigh. There didn't seem to be any bitterness in the successive sounds. They were expressions, I thought, of a black depth of tiredness.

"Not me, Colby. I might have, eventually, but I never got around to it."

"All right. That disposes of you. How about someone else?"

"You want to play eeny, meeny, miney, mo? I don't."

"Maybe we ought to stick to current affairs."

"Don't ask me, Colby. I quit try-

ing to keep up quite a while ago."

"You're not being much help, Crawley."

"I'm not sure I want to be. I didn't kill her, and I didn't want it to end this way for her, not really, but now that it has, whoever did it, I can't seem to work up any yen for justice or revenge or anything like that. Probably she deserved what she got."

"That's pretty rough on her, Crawley."

"I don't think so. Nothing hurts her now. Nothing will help her."

"You always try to catch a murderer. Especially if you happen to be a cop."

"I know. You got your job."

"Sure I have, Crawley, and I'd better get on with it. You willing to tell me what you can?"

"You ask the questions, Colby. I'll answer."

"All right. When was the last time you saw Faye alive?"

"This morning. About nine o'clock, I guess. I'd been doing some work around the barn. About that time, about nine, I decided to go repair some fence that's been needing it for a while. I went into the house and told Faye I was going, and she said all right, that she thought she'd go into town later. I went back to the barn and got a roll of wire and some tools and left. I didn't come in at noon. I wasn't hungry. I stayed on the job until after four in the afternoon, and it was close to five when

I got back here. Faye wasn't home, but the car and the truck were both here, and so I assumed someone had come and picked her up. It wasn't unusual for that to happen. I ate a cold supper by myself and sat here on the porch, right where I'm sitting now, until the fire started down there in the field."

"Where is this fence you mended?"

"West of here. Over on the section line."

"Not close to the creek or the field where the fire started?"

"No. A long way. You know where the section line is, Colby."

"Did Faye tell you where she was going in town?"

"No. She didn't say. I didn't ask."

"She didn't mention anyone picking her up here?"

"Faye hardly ever told me what she planned to do. When she did, she usually lied."

The lights of a car flashed past the side of the house, picking up the edge of the barn and flooding the lane beyond. The car itself followed, the tired ambulance driven by Emil Coker, undertaker and coroner. It went past the barn and stopped while someone got out and opened the gate to the lane. It went on down the lane and stopped again at the far end while someone got out again and opened the gate to the pasture. It moved on across the pasture, red tail lights bobbing.

I stood up and said, "There goes Emil."

"Yeah." His voice was curiously flat. "You'll want to go down and talk to him, I guess."

"No. Not tonight. Tomorrow will be soon enough. It isn't likely Emil will have anything to tell me that I can't guess."

"Sure. She's dead. Someone killed her. You don't need Emil to tell you."

I walked over to the screen door and opened it, hesitating before passing through. I thought about saying again that I was sorry, but it didn't seem to be necessary. He struck a match and lit a cigarette, the planes of his face flat and hard in the brief flare. The descending darkness was swollen and throbbing with the sounds of the night—an owl's cry, a chorus of frogs, the singing of a thousand cicadas.

"Good-night, Crawley," I said.

"Good-night," he said.

I turned the patrol car in the yard and drove down the drive to the road and down the road to town.

## 2.

I drove along the main drag to the Hotel Bonny, a five story brick building standing tall on a corner. The street, in the slack period between five and eight, was almost deserted. Angling into a parking slot in front of the hotel, I got out and went into the lobby and down

a couple of steps into the taproom. The taproom, like the street outside, was idling through the early evening interlude when people were engaged in other places. Hobby Langerham was behind the bar. He was eating a roast beef sandwich, washing it down with Schlitz beer. Hobby was a shrewd guy with sharp eyes, built like one of the kegs he tapped for the customers, and he had been behind the Bonny bar for a dozen years or more. He pulled a long shift, twelve to twelve, opening to closing, and I knew from experience that he generally knew who came and went at approximately what times.

"Hello, Colby," he said. "How's the law?"

"Can't complain," I said. "Draw me one, Hobby."

He drew the beer and shoved it across the bar and waved away the two-bit piece I offered in payment. I always offered, and he always waved it away, and I don't know why we kept going through the routine, unless it was just to keep the record straight.

"Thanks, Hobby," I said. "This one I need."

"You got a problem, Colby?"

"Looks like murder. I guess you could call that a problem."

Hobby sucked in his breath, and his little eyes glittered in the soft light of the room, but he didn't make a big demonstration out of his reaction. Hobby never did.

"I'd call it a problem, Colby. Anyone I know?"

"Come off, Hobby. You know everybody."

"Okay. So it's someone I know. Maybe it's an official secret or something."

"Nothing's secret, official or otherwise, except the name of the one who did it. I wish I could tell you. Was Faye Bratton in here this afternoon, Hobby?"

"You mean it was Faye who got it?"

"That's right. Faye Bratton."

"Well, by God, it couldn't have happened to anyone who tried for it harder. She was made to be murdered, that Faye was."

"Maybe. I've got to take the position that no one is made to be murdered, not even wanton wives. Was she in here, Hobby?"

"Briefly. Fairly early. Alone."

"How briefly?"

"I didn't hold a watch on her. Say half an hour. Long enough to take her time drinking a couple of bourbon highballs."

"How early?"

"When she got here? Let's see. Not earlier than two. Not later than two-thirty."

"You say she was alone?"

"That's what I said. She came alone, she left alone."

"She meet anyone here?"

"No."

"She talk with anyone?"

"Sure. Me."

"No one else?"

"No one. Matter of fact, there wasn't anyone else here most of the time. Couple of guests of the hotel came in for maybe fifteen minutes. Drank a beer each. I took them to be salesmen. Not regulars, though. I'd never seen them before."

"Did she say anything about meeting anyone later, after she left here?"

"She said she was going down the street to see Dolly Noble. That's all."

"Down to Dolly's beauty parlor?"

"I took her to mean there. She didn't say so."

"That's all she said about where she intended to go and what she intended to do?"

"That's all."

"How did she seem? I mean, did she seem nervous or excited or anything unusual at all?"

"Faye always gave the impression of looking for something or someone. Something or someone for excitement. Like a woman on the prowl. Tending bar, even in a place like this, you learn to know them. You can almost smell them. Nothing unusual about Faye this afternoon, I'd say. Just Faye the way she always was."

"She talk about anything that seems significant, looking back?"

"I can't remember anything." He creased his brow, which ran up and back over the crown of his head, which he shook slowly side-wise. "Just talk, the kind of stuff

you pass back and forth across a bar. No name was mentioned except Dolly's."

"Faye came in here pretty often, didn't she?"

"She was in town often. I'd guess she came in here everytime she was in town. She was a good drinker, Faye was. She took bourbon in water with one ice cube. Short on the water. I've seen her a little high, but never what I'd call drunk."

"Was she in the habit of meeting anyone here lately? Any special person, that is?"

"Like a man, you mean?"

"A man will do."

"There wasn't any. No one special. No one she was meeting by arrangement, I'll swear. You know how Faye was, Colby. She never ran from a man if she came across one. If there happened to be one here, she was congenial."

"I know. It doesn't help much."

"Maybe it does. In a negative way. If Faye was involved with a particular guy in a really big way, he'd probably be the one she *wouldn't* be congenial with in a public bar. You see what I mean?"

"I see what you mean. You're real clever to think of that, Hobby, but it sure as hell doesn't narrow the field any. I can hardly suspect every man in the county that Faye hasn't met up with one time or another in this taproom."

"With Faye it's going to be pretty hard to narrow the field much any



way you look at it. Faye just naturally took in a lot of territory. You going to tell me what happened to her, Colby, or is it something you're sitting on?"

"I'm not sitting on anything, Hobby. News just hasn't had time to get around yet. Someone set fire to a haystack behind Crawley's house this evening, out in a field near the creek. It attracted several men and kids from the area, including Virgil Carpenter and Rudy Squires, besides Crawley himself. When the fire burned down some and the smoke had lifted, they saw a body in there. Virgil forked it out, and it was Faye."

"Jesus! You mean someone killed her and put her in the stack and set it on fire?"

"Looks that way, superficially. There are some crazy things about it."

"It's all crazy, if you ask me. How was Faye killed?"

"I'm not sure yet. The body was burned pretty bad. Emil Coker's got it now, but I don't suppose he'll find out anything significant. Her head didn't seem to be bashed in, and I couldn't see any wounds. Maybe Emil will see something when he takes a close look at her on a table, but I doubt it. We'll call in a doc for a post mortem, of course. It's my guess she was strangled."

"Why strangled in particular?"

"I don't know. It probably hap-

pened in a quarrel about something. It seems to me the way a man would likely kill a woman under those circumstances, not having planned to kill her in advance. I might be wrong, of course, but it's the way I've been thinking about it."

"A guy would have to be out of his head to do something that crazy."

"Faye drove men out of their heads. She was good at it."

"You're right there. How's old Crawley taking it?"

"Virg and Rudy said he was busted up pretty bad down by the fire. When I talked to him at the house later, he wasn't. He talked calm and sensible. He said he might miss Faye a little."

"It's a wonder Crawley didn't kill her himself a long time ago, and that's God's truth."

"Well, maybe he finally got around to it. He says he didn't, of course."

I drained my schooner and set it on the bar. Hobby picked it up and made a motion toward the tap.

"You want another, Colby?"

"No, thanks. I've got a place or two to go, Hobby. Keep an ear cocked to the bar talk tonight, will you? Something might drop. Chances are nothing will, but you never can tell."

I went up the pair of steps and through the lobby and turned right on the main drag. Under

lights, the street was beginning to look alive for a few more hours of this particular day. There was a moderate traffic of pedestrians on the sidewalk, and Wheeler's Drug Store, next corner up from the Bonny, had begun to gather its nightly accretion of loafers and nylon inspectors. Passing, I wondered how often Faye Bratton's nylons had been inspected and approved at this place to the sound of soft whistles, but it was nothing I gave a lot of attention to, just wondered in passing. In the next block, about half way between corners, I came to the narrow front of Dolly Noble's beauty parlor, and found it dark. It was after closing hour, of course, but sometimes Dolly made night appointments with working girls, and I thought she might have made one tonight. It didn't really matter, anyhow, for Dolly had a small apartment upstairs over the parlor, and I went up narrow stairs from the street into a narrow hall above, lighted by a single globe, and knocked on Dolly's door. After a minute or two, she opened it.

"Hello, Dolly," I said. "What's new?"

"Nothing new," she said, "except I'm getting a call from the sheriff. That's new. What do you want, Colby?"

"Let me come in and tell you."

"Why not? You'll have to make it snappy, though. I'm expecting someone."

I went past her into the living room of her little apartment, and she closed the door and sat down, crossing her legs, which were nice. She had a one-ton conditioner stuck in one of the windows overlooking the street below, and that was nice, too. It made the apartment nice and cool, and it was pleasant to sit there in the chair she'd offered and sneak a few looks at her nice legs. It was a lot better than standing in front of Wheeler's.

"I'll try to get out of the way before your date arrives," I said.

"Oh, it's no one that important, Colby. Just Faye Bratton."

"Faye's coming here?"

"She ought to be here now. She's late."

"What have you and Faye got scheduled for tonight?"

"That could be a personal question, Colby. You asking for a personal reason, or is it official?"

"What makes you think it might be official?"

"Nothing makes me think so. Hell, I don't mind telling you, either way. We're going to have dinner at the Bonny and go to a movie. Big night. Faye gets bored out on that damn farm with Crawley Bratton. She comes in and spends an evening with me every now and then. Sometimes she spends the night and goes home in the morning."

I sat and looked at Dolly for a few seconds without speaking.

Shorter than average, she wore spike heels to make herself look taller than she was, and someday she'd either be fat or haggard from diets and reducing exercises, but she was neither yet. Her blond hair, cut short and shaggy, had the benefit of her best rinse. Thanks to the treatments and tricks of her trade, Dolly managed to make herself a good-looking woman. Lots of men claim to consider this sort of deception unfair, but not me. The time comes for all women when it's a good thing to know the tricks, and I'm all for the ones who learn early.

"Faye won't be here," I said.

"Why not?" she said. "Has something happened to her?"

"The last thing that ever will. She's dead. Someone killed her."

She sat staring at me with her mouth hanging slightly open, her eyes wide and sick with sudden shock. Under the eyes and on her cheeks, blue shadows and crimson paint stood out against drained flesh in stark and ugly relief. I watched for another sign than shock, but there was none. No fear, no anger, no slight beginning of grief. In her life, I thought, Faye Bratton had incited often the easy expression of love, but now in death she had taken away nothing that would be missed for more than a little while, if at all, and she had left not even sorrow. Thinking of Faye, I watched Dolly, and after a while Dolly's breath es-

caped in a long sigh. The tip of a pink tongue slipped out to wet her lips.

"So he did it after all!" she said.

"He says not."

"Did you expect him to confess?"

"Sometimes killers do. I guess I couldn't have any such good luck as that, though."

"When did you talk to him?"

"Tonight. Little more than an hour ago."

"How did it happen?"

"I'm not sure. She was strangled, I think."

"I don't mean that. I mean, how did it happen that you talked to him."

"That's routine, Dolly. If a wife's killed, you naturally talk to the husband."

"Crawley? My God, Colby, I wasn't thinking of Crawley."

"No? It seems to me, under the circumstances, that Crawley would be a natural one to think of. Who did you have in mind?"

"Fergus Cass."

It was a name I hadn't expected, and it took me a while to adjust. In the few seconds of adjustment, I tried to think of what I knew about Fergus Cass, and what I knew was practically nothing. He'd come into the county only about six months before, and he'd been living with an aunt and uncle on their farm across the creek from Crawley's place, about a mile from house to house. He was from St.

Louis, as I remembered, and there had been a rumor circulated at the time of his coming that he'd been sick, tuberculosis or something like that, and had spent some time in a sanitarium somewhere before coming to the country for rest and fresh air. This seemed a reasonable explanation, for he didn't do anything in the way of work that anyone had ever noticed. I'd seen him in town a number of times, and once or twice tramping through the fields in the country carrying a rough hand-cut walking stick. He was a dark, lean man, somewhere in his late twenties or early thirties, with heavy black hair and eyes so deeply brown that they too looked black. There was a kind of unusual grace in the way he moved and held his head. He didn't really look as if he'd ever been seriously sick, but of course you can't always tell about such things from appearances.

"I never thought of Fergus Cass," I said. "Tell me about him. Him and Faye, I mean."

"They had something going. It's been going four, five months, Colby. Since soon after Fergus came here to stay."

"My understanding is, Faye almost always had something going. Isn't that right?"

"Oh, sure. Faye always had to have something going with a man, but most of the time it didn't amount to much. This was different. Bigger. Because of Fergus, the

kind of guy he is. I told Faye she'd better leave him alone, but you know how she was. She wouldn't listen."

"You said the kind of guy Fergus is. What kind is he?"

"It's hard to say, Colby. Nothing he's done. Nothing he's said. I guess it's just the feeling he gives you, and the way he looks sometimes. You ever seen his eyes when something happens he doesn't like? They get a kind of glaze on them. It's like he's gone suddenly blind. He's so damn intense, Colby, that's what he is."

"I've never noticed. Maybe I haven't looked into his eyes as often as you and Faye. Anyhow, it's pretty thin. You can't condemn a man for the look of his eyes."

"That's not all, Colby. Like I said, they've had this thing going for months. They used to meet down by the creek between Faye's place and the Cass's, but lately, the last two or three weeks, Faye's been trying to break it up. I think she was getting a little scared or something. Fergus wanted her to leave Crawley and go back to St. Louis with him, but Faye wouldn't go, and Fergus kept staying on and on, forcing her to meet him and trying to change her mind. He was supposed to go back a month ago, Faye told me, but he kept staying on."

"Why didn't Faye go? She didn't give a damn for Crawley, that's plain enough, and it seems to me

it should have suited her fine to go running off to St. Louis with a good-looking guy like Fergus Cass."

"Hell, Colby, good-looking guys are a dime a dozen, from St. Louis or anywhere else. You got any idea what Crawley Bratton's worth?"

"I never gave it much thought. Quite a bundle, come to think of it."

"It comes to six figures, at least."

"Well, that's something to take care of. It's funny Faye took so many chances with it."

"She couldn't help taking chances. That was Faye for you. But she wasn't going to throw it all away deliberately just for a good-looking nothing from a big town. He was all right to have a thing with, a big thing, but he was intended to be strictly temporary."

"The same as others who could be named."

"Name them if you want. What does it get you?"

"I don't want to. Not now, anyhow. Maybe later. Hobby Langerham said Faye came to see you this afternoon. What did she want?"

"Nothing special. I was busy, and she didn't stay. She just asked how about dinner and a movie tonight, and she left."

"She say where she was going?"

"No."

"Anything about meeting Fergus Cass down by the creek where you said they met?"

"No."

"All right, Dolly. You've been a help. Thanks."

"Sure. Make me a deputy."

She didn't get up to show me out. At the door, I looked back for a moment, and I thought she looked scared. Maybe she was seeing Fergus Cass staring at her with black eyes that had the glaze of blindness on them. I went on down to the street and back to the patrol car in front of the Bonny. In the car, I drove out of town to the Cass place. There was a light in the front room and in the kitchen at the rear. I went around back and knocked on the door, and pretty soon Elmo Cass, the uncle, came out of the living room and across the kitchen in his sock feet.

"Who is it?" he said.

"Colby Adams," I said.

He opened the screen door and peered out at me. He was a big man with a shock of gray hair and a bushel of eyebrows. The eyebrows made him look fierce, and it was reported that he sometimes was. He didn't invite me in.

"What you want, Colby?"

"I'd like to talk to Fergus, Elmo."

"What about?"

"I said to Fergus, Elmo. If you want to listen, you can."

"If it's about that Bratton slut, Fergus doesn't know anything. You're wasting your time."

"I don't remember seeing you at the fire, Elmo."

"That's right. You didn't. I don't go running across the fields to watch every little fire that starts up."

"Who told you about Faye Bratton being in that stack?" Was it Fergus?"

"Fergus ain't here. He drove off in the car about five. He hasn't been back."

"Where'd he go?"

"I don't know. Fergus ain't much of one for confiding."

"You expecting him back soon?"

"I'm not expecting him any time in particular. Fergus goes and comes as he pleases. Sometimes he's late."

"I think I'll wait around for him, if you don't mind."

"Suit yourself."

He closed the screen door and hooked it on the inside. If I wanted to wait, I could wait on the outside. I went back to the patrol car and got in and waited. About ten, the lights went out downstairs in the house, and one came on upstairs. About ten-fifteen, the light upstairs went out. I waited till midnight and gave up. If Fergus was back in the morning, I could talk to him then. If he wasn't, I could get a warrant and start looking for him. I drove back to the jail, and Rudy was still waiting in the office when I got there.

"How'd it go, Colby?" he said.

"I'm tired, Rudy," I said. "I'll tell you later."

"I told Lard about the lumps in the mashed potatoes."

"Good for you, Rudy. What'd he say?"

"He said for you to go to hell."

Instead, I went to bed on a cot in the next room. It was hot in there, and I didn't sleep well.

### 3.

The next morning I drove back to Crawley's place. I didn't stop at the house. Passing the barn, I drove on down the wide lane to the pasture and left the car at the gate. Crossing the pasture on foot, I crawled over the fence on the far side and walked on across the fallow field to the scorched patch of earth where the haystack had stood. I didn't know what I was looking for, nothing special in mind, but the fire bothered me, and I couldn't help thinking about it. What bothered me was why the hell it had happened. It just didn't make any kind of sense that I could see.

After poking around for a couple of minutes, I found something. It was lying inside the blackened area, near the outer edge, and it was still warm to the touch when I picked it up. Nothing much, really. Just a small, flat can with a hinged lid. The paint was burned off the outside, but it was easy enough to identify anyhow, for I had seen thousands like it and had emptied at least a thousand myself in my time. A tobacco can, I mean. Probably Prince Albert. Maybe

Velvet. I forced the narrow lid open and saw that the can still contained tobacco. It had not, then, been discarded. It had been dropped accidentally in the hay, which meant that maybe someone had been smoking in the hay, which meant that maybe the hay had been accidentally set on fire. Just maybe, of course. Just guessing. But it was an explanation that made sense. It was the only one I had been able to think of that did. There was something about it, to tell the truth, that tickled my fancy as well as my reason.

How had it happened, approximately? Well, say that someone had killed Faye Bratton, which someone had. That much was no guessing. Say the killer, needing to make a quick disposition of the body, had buried it in the hay until night came to give him time and cover to do something more adequate and permanent about it. Something like digging a hole, maybe. Then, say, someone had wandered along and stopped to lie down and rest and smoke a roll-your-own and maybe doze off in the sun with the smoke burning dangerously between his fingers, and all the while the body was there beneath him in the hay. There was a kind of grim comedy in it, the crazy disruption of a desperate plan by pure chance in the form of someone dumb enough to smoke a cigarette while lying on a haystack. And who might have

been along this way late yesterday afternoon who was dumb enough? I could think of several, actually, but I began to think of one in particular. He had probably been along yesterday, as he had probably been the day before and would be today, following the course of the winding creek. Turning away from the black patch of earth, I went on across the field and over a fence and into the brush and timber along the creek. I sat down on the bank of the creek to wait a while before going on up the back way to the Cass place.

I was waiting for a kid named Snuffy Cleaker, but you could just as well have called him Snuffy Jukes or Snuffy Kallikak. He was that kind of kid, I mean, from that kind of family. As a matter of fact, he didn't really have any family, except his old man, who lived in a shack on the west side of town and hauled a little trash and garbage now and then when he needed the price of a bottle. Snuffy lived there with the old man off and on, but you could never count on finding him there, especially in the warm months, because most of the time he was out prowling the countryside, following the creek, living on catfish and stolen chickens and vegetables and melons, sleeping in haystacks or beside hedge rows or wherever he got tired and dropped. Cherokee County's Huck Finn. When he was a few years younger, we tried

to keep him in school according to the law, but he was too stupid to learn, and we gave up before the law said we ought to. He was now about fifteen, maybe sixteen. Most people considered him harmless.

I didn't really expect him to oblige me by coming along just when I wanted him to, but luck was with me for a change, and damned if he didn't. I heard him in the brush before I saw him, and I got up quietly and slipped out of sight behind a tree. He came ambling leisurely into sight, cutting at the brush with a stick he'd cut, and when he came abreast of the tree, I jumped out and grabbed him. He yowled like a scared cat and tried to jerk away.

"Got you, you little son of a bitch," I said. "Stop squirming!"

He went limp and quiet all of a sudden, and I could see that he was scared, all right. His eyes skittered wildly, refusing to look at me, and he kept making through his long nose the exaggerated snuffing sound that had given him his name. Probably he had another name, duly recorded in the courthouse, but no one could ever think of it.

"Lemme go," he said. "I ain't doing anything."

"Sure you're not, Snuffy. You've never been known to do anything except smoke and chew and steal and everything else a kid's got no business doing. Where you going?"

"Nowhere."

"Sure you are, Snuffy. You're going to reform school, that's where you're going. I've got a belly full of complaints about you prowling and stealing and making a general damn nuisance of yourself."

"I ain't done anything to be sent to reform school for."

"Is that so? Wouldn't you say it was something to burn Crawley Bratton's haystack down?"

It was still a guess, nothing more, but I knew it was true the instant I said it, and it was in the same instant that I was aware for the first time of the dirty rag he had wrapped around his right hand. Under the rag, I was sure, was seared and blistered flesh. He jerked the hand behind his back and tried again to pull away and run. He wasn't a strong kid, though, skinny and undersized. I held him easily.

"What's the matter with your hand, Snuffy?" I said. "Don't you know any better than to try to beat out a flame with your bare palm?"

"I didn't aim to burn it down," he said. "It was an accident."

"That's more like it. If you want to stay out of reform school, you'd better tell me the exact truth."

"I was having a smoke, that's all. Just stretched out there in the hay having a smoke and thinking about staying the night. I dozed off, I guess, and pretty soon I woke up with the fire blazing up beside



me. I didn't try to beat it out, the way you said. I got more sense than that. The fire just burned my hand, and I guess that's why I woke when I did. If I hadn't, I might have burned to death. All I did afterward was cut and run. I went into town and stayed the night with my old man."

"It was a damn good thing for you that you woke when you did, Snuffy. No question about that. If you hadn't, we might have had two bodies in the fire. Yours and Mrs. Bratton's."

"I don't know anything about Mrs. Bratton. I heard in town that she was burned in the fire, but I don't know anything about her."

"That's what you say. To me, it's beginning to look different. Maybe you met Mrs. Bratton down here and got fresh with her. Maybe you decided to kill her to keep her from telling what you did to her. Then maybe you decided to put her body in the stack and burn it up. It's just what a dumb, no-good kid like you might do."

"I wouldn't do anything like that, Mr. Adams! Honest to God, I wouldn't!"

"I'm not so sure. Anyhow, it looks pretty bad, far as you're concerned. Lots of folks around here have been thinking you might get dangerous, once you got a little age on you. It's beginning to look like you might not go to reform school after all, Snuffy. It's beginning to look like you might go

straight to the penitentiary for all the rest of your life."

He was a stupid kid and plenty scared. His eyes were wild and his teeth were chattering. Truth was, I was ashamed of myself for saying those things, which I didn't believe, but I thought they might bring something out, and they did.

"Don't say such things about me, Mr. Adams," he said. "Please don't say such things. You quit saying such things, I'll tell you something you might like to know."

"You tell me, and I'll see. Chances are you're fixing to tell a lot of lies to get yourself out of trouble."

"I'll tell the truth, Mr. Adams. I swear to God I will!"

"Never mind the swearing. Just tell me."

"It was that Fergus Cass who did it. Killed Mrs. Bratton, I mean. I know he did."

"There you go, Snuffy. Telling a damn lie already. Why would Fergus want to kill Mrs. Bratton?"

He licked his lips, and a sly expression came into his eyes and reminded me that even a stupid kid like Snuffy Cleaker can develop a kind of shrewdness within his limitations.

"They were carrying on with each other," he said. "I've seen them more than once down here by the creek."

"You mean you spied on them."

"Well, I just happened to see them the first time, quite a while

ago, and I couldn't help it if they kept meeting here and I happened to come along sometimes when they were together."

"That's right, Snuffy. You couldn't help it. You couldn't help it if you came sneaking along through the brush. You're nothing but a nasty little Peeping Tom, but you can't help it any more than you can help being a thief, because that's just what you naturally are. Never mind that, though. If Mrs. Bratton and Fergus Cass liked each other well enough to meet down here, what makes you think he killed her? Doesn't seem to me it would work out that way at all."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Mr. Adams. Lately they haven't been getting along so good. I heard them have a couple of fierce fights, him calling her a lot of dirty names and threatening to kill her, and then yesterday afternoon when I come along they were up the creek from here about fifty feet, under the trees where the creek bends, and he hit her in the face because of something she said, and she started to run, but he ran after her and caught her and began choking her."

"What did she say to him?"

"I don't know. I wasn't close enough to hear."

"What did you do when he started choking her?"

"I ran. I didn't want to mix in any trouble like that. I got scared and cut out of there in a hurry."

"Where did you go?"

"Just up the creek. Just fooling around. When I came back quite a while later, Mrs. Bratton and Fergus Cass were both gone, so I figured he probably hadn't hurt her much, and I went up in the field to the haystack and had a smoke, like I admitted, but when I heard in town that Mrs. Bratton's body had been in the hay and burned, I knew he'd killed her and put her there, and she'd been there in the hay right while I was having the smoke that set the stack on fire."

"Why the hell didn't you tell somebody about it?"

"I was scared, that's why. I didn't want to get mixed into any trouble like that."

He was telling the truth, all right. He'd never have told it if I hadn't caught him and scared him into it, but he was telling it now to save his scurvy little hide, and it was just what I needed. True, he hadn't actually seen Fergus Cass kill Faye Bratton, but he'd seen him choking her, and what he'd actually seen and what he might later remember seeing when a sharp county attorney got hold of him could damn well be two different stories.

"You're mixed now," I said, "and you're mixed good. You come along with me."

"Where you taking me?"

"I'm taking you to jail, that's where. You're what we call a ma-

terial witness, you little devil, and I'm not taking any chances on your skinning out on me."

"You can't arrest me, Mr. Adams. I ain't done anything to be arrested for."

"Who said I was arresting you? I'm just sort of holding you in protective custody to save myself the trouble of running you down later. Come on. Let's move out of here."

We walked up across the field and the pasture to the car at the foot of the lane. I maneuvered the car between the barbed wire fences, turning it around, and drove up toward the house with Snuffy beside me in the front seat. When I got out to close the gate to the lane, after driving through, Crawley Bratton came out of the barn and stood there watching us. He looked tired and gaunt, his eyes darkly circled and his coarse, thick hair hanging down over his forehead from under his battered hat. Suddenly, walking toward him, I felt a sharp stab of genuine pity.

"Who's that you got with you, Colby?" he said. "It looks like Snuffy Cleaker."

"That's who it is," I said. "I'm taking him back to town."

"What for? He been getting himself into trouble again?"

"Chances are he's getting someone else into trouble this time, Crawley. He was down there at the creek yesterday when Faye was killed. He set the stack on fire."

"Why would he want to do a thing like that?"

"He didn't aim to. It was an accident. The point is, he saw something before the fire."

"Is that right? What did he see?"

"He saw Faye being choked."

"You mean he saw who killed her?"

He was looking across at Snuffy in the car, not at me, and his expression was calm and tired, no anger in it—not even, it seemed to me, much interest. After a while, he sighed and rubbed the back of a hand across his eyes.

"Who was it, Colby?" he said.

"I'm not ready to say yet. I'll let you know when I'm ready."

He didn't protest, and I still had the strange impression that he really wasn't very interested, but then I had the sudden notion that it wasn't really lack of interest at all. It was only, I thought, that he'd already guessed. Crawley was no fool, and it was entirely possible that he had known, or guessed, that Faye had been meeting Fergus Cass down by the creek, and it was almost certain, if he had, that he'd also guessed who'd killed her. Some deep and distorted anger and shame and sense of pride had kept him from making any accusation or showing in any way the knowledge of her affair. It was Crawley's way. He'd either keep quiet and do nothing, or he'd kill Fergus Cass himself, when he was completely sure, in his own time.

"Besides, Crawley," I said, "You don't need me to tell you. You know as well as I do who it was."

"Sure, Colby." He sighed again, rubbing his hand across his eyes as if they pained him. "I know."

I turned and started back for the car, and when I was almost there he called after me.

"Thanks, Colby," he said.

I didn't answer.

#### 4.

Rudy was in the office with his feet on the desk. When I came in with Snuffy, he dropped his feet and stood up looking as guilty as a kid caught in a cookie jar. Between Snuffy and Rudy, there wasn't a hell of a lot to choose. Rudy was cleaner, but not much brighter.

"I've got a guest for you, Rudy," I said. "Tell Lard there'll be another one for dinner."

"Snuffy?" Rudy said. "You mean Snuffy Cleaker?"

"That's right. Lock him up."

"What for?"

"Never mind what for. Just pick out a nice cell and put him in it."

"Sure, Colby, if you say so."

"I say so. Where's Virg?"

"He went up north in the other patrol car to investigate a brawl. Someone got cut up."

"Okay. We had any word from Emil Coker?"

"I was going to tell you about that. Emil called and said he fig-

ured Faye Bratton was strangled before she was burned in that fire. He says he'll have a doctor work on her."

"Good old Emil. Tell him to take his own sweet time if he calls again. No hurry at all."

"I'll do that, Colby. You going away somewhere again?"

"I'm going out to the Cass place."

"What for?"

"Never mind what for."

"Where you been, Colby? I've been wondering."

"Never mind where I've been."

"All right, Colby. If you say so. You got any orders or anything?"

"Yeah. Take care of Snuffy and keep your God-damn feet off my desk."

I went out and got in the patrol car and drove west again. This time I turned off before reaching Crawley Bratton's and drove around the country square to the front of the Cass place. I didn't really figure Fergus would be there, to tell the truth. I thought I'd have to swear out a warrant and put out an alarm and have him brought back from wherever he'd got on the way to wherever he was running. That was my mistake, to my surprise. He was there. I found him sitting on a block of wood in the sun in front of a corn crib. He was dressed in a clean white shirt and a pair of blue jeans, his feet, in heavy white socks, shoved into a pair of soft black

loafers. He looked lean and dark and handsome and mean. He had the cut of cruelty in his thin face, and I saw what Dolly meant by the glaze of blindness in his eyes. It was in them as he watched me approach.

"Hello, Sheriff," he said. "Uncle Elmo said you were looking for me last night."

"That's right," I said. "I waited till midnight."

"That's too bad. I didn't get home till two."

"You mind telling me where you were?"

"Unless you've got a good reason for knowing, I do."

"I've got a good reason, but let it go. I'm more interested in knowing where you were in the afternoon. Between three and five, say."

"I suppose you've got a good reason for knowing that, too?"

"The best. I figure Faye Bratton was killed sometime during those two hours."

"I heard about Faye. Too bad. She was a common little bitch, but a looker. I hate to think of her being dead."

"Do you? I can understand that. Seems to me you'd hate it more than most, having been so close."

"Oh." He shrugged and smiled at a secret joke. "I thought you'd probably found out about that. I couldn't think of any other reason why you'd want to talk to me."

"Such things have a way of being found out."

"I guess they do. It's a shame, too. Causes a lot of unnecessary trouble. We did our best to be discreet."

"You must have been, to tell the truth. Only two or three people knew about it, apparently. One of them told me you wanted Faye to run away to St. Louis with you. Is that right?"

"Who told you?"

"No matter. I was told."

"So I wanted her to go away with me. She wouldn't. I thought she'd jump at the chance to get the hell away from here and see what living could really be. My mistake. She was just as stupid as she was good-looking. No imagination. She wasn't about to fly out of that soft nest Crawley Bratton kept for her on the other side of the creek."

"Was that what you had the fight about yesterday afternoon?"

"What fight?"

"The one you had down by the creek. The one that ended with you strangling her to death."

He had been looking over my shoulder, talking to me but acting all the while as if I wasn't really there. Now he looked at me directly in sudden stillness, but I had a feeling that he couldn't see me at all through his bright glaze of blindness.

"That's a lie," he said. "I didn't strangle her to death."

"I didn't expect you to admit it. It doesn't matter. There was a witness. You might be interested in

knowing that there was a witness to a lot of what went on between you and Faye down there."

"I didn't strangle her to death. Anyone who says I did is lying."

"Next thing you'll be telling me you didn't even see her yesterday afternoon."

"No. I saw her, and we had a fight, and I choked her. But not to death. I wanted to, and I thought for a few seconds that I had, but I didn't. I let her go alive. The last I saw of her, she was leaning against a tree and breathing easy. I came up here and got the car and went off on a drunk. I never wanted to see her again, and that much was given me. I never will."

"Well, you never know. Could be you'll wind up in the same place pretty soon."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you'll stand trial for murder. Maybe you'll hang."

He sat there staring at me with his blind eyes, and I had an uneasy notion that he was going to spring at me any second, but he didn't. He took a deep breath and looked away, over my shoulder again.

"Am I under arrest?" he said.

"That's right. You are."

"You're making a mistake. You'll see." He stood up and looked toward the house. "If you'll wait out here, I'll get some things together and say good-by."

I let him go. He went across the yard and into the house, and he was in there for maybe fifteen min-

utes. He came out carrying a little leather bag, and we got into the patrol car and drove back to town. In the office at the jail, Rudy was sitting in a chair away from the desk with his feet on the floor. He must have heard us coming.

"Hello, Colby," he said. "Hello, Fergus. What you two doing together?"

"He's under arrest for murder," I said. "Lock him up."

"Murder!" Rudy jumped as if his chair was wired and someone had thrown the switch. "Whose murder?"

"How many murders we had around here lately, Rudy?"

"Faye Bratton's, you mean?"

"Faye Bratton's, I mean."

"Well, Jesus, Colby. I got to thinking after you left, and what I thought was Snuffy Cleaker must have done it."

"You weren't thinking, Rudy. Your brain was just turning over. There's a difference."

"That may be, Colby, if you say so, but I'm thinking now for sure, and what I'm thinking is you ought to tell me more about what's going on."

"Excuse me, Rudy. I'll try to do better. Right now I'm going back to Crawley Bratton's to tell him we've made an arrest, and then I'm coming in to see the county attorney. Tell Lard two more for dinner instead of one."

I went out and got into the patrol car and drove west for the

third time that day. I stood beside the car in Crawley's back yard and looked out over all the fields as far as I could see, but there wasn't any sign of Crawley out there, and so I went over and hammered on the back door of the house, but there wasn't any sight or sound of him there, either. Then I went out to the barn and inside, and there he was. He was lying on his back on the rough plank floor, and nearby, where it had fallen from his hands, was a double-barreled 12-gauge shotgun. Most of the top of Crawley's head was off. Some of it was on the floor, and the rest was on the wall behind him. There was something else on the wall, too. It was a note pinned to the planking with Crawley's pocket knife. I went over and ripped the note loose and read it, and this is what Crawley had written:

Colby:

I thought you'd find out, and I'm glad you did. Thanks again for letting me know you knew, and for giving me time to get out of it my own way. This is it, Colby. This is the way. It was a tough break, that dumb kid seeing me kill Faye, but it's all right. I don't think I could have lived with myself very long, knowing all the time I was a murderer. I wasn't cut out for it.

I didn't really plan to kill her. I just walked down to the creek to find her and bring her back, and there she was with her dress

torn, and she'd been crying, and I could see someone had treated her rough. She said it was Fergus Cass who did it, and wanted me to go find him and kill him. Instead, I killed *her*. I finished what he'd started, and killed her. I guess I knew right along that she'd been carrying on with him. I just didn't want to admit it to myself. A man's pride keeps him from admitting things sometimes. Maybe later I'd have killed Fergus Cass, too. I was thinking about it, and so I guess it's better it's ending this way before I could.

You can imagine how surprised I was when the haystack caught fire. I was going back after dark to bury her. I had a place picked out.

I hope you find me soon, Colby. See that we're buried together.

5.

Well, hell. So it was just a misunderstanding. So I figured it was Fergus Cass, and all the time it was Crawley. I can see, looking back, how the misunderstanding came about naturally. When I came up from the creek with Snuffy Cleaker and said that Snuffy had seen someone choking Faye, not saying who it was Snuffy had seen, and then making that crack about Crawley knowing as well as I did who it was, why, what the hell was

he naturally to think? Being guilty, although I didn't know it, he thought there was only one person I could possibly mean, and that person was Crawley Bratton, although it wasn't. The only reason he could see for my not arresting

him then was just to give him a chance to take his own way out, and that's why he said thanks when I left, and took the way when I was gone.  
I'm glad he did, and I think it's time Virgil had my job.



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# KILL ONE KILL TWO

*The parcel came C.O.D. She didn't mind paying \$13.78 for it. After all, it contained \$50,000 in jewels.*

BY H. A. DE ROSSO



SHE WORE a cute little look of surprise and a proper pallor of fear when I found her. "Hello, Laura," I said. "Long time no see."

"Wes?" She made it sound like a question, as if she could not believe it was really me. "How on earth —?" She did not finish.

"It's my job to be able to trace people and find things," I said. "Remember?"

"But I thought Al Casey was handling it." Her voice started out bravely enough but quickly faltered. Color was slow in returning to her face. She was not coming out of it as quickly as I had expected and this was not like her. "You said they hadn't assigned it to you because we were friends and neighbors and—" Again her

voice died out without finishing.

"Not friends," I corrected her, "just neighbors. Anyway, Al hasn't been making any progress and when you up and disappeared I thought I'd take a crack at it—on my own. After all, those jewels were insured with us and I still work for the outfit."

She bowed her head and I could see her small, white teeth clamping a moment over her lower lip. The early morning sun made a golden blaze out of her blonde hair. She was a while like that, apparently thinking deeply. When her head lifted, she had hold of herself.

"I'm afraid my manners are not the best today, Wes," she said, and there was no faltering or fading away of her voice now. "Won't you come in? You look like you could stand a drink and so can I."

I sat and watched her moving about, the feline liteness of thighs and hips in the tight toreador pants, the thrust and jiggle of the well-filled blouse, all this for my benefit and distraction. With her back to me and mixing the drinks, she finished what she had started to say moments ago outside.

"How on earth did you find me here?"

I looked the small room over. The house was old; it sagged in one corner; the floor was uneven. "I remembered about Carl owning this place outside of Elsburg. Me and him came up here once to fish for steelheads in the Russian River.

So I thought I'd play a hunch. It worked."

Turning, she handed me my drink and then watched me with a long, level look. I found my heart beating a trifle faster and I couldn't help remembering the many times alone in my house and Carl, her husband, working nights and her alone, too, and next door to me and so available. These temptations I'd had many times but always there was the restraint, the holding back, because she was not always alone on those nights that Carl had been away and it all would have been too easy; and then there was that certain bitterness in me ever since the day Janet packed and walked out of my life without even a cold goodbye.

As though she had read my thoughts and was mocking me, she smiled, a quick, thin smile that did not quite reach her eyes. "And why should you even bother to play a hunch? I certainly don't have those precious stolen jewels your company is raising such a furor about."

"Don't you?" I asked quietly.

"Look, Wes," she said, and now she was hard, the hardness that comes from association with the garbage-and-gutter way of life, and I realized how little I really knew about her, just a two-year acquaintance as another man's wife, the partner in a marriage headed for the rocks just as mine had been and which had ended when he had conveniently got himself killed.

"I've been through all this with the L.A. cops. I'm tired of those same damn questions over and over. Just because Carl and a partner pulled a jewelry store stickup and Carl got shot when he went through a red light and didn't want to be stopped for questioning and somehow made it home to die right in his car. He died as I found him and he didn't have the jewels on him. Maybe he hid them someplace, maybe he threw them out the car window, maybe his partner has had them all the while. There's one thing for sure. I don't have the damn things and I don't want them. Do you think the cops would have let me leave L. A. if they thought I had anything to do with that stickup? I'm not hiding. I'm using my real name, Mrs. Laura Swain. I've come here because it's the only place I know to get away from people and those damn, sickening questions."

I took a sip of my drink and grinned at her angry, flushed face. Her chest heaved with fury and her fingers were clenched whitely about her drink. "Very good, Laura," I said. "You'd win an Oscar any time with that performance."

"Damn you, Wes Allison," she cried, and for a moment I thought she'd throw her drink at me. "When are you cops going to stop hounding me? Aren't you ever satisfied?"

"I have nothing to do with the cops," I pointed out. "The company

I work for keeps picking away at a case long after the cops give up."

"Why me?" she cried, and her voice turned plaintive now. "Why me? What about Carl's partner? Why don't you go after him?"

"Like I said, Al Casey's working on that angle. I'm checking on you—and Blake." I looked around. "By the way, where is he?"

That made her sit down and caused some of the color to leave her face again. She remembered her drink and lifted it and drained it without stopping. Then she watched me out of green, glaring eyes. "What—what are you driving at?"

"Roger Blake left L. A. with you, didn't he?"

Those eyes defied me. She shrugged and said nothing.

"Now, Laura," I said, "you aren't going to pretend you don't know Blake. For a long time I've been aware of certain comings and goings at night at your house. After all, we were neighbors. Remember?"

"You dirty pig."

"Of course, there wasn't just Blake. Wasn't there also a George Oliver? And a Lee Thornton? And a Dominic Angelo? You see, Laura, I took the time to learn a lot of things about you—after Carl got killed."

"You dirty abominable pig."

"Sticks and stones may hurt my bones," I chanted.

She used an obscene expression.

Then the fury ebbed from her and she grew thoughtful and began to watch me as from a distance, warily, ponderingly. "All right," she said. "So Roger came with me. I'm not married any more. So what's wrong with that?"

I was going to point out that it hadn't made any difference to her even when she was married but decided to forego it. That would only rouse her wrath again and avail me nothing of what I was after.

"Where is he?"

The pause was so slight I hardly caught it. "Gone down to Frisco."

"Oh?"

"Something to do with investments. He's a broker, you know."

"Couldn't he have just as easily called from Elsburg? Or don't they have phones north of Frisco?"

"Maybe it was something that couldn't be transacted over the phone. How should I know? He's never gone into detail with me about his business."

"Your car is outside," I said. "You both came north in it."

Her eyes threw knives at me. "I drove him to Elsburg. He took a bus from there."

"When do you expect him back?"

She seemed to withdraw ever so slightly and watch me from a new perspective. A tiny pulse began to beat in her throat. "Just what are you trying to insinuate?"

"Nothing, Laura. We're just sitting here, two old neighbors from

down in good old L. A. Why not pass the time with a little conversation?"

"You're not one bit funny."

"Okay. I'll cut the comedy. When is Blake coming back?"

Something in my tone made her sit up straighter in the chair. The green eyes were hostile now; there was no mistaking that. "Tomorrow. The day after. He didn't know for sure."

"Is he that trusting?"

"Listen, you," she cried, "I've had just about enough out of you. Now get out of here."

I shook my head. "I'm not going, Laura. Prepare yourself for a long visit."

She was on her feet, trembling with fury. "All right. So you think I've got those jewels. Well, search this house then. Search it to your complete satisfaction. Then get the hell out and don't ever let me see you again . . ."

I knew I wouldn't find what I was looking for but I searched anyway, out of perversity, perhaps, but mostly to see how far I could provoke her. She wouldn't have urged me into searching had the jewels, worth some \$50,000, been in the house. I knew she was quite clever that way because I had gone through her home in L. A. without any results.

She jeered me at first, telling me to look here, or there, or why not over yonder, mocking me, laughing at me. But as I persisted her jibes

lessened and I began to detect a worried note in her tone. I had provoked her very well so that in her anger she had not considered all the consequences.

"Why don't you give up, Wes?" she said. "You know you won't find anything. You're just making an ass out of yourself."

I paid her no heed and went on looking. There was an old chest of drawers in the bedroom and she tried to get to the top drawer ahead of me. "There's just some underthings in there, Wes," she said, trying hard to blush. "That's all."

I grabbed her arm as it was coming out and twisted it hard, bringing a scream out of her, and then belted her one that sent her stumbling across the room but not before I had in my hand what had been in that drawer. It was an automatic pistol.

Neither one of us said anything for a while. The only sound was that of her breathing as she straightened up from where she had fallen to her knees. All the time she watched me with an expression containing a mixture of anxiety and calculation and fear. I just stood there, hefting the pistol in my hand and staring at her.

"Don't you see, Wes?" she said, spreading her hands in a gesture of appeal. "I knew you'd get the wrong impression. That's why I didn't want you to find the gun. I hate guns. I'm deathly afraid of

them," she said, and shuddered. "Roger left it with me. For protection. Way out here in the country with no immediate neighbors, I'm scared to be alone. So Roger left that—that thing with me so I'd feel better." Her eyes were big and pleading. "Don't you believe me, Wes?"

"I haven't said anything yet."

"But I can tell from the way you're looking at me. Please, Wes. Can't you understand what I've been through? Carl dying in my arms and the robbery and all that awful, endless questioning. Can't you realize the hell I've been through? There are times when I think I'm actually out of my mind. I didn't mean to do anything that you're thinking, Wes. I just didn't want you to find the gun. There's nothing else I've got to hide."

I slipped the clip out of the pistol and saw that two cartridges were missing. I smelled the muzzle. Then I slid the clip back in place.

"This gun's been fired, Laura, and quite recently."

"That was Roger. Before he left this morning. He shot at something. To show me how it works."

"Then Blake left this morning?"

"Very early."

I stared at her. "I can check the bus schedules in Elsburg. Should I do that, Laura?"

She had no answer for that. The look on her face was lost and dismayed and for an instant I almost felt sorry for her . . .

We stood outside in the yard. There were hills on either side of us and off to the west the timber-clad crests of the Pacific Coast Range. Not a house could be seen from where we stood; the only signs of habitation were the symmetrical patterns of the vineyards on some distant, ruddy slopes.

She stood with head bowed and shoulders slumped, looking rather small and helpless and pathetic. She must have sensed the brief passage of pity through me not so long ago and so was trying to revive it in me. But I would not allow it to touch me again. I just looked around, at her car and mine parked in the yard and at the old, empty winery and then up at the blue California sky and at the vulture soaring and banking high up there with the foul and obscene patience of its kind.

Something clicked in my mind. "What's down in that gully?" I asked, pointing at the willow and liveoak obscured scar in the floor of this ravine. "A creek?"

She looked at me with a sharp scuttling of fear across her features. Her nod was her only reply. I glanced up again at the vulture sailing slowly on motionless wings.

"Is that all, Laura?"

"What do you mean?" Her voice was barely audible.

I pointed up at the vulture. "Don't you know what that is? They're carrion eaters. They won't touch anything that's alive."

"What are you trying to do to me, Wes?" Two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Are those tears for me or for Blake, Laura?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." She tried to fling the words at me but the attempt did not come off too well.

"Should we go for a walk, Laura? Down along the creek? And toss rocks in the water? Didn't you ever do that when you were a kid? Or weren't you ever a kid?"

"Just what are you trying to do, Wes?"

"Take you for a walk. Along the creek. Won't you come?"

I took her elbow but she wrenched away from me violently and with a hoarse sob ran into the house. I followed slowly and paused in the doorway and watched her weeping with her face against the wall. I tried hard but that brief flash of pity wouldn't come any more . . .

After a while I got the whiskey bottle and poured a good slug of it in a water glass and forced it into her hand. Once she realized what it was she threw it down straight and hardly make a face. Slowly color came back into her cheeks.

"You might as well own up, Laura," I said. "All I have to do is look. Blake is down in that gully, isn't he?"

"It was an accident. He was cleaning his gun and it—"

"For Christ's sake, Laura, how long do you expect me to keep swallowing all your lies?" I slammed the table so loud with my hand that she jumped. "All I want from you is the truth from now on. Just the plain, old-fashioned, unvarnished kind. Understand?"

"Please, Wes," she said, putting her face in her hands, and I thought she was going to start crying again but she didn't. "I don't feel so good. Honest. All that liquor. I'm not used to drinking. Could I have some black coffee to clear my head?"

I waved a hand at the stove where a coffee pot simmered on a gas burner. "Be my guest."

I stayed in the doorway while she drank. The coffee steadied her. She was quite dry-eyed when she looked at me again.

"All right, Laura," I said. "Tell me."

"He—he got abusive. He'd been drinking and—"

"Oh, Laura," I said wearily, "not that again. Don't try to tell me that a slip of a woman like you dragged a two-hundred pounder like Blake down into that gully. There's no sign of a struggle or of blood either in this house or the yard. You probably marched Blake down there and shot him. He knew you'd taken the jewels from Carl before the cops arrived and he wanted a split. That's why he wouldn't let

you out of his sight and came north with you. So to get him out of the way you killed him. Now we've got that settled. There's just one thing more to clear up. Where are those rocks?"

"I haven't got them. Honest, Wes. You searched the house, didn't you?"

"Listen, Laura," I said through my teeth. "Listen to me real careful. I know you've got them. I've come a long way and worked hard for this and I'm not going to let you foul me up. One way or another I'm going to make you tell. It would save both of us a lot of unpleasantness if you'd cooperate."

She took a long, measuring look of my face. Then her eyes shifted, into the distance as though she were going over something very carefully and thoroughly in her mind. Finally, she sucked in her breath and spoke.

"It wouldn't help me very much, would it? I mean, there's Roger. I could get the gas chamber for that. What's the percentage in my telling you where those jewels are? You just go to hell, Wes Allison."

She was a hard one, all right. I'd never misjudged her in that respect. Hard and callous and conniving and treacherous. Beautiful and inviting and desirable but I'd as soon take a cobra to bed with me.

It was a while before I could find something to say. "We could

let the vultures worry about Blake. My company insured the jewels, not him."

She laughed quietly. There was a note of triumph in her tone and it angered me because she had finally got me to commit myself.

"Why return all those pretty jewels to your company, Wes? Why not just half of them? You could always say Carl's partner had the other half."

"I want those rocks," I growled. "Damn you, Laura, quit horsing around. I want them and I mean to get them."

"Fifty-fifty?" she said teasingly.

I looked at her, at the bright, deceptive smile, the half-veiled invitation in the green eyes, and I remembered Carl and Roger Blake, both dead, and I told myself I would not be honor bound to keep any bargain I made with her. All that mattered was to get those jewels. So I said:

"Fifty-fifty it is . . ."

She had been really clever about hiding them. The idea had come to her from her experience in ordering things COD and, if she did not have the cash on hand, the post office would hold a parcel for up to ten days. So she had placed the jewels in a parcel addressed to herself at Elsburg and mailed it COD and it was at this very moment in the post office at Elsburg waiting for her to pay the charges and claim it.

I checked my watch. "You're go-

ing to call up the post office," I said, "and have them send that COD out with the rural carrier and I'll be right with you when you get it from him."

"But there's no phone here, Wes."

"I remember a beer joint about a mile from here. They should have a phone."

We had to wait for more than two hours before the rural carrier would arrive at her mail box. We spent most of that time back at the house. I drank black coffee and so did she. Both of us wanted clear heads for what lay ahead.

She tried to make small talk but I was no longer in the mood for conversation. I only grunted or made no answer to all her sallies and she finally gave it up. She sat across the room from me, watching me silently and thoughtfully, eyes falling now and then to the pistol I had taken from her and which I had tucked in my waistband.

We left a half hour before the mailman was due to make sure we would not miss him. I parked the car in the road leading to the house and close to the mail box.

"Don't try anything funny," I said to her. "Speak up so I can hear everything you say. And if you should get any ideas just remember Blake. You killed him, not me. So you're the one with the most to lose."

Her face looked pale and tense. But there was no trace of fear in it



and she seemed composed and in full control of herself. She nodded acknowledgment of my instructions. She was very quiet now as the time drew near.

She was standing by the mail box, waiting for the carrier, when his car pulled up. She gave him the bright, flashing smile and asked if he had the COD for Mrs. Swain and she was so sorry to have made them hold the parcel but she had just simply been flat broke until today and innocently asked how much the charges were and pretended that the \$13.78 was more than she had expected but she paid cheerfully and gave him the smile again and a wave as he drove off.

She held the parcel very tightly in her lap all the way back to the house and I had to smile a little at that. "There's one thing bothering me," I said. "Who is the post office going to send that COD money to?"

"A false name and address I gave when I mailed it in L. A. What difference does it make? What's in here is worth a lot more than \$13.78."

By the time we reached the house she was in good spirits. "I'll let you have the pleasure of opening it," she said. "After all, half of it is yours. I'm going to have a cup of coffee with a good slug of liquor in it. How about you, Wes?"

"Make mine black."

I sat at the table and began to

open the parcel while she got the coffee. She was chattering gaily all the while as though all her troubles were over and there was nothing to worry about any more.

"Fifty-fifty. That's not bad. It still leaves me with about \$25,000, doesn't it, Wes? You know, it's a shame splitting all that money. Why don't we just go off together? You don't want to keep on working for that lousy company of yours, do you? I could really go for you, Wes. I tried getting that across to you for the past year, ever since Janet walked out on you, but you just wouldn't react. What's the matter? Still carrying the torch for her? Believe me, she's not worth it. I'm no angel but there are things I could tell you about her. Why not think it over, Wes?"

I guess it was the excitement of seeing those jewels there before me and picking up the necklaces and brooches and holding them in my fingers and so I grew careless, for only a few seconds, but it was enough for her. She came toward me with a cup of steaming coffee and before I knew it the coffee was all over my shirt and I was shouting with pain and cursing as I jumped to my feet. She moved like a tigress, coming in behind me and reaching around to grab the pistol out of my waistband while I, like a damn fool, was trying to hold the wet, hot cloth of my shirt away from my scalded flesh.

She came around in front of me and aimed the pistol at my belly. The smile on her mouth was just a parting of the lips. Only cruelty and determination were in her eyes.

"Yes, Wes," she said, "I can really shoot. If you doubt it, just try something."

I stood there, silently cursing myself for the fool I had been. All along I had known her for what she was. Still, I had allowed the sight of those rocks to throw me off-guard. There was no one to blame for that but myself.

"You were right, Wes," she went on when I said nothing. "Carl had the jewels on him when he drove home. I don't know how he made it. He must have passed out as soon as he stopped the car. He was unconscious when I found him and he died as I was going through his pockets. Roger arrived then and wanted a share to keep his mouth shut. I strung him along until I got him up here where I wanted him. Yes, he's in the gully, Wes. Let's go take a look at him, shall we?"

There was not much sense in resisting. She held the pistol quite easily and nonchalantly, the way a person familiar with fire-arms would. There was a certain relaxed wariness about her which was more dangerous than a tense, vigilant attitude. She knew just exactly what she was going to do and you could bet that she was going to do it.

For a few seconds I was tempted to say the hell with everything and let her shoot me down right there. But then I got to thinking that as long as I was alive there might be a chance. But where was I to find it?

Blake lay on his face with his feet at the edge of the creek which was only inches deep here. I could hear Laura breathing in short, quick gasps just behind me. My heart was racing as though trying to get in as many beats as it could before it was stilled forever.

"You're a lousy shot, Laura," I said. "Blake is still breathing."

I gambled on her woman's curiosity and the fact that there had to be some excitement and turmoil in her. After all, she had been quite shook up that morning when I had appeared probably not long after she had shot Blake. I was right for she stepped to the side and craned her neck to look around me.

That was the fastest I've ever moved in my life. The pistol went off but not before I had batted her arm aside. The pain of the blow made her drop the gun and I scooped it up and fired.

She saw it coming and lifted her hands in a mute gesture of pleading but there was no stopping me now. I fired and she gave a small shriek and sank to the ground on her side. Blood began to stain her blouse. The eyes that stared up at me were wide with shock and hurt and unbelief.

"It's no more than you intended giving me," I said to her. "Remember? Besides, it wouldn't have made any difference, Laura. I was going to kill you anyway. Those rocks are mine and I never intended sharing them with anyone, including you."

Her lips moved but no sounds emerged.

"Haven't you been able to dope it out yet?" I went on. "Carl and a partner pulled that jewelry stickup. While the partner went to establish an alibi, Carl took off for home with all the rocks. He'd have made it all right if he hadn't run a red light and panicked when the squad car took after him. The cops opened fire and tagged him bad but somehow he managed to give them the slip and make it home. He probably died from loss of blood. Are you reading me yet, Laura? Don't you realize yet why

I was so positive you had the rocks? I was Carl's partner."

It was my intention to leave her there to die. Just climb out of the gully and walk away. She wouldn't be found for a long time, not until she would be very much dead. But as I poked my head above the rim of the gully I looked right into the muzzle of a .38.

Al Casey's eyes were the coldest I'd ever seen them. "You never should have taken that leave of absence and followed Laura, Wes. That was when they assigned me to tail you because they got to thinking that you might have been Carl Swain's partner." He stole a look down at Laura. "She should live if we get her to a doctor soon enough. That way you'll have company when you go to the gas chamber. Isn't that nice?"

Yes, I thought silently, that's very nice . . .



## **Next...let's conquer mental illness!**



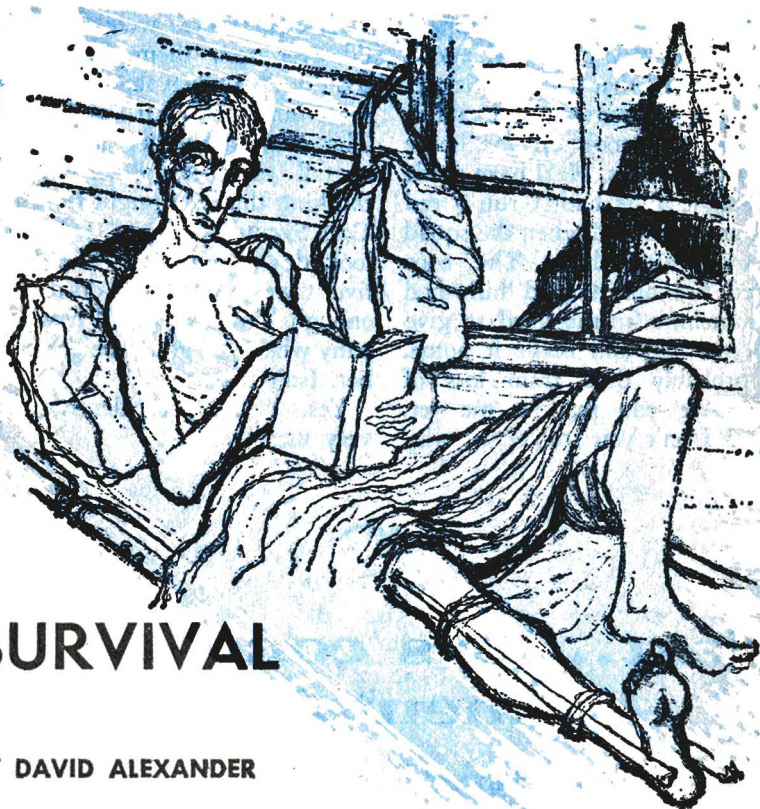
**Support Your  
Mental Health Association.  
Give at the Sign of the  
Ringing Bell!**

**W**HEN you see an avalanche roar down a mountain, you believe in God.

Not the new God of peace and compassion and forgiveness, but the old, fierce God of wrath and vengeance whose eyes were lit with lightning and whose voice was thunder in the hills. Only such a

God could make a mountain tear itself apart.

We were on the topmost ledge of the peak the Swiss call God's Staircase, standing outside the log-girded summit house, when we heard the first low rumblings of disaster. In the beginning there was only a faint patter as tiny pebbles



## SURVIVAL

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

*Linda was a loving and devoted wife. She saw to her husband's every need. But she was also a very practical woman.*

bounced from ledge to ledge, and then the sharp staccato of a stony hailstorm, and finally the rending crash as tons of tight-packed snow exploded into a lethal torrent. Boulders that were old when dinosaurs walked the earth were belched up suddenly to skip and hurtle and pound as they broke the mountain's granite face.

For half an hour, for thirty minutes that were all Eternity, the three of us—my wife Linda, the Swiss guide Keller, and myself—stood there suspended in awesome space as the terrifying tidal wave swept by within a hundred feet of us. Fragments of rock and shards of ice-hard snow were spewed into our faces, but none of us moved. We simply stood there staring at this unbelievable spectacle. When the old, forgotten God returns to show his might, you do not turn away.

When the thing was finally over we saw that half the topmost shelf, the shelf on which we roosted precariously, had been sheared away. All the other ledges had disappeared and we knew at once that there was no way down. We would almost surely die here in a little log house suspended a mile above the earth.

We thought of the pleasant village beneath the clouds and of the laughing, rosy people, buried now forever beneath a new mountain made of rubble.

God's Staircase is the most pe-

culiar peak in all of Switzerland—but I should not use the present tense. It *was* the most peculiar, before the avalanche sliced half of it away. It stood remote from other mountains. From a distance it resembled a slender spindle thrusting up into the clouds, or a gnarled finger pointing to Infinity. On three sides it had been sheer, slick rock, with no hand-holds, no foot-holds. A mountaineer, however foolish and daring he might be, would never have attempted to scale those sides. The fourth side afforded the easiest climb in Europe. Even fat old ladies encased in rigid corsets could conquer the fourth side of the mountain without undue exertion. That was why the villagers compared it to a staircase.

In some remote age of earth a slowly grinding glacier had made a serrated design on one side of the mountain so that it resembled a jagged saw-blade. There was a pattern of ledges, some narrow, some comfortably wide, from top to bottom. Climbing God's Staircase had always been an amusement rather than a feat. There had been little difficulty in moving upward—or downward—from ledge to ledge. Now the avalanche had struck, it was impossible to move either up or down.

The three of us were stranded in Eternity as effectively as space-men in a runaway rocket.

I can remember now how Schweder, the fat innkeeper, had warned

us against the climb. In the spring, he said, the mountain clears its throat and some day it will cough and the whole village will be destroyed. Keller, our guide had laughed at him and chided him for being an old woman.

"There has been no avalanche in the memory of the oldest man," he said. "It is safer to scale the peak than to climb your creaky stairs, Innkeeper."

I had not wanted to make the climb. I have never been a physical man and I have had little exercise since I was a child. I can see no point at all in knocking a small ball over acres of ground, even though this appears to be the sport of Presidents. It seems to me to be sheer cruelty to make bloody holes in animals with bullets or to rip the mouths of fish with jagged hooks. I am a novelist, you see, a novelist and a poet. I am most at peace with myself in my book-lined study in a quiet old house. I am entirely happy only when I am putting words on paper. That is why I am scribbling in my journal now, despite the unendurable pain, despite the gnawing hunger in my stomach, despite the fact that Death stands here beside me, hovering like a white-faced nurse, waiting patiently. A writer must always write, even at a time like this.

When we came to Switzerland I certainly entertained no idea of climbing a mountain. It was Linda who insisted that we should scale

God's Staircase. Linda is a strong woman and a determined woman. She is also a very physical woman. She nearly always finds a way of doing exactly what she wants to do.

Linda and I had been drifting further and further apart in recent years. We had come to Europe on a kind of second honeymoon in the hope of saving our marriage. I suppose that basically the trouble was our lack of mutual interests. Linda seldom reads books, although she makes an effort to read the ones I write. She loves the outdoors and excels in sports. She plays tennis and golf and rides to hounds and it seems to me that she has spent more time in the summers swimming in water than she has spent walking on dry land.

The walls of my study are decorated with delicate and charming Japanese prints by Hiroshige and Sharaku and Hokusai and many other masters. Linda has expressed admiration for only two of the beautiful prints in my large collection. She likes a portrait of a rearing horse by Harunobu and a wrestling scene by Suncho. The rest of our home belongs to Linda. At least she has appropriated it. The walls of the living room and dining room and halls are cluttered with prints of beefy men, whose faces are as crimson as their coats, mounted on leaping horses.

Linda says that our widely different interests are not the real cause of the trouble that arose between

us. She says my gnawing jealousy is the true reason. It is a fact that I am jealous of Linda's admiration of other men. I have no proof that she has ever been unfaithful to me. Still, there have been ugly stories linking Linda with Benson, the golf professional at the country club, and with young Aldrich who is usually her partner in mixed doubles, and even with the gross and fattening Gaines who is a Master of Foxhounds, whatever that may mean.

Linda says I criticize her too much. It's true that her eating habits used to annoy me almost as much as her strenuous physical life. I do not see how a woman can possibly retain a figure as lovely as Linda's and still eat heavy meals of meat, potatoes and rich desserts. I have always been a spare eater myself. A single lamb chop, a green salad and rice pudding for a sweet used to comprise a feast for me.

Now that I am on the verge of starvation I confess that my mind is swimming with dreams of the rich and heavy food that Linda fancies. Oddly enough, now that there is no possibility of gratifying the fleshly appetites these unholy lusts overwhelm me. I do not deeply regret the books and poems I did not write. I regret that I was not a glutton and a lecher while I had the chance of gratifying the hungers of the body. Human beings like to think that in their final

hours they turn their minds to God and dwell only upon matters of the eternal spirit. This is false. When you know that death is near, that it is inevitable, you become an animal. Your mind is occupied entirely with yearning for the most primitive pleasures of the flesh.

When they feed me my ever-decreasing rations, I wolf down like the slavering mastiff Linda once owned wolfed down raw meat. That dog was the beginning of the trouble between Linda and myself. Linda threatened to divorce me when she discovered that I had poisoned the disgusting beast. Now I am little better than the dog. I exist from morsel to morsel that Linda and Keller give me. Sometimes I whine and beg for more. When Linda is near, I reach out a claw-like hand to touch her wasting body and an overmastering, though impotent, desire burns in me. Yes, I have become an animal. Even in this extremity, Linda and the guide named Keller have managed to cling to some shred of human dignity. Both still have hope, I think, but hope died in me long ago. Because of my broken leg, I am completely dependent upon them. They must do everything for me. I know they have given me more than my share of the scant supply of tinned food with which the summit house was stocked against an emergency like ours. Now the food is gone. Half an hour ago I was fed the last of it.

Even now, Linda does not despair. When I sobbed and begged for just a teaspoon more, she had to tell me that the rations were completely exhausted, that she and Keller had given me the last. When I finished the last food I will ever taste, Linda put her thin arm around my shoulders and tried to comfort me.

"Don't worry, darling," she said. "There has to be some way down the mountain. I will find the way before it's too late. I promise you." She managed an almost cheerful little laugh. "Love will find a way," she added.

Linda's habit of uttering clichés as if they were original and witty remarks used to grate on me.

Now I said, my voice so weak I could barely whisper, "Do you really love me, Linda? Did you really love me all the time?"

She gave my shoulder a squeeze and said, "Of course, you foolish darling. And I love life. I do not want to die. I am going to find a way to live."

I dozed off into one of my fitful sleeps after writing the above. In reading it over, I see my narrative is wandering, and I wish to be coherent, for there is at least a chance that the journal will be found some day. Pain and hunger do something to the mind. It is difficult to think clearly, to set down things in their proper order. But I will try.

As I have said, it was Linda who insisted upon climbing the peak

called God's Staircase. I refused point-blank and we arrived at another of the small and silly crises that have been too frequent during our married life. Linda stated that she would make the climb, even if I did not go. I could not tolerate that, of course. She would be alone on the summit with Keller, the guide, and he was the physical type of man I have always heartily detested, a stocky, ruddy fellow with fair hair and bright blue eyes. I had seen Linda looking at the Switzer covertly, the way she always looks at male animals who appeal to her.

And so the three of us made the climb, despite the landlord's grumbled warnings.

I suppose the climb was an easy one, as Keller had said. Yet by the time we were half-way up I was choking for breath and my body was slimy with sweat. My wife and Keller seemed to find the ascent only a mildly exhilarating experience. Neither was even breathing hard. They tried to conceal their annoyance at the slow progress I was making, for I was holding them back, of course. At last we thrust our heads through low-hanging snow clouds and reached the final shelf at the top of the peak. I dropped down, completely exhausted.

It was a few moments later that the mountain began to "clear its throat" as Schweder, the landlord, had predicted. Within seconds the



bellowing thunder of snow and rock began.

When it was finally over I stood for moments dazed by shock. And then I screamed at Keller, "How will we get down? How will we get down again?"

Keller examined the havoc carefully before he answered. Then he shook his head and said, "There is no way down."

I became hysterical. My voice was little more than a womanish screech. "You have to get us down! We can't just die up here."

Keller looked at me with contempt. He threw out his arms and gestured toward the village that was hidden beneath the snow clouds.

"We are better off than the ones down there," he said. "They are already buried. My father and my mother and my sister are all buried in the village."

I could waste no pity on Keller and his lost relatives. Our own predicament was too urgent.

"But we're alive!" I cried. "You must find a way down. You're our guide and it's your duty to take us down safely!"

Linda spoke softly, as if she were conversing with herself. "There has to be a way," she said. "There's always some way out."

Keller was exasperatingly calm.

"It has begun to snow," he said. "The clouds hang very low and there is fog in the valley. There is no way down, and there is no way

up, either. No rescue party could try to scale this peak now. But there is a chance. There is the little plane from the military post, the one that has the funny windmill on top of it. It is possible it can land on this ledge and take us off. But not now, and not tomorrow. Not until the weather clears. And no one can say when that may be. No one knows when the snow and fog may disappear in these mountains. Perhaps a few days from now. Perhaps a few months."

"We must signal somehow," I said. "We must. . . ."

"There is no use," Keller interrupted. "No one could see our signals through the clouds and fog and snow. And they will be quite busy down there for many days digging out the bodies. But it could be worse. We have shelter in the summit house. There are cots and blankets inside. There is a stove and firewood. We guides have stocked the place with tinned food, bought out of the small fees we earn from tourists. It will last awhile if we are careful. We can melt snow for water. My fellow-guide and friend, Jan Brucker, knows we made the climb today. He is taking a party up Thunder Ridge, miles from here, and he will have missed the avalanche. He will tell the military post we are on God's Staircase. When the little windmill plane can fly, they will search for us."

"And when will that be?" I screamed. "When, Guide, when?"

The Switzer remained calm. "I cannot answer that," he said. "Perhaps the little plane will come in time, perhaps not. It all depends upon the weather. We must use what rations we have very carefully. By the way, there is *schnapps* inside the log house, too. You are trembling. You can use a glass."

His tone infuriated me. I was even more enraged by Linda, who put her hand on my arm and spoke to me as if she were a patient mother soothing a squawling child.

"We will find aay," she said. "There is always some way. Keller has been climbing this peak for many years. He knows every detail of the mountain the way you know every detail of your Oriental prints."

Her words drove me mad with fury. In this life-and-death emergency she relied entirely upon the strength and resourcefulness of this stocky blond stranger. She looked upon her husband as a helpless, puny, effeminate man, good for nothing but such precious pastimes as collecting Japanese color-prints.

Linda's word goaded me to an act of ridiculous bravado.

"I will find a way down!" I yelled at them.

And I began to run forward over the slippery rock, toward the path we had ascended, the path the avalanche had crushed. When I reached the precipice, I looked down. The clouds parted for a mo-

ment and I could see the sheer, awful drop. But I had to make a gesture, I had to impress Linda, who was calling after me in a frightened voice. I had to dare a thing the phlegmatic Switzer refused to attempt.

I saw that just below our shelf, before the naked plunge of almost vertical cliffside, there was a slight protuberance of rock, heaped over with the rubble of the landslide. I was sick and dizzy, but I began to lower myself carefully and slowly over the precipice, seeking a foothold in the debris of broken rock and snow. It was a completely futile risk that I was taking, for even if I found a foothold just below, there was no possibility of my proceeding farther.

My left foot touched something that seemed solid, but the rubble parted under me like quicksand and my whole leg was sucked down into the pile of snow and rock. And then the boulder itself gave way and went plummeting down the mountain and my kneecap banged against the hard side of the peak, and I was dangling by my fingertips, it seemed. A sickening pain stabbed my leg from ankle to hipbone, and I screamed.

Keller managed to lift me back to the ledge. He examined me and found my leg was broken. I am a small, slight man. Keller had little trouble lifting me in his arms and carrying me into the log house. He placed me on a rude bed. I was still

screaming in my agony. There was a little cache of medicines in the log house, as well as food and firewood. The Switzer found a syrette of morphine and injected the narcotic into my arm. Then he took pieces of firewood and the coiled rope from his belt and devised a splint of sorts.

I cannot tell you how long ago that was. I am sure that Linda and Keller have kept track of time, but I am afraid to ask them how long we have been here. I only know that they say the snow and fog still screen the peak where I lay dying.

The little log house is partitioned into two sections. Linda sleeps in here with me and sometimes she sits beside my bed, holding my hand, assuring me that she will find a way. But she spends more and more time in the other room with Keller. Perhaps that is because I am too weak to talk much to her.

I can hear Linda's footsteps now. She is coming toward the door. Perhaps she has found more food. Oh, please, God, please! Make Linda bring me food!

Linda did not bring food. When I complained, she told me there was none to bring. Instead she gave me an injection of morphine. She told me it was the last syrette. When the effect wears off, I will be left to suffer unendurable pain, and to starve to death. . . .

. . . I have waited a while before continuing this record. I tried

to sleep. But I have become immune to morphine, it seems. To please Linda, I closed my eyes and breathed heavily. She thought that I was sleeping as she tiptoed back to Keller's room. She left the door open a crack, and I could hear them talking. Perhaps the pain and the hunger have sharpened my sense of hearing. I could hear them quite clearly, although they spoke in low voices, fearing to awaken me.

Linda said, "Keller, will the helicopter come in time?"

"The what?" asked Keller dully.

"The helicopter. The little windmill plane."

There was a long silence before Keller spoke. "I will tell you truthfully," he said. "The little plane will come, but I do not think now that it will come in time. We are very weak. We have been here a long while and all the food is gone. And we gave most of what we had to your husband. No, I do not think our lives will outlast the fog and snow that keep the little plane away."

Linda spoke very softly. "I have found a way, Keller. We must not die. I have a plan that will save our lives."

Linda told Keller of her plan. I listened in amazement. It was so obvious, so simple. I could not understand why she had not thought of it before. She is such a clever woman, equal to any emergency. Now that I know Linda has a plan,

I am hardly conscious of the searing pain in my leg or the gnawing hunger in my belly. I can even smile. There is nothing I have to do now but wait. . . . .

. . . . . I have not waited very long. I can hear Linda coming toward my door. I wonder if she will

tell me of her plan of the way that she has found. No, of course not. She will think it much better to have it come as a surprise to me.

There is no need to tell me. I have heard them talking and I know exactly what they are going to do.

They are going to eat me.



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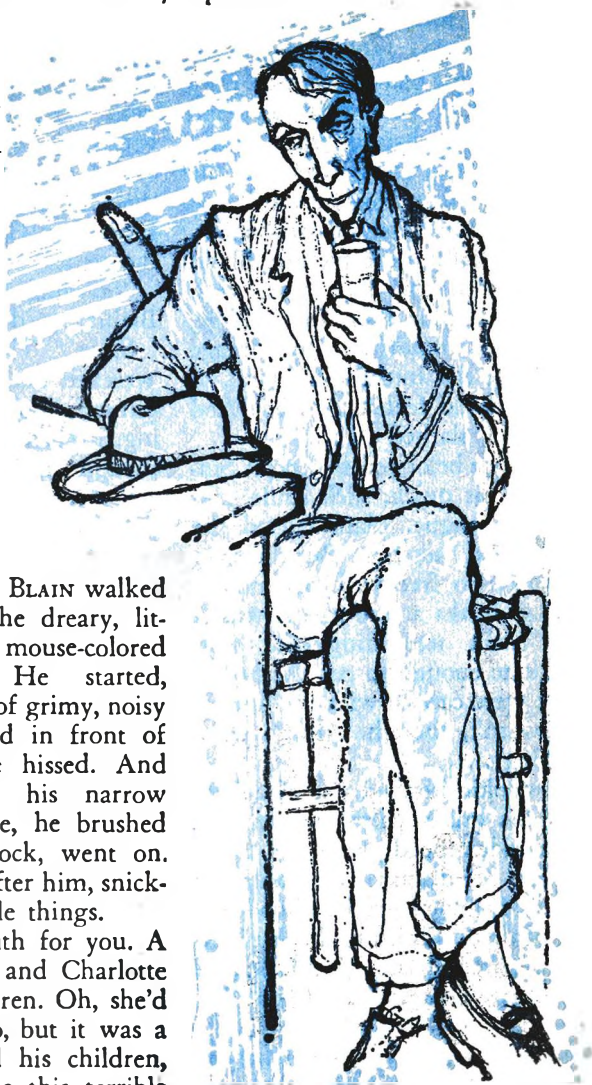
*The brothers Seene were insurance adjusters. Their office was just off the Bowery near the waterfront. Quiet and unpretentious, their adjustments were of a permanent nature.*

# DEADLY ERROR

BY  
AVRAM  
DAVIDSON  
AND  
CHESTER  
COHEN

GROVER CLEVELAND BLAIN walked slowly down the dreary, littered street, his mouse-colored brows fluttering. He started, gasped, when a pair of grimy, noisy kids suddenly darted in front of him. "Gamins!" he hissed. And scowled, tightening his narrow lips. With a gesture, he brushed back his thin forelock, went on. The gamins stared after him, snickering. Snickering vile things.

That was the youth for you. A good thing that he and Charlotte had never had children. Oh, she'd said she'd wanted to, but it was a lie. If she'd wanted his children, could she have done this terrible thing to him? No.



Gradually, the thin slack face relaxed from its scowl, and the eyes went glassy. He was staring at the rough and broken sidewalk as he walked. In his mind the jagged cracks became bloody wounds, gory slashes on a face with a blond mustache. A hateful face. Blain was glad he'd always refused the hints to paint it. No—he was sorry. Else he could have the satisfaction, now, of slashing the picture. Bland and smooth the face was, with washed-out blue eyes, and a large, full-lipped mouth . . . the image of a knife slid into Blain's hand, so real he could feel it . . . he lifted it, ripped, slashed . . .

The face belonged to Joseph Sinia, with his quick, slick smile, and his glib tongue. Blain cursed the day he had met him. But the man had been so free with his money, buying drinks at the bar. It wasn't that Blain was stingy—he gave Charlotte enough to run the house, if she were careful with the money. She wasn't, though. Always complaining . . .

A smokie lurched out of a hallway, his grimy palm outstretched. Blain sidestepped, with an exclamation of disgust. He hated a cadger. Damned neighborhood was full of them. Finish up his business and depart in haste. Find J. Starr & Company. Get it there. Poetic justice. . . .

Sinia never would say what he did for a living. The thing to do was to have forbidden him the

house. But he was always coming up with bottles of wine, imported beer, roasted chickens, things like that. Figure it up, in the course of a month, it made quite a difference in the household accounts. And with magazine art-directors the way they were (damn them, too!)—why, it was only a month ago that one of them had as much as sneered at Grover Blain for refusing to accept a suggestion.

"Starving for art in the pulps, Blain?" he'd sneered.

Sinia. The man who had wrecked his life. Blain growled to himself, "So he's big. Size is nothing. Probably muscle-bound." This thought, mildly consoling, brought a flickering smile to Grover's thin lips. Briefly.

Two weeks ago the Blains had been still happily married. At least *he'd* been happy. His life was quiet, orderly; his work was going better than usual. There was the commission, for example, to do the two cover paintings for a prominent second-rate magazine. Biggest assignment in months. He rushed home to bring the happy news to his wife.

They could invite Sinia, hold a little party. Sinia would bring the refreshments. "Why, Joe's practically a member of the family," Charlotte used to say, whenever Grover would complain. So—let him pay for the privilege. What *did* he do for a living, anyway? Odd that he should have a pawnbroker's

card on him. Because, whatever he did, it obviously paid well. Pay. Oh yes, Sinia would pay!

Blain's eyes burned now, as he pictured his wife's lovely green eyes, set in a soft, sweet face, framed by a shining mass of chestnut hair. Oh—it's true, in angry moments he'd said she had pop-eyes, said the face was not so much soft as flabby, said the hair—but what of it? Man's got a right to lose his temper, hasn't he?

And then his shallow jaw set grimly, as he remembered the curt note he had found on his drawing table when he burst in with the news.

*"Sorry, Grover, but I've had all I can take. Now I have someone who appreciates me and I won't be back. Joe's lawyer will see you about a divorce."* But she had not been entirely oblivious to her husband's welfare. The note went on, *"There's a lambchop in the icebox. You can open a can of peas. Good-bye, Charlotte."*

A lambchop! His life in ruins—and she—Is that how little she'd thought of him all these years? Just a mouth to feed? A lambchop in exchange for a wife? Why, a weaker man would have wept.

Blain's thin mouth curled, thinking of it, hatefully. At that rate, a harem-full of wives would have rated him a T-bone steak!

When he read that note something in Blain's mind snapped. He

tore the note to shreds and then raged around the apartment smashing furniture, spilling paint, slashing canvas and paper—the sketches he had done of Charlotte—beautiful, bored Charlotte. For days he had sat brooding among the ruins, tortured with pain and with hate.

So now he found himself in the dirty gloom of the Bowery—dingy bars and filthy flop-houses, restaurants with menus scrawled in white paste on the window glass, men stumbling along, begging, cursing, lying sprawled in hallways, gutters. Blain's burning eyes scanned the store-fronts.

In the middle of a long block, cluttered with second-hand clothiers' stores, barber colleges offering cut-rate services, tattoo parlours (*Mother, God Bless America, Lindy Lou, U.S.N., Liberty or Death, True Love*), and greasy spoon joints, he found the pawn-shop. It was a small place, dimly lit, flanked by saloons. J. Starr & Company.

The card had fallen out of Sinia's pocket once. Grover found it between two twenty-dollar bills almost out of sight behind the seat-cushions of Sinia's favorite chair, and had hastily shoved it all into his pocket before Charlotte could see. *She*, of course, would've wanted to return the money. Well, Grover would return it—in a way. He was glad, now, that he hadn't spent it. Poetic justice. With Joe's own money! Grover smiled, entered the shop.

The proprietor was a wrinkled little man with black button eyes in a huge bald head. In the act of locking a drawer, he stopped and looked at Blain with automatic suspicion.

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?" his voice was surprisingly deep.

How many times had Blain acted out the scene to himself: *I never had any intention of killing him, I brought the gun along to frighten him, he lunged at me . . . I fired to protect myself . . .* Why, let the judge say what he would about there being no such thing as the Unwritten Law—no jury would convict in such a case. And in New York, fortunately, murder trials were tried by juries, not judges alone. If it even came to trial for murder. It might not.

But he had to have the gun first. "I—I want purchase a revolver," Blain told him, his voice starting out firm, but quavering at the last.

The pink face crinkled. "Got to have a permit to own a revolver in this State, you know," he said, unrolling his shirtsleeves.

Blain felt a sudden flare-up of fear. He couldn't go through with it, it was too far out of his line.

Yet—the insolent memory of pain tugging at his mind—"I must have it," he pleaded. "My life has been threatened—I'll pay—"

The uncle held up a hand. A wan smile added two deep lines to his pendulous cheeks. "Look, fel-

low," he said, "tell me your beef—if you want to. Maybe I can help you out. Depends."

And suddenly Blain was pouring out his story to the stranger. It was the first time he had told anyone. When he was through, the little man said, "Fellow, you're all wrong. That ain't the way to get your wife back. And besides, suppose he plugs you first? *He* might have a shooter, too, y'know." Somehow Grover had never thought of that. He stared, stricken.

The uncle brought his big head forward towards the little opening in his wire cage, and a dark cross-hatch of shadows spread along his pink face. His voice lowered to a conspiratorial rasp as he spoke.

"Tell you what you do—go down and talk to Johnny Scene. He knows how to take care of things like this. Got contacts, see? You slip him the money and you'll never have to risk a finger: Get it?" Slowly, Grover nodded. Maybe this was the best way. He'd have to give up the thought of being present when his enemy was destroyed. But maybe there'd be a picture of the body in the *News* or *Mirror*. And it was safer . . .

The little man whispered an address. "Just tell him that Jack sent you."

The street was lined with warehouse and loft buildings. Here and there a cheap lunch-room showed a blank face. Everything was closed, nobody seemed to be around. Blain



shivered. Suppose he should be acosted here? He could be killed! There was no one to hear! Really, the authorities didn't care at all—where were the police? And besides. Suppose it was a trap? Suppose old Jack had lied? Suppose he'd phoned on ahead? Suppose—

*"An unidentified torso was found floating off Corlear's Slip this morning . . ."*

He shuddered.

After a moment he recovered, managed a smile. Pool he thought. I'm being an old woman. Ridiculous! It was a straightforward business transaction, the old man was going to get his commission. Everyone knew there were ways to have an enemy removed. It was, Blain rationalized, a social necessity. Police couldn't prevent murder any more than vice or gambling.

And, so thinking, he found himself in front of a small office building with a light burning in the hallway. There were no offices on the street floor, but he found his destination on the second. The sign on the door's frosted glass panel read SEENE AND SEENE, INSURANCE ADJUSTERS. Blain pushed into the office and came face to face with a fat redhead seated at a switchboard.

"Mr. John Seene, please," he said, firmly. Thinking: she can't *know*, it's not written on my face, they must do plenty of legitimate business, if only as a front.

"Whatsa name, please?" she

asked, bored, shifting her cud of chicle.

"Smith," said Blain, his invention faltering. "Uh—tell him Jack sent me."

The girl inserted a plug and pressed a key. After a moment, she spoke into the mouthpiece. "A Mr. Smith is here t'see ya'. Says t'tell ya Jack sen'm." She listened, but the effort of further speech was evidently too much for her, and so, with a nod of her hennaed head, she directed him to the inner office.

The inner office was a small cubicle, painted an off-brown. The paint was peeling in a few places. On the wall was a faded group photograph, proclaimed in white letters to be that of the annual picnic of the William F. Calhoun Social Organization, at City Island, 1928. There was a filing cabinet, a desk, two chairs, a bleached-looking rug, and a huge rubber plant in one corner.

A thin, grey-haired, grey-faced man with pale blue eyes was sitting at the desk, writing on a pad of ruled, yellow paper. He looked up with a rusty smile. Something nibbled at the back of Blain's mind, and was quickly gone.

"s, sir," the man said, in a low, hoarse voice. "'t c'n I do f'r you?"

"Mr. John Seene?" The man nodded. "Uh—" Blain was suddenly tongue-tied. Seene remained blank-faced, but he reached into the top drawer and offered Blain a cigarette from a box, took one

himself, lit both of them.

Then, speaking as if he were very tired, Seene said, "No need t'be nervous, Mr. Smith. We handle all types business here. The sign gives no idea of the scope of our service. See?" Blain nodded. "So Jack sentcha?" Blain nodded. "Ah-hah. Well, are you concerned with matters dealing with business premises, frinstance?" *Arson!* the word raced through Grover's mind. He shook his head. "No, huh. An individual, maybe?" And again Blain nodded.

"I see," said Mr. Seene. He tapped pencil against pad. "So what's the prospect's name? Godda have name 'naddress."

Blain took a deep breath. "Joseph Sinia," he said. "His address is—"

Seene listened indifferently, nodded, scribbled on his pad. Then he went over to the filing cabinet, pulled out a drawer, riffled through a file. "Insurance man, huh?"

Blain said, "I don't know—I never knew—"

"Yup, insurance man. Kinda close t'home, huh?" A chuckle rusty as his smile broke through the grey lips.

Blain felt his head nodding like a doll's. His lips felt like parchment. His palms began to sweat.

"Well, now, there's a couple kinda processing, Mr. Smith," the soft, hoarse voice went on. "Now, you want hospitalization?" Grover shook his head. "I see. You want finalization. Okay," For the first

time, Seene broke into a shy smile. "Whats matter, still nervous? Like a drink, maybe?"

"Sure would," Grover Blain croaked. Seene bent down and clicked open a door in the side of the desk. After a moment, he came up with two glasses of whiskey and set them on the blotter. Seene lifted his glass.

"To commerce and industry," he said.

Blain drained the glass. A ball of fire filled his stomach and began to spread through him. He smiled. "How soon can this matter be taken care of?" he asked.

"Sooner than you think," Seene smiled thinly. The grey man's faded blue eyes looked him up and down. He said, with detachment, "Well, it's kind of too bad in a way . . ."

"How do you mean?" Blain asked. His voice came out thickly. Seene shrugged, he watched—

Suddenly, Blain felt a cutting pain in his chest. His heart began to pound, violently, and his throat was constricting in terrible spasms. He gazed in terror at the man looking quietly across at him. He tore at his collar, tried to speak, crashed to the floor, writhing. The room was wavering in a red haze.

Through gaps in the haze he saw a tall, broadshouldered man with a blond mustache and pale blue eyes come into the room from a side door. Blain, gasping, and clutching at the rug, tried to raise himself, fell

back. The rug became a sea of blood, and he was thrashing his arms, trying to swim—but going down—going down—

"You should have let well enough alone, Grover," said the hated face, looking at him and melting, wavering. "We offered you a divorce. You chose murder yourself."

Through the swiftly darkening haze, the pain, he heard the soft, hoarse voice say, "Kind of too bad

you hadda ask me to process Joe, here. I couldn't let you get away after that. Why, Joe is not only my partner, he's my brother. We even godda liddle poem about it—'As "Sinia" we are known to fame—"Seene" is but our business name.'

"Still, you got *one* consolation, anyway—" the voice was far away now. "—We'll see to it you get a decent funeral. After all, in a way, you're almost a member of the family."



## LUCKY LUCY?



No! No rabbit's foot for her. She knows many cancers can be cured if found in time—so she gets a health checkup every year. She also knows contributions can help conquer cancer—so she gives generously to the American Cancer Society. Send your gift to "Cancer," in care of your local post office.



**AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY**

THE MAN stood in the center of the small office. He was a short, thin man, shabbily dressed, in the vicinity of forty-three or four and he was on the verge of becoming bald. He wore a holster, western style, and the heavy, ominous-looking butt of a pistol protruded conveniently. His wrinkled shirt was open at the collar. In his hand, he held a star-shaped badge, with the word, SHERIFF, emblazoned across the face of it. The little man's hand closed about the badge tightly; then a slow smile crept across his lean face and, methodically, he pinned the badge to the front of his soiled shirt.

He walked quickly toward the lone cell at the rear of the office, glanced in and saw that the prisoner was lying supinely on the narrow bunk. The prisoner lay still

and quiet, with his eyes closed. There was a growing, reddish lump on his forehead. *Serves him right*, the little man thought, *for being such a damn smart aleck! I should have killed him, instead of just putting him to sleep for a while.*

Then the man strode back toward the front of the office, glanced back once at the cell then headed for the front door. Suddenly, the door opened inwardly, toward him. He took a step backwards. Framed in the doorway, stood a tall, heavy-set, younger man who was impeccably dressed in a dark blue business suit.

"Sheriff Barnett?" The tall man asked.

The man wearing the badge looked at the tall one suspiciously, nodded his head slowly, then

# THE PRISONER

BY

LAWRENCE HARVEY

*The sheriff smashed a fist into the face of the prisoner rendering him unconscious again. Then he turned to the police lieutenant from Atlanta, smiled and said, "We play rough down here. We don't baby these characters."*

stepped aside to allow the other man to enter.

"Sheriff," the tall man said, "I'm Lieutenant Rollins of the Atlanta Police Department." He extended his hand and the little man took it reluctantly.

"Glad to know you, Lieutenant," the little man said, entirely without feeling. "Glad to know you." There seemed to be a strange coldness, a stiffness between the two men.

Lieutenant Rollins stood there, glancing about the small, musty office, his face registering instant disapproval. Finally he looked back at the smaller man. "I got your wire," he said.

The little man stared at Lieutenant Rollins. Then he said "Good." He then strode over toward the battered, walnut desk which sat with its back to the wall in one corner of the cramped office. He sat down behind the desk, looked up at the tall man and said, "Have a seat, Lieutenant. Have a seat."

Lieutenant Rollins strode over stiffly and sat down facing the desk. "I suppose you'd like to see my credentials," he said, reaching into his inside coat pocket.

"Yeah . . . Guess so. Guess I do, Lieutenant."

Rollins laid his identification folder upon the desk then leaned back in the straight, uncomfortable chair, waiting for the older man to examine his identification papers. Good-naturedly, he said, "We were sure glad to get your wire that

you'd caught Ben Fincher." Nervously, he tapped the top of the desk with his fingertips. "Wanted for a filling station holdup, you know."

"Yeah," the little man said, glancing up quickly. "I know." Then he tossed the folder across the desk top toward Lieutenant Rollins who retrieved it and put it back into his coat pocket.

"Guess my identification passed all right," Rollins said, half jokingly.

"Looks okay to me, Lieutenant. Looks okay to me," the little man said, folding his hands across his chest. "Guess you're a little anxious to get the prisoner and be on your way, Lieutenant."

Rollins smiled. "Well . . . Yes, I am. It's a two hour drive back to Atlanta. Like to get back as early as I can. Like to spend my evenings with the family. You know how it is. You a married man, Sheriff?"

"Was . . . Once," the little man said gruffly. He looked Rollins straight in the face. "Now, Lieutenant," he said, "I guess you got all the paper work. Gotta keep this thing legal, you know."

Rollins chuckled. "Sure have, Sheriff." Then he reached into his coat pocket again and extracted some papers which he laid on the desk. "I'm sure you'll find these in order, Sheriff."

The little man picked up the papers and read them intently. Later, he placed them back on the desk. "Seem to be all right. No reason

why you can't take 'im. No reason."

They both stood up, as if on signal. The little man led the way to the cell. He placed a key into the old lock, turned it, then opened the barred door. "He's all your's, Lieutenant. All your's."

Lieutenant Rollins stopped abruptly in the doorway, looked back and said in an astonished voice, "What . . . What'd you do to him?"

The little man laughed. "Just tried to teach 'im a few manners."

Rollins shook his head slowly. "You sure do play rough down this way."

"I treat rough customers rough," the little man said, smiling. "And say, Lieutenant, you going to take 'im back by yourself? He's a mean customer, he is."

Rollins was still staring at the prisoner. Finally, he said, "No . . . No I'm not. I have another man with me. He's waiting outside in the car."

The prisoner stirred on the bunk. Slowly, he raised to a sitting position and held his head in his hands. He shook his head back and forth slowly. "Okay, you," the little man said roughly. "On your feet!"

Dazed, the prisoner stood up, swaying on his feet. Then he opened his eyes and looked into the little man's face. "You! . . .

You damn son . . ." The little man smashed a fist into the prisoner's face, rendering him unconscious again.

Rollins jerked his head about quickly, his eyes reflecting disgust. "Now wait a minute!" He said hotly. "You didn't have to hit him. Did you?"

The little man smiled. "As you said, Lieutenant, we play rough down here. We don't baby these characters. We don't baby 'em at all. Here . . . Give me a hand. I'll help you to the car with 'im."

Together, they carried the prisoner to the car waiting at the curb. Lieutenant Rollins got in back with the prisoner; a uniformed policeman was at the wheel. When the engine coughed into life, Rollins leaned out the window and said, "Thanks for helping us."

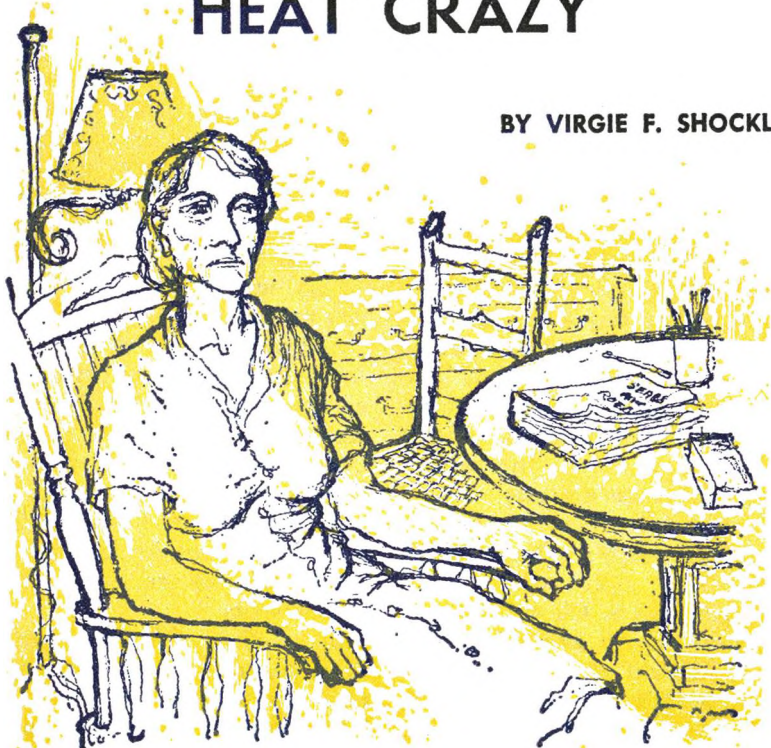
"Don't mention it, Lieutenant. Don't mention it." Then the car pulled away. When it was out of sight, the little man walked back into the office, took off the badge and the gun, dropped them to the floor. He was smiling. Then he stepped back to the street again and started walking, toward the railroad depot. He had a train to catch. *Sure hope Sheriff Barnett and that damn lieutenant have a nice trip back to Atlanta, he thought. Sure hope they do.*



*There was a small neat hole in his back where the suspenders of his faded overalls crossed. The blood was meager, but bright red, and already a fly explored the wound.*

## HEAT CRAZY

BY VIRGIE F. SHOCKLEY



SHERIFF BRUCE sat in his cubby-hole office in the old courthouse. He was watching the lazy revolutions of the big fan, and anticipating the frosty pitcher of ice tea his wife would have ready for lunch.

The Sheriff was dressed in the

western garb adopted by Colorado towns to tickle the tourist trade. But now his pink gabardine ranch clothes were stained with sweat; at the armpits, between the shoulder blades, and above the wide leather holster belt.

He was thirty-eight, a husky

tanned man, with coal black hair. He wasn't a hero—he was moderately afraid. And occasionally in his thirteen years in office he had been scared spitless. He had grown up in the county, been deputy for his uncle for a year. Then the war, where he had been a baker. God only knew why. When he had run for office, the Democratic Chairman made out that he'd been on the firing line from Declaration of War to Signing of the Armistice. It was a year of gratitude to vets and he had been elected.

The voters knew they had a rarity—an honest man—and he could probably have the job long as he wanted it. Or lived to hold it.

The call came in just at noon, naturally. He debated ignoring it in favor of the ice tea. But because he had an outdated sense of duty, he picked up the instrument.

"Hello. Sheriff's office. Sheriff speakin'."

"Sheriff, this is Clem Wiggins." The mail carrier sounded excited and the Sheriff pressed the phone tighter against his ear, trying to hear over the interference of the country line.

"Come on out here, Sheriff. Link Slover's cracked up. I mean that dirt farmer is off his rocker! He shot at me when I was puttin' his mail in the box!"

"You sure about that, Clem? Sure he wasn't shootin' rabbits or something?"

"Not unless I'm a rabbit, by God!

He had that pickup of his parked about a hundred yards out in his pasture, and the minute I stuck my arm out of the car to put his mail in the box, he commenced shootin'! I got Carl Freeks and we went back over there to see what was up. And that time he was parked up by his cattleguard, and started shootin' when we was a quarter mile away! We got the hell out of there!"

The Sheriff felt the sweat dripping down his back. "Nothing happened between you two, Clem? No bad feelings?"

"No, sir! That's why I tell you he's off his rocker!"

"I'll be right out there!"

"You're going to earn your money this day, Sheriff!" The phone clicked.

The Sheriff hung up, then sighed, and dialed his home number. "Peg? Honey, I won't be home for lunch. Something has come up. What? Oh, just routine stuff. See you at supper!"

He picked up his .38 from the desk, and fitted it into the holster. Got his Stetson from the rack. Then he went to the gun case, unlocked it, and got out the surplus carbine and a box of shells. In less than two minutes he was climbing into the county Ford and heading for Squirrel Creek.

He turned on the siren until he got clear of town, then flipped it off and pressed down on the accelerator until the needle steadied at eighty.



Routine, he'd told Peg. Routine! Usually his county business consisted of an occasional bad check to be squared, or a repossession of a TV or a car. But every few years (always in the heat of the summer) some man's brains dried out and he went berserk. Like the mild little farmer named Jenkins couple of years ago. Not over five miles from Link Slover's place, the Sheriff thought. Jenkins killed his wife and fed her to the pigs. One of the biggest kids got away and carried the word to a neighbor's.

Sheriff Bruce had to go after that man too. He had finally had to kill him. Just thinking about it made a trickle of perspiration run down his forehead, and catch in the coal black bush of his eyebrows. Jenkins had holed up in the outhouse, and stayed there, swapping shots with the Sheriff, until a bullet went through the crack in the door and on through Jenkins' eye.

The Sheriff lit a cigarette with one hand, then pushed back the wing ventilator, trying to coax a bit more breeze into the car.

He thought how Jenkins had been a mild-mannered little man up to that day. But Link Slover was different. Link always was a mean one. The Sheriff knew that, the way a Sheriff knows a lot of things he can't do anything about. Gossip. The way the kids left soon as they got big enough.

He hoped he wouldn't have to kill Link Slover. He hoped that if he

did have to kill the man, he would stay out of the outhouse.

He thought of Mrs. Slover, remembering her as he'd last seen her couple months ago. He hoped she'd stay out of sight if there were any shooting. Like so many couples, she and Link looked a lot alike—both sharp of feature and gaunt. What did it, the Sheriff speculated, was it diet or years of common experiences? Or an unconscious mimicry? He wondered if he and Peg would grow to look alike? He wondered if he would live so long . . .

The Sheriff braked the car, and swung off the highway onto a secondary road. This way he would bypass the filling station. Clem Wiggins and Carl Freeks and a bunch would be waiting for him there. He didn't want them to follow him out to the Slover Place and get themselves killed. Or, he grinned, for them to see him shake with fright might not go over well come next election day!

He slowed down as he got nearer Slover's place, and he was only doing twenty as he topped the rise which overlooked the ranch buildings. At least he didn't have to worry about being ambushed until he got there! The gramma grass was a yellow-gray cover about eight inches high. There were no trees, other than a few spindly cottonwoods around the house. When he crossed the cattleguard at a creep, he imagined he heard a

shot. "You're jumpy!" he said.

The heat waves shimmered off the old brown shingle two story house. The Dempsey windmill turned very slowly, and one old cow stood there licking the trickle of water coming out of the pipe.

The Sheriff braked the Ford at the yard gate, and sat, finishing a cigarette, studying the place. The red barn, and the corrals, all dilapidated. The chicken house was sunbleached gray, with tin can lids patching the roof. The house, boxy and ungainly, and needing paint, stood with its Pygmy guard of cottonwoods that would need another twenty years to offer any shade to the upstairs windows. The blue Ranchero pick-up was the only sign of prosperity on the place, thanks to credit buying.

The Sheriff sighed, picked up the rifle, and got out of the car. Standing on the far side of it, he yelled at the house: "Hey, Link! This is the Sheriff. Come on out here! I want to talk to you!"

He saw a flash of blue overall and straw hat in the upstairs front window. And he ducked before the shot rang out. That tore it! That tore it all to hell and back!

He squatted by the front tire a long time. His rifle butt was slick with sweat, and he could feel the sweat on his hatband. A leghorn hen took a dirt bath in a pothole a few yards from him, and a lizard ran by, and stopped to pant. He wondered how Peg could raise

three kids on thirty-five hundred dollars insurance.

Finally he yelled: "Come on out, Link! Don't want me to get rough do you? You ain't done nothing bad yet, so come on out talk it over!"

No answer. Slowly he raised up until he could look over the hood. A bullet skated across the hood a foot from his head, and the blue paint pricked his cheek. The Sheriff lit out running for the hump of the cellar, and threw himself behind it. He felt the seam in the back of his tight gabardine pants split. How damn undignified! But he was now only thirty feet from the front door. He put down the rifle, and took the .38 out of his holster. He raised up, and took a quick shot at the window, and saw the wood splinter beside it. The answering shot came close. The Sheriff thought, "He's looking right down my throat! I oughta reduce, like Peg says. I make a damn big target!" Another shot sounded, but he couldn't tell where it hit. Something odd about that last shot, like Link had changed guns. Sweating and dusty he got into a crouch ready to run at the door. He could almost feel the bullet hit him.

A woman's voice called out, "Sheriff, don't shoot no more. Link he's done dead!"

Cautiously, the Sheriff stood up, the .38 dangling. Mrs. Slover stood in the window. She said, "I shot him. I had to. 'fore he kilt some-

body."

The feeling of relief made the Sheriff so weak he could hardly move. He walked slowly into the house, and up the uncarpeted stairs.

The woman was as sharp featured and weathered and gaunt as he had remembered her. Her sleeveless print housedress hung on her with no signs of a figure. He could see a bruise on her shoulder. She was crying and ugly, and her gray hair hung wet and lank. The Sheriff couldn't imagine that she had ever carried and borne and nursed children. But he knew she had. Six of them. He reached out gently and took the .22 rifle out of her hands. Then he turned to look at Link Slover.

Link lay face down on the floor below the window. The big 30.06 rifle was close to his hand. The straw hat beside his head. There was a bullet hole, and a small amount of blood, where the suspenders of his faded bib overalls crossed in the back. A fly was already exploring the wound.

The Sheriff looked away to keep from being sick. The ceiling was sagging, and the plaster was cracked. The room was fixed as an upstairs sitting room—an old style radio, a couple of rocking chairs and a desk with a mail order catalog on it. Pictures hung all over the walls, all sizes, cut from calendars and magazines.

The Sheriff laid the .22 carefully

on the desk, and walked back to the middle of the room. "What happened here anyhow, Mrs. Slover?"

"Link, he went crazy that's all! Got up this morning, and said he was going to shoot Clem Wiggins. Said he'd seen Cleo tom-cattin' around here! That ain't true, Sheriff!"

"Go on. What'd Link do then?"

"He went out with the rifle and when he came back he told me he shot at Clem at the mailbox and missed him. Little later a car came up the road and he shot at it. Then he came back to the house. He knew you'd come, and he got ready. I stood it long as I could! Then I shot him in the back, 'fore he kilt you!"

The Sheriff thought how it always happened in the summer. Sun seemed to cook a man's brains. Or sometimes a woman's.

He sighed and said almost kindly, "It won't work, Mrs. Slover. You're the one's been taking pot shots at me. Not Link!"

She quit crying and stared at him. Her faded blue eyes were watchful. But she said tonelessly, "What you talkin' about?"

"The bruise on your shoulder for one thing." With one tanned finger he poked back the sleeveless print dress. "A .22 doesn't kick much. That is a recoil bruise from shootin' the deer rifle. Lots of times. At Clem. And at me. 'sides," he pushed back his Stetson, "you and me we got sweaty hat brim marks.

But your dead husband doesn't. He hasn't been wearing a hat."

He went on, getting it all figured out. "It was you in the pickup in bib overalls and that hat, shot at the mailman. In an outfit like that you'd pass for Link. You were setting Link up. Probably remembering how I had to shoot it out with Jenkins couple years ago. You shot Link the minute I hove in sight, didn't you? I thought maybe I heard a shot when I went across the cattle guard. Then you stood at the window with bib overalls and Link's hat and shot at me. At the right moment, you kicked off the overalls, put the gun and hat beside Link there on the floor.

The Slover woman said, "Sheriff, you sound crazy as Link was!" Without a word, he walked over to the desk, and opened the drawer, and pulled out a pair of blue bib overalls. "You hid them here before you called to me. Why did you

do this to your husband, Mrs. Slover?"

She sat down in the rocking chair, and started to rock, looking down at the man on the floor. She said without tone, like a litany, "He was mean as all get out. Beat me and the kids. But I put up with it twenty years, 'cause of the kids. It was the wallpaper finally did it. It's my turn to have the Club. And I was orderin' wallpaper to pretty up the place. He tore up my order. Laughed at me. And I started figurin' to kill him. . . ."

Riding into town with Mrs. Slover beside him, the Sheriff thought: "You can't tell about a woman. Link never knew what hit him. He beat her down for twenty years, and he thought she didn't have a drop of spirit left in her. And all the time she was about as helpless as a wounded rattler! Oh, God, let the snow fly early this year. I couldn't take this again for awhile!"



**A**t 4:37 P.M. on October 3, 1958, a thirty-seven year old New York jewelry salesman by the name of Jack Wasser parked his new black Thunderbird in front of Mandelbaum's Jewelry Store at 986 West North Avenue, Chicago. Mandelbaum was a good customer and Wasser was cheerfully anticipating a sizeable order as he got out of the car and went to get his sample case from the locked trunk.

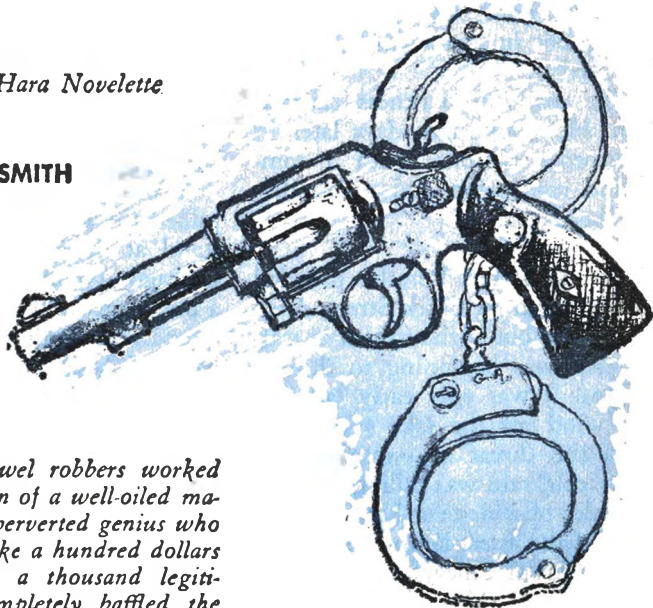
As he fumbled with the lock, a

car pulled into the parking space behind him. He looked up casually. He had an automatic in his coat pocket, but in three years as a jewelry salesman he had never had occasion to use it. There was nothing to indicate that he might have to use it now; the low-priced blue sedan and the three men in sports shirts in the front seat blended perfectly into the background of the hazy Indian summer afternoon and the crowded working-class

## NEW YEARS PARTY

*A Lieutenant O'Hara Novelette*

**BY ALSON J. SMITH**



*The gang of jewel robbers worked with the precision of a well-oiled machine. Led by a perverted genius who would rather make a hundred dollars dishonestly than a thousand legitimately, they completely baffled the Chicago police.*

shopping street.

Out of the corner of his eye Wasser saw two of the men get out of the car and pause to light cigarettes. One, he noted vaguely, was pudgy.

He unlocked the trunk and took out a brown leather case containing \$30,000 worth of jewelry samples. As he did so there was the sickening crack of a leaded sap against the back of his head and a thousand multicolored pinwheels exploded in his brain. He sagged to his knees in the gutter as blood from his nose and mouth trickled brightly down his stylish, button-down blue shirt and his natty gray dacron suit. In a flash his sample case was gone, and so were the young men in sports shirts, and the blue sedan.

The merciful darkness claimed him. He awoke two days later in Concordia Hospital with a compound concussion and a thundering headache.

The sleek red Porsche prowled slowly north on Clark Street, drifting in and out of the stream of traffic that was beginning to thin at 11 P.M. It was only early fall, but the wind off the lake was sharp with the threat of winter and a light, cold rain was falling, causing globules of iridescent haze to form around the street-lamps and gaudy neon signs of Chicago's honky-tonk Near North Side.

The top was up on the powerful

little Porsche and the man behind the wheel had his black raincoat buttoned snugly against his throat. He wasn't wearing a hat. His thick black hair was slightly curly and beginning to show flecks of gray at the temples. He was a well-built man with a square, smooth-shaven, high-cheekboned face and pale blue eyes, about forty years old.

He was getting a little discouraged. He'd been buzzing the Near North for three nights now, and so far had drawn nothing but blanks. The people just didn't know anything. Even the old reliables, like Honest-To-God Sam, the porter in Madame Olga's on Erie Street, and Eddie Kluski, the arm for the game Alderman Crotty ran in his political club on Huron, shook their heads. They hadn't picked up even a faint rumble. Or so they said. Of course, you could never tell—

It was raining harder now. He pulled the Porsche over to a newsstand at the corner of Clark and Chicago Avenue. The news-dealer, a one-legged old fellow with a battered crutch under his left arm, was huddled beneath the overhang of his flimsy wooden stand. He had a sharp, thin face with a gray stubble of beard, and the rain dripped from the broken-peaked cap that was pulled down over his ears.

The man in the raincoat opened the door of the Porsche and called out: "Hey, Petel Got a morning Trib?"

The old man peered uncertainly through the mist, then recognized the driver of the Porsche. He hobbled over to the car, expertly folding the paper with one hand. "Christ'sake, O'Hara," he wheezed. "What you doin' out on a night like this? Jeez, that wind! It's enough to freeze yer—".

"Yeah, Pete, sure is. Look"—Steve O'Hara took four mug shots out of his raincoat pocket and handed them to the cripple. He held a folded twenty-dollar bill lightly between the fingers of his left hand, resting casually on the steering wheel. "You make any of these characters, Pete?"

The old man's eyes flicked greedily from the photos to the twenty and back again. He leaned into the car and studied the four pictures by the dashboard light, then shook his head regretfully. "Can't make a mother's son of 'em, O'Hara."

O'Hara sighed and put the pictures back in his pocket, along with the twenty. "You get anything on that jewelry heist, Pete?"

"The one where they slugged the salesman and cut fer Dixie?"

"That's it".

"Naw, I dint get nuthin' on that". He spat disgustedly.

"Give me a ring if you get a rumble".

"Sure, Lieutenant. Hey—you dint pay me fer th' paper!"

The Porsche pulled smoothly away from the curb. "Charge it!" the man in the raincoat called back.

As he turned right on to Chicago Avenue he could hear old Pete cursing. Damned, dirty stoolies. The trouble was you couldn't live without them.

At Rush Street he turned left. One more, and he'd call it a night. Penny Copper seemed like the best bet. Anybody throwing folding stuff around in the Near North joints would be very likely to throw some of it at Penny or one of her girl-friends.

The Rush Street peel parlors were plushier than those on Clark. Same show, though. Long runway down the middle of the horseshoe shaped bar, with a three-piece combo behind a curtain at the end. Girls bumping, grinding, taking it off down to G-string and pasties. The strippers doubling as B-girls, cadging watered drinks from the customers. A half-dozen slots in the back room. In other words—syndicate joint.

He parked the Porsche and walked up Rush to the Celebrity Lounge where Penny worked. He went in, sat at the bar, and ordered a beer.

There were a dozen men seated around the bar. They nursed their beers and stared slack-jawed at the stripper working in the purple strobolite. She had a pair of man's hands outlined in luminous paint on her fanny. She wiggled and bumped and rolled her eyes with false lubricity. Three bored bartenders stood with their backs to

her, paying no attention. At the tables along the walls there were half a dozen couples, B-girls and men, drinking champagne cocktails. From a back room, above the cacophony of the music, could be heard the long whir and three sharp clicks of a slot machine.

Somebody else's headache, he thought wearily. Not mine.

He looked around, but didn't see Penny anywhere.

A heavy blonde in a low-cut evening gown came over and laid a too-friendly hand on his leg. She stank of cheap perfume. "Hi", she said. "Like some company?"

"Not tonight. Isn't Penny working?"

"She goes on next. You waitin' for her?"

"Yeah".

"I'll tell her". The blonde moved off.

The girl who had worked in the strobolite made her exit to a scattering of applause. There was a fanfare, and Penny Copper stepped from behind the curtain. She was a dark, full-bosomed, brown-eyed girl of medium height with jet black hair falling to her shoulders. Her skin had the copperish sheen of the Caribbean, which was why she called herself Penny Copper. O'Hara knew that her real name was Maria Gonzalez and that she was a Puerto Rican. Also that she was smart and very hungry, and the sole support of her mother and four brothers and sisters.

Penny worked strong, and zippered quickly out of her silver-sequined blue gown. She saw O'Hara and came over and stretched out on the runway in front of him like a wanton, playful cat.

She grinned, showing a gold tooth. "Ai, O'Hahra!" She ran her fingers lightly over a swelling breast, and winked. "You like, bay-bee?"

He laughed and nodded.

"Zee you later, alligator!" She got up and slithered off down the runway, tearing off her net bra and waving it over her head.

When the next girl was half way through her number, Penny came out and joined him at the bar. "'Allo baybee", she said, smiling her gold-toothed smile. "Lez get comfortable". She led him to a table as far away from the bar as possible.

A waiter bustled over and he ordered the usual mark's drinks, champagne cocktails. Pink gingerale, at a buck and half a throw.

Penny took his big hand in both of her slim, copperish ones. "Okay, O'Hahra, wot I do for you?"

Nobody seemed to be paying any attention to them. "I want you to take a look at some pictures", he said. "See if you can make one of these guys". He handed her the four mug shots and made sure she saw the folded bill in his hand.

"Gimme you lighter, O'Hahra".

He handed her his cigarette lighter. She lit it and looked at the pictures, frowning in concentra-



tion, shaking her head as she quickly rejected three. She looked at the fourth for a long time. Finally she smiled and plucked the twenty neatly from between his fingers. "That's heem". She tapped the fourth picture. "That's Gus".

"Gus who?"

"Gus I don' know. Jus' Gus. He in here night before las'. He have two pals. Me, two uzzer girls, we trink wiz zem. Real live wans! Teep us fi' dollah apiece."

"What did they talk about?"

"Oh, zat I don' remember. Jus' keeding. Horses, ball game maybe."

"They didn't mention jewelry?"

Her eyes opened wide. "Joolry? No, I don' tink."

"Have you ever seen this Gus in the place before?"

"Sure. He come in, maybe once a week, oh, for year now."

He got up. "Okay, Penny. Thanks. You're a good kid".

"You good keed, too, O'Hahra. I keep eyes open".

It was almost 12:30. Pretty late for that nightcap with Althea, but she'd be expecting him. He turned the Porsche north on Lake Shore drive and headed for Fullerton. He parked in front of the fifteen-story apartment house where she lived at Lincoln Park and Fullerton, and went up in the self-service elevator.

Althea Blake was Bryn Mawr, class of '50, which made her about twenty-nine years old. She was the

assistant society editor of the *Sun-Times*. A trim 5-7, hundred and twenty pounds, ash-blond hair worn short in one of those carefully disheveled Italian cuts, blue-gray eyes set in a long, patrician face, and a shape to make Minsky flip. Steve O'Hara had met her when the paper had assigned her to do a background story on a rather messy society murder. He had a theory that marriage wasn't for career cops, even if they had worked their way through Northwestern and had a year of law school. For four years she'd been trying to prove the theory wrong and still wasn't discouraged.

She had the kind of an apartment you'd expect Althea Blake to have. Two rooms and bath, with a view of the lake. Fireplace, with a fire in it. Combination hi-fi, TV, and FM radio. Good books. Vogue, Harpers, and House Beautiful on the glass-topped coffee table. Deep green rug. Two Gauguin reproductions on the walls. Couch in front of the fireplace. White birch logs in a black scuttle from Carson, Pirie and Scott's.

Her lips were cool, but her kiss was warm. She was wearing a green lounging robe with yellow dragons embroidered on it.

She said: "Hello, Hawkshaw. Any luck?"

"Not much". He kicked off his shoes and dropped on the couch.

She was mixing the drinks. Bourbon for him, Scotch for her.

"Meaning what?"

"Girl in a clip joint over on Rush recognized one of the mugs."

She handed him his drink. "Doesn't sound like much".

"It isn't". He tried to pull her down beside him.

She twisted away. "Wait. I want you to hear my new Casals." She put a record on the hi-fi and came back to snuggle beside him.

They sipped their drinks and listened to the cello music in silence. It was great music, played by a great man. After awhile the drinks and the warmth of the fire and the exhaustion of the day got them, and they fell asleep in each others arms.

O'Hara woke up about three. Althea was still asleep. He got a blanket from the bedroom, put it over her, and tip-toed out. It had stopped raining, but there was a heavy mist. The red Porsche purred south through the damp, towards his own apartment on East Superior.

He was at his desk by ten that morning. The Criminal Investigation Division, where he worked, had been established by Police Commissioner Mulcahy to answer the criticism that the Department was soft on the old Capone syndicate. The toughest, smartest cops in town had been assigned to it, and headquarters had been set up in an old police station at Canalport and Halsted. Captain Bill Pelswick had been brought down from the East

Chicago Avenue station to head up the operation, and Lieutenant Steve O'Hara had been plucked out of the Detective Division to be his second in command. It was the Division's job to build information on the underworld and to ferret out and smash organized underworld crime.

That was how this jewelry mess had come to be dumped in the Division's lap. The Commissioner figured that the whole series of sensational jewel robberies over the last year was the work of a clever gang of jewel thieves linked to the syndicate. The Outfit had to be in on it, otherwise the jewel thieves couldn't have kept on working in Chicago for as long as a year. They had obviously gotten the nod. So, after the Wasser slugging, the Commissioner had taken the jewel robberies away from the Jewelry Detail and thrown them at the new C.I.D. Wasser, who was still in Concordia Hospital, thought two men had jumped him while one stayed in the car. The blue sedan, he thought, was a low-priced car, maybe a Plymouth or a Chevrolet, three or four years old. He had gotten a quick look at only one of the two men, the stout one. After going over hundreds of mug shots, he had come up with four possibles.

These were the pictures that O'Hara was showing the Near North stoolies. It was his hunch that the gang was working out of the Near North area. All of their

jobs had been pulled within a three-mile radius of the corner of Clark and Division streets. Put a compass on that corner, swing a three-mile arc around it, and you took in all eight of the past year's jewelry heists.

The Near North—bohemia and honky-tonks, Gold Coast and slum, assignation flea-bags and luxury hotels. A regular casbah.

Captain Pelswick buzzed him, and he went down the hall to the Captain's office. Pelswick was puffing nervously on a cigar. He said: "Sit down, Steve. What's with the goddam jewelry investigation?"

"So far they're pitching a shut-out at us, Bill."

Pelswick groaned. "That's what I was afraid of. Mulcahy is breathing hot napalm down my back. The insurance companies are getting blue in the face. If we don't crack this, Steve, we'll all be back in uniform chasing goats out of the weeds down in Hedgewisch!"

O'Hara sighed and looked at the ceiling.

"Need more men? Who's on it?"

"No. I've got five of the best—Fitzpatrick, Svenson, Strawicki, Malloy, and Tisdale."

"Mugs shots turn up anything?"

"We're showing them to all the people. I got a little something last night". He tapped one of the pictures. "Girl in a strip bar on Rush made this fat boy. Swears he and two pals were living it up in the joint right after the Wasser

slam."

Captain Pelswick looked at the picture. It showed a heavy-faced, thick-set youth, apparently in his twenties. "What about him?"

"She says his name is Gus. Identification has him as Oscar A. Hogle, 3217 West Washington, twenty-one years of age. Three falls, two for petty larceny and one malicious mischief. One petty larceny conviction, for stealing a bicycle. Suspended sentence."

Pelswick snorted. "A punk! A petty-larceny punk and pool-room loafer! These jewelry heisters are smart. Big-time!"

O'Hara said: "Well, his last fall was four years ago. He could have smartened up."

"I doubt it. Who's checking him?"

"Ollie Svenson. He's out there now."

"Good. Keep after it, Steve."

O'Hara went back to his own office. There was a buzz on the intercom. "Hi, Steve. Ollie. Can I come in?"

"Sure thing, Ollie. Right away."

Ollie Svenson was a powerfully built, yellow-haired, red-faced Swede, and a very good man to have around.

O'Hara said: "Okay, Ollie, what gives?"

Sevenson grimaced. "Not much, I'm afraid. The Hogle family moved out of the neighborhood about four years ago. Nobody knows where they went. There's

hardly anybody around there now who remembers them. The Greek who runs the fruit store on the corner is about the only one. He thinks they went downstate."

"How many in the family?"

"Six. Old man, old lady, four kids. This Oscar was the oldest. Lazy crud, hanging around street-corners, always getting into trouble. Oh, yes—the Greek says he hated to be called Oscar."

O'Hara pricked up his ears. "Why?"

"He wanted people to call him Gus. His middle name is Augustus." Svenson shrugged his shoulders. "That was about it, Steve."

That night O'Hara prowled the Near North again, but none of his remaining informants recognized any of the mug shots, and none of them had picked up any information on the jewel thieves.

About 11 P.M. he went to the Celebrity Lounge and talked to Penny Copper again. "When Gus comes in next time, honey, give him a big hello. Try and find out where he lives. And try to get the names and addresses of those boy friends of his."

She wrinkled her nose. "I don't like that guy, O'Hahra. Hees a peeg. I might have to go far to get wat you wan'."

"So go. The pay will be good."

"You don' deeg me, O'Hahra. I don' like zat peeg Gus to touch me. Make me trow up." She took his hand and held it tightly. "You,

O'Hahra, I like for to touch me. Unnerstan'?"

"I understand, Penny." He patted her hand. "I understand you're snowing me. But you're still a good kid."

"No, you don' unnerstan', O'Hahra." She sighed. "But I do bes' job I can." She smiled. "Good money, huh? Half a C, maybe?"

"Maybe. I'll be in touch."

"You good keed, O'Hahra. Kees me good-night."

"My pleasure," he murmured, bending down to her upturned, dark, pixie-ish face.

And, he was a little surprised to note, it was.

He got to Althea's around twelve. She had a fire going and the score of "My Fair Lady" on the hi-fi. She was wearing the green robe.

He was just starting on his three fingers of bourbon when the phone rang. She disentangled herself from his arms and answered it. "For you," she said, lifting her eyebrows in a faint gesture of surprise. Of course he'd given headquarters her number. But he'd never been called at her place before.

"Hello," he said. "O'Hara here."

A rasping voice barked: "Steve? Bill Pelswick. They've hit us with the plumbing fixtures this time. Cracked the safe in the Hotel Senate Jewel and Fur Shop. Come down right away."

The Porsche streaked from Ful-

lerton to the Loop in seven minutes. The Senate was a 37-story hotel on Madison near Dearborn. The Jewel and Fur Shop, Mrs. Lydia Rose Arbegast, proprietor, was on the third floor.

O'Hara didn't wait for the elevator. He took two flights of marble staircase from the lobby to the third floor three steps at a time. Several curious people were gathered about the open door of the Jewel and Fur Shop, kept out of the shop itself by two policemen.

Inside, a stout, middle-aged lady wearing pince-nez and easily identifiable as Mrs. Arbegast sat sobbing on a couch. There were tiny ribbons of blue smoke in the air and a queer, garlic-like odor that O'Hara recognized immediately as acetylene gas. The gas had been used to burn through the door of the shop's safe. The safe stood in a corner, its door hanging from one hinge.

Pelswick spotted him and took him aside. "Here's the picture, Steve. Night watchman makes his rounds at 11:05, and everything's okay. When he swings back again at 11:55, he sees the outside door open. He turns on the lights, smells the gas, and sees the safe door hanging open. \$230,000 worth of ice gone."

"No furs?"

"All jewelry. They didn't touch the furs."

"Did the boys find anything?"

"Only this." He took a small

metal gauge out of his pocket. "Looks like it came off the compressed gas tank."

O'Hara looked at the gauge and then slipped it into his own pocket. "How'd they get in?"

"Unlocked the door and walked in."

O'Hara whistled. "Inside job, looks like."

"Mrs. Arbegast insists it couldn't have been. She's got three employees. All been with her for years."

O'Hara spent all of the following day quizzing the three employees of the Senate Jewel and Fur Shop. They turned out to be two dignified men in their sixties, and a middle-aged widow. The men had been with Mrs. Arbegast for almost twenty years and the woman for ten. All were bonded. None had police records. And all had perfect alibis.

Somewhat reluctantly O'Hara concluded that it could not have been an inside job. The thieves had apparently used the service elevator; at least nobody could recall having seen a man carrying a cylinder of compressed gas. The door of the shop had not been forced; they had entered with a key. But all the keys were accounted for, and everybody who had one swore that it had not at any time been out of his or her possession. The crime lab reported no trace of wax around the lock, which meant that no impression had been made of it.

What did that mean? Very likely it meant that one of the thieves was an extremely clever locksmith. In seven of the nine robberies, locked doors had been magically opened. And another of the gang had to be a good box-man, because the door of the safe had been neatly and quickly cut open with acetylene gas. In five of the nine robberies acetylene gas had been used to cut into the safes.

The next morning he went over it all with Bill Pelswick. The latter pointed to a copy of the morning *Tribune* on his desk. It had a two-column, front page headline: JEWEL THIEVES BAFBLE POLICE. "We can't afford to stay baffled, Steve. We've got to come up with something, and fast!" He pounded the paper with a ham-like fist.

O'Hara said: "One thing is pretty certain. They've got a first-class locksmith. The most consistent element in their M.O. is their ability to get past locked doors. I'm going to check out locksmiths with records. If we find one in this area, maybe we'll have somebody to throw a few questions at."

Pelswick grunted. "What about that punk that Wasser made?"

"Hogle? In the first place, Wasser didn't give a positive identification. In the second place, this league is too fast for him. He just doesn't fit into a smart operation. I think Wasser goofed."

Pelswick nodded. "Well, for Chrissake come up with some-

thing, so's I can stop dreaming about goats."

An Identification Bureau check on locksmiths with police records and known criminals whose usual M.O. involved lock-picking, turned up four names in the Chicago area. One had died recently. One had moved to Arizona two months previously. The other two had perfect alibis: a night job in a steel mill for one, a broken hip and a month in the hospital for the other.

O'Hara felt pretty low. Ten days after the Senate Hotel affair, and not a single good lead. And somewhere in the crowded casbah of the Near North Side the gang was holed up, planning the next strike.

He could almost smell those goats out in Hedgewisch.

He had lunch with Althea at Fritzels, and he told her glumly about the locksmiths-with-records angle not working out. "We'll have to start checking all the locksmiths," he said. "It'll take weeks."

She thought for a moment, puckering her brows in concentration, and picking absent-mindedly at her shrimp salad. She laid down her fork and looked at him. "I'm probably way out in right field somewhere, but isn't there an intermediate step?"

"I doubt it, but I'm listening."

"Trained locksmiths that aren't working at it. Isn't it likely that your boy is no longer regularly employed as a locksmith?"

"Most likely. I don't know when he'd find time for it."

"And don't people study somewhere to be locksmiths?"

"Sure. Trade-schools, mostly."

"How many trade schools are there in Chicago?"

"Hm. I don't know offhand. Maybe twenty."

"Well, before you start checking all the locksmiths, couldn't you check these trade-schools and get a list of the locksmiths they've graduated in recent years? Then if you turned up a few first-rate locksmiths who weren't working at it—."

He drummed his fingers on the table and looked at her speculatively. "Well, it's a hell of a long-shot, but we'll play it. Say, how about joining the Division? I could use you."

She fluttered her eyelashes at him. "Could you, Lieutenant? I'm sure I would enjoy being used by you."

"I'll guarantee it," he said. They both giggled. He felt better.

That afternoon he set Detectives Joe Strawicki and Pat Malloy to work checking the city's trade-schools.

That evening he talked to some of the North Side people to see if they'd gotten any rumbles on the Senate Hotel robbery. Honest-to-God Sam had heard that the loot was being fenced through a syndicate-controlled small loan company on Milwaukee Avenue. Ed-

die Kluski, the Arm, heard that the next and biggest hit so far was being set for a North Side jewelry store. It still wasn't much.

He was driving down Michigan Avenue when he thought of Penny Copper. With the Senate Hotel job and all he had pretty much forgotten about Penny and the fat-faced Gus. He parked and walked over to Rush Street.

Penny and another girl were sitting at a table with two marks, drinking champagne cocktails. He sat at the bar and ordered a bourbon and water. Pretty soon she saw him and hustled over.

"Ai, O'Hahra, why you not come 'roun before? You geef me job to do, zen you don' show up to see eef I do eet! Wot the hell!"

He was surprised. "Sorry, Penny. I got tied up. Don't you read the papers?"

"No, I don' read no papers. Wait, I got all dope for you on Gus." She went to her dressing room, returning in a few seconds with a piece of paper. "Eets all here, O'Hahra."

He put the paper in his pocket. "How did you work it?"

"Me, two uzzer girls, we trink wiz Gus an' two pals. Zey ask us come to zair place after joint close." She made a face. "We zay okay, geef us address. Zey say okay, here ees address."

"Just one address for the three of them?"

"Tha's right, O'Hahra."

"What kind of a place was it?"

She looked at him reproachfully. "O'Hahra! You don' tink we go, do you?"

He laughed. "Your love life is your own business, sweetie."

"O'Hahra, why don' you make eet your business?"

For the first time it occurred to him that maybe she wasn't kidding. He said: "Thanks, Penny. I'm flattered. Anything else?"

The marks were looking around, wondering what had happened to her. She said: "I got to go back to work. Wan leetle ting I hear. Wen zey trying to get us to come by zair place, one zay to Gus 'we don' have no fun wiz girls zince Oak Park deal.' Tha's all. Now, ware my feefty bucks, O'Hahra?"

He said: "I'm not holding tonight, honey. *Manana*."

"Okay, don' forget, O'Hahra."

The next morning he reported to Captain Pelswick. Two men were checking trade-schools for locksmiths. Two more were running down an underworld rumble that the loot from the Senate Hotel robbery was being fenced through a small-loan company. The crime lab had been unable to find any fingerprints except the ones you might expect around the Jewel and Fur Shop, and there was no wax around the lock.

Back in his own office after a rather uncomfortable half-hour with the boss, O'Hara took out the wrinkled piece of paper Penny had

given him the night before. In a childish scrawl she had printed: Gus Hogle, Albert Meister, Ronnie Brubaker—74 Schiller Court.

He knew the neighborhood. The "Courts" were really alleys, and most of the Court addresses were made-over barns, sheds, and tool-houses that had once served the brownstone mansions of the rich, long since gone. Artists and writers hung batik curtains at the windows and called the old out-buildings "studios."

He turned the paper over pensively, then put in a call to Identification. "Hello, Walt? Steve O'Hara out at Canalport. Listen, Walt, will you do a run-through on these two characters? M-e-i-s-t-e-r, Albert, and B-r-u-b-a-k-e-r, Ronnie. No, that's all I know, except that they are WMA's in their twenties. Call me back after one; I'm going out for chow."

He was back before one. Shortly after that hour Detectives Fitzgerald and Tisdale returned to the Canalport station. They had traced the scuttlebutt about a small loan company fencing the loot to the Milwaukee Avenue branch of the Lake Loan and Trust Company, a shylock agency controlled by one John "Slasher" Bandino, a former Capone bodyguard. They had gone over the place with a fine toothcomb but had turned up no evidence that any of the jewelry had been fenced through that office.



About 2:30 the phone rang. "Steve? Walt. We ran a make on those guys. They've both fallen plenty. Want to hear it?"

"What guys? Oh, yeah—Gus Hogle's buddies. Shoot, Walt."

"Meister, Albert—also known as Masters, Al—31 years old, WMA, last known address 2211 West Jackson. Two arrests suspicion of narcotics violation, one conviction. Served eighteen months Joliet. Two arrests simple assault, one conviction. Served four months Cook County jail. Three arrests petty larceny, no convictions.

"That's all for Meister. Here's your other cookie: Brubaker, Ronald Henry—also known as Hank Baker—32 years old, WMA, last known address 1318 West Ontario. Four arrests petty larceny, one conviction. Served six months Cook County jail. Two arrests shoplifting, one conviction, suspended sentence. Prime suspect in fatal shooting of Eric Hagler, watchman in a lumber yard at 5601 North Kedzie, on September 11, 1955. Released after inconclusive lie-detector test. One arrest on charge of attempted burglary. Charge reduced to malicious mischief. Convicted. Served three months in the Bridewell."

O'Hara said: "Hm. Pretty fast company for my little fat boy. Send over the mugs, will you, Walt?"

"Will do, Steve."

He buzzed Ollie Svenson. "Ollie? Steve. I've got a couple of

mugs coming over from downtown. When they get here, take 'em up to the hospital and see if Wasser can make either of them, will you?"

"Right, Steve."

What was it Penny had said last night? Oh, yes—either Brubaker or Meister had complained that they hadn't had any fun, meaning girls, since "before the Oak Park deal." What Oak Park deal? Oak Park, a residential suburb, adjoins Chicago on the west.

He called the Oak Park police and asked for Lieutenant Hanson. "Hello, Ed? Steve O'Hara. Say, Ed, have you had anything out there within the last year involving any of these names: Meister, Albert, also known as Al Masters; Brubaker, Henry Ronald, also known as Hank Baker; and Hogle, Oscar Augustus, also known as Gus Hogle?"

"I'll check, Steve. Call you back."

About an hour later Ollie Svenson called from Concordia Hospital. Wasser said Brubaker and Meister *might* have been two of the three men who sapped him in front of Mandelbaum's. He was only a little more positive about Hogle. Svenson didn't think much of any of Wasser's story. He didn't think the guy had seen a damned thing.

Soon after Svenson hung up Ed Hanson called back from Oak Park. "Hello, Steve—on those three names you gave me."

"Yes, Ed."

"Only one of them ever got on our books, and that wasn't much."

"Yeah. Let's have it anyway, Ed."

"On the night of October 17 last a gas station was held up at the corner of Maple Street and Austin Avenue out here. An abandoned blue Plymouth sedan was found near the scene later. We traced the plates to an Oscar A. Hogle, 74 Schiller Court, Chicago. That your boy?"

"That's the lad. What happened?"

"We picked him up and questioned him. He claimed the car had been stolen a couple of hours before the hold-up. He said he hadn't reported it because he thought one of his buddies had borrowed it for kicks. The filling station attendant couldn't identify him. Said two guys had come in wearing stocking masks and locked him in the little girl's room. He thought Hogle was too short and fat to be either one of them. We finally let Hogle go. Had nothing on him."

O'Hara was thinking hard. The filling station had been held up on October 17, two days before the Senate Hotel job.

He said: "One more thing, Ed. What loot was taken?"

Ed said: "I was on that one myself, and it was a weirdie. They didn't even look at the cash register, which had close to a hundred bucks in it. They took two cylin-

ders of compressed gas. That was all."

O'Hara took a deep breath. "Thanks, Ed. I'll keep you posted."

He opened a desk drawer and took out the metal gauge that had been found on the floor of the Senate Hotel Jewel and Fur Shop. He dropped the gauge into his pocket, picked up a prowler car at the parking lot behind the station, and headed west for Oak Park.

He found the filling station without any trouble. The attendant who had been on duty when the station was held up was not there, but the man who leased the place was.

O'Hara introduced himself. "Lieutenant O'Hara, Chicago police. I understand you rent out compressed gas tanks."

"That's right. We're agents for the Westville Industrial Supply Company. Customers pick up the full tanks here and drop off the empties."

O'Hara took the gauge out of his pocket. "Could this have come off one of your tanks?"

The man looked at it. "Sure could. It's a Westville gauge. Let's see." He took the gauge over to a line of half a dozen cylinders of compressed gas, each of which was about the size of a fire extinguisher. He unscrewed the gauge from one of the cylinders and screwed on O'Hara's gauge. It fit perfectly.

That night O'Hara turned the Porsche towards the Near North

Side again. It was cold now, in mid-December, and he wore a brown topcoat buttoned tightly around his neck. No hat, though. He didn't like hats.

His first stop was at the Celebrity Lounge. Penny quickly identified the mug shots of Meister and Brubaker. They were the men who had been in the joint with Gus Hogle.

He slipped her the fifty he had promised. "Keep your beautiful brown eyes open, Penny. I'll be in touch."

He got back in the Porsche and drove around until he located Schiller Court. It ran for only two blocks between noisy, crowded Chicago Avenue and quiet, tree-shaded Chestnut Street. Number 74 was a converted coach-house, a two-story red brick affair. The upstairs was dark, but the downstairs was ablaze with light. However, the window-shades were down and he could not see in. Three cars were parked close up against the side of the house, there being no sidewalks in Schiller Court. One was a blue Plymouth sedan of about a '52 or '53 vintage—Hogle's, obviously. There was a snappy little black Mg with bucket seats upholstered in gleaming black leather, which O'Hara, a sports car aficionado, looked at admiringly. The third car was a green Chevrolet panel truck, about a '57 model.

He jotted down the license numbers of all three cars, then headed

the Porsche towards Fullerton.

As Althea mixed him a drink she said cheerily: "What's the latest hot poop in the snoop biz, Commissioner?"

He had stretched out on the couch. "I think I've finally washed a little color, ma'am, as we old sourdoughs say."

She looked up. "Elucidate, pod-'ner."

"The brawn. The musclemen. Three of 'em."

"Are you going to—what's the expression?—'put the collar on em'." She handed him his drink.

"Not yet. Haven't really got anything on 'em, but I think they're the guys who slammed Wasser. Besides, they're obviously just the brawn. I'm hoping they'll lead me to the brains."

"Very clever of you. And when you get to the big brain, you'll find it's one of my non-locksmithing locksmiths."

"Uh-huh." He took a long pull on his drink. "Just so long as we get to him. If it is a him."

"And another thing. Don't get to 'him' or 'her' or 'it' on New Year's eve. I want you right here. I'm throwing a small orgy, and I may need police protection."

"You need protection? Ho, ho, and ho."

"The sports editor of our paper will be here. He's got a big letch for me. Regular timber wolf."

"May I ask why you invited such an animal?"

"I like to live dangerously."

"Well, if I can't make it, I'll send up a police dog. You can tie him to the bed-post. He knows just where to bite wolves."

She nestled down beside him. "You *be* here, O'Hara!"

The next morning he called the Westville Industrial Supply Company. They had six agencies in Chicago's western suburbs. Sure they'd check. In a half hour, the Westville man called back. All of their tanks were accounted for except the two that had been stolen from the Oak Park filling station. And if the gauge O'Hara had was a Westville gauge, it must be from one of the stolen tanks, because the gauges were intact on all their other tanks.

That was all he wanted to know. The compressed gas tanks had been stolen for the sole purpose of opening the safe in the Senate Hotel Jewel and Fur Shop. Gus Hogle's car had been found at the scene of the hold-up, and it answered the description of the car used by the men who had slammed Wasser.

He promptly had a tail put on Gus Hogle.

He called the State Motor Vehicle Department. "Lieutenant O'Hara, Chicago police. Will you give me a quick make on two license numbers? Illinois 151-709, Illinois 642-129. Got that? I'll hang on."

In a couple of minutes the clerk

at the Motor Vehicle Department was back on the line. "Here you are, Lieutenant," she said briskly. "151-709 is registered to Belski Florists, Joseph J. Belski, 4907 West Roosevelt Road, Cicero. It's a small panel truck. 642-129 is a black MG sports car, registered to Mrs. Eunice Patterson, housewife, of 14 Drum Lane, Forest Park."

O'Hara's men began keeping Hogle, Meister, Brubaker, and the coach-house at 74 Schiller Court under quiet, 24-hour surveillance. O'Hara himself roamed the North Side in a prowler car to take advantage of the two-way radio. Almost every night the MG and the panel truck were parked against the wall of the coach-house while the lights burned late in the downstairs rooms.

He had both the panel truck and the MG stopped by traffic officers and the licenses of the drivers examined. The panel truck was being driven by Joseph J. Belski himself. He was a young man of about thirty, recently out of the army, he said. The traffic cops, briefed by O'Hara, found out that he had been in the florist business for about a year. He'd been married for eight months. He seemed all right.

When stopped for allegedly jumping a yellow light, the driver of the MG turned out to be a tall, scholarly-looking man who wore horn-rimmed glasses. He answered questions with studied ease. He

was Harry Patterson, 32, and the MG was his wife's car. He also had been married less than a year. His license listed his address as 14 Drum Lane, Forest Park. He volunteered the information that he was a bartender at the Forest Park Inn, working from 11 A.M. until 6 P.M. He seemed all right, too, although you didn't see too many scholarly-looking bartenders driving MG's.

Self-doubt tortured O'Hara. He had put all his eggs in one basket. Suppose the men meeting nightly at 74 Schiller Court were not the jewel thieves? The real thieves would strike again, and he would be like a cat crouched in front of the wrong mouse-hole.

He confided his fears to Althea. All she said was: "When you find my locksmith, you'll have your brain."

"Thanks a lot," he said sarcastically.

"And I'm counting on you for New Year's eve. That's a quiet night in your business."

"I hope so," he sighed. "I could use a quiet night."

New Year's eve was only seventy-two hours away.

The next morning a routine check on Belski and Patterson disclosed that although Patterson had no record, one Joseph J. Belski of 4907 West Roosevelt Road had been a suspect in a robbery about eleven months previously. Belski, in his panel truck, had been

stopped by police while trying to drive away from the vicinity of the crime, the Madison-Crawford shopping area on the West Side. Major's Sport Shop there had been broken into a few minutes before Belski was stopped. But Belski had denied any connection with the robbery and since the police had no reason to detain him, he had been released.

Nothing much there. But O'Hara was a hunch-player, and he had a sizeable hunch now. "What loot did they get at Major's?"

Walt checked it. "Funny thing. All they took was five Smith and Wesson .38 calibre revolvers and some ammo. Didn't touch the register."

The robbers had taken only what they thought they needed. Just as in the hold-up of the Oak Park filling station.

O'Hara wrinkled his brow. He said to himself: Look, you thick mick, just what have you got? A florist named Belski and a fat punk named Hogle who've been placed in the vicinity of a couple of heists. The fat boy is a vague 'maybe' in another. These guys know each other. They get together every night at Hogle's, along with two tough pals of Hogle's and a bartender named Patterson. What the hell, maybe they play poker. How do you figure them for clever jewel thieves? A florist, a bartender, and three petty larceny punks. Where's

the kicker?"

That goat smell was getting stronger.

Then, suddenly, it all fell into place. Detectives Strawicki and Malloy finished their check on the trade-schools.

During the past five years, Chicago's twenty-nine trade-schools had trained 876 locksmiths. Of these, 18 had died. 32 were in the armed services. 92 had switched trades or for some other reason were not working as locksmiths. Strawicki and Malloy had compiled a list of the names, addresses, and present occupations, as far as these were known to the trade-schools, of the 92 who were not working at locksmithing.

And a little more than half way down the list was the name that brought a smile to the face of Lieutenant O'Hara: "Patterson, Harry W.— awarded certificate in locksmithing, Kedzie Trade and Technical School, December 1, 1957. Present address 14 Drum Lane, Forest Park. Present position, bartender Forest Park Inn."

At the Kedzie Trade and Technical School, 147 North Kedzie Avenue, the principal remembered Harry Patterson very well. "We don't get many college graduates," he told O'Hara, "and I'd remember Harry for that if for nothing else. I believe he had a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin. Anyway, he was one of our smartest students here. Always wondered why

he didn't go into locksmithing. We could have gotten him any number of good jobs. He was the inventive type. As I recall, he was working on a machine to make keys. Entirely new principle. It probed the lock with a very fine gauge and recorded the depths of the tumblers, spring tensions, and all the rest of it. Then you just turned a dial to the proper setting and out dropped your key. I don't know whether Harry ever finished it or not."

O'Hara took a deep breath. "I think he did, sir."

"Then there was Patterson's buddy—oh, what was his name? They'd been in the army together. He never went into his trade, either."

"What was that, sir?"

"Welding. Acetylene welding. He was pretty good at it."

"Could his name have been Belski?"

"Yes, Belski. Joe Belski. Funny how a fellow will spend time and money training for something and then go into another trade altogether, isn't it?"

"Very odd," said O'Hara.

He had his kicker. He wasn't crouched in front of the wrong mouse-hole over there on Schiller Court. But he still didn't have enough evidence to pounce. He would have to wait for the gang to move. And he knew he would not have to wait long. The people were getting a big rumble, and they

passed it on up: ANYTIME NOW.

When they moved, he would be ready. A three-man repair crew from the Department of Streets and Electricity tore up a small section of Schiller Court and made "repairs" around the clock. Unmarked prowler cars watched the Belski home in Cicero and the Patterson home in Forest Park.

On the afternoon of December 31st, O'Hara was tense and chain-smoking cigarettes. Outside on Halsted Street shuffling winos began an early celebration of New Year's eve by smashing pint muscatel empties against the side of the old police station. All was quiet up on Schiller Court; Hogle, Meister and Brubaker had not left the house. Belski was still making wreaths in the florist's shop in Cicero, and Patterson was behind the bar at the Forest Park Inn, as usual.

But he felt it in his bones. Althea had been right—actual major crime was rare on New Year's eve. Drunkenness, disorderliness, traffic violations—yes. But hardly ever anything really big.

All of a sudden O'Hara decided to make his move. He called Captain Pelswick. "I'm going to stake 'em out, Bill. I have a hunch tonight's the night."

Pelswick said: "Good luck, Steve. Take care."

O'Hara put on a shoulder holster and carefully checked his police Colt. Okay. He slipped into his black raincoat. It was rather warm

for New Year's eve, with a threat of rain.

An odd procession pulled out of the parking lot behind the old Canalport station. There were two unmarked sedans, one black and one gray, each about three years old and too nondescript to attract attention. In the black sedan were O'Hara and Svenson; in the gray, Fitzpatrick and Tisdale. There was a white Volkswagen milk truck with the name NORTH TOWN CREAMERY on the sides; in it were two new men recently added to the case, Detectives Horgan and Johnson. And bringing up the rear was a yellow panel truck with BUREAU OF STREETS AND ELECTRICITY lettered on the doors in green. In it were Strawicki and Malloy.

O'Hara, Svenson, and Fitzpatrick wore ordinary business suits and raincoats. Tisdale wore a tux and a funny paper hat and carried a troy horn. Horgan and Johnson wore immaculate white jumpers with NORTH TOWN CREAMERY in red block letters on the backs. Strawicki and Malloy were attired in the gray overalls of the Bureau of Streets and Electricity. All were armed with Colt .38's in shoulder holsters. In each car was a World War II walkie-talkie. O'Hara had decided to black out the police radio; the gang undoubtedly had car radios that could pick up the police call band. The range of the walkie-talkies was limited, but he could not take a chance on the po-

lice radio system.

Carefully he deployed his little force into position. The truck from the Bureau of Streets and Electricity was parked next to the excavation that had been dug in Schiller Court about two houses down from Number 74, and Strawicki and Malloy relieved the three "repairmen" who had been working there. On Chicago Avenue at the corner of Schiller Court the milk truck was parked. Beneath the trees on Chestnut Street at the corner of Schiller was the inconspicuous gray sedan. Around the corner on Dearborn Street, O'Hara and Fitzpatrick sat in the black sedan. From here O'Hara directed the operation by walkie-talkie.

The stake-out had been set up at 5:30 P.M. For four hours, nothing whatsoever happened. The lights came on in the coach-house, but Hogle, Meister, and Brubaker did not come out, and nobody went in. New Year's eve revelers roistered happily up and down Chicago Avenue, their laughter punctuated by the raucous squawk of toy horns. Drunks staggered in and out of taverns.

O'Hara bit his lip. Looked like his hunch was wrong, and the wily Patterson was not going to take advantage of crime's traditional "quiet" night. He felt let down and a bit foolish.

At 9:32 Strawicki came through on the walkie-talkie. "Belski just arrived in the flower truck. He's

gone into the house."

O'Hara sighed. He felt a little better.

At 9:37 Strawicki called again. "The MG's here. Patterson's in."

But by 11:30 he was beginning to feel low again. Nobody had come out of the coach-house yet. Looked like a dry run.

At midnight bells rang, horns tooted, and revelers erupted from taverns shouting "Happy New Year!"

By 12:05 the noise had died down. The walkie-talkie crackled. "Straw here, Steve. Three coming out. Christ, they're coming over here!"

The walkie-talkie clicked off, then in a few seconds Strawicki came through again. "It was Hogle, Belski, and Patterson. Wished us a Happy New Year. Said it was a hell of a shame we had to work on New Year's eve." His voice grew excited. "Hogle's gone back in. Belski and Patterson are leaving. Belski out to Chestnut, Patterson to Chicago Avenue. Over."

O'Hara picked up the walkie-talkie. "All right, everybody! Fitz and Tis, take Belski. Sven and I'll take the MG. Milk truck, Straw and Pat stand by. If the Plymouth goes, milk truck takes it!"

Svenson was driving. As they reached Chicago Avenue they saw the MG come out of Schiller Court and turn right, headed west. Svenson and O'Hara followed about a block behind. The MG continued



west on Chicago in a leisurely manner. They followed it out of Chicago and through Oak Park to Forest Park. There Patterson turned into the driveway of a big, good-looking stucco house at 14 Drum Lane, put the MG in the garage, and went into the house. In fifteen minutes the house was dark.

"Damn!" moaned O'Hara, "Don't tell me he's gone to bed!"

There was nothing to do but wait. They located the unmarked prowler car, that had been keeping the Patterson house under surveillance. A downhearted O'Hara told the men they could go home; he and Svenson would hang on until dawn. The prowler car men gave them a thermos of hot coffee that they had been saving and drove off.

O'Hara was drinking coffee and wondering what was happening at Althea's party when a light suddenly came on in a second-floor room of the Patterson home. He looked quickly at his watch. 3:15. Svenson was nodding over the wheel; O'Hara nudged him awake.

In a few minutes a light came on downstairs. At 3:44 Patterson carrying something that looked like a small overnight bag, emerged from the house and went into the garage. But the car he drove out of the garage was not the MG. It was a black Buick sedan, about a '55 model, as inconspicuous as the unmarked car O'Hara and Svenson were using. The Buick turned east,

towards Chicago.

The police sedan followed about two blocks back.

The Buick was going into Chicago by way of Jackson Boulevard. The traffic was light at four in the morning. O'Hara and Svenson didn't dare stay too close.

Suddenly the Buick shot forward. Tires screaming, it turned into Cicero Avenue and headed north.

Svenson cursed and gunned the police sedan after it. Had Patterson spotted them, or was he merely taking the usual underworld precaution to shake a possible tail?

The latter. He slowed again, turning right on Madison Street. O'Hara breathed a sigh of relief.

Then suddenly he was gone. He made a left turn off Madison—and vanished. They prowled the area for five minutes trying to pick him up again. There was no trace of the Buick.

O'Hara had that empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. "Head for Schiller Court," he told Svenson. God, what rotten luck!

He turned on the walkie-talkie. He was still too far away to pick up Schiller Court, but there was a faint chance that Fitzpatrick and Tisdale might have tailed Belski back into his range. He said: "O'Hara speaking. Does anybody read me? We've lost Patterson. He's in a black Buick sedan, about a '55 model. Over."

Nothing.

He kept trying the walkie-talkie as the car sped east on Madison. Finally there was a slight click and a faint voice said: "I read you, O'Hara, but just barely. This is Johnson in the milk truck. We're tailing Hogle's Plymouth. Just left Chicago Avenue, turning north on Milwaukee Avenue."

"Hang on, Johnson!" shouted O'Hara. "We're coming!"

Svenson turned left on to Kedzie and gunned the car north. If he stayed on Kedzie he would hit Milwaukee Avenue at the 2700-block. Milwaukee Avenue, the great northwest artery, cut diagonally across all of Chicago's North Side streets.

"Johnson, what's your speed? Over."

Johnson's voice was louder now. "About 35. No sweat."

With luck, O'Hara and Svenson would hit the 2700-block of Milwaukee Avenue at about the same time the Plymouth and the milk truck did. Svenson whipped the sedan north at seventy-five miles an hour.

As they neared the intersection of Kedzie and Milwaukee, O'Hara picked up the walkie-talkie. "Johnson, where are you?"

Johnson's voice was loud and clear as a bell. "Just passing the 2400-block. You'll see us in a few seconds."

There was little traffic on Milwaukee Avenue at 4:40 in the morning, but it was enough to pro-

vide cover for the tail. A few trucks and buses. Milkmen making morning deliveries to restaurants. Now and then a car full of die-hard revelers tooting their horns.

There was a stop-light at Kedzie and Milwaukee. It turned red as they reached it. Svenson stopped and the two men looked southeast, down Milwaukee Avenue.

There they were, the Plymouth only a block away and the milk truck about a block and a half back of it.

As the Plymouth passed Kedzie Avenue, O'Hara saw two of the three men in the front seat looking back in the direction of the milk truck, as though saying to themselves: what the hell kind of a milk truck is it that never stops to make deliveries?

He grabbed the walkie-talkie. "Johnson, I think they're beginning to wonder about you. Follow along, but drop back out of sight. We'll take over."

The light changed and the police sedan cut between the Plymouth and the milk truck, which pulled over to the side. The two men in the front seat of the Plymouth turned around. They seemed relieved.

Half way down the 2900-block and on the opposite side of the street there was an all-night restaurant, one of a cheap, popular chain. The Plymouth stopped across the street from it, but the three men did not get out.

The black police sedan passed the Plymouth, made a right turn, and went around the block, parking on the side street but close enough to Milwaukee Avenue to see the Plymouth. Svenson turned off the lights.

O'Hara picked up the walkie-talkie. "Johnson, stay put until you hear from me. Keep out of sight. They're parked."

In a matter of seconds a panel truck appeared, coming south down Milwaukee Avenue. It made a u-turn and parked right behind the Plymouth. A couple of blocks back of it was a gray sedan, which parked in front of the restaurant. Fitzpatrick and Tisdale had hung on Belski all the way.

O'Hara went to the walkie-talkie again. "Fitz and Tis? Steve, down around the corner. Good work. We're expecting another customer."

Belski left his truck and got into the back seat of the Plymouth. They could see the fumes from the Plymouth's exhaust rising in the moist air. Hogle was keeping the motor running so that the heater would work.

In a few minutes the black Buick appeared, coming slowly north on Milwaukee. It didn't stop. Belski hustled back to the panel truck. The Plymouth and the truck fell in behind the Buick, and the three cars proceeded north on Milwaukee Avenue at about thirty miles an hour.

The two police cars followed a

block and a half back. The milk truck was four blocks back and, in the pre-dawn darkness, unidentifiable.

Suddenly, at the corner where Belmont Avenue bisects Milwaukee, the three gang cars shot off in opposite directions at high speeds.

O'Hara grabbed the walkie-talkie. "Same M.O. Fitz and Tis on Belski. We'll take the Buick. Johnson, afraid you're out of it. Continue north on Milwaukee and keep in touch. Over and out!"

The Plymouth was already in the clear, and this time Belski succeeded in shaking the gray sedan. But one car was all O'Hara needed, and Svenson clung to the careening Buick like a used car salesman to a sweepstakes winner. Finally the Buick slowed and came out on to Milwaukee Avenue again, this time in the 3900-block. It turned north.

O'Hara picked up the walkie-talkie. "Come to me. I'm in the 3900-block Milwaukee, going north at twenty-five miles an hour. I think this is it!"

At the 4700-block, the Buick made a right turn on to Bedford Street, a short thoroughfare lined with stores and small office buildings. It was in the heart of the Milwaukee-Lawrence shopping area, and at 5:10 in the morning of New Year's day it was completely deserted.

Parked on Bedford Street a couple of doors down from Milwaukee

were the Plymouth and the panel truck. The three cars were right in front of the Bernikoff Jewelry Store, one of a large midwestern chain.

O'Hara took it all in as the black police sedan cruised slowly past Bedford Street. He told Svenson to park on Milwaukee, just out of sight of the gang cars on Bedford. They were not conspicuous; there were other cars parked here and there, for it was an area where all-night parking was permitted.

He picked up the walkie-talkie. "They're hitting the Bernikoff Jewelry Store on Bedford. Fitz, park with your lights off just south of Bedford. Johnson, pull up behind Fitz if you can read me. Tis will do his stuff as soon as they are in."

He saw the gray sedan pull over and park. At the same time a man appeared at the corner of Bedford and Milwaukee and gazed carefully up and down the street. It was Brubaker, acting as lookout. He apparently saw nothing suspicious. He lit a cigarette.

O'Hara breathed into the walkie-talkie: "Now, Tis!"

Detective Tisdale drew a pint bottle from the glove compartment of the gray sedan and sprinkled himself liberally with whiskey. He got out of the car and reeled towards Brubaker, paper hat askew on his head and the toy horn grasped firmly in one hand.

Brubaker's hand went to his coat pocket. He looked at Tisdale un-

certainly, then withdrew his hand—empty.

Tisdale staggered up to him. "Happy New Year, fren!" he hiccupped.

Brubaker grinned. "Happy New Year, buddy!"

Tisdale turned and staggered down Bedford Street.

Farther down Bedford, Hogle was acting as lookout. In the doorway of the jewelry store were Patterson, Belski, and Meister. Belski had a small tank of acetylene gas cradled in his arms. The light from a street lamp glinted on a Smith and Wesson .38 in Meister's hand. Patterson was fumbling in his overnight bag for something.

Brubaker called out: "Just a drunk!"

Patterson and Belski ignored Tisdale. Meister watched him with good-natured contempt.

Tisdale leaned against a lamp-post.

He saw Patterson take a box-like contraption out of the overnight bag and hold it up to the lock on the jewelry store door. There was a faint buzzing, a click, and a newly-made key dropped out of the machine. Patterson picked it up and opened the door. He and Belski went in.

Tisdale lifted the toy horn to his lips and blew a loud squawk.

Meister, gun in hand, sprang at Tisdale. "Hey, cut out that god-dam racket, you—".

Tisdale dropped the horn and

whipped out his police Colt.

The two shots sounded like one. The "drunk" sagged to his knees, clutching his stomach. Meister staggered towards him, then crumpled face down on the sidewalk. Two trickles of gore curled slowly towards the gutter.

At the signal by Tisdale, O'Hara, Svenson and Fitzpatrick boiled out of the police cars, guns in hand and converged on the jewelry store. Brubaker, on the corner, fired at once at O'Hara and missed. He dropped his gun and ran for the Plymouth. O'Hara's shot caught him in the back of the head and he went down like a sluggish steer.

Hogle panicked. Without firing a shot he ran to the panel truck, got it started, and almost ran down Fitzpatrick, who was running across Bedford Street. Fitzpatrick dove into the gutter and a volley of shots from O'Hara and Svenson crashed into the cab of the panel truck. Hogle slumped across the wheel. The truck careened across Milwaukee Avenue, mounted the sidewalk, and crashed to a halt amidst the shattered glass of a clothing store window.

The dark interior of the jewelry store was ominously silent.

O'Hara, crouched near the door, yelled: "Throw out your artillery, Patterson! The party's over!"

Silence. Then two '38's clattered across the floor of the jewelry store. Belski and Patterson walked slow-

ly out, their hands in the air. Belski looked scared. But Patterson said calmly: "Good work, Lieutenant. This ought to get you a promotion."

Hogle and Brubaker were dead. Meister was seriously wounded. Tisdale had been hit in the gut, but would probably be all right.

O'Hara turned on the police radio in the black sedan and called for an ambulance. Horgan and Johnson had come up in the milk truck by now, and there were half a dozen police cars crowding into Bedford Street. Little knots of curious people, appearing out of nowhere, stared at the bodies and the blood.

On the way down to the Canalport station, Patterson asked O'Hara: "Where did I slip, Lieutenant?"

O'Hara didn't feel much like talking. But he said: "Hogle, mostly. We had a mug shot of him, and then when he left his car over there in Oak Park—"

Patterson nodded. "He was the lookout. He couldn't get his heap started right away after the job, so he panicked and ran for Belski's truck. The dumb bastard!" he added bitterly.

When Patterson and Belski had been booked and jailed and he had called Captain Pelswick, O'Hara remembered Althea's party. It was almost six o'clock, but still pitch dark.

He was bone tired, but he want-

ed to see her. Fortunately he had left the Porsche in the Canalport parking lot.

She was still up. She was lying on the couch wearing a revealing black negligee, and listening to the hi-fi. The room was a shambles of not-quite-empty highball glasses, overflowing ash-trays, stray bits of sandwiches, lip-stick stained paper napkins, and general debris.

He said: "Sorry I'm a little late."

She held out her arms. After awhile she said: "Want to tell me about it, Steve-o?"

"Not particularly. Patterson made a full confession. He and Belski planned the whole thing when they were in the army, even down to getting married as a cover. Patterson is a kind of perverted genius, a born thief who would rather steal a hundred dollars than make a thousand legit. He could have made an honest fortune with that key thing of his. Anyway, he and Belski took the whole thing to the syndicate boys, who okayed it

for a 50% cut. They fenced the loot through Bandino's loan outfit all right, but not through the Milwaukee Avenue branch. Hogle, Meister and Brubaker came into the picture when Patterson asked the syndicate for three punks to do the stealing and muscle work. And Hogle turned out to be their Achilles heel."

She said: "Don't I get any credit?"

"For what?" He was very tired.

"The non-locksmithing locksmith angle, remember?"

"Oh, that. Sure. Here's your reward." He got up and moved towards her.

She murmured: "Let's eat first."

So as the dawn of a new year came up redly over the lake, they drank bourbon and ate bacon and eggs, and later, when they lay close together on the couch and her breath was warm and sweet on his face, he sighed and reflected that not always was a policeman's lot an unhappy one.



# BUSYBODY



**K**ARL WAGNER's bare, hairy chest heaved as he stood in his closet doorway staring at his wife, wondering just how much longer he could take it.

"You don't have to shout at me, Karl," Myrtle said softly. She was lying in the bed, the sheet pulled up around her skinny body. Her mouse-colored hair had not been combed all day. Her skin was pale, her features pinched. There were dishes from her breakfast, lunch and supper on the night-stand, and there were magazines on the bed and under it, on the dust and under the dust and curled up with the dust-rolls in the far corners of the room.

"WHO THE HELL'S SHOUTING?" Karl Wagner yelled. "ALL I WANT IS A FRESH, CLEAN SHIRT!"

"I just wasn't up to it today, Karl," Myrtle said, even softer. That was what he couldn't take . . . the way her voice got softer as

BY J. SIMMONS SCHEB

*"Must you shout so?" His wife's voice was soft and whining. "Henrietta says she can hear every word you say." He gripped the sash cord in big sweaty hands.*

the argument got farther and farther along. He could take the hypochondria and the martyrdom and the complaining. He could even feel a little guilty because he had never bought her the moon or the mansion or the air-conditioned Cadillac he had promised to buy her, twelve years ago, when he had begged her to marry him. He could feel a little ashamed because he had not, after all, had enough love for both of them, as he had sworn he had. But he could not stand the quiet, incessantly whining voice that had become so much a part of her.

He turned back to the closet, yanked at a half-dirty shirt and tore it down the back. He swore loudly.

"Henrietta will hear you," Myrtle said.

Henrietta was the large-sized old maid who lived on the other side of the paper-thin wall of the sagging duplex. She worked days as a bookkeeper in a garage, and she spent her nights eating ice cream and reading magazines and eavesdropping on the Wagners. She hated him.

Later, after he had gone, she would come over with a quart of ice cream under one arm and a stack of cheap magazines under the other, and she would sit on the end of Myrtle's bed, and they would discuss him. They would eat their ice cream, and they would say how terrible he was to go out and leave Myrtle to the mercy of any prowler

that happened to be passing by. And how awful he was to play poker and deprive her of the nice things she ought to have. And how absolutely monstrous he was to expect her, a sick woman, to stand up and iron a shirt, just so he *could* go out and leave her. They would discuss his loud voice and his foul language, and they would agree that Myrtle would have been far better off if she had gone into modeling, as she had planned. And then they would discuss their confession magazines and they would trade their latest ones, and then Henrietta would go home and stay awake, listening for him to come in.

It happened every week on poker night. He knew it happened like that. He knew about the ice cream because the dishes were always there in the bedroom and the empty carton was always balanced precariously on top of the trash in the kitchen. And he could tell almost exactly what they had said by the way Myrtle talked when he got home.

"She says she can hear you as clearly as if you were beside her, but she can't hear a word I say," Myrtle said now.

Karl didn't answer. He reached for another half-dirty shirt and stood with his back to her, buttoning it.

"It's hot in here, Karl," Myrtle complained.

"Open the window!"



"You know I'm afraid."

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Karl strode across the room and grabbed at the rope of the venetian blind. "You know damn well if anybody tried to get in here, Henrietta would hear them before they could . . ." He gave a ruthless tug at the rope, and the blind came down and clattered to the floor.

Myrtle swung her skinny legs over the side of the bed. Her legs had not always been skinny. Karl could remember when they had been round and smooth and pleasing to the touch. He could remember burying his face in her softness and begging her forgiveness, like a child. Only, the forgiveness never came.

"Karl, for heaven's sake," Myrtle whined now. "Don't you have any control over yourself at all? Look what you've done now."

He stood there, feeling the wild rage sweep over him as the nagging voice went on. She sat on the edge of the bed, her back to him, pushing her bony feet into her slippers. His mouth opened. He let his thumb run along the rope that still hung from his big hand. Raw sweat ran down his back; his huge shoulders heaved mightily.

"Now, I have *no* privacy at all. Anybody—just anybody—can look in and see me in my bed. As soon as it gets dark and we turn on the lights . . ."

He knew what he was going to do before he did it. It was not

planned murder, but he did wait a long thirty seconds, to see if Henrietta had responded to the noise. There was no sound from next door. There was only the soft whining of Myrtle's words.

"I swear, Karl, sometimes I think it's a wonder I don't go out of my mind. Henrietta doesn't know how I stand it—you with your yelling and your temper and your awful language. And with what you lose at poker every week, we could be paying on an air-conditioner, and I wouldn't have to suff . . ."

She never finished the word. She would never have to suffer again.

He pulled the rope tight. It was ironic, he thought, and he couldn't help but smile, just a little, wondering if she had been going to say "from the heat." He heard a cracking sound and he stopped smiling and frowned and pulled at the rope with all of his strength.

Then, when her movement had ceased—when the soft, gagging noises no longer came from her throat, when her small breasts no longer rose and fell under the sheer night-gown—he stopped. He listened. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead, and he bit his lower lip. He waited.

There was no sound from next door. He could imagine Henrietta with her ear against the wall, but he could hear no sound.

"Don't be an ass!" He said loudly, "I'll fix it when I get home."

He worked quickly then. He

did not break the window, because the prowler pitch, he knew, would never work. Not with Henrietta next door.

"She can hear every word you say," Myrtle had told him, and he, himself, had pointed out how she would have heard a prowler.

He worked mechanically. He would have been surprised to know that he had been planning it all in the back of his mind for weeks. He got a stool, and he carried the body to the open closet door. He climbed up and tossed the rope over the top. He tugged her into the air, pulley-wise, and tied the rope to the knob on the other side. He kept his eyes focused on details. He made his mind a blank. He refused to see or think.

Then, as he bent down to turn the stool onto its side, her bare foot brushed against his forearm, and he shivered violently. For a long, icy minute, he thought he was going to be sick. His stomach wrretched, and he pressed his fist against his teeth. At last, he stood up, steadied himself against the wall and forced himself to look at her and check over everything he had done.

All was in order. She hung there by the neck, her head sagging to one side, her sheer gown drooping low to reveal one pasty-pale shoulder, her expression sad and lost and not at all surprised. She had not had time to be surprised. The bench, turned on its side, was ex-

actly the right height. Her bare white feet, swaying only slightly now, hung inches below where the top of the bench would have been if it were upright.

He took a deep breath. "Heart trouble, hell!" he said. "You're not too damn sick to sit up half the night, reading those crummy magazines. You know damn well Henrietta will be over here ten minutes after I'm gone."

And Henrietta would find the body. They would question her, of course, and she would let them know how much she hated him. She would tell them that Myrtle's life had not been worth living. She would mention that there might be another woman. She and Myrtle had discussed that possibility. She would tell them that Myrtle had a terrible heart condition that even the doctors could not seem to diagnose, and that her husband didn't seem to care. She would describe this final fight in minute detail, and she would insist that it had continued up until the time he had left the apartment.

Henrietta would, in fact, be his own star witness. The state does not punish a man because his wife commits suicide.

He opened the front door that led out onto the screened porch which spanned the two apartments. "If I thought you had the guts," he shouted, "I would hand you the rope, myself."

And then he slammed the door.

It was at that moment that his knees began to tremble. If Henrietta came over too soon . . .

He knelt quickly, untied his shoe lace and tied it again. He shifted position and did the same to the other shoe. He stood up, stuffed his shirt tail into his pants, tightened his belt around his middle. He searched in all his pockets for a cigarette, found it, searched again for a match. He had trouble lighting it, then drew the first long drag deep into his lungs and stifled down the nausea. Henrietta, he felt sure, would wait until he was out of sight before she went over. The more time Myrtle had to kill herself, the more convincing it would seem.

All together, he managed to use up a full five minutes. It seemed like five months. He could think of nothing else to do. Slowly, then, he moved across the porch and down the walk to the street.

He turned right and was almost to the corner when he saw her. She came out of the drug store and started toward him, a quart of ice cream under one arm and a stack of magazines under the other.

He felt his neck stiffen. The blood jumped across a nerve, and his head felt as if it would shake itself loose from his shoulders. Henrietta nodded politely and moved to one side to let him pass.

He walked on. He wondered how far he would get.



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CLUTCHING his empty lunchbox, he stepped off the city bus into the heat of the August evening. Before beginning the long walk to the trailer camp where he and Birdie kept their little house on wheels that wouldn't roll, he spewed out onto the sidewalk the tobacco juice he'd been hoarding. It bounced like water on a hot wood stove. Thinking ahead, he spit out the remains of his "chaw," too, getting his mouth ready for



BY  
ANNE SMITH EWING

## FRUSTRATION

*His job, his home, his life was a gray mist of dis-illusion. There was only the melon . . . cold, dark, rich red and juicy and bursting to open at the stroke of a sharp knife.*

his watermelon which Birdie, protesting, had promised to cool.

"Ice cold, you keep it ice cold," he had warned her, "Get plenty chunks from the ice-house and keep the gunny sack over it."

The exhaust fumes from the bus as it nudged back into the traffic blasted him and he waved at them angrily. As he started through the City's sprawling edge—uneven as the hem of one of Birdie's home-made dresses, he felt as usual the uneasiness. At this time of day, he should be putting up the plow, or letting the mule to pasture, or sharpening the hoe for tomorrow instead of getting off work from a janitor's job at a factory. He didn't belong here among the used-car lots, the signs with their surrounding litter, the half-emptied stores, and the dirty alleys where vacant-eyed children played listlessly.

From habit, now, passing the Lopez Bar, he hesitated.

"Drinkin' is a sin, Samuel," her lips would purse in her fat face, "Cold tea is cheaper and don't smell like dirty socks. If you'd only go to the lectures at the Gospel Home with me, Samuel, Brother Cornelius says . . ."

This evening, Samuel did not want to hear what Brother Cornelius predicted for sinners at the Gospel Home or during his "calls" to Birdie at the trailer. This evening would not be spoiled with the arguing. Besides, the beer might take away his appetite for the melon.

Bent and determined, he plodded past the Bar. He could already see the melon cradled in the dishpan of ice. He could feel the crisp crunch of the cold redness against his tongue.

. . . "They say it's so pretty out there in California," Birdie had insisted years ago, "Samuel, it's close to the Pacific and they's hills all about. We can get us a little trailer and you can get a job in a *de-fense* plant and only a few years workin' at that high pay and we can have enough to buy that bottom land of Tatum's stead of croppin' it. Man should have some pride and stand on his hind legs stead of takin' cuss words from another man."

Years . . . Slipping one into another. They were still stuck in the trailer camp, with it getting shabbier each year, and with him getting more worn and tired each year and forgetting the sounds of the field mice and the mockers and the tree frogs, and with Birdie getting fatter and more querulous until it seemed that she filled up the small trailer with her huge petulance.

He had never been able to afford another car after the first one wore out. Where had the money gone that he hadn't made at a defense job but sweeping a factory because he wasn't good for much but raising cotton? The church? Birdie was taking no chances of not getting there. Of course, she whined, Brother Cornelius wasn't as good as Pastor Jones back home but she

didn't aim to backslide and she liked to feel the goodness in her bones. Her doctor bills? Birdie had a lot of spells of feeling "poorly" and there was just nothing as soothing as the adjustments.

If he crossed her on money, she would call attention to her skimping on food. She picked at meals but he knew that she nibbled all day when she was alone. Besides, she would point out, he would earn more if he got a night job, and she did sew his underwear and her dresses by hand (no store could fit her) from grain and sugar sacks mailed to her by her sister Ida Mac from back home.

Yesterday after supper Samuel had gone to the produce stand and thumped out the smallest of the small melons in the stall. Down to two cents a pound. Not long and thick like the melons grown in the sandy loam nudging the bottom land in Texas. Small, but still too big to fit into the trailer's tiny refrigerator.

"I waited till they got down in price," he told Birdie, "And if you wasn't so lazy, you could make some preserves or pickles out'n the rind."

She had gone on protesting, "Well, I do like watermelon but it upsets my stomach. You could a got a canteloupe. They don't bother me so."

"I can have a watermelon onc't and a while!" Not telling her how he was almost sick from thinking

of the melons back home growing on their green vines in the melon patch along the creek, next to the cotton, growing heavy and ripe and sweet in the rich Texas sun. "I can have a watermelon onc't and a while," he kept muttering.

He turned in at the trailer camp at last. Resthaven. He grinned sourly at the sign. Past Mrs. Wingate's, her with her four children with no father. One of the boys had made himself a mudhole and was sitting in it. Perhaps it would have been different for him and Birdie if they'd had sons,—tall, lean, strong boys to hoe and turn up the black clods.

Past Oxstein's that Birdie wouldn't speak to because they were foreigners. "Evening, Mr. Oxstein."

"Ah," the old man peered over his glasses, "So, iss you, Mr. Parker? Hot today at the factory, yas?"

Past Miss Starr's, who entertained men callers in spite of the strict rule the trailer camp's owners didn't enforce. He slowed passing the neat geraniums because sometimes he could hear singing, happy sounding.

Tonight would take some of the anger away that he felt against Birdie and the trailer camp which had trapped him and against himself for being trapped. He would cut the watermelon as soon as he had finished supper. Then, it would be dark and he would sit outside in the beginning coolness

and eat it, and watch the lights of the City out on the hills, imagining all the time that he was home barefooted on the gallery counting fireflies among the oak trees, feeling the splinters on the boards under his feet with the dogs growling in their sleep on the steps. On the gallery after a day in the cotton field washed down from the pump. There was just nothing like pump-water to clean a man or cool a melon.

He pulled at the locked door of the trailer and heard the flooring creak.

"That you, Samuel?" She was afraid of fiends.

"Who'd you think it was?" he grumbled.

When she unsnapped the latch, the broad pinkness of her dress overwhelmed him till he thought he would choke. Usually, in the heat, she would be loosened into a cotton slip.

"What you all dressed up for? You had company?"

"Can't I put on somethin' nice? This is the material Ida Mae sent me last week. The pink. It took eight of the grain sacks but it sure made up pritty, didn't it?"

Not answering her, he put the lunchbox down, washed his hands, and uncovered the melon. "You been keepin' ice chunks on it all day like I said? It don't seem too cool to me."

"Oh, it's been coolin' right along," she glanced sideways at the

melon. "It sure looks nice and ripe."

"Seems it should be cooler."

"It's been a hot day and I done the best I could. Walkin' over to that ice house with my bunions killin' me."

Samuel opened the refrigerator and dumped out a tray of ice cubes on the melon.

"There goes the ice for the tea," she sniffed. She hesitated, "You reckon it'll be red ripe?"

"I was always the best melon thumper in the county, wasn't I?"

"Maybe you losing your touch."

He opened up like a snapping turtle to answer her, but he didn't. *Baiting me*, he thought.

He pulled out a drawer and took out a long knife, rubbing the blade against his thumb, sensing its serrated sharpness. He placed the knife beside the dishpan and then sat down at the small table and looked for the first time at the food she had spooned out into the several bowls and platters. They ate left-overs, different foods being added from new cans each night.

He forked greens in and wiped his mouth on his sleeve.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," she complained, "Hard enough to wash in those laundry trays."

"Gives you somethin' to do."

"That cheap Starr was there today, washing away. All those fancies she has. Certainly had a lot to do," she snickered.

His lips tightened as she went

on, "Guess you feel right honored getting those fancies washed right next to your sugar sack shorts? Guess maybe she be callin' you 'Sugar'?"

For a moment he imagined Miss Starr smiling at the home-made shorts, then he flushed with furious embarrassment.

Birdie's face wrinkled in laughter, the small blue eyes glittering from between the creases.

Rising abruptly, he went to the melon, handling its cool slickness gently. He took it from the dishpan and placed it on the sink and picked up the knife, intently regarding the green oval. Should he split it lengthwise? Or crosswise? Or through the middle? Lengthwise. The knife jerked through the rind and there was the ripping, cracking split of the parting.

He stared a long moment, not understanding. Green inside. The melon was green inside. Only a pale flush of pink and the seeds unfinished. How could that be? Wasn't he the best melon thumper in the county? He wiped his hand across his eyes. Then he shook his head, trying to order his thoughts, grabbing at the edge of the sink. Across the quiet of the small space, he could feel her gaze on his back, her waiting for what he would

have to say.

He knew then . . . why the melon had not been icy cold. The new pink dress. . . . Brother Cornelius had visited. "My melon," his voice was low, "My melon. This ain't my melon."

"Ain't it still manners to offer a guest a little something? . . . It was hot when Brother Cornelius come."

"What you do with the rest of it?"

She snorted, "Throwed it in the trash so's you wouldn't know."

He jerked around, staring, his eyes light with anger.

Her baby mouth puckered and she shrugged her heaviness, "And the ice house boy said this would be ripe. How'm I to tell, it's been so many years."

So many years. He felt the shaking creep down his arms into the tips of his fingers, the feeling his arms got that first hot day of summer from hoeing too long in the sun. He reached behind him for the long knife.

"Now, Samuel," she could only whisper.

Her whole over ripe pinkness jiggled before him, blurring and receding. The knife came forward. It slashed, again and again and the pinkness turned ripe-melon red.





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