

ANC

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

DECEMBER
35 CENTS

BLACK PUDDING

By

David
Goodis



Plus —

CRAIG RICE

HAROLD G. MASUR

FRANK KANE

EVAN HUNTER

— and others

EVERY STORY NEW!

Uppswall

CONTENTS

NOVELETTES

	<i>Page</i>
THE ICEPICK ARTISTS <i>by Frank Kane</i>	122
(A Johnny Liddell Novelette)	
BLACK PUDDING <i>by David Goodis</i>	1
THE WIFE OF RILEY <i>by Evan Hunter</i>	61

SHORT STORIES

MURDER MARCHES ON! <i>by Craig Rice</i>	39
(A John J. Malone Story)	
RICHEST MAN IN THE MORGUE <i>by Harold Q. Mansur</i>	81
(A Scott Jordan Story)	
KILLING ON SEVENTH STREET <i>by Charles Beckman, Jr.</i>	33
SWITCH ENDING <i>by Richard Marsten</i>	22
THE QUIET ROOM <i>by Jonathan Craig</i>	94
SUCKER <i>by Hunt Collins</i>	51
THE COYOTE <i>by David Chandler</i>	102
WIFE BEATER <i>by Roy Carroll</i>	108
THE INSECURE <i>by R. Van Taylor</i>	138

FEATURES

CRIME CAVALCADE <i>by Vincent H. Gaddis</i>	117
PORTRAIT OF A KILLER <i>by Dan Sontup</i>	58

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

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

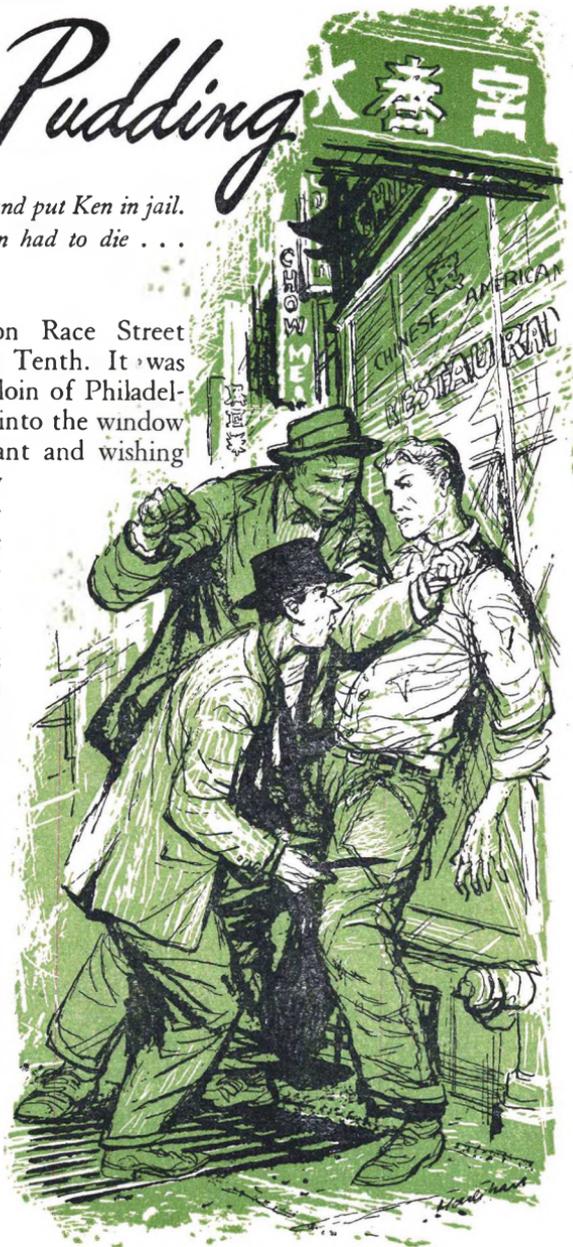
MANHUNT VOLUME 1, NUMBER 12, DECEMBER, 1953. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. Telephone MU 7-6623. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1953 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. (an affiliate of St. John Publishing Company), under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A.

Black Pudding 大齊室

*Riker had taken Ken's wife, and put Ken in jail.
Now Riker decided that Ken had to die . . .*

THEY spotted him on Race Street between Ninth and Tenth. It was Chinatown in the tenderloin of Philadelphia and he stood gazing into the window of the Wong Ho restaurant and wishing he had the cash to buy himself some egg-foo-yung. The menu in the window priced egg-foo-yung at eighty cents an order and he had exactly thirty-one cents in his pocket. He shrugged and started to turn away from the window and just then he heard them coming.

It was their footsteps that told him who they were. There was the squeaky sound of Oscar's brand-new shoes. And the clumping noise of Coley's heavy feet. It was nine years since he'd heard their footsteps but he remembered that Oscar had



A Novelette

BY DAVID GOODIS

weakness for new shoes and Coley always walked heavily.

He faced them. They were smiling at him, their features somewhat greenish under the green neon glow that drifted through after-midnight blackness. He saw the weasel eyes and buzzard nose of little Oscar. He transferred his gaze to the thick lips and puffed-out cheeks of tall, obese Coley.

"Hello, Ken." It was Oscar'surring voice, Oscar's lips scarcely moving.

"Hello," he said to both of them. He blinked a few times. Now the shock was coming. He could feel the waves of shock surging toward him.

"We been looking for you," Coley said. He flipped his thick thumb over his shoulder to indicate the black Olds 88 parked across the street. "We've driven that car clear across the country."

Ken blinked again. The shock had hit him and now it was past and he was blinking from worry. He knew why they'd been looking for him and he was very worried.

He said quietly, "How'd you know I was in Philly?"

"Grapevine," Oscar said. "It's strictly coast-to-coast. It starts from in Quentin and we get tipped-off in Los Angeles. It's a letter telling the Boss you been paroled. That's three weeks ago. Then we get letters from Denver and Omaha and a wire from Chicago. And then a phone call from Detroit. We wait to see how far east you'll travel. Finally we

get the call from Philly, and the man tells us you're on the bum around Skid Row."

Ken shrugged. He tried to sound casual as he said, "Three thousand miles is a long trip. You must have been anxious to see me."

Oscar nodded. "Very anxious." He sort of floated closer to Ken. And Coley also moved in. It was slow and quiet and it didn't seem like menace but they were crowding him and finally they had him backed up against the restaurant window.

He said to himself, *They've got you, they've found you and they've got you and you're finished.*

He shrugged again. "You can't do it here."

"Can't we?" Oscar purred.

"It's a crowded street," Ken said. He turned his head to look at the lazy parade of tenderloin citizens on both sides of the street. He saw the bums and the beggars, the winos and the ginheads, the yellow faces of middle-aged opium smokers and the grey faces of two-bit scufflers and hustlers.

"Don't look at them," Oscar said. "They can't help you. Even if they could, they wouldn't."

Ken's smile was sad and resigned. "You're so right," he said. His shoulders drooped and his head went down and he saw Oscar reaching into a jacket pocket and taking out the silver-handled tool that had a button on it to release a five-inch blade. He knew there would be no further talk, only action, and it

would happen within the next split-second.

In that tiny fraction of time, some gears clanged to shift from low to high in Ken's brain. His senses and reflexes, dulled from nine years in prison, were suddenly keen and acutely technical and there was no emotion on his face as he moved. He moved very fast, his arms crossing to shape an X, the left hand flat and rigid and banging against Oscar's wrist, the right hand a fist that caught Coley in the mouth. It sent the two of them staggering backward and gave him the space he wanted and he darted through the gap, sprinting east on Race Street toward Ninth.

As he turned the corner to head north on Ninth, he glanced backward and saw them getting into the Olds. He took a deep breath and continued running up Ninth. He ran straight ahead for approximately fifteen yards and then turned again to make a dash down a narrow alley. In the middle of the alley he hopped a fence, ran across a backyard, hopped another fence, then a few more backyards with more fence-hopping, and then the opened window of a tenement cellar. He lunged at the window, went in head-first, groped for a handhold, couldn't find any, and plunged through eight feet of blackness onto a pile of empty boxes and tin cans. He landed on his side, his thigh taking most of the impact, so that it didn't hurt too much. He rolled

over and hit the floor and lay there flat on his belly. From a few feet away a pair of green eyes stared at him and he stared back, and then he grinned as though to say, *Don't be afraid, pussy, stay here and keep me company, it's a tough life and an evil world and us alleycats got to stick together.*

But the cat wasn't trusting any living soul. It let out a soft meow and scampered away. Ken sighed and his grin faded and he felt the pressure of the blackness and the quiet and the loneliness. His mind reached slowly for the road going backward nine years . . .

It was Los Angeles, and they were a small outfit operating from a first-floor apartment near Figueroa and Jefferson. Their business was armed robbery and their work-area included Beverly Hills and Bel-Air and the wealthy residential districts of Pasadena. They concentrated on expensive jewelry and wouldn't touch any job that offered less than a ten-grand haul.

There were five of them, Ken and Oscar and Coley and Ken's wife and the Boss. The name of the Boss was Riker and he was very kind to Ken until the face and body of Ken's wife became a need and then a craving and finally an obsession. It showed in Riker's eyes whenever he looked at her. She was a platinum blonde dazzler, a former burlesque dancer named Hilda. She'd been married to Ken for seven months

when Riker reached the point where he couldn't stand it any longer and during a job in Bel-air he banged Ken's skull with the butt end of a revolver. When the police arrived, Ken was unconscious on the floor and later in the hospital they asked him questions but he wouldn't answer. In the courtroom he sat with his head bandaged and they asked him more questions and he wouldn't answer. They gave him five-to-twenty and during his first month in San Quentin he learned from his lawyer that Hilda had obtained a Reno divorce and was married to Riker. He went more or less insane and couldn't be handled and they put him in solitary.

Later they had him in the infirmary, chained to the bed, and they tried some psychology. They told him he'd regain his emotional health if he'd talk and name some names. He laughed at them. Whenever they coaxed him to talk, he laughed in their faces and presently they'd shrug and walk away.

His first few years in Quentin were spent either in solitary or the infirmary, or under special guard. Then, gradually, he quieted down. He became very quiet and in the laundry-room he worked very hard and was extremely cooperative. During the fifth year he was up for parole and they asked him about the Bel-Air job and he replied quite reasonably that he couldn't remember, he was afraid to remember, he wanted to forget all about it and

arrange a new life for himself. They told him he'd talk or he'd do the limit. He said he was sorry but he couldn't give them the information they wanted. He explained that he was trying to get straight with himself and be clean inside and he wouldn't feel clean if he earned his freedom that way.

So then it was nine years and they were convinced he'd finally paid his debt to the people of California. They gave him a suit of clothes and a ten-dollar bill and told him he was a free man.

In a Sacramento hash-house he worked as a dishwasher just long enough to earn the bus-fare for a trip across the country. He was thinking in terms of the town where he'd been born and raised, telling himself he'd made a wrong start in Philadelphia and the thing to do was go back there and start again and make it right this time, really legitimate. The parole board okayed the job he'd been promised. That was a healthy thought and it made the bus-trip very enjoyable. But the nicest thing about the bus was its fast engine that took him away from California, far away from certain faces he didn't want to see.

Yet now, as he rested on the floor of the tenement cellar, he could see the faces again. The faces were worried and frightened and he saw them in his brain and heard their trembling voices. He heard Riker saying, "They've released him from Quentin. We'll have to do something."

And Hilda saying, "What can we do?" And Riker replying, "We'll get him before he gets us."

He sat up, colliding with an empty tin can that rolled across the floor and made a clatter. For some moments there was quiet and then he heard a shuffling sound and a voice saying, "Who's there?"

It was a female voice, sort of a cracked whisper. It had a touch of asthma in it, some alcohol, and something else that had no connection with health or happiness.

Ken didn't say anything. He hoped she'd go away. Maybe she'd figure it was a rat that had knocked over the tin can and she wouldn't bother to investigate.

But he heard the shuffling footsteps approaching through the darkness. He focused directly ahead and saw the silhouette coming toward him. She was on the slender side, neatly constructed. It was a very interesting silhouette. Her height was approximately five-five and he estimated her weight in the neighborhood of one-ten. He sat up straighter. He was very anxious to get a look at her face.

She came closer and there was the scratchy sound of a match against a matchbook. The match flared and he saw her face. She had medium-brown eyes that matched the color of her hair, and her nose and lips were nicely sculptured, somewhat delicate but blending prettily with the shape of her head. He told himself she was a very pretty

girl. But just then he saw the scar.

It was a wide jagged scar that started high on her forehead and crawled down the side of her face and ended less than an inch above her upper lip. The color of it was a livid purple with lateral streaks of pink and white. It was a terrible scar, really hideous.

She saw that he was wincing, but it didn't seem to bother her. The lit match stayed lit and she was sizing him up. She saw a man of medium height and weight, about thirty-six years old, with yellow hair that needed cutting, a face that needed shaving, and sad lonely grey eyes that needed someone's smile.

She tried to smile for him. But only one side of her mouth could manage it. On the other side the scar was like a hook that pulled at her flesh and caused a grimace that was more anguish than physical pain. He told himself it was a damn shame. Such a pretty girl. And so young. She couldn't be more than twenty-five. Well, some people had all the luck. All the rotten luck.

The match was burned halfway down when she reached into the pocket of a tattered dress and took out a candle. She went through the process of lighting the candle and melting the base of it. The softened wax adhered to the cement floor of the cellar and she sat down facing him and said quietly, "All right, let's have it. What's the pitch?"

He pointed backward to the opened window to indicate the

November night. He said, "It's chilly out there. I came in to get warm."

She leaned forward just a little to peer at his eyes. Then, shaking her head slowly, she murmured, "No sale."

He shrugged. He didn't say anything.

"Come on," she urged gently. "Let's try it again."

"All right." He grinned at her. And then it came out easily. "I'm hiding."

"From the Law?"

"No," he said. "From trouble."

He started to tell her about it. He couldn't understand why he was telling her. It didn't make sense that he should be spilling the story to someone he'd just met in a dark cellar, someone out of nowhere. But she was company and he needed company. He went on telling her.

It took more than an hour. He was providing all the details of events stretched across nine years. The candlelight showed her sitting there, not moving, her eyes riveted to his face as he spoke in low tones. Sometimes there were pauses, some of them long, some very long, but she never interrupted, she waited patiently while he groped for the words to make the meaning clear.

Finally he said, "— It's a cinch they won't stop, they'll get me sooner or later."

"If they find you," she said.

"They'll find me."

"Not here."

He stared at the flickering candle. "They'll spend money to get information. There's more than one big mouth in this neighborhood. And the biggest mouths of all belong to the landlords."

"There's no landlord here," she told him. "There's no tenants except me and you."

"Nobody upstairs?"

"Only mice and rats and roaches. It's a condemned house and City Hall calls it a firetrap and from the first floor up the windows are boarded. You can't get up because there's no stairs. One of these days the City'll tear down this dump but I'll worry about that when it happens."

He looked at her. "You live here in the cellar?"

She nodded. "It's a good place to play solitaire."

He smiled and murmured, "Some people like to be alone."

"I don't like it," she said. Then, with a shrug, she pointed to the scar on her face. "What man would live with me?"

He stopped smiling. He didn't say anything.

She said, "It's a long drop when you're tossed out of a third-story window. Most folks are lucky and they land on their feet or their fanny. I came down head first, cracked my collar-bone and got a fractured skull, and split my face wide open."

He took a closer look at the livid scar. For some moments he was

quiet and then he frowned thoughtfully and said, "Maybe it won't be there for long. It's not as deep as I thought it was. If you had it treated —"

"No," she said. "The hell with it."

"You wouldn't need much cash," he urged quietly. "You could go to a clinic. They're doing fancy tricks with plastic surgery these days."

"Yeah, I know." Her voice was toneless. She wasn't looking at him. "The point is, I want the scar to stay there. It keeps me away from men. I've had too many problems with men and now, whenever they see my face, they turn their heads the other way. And that's fine with me. That's just how I want it."

He frowned again. This time it was a deeper frown and it wasn't just thoughtful. He said, "Who threw you out of the window?"

"My husband." She laughed without sound. "My wonderful husband."

"Where is he now."

"In the cemetery," she said. She shrugged again, and her tone was matter-of-fact. "It happened while I was in the hospital. I think he got to the point where he couldn't stand to live with himself. Or maybe he just did it for kicks, I don't know. Anyway, he got hold of a meat-cleaver and chopped his own throat. When they found him, he damn near didn't have a head."

"Well, that's one way of ending a marriage."

Again she uttered the soundless laugh. "It was a fine marriage while it lasted. I was drunk most of the time. I had to get drunk to take what he dished out. He had some weird notions about wedding vows."

"He went with other women?"

"No," she said. "He made me go with other men."

For some moments it was quiet.

And then she went on, "We lived here in this neighborhood. It's a perfect neighborhood for that sort of deal. He had me out on the street looking for customers and bringing the money home to him, and when I came in with excuses instead of cash he'd throw me on the floor and kick me. I'd beg him to stop and he'd laugh and go on kicking me. Some nights I have bad dreams and he's kicking me. So then I need the sweet dreams, and that's when I reach for the pipe."

"The pipe?"

"Opium," she said. She said it with fondness and affection. "Opium." There was tenderness in her eyes. "That's my new husband."

He nodded understandingly.

She said, "I get it from a Chinaman on Ninth Street. He's a user himself and he's more than eighty years old and still in there pitching, so I guess with O it's like anything else, it's all a matter of how you use it." Her voice dropped off just a little and her eyes were dull and sort of dismal as she added, "I wish I didn't need so much of it. It takes most of my weekly salary."

“What kind of work you do?”

“I scrub floors,” she said. “In night-clubs and dance-halls. All day long I scrub the floors to make them clean and shiny for the night-time customers. Some nights I sit here and think of the pretty girls dancing on them polished floors. The pretty girls with flowers in their hair and no scars on their faces—” She broke it off abruptly, her hand making a brushing gesture as though to disparage the self-pity. She stood up and said, “I gotta go out to do some shopping. You wanna wait here till I come back?”

Without waiting for his answer, she moved across the cellar toward a battered door leading to the backyard. As she opened the door, she turned and looked at him. “Make yourself comfortable,” she said. “There’s a mattress in the next room. It ain’t the Ritz Carlton exactly, but it’s better than nothing.”

He was asking himself whether he should stay there.

He heard her saying, “Incidentally, my name is Tillie.”

She stood there waiting.

“Kenneth,” he said. “Kenneth Rockland.”

But that wasn’t what she was waiting for. Several moments passed, and then somehow he knew what she wanted him to say.

He said, “I’ll be here when you come back.”

“Good.” The candlelight showed

her crooked grin, a grimace on the scarred face. But what he saw was a gentle smile. It seemed to drift toward him like a soothing caress. And then he heard her saying, “Maybe I’ll come back with some news. You told me it was two men. There’s a chance I can check on them if you’ll tell me what they look like.”

He shook his head. “You better stay out of it. You might get hurt.”

“Nothing can hurt me,” she said. She pointed her finger at the wreckage of her face. Her tone was almost pleading as she said, “Come on, tell me what they look like.”

He shrugged. He gave a brief description of Oscar and Coley. And the Olds 88.

“Check,” Tillie said. “I don’t have 20-20 but I’ll keep them open and see what’s happening.”

She turned and walked out and the door closed. Ken lifted himself from the floor and picked up the candle. He walked across the cement floor and the candle showed him a small space off to one side, a former coal-bin arranged with a mattress against the wall, a splintered chair and a splintered bureau and a table stacked with books. There was a candleholder on the table and he set the candle on it and then he had a look at the books.

It was an odd mixture of literature. There were books dealing with idyllic romance, strictly from fluttering hearts and soft moonlight and violins. And there were books

that probed much deeper, explaining the scientific side of sex, with drawings and photos to show what it was all about. There was one book in particular that looked as though she'd been concentrating on it. The pages were considerably thumbed and she'd used a pencil to underline certain paragraphs. The title was, "The Sex Problem of the Single Woman."

He shook his head slowly. He thought, *It's a damn shame . . .*

And then, for some unaccountable reason, he thought of Hilda. She flowed into his mind with a rustling of silk that sheathed the exquisite contours of her slender torso and legs. Her platinum blonde hair was glimmering and her long-lashed green eyes were beckoning to say, Come on, take my hand and we'll go down Memory Lane.

He shut his eyes tightly. He wondered why he was thinking about her. A long time ago he'd managed to get her out of his mind and he couldn't understand what brought her back again. He begged himself to get rid of the thought, but now it was more than a thought, it was the white-hot memory of tasting that mouth and possessing that elegant body. Without sound he said, *Goddamn her.*

And suddenly he realized why he was thinking of Hilda. It was like a curtain lifted to reveal the hidden channels of his brain. He was comparing Hilda's physical perfection with the scarred face of Tillie. His

eyes were open and he gazed down at the mattress on the floor and for a moment he saw Hilda naked on the mattress. She smiled teasingly and then she shook her head and said, *Nothing doing.* So then she vanished and in the next moment it was Tillie on the mattress but somehow he didn't feel bitter or disappointed; he had the feeling that the perfection was all on Tillie's side.

He took off his shoes and lowered himself to the mattress. He yawned a few times and then he fell asleep.

A voice said, "Kenneth —"

He was instantly awake. He looked up and saw Tillie. He smiled at her and said, "What time is it?"

"Half-past five." She had a paper bag in her hand and she was taking things out of the bag and putting them on the table. There was some dried fish and a package of tea leaves and some cold fried noodles. She reached deeper into the bag and took out a bottle containing colorless liquid.

"Rice wine," she said. She set the bottle on the table. Then again she reached into the bag and her hand came out holding a cardboard box.

"Opium?" he murmured.

She nodded. "I got some cigarettes, too." She took a pack of Luckies from her pocket, opened the pack and extended it to him.

He sat up and put a cigarette in his mouth and used the candle to light it. He said, "You going to smoke the opium?"

"No, I'll smoke what you're smoking."

He put another cigarette in his mouth and lit it and handed it to her.

She took a few drags and then she said quietly, "I didn't want to wake you up, but I thought you'd want to hear the news."

He blinked a few times. "What news?"

"I saw them," she said.

He blinked again. "Where?"

"On Tenth Street." She took more smoke into her mouth and let it come out of her nose. "It was a couple hours ago, after I come out of the Chinaman's."

He sat up straighter. "You been watching them for two hours?"

"Watching them? I been with them. They took me for a ride."

He stared at her. His mouth was open but no sound came out.

Tillie grinned. "They didn't know I was in the car."

He took a deep breath. "How'd you manage it?"

She shrugged. "It was easy. I saw them sitting in the car and then they got out and I followed them. They were taking a stroll around the block and peeping into alleys and finally I heard the little one saying they might as well powder and come back tomorrow. The big one said they should keep on searching the neighborhood. They got into an argument and I had a feeling the little one would win. So I walked back to the car. The door was open and I

climbed in the back and got flat on the floor. About five minutes later they're up front and the car starts and we're riding."

His eyes were narrow. "Where?"

"Downtown," she said. "It wasn't much of a ride. It only took a few minutes. They parked in front of a house on Spruce near Eleventh. I watched them go in. Then I got out of the car —"

"And walked back here?"

"Not right away," she said. "First I cased the house."

Silly Tillie, he thought. *If they'd seen her they'd have dragged her in and killed her.*

She said, "It's one of them little old-fashioned houses. There's a vacant lot on one side and on the other side there's an alley. I went down the alley and came up on the back porch and peeped through the window. They were in the kitchen, the four of them."

He made no sound, but his lips shaped the word. "Four?" And then, with sound, "Who were the other two?"

"A man and a woman."

He stiffened. He tried to get up from the mattress and couldn't move. His eyes aimed past Tillie as he said tightly, "Describe them."

"The man was about five-ten and sort of beefy. I figure about two hundred. He looked about forty or so. Had a suntan and wore expensive clothes. Brown wavy hair and brown eyes and —"

"That's Riker," he murmured.

He managed to lift himself from the mattress. His voice was a whisper as he said, "Now let's have the woman."

"She was something," Tillie said. "She was really something."

"Blonde?" And with both hands he made a gesture begging Tillie to speed the reply.

"Platinum blonde," Tillie said. "With the kind of a face that makes men sweat in the wintertime. That kind of a face, and a shape that goes along with it. She was wearing —"

"Pearls," he said. "She always had a weakness for pearls."

Tillie didn't say anything.

He moved past Tillie. He stood facing the dark wall of the cellar and seeing the yellow-black play of candlelight and shadow on the cracked plaster. "Hilda," he said. "Hilda."

It was quiet for some moments. He told himself it was wintertime and he wondered if he was sweating.

Then very slowly he turned and looked at Tillie. She was sitting on the edge of the mattress and drinking from the bottle of rice-wine. She took it in short, measured gulps, taking it down slowly to get the full effect of it. When the bottle was half-empty she raised her head and grinned at him and said, "Have some?"

He nodded. She handed him the bottle and he drank. The Chinese wine was mostly fire and it burned all the way going down and when it hit his belly it was electric-hot. But the climate it sent to his brain was

cool and mild and the mildness showed in his eyes. His voice was quiet and relaxed as he said, "I thought Oscar and Coley made the trip alone. It didn't figure that Riker and Hilda would come with them. But now it adds. I can see the way it adds."

"It's a long ride from Los Angeles," Tillie said.

"They didn't mind. They enjoyed the ride."

"The scenery?"

"No," he said. "They weren't looking at the scenery. They were thinking of the setup here in Philly. With Oscar putting the blade in me and then the funeral and Riker seeing me in the coffin and telling himself his worries were over."

"And Hilda?"

"The same," he said. "She's been worried just as much as Riker. Maybe more."

Tillie nodded slowly. "From the story you told me, she's got more reason to worry."

He laughed lightly. He liked the sound of it and went on with it. He said, through the easy laughter, "They really don't need to worry. They're making it a big thing and it's nothing at all. I forgot all about them a long time ago. But they couldn't forget about me."

Tillie had her head inclined and she seemed to be studying the sound of his laughter. Some moments passed and then she said quietly, "You don't like black pudding?"

He didn't get the drift of that. He

stopped laughing and his eyes were asking what she meant.

"There's an old saying," she said. "Revenge is black pudding."

He laughed again.

"Don't pull away from it," Tillie said. "Just listen to it. Let it hit you and sink in. Revenge is black pudding."

He went on laughing, shaking his head and saying, "I'm not in the market."

"You sure?"

"Positive," he said. Then, with a grin, "Only pudding I like is vanilla."

"The black tastes better," Tillie said. "I've had some, and I know. I had it when they told me what he did to himself with the meat-cleaver."

He winced slightly. He saw Tillie getting up from the mattress and moving toward him. He heard her saying, "That black pudding has a wonderful flavor. You ought to try a spoonful."

"No," he said. "No, Tillie."

She came closer. She spoke very slowly and there was a slight hissing in her voice. "They put you in prison for nine years. They cheated you and robbed you and tortured you."

"That's all past," he said. "That's from yesterday."

"It's from now." She stood very close to him. "They're itching to hit you again and see you dead. They won't stop until you're dead. That puts a poison label on them. And

there's only one way to deal with poison. Get rid of it."

"No," he said. "I'll let it stay the way it is."

"You can't," Tillie said. "It's a choice you have to make. Either you'll drink bitter poison or you'll taste that sweet black pudding."

He grinned again. "There's a third choice."

"Like what?"

"This." And he pointed to the bottle of rice-wine. "I like the taste of this. Let's stay with it until it's empty."

"That won't solve the problem," Tillie said.

"The hell with the problem." His grin was wide. It was very wide and he didn't realize that it was forced.

"You fool," Tillie said.

He had the bottle raised and he was taking a drink.

"You poor fool," she said. Then she shrugged and turned away from him and lowered herself to the mattress.

The forced grin stayed on his face as he went on drinking. Now he was drinking slowly because the rice-wine dulled the action in his brain and he had difficulty lifting the bottle to his mouth. Gradually he became aware of a change taking place in the air of the cellar; it was thicker, sort of smoky. His eyes tried to focus and there was too much wine in him and he couldn't see straight. But then the smoke came up in front of his eyes and into his eyes. He looked down and saw

the white clay pipe in Tillie's hand. She was sitting on the mattress with her legs crossed, Buddha-like, puffing at the opium, taking it in very slowly, the smoke coming out past the corners of her lips.

The grin faded from his face. And somehow the alcohol-mist was drifting away from his brain. He thought, *She smokes it because she's been kicked around.* But there was no pity in his eyes, just the level look of clear thinking. He said to himself, *There's only two kinds of people in this world, the ones who get kicked around and the ones who do the kicking.*

He lowered the bottle to the table. He turned and took a few steps going away and then heard Tillie saying, "Moving out?"

"No," he said. "Just taking a walk."

"Where?"

"Spruce Street," he said.

"Good," she said. "I'll go with you."

He shook his head. He faced her and saw that she'd put the pipe aside. She was getting up from the mattress. He went on shaking his head and saying, "It can't be played that way. I gotta do this alone."

She moved toward him. "Maybe it's good-bye."

"If it is," he said, "there's only one way to say it."

His eyes told her to come closer. He put his arms around her and held her with a tenderness and a feeling of not wanting to let her go. He kissed

her. He knew she felt the meaning of the kiss, she was returning it and as her breath went into him it was sweet and pure and somehow like nectar.

Then, very gently, she pulled away from him. She said, "Go now. It's still dark outside. It'll be another hour before the sun comes up."

He grinned. It was a soft grin that wasn't forced. "This job won't take more than an hour," he said. "Whichever way it goes, it'll be a matter of minutes. Either I'll get them or they'll get me."

He turned away and walked across the cellar toward the splintered door. Tillie stood there watching him as he opened the door and went out.

It was less than three minutes later and they had him. He was walking south on Ninth, between Race Street and Arch, and the black Olds 88 was cruising on Arch and he didn't see them but they saw him, with Oscar grinning at Coley and saying, "There's our boy."

Oscar drove the car past the intersection and parked it on the north side of Arch about twenty feet away from the corner. They got out and walked toward the corner and stayed close to the brick wall of the corner building. They listened to the approaching footsteps and grinned at each other and a few moments later he arrived on the corner and they grabbed him.

He felt Coley's thick arm wrapped tight around his throat, pulling his head back. He saw the glimmer of the five-inch blade in Oscar's hand. He told himself to think fast and he thought very fast and managed to say, "You'll be the losers. I made a connection."

Oscar hesitated. He blinked puzzledly. "What connection?"

He smiled at Oscar. Then he waited for Coley to loosen the arm-hold on his throat. Coley loosened it, then lowered it to his chest, using both arms to clamp him and prevent him from moving.

He made no attempt to move. He went on smiling at Oscar, and saying, "An important connection. It's important enough to louse you up."

"Prove it," Oscar said.

"You're traced." He narrowed the smile just a little. "If anything happens to me, they know where to get you."

"He's faking," Coley said. Then urgently, "Go on, Oscar, give him the knife."

"Not yet," Oscar murmured. He was studying Ken's eyes and his own eyes were somewhat worried. He said to Ken, "Who did the tracing?"

"I'll tell that to Riker."

Oscar laughed without sound. "Riker's in Los Angeles."

"No he isn't," Ken said. "He's here in Philly."

Oscar stopped laughing. The worry deepened in his eyes. He stared past Ken, focusing on Coley.

"He's here with Hilda," Ken said.

"It's just a guess," Coley said. "It's gotta be a guess." He tightened his bear-hug on Ken. "Do it, Oscar. Don't let him stall you. Put the knife in him."

Oscar looked at Ken and said, "You making this a quiz game?"

Ken shrugged. "It's more like stud poker."

"Maybe," Oscar admitted. "But you're not the dealer."

Ken shrugged again. He didn't say anything.

Oscar said, "You're not the dealer and all you can do is hope for the right card."

"I got it already," Ken said. "It fills an inside straight."

Oscar bit the edge of his lip. "All right, I'll take a look." He had the knife aiming at Ken's chest, and then he lowered it and moved in closer and the tip of the blade was touching Ken's belly. "Let's see your hole-card, sonny. All you gotta do is name the street and the house."

"Spruce Street," Ken said. "Near Eleventh."

Oscar's face became pale. Again he was staring at Coley.

Ken said, "It's an old house, detached. On one side there's a vacant lot and on the other side there's an alley."

It was quiet for some moments and then Oscar was talking aloud to himself, saying, "He knows, he really knows."

"What's the move?" Coley asked.

He sounded somewhat unhappy.

"We gotta think," Oscar said. "This makes it complicated and we gotta think it through very careful."

Coley muttered a four-letter word. He said, "We ain't getting paid to do our own thinking. Riker gave us orders to find him and bump him."

"We can't bump him now," Oscar said. "Not under these conditions. The way it stacks up, it's Riker's play. We'll have to take him to Riker."

"Riker won't like that," Coley said.

Oscar didn't reply. Again he was biting his lip and it went on that way for some moments and then he made a gesture toward the parked car. He told Coley to take the wheel and said he'd sit in the back with Rockland. As he opened the rear door he had the blade touching Ken's side, gently urging Ken to get in first. Coley was up front behind the wheel and then Oscar and Ken occupied the rear seat and the knife in Oscar's hand was aimed at Ken's abdomen.

The engine started and the Olds 88 moved east on Arch and went past Eighth and turned south on Seventh. There was no talk in the car as they passed Market and Chestnut and Walnut. They had a red light on Locust but Coley ignored it and went through at forty-five.

"Slow down," Oscar said.

Coley was hunched low over the

wheel and the speedometer went up to fifty and Oscar yelled, "For Christ's sake, slow down. You wanna be stopped by a red car?"

"There's one now," Ken said, and he pointed toward the side window that showed only the front of a grocery store. But Oscar thought it might really be a side-street with a police car approaching, and the thought was in his brain for a tiny fraction of a second. In that segment of time he turned his head to have a look. Ken's hand moved automatically to grab Oscar's wrist and twist hard. The knife fell away from Oscar's fingers and Ken's other hand caught it. Oscar let out a screech and Ken put the knife in Oscar's throat and had it in there deep just under the ear, pulled it out and put it in again. The car was skidding to a stop as Ken stabbed Oscar a third time to finish him. Coley was screaming curses and trying to hurl himself sideways and backward toward the rear seat and Ken showed him the knife and it didn't stop him. Ken ducked as Coley came vaulting over the top of the front seat, the knife slashing upward to catch Coley in the belly, slashing sideways to rip from navel to kidney, then across again to the other kidney, then up to the ribs to hit bone with Coley gurgling and trying to sob, doubled over with his knees on the floor and his chin on the edge of the back seat, his arms flung over the sprawled corpse of Oscar.

"I'm dying," Coley gurgled.

"I'm —" That was his final sound. His eyes opened very wide and his head snapped sideways and he was through for this night and all nights.

Ken opened the rear door and got out. He had the knife in his pocket as he walked with medium-fast stride going south on Seventh to Spruce. Then he turned west on Spruce and walked just a bit faster. Every now and then he glanced backward to see if there were any red cars but all he saw was the empty street and some alley cats mooching around under the street lamps.

In the blackness above the rooftops the bright yellow face of the City Hall clock showed ten minutes past six. He estimated the sky would be dark for another half-hour. It wasn't much time, but it was time enough for what he intended to do. He told himself he wouldn't enjoy the action, and yet somehow his mouth was watering, almost like anticipating a tasty dish. Something on the order of pudding, and the color of it was black.

He quickened his pace just a little, crossed Eighth Street and Ninth, and walked faster as he passed Tenth. There were no lit windows on Spruce Street but as he neared Eleventh the moonlight blended with the glow of a street lamp and showed him the vacant lot. He gazed across the empty space to the wall of the old-fashioned house.

Then he was on the vacant lot and moving slowly and quietly toward the rear of the house. He worked his way to the sagging steps of the back porch, saw a light in the kitchen window, climbed two steps and three and four and then he was on the porch and peering through the window and seeing Hilda.

She was alone in the kitchen, sitting at a white-topped table and smoking a cigarette. There was a cup and saucer on the table, the saucer littered with coffee-stained cigarette butts. As he watched, she got up from the table and went to the stove to lift a percolator off the fire and pour another cup of coffee.

She moved with a slow weaving of her shoulders and a flow of her hips that was more drifting than walking. He thought, *She still has it, that certain way of moving around, using that body like a long-stemmed lily in a quiet breeze. That's what got you the first time you laid eyes on her. The way she moves. And one time very long ago you said to her, "To set me on fire, all you have to do is walk across a room." You couldn't believe you were actually married to that hothouse-prize, that platinum blonde hair like melted eighteen-karat, that face, she still has it, that body, she still has it. It's been nine years, and she still has it.*

She was wearing bottle-green velvet that set off the pale green of her eyes. The dress was cut low, went in tight around her very narrow waist and stayed tight going

down all the way past her knees. She featured pearls around her throat and in her ears and on her wrists. He thought, *You gave her pearls for her birthday and Christmas and you wanted to give her more for the first wedding anniversary. But they don't sell pearls in San Quentin. All they sell is plans for getting out. Like lessons in how to crawl through a pipe, or how to conceal certain tools, or how to disguise the voice. The lessons never paid off, but maybe now's the time to use what you learned. Let's try Coley's voice.*

His knuckles rapped the kitchen door, and his mouth opened to let out Coley's thick, low-pitched voice saying, "It's me and Oscar."

He stood there counting off the seconds. It was four seconds and then the door opened. It opened wide and Hilda's mouth opened wider. Then she had her hand to her mouth and she was stepping backward.

"Hello, Hilda." He came into the kitchen and closed the door behind him.

She took another backward step. She shook her head and spoke through the trembling fingers that pressed against her lips. "It isn't —"

"Yes," he said. "It is."

Her hand fell away from her mouth. The moment was too much for her and it seemed she was going to collapse. But somehow she managed to stay on her feet. Then her eyes were shut tightly and she went on shaking her head.

"Look at me," he said. "Take a good look."

She opened her eyes. She looked him up and down and up again. Then, very slowly, she summoned air into her lungs and he knew she was going to let out a scream. His hand moved fast to his coat pocket and he took out Oscar's knife and said quietly, "No noise, Hilda."

She stared at the knife. The air went out of her without sound. Her arms were limp at her sides. She spoke in a half-whisper, talking to herself. "I don't believe it. Just can't believe it —"

"Why not?" His tone was mild. "It figures, doesn't it? You came to Philly to look for me. And here I am."

For some moments she stayed limp. Then, gradually, her shoulders straightened. She seemed to be getting a grip on herself. Her eyes narrowed just a little, as she went on looking at the silver-handled switchblade in his hand. She said, "That's Oscar's knife —?"

He nodded.

"Where is Oscar?" she asked. "Where's Coley?"

"They're dead." He pressed the button on the handle and the blade flicked out. It glimmered red with Oscar's blood and Coley's blood. He said, "It's a damn shame. They wouldn't be dead if they'd let me alone."

Hilda didn't say anything. She gave a little shrug, as though to indicate there was nothing she could

say. He told himself it didn't make sense to wait any longer and the thing to do was put the knife in her heart. He wondered if the knife was sharp enough to cut through ice.

He took a forward step, then stopped. He wondered what was holding him back. Maybe he was waiting for her to break, to fall on her knees and beg for mercy.

But she didn't kneel and she didn't plead. Her voice was matter-of-fact as she said, "I'm wondering if we can make a deal."

It caught him off balance. He frowned slightly. "What kind of deal?"

"Fair trade," she said. "You give me a break and I'll give you Riker."

He changed the frown to a dim smile. "I've got him anyway. It's a cinch he's upstairs sound asleep."

"That's fifty percent right," she said. "He's a very light sleeper. Especially lately, since he heard you were out of Quentin."

He widened the smile. "In Quentin I learned to walk on tip-toe. There won't be any noise."

"There's always noise when you break down a door."

The frown came back. "You playing it shrewd?"

"I'm playing it straight," she said. "He keeps the door locked. Another thing he keeps is a .38 under his pillow."

He slanted his head just a little. "You expect me to buy that?"

"You don't have to buy it. I'm giving it to you."

He began to see what she was getting at. He said, "All right, thanks for the freebee. Now tell me what you're selling."

"A key," she said. "The key to his room. He has one and I have one. I'll sell you mine at bargain rates. All I want is your promise."

He didn't say anything.

She shrugged and said, "It's a gamble on both sides. I'll take a chance that you'll keep your word and let me stay alive. You'll be betting even-money that I'm telling the truth."

He smiled again. He saw she was looking past him, at the kitchen door. He said, "So the deal is, you give me the key to his room and I let you walk out that door."

"That's it." She was gazing hungrily at the door. Her lips scarcely moved as she murmured, "Fair enough?"

"No," he said. "It needs a tighter contract."

Her face was expressionless. She held her breath.

He let her hold it for awhile, and then he said, "Let's do it so there's no gamble. You get the key and I'll follow you upstairs. I'll be right in back of you when you walk into the room. I'll have the blade touching your spine."

She blinked a few times.

"Well?" he said.

She reached into a flap of the bottle-green velvet and took out a door-key. Then she turned slowly and started out of the kitchen. He

moved in close behind her and followed the platinum blonde hair and elegant torso going through the small dining-room and the parlor and toward the dimly-lit stairway. He came up at her side as they climbed the stairs, the knife-blade scarcely an inch away from the shimmering velvet that covered her ribs.

They reached the top of the stairs and she pointed to the door of the front bedroom. He let the blade touch the velvet and his voice was a whisper saying, "Slow and quiet. Very quiet."

Then again he moved behind her. They walked slowly toward the bedroom door. The blade kissed the velvet and it told her to use the key with a minimum of sound. She put the key in the lock and there was no sound as she turned the key. There was only a slight clicking sound as the lock opened. Then no sound while she opened the door.

They entered the room and he saw Riker in the bed. He saw the brown wavy hair and there was some grey in it along the temples. In the suntanned face there were wrinkles and lines of dissipation and other lines that told of too much worry. Riker's eyes were shut tightly and it was the kind of slumber that rests the limbs but not the brain.

Ken thought, *He's aged a lot in nine years; it used to be mostly muscle and now it's mostly fat.*

Riker was curled up, his knees close to his paunch. He had his shoes

off but otherwise he was fully dressed. He wore a silk shirt and a hand-painted necktie, his jacket was dark grey cashmere and his slacks were pale grey high-grade flannel. He had on a pair of argyle socks that must have set him back at least twenty dollars. On the wrist of his left hand there was a platinum watch to match the large star-emerald he wore on his little finger. On the third finger of his left hand he had a three-karat diamond. Ken was looking at the expensive clothes and the jewelry and thinking, *He travels first-class, he really rides the gravy train.*

It was a bitter thought and it bit deeper into Ken's brain. He said to himself, *Nine years ago this man of distinction pistol-whipped your skull and left you for dead. You've had nine years in Quentin and he's had the sunshine, the peaches-and-cream, the thousands of nights with the extra-lovely Mrs. Riker while you slept alone in a cell —*

He looked at the extra-lovely Mrs. Riker. She stood motionless at the side of the bed and he stood beside her with the switchblade aiming at her velvet-sheathed flesh. She was looking at the blade and waiting for him to aim it at Riker, to put it in the sleeping man and send it in deep.

But that wasn't the play. He smiled dimly to let her know he had something else in mind.

Riker's left hand dangled over the side of the bed and his right hand

rested on the pillow. Ken kept the knife aimed at Hilda as he reached toward the pillow and then under the pillow. His fingers touched metal. It was the barrel of a revolver and he got a two-finger hold on it and eased it out from under the pillow. The butt came into his palm and his middle finger went through the trigger-guard and nestled against the back of the guard, not touching the trigger.

He closed the switchblade and put it in his pocket. He stepped back and away from the bed and said, "Now you can wake up your husband."

She was staring at the muzzle of the .38. It wasn't aiming at anything in particular.

"Wake him up," Ken murmured. "I want him to see his gun in my hand. I want him to know how I got it."

Hilda gasped and it became a sob and then a wail and it was a hook of sound that awakened Riker. At first he was looking at Hilda. Then he saw Ken and he sat up very slowly, as though he was something made of stone and ropes were pulling him up. His eyes were riveted to Ken's face and he hadn't yet noticed the .38. His hand crept down along the side of the pillow and then under the pillow.

There was no noise in the room as Riker's hand groped for the gun. Some moments passed and then there was sweat on Riker's forehead and under his lip and he went on

searching for the gun and suddenly he seemed to realize it wasn't there. He focused on the weapon in Ken's hand and his body began to quiver. His lips scarcely moved as he said, "The gun — the gun —"

"It's yours," Ken said. "Mind if I borrow it?"

Riker went on staring at the revolver. Then very slowly his head turned and he was staring at Hilda. "You," he said. "You gave it to him."

"Not exactly," Ken said. "All she did was tell me where it was."

Riker shut his eyes very tightly, as though he was tied to a rack and it was pulling him apart.

Hilda's face was expressionless. She was looking at Ken and saying, "You promised to let me walk out —"

"I'm not stopping you," he said. Then, with a shrug and a dim smile, "I'm not stopping anyone from doing what they want to do." And he slipped the gun into his pocket.

Hilda started for the door. Riker was up from the bed and lunging at her, grabbing her wrist and hurling her across the room. Then Riker lunged again and his hands reached for her throat as she tried to get up from the floor. Hilda began to make gurgling sounds but the noise was drowned in the torrent of insane screaming that came from Riker's lips. Riker choked her until she died. When Riker realized she was dead his screaming became louder and he went on choking her.

Ken stood there, watching it happen. He saw the corpse flapping like a rag-doll in the clutching hands of the screaming madman. He thought, *Well, they wanted each other, and now they got each other.*

He walked out of the room and down the hall and down the stairs. As he went out of the house he could still hear the screaming. On Spruce, walking toward Eleventh, he glanced back and saw a crowd gathering outside the house and then he heard the sound of approaching sirens. He waited there and saw the police-cars stopping in front of the house, the policemen rushing in with drawn guns. Some moments later he heard the shots and he knew that the screaming man was trying to make a getaway. There was more shooting and suddenly there was no sound at all. He knew they're be carrying two corpses out of the house.

He turned away from what was happening back there, walked along the curb toward the sewer-hole on the corner, took Riker's gun from his pocket and threw it into the sewer. In the instant that he did it, there was a warm sweet taste in his mouth. He smiled, knowing what it was. Again he could hear Tillie saying, "Revenge is black pudding."

Tillie, he thought. And the smile stayed on his face as he walked north on Eleventh. He was remembering the feeling he'd had when he'd kissed her. It was the feeling of wanting to take her out of that dark cellar, away from the loneliness and the opium. To carry her upward toward the world where they had such things as clinics, with plastic specialists who repaired scarred faces.

The feeling hit him again and he was anxious to be with Tillie and he walked faster.



Switch Ending

You get out of jail and you look for your son. And when your son's headed for jail, too, you get mad. Killing mad.

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

I HELD Tigo against the wall with one fist bunched into the front of his shirt, and with his spit falling down over his lips and jaw and trailing onto my hand.

"Where is he now?" I asked.

Tigo shook his head, with his eyes blue and wide, and streaked with bloodshot cobwebs.

"Where is he, Tigo? Tell me where he is."

Tigo started to shake his head again, and this time I helped him a little. I gave him the back of my knuckles, hard, splitting his cheek and mixing a little blood with his spit. His head rocked over to one side, and a wash of sweat spilled from his straight black hair.

"You were supposed to take care of him, Tigo. All right, you didn't.



Now all I want to know is where is he? Either that, or we play the game, Tigo, only we play it harder.”

“Danny, I’m your brother-in-law, your own . . .”

“Where is he, Tigo?”

“It’s not my fault your sister left me, Danny. You can’t blame that on me. I watched the kid good, I swear. I took care of him . . .”

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know, Danny.”

I hit him again, only this time it wasn’t my knuckles. This time it was my bunched fist, and it collided with the bridge of his nose, and his eyes began to water and blood spilled from his nostrils in a steady stream, warm with the heat of his body.

“Danny . . .”

“Where, Tigo?”

His eyes held the opaque stare of someone who’s been on heroin for a long time, and I thought of the kid and cursed my rotten sister for walking out and leaving him with this lump. I hit Tigo again, and he screamed like a woman in childbirth, and the sweat stood out on his face in giant shimmering globules. He moved his lips, and I was ready to start on his teeth next when he began to blubber.

“Don’t hit me again, Danny. Lay off, please, lay . . .”

I drew back my fist and his eyes went blank with fright.

“No!” he screamed. “No, I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you, Danny.”

“Fast.”

“The broad,” he gasped.

“What broad?”

“Connie. Connie.” He was gasping for breath, and I still held the front of his shirt, and my fist was still cocked.

“Connie? What do you mean, Connie? You know what you’re saying, you bastard?”

“Connie Blaine. I swear, Danny.”

“You’re a liar, Tigo. You’re a lying bastard.”

I pulled back my fist, ready to really let him have it this time, and he started screaming like an animal.

“I’m telling the truth, Danny. He’s with Connie Blaine. Danny, this is the goods. Danny, I swear. Danny, I wouldn’t snow you, not you, Danny. Danny . . .”

“Shut up!”

“Danny . . .”

“Shut up, Tigo.”

He stopped blubbling, and I held his shirt in my fist and thought for a few minutes, and then I asked, “How long has this been going on?”

“A year or so. Danny, I watched him good, like my own son, I swear. But Connie . . .”

“Connie Blaine? My kid, with Connie Blaine?”

“He ain’t such a kid, Danny. He must be twenty-one now. He . . .”

“Where does Nick fit in?”

“Nick?”

“Don’t play dummy, Tigo. Where does Nick fit the picture? Don’t tell me he’s going to sit with his thumb in his nose while a kid like Johnny plays house with his broad. Where does he fit?”

"I guess they busted maybe. Nick and Connie, I guess they did."

"Don't make me laugh." I paused and said, "Where's her pad?"

"You ain't going there, are you, Danny? Jesus, if they find out I told you . . ."

"Where's her pad?"

"Danny . . ."

"Tigo, if you want your teeth, tell me where she shacks. Tell me damned fast, Tigo, or you'll be chewing with your gums."

He considered this for two seconds, and then he told me. I left him slouched against the wall, and I went looking for Connie Blaine.

She was the same Connie, better if anything. She opened the door, and she was wearing silk lounging pajamas, and the pajamas didn't try to hide one line of her body, and neither did Connie. With some broads, a man acts like a tonic, any man. It was that way with Connie. When she opened the door and saw it was a man, she sucked her stomach in flat and threw out her chest, and the naked nipples under the pajama top punched harsh holes in the silk. Her hand went unconsciously to her hair, patted it, and she said, "Danny, I've been expecting you."

"I'll bet. Where is he?"

"Where's who?"

I started in, and she moved to one side, leaving me just enough room to get by. I got by, brushing against her, and I smelled the heavy sensuous perfume on her. Her hair was

black and tousled, and her brows were the same black, the black of pitch. Her eyes were half-closed, and she always looked as if she'd come straight from a haystack. She closed the door and walked to a low end table, leaning over to spear a cigarette from the container there. Her pajamas tightened across her back. I went through the apartment fast, and found nothing. When I came back, she had the cigarette going.

"Where's the kid?" I asked.

"Your son, you mean?"

"My son, I mean."

She blew out a cloud of smoke, looked at me through it, and said, "How should I know?"

"I've been hearing things, Connie."

"Like what?"

"Like you and Nick are on the rocks. Like my son's climbed into the saddle. I don't like it."

"Why not?"

"You know why not, baby. Don't give me the big blue-eyed stare. You know why not."

"Johnny's a big boy now, mister. He chooses his own playmates."

"And I don't like the playmates he chooses."

"He does. He likes it fine."

"I can imagine. It must be real professional."

"Look, Danny, if you came here to be insulting . . ."

"I came here to find Johnny. He's just a kid, and I don't want him messing with you or with the company you keep."

"He's twenty-one. That's old enough to vote, buster, and it ain't such a kid. It ain't a kid at all."

"A little hair under the armpits don't make a man. Where is he?"

"How the hell should I know? You're such a big-shot, you find him."

I glared at her, and we were both silent for a moment, and then she smiled, an arch smile that curved her full lips.

"How was it?" she asked.

"Fine," I said. "Just like a vacation."

"I'll bet."

"It was. A vacation with pay. Five years, just like Nick said. Not bad at all." I paused. "I took the rap, Connie. I didn't mind. Fifty grand is a lot of loot for a small stretch."

"And now you're back."

"Now I'm back. I had the vacation, and now I want the pay."

"So talk to Nick. He's the man with the bankroll."

"I'll get to him. In the meantime, keep clear of Johnny."

"Why?"

"Because I don't like the idea of coming straight from rock-breaking and finding him Christ knows where. I don't like it at all. I busted my back to keep him away from all this junk, and he's not going to get poisoned by it now."

"You're the one to talk, all right."

"You bet I'm the one to talk. I'm the one to talk because I'm in it up to my nostrils, and it stinks. But it's not going to touch him.

I've got fifty grand coming from Nick. I'm going to send the kid away with that and . . ."

"Stop calling him a kid, god-damnit!"

". . . and if you try to swing your hips into this, you're liable to wake up with something broken."

"You're scaring me, Danny."

I smiled. "Nick's a big man, huh? Is that what you're thinking? Baby, Nick can't watch you all the time. All I need is a few minutes. So steer clear of Johnny."

"I steer where I want to. No two-bit punk is going to direct my kicks."

"Where is he now?"

"Where's *who* now?"

"Johnny. You know damn well who . . ."

"If you think he's here, have another look." She laughed, a short malicious laugh. I glared at her and then went through the place with a fine comb. When I was finished, she said, "You satisfied?"

It was an obscene suggestion, the way she said it.

I turned my back on her and walked out.

Nick Trenton seemed glad to see me. He extended a beefy paw and took my hand in his, pumping it hard. He was a big boy, Nick, with a round face and heavy shoulders and chest. There was a time when a shoulder holster spoiled the cut of his three-hundred dollar suits. No more now. Now Nick hired his

guns. He also hired his fall guys, and I'd been one of them, and I wanted my fifty grand now.

"You look good, Danny," he told me. "A little pale, but otherwise fine."

I grinned tightly and said, "I found a home at Sing Sing."

Nick laughed, a good clean booming laugh. "They say you keep your sense of humor, and you're all right. Yessir, Danny, it doesn't seem to have hurt you one bit."

"Not a bit." I paused. "There's a little matter, Nick."

"Ah yes, the little matter."

"A little matter of fifty G's. You remember."

"I remember, Danny," Nick said. "A man don't forget fifty G's so easy, nosir. I remember, and I'm grateful as hell. A man does something for me, and it's appreciated."

I smiled. "Fine," I said. "Let's see the color of your appreciation."

Nick laughed aloud again, and his belly shook under his tailor-made suit. He walked around behind his desk, and opened the top drawer. He pulled out a narrow black book, threw it on the desk top, and then reached for a pen.

"A check all right?" he asked.

"No," I said.

Nick looked surprised. "Danny, my check's as good as gold."

"I know. I prefer the gold."

"Danny, Danny." He chuckled a little, softly this time. "I don't keep that kind of dough around. Why won't you take a check?"

"Because maybe I'll never get to the bank with it. Maybe I'll never get to cash it, and it's a simple thing to stop a check — especially when the payee is dead."

Nick shrugged. "What's the difference? I mean, okay, you don't trust me." He shrugged again. "But if I was going to have you cooled, I could do it even if I paid cash. I mean, a dead man don't put up a fight when someone goes through his pockets."

"I know. That's why I want it in savings bonds."

"What?"

"Savings bonds. United States Government Savings Bonds. All in capital letters, Nick. Fifty grand worth. With my son as beneficiary."

Nick studied me for a moment and then nodded. "How'd you figure that one out?"

"I had a long time to think about it."

"Well, if you want the bonds, I'll get them. But it'll take a little while."

"No time at all," I told him. "You can send a man to the bank now. I'll come back later."

"You really *don't* trust me, do you?"

"Not a bit, Nick. Not one goddam bit."

Nick smiled. "You should have thought of that before you took the rap."

"I should have, but I didn't. I should have been paid in advance. A man can't think of everything, Nick."

I'm doing all my thinking now."

"Sure." Nick smiled. "You got nothing to worry about, anyway. Nick Trenton never welshe. You come back at about six, Danny. I'll have the bonds for you then."

"With Johnny as beneficiary, don't forget."

"I won't forget."

"One other item, Nick."

"What's that?"

"Where's Johnny now?"

Nick smiled and shrugged. "How should I know?"

I tried to figure it.

I tried to figure why a broad who'd tumbled with every big wheel in the racket would give a second look to a kid like Johnny. I tossed it around, and I came up with zero each time, so I let it drop. I let it drop, and I searched the city for a kid I hadn't seen in five years.

He'd been sixteen when I went away, and the courts had awarded him to my closest female relative, my sister. She'd been okay then, and Tigo'd been a fairly good man. But times had changed, and Christ alone knew where she was, and Tigo had a habit as long as my arm. So now the kid was somewhere in the jungle of the city, only he wasn't such a kid anymore. He was big enough to play with Connie Blaine, and that's pretty damned big. Only why?

I started hitting the bars, figuring I'd pick up the word in one of them. Nobody knew, or if they knew, they

weren't saying. In the fifth bar, I ran into Hannigan.

He stood there with one foot hooked on the rail, and with a shot glass in front of him on the bar. He looked just the way he'd looked five years ago, but maybe cops never change.

I walked over to the bar, and he said, "Well, if it ain't."

"It ain't," I told him. I turned to Mike, the bartender, and said, "A double whiskey."

"How was the trip?" Hannigan asked.

"Nice. I missed you."

"Wished I was there, huh?" Hannigan laughed mirthlessly. He was a big cop, and a tough one, and I think he was still sore about my taking the rap. He'd hauled Nick in, anxious to slap him behind bars, and then I'd come along with my story and full confession, and that left Hannigan with an empty sack. I'd had reasons, though, and you don't explain reasons to a cop. When a kid's mother is gone and his old man is in the rackets, you got to be careful. Fifty grand can help you be very careful. That fifty grand was going to keep the kid away from the slime.

Mike brought the whiskey, and I downed it.

"When's the payoff?"

"What payoff, cop?"

"You know, Danny. Fifty grand, ain't it? The rumble's out."

"The rumble's wrong. Nobody's getting paid for anything."

"That may be truer than you think."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, ignoring his meaning.

"You clean, Danny?" Hannigan asked.

"Try me," I said.

Hannigan stood up, stretched, and then began frisking me.

"You know," I said, "I think you get a charge out of this, Hannigan. I think frisking is just an excuse with you."

"Go to hell," he told me.

"I'm not heeled. You can relax."

Hannigan fished into my pocket. "No? What's this?"

"For paring my nails. Any law against that?"

"It depends. How long is the blade?"

"Under four inches." I smiled. "You want to measure it?"

"I'll take your word, Danny."

"Thanks."

Hannigan climbed back onto the bar stool and was quiet for a moment. Then he said, "Your son . . ."

"What about my son?"

"Don't put up your guard, god-damnit. I know what you're trying to do for him, and I admire it. That's the only thing I *do* admire about you."

"So?"

"So it'd be a shame if everything you're trying to do goes down the drain."

"What do you mean, cop?"

"Stories, Danny. Stories that the

kid is turning into a cheap hood. Stories that he's already done some gun jobs for Nick Trenton. Stories that . . ."

"Shut up, cop."

"Stories that Connie Blaine's got him wrapped up. All she does is wiggle her backside and the kid would gun his own grandmother."

"Shut up, I said!"

"Stories like that."

"Keep your stories, and shove off. I like to choose my drinking companions."

"Sure. But you're liable to be mighty surprised, Danny."

"I don't need any advice from you, Hannigan."

"I'm not offering any, smart guy. But remember that I'm going to get Nick Trenton some day, and there won't be another sucker around to sub for him next time. I'm going to get him no matter who's in the way, Danny. And I hope your son isn't."

"Don't worry. He won't be."

"We'll see."

"We'll see. So long, cop."

Hannigan left, and I hung around a while and then covered the other joints I could think of. Before I knew it, it was six o'clock, so I hurried over to Nick's pad. He lived in an ornate joint, with a dozen elevators in the lobby and a pile of uniformed jokers running them. I took a car up to the twelfth floor and then walked down to the end of the hall and pressed the stud in the door jamb. I heard three chimes

sound inside, and then the door opened.

Connie Blaine opened it.

She was dressed to kill this time, wearing black silk that dipped low over her full breasts. She smiled and said, "You're late, Danny."

"A little. I didn't know there was going to be a party."

"Come on in."

I followed her into the apartment and into Nick's den. He was sitting behind his desk when I came in, and he stood and walked over to me and shook my hand.

"Right on time, eh, Danny?" he said, smiling.

"A little late, Connie tells me."

Nick beamed. "You can never be too late when fifty G's is involved. Ain't that right, Danny?" He kept smiling, and I didn't like the smile or the way his eyes didn't match his mouth. I watched him, and I said nothing.

"You want the bonds, I guess," he said.

"You guess right."

"Well, no sense wasting time, is there?" He walked around to his desk, and opened the top drawer again. This time he came out with a sheaf of bonds, and he dropped them on the desk top and said, "There they are, boy. Nick Trenton never welshees."

I smiled and walked over to the desk, leafing through the bonds. It was all there, fifty grand worth.

"Okay?" Nick asked. The smile hadn't left his face.

"So far," I said. I slipped one of the bonds out from under the rubber band and I examined it more closely. My hand shook a little, and I felt the sweat break out on my brow.

"What are you trying to pull, Nick?"

"Pull? What's wrong, Danny? Something wrong?"

"You know damn well what's wrong. I told you to make Johnny beneficiary."

"Didn't they? I told them to . . ."

"You're listed as beneficiary, Nick. Beneficiary, Nick Trenton. What's the idea?"

Nick shook his head. "A stupid mistake. You just can't trust these banks, can you, Danny?"

"You're dumber than I thought, Nick," I said.

"Really?" He was smiling again, and the smile burned me.

"This is about as obvious as a rivet. You keep your bargain, but I get cooled the second I step out of here, and the fifty grand goes back to you. You must think the police are meatheads."

Nick stopped smiling, and his eyes narrowed with a crafty look. "Can I help it if you like me and list me as beneficiary? And can I help it if you have an accident? Can I . . ."

"Look, Nick . . ."

"No, you look, stupid. You think I'm going to do the gunning? You think the police will be able to pin anything on me?"

"Let's get this over," Connie said.

"You're playing in the wrong league, punk," Nick said tightly. He smiled again, and added, "I'm really doing you a favor, Danny. A punk is liable to flip his wig over so much cabbage. I'm saving you a trip to the nut hou . . ."

I reached over the desk and grabbed Nick's lapels with one hand. I brought the other hand back and forward before he had a chance to move, catching him on the jaw and rocking his head back. He was out before I hit him the second time, but I followed through anyway and then let his lapels go. He flopped to the rug like a dead whale, and I scooped up the bonds and turned to Connie.

"Tell your boyfriend I'm going to the bank now. Tell him these bonds'll be cashed before he comes to. Tell him he can whistle then."

"You're not going anyplace," the voice said.

It was not a familiar voice. I turned rapidly and saw the open door to the right of Nick's desk. I saw the figure standing in the doorway, and then my eyes dropped to the .45 in the guy's fist.

My eyes moved up slowly to the guy's face.

It had changed. It had been boyish the last time I'd seen it, with rounded cheeks, with peach fuzz, with an innocent smile. It had narrowed now, sharpened with maturity. The lips were thin, and a heavy shadow had replaced the peach fuzz. The cheeks were hollow,

and the mouth was unsmiling, and the eyes held me most of all, because the eyes were hard and glittering.

"Hello, pop," Johnny said. He said "pop" bitterly, as if the word burned his tongue.

"Johnny . . ."

"Don't move, pop. Don't move a goddamn inch."

"Put that gun up, Johnny. What the hell do you think . . ."

"Shut up!"

"You surprised, Danny?" Connie said. She stood beside me, and she smiled triumphantly, and her breasts heaved in excitement. "You surprised, you bastard?"

"Look . . ."

"Tell your son what you told me this afternoon. Go ahead. Tell him what a tramp I am. Tell him all about it. Go ahead." She turned to Johnny. "Listen to him, Johnny. Listen to the bastard talk about me."

"I don't have to hear anything, Connie," he said.

I looked at him, and I was looking at a stranger, and I tried to think of all the things that had happened to him in five years. Connie Blaine had happened to him, and that could have been enough.

"Johnny," I said, "put up that gun. I'm your father. I'm . . ."

"You're a punk," he said. "You're a punk who got suckered into taking a bum rap. That's all you are. A step above Tigo. Good old Uncle Tigo."

"Johnny, for Christ's sake, can't

you see what they're trying to pull? Can't you see that you'll be the fall guy? The way I was? The way . . ."

"You don't think Connie's good for me, huh? A punk like you making decisions, huh? That's a laugh."

"Johnny, I've got fifty G's. We can get away from here. We can . . ."

"Get away from Connie? Leave her? You've got a hole in your head, old man."

I looked at Johnny's face, and I saw the eyes, and they were the eyes of someone who'd killed before. They were the eyes of everything I'd tried to keep him from, and it was too late now because the kid had pulled a real switch on the old man who'd tried like hell to keep him away from it. He'd turned into a real killer, and that was a big laugh. Except that it wasn't funny because his knuckle was turning white around the trigger, and I thought, *Christ, he's rotten.*

The knowledge made me a little sick, but there was no time for crying and no time for thinking. There was only time to grab Connie. I yanked her wrist and whirled her around in front of me, and then the .45 exploded.

She screamed when the slug tore into her chest, and then she dropped to the rug and Johnny's face went white with hatred. I ran across the room, yanking the knife from my pocket as he brought the .45 up again.

I pressed the stud, and the switch blade snapped open, and it was only three-and-a-half inches long, and that didn't make it a dangerous weapon as far as the police were concerned. I was close to him now, and I looked into those eyes once more, and I saw everything I had to know there, all the slime and all the filth, and the rotten road that ended bleeding in a gutter.

I ducked under his arm, and the .45 went off close to my head, and I smelled the stench of cordite, and then I brought the switch knife up and sank it into his gut. I twisted the knife and then slashed it across his middle and up and across the other way, and his face tightened in pain, and he screamed, "You punk bastard," and I knew I was doing the right thing.

His eyes went blank then, and the killer light went out of them as he fell to the rug. I yanked the knife clear of his body, and there were tears in my eyes and I couldn't see too well, but I went to where Nick Trenton lay unconscious, and I kicked him in the head to make sure, and then lugged him out from behind the desk.

I called Hannigan then.

When he got there, my eyes were dry.

The bonds were in my jacket pocket, and my knife was in Nick Trenton's fist.

"I figure they got into a fight over the broad," I said.

"This is the way you found them, huh, Danny?"

"Yes."

"I'm . . . I'm sorry about your son, Danny. I . . ."

"Skip it, Hannigan."

"Sure."

Hannigan stooped down near Nick and said, "He's going to be mighty surprised when he wakes up. This is the end of him, you know."

"I know."

Hannigan looked at the blood-smearred knife in Nick's fist.

A look of recognition crossed his face, and then he lifted his head and stared at me for a few minutes, saying nothing.

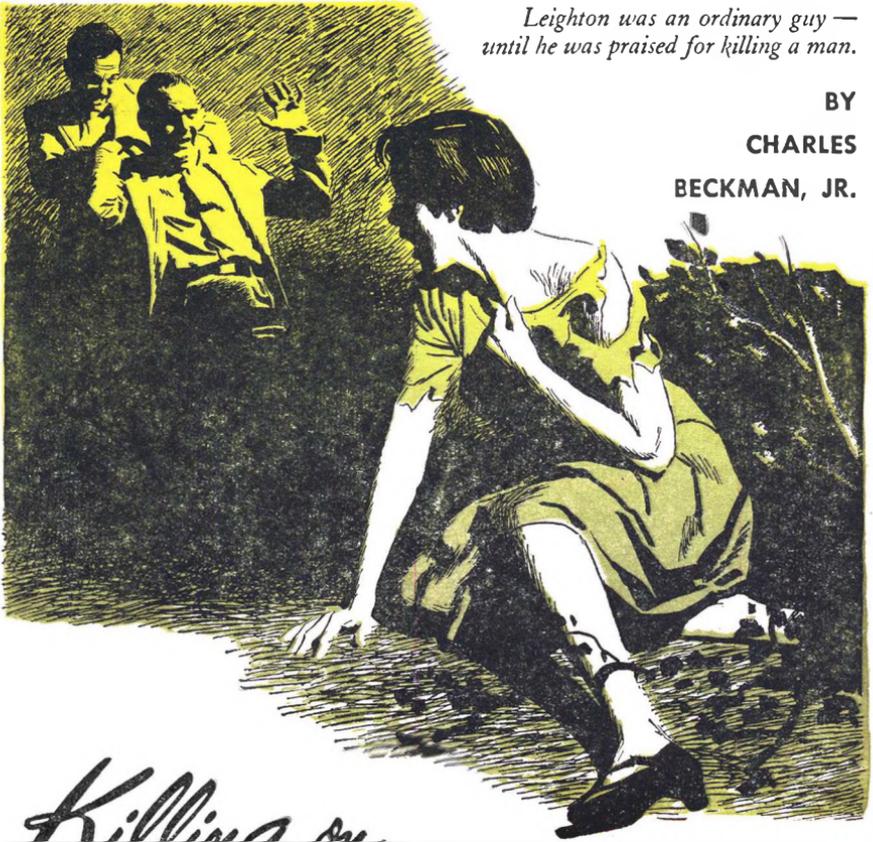
He did not mention the knife when he stood up and walked to the phone.

He simply said, "I'll call headquarters. They'll want to come down for Trenton."



*Leighton was an ordinary guy —
until he was praised for killing a man.*

BY
CHARLES
BECKMAN, JR.



Killing on Seventh Street

HIS NAME WAS Clifford Leighton and he was an ordinary, run-of-the-mill guy until that night when he killed a man.

He and Beryl, his wife, were

strolling home after the late show. The man was waiting in the shadows of the deserted corner of Park and Seventh.

When the Leightons passed him, he stepped out and asked Clifford for a match.

Nothing like this had ever happened to Clifford before, in his

placid little life. Entirely unsuspecting, he reached in his pocket for the match.

This man looked at Beryl while Clifford dug out the matches. Then there was a metallic "click" and something gleamed in the man's right hand. He moved closer to Clifford and put the thing against Clifford's stomach. It was the sharp-pointed tip of a knife blade. "Get over here," he said, "against the wall," and he pressed the sharp point through Leighton's clothes, pricking his flesh.

Clifford was dumbfounded. He stood petrified, his arms and legs frozen into chunks of lead. His heart began a wild patter and a thin, acid fluid rose into his mouth. He realized, in a kind of daze, that they were being held up. This was so foreign to Clifford Leighton's secure, routine existence that it took on all the aspects of a distorted dream.

The man prodded him again and his legs obediently carried him up against the stone wall that edged the sidewalk. The man's free hand darted skillfully through Clifford's pockets, relieving him of his billfold, watch and Woodmen of the World pin. All Clifford could do was stand there with his hands raised and clamp his teeth tightly together to keep them from rattling. Beryl stood off to one side with her finger tips up against her lips and her eyes about to pop out of her head.

The man looked at her again, then back at Clifford. Suddenly, he put the knife in the other hand and swung his right fist against Clifford's jaw.

It was a totally unexpected blow. It struck Clifford's chin, causing his head to bounce against the stone wall and he collapsed in a heap. He was not completely unconscious, but half-stunned and unable to coordinate his muscles. He was dimly aware that the man and Beryl were scuffling on the ground, nearby. Beryl was making stifled, whimpering sounds, as if she were trying to scream, but the man had his hand over her mouth. With great effort, Clifford rolled over so that he could get a better look at them. His head was buzzing and his eyes were out of focus. He heard cloth tear, and then he saw the pale gleam of Beryl's thighs, exposed.

It dawned on him what was taking place. It was unbelievable, inconceivable. Things like this did not occur in this safe little town, to nice, respectable people like Clifford and Beryl Leighton.

He rose to his feet, drunkenly. Something greater than his own will powered his muscles. He towered over Beryl's attacker and he got his hands around the man's throat. The criminal came to a half-standing position, strangling and clawing at Clifford's fingers. But Leighton held on stubbornly, digging them in deeper into the soft,

yielding flesh. The man's muscles exploded into a mighty spasm, but his frantic efforts did not dislodge the man who was strangling him. Clifford's lips drew back from his teeth and something like an animal snarl came from his throat. The man's struggles grew weaker, but Clifford held on, snarling and digging his fingers in deeper. Beryl was crouched near by, watching with horror-fascinated eyes. Her clothes had been torn nearly off her. As he was choking the man to death, Clifford Leighton glanced toward his half-naked wife. Something bright and hot came into his eyes. He continued to look at her long after the attacker had ceased to struggle beneath him. Long after she said, "He's dead, Clifford. He's dead. You've killed him. . . ."

"Name?"

"Clifford Leighton."

"Age?"

"Thirty-two."

"Married?"

"Yes."

"Occupation?"

"Office Manager."

"Employer?"

"Allied Finance Company. . . ."

He answered the necessary questions. The police filled out their forms. Routine stuff, they apologized. Everyone was solicitous, respectful. Beryl was whisked to a hospital for first aid treatment. She had not been harmed, merely frightened out of her wits, and shaken up.

They were taken home in a police car. The next day, there was a court where they had to appear. Clifford told his story. Beryl confirmed it. A policeman came in with a police record of the dead man. He read off the list of previous convictions and arrests with a bored voice. The whole thing was over in a few minutes. "Justifiable homicide," was the verdict. Everybody shook Clifford's hand. As they went home, people slapped Clifford's back. At his office, the others looked at him with sudden new interest and respect. Imagine, a quiet, shy guy like Clifford Leighton. A Town Hero. There was a story about him in the paper that evening, how he'd saved his wife from an attacker.

Clifford went about his business in his quiet, unassuming way. He and Beryl talked, the night after it happened, and they agreed they should try and forget about it. Clifford had done the right thing. He had been brave, saving her that way and she was proud of him, Beryl said, but it was a morbid, ugly thing to happen to anybody and it would be best if they could quickly forget about it.

Clifford never said any more about it after that. A couple of weeks passed and people began forgetting it ever happened. Clifford didn't talk about it. In fact, he didn't talk about much of anything. He became even more taciturn and reserved. At times he would sit alone in the evenings,

staring off into space for hours without uttering a syllable.

Otherwise, he went about the confines of his routine existence with little change. He arose at seven-thirty, took the bus to work, returned home at five-thirty and cut the grass or pattered about in the flower beds. Only one change was noticeable. Beryl, who had begun to sense the routine and boredom that had crept into their five-year-old marriage, was surprised and secretly pleased at a sudden renewal of his romantic interest in her. Their nights took on the roscate glow of a second honeymoon.

Clifford wasn't sure just when he began having the Dream. Possibly three weeks or a month after the killing on Seventh Street. The first few times it was vague, growing into sharper focus until the final night, when he frightened Beryl half to death. That night, the dream started the usual way: Beryl was walking toward him through a mist. As she approached, her clothes dissolved until she was stripped. He moved in her direction with a quirt in his hands. She stood, waiting, head bowed, until he was close to her, and then he slashed her quivering flesh; she fell to her knees, screaming, and he threw the quirt away and reached for her throat. But he was not angry with her, in the dream. He kissed her while she was strangling.

Her screams shook him loose from the dream. The moonlight fell across

their bed and her swollen, frightened face stared up at him, goggle-eyed. In a daze, he pried his fingers from her throat and sat up. Beryl, choking and coughing, scrambled out of the bed, snapped on a bedside lamp. She massaged her bruised throat, looking at him with frightened eyes.

Clifford looked away and gazed down at his sweat-drenched palms.

Beryl was very solicitous, the next few days. She told him that the killing was preying on his mind because he was a moral person. Even though he had been justified, he had taken a life and it was worrying him, subconsciously. She made him take her to a show, or have company over for bridge, every evening, to occupy his mind. She chattered constantly, brightly. The next week-end, they went to the coast for a little holiday.

They returned early Monday and Clifford was at work as usual, suntanned and apparently cheerful. But, that evening, he was behind the garage, sharpening the lawnmower, when the neighborhood dog came running over, barking. Clifford reached for the animal and things dissolved in a haze. When it cleared, the dog was a limp form, its broken neck clenched in his hands. Quietly, he took out the shovel and buried the dog under a tree. He spoke little to Beryl that night. The next day, while sitting at his desk, working on some figures, he suddenly

burst out crying. He put his head down on his arms and sobbed loudly. They took him to the hospital. The family doctor told Beryl that Clifford was suffering from a nervous breakdown and would have to have psychiatric care for a few weeks. She came to see him every day.

The psychiatrist asked Clifford many questions. Clifford couldn't tell him too much. He would lie on the bed, staring at the ceiling and try to think about when he had been a little boy. It was hard to recall. He'd had a good mother, he remembered, who had protected him a lot because he had been a frail, small boy. The bullies had beaten him up often in school. He had grown afraid of them, afraid of all violence. He took part in few athletics. When the war came he was put in 4-F because, they told him, of nervous instability. He'd wondered if that had been another word for cowardice. He had always been a coward, he'd known, until that night on Seventh Street. . . .

They allowed him to leave the hospital after a month. He would have to remain at home, though, for another month before resuming work.

Beryl was her usual sweet, solicitous self. She did everything to keep things harmonious and calm at home. She was happy to have him back, but one thing disappointed her. She had hoped that in a renewal of their love, she could help his

return to normalcy. But when they tried to make love, he became impotent. The doctor told her this was to be expected in view of his nervous condition.

Only Clifford knew the real reason. In his imagination, he could love Beryl. He could think about that time on Seventh Street, when the man was ripping her clothes off, stifling her cries, trying to take her by force. Or that dream, when he choked her and kissed her puffed lips. Thinking about those things, he wanted her with an intoxicating passion. But when he went to her at night he had to restrain his hands from bruising her white flesh, from choking her. And so he failed her. And he lay there, staring up at the black night, sweating, his nerves screaming for release.

She was his wife. He must not harm her. Yet, all the other doors to passion had been closed for him.

His restlessness increased. One evening after supper, he went for a walk. He found himself, after a while, near the lonesome part of Seventh Street. Under a street light, he caught up with a person walking in his direction.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Leighton."

"Hello, Jean," he greeted, recognizing the person as a teen-age girl who lived across the street from him.

"You walking this way far?" she asked.

"Why — yes, I am."

"Then I'm glad I ran into you."

I have to go to a play practice at the gym tonight and Dad and Mother had a bridge date and couldn't take me." She shivered. "Gives me the creeps to walk down this dark street alone."

"Well, I'll walk with you. . . ."

As they strolled together she chatted. He glanced toward her young curves, hugged by a tight sweater, and her white throat.

The next morning at breakfast, Beryl opened the paper and emitted a shocked gasp. "Oh, how horrible!"

"What's the matter?" Clifford asked.

"Oh, that poor child." Beryl glanced across the table at him, her face ashen. "Jean Austin. You know her. The girl that lives across the street. The police found her body this morning. All her clothes were torn off. She'd been assaulted and strangled to death."

Clifford did not answer.

"I must go over there right away," she exclaimed, dropping the paper and jumping up from the table. "Her poor mother must be frantic —"

That night as they prepared for bed, Beryl held to him for a moment with a little shiver. "The poor girl," she whispered. "She didn't have someone like you to protect her, darling — the way I had that night."

Clifford kissed her. "I think," he murmured softly, "that I'll be all right tonight, Beryl. I want to make love to you very much."

She raised her eyes to his, her face suddenly flushed. All the events of the day, the trouble at the Austins, fell away from her mind. "Clifford," she whispered thickly, her eyes star-filled.

He went into the bathroom to shave and undress. The bathroom door opened into their bedroom. When he pushed it open, he could see Beryl in there, silhouetted against the moonlight coming through an open window. She was waiting for him and she did not have a stitch of clothes on. He went into the room where she was. She seemed to be moving toward him through a fog. He reached for her, his eyes hot and bright, and his thick fingers began to twitch. . . .

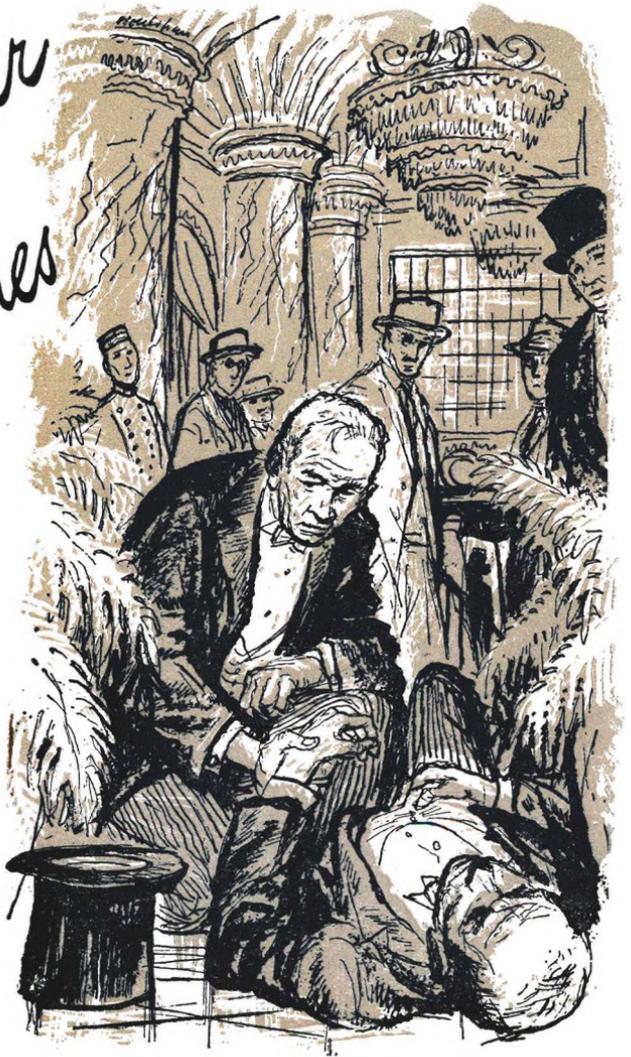


Murder Marches On!

Perfect place for murder, Malone thought as he joined the parade. The men parading were all undertakers.

*A John J. Malone
story*

BY CRAIG RICE



THE PARADE started late, as all parades do. There was the usual confusion, with bands mustering on the wrong street corners, floats get-

ting stuck in the traffic jam, and drum majorettes detained at the last minute by snap and elastic failures in strategic areas. There was

the customary mix-up in the line of marching orders, with division captains running up and down waving their arms and blowing whistles, and the parade marshal sweating it out in his limousine and scowling at his wristwatch. And there was the usual search for visiting dignitaries, finally discovered in a nearby saloon. That was why John J. Malone was able to catch up with the parade after it had progressed only a block or two from its starting point at Michigan Boulevard and Roosevelt Road.

For the little lawyer, too, had been detained. Finding a rental outfit that would trust him for a frock coat, a high hat and a pair of patent leather shoes without the formality of a cash deposit was not easy on such short notice. That was the formal regalia of the Oblong Marching Society and to have appeared in anything else would have made him look conspicuous. He had no desire to look conspicuous. Somewhere along the line of march one of the marchers was to slip him a list of names and one thousand dollars in cash.

"What do I have to do for the money?" Malone had asked Rico de Angelo. Rico was an undertaker, a relative of Joe of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar. "You don't have to do anything," Rico had told him on the telephone. "All you have to do is keep this guy's name out of the newspapers."

"Why?" Malone said.

Rico hesitated. Then he said, "Remember the Gerasi murder? Well, this friend of mine, he was a friend of Gerasi's too. And Gerasi gave him this list of names before he was killed. Gerasi wanted him to give the list to the cops. But when Gerasi got killed, my friend got scared. He wants *you* to take the list and give it to the cops, Malone. He wants to stay out of it."

Simple. Just a shade *too* simple, Malone told himself as he hung up the receiver. The newspapers had been running black headlines for weeks about ballot box frauds in the spring elections. Ghost voters. Names taken from the cemeteries. The cops had figured that Gerasi's Funeral Home had been supplying the names for the fraud. But Gerasi had turned honest, and passed the list on before he'd been killed. Now Malone had to get the list to the cops. But it had to be on the q. t. If the gang found out about it Malone, and Rico's friend, might both be Rico's customers.

His friends on the papers would thank him for a list like that, Malone knew, but he also knew that gangsters and crooked politicians took a dim view of informers. He would only be taking the heat off Rico's friend and putting it on himself. Still, a thousand dollars was a thousand dollars. He had a date with a blonde that night. There was also the office rent, three months overdue, with the landlord breathing down his neck. A thousand

dollars would very nicely take care of both emergencies. He could depend on the boys at the city desks to keep his own name out of the papers, he assured himself. Besides, there was his duty as a lawyer to help the innocent, and this guy was an innocent party to the fraud — he hoped.

Third row from the front, fourth guy from the left, facing front, the guy with the red face and the gold tooth. That was how Rico had identified the client. Now, what with the hot Chicago sun beating down from above and the sizzling asphalt giving him the hotfoot from below, the instructions were getting a bit fuzzy in his mind. Fourth row from the front, third guy from the left, or was it third row from the left, fourth guy from the front — no, that couldn't be it. Something about facing front. He had been following the contingent. The thing to do was to hurry up ahead of it and count facing it. Malone hated walking, anywhere, any time, for any reason. Besides, his feet were killing him in the rented patent leather shoes. Maybe he shouldn't have reinforced himself quite so much from the bottle in the emergency file in his office before leaving. Under forced march he managed to get up ahead of the marchers and, turning around to face them, walking backwards, he scanned the lines. Yes, that was it. Third guy from the front facing left — Oh, the hell with it. One thing he *did* remember.

Somewhere in that weaving line of faces was a red-faced guy with a gold tooth and one thousand dollars. Never look a gift horse in the mouth, Malone reminded himself. Especially one with a gold tooth.

The girl's band from Bloomington struck up with a deafening rendition of John Philip Sousa's *Washington Post March*. The particularly curvaceous drum majorette doing cartwheels momentarily took Malone's mind off his work. A visiting dignitary hurrying to catch up with his place in the line of march shook Malone's hand and disappeared. Walking backwards was beginning to make him dizzy. He was about to give the whole thing up when he spied the flash of a gold tooth and quickly fell in line beside the red-faced guy, a maneuver that brought a polite "Pardon me" from the jolly little fat man he had bumped out of place, and an oath from the big, sad-faced man who reminded Malone of the hound dog Hercules he had once befriended up in Jackson County, Wisconsin, the one whose feet hurt him.

Now there was only one thing left to do. Wait for the red-faced guy on his right to slip him the fraudulent voting list and the one thousand bucks. That was to happen when the close order drill band of the Oblong Marching Society struck up, "How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood," Rico de Angelo had informed him on the telephone.

That was to be the signal for him to edge over to the guy with the gold tooth and receive the list and the money.

Keeping up with the steady tread of the marchers, face front, Malone stole a look out of the corner of his eye at the man with the red face. He looked the way any respectable undertaker would be expected to look. His frock coat was well tailored with an expensive Capper and Capper cut to it. His top hat was of the glossiest silk and sat well on his well-groomed head. The expression on his face was the one every undertaker wears when the last notes of the organ music are dying away and he steps up to the coffin to invite the mourners to file past for a last look at the remains.

Solemn. Serious. But nervous. You could tell he was nervous by the too-rigid way he kept his eyes fixed ahead of him, afraid to look either to the right or to the left. Afraid to betray by so much as the flicker of an eyelash that he was even aware of Malone's sudden and unceremonious appearance in the line beside him. The sweat that glistened on his forehead might have been from the heat, but it stood out in shiny explosive little beads — fear sweat. Yes, he was scared. The red-faced man with the gold tooth was scared stiff. And he wasn't the only one. There was a feeling of tension all around him, Malone felt. It showed itself when, during a lull in the band music, the jolly little fat

man on his left gave out with the first six notes of "Donna E Mobile". The big sad-faced Hercules behind him promptly squashed him with a "Shet up!" and the red-faced guy winced all over like a spastic.

Yes, there was tension in the ranks. But definitely, Malone told himself. It set him to thinking. What assurance did he have, after all, that he and the red-faced man with the gold tooth were the *only* ones in the line who knew about the incriminating list of names and the money that was about to be passed. The red-faced guy was sticking his neck out a mile, playing informer on the voting fraud gang. Where there was a neck that long there was probably an ax *somewhere* in the vicinity, waiting for a chance to strike. A cute little Colt automatic in the pocket, maybe, with the safety off. Or a shiny Smith & Wesson .38 with a sawed-off barrel, under one of these respectable frock coats. And they could be aimed straight at the red-faced guy, ready to fire the minute he made one suspicious move. Or aimed at *him*, Malone reminded himself ruefully. Either /or — or both.

You don't pick up a hot list of names and a thousand bucks easy money without putting yourself in jeopardy, the little lawyer reflected, and wiped the sweat from his brow. Who was the jeopord? The little fat guy on his left? He didn't look it, but appearances could be deceptive. Malone remembered the

jolly little man in the Hanson ax-murder case on the South Side. He turned out to be the coldest, most murderous killer he had ever tangled with. Could it be the hound-faced Hercules who was marching directly behind him? There was something sad, even gentle, in the pouchy droop of his eyes. When he said, "Shet up!" to the jolly guy who wanted to sing "Donna E Mobile" it was more in sorrow than in anger. A tired, weary, beaten-down "Shet up!" rather than an angry one. Just the same it could be either one of them. You couldn't tell about people.

No, and you couldn't tell about places, either. The middle of a street parade didn't seem like the kind of a place a gangster would pick to commit a murder. But neither did the corner of State and Madison, "the world's busiest street corner," and yet that was where death had caught up with snuffy little Joshua Gumbrill. Right in the middle of the noon-hour rush, too. And the killer had made a clean getaway in the milling crowd.

Yes, it could happen here. And it could happen to *him*.

He had come away from the office unarmed, with nothing deadlier on him than a half pint of whiskey in his hip pocket. Not that he ever used it — a gun, that is — but it was always comforting to know it was there if you needed it. For that matter, the same could be said for the half pint, Malone re-

minded himself. He wondered if it was strictly according to the manual of close order drill or the by-laws of the Oblong Marching Society to summon liquid reinforcement in the line of march. Just then a woman fainted from the heat in the watching crowd on the sidewalk and, while all eyes were on the scene of the accident, he raised the bottle to his lips with a quick, practiced gesture that had long ago made his the most celebrated elbow at Joe the Angel's City Hall bar.

It was a good thing he had fortified himself in time, for it wasn't two minutes later, at the intersection of Michigan Boulevard and Randolph Street to be exact, that the band leader of the Oblong Marching Society blew a shrill blast on his whistle and the band struck up:

"How much wood could a wood-chuck chuck

If a woodchuck could chuck wood."

Malone sidled over slowly toward the red-faced guy on his right, ready for the pass that was to deliver the list of names and the money into his hand. Then something happened that wasn't on the program. The girls' band from Bloomington just behind them gave out simultaneously with:

"Oh, the monkey wrapped his tail around the flagpole."

The resulting disharmony and din threw the whole column out of step. Everybody stopped and turned to

scowl at the bunglers. Instinctively Malone turned too. When he turned back again the red-faced man was no longer beside him. For a second Malone stared about him, bewildered. Then he looked down and saw that the man had collapsed on the street.

He lay on his back and he was gasping for breath. Immediately the marchers closed around him.

"Give him air," somebody shouted. "Can't you see the man's fainted?"

The parade came to a dead stop as the marchers carried their fellow member off the street, through the crowd and into the lobby of the corner building. He was still gasping for breath as they laid him down on the floor, fanning him with their top hats and debating excitedly about the best way to handle a case of sunstroke. By the time the police shouldered their way through the crowd he had stopped fighting for breath and lay quite still. Too still, Malone thought. He knelt down and reached for the man's wrist to feel his pulse. As he did so he heard a familiar voice behind him.

It was Captain Daniel von Flanagan of the Homicide Division.

"Well, if it isn't John J. Malone, attorney and counselor at law. And since when, may I ask, have the undertakers been taking lawyers into membership?"

"*Honorary* membership," Malone began lamely, and then, "Don't ask foolish questions, von Flanagan. A

man's fainted from the heat and we've got to get him into an ambulance."

Von Flanagan bent down and felt the man's pulse. Then he turned to Malone.

"Fainted, did you say? Fainted from the heat? Malone, this man is dead."

"Heart failure," someone in the crowd said, and for a moment Malone was almost prepared to believe it. That red face. The way he had gasped for breath.

Von Flanagan turned the man over on his stomach. A wet patch was spreading over the black broadcloth of his frock coat. The stone floor where he had lain was wet too. And bright red. Von Flanagan pulled the coat up over the dead man's head and ripped off his shirt. In the middle of his back below the shoulder blades and a little to the left was a neat bullet hole.

"Drilled through the heart," von Flanagan said. He rose and looked around him at the frock-coated brethren.

"Didn't anyone hear a shot?" he demanded.

They looked at one another in dumb amazement, shaking their heads.

"I was right next to him," Malone said. "I didn't hear any shot."

But this time the lobby was crawling with cops.

"Nobody leaves here till I say the word," von Flanagan called out to them. "And you, Malone, I want to

have a word with you. In private.”

Malone followed von Flanagan to the storeroom behind the lobby cigar counter. The Captain's face was red with a hot Irish anger. His eyes narrowed as he looked down at the little lawyer.

“Malone, what do *you* know about this? I'm putting you all under arrest. You and this whole Oblong Marching outfit. I'll sweat it out of you if I have to—”

“If you'll take the advice of an old friend,” Malone said, “you'll let the parade proceed as scheduled, without another minute's delay. You'll order every member of the Oblong Marching Society to take his place in line just exactly where he was before this thing happened. First, though, I want your permission to go through the dead man's pockets.”

“What for?”

“I've got my reasons, but I can't tell you now,” Malone said. “There isn't time. You want to catch the killer, don't you?”

“Somebody drilled him from behind,” von Flanagan said. “All I want to know is, who was marching directly behind this guy? What I can't figure is why didn't anybody hear the shot?”

“The noise,” Malone said. “The bands got their signals mixed and two of them started up the same time. You could have shot off a cannon and everybody would have thought it was part of the program. Now, if you'll order the members

back into some sort of formation —”

“Maybe you've got something there,” von Flanagan said. “And the minute I see who the guy is that was marching behind the murdered man I'll order him searched and put under arrest at once.”

Malone said, “Listen to me, von Flanagan. You won't do anything of the kind. If he committed one murder he won't hesitate to commit a second murder—this time to wipe out the evidence of the first murder. He'll try to shoot his way out—and innocent people are going to get hurt.”

“Wait a minute, Malone.”

“I'll point some guy out to you,” Malone said. “You'll put the guy under arrest in full view of the whole crowd. Then you'll order the rest of them back into line and let the parade go on. After you take the suspect into custody you and your boys will do a fake vanishing act. Stay out of sight but not too far out of reach. I might need your help. When the killer starts shooting . . .”

The captain's face lighted up with its first faint ray of understanding. Then he shook his head. “No. No, Malone, I can't let you do it. No friend of mine is going to make a clay pigeon out of himself.”

But the Captain quickly let the little lawyer talk him into it. Too quickly, for such a devoted friend, Malone thought afterwards.

Back in the lobby again Malone went through the dead man's

pockets looking for the hot list and the money. There wasn't a sign of anything like a list anywhere on his person. The only money was a few crumpled bills in his pants pocket. Could it be that the killer had murdered the wrong man? Or had the red-faced guy been scared out of the deal at the last minute?

He rose to his feet, hiding his disappointment and confusion behind a mask of smiling confidence.

"There's your man," he told von Flanagan, and pointed to a bewildered, professorial guy in the crowd. The others fell back in amazement as von Flanagan's cops clapped handcuffs on the man and went off with him.

Von Flanagan addressed himself to the crowd.

"Now I want everyone of you to fall in line again, just the way you were before this happened."

They filed out of the lobby and took their places in the parade again. Malone noted that his high hat lay on the street, a battered mess, where the marchers had trampled it underfoot in the excitement. He wondered how much that was going to set him back with the rental people. Beside it lay the dead man's hat. It had miraculously escaped being stepped on. Malone picked it up and put it gingerly on his head. It didn't quite fit, but he figured it would have to do. He wondered if the rental people would accept the substitution.

At a signal from von Flanagan the

band leader blew his whistle and the band struck up "The Stars and Stripes Forever." The parade began to move once more up Michigan Avenue. Murder marches on, Malone muttered to himself as he looked uneasily to his right at the vacant spot where only a little while before the red-faced man with the gold tooth had been marching beside him.

He stole a backward glance at the man who was marching behind the vacant spot, and wondered why he hadn't noticed him before. Then the reason dawned on him. Who would figure the fat man for a killer? A jolly little guy singing "Donna E Mobile." That was why the gang had picked him, Malone realized — he looked like anything but a killer. But if the little fat guy had committed the crime it was going to be hard to convince a jury of it, unless he was taken *in flagrante delicto* with the murder weapon still smoking in his hand.

That was precisely what he had let himself in for, the little lawyer reflected ruefully. A sitting — or rather, a marching — duck. A waddling duck — his feet were killing him, and the dead man's hat sat on his head like a tin can on a post. A perfect target for a pot shot, if the fat man happened to miss this time. If he didn't miss, if his aim was as good on the second try as it was on the first, then he, John J. Malone, attorney and counsellor at law, was a dead duck.

It was a sobering thought and the last thing he wanted just now was sobering thoughts. He reached into his hip pocket and brought out the reinforcing fluid. Let the members of the Oblong Marching Society, and the million spectators along the line of march, too, for that matter, think what they pleased of an undertaker taking a drop of liquid nourishment in public. He was damned if he was going to die of thirst just to uphold the reputation of the undertaking profession.

The band struck up a Sousa march and Malone, in an effort to add further support to his drooping spirits, raised his voice in song.

“Be kind to your flatfooted
friends,
For a duck may be somebody’s
mother,
They live in deep marshes and
fens,

Where it’s damp —”

“Shet up!” said the sad-eyed Hercules behind him.

“What’s the matter with my singing?” Malone replied without turning around.

“It stinks,” said the sad-eyed man.

Malone decided that the man had no ear for music.

The Oblong Marching Society. The name was probably meant to suggest the shape of a hearse. Or was it a coffin? He dismissed the thought from his mind. This was no time to be thinking of hearses or coffins.

When was it going to happen? Was the killer going to fall for the decoy? He was probably weighing his chances right now. He had killed one man and he probably had the murder weapon on him this very minute. What would he have to lose if he killed a second man? They couldn’t kill *him* twice. And there was always the chance that he could make a get-away in the excitement. So far as *he* knew the incriminating list was now on the person of John J. Malone, who had searched the dead man. Malone had even taken the precaution to “palm” the papers as he was searching the red-faced guy, just in case the killer was watching him, which he probably was. In short, he had done everything he could to put himself on the spot for anybody intent on obtaining possession of the hot list.

If that was what the killer was after — and what else could it be? — he was certainly a desperate man to be taking such chances right out in the open. Only one thing could explain it. He was one of the gang of racketeers who had muscled into the Oblong Marching Society as a source of cemetery names with which to help the crooked politicians stuff the ballot boxes. They were probably using the Society, too, as a respectable front for plenty of other rackets. Obviously the killer had been hand-picked by the mob as the fall guy for this dangerous assignment. His orders were “Get those papers, or else.” He was

right smack between the blue-barreled service automatics of von Flanagan's boys and the sawed-off shotguns of the mob.

Malone was almost sorry for the guy. He was even a bit sorry for himself. Where *were* von Flanagan's boys? He had warned the Captain to keep his man out of sight but not out of reach. Marching with measured tread to the music of the band — a bit unsteadily now, to be sure — he was listening for the reassuring purr of police motorcycles. He told himself he could hear them, ever so faintly, in the distance. He hoped, not too far distant.

He was lost in these reveries when suddenly the drum and bugle corps of V.F.W. Post No. 9 just up ahead broke into:

"How much wood could a woodchuck chuck

If a woodchuck could chuck wood."

This is it! Malone told himself. The next instant he felt himself pushed from behind and when he looked up from the asphalt the scene that met his eyes was one of pure pandemonium, uncut and unrefined. The jolly little fat man was struggling in the grip of a dozen arms and von Flanagan's cops were converging from all sides with sirens moaning, cut-outs blasting the air like jet fighters. In less time than it takes to tell it the culprit was in handcuffs and being led away to the waiting squad car.

"You did it," von Flanagan told

Malone. "You did it and the department owes you an apology for ever suspecting —"

"The department owes me more than an apology," Malone said. He examined the silk topper. It had a bullet hole on each side of it. "How much," he asked, "do you think it's going to cost me to replace one of these things?"

Von Flanagan shrugged and, after a congratulatory handshake, took his departure with the squad car. Malone was left holding the hat. He looked up at the sad-eyed Hercules whose shove from behind had pushed him in the nick of time out of harm's way.

"I owe my life to you," he said. "Do you mind if I buy you a drink?"

Ten minutes later at Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar the little lawyer sat brooding, head in hand, on the turn of events that had left him with nothing to show for his pains but a bullet-pierced high silk hat that he would have to pay for when he returned the outfit to the rental people. No hot list. No thousand dollars. Two tired feet that felt like half-raw, quick-fried beef in the tight patent-leather rented shoes. And a headache from the dead man's ill-fitting hat.

The sad-eyed guy wasn't proving to be much of a help either, sitting there and staring moodily into his beer. Malone ordered up another double rye. He turned to the sad-eyed one and said for the dozenth

time, "I owe my life to you. Can I buy you another beer?"

The dour one shook his head.

"You don't owe me nothin'," he said sourly.

This was a hell of a note. A guy saves your life and when you offer to buy him a drink he insults you by ordering one beer and refusing a refill. This was one more frustration in a day that had been nothing but frustrations. This was the last straw.

"Bring this guy a double rye," he said to Joe the Angel. "Give him *two* double ryes, Joe. And a beer chaser."

"In your hat," said the sad-eyed one.

"Nobody talks like this to my friend Malone," Joe the Angel said.

Malone said, "You keep out of this, Joe. I owe my life to this man. The least I can do is buy him a drink."

"Then let him drink up," Joe the Angel said. He set down two glasses on the bar and poured two double ryes. And a beer chaser.

"Down the hatch," Malone said, raising his own glass.

"In your hat," said the sad-eyed Hercules.

Joe the Angel reached for the bung-starter, but Malone stopped him with an imperious wave of the hand.

"An insult is an insult, friend or no friend," he said to the dour one. He was beginning to feel the heartening effects of the rye. "Now, if you'll oblige me by stepping outside

we can settle this thing like gentlemen."

The sad-eyed one lifted himself off the bar stool and started for the door. Malone donned the silk topper and followed him outside.

At the first passage of arms Malone found himself sprawling on the sidewalk. Beside him lay the silk hat, a shapeless mess.

"In your hat," said the dour one, and stalked off.

Before Malone could get to his feet the sad-eyed Hercules had disappeared in the sidewalk crowd.

Malone picked up the battered topper and as he did so his fingers encountered something bulging in the hat-band. He reached in and pulled out a sheaf of carefully folded sheets. They were covered on both sides with close-packed single-space names. He dived into the hat-band and this time he came up with a little sheaf of crisp hundred dollar bills. He counted them. Ten.

He pocketed the typed list and deposited the bills carefully in his wallet. Enough to pay for the busted topper, the back rent, and a date with the blonde which — he glanced at his wrist watch — was only four hours away.

For a second, it didn't register. Then he got it. Hercules had been a friend of the murdered man. Hercules had known all about the list — and he'd known where it had been hidden. He'd known about Malone, too, and he had been telling Malone everything the lawyer

needed to know about the list and the money. It was all cleared up now.

Malone considered chasing the sad-eyed man, but decided against it. Hercules would want no publicity, and very probably no thanks. The way he'd look at it, he'd only have been doing his job. Helping out a friend.

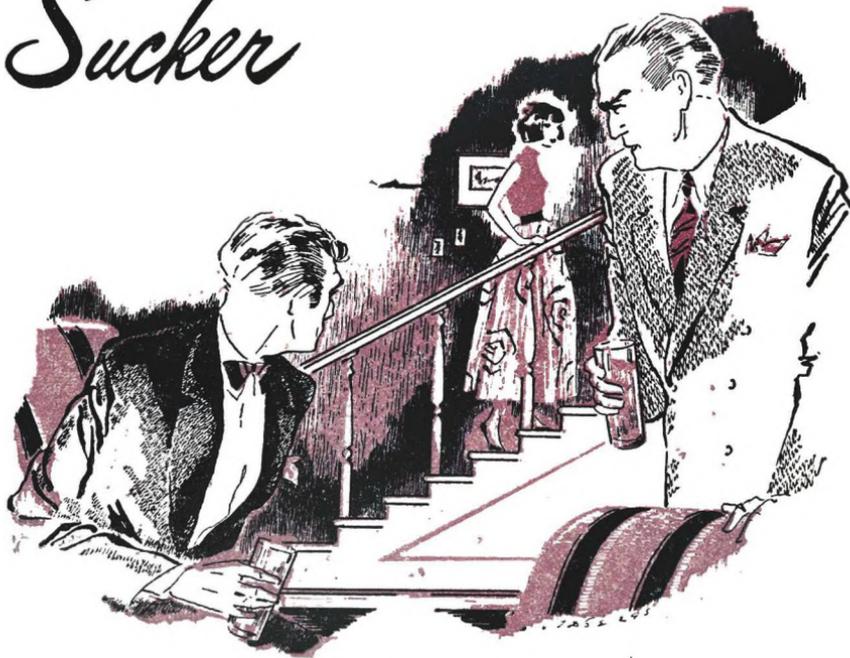
Besides, Malone told himself, Hercules would be too far away by now.

The little lawyer shrugged. He'd had the money with him all the time — and never known it.

"In your hat," Malone told himself. He put the crumpled topper on his head, and went back to the bar.



Sucker



BY HUNT COLLINS

Harley was the fall guy for the cops, and they had him all sewed up. Somehow, I had to get him out . . .

IT WAS Harley's wife who called me. I remember hearing the phone ringing, and then Anne nudged me and said, "You'd better get that, hon."

I swung my legs over the side of the bed and turned on the lamp on the end table. The clock read two-thirty.

"Now, who the hell is that?" I said to Anne.

"Answer it," she said. "That's the best way to find out."

I made some crack about early morning humor and then walked out into the hallway and past my daughter Beth's room. I went down the steps, and the phone kept clam-

oring. When I reached it, I snatched the receiver from the cradle.

"Hello," I said, perhaps a bit too gruffly.

"Dave?" the voice asked. It was hurried and almost frantic.

"Yes," I said. "Who's this?"

"Marcia. Dave, Harley's in trouble."

I was still half-asleep. "Who?" I asked.

"Harley, my husband," she said.

"The police . . . our sitter . . ."

"Pull yourself together, Marcia. What kind of trouble?"

"They . . . they say he killed our baby sitter. Dave . . ."

"What?"

"Yes, yes. Dave, they've taken him away. He asked me to call you. He . . ."

"Where'd they take him?"

"To the sheriff's office, Dave. It's all so crazy. He . . . he couldn't have done a thing like that, Dave. You know that. He . . ."

"Of course I know." I was wide awake now. "I'll get right down there, Marcia. Now don't you worry. I'll go right down."

"Thank you, Dave. Thank you so much."

"I'll want to hurry now. I'll call you later."

"All right, Dave. Thank you."

I hung up and went upstairs and started to dress. Anne sat up in bed and said, "Where are you going?"

"Down to the sheriff's office. They're holding Harley there. They say he killed his baby sitter."

"Oh, that's absurd," Anne said.

"I know. But they seem to be serious about it."

"Well, my God," Anne said.

I finished dressing, and then I dusted a little talc over the two-thirty A.M. shadow on my chin. I went back into the bedroom, kissed Anne, and said, "I won't be long, honey."

"All right," she said. "Be careful."

I went out into the hallway and opened the door to Beth's room. She was sixteen, but she still kicked the covers off every night. I tiptoed in, covered her, and then kissed her lightly on the cheek, the way I'd been doing ever since she was born. Then I went down and got the car out of the garage.

When I arrived at the sheriff's office, the sheriff himself greeted me. He told me Harley wasn't allowed any visitors, but I told him I was Harley's lawyer, and he said I could have a few minutes. He led me to the back of the building, unlocked a barred door leading to the cellblock, and brought me to Harley's cell.

Harley said nothing until the sheriff was gone. Then he came to me and squeezed my hand tightly. "Dave, thank God you're here," he said. He was a thin man, with hair greying at the temples. His eyes were grey, and he was thin-lipped and high-cheeked, and I guess I'd known him for more than three years now.

"What's it all about?" I asked. I offered him a cigarette, which he took gratefully and lighted hurriedly. He let out a great puff of smoke and said, "Dave, they're trying to play me for a sucker."

"How so?"

He drew in on the cigarette again. "This kid tonight. The pressure is probably on from upstairs someplace, and they're trying to hang it on the most convenient sucker. That happens to be me."

"All right, suppose you tell it from the beginning."

Harley nodded. "Sure. Sure." He let out a deep sigh, as if he'd already told the story too many times already. "Marcia and I went out tonight. Nothing special. A movie and a few drinks afterwards. To be exact, we had three martinis each."

"All right, go on."

"We got home at about midnight. This kid who was sitting for us — Sheila Kane — a nice kid we always use, she was sleeping on the couch when we came in. Marcia woke her, and I paid her and then took her out to the car. She lives on the other end of town, Dave. I always drive her home."

"Go on."

"I took her straight home. I dropped her off at her house, and then took off. I stopped in a bar to buy a package of cigarettes. Then I went home." He paused and sucked in a deep breath. "An hour later, the cops were pounding on my door. They said the kid had been raped

and strangled. Her parents told them she'd been sitting for us."

"I don't understand," I said. "How do they tie that to you?"

"My cigarette lighter. They found it near her body."

I looked at Harley steadily. "How come?" I asked.

"The kid smokes," he said, shrugging wearily. "Hell, Dave, she's all of eighteen. She lighted up in the car when I was taking her home. I gave her my lighter. I guess she forgot to return it."

"This bar you went into later, for cigarettes. Did anyone see you?"

"I don't think so. It was one of these places that have a small floor show. The show was on when I went in, and no one was paying attention to who came and went. I got the cigarettes from a machine just inside the door. Then I left."

"When you took the girl home, did you wait for her to go inside before you left?" I asked.

Harley puffed on his cigarette, trying to remember. "No," he said at last.

"Do you usually?"

"Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. I was tired, Dave. I wanted to get home. Hell, who knew anything like this was going to happen?"

"Where'd they find the girl?"

"In a dark street a few blocks from her home. They figure she was thrown out of a car."

"And your lighter?"

"Alongside her in the road. They say I dropped it when I threw her

out. Good God, Dave, can't you see they're trying to sucker me?"

"It looks that way," I said. "I wish someone had seen you in that bar, though."

"The hell with the bar. I wasn't gone more than fifteen minutes. It takes about five minutes to get the girl home, and another five coming back. Jesus, Dave, I couldn't have even if I'd wanted to."

"Does anyone beside Marcia know you were gone only fifteen minutes?"

Harley shook his head. "*She* doesn't even know, Dave. She was asleep when I got home. Oh god-damnit, this is a mess."

"And they've booked you on suspicion?"

"Yes," Harley said miserably. "I'm their big sucker."

"Don't worry," I said. "Maybe we can work something out."

It was one of the hardest trials I've ever fought. The district attorney swung it so that the jury was almost all women. If there's anything a woman hates and despises, it's a rapist — so I had nine strikes against me to begin with. The other three jury members were men.

The trial went for five days, with the DA pulling every trick in the book. He paraded all the circumstantial evidence, and he did it so well that every member of that jury could have sworn they'd all been eye witnesses to the rape and murder.

When he got Harley on the stand, Harley told the same story he'd told me. He told it simply and plainly, and the jury and the assembled spectators listened in silence. Then I began to question him.

"How old are you, Mr. Pearce?" I asked.

"Forty-two," Harley said.

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"Do you have any children?"

"Yes."

"How many, Mr. Pearce?"

"Two. A boy and a girl."

"How old are they?"

"The boy is seven. The girl is five."

"Did you engage the dead Sheila Kane to stay with these children while you and Mrs. Pearce went out for the evening?"

"Yes."

"Was this a customary practice of yours?"

"Yes."

"How many times had you engaged Miss Kane previous to the night of her death?"

"We'd been using her on and off for about a year."

"And nothing ever happened to her before this night," I said. "Nothing . . ."

"Objection!" the DA snapped. "Counsel for the defense is attempting to establish . . ."

"Sustained," the judge said wearily.

"Would you tell the court what Miss Kane looked like, please?"

Harley hesitated. "I . . . well, she was blonde."

"Yes?"

"Blue eyes, I think. I don't really remember."

"Short or tall?"

"Medium, I suppose."

"Glasses?"

"No. No glasses."

"What was her address?"

"I don't know. I drove by memory, I suppose. She showed me the first time, and then I just went there from memory every other time."

"Did you call her 'Sheila,' Mr. Pearce?"

"Yes, of course."

"And what did she call you?"

"Mr. Pearce."

"Thank you, that will be all."

The DA stared at me, and then he shrugged. I suppose he wondered what I was trying to do. It was so simple that it probably evaded him. I was simply trying to show that no lust had ever crossed Harley Pearce's mind or heart. He couldn't even describe the dead girl well. He did not know her address. They maintained a strictly adult to adolescent relationship. Sheila and Mr. Pearce.

The DA called his next witness, the bartender at the *Flamingo*, the bar Harley had stopped at to buy his cigarettes. The bartender said he always watched the door during the floorshow. He'd known of a lot of bars that had been held up during floorshows, when no one was paying attention to the bar or the cash register. So he always kept a close

watch, and he'd have noticed anyone who came in that night. He had not seen Harley Pearce enter. The DA smiled and turned the man over to me.

"What time does the floorshow start at the *Flamingo*?" I asked.

"Ten minutes to twelve, sir," he said.

"Do you serve many drinks while the floorshow is on?"

"No, sir. Most everyone is at their tables, watching the show."

"And are we to understand that you keep a constant watch on the door during that time? I mean, since you are not serving drinks."

"Objection," the DA said, rising.

"Overruled," the judge answered. "Proceed."

"Is that what you do during the show?" I repeated.

"Well . . . I guess I look at the show, too. On and off, I mean. But I watch the door mostly. A lot of robberies . . ."

"Watch the cigarette machine?"

"Well, no, sir."

"Then it is likely that someone did enter, stop at the machine, and leave, all while you were taking one of your periodic looks at the show?"

"Well . . ."

"Did you see me standing at the bar that night?"

The bartender blinked his eyes. "You, sir?"

"Yes, me. Standing near the blonde in the mink stole. I was drinking a Tom Collins when the show started. Did you see me?"

"I . . . I don't recall, sir. I mean . . ."

"I was there! Did you see me?"

"Objection!" the DA said. "Counsel for the defense is perjuring . . ."

"*Did you see me?*"

"Near . . . near the blonde, sir?"

"Yes, near the blonde. Did you or didn't you?"

"Well, there was a blonde, and if you say you was standing near her . . . I mean, I don't remember, but . . ."

"Then you *did* see me?"

"I . . . I don't remember, sir."

"I wasn't there! But if you couldn't remember whether I was or not, how can you remember whether or not Mr. Pearce came in for a package of cigarettes especially when — by your own admission — you could have been watching the floorshow at that time?"

"I . . ."

"That's all," I said.

I heard the murmurs in the courtroom, and I knew I'd done well. I'd punctured one part of the DA's case, and the jury was now thinking if he was wrong there, why can't he be wrong elsewhere, too? Why couldn't Harley have loaned the girl his cigarette lighter? Why couldn't his story be absolutely true? After all, the DA's case was purely circumstantial.

I clinched it in the summing up. I painted Harley as an upstanding citizen, a man who — just as you and I — was a good husband and a good father. A man who hired a baby sitter, the same sitter he'd been

hiring for the past year, went out to a quiet movie, had a few drinks with his wife, and then came home. He drove the sitter to her house, dropped her off, and then went back to his wife. Someone had attacked her after he'd gone. But not Harley. Not the man sitting there, I told them, not the man who could be your own brother or your own husband, not him.

The jury was out for half an hour. When they returned, they brought me a verdict of Not Guilty.

We celebrated that night. Harley and Marcia came over while his mother-in-law sat with their kids. We laughed and drank and Harley kept saying, "They were looking for a sucker, Dave. But you showed them. By Christ, you showed them you can't fool with an innocent man."

He told me I was the best goddamn lawyer in the whole goddamn world, and then he started a round of songs, and we all joined in, drinking all the while. The party was doing quite well when Beth walked in.

She'd had a date with one of the neighborhood boys. He dropped her off at the front door, and she came into the living room. She said hello to Marcia and Harley when we stopped singing, and then excused herself and started up the steps to her room.

"How old is she now, Dave?" Harley asked.

"Sixteen," I said.

“A lovely girl,” he said, very softly.

I’d been watching Beth climb the steps, watching her proudly. She was still my little girl, but she was ripening into womanhood quickly. I watched her mount the steps with the sure, swift suppleness of a healthy young girl, and then I turned to look at Harley.

His eyes were on Beth, too. He watched her legs as she walked higher and higher up the staircase, and then his eyes traveled the length of her young body, slowly, methodically.

He did not take his eyes from her until she’d opened the door to her own room and stepped out of view. Then he said: “What’ll we sing next, folks?”

I looked at Harley, and then I looked at the empty staircase, and I suddenly felt very foolish inside, very foolish and very naive. Naive and tremendously stupid.

I felt exactly like what Harley would, undoubtedly, have called a “sucker.”

And there was, of course, nothing I could do.

I did not join in the next song.

Portrait of a Killer

No. 7—Tillie Gburek

BY DAN SONTUP

TILLIE GBUREK was just another married woman in her forties — until she decided to become a prophet of death.

She had been married to the same man for twenty-five years, had lived an uneventful life, had done nothing out of the ordinary. Then, one day, Tillie decided that a small mongrel dog was about to die. She pointed out the dog to her neighbors, told them she could feel a prophecy about the dog — he was going to die within a week. Then she sat back and waited.

Exactly one week later the dog was found dead.

Tillie now had a small bit of prestige in the neighborhood, and she enjoyed it a lot. She lived in a neighborhood where superstition was a part of everyday life, and the prediction of death was something that made people sit up and notice Tillie. One death didn't prove much, though, so it wasn't long before Tillie came up with another prophecy: another dog was going to die.

The same thing happened again. The dog died.

Tillie's score was now going up, and two accurate predictions in a

row were something to think and wonder about. Tillie followed this up with still another prophecy — and then more after that. Each prophecy came true with remarkable accuracy, and now Tillie was a real celebrity in her neighborhood. For three years she predicted the deaths of various dogs in the area, and by now her neighbors were good and scared of her. To them, Tillie had strange and secret powers that allowed her to prophesy death, powers that Tillie might use if anyone dared anger her. Tillie, therefore, was treated with awe and respect.

It might have remained this way if Tillie hadn't grown tired of her husband and then decided to branch out into foretelling the death of human beings instead of dogs.

John, her husband, wasn't too impressed with Tillie's abilities as a prophet, and he let her know that. Also, John liked drinking and eating better than working with the result that Tillie had to be the breadwinner of the family. So, Tillie — after spending almost all her life with John — finally got a "message from the powers" that John was going to die. She told the neighbors

that her poor husband was due to depart this Earth in three weeks or less.

Exactly three weeks later John was dead. However, Tillie had made his last days comfortable. She was a wonderful cook, and John loved her beef stew — and Tillie fed him plenty of stew. John gulped it all down, of course, and the only complaint he had to make was that the stew tasted just a little bitter.

With John safely buried, Tillie decided that her wonderful cooking talents shouldn't go to waste, so she went right out and got herself another husband. This one was also named John, and he also liked Tillie's beef stew. Tillie fed him well, for he was a man who believed in life insurance, and he carried even more insurance than the first John had.

The second John lasted for three months of marriage and hearty eating. Tillie made another prophecy, and her second husband soon followed her first one into the grave.

Tillie's prestige with her neighbors was even higher now.

The next subject of one of Tillie's prophecies wasn't named John, and he wasn't a husband of hers. His name was Joe, and he was the man Tillie wanted to marry next. Joe, however, let it be known that he didn't particularly care for Tillie, and this really hurt Tillie's feelings. She swallowed her pride, though, and got Joe to swallow some of her beef stew on the pretext of showing

him what a good cook she was. Joe didn't have too long to enjoy Tillie's cooking. Two months later, Joe was buried in the same cemetery as Tillie's first husband. Tillie didn't grieve very much — Joe didn't have any insurance.

Tillie still felt the need for a husband, though, and it didn't take her long to find one. This one was named Frank, and he lasted quite a while — five years.

But Tillie's art of prophecy wasn't neglected in the meanwhile. She had been lucky, incredibly lucky in not having come to the attention of the police because of the deaths and her very accurate predictions. Her neighbors wouldn't say anything to the police because all of them believed that Tillie had supernatural powers, and no one even thought of crossing her. This feeling grew even stronger when a girl, a distant relative of Tillie's, was foolish enough to make some comments about the deaths of the two Johns and Joe. Tillie immediately forecast that the girl would die soon — and she did. The death of the girl cinched it. No one dared question Tillie's powers of prophecy again.

Tillie played it smart, however. She didn't take chances on her neighbors' fear of her, but made even more sure of not being detected by using different doctors and different undertakers and different insurance companies in each case.

So, Tillie and Frank lived a normal married life for five years, until

Frank began to develop a roving eye for other women. Up to that time, Tillie had fed Frank plenty of good stew, but the minute he began to stray from home, Tillie changed the recipe for her stew and made another prophecy. This time she even ordered her husband's coffin in advance — and it was put into use within ten days.

Even with the death of Frank, the police hadn't heard of Tillie's prophecies, and the neighbors still didn't question her powers. And, despite her reputation, Tillie was able to snag still another husband, this one named Anton.

There's no telling how long Tillie could have gone on in exactly the same manner, but Tillie made the mistake of switching from human beings back to dogs.

Anton had a couple of dogs that he liked a lot, and Tillie thought he liked them more than he did her. She predicted that both dogs would die, and so they did. Anton was quite upset over all this, and he told his brother about it. The brother took one look at Anton — who had been eating some of Tillie's special stew by this time — and told Anton that he'd better do a little checking

on his wife. Anton did. He questioned Tillie about her past husbands, but he couldn't quite make up his mind about her. His indecision proved almost fatal.

Anton didn't feel like eating more stew, but Tillie talked him into having some soup instead. Anton was soon flat on his back in bed — and Tillie was preparing him one more meal. It was to be his final one.

But Anton's brother had become worried about him and had contacted the police. The police investigated, came to Tillie's apartment — and Anton never did get to eat that final meal. He was rushed to a hospital and finally recovered.

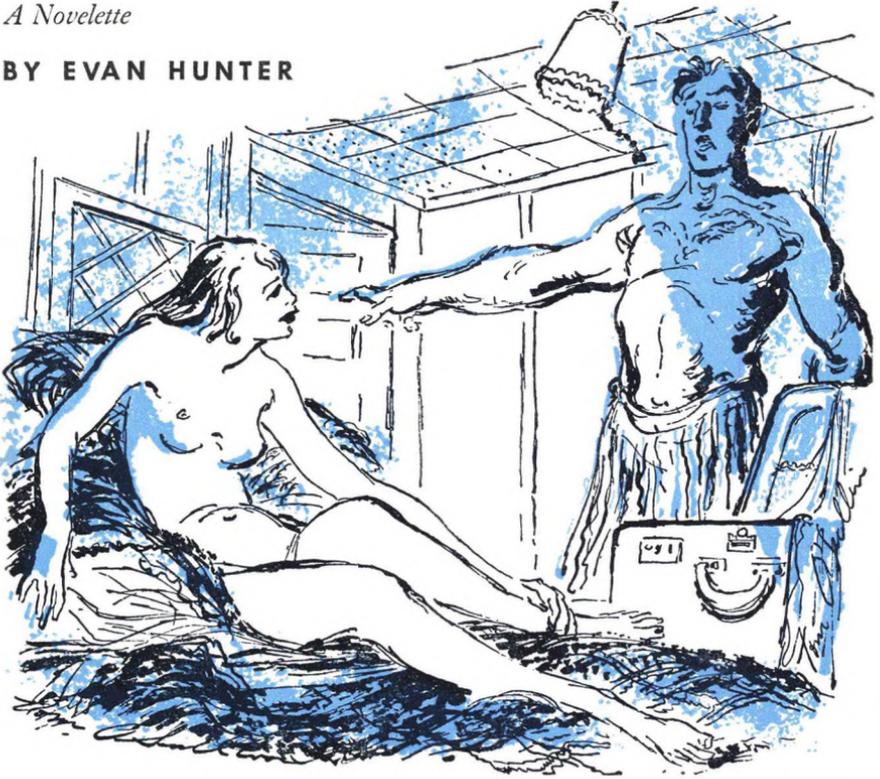
Tillie, of course, was speedily brought to trial after an examination of Anton and an exhumation of Frank's body showed that Tillie had been using arsenic as a liberal spice in her stews, which she fed to both dogs and humans. At her trial, Tillie made another prophecy — she wouldn't be executed. And this prophecy came true the same as the rest of them. She managed to get off with just life imprisonment.

So, Tillie went off to jail — and the only job they wouldn't let her have there was that of cook.



A Novelette

BY EVAN HUNTER



He went into the cabin with one woman, and came out with another. Some guys might have liked the idea, but not Riley.

IF YOU KNOW any seashore resort town in mid-July, you know this one. You know the rows of wooden, salt-scarred bungalows hugging the main drag, with the boardwalk on the side flanking the ocean. You know the hot dog stands, and the shooting galleries, and the tanned women in shorts and halters and brief bathing suits, and the men with browned, hairy chests and spidery white legs.

The Wife of Riley

You know the smell of the ocean mixed with the smell of popcorn, and you know the shriek of the gulls and the boom of the surf against the sand, and the creak of the dock that juts out onto the water. You know all that, and you also know the feeling of impermanency that underlies the whole setup; you know that once Winter comes, the concessionaires will fold their tents like the Arabs, and the bungalows and motels will be boarded up tight.

We pulled into the town at about six in the morning. We'd been driving all night, or at least, *I* had. Anne was asleep on the seat beside me, her red hair spilling onto the plastic of the seat cover. Yesterday had been a scorcher, and she was still wearing shorts and a halter, with her tanned legs pulled up under her. I'd have gone straight through the town because these summer dumps never appeal to me, but I was bushed down to my toes so I stopped at the first bungalow colony and asked for a room.

They were sorry, but they were full to capacity. I shoved the Dodge into reverse, backed out onto the main road again, and kept working my way down, stopping at every colony and motel. I tried five and was ready to say the hell with it when I saw the sixth one close by. A sign swung back and forth outside, hanging from a salt-corroded iron bar, creaking on the early morning sea wind. An inexpert sign painter had tried his hand at Old English,

and come up with the sloppily lettered word, "Zach's."

I shrugged and turned off the macadam onto a dirt road that raised a cloud of dust behind me. I pulled up alongside a gnarled oak, squinted through the dust and saw neat rows of white bungalows with red shutters. On one of the bungalows, the same tyro sign painter had lettered "Office." I looked at the Old English and was opening the door of the car when a guy stepped out of the office and started walking toward me rapidly.

He was a tall guy, with a sort of pyramid build — narrow, rounded shoulders that expanded to a wide middle. He was wearing canvas-topped shoes that had once been blue but were now a muddy brown, like a healing skin bruise. He wore white trousers coated with a film of dust, and an open-throated short sleeve sports shirt that showed scraggly crabgrass hair on his chest. He walked to the car quickly, and I studied his face and waited.

He had narrow eyes, pale blue, a fat-lipped mouth and a wide nose. He hadn't shaved, and he had that patchy kind of beard that always reminds me of a mandarin. His skin was bad and his eyes were puffed with sleep, and he looked like the kind of guy you could rouse out of any doorway in the Bowery. He came up alongside the car, and I said, "Are you filled up, too?"

"We got a cabin left," he said.

He rested his arms on the metal

of the door and stuck his head inside the car. He saw Anne then, and his eyes got narrower. His mouth opened a little, and the eyes traveled over Anne's body, stopping at the full breasts that bunched against her halter, traveling over her bare midriff, down to her curving legs. His breath was foul with sleep, and he smelled of sweat.

"Why don't you come inside?" I said. "The front seats three comfortably."

He smiled, but he didn't move.

"Do you run a motel, or are you the local beauty contest judge?" I asked, beginning to get a little sore at the direction of his eyes.

"I run a motel," he said, still smiling.

"Then put your eyes back in their sockets and rustle up a cabin. We're sleepy."

"Sure," he said. He gestured with his thumb toward a wide square of gravel. "You can park the car there."

"Thanks."

I shoved the Dodge into gear and pulled up alongside a pickup truck on the gravel. I set the emergency brake and then touched Anne's shoulder.

"Honey," I said.

She stirred a little, and I nudged her again. "Anne, wake up. We're here."

"Unh," she said, and then her eyes opened and blinked a little. "Where are we?" she asked sleepily.

"A dump," I said. "We'll sleep a

while and then shove off tonight. Okay?"

"Okay," she said, still half-asleep. She swung her legs out and rubbed her eyes, and I said, "Better put a skirt on, honey."

"A *what*?"

"A skirt."

"Why? What on earth for? We're going right to sleep, aren't we?"

"Yes, but put a skirt on."

"You're a prude," she said. "Victorian."

"I know." I leaned over for the valise in the back, opened it, and pulled out a skirt. "Here."

Anne shrugged and shook her head, but she slipped on the skirt, buttoning it on the side. I swung the valise out of the car, followed Anne out, and locked all the doors. We began walking toward the office then. My friend the pyramid was nowhere in sight, so I figured he'd gone inside. I opened the screen door, and Anne and I entered a small room with a desk on one wall and two rattan chairs on the other wall. A Marilyn Monroe calendar hung over the desk, and one wall was covered with pictures of women in various stages of undress. My friend sat behind the desk.

He glanced at the skirt Anne had thrown on, and his eyes showed disappointment. "I can give you Number Four," he said. "A nice clean cabin, and closer to the beach than the others. We don't serve meals, you understand, but there's a good . . ."

"We won't be staying that long," I told him. "How much is it for the day?"

"Seven-fifty," he said. "In advance."

"That's a little steep, isn't it?"

He shrugged. "You can try some of the other places," he said, knowing damn well I'd already tried them.

"Are you the *Zach* advertised out front?"

"That's me. Zachary Hobbs."

"A good New England name," I said drily.

"What's *your* name?" he asked. "For the register."

"Mr. and Mrs. Steve Riley."

"A good Irish name," he commented. "I don't suppose I'll need to see a marriage certificate."

"I don't suppose so," I said. I paused. "If that's why the tab is so high, you can come down to four bucks. We've been married for three years."

"That's your business," he said. "My business is renting cabins. The price is seven-fifty. In advance."

"You said that once already."

"With some guys," he said pleasantly, "you have to say it twice."

I dug out my wallet and put a five and three singles on the desk. Hobbs opened a drawer, pulled out a green cash box, and lifted two quarters from it. "And fifty makes eight," he said.

I took the fifty cents and said, "Where's the cabin?"

"I'll show you. Come on."

He surprised me by picking up the bag, and then Anne and I followed him down a dirt path to one of the white, red-shuttered cabins. He pulled a chunk of wood with a key attached to it from his trouser pocket and unlocked the door. He stepped inside, put the bag down, and then opened the windows. I looked around the cabin, and I saw Anne was doing the same thing. It was clean enough, with a double bed against one wall, a dresser against another, and a maple butterfly-back chair near the foot of the bed. He continued opening windows, and I said, "No shades on the windows?"

"Won't nobody look in," he said.

"Mmm."

"Well, that's it. Everything okay?"

"Fine," I said half-heartedly. "Where's the bath?"

"No bath. Shower and toilet up at the office."

"I see."

"You got a sink there in the corner. I'll send a girl down with towels and soap for you. The bedclothes are fresh, changed this morning."

"Thanks," I said.

"Not at all." His eyes leaped to the top of Anne's halter. He smiled and added, "The pleasure was mine." And then he was gone.

When the door closed behind him, Anne said, "What a scurvy character. Did you see the way he undressed me?"

"That's why I was Victorian."

“Oh.” Anne shrugged. “Well, I’m still sleepy.”

“Sleepy? I’m ready for cremation.” I opened the valise and pulled out one of Anne’s skirts and two of my dirty shirts. I draped these over the three windows in the room, and then pulled down the covers on the bed. I was unlacing my shoes when I heard the whine of the pickup truck outside. I went to the window, drew back the shirt covering it, and looked out.

Hobbs was behind the wheel of the truck. He backed it off the gravel patch, and I said, “Zach the Ripper is leaving.”

“Good,” Anne said. “I wanted a shower, but I’ll be damned if I’d go up there with him around.”

I watched the truck leave the grounds. “He’s gone,” I said. “Go take your shower.”

Anne yawned and nodded. She took off the skirt, shorts and halter, and then walked across the room and kissed me gently on the mouth.

“Go away,” I said.

“I’m going.” She pulled on a robe, took her soap dish from the valise and grabbed up a towel. “I’ll be right back.”

“Fine.” I took off my trousers and stretched out on the bed, fully intending to wait for Anne to come back before corking off. I guess I was tiredier than I thought.

I remember her coming back to the cabin. I heard the rustle of clothing, but I didn’t open my eyes.

Sleep was light upon me, but heavy enough to make movements hazy, sounds unclear. I heard her light, bare-footed tread across the cabin, and then I felt the mild ocean breeze caress my bare legs as she pulled the covers back. And then she was beside me, her body cool on the surface, warm underneath. I reached over, my eyes still closed, and took her into my arms. I thought I heard her giggle. I held her tight, and she fitted the curve of my body, and I fell asleep with my arms around her.

When I woke, the sun was casting its last feeble rays through the shirt I’d hung on the window. For a moment, I didn’t remember if Anne had come back or not. I felt her body close to mine then, and I sighed and closed my eyes once more. I rolled over, and she rolled with me, and I felt her breasts tight against my back. I tried to shake the sleep from my mind, but I’d been driving for a long time, and I fell off again. I must have slept for a good four hours. When I woke the second time, the cabin was dark.

I looked over at Anne beside me, and I touched her upturned breasts and whispered softly, “Anne.”

She didn’t answer. I rubbed my eyes and then passed my hand over the flat hardness of her stomach. She stirred and moved closer to me, and then she suddenly lifted her head and clamped her mouth to mine and kissed me desperately. I held her close, kissing her ear and the curve of her neck. She moved

expertly against me, her hands traveling over my body.

"That's it, baby," she said. "That's the way."

I drew my head back. The voice. The voice hadn't been Anne's! I threw the covers back, and I swung my legs over the side of the bed. I crossed the room to the light switch in the wall, and I snapped it on quickly.

The girl in the bed sat up, blinking her eyes against the light. She was a brunette, with large, well-formed breasts and a pretty face. She smiled and said, "Am I okay?"

"What is this?" I said.

"Oh come on now, mister," she answered, the smile still on her face. "You know damn well what it is."

"Where's my wife?"

"Your wife?" She looked at me, startled. "Your wife? Come on back to bed, mister."

I walked over to the bed, and I grabbed her by the wrist. "What's this all about, sister?"

"Come on, make easy with the wrist," she said.

"What are you doing here? Where's Anne?"

"Who the hell is Anne? Hey, leggo the wrist, will you?"

"Who sent you here?"

"I found my own way. I looked in, and you were alone." She smiled engagingly and sucked in a deep breath. "I figured you might want company."

"You figured wrong, sister. Pack up and beat it."

She threw her arms around my neck, shaking my grip on her wrist. She leaned forward, and her breasts dipped with the sudden motion. She parted her lips, and her eyes narrowed. "Come on," she said. "I'm good. I'm real good."

"I'll bet," I said, shaking free of her. I crossed the room and put on my trousers. "I'm going up to the office. You'd better be gone when I get back."

The girl's eyes narrowed. "You goddamn fairy," she hissed.

"Have it your way, sister. But get out."

I slammed out of the cabin and followed the trail down to the office. In the distance, I heard the thunder of the surf, the cries of the hawkers on the boardwalk. I opened the screen door to the office and walked in without knocking.

Zach Hobbs was sitting behind the desk. He looked up when I came in, and he smiled broadly. "Evening, Mr. Riley," he said.

I walked to the desk and I leaned over it, my palms flat on the wooden top. "Where's my wife, Hobbs?"

"Your wife?" he said, his eyebrows raising.

"I read the story and I saw the movie," I told him. "Don't make like I didn't come here with a wife. You know goddam well I did. Where is she?"

"Sure you did," Hobbs said. "A nice looking woman. I remember."

"You should, all right. Where is she?"

"She left," he said simply.

"What do you mean, she left? What are you trying to hand me?"

"She left. She came up to the office and said something vile about you, and then she took off."

I reached across the desk and grabbed a handful of Hobbs' shirt. "Don't give me that, you bastard," I said. "Anne wouldn't . . ."

"Relax, Riley," he told me. "Next time don't play with another babe when your wife is out taking a shower."

"Another . . ."

"Yeah, that's what she said. Found you in the cabin with another broad, dead asleep. She came up to the office and asked me when the next bus out was. I told her. Then she took off."

"You're lying, Hobbs."

"All right, I'm lying. She's your wife. What the hell do I care?"

"Who's the girl in my cabin?"

"How should I know? It's your cabin."

"They're your teeth, Hobbs. If you like them in your mouth, you'd better start making sense."

"Don't get smart with me," he said. "I know a few people in this town."

"And you say Anne left, huh? You say she took a bus, huh? Is that your story?"

"That's my story. That's the truth."

I dropped his shirt. "We'll see, Hobbs. We'll see soon enough."

I barged out of the office and

went back to the cabin. The brunette was still there. She was standing near the window, and she wore a half slip, black and lacy, and nothing else. She turned when I came in, and her breasts bobbed.

"You still here?" I asked.

The girl walked toward me, swinging her hips. She cupped her breasts and said, "I thought you might change your mind."

"I came back to change my shirt," I said. "Get the hell out."

"Sure," she said surlily. "Sure."

She began putting on her bra, and then slipped a red silk dress over her head. She picked up her purse, walked to the door, turned and said, "You goddamn . . ."

"Get out sister, before I . . ."

She left quickly. I took a clean shirt from the valise, slipped into it, and buttoned it hastily. When I went outside, the girl was walking toward the office. A car turned into the road, and the lights splashed through her thin dress and slip, outlining the long curve of her legs. I caught her elbow and asked, "Where's the bus terminal?"

"You leaving town?" she asked.

"Maybe. Where's the terminal?"

"Down the road and right. You can't miss it. It's near the Esso station."

"Thanks," I said.

I walked to the car, unlocked it, and backed off the gravel. I turned into the dirt road and then onto the macadam. The roller coaster was dipping and screaming at the other

end of the boardwalk. The ferris wheel circumscribed a brilliantly-lit circle against the stars. I could hear the wash of the surf, and the delighted cries of a few moonlight bathers. I kept the car on the macadam road until I spotted the Esso station, and then I turned right. The bus terminal was a small affair, and I was thankful for that. I parked the car on the concrete strip behind the terminal and then went inside.

It was a conventional station. Benches, a newsstand in the corner, two ticket windows, and an information booth. I walked to the first ticket window and stood behind a fat woman while she bought her ticket and paid for it. She smiled at me when she turned, and I went directly to the window and said, "I'm trying to locate my wife. She may have bought a ticket here. I wonder . . ."

The clerk looked at me with a bored expression on his face. He was a thin man with a hawk-like nose, and he wore a green eye shade.

"Lots of people buy tickets here," he said.

"You'd remember my wife," I said. "She's a redhead. How many redheads do you have every day?"

"A redhead, huh?"

"Yes. She was probably alone, if she bought a ticket."

"Then this one ain't her."

"There was one?"

"Yeah. But she was with another girl. A blonde. I remember them because they . . . well, you re-

member two pretty girls traveling alone together."

"What time was this?"

"Early this morning. Eight, nine . . . maybe ten. I don't remember."

"And they bought tickets here, is that right?"

"The blonde bought the tickets. The redhead stood right beside her."

"Tickets for where?"

"New York."

"What were they wearing? I mean, what was the redhead wearing?"

"A white dress, I think. Yeah, she was in white, and the blonde was in black. I tell you, they made a pretty pair."

"A white dress? Are you sure?"

"Mister, I'm positive."

"Were there any other redheads who bought tickets today?"

"I didn't see any. Hold it a minute." He walked out of his booth and had a little chat with the guy at the next window. When he came back, he said, "Charlie didn't sell no redhead. Charlie remembers things like that."

"Do you think you can recognize her from a picture?"

"The redhead? Maybe." He shrugged. "I didn't pay much attention to the face." He grinned sheepishly, remembering it was my wife I was asking about.

I fished into my wallet and came up with the only picture I had of Anne, a snap we'd taken on our honeymoon. Her hair had been long then, and she now wore it clipped

close to her head in the new Italian cut. She'd also filled out a little more since then. I looked at the picture as if I were seeing it for the first time, and then I handed it to the clerk.

"Is that her?" I asked.

He studied the picture and then shrugged again. "Search me," he said. "This broad had shorter hair." He studied the picture again. "Gee, mister, I honestly couldn't say."

I sighed and took the picture back. "Well, thanks a lot," I said.

"Not at all. Glad to help."

I left him and walked outside to the Dodge. A white dress, he'd said. Anne owned a white dress, but it was home in our closet. She didn't even have a white *blouse* along with us, no less a dress. And the blonde. Even assuming Anne had made the acquaintance of another woman somewhere on her walk from the motel to the terminal, the friendship couldn't have blossomed that rapidly. After all, the blonde had paid for the tickets.

It stank. It stank right from go.

To begin with, I knew Anne like the back of my checkbook. If she'd come into that cabin and found me asleep with the brunette, she'd first have kicked the girl out on her fanny, and then awakened me to ask just what the hell was going on.

But even giving her the benefit of the doubt, I knew damn well she was not the kind of girl who'd go traipsing down to the bus terminal, taking up with a blonde on the way.

When Anne is angry, she's angry right down to the roots of her toes. She'd have taken every penny in my wallet, along with the keys to the car. She'd have packed the valise, and probably taken my pants with her, too, just to show me how angry she really was. She'd have driven back to the city, and she'd probably have started suit for divorce within an hour.

That's the way Anne was. We'd known each other for six years, and we'd been married for three, and I could just about tell what her reactions would be to any set of circumstances. My money was on her awakening me and having it out right then and there. Second choice was a vengeful leave-taking, with no holds barred — not a quiet withdrawal wearing some other woman's dress.

I drove back to the cabin, and I went through the clothes there. As far as I could tell, she'd taken nothing. Even her purse was still on the dresser, and Anne wouldn't be caught dead anywhere without her purse. The only garment missing was the robe she'd taken with her to the shower.

I picked up a towel and a bar of soap, shed my clothes and donned a robe, and then started for the office, trying to plan as I walked. Anne had left me to take a shower. All right, the shower was the starting point. I'd start there. Then, later in the night, giving her plenty of time to get to New York, I'd call home.

Maybe Hobbs' story was true. Maybe she had left in high dudgeon. But I'd be damned if I was going to run back to the city after her. The shower was the starting point. My hunch was that Anne had not boarded that bus, or if she had, it was not done willingly.

I opened the screen door to the office, and I was confronted with the semi-nude photographs on the wall again. Hobbs was leafing through a small book, and I had an idea what kind of literature it was.

"Where's the shower?" I asked.

"You staying?" He looked surprised.

"Yes."

"You check at the terminal?"

"I did."

"Was I telling the truth?"

"Maybe. I'm staying, anyway. Where's the shower?"

"How come? I mean . . ."

"She'll be back," I said curtly.

"Where's the shower?"

"Around back. Just follow your nose."

"Thanks," I said. I walked out of the office and around back, following my nose. The shower was a simple wooden stall tacked to the rear wall of the office. Wooden plankings were set around the stall, and they also formed the bottom of it. I walked inside, closed the door, and looked for a latch on it. There was none. I pulled the door tight, but it didn't fit the jamb well, and it hung open about two inches. I grunted and turned on my heel, looking around

the stall. There was nothing in it but the showerhead and the pipes supplying the water. The rear wall of the stall was peppered with knot-holes, and light glanced through several of them. I put my eye to one of them, and was surprised to see the interior of Hobbs' office. Of course! The stall was tacked to that wall.

I wondered how many times that sonovabitch had peered through the knotholes when a woman was taking a shower. In the daytime, with no light on in the office, it would be difficult to tell that the viewing season was on. I also wondered if he'd been at his post when Anne had gone to the showers this morning. I sighed heavily. Wondering wasn't going to help me find Anne. There was nothing in the stall to give me a clue, so I started walking out, and then remembered Hobbs could hear the water from his office. He'd know I hadn't taken a shower, and I didn't want him to know I suspected something unkosher.

I took off my robe, turned on the hot faucet and got a stream of luke warm water. I didn't touch the cold faucet. I stayed under the shower for about three minutes. Then I turned it off, dried myself, got into the robe, and headed for my cabin.

I was rounding the corner of the office when I almost ran into the brunette who'd been in my bed, earlier. I started to sidestep her, and then I saw what she was wearing, and I grabbed her arm.

"Hey!" she complained. "What the hell . . ."

"Where'd you get that robe?" I asked.

"It's mine," she said.

"It's not yours, honey. Where'd you get it?" The robe was a plain white one, with a *fleur de lis* design delicately printed on it in red. We'd bought the robe in Greenwich Village, and it had been hand printed at the shop. I knew damn well it was Anne's.

The girl studied me for a moment, saying nothing.

"Where'd you get the robe?" I asked. "Let's talk."

"My time is money," she said. "Talking or otherwise."

"Come on up to my cabin," I said.

She looked at me steadily for a few moments. "I'm busy right now," she said.

"How much will it cost to un-busy you?"

"Five for my loss, and another five for my time. What we do with it is up to you."

"Get rid of your playmate," I said. "I'll be in the cabin."

"Give me five minutes," she said. Then she smiled archly and stroked my cheek. She moved closer, thrusting her hips forward. "I'll be right up, darling."

I moved away from her, and watched her turn back on the path and head for one of the darkened cabins. I was beginning to get some inkling of the kind of place good old

Zachary Hobbs ran. Cabins for couples, no questions asked. Also, cabins for men, complete with hot and cold running blondes, brunettes, and red . . .

Redheads. I wondered if there were any redheads in his crew. Or was he trying to . . . No, he couldn't be that stupid. I mean, even assuming the local police were in his pocket, he couldn't hope to get away with abducting Anne for his own particular purposes. No, that was out. Still . . .

I mulled it over, walking to my cabin. I watched seven minutes march across the face of my wrist watch, and then the brunette came back. She opened the door, closed it quickly, and then opened the robe.

"Keep it on," I said. "I'm paying for talk."

"Let's see the color," she said.

I dipped into my wallet and came up with a sawbuck, handing it to her. She folded it, and then looked around for a place to put it. There were no pockets in the robe, and there were no pockets in what she had under the robe, because she didn't have anything under that.

She held the folded bill in her closed fist. "All right," she said. "Let's talk."

"Where'd you get the robe?"

"I told you. It's mine."

"Where'd you buy it?"

"Who remembers? In town."

"It was bought in a joint called Andre's in Greenwich Village. Look at the label. Where'd you get it?"

“Why? What’s so damn important about it?”

“I’m curious.”

“All right, it was given to me.”

“Who gave it to you?”

She hesitated.

“Come on, who gave it to you?”

“Zach,” she said quickly.

“How long have you been working in this floating bordello?” I asked.

“A while.” She paused and eyed me skeptically. “You a cop?”

“Do I look like a cop?”

“No. It don’t matter, anyway. Cops don’t bother us.”

“How come?”

“Ask Zach. I just work here.”

“Who told you to come down to my cabin this morning?”

“I already answered that one,” she said.

“Sure. Now give me the right answer.”

“Zach did. He said you were needing.” She slipped the robe off her shoulders and came closer to me, hugging it around her waist so that only the white mounds of her breasts were exposed. “Was he right?”

“I’m partial to redheads,” I said.

The girl shrugged. “We split it all anyway. You want a redhead?”

“Have you got one?”

“Sure. I’ll ask Zach to send her down.” She paused. “You’re making a mistake, though.”

“Am I?”

“She’s new, just came in yesterday. You’re making a mistake.”

“As the old maid said when she

kissed the cow, ‘It’s all a matter of taste.’”

“All right,” the brunette said. “Make yourself comfortable. I’ll talk to Zach.” She pulled the robe up over her shoulders, and then she left, wiggling her fanny so I’d know just how big a mistake I was making.

I waited for ten minutes, not sure of what I was going to do, but figuring there might be a connection between Zach’s redhead and Anne. When the knock sounded on the cabin door, I called, “Come in, it’s open.”

The door swung wide, and I was a little surprised because I was expecting a redhead. I was more surprised because the woman was blonde and she was wearing a black silk dress that was slit down the front almost to her navel. I remembered what the guy at the bus terminal had said. A blonde in a black dress.

“Come in,” I said.

She stepped into the cabin, spotted my cigarettes on the dresser, and walked to them quickly, using a loose-hipped gait. She shook a cigarette free from the pack, lighted it, and blew out a wreath of smoke. She hesitated a moment, and then said, “Marie told Zach you want a redhead.”

“That’s right,” I said. I didn’t tell her the redhead I wanted was Anne.

“Zach says he’s sorry, but we ain’t got any.”

I looked at her curiously. “The girl said . . .”

"Marie just works here. There ain't no redheads."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"They call me Bunny," she said.

I looked at her steadily, and she added, "Zach says I'm not for hire."

"I didn't ask," I told her.

"Just in case you were going to."

She sucked in another cloud of smoke, and her breasts bunched against the wide split in the top of her dress. "Why don't you go home to your wife, Mac?"

"My wife walked out," I said, playing my little part in the drama.

"A redhead, huh?"

"Sure."

"You can always tell. Taste always follows the same."

"Is that how you can tell?"

"Sure. How else?"

"I thought maybe you'd seen her."

"Nope." She sucked on the cigarette again. "So, can we do business?"

I smiled wryly. "Honey," I said, "how could I settle for anything less than you?"

She didn't smile back. She considered this for a moment, and then said, "That might be arranged, too."

"I thought . . ."

"Anything can be arranged if you know the right people."

"And you're the right people?"

"Right as rain."

"And good old Zach? What about him?"

"What about him? He's asleep already."

"Was he asleep when you went to the bus terminal?"

Bunny blinked her eyes. "Who went to the terminal?"

"I thought *you* did."

"You thought wrong. Are you in the market or not? I'm busy."

"I'll bet you are. Let me think it over. I'll let you know."

"All right. I'm in Three, if you want me."

"And Zach?"

"He sleeps in the office," Bunny said. She paused and then added significantly, "With his pictures."

"I'll let you know."

She went out, and I thought, *Hell, there must be a million blondes in black dresses. Black is a good color for blondes. Besides, this is a small town. Wouldn't the clerk have recognized a native? Yes, unless Bunny wasn't a native. In a business like Hobbs', there are probably a lot of imports.* I took off my robe, dressed quickly, and left the cabin. There was a pay phone near the office, but I avoided it and headed for the boardwalk. It was uncluttered, with the crowds beginning to thin out.

I passed the Pokerino setup, and then walked back when I saw a phone booth tucked into one corner of the joint. I got the operator, gave her our city phone number, deposited the coins, and listened to the phone ringing. I let it ring twenty-two times, and then I gave up. Anne wasn't there.

There was only one question remaining.

Where was she?

I walked up the boardwalk, and I tried to sort the important from the unimportant. I knew I should go to the police, but I figured they were all sewed up on Hobbs' side. They'd have to be. I thought of calling the state police, but by the time they arrived . . . No. I was here. Right on the spot. I knew everything that had happened. All right, so what was important?

The terminal clerk had remembered Anne — if she was Anne — and the blonde. That was important. They certainly weren't trying to hide the fact that they were taking her out of town.

Or was that the idea? Were they trying to show everyone they were leaving? A blonde in a black dress, a redhead in a white dress. Both attention-getters. Well, if they were after attention, they'd have stopped at several places along the way to the terminal. If they wanted to be remembered, they'd want a lot of people to remember them.

But why?

Why in hell do that?

I didn't question it any further. I walked to the end of the boardwalk, and then I started for the terminal. The first place I saw was a bar. I went in and questioned the bartender. Yes, he'd seen the girls — and what girls! He remembered them. Was anything wrong?

I left and stopped in the candy store on the corner. The girls had been there that morning. They'd stopped for magazines, a blonde and a redhead, both pretty, both dressed to kill.

I stopped in another bar, and was told the girls had been there, too. They'd dropped in for a quick drink. The blonde had put a dime into the juke, and then she and the redhead had sipped martinis and then left.

I thanked the bartender and walked out of the bar, sure I'd hit upon the idea. The idea was to be seen. Christ alone knew why, but that was the idea. I stepped onto the sidewalk and a young girl moved away from the building and brushed against me.

I said, "Pardon me," and then began walking back toward Zach's. The cop materialized out of nowhere.

"All right, cousin," he said.

For a minute, I didn't know he was talking to me. Then I frowned and said, "Something wrong, officer?"

"Drop the act, cousin," he said. "I saw you."

"You saw me *what*?"

"That young girl back there. We don't go for molesting in this town."

"Molesting? Are you out of your mi . . ."

"Can it, cousin. Come along with me."

"The hell you say. You're not

going to hang any hick rap on me for something I didn't . . ."

He brought his billy up so fast that I almost didn't see it. He lifted it over his head, and then it whipped down, catching me on the shoulder, sending a sharp pain straight down to my wrist.

"You son of a . . ." I started.

He brought the billy up again and cracked it down on my bicep. He grabbed my wrist then and flipped my arm up behind my back, wrenching it hard.

"Had enough, cousin?"

"Look, you sloppy bastard. Let go that arm or . . ." I shouted in pain as he tugged up on my arm again.

"Come along," he said. "Come along now."

I cursed all the way to the jail, and then I cursed when he brought me in front of a fat bastard he called, "Chief."

Chief looked at me and then turned to the cop. "What's the trouble, O'Hara?"

O'Hara! The name burned me up even more. O'Hara to Riley. Of all the goddamn . . .

"Masher," O'Hara said. "Caught him near the terminal. Tried to get funny with a young kid."

"You're full of it, O'Hara," I said. "Look, Chief, are you going to let this slob . . ."

"Shut up," Chief said.

"He's lying through his goddamn teeth. I never . . ."

"Shut up!" Chief said more firmly.

"Toss him in the cooler, O'Hara. Vagrancy, molesting, exhibitionism, indecent expos . . ."

I got it then, clear and fast. The cops were in Hobbs' pocket all right, tucked away like a handkerchief. I'd been snooping around, and they hadn't liked it, so now they were going to dump me in the hoosegow, where I'd be safe for a long while.

O'Hara was standing behind me, and Chief was sitting close to his desk. If there was any time to do it, this was it. I rammed back with my elbow, catching O'Hara in the gut. I whirled as he doubled over, and I let him have a fistful of knuckles against the bridge of his nose. I turned again as Chief started to push his chair back. I shoved the palms of both hands against the desk, and Chief sat down abruptly, the desk slamming into his stomach and pinning him to the wall.

I ran like a bat out of hell, straight for the boardwalk and then over to Zach's. I heard shouts behind me, and I knew I wasn't going to get far unless I moved damned fast. I cursed myself for not contacting the state police to begin with, and then I was on the dirt road and running for the gravel patch and my Dodge. I fished the key out of my pocket and opened the door, and I heard a siren wail in the distance and I knew Chief and O'Hara were hot on my trail, with blood in their eye.

I twisted the key in the ignition and pressed the starter. She usually started on the button, but this time

she made a low, complaining whine. I tried again. I could hear the siren closer now, and I knew there wasn't much time. The engine wouldn't kick over. I tried once more and then got out of the car. Some bastard had probably played with the wires. Some bastard named Hobbs. I started to run, and then I saw his pickup truck at the end of the gravel patch. I ran to it and leaped into the cab, feeling for the ignition.

The keys were there.

I twisted them, felt around for a starter, and then stepped on it. The engine coughed into life, and I heard the door to the office slam open, and Hobbs' voice came out to me.

"Hey, you! Hey, you, get the hell out of that truck!"

I said something unprintable and then backed off the gravel, gunning the truck forward on the dirt road. When I hit the macadam, I turned right and went like sixty. I passed the flashing red lights of the police car, and I heard them blowing their horn, so I knew they'd spotted me. I saw them making a U turn in the rear view mirror. I kept my foot down to the floorboard, driving like a maniac. I was outside of town in ten minutes flat. I took the first cutoff I saw, kept on that until I came to a fork in the road, and then followed that for about five minutes, keeping on the right branch. I passed a grove of trees, and as soon as the ground was flat again, I turned off the road and crossed the field, heading back for the stand of trees.

I swung into a large clearing between the trees, cut the lights and the engine, and then sat back to listen. In a few minutes, I heard the wail of the siren, and then I saw the bright headlights and the flashing red lights swoop by on the road beyond the trees. The first car had hardly passed when a second followed, its lights slicing through the darkness. I sat in the cab of the truck and lighted a cigarette, wondering how long it would take them to figure what I'd done. Probably not very long at all.

I wondered if Hobbs carried any artillery in the truck. I opened the glove compartment and rummaged around there. Outside of a few oily rags, a flashlight, and a couple of road maps, there was nothing. I got out of the cab and walked around to the back of the truck. A tarpaulin was bunched into the far corner of the truck, and a barrel was roped to the sides near the back. I looked into the barrel, found a batch of tools, and picked out a monkey wrench. A wrench wasn't a gun, but it could bash in a few heads if it ever came to that. I tucked the wrench into my waistband and climbed over the tailboard, walking toward the tarpaulin.

I stooped down, pulled back the tarpaulin, and then felt the hackles on my neck rise.

A redhead was sprawled on the floor of the truck. Her mouth and her eyes were open. She was naked, and there were purple bruises on her

throat, and long crimson scratches on her breasts and her belly.

My hands were trembling. My first thought had been of Anne. It had taken me about five seconds to realize the dead redhead wasn't my wife, but the shock was still on me. I stood looking down at her. She'd been a pretty girl, with short red hair like Anne's. Her eyes were a startling, glassy blue. She was well-built, with pale full breasts, and a hard, flat stomach.

I covered her quickly, my hands still trembling. I backed away until my legs hit the tailboard, and then I climbed down and walked to the side of the truck. My first idea was to get the hell away. I let the idea peter out until I'd calmed down a little. When my hands were a little steadier, I lighted another cigarette and then tried to make some sense out of it.

She'd been strangled and pretty badly mangled. She was naked. I formed a mental picture of what had happened, and the picture fit perfectly with the kind of joint Zach Hobbs ran.

She was also in the back of a truck, and you don't put someone in a truck unless you plan on taking her someplace.

That figured. If she was one of Zach's girls and killed on the premises, he'd want to get her far away. Murder would buy the state police, and the state police wouldn't help his type of business.

The girl was new, if she was the

same one Marie had planned on sending down to me. She'd arrived yesterday, Marie had said. Yet Bunny, the blonde, said they had no redheads. Apparently, Bunny was buddy-bunny with Hobbs. She'd lie for him, of course, and especially if she'd been the blonde who'd accompanied Anne to the bus terminal.

And all at once, it fell into place.

The dead redhead, and Anne's abduction, and all of it. Every blessed bit of it. I was right back to go again, and back to go was a visit with Zachary Hobbs. Back to go was a few missing teeth unless somebody started talking, and started damned fast.

I kept off the road, working my way through the trees, staying out of sight and hearing until I hit the town. I cut down to the beach then, and I stayed on the sand until I was opposite the motel. I waited, watching the macadam road until there was no one on it. Then I ran across to the dirt road, up past the gravel patch and behind the office into the shower stall.

Light flickered through the knot-holes at the back of the stall. I put my eye to one of the holes. Hobbs was behind his desk, busy on the phone. I tried to make out what he was saying, but it was just a mumble from where I stood. The blonde, Bunny, was leaning against the wall staring straight ahead of her, puffing on a cigarette.

I took the monkey wrench out of my waistband and waited until Hobbs put the receiver back into its cradle.

"It'll be okay," he said to Bunny.

"Did they get him?"

"No, but they found the truck. It'll be okay."

I waited for him to say more. He came out from behind his desk, and he walked to Bunny, taking the cigarette from her hand and grinding it beneath his heel. Without preamble, he thrust his hand into the front of her blouse.

She tried to back away, but she was pinned against the wall.

"Zach," she said, "for Christ's sake. Can't you pick a better time?"

He threw his other arm around her waist and said, "I told you it's going to be okay. Come on, baby. Come on, now."

I didn't wait for more. I left the shower stall and stayed in the shadows close to the office, working my way around to the front door. I listened outside the door for a second, and then threw it open.

Hobbs had his fat lips planted on the side of Bunny's neck. He pulled his head back when the door opened, and then he dropped the girl and rushed over to the desk. I was closer, but we got there at about the same time because he'd had a start on me. He threw open the top drawer and reached into it, and I caught one glimpse of blue gunmetal, and then I brought the monkey wrench up and down in a fast blur.

It caught him on the wrist, and he pulled his hand back in pain. I shoved between him and the desk, slamming him back against the wall and reaching into the drawer for the gun. It was a .45 with the look and feel of a well-oiled, cherished weapon. I closed my fingers around it, and then snapped the safety release with my thumb, tucking the monkey wrench back into my waistband at the same time. Bunny stood to one side, her hand to her mouth, not bothering to button her blouse.

"All right, brother," I said to Hobbs. "Let's get at it."

"Let's get at what? You know the police are after you, Riley? You know what they'll do to you when they get you?"

"You know there's a dead girl in the back of your pickup, Hobbs?"

His eyes flicked to Bunny, and then back to me. I could almost hear the gears grinding inside his skull, and I had to hand it to him for quick thinking. "You killed someone, did you?" he said quickly. "That ain't going to help, Riley. The cops'll just . . ."

"Let's cut the comedy," I said. "Let's stick to the goddamn facts." I hefted the .45. "I learned how to use this bastard in the Army. I haven't forgotten how."

"What facts you talking about?" Hobbs asked. "You must be nuts."

"Fact one: the dead girl in your truck is a redhead. You had a redhead here yesterday, but you haven't got one now."

"We never had . . ."

"Fact two: my wife came up to take a shower early this morning. Later this morning, she got on a New-York-bound bus, accompanied by a blonde I'll bet was our rabbit friend here."

"Bunny!" the blonde corrected vehemently.

"Fact three: my wife is a red-head, and she was wearing a dress that didn't belong to her."

"What's all that got to do with . . ."

"I'll tell you, Hobbs. I think that dress belonged to the dead redhead in the pickup truck. I think that's the same dress she wore coming into town, and on a number like her, it must have caused quite a stir. I think you slammed that dress onto my wife because you wanted to make sure everyone saw the dead redhead *leaving* town. That's what I think, Hobbs."

"You're crazy! You're . . ."

"I think you forced my wife to get onto that bus. Rabbit here probably had a gun in her purse. I think you took her off the bus somewhere between here and New York, and I think you're holding her until you can ditch the redhead's body someplace far away from here. That's why she's in the pickup, isn't it?"

"I don't know any redhead. Pickup truck or otherwi . . ."

"One thing I want to know, Hobbs. Is my wife still alive?"

"I don't know where your god-damned wife is. I never . . ."

I swung the .45 up and down, catching Hobbs across the cheek bone, ripping the skin back in a wide, bloody flap.

"Is she alive, you bastard?"

"Go . . ."

I gave him another whack with the gun before he could complete his sentence. This time I caught him on the mouth, and he fell back against the wall, holding his splintered, bleeding teeth.

He began blubbing, and then he started cursing and swearing.

"Is she alive?" I shouted. "Where is she, you bastard?"

Hobbs lifted his head, and spit at me, and the blood and sputum hit my face an instant before I hit him on his skull with the gun. This time he folded against the wall, and then his knees went out from under him, and he fell face forward on the wooden floor.

I turned and walked toward Bunny.

"All right, sweetheart," I said. "Your playmate's out of the running. Now it's your turn."

She swallowed hard and looked at the .45 in horror. "You . . . you wouldn't . . . you . . . wouldn't . . ."

"Wouldn't I though? Did you put my wife on that bus, you bitch?"

She opened her mouth wide as I raised the .45. "Yes, yes! I did! For Christ's sake . . ."

"Where is she?"

"A rooming house about forty

miles from here. Jesus, Mac . . .”

“She’s all right? Is she?”

“Yes. Yes, she’s fine. We . . . we were going to let her go later. We . . . we just wanted to get rid of the redhead first. We just wanted to make it look like the redhead left town.”

“Who killed the redhead?”

“Not me! Jesus, not me! I didn’t . . .”

“Zach?”

“Yes. Zach. He . . . he said he wanted to break her in. He told me to send her to the office. I guess . . . I guess she didn’t like . . . I guess she objected to what he . . . he killed her.”

“And then he had to make it look like she’d left town, so that when her body turned up, he’d be in the clear.”

The girl was blubbing now, just the way Zach had. “Yes. Yes, he . . . that’s what. That’s . . . Mac, I just work here. I just take orders. You don’t know, Mac. You don’t know. I swear . . . I just . . . your wife is okay. I didn’t harm her.”

“Who’s she with?”

“Zach’s sister. She . . . she runs the rooming house.”

“Where? What’s the address?”

She gave it to me, and I went to Hobbs’ phone and dialed the state police, and then tried to explain the whole thing. I told them everything

that had happened, and I also told them the local police were probably in on the coverup, and that they had Hobbs’ truck with the dead girl in it.

I hung up and waited then, and a trooper’s car reached the office in seven minutes flat. They’d already radioed to have Anne picked up at the rooming house. Hobbs wasn’t talking to anyone when they came in. He was still huddled against the wall like a broken egg.

We drove back to the city that night.

Anne was silent for a long time. She kept smoking cigarettes, peering through the windshield until dawn spread across the sky in a pale grey wash.

“Was it bad?” I asked her.

“No,” she said.

“Then why . . . I mean . . .”

“I keep thinking of you,” she said. “With all those naked women running around.”

I took one hand off the wheel and hugged her close to me, and she buried her head in my shoulder.

“Did . . . did you look?” she asked.

“Sure,” I told her.

“You . . . you did?”

“Yes, but not very hard.”

She snuggled closer to me, and I added in explanation, “They didn’t have any redheads.”



The man in the Oriental costume was going to talk to Jordan. He reached Jordan's door — but he never got inside.

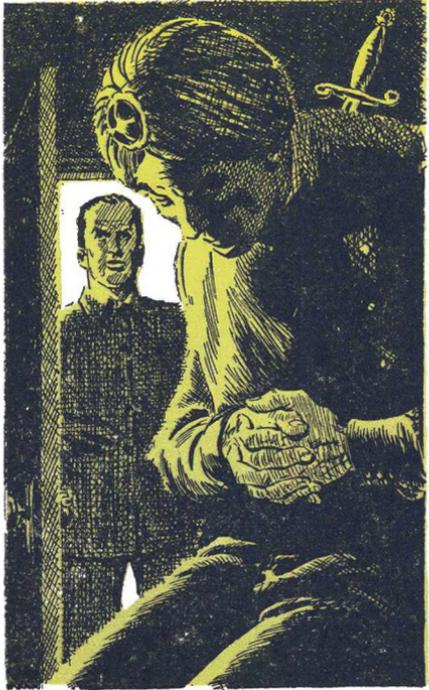
A Scott Jordan Story

BY HAROLD Q. MASUR

IT STARTED with a Hindu dancer and a lawyer. When they met, the Hindu dancer's heartbeat stopped permanently and the lawyer's temporarily. I did not know the Hindu dancer at all, but I knew the lawyer well enough. He's me, Scott Jordan.

The event was a memorable one. It led to a small brunette and a large swindle. Both were beauties. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was Thursday morning, 2:30 A.M., when I came awake sharply and irritably at the insistent ringing of my doorbell. I muttered thickly



Richest Man in the Morgue

into the pillow and tried to ignore it, but the bell kept going, so I got up and shuffled blindly into the foyer. A summons at that hour usually means trouble. Still, I couldn't help myself. In some ways a lawyer is like a doctor. Sickness and crime work on a twenty-four hour shift right around the clock.

I opened the door and there he was, brightly festooned in the costume of an Oriental potentate, with a jeweled turban wrapped around his head. At first I didn't see him. He was on his knees, bent over, his forehead touching the floor in an attitude of prayer.

I knew if I touched him he would

topple sideways. I knew it because the knife sticking out of his back had been planted in exactly the right spot. But he toppled anyway, listing to port slowly and then rolling over with a soft thud.

I stood in the doorway, impaled, heartbeat suspended.

His lips were frozen in a twisted grimace, and lidless eyes stared upward in a kind of perpetual astonishment. He was young, about twenty-five, his face darkly smeared with theatrical makeup. I didn't know the fellow from a hitching post.

Good-bye rest. No more sleep for me tonight. I could, of course, haul him down the corridor and deposit him in front of somebody else's door. But I'm in the business. I know better. Transporting a homicide victim carries stiff penalties, and besides, this chap had been scratched out on his way to see me and I wanted to know the reason why.

I sighed with resignation and headed for the telephone.

I can recall the next two hours as a montage of frenetic activity. City employees came, performed their chores with calculated efficiency and departed. Homicide detectives of all shapes and sizes kept firing questions at me, but through it all I maintained complete innocence. The corpse was finally removed and at last I stood alone with Lieutenant John Nola.

The lieutenant was a neat, dark, sober, slender man, with brooding

eyes and a searching brain, tough but human, and absolutely incorruptible. He was studying me carefully. "Hope you're not trying to promote something, counselor," he said.

I gave him an aggrieved look. "Haven't I always been on the level with you, John?"

"Up to a point, yes. But I'd hate to think you were pulling a fast one now."

If he ever did it would be curtains. Five years of friendship would go out the window. He lit one of his thin, dappled cigars and inhaled thoughtfully. I knew that he had established the victim's identity and asked him about it.

He said, "The boy's name was Eddie Lang. Made his living as a Hindu dancer in night clubs and television spots. Current booking at *The Kismet*, 52nd Street. According to the M.E. he was ambushed as he stepped out of the elevator and barely made it to your door." Nola searched for an ash tray. His habits were meticulous. "Know many people in show business?" he asked me offhandedly.

"A few. Eddie Lang wasn't one of them. Why?"

"Because he was on his way to see you. Probably recommended. We'd like to know what he wanted."

I shrugged helplessly. "Have you checked his living quarters?"

"The boys are there now."

"How about the knife?"

"Not even fingerprints. You saw

the type. Cutlery stores all over the city sell them in sets." He rubbed his forehead. "Eddie Lang knew something and that knowledge killed him. Somebody had to put him in cold storage before he could talk."

He stopped as the telephone rang and got the handset to his ear. He grunted into the mouthpiece and gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Hold her there," he said crisply. "I'll be right down." He hung up and regained his feet. His eyes met mine. "Gladys Monroe — ever hear the name?"

I thought and shook my head. "Who is she?"

"Eddie Lang's dancing partner. Sergeant Wienick just picked her up at the Hotel Buxton. She's down at Headquarters now. Like to sit in?"

The idea appealed to me, but I shook my head. "Got a case on the calendar tomorrow morning at ten. I won't be able to think straight if I don't get some sleep. Suppose I contact you later?"

He nodded and left.

I saw no profit in a safari to Headquarters at this hour. I didn't even have a client, but the city was paying Nola. I went back to bed, but I didn't get any sleep. The event was too recent, the memory too fresh. I couldn't relax. How insensitive would a man have to be to accept the fact of homicide at his doorstep with equanimity? So I sat up and smoked and rummaged through my memory. Eddie Lang rang no bell.

Dawn was a soiled gray smudge

when I wandered swollen-eyed into the kitchen and brewed a pot of coffee that was blacker than sin and thick enough to walk on. When the pot was empty I got dressed and went down and headed, without conscious volition, to the Buxton.

It was an ancient hotel, clinging to its air of reserve and quiet respectability. The lobby was deserted. I sat down at a writing desk and scribbled *Gladys Monroe* across an envelope. I took it over to the desk and handed it to the clerk. He glanced at the name and shoved the envelope into Box 520.

I was on my way to the elevator before he turned around. The operator was half asleep and manipulated the contraption by instinct. I debarked on the fifth floor, found the girl's door, and knocked.

Apparently she was awake, for she answered at once. "Who is it?" But the voice was small and unsteady.

"A friend of Eddie's," I said.

The door opened and I saw a girl who would have rated high on anybody's list of prospective brides. Small and trim, with luminous eyes in a pale oval face. Right now the eyes were miserable and the face woebegone, yet a wistful, appealing quality came right out at you. The high cheekbones were streaked with moisture, and she wrinkled up her forehead, trying to remember me.

"May I come in, Gladys?" I said.

"But I . . ."

"The name is Jordan — Scott Jordan."

Slim articulate fingers flashed to her mouth. She spoke breathlessly between them. "You're the lawyer Eddie went to see. Where he died. The police told me."

I nodded gravely.

She sized me up, relying on her intuition, then stepped aside. The room was small, its dominant feature a gorgeously spangled Oriental costume hanging from a hinge on the closet door. She let me have the single straight-backed chair and perched herself on the edge of the bed.

"Sorry to bother you like this," I said. "The police give you a rough time?"

She managed a tremulous smile. "Not too bad."

"I imagine you're weary of questions about Eddie," I said. "So I won't keep you long. He was on his way to see me and killed before he could talk. It's been on my mind. I haven't been able to sleep. Clues in a murder case cool off fast and I didn't want to waste time. Will you tell me about Eddie? Some seemingly unimportant detail may have more significance for me than it did for the police."

She nodded. "I don't mind. I met Eddie several years ago at a rehearsal hall. I liked his style of dancing and his ideas and I decided to team up with him. We got along fine. He was clever and he taught me a lot. He designed the choreography for our act and handled the business too. Got us most of the bookings.

I . . . I'll be lost without him."

"Were you very close?"

"He wasn't my boy friend, if that's what you mean."

Glad to hear it, I almost said, but held my tongue. "Ever hear him mention my name?"

"No. Not that I can recall."

"Enemies?"

"Not one. Everybody liked him."

"How about his family, his background?"

"I don't think — wait a minute."

Her expression changed. "I remember something. Eddie was sitting in my dressing room between numbers yesterday, reading a newspaper, the *Herald Tribune*, I think, and suddenly he gave an exclamation. 'Look who's in town!' He seemed excited. I asked who and he said, 'Malcolm Parish of the Parish Shipping Lines.' " She stopped short. "What is it, Mr. Jordan? Is something wrong?"

"No," I said. "Go ahead."

"I'd never heard Eddie mention the man and I asked about him. He said his uncle Victor had met Mr. Parish in Switzerland about fifteen years ago and had become his traveling companion and secretary. They went all over Europe. Eddie said his uncle used to write once in a while, but he hadn't heard from him in over a year. According to the paper, Mr. Parish was staying at the Waldorf, and Eddie said he was going to call him and find out if his uncle had come back too."

"Had he?"

"I don't know. Eddie left and after that we had to do our number."

"But you saw him later. What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything, only that he was going over to the Waldorf. We usually stop off for coffee after the last show, but Eddie excused himself and went out alone. That was the last time I saw him." Her mouth was thin and hurt.

I was silent for a moment. "Can you do the act alone?"

"With changes perhaps. I'll try it tonight."

"May I come and watch?"

She looked at me seriously. "I think I'd like that."

I had my link now, though I didn't know what it meant. I had recently handled a matter for the Parish Shipping Lines that had received considerable publicity. The company's chief stockholder, inactive in the business, was something of an enigma. On my way to the Waldorf I mulled over some of the facts and rumors I'd heard about him.

Malcolm Parish had inherited his interest from his grandfather, the company's founder, twenty years ago. At that time, Malcolm was forty years of age, and the older man had had ample opportunity to evaluate his grandson's business acumen and administrative ability. Having reached the conclusion that these qualities were non-existent he prudently arranged to put his holdings

into a trust and leave the firm's management in more capable hands. These measures proved to be both timely and expedient. He passed on soon afterward and Malcolm wasted no time in confirming his grandfather's judgment.

He took his insensitive soul to Europe and devoted himself to the nomadic life of a luxurious wanderer. Europe and the Far East had traditions and culture which he felt were sadly lacking in his native America. But never once, during twenty years of expatriation, did he fail to cash those nasty materialistic checks supplied by American enterprise.

Now, apparently, travel had lost its allure. He was back home — if the impersonal accommodations of a hotel can be called home.

His suite was in the tower, sufficiently opulent but lacking warmth. I had identified myself on the house phone and he consented to see me. He came affably to the door, a slightly built man with mild eyes and a firm handshake. He had reddish hair and a neatly trimmed imperial of the same color.

"Glad to meet you, counselor," he said, conveying me to a chair with a companionable hand on my shoulder. "Read about you in the morning paper. Frightful experience, I gather. Gave me something of a shock, too. Why, I spoke to that man myself only yesterday. Liked him on sight. Very decent sort. Good manners, forthright. Came to inquire about his uncle who used to

work for me. What do you drink? Brandy? Scotch? Absinthe? Call down for anything you like. Take only a moment."

"Nothing, thank you," I said.

"Smoke? Here, try one of these. Made especially for me in Cuba." He shoved a box of long Havana fillers under my nose. They were fragrant and fresh. "Take a couple, counselor. Go ahead. Help yourself."

I selected one and put it in my pocket. He took one for himself, trimmed the end, and got it ignited. Smoke poured luxuriously from his nostrils.

I said, "The police are checking Eddie Lang's movements. Have you notified them he was here?"

Expensive dental work appeared in a lame smile. "Quite frankly, I did not. I saw no connection between the two events." A slight frown drew his eyebrows together. "Incidentally, Mr. Jordan, what brought you to me? How did you know Eddie Lang was here?"

I told him and asked, "What news did you give him about his uncle?"

The bearded face went long and solemn. "I told him that Victor was dead."

"Dead?"

"Quite." Malcolm Parish nodded sadly. "Victor died about a year ago. We had just taken a trip to Italy, flew over the Alps. It may have been the altitude, I don't know. Victor's heart was never strong. He suffered a severe thrombosis shortly after we reached a small villa I had rented

for the season, and he was gone in a matter of minutes. In the twinkling of an eye, you might say. Before I could summon a doctor."

I raised an eyebrow. "Didn't you notify anybody?"

"Of course, the local consul. Victor was buried in the town cemetery."

"I mean relatives."

"Well, now, the fact is I didn't even know Victor had relatives. He never mentioned his nephew and I didn't even know Eddie Lang existed. I was under the impression Victor was alone in the world." Parish shook his head mournfully. "Missed the man dreadfully at first. He ran my household efficiently and played chess like a master. Absolutely irreplaceable."

"How did Eddie take the news?"

"Rather badly, I'm afraid. He seemed genuinely affected. But he shook it off nicely and after a while we had a fine chat. He told me all about his work and that little girl, Gladys Monroe. Meant to catch his act this evening and take them out afterwards. I'd like to know who killed him. Any ideas?"

"Not yet. We're working on it."

He blew smoke at the ceiling. It hung over his head in a disembodied cloud. "I understand you did some work recently for the Parish Lines, Mr. Jordan."

"It was more in the nature of an investigation," I told him.

"Investigation? Are you a detective, too?"

"Not officially, but I've had some luck in the field."

He sat up. "Well, now, I'm interested, counselor. What sort of an investigation?"

"Sorry. It was confidential."

He smiled patronizingly. "Come now. In a manner of speaking, you might say that I am the company, since I hold the largest block of stock."

"True." I smiled back. "But I was hired by the Board of Directors."

"Who, in the last analysis, represent me."

"Unquestionably. So I imagine they'd be glad to show you the files."

He coughed up smoke in a hearty laugh and slapped his knee. "I like that. I do indeed. It isn't often one meets a man of prudence and discretion. I like you, counselor. I like you very much." He closed his mouth and stared at me intently for a moment. "Are you still under retainer to the company?"

I shook my head.

"Would you care to represent me, personally?"

"To do what?"

"To help me accomplish what I came back to the States for."

"Which is?"

"Namely, to vacate the trust set up by my grandfather and have it declared a nullity." He struck his knee with a clenched fist. His lips were grim and his eyes glowing. "To wrest control of my own company from its present Board of Directors.

To manage and pilot the destinies of the Parish Shipping Lines. I'm not at all pleased with the way things are going. We live in an expanding economy, Mr. Jordan, and the Parish Lines should have grown to twice its present size. Instead, the company is virtually at a standstill." His beard quivered with indignation. "The directors have been sitting on their rumps, riding the crest." The fist landed on his knee again. "I'm not going to stand by as an idle spectator and watch the company become atrophied. I'm going to take a hand."

He bounced out of his chair and went to a desk. He turned holding a checkbook in one hand and a ball-point pen in the other. His jaw was set with determination.

"I need the services of a fighting lawyer, Jordan. I like the cut of your cloth. You look like a scrapper. Name your retainer. Go ahead. I won't haggle about the fee."

I sat blinking. His enthusiasm and eloquence surprised me. At last I said, "Ten thousand dollars," just to test his sincerity.

He wrote without batting a lash. He folded the check and tucked it into my pocket behind the display handkerchief.

I said cautiously, "Your grandfather's trust may be irrevocable. I can't promise a thing."

He waved it aside, his mouth obstinate. "Win or lose, my mind is made up. I'm going to the mat with those boys and I want you in my

corner. What's ten thousand dollars? Peanuts, counselor. The company is worth millions."

This was the first time my services had been courted with such enthusiasm. "I'll be in touch with you, Mr. Parish," I said, rising. "As soon as I can read through the trust documents."

"Fine. Just remember, time is of the essence. We've got to start rolling."

After twenty years of indolence he was suddenly in a hurry.

I stopped off at a phone booth and arranged an adjournment of the case on this morning's calendar.

I placed Malcolm Parish's cigar on the desk in front of Lieutenant John Nola. He sniffed at it and raised an eyebrow at me. "What's this, a bribe?"

"Yes, sir. I'd like to know if you've made any progress."

His face was lined and tired. "Very little."

"How about Gladys Monroe?"

"Business associate, that's all."

"I saw her this morning." He stared at me, and I went on telling him about Malcolm Parish.

He mulled it over. "What do you make of it?"

"I don't know, I said. "Yet. Did you check Eddie Lang's room?"

"With a magnifying glass. Combed the place thoroughly. No clues."

"Mind if I go over and take a look?"

"Why?" His inspection was criti-

cal. "You got better eyesight than we have?"

"No, John, I don't mean that at all, but I've been mixed up in a lot of matters and there's always a chance something may click. It can't hurt and it may do some good."

He deliberated briefly and then reached for an envelope, extracting a key which he tossed across the desk. "Here. Got it from the manager. It's a duplicate. Couldn't find Lang's key in his pocket." He paused and leveled a finger. "Report in full, understand?"

"Yes, sir."

I could feel his eyes following me through the door. The name stamped on the key was *Hotel Buxton*. I hailed a cab and sat back. I had a feeling that something was going to happen and as it turned out I was right.

When I crossed the Buxton's antique lobby I thought of Gladys sitting alone in her room. I controlled an impulse to visit her again and went on up to the seventh floor. I found Eddie Lang's room and used the key. I took one step and froze in the doorway, whistling.

It seemed, from the room's appearance, that the Police Academy had omitted a course in neatness from its curriculum. The place was a mess. Drawers had been emptied out on the floor and Eddie's suits lay askew across the bed.

I started with the suits, turning all the pockets inside out. Nothing. Then I got down on my hands and knees and went poking through the

piles of stuff on the floor. My fingers encountered something and pulled it clear. One of those correspondence portfolios in imitation leather, with compartments for stamps, paper, and envelopes. It contained several old letters, one from an agent offering a San Francisco booking, one from a high school girl who'd caught his act on TV and thought he was the best thing since Fred Astaire, and one postmarked Switzerland about a year ago and signed Uncle Victor.

I read the salutation and that's when I got it. His footsteps were silent coming up behind me. I never heard him. But I felt him all right. The blow landed with a shattering impact and what probably saved my life was the hat on my head. A streak of lightning seemed to explode through my brain. I grabbed for my head and the next blow almost broke my thumb. The sap was poised for its final benediction when I rolled over and it caught me on the shoulder, paralyzing my arm.

I was dimly conscious of harsh breathing and a flurry of activity. Then the door slammed. I tried to rise and was engulfed by a wave of nauseating dizziness. I lay still until it passed. Then I struggled upright and steadied myself against a chair. The closet door stood open. Three short steps had brought him close enough to strike. The letter I had started to read was gone.

I reached for the phone and called Nola. When he heard my voice he

knew something was wrong and demanded sharply, "What's up, Scott?"

"Somebody conked me," I said shakily. "Damn near fractured my skull."

"Where are you?"

"In Eddie Lang's room."

"Did you see him?"

"No. He was hiding in the closet and came up behind me."

Nola muffled an oath. "Are you all right?"

"I think so. Listen, John, didn't your boys find a portfolio of letters belonging to Lang?"

"Found it myself. I was there."

"Why didn't you keep it?"

"Because it was old stuff. Innocuous. What's needling you, boy?"

"A letter from his uncle," I said, hollow-voiced. "It's gone. There was a clue in it somewhere."

"Don't guess, Scott. Be specific."

"I can't. I didn't read the letter. You did. Dig in, Lieutenant, please, and try to recall. What did it say?"

We had a bad connection. Static crackled softly over the wire. Finally his voice came: "Listen, Scott, that letter was written a year ago. The guy was a windbag, full of fury, griping about his job and knocking European customs, their lack of efficiency. You know the type. A tongue-waver."

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "I know the type. Talk to you, later, John. My head's splitting." I hung up.

Sure, I reflected grimly. The type is well known to me. Sometimes it's

only talk and sometimes it's more than talk. They thought Hitler was nothing but a windbag too, until he gave the world twenty-four hours to get out.

People reveal themselves by what they say. A man's true stripe rides close to the tip of his tongue. And clues in a murder case can be found in character.

I turned towards the door and winced with pain. I removed my hat, gingerly exploring the wound. It was open and moist and needed attention. So I descended to the fifth floor and knocked on Gladys Monroe's door. She asked who it was. She opened at once when I identified myself, her face pleased and bright. One look was all she needed.

"Mr. Jordan!" she said in quickly rising alarm. "Are you ill?"

"Something fell on my head. Have you got any iodine and a band-aid?"

She ran to the bathroom cabinet and came back. "Let me see." I turned and heard her gasp. "Something fell on your head? What was it, Rhode Island? You need a doctor, somebody with needle and thread. Look, Mr. Jordan —"

"Scott."

"Look Scott, I'm going to call —"

"Later," I said. "Emergency repairs will do for a while. I've got to see a man. It's urgent."

She said no more and went to work. Antiseptic was an applied flame. She pinched the wound together and covered it with a band-aid. "How do you feel?"

"Slightly used, but ready for action."

The phone rang and she reached for it. "Yes," she said, "this is Miss Monroe." Her eyes widened. "You're in the lobby now, Mr. Parish, and you'd like to see me?"

I caught her attention by chipping at the air. Tell him you're alone, I signalled, and willing to receive him. She took the cue without faltering and told him to come ahead. Then she turned to me in puzzlement.

"What's this all about, Scott?"

"No time for explanations now," I told her swiftly. "Just listen. Listen carefully. I want you to stretch the truth. Tell him Eddie often spoke about his Uncle Victor. Tell him you have a snapshot somewhere." I bent down and brushed her cheek lightly with my lips.

She blinked. "Who was that for?"

"Me."

"Then it's my turn now."

I swallowed an impulse to give her the chance and ducked toward the closet.

"What are you going to do?" she called nervously.

"Hide. I want to observe his reactions. Slow down, Gladys, and look natural." I left the closet door slightly ajar for visibility and ventilation.

Just in time. Almost at once there was a knock on the door. I was proud of Gladys. She handled the situation with bland innocence. "Mr. Parish, I'm delighted to meet you. Eddie

mentioned your name only yesterday. Come in, please, won't you?"

He accepted the invitation, courtly and urbane, lips smiling over the red-tinted imperial. His clothes were fashionable, a shade too meticulous, and he carried a silver-knobbed walking stick with quite a bit of dash. He tucked it under his elbow and bowed from the waist. "A pleasure, Miss Monroe; a pleasure indeed."

The amenities over, he sat in the proffered chair and appraised her with a wandering and faintly lecherous eye. "Why, you're quite lovely," he remarked benignly.

"You sound surprised, Mr. Parish."

"Not surprised. Pleased. In fact, overwhelmed. I consider myself something of a connoisseur. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Please do."

He lit one of his fragrant cigars, savored it for a moment, and then inquired idly, "In what connection did Eddie mention my name, may I ask?"

"He read about your arrival in New York and he was very anxious to see you about his uncle."

"Ah, yes." The bearded face went long and solemn. "I feel badly about that. Can't forgive myself. Should have broken the news to him more gently. Didn't realize Victor was the only family Eddie had. The boy was badly shaken. I take it he's in the morgue?"

"Yes."

Parish nodded with sudden de-

cision. "I'd like to do something in Victor's memory. Give the boy a decent burial."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Parish." Gladys was having a little trouble keeping her voice steady.

"My pleasure. He seemed a decent lad. Liked him on sight. Had he asked you to marry him?"

"We were friends, that's all."

"Too bad. He'd have made a fine husband. Did Eddie speak of his uncle often?"

A bull's-eye for me, I thought, smiling tightly to myself in the closet.

"Oh, yes," Gladys said. "He read me all of his uncle's letters." She frowned. "As a matter of fact, his uncle sent him a snapshot once. I think I have it. Eddie traveled light and I keep a lot of his personal papers in my wardrobe trunk."

"Was there much resemblance?"

"A little, around the eyes. It's hard to remember details like that."

Parish sighed. "Victor was my right hand man for years, and I haven't a single memento. Would the picture still be in your possession?"

"I think so. Shall I try to find it?"

His face brightened eagerly. "Why, yes. I'd appreciate that very much."

She swung open her wardrobe trunk, removed one of the drawers, placed it on the bed, and bent over to sort through an accumulation of papers. The man behind her rose silently. His lips, I saw, were pulled back over his teeth. The whole cast

of his face had changed, its features distorted. He raised the walking stick.

I kicked the door open and was on him like a cat, gripping his wrist. An enraged growl tore at his throat. He twisted violently, trying to break loose. I bulled him across the room and wrenched the weapon free.

He crouched back, panting, a bloated vein throbbing spasmodically in a blue diagonal across his temple.

Gladys had wheeled and was watching us, white-faced, stifling a cry.

I saw the red beard quivering with indignation as he tried to assume an air of outraged innocence. "What does this mean?"

"It means it's all over, Victor," I said.

"What?" His jaw hung askew.

"You heard me. The masquerade is over. You tried to pull a fast one and it almost worked. Malcolm Parish died in Italy last year and you took his place. No one knew him there and it was easy. You grew a beard like his and learned to forge his signature. You changed your appearance and your handwriting, but you couldn't change your character. Parish was satisfied to live on his income, but you were more ambitious. You wanted the whole works."

Victor Lang swallowed audibly. He was breathing hard through distended nostrils. "You're crazy!"

"Not me," I said. "You are. Crazy to think you could get away with killing Eddie because he recognized you. You couldn't swear him to silence. The boy was too honest to go along with your stunt, and he threatened to upset your apple-cart. He'd seen my name in the papers connected with the Parish Lines and said he was going to see me right after the last show. But you got there first and nailed him when he came out of the elevator."

Victor Lang was shaking and trying to control it. His nose and mouth were pinched and gray. "You have no proof, Jordan."

"All the proof we need," I said. "You think we can't wash that red dye out of your beard and hair? And how about the key you took from Eddie's pocket so you could search his room in case he left some memento to link you with the crime? You were there when I arrived and you hid in the closet. I owe you one for that clout you gave me."

He stepped back, his lips working.

"You were in a sweat," I said, "and that's why you came back here to the hotel again. You had to be sure Eddie hadn't left anything with Gladys. When you learned she had a picture you were scared she might recognize you. So you decided to swing the stick again. And it was all for nothing, Lang. She had no picture. It was a plant. You think we have no proof, mister? We have enough proof to strap you in the chair."

He broke. His eyes raced wildly around the room and he lunged at the door. I caught him behind the ear with his own walking stick and knocked him sprawling against the wall. I was ready to deliver an encore when Gladys cried out: "No, Scott, please . . ."

She was right, of course. I was neither his jury nor his executioner.

The tightness ebbed out of me.

"Okay," I said. "Call Headquarters, will you, honey?"

Victor Lang was watching me with bankrupt eyes as I took out his ten thousand dollar check and tore it up. I felt very sad. And then I saw Gladys. I saw the admiration and the promise in her face.

I didn't feel sad any more.



The Quiet Room

BY

JONATHAN CRAIG

DETECTIVE Sergeant Carl Streeter's home on Ashland Avenue was modest. So were the dark gray suits he always wore, and the four-year-old Plymouth he drove. But in various lock boxes around the city he had accumulated nearly fifty thousand dollars.

He was thinking about the money now as he watched his daughter Jeannie clear away the dinner dishes. He never tired of watching her. She had just turned sixteen, but she was already beautiful, and lately she had begun to develop the infinitely feminine movements and mannerisms he had once found so irresistible in her mother.

The thought of his wife soured the moment, and he frowned. It had



"Okay," the cop said. "You're in trouble. But maybe you can buy your way out . . ."

been wonderful, having Barbara away for a few weeks. But she'd be back from the seashore next Monday, and then the nagging and bickering and general unpleasantness would start up again. It didn't seem possible, he reminded himself for probably the ten thousandth time, that anyone who had once been almost as slim and lovely as Jeannie could have grown into two hundred pounds of shapeless, complaining blubber.

"More coffee, Dad?" Jeannie asked.

He pushed his chair back from the table and got up. "No," he said. "I guess I'd better get going if I want to get down to the precinct by seven."

"Seven? But I thought your shift didn't start till eight."

"It doesn't. There are a couple things I want to take care of down there, though."

"When will you be home?"

"Depends. Not until three or four, anyhow. We're a little short-handed."

"You put in too many hours, Dad."

"Maybe," he said. He grinned at her and walked out to the front hall to get his hat. Just another few months, he thought. Six months at the outside, and I'll have enough to put Jeannie in a damned good college, ditch Barbara and her lard, and tell the Chief to go to hell.

Sally Creighton was waiting for him in the Inferno Bar. She pushed a folded piece of paper across the table as he sat down facing her.

"How's the Eighteenth Precinct's one and only policewoman?" Streeter asked.

Sally looked at him narrowly. "Never mind the amenities. Here's the list we got off that girl last night."

He put the list into his pocket without looking at it. "Did you check them?"

"Don't I always? Only two of them might be good for any money. I marked them. One's a dentist, and the other guy runs a bar and grill over on Summit." She lifted her beer and sipped at it, studying him over the rim of the glass. "There've been a few changes made, Carl." Her bony, angular face was set in hard lines.

"Like what?"

"From now on I'm getting fifty per cent."

"We've been over that before."

"And this is the last time. Fifty per cent, Carl. Starting as of now."

He laughed shortly. "I do the dirty work, and take the chances — and you come in for half, eh?"

"Either that, or I cut out." She put a quarter next to her glass and stood up. "Think it over, Sergeant. You aren't the only bruiser around the Eighteenth that can shake a guy down. Start making with the fifty per cent, or I'll find another partner." She moved toward the door with a long, almost mannish stride.

Streeter spread his fingers flat against the table top, fighting back the anger that he knew would get him nowhere. For almost a full minute he stared at the broken, scarred knuckles of his hands. By God, he thought, if it's the last thing I ever do I'll knock about ten of that woman's yellow teeth down into her belly.

Hell, he'd taught her the racket in the first place. He'd shown her how to scare hell out of those under-age chippies until they thought they were going to spend the rest of their lives in jail if they didn't play ball. Why, he'd even had to educate Sally in the ways of keeping those girls away from the juvenile authorities until she'd had a chance to drain them.

He closed his right fist and clenched it until the knuckles stood up like serrated knobs of solid white bone. Damn that Sally, anyhow; she was getting too greedy. Fifty per cent!

He got up slowly and moved toward the door.

Twenty minutes later, after he had checked in at the precinct and been assigned a cruiser, he pulled up in a No Parking zone and took out the list Sally had given him. His anger had subsided a little now. Actually, he realized, no cop had ever been in a better spot. His first real break with the Department had been when they had organized the Morals Squad and assigned him to it as a roving detective. The second break had occurred when Sally Creighton was transferred to the Eighteenth. He hadn't talked to her more than ten minutes that first day before he'd realized that he had found the right person to work into his ideas.

In three years, working alone every night as he did, he had loaded his safe deposit boxes with almost fifty thousand dollars.

He lit a cigarette and glanced at the list. Of the two names Sally had marked, the man who owned the bar and grill was the best bet. The other, the dentist, lived on the far side of town; and besides, Streeter had found it was always best to brace a man at his place of business. There was a tremendous psychological factor working on his side when he did that, and especially if the guy happened to be a professional man. He memorized the address of the bar and grill and eased the cruiser away from the curb.

It was too late for the short-order dinner crowd and too early for the beer drinkers, and Streeter had the long bar entirely to himself.

The bartender came up, a thin, blond man in his middle thirties.

Streeter ordered beer, and when the blond man brought it to him he said, "I'm looking for Johnny Cabe."

The bartender smiled. "That's me. What can I do for you?"

"Quite a bit, maybe," Streeter said. "It all depends."

Some of the bartender's smile went away. "I don't follow you."

"You will," Streeter said. He took out his wallet and showed the other man his gold badge.

"What's the trouble?" Cabe asked.

"Well, now," Streeter said, "there really doesn't have to *be* any." He took a swallow of beer and leaned a little closer to Cabe. "You had quite a time for yourself last night, they tell me."

Cabe's eyes grew thoughtful. "Last night? You kidding? All I did was have a few beers over at Ed Riley's place, and —"

"Yeah," Streeter said. "And then you picked up somebody."

"What if I did?"

"Then you took her over to your room."

"So what? They don't put guys in jail for —"

"The hell they don't," Streeter said. "Raping a girl can put you away damned near forever, boy."

"Rape? You're crazy! Hell, she wanted to go. She suggested it."

"Next you're going to tell me she charged you for it."

"Sure, she did. Twenty bucks."

"That's a damn shame," Streeter said. "Because it's still rape, and you're in one hell of a jam."

Cabe moved his lips as if to speak, but there was no sound.

"That girl you took home with you was only fifteen years old," Streeter said. "She —"

"Fifteen! She told me she was nineteen! She *looked* nineteen!"

"You should have looked twice. She's fifteen. That makes it statutory rape, and it doesn't make one damn bit of difference what you thought, or whether she was willing, or if she charged you for it, or anything else." He smiled. "It's statutory rape, brother, and that means you've had it."

Cabe moistened his lips. "I can't believe it."

"Get your hat," Streeter said.

"You're arresting me?"

"I didn't come in here just for the beer. Hurry it up."

"God," the blond man said. "God, officer, I —"

"Kind of hard to get used to the idea, isn't it?" Streeter asked softly.

Cabe's forehead glistened with sweat. "Listen, officer, I got a wife. Best kid on earth, see. I don't know what came over me last night. I just got tight, I guess, and . . . God, I —"

Streeter shook his head slowly. "Good thing you haven't got any children," he said.

"But I have! Two of them. Seven and nine. And my wife, she's — she's going to have another baby pretty soon. That's why — I mean that's how come I was kind of anxious for a woman last night. I —" He broke off, biting at his lower lip.

"Tough," Streeter said. "Real tough. But it's that kind of world, friend. I've got a kid myself, so I know how it is. But —" he shrugged — "there isn't a hell of a lot I can do about it." He shook his head sadly. "When little guys — guys like you and me — get in a jam, it's just plain tough. But guys with dough . . . well, sometimes they can buy their way out."

Cabe looked at him a long moment. "How much dough?"

"Quite a bit," Streeter said. "More than you've got, Johnny. Better get your hat."

"Let's cut out this crap," Cabe said. "I asked you how much dough?"

"We got to think of your wife and kids," Streeter said. "So we'll have to go easy. Let's say a grand."

"I ain't got it."

"You can get it. A little at a time, maybe, but you can get it." He took another swallow of his beer. "How much you got in the cash register?"

"About three hundred. I got to pay the help tonight, or there wouldn't be that much."

"Too bad about the help," Streeter said. "Let's have the three hundred. In a couple weeks I'll be back.

By that time you'll have the other seven hundred, eh, Johnny-boy?"

Cabe went to the cash register, took out the money, and came back. "Here," he said. Then, softly beneath his breath he added: "You bastard!"

Streeter put the money in his pocket and stood up. "Thanks, Johnny," he said. "Thanks a lot. You reckon I ought to give you a receipt? A little reminder to get up that other seven hundred bucks?"

"I'll remember," Cabe said.

"I'm afraid you might not," Streeter said, smiling. "So here's your receipt." He leaned across the bar and slammed his fist flush against the blond man's mouth.

Johnny Cabe crashed into the back-bar, blood trickling from the corners of his mouth.

"Thanks again, Johnny," Streeter said. "You serve a good glass of beer." He turned and went outside to the cruiser.

He spent the next four hours making routine check-ups and trying to think of improvements in the system he had worked out with Sally Creighton. The system had been working nicely, but it was a long way from foolproof. Most of the cops on the force were honest, and for them Streeter had nothing but contempt. But there were a few like himself, and those were the ones who worried him. He'd had reason lately to suspect that a couple of them were getting on to him. If they did, then his racket was over. They could

politic around until they got him busted off the Morals Squad. Then they'd take over themselves. And, he reflected, they wouldn't even have to go that far. They could simply cut themselves in on a good thing.

And that Sally . . . He'd have to start splitting down the middle with her, he knew. Maybe she was even worth it. One thing was sure, she'd learned how to terrify young girls better than anyone else he could have teamed up with. He'd seen her work on just one girl, but it had been enough to convince him. Sally had wrapped her arm around a fourteen-year-old girl's throat in such a way that the girl was helpless. Then, with a hand towel soaked with water, she had beaten the girl across the stomach until she was almost dead. When the girl had recovered slightly, she had been only too willing to tell Sally every man she'd picked up during the last six months.

That particular list of names, Streeter recalled, had been worth a little over ten thousand in shake-down money.

He came to a drug store and braked the cruiser at the curb.

In the phone booth, he dialed Sally's number, humming tunelessly to himself. He felt much better now, with Johnny Cabe's three hundred dollars in his pocket.

When Sally answered, he said, "Streeter. Anything doing?"

"I got one in here now," Sally

said. "A real tough baby. I picked her up at Andy's trying to promote a drunk at the bar."

"She talking?" he asked.

"Not a damn word. I got her back in the Quiet room."

"What's her name?"

"Don't know. All she had in her bag was a lipstick and a few bucks." She paused. "Like I said, she's tough. She won't even give us the time of day."

"Listen," Streeter said. "Things are slow tonight. See if you can get her talking. Maybe I can collect a bill here and there."

"That's an idea."

"You haven't lost your technique, have you?"

"No."

"All right. So turn it on. Give her that towel across the belly. That ought to make her talkative."

For the first time he could remember, he heard Sally laugh.

"You know," she said, "I'm just in the mood for something like that. Maybe I will."

"Sure," Streeter said. "The sooner you get me some names, the sooner I get us some dough."

"Don't forget, Carl — it's fifty per cent now."

"Sure."

He hung up and went back out to the cruiser.

After another slow hour of routine checks, he decided to see how Sally was making out with the tough pick-up. He stopped at a diner and called her.

"God," she said, as soon as he had identified himself, "we're really in it now, Carl." Her voice was ragged, and there was panic in it.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I went too far. I was doing what you said, and —"

"For God's sake, Sally! What's happened?"

"I — I think I broke her neck . . ."

"You think! Don't you know?"

There was a pause. "Yes. I broke her neck, Carl. I didn't mean to, but she was fighting, and all at once I heard something snap and . . ."

The thin film of perspiration along his back and shoulders was suddenly like a sheathe of ice.

"When, Sally? When did it happen?"

"J-just now. Just a minute ago."

"You sure she's dead?"

"Dead or dying. There was a pulse a few seconds ago, but —"

"But her neck! You're positive it's broken? That it just isn't dislocated, or something?"

"It's broken. This is it, Carl. For both of us. God . . ."

"Listen, damn it!" he said. "Was she wearing stockings? Long ones?"

"Yes. What —"

"Take one of them off her and hang her up with it."

She seemed to have trouble breathing. "But I — I can't do that. I —"

"You've got to! Do you hear? It's the only way out. Tie one end of the stocking around her neck.

Then put a chair beneath that steam pipe that runs across the ceiling. Haul her up on the chair with you and tie the other end around the pipe. Leave her hanging and kick the chair away, just like she'd done it herself."

He waited, breathing heavily.

"All right," Sally said. "I'll try."

"You'd better. And hurry. Get her up there and then leave the room for a few minutes. When you go back to see your prisoner, she's hanged herself. See? They'll give you hell for leaving her alone with stockings on, but that's all they can do. She panicked and hanged herself; that's all."

"But, Carl, I —"

"No buts! Get busy!"

He opened up the siren and kept it open all the way back to the Eighteenth. He ran up the station steps, through the corridors. He was breathing quickly. When he arrived at the second floor he was soaked with perspiration.

He forced himself to walk leisurely through the large room that housed the detective headquarters, back toward the short corridor that led to the Quiet room. The Quiet room was a small, soundproof detention cell where they sometimes put the screamers and howlers until they calmed down enough for questioning. It had been designed to provide some degree of quiet for the men out in the headquarters room, and not as a torture chamber.

But it had served Streeter and Sally Creighton well and often.

Streeter paused at the door to the corridor and drew a paper cup of water from the cooler. Where in hell was Sally? he wondered. She should be out here by now, killing time before she went back to discover that her prisoner had hanged herself.

He glanced about him. There were only two other detectives in the room, and both were busy with paper work. A man in a T-shirt and blue jeans sat dozing in a chair, one wrist handcuffed to a chair arm.

Then he heard footsteps behind him, and Sally's voice said, "Thank God you're here."

He turned to look at her. Her face was gray and her forehead was sheened with sweat.

"Where've you been?" he asked.

"To the john. I don't know . . . something about this made me sick in the stomach."

"Yeah. Well, let's go down there and get it over with."

He led the way down the corridor to the Quiet room and threw the heavy bolt. The goddamned little chippie, he thought. So she'd thought she was tough . . . Well, she'd asked for it, hadn't she? She'd asked for it, and she'd damn well got it.

He jerked the door open and looked up at the girl hanging from the steam pipe. Her body was moving, very slowly, a few inches to

the right and then back again.

He stared at her while the floor seemed to tilt beneath his feet and something raw and sickening filled his stomach.

He took a faltering step forward, and then another, his eyes straining and misted. It was difficult for him to see clearly. Absently, he brushed at his eyes with his sleeve. The hanging

figure before him sprang into sudden, terrifying focus.

The girl's body was as slim and graceful looking in death as it had been a few hours ago when he had watched her clearing away the dinner dishes. But not the face, not the horribly swollen face.

"Jeannie," he whispered. "Jeannie, Jeannie . . ."



I was sick to my stomach. There was my father, the gun in his hand, saying, "Take it! Take it!"

BY DAVID CHANDLER

MAMA told me to see Beaver but when I got to the toolshed I saw that someone had already tethered him, maybe the hired man from Ventura Father had sent away

that morning after hardly a day with us. I went straight back to the house. I could hear them still talking in Father's room. A lot of it I couldn't understand but what they were saying about me I could figure out all right, and I stood by the door listening to them.

"You just haven't cared about trying to understand," Mama said.

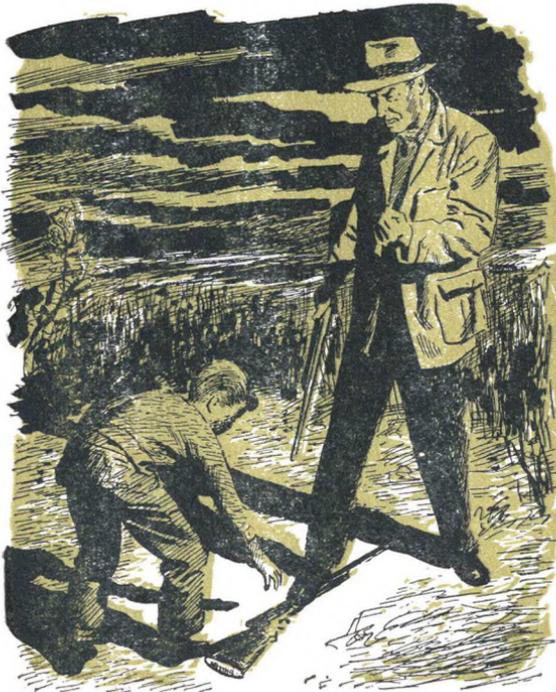
"Anything that isn't to your liking you won't hear about."

"Have it your way," Father said. "I will not waste my time arguing with a woman or a boy."

"But this is like everything else in our life," Mama said. "You won't bend an inch for Tommy or for me. That's the way you run the ranch, that's the way you treat your family and your help. Why won't you leave even a little bit of what was once our marriage, Tom?"

There weren't any words for what seemed a long time. All I could hear was my breathing. Then there was a sound like a slap and Mama called out Father's name, "Thomas!" And it was awfully quiet in there again, not even anyone moving on the floor. When Mama started to

The Coyote



talk it sounded like her throat was drowned in tears. She said, "You're doing this because you know there's nothing I won't take on Tommy's account."

"Look," Father said, "we've been through all that before. If you get any fun grubbing around in dead ashes, keep yourself a diary. You know how I feel, I know how you feel. It's an old story and it always comes out the same, that if it wasn't for Tommy we wouldn't stay together an hour. All we can do is hate each other and wish to God one of us falls into a threshing machine or gets hit by a truck so Tommy need never know how it was with us. But while you're living here, on my ranch, mothering my son, we'll have no trouble so long as you understand what you're to do. I won't have you bringing up that boy a lacey-pants. He's my son and I'm not giving in to childish whims."

I could hear Mama clear her nose. "Thomas," she said in a voice that didn't sound like Mama, "I told you the boy doesn't want to go hunting with you. It's a simple thing. He loves you very much but he doesn't like to kill anything, even in sport."

"Kill!" Father exclaimed. "I've heard of men shamed by the soft eyes of deer, but this is only coyotes."

"It doesn't matter. Tommy doesn't like to kill anything."

"What kind of damned boy is that?" Father shouted. "I'd be the laughing stock of every rancher in

the valley if they thought I had a son too chintzy to kill a lousy coyote."

"He's a gentle boy, don't you see? Take him camping with you, sleep out on the range, shoot skeet, he likes that very much, but don't ask him to kill living things. Try to understand the boy, not for my sake, for his. He wants so to admire you."

"What do you mean, wants?" Father said, very loud. "Have you been turning him against me?"

"Please," Mama said, "don't shout. He's out with his pony and I'd die if he heard us. I haven't, Tom. I swear I haven't. I'm just trying to tell you he's the kind of boy who never even killed caterpillars out of curiosity."

"It's your doing!" Father exclaimed. "You're making a lousy flower-sniffer out of him. What you want me to do, go chasing with him, with a butterfly net? Is that your idea how a boy should be brought up? You've kept that boy chocked tight to your apron and I'm damned glad I found out in time."

"What's the use?" Mama said. Her voice sounded tired. "You won't understand anybody but yourself."

"I'm not interested in your opinion of me. I'm telling you no son of mine is going out into the world afraid of a little blood, too good to do what killing's got to be done or to make a sport of a thing like thinning out the coyotes. Go tell him to get his shotgun. I'll be ready to leave in half an hour."

“Thomas,” Mama pleaded. “Thomas, I’m begging you. I know the boy. He’s only eleven years old. Maybe when he’s older, if you don’t force things, maybe he’ll grow out of this.”

“He’s going with me,” Father said, like he hadn’t listened to anything after all. I was beginning to cry then and I was afraid they’d learn I’d been listening to everything they’d said, so I went to the outside door, stepping carefully so the floorboards wouldn’t squeak and I ran away where I could cry without Father ever knowing about it.

She put her hand softly on my back and leaned forward to press her cheek on my cheek. She smelled clean and sweet and she picked up a straw and put it in my ear to tickle me when I wouldn’t turn to look at her. If I hadn’t heard what I did I would have thought it was like it had always been, but now I knew she was play-acting me and I couldn’t look at her for wondering how long she had been play-acting me without my knowing it.

“Tommy,” Mama said, “I couldn’t imagine where you’d gone. Until I remembered this place.”

“Mama, please let me stay here awhile. I just want to think.”

“Of course.” Mama leaned down and kissed me. “I know how you like it here. I’ll wait for you in the house. But don’t be too long. Father’s waiting for you to go hunting with him.”

I stood up in the loft. “Mama, I don’t want to, I don’t!” Now I couldn’t keep from showing her I had been crying and I ran to her and she put her arms around me and pressed me very close to her. “I hate it, Mama, I hate it!”

She held me close to her and let her fingers touch my face and my hair and then she said, “Sit down, Tommy,” and we sat and she took my two hands in hers and looked right in my eyes and said, “Tommy, sometimes we have to do things we don’t like doing. You can understand, can’t you?”

“Yes, Mama,” I said, “but I don’t want to go hunting with Father.”

“But it will be fun, Tommy. Just the two of you, when the desert floor is cooling and the colors are so nice in the sky. There’ll be no one but you two. Think of the good time! I wish I were a boy so I could go along, too.”

“I don’t want to go,” I said.

She pressed my hands very tight. “Tommy,” she said, “even if we didn’t like it, for the sake of the ranch, we might have to destroy coyotes. They kill things, you know.”

“No, they don’t, Mama,” I said. “They’re too timid. They only eat what others leave behind and what we throw away. They don’t hurt anything.”

“A boy must shoot, Tommy.” Mama said it like she was a teacher telling me about fractions. “Even if you don’t like it for sport, then for the ranch. Can you see that? Coy-

otes are disorderly. Do you remember when the vet said we'd have to inoculate the puppy because the coyotes might give him rabies?"

"Father's not doing it for that reason," I said. "He's doing it because he likes to kill things and he wants me to start to like killing things, too."

"What a thing to say!" Mama said. She let go of my hands and turned her head from me and when she talked again she sounded the way she had before when the tears were bubbling in her throat but she hadn't wanted to let on. "Father is only trying to bring you up so you can take your place next to him when you grow up."

Mama took my head in her hands and pressed it to her shoulder. "I wish you didn't have to go," she said. "I wish I could help you. But you must go if only because it'll be easier for you to go than not to go. It will please your father and you must do that. We must always do what Father wants us to do." She stroked my hair and I couldn't talk. I thought about everything and I tried to figure it all out.

We walked around the alfalfa, across the last irrigation ditch and over a little rise in the ground from which I could see the house. "Come along," Father said, "I never saw a boy walk so slow in all my days." Father was walking ahead of me, his shotgun slung easy across his two shoulders like a yoke. Father didn't

believe in going hunting with your gun broke in half. That's the way I liked to carry my gun. It seemed better balanced that way. But Father said if you carried it like that and saw something suddenly you wouldn't have time to fire, so the thing to do was to keep your gun loaded all the time.

We walked for a long time, not seeing anything, Father ahead of me turning around every now and then to hurry me up and me trying to do my best to keep up with him.

Suddenly, Father turned toward me and pointed off. "There!" he said. "Over there! Go on, boy. Shoot him!"

Just a few steps from him a big brown jack was bouncing up and down across the brush. He must have sensed something because he was going very fast.

"Let him have it!" Father cried. "Shoot him on the run!"

I looked at the rabbit and then at Father and then to where the rabbit had been, but he was gone.

Father came over and grabbed my arm right below the shoulder. He shook me hard. "You stupid little fool," he said. "When you see something, think and act quickly. Shoot! Don't go looking for any by-your-leave." He shook me again. "Why didn't you shoot?"

I couldn't talk. I turned my head from him.

"Why didn't you shoot? Why?"

"I forgot, I guess," I said. I wasn't telling the truth, but I knew

what would happen if I told him the truth. It would have sounded wrong to him to say I knew I could have got that jack but he looked so pretty bounding there among the sage, so I said I forgot.

He let my arm go with a push. "Next time I won't ask for explanations. I'm going to spank you, like a little boy. Understand? If you don't shoot first and think after, I'll thrash you."

He went away from me and motioned for me to come after him. I walked quickly, the gun in my hand at the side. Father turned to see how I was going. He came up to me again, swiftly, and pushed the gun to the ground. "Not like that, you fool!" he exclaimed. "You want it to go off and kill me?"

I bent down to pick up the gun. He put his foot over the barrel. "I said, do you want it to go off and kill me?" I looked at him. I didn't know what to say and I was afraid to say anything at all for he'd be able to tell I was trying to keep from crying. I bent down again, but Father seized my shirt and straightened me once more. "Do you?" he shouted. "Do you?"

I started to cry. "I want to go home, Father," I said, but I was crying so hard I think he didn't understand me.

"You stop that cry-baby stuff," he said. "Stop it, I tell you!"

He waited till I did what I was told. I rubbed the back of my hand across my eyes and my face and I

could taste the salt on my mouth.

"All right now, pick up that gun and watch it, you fool. You handle it carelessly, you'll blast your leg off."

"I'm sorry," I said.

Father looked at me. "Very well. We'll go on and forget the whole thing."

But I could see it wasn't the same. Father didn't turn to look at me the way he had before. I had displeased him again, the way I always did whenever we went out together and I wished I could tell him I was trying. But he was too far away and too angry at me, so I walked as fast as I could to keep up with him. Then I saw him, dead ahead, and he was resting on one knee and gesturing to me to come up to him fast. When I broke into a run, he put his finger to his mouth and made a face to tell me to be quiet. I walked softly to him and there, not far from us and straight ahead, was a coyote, the wind coming from behind us so he didn't even know we were watching him, and he was eating something he was holding like a dog between his two paws.

"All right," Father whispered. "Now. Quickly."

I looked at Father, but he only tightened his mouth and repeated, "Now."

I brought my gun to my shoulder. I looked at Father again, and I could see him grow more furious at me. Then I looked at the coyote as best I could, my eyes suddenly

hazy, and I squeezed the trigger and there was a blast and I wasn't holding the gun properly, I guess, for it seemed to have an awful kick, hurting my shoulder. I could see the coyote fall over.

Father got up. "You didn't take proper aim," he said. He started to walk to the coyote who got hit in his side and who was trying to get up and run but couldn't. "You've only injured him, you damned fool. Now you've got to do it properly."

The way Father looked at me frightened me, so I started to run. Father caught me by the crook of the elbow and dragged me with him. "I don't want to!" I cried. "Papa! Papa!"

He squeezed my arm and pulled me with him. "That's what comes of being sentimental. Now he's bleeding to death out there and you're going to put him out of his pain." He let go of me. "Come on, we'll go on over to him and you can bash him over the head with your gunstock and end his misery. He isn't worth another shell."

"No, Father," I shouted.

He struck me across the face. "What the hell's the matter with you?" he said. He took hold of my shirt behind my neck and started to walk. We circled around the coyote who was still trying to get to his feet. His eyes were redshot

and his tongue was hanging out, gray foam flecking his mouth.

I turned to Father. "Let's take him home, Father. Let's make him well again."

"Kill him, you fool," Father said, hardly opening his mouth. "Kill him now."

We were standing over the coyote now, his eyes upturned to me.

"Put him out of his pain," Father said.

I lifted my gun in the air, looked at Father, and then let the stock crash into the coyote's head. I could feel the bones crush like dry adobe and the coyote let out a long little sigh that sounded like, "Oh," and his legs stiffened and he was dead.

Father had walked away from me. I stood over the dead coyote. "There," Father said, turning to me. "You've killed. You've learned to kill. The next time it won't be so hard. Put a shell in your barrel and come on."

I broke my gun and the spent shell popped out. I put a new one in.

I looked at Father. He was trying to smile. "Sec, now you've learned, it isn't so bad, is it?"

I was walking toward him when his eyes grew big and afraid. "I told you not to carry the gun that way, you fool." Then he tried to move away from me. "Don't carry it like that!" he shouted. "Don't! *Don't!*" he said. "*For God's sake, don't!*"



Wife Beater

HER NAME was Cherry Szykora. Regularly, every week, her husband would beat her black and blue. Across the street, Harry, the bartender, would slide a beer over the bar to a customer. They'd listen for a moment and chuckle. "Well," Harry'd say, "Cherry's gettin' it again."

The call came in at eleven sixteen P.M.

"Car six. Check on disturbance at two-ten"

The cops could hear her screams from the street, so they went up and got the guy who was beating her. But that was only the beginning . . .

Prescott. Man beating his wife. . . ."

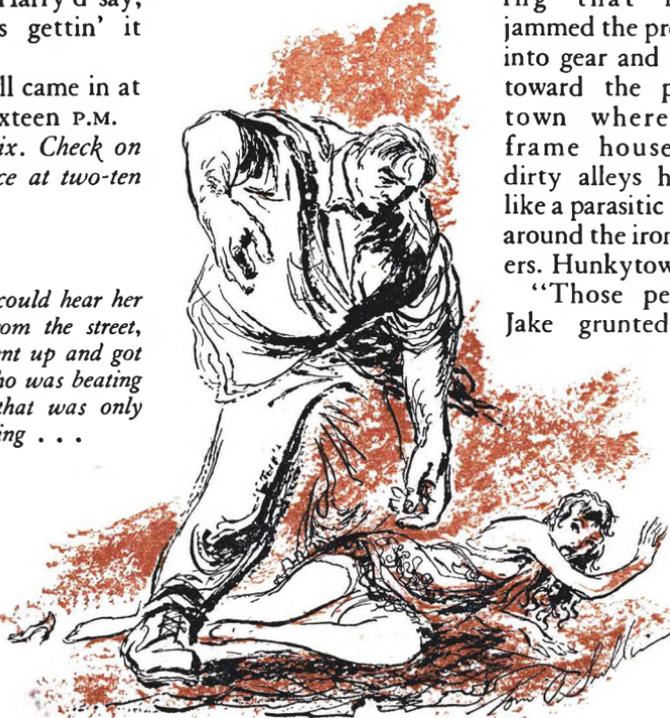
Jake threw his cigarette out the window. "Hell," he said. Then he thought for a second. "Prescott. That's down in Hunkytown, isn't it?"

Tom Rivas nodded. "Yeah," he said.

Jake, who was driving that night, jammed the prowl car into gear and headed toward the part of town where drab frame houses and dirty alleys huddled like a parasitic growth around the iron smelters. Hunkytown.

"Those people," Jake grunted. "Al-

BY ROY CARROLL



ways kicking their wives around.” He chuckled then. “Oh, well, maybe if my wife ran around like some of them babes do . . .”

Tom Rivas’ face was pale in the glow of the dash. He was quietly grinding his right fist into the palm of his left hand. “Don’t joke about it. It’s nothing to joke about.”

Jake Smith shot him a quick, puzzled glance.

Tom shrugged and lit a cigarette jerkily. “I just don’t like wife beaters, that’s all,” he muttered.

“Okay,” Jake shrugged. “So you don’t like wife beaters. Personally I don’t give a damn.” He concentrated on driving.

Tom Rivas watched the streets unfold before their headlights. He didn’t bother to explain his words. It was a matter of pride. You didn’t go telling everybody how you watched your old lady get her brains beaten out one night by a crazy-drunk father. But Tom could remember plain enough, though he’d been only seven at the time. He could remember her whimpering cry and the huge brute of a man, his father, slamming his fist into her face over and over. And then the piece of stove wood coming down on her head, popping it open like an overripe canteloupe.

Yeah, he could remember.

They got down to the narrow streets and the buildings that were a constant gray from the iron works smog.

They stopped the car and walked across a wet street to a bar. It was raining a fine mist that night.

The name of the bar was *Harry’s Place*. Harry, himself, was at the beer tap, carefully filling a glass with keg beer. He had a little plastic paddle in his right hand, skimming off the excess foam. He was an artist at this job.

Jake walked up to the bar. “You got some apartments in this building?”

Harry looked up at the two policemen. The other men in the dim place looked up too. Their faces all had the same look, a sullen animosity which was half fear. The people down here in Hunkytown had little use for the law, which was seldom on their side whether they were right or not.

Slowly, Harry laid the paddle down. He caught up a corner of the soiled apron that was tied around his fat middle and wiped his hands. “Nah,” he said. “We ain’t got no apartments here. Why?”

“This two-ten Prescott? We got a call to check a disturbance here. Something about a man beating his wife.”

Harry’s jagged teeth stumps revealed themselves in a leer. “Oh, sure.” Down the bar, there was a man with his cap pulled down over his eyes, a mug of beer in his hand. He laughed shortly.

“Well?” Jake asked, his temper beginning to shorten. Tom Rivas stood right behind him.

"Yeah," the saloon keeper said, "I guess there was a disturbance here, you might say. They went home, though. He took her home."

"The guy that was beating his wife?"

"Yeah. He come here and got her. She was screeching around like she didn't want to go, so he slapped her up a little and took her home. It's just across the street." He took a dirty, broken thumb nail out of the beer suds and jabbed it at a frame house across the way.

The man in the cap chuckled again. "Ain't nothin' to get excited about, copper. Just Mack Szykora havin' a row with his missus. Happens all the time. Every week he knocks her around a little. Don't mean no harm."

Tom Rivas' fists bunched and he got a little white around the mouth, feeling the urge to knock the man in the cap down for his callousness.

The bartender said, "Don't know who called you, copper. It wasn't nothin'."

Jake stood there a minute longer, then he went outside. "Let's go," he muttered. He opened the car door.

But Tom Rivas remained on the sidewalk. He gazed across the street at the cheap frame house with the shades drawn. While he stood there, he heard a faint cry.

"Hey," Jake called after him, "where you goin'?"

Tom didn't answer. He went right up to the house, walking through

the weeds and rubble in the front yard. He could hear it quite plainly now. A man's deep, rumbled curses. The smack of a hand against bare flesh. Then her gasp. "No, Mack. Please . . . for God's sake. Don't —"

Tom leaped up on the porch and went for the door. His lips were drawn back and a hot, red haze came down over his eyes.

The door was not locked. The knob spun in his hand. He jerked it open and charged into the place, stumbling over furniture in the dark hallway. Over to the left, a slit of light was showing under the bedroom door. Tom headed that way and wrenched the door open.

The man and the woman in the room froze with surprise when he burst in. For a split second the scene was transfixed. Nobody moved. The young policeman glanced at the girl who was huddled against a wall.

She was a pretty, young thing, not over twenty. Almost all her clothes had been ripped off. Her thick black hair had piled loosely around her naked shoulders and her puffed, tear-stained face. Her long, slim legs were coated with sheer nylon. She had lost one shoe. Her flesh was very white and smooth except where big Mack Szykora's fingers had left ugly, purple bruises.

Like most of the girls in Hunkytown she was a bit on the pale, thin side. But her huge black eyes and dark hair contrasted beautifully with her white skin.

Tom couldn't get his eyes off her.

He was a bachelor and not exactly dumb about women, but this one had an indefinable something that hit him like a strong electrical charge on a wet day. It was the first time he'd ever wanted a woman at first sight.

Her husband was a giant. Like all the iron workers in Hunkytown, he was well over six feet tall and carried at least two hundred and thirty pounds of solid beef. Heat from molten metal and blast furnaces had tinged his battered features a permanent dull brick red. Now he stood in the center of the room, blinking dazedly at Rivas.

The girl recovered first. She moved away from the wall to the bed where she snatched up a sheet to cover her nakedness. Her husband's brain moved slower. "Whata hell're you doin' here, copper?" he grunted, shaking his head.

With an effort, Rivas stopped looking at the girl. "Come on," he said. "You're going with me."

The ceiling light, a naked fifty-watt bulb on the end of a drop cord, hung directly over the big man's head, shining on a bald spot and casting the jagged lines of his face in harsh shadows.

His big paws began flexing. A low rumble, like a freight going down a grade, issued from his throat. "Why, you rotten copper," he whispered. Then he came at Rivas with his giant arms outstretched, a gorilla reaching to crush every bone in the policeman's chest with one hug.

The raw hate washed up into Rivas' mouth with a sour, rotten taste out of his stomach. He was glad Szykora wanted to argue about it. He took a blackjack out of his pocket and waited until the husky iron worker's arms came around him and the man's coarse face was pushed up to his with a gush of sour beer stench. Then, Rivas brought the blackjack down across Szykora's face. He could have simplified all this by drawing his pistol and frightening Szykora into submission. But he preferred to do it this way. He preferred to swing the blackjack again and again, whipping the big ape down to his knees, whipping his face into a bloody froth, while everything dissolved into a red haze. The frightened girl merged with his memory of his old lady the night she was killed and he took out on Szykora the hatred that had lived with him for twenty years.

Rivas was making animal sounds in his throat as his arm came down again and again and the sweat soaked through his uniform and stood out in big, sticky drops on his face. He would probably have beaten Szykora to death on the spot if Jake Smith hadn't come in and dragged him off the man.

The next day they brought Szykora into court. There wasn't much they could do to him. The girl was there, but when she was brought before the court, she refused to testify against her husband.

Nobody in Szykora's neighborhood would file a complaint. They were all afraid of the big man. Finally, Szykora was given a couple of days for drunken behavior and resisting arrest.

After the brief trial, Tom Rivas saw the girl out in the corridor. She was standing in a corner, lighting a cigarette. There was a long purple bruise on one cheek bone, poorly disguised with heavy pancake make up. She was wearing a sheer blouse, gray skirt, high heel pumps. A cheap patent leather purse was hugged under her left arm. Her clothes across her bosom, hips and thighs were tight, and Tom thought about how she had looked last night and a warm flush came up his throat.

He walked over to her. "You should have told the truth in there," he said gently. "You didn't have to be afraid of him. We would have put him away where he wouldn't hurt you any more."

She glanced quickly up. Her eyes were numb and a little frightened. She looked at him the way any of them from Hunkytown would look at a policeman, with a mingling of fear and hatred. *Damn it*, Tom thought, *even when you were trying to help them, they were afraid of you.*

He took a card out of his pocket with his home telephone number on it. "If he tries to hurt you again, call the station, or call me. I'll come down even if I'm not on duty."

She gazed at the card for a long

moment with wide eyes, as if not entirely comprehending. Then, as if she had been ordered to do so, she took the card and put it in her purse. She started to turn and leave, but he caught her arm.

"What's your name?" he asked, with an undercurrent of desperation in his voice.

She stood there with her eyes lowered. Finally, she whispered, "Cherry." Then she walked away.

After Szykora was released, Tom had Jake Smith drive through that neighborhood several times a night so he could check on the house.

"I don't know," Smith swore. "She's nothing but a little twist. Not particularly pretty. I don't see why you're knocking yourself out over her. So her old man beats her up sometimes — so what? It happens to dozens of them every night. They like it."

"I just don't like a man that'll do that to a woman," Rivas said, rubbing his right fist into his left palm. "If he does it again, I'll kill him."

Smith shot him a disturbed glance. They'd been working together for several months. Smith had taken him under a wing because he was a rookie and he felt responsible for him. "Look, kid," he advised, "that blue suit you got on don't make you God. It don't even give you permission to bust into another man's house without a warrant. You're liable to get in trouble, doing what you did to Szykora the other night. Take it easy, will you?"

Tom Rivas started going down to her neighborhood when he was off duty. He'd sit in the saloon by the hour, hoping to get a look at her. Sometimes he'd see her walking by, then he'd go out and make her stop and talk with him. She was always afraid, when he did this. She'd keep looking around, like a nervous animal. But he'd make her talk to him, anyway. He was going crazy, wanting her and worrying about her.

Szykora was still beating her up. She denied this, but she couldn't cover up all the bruises and marks. Once, she went in a bar with Tom for a beer. They were sitting in a booth together in the back of the room and she was swearing that Mack Szykora wasn't hitting her any more. With a swift movement, Tom caught her wrists in one hand and with his other, flicked the hem of her dress back up to her waist. Her thighs were firm and white above her stocking tops — except for the long red stripes where a belt had cut into the tender flesh.

She put her hands over her face and cried softly.

"Listen, Cherry," Tom begged, "leave him before he really hurts you. Before he kills you some night."

She took her hands away from her face and got out of the booth. "Leave me alone," she whispered miserably. "Just leave me alone!"

How could you help a girl whose eyes were dead, the way hers were?

A girl so afraid of a man, she was letting him slowly kill her?

One night Tom was on Prescott Street, off duty, in plain clothes. He stood in the thick shadows and listened to them row. It was worse tonight. They'd been keeping quiet since that night Rivas had arrested Szykora. But tonight the big iron worker was too drunk to be cautious. The sound of him cursing and slamming around inside the house could be heard across the street. In the saloon, Harry served a foaming glass of keg beer to a customer and they exchanged knowing smiles.

Sweat covered Tom Rivas' face. He couldn't stand any more of it. He threw a half-smoked cigarette into a gutter and started toward the house. Just then the front door burst open and Mack Szykora came reeling out in his shirt sleeves. The big man stumbled across the yard, headed to the saloon for more beer.

Tom met him in the shadows. "You dirty bastard," Rivas cursed. "I told you to leave that woman alone."

Szykora reeled and blinked, picking out Tom Rivas' features in the darkness. "Well, I'll be damned," he said thickly, "it's th' copper. And without his monkey suit." A giant paw caught the front of Tom's coat. "You listen, you damn copper. You keep away from here. You leave my wife alone. I know you been sniffin' around her. I heard talk." Szykora was whipping himself into a murderous rage. "She's

my wife. What I do to her's my business — you hear me, copper?"

Rivas slapped the big man's hand away from his coat, and hit Szykora with all his force. It was like throwing your fist at the side of a stove. Szykora shook his head and swept Rivas up like a rag doll, hurling him against the dark wall of a warehouse. Then Mack Szykora picked up a rock the size of a large cabbage and came at the half stunned policeman, raising it to smash Rivas' head.

Numbly, Tom drew his service revolver and, lying there propped on one elbow, shot Mack Szykora in the face. Doing it gave him a great deal of pleasure.

Tom Rivas got in no trouble over the killing. Some men had come out of the saloon and they testified that it was justifiable homicide.

After the funeral and after the grand jury acquitted him, he went down to Hunkytown to see the girl. "It's going to be all right now, Cherry," he said, taking her gently into his arms. "I'm going to treat you right. You don't know what it's like for a man to treat you right."

"Thank you, Tom," she said numbly. She registered absolutely no emotion, neither grief nor joy at Mack's death. Submissively, she allowed Tom to kiss her, but her lips were like clay under his.

He realized that he had never seen her display any kind of emotion; she was a strange woman.

Tom figured that her natural

emotions had been stifled by the years of fear she had lived through in Mack Szykora's house. She'd married him when she was sixteen. It would take a lot of tenderness and patience on his part to make her warmly human again.

As the weeks passed, he was good to her. As good as a man could be to a woman. He brought her gifts. He took her to fine restaurants where she had never been.

But she never showed a thing, other than to say, "Thank you," very politely. She allowed him to kiss her whenever he wanted. She didn't refuse a thing — she was like a statue that he could use in any way he wished. Several times he parked and kissed her and got a little more intimate, unbuttoning her blouse or brushing his hand along her leg. She was completely submissive, allowing him anything he desired. But he did not claim her. He wanted her more than anything in the world. He wanted to marry her. But not until she could come to him as a woman should, with fire on her lips and a warm response in her beautiful body that was made for a man to love.

He was living under a great strain, now. It was telling on him. He was thin. There were great shadows under his eyes which burned with a dark, restless fire. A man could stand only so much of what he was going through.

One night after he had been wooing Cherry for three months, he

went down to Hunkytown to pick her up for their usual date. He went down to Prescott street to the house across from Harry's Place, her house now, since the death of Mack Szykora.

He went in and waited while she finished the little feminine rituals required of a woman, touching a powder puff to her nose here and there, drawing a lipstick across her mouth carefully. Tom Rivas stood at one side of her mirror, watching her lithe, graceful movements, the soft curve of a bare arm, the valley of her bosom as she leaned toward the mirror and her deeply cut blouse fell away from her breasts. She was a beautiful, desirable woman, with her Slavic inheritance of large dark eyes, high cheek bones, a wide full mouth and a skin like moonlight. Tom stared at her, aching, and with a sudden cry, he grabbed her arm and brought her up, crushing her wide red mouth under his, like a starving man.

"Cherry," he cried against her lips.

Lips that were like clay, body like a statue.

She stood there letting him kiss her, letting him do whatever he liked. She was like a sleepwalker.

He shook her roughly, digging his fingers into her soft white shoulders. His face was slick with perspiration. "What's the matter with you?" he gasped hoarsely. "What kind of woman are you? Don't you ever feel anything?" He was shaking all over, sick with frustration.

Her eyes filled. "I'm sorry," she said simply. He had been good to her and she was genuinely sorry that she could not give him what he desired.

"Don't you like me, at all?"

"Of course I like you," she answered quietly. "I like you, Tom."

"Then what's wrong with you? Why can't you wake it up? Why do you treat me like this? A man can't make love to an ice statue."

All she could say, numbly, was, "I'm sorry, Tom. I — I can't help the way I am. I'm sorry."

Rivas dug shaking fingers into his hair. It was like ramming your head against an invisible barrier. What could he do? He became filled with rage at something he couldn't see, couldn't fight with his own hands. He began cursing her. "You filthy little tramp. There's somebody else — isn't that it? You're sleeping with somebody else."

"No, Tom," she answered simply.

"Yes there is," he screamed, and hit her across the mouth. "I've done everything for you — killed for you, and you go out and lay with some bum." He struck her again, leaving red splotches across her cheek.

She took a step away from him, her head going back. Her lips parted, teeth gleamed. Something stirred in her dark eyes, something he had never seen before.

The months of frustration, desire and bafflement exploded in an uncontrollable fit of jealous rage. Listening to his own words, he had

convinced himself that she was frigid with him because she was sleeping with another man. He hit her again and again, with blind, unreasoning anger.

She flew against a wall. Her black hair tumbled over her eyes. There, she cowered, whimpering, staring at him, fascinated. Her dark eyes were filled with a wild excitement he had never seen before. Suddenly, she reached up with both hands, grabbing the collar of her blouse. With a single, impatient gesture, she ripped it open, baring herself to her waist. Then she threw herself at him, mouthing unintelligible sounds. Her parted lips found his, hungrily. Her fingers, like claws, dug into his back while her body writhed and bumped against him in a paroxysm of uncontrollable passion.

But Tom Rivas could no longer stop. He tore the rest of her clothes off and then his fists struck her body again and again, tattooing the soft white flesh with ugly purple bruises. His eyes glazed and his breath rattled in a hoarse gasp.

He kept hitting her, harder and harder.

And across the street, Harry, the bartender, drew a glass of beer off tap, shoved it over the bar to a customer. They both listened to the sound of blows and a woman's sharp cry from the frame house. Harry put a finger against one nostril and blew.

He grinned at the customer. "Well, Cherry's happy. She's gettin' it again."

"Yeah," the man said. "She's gettin' it again."

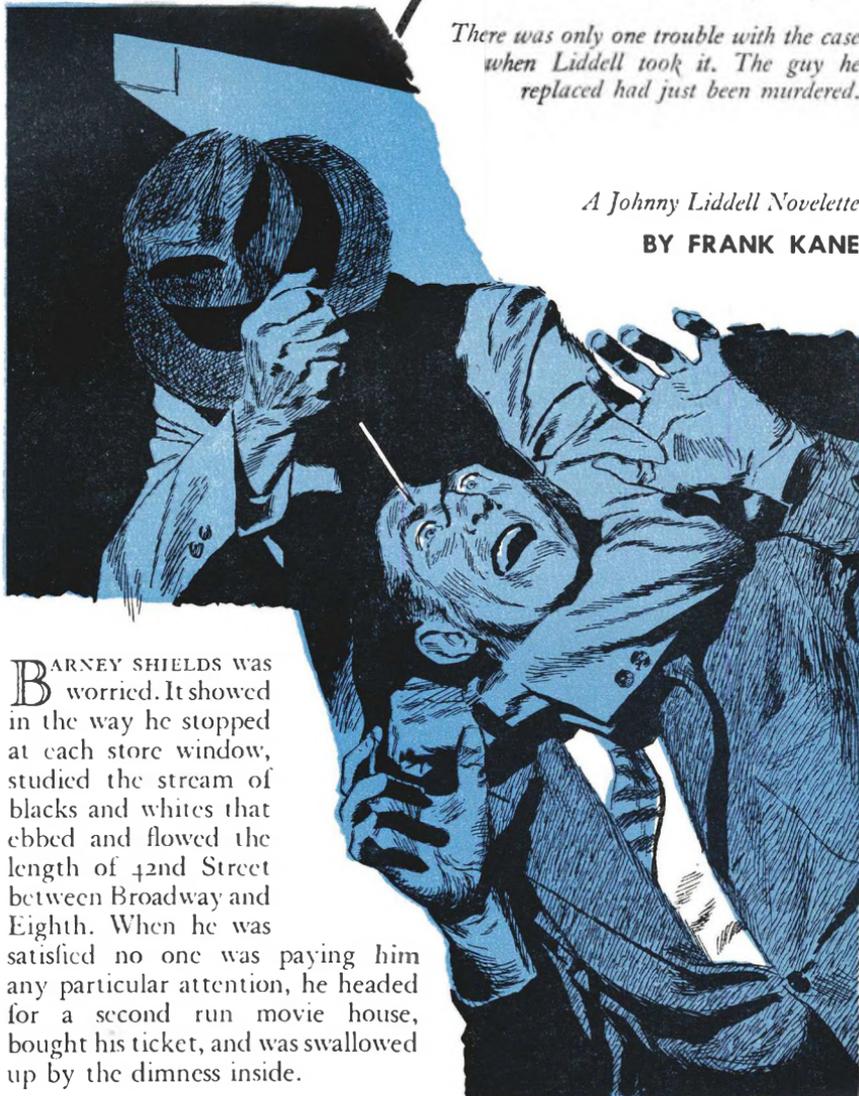


The Icepick Artists

There was only one trouble with the case when Liddell took it. The guy he replaced had just been murdered.

A Johnny Liddell Novelette

BY FRANK KANE



BARNEY SHIELDS was worried. It showed in the way he stopped at each store window, studied the stream of blacks and whites that ebbed and flowed the length of 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth. When he was satisfied no one was paying him any particular attention, he headed for a second run movie house, bought his ticket, and was swallowed up by the dimness inside.

He didn't see the thin man with the wedge-shaped face who lost interest in the job he was doing on his nails, closed his pocket knife and dropped it in his pocket. The thin man walked over from the curb, bought a ticket, followed Shields into the theatre.

Inside, the man stood for a moment until his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, then walked over to the center aisle. Barney Shields had the back row to himself, sat right in front of the thin man.

An usherette in a maroon uniform coat that was sizes too big detached herself from the shadows against the back wall, came over to whisper to the thin man that there were plenty of seats. The man nodded. She went back to her companion in the shadows.

The thin man looked around, calculated his chances. On the screen, Alan Ladd as Shane was building up to the big fight scene. The half-empty theatre was charged with the anticipation of violence. The little usherette had lost interest in him, was engrossed in her companion. Over near the entrance, a policeman was stealing a smoke, cigarette cupped in his hand. No one seemed to be paying any attention to the thin man.

He leaned against the railing behind the back row, slid his hand inside his coat, tugged the icepick out of its special leather case. He tested the point against the ball

of his thumb and was satisfied.

On the screen, excitement was mounting. Shane was standing off five villains, chairs were being broken, bottles smashed.

The thin man reached over the railing, caught the man in the back row in a murderous mugger's grip. Shields gasped, tried to struggle, but couldn't break the hold on his throat. His head was pulled back against the seat. His eyes rolled up to the thin man's face, white and frightened in the half-light.

The thin man aimed for the right eye, jabbed. The blade sank home almost to the handle. Shields' body jerked as the icepick bit into his brain, slumped back. The thin man held the body erect, sank the blade into its chest a dozen times. Shields stopped struggling and went limp.

The fight on the screen had reached its climax; the sound died away suddenly. The thin man straightened up, looked around.

The cop had finished his smoke, dropped the butt to the floor, was crushing it out with his heel. The usherette had her back half turned to him, using her body to shield the frenzied fumbling of her companion's hand in her open coat.

The thin man wiped the icepick blade on the dead man's shirt, then returned it to its leather case under his coat. He walked unhurriedly to the exit and melted into the stream of humanity that was flowing East toward Broadway.

Johnny Liddell leaned on the bar at *Mike's Deadline Cafe* with the ease born of long experience. He lit a cigarette, adding to the grey fog that swirled lazily near the ceiling.

Mike's Deadline, usually packed during the hours when genius was at work in the advertising agencies in the neighboring skyscrapers, was beginning to thin out at 8 o'clock. Only a handful of commuters who had stopped by at 5 "for just one" before heading for Grand Central were still draped over martinis.

Liddell examined his glass, discovered it was empty, signalled for a refill. The man behind the stick made a production of dropping a couple of ice cubes into a glass, drenching them down with bourbon. He separated a quarter and a half from the pile of silver in front of Liddell on the bar, shuffled off to answer a phone that had started shrilling somewhere.

Liddell took a sip of the bourbon, softened it with a touch from the water pitcher.

"It's for you, Liddell," the bartender called from the end of the bar.

Liddell picked up his glass, walked back to the phone.

It was the redhead in his office. She sounded upset.

"You'd better get right up here, Johnny. Lee Devon of Seaway Indemnity is on his way over." She dropped her voice. "Barney Shields, the head of their investiga-

tion bureau, was knocked off to-night."

Liddell whistled softly. "How?"

"I don't know. Devon was down at the morgue. He couldn't talk much, I guess."

Liddell nodded. "I'll be right up, Pinky."

Lee Devon looked as though he had been jammed into the armchair across the desk from Johnny Liddell. He was fat and soft looking, and kept swabbing off his forehead with a balled handkerchief. His eyes were two startlingly blue marbles that were almost lost behind the puffy pouches that buttressed them.

"Pretty rugged, eh?" Liddell sympathized.

The fat man nodded, his jowls swinging in agreement. "Plenty." He jabbed at the damp sides of his cheeks with the handkerchief. "You wouldn't have a drink handy? I could use one."

Liddell opened the bottom drawer of his desk, brought out a bottle and two paper cups. He tilted the bottle over both, held one out to Devon. "What was Barney working on, Devon?"

"The piers. We've been taking a pretty bad lacing on maritime risks lately. Most of it right here on the docks." He took a swallow from his cup, coughed. "Barney's been trying to run it down."

"He keep you up to date on his progress?"

The fat man leaned back in his chair, sighed. "He hadn't made

much. When he had something to report, he telephoned in and I'd meet him in the back row of a movie."

"He called in today?"

"His girl did. He'd stumbled on something important, he thought. Set the date for 7:30." Devon drained his cup, crumpled it between his fingers. "When I got there, he was dead."

Liddell pursed his lips, nodded. "How did he give the reports? In writing or verbally?"

"Verbally. In case they got suspicious and picked him up. He didn't want anything on him to give him away."

"Then you don't know what he had for you tonight?"

The fat man sighed again, shook his head.

"How about his secretary? Would she know?"

"I haven't talked to her yet. I came right here from the morgue." He ran the damp handkerchief across his face again. "We want you to find Barney's killer, Liddell."

Liddell swirled the liquor around the paper cup, stared down at it. "How about the police? That's their job."

"I'd feel better if you worked on it, too. You know how much pull those dock racketeers have. I wouldn't rest if we didn't get the man who did that to him." He licked at his full lips. "You wouldn't, either, if you saw him on that slab, Johnny."

Liddell nodded, tossed off his drink, threw the cup at the waste basket. "Where do I find this secretary of his?"

The fat man fumbled at his pocket, brought out a small memo book. He wet the tip of his finger, flipped through the pages, found the pencilled note he wanted. "Her name's Lois Turner. She lives at 331 East 38th Street. Apartment 3D." He closed the book, returned it to his pocket. "You'll take the case?"

"I'll take a stab at it," Liddell nodded. "Is there anything else I should know?"

"Just one thing. Barney Shields was getting a lot of information from one of the union boys. You've got to keep him covered."

"What's his name?"

The fat man shook his head. "I don't know if—"

"Look, I'm playing with a marked deck as it is. Don't stack the cards as well. Who's the fink?"

"Lulu Monti. He's one of the organizers."

"A meatball, eh?"

The fat man stared. "A what?"

"A meatball. A strong arm man," Liddell growled. "Know where I can find him?"

The fat man shook his head. "Shields kept him well covered. I was the only one that knew Monti was working with us." He looked worried. "You'll keep him covered, Liddell?"

Liddell nodded, chewed on his

thumb nail. "I'll keep him covered." He snapped back his sleeve, scowled at his watch. "If I'm going to get started on this thing, it might as well be now."

"Where are you going to start?"

Liddell shrugged. "You mean I've got a choice? Apparently the only lead I've got is his secretary, and chances are she doesn't know too much of what he's been doing."

"That's the trouble," the fat man said. "Barney always was a solo. Will you be reporting to us?" He sighed at the necessity for movement, decided it was inevitable, and pulled himself out of his chair with a lugubrious grunt.

"Not until I have something worthwhile to report," Liddell said.

331 East 38th Street turned out to be an old-fashioned residential hotel set almost in the shadow of the Third Avenue El. It had a faded awning that showed signs of having waged a losing battle with time and strong winds. Nobody had bothered to patch the gaping rips that flapped noisily in the evening breeze.

The prim little lobby inside had the requisite number of tired rubber plants, a few chairs obviously not intended to be sat on, and a general air of decay. The impression was borne out by the shabby registration desk and the old man who presided over it. He blew his nose noisily and favored the detective with a jaundiced look.

"Miss Turner. Lois Turner."

The old man stowed the dingy handkerchief in his hip pocket, looked at the fly-specked face of the alarm clock on his desk. "After nine, mister. We don't allow men upstairs after nine."

"Police business," Liddell told him.

The old man sniffed. "How many cops have to see her?" he grumbled. "One left no more'n half hour ago."

"Just tell her Johnny Liddell wants to see her," he cut short the complaint.

The old man started to argue, shrugged. He shuffled to a small office set at the end of the desk, stuck his head in. "Call Turner. Tell her she's got more company. Detective name of Liddell." He waited in the doorway for a few moments, then shuffled back. "Says for you to go up. It's 3D." He stared at Liddell sadly. "Management don't like men visitors this hour."

"Good thing I'm not visiting the management, huh?" Liddell followed him to an open-grill elevator at the back of the lobby.

The blonde who opened the door to 3D was tall. Her hair had been clipped short, curled around her head. A blue silk gown managed to cling skin-tight to her curves under the guise of covering them. It was, Liddell noted, a figure worth clinging to, high-breasted, narrow-waisted, long-legged. Her

lips were full and moist, her eyes green and slanted.

"What was it about?" The slanted eyes hop-scotched from the broad shoulders to the face approvingly. "I've already told the police all I know."

"I'm not police. I'm a private op. Lee Devon asked me to take over for Barney Shields."

She stood aside. "Come on in." She led the way into a surprisingly well-furnished living room. "Lee didn't lose any time, did he?"

Liddell tossed his hat at a table, walked over to the couch and sat down. "He seemed to think you could give me a hand."

The blonde walked over to the coffee table in front of the couch, leaned over to pick a cigarette from the humidor. It had a devastating effect on the neckline, confirming Liddell's conviction that she wore nothing under the gown. "I'd like to, if I can." She stuck the cigarette between her lips. "Tell me what I can do."

Liddell grinned at her. "I've got a hunch nobody would ever have to tell you what you can do."

"I've never had any complaints," she grinned back. She walked over to the kitchen door. Her body moved tantalizingly against the smooth fabric of the gown. When she returned a moment later with a bottle and glasses, the effect from the front was equally satisfying. She set them down on the coffee table, dropped down alongside Lid-

dell, accepted a light for her cigarette. "But if you're talking about Barney, I don't think I can help much." She took a deep drag on the cigarette, let it dribble lazily from half-parted lips.

"You talked to him today?"

The blonde nodded. "He wanted me to ask Devon to meet him in the back row of the movie at 7:30." She took another drag on the cigarette, removed it from between her lips and studied the carmined end with distaste. "When Devon got there, Barney was already dead."

"You don't know what he had to report?"

Lois shook her head.

"It sounded important?"

"Very."

Liddell scowled at the bottle on the coffee table, reached over, poured some liquor in each of the glasses, took one. "Know a guy named Monti?"

The blonde caught her full lower lip between her teeth, chewed it for a moment. "The one they call Lulu? The union goon?"

Liddell nodded. "Shields ever mention him?"

The blonde shook her head. "No more than any of the rest. I guess he was one of the gang Barney was after."

"Guess again. He was stooling for Barney. I've got to get to him."

The green eyes widened. "You sure of that?"

"Reasonably. Know any way we

can catch up with him tonight? Shields never mentioned any contacts or places he hung out?" He smelled the liquor in his glass, tasted it. It tasted as good as it smelled.

The blonde took a last drag on her cigarette, crushed it out in an ashtray. She glanced at the tiny baguette on her wrist. "He might be down at the union hall. Maybe I could reach him there." She looked up at Liddell. "Suppose I can?"

"I want to see him. Tonight."

"Suppose he doesn't want to see you?"

"Tell him who you are. Tell him Barney's dead and he may be next unless he plays ball."

The blonde shook her head uncertainly. "I'll try it. But I'm not too sure it'll work. That big goon doesn't scare easily, from what I've heard." She reached over, picked up her glass, took a deep swallow. "Wish me luck."

She walked across the room, disappeared in the bedroom. Liddell leaned back on the couch, lit a cigarette. After a few moments, the blonde re-appeared in the bedroom door. "Jackpot! He was there."

Liddell pulled himself out of his seat. "How fast can you get dressed?"

The blonde grinned at him. "That depends."

"On what?"

"On how fast you want me to get dressed." She raised her hand to her neck, fumbled with the zipper. With a quick motion, she

unzipped the front of the gown. Her full, tip-tilted breasts spilled out. "There's really no hurry. Monti can't get away until midnight. He'll meet us then."

Liddell walked closer to her. He could smell the faint perfume of her body. He slipped his arm around her waist, covered her mouth with his. Her body melted against his, almost unbearably hot.

After a moment, she put the flat of her hands against his chest, pushed herself free. She slid the gown back off her shoulders, stepped out of it. Her legs were long, softly curved. Shapely calves became rounded thighs above the knee. Her high-set hips converged into a narrow waist and a stomach as flat as an athlete's. She stood in front of him proud, assured of the impact of her loveliness.

Liddell dropped back on the couch, caught her wrist, pulled her down into his lap. She reached up, buried her fingers in his hair, pulled his mouth down to hers. Her lips were soft, eager.

After a moment, he pulled back, breathed hard. "I'm glad there's no hurry, baby."

She smiled at him. "We only have two hours," she told him. She caught his tie, loosened it, unbuttoned his collar. She pulled his face down again.

Several hours later, Johnny Liddell slid the big convertible through the midnight Park Avenue traffic

as easily as though it were a baby carriage. Alongside him, the blonde sat quietly, her tight curls ruffled by the breeze. At 93rd Street, he skidded to a screeching stop, drummed impatiently on the wheel, glared at the red light that stared back imperturbably with one eye.

"Do you think Monti will talk, Johnny?" She asked.

"One way or another."

The light blinked green. The convertible shot forward.

Liddell concentrated on his driving, pushed the car as fast as the traffic would permit. Slowly, the character of the neighborhood changed. Huge, flashy apartment houses gave way to less pretentious apartments, then to tenements. There were fewer chauffeur-driven cars, more jalopies and trucks.

"116th Street, eh?" Liddell glanced at the street signs whizzing by. "Only a few more blocks now."

A minute later, he swung the car in a skidding turn off Park Avenue toward Fifth, screeched it to a stop at the curb halfway down the block. He studied the house numbers, compared them to a pencilled notation and pointed to one across the street.

"That's the number." He pushed open the car door, stepped out. "You wait here. I think he may talk, if there's just the two of us."

He crossed the street, climbed the three stone steps that led to the vestibule, stood there for a moment looking around. An odor

compounded of equal parts of Spanish cooking, unwashed bodies and inadequate sanitary facilities assailed his nostrils. He walked through to the inner hall, started up the badly lighted stairs to the second floor.

He struck a match, found a small card alongside the door to the front apartment with the name "Monti" scribbled on it in pencil. He blew out the match, put his ear to the door. There was no sound from the other side. He knocked softly, reached inside his jacket, loosened the .45 in its holster. There was no response from inside the room.

He reached out, rapped his knuckles against the door again. This time when he got no answer, he tried the knob. It turned easily in his hand. He pushed it open, waited. There was a rush of stale air spiced with a smoky, unpleasant smell. Nothing else.

The room itself was in complete darkness. He tugged the .45 from its hammock, transferred it to his left hand. Slowly he walked in, right hand groping along the wall for a switch. He strained his eyes against the wall of darkness, listened for any sound that might betray the presence of another. The only sound in the room was that of his own heavy breathing.

Suddenly, his fingers hit the switch. He snapped it, spilled sudden yellow brilliance into the hallway. At the same moment, he dropped to his knee, brought the .45 into firing position.

A man stood in the doorway to the kitchen, his arms above his head, his thick fingers curled like claws. A gag clenched between his bared teeth cut ridges in the side of his face, his eyes were blank and staring. Two thin wires attached each of his thumbs to opposite corners of the door frame. A dozen or more cigarette burns and the number of small, ugly-looking icepick wounds on his bare chest were evidence that his death had been neither quick nor merciful.

Johnny Liddell walked over to where the dead man hung, put his hand against the side of his arm. It was still warm.

He squeezed past into the kitchen, checked the other rooms, satisfied himself that the killer had left. He walked back to the dead man, was staring at the number of wounds when a voice rang out.

"Hold it, Buffalo Bill."

Liddell froze.

"Drop the artillery and turn around real slow."

Liddell let the .45 hit the floor with a thud, turned around. Two uniformed policemen stood in the doorway. The younger cop held a riot gun in his hand, its muzzle pointed at Liddell's belt buckle. The older covered him with a .38 special.

"Kick the iron over this way," the older cop ordered. When Liddell complied, he looked past him at the body. "Been having yourself a ball, eh?"

"I just got here," Liddell grunted.

"Be our guest. Stay awhile. I got a hunch Homicide's going to want to have a long talk with you."

"Act your age. This guy's been stabbed. They're not making .45's with pointed ends this season."

The older cop bent over, picked up the .45, hefted it in his palm. "What's this for? You wear it just to make your coat hang straight?"

"It's licensed. I'm a private cop on an investigation for Seaway Indemnity. I've got papers in here that say so." He motioned at his breast pocket.

The two cops exchanged glances; the older walked over to Liddell, stuck his hand into his breast pocket, pulled out his wallet. He riffled through Liddell's credentials, copied down a few notations in the worn leather notebook he carried in his hip pocket. "I guess he's okay, Vince," he told his younger partner. He handed the wallet back to Liddell, scratched the back of his neck. "Know who he is?"

Liddell shook his head. "I was supposed to meet a guy here. A guy named Monti. Lulu Monti. I never saw him, so I don't know if this is the guy."

"Looks like it." The older cop walked over to the body, pointed a thick forefinger at a tattoo on the inside of the arm. "The initials are L. M." He stared at Liddell curiously. "You didn't know the guy but you had to see him in the middle of the night. What about?"

"A squeal. He was supposed to finger the guys who were looting cargoes Seaway insured. The company was getting hit too hard and too often."

"A stoolie, huh?" The cop grinned. "Not a pleasant way to grow old gracefully." There was a screeching of brakes in the street below. The cop walked to the window, looked down. "Here's Homicide. It's their baby now."

The man who led the Homicide detail didn't fit the usual pattern of Homicide detectives. He looked more like a fugitive from a Varsity football squad, with his broad shoulders and bristly, crew-cut hair. As he walked in, he was chewing on the stem of a bulldog briar. He nodded to the two uniformed men, flicked a brief glance at Liddell.

"You call in?" he asked.

Liddell shook his head.

"He's a private cop, Lieutenant. Came here to keep a date with the dead guy. He was here when we got here," the older cop volunteered.

The homicide man walked over to the body, studied the wounds with a practiced eye. Then he nodded to the specialists with him to take over. He walked over to the two prowler car men, muttered a few words, studied the notes the cop had made in his leather notebook. After a moment, he handed the book back, walked over to Liddell.

"Your name's Liddell?"

The private detective nodded.

"I'm Roddy. Lieutenant in Homicide." He rattled the juice in the stem of the briar. "I've heard the inspector speak of you." He took the pipe from between his teeth, knocked out a dottle of tobacco. "Want to tell me what this is all about?"

Liddell dug into his pocket, came up with a cigarette. "I'm doing a job for Seaway Indemnity. Trying to bust up a pilfering mob that's costing the company important money."

Roddy pulled a pouch from his pocket, dipped the bowl of the pipe into it, started packing it with the tip of his index finger. He nodded for Liddell to continue.

"I was supposed to see this character tonight around midnight. He was stooling for us." He stuck the cigarette in the corner of his mouth, lit it. "This is the way I found him."

"Barney Shields used to work for Seaway." Roddy's colorless eyes rolled from Liddell to the icepick wounds on the dead man. "He got his with an icepick, too." The eyes returned to Liddell's face. "Any connection?"

"Monti was Shields' stool. I was trying to pick up the threads." He waited until the homicide man had initialled the DOA form for the medical examiner's man. "He was practically my only lead."

Roddy scratched an old-fashioned wooden match with his thumb nail, held it to his pipe. "Too bad you

didn't tell us about Monti earlier. He mightn't be there now."

Liddell shrugged. "You'll have to take that up with Seaway. I just came on the job." He blew a stream of smoke through his nostrils. "Need me for anything else, lieutenant?"

The homicide man considered it, shook his head. "Not right now. Drop by the office in the morning. The inspector might want to have a little talk with you."

Liddell nodded. "Okay if I take my gun along with me?"

The older of the two prowl car cops looked to the lieutenant, drew a nod, handed the gun over.

"Don't forget, Liddell," Roddy told him. "We'll expect to be seeing you in the morning."

Johnny Liddell swerved the convertible to the curb outside Lois Turner's apartment hotel, turned off the motor, swung around in his seat, stared up the avenue.

"What's the matter, Liddell? You've been looking over your shoulder all the way downtown."

"Force of habit, I guess." He reached across her, pushed open the door. "Head for the lobby fast and keep going."

"Why?" The blonde looked back, saw the black sedan as it swung around the corner a block away. "You think someone is —"

"Maybe I'm buck shy, baby," Liddell growled, "but I think that heap's been following us. Do like I say." He pushed the girl out,

started to follow her to the lobby.

The black sedan put on a burst of speed, pulled up abreast of the entrance. There was a dull glint of metal in the car's back window; then it started to belch flame. Liddell had his .45 in his hand, squeezing the trigger as he started to fall away.

Heavy calibre bullets gouged trenches in the concrete near his head. He brought the .45 up, sat the back window on its front sight. Suddenly a heavy slug hit him in the chest, slamming him back against the ground. The heavy boom of the gun in the car's back seat could still be heard above the roar of the motor as the car pulled away from the curb, gathered speed.

Liddell lay on his back, was dimly aware of a crowd gathering, of the numbness in his chest, of the re-assuring coldness of the butt of the .45 against the heat of his palm. He tried to get up, fell back weakly.

From somewhere an authoritative voice impressed itself on his consciousness. "Let me through. If that man's hurt, I can help. I'm a doctor."

Liddell had a blurred impression of a wedge-shaped face bending over him, white teeth bared in a fixed grin. He caught the movement as the man's hand dipped under his jacket, came out with the icepick.

Liddell laboriously raised the .45, squeezed the trigger. The dark face dissolved in a flood of red; the icepick clattered to the ground.

Somewhere a woman screamed shrilly as the icepick artist's body fell across Liddell. A dark cloud moved in, squeezed consciousness from the detective's mind. He closed his eyes, was swirled into the middle of the blackness.

When Johnny Liddell opened his eyes, a white-faced Lois Turner was bending over him. He tried to move, had the sensation of being nailed to the sidewalk.

"Don't move, Johnny," the blonde whispered. "An ambulance is on its way."

He looked past her to where two policemen stood scribbling in their report books. One held Liddell's .45 wrapped in a handkerchief.

"He's alive," someone in the crowd murmured morbidly. They crowded closer for a better look.

One of the cops strolled over, pushed the crowd back. "Give 'im air," he ordered. He bent over Liddell. "How you feel, Bud?"

Liddell attempted to nod his head, regretted the impulse. The black cloud threatened to move in on him again. He closed his eyes, fought it off.

"Can't you leave him alone until the ambulance gets here?" he heard Lois say. "I told you everything you have to know. They tried to kill him from a car and then they sent a man with an icepick to finish the job. You have enough witnesses. Ask them. Any of them. They all saw it."

"Look, lady," the cop explained patiently. "No matter how many people saw it, a couple of guys turn my beat into a shooting gallery, I got to have some answers when my boss starts asking questions. Now —"

He broke off as the ambulance skidded to a stop at the curb, disgorged a white-coated interne. He shouldered his way through the crowd, walked over to the cop. "Save any for me?"

The cop pointed to Liddell with a pencil. "He's all yours, doc."

The interne nodded, knelt at Liddell's side. He tore open Liddell's bloody shirt, swabbed the chest dry with gauze, grunted. He looked up at the cop. "What's supposed to have happened to this guy, Mac?"

The cop shrugged. "Stopped a couple. Some guys in a car —"

"Not this guy." The interne flipped back Liddell's jacket, examined the heavy leather holster. "Take a look at this. This took the slug, deflected it." he scratched at his head. "But where the hell did all the blood come from?"

"You ought to see the other guy," the cop grunted. He leaned over, stared at Liddell. "He ain't punctured at all?"

The interne shook his head. "His chest'll be sore where that slug kicked him, but the worst he's got's maybe a cracked rib. Where's the other guy?"

The cop led the way to another

form covered with newspapers. The interne leaned over, took a look, drew the breath in through his teeth. "What'd he try to do? Swallow a cannon?" He dropped the newspapers back over the dead man's face. "We're not dirtying up our nice clean ambulance with that. I'll give you a DOA on him and you can have the meat wagon pick him up." He pulled the printed form from his pocket, scribbled on it, handed it back to the policeman.

"You're sure he's all right, doctor?" Lois wanted to know.

The interne nodded. "Might pay to have some X-rays taken." He leaned over Liddell. "How's about coming in with us and getting checked over?"

Liddell shook his head. "I'll be all right, doc."

"I'll take him up to my place. I live right here," Lois volunteered.

The interne shrugged. "You're the boss, mister." He ran his eyes appreciatively over the contours revealed by the blonde's tight dress. "But," he said, grinning, "I wouldn't try anything strenuous for a while, if I were you."

Johnny Liddell opened his eyes slowly and looked around. The blinds in the room had been drawn, making it dim and cool. He tried to sit up, groaned at the sharp pain that shot through his chest, slumped back on the couch.

"Take it easy, Johnny." The blonde got up from an armchair

across the room, walked over to the couch, sat on the edge of it. "How you feeling?"

"I'll live." He took a deep breath, gritted his teeth, pulled himself up. "How long've I been sleeping?"

Lois consulted her watch. "A couple of hours. It's a little before four." She reached across him, snapped on a light. "That better?"

Liddell grinned crookedly. "All I need now is a transfusion."

"Bourbon?"

"Bourbon."

She got up, headed for the kitchen. She had changed from the tight-fitting blue dress to the gown she had been wearing when he first came to the apartment. When she returned with the glasses and ice, the light of the lamp revealed a fine network of lines under her eyes, a tired droop at the corners of her mouth.

She set the glasses down, tried a grin that almost made it. "I sure didn't think I'd be having a drink with you tonight when I saw you sprawled out on the sidewalk."

Liddell watched her put the ice in the glasses, fill them half way with bourbon. "Disappointed?"

She stopped pouring, looked up at him through her lashes. "What's that supposed to mean?"

The detective struggled up on one elbow. "You can't bat 1.000 all the time, baby. You're doing all right with two out of three."

The blonde set the glass down, straightened up. "I still don't know

what you're talking about. Maybe you should have let them take you to the hospital. You're delirious."

"That's the trouble with killing. You've got to keep it up." He reached over, snagged a cigarette, stuck it in the corner of his mouth where it waggled when he talked. "Was what they paid you worth it, baby?" He didn't take his eyes off her suddenly white face. "Or did you start thinking that maybe they can't stop until they get rid of everybody that can put the finger on them — including you?"

She backed away from the couch, her make-up garish blobs against the pallor of her skin. She said nothing.

Liddell touched a match to his cigarette, tried to take a deep drag, grunted with pain. "The police will start putting two and two together, too, baby. You've made a lot of mistakes." He leaned back, blew a stream of smoke at the ceiling. "See if I'm right. Barney Shields turned up some important evidence. He managed to get it into your hands to turn over to Devon. Instead, you sold it out to the mob he was investigating, didn't you?"

The blonde backed up until the table at the far side of the room caught her in the back. She reached down, pulled open a drawer, took out a snub-nosed .38. "Go on."

Liddell took another drag on the cigarette, rolled his eyes to where the girl stood. "You won't use that. You might be able to set

a man up for a kill, but you haven't got the nerve to do your own killing."

"I didn't know they were going to do that to him," she protested. "I — I was scared. I realized he'd know I didn't give the report to Devon. He might even call Devon."

"So you set up a meet in the back row of the movie. Only you told Barney that Devon wanted to meet him at 7. The guy with the pick kept the date. You had Devon show up a half hour later. Who killed Barney, Lois?"

"The man you killed downstairs. I don't even know who he is. Just that his name is Denver." She shook her head. "I didn't know they'd want to kill you, Liddell. I thought they'd be satisfied with Monti."

Liddell managed to prop himself up on his elbow. "I sure pulled a bonehead on that one, baby. But so did you. The minute the mob killed Monti I knew it had to be you that tipped them off. When? When you pretended to call Monti?"

The blonde licked at her lips. "I called Denver. He told me to stall you until midnight. I thought it was supposed to scare you off and that's as far as it would go."

"Nice stalling," Liddell grinned humorlessly. "Who were you working for? Who bought the report?"

"I don't know. The night I got it, I read it. It mentioned Denver. I called him at the union hall and read it to him. He called back and

made an offer. No names. Just an exchange of packages. Mine was the report. Theirs was money. Lots of money." She stared at him. "Why shouldn't I? Why should I keep on living in this rat trap, scratching for pennies when I could get all that money? Just for one report! Why not?"

"Because it meant men had to die."

"So what? Shields was on his own. We're all on our own." The hand with the gun started to shake. "You think they'll kill me, don't you? Well, they won't. They'll give me a lot of money for telling them about Monti. They'll give me a lot."

"Maybe more than you figure, baby. Those boys don't leave loose ends laying around. And we're loose ends. Real loose! You'd better —"

"Shut up." The blonde's face was contorted with rage. She crossed the room on the run. The barrel of the gun flashed up, caught Liddell across the side of the head, slammed him back against the couch. A thin trickle of blood ran down the side of his cheek.

Lois stuck the gun in her robe pocket, ran into the bedroom. When she emerged a few moments later, she was fully dressed, carried a small overnight bag. She ran for the door, hesitated with her hand on the knob as she heard Liddell groaning his way back to consciousness. She slammed the door behind

her, ran down the hall to the elevator.

Painfully, Liddell pulled himself to his feet. He stood swaying for a moment, tottered toward the door. He reached it just as the elevator started downward. He called after Lois, his voice echoed hollowly down the hall. Doggedly he started for the stairs. He was on the second floor landing when she left the elevator, ran across the lobby toward the street.

Liddell's convertible stood at the curb where he had left it. The blonde pulled his keys from her pocket, threw her bag in the back, slid behind the wheel. She could hear Liddell yelling to her.

She turned on the ignition, jammed her foot down on the starter. There was a shattering blast as the windshield seemed to disintegrate in her face. A bright yellow flame shot from the dashboard, the heavy car seemed to lift from the street, then settled back, a shattered pile of twisted, smoking metal and splintered glass.

Liddell ran out onto the sidewalk, followed by a white-faced night clerk. "Send for an ambulance," he tossed over his shoulder. As he reached the car, he shook his head. "Never mind that ambulance."

Windows were going up in buildings on both sides of the street, heads were appearing cautiously. Somewhere a siren moaned.

The night clerk followed him

across the sidewalk, stared at the smashed body of the blonde. "What was it? How did it happen?"

Liddell shook his head wearily. "It was just the boys keeping their word. They paid off in full."

Now that you've finished reading this Johnny Liddell novelette, you'll have discovered that Liddell hasn't even scratched the surface of the

waterfront rackets Barney Shields was investigating when he was killed. He's got the person who murdered Barney — but that's only the start of things.

Frank Kane deliberately ended the story at this point. In our Anniversary Issue, coming up next month, Kane will be back with the sequel to THE ICEPICK ARTISTS, a brand-new story about Johnny Liddell, and the real bosses of the waterfront rackets.



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Haphazard Holdup

Two lady bandits, apparently on their first job, entered a service station on the outskirts of Oklahoma City, Okla. One of the women watched, while the other walked around the counter, opened the cash register and reached for the money.

William Brown, the attendant, shoved the woman away, closed the cash drawer, and demanded to know what she was trying to do.

"This is a holdup!" she said. She turned to the other woman who was standing near the door, and shouted: "We forgot the gun. Get it! Hurry!"

Her companion ran to a car and came back waving a revolver. Brown, who had been watching the episode in bewilderment, now got angry. He seized the woman as she entered the station and took her gun.

"They were so dumb I couldn't believe it," Brown told police later. "I thought it must be a joke. Both women begged me to give up the gun, but I told them I was going to call the cops. Then they beat it."

Pickpocket Patient

Dr. John S. Lowe, of Benton Harbor, Mich., told police that he thought he'd better keep an eye on his patients hereafter. A woman

picked his pocket of \$300 while he was examining her eyes.

Compounding a Felony

In court at Elyria, O., 19-year-old Crawford Casebolt was asked to explain how he happened to be driving a stolen car. Casebolt said he merely "borrowed" the car in Lorain, O., so he could report to his parole officer in Tennessee, where he had formerly lived. The charge in Tennessee? Stealing another car.

X-Ray Detection

Seaford, Del., police were called recently to a jewelry store where they found employees detaining a 40-year-old woman suspected of stealing a wrist watch. The woman submitted to a search, but the watch could not be found. The clerks, however, insisted the woman was guilty, and under rigorous questioning she finally admitted that she had swallowed the watch. Taken to a hospital, X rays disclosed not only the watch, but a finger ring in the woman's stomach.

Advice Backfires

Two cousins, Lionel and Cecil Richards, were stopped while driving in Los Angeles by three youths and accused of reckless driving. The cousins, who told police they acted in self defense, got out of their car

and destroyed the car the youths were driving. The weapon used by the cousins to destroy the other car was a flame thrower.

Ruffled Rifling

Burglars in New York City who entered the John C. Maile Co., manufacturers of rufflings, must have been ruffled on the following day when they read newspaper accounts of the crime. The loot included a worn-out whiskbroom, an old electric hot plate, two screw drivers, and \$3 worth of stamps. They overlooked \$50 worth of stamps, about \$100 in cash, a stock of laces valued at \$5,000, and a bottle of whisky.

Wrong Track

One of the most brutal murders in the history of Georgia was uncovered in Dec., 1943, when the dismembered body of John Jump was found on a railroad track at Fort Valley near his home. It appeared that the victim had fallen in front of a train, but police made a routine inquiry that changed their minds. Suspicion settled on Mrs. Elise Fry Jump, a 22-year-old woman who had married the victim only 11 days prior to his death.

Technician James Addy, of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation in Macon, noticed that the kitchen walls in the Jump home had recently been washed. He sprayed the walls with a chemical that brought out blood stains. Elise, pleading self defense, then admitted she had killed

her husband with an ax, cut the body into three parts, and placed them on the railroad right-of-way. She was sentenced to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty of second degree murder.

There were three tracks along the right-of-way. Elise's mistake was placing the parts on a spur track that had not been used by the railroad for eight months. Police had become suspicious when they noticed rust spots on top of the rails.

Police Go to Church

In Laurel, Miss., police raided the First Baptist church and found a moonshine whisky still in the basement. They said the janitor had the still hooked up to the church furnace.

Oh, No You Don't!

Patrolman P. B. LePage entered a Los Angeles courtroom and averted the possibility of a man being called as a prospective juror in his own grand larceny case. The officer noticed that one of the jurors, Garrison Harris, appeared familiar, and a check revealed that Harris was scheduled to go on trial two days later on the theft charge. He was promptly ejected from the jury panel.

It Wasn't All Her!

Alberta Patoux, of San Gabriel, Calif., is a large woman, usually weighing 230 pounds, but her weight increases when she visits a market.

Police arrested her recently for shoplifting. She had 13 cartons of cigarettes concealed in her bloomers.

Crime Pays

A study of the working hours of 3,350 criminals and their loot last year by Japanese police has revealed that crime does pay — about 15 cents a day.

Home Work

In Detroit, William D. Clinton woke up one recent morning to find that his six-room home had been burglarized while he, his wife and three children were asleep. Clinton is a detective in the city's police department.

Crooked Crow

The criminal career of Jim, a pet crow, has been brought to an end by permanent confinement. Mrs. Walter Wheaton, of Columbia, Conn., the bird's owner, said Jim's career began with stealing little articles about the house and hiding them. Later he started taking clothes pins from lines full of wet wash. The climax was reached, however, when he flew into the window of a neighboring home and swiped an envelope containing three dollars.

Human Bloodhounds

Police in Minneapolis, Minn., nosed around and picked up the scent right away after Wilbur Kellison, of Sioux City, Ia., reported that he had left his automobile in a down-

town parking lot two weeks ago, but couldn't remember the location of the lot. Kellison had left 500 pounds of fish in the car's trunk.

Pennies from Heaven

For weeks David Cohen, Chicago, had been receiving deliveries of furniture, toys, dresses, baby carriages, and groceries from stores in the city. He always sent the articles back with the statement that he had never ordered them. The mystery was solved when Mrs. Mary Gulczynski was arrested for passing worthless checks totaling \$15,000 within a two-month period. She would make a purchase with a check for more than the cost, then pocket the change. She ordered the articles she bought sent to Cohen's home, explaining that she "just happened to pick his name out of the telephone book."

Timed Thefts

Using the noise of planes landing at the Weir Cook airport, Indianapolis, Ind., to cover the sounds, David Himes Jr., 22, shot 70 pigs valued at \$1,500 on a farm nearby and sold the animals to local packing houses. Police said Himes also admitted taking three calves from another farmer and returning them for a \$10 reward; stealing used bathtubs from a sanitarium and selling them for junk; and robbing a lumber company of 10 buggy whips and selling them at the stockyards. Himes was

sentenced to 2 to 5 years in prison on 127 counts of burglary.

Sweet Revenge

"In 24 years on the force I never saw anything like it," Patrolman Harry Hayden said after he watched a customer take his revenge at a downtown hotel dining room in Detroit.

Following his arrest for investigation of malicious destruction of property, Joseph Rykowski, 57, explained that he ate breakfast in the dining room and something in the food made him ill. He decided to get even. Each day for a week he dropped a rock into a paper bag and went to the hotel, but each time, as he looked through the large plate glass window, he noticed that the dining room was filled with customers. Finally the day came when the room was practically empty. Rykowski hailed the officer as he passed in a scout car, and while Hayden watched in amazement, Rykowski wound up and pitched the rock through the window.

"I enjoyed it," Rykowski said as he was booked at police headquarters.

Criminal Citizenry

Several hundred representative citizens of Kannapolis, N. C., were sent questionnaires recently by a local newspaper asking them to confess anonymously to any state or federal law they had violated. The replies revealed that 85% were guilty of speed violations, 40% of

drunken driving, and 30% of adultery. Another 30% admitted possession of illegal liquor, 15% confided that they occasionally carried concealed weapons, while 50% said they gambled.

As a result of the survey, the Kannapolis *Independent* reported that the average local citizen should be in prison serving a maximum 15-year sentence.

Alibi Dept.

In Baltimore, Md., police arrested Robert Rinegold, 24, on the following traffic charges: ignoring 21 red lights and three stop signs, reckless driving, going the wrong way on a one-way street, failure to identify himself after an accident, failure to obey police signals, exceeding 70 miles per hour, and having no driver's license or car registration in his possession.

Asked to explain his conduct, Rinegold replied: "I lost my wallet, so I didn't have any identification on me, and I was afraid I'd get into trouble if the police stopped me."

Bandit Bonus

Joseph Silverman, operator of an auto license bureau in Philadelphia, didn't mind being held up after it was all over.

Two men walked into his office. One asked for a beginner's permit and handed Silverman a \$10 bill from which to take the fee. As Silverman turned to make change, the second man pointed a pistol

through the cage window and demanded money.

Silverman dropped to the floor behind the counter, pulling a burglar alarm lever as he went down. The robbers fled, leaving Silverman holding their \$10.

Legs and Trunk

A "trunk murder" investigation was launched in Sacramento, Calif., after motorists reported seeing legs protruding from an abandoned trunk alongside a highway near the city. The case was solved when sheriff's deputies discovered that Ralph McKelver, a hitchhiker, had crawled in out of the rain to sleep in the convenient trunk.

Help, Police!

As a gag to illustrate low salaries, Bruce Shanks, cartoonist for the

Evening News in Buffalo, N. Y., pictured a policeman baby-sitting to supplement his regular salary. However some of the paper's readers didn't get the point. Half a dozen parents telephoned police headquarters that night seeking baby sitters.

Reply Received

When an automobile containing four men bumped his car as it was attempting to get out of a parking space, Leroy Bernhard, of St. Louis, Mo., hopped out and demanded an explanation.

He got it.

The quartet was making a getaway after taking \$225 in cash and narcotics from a drugstore.

They paused long enough to relieve Bernhard of \$7, then sped away.

She was there in the house when — one by one — her family began to disappear.

BY R. VAN TAYLOR



of his voice. All she heard was the ticking of the clock which seemed in a panic to unwind itself.

She snapped on the bed lamp.

It was after two.

She looked across at Joe's bed. The emptiness of it was unreal. Unreal — that was the word for the entire night. It were as if this night had been cut loose from its moorings of simple, routine, everyday reassurances and had drifted away from her, leaving her stranded in a void of frightening questions and increasing uncertainty.

She had to do something.

Of that much she

KAY had finally gone to bed. But sleep was impossible. She lay there in the darkness of the bedroom, wide-eyed, listening for the sound of the car, for the metallic click of a key in a lock, for the sound

was certain.

She got up and slipped into a robe, then tip-toed to the door of the nursery.

The sight of a six-year-old son and a baby girl of sixteen months were

The Insecure

reassuring things. Comforting things. Solid stepping stones across a night that had turned into quicksand. She tucked the blanket carefully about Judy. At the side of Mike's bed she picked up the Mars Special — a battered veteran of many solar flights.

Strange, she thought. When we were children we were afraid of reality and escaped into a world of make-believe. And then, we grew to be adults, we built a dike about our world of reality, and when a break appeared in that dike, fear flooded in.

She returned to the bedroom and went to the blinds and opened them. She looked at the Davis home across the way. As this feeling in her grew she covered her shoulders with her hands as if to ward off the cold.

Abruptly she cast off the last shackle of indecision. She went back to the bed and reached for the phone on the stand. She dialed. In a moment, through the blinds, she saw a light come on in the house next door.

A man's voice answered.

Then she said, "Frank, this is Kay. I hate to bother you but I'm worried about Joe. He hasn't come home."

"Hey! That's no good, is it?" Frank said.

"I can't imagine where he could be. I kept dinner on the table until nine. I — I kept thinking that if he had to work late he would call me, but he never did. Finally I called the office, but I didn't get any answer."

"Imogene and I will come over," Frank said.

"No, you don't need to do that," Kay said. "It's just that I don't know what to do." Her hand tightened on the phone. "I thought about calling the hospitals, but if he had been in a wreck they would have been sure to find his identification and notify me."

"We'll be over in a minute," Frank said. He hung up.

Kay replaced the phone. The phone. There was something solid. A direct line to reality. And the Davises. Good friends. Sandbags. Sandbags with which to repair the dike.

Frank and Imogene arrived in less than five minutes, Frank with his pajama tops stuffed into his trousers and Imogene with a housecoat wrapped over her nightgown.

"Kay, dear!" Imogene said, putting her arm around her. "Why didn't you call us sooner?"

Kay tried to smile. "Well, I — I kept thinking he would come in."

"You poor thing. I know you're just worried sick."

"One thing we can be sure of," Frank said, grinning too much. "We know he's not out with another woman — not with the kind of homework *he's* got."

"Not funny, Frank," Imogene said. "Kay doesn't need bum jokes; she needs help. Think of something."

"I'll tell you, Kay," Frank said, "I could go out and look for him,

but it would be pretty pointless. There's just no place you can look for a fellow like Joe. I'm not trying to scare you, but I think maybe it would be a smart move to call the police. Why don't you let me do it?"

Kay felt herself tense. Frank was talking sense, of course. It was simple and obvious. And yet, she felt a hesitation that she did not fully understand. Perhaps it was because once that she called the police she would be admitting to herself that her existence was insecure.

"All right," she said. "I'll call them."

"Frank can call them," Imogene said. "Let's you and I go back to the kitchen and put on the coffee pot. The children all right?"

In a minute or so Frank came back to the kitchen and told them that the police were sending someone. Then they sat around the kitchen table and drank coffee and talked about everything except what was important. In less than thirty minutes two uniformed policemen arrived. Frank brought them into the kitchen and poured them coffee. They were polite men with trained efficiency. The one named Monohan asked the questions.

Missing person's name? Joseph W. Scott. . . . Age, 34. Height, 6' 1". Weight, 185 pounds. Brown eyes; dark brown hair. Occupation, Industrial Engineer. Employer. Last seen wearing. Driving car, license. . . .

"Happily married?" Monohan asked.

"Very," Kay said.

"Has Mr. Scott seemed worried about anything recently?"

"No."

"Does he usually carry large amounts of money on him?"

Again Kay felt the cold wind when there was none. "No," she said.

As Monohan and the other policeman left, he told her that they would notify her the moment they had any information. He was enough of a realist that he did not mention the trite advice of not worrying and Kay appreciated this, because realism was what she felt she needed. She needed every solid thing she could grasp.

"There's no use of you staying any longer," she told Frank and Imogene. "Thanks — thanks so very much for what you've already done."

"Chin up," Frank told her.

"If you need anything, call," Imogene said. "I'll be home all day tomorrow. Come over, if you wish. Or, I'll come over here."

"I'll be all right," Kay said.

"It will work out okay," Frank said. "Chances are that we're excited over nothing. Joe will probably show up soon and have a simple explanation for the whole thing."

"Yes," Kay said. "I feel that way, too."

She looked in on Mike and Judy again, then went back to bed. As she lay there the questions that Monohan had asked her begun to gnaw at her. It wasn't the questions them-

selves — it was the abstractions they suggested. Seeds of doubt that sprouted and grew into unreal plants. She tried to kill these plants by recalling all the solid things that had come to her support during the night. The telephone. The Davises. Her children. The police. Yet, her feeling of unreality clung to her.

In the morning, she told Mike that daddy had gone on a trip. It seemed to be the simple solution to hold down alarm. Shortly after she had finished feeding Judy, Imogene came over again and stayed almost until eleven.

At fifteen minutes after twelve, Kay called Mike for lunch. He had been playing with his train on the back porch. She called him twice but got no answer. She stepped to the door leading to the back porch and saw that he was not there.

Her first thought was that he had gone outside. But the screen door was still hooked. She was sure that he had not passed through the kitchen for she would have seen him.

"Mike?" she called again.

The only thing she heard — and she was sure that it was her imagination playing a trick on her — was the ticking of the bedroom clock, as it had ticked last night.

"Mike!"

She half ran to the nursery. Judy was in her play pen. But Mike was nowhere in sight.

"Mike!"

The front door was still locked. It didn't seem possible that he could

have gotten outside. Yet, he was nowhere in the house. It was strange. Unreal.

"Mike!"

The panic in her voice startled her. She tried to tell herself that there was a simple explanation for his disappearance. Perhaps he had gotten outside somehow. Perhaps he had gone to Imogene's.

She went into the bedroom and called Imogene. She heard the phone ring a half a dozen times before she reluctantly hung up.

She went outside and looked around the house, then cut across the back yard to Imogene's. She called Imogene and knocked on the door until her hand hurt. The house seemed dead. This entire neighborhood which she had known so intimately for the past five years suddenly became a stranger.

She went back to her house, feeling an acute sense of loss which she did not understand. But one thing she did understand. Something was wrong. Terribly wrong. And she needed help.

She went to the phone again. This time she dialed the police. She got no answer.

She dialed again and stood there, feeling a heavy nothing pressing against her. The clock was unbearable. She threw it onto the bed and covered it with a pillow, but it ticked on.

She dialed the operator.

"Operator," she said, "I'm trying to get the police but they don't

answer. Would you please ring them for me."

"I'm sorry," the operator said. "That number has been discontinued."

A wave of confusion flashed through Kay.

"You must have misunderstood me," she said. "I want the police."

"I'm sorry," the operator said. "That number has been discontinued."

Kay's hand went to her throat. "But that's absurd! Surely you haven't understood me. I said the police. The police!"

"Just a moment, please," the operator said. "I'll connect you with Information."

"Information," another voice said.

"I want the police," Kay said.

"I'm sorry," Information said. "That number has been discontinued."

"But —"

Kay dropped the phone as she had the sensation of being crushed by nothing. It frightened her and she wanted to run. She wanted to grab up Judy and run before the dike gave away completely. She wanted to run to a simple explanation.

She ran to the nursery.

Then she was frozen still by the sound of her own scream.

Judy was not there.

She started to scream again, and then she realized that someone was knocking on the front screen door.

It's Joe! she thought. *At last!* She

hurried through the house to the front door.

But it was not her husband. Mrs. Norbert, Kay's next-door neighbor, stood there. And with her were a policeman and a woman whose dark blue dress was fashioned along the same general lines as the policeman's uniform.

"Is it about my husband?" Kay asked.

"The poor thing," Mrs. Norbert said softly.

The policeman shook his head. "Maybe you'd better take over, Sue," he said to the woman in the uniform-dress.

Kay stared at Mrs. Norbert. "What is it? What are these people doing here?"

"You say it was a delivery boy who called you over here?" the policeman asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Norbert said. "From the grocery store. He took Kay's groceries in the back door, like he always does, and she was sitting right in the middle of the kitchen floor, moaning and crying to herself. He ran over to get me." She lowered her voice. "Kay didn't even know who I was."

"Is this the first time anything like this has happened?"

Mrs. Norbert glanced at Kay, and then looked quickly away. "It's the first time for anything this bad," she said. "But — well, Kay hasn't been quite right ever since her husband and children were drowned out at the lake last month. A boat

turned over with them, and Kay was the only one who got out of the water alive."

Kay felt the scream starting in her throat. She tried to choke it back but could not.

"The poor thing," Mrs. Norbert said again. "I was with her all morning, helping her clean the house, and she was perfectly all right. I went back to my house just a few minutes before the delivery boy came running over to get me."

The woman in the uniform-dress opened the screen door and stepped inside. She was smiling pleasantly as she took Kay's arm, but her grasp was firm and her fingers were very strong. "We'd like you to come

with us now, Mrs. Scott," she said.

There was a sudden dull ache behind Kay's eyes, and the sickening realization came to her that Mrs. Norbert was right. She remembered now; Mrs. Norbert *had* helped her with the housework, and she *had* gone back to her own house only a few minutes ago. But that had been before all these horrible things had happened. How could that be? How could all those things have taken place in only a few minutes?

How?

God, she thought. What's happening to me?

The woman in the uniform-dress pulled her gently toward the door. "Come along, dear," she said.



Don't miss ...

MANHUNT'S

First Anniversary Issue

COMING UP NEXT MONTH!



ALL FAMOUS-DETECTIVE ISSUE — SIXTEEN EXTRA PAGES

Featuring

- A full-length Shell Scott novel *by Richard S. Prather*
 - A Peter Chambers novelette *by Henry Kane*
 - A Lew Archer story *by John Ross Macdonald*
 - A Johnny Liddell story *by Frank Kane*
 - A John J. Malone story *by Craig Rice*
 - A Manville Moon story *by Richard Deming*
 - A Matt Cordell story *by Evan Hunter*
 - A Scott Jordan story *by Harold Q. Masur*
- ILLUSTRATIONS *by Tom O'Sullivan, Miller Pope, Dick Francis, Bob Correa, Sigsmund Vidbergs*

MUGGED AND PRINTED

FRANK KANE, whose private eye Johnny Liddell blasts his way through *The Icepick Artists*, in this issue, has been called one of the



most realistic writers in the mystery field. Maybe it's because of his brother who was one of New York's top cops before his retirement. Kane started his writing life as a Broadway columnist — another source of his realistic view of people and motives —

and then turned to fiction. His books, all of which feature Liddell, include *Green Light For Death*, *Slav Ride*, *Dead Weight*, and the latest, *Poisons Unknown*, which helped to pay for his new Manhasset, L. I., home.

HAROLD Q. MASUR knows guys like Scott Jordan from the inside. He was a successful lawyer himself for some years, before deciding



to turn the work over to Jordan, who's appeared in the novels *Bury Me Deep*, *So Rich, So Lovely*, and *So Dead*, and *Suddenly A Corpse* as well as in several stories for *Manhunt*. The latest *Richest Man In The Morgue*, appears in this issue, and tangles Jordan

up with a mess of night-club trouble and a corpse in Oriental dress.

DAVID GOODIS claims, "If I wrote about what I've actually seen, nobody would believe it." Though a Philadelphia resident, Goodis



travels to New York on occasion and ventures out into the slums to pick up material. On one such trip he was waylaid by two armed men who took him to the roof of a building and began to discuss whether they should toss him off. Goodis talked his

way out of that one, but says, "That was one time when I was really scared." Goodis' novels include the famous *Dark Passage*, *Nightfall* and *Behold This Woman* — all as realistic as his latest novelette, *Black Pudding*, in this issue.

DAVID CHANDLER was born in Brooklyn, raised in New Haven, schooled in Pittsburgh, and now lives in southern California. His travels



have taken him to Spain, Yugoslavia and Burma, and provided material for many of his fine stories, which have appeared in *Collier's* and other top magazines. *The Coyote*, in this issue, is a first-rate example of his tense tale-telling. Chandler's pet

boast is his family, which has, he says, converted confirmed bachelors to marriage.

CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. (*Killing on Seventh Street*) is an ex-musician whose stories are rapidly placing him in the top rank of mystery and crime writers. • R. VAN TAYLOR's *The Insecure* presents one of the most unusual ideas ever to appear in *Manhunt*. Van Taylor is a new writer for whom we predict a lot of success! • EVAN HUNTER (*The Wife of Riley*) is now hard at work on a new Matt Cordell story for next month's Anniversary Issue. • DAN SONTUP's voluminous research for his *Portrait of a Killer* series bears fruit every month in another stellar article about a strange murderer. This month's Tillie Gburek is certainly no exception!

IN THIS ISSUE:

GUNS

FRANK KANE returns to *Manhunt* with a new Johnny Liddell yarn about a neat and silent killing, and the mess of trouble between Liddell and *The Icepick Artists*. CRAIG RICE's John J. Malone is on hand in *Murder Marches On!*, the story of a murder in which all the suspects could profit — because they were all undertakers. And HAROLD Q. MASUR has the lawyer-detective, Scott Jordan, tangled up with a corpse in Oriental costume, a beautiful gal, and a night-club dance act, in *Richest Man in the Morgue*.

GANGS

DAVID GOODIS tells a story of two kinds of revenge in *Black Pudding*, and RICHARD MARSTEN's *Switch Ending* shows a man who didn't want his son to go into his business — because his business was murder.

GALS

EVAN HUNTER gives you a man whose wife disappears, and is replaced by another woman, in *The Wife of Riley*. CHARLES BECKMAN, JR. draws the picture of a man who was perfectly normal — until he was praised for killing a stranger, in his *Killing On Seventh Street*. And HUNT COLLINS' *Sucker* is the story of a man who insists he's being railroaded to the chair.

GRIM

ROY CARROLL returns with *Wife Beater*, the story of a problem caused by police efficiency, and R. VAN TAYLOR's *The Insecure* deals with the day the Police Department suspended operations. *The Coyote*, by DAVID CHANDLER, portrays a boy who couldn't kill — and a father who loved nothing else but killing.

GRIPPING

That's the word for this issue of *Manhunt!* All the above, plus features by VINCENT H. GADDIS and DAN SONTUP, round out a terrific lineup for December!