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Cover by Ray Houlihan

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SHORT STORIES

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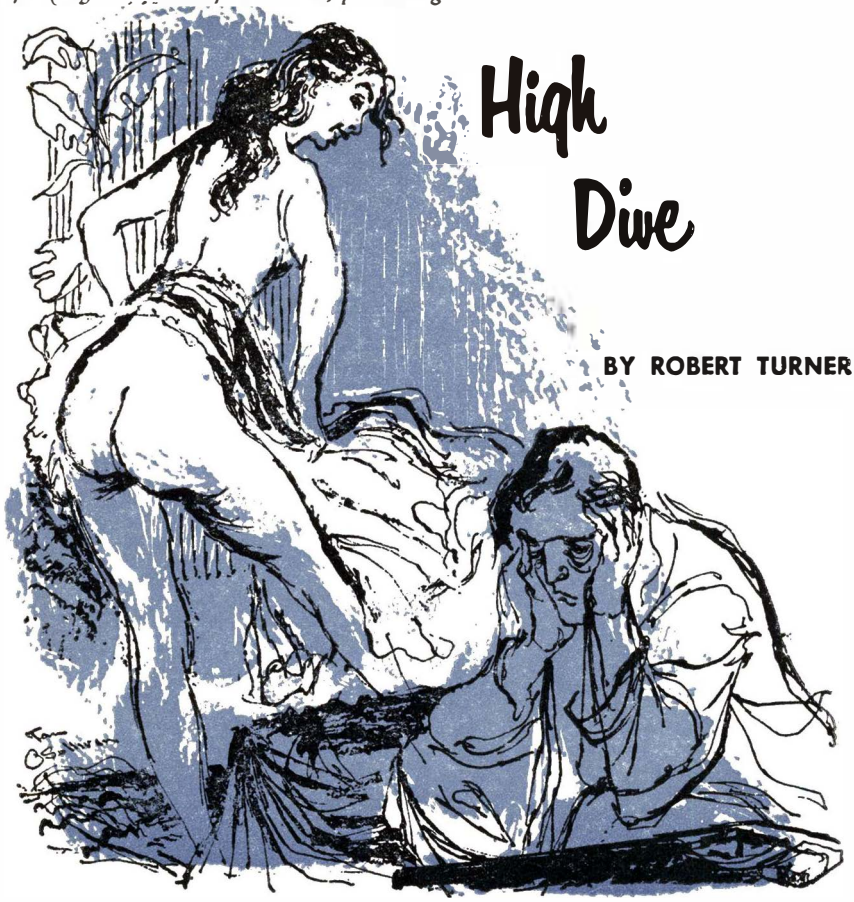
Jack offered his wife to Vern, providing . . .



High Dive

BY ROBERT TURNER

NAN WAS in the bathroom, showering, when Spencer awoke with the sudden, nauseating shock of acute hangover. He gingerly raised to a sitting position on the edge of the bed and put his face in his hands. He was still sitting that way when Nan came out of the bathroom, toweling herself dry, looking at him.

"Well," she said. "Still among the living?"

He looked up at her for several moments, without speaking, and then he said: "So he finally made it, eh? He did it at last. Which proves that infinite patience is always rewarded, I guess."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Nan tossed the towel onto

a chaise longue and walked, naked, in all her lithe, curved, beautiful unselfconsciousness, toward the closet.

"Mathewson," Spencer said. "You know. Vern Mathewson, the big man, the boss man, in whose home we're being regaled. Last night he did what he's been trying to do all week. He got me drunk. So that's that."

Nan took a negligee from the closet and shrugged into it. *"Got* you drunk, darling? How do you mean? You did drink a lot, but I don't recall seeing Vern—or anyone—holding you down and pouring stuff into your throat."

Spencer got up from the bed. He thought for a moment that he was going to be sick to his stomach, but he fought it off. He moved weavingly toward his wife. He was so full of anger and disgust, he could feel it thrumming through him like electric shocks. He caught Nan's shoulders and twisted her around before she could sit down at the dressing table.

"All right," he said. "What happened after I passed out last night? I don't really mean that, of course. I mean *where* did it happen and *how*. I know *what* happened."

"Jack!" Nan winced, turning her face away. "You're hurting my shoulders. What's the matter with you, this morning? For heaven's sake, go wash your teeth; your breath is terrible."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I doubt tooth paste and brushing would get my mouth clean right now. No more than a shower and scrubbing got your body clean."

She shook her head, puzzledly. "Honestly, I wish you'd stop talking in riddles. I swear I don't know what's got into you, this morning."

"What's got into me this morning has to do with a slight case of adultery last night," he said. "Now, there. That's a funny line, isn't it? Why don't you laugh?" He shook her until her long, soft, chestnut hair jounced about her shoulders. Then he flung her away from him and turned and went back and sat down again on the edge of the bed.

"Oh, God," he said. "Why? Why did it have to happen?"

He sat there, racking back and forth.

Soon he felt her hand on his shoulder. "Jack," she whispered. "Nothing happened last night, nothing at all, understand, except that you got terribly drunk and passed out and Vern and I put you to bed. Then he and I had a nightcap and I went to bed, too. I swear that's all it was, Jack. Vern was every inch a gentleman."

"Oh, my God," he said. "You would put it *that* way."

"I swear it, Jack. Why can't you believe me?"

He reached up and knocked her hand away. He stood up. She backed away, frightened. "All right," he said, "I'll spell it out for

you. Because when you get too much to drink, you're easy meat for any clever, experienced, aggressive guy. Last night you had too much to drink. And Vern Mathewson is not the kind of guy to let an opportunity like that get by him. There could be only one possible result."

She began to whimper. "That isn't fair, Jack, to say such things about me. I—why—I've never been unfaithful. You know that."

"Maybe," he said. "Up until last night. Because I've always been around when you've been drinking, to prevent it. That's the only reason. Listen, don't you think I see the way you dance with other men when you get a few drinks in you? How about that time I came out into the kitchen at the Porter's week-end party? If I'd come out ten minutes later, God knows what —Why, even last night, right in front of Vern and me, you went on the make for Max. I saw you keep holding that big, pretty-face butler's hand after he'd lit your cigarette. We both saw you looking up at him that way, and whispering something to him. You think we didn't see that?"

Her voice breaking a little, she said: "That still doesn't prove that last night—"

"No," he cut in. "It doesn't. But what I saw when I woke up about five this morning, sick to my stomach, and stumbled to the bathroom, does. I saw you coming out of Vern's room. I suppose that doesn't prove anything."

"I—I just went in to borrow a cigarette."

"Oh, sure. With a full pack right on our night table."

She had nothing to say to that, except to fling herself across the bed, crying openly now.

He watched her for a long while and then, his voice gentler, he said: "All right, Nan, quit it, will you? Let's just forget it. I'm not condemning you. You can't help being the way you are, your low resistance to alcohol and the way it affects you. It's over now. Let's just forget it."

He got up and began to pace the room. After awhile, he said: "Look, I forgive you, Nan. I really do, honey. But not him. He knew what he was doing. And I'm going to fix the bigshotty bastard for it, some way."

The crying stopped abruptly. She sat up, turning her tear-stained face toward him. "What are you going to do, Jack? Please don't start any trouble."

"I don't know, but I can't just let him get away with this."

"Jack, if you start anything, you'll lose out on everything you've worked so hard for."

He didn't answer. He went into the bathroom and shaved and showered. That helped to clear his head, made him able to think over the whole thing calmly and cooly, now, while he was getting dressed.

It stacked up like this: He could beat the hell out of Vern Mathewson; he knew he could do it. But if he did, he'd be finished in business. Mathewson, as the senior partner in the law firm Spencer worked for, would see to that. Mathewson would have him fired and with his tremendous influence, get Spencer blackballed everywhere in the corporation law field. So that was out. Spencer was moving ahead too fast with Mathewson's company, starting to taste the big money, the fine future in store for him if he kept his nose clean.

The only alternative was to kill the man. Mathewson's junior partner, Jason, would continue to run the company and Spencer got along fine with him. But how do you kill a man like Mathewson and get away with it?

Later, at breakfast, the three of them chatted politely, just as though nothing had happened. Yet, Spencer caught an occasional knowing glance between Mathewson and his wife.

Through lunch and most of the afternoon, Spencer wrestled with his problem of vengeance. About four o'clock, he found his answer.

The afternoon was spent at the small private swimming pool of the Mathewson's estate. Spencer, who didn't care much for the water, passed the time sitting at a pool-side table, drinking stingers and watching Mathewson and his wife cavorting in the water. He also watched Mathewson display his fine, slender physique and his prowess on the high dive board. After four stingers, Spencer felt himself getting quite drunk again. And he got a kick out of the way Mathewson kept on encouraging both him and Nan to drink.

"The bastard," Spencer thought. "He thinks it's going to be a repeat performance tonight. He liked her. He must've really liked her, to work so hard at it again today. Well, we'll see. We'll see what happens."

After a few more drinks, the idea he had in mind, as a result of watching Mathewson do one graceful trick dive after another off the fifteen foot board, began to really take shape.

That night Mathewson, because it was Max's regular day off and he wouldn't be home until quite late, served dinner himself. Afterward, the heavy drinking continued and Spencer, watching Nan, saw the hot highlights that came into her eyes when she began to heavily feel the effects of the liquor. He watched the restless way she moved her long, sleekly beautiful body, the challenge and invitation in her every motion. And he watched the way Mathewson looked at Nan, the way he held her when they danced, the speculative way Mathewson glanced at Spencer, wondering how long it would be before Spencer passed out and he would have Nan, for

the second night in a row, all to himself again.

Later, while Nan and Mathewson played records on the hi-fi set, Spencer excused himself. He had to go up to their room for a moment, he said.

But he didn't go to their room. He went outside. He went toward the swimming pool. It was now quite dark and the night was cloudy, moonless, so that he had to find his way with the aid of the flame from his cigarette lighter. Walking along the edge of the pool, past the table where he'd sat that afternoon, past the high diving tower, Spencer could scarcely see the ripple of the water in the pool, it was so dark.

Then he came to the pump house behind the pool, where, earlier in the week, Mathewson had shown them how the water in the pool was filtered and changed and how the pool was emptied for the winter. He had a little trouble with the big wheel that opened the emergency sluice gate that could empty the pool in an hour, if necessary, but he finally got it turned all the way. He listened to the sound of the water rushing out into a drainage ditch that led down to the river, while he carefully wiped his prints from the wheel. Then he once more made his way through the darkness, back toward the house. He was sweating now as though sick with fever and his heart was sledgehammering against his rib cage. He did not remember ever before feeling such terrible tearing excitement.

When he went back inside, Mathewson and Nan were dancing. If you could call it that. Nan, Spencer saw, was now very tight. For a few seconds she didn't even realize what was going on when Mathewson tried to force her away from him a little, when he saw Spencer come into the room. She kept right on clinging and slumping and moving against Mathewson. Then, when she saw her husband, she stepped back, smoothing her dress in front, pushing back a lock of hair that had tumbled over her forehead.

"Jus' havin' little dance, honey," she said, giggling. "You don't mind if your wife has little fun, dancin', huh, honey?"

"Of course not," he said. "Don't mind me. Go right ahead."

He walked over to where a chess game was set up on a table and sat down to it. He forced himself to concentrate on the game, figuring out possible moves and strategems. He had to kill at least an hour and to be on the safe side, longer, to make sure the pool was completely emptied . . .

And then, at last, it was time.

He got up stiffly from the chess table and went over to the bar and poured himself another drink and then walked over to where Nan and Mathewson, in a dim corner,

were no longer hardly even making a pretense at dancing. He said: "Okay, Nan, you've had it for the night. I think you'd better go upstairs to bed."

She began to pout then and mumble in drunken protest. With that, the tension and anger in Spencer exploded. He stepped toward her and grabbed her arm and spun her toward the doorway. "I said, get the hell upstairs and into bed and be quick about it, before I break your drunken little head. Now, get going."

She goggled in helpless dismay and then turned, and making an effort to walk steadily, reeled from the room.

When she was gone, Mathewson turned to Spencer with a wry face. "What was that all about, Jack? I never knew you to have a temper like that."

"You knew I had a wife like that, though, didn't you?" Spencer answered. "That's why you invited us up here for a week. So you could have her. Isn't that right?"

Mathewson frowned. "I don't think I know what you're talking about, Jack," he said. "Maybe it's just as well. Perhaps you ought to join your wife. You're pretty tight yourself."

"Not as much as I was last night. Just a few more and I'll probably make it, though. Then you'll be all set with Nan again. Won't that be nice, Vern? Only it's not going to happen. Not that way, anyhow. Maybe no way at all. That'll be up to you."

Mathewson looked as though he didn't know what to say. He picked up a cigarette, fumbled with it and dropped it and had to get another from the box on the table.

"Okay," Spencer said. "I'm laying it flat on the table. First, I know what happened last night." He held up his hand as Mathewson started to protest. "Wait. Hold it right there. I'm not going to argue with you about it. I know and that's it. What's done is done. All I want, now, is to make a deal with you."

"A deal?"

Spencer took in a deep, ragged breath. "Yeah. You want my wife, Vern—I'll give her to you. Tonight and any other night you have a yen for her. Providing—"

Mathewson looked shocked. "Are you out of your mind, Jack? I know you're stinking drunk and obviously jealous, but the way you're talking is insane."

"Why? You want my wife, don't you? By the same token, naturally, *I* don't *want* you to have her. So I thought we could make an agreement."

Mathewson looked steadily at him for a long time and then a smile slid quickly on and then off his face. He said: "All right, Jack, I'll listen. Just remember, though, that you started this. Let's hear it."

"Did you ever do any night diving? In the dark?"

Mathewson thought about it. "Well, in lighted pools, yes."

"I don't mean that. I mean in pitch dark, on a completely moonless night like tonight, without any illumination. I understand that takes real guts. I understand that no matter how many times a man's gone off a high board, doing the same thing in pitch blackness, when he can't even see the water below him, is something else again."

"I suppose it would be," Mathewson said. "In complete darkness, up on a narrow board like that, I should think something would happen to your sense of balance and your judgment of distance. From fifteen feet, if you hit the water wrong, you could hurt yourself—perhaps badly. All right. I agree it might be a grim thing to try."

"And I don't think *you've* got the guts to do it, Mathewson. I'm betting that against my wife. Do you want to make a deal?"

For a moment, Mathewson didn't answer. Then he said: "Let me get this straight. You don't think I have the courage to dive off the high board into the pool, in complete darkness. Suppose I do, though?"

"Then you're more of a man than I think you are. I'll be wrong about you. Then I'll make way for you and get so drunk I won't know or care what you and Nan do. And that means tonight or any other night you want it that way, Vern."

Mathewson's color rose. His eyes became animal bright. "And if I don't?" he said, softly.

"Then I win and you swear to stay away from Nan, completely away, tonight and from now on. And there'll be no taking it out on me, in any way, whatsoever."

It took Mathewson only a few moments to make his decision. The two men walked out to the pool together. Mathewson wanted to take a flashlight, but Spencer forbade it. Mathewson laughed. He said: "Okay with me. I know my way around here by daylight or dark. I was thinking about you. Drunk as you are, I was afraid you might stumble into the pool."

"Don't worry," Spencer said. "I'll follow close behind you, until you reach the high board ladder."

And he did that and he stood at the bottom of the ladder while above him Mathewson climbed and disappeared into the intense gloom. Then he heard Mathewson say: "Okay, Jack. I'm up here and I'm out on the board. Here goes nothing."

Then there was complete, almost frightening silence. There was the creak of the board as Mathewson sprung lightly on the end of it. There was the snapping sound the board made when Mathewson's weight left it and Spencer knew that now Mathewson was arcing up through the darkness in one of his perfect-form dives.

That same instant, because he had to make Mathewson in this last moment, know what had been done, Spencer shouted: "Vern, the pool is empty! I drained it! No water! *The pool is empty!*"

Then there was the sound of Mathewson's head and body striking the bottom of the pool, a sound so sharp and horrible in the quiet, inky darkness, it made Spencer instantly and devastatingly sick. He ran toward the grass beside the pool and barely made it.

Later, back in the house, Spencer had two more drinks and went up to their room. He turned on the lights, but the room was empty. Nan wasn't there. Panic touched Spencer before he realized that she, in her drunkenness, had probably gone to bed in the wrong room. He went on down the hall to Mathewson's room, next door. She wasn't there, either. He stood, staring stupidly into the empty room.

There was only one other bedroom on this floor, way down at the end of the hall. It was the bedroom of Max, the butler. Walking toward it, Spencer knew that no matter how drunk Nan was, she couldn't have gone that far out of the way by mistake.

She was on the bed, sprawled in a pose of wanton abandon. Spencer stood, looking down at her. Then he moved and sat on the edge of the bed beside her.

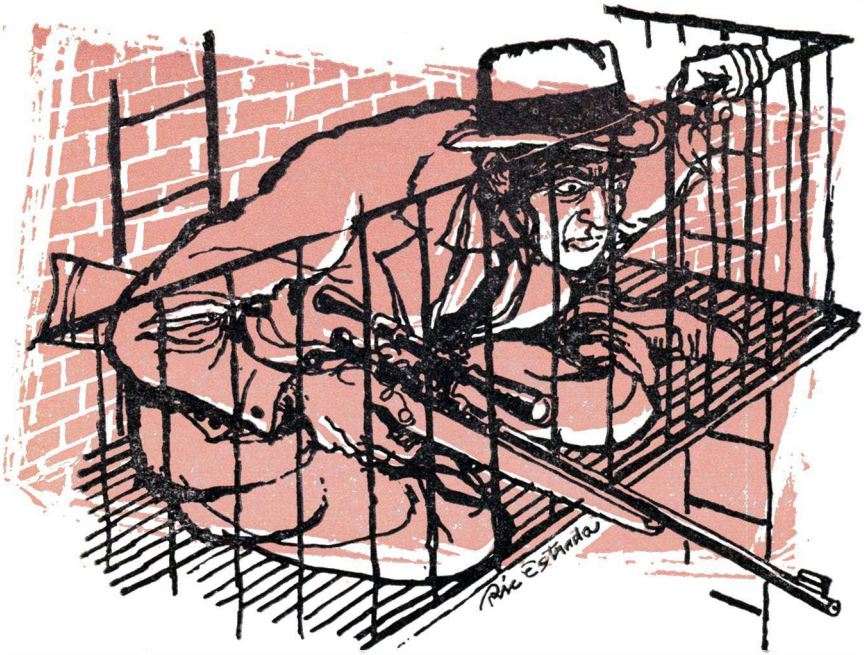
As his weight bore down on the bed, Nan reached out and grasped his arm. "Maxie, honey," she said thickly. "You don't mind, do you? I been waitin' long time f'you to get home, long, long time."

Spencer sat there in the darkness, stiffly, staring, unmoving. He was now as shockingly sober as though he'd never had a drink in his life. His thinking had never been more lucid. He thought about all that had happened, about Mathewson and Nan and about Max and about the smashed body of Mathewson out there on the bottom of the empty pool.

Then Spencer, himself, took a high dive, into the black depths of realization. He said terribly softly: "She isn't *that* drunk. Nor was she last night, probably. . . What'll I do? Kill her? Because I can't kill them all. I won't be able to kill them all . . . Will I?"

Theft of a 1923 Model T Ford from a garage where it was stored was reported recently by Ex-Gov. Sumner Sewall at Bath, Me. Sewall told police that the car wouldn't run.

The 30/06, broken down, fitted diagonally into the suitcase. I put a handful of cartridges in my coat pocket . . .



Degree of Guilt

BY JACK RITCHIE

JIM STAUFFER sat on the hardwood bench, and his right wrist was handcuffed to the radiator. He didn't look up at me.

"It's a mistake," he said tightly. "I swear I didn't do it."

Sergeant Morris had one foot on a straight-backed chair. He took the cigar out of his mouth and looked despicably at Jim. "You're going to have trouble persuading us."

I watched Jim for a few moments and then I turned to Morris. "I'd like to see my daughter now if it's all right," I said.

He took his foot off the chair, and I followed him into the next room.

Millie was sitting on a leather davenport with her hands folded on her lap. A lean man with quiet brown eyes was at the desk smok-

ing a cigarette, observing her.

Millie looked up at me with dark eyes. "The doctor examined me," she said.

I put my hand on her head and smoothed her hair gently. "I know," I said.

The man at the desk got up, and Sergeant Morris said, "This is Dr. Kaplan."

Dr Kaplan glanced at the notes on his desk. "She says she's thirteen."

"That's right," I said. "Thirteen."

Millie's eyes moved to Sergeant Morris. "Mr. Stauffer and Daddy have been friends all their lives. They go fishing together, and I didn't think he would do anything like that."

Dr. Kaplan rubbed one of his eyebrows. "I haven't given her anything. I didn't think a sedative was necessary."

"I just went to get your tackle-box, Daddy," Millie said. "You said you left it at his house, and I thought you'd want it."

Her eyes went to the floor. "When Mr. Stauffer let me go, I ran next door to Mrs. Hendricks and she called the police."

I went to the window and looked out. Two hundred yards of green lawn separated the rear of the police station from the next building, a large brick warehouse.

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

"I don't know how it will end," Morris said. "The maximum is life, but some get as little as five years."

I turned around. "And eligible for parole in three?"

Morris shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe I agree with you that it isn't enough, but I don't make the laws."

Dr. Kaplan leaned against his desk and stared thoughtfully at a picture on the wall.

Morris unwrapped a fresh cigar. "He could have killed her," he said. "They do that when they know they can be identified."

"Sometimes," Dr. Kaplan said quietly. He smiled slightly to himself. "And then some of them aren't killers." His eyes came to me. "Is your wife here?"

"No," I said, "She died ten years ago."

Millie's eyes were watching me.

I walked over to her. "It's all right, honey. Everything will be all right."

I turned to Sergeant Morris. "I'd like to have one more look at Jim."

He exchanged glances with Dr. Kaplan, and then Kaplan came with us.

Jim had a cigarette in his left hand and he looked up momentarily as I entered the room.

I walked toward him, but one of the officers stepped in front of me.

"Easy now, Mr. Holman," he said quietly.

I stared past him for a few more seconds and then I moved back.

Dr. Kaplan spoke. "Mr. Stauffer," he said. "We have a polygraph, a lie detector. However, it's your right to refuse to take the test."

Stauffer licked his lips. "I refuse," he said. "I'm not going to take it."

My eyes went to the holster of one of the uniformed patrolmen. Dr. Kaplan was watching me and he shook his head slowly from side to side.

I met his eyes. "Do you know how I feel?"

He smiled slightly. "No," he said. "I really don't."

The door opened and a plain-clothes' man came in. 'Stauffer's lawyer is here," he said.

I walked out of the room and went back to Millie. "Come on, honey," I said. "We're going now."

She looked up. "Are we going home?"

"No," I said. "We're going to a hotel for awhile."

I registered at the Marshall Arms as Mr. James West and daughter, and we went upstairs to our room.

"Are you hungry, honey?" I asked.

She stood in the center of the room and looked at the vanity table. "Yes," she said.

I ordered a meal brought up, and when Millie was finished, I said, "Will you be all right for a little while, honey? I've got to go back home and get a few of our things."

She fingered the gleaming silver coffee urn. "I'll be fine, Daddy."

A dark blue sedan was parked in front of my house and I pulled up behind it.

Dr. Kaplan was on my porch swing smoking a cigarette. He stopped his dreaming and looked at me. "Your daughter isn't with you?"

"No," I said. "We're staying at a hotel."

He nodded. "There were reporters here when I came, and they'll be back."

I sat down next to him. "Well?" I asked.

He crossed his legs and looked out at the approaching dusk. "Stauffer talked to his lawyer after you left. They've decided to enter a guilty plea."

I watched his face for awhile. "You don't think he's guilty?" I asked.

He dropped the cigarette to the porch floor and ground it out with his toe. "I don't think he's innocent." He got to his feet and looked down at me. "Stauffer and his lawyer will probably try to get it changed to knowledge and abuse, you understand."

I waited. In the shadows his teeth were white in a thin humorless smile. He seemed to be listening to the quietness of the deserted street.

Then he said, "That's not rape."

I looked at my hand. "Why did you come here?" I asked.

He thought a moment. "A matter of duty," he said. "And perhaps

curiosity. I wanted to know what your thoughts are."

I remained quiet.

His eyes went to his watch. "I'm having Stauffer brought to my office this evening. I'll know a little more when I'm through with him." He tapped a fresh cigarette out of his pack and lit it. He exhaled smoke. "Who does she take after? Her mother?"

I looked at him and was silent.

He went halfway down the steps and then turned. "I'll have to testify," he said, and there was a sadness in his smile. "I'm a doctor, you know." He hestitated another moment. "By the way, Mr. Holman. How did your wife die?"

I listened to the sound of a cricket on a neighbor's lawn. "A hunting accident," I said. "I shot her."

When he was gone, I unlocked the front door and went inside. I found a suitcase and went through Millie's things, packing what I thought she might need in the next few days.

I put her cotton pajamas into the suitcase and went to the closet. A patch of red between two folded blankets on a shelf caught my eye. I fingered the red dress for a moment, before I put it into the suitcase.

Then I sat down on her bed and smoked a slow cigarette. When I was through, I went to the dresser. I touched the brush and comb on top of it; then I opened one of the drawers. I took out a pair of antique pearl earrings and a lipstick and put them in my pocket.

I took the suitcase to the gun cabinet in my workshop. The 30/06, broken down, fitted diagonally in the suitcase. I put a handful of cartridges in my coat pocket.

I drove my car downtown and parked in the dark alley next to the furniture warehouse. By the illumination of the dashboard lights, I fitted the rifle together. Then I got out of the car and pulled down the fire escape on the side of the building and climbed to the second floor.

I slipped a cartridge into the chamber of the rifle and, using my 6X scope as a binocular, I searched the lighted windows of the big building across the lawn until I found Dr. Kaplan's office.

He was at his desk, a cigarette in an ashtray next to him drifting smoke, and Jim Stauffer was in a chair facing him. A uniformed officer sat on the davenport, one leg crossed over the other.

I steadied the forearm of my rifle on the fire escape railing. The cross-hairs of the scope lingered for a moment on Dr. Kaplan and then moved on to Jim.

Jim was leaning forward and talking, when I squeezed the trigger. I held the scope on the window just long enough to make sure I had done the job right. Then I went down the fire escape.

It took about ten seconds to break

down the rifle and put it back in the suitcase. When I started my car and drove down the alley, the back doors of the police station were still closed.

At the Marshall Arms Hotel, I parked my car and took the suitcase with me up to our room.

Millie was in front of the vanity combing her hair.

She looked at me and smiled. "I phoned downstairs and had them send up a comb and brush. I thought you'd forget. I bought a nightgown, too, Daddy. It's lovely, A beautiful azure."

I put the suitcase on the floor.

She examined herself critically in the mirror. "Will my name be in the newspapers, Daddy?"

"No," I said. "They're not allowed to print it."

She ran the comb through her long hair slowly and smiled.

I sat down in a chair and closed my eyes.

"That's the worst crime in the world, isn't it, Daddy?" she asked.

"Some people think it is," I said.

She was silent for a few moments and then she said, "That's what I thought."

I opened my eyes, and she was still at the mirror. I reached into my coat pocket and took out the lipstick. I walked over and put it on the vanity.

She looked at it and then at me. "Lots of girls my age use lipstick." She smiled at me. "Of course it's all right, Daddy."

I went back to the chair and sat down.

"Mr. Stauffer is sorry now, I'll bet," she said. "And he'll stay in jail for life, or maybe they'll hang him." She turned and looked at me. "Even a lawyer won't get him off, will he, Daddy?"

"A lawyer won't help him," I said.

She smiled. "I'm glad. Because Mr. Stauffer has lots of money and maybe he could hire a real smart lawyer. He showed me his bank book once." Her eyes went back to her reflection and she studied it. "He's tight," she said. "A tight skinflint."

I sat quietly and waited.

After awhile, she said, "I don't look like I'm thirteen, do I, Daddy?"

"No," I said.

She turned again. "Do I look much like mother?"

"Yes," I said. "You're just like she was."

Millie was silent, thinking, and then she got up and came over to sit on the arm of my chair.

"Mr. Stauffer is desperate, isn't he, Daddy?"

I didn't say anthing.

"What I mean is that he'll say all kinds of nasty things because he's desperate. But everybody will believe me, won't they, Daddy?"

"Most of them," I said.

She brushed my hair absently. Her eyes were gleaming as she stared into the distance, and there

was a small smile on her face. Her lips moved and the words were soft and low. "The dirty, tight bastard. He'll be sorry now." And then she stretched, slowly and luxuriously. "I'm going to bed now, Daddy."

She went to the bathroom and when she came back she was wearing a filmy negligee. She pulled back the covers of one of the twin beds and got inside.

"Good night, Daddy," she said.

I looked down at her. Her face was freshly washed and her light hair was bound in a blue ribbon.

"Good night, honey," I said. "Good night, my little girl."

I leaned over and kissed her.

I went back to my chair and sat there, quietly smoking a cigarette until I heard her breathing deeply and evenly. Her face was relaxed, and she smiled as she slept.

I went to the suitcase and opened it. I pushed aside the red dress my money hadn't bought and picked up the rifle and put it together, methodically.

My hand went into my pocket and touched the pearl earrings that Jim had once shown me. They had been in his family for generations, and he always kept them in his wall safe.

I put two cartridges in the magazine of the rifle. Soon my daughter would be sleeping for good.

In Holland, Mich. an unmarked state police cruiser gave chase to a speeder. A few minutes later an unmarked sheriff's car started in pursuit of the unmarked cruiser. Then a plainly marked city police car set out after the two unmarked cars.

The sheriff's car halted the state police car. While the state trooper was explaining the situation to the sheriff's deputy, the city police arrived on the scene. Then the trooper and deputy made explanations to the city officer.

The speeder, who started the four car chase, got away.

Henry Davis Jr., 64, Detroit, was sentenced in city court to 10 days in jail for stopping for a red light. He told an officer who noticed his car stationary at an intersection that he was waiting for a traffic light to change. The charge against Davis was driving while under the influence of intoxicants. There is no traffic light at the intersection at which Davis had stopped.

Lending real dough to a guy who knows his way around, okay. But this Hawley, a deuce was more than enough!

A Couple of Bucks

BY CLAIR HUFFAKER

"SO WHAT's the pitch?"

A bartender at Grophie's Bar & Grill does not normally go out of his way inquiring of the clientele. But George Hawley, a thin, balding little man with sullen eyes and a narrow mouth turned down at the edges, had been rambling on for ten minutes. At the moment it seemed the only way to make George come to the point.

"Why damnit, Hal, there's no real problem." George leaned over his beer and whispered quickly, his

face twisted into a confidential frown. "Like I say just between you and me. We got a lot in common, you and me. You read books and stuff like that there. You went all the way through high school. So you're smart. We understand each other. I'm not one of these God-damned little punks that gets heaved in the can for trying to heist a candy store. I'm wise. Got connections. And come next Tuesday I'm going to be worth plenty."

"Yeah?" I said it gruffly, making a swipe at some spilled beer with the bar towel.

He leaned so far over I thought he was going to fall off the stool. "Like I say, I know my way around. And next Tuesday I'll be loaded."

"So?"

"So look, Hal. Leave me have five bucks till Tuesday."

"I ain't got five bucks."

That should have been simple enough, but it wasn't. Another customer came in and sat at the corner stool near the window. Sam creased his newspaper and put it down to wait on him.

George lowered his voice even more so that he wouldn't be heard. "You got nothing to lose. You know that I know my way around. Three?"

"What happens Monday that makes you good for three bucks Tuesday?"

"It's a natural. It's a movie down on Broadway. Nephew worked there a while as an usher. You know how much those big movie houses take in every night, at a buck fifty a throw? Take it from me, ten grand ain't far off—maybe more. This particular one, you know how they treat their dough? Like dirt they treat it. Tell you what they do. This dame in the box office, just a squirt of a kid, puts it in a sack and lugs it back to the manager's office where they got a safe. She just walks across the lobby with it. Nobody with her. Nobody watching. Nothing. Imagine! Ten grand walking across a lobby that way! So I'm in the movie. So I'm just coming out as she starts walking. She don't even pay attention to what I look like. She passes me. I turn around. Wham!" He raised his voice involuntarily and turned to scowl at Sam and the other customer as though they'd purposely been eavesdropping. They were in their own conversation, unaware of his glare. He looked back at me.

"I crack her over the head. Not too hard, not too soft. I take the sack and I get the hell out of there. That's all there is to it. One man job. No splits. No arguments. No trouble. Like I say, I know my way around."

"Yeah, well look—"

"It's foolproof I tell you! No serial numbers, no big bills, no nothing except a big ten grand. And all I'm asking for is a lousy three bucks! You leave me have three, I'll give you back thirty!"

There was only one way to get rid of him. Painful as it was, I pulled the wallet out of my hip pocket and fished out two bills. "I'll let you have a couple of bucks. But I want both of them back Tuesday, understand?"

George grabbed at them like a drowning man snatching at a life-buoy. He jammed them into his pocket and stood up. "I'll give you back twenty."

"Just make sure you give me the two back."

He smiled and shook his head sadly. "I just can't seem to make you understand, Hal. You got no chance of losing your two-spot. You've loaned a deuce to a guy that knows his way around."

He put a dime and a nickel on the bar and went out the door.

Sam walked over while I was washing the glass. "I see you give that character some green backs?"

"Yeah. A couple."

"You crazy?"

"Hell, you know how it is once he gets talking to you. Only way to get rid of him is belt him one or give him a buck. He can't shut up."

Sam glanced back at the rear door where Louie, the owner of Grophie's Bar & Grill, came in whenever he dropped by. The door was closed tight and Sam decided Louie wasn't going to open it within the next few seconds. He poured himself a long one under the counter and drank it down. "Ahh," he murmured. "Good." He replaced the bottle and shrugged. "Maybe it's worth two bucks to get rid of George. Sometimes I think if I ever hear him talk about knowing his way around again I'll kill him on the spot."

Almost everyone on the avenue felt that way about George Hawley. He was pushing forty years and had been claiming for about thirty-five of them that he was a shrewd operator who knew just what he was doing. There are a million guys who talk like that. Difference is, the average man couldn't talk as much as George, and didn't hang onto that one, old-fashioned phrase forever.

I told Sam about George's plan to knock over a movie on Broadway and Sam grinned. "He wouldn't have the guts to sneak into a movie without paying, let alone heist one."

Monday afternoon George came in and sat at his usual stool. I got a beer glass out of the rack and he said, "Not this time, Hal. Give me a shot of whiskey."

He was nervous. For the first time since I'd known him he wasn't talking. I put the glass in front of him and held out the bottle. Before I tipped it, I said, "You got the fare?"

"Yeah. Still got your two bucks." He put one on the bar. His hand shook slightly as he lifted the glass and sipped the whiskey slowly, trying to make it go a long way.

He was silent while I rang up the forty-five cents and put his change in front of him. He picked it up carefully. "Still got enough for the movie," he said with a forced smile.

"I'd think they'd take in more on a Friday or Saturday than a Monday," I said, unconsciously pushing the conversation I usually tried to avoid.

"Picture changes today. It's a Danny Kaye. Full house tonight."

School was out and half a dozen leather jackets slammed in and took a table. Sam went over. They were from another neighborhood and they looked like trouble. Sure enough Sam put a hand behind his back and gave me the signal. I picked up the cut-down baseball bat and went over to stand beside him. One of them had a blade out, cleaning his fingernails. Sam said, "You ever see a shiv against a baseball bat?" They got the idea and went elsewhere for their beer.

Putting the bat back under the counter I noticed that George had gone. His whiskey glass had maybe half a teaspoonful left in it. He had been more on edge than I thought.

"Maybe he'll do it," I told Sam.

"Naw. Not a chance," Sam grunted.

George did it.

Next morning when Sam unfolded his tabloid he let out an astonished, "Jesus!" He spread the paper before me on the bar and we stared at the front page. The picture showed a sympathetic cop lifting a dazed girl to her feet. From the size of the crowd that had gathered behind them they'd had to pose the picture several times before they got it right. The caption beneath the photo said, *"Mystery Man Robs Movie. Geraldine Hutchison is helped to her feet by patrolman John Agerthy after sneak thief clubbed her in movie lobby and made off with more than* $2,800 *in ticket receipts. See story on page three."*

It turned out that the reason George was called a "Mystery Man" was that he'd disappeared like a "phantom of the opera," according to the newspaper. The girl had cried out, bringing the patrolman on the run. He'd seen George hustling up the stairs and gone after him. George had finally rushed through the projection room and climbed out onto the roof. There, the patrolman had lost him in the dark.

"Well, well," Sam chuckled. "So for once he made good. For once our boy knew his way around, after all!"

We waited all day to set them up on the house for George. We couldn't help being a little hurt when, at the end of the day, he still hadn't shown.

"Guy makes out," Sam grumbled, "and right away he forgets all about his old pals. He's probably out spending his take in some fancy joint. Too good for us now."

"I just hope he holds onto the two bucks he owes me."

It wasn't until two days later that we got news of George. Again through the tabloids. Sam got half way into the paper before he sucked in his breath and said, "C'mere, Hal."

This story was short. No pictures. In about four paragraphs it explained that the body of George Hawley, still clutching the bag of money, had been discovered by a cleaning woman who opened a window to shake out her mop. He'd fallen 140 feet before bouncing off a nearby wall like an eight-ball in the side pocket.

Sam and I agreed that the last paragraph couldn't have been better written. It went, *"On the roof, in a strange neighborhood, Hawley had a choice of going right or left around a large chimney. To the right, he could have stepped onto an adjoining roof and escaped across it. To the left, the roof ended abruptly behind the chimney. Hawley chose the latter. Obviously, he did not know his way around."*

Sam shook his head and chuckled until tears came to his eyes. While appropriate, I didn't think the story was any cause for merriment.

"I am out two bucks," I reminded Sam.

Leland Branch, of Safford, Ariz. has been Santa Claus each holiday season in Safford stores for 15 years. He never has any trouble separating the good children from the bad. Branch, during the rest of the year, is the county juvenile probation officer.

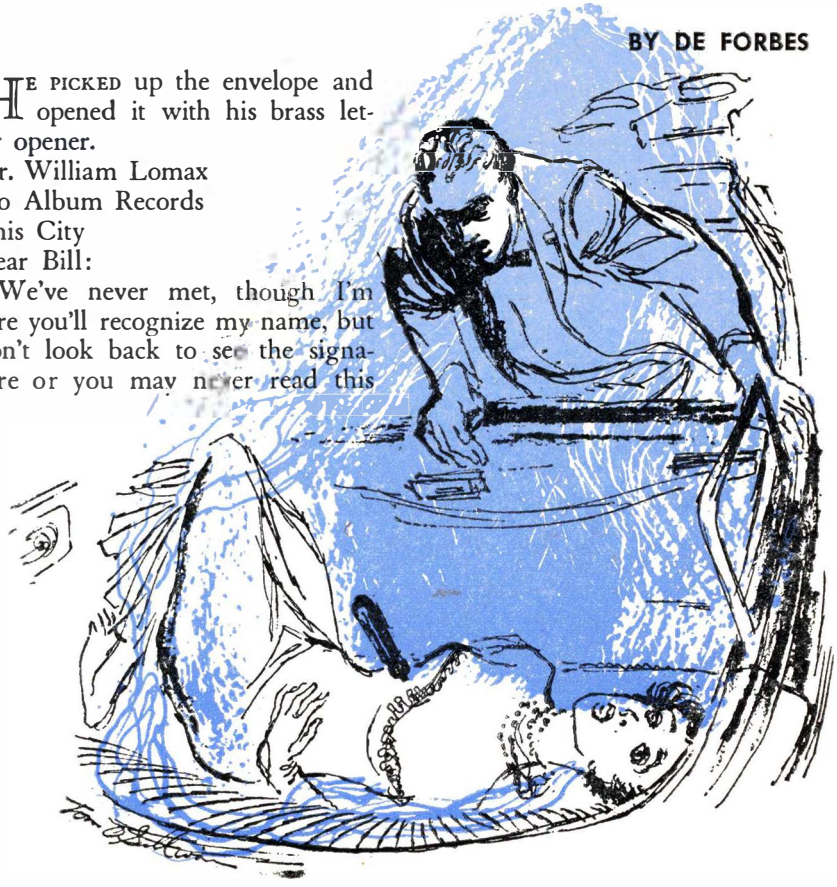
In Kendallville, Ind. Keith Renkenberger, 28, a truck driver for the Laotto Elevator Co., was charged with grand larceny. Sheriff's officers said Renkenberger admitted stealing corn, wheat and soybeans from the elevator and selling it back to his employers on several occasions during a two year period.

John Karnowski, 59, Monroe, Mich., was acquitted of a drunk driving charge following a simple demonstration. A state's witness testified that Karnowski's eyes "looked glassy" when he was arrested. "One of them is glass," Karnowski said, removing a glass eye and showing it to the court.

Get a fantastic letter like this in the mail, you don't believe it. But you're scared, plenty scared!

I Dig You, Real Cool

BY DE FORBES



HE PICKED up the envelope and opened it with his brass letter opener.

Mr. William Lomax
c/o Album Records
This City
Dear Bill:

We've never met, though I'm sure you'll recognize my name, but don't look back to see the signature or you may never read this

letter. And you've got to read it!! (Please excuse the exclamation marks, but I don't know how to emphasize my point more strongly.) Bill, you've got to read this. Don't stop for any reason. It is truly a matter of life and death.

To begin at the beginning—and try to make sense—it started as far as I was concerned with a letter in the People Speak column of the newspaper.

In my job as a disc jockey, I felt pretty close to the kids—especially the teen-agers. Just as you must, since you're a singer with a big teen-age following. So I had taken it upon myself to do some crusading—against juvenile delinquency, and especially against its incubator, the gangs.

Maybe you caught one of my programs when I was standing on the soap box, sounding off against one of the rat packs—the Goons or the Avengers or the Molls. Cute names, eh? Cute kids, too. Oh, I had inside tips all right, and they began to pay off when the police started moving in and breaking them up. Sure, I got some mail that wasn't too flattering, but the juvenile crime rate began to go down and I figured I was not only doing my bit in the entertainment world, but getting a score on the credit side of the big ledger, too. So I can't say I was too surprised to see that letter in the column.

It was addressed to the editor and went on to say that, speaking as a group of representative teenagers, a special commendation should be awarded to me for my efforts in behalf of the kids. Just because a guy or gal dug rock 'n roll, it said, or wore an Eisenhower, or a DA haircut it didn't mean that kid was a menace to society. Then it went on to say that I recognized this fact and in breaking up the real terrorists, the gangs, I was doing a big favor to all juveniles who were not delinquents. It went on and on concerning my achievements and how I should be made superintendent of schools or President of the United States or some such thing. And it was signed I Dig You, Real Cool. Underneath there was a note from the editor stating that it was against the policy of the paper to print anonymous letters, but, due to the nature of this particular one, they had decided to overlook the lack of an actual signature. Then the editor, too, gave me a pat on the back.

I was flattered. I tore the item out and took it home to show to Crystal, my wife. Her only comment was to the effect that she'd be happier to see my efforts rewarded by an increase in my pay check. I shouldn't have expected anything else. Crystal is the practical type.

It was shortly after the letter appeared—a couple of days, I think—that Lilly Blane came to one of my broadcasts.

Like every DJ I had a little group of followers who attended my sessions regularly and sent up requests written on torn pieces of school notebook paper. There was a slight turnover when the kids were graduated or left town for some reason. Then, as if advised by radar of the vacancy, additions would show up—usually in groups of two or three. But Lilly Blane came alone.

Lilly would have been noticed anywhere. She wore the regulation sweater and skirt, the cropped hair, dirty white buck shoes. But she stood out from the herd like Marilyn Monroe in a group of housewives. Her hair was curly and dark; her eyes were blue—that clear, honest blue that can't look anything but innocent. Her figure was adult and exceptional. I noticed all this even though I was in the middle of a commercial. She sat down in the rear of the studio and looked at me through clear, expressionless eyes.

All through the broadcast I was aware of her presence. While the records were spinning and the mike was dead, I would often exchange quips with my audience. I think I addressed most of my remarks that day to her; I wanted to hear her voice. But she left the answers to others.

"How ridiculous can you get?" I asked myself. "She's almost young enough to be your daughter. Why should you try to attract her attention?" And so I ignored her for the remainder of the program —or tried to.

Afterwards when they had all filed out and I was discussing a problem with the engineer, I felt someone standing behind me. It was the girl. I found myself thinking, "I wish I were fifteen years younger."

"I'm Lillian Blane," she said. Her voice was clear and cool. "My friends call me Lilly."

I smiled. "Am I a friend?" I was actually being coy.

"Not yet—but you might be. I wanted to tell you that I enjoyed your broadcast."

"Thank you. Would you like to make a request? I'll play it tomorrow if I can."

"I would like *I Died on Sunday.*"

I was surprised. It wasn't one of the current hits. *I Died on Sunday* was an import from the Continent, with a supposedly dark history; the composer was rumored to have killed himself. True or not, it was a depressing ditty seldom heard on the networks.

"I'll see what I can do. I'm not sure we have it. If we do, do you want to dedicate it?" I turned to write it down.

"No—no dedication. But I dig you, real cool."

I looked at her quickly. "What did you say?"

"I dig you, real cool. I mean I enjoy your program. It's good."

Her eyes were guileless. I won-

dered if she had anything to do with the letter in the paper, but it would be embarrassing to ask. While I was searching for a way to put the question, she inclined her head and turned to go.

"You'd better stop in tomorrow," I said to her back, "to hear your record."

She looked over her shoulder. "I'll be listening," she said and was gone.

Ben Bishop, the engineer, was grinning. "A real gone chick," he said with a leer.

"She's only a kid," I said and my tone was peevish.

"Sure," said Ben. And added, "They didn't grow them that way when I was a boy."

I went out and bought a copy of *I Died on Sunday*. Out of my pocket.

The next day I found myself watching the door, hoping every time it opened that it would be Lilly. She fascinated me. She was not like the others; there was something so poised, so adult about her. And besides, I reminded myself, I was curious about the letter-writers.

But she didn't come—that day or the next.

On the third day I was tied up with some new commercials and didn't bother to watch the audience. When I looked up, she was there—sitting in the same place. She sent up a note this time. It read, *I Died on Sunday*. And was signed Lilly Blane. She left with the others, and I felt cheated somehow.

Ben came out of his cubicle with a peculiar smile on his long face. "Kinda flipped, haven't you, Bob?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The kid. The one with the big eyes and the big—"

The look on my face must have stopped him. "You've got a filthy mind, haven't you, Ben?"

He grinned again and raised his eyebrows. All the way home I thought about what he had said.

He was right, but he was also wrong. Lilly Blane was attractive to me physically. But I was a mature man and I didn't intend to be stupid enough to get involved with a San Quentin Quail. Furthermore, I was a married man with good standing in the community. I told myself that I would put Lilly Blane right out of my mind—and I swear I did, too, until the record hop.

I hadn't been running too many hops, although I enjoyed them and looked forward to meeting the kids. But Crystal objected to my being away nights. "And they don't pay enough to make it worthwhile," she added.

But when I got a letter that contained the phrase "I Dig You, Real Cool," I felt this was one hop I had to do.

It said:

Dear Bob,

It goes without saying that you're our favorite DJ. Not

only do you flip a mean platter, but from all we hear you're a George Joe. We're running a record hop in the gym at our school, for the benefit of the athletic fund. The big night is Saturday, May 12, from eight until midnight, and we hope you can make it with your discs. Please let us know as soon as possible. And remember, we dig you, real cool.

The Committee,
Lennie Blakestrum
Ron Teasdale
Betty Bonn
Lillian Blane

These, I figured, were the kids who had handed out the laurel leaves in the newspaper. Apparently, Lilly Blane had been sent to look me over and had approved. These, I told myself, were the kind of kids who were never mentioned in the newspapers—the good ones who behaved themselves. These were the kids who made my job a pleasure. I said I'd go. I even told them to donate my fee to their fund. Crystal was furious.

This letter is long-winded, Bill, and maybe you're losing interest, but don't. I beg of you—don't. This is the crucial part. When I told Them my story I think They believed me—up to here. They looked as though They did, but it was when I started telling Them about the record hop that their expressions began to change.

You know how it is when you do a personal appearance—the kids are all scrubbed and dressed to kill. They're set to have fun and don't care who knows it. There's an atmosphere almost thick enough to see, composed of enthusiasm and ready-to-break laughter. It makes you feel young again just to be there.

This time it was different. I'm not sure when I began to feel it. It was the usual setting. Crepe-paper decorations and a soft drink stand. The girls in their simple formals and the guys mostly in blue coats and gray flannels. But there was something wrong.

I saw it in their faces, I think. Their mouths were smiling, but their eyes were quiet, watchful. Not all of them, perhaps, but it seemed so to me. I started off with some real ice-breaking rock 'n roll. They danced all right. Their feet had a carnival, but their faces remained the same.

Midway through the third or fourth number, I heard a stir at the door and saw the chaperons craning their necks.

It was Lilly Blane. And if the other girls were dressed for a high school prom, Lilly was garbed for the Stork Club.

Her dress was white and not skimpy any place, so that there wasn't anything to really object to. It was the way it was draped to her figure that made the difference. Her hair was brushed back, and

her mouth was a tantalizing scarlet butterfly. She was with a boy. The only thing I noticed about him was his eyes. Across the dance floor, they looked colorless. It was as if someone got careless making a doll and forgot to put the eyes in.

They stepped onto the dance floor, and the usual conversation started again. I put on another record and wondered what secret formula made Lilly Blane so intriguing. She had a look of dedication almost, of I-am-above-all-this. But what she was dedicated to, I couldn't tell.

As the evening wore on, I noticed the faces of the kids as they danced by me. They seemed to be watching me, afraid to let me out of their sight. At first I was flattered, but then I began to feel uncomfortable. I knew what the beasts in the zoo must feel like. Even when they turned in their intricate dance steps, their faces twisted toward me. I began to feel the whole thing had been a mistake. Perhaps admiration is warmest when it shines from a distance, I thought. Damn it, Bob, you're getting poetic.

I was happy when it was over. They streamed out, as I packed my gear. Most of them hadn't exchanged two words with me, hadn't even thanked me for my generosity. Lilly Blane had disappeared like the rest of them. I had never felt so let down in my life.

The parking lot was quiet as I went to my convertible. I opened the trunk and stuffed my equipment into it. I slammed the lid down and as I did I thought I heard a noise. I looked about me—into the darkness—and saw nothing. Every last car had gone. Only the weak light of a street lamp shone on the scene.

I slid into the front seat and decided it was warm enough to put the top down. I needed the air. I pressed the button and idly watched it slide back over my head. From habit I turned to see that it folded itself properly in the rear. I never knew whether it did or not. Lilly Blane was lying in the back seat of my car—bleeding to death.

I remember I almost fell in my haste to get to her. The seat didn't want to fold, and my hands were shaking.

There was blood all over her white dress, making it look like a huge red poppy in the process of growth. Her eyes opened and looked at me from some far-off place.

"Lilly!" I cried. "Good God! What happened?"

Her lips moved, but only a low moan came out. The handle of the weapon stuck out of her chest. I didn't know whether it was best to remove it or leave it there.

She was trying to say something. I was torn between going for help and staying with her. I was no expert, but it looked to me as if she

were dying. I couldn't leave her alone to die, but I couldn't stay if there was a chance that something could be done for her.

"Who did this, Lilly? Was it the boy you were with? Try, Lilly. Try to tell me."

She couldn't speak. She lifted a weak hand toward the handle in her chest. She wanted me to pull it out.

Gingerly, I reached for the handle and pulled. It was in up to the hilt and difficult to move, but at least it came out and the blood flowed anew. I looked stupidly at the weapon I held in my hand. It was not a knife as I had imagined, but a screw driver with a yellow plastic handle. It looked just like a million other screw drivers and it also looked just like the tool I carried in my glove compartment. At that moment, car lights flashed upon us. As I heard a car door close, I heard Lilly whisper, "They believe in human sacrifice. From a book—the fairest of the maidens . . . "

They found us there like that—the police cruiser making its usual rounds of the high school parking lot. Me holding the screw driver and Lilly, suddenly dead.

They took me to the police station and Lilly to the morgue. The questions began. My answers did not seem to be the right answers, so they gave me a new set.

I had fallen for Lilly, they told me. (Ben Bishop later backed that up.) I had made advances to her at the record hop. (Several of her friends swore that this was so.) I had not been getting on with my wife. (Crystal always exaggerated things.)

Lilly was afraid of me, but I had persuaded her to meet me after the dance. (According to Ron Teasdale, the boy with no eyes who turned out to have quite normal gray eyes.) I had made more violent advances and been repulsed (conjecture) and had stabbed her with a screw driver in a fit of rage after she had threatened to report me. (It was my screw driver and had my finger prints.) You can see that their case was very neat.

I told them what Lilly's last words had been. Since even I found the words hard to believe, I could not blame them for being incredulous.

I tried to explain about the gangs and the letter, about how I'd figured it out. They'd written the letter to set me up as a pigeon, pour on the oil. They'd sent Lilly to me because of her obvious charms to cinch the matter. I was dangerous; I was cutting into their organizations. Because it was a clever gang, some members had wormed their way into the higher echelons of school politics, so they could be certain I'd be the DJ employed. And so I came—signed and sealed and, at the end, delivered right into their hands.

Because of a head injury during

the war and my unbelievable (even to me) tale, they sent me to the state psychiatrists who listened to me for weeks and certified me insane. I've been here ten months, I think, and that's almost the end of my story. To protect a colony of deadly fledgling criminals, a girl died and a man's life is finished. But they made their point—I'll never bother any of them again.

You wonder perhaps, even now, why I write to you. It's because of a newspaper, a paper at least a month old. I found it blowing across the recreation yard today. Since I am not allowed papers, I hid it in my clothes and read every single item later on in my "room." There were two that particularly interested me. One was a story about a hoodlum breaking and entering a house. It told how the man of the house, one Bill Lomax, disarmed him and turned him over to the police. He was a kid, just sixteen, and as tough as they come. He faces a stiff prison sentence, and police suspect he is part of a gang.

The second item is a letter in the People Speak column. It was written, apparently, by a group of youngsters who admire you and what you stand for. It is signed the "Bill Lomax Fan Club."

Now, I could be wrong, but I'm afraid for you. The pattern is the same, and non-existent to anyone but me. If you're approached in any way, be careful. An old cliche—to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Consider yourself forewarned. Remember my story—and don't for a minute laugh or say they're harmless. Believe me, Bill Lomax, they're deadly. I might have trouble getting this letter out. I've bribed my guard to mail it on the q.t. He's the greedy type; so I think you'll get it. I pray to God you will. And I pray it's not too late.

Sincerely yours,
Bob Underhill

Bill Lomax looked at the pages for a long time, thumbing them over, but not bothering to re-read.

At last he seemed to have made a decision. Putting the letter back into its envelope and placing this in an inside pocket, he donned his coat and hat and went quickly out the door.

"I realize," he said to the attendant at the hospital, "that this is a peculiar hour to call, but I have an unusual errand. To be perfectly frank, I don't think I can sleep until I've talked to the Doctor. Do you think I might see him?"

The male nurse looked him over. "I'll see." He turned to the switchboard behind him and held a quiet-voiced conversation with someone on the other end of the line. "He's in. The third door down the hall."

Bill Lomax could hear his heels making clicking noises on the linoleum floor. The Doctor looked tired and he thought for a fleeting

second, "I shouldn't have bothered him." He took out the letter and placed it in the Doctor's hand.

As he read, Bill Lomax paced the floor, unaware that he was pacing.

The Doctor looked up when he had finished the last page.

"I can see you're quite concerned."

"Wouldn't you be? The letter is wild. It sounds as wacky to me as anything I've ever read. But I have to know if there's a chance that it's true? Does this Bob Underhill have enough sanity to be right about all this?"

The Doctor rose and removed his glasses, rubbed his eyes. "You were perfectly correct in coming to me. I shall have to investigate and find out which guard smuggled the letter out. It is too bad that the imaginings of a sick man had to cause you discomfort."

"Discomfort! If there's a grain of truth in the letter I'd be more than discomforted. I'd be scared to death. A band of young terrorists—out after me."

"If I were you, Mr. Lomax, there is just one thing I would do with that letter. I would carefully tear it up and drop it in this waste basket and then go home to bed and forget about it completely. Mr. Underhill's case history is an interesting one. I won't bother you with the technical details. I will only say that in order to cover up his own sense of guilt he has given himself a magnificent persecution complex. This complex speaks through this letter. Believe me, Mr. Lomax, that's all there is to it."

Bill Lomax let out a sigh. "I won't kid you, Doctor. I'm very relieved to hear this. Then you're sure I have nothing to worry about?"

"As far as this letter is concerned, Mr. Lomax, nothing."

The Doctor handed him back the letter, and he looked at it a moment, then tore it into neat small pieces and dropped them into the basket. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you. Thank you, very much."

"Not at all. Glad to have been able to reassure you. You can put it right out of your mind and never think of it again."

But as Bill Lomax went down the dimly-lit, silent hall, it kept nagging:

Dear Bill: We've never met, though I'm sure you'll recognize my name, but don't look back to see the signature or you may never read this letter . . . It is truly a matter of life and death . . .

"Don't be a damn fool," said Bill Lomax aloud. The attendant looked at him as he went out the door.

As he drove through quiet streets toward Ocean Drive and home, he tried to shake the memory of the fantastic letter. Passing an intersection, he noticed a middle-aged red

convertible filled with teen-agers. Under the street light he saw their laughing faces, heard their young boisterous voices.

There, he thought, there they are—the so-called juveniles. Living in a mixed-up world with children's minds and grown-up bodies. He saw them when he sang, looking up at him with coma-like adoration, secure for the moment in a world of music. He sighed. Poor kids. Underneath, most of them were good. But some were so confused . . .

The ocean pounded below the drive, and Bill, grateful for the lack of traffic, realized that he was tired. It would be wonderful to crawl into bed and forget the whole nightmare. A good night's sleep, and tomorrow the sun would shine and things would go on as they always had.

A car was coming toward him on the opposite side of the road. Some idiot without the sense to dim his lights. Bill blinked his, but the blinding glare of the bright headlights came inexorably on.

It was a convertible—a red convertible—with its top up. There was somehow a blind look about it that made him think of an unseeing juggernaut bent on destruction. Suddenly, Bill Lomax felt fear.

Below him, on his right, was the sheer drop to the ocean. The red car seemed to be veering from the left lane into his own. The driver must be sick—or drunk. There was only one way for Bill to go, if he wanted to avoid a head-on collision. To his right—and down.

And then he remembered the boy who had been driving the red convertible back there at the intersection. There was only one way to describe him, he looked as though he had no eyes.

As the roar of metal in motion and the brilliance of light bored into his very brain, Bill Lomax made a final move. He twisted the wheels of his car hard and sharp—to the left.

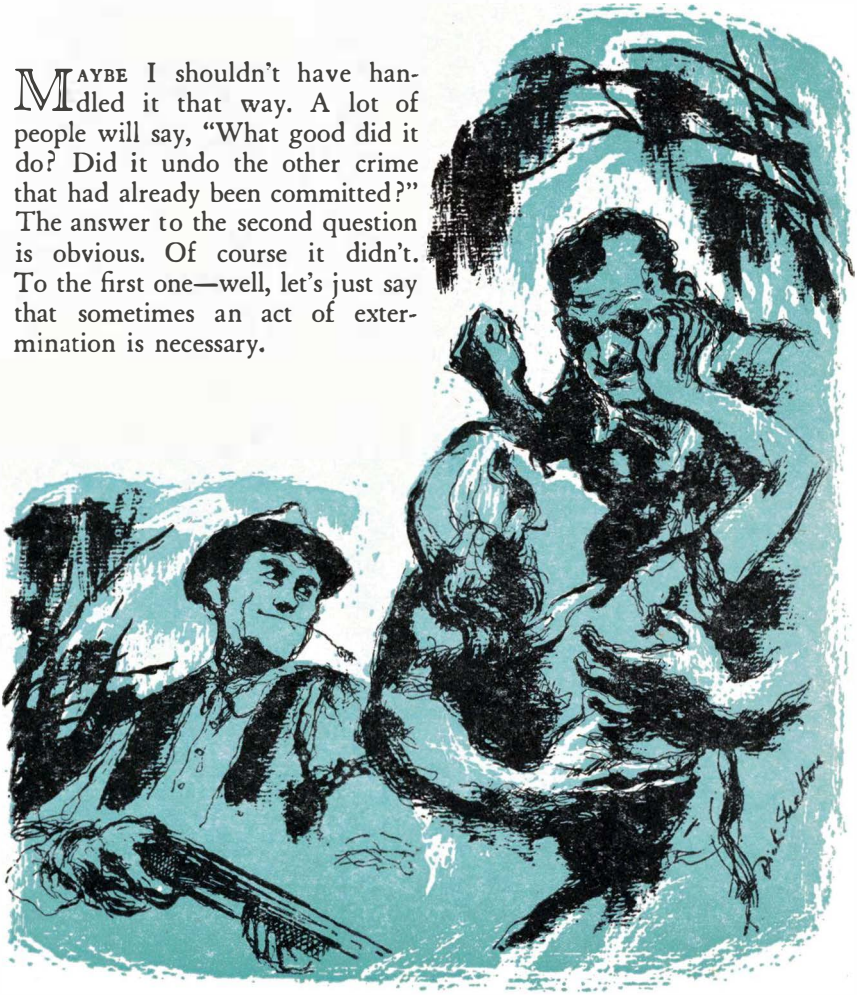
Stating that he had lost his memory and did not know his name, a man asked Nashville, Tenn. police for assistance in learning his identity. Detectives checked his fingerprints and found that he was James O. Ivey, 29, wanted in Huntsville, Ala., for questioning about a $1,500 robbery.

Vacation Nightmare

What the men had done to his wife and daughter could only be balanced by — murder. But there were three of them, and he had no weapon.

BY ROY CARROLL

MAYBE I shouldn't have handled it that way. A lot of people will say, "What good did it do? Did it undo the other crime that had already been committed?" The answer to the second question is obvious. Of course it didn't. To the first one—well, let's just say that sometimes an act of extermination is necessary.



We were driving back from a vacation in New England, to our home in Florida. There was my wife, Thelma, myself and our daughter, June.

You know the way it is with vacations. We'd spent too much money, and so I was trying to shave expenses on the way back. Instead of taking three days for the return trip, I decided to cut it to two. That meant doing the last eight-hundred miles in one jump. The only trouble was, I didn't make it.

Still three hundred miles from home, in the southern part of Georgia, about two o'clock in the morning, I began to feel the strain. The two-lane road was narrow and uneven and curving, with only a slight shoulder between the road and marshy ground. It had been like this for miles and miles, with heavy trucking traffic coming the other way. My leg was cramped from steady pressure on the accelerator. My right hand was stiff from gripping the wheel. (We've got a middle-aged car, with no power steering.)

Anyhow, I finally got bushed. I was seeing things up there in the headlight beams that weren't there. When I almost sideswiped a passing trailer-truck, I knew it was time to park and get some rest.

The problem, then, was to find a place where the shoulder of the road was wide enough to pull off without risk of being hit. I couldn't find such a place.

After awhile, though, I came to a side dirt road and a scabrous wooden sign that said, *Snooker's Fishing Camp—2 miles.* I turned in. For a quarter mile there was still no place to turn off, but then, rounding a slight turn, there was a cleared space about twenty yards wide and a hundred long, under a patch of moss-bearded live oak. I swung into this clearing and cut the motor.

For several minutes, I sat listening to the cooling knock of the motor, the *chugarum* of swamp frogs, the shrill burring of tree toads and cicadas. I thought the sudden cessation of movement might wake Thelma and June. It didn't. I guess nothing would. They'd been asleep for several hours and now they were really corking it off.

I had to grin, looking back at them. Each was propped against a pillow in a corner of the back seat, their long, lovely bare legs (both of them had put on shorts to travel through the heat of the day and hadn't bothered to change) thrown across each other. June is not quite sixteen, but she's physically mature, the way kids are today and she looks several years older. Thelma, her mother, is the opposite. She's thirty-six, but looks seven or eight years less. Corny as it sounds, she really does look more like June's sister than her mother.

In the moonglow filtering through the trees into the car win-

dows, they both looked terribly young and innocent and at peace with the world. I had the sudden sensation of bursting with love for them, these two gals of mine. I suddenly felt very big and strong and full of masculine pride because those two had such complete faith and trust in me—and yet was a little humbled by this.

Then the moon went behind a cloud, and I couldn't see them any more. I turned back around in the front seat. I made myself as comfortable as possible, stretched out from under the wheel and sleep hit me right off, with no in-between stage. One moment I was awake and the next I was unconscious.

It was full daylight, and jays and mocking birds were making a fuss in the trees above us when I woke up. I didn't sit right up. I just opened my eyes and tried to stretch some of the stiffness out of my limbs, trying to remember where I was and why. Then I heard the voices.

One of them said: "— — can *he* do, Hub? Hell, man, what you so yaller about? C'mon, let's wake 'em up."

"Gawd-a-mighty!" another voice said. "Lookit them long laigs on the young'n. That's for me, son."

A third said: "You can have it. Them young'ns don't *know* nothin'. Gimme a grown woman, any time, especially when she's ripe like this'n."

I thought for a moment those voices, the things they were saying were a part of some nightmare and I was still asleep. I sat up. Then I saw them.

They didn't even look at me. They all had their heads close together, looking through a back window of the car at the still sleeping women, at my wife and daughter. The expression on their faces is hard to describe, but you've seen animals in heat; that's about the closest I can come to it, except that the imaginations of men make that expression even worse.

Because of their lined, unshaven, hard-bitten faces, it was hard to say exactly how old they were. Two of them looked to be in their early forties; the third one was considerably younger, perhaps twenty-five. The older ones were gaunt-faced. But the young one was full-featured, almost moon-faced; he was sun burned and healthy looking in comparison to his gray-complexioned companions. The eyes of all of them, though, were tired and red-rimmed from too much drinking.

In that first moment a lot of things went through my mind, but the dominant emotion was fear. I was afraid, as afraid as I've ever been in my life. All I wanted to do was get away from these men, from this situation—get my women away.

I thought: *If I can start the car, jam the gas pedal and spurt off, I can catch them by surprise.*

We'll be away and safe once again.

When a man is really scared, his reflexes work fast. While the thought was still half formed, I reached for the ignition key, where I'd left it in the switch. I didn't find it. My hands fumbled frantically. My still sleep-heavy eyes stared stupidly at the ignition switch. There was no key in it; it was gone.

One of the men laughed. I turned my head, and they were all looking at me now.

One of the older men had some front teeth missing, and his small eyes almost closed when he smiled. He said: "You lookin' for somethin'?" Then he glanced at the others. "Seems somethin's missin', boys. What you reckon the man's lookin' for?"

He stepped back away from the car and began tossing the ignition key up and down in his hand, up and down. My eyes followed the movement of the key, glinting in the clean, early morning sunlight.

The other two stepped away from the car, too. They carried long cane fishing poles, with cord wound tightly around the thin, springy tips and with corks under the wound string and hooks stuck into the corks. The man with the key, the one with the squinched eyes and missing teeth, didn't carry a pole. He carried a single gauge shotgun.

Now they all stood there, looking at me, not speaking. Hoping my voice wouldn't break, that I wouldn't show my fear, I said: "I see you found the key to my car. I must have dropped it, last night." I was trying to give them a graceful out, trying to change their minds. I knew, though, as soon as the words were out that it hadn't worked. You could tell they didn't want any way out.

The young one said: "Aw, c'mon, Lyle, give the fella his key back and let's dragass outa here."

Lyle didn't look at him. He said: "Hub, you don't enjoy this, stay back out of the way and tend your own business. Let me and J. B. alone."

Then there was a movement in the back seat of the car. Somebody yawned, and I heard June say: "Where in the world are we, anyhow? Momma, wake up. It's morning, and we've stopped somewhere."

I didn't look back there. I didn't want to see their faces when they realized what was going on. But I could hear them straightening up, could hear my wife, Thelma, murmur sleepily. Then I heard her say sharply: "Bert, where *are* we? What —who are these men?"

I watched the men. They were staring again at the back seat of the car. The man called J. B. kept moving his tongue around his lips, not licking them, just caressing them with his tongue.

I said: "Thelma, you and June keep quiet. Keep out of this." I

spoke angrily; I had to, to keep them and the men from knowing how afraid I was.

Finally, J. B. stopped moistening his lips and said: "Jesus Aitch, lookit what that young'n's got in front, will you? If that wouldn't make even toothless ol' dog Tray sit up and beg!"

I couldn't stop it; temper exploded it out of me. "Keep your filthy, rotten mouth shut. That's my daughter."

I wasn't being brave, not being a hero, but nobody looked at or talked about my daughter that way while I was around.

None of the men acted as though they'd heard me. The one called Lyle, still squinching his eyes and showing his partially toothless mouth, hefted the shotgun in both hands and stepped back a pace. He said: "You wimmin get out of the car." He said it quietly, almost politely, but you knew he didn't mean it that way.

"Are these men out of their minds, Bert?" There was a rising note of hysteria in Thelma's voice. "Are they crazy or drunk or what? This is ridiculous."

"Goddamn," J. B. said. "Listen to that. I like 'em like that. I like 'em to talk high-toney."

For no special reason, then, I became aware of the swish and roar of traffic on the nearby highway, distant but still distinguishable. I remembered we were less than a quarter mile from U. S. Highway 301, the favorite route from Florida to the north and one of the most busily traveled highways in the U. S.

I thought: *Nothing's going to happen, really. They're just bluffing, throwing a scare into us, having some fun. They won't dare do anything. When they get tired of baiting us, they'll quit and leave us alone.*

"Look," I said. "Why don't you guys leave us alone? What's the point of this?"

"Point?" Lyle said. "Mistuh, we don't have to have no point to what we do. We do things for pure meanness, we want to."

"But why pick on us? We're not hurting anybody. You've already frightened my wife and daughter. Now, why don't you leave us alone?"

"Frighten 'em?" J. B. said. "We weren't fixin' to do that. No need anybody to get frightened, they do what they told 'round here."

"That's right," Lyle said. "Ladies, I told you, get out of that there automobile. Get out."

None of us moved. I was trying to think of something else to say, some way to break through to these men. I didn't believe it was impossible. They were human beings, weren't they? They'd have pity on us any time, now. That's what I thought.

When neither Thelma nor June made a move to get out of the car, Lyle said: "J. B., pull 'em *out* of

that damn car."

"Why, sure, Lyle," J. B. said.

He stepped to the car and grabbed the door handle and tried to open the door. It wouldn't open. The lock was on. I watched him do this, but it wasn't real to me; I couldn't believe it. These things didn't happen, that was all.

Then I watched him reach inside and release the lock and open the door and reach inside and take June by the arm. I saw his long, dirty-nailed fingers dig into her soft flesh. I heard her cry out and then I didn't hear anything because of the roar of anger in my head.

I swung around in the seat and tried to punch at J. B., leaning inside the car. I hit him once in the cheek and once on the side of the head. I couldn't hit him very hard because of my awkward position. Then he grabbed my arm and bent it down and backward over the front seat, so hard I thought it was going to break.

When I made the slightest move, this J. B. bore down on my arm. I couldn't stand the pain. I stayed still. I watched Lyle run around the other side of the car, where June and Thelma were trying to scrabble out the door. He yanked them both out by the arms and slammed them against the side of the car and pointed the gun at them. Then he made them move in front of him, around the car to my side.

He stood there, with the shotgun pointed at them. June and Thelma, with their hair dishevelled, needing makeup, with their faces numbed by shock and fear, looked like strangers to me that moment.

"You want these wimmin hurt, mistuh?" Lyle said. "Don't try any more rough stuff, you don't want them hurt."

I moved my head in a negative motion. I was breathing too hard to speak.

Then Lyle said: "Leave his arm go, J. B."

The pressure went off my arm. J. B. got out of the car. I pulled my arm over the seat and flexed it to see if it was broken. It surprised me that it wasn't, considering the way it hurt.

"All right," Lyle said. "Now, *you* get out of that car."

There was nothing I could do in the car; there was no reason to disobey. I got out. I stood there, watching Lyle walk toward me. He swung the gun as though it was a toothpick, with no seeming effort, although he didn't look very big or strong. The way he did it caught me by surprise. I saw the gun barrel coming toward my face, but I couldn't do anything about it.

The funny part was, I guess he didn't really hit me too hard, because it didn't knock me out. There was a quick, hot flash of pain in my head, and the whole landscape swung around once. I didn't re-

member falling, but the next thing I knew I was on the ground. I never did lose consciousness.

I touched the side of my head. There wasn't a lump, but about a six-inch-long ridge of swelling from my temple to the top of my skull.

Standing over me, Lyle said: "You just take it right easy, hear?"

Then he handed the shotgun to the youngest one, the one called Hub, who was looking down at me, fascinated, and—I thought—a little pityingly. I began to have hopes that maybe this one was with us—or at least not really against us. And he was being given the gun.

"Hub," Lyle said. "He ain't goin' to bother us none, no more. But keep an eye on him, in case. I got somethin' else to do."

Hub took the gun and he kept staring down at me with that strange expression on his face. Then, in an awed voice, he said: "Damn! He didn't go out. How hard you have to hit a man to *really* knock him out?"

When he said that, the way he said it, I knew there was no sense in hoping for help from him.

"Harder than you'd think," J. B. said. "Didn't you ever gun-whip a man?"

"No," Hub said. He just barely breathed it, his eyes suddenly very shiny. "Not yet I ain't."

Then I saw Lyle move toward June. June backed away, horror and disbelief twisting her pretty face, her hands thrown up before her protectively. She kept saying over and over in a small, sick, young voice: "You leave me alone. You leave me *alone.*"

Lyle answered her softly: "You don't want to see your daddy hurt none. Now do you, honey? I tell Hub to shoot your daddy, he'll surely do that. Hub is peculiar. You try to run or fight me, shug, I'll tell Hub to kill your daddy, right while he's lyin' there, just like he was a hurt-bad bird dog. You wouldn't want that."

June stopped backing off. Lyle moved fast and grabbed her, pinned her arms to her side. She struggled, but it did no good. Lyle buried his face against her throat, and his hands began to move.

Thelma screamed something unintelligible and sprang toward Lyle, but J. B. grabbed her from behind and held her helpless.

I came up off the ground, screaming things at them I'd never called anybody before in my life. Right then, I didn't know or care anything about Hub or that shotgun. I only knew what these two were doing to my wife and daughter.

I got full up off the ground and onto my feet before Hub hit me with the shotgun. This time the blow sent me spinning toward the road before I sprawled face down. I managed to turn over, but that was all I could do. I couldn't gather up my legs. It was as though

every part of me but my eyes and ears was paralyzed.

I heard Hub say: "He's *still* awake. God *damn,* how hard *do* you have to hit 'em? Never saw a man with such a hard haid."

I saw the two women struggling with Lyle and J. B.; only Thelma wasn't struggling much, any more. Her head was hanging forward, and she was crying. J. B. held her with one arm, now, in a half nelson. His other hand was tearing at her blouse. His mouth was gaped with his heavy breathing, and his tongue curled out one corner of it. He had the look of a rabid animal.

Then I saw Lyle trip June to the ground. He went down with her, rolled onto her and seeing that, some strength came back to me. I made it to my feet, but felt nauseous. I was staggering forward as blackness rushed up at me . . .

When I came out of it, I was on the car's back seat. My face was smeared with blood, some of it already dried. My shirt was sticky with blood. My head hurt so that I could hardly think. But I managed to raise it and saw that I was all alone. Then I heard a car drive up. I looked through the rear window and saw a car stop behind ours. Thelma and June got out and ran toward our car.

Thelma said to somebody in the other car: "Hurry. We've got to get him to a hospital."

Her face was still tear-streaked, and there was an ugly contusion on one cheek. There were finger-shaped blue bruises on her arms.

I got up and sat on the edge of the car seat, my feet outside. I told Thelma: "I'm all right. Take it easy. I'm all right, I tell you."

Then she told me how they'd gone out to the highway and flagged down a car, and the man was there to help us. He was a balding, plump little man. He came toward us, hands fluttering, his eyes popping unbelievingly behind steel-rimmed glasses.

He looked as though he might faint when he saw me. "Good Lord, sir!" he said. "What can I do? Tell me what to do."

Thelma kneeled before me and put her head onto my lap. Her whole body shook with the crying that now came out of her. I kept patting her back and saying, "There, there," and looking toward June who was standing a short distance away, fumblingly trying to put together the ripped seam of her shorts and shaking as though she was freezing cold.

After a moment, I eased Thelma away. I saw the car ignition key lying in the dirt of the road a few feet away. I took Thelma's face in my hands. I said: "Thelma, honey, stop it now and tell me something. You hear?"

She stopped crying and moved her head up and down.

I said: "Which way did they go."

She couldn't answer, but she

turned her head away from the highway, nodded to indicate the country dirt road, at a point where it turned.

Then I helped her up and saw that she was able to stand. I said to the man in the glasses: "Please do me a favor. Take my wife and daughter to the nearest doctor. I'll join you there in a little while."

He looked as though I'd spoken to him in Hindustan, but I knew that he'd heard me, understood.

Thelma said: "Bert, where are *you* going? Don't go anywhere, now. Come with us."

I shook my head. "I'll see you later." I went over and picked up the car key. I remembered the fishing camp sign at the head of the road and that the men had had fishing poles.

Thelma almost shouted it. "Bert, you're not going after them. What are you going to do, Bert?"

"I don't know, yet," I said. "Kill them if I can, I guess."

Thelma tried to hold me, to stop me. She couldn't. I got into the car and drove off down that dirt road. I drove fast, I guess, because it seemed only seconds before I went around a turn and then slammed the brakes. Before me was Snooker's Fishing Camp.

It was a wooden shack, with a porch running along the front, a barbecue pit, badly in need of repair, to one side, two rickety outhouses behind it and a model A Ford parked in front of it. This whole setup was on the top of a long, steep slope leading down to a small lake. There was no road going down to the lake, itself, only a dirt-and-gravel path with low weeds on either side of it. The road ended the other side of the shack.

At the bottom of the footpath, a dock protruded into the waters and rowboats were tied to each side of it. At the end of the dock, three figures stood, fishing. It was a couple of hundred yards down that slope. I couldn't see their faces, of course, but I knew who the three were. And I heard their drunken laughter. One had his head far back, holding a bottle to his mouth. The car coasted behind a copse of jack pine that partially shielded it from sight of the dock.

I sat there, trying to think. I felt sick and weak from the gun-beating, now. To tell the truth I didn't know what I was going to do. Most of my bravado was gone. I finally decided I'd better try to find out who the men were and then drive back and find the nearest cop and set the law on them.

I got out of the car and made my way toward the shack. The windows were all closed, and it had a deserted look. Still, I went up to the door. I turned the knob and shook it, even after I realized it was locked.

I went back to the car. Singing—drunken howling, really—drifted up from the dock. I thought of Thelma and June and what those

animals had done to them. My hand was trembling so I couldn't get the key into the ignition. Then I stalled the car twice, flooding it, trying to get it started. All the while, I was trying to think, trying to know what I should do. I kept looking down toward the three men on the end of the dock, down there at the bottom of the slope. They were all laughing now. Laughing, I thought, because they were so sure they'd gotten away with what they'd done. Laughing at some obscenity arising out of what they had done. I didn't even have a weapon. What could I do to them, unarmed?

And then I remembered that I did have a weapon, one of the most dangerous in the world.

When I released the brake, the car started rolling very slowly. I had it in second and kept the clutch in. All the way down the slope, the car picked up speed. Close to the dock, I saw for sure that it was wide enough. I didn't know if it would hold the weight of the car. I hoped it would, because there was no stopping now.

The three men didn't see the car speeding down the slope straight toward them. They didn't see it until I was almost on them and had let out the clutch and gunned the motor. When they saw it rocketing at them they froze.

The car plowed into them and I jumped free. As I went off into space, all I saw was the face of the man, Lyle, through the windshield, over the hood of the car. It was nothing but one lovely, big, twisted, animated scream of bleeding terror . . .

I don't remember getting out of the lake, but they told me later the highway patrol found me up on the dock, unconscious.

They also told me later that I'd said the car had gone out of control, that the accelerator jammed and the brakes didn't work. Anyhow, outside of an informal hearing and the signing of some papers, there wasn't any real trouble. It seemed nobody in that section had much use for Lyle and J. B. Downes and their cousin, Hubbard Fane. Everybody was real sorry for us, and nobody seemed sorry that they were dead.

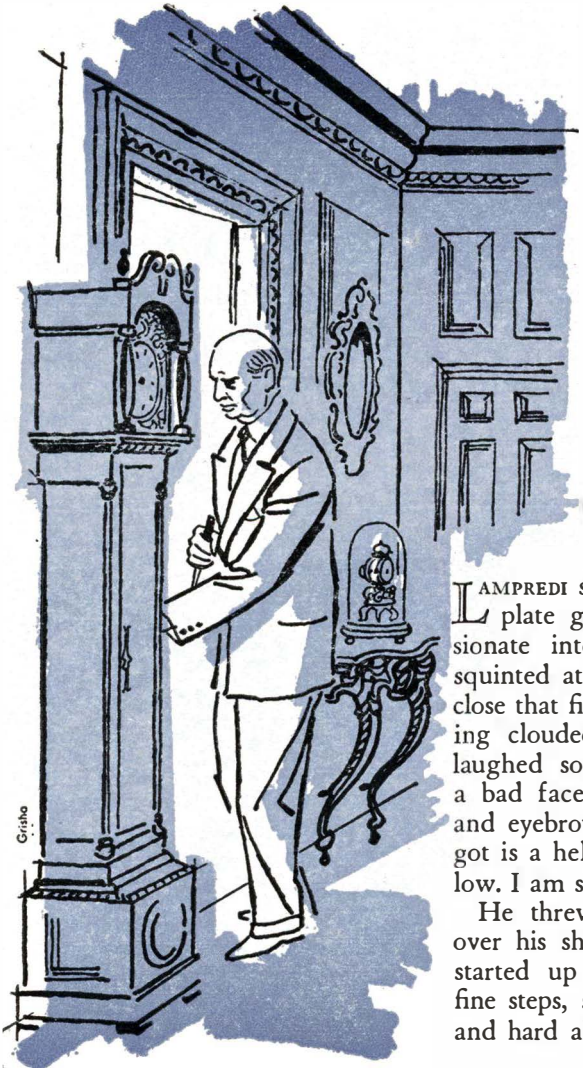
That was two months ago, now. We don't ever talk about it and we try not to think about it. We try to live as though it never happened. But it's difficult.

So that's the way it was. Actually, I suppose doing what I did was wrong, but I have trouble really believing that. I've killed rats before and weasels and poisonous snakes, and I've squashed bedbugs and roaches. That's never bothered me—or anyone. Why should this?

He was sorry to change his own features. But was it not worth it, to become a man of such great wealth as Gianinni Musso?

The Face of a Killer

BY CHARLES BEAUMONT



LAMPREDI STUDIED the killer in the plate glass window with passionate interest. He peered and squinted at himself and moved so close that finally his excited breathing clouded the image; then he laughed softly and thought, Not a bad face. Take away the nose and eyebrows and what you have got is a hell of a nice looking fellow. I am sorry to lose such a face.

He threw an automatic glance over his shoulder, swallowed, and started up the steps. They were fine steps, smelling of strong soap and hard all the way through, like

marble; you would not expect to find a man like Doctor Donohue at the top of them. But though the world was full of wonders, as Frank Lampredi knew, to find a really accomplished surgeon in a dirty room on a sidestreet was still somewhat unusual.

He walked into the office. "Tell the doctor that Mr. Jerome is here," he said to the nurse, and smiled. She did not smile back. No one did any more, not to him. But they would. And he would walk with his head high and not be afraid. If only there were a way to kill the *mind* part of Frank Lampredi, too . . .

The doctor came in, his nose twitching like a rabbit's. Of the two, it was this white-clad man with the distinguished spectacles who looked like a wanted criminal, like a man so often hunted and photographed and shot at that he wished to die. But the doctor was nothing of the kind, and life in the shell of his flesh meant a great deal. Otherwise, he would not permit little men with no money to order him about.

He nodded quickly, jerked his head and went into another room. Lampredi followed. When they were alone and the door was firmly shut, the doctor said, "What do you want?"

Lampredi chuckled. "I am here to be treated," he said. "I am here to be killed and then made to live again. Can you do it?"

"No jokes, man. Please." The doctor had begun to perspire. His hands were steady—God ruin us, Lampredi thought, if they weren't! —but the glistening had begun along the neck and across the forehead. "I can't spend my time in guessing games."

"That is wrong," the little man with the scarred nose said, and the harshness in his voice was real. "You can spend your time doing whatever I say. Is that not correct? Because otherwise, what would I do? I would write letters to people, telling all about the good Doctor Donohue and a certain old woman in Kansas City, many years ago."

"Very well."

"Yes. Very well, very well." Lampredi made a noise with his tongue and patted the doctor's cheek. He grinned; then the grin went away and suddenly you could see how such a small person could have done so many violent things. He produced an envelope. "All right, then," he said, "we'll talk," and plucked a snapshot from the envelope. It was a picture of a bald man with a mustache and thick lips. "You see him?"

The doctor looked at the snapshot, nodded, and returned it.

"That is Frank Lampredi," Lampredi said, and laughed loudly. "Excuse me!" He held the photograph up next to his face and frowned like the bald man. "Well?"

"I don't know," the doctor said, slowly. "I don't think so."

"Why not?" Lampredi asked.

"The lips, for one thing. The eyes."

"Well, I am sorry. Now I will have to write those letters after all. Good-bye, Doctor Donohue."

"No—" The doctor breathed heavily. "Perhaps it can be done," he said.

"Perhaps?"

"All right, then. Yes."

"Yes," Lampredi said, and made the noise with his tongue again. He took a slender cigar from his breast pocket and lit it. "We begin at once," he said. "Don't make an argument. Tell the patients that your gall bladder is no good suddenly, I don't care what you tell them. Send them away. See, I am tired of this running and looking back to see if there is a tail on me and wondering how I will elude the dogs. I am so tired of it—" The little man shook his head. "I have decided to go straight."

There was an almost imperceptible movement to the doctor's eyebrows.

"Yes. But this going straight is not so easy for a man like me," Lampredi sighed. "For I am very well known, you see. People recognize this face." He pinched his own cheek. Then he puffed at the cigar and spoke in a voice that was both wistful and realistic. "Well, here is the thing, Doctor. Tomorrow in the papers you will read a big headline. You will read that Frank Lampredi is dead. His body will be found burned beyond identification, only with a ring here and a wallet there and enough so that we know who it is, you understand. No more Lampredi. You see why we must begin."

The doctor was silent.

"My plan is—"

"I don't want to hear your plan!" the doctor shouted, abruptly. "I don't want to hear anything about it!"

"Yes, but it is such a clever one," Lampredi said, gesturing with his arms. "Look, when I saw that this running and hiding was no good, right away I knew something. I must go and get my face fixed, because even if they weren't after me, it would be the same. I am the criminal type, you know? Dark and small with small eyes and that kind of stuff. But who was there that could do such work? That *would* do it, huh? In the movies, it is easy. But in real life, it is another story. I racked my brain for many days; then, all of a sudden, I remembered my very old and dear friend from Kansas City who was in a little trouble there."

"Lampredi, if you don't mind—"

"No!" Lampredi reached forward and brought his right hand hard across the doctor's face; it left a red mark. "Musso. Gianinni Musso. That is my name. And I *do* mind. You just listen to me!"

The doctor sat back and made fists.

"I know a little bit," Lampredi

went on, casually. "I am not one of your dummies who thinks that plastic surgery is like magic; all you have to do is snap your fingers. No. I know that you can only have certain things changed. But your height and your weight and things like that—your bones—they stay the same. Now, look. What I wanted was this. I wanted to find a man of complete honesty, without a wife and without many friends, but with enough of the money so that there is never any worry. A man of my age, with the same looks basically. You see what I mean? Also Italian. A pillar of the community, a man without any record of any kind." Lampredi shrugged. "It was an almost impossible job. Where do you find such a man? I was hot and had to be on the move, anyway; so I went from town to town, looking—in banks, in offices, in factories —everywhere. Many honest ones I found, but none who looked even a little bit like Lampredi. But I would not give up. And at last it happened. Finally, I found what I was looking for. In the town of Monterey, in California, there is my fellow. A pillar of the community! He is the vice-president of the bank there. You wouldn't believe my luck! Gianinni Musso. Italian." Lampredi moved nervously about the office, making gestures with his hands; his eyes burned. "Sixty-one years old, a widower, living alone in a big house, a great big rich house like they don't have so much these days. You see?"

The doctor said nothing.

"Of course I know, for best success I should have gotten a job with this Musso and studied him up close. But this was not possible. So I watched him from the crowds and followed him and waited. His chauffeur got drunk one night, and I put many questions to him, which he answered. He got drunk again, another night; then he was fired. Did he talk then! Everything. I tell you, everything! But—it was not enough. I did a tiny job and with the money bought one of those tape recorders that you can hide in your pocket. I captured Mr. Musso's voice. Like this. Listen!" Lampredi moved his spectacles down on his scarred nose. He put his hands behind his back. "Listen!" He spoke, and his voice was another man's voice. "Tend to the Baker loan. Would you, George? Thank you."

The doctor's eyes widened.

"Huh?" Lampredi howled. "All right, you are not interested. It makes no difference." He relit his cigar and sat down. "I have many more pictures of this fellow, Doctor," he said. "Lots of angles, plenty of angles. Now here is what you must do. You must make me look so much like Gianinni Musso that no one, not even his mother, could tell the difference. You must do your masterpiece, a perfect job. So perfect that when I look into the mirror I will be startled and alarmed and wonder if I am not

really a successful banker."

Doctor Donohue rose, suddenly, and walked to the window. "It's a completely wild idea, Lampredi," he said. "It couldn't possibly work."

"No? That is a great pity, then," the little man said. "Because if it does not, then we will both suffer."

"What do you mean?"

"I have studied this honest man. I know how he walks, what he likes to eat in the morning, how many times a day he blows his nose—everything. I will not make a mistake, because this is my chance to live well until I die, with all the luxuries and no cops. The only thing that could go wrong is that you do not do a good job; so somebody looks at me and says, 'Hey! That is not Gianinni Musso – I know, because his nose is too long!' If that happens, Doctor, then the first thing I will do is tell everybody about you and Kansas City." Lampredi smiled. "They would take away your license, maybe even put you in jail—I could not say. But it wouldn't be so good, huh?"

There was silence in the room for many minutes. Then the doctor turned around, slowly, stiffly, like a wind-up toy, and said: "Show me the rest of the pictures . . . "

The months that followed were torture to Lampredi, in many ways. At times he would think, Well, good enough! Then he would check himself. No. It was not good enough. Like clay complaining to its sculptor, Lampredi would say to the doctor, "Here, you have missed with the upper lip; it must be done over! It is a dead giveaway!" or "Wait, wait, the lobes of the ears—they do not have enough dangle." And Doctor Donohue would prepare his instruments again and rechisel bone and graft flesh and make it all better. No one else in the world knew of this surgery, and it undoubtedly occurred to the surgeon that nothing could be simpler than letting the knife slip a little. But Lampredi had gambled that Donohue would not take the chance. Murder had a way of scaring those of weak liver, he knew.

The months were full of pain, also. With his face swaddled like an ancient babe's, Lampredi sometimes felt that the flesh had been torn away and that nothing was worth so much hurting, not even freedom and peace; but he did not weaken, for pain was no new thing to him. When it burned like hot knives, he forced his mind away. He thought of the good Gianinni Musso, of thick rugs and mahogany tables and little round wall safes. And these thoughts helped.

Then, at last, the work was finished. Doctor Donohue had lost weight and did not seem to take pride in his creation, but Lampredi was proud. The day he looked in the mirror at his own reflection, and then at the photograph of the bald man, he nodded and chuckled

and embraced the surgeon. The resemblance was perfect. To an eyelash, to a hair, to the tiny liver spots along the forehead—

"Frank Lampredi is dead," Lampredi said.

And Doctor Donohue said, "I hope so," under his breath.

It did not matter. Nothing could dampen Lampredi's spirits this most glorious of glorious days. The hard part of it was over now, was it not?

"You will forget Lampredi?" he asked in a way that was not asking but saying.

The surgeon nodded.

"Then," said Lampredi, "I will not write any letters. Good-bye."

He left the private sanatorium and spent most of the day peeking at himself in windows and mirrors, feeling that he was not a fifty-seven-year-old criminal wanted by the police for murder and robbery and other deeds, but somebody else. He chuckled like a monkey. And when he bought the double-breasted gray suit, of the type that he knew Gianinni Musso wore, and bought the ventilated shoes and the elk's tooth watch-chain, then he burst out laughing so hard that he was forced to sit down.

"So perfect," he thought. "Mother, listen. Do you know me? Do you know your own son?"

He walked to the bus station and got a ticket to Monterey, California.

Later he boarded the bus and sat down at the rear and closed his eyes. There was no sorrow at anything he had done, no remorse. After all, like they say, had he not been born into a loveless house? And did he not have to mingle early with unsavory companions? Of course he became a criminal. It was natural. If he had been hatched in a big fine house, now, and given education and a little money, well, then, it would have been different. Yes.

He decided to go over the life of Gianinni Musso. Was everything right? Foolish! Would Lampredi try such a stunt if he were not sure? Besides, the impersonation would last for only a little while. Enough time for Mr. Musso to be ill, retire from his job and gather up his coin and go for a nice long vacation.

Lampredi tested the spring action of his knife, made sure that he'd not forgotten the heavy oilcloth, and fell into a pleasant sleep . . .

The neighborhood was trees and large houses made from stones and bricks, with many rooms, and gates. Lampredi kept the handkerchief to his mouth as he walked, despite the fact that it was long after two in the morning and no one would be in the streets. Still he could not afford to be careless now. He walked three blocks and stopped at the strong iron gate that reached to the sky.

Beyond the gate was a dark green carpet and hedges cut into the shapes of animals and a house so very big that you would take it for a cathedral. Black now, the shades all drawn, the doors locked.

Oh, Mr. Musso! Mr. Musso, what are you dreaming about? Parities? Stocks? Net assets? Liquidations? Or, perhaps, the Club . . . About how nice it is to be rich and free? No, no; you wouldn't dream about that. Your kind never does!

Lampredi snorted and walked back around to the stone wall. He cast a sweeping glance in all directions, held his breath, and began to climb. It was odd to see the agility with which this staid, old, bald man ascended. At the top, he paused before dropping to the soft wetness; then he moved cat-silent to the kitchen window of the big house. He jimmied the window.

The smells of richness went into his lungs. The smells of solidity and tradition and social standing. Very different indeed from the stink of crowded prisons and upstairs tenements and the sweat that runs down your body when you have run for more than a mile, waiting for a bullet. Very different, huh?

Suddenly, for perhaps the first time in his life, Lampredi felt sorry that he must kill a man. Gianinni Musso's life would soon run out in a red river, and it seemed, in that half-instant, a cheap thing to do. But then the feeling passed, and Lampredi remembered that the man was old and lonely, too old for all this, through with life anyhow.

He moved through the house he knew so well because he had studied it so many times, past the dining room and the library and the den and up the stairs to the bedroom he knew would be occupied because Gianinni Musso always went to bed promptly at ten after reading the *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week* and taking his laxative. Such people you can count on. Their actions are like the actions of good clocks.

Lampredi eased the door open and took out his knife.

He entered the bedroom, more quietly than the shadows and the blackness, for he must not awaken Mrs. St. Claire. Mrs. St. Claire slept heavily, he knew, downstairs, but a person could not be too careful in this sort of thing. And thank the good Lord, old Musso had fired his other servants along with the chauffeur.

He inched toward the panoplied bed until, at last, he could discern the outline of a figure, until he could hear the soft modulated snores; then he raised the knife, high. It must be clean, he thought. Direct. A single thrust.

The figure in the bed moved slightly, settled.

Lampredi struck.

There was complete stillness in the room now, no soft modulated

snores, and no movement. All quiet.

Lampredi released a stream of breath. He wiped the blade of the knife quickly on a billowy quilt. He quickly folded it, replaced it.

The hard part of it was over.

There remained, of course, the disposal of the body.

Fast! He worked in the crispest, most businesslike manner – first spreading the oilcloth, then taking up the sheets and quilts and blankets and wrapping them about the dead thing. Once this was done, he lifted the weight to his shoulders and crept to the door downstairs that led to the heated garage.

He opened the trunk-lid of the big black Chrysler, deposited his bundle, and closed the lid again, locking it securely with the duplicate key he'd obtained from the drunken chauffeur.

The next evening he would drive to the water and fix the weights. If the body eventually broke loose –and it might–it would by then be beyond recognition. Who would say, "This is Gianinni Musso!" when Gianinni Musso was known to be at home enjoying the fruits of a lifetime's work?

Lampredi padded upstairs, raided the linen closet, washed away some of the blood that had spilled unavoidably, generally made sure that there was no obvious trace of what had transpired. Now, only a probing eye could see the difference, and there would be no probing eyes.

He drew on a pair of pure silk pajamas and got into bed. It would not be long before dawn; then Mrs. St. Claire would awaken her master, and he would go to work–even though ill, so ill.

Lampredi stroked the fine linens with his fingers.

He waited.

Eight o'clock chimed and minutes passed, but there was no sound in the house, and this annoyed him, somewhat. He waited awhile longer, then threw a dressing gown about his shoulders, surveyed his new visage in the mirror, and went downstairs.

He rapped sternly on Mrs. St. Claire's door.

There was no answer.

He rapped again, turned the knob, went inside.

The room was empty.

A small panic rose inside him and was quelled. What could be simpler, he told himself: the woman had changed her arrangement. She went home to her sister's house Fridays. Now she goes home Tuesdays. Nothing more.

Such nerves!

He dressed slowly, breakfasted on coffee and toast, and, when it was exactly time, walked into the garage.

The trip to town was a delight, a joy. He was not nervous, except with anticipation, as great actors are nervous. Today he would give a Grand Performance.

He parked the Chrysler in its

proper slot, looked at his watch, exhaled, and stepped out.

His gait to the door was perfect. A little lean to the left—so—favoring the bad leg. Hand out now in salute to the guard (Snappy, fast, Lampredi, you've done it a thousand times!) and fingers to the tie.

Grandly, Lampredi swept into the bank.

"Good morning, Oscar!" The gray old man in the guard's uniform half-raised his hand. Fast—a nod to the others. Now walk slowly; remember, today you must become ill. Today you are, "not quite yourself, Mr. Musso." Calm. That is the whole thing. Calm.

There was no sound in the building, and, for a marvelous moment, Lampredi felt a relaxation in his blood that had never been there before.

"Good morning, Randolph."

His footsteps rang across the stone floor (*face forward!*) and reverberated through the forest of veined marble pillars.

"Miss Newcombe."

Walking, he removed his hat, coughed, tapped his nose (*exactly!*) and was almost to the dark mahogany desk before he became aware of something.

The machines had all stopped.

Never mind, never mind; it's fine. He hung up the hat indifferently, sighed, coughed again and sat down.

And that is when the girl he had called Miss Newcombe screamed.

It was the sort of scream one hears in films: high-pitched, continuous, filled with terror.

Lampredi looked up and found himself surrounded by a group of paralyzed beings, their eyes burning, their mouths open.

"Mr. Musso!" someone cried. "Mr. Musso!"

Then the movement began, a stampeding circus of moving people.

Lampredi tried, frantically, to understand. Something was wrong, yes, yes, but—he could not imagine what that thing might be. Had it not all gone perfectly? Had he not planned it with all of his cunning and all of his wisdom?

A few men came close to look at him; then they shrank back to where the women were huddled at the door, and soon the bank was empty except for Lampredi.

He shook his head, to shake away this impossible nightmare, and sat, trembling, trying, trying to understand. He'd come in; the people had fallen silent; one of them had screamed; and now they were gone . . . No. It could not be!

He stood up, swaying dizzily, and saw the uniformed policeman. (Donohue? No. Donohue would not have informed, the man was too frightened. Then—) A big man, not so white-faced as the others, but staring all the same.

"Your name?" he said.

"Musso," Lampredi said, feeling the foolish wrongness of his

answer. "Gianinni Musso. What is the trouble?"

"I think we'd better go." The policeman took hold of Lampredi's arm. "Down to the station."

"I want to know what is the reason behind this behavior. I have work to do, Officer. Why should I go to your station?"

The policeman cocked his head sideways, as if he, too, were trying to understand something. "You—a brother of Mr. Musso's, a relative or some kin like that?"

Lampredi pulled his arm free. "I don't know what you're talking about. Has everyone gone insane in the mind?"

"Not everyone, I don't think," the policeman said.

"Then—"

"Gianinni Musso died almost a week ago. I guess we're not used to ghosts in Monterey, Mister."

Lampredi fought away the blackness. "Impossible," he said, thinking of the heavy wet red bundle in the back of the car. "You are playing a joke!"

But the policeman wasn't smiling. His eyes were hard and cold.

"Let's go," he said.

When he learned, later, that it was no joke at all, and that Mr. Gianinni Musso had indeed passed away, of a heart attack, Lampredi began to laugh. And he only laughed harder when they told him that the estate had been left to Mrs. St. Claire, the housekeeper, and that she had taken to sleeping in the master bedroom.

He laughed all the way to the penitentiary.

And when they finally strapped him in the chair in the little green room, even then he did not stop laughing.

TV fans in Pineville, Ky. were in an ugly mood for several days recently. Someone stole the 1,500 foot coaxial cable that relays television to Pineville residents from a mountain top.

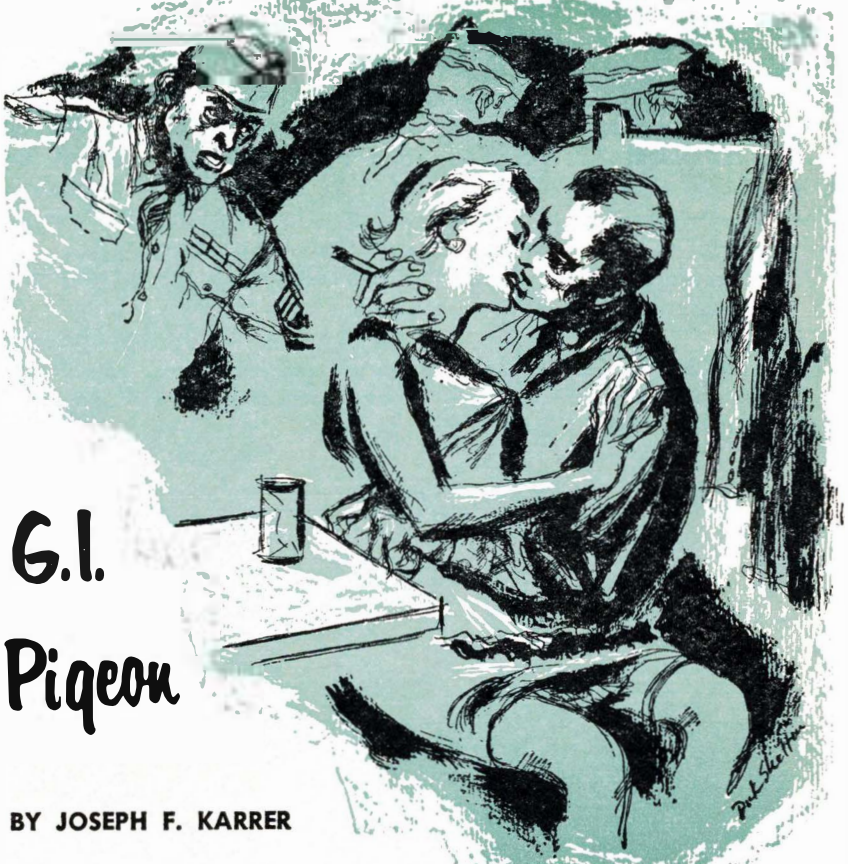
Mrs. Elwanda Lorey, 22, told a saleslady in a Louisville, Ky. department store to charge her purchases. The saleslady asked for the customer's name; the store detective hurried to the scene, and Mrs. Lorey was arrested on 55 counts of obtaining merchandise under false pretenses.

Detectives said Mrs. Lorey copied charge customers' names and used them for her own purchases. She was caught when the name and address she gave belonged to the saleslady.

THE SUNSHINE was really nice, and I was walking around, soaking it up. Guys were sprawled everywhere, enjoying it, and I was content to walk around alone and mind my own business. But some of the boys, leaning against the carpenter shop, called me over.

I went, figuring they had another argument to settle. Anytime they had a battle over some simple thing, they called me, and I made a decision on it. Sometimes I didn't know what I was talking about, but I never let that stop me. I've got a reputation to think of.

Sure enough, they were in a hassle, and they put it square up to me.



G.I. Pigeon

BY JOSEPH F. KARRER

She got more propositions in ten minutes than an alley cat got in a month. But what she really wanted was a sure, safe way to knock off this poor sap.

"Doc, this lumberhead here is trying to tell us something about a bunch of coppers called Sid."

"Not 'Sid,' Stupid!" Red yells. "C.I.D."

"Well," the first one comes back, "Sid, C.I.D., it's all the same. You ever hear of 'em Doc?"

Had I ever heard of them? Sure, I was real familiar with that name. Anyway, I want to stay popular with the boys, and they like new stories, so I give out with an adventure of mine, involving C.I.D.

"There's an outfit like that all right. I met one of them a year or so back. They investigate crimes that soldiers pull off, or dirty deals that people hand army boys. You want to hear about it?"

For once they're all ears, instead of all mouth, and they give me the go ahead sign. I settle back against the wall, and let 'em have this tale.

Sixteen months ago, I was the owner of a little bar in Franklin. Franklin is an Army town, seven miles out of Fort Slater. All army towns run the same, plenty of restaurants, a few cheap shows, supply stores, and bars. No lie, every other place, on every street, is a bar.

There were a bunch of rooming houses, run down as hell, but they got good rent from soldiers that kept their wives in town. I don't know how come they kept them there; the broads got insulted or passed at every five minutes by some drunken soldier, but I guess the guys figured, if you had a wife, use her.

The army paid once a month, and on that week end, the boys always roared into town, determined to have a roaring time. But there wasn't any big times to have. They could get a meal, see a show, hang around and pester cabbies to take them to the girls, or sit around the bars and stare at the waitresses. This was the big occupation.

A lot of these boys were fresh away from their mamas, and a few beers would make them pretty wild. But they never had a chance. Some of the military cops were always walking up and down, and where they wasn't, the city cops were. Once in awhile the boys got a few licks in, but like as not, when they cocked a fist, the cops had 'em by the wrist before they could throw the punch.

My bar did a big business. I paid my girls better than any place in town. That wasn't much, because these dames were working for ten bucks a week, just to get the tips from the hopeful lovers. But paying the best wages was smart business.

You see, most of those girls were no bargain in the looks department. At least, they wouldn't be in another town. But here, all broads look good, at least to the boys. The joint that had the best looking dolls was made. When you could hire a real looker, the money rolled in.

I had one of these lookers. She

could have made out anywhere. She got more propositions in ten minutes, than an alley cat got in a month. But no dice.

She was married to some goon out at camp, and he picked her up three nights a week. The other nights, she'd leave alone, or ask me to give her a lift. I used to get the feeling she wasn't crazy about her old man, but she played it like she was.

There were plenty of ways a guy could make loot on the side, and I had a few nice things going. After this dish had been with me awhile, she caught on to what was happening, but she was a real clam. This, I appreciated.

She had been working for me about three months, and I trusted her to a point. That was when she caught on to what was happening, let me have the proposition. She wanted to get rid of her old man. Just like that. She wanted him gone. I remember looking at her, and deciding to take this slow and easy.

"What do you mean, 'get rid' of him?" I asked her.

"Don't give me that dummy act, Doc," she came back. "You know what I mean."

"Okay, okay, so I know. But what did he do to you?"

Esty looked me over for a moment. We called her Esty, but her handle was Estelle. Estelle Maddox.

I thought she was trying to figure how much she could let me in on, but this kid didn't have a doubt in the world. Boy, was she sure of herself. Finally, she tipped me off.

"Doc, it isn't what he did to me; it's what he can't do for me. I tied up with him to get that monthly allotment check. But it wasn't worth it. I get better offers all the time. And here I am with this bum hanging on my shoulders. And he's jealous, yet."

"So why pick on me?"

"Because you're the big man around here. Because you can get things done, and you like a buck as much as I do. Maybe more."

I studied her face. I saw that she meant business. But making people disappear ain't nothing to grab up and dive into.

"Look, Esty," I said, "suppose, just suppose now, that I can see a way clear to pull this off. Where does my cut come from?"

"The jerk has a ten grand insurance policy. I'm the beneficiary. You get half."

"That old angle, huh?"

"It's old," she said, "but they still pay off. And his policy pays, no matter how he gets it." She looked at me, and said again, "Half, Doc, five thousand."

"How do I know you'll come through with the money?"

"You have my word."

"Word, schmord, this is nothing to kill somebody on. Tell you what. I'll write up a paper, saying you hired me for the job, and you sign

it. Then, it's a deal," I told her.

"Sure, I sign a paper, then you blackmail hell out of me. Say, Doc, I know better than that."

"Look, pigeon, all I want is to be protected. I couldn't put the squeeze on you, without nailing the lid on my own box."

She thought that over, and it must have sunk in. I got the okay and wrote up our contract. She looked it over, like she was buying a house, or something, then she signed.

"Now," I told her, "I need about a month to get something rigged up. Meantime, you do whatever I tell you, and no questions asked. Whatever I tell you."

"Just a minute, Doc—"

"Can it! I could be your father twice. Just do as I tell you, and we'll have it over in no time."

"How you going to do it?" she asked me.

"Esty, I don't know yet. I'll have to get one of my brilliant flashes. Now get ready to work. Tonight should be a good one."

It was a good night, but my mind wasn't on the business. I was trying to figure a real sharp angle. I knew that when something happened to a soldier, it was a federal case. I didn't want any thouble with the F.B.I. But I had some money saved, and this five grand would put me in position to open a classy place somewhere. So I thought and angled and, finally, I hit it. A way to knock off this poor sap.

The first step was to find a fish. I had a regular bunch that came in, and they had all had a turn at trying to make Esty. Now they figured she was too hard to get, and in their own way they respected her and protected her.

I figured they wouldn't believe anybody who claimed he was making out with her. Guys are like that. If they can't do it, then nobody can. That helped my idea along.

Looking around, I spotted my fish. Boy, he was perfect. He was a well built kid, twenty-three, maybe twenty-four. A real cocky lad, who had probably had his way with most of the girls back in Plowhandle High. A couple of the girls here hadn't gone for him, and he was still trying to figure out why. Anyway, he had two ears, separated by a mass of fat. He was made to order.

When he glanced my way, I called him over and gave him a beer on the house. This pained me, but I was after bigger things.

"Look," I told him, "I've got a message for you from one of the dolls."

He looked me over, in his best tough guy manner, and said, "Spill it."

"I want you to use your noggin. Esty always played it straight with her old man, but she'd had a yen for you for some time. Only she don't want word of what's going on to leak out."

The kid's face lit up like a tilted pin-ball machine. "Esty," he breathes. "Esty is hot for me?" Then he got control of himself, and he was the old phony again. "Well, that makes sense."

"Sure, sure it does. Now look. We close at midnight. You get your car and park out in the alley. She'll meet you out there, and you can go someplace and eat."

The punk gave me a real wise wink. He looked at the clock, saw he had half an hour to wait, and ordered a beer. When he paid me, he gave me the quarter like I was a butler. I told myself that this deal would be a pleasure.

"Remember, lover," I warned him, "she says if you want to be a big man with her, keep your yap clamped."

I got another wink from the boy bad man.

After we closed, and the place had cleared out, I collared Esty and told her what was what. She didn't like it.

"You want me to go out tonight? With that clown? Are you bugs?"

"Look, look, it's part of the plan. Remember, you're supposed to do what I tell you. We need this guy to do things right."

"What do we need him for?"

"It's simple. He's the boy that's gonna knock off your old man."

That rocked her a little, but she let it ride. I guess she felt it was my deal, and she'd play the cards like I dealt them. But still, she wasn't happy about the thing.

"This eight-ball will give me a hard time tonight. What then?"

"Come off it, Esty. You've been around. If it gets any further than a little pawing, you know how to take care of yourself. And that's what I want you to do. Take care of yourself. Give him something to look forward to. String him along. Make him want more. Got it?"

She had it. And after getting ready, she left through the back door. I watched as she climbed into this beat up car; then I went back in and had myself a little drink. So far, so good.

The next night rolled around, and we had business as usual. It had worked like I figured it would; buster couldn't keep his mouth closed. He had gone back to camp and bragged to the boys. His buddies made no bones about calling him a liar. This made him sore, but made me very happy. He wanted to prove how solid he was in with Esty; so about nine-thirty, he ambled up behind her and put his arm around her, while the boys watched. She picked up a bottle and told him that if he kept bothering her, she'd tell her husband to make mincemeat out of his face.

That slayed the boys in the booths, and they rolled around and split their sides. I had told Esty what to do if this ever happened, and she had handled it perfectly. Our boy was really mad now, and he made a bee line for me.

"What gives, Doc? Last night, I'm her secret love; tonight she wants to brain me."

"You said the word, stupid. Secret. I tipped you to that before you started. If you can't play it that way, drop the whole deal. Forget about Esty."

He was hot on the trail now, and there wasn't any chance of him dropping it. So he cooled himself off with a couple of beers. He was waiting for another date with Esty. I let him wait. Tonight was one of the nights her husband picked her up.

He waited for two more nights, and then I made another date for him. Meanwhile, he was getting desperate, and his eyes followed every move she made around the bar. The other soldiers noticed it, and began to figure he had gone nuts over Esty. They kept an eye on him, because it looked like he was getting set to bother her at any minute. Their thinking suited me fine.

It went this way for three weeks, husband three nights a week, the punk, a couple of nights. He was so determined to add Esty to his string, that his tongue was hanging out. He was sitting at the bar one night, watching her as usual, when I let him have a clincher.

"Esty says her old man has guard duty tomorrow night. He won't be able to make it. And something else. I don't know what she means, but she says to tell you she can't hold out any longer. See her tomorrow night."

He took the bait. All he could think of was how he had arrived at last. I could've told him anything at all, and he'd have swallowed it.

When the husband came in later, he was looking around like he'd heard some rumors he didn't like. He asked Esty if anyone had been bothering her, but she gave him a few pats on the cheek and passed it off. I saw her searching her pocketbook, and she mentioned that she'd lost her compact someplace. Her husband told her he'd buy another one for her, and they left. I began to make the final preparations.

I had a gun under the bar. The city said I could have one for protection, but they wanted me to be careful about using it for any old reason. I checked it, made sure it was loaded, and put it back in place. Then I took out a little automatic, that I had gotten hold of, and checked it. It was a wicked looking little thing, and as I loaded it, I thought about what a shame it was to part with it. But an investment is an investment.

When it was ready, I put it down under the bar rag, a few inches from mine. Then, with everything set in my mind, I got a good night of sleep. Tomorrow was the day, and if everything went on schedule, we were in. I counted hundred dollar bills, instead of sheep.

Early in the morning, I called

Esty and told her to come over. She was there in fifteen minutes, and I gave her the lowdown.

"So that's it, Esty," I told her. "Tonight we wrap it up."

She took it in stride, but she had her doubts. She'd thought I was going to hire somebody to do the job, somebody who'd knock off her husband at camp.

"Nope, it's going to be right here. Right in this bar, after closing time. When you hire somebody, that's one more to worry about. Now, remember, I want you to play your part good."

"I'll hold up my end," she said, and I had to laugh, thinking how many guys would like to hold up her end for her. But I went ahead and explained the deal to her, and she liked it fine. That was that, until that evening.

The fish sat at the bar all evening, guzzling beer and drooling over what he thought was coming. Ever so often, he'd glance over toward the other soldiers, with the look of a man who had finally won. I could see that they didn't know what to make of it.

Five minutes before closing time, I cleared the place of those that could walk, and threw out those that couldn't. Then I closed the door. As soon as the latch clicked, my boy was headed for Esty. He got a stranglehold on her, and she didn't give him any argument.

By sitting on my stool, I could see over the paint, which reached halfway up my front windows. The nearest military police were down the street, helping a bartender get rid of some last minute drunks. I also saw what I wanted to see most, Esty's husband. He was a few feet away, coming fast, because he was late.

I slipped off the stool and unlocked the door. Junior was still loving all over my barmaid, and planning where they could go for privacy. She looked at me, and I gave her the signal. She screamed and started wrestling all over the place. I gave a roar, telling him to leave that girl alone, and hubby walked in with perfect timing.

It took him three long steps to reach the kid, who was a little bewildered, and two-thirds drunk. After a couple of raps in the puss from the husband, he sobered some, and threw a few of his own. When they had marked each other up pretty good, I made another check at the window. It was still all clear.

I grabbed both guns from under the bar and went around the end to where the action was. I covered them both, ordering them to stand up. They wrestled around some more, until they saw the rods. Then they came unstuck in a hurry. I made one stand on one side, and one on the other. When they were both standing and looking at me, I shot Esty's husband twice.

Lover boy swiveled his head to watch the guy go down. I put a bullet from my own rod through

the side of his head. He hit the floor without a moan. I didn't have to look out the window again; I knew the cops were on their way. I wiped the automatic clean, stuck it in the punk's hand, and jumped over the bar. I stood there with my gun dangling from my mitt, and a shocked look on my face. Meanwhile, Esty went into her act, falling down on her husband's body, and sobbing to beat hell.

Five seconds later, the police were all over the joint. Two cops were holding back a mob of curious soldiers, who had run over from the bus station. I saw some of my regular customers in the group. Fine.

The city police were restoring order and asking me what had happened. I tried to explain, but the noise was terrific. Esty was still wailing, and a military cop was trying to comfort her. The soldiers at the door were all yakking at once.

Then this guy in a business suit walked in. He introduced himself to the cop in charge and took over. In a few minutes, he had Esty quiet. Then he went to the door, picked out three soldiers that knew the dead boys, and ran the rest off. In a minute, he was staring me in the face. He was as polite as hell and looked like an insurance salesman. I started to wonder if the F.B.I. was using rocket ships. He cleared me up.

"You're the owner of this establishment, aren't you, Mr. Florin?"

"That's me. You'll have to excuse me if I get a little mixed up here. This was a terrible thing."

"Certainly, Mr. Florin, I understand. My name is Dally. I'm with the Army Criminal Investigation Department."

I was relieved to hear that. I figured I'd rather have a Dally from the army, then some dilly from the Feds. But this boy is no dummy either. He stayed calm and asked questions in a nice relaxed manner.

"Could you tell us what happened here, Mr. Florin?"

"Look," I said, "call me Doc, willya? Everytime you pull that 'Mr. Florin' I look around behind me."

He gave me a big smile and nodded. Then he repeated his question.

"Here's as much as I can tell you. That girl works for me. Good worker, steady, quiet, never any trouble. That fellow there was her husband. The other one was a nut. He wanted Esty to go out with him. She wouldn't give in."

"Did she ever go out with him, Mr.–excuse me, Doc?"

"Not him, or anybody else. You can ask these soldiers you brought in. Plenty tried, but she was straight with her husband. But that boob wouldn't take no for an answer."

"Did she ever complain to you, about him forcing his attentions on her?"

"Yes sir, she did. But my busi-

ness depends on good will here, and I hated to have trouble. Only it was getting to where I knew I'd have to tell this kid to stay out of here."

Dally made a few notes in his book and told me to keep talking. I did.

"Tonight, he was sitting at the bar when we closed. He said he needed a few bucks till payday and wanted to know if I'd lend him some. I told him I would, because he knows I've lent to other steady customers, off and on."

The three soldiers are nodding that this was so, and Dally noted that. I kept talking. "I cleared the bar and closed the door. Then I went behind the bar to get the money for the kid. When I looked up, he was over there grabbing at Esty. I guess he just couldn't believe she didn't like him. He started to rough her up a little."

I stopped a minute and shook my head as if I couldn't believe the thing had happened. Dally was sympathetic and waited.

"When I yelled at him to let her go," I said, "he didn't pay any attention. He had so much booze in him, I guess he didn't care. Then Esty's husband walked in. When he saw what was happening, he tore into the kid. They were both pretty strong, but the husband was sore. He started to get the best of the kid, and when that happened, the kid jumped back. His hand went into his pocket. When it came out, there was a gun in it."

I pointed at the automatic, and Dally went over and had a look at it. In a minute he came back.

"Did you ever see him with the gun before?"

"If he had it, he never showed it to me. Tonight was the first time I ever saw it."

"Okay, Doc. After he drew the gun, what happened?"

"I snatched my gun from under the bar and told him to drop that automatic. He was out of his head, didn't pay any attention to me. When I saw he meant to shoot, I blasted at him. Too late. Before I hit him, he'd put two shots into that poor devil."

The C.I.D. man thanked me and said he'd see me later. Then he talked to Esty. Between sobs, she backed up everything I had said. Then the agent took statements from the three soldiers. They told him the bum had been bothering Esty. In fact, he had bragged to one of them, just that morning, that he was going to nail her tonight. Perfect!

Dally looked at the bodies again, picked up the gun with a pencil, and talked with the cops for a few minutes. While they talked, the meat wagon came and carted the stiffs away.

Then I said to Dally, "Sir, I hope this is gonna be all right. I don't want my place to get a bad name. It would wreck business."

"I don't think it will reflect on you, Doc. It could've happened anywhere."

"What happens now?" I asked.

"Not too much," he told me. "We have to make a routine check on the case. The police have given you a clean bill on your gun, and they'll keep it at the station for a few days as evidence. If we need further help from you, we will call. Otherwise, I don't believe you'll be inconvenienced again."

That was fine with me, and I was glad to see him go. They took Esty along to get a formal statement from her, and that worried me a little. But she was back in an hour, telling me they had treated her fine. We went into the back room and had a good laugh.

"I have to hand it to you, Doc. You know your business."

"You're not bad yourself, kid. That crying spell was a real heartbreaker. I wish I'd met you fifteen years ago."

After we were done patting each other on the back, I sent her home.

Next afternoon, I opened as usual. I had decided to leave the bloodspots on the floor. It makes the curious people happy. Boy, what a business I did that night. We were packed. Everybody wanted a beer in the place where the bartender blasted guys. They wanted a look at the girl guys killed each other for, but I had ordered Esty to stay home for that night. She was supposed to be grieving.

Things ran smoothly for a week, and I was making enough to keep me happy. We hadn't heard from the insurance yet. I had spent that money so many times in my imagination, that I was beginning to get impatient.

It was a Saturday afternoon, eight days after the shooting, and I had been open about an hour. One sergeant, with a three day pass, was leaning on the end of the bar, nursing a brew. Otherwise, the place was deserted. I looked up, and saw Dally enter. There was another guy with him. I gave them the big welcome.

"Glad to see you, sir. Have one on the house."

I didn't figure he'd take one, but he did, and introduced his friend as Agent Horner. I offered him a beer, too, but he turned it down. He acted a little nervous.

"Well," I asked Dally, "what's new?"

"It's just about cleaned up, Doc. But frankly, the boys at headquarters are a little puzzled about a couple of things. You were so cooperative before, that we felt we could ask you to clear them up for us."

"Say the word, say the word."

"The first thing is, both you and Mrs. Maddox stated that she had never gone out with this fellow that shot her husband. Is that right?"

"That's right, Mr. Dally. Like I said, she's a good kid."

"I see. Now this other oddity.

I understand that you had never seen this automatic before—the one used to kill the husband."

"Right again. I have my own gun under the bar, and that's plenty. If I ever saw a soldier with a gun, I'd report him. I can't afford to have one get stewed and shoot up my bar."

This Horner was looking at me kind of fishy, but Dally hadn't changed expression.

"That is the way we remembered your statement, Doc. And those are the parts we can't figure. You see, while we were making a check on the boy's belongings and things, we went through his car. We came up with a compact, that has been identified as Estelle's."

The more he talked, the less I liked the deal. I didn't want them working on Etsy and so I tried to alibi the compact.

"Maybe the guy stole it from her. He was so nutty, he might have wanted a souvenir."

"We considered that possibility, Doc. But if he did, he put it in a peculiar place. We found it down behind the rear seat. You know, where it might be if there were funny doings. But we can get back to that. This other part is even stranger."

By now I had worked up a mild sweat. I tried to keep a dead pan and motioned him to go on.

"We checked that automatic pretty carefully," he told me. "You know, to try and see where the boy obtained it. We checked the butt, barrel, trigger, looking for prints. Only the kid's showed up. But you load an automatic by shoving the clip up into the handle. Since you know a lot about guns, you might explain something to us. If a man never saw a gun, how would his prints get on the clip, and on a couple of the shells?"

I made a grab for my gun under the bar; then remembered that it was at the police station. It wouldn't have mattered anyway. Horner had an army forty-five staring me in the face. Dally came up with the cuffs and respectfully requested me to accompany him to headquarters. He said I could meet Esty there.

They searched my room and found the contract Esty had signed for me. After that, there was nothing to it.

The fellows sat quiet for a few minutes, then Red says, "What happened when you got to the station, Doc?"

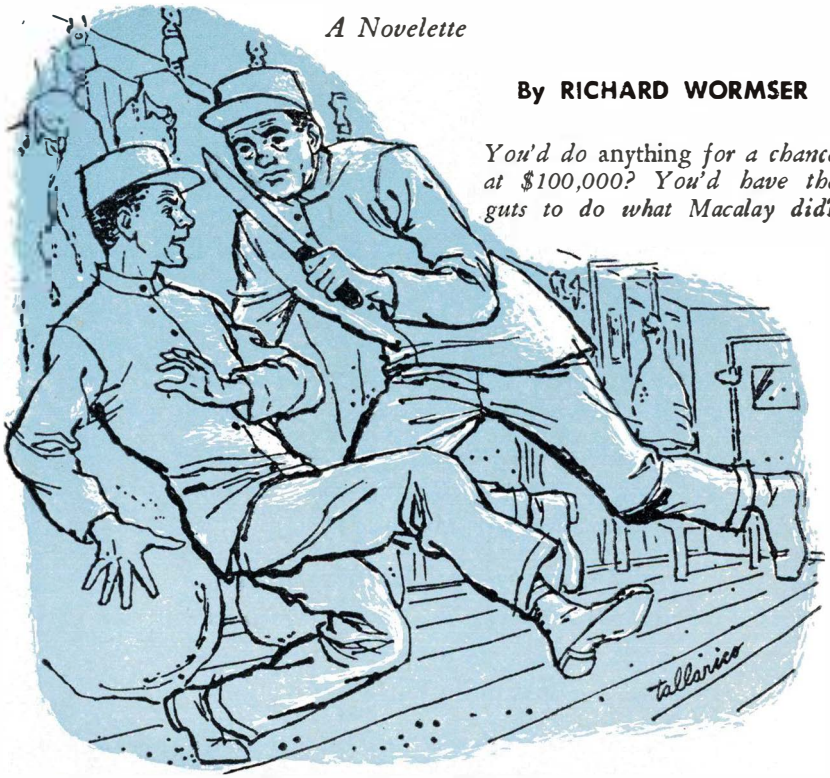
Before I could answer, the guard came by and told us it was time for headcount. We lined up for the march to the cell block. I didn't get time to finish the story for the fellows today. Well, no sweat on that account. I've got time. Boy, have I got time!

Man with a Skiv

A Novelette

By RICHARD WORMSER

You'd do anything *for a chance at $100,000? You'd have the guts to do what Macalay did?*



I.

THEY CAME through the prison gate, sixteen of them, handcuffed two by two, with four city policemen to deliver them to the prison. They saw their first convict in the shower room, a trusty who took their civilian clothes and thumbed them to the showers. Afterwards, they went along one at a time, and Macalay found himself in a barber chair. Clippers ran over his hair, and he was out again.

He looked down at his chest. His number was 116911. No. His name was that; he was 116911. And would be for quite a while.

He'd been here before, on business, to question prisoners. But it

was different now. He was not a visitor with a badge in his pocket and a gun checked at the main gate, with a name and a job, a salary and a whistle to blow if the guards were slow letting him out. He was 116911, in a blue denim suit that was too tight across the shoulders and too long in the legs. But he was still big and he still looked like a cop was supposed to look. A cop for a mural or a Police Athletic League poster. He had the requirements, size and an ugly sort of handsomeness.

From his new viewpoint, he saw, somewhat to his surprise, that the guards did very little more than stand around. The actual bossing was done by trusties. Trusties had issued them their clothes; trusties formed them into lines. Now a trusty marched them to an isolation barracks. "You'll be here three weeks," he said. "Till the doc's sure you ain't gonna break out with something an' infect us tenderer guys. I'm your barracks leader; the guys call me Nosy."

One of the new fish said: "This is like the Marine Corps all over again."

"If you was in the Marines, I don't know how we won any wars," Nosy said calmly. "Okay. There's a bed for each of you. A shelf at the top, box at the bottom. There's a john through that door. You can't go no place but in here, but if you want lib'ary books, write 'em out, any they'll bring 'em to ya. Any questions you got ask me now."

Macalay said: "Can we have pencil and paper?"

Nosy didn't answer.

One of the other cons said: "How about radios?"

"There's headsets under your shelves, hooked into the prison system . . . No more questions? I'll write a duty after each guy's name, put it on the bulletin board here. That door leads to my room."

"How about you picking up an infection from us?" the former Marine asked.

Nosey said: "Let's see, you're Rodel, aren't you? Why, Rodel, the warden figgers anything I haven't had'd be plain interesting. Keep the doc on his toes."

Nosy stood up and tacked the sheet on the bulletin board and went into his room.

Macalay said: "Seems like a nice kind of guy."

Nobody said anything. One by one the men got up and looked at their assignments. Rodel got to take care of the washbasins; he told a con named Beales: "You gotta call me mister. You're the wiper of the johns; you gotta look up to me."

After awhile Macalay went and looked, too. He turned from the list. "Hey, my name isn't here."

Nobody answered him. He went and knocked on Nosy's door. Nosy yelled a "come in," and when the door was opened could be seen stretched out on a cot with two mattresses, holding a magazine.

Macalay said: "You forgot to give me any work."

Nosy stared at him silently and then went back to reading. After awhile, Macalay shut the door and went back to his cot. Somebody laughed, but when he looked around, there wasn't a smile in the barracks room.

So now he knew how it was going to be; how it was for a policeman who went to prison. You became a ghost, something that nobody could see or hear.

It wasn't good. But when he'd made the deal, he knew it wasn't going to be any bed of roses.

It had started in the rain. There were two of them, as per regulations, two patrolmen in a car, making the rounds. That Macalay wasn't physically fit, his right arm dislocated, was not according to regulations. They were listening to the traffic squad get all the calls while they—Gresham was driving, Macalay on the radio—tooled their weary way through the deserted commercial streets, the rain doing nothing for their spirits, the lack of calls letting them slowly down into a bog of indifference.

It was Macalay who saw the light, just a flicker of it, in the window of a second story salesroom. His hand on Gresham's arm stopped the car, and they both watched, and then they were sure of it. There was a flashlight up there.

So they had gone up, Gresham first, and found the bars in the jewelry place cut away, the electric warning system carefully extracted, as Macalay had dissected angleworm nerves in high school biology. They saw the three men at the safe with the burning-torch, but they never saw the other two.

After that it was all noise and guns; Gresham dead and one of the safecrackers dying; Macalay in a corner with his right shoulder, the bum shoulder, shot and all the rest of him bruised as a .45 bruises a man; the other four getting away, and later the sergeant's car and the lieutenant's car, the headquarters car and the loft-squad truck all screaming down below.

And the ambulance and the trip to the hospital and the brass standing around his bed arguing and questioning.

And finally the hospital orderly—how honest can a skid-row whitecoat get?—coming in and turning over the little paper to the inspector. The little paper with two diamonds folded in it that they had found in Macalay's shoe, just where he had put them before blacking out trying to help Gresham, who was already beyond help.

After that, it got slower. He talked with Inspector Strane and they'd come to an understanding. He'd had a choice to make—which of two eight balls he'd get behind. And then there was the trial, and the district attorney who had asked the chair for Macalay: "If a man

is committing a felony, such as grand larceny, and anyone gets killed as a result of said felony, he is guilty of murder under the law."

But the jury had only given him ten to twenty. Ten years to twenty years in the pen. A reporter in the courtroom had said: "It doesn't matter. Send a cop to prison, and the cons'll knock him off anyway." And this reporter, of course, didn't know about the deal between Macalay and Strane which made a special target out of Macalay for the cons . . .

So here he was. In Isolation Barracks No. 7, bed No. 11. With a con on either side of him, and cons across the room; but nobody to speak to. He talked to them but he never got an answer, and even when the prison doctor came around once a day, he grunted at Macalay, though he made jokes with the other fresh fish.

All things pass. The three weeks went by without a contagious disease showing up and Macalay—116911—was put in a regular cellblock, No. 9, on the second tier, and given a regular job, running a stitching machine in the shoe shop.

The clerks who assigned the jobs were almost all trusties, and they would have given him hard labor, but his shoulder hadn't completely recovered from the bullet wound and the old injury that kept throwing the collar bone out of place. It had been weak and strained the night he'd seen the light in the jewelry-loft; that was why poor Gresham had gone up the stairs first.

If it hadn't been for the shoulder, it would have been Macalay dead and Gresham wounded, and sometimes 116911 thought it might have been better that way.

The needles used on a power leather sewing machine are strong, sharp. Set in the end of a piece of broom handle, one of them makes a lovely shiv. Coming to his machine one morning, Macalay found his needle missing. He went to the foreman, his lie prepared.

"I forgot to tell you last night. My needle broke just as I finished work."

The foreman looked him over. "Okay. Bring me the broken parts and I'll sign a new one out to you."

"I threw the broken pieces in the scrap bin. Last night."

The foreman was a civilian. He raised his hand, and a guard came over. "Take him to the P.K. Keep an eye on him; he stole a needle."

As the guard marched Macalay out of the shoe shop, all the cons were, for once, bent hard over their work. But he thought he caught a couple of smiles.

The Principal Keeper was no gentleman; he left all that to the warden. When the guard lined Macalay up in front of him and said: "116911. Stole a needle from the shoe shop," the P.K. hardly looked up. He just said: "Search him," picked up a phone and said:

"Search 32a, cell block 9," and went on with his paper work.

Before the block guards could call back, Macalay was stripped and searched standing at attention, naked in front of the P.K.'s desk. When the call came back that there was no contraband in the cell, the P.K. sighed and got up from behind his desk. He walked slowly around to face Macalay.

"Where's the needle?"

Macalay said: "It broke. I threw it in the trash bin last night."

The P.K. brought the heel of his shoe down on Macalay's naked toes. "Where is it?" He twisted the heel a little. It was not made of rubber.

Macalay said: "I don't know."

The P.K. hit him in the belly. "Stand at attention," he said, when Macalay bent over involuntarily. "And call me sir. Where is it?"

Macalay found a little wind left in him and said: "I don't know, sir."

The P.K. bawled "Parade rest." Spray from his mouth landed on Macalay's face.

Macalay advanced one foot, and started to clasp his hands in front of him. As soon as he separated his legs, the P.K. brought his knee up between them, hard. Macalay passed out.

He came to in the Hole, in solitary. He was still naked, but there was a suit of coveralls and a pair of felt slippers in his cell. He put them on, and had to walk bent over, because the coveralls were too short. The slippers were too big.

Nobody tapped on his water pipes, nobody put a message in his oatmeal for two weeks. That was what he ate—a big bowl of oatmeal once a day, put in a Judas-gate in the door every morning, together with a half-gallon jug of water. The Judas-gate only opened one way at a time, so he didn't know if his food was brought by a trusty or a guard.

That went on for two weeks. Towards the end of that time, Macalay began to have an illusion; he imagined Gresham's dead body was in the cell with him. When he moved from one side of the Hole to the other, the body slowly moved after him. It took a lot of effort not to think about contacting Inspector Strane and begging him to call the whole thing off.

When he got back to cell block No. 9, he had a new bunky. It didn't matter to Macalay; none of the cons talked to him anyway. He sat down on his bunk, and the thin mattress and chain-link spring felt wonderful after the floor of the Hole. He pulled his feet up, stretched, and slowly, tentatively closed his eyes; the light hurt them.

The body of Gresham came back and lay on the floor of the cell. But in a few minutes it faded, and Macalay let out a long sigh.

The man on the other bunk put down his magazine. "What did you see?" he asked.

"A body," Macalay said. "He was my sidekick."

"I saw my mother," the other man said. "The time I was in the Hole. Everybody sees something, if he stays in the Hole more than three days."

Macalay said: "Does anybody—" and then stopped. He suddenly realized he was being talked to. He finished the sentence. "Does anybody ever get less than three days in the Hole?"

"Not under this P.K.," the cellmate said. "If he don't end up with a shiv in his ribs, the class of prisoners has fallen off in this can . . . My name's Mason. Jock Mason."

"Macalay."

"Yeah, I know. You were a cop, Mac. We're willing to forget it. My gang. Jock's Jockeys. If you'd said somebody lifted your needle, all the guys in the shoe shop woulda gotten hacked. We like a guy who keeps his teeth covered."

Macalay slowly grinned. It never occurred to him to say he might not like to be one of Jock's Jockeys. He said: "Hey. What are we doin' in our cells?"

Jock laughed. "It's Sunday morning. Church parade's just gone, an' lunch'll be coming up in an hour . . . A guy loses track of time in the Hole, an' don't I know it. There's a ball game this afternoon, the Stripes against the Stars. Who do you like?" Jock slowly rolled himself a cigarette and tossed the makings over to Macalay.

Macalay built a cigarette carefully. He hadn't smoked in four years, but he thought he knew how to roll one from when he was a kid. It looked a little like a tamale, but it held together while he lighted it. He said: "I'll take either side you don't want, for a pack of tailor-mades—when I earn them." The cons got a quarter a day when they worked.

Jock said: "You got the Stars. It's a sucker bet."

"Yeah? They'll lick the numbers off the Stripes."

Both men laughed.

2.

Life changed after that. A prison is a peculiar place; almost everything happens in one that happens in the outside, free world; but it happens fast, in odd corners, just before a guard walks by, just after one has passed.

So Macalay, as one of Jock's Jockeys, found he could get drunk if he really wanted to; could get as many uncensored letters out as he wanted to; could even have a love affair—if he cared for it, and with a boy who should have been in a women's prison—or an asylum —anyway.

He passed up the latter two amusements, but once in a while he took on a skinful. Ten to twenty's a hard sentence to pass, and he'd done less than six months of it.

So he was in on the drunk in

Boiler No. 4, which made prison history.

No. 4 was a power boiler, not a heating one, and it was out of commission while a bunch of cons scaled it. Fitz Llewellen, a lifer, was in on the scaling gang, and he designed a still out of some of the boiler tubes they were cleaning. Since no guard in his right mind would possibly go inside a boiler, the still ran all the time they were chipping No. 4; but Fitz and Jock wouldn't let anybody touch the white mule till the day before the boiler was cleaned.

There were six of them in there: Fitz, Jock, Macalay, the Nosy who had been a trusty when Mac was a fresh fish, and two safecrackers named Hanning and Russ, friends Macalay had cultivated with a great show of casualness, and persuaded Jock to take into their gang.

They passed the popskull around gently at first, with a lot of "will-you-please" and "your turn." It was pretty good jungle juice; made out of oranges and prunes lifted from the mess hall. Jock's habitual easy gloom lifted, and he began singing, the tenor notes bouncing back off the boiler plate. "Singin' in the rain, oh singin' in the rain . . ."

"Shut up," Russ said. "A screw'll hear you."

Jock said: "A guy can't shut up forever. I feel good." He went on singing.

Russ said: "You may want a month in the Hole. I don't. Shutup."

"Hole ain't so bad," Jock said. "Ask Mac. He was there last."

Macalay said: "Not so bad. But I don't want any more of it."

"You used to be a cop, didn't you?" Russ asked.

Macalay nodded. It was the first time it had been mentioned.

"I don't like cops," Russ said. He drained a big swallow of popskull, and breathed out. "I don't like cops' brothers. I don't like ex-cops, an' any woman who'd give birth to a cop would sleep with monkeys." And he took another drink.

"Okay," Macalay said, telling himself to take it slow and easy, to feel his way along. "Now I'm a con, just like anybody else." It was hot in the boiler, and the liquor didn't help any. That stuff must have been a hundred and thirty proof at least, and they were drinking it straight.

"I don't like drinking with cops," Russ said monotonously. "I don't like drinking with cops' cellmates. I don't have to listen to cops' cellmates sing."

"You're just beggin' for a throat full of teeth," Jock said, still humming.

"Oh, tough guy," Russ said. His hand flicked, and there was a little round of wood in it; a piece of broomstick, but carved carefully to give it looks. It opened, and one piece had a leather-needle sticking out of it. The other had been the sheath.

"Put it away Russ," Hanning said. He was a very quiet guy, who

had only drifted into buddying with Russ because they'd been in the same trade in the free world, loftmen.

"You turnin' cop-lover, too?" Russ asked. His speech was getting a little blurred. He turned the brad-awl shiv, and it shone in the dim light.

Jock suddenly shot out his foot, trying to kick the shiv out of Russ' hand. Russ slid away, and stood up, his back against the polished boiler plate. "Now we know," he said. "Now we know." He started going for Jock.

Macalay got his feet under him. Why couldn't it be some con other than Russ? Lousy luck. There was no other way to make the play now. Maybe, with Jock, he could get the shiv away and later, when sober, Russ would appreciate it.

The floor of the boiler was slick from the chipping they had given it. It was going to be a nasty fight; but Macalay needed Russ alive. He must try to keep him alive.

Fitz was gone; Nosy was halfway up the ladder. Before he could disappear through the manhole, Hanning was after him. The light was blocked a second time, and then Jock and Macalay were alone with the safecracker.

Jock said: "Got a shiv, Mac?"

Macalay said: "No. But there's only one of him. I'll keep him looking at me, and you get up behind him and mug him."

Jock said: "Fair enough."

Russ was bent over, shuffling around the boiler floor, the shiv held out, threateningly and guarding his belly at the same time. He moved into the center of the boiler, and that was a mistake. Jock started to get behind him, he half-turned, and Macalay was on him.

Macalay had had judo training as a rookie cop. He lunged at the knife with his right hand, and as it came up, shifted and came in fast with his left. The knife edge of his palm caught Russ on the side of the neck, and the safecracker went half off his feet.

Then everything turned into slow motion. Russ caromed off the side of the boiler, slid and staggered, and fell. He landed square on the leather needle in his hand. He made a little, quiet noise—almost like a tired man snuggling into bed—and was still.

Jock and Macalay stared at each other across his body. After a moment Jock bent down and felt his pulse. "Okay," he said. "Okay. He's had it."

Macalay said: "I guess we have, too." He shook his head. "No way of getting out of this. No way." And by the emphasis, he included his chance of beating the rap per Strane's agreement.

Jock said: "We can try. It's hot out there. Maybe the screw's gone off to hunt himself some shade . . . If we can get to the kitchen, and be bumming chow, the boys there'll give us an alibi."

Macalay said: "We have a chance. Those damn guards don't work too hard."

Jock went up the ladder first. Macalay was so close behind him that he almost got his fingers stepped on. They clambered through the manhole, and out onto the boiler top, and dropped down on the brick floor of the boiler room.

Nobody was around. The heating furnaces were off for the summer; the con in charge of the power boilers was around on the other side, where the gauges were. It was almost as hot on the boiler room floor as it had been inside the boiler, or at least it seemed that way.

They made it to the door, and out, and walked along the side of the powerhouse towards the kitchen, the next building. The yard was deserted in the heat. Jock said: "The P.K. done us a favor, when he thought he was piling it on us, making us chip that boiler. We're gonna get away with it."

Macalay said: "We haven't yet."

Jock said: "No. We ain't. I got an ace in the hole. I've been saving it. If we can make the kitchen I think I'll play it."

"This is the big hand," Macalay said. "Play your ace. This is murder." The goose that could lay the hundred-grand egg for him had been murdered.

"Self defense," Jock said quickly. "Ain't no fingerprints on that shiv except his."

Macalay laughed. "By the time the P.K. gets through, there'll be fingerprints. Yours, mine. That P.K. lives to see us all fixed, but good."

A hundred feet from the kitchen, ninety feet. Their shoes seemed to have lead soles, like they'd dressed for diving. The sweat poured steadily down Macalay's back. Abruptly, he wanted to stand in the scorched yard and scream: "I'm not a criminal. I'm not a con! I don't belong with these men, this isn't me!"

You're shook, he told himself. Take it easy. Remember, this is the eight-ball you picked.

Fifty feet, forty feet. The whole traverse wasn't taking more than two minutes. But hours went by inside Macalay's brain, years of aging were being piled on his body. He told himself, trying to make a joke of it, that his arteries would be hardened before he got to the kitchen.

He found the joke didn't amuse him.

Now the loathesome smell of greasy stew bubbling was strong in their noses. There should have been a guard outside the kitchen door; there wasn't. The P.K. was so bad that the guards doped off half the time, smoking and lounging in a shady area behind the infirmary. The P.K. himself stayed out of the yard as much as possible.

The Warden was writing a book on the reform of criminals. The Deputy Warden toured around the

United States making speeches about the Warden's pet theories.

It was a hell of penitentiary, but it had a kitchen and they were almost there.

And then they were inside. Macalay followed Jock around the edge of the big room, past cons peeling vegetables, washing pots, past baker-cons and cook-cons and salad-maker-cons. There were supposed to be civilian chefs, but the jobs were never filled, and the budget came out nicely at the end of the year, if the food didn't.

Somewhere Jock snatched two white caps, and they put them on. They bellied in to a sink where a punk named Snifter was scrubbing grills with a red brick. Each of them snatched up a brick and went to work. Macalay noticed that Jock was very careless with the dirty water that came off the grease-caked grill; he splashed it on his clothes, it ran down on his shoes. After a moment Macalay got the idea too; and in a couple of minutes he looked as though he'd been working in the kitchen all morning.

His stomach began to unknot, his arteries to soften.

A trusty-messenger went by, carrying invoices from the kitchen to the front office. Jock stepped back and blocked his way. Jock's lips hardly moved, and his voice was faint even as close as Macalay was.

"Bud, take a message for me. To a screw named Sinclair. You know him, don't you?"

"Yeah," the trusty said. "Big pot-bellied guy with a brown moustache."

"The one," Jock said. "Tell 'im I wanna see him. Here. Now."

"S'posin' he don't want to see you?"

"Tell him I just got a letter from a friend of his in ElkoNevada."

"Okay," said the trusty. "You owe me a favor." You got nothing for nothing in the can.

Jock nodded, and stepped in to the sink again, started scrubbing. A con pushed a load of grills up and dumped them in the sink, and more greasy water splashed over them. Macalay said: "Watch what you're doin', stir-bum."

"Who's a stir-bum, you stir-bum?"

The grease from the grills was a solid coating on Macalay's arms now, and its taste, and the taste of the blue air of the kitchen, was all down his throat. He said: "Isn't this enough grills?"

Jock said: "I'm waiting for Sinclair."

All this time the punk named Snifter scrubbed grills between them, not saying anything, apparently not hearing anything. Macalay realized that the punk was scared to death at being between Jock and one of his Jockeys, a tough yard gang. Macalay wondered what Snifter would do if he knew why Macalay and Jock were scrubbing grills, and remembering why

they were there, made the filthy work a lot easier to take.

And here came Sinclair, a paunchy guy, with a moustache that probably would have been gray if he hadn't chewed tobacco. There were grease spots on his gray shirt and blue pants, and tarnish on his badge. "You Jock?" he said.

Jock nodded. "One time of Elko Nevada," he said. "With lots of friends there."

Sinclair chewed the moustache, and looked at Macalay and Snifter. "Blow."

Jock said: "Snifter can blow. Macalay's a friend of mine. From ElkoNevada."

Snifter sidled away, happily.

"What's all this about Elko, Nevada?" Sinclair said. Unlike Jock he did not say it as though it was all one word.

"Mac and I have been here all morning. When we reported to the job we were supposed to do, it was all done, and you went through the yard and told us to report to the kitchen."

Sinclair spat brown juice on the kitchen floor. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," Jock said. "And you never held up Horse Caner's gambling joint in ElkoNevada and you never shot his brother and one of the faro-dealers. Never."

Macalay watched Sinclair. The pig eyes of the guard never showed anything, not fear, not anger. "When did all this happen?"

"Five minutes after the first shift started this morning," Jock said.

Sinclair said: "Okay. What job was it that was finished?"

"Chipping boilers."

Sinclair started away. From five feet he turned back. "And stay away from Nevada."

"Never even heard of the place," Jock said.

"It's a no-good state," Sinclair said, and kept on going.

Macalay let out his breath as far as it would go. Then he hated to breathe in again because of the blue grease-smoke in the kitchen. "That was quite an ace."

Jock nodded, sadly. He had given up on the grills, was trying to get the grease off his hands. "Yeah," he said. "A pal got the word to me when he heard I was coming here. I hated to play that hole ace. I really hated to."

3.

This time there were five naked men lined up in front of the P.K.'s desk. The P.K. looked very happy; he had the look of a man who'd hit oil digging a sewer. There was old Fitz, there was Hanning, Nosy, Jock and Macalay.

The P.K. said: "Okay. I'm paid by the year; I don't mind waiting. You were the guys on the chipping gang with Russ. This morning we go to put the boiler back in service, and he's in there stinking dead. And we've had the state cops looking for him for three days. So what

happened?" He glared at them.

Nobody said anything. The P.K. leaned back in his desk. A triangular stand of wood on it said his name was J. Odell, and he was Principal Keeper. Macalay wondered vaguely what the J stood for, but he didn't ask.

"I don't take it kindly that for three days the papers have been full of I let a con escape," the P.K. said. "I don't take it kindly on account of the people don't remember it wasn't so. They think they remember I got a leaky jug. It ain't good."

None of the cons said anything. It was still hot weather, and their bodies glistened. Macalay wondered if the P.K. was a little queer, the way he liked to question naked cons. It could very well be. A homo and a sadist would be two nice things to say about the P.K.

You're thinking like a con, Macalay told himself. The P.K.'s just a sour guy who does all the work the Warden and the Deputy Warden should do. You find guys like that in police stations all over the country. Supposing they take it out in socking a prisoner now and then, it's understandable.

And a voice inside answered: "It depends on which side you stand. What a cop or a guard can understand doesn't make sense to a con or a suspect."

The P.K. said: "You guys were on the crew with Russ. One of you killed him."

Hanning said: "How did he die?"

A guard standing behind the five prisoners reached out with his swagger stick and whacked Hanning across the back. "Shut up."

"One of you knows how he croaked," the P.K. said. "It don't matter to the rest of you. I can throw the five of you into the Hole. But it's nice an' cool in the Hole now. So—" He turned to the guards. "I want five pairs of cuffs." He thought. "An' a piece of chain."

He was positively chuckling when the things were brought. "You guys like the boiler room so well, you're gonna see it. There was jungle juice in that boiler, there was a still. Having a good time, wasn't you?"

He had them handcuffed one to the other. The man at each end had one open cuff; the guard slipped a chain link over one of them, and then led the line of five, still naked, out of the office, down the stairs, across the exercise yard to the boiler room. The P.K. strolled along with them, his uniform coat open. He was whistling softly under his breath.

There was a guard on duty outside the boiler room this time. The word had gone out; the P.K. is in the yard. It wasn't a thing that happened very often; the screws were all on duty and at their posts. Some of them had even straightened their uniforms and tried to polish their badges.

The guard saluted, and the pro-

cession marched into the boiler room. There were cops, plain clothes and uniformed, from the State Police Force working around No. 4. The P.K. led his little show there and stopped.

He said: "You guys about through?"

A detective turned and grunted. "Nothing to find out here."

"Then scram."

The detective probably had a good deal of rank; he didn't seem to be used to that kind of talk. He said: "Huh?"

"Regulations say if there's a homicide in the prison, I gotta let you guys look it over. So you looked. Now I'm taking it over my way. I'll call you tonight, let you know who croaked Russ."

The detective turned a blue-eyed gaze on the five naked men. "What the hell?"

"They're gonna talk. Probably only one or two of 'em did the killing. The others'll be glad to squeal before I get through with them."

"Stuff you get that way don't stand up in court."

"This is my pen. It'll stand up here."

The P.K. reached out, grabbed the loose end of the chain, pulled it. The con to whose cuff it went gave a little yelp as the cuff bit into his wrist. The P.K. said: "You guys make a circle around the boiler. No. 5 here. Face the boiler and stand a foot away from it. He turned to the detective. "You think I'm cruel, cap? A cruel guy wouldn't give 'em that foot. But me, I got all the time in the world."

Macalay found it was hard to force himself to step that close to the boiler side. A faint cherry glow came out of it. But the bite on his wrist was more immediate and he stepped in. The P.K. fastened the chain so they were pinned there, in a circle whose radius was just a foot more than that of the boiler rim.

The detective-captain said angrily: "I don't want to see this."

"Then don't look," the P.K. said. "Get back in your dolly-cart an' go tour the pretty scenery. You state cops give me a pain. Inside here, we know what these guys are. Rats, all of 'em. Punks. Mebbe they act nice an' pretty for you, but once that gate closes on 'em, they show up for what they are."

The captain was not visible to Macalay any more. He said: "All right, boys, the Warden doesn't seem to need us anymore."

There was the shuffle of men moving together. There was the snarl of the P.K.'s voice. "I'm not the Warden. I'm just the lousy Principal Keeper."

But the heat had started now. Sweat streamed down his front, into his eyes, into his mouth when he gasped. He shut his eyes tight, and red flames flickered against the eyelids.

His wrists hurt, and he had to brace himself. The men on the other side of the circle were pulling back, trying to get away from the cherry-glow of the boiler wall, and that meant they were pulling him in. He braced his naked, aching feet, and pulled back, and across the boiler one of the men shrieked. He didn't know which one.

Old Fitz was next to him. Macalay heard him mutter: "We gotta hold our own."

The boiler room floor was greasy, the puddle of sweat didn't help. But he braced himself, and leaned backwards.

Jock's voice on the other side of the boiler yelped: "Give us a little slack here. Hanning's touching the metal!" Macalay realized then that the scream he'd heard had never stopped. He let up on the pull a little, and the screaming stopped, broke off into a mumbled wail.

The sweat had stopped, he suddenly realized. Guess there's just so much in a man, and his was gone.

Now his head began to go around, and his eyeballs began to swell. It was as though all the liquid left in his body had gone to his eyes. He was sure they would burst in a moment, and that seemed worse to him than dying. The picture of his eyes bursting, and their liquid spattering on the boiler wall and drying there became so real that he jerked back, and the scream came from the other side again.

He shook his head and came back to a sort of half-sanity, a limbo-land on the edge of reason. The P.K.'s gravelly voice came through to him: "All right, you lice. Anybody want to confess an' save four other guys' lives?"

He got no answer; perhaps he hadn't expected any. The voice deepened to a snarl: "All right. If you think I mind seeing the whole bunch of you shrivel up an' blow away, just keep your mouths shut. It don't matter to me."

The snarl went on. But Macalay had a new worry. Old Fitz on his left wrist had fainted. He fell forward, almost breaking Macalay's arm, and Macalay and Nosy, on either side of him, flipped him back, automatically, and held him there. The cuff bit through the skin and Macalay began to bleed. The blood running down his hand felt cool and nice.

Maybe I'll bleed to death and get out of this. Easy dough, Strane's kind, you can't take it along. Wouldn't it be nice to die, just to die?

A new noise cut over the P.K.'s growl. It was Nosy. "Got a guy passed out, sir. He's breaking my arm."

"Fine," the P.K. said, "fine. So talk, and get outta the daisy chain."

"How can I talk?" Nosy asked. "My arm's breaking."

"Let it break," the P.K. said. "Talk with your mouth."

"Go to hell," said Nosy.

Through the fog of his pain, he heard the P.K.'s feet tramping towards him. Grit on the boiler room floor ground under those big feet, and they did it on a note high enough to cut piercingly through Macalay's head and add one more pain to a system that was nearly all pain now.

The P.K. had kicked Nosy up against the boiler.

Nosy screamed, and jerked back, and Hanning on the other side screamed, and then Hanning's scream turned into words. "Macalay," he yelled. "Macalay an' Jock was the last two in the boiler with him. They did it, Jock and Macalay."

"All right," the Principal Keeper said. "Open the chain, boys. Take Hanning and Fitz and Nosy to the hospital. Lay the other two out on the floor here and throw a bucket of water on 'em."

Macalay felt hands on him, but he couldn't be sure what they were doing. But he did feel cooler, and there was some sensation left in his back, because he could feel the filth of the floor biting into his skin.

"G'wan," the P.K. said. "Throw some water on 'em."

Another voice said: "Sir, those burns'll blister if you hit them with cold water."

"So? Let 'em blister."

"I thought the Principal Keeper wanted them for trial. Any jury'd let them off if they get blistered."

"Who's going to try them?" The Principal Keeper was laughing now. "There wasn't any fingerprints on that shiv except Russ'; we'd never get a conviction. But if these crumbs had told me about Russ when it happened, the papers never would have printed that I'd let a guy escape. I want to teach these bums that they better keep clean with me. Throw some water on 'em and put 'em in the Hole. They gotta learn."

Macalay, for all his pain, laughed inside when he heard he was going to the Hole again. It was cool in the Hole, and this was summer. He could take it; he'd taken it before . . .

And once he'd been sorry for himself, just because he was in a detention cell in the city. Sorry for himself because he was lonely. That was why he had been so glad when Inspector Strane showed up.

Inspector Strane, William Martin Strane, was something in the Department; a man four years beyond the retirement age, the city council had had to pass a special law exempting him from retirement. Theoretically, Inspector Strane couldn't live forever; but the city, and the city's police, had no idea of what they would do when and if he died.

He didn't look like dying as he sat down on Macalay's bunk and stared at him from ice-colored eyes.

He didn't seem to have much time to waste on words. "Macalay, you had no business being on duty that night."

Macalay knew the Inspector, from hearsay and personal knowledge. You didn't kid around with him. He said: "No, sir."

Strane said: "I want to brief you on your physical condition. Seems you're not aware of it. Your right arm's gone out four times in the last two months. You dislocated it wrestling at the Y, and the civilian doctor you went to hasn't been able to fix it."

"No, sir. No, he hasn't."

"You got a physical exam coming up next month. You wouldn't be able to pass it, even if you had the chance to take it." The Inspector reached his leg out and squashed a cockroach under the sole of his high-laced kangaroo shoe.

Macalay said nothing.

"Hmph." Even the Inspector's grunt had an old-fashioned quality about it. "Some day you'll have to learn a trade. Clerk in an office or something."

Macalay shifted from one foot to the other. He didn't dare sit down until the Inspector asked him to.

"Listen, Macalay," the Inspector said. "Those jewels in your shoe weren't worth a million, but they were still worth a hell of a lot. Even if they were glass, you'd still be on a spot. You know that."

All Macalay said was: "Yes, sir."

"The Jewelers Association has posted a hundred thousand dollars reward for that gang, arrest and conviction. It's their sixth job."

He stopped, and Macalay waited. The Inspector pulled a narrow cigar out of his pocket and lit it. He half-closed his ice-cube eyes against the smoke. For a man with a reputation for bluntness, he was being surprisingly circuitous.

"That's a lot of money," Macalay said, to break the silence, wondering when Strane would get to the point.

"Yeah. Jewelers pay a lot of insurance. A gang like this raises the premium — y'know? These bums have heisted several million bucks' worth."

"You'd think they'd retire," Macalay said.

Inspector Strane stared at him, as though trying to figure out if this cop in a cell was trying to be funny. Finally, he concluded Macalay wasn't. He said: "Bums never got enough money. Their friends blackmail 'em; their dames cost money; the fences rook them. I never knew one to die rich."

Macalay had no observations to make on bums and their money problems.

Inspector Strane let the silence build; then he nodded, as though pleased with the young man. "Okay," he said. "You got the picture. Signify anything to you?"

Macalay shook his head slightly.

"You've not got too much to choose from," Inspector Strane said. "So. Why not take on this case? The Jewelers' Association's been talking to me. They want a man."

"Me?" Macaley laughed a non-funny laugh. "I'm sure as hell not going to be around.

Inspector Strane crossed his legs and the bunk creaked. He took the thin cigar from his mouth. "Why'd you take those diamonds? No crap now, Macalay."

"Like you said, Inspector: the doc told me I'd never pass another physical. They were right there for me to take. I'd just come to after being slugged and there they were. If I hadn't passed out trying to get to Gresham, I'd have got away with those stones."

Strane came as close to smiling as he ever got. "We want the bums who *have* been getting away with too damn much."

Macalay said: "And don't forget Gresham."

"You'd like to square things for him, wouldn't you?"

A silence hung between them. Strane wasn't getting to his point. Macalay figured he'd help him.

"You said something about a hundred thousand reward. That dough interests me."

"All right," Strane said, and then laid it on the line. He had given it to him like an itemized account. His offer and the alternatives, numbering them one to three, for definiteness as well as clarity: In return for information, Macalay would be sprung, his sentence whatever it might be, nullified. That plus the reward. If he failed, tough—Strane had no bargaining tools; he served his time. In either case, he ran the risk of a shiv in his gut by a con. There was only one thing worse, to a con's way of thinking, than a cop... and that was a double-crossing cop.

"Why go into the pen to crack this case?" Macalay wanted to know.

"We got no leads on the outside, that's why." Strane sounded annoyed. "Well?"

"A guy can live forever on a hundred grand. Live real well. His shoulder'll never bother him."

"You sound like I'm giving you a guarantee." Inspector Strane shook his head dolefully. "Bums don't talk, remember that." It was his standard word for crooks. "Especially to cops."

"They talk to other bums," Macalay said.

"Hmph." The Inspector's grunt belittled Macalay's confidence. "And there's another thing to remember. We go on working on this case on the outside. We crack it before you, the deal's over. You understand?"

"I still like the sound of that big lump of dough."

Inspector Strane nodded. "I just hope you're tough enough. Once you start on this, you know, there's

no out?" He spotted another cockroach; his foot went for it and got it. "Write when you've got something to tell me. My first two names, William Martin. On second thought, make it Miss Billie Martin. Tell her you miss her. The box number is 1151, here at the Central Post Office. The bum you're to get close to is a loft-man by the name of Russell. He's the brother of that safecracker who died right alongside of Gresham. That's about it."

4.

Macalay was four weeks in the Hole this time. But even in there, he could sense that his position in the prison had changed. The first time he'd gone to the Hole for not squealing, he hadn't known whether a prisoner or a screw brought his food; this time when he was in for not squealing under the toughest circumstances, he was sure it was a con.

Because in his very first tray there was a salve of burn ointment. And on the second tray there was a candle and a dozen matches.

After that there was a little something on nearly every tray; a few slices of bacon, a buttered roll, an orange even. Sometimes there was nothing, and that undoubtedly meant that a guard was looking over the trays. But that didn't happen very often, so probably the P.K. had gone back to sitting in his office, and the Warden was still working on his book and the Deputy Warden was still making speeches, and the screws were still doping off in the shade.

It was funny, now. Even in the Hole Macalay felt in touch with the whole prison, perhaps as a man giving a transfusion to a patient on the operating table feels in touch with the operation; it is passing through his veins and arteries. He never heard a word from Jock or anyone else, but he could feel himself in touch with Jock, in some other Hole.

Macalay was really part of the prison now, and the Hole wasn't so bad. And best of all there was Hanning, Russ' sidekick. Hanning who probably knew what Russ knew.

His burns healed, and the broken skin on his wrist healed, though his wrist bones ached for quite a while, and there were permanent scars there and on his knees and on one shoulder that must have gone against the boiler when he didn't know it.

Instead of fighting the Hole this time, he looked on it as a rest from chipping boilers or scrubbing greasy pans in the kitchen. Maybe it would have been better in the infirmary, but it was all right.

And so he got a little better all the time. He began exercising, doing knee-bends and push-ups. He told himself he was doing this to keep his health; then, when that

self-lie stopped fooling him, he said he was doing it because you didn't dare go out in the yard weak.

And then he stripped away all self-pretense. He faced himself: Hanning squealed on Jock and me; Jock and me have to get him. And we will. So I got to be strong.

The next meal he kept his spoon out, hoping it wouldn't get the trusty who'd been feeding him into trouble. He hid the spoon by putting it behind some loose mortar in the wall, and waited two full meals. When there was a cold chunk of stew meat—good lamb shank with marrow in it—on his tray, he knew the same trusty was still on duty, and had covered up about the spoon, some way.

So he took the spoon out of hiding and began sharpening it on the rough concrete floor.

You can kill a man with a spoon. The way you do it is, you sharpen the bowl down to an arrowhead; then you bend the handle like a finger ring, only you leave an inch and a half at the back to lie flat along your palm.

Slip that on, and one punch will do the job.

Now his time was pretty full. He had his exercise; he had his sharpening; he had his thoughts. He thought of the hundred thousand. He thought he would get the dope for Strane from Hanning and then kill Hanning.

After awhile he got out. His cellmate this time was a fresh fish, just out of the quarantine block, guy named Leon something or other. Just a punk. Looked like he didn't even have to shave every day. A punk with light fuzz on his chin.

As soon as Macalay was shoved into his cell, this Leon volunteered his name and said: "I'm doing two to ten for grand larceny, automobile. How about you?"

"I'm a chicken thief," Macalay said. "I took three hundred to five hundred for habitual chicken theft."

Leon looked at him. "Aw," he said. "I'm sorry. I'm always doin' something wrong. Isn't it right to ask the guys what they're in for?"

"No, fish. It ain't right. You can accumulate a mouthful of floating teeth asking questions. It isn't ethical."

"I didn't know," Leon said, gloomily. "I never do anything right. Like the car I took. It was already hot, and on the police radio, was why the guy had left it there with the keys in it... I thought the law was it wasn't stealing if the keys were in it, but that ain't the law."

"Thanks for the advice," Macalay said. "I knew the P.K. had it in for me, but I didn't know he'd go this far, putting you in my cell."

"Who's the P.K.?" The kid had thick black hair and pink cheeks, and his eyes shone. He'd last about two hours in the yard.

"The P.K. is a kind of chewing

gum they give us," Macalay said. He stripped off his shirt and went over to the washstand. He knew the kid's eyes must be coming out on his cheekbones when he saw the still-fresh scars, but he didn't hear any questions.

Fresh water played across his face, he rubbed it in well, rubbing the Hole out, getting clean again. He started to shave, and then, not suddenly, but rolling hard at him, as a steam-roller goes at a pile of rubble, some sort of sanity returned.

I was going to kill Hanning, he thought. Kill Hanning, take a chance on the big rap, on throwing away everything that maybe can get me out of here.

He shaved slower, pausing every now and then. To live like a con, and yet not to become one. That, he told himself, was what he had to fight against—that was the big danger. To keep my eye on the outside, on the free world, on a hundred thousand bucks, to remember that stir is only a small part of the world. To think of it as prison, not stir, the men prisoners, not cons, the officers guards and not screws; to live penned up, but think free.

He turned, reached for his shirt, and said: "Leon, the P.K. is the Principal Keeper. He runs this place. He's the man to fear."

A smile broke across Leon's face. His eyes got shiny. He said: "Thanks, mister."

"The name's Macalay. Just Mac."

Macalay returned the smile, wondering fleetingly if he could in some way use this young squirt to get to Hanning. "There goes the supper bell. We line up here, I'll show you how, and do a snake dance to the mess hall... Keep your lip buttoned up, there are swagger-stick screws all along the way."

It was still hot weather, but there was just the smell of fall coming in the air. It was good to be walking along to the mess hall, out in the sun and the cool air.

Good just to drift along with the other cons, but it was time for Macalay to think. He had accomplished only one thing so far: he had established himself as a real con. Hardly anybody would remember now that he'd once been a cop; two sessions of the Hole had taken care of that.

And now—suddenly, not like the steam-roller, but like a bulldozer hitting something hard, and pushing it, all at once into something new, he understood why there had been no outside trial, no investigation of Russ' murder.

The P.K. That snake brain, sitting in his twin offices, one bloodproof, and one carpeted, planning. It would be easy for the P.K. to see to it that the state cops would find no evidence to take into court, and an officer won't push a case that he's going to lose.

Macalay knew that. Every cop knows that. It's bad for your record.

And why? So the P.K. could keep his own record clear. So he could have a real reason to use the torture that was as necessary to him as grass to a cow, water to a fish.

Macalay, back from the Hole, back from the depths of his convict-thinking, summed it up. I'm in stir, but good, not a con holds my police background against me. I've got that, and it's one thing I figured right from the start I had to get.

And I've got one other thing: I know how to handle the P.K., and the P.K. is the prison. The whole prison. But my neck is still in a noose. I got to act like I'm expected to act. The cons will expect me to get Hanning for squealing. I've got to make that play, and cross the next bridge when and if.

Macalay laughed inside, thinking of Strane smashing cockroaches, Strane, who should be retired, sitting on his old ass telling him he'd have to be tough. But Macalay's face never moved a muscle. The screws didn't like it if you laughed in the march-along.

He marched into the mess hall, eyes in front of him, hands at his sides as per regulations; but he had learned to see a lot without looking. He saw Hanning two files over, and Hanning saw him. Hanning's look said, "Come on, you sonofabitch, I'm ready." He saw Jock one file on the other side of him, and Jock didn't look like he'd ever get his strength back. The P.K. had broken Jock; the P.K. could break anyone in time. Including Macalay.

Leon was on one side of him, and that was no good to him at all. But the man on the other side of him was an old stir-bum, Lefty something-or-other. As they bowed their heads and stood behind the benches, he gathered his breath; and as the chaplain started the grace, he told Lefty: "Hanning's my meat and nobody else's. Pass it."

The Chaplain finished and they sat down and the bowls were placed on their tables: hot dogs, vinegary sauerkraut, boiled potatoes and watery spinach. Macalay speared hot dogs and potatoes and took his bread and Leon's to make sandwiches; it takes twenty years to learn to eat prison sauerkraut. As the new head of Jock's Jockies, he probably should have taken Leon's sausages, too, but he couldn't do it.

He knew the word was passing down the long tables. It was a thing that the rifle-screws on the balcony, and the swagger-stick screws walking up and down between the benches couldn't stop; it happened at every meal that somebody passed the word. But never a lip moved, and not a wave of sound went anywhere but where it was aimed.

We've suspended the laws of physics, Macalay thought. We can make a tunnel out of air, and

shoot sound through it. We ought to be studied by some of the egg-heads at the colleges.

He reached out and scooped up Leon's margarine, buttered a sandwich with it.

Leon looked at him sadly.

There was a commotion behind them, aways. The rifle-guards on the balcony stiffened at the rail, raking the place with their guns. Leon said: "What happened?"

A screw yelled: "Shut up, you! No talking in the mess hall," and poked Leon in his back with his swagger-stick.

Macalay said: "Somebody passed out. The stinkin' food they give you, you never know if it's to be eaten or if it's already been eaten. It's a mystery somebody doesn't pass out every meal."

Nobody but Leon heard him say it.

The doors to the yard opened and two white-shirted trusties with a stretcher came in, trotting. The chug-chug of the infirmary's old ambulance could be heard outside the door.

A gentle wind ran across the mess hall. Lefty let a breath of it go at Macalay. "Jock lost his lunch. He passed out."

Macalay said: "A lunch like this ain't much loss." And he thought that with Jock laid up, Hanning became unquestionably his meat. It was up to him now.

The mess hall trusties served rice pudding.

5.

The P.K. assigned Macalay to the concrete block plant. It was rough work; pick up a shovel of cement, heave it in the hopper, follow it with a few shovels of sand, a few of gravel, one of stones and turn and do the same thing to the mixer on the other side.

It was work that left your arms trembling long after you were on your cot in the cell with the lights out and the radio earphones turned off. Macalay was the only man in the yard who had to tend two mixers at one time. His bad shoulder nearly killed him at night.

He heard Jock was in the clay-brick yard, unloading kilns. That wasn't bad work, if the screws let the kilns cool before you had to unload them. He heard they didn't with Jock. The P.K. was still riding both him and Jock.

Then he heard that Hanning had been given a job in the office, filing papers for the P.K.

That night he wrote a letter to Miss Billie Martin, Box 1151. He had to make an effort to remember the number.

Two days later he was hauled out of his cell right after lunch and told the P.K. wanted him.

Even though he knew what it was about, he felt the old thrill of fear go through his stomach and the small of his back. He didn't even like to hear about the P.K. anymore; the P.K. was the cons'

favorite conversation piece.

But this time there weren't screws in the office; it wasn't even the same office. It was the one where the P.K. did his front work, a pleasant place with a trusty typing away at a desk, and the P.K. behind a bigger one, with a bookcase behind him, full of books on criminology and penology and institute management which he had never read.

Opposite him was Inspector Strane. He looked around as Macalay came to attention, his heels clicking.

The P.K. said: "All right, Macalay. At ease. The Inspector here has some questions to ask you."

Inspector Strane said: "No use taking up your time, Mr. Odell."

Odell, that was the P.K.'s name. He had another of those triangle things on this desk, like he had in the other room, the room that was plain and slick, so blood wouldn't stain anything.

The P.K. said: "I like to cooperate."

"And I appreciate it. But I would like to talk to Macalay alone now. If we could just have a little room to talk in, a cell, anything."

"I ain't likely to put a city police inspector in a cell. You g'wan an' use my other office. You want somebody to take notes?"

"No." Inspector Strane had not looked at Macalay. "You can't get anything out of a convict if notes are being taken, Mr. Odell."

"You can't get anything out of Macalay anyway," the P.K. said. "He's one of the worst troublemakers in this can. I wisht you'da framed a more docile guy to send here."

The Inspector was as stiff-backed as ever. "I don't frame people, Mr. Odell."

"That was a joke," the P.K. said. "Just a joke. Okay, Strauss, take Inspector Strane over to my other office, take Macalay with him. You don't have to stay with them, jus' make sure Macalay don't have a shiv on him. I don't want any cops getting killed in my stir."

The screw, Strauss, saluted. He snapped his fingers at Macalay to rightabout-face; Macalay did. The Inspector followed them out. The P.K. said: "You guys on the cops don't have any idea what we gotta put up with. You see the best side of them, when they still think they maybe are gonna beat the rap."

When they were alone, Macalay stood at attention in front of the P.K.'s desk.

The Inspector, behind the desk, said: "All right, Mac, all right. Break it off."

Macalay said: "Yes, sir."

Strane's eyes widened. Then he nodded, slowly, and began sliding the desk drawers open, slowly, smoothly, as though he'd once been trained as a second-story man. He found the mike in the middle

drawer, left-hand side. He sat staring down at it for a moment, and then slowly grinned. He took his hat—his good felt hat—and jammed it down over the mike. Then he shut the drawer again. "There," he said. "Sit down, Mac."

Macalay sat down. Inspector Strane pulled two thin cigars out of his pocket, handed one of them to Macalay, took a flask off his hip and a box of breath-killers, and put those on Macalay's side of the desk. "Okay," he said, "let's have it. You getting anywhere?"

"Sure. I'm making concrete bricks now. It's better than chipping boilers or washing pots. It's not as good as being in the shoeshop, where I was."

Strane's lips thinned. "Knock it off, Macalay. Quit clowning."

Macalay reached out and took a drink from the flask. The taste of free-world liquor brought him all kinds of memories; and for a minute he was afraid he was going to cry. He bit his lip and said: "I've been in The Hole, in solitary, twice. It pretty near got me."

"So now you want out. You know I can't—"

"No. No. I don't want to get out."

The Inspector sat up a little straighter. He looked almost angry. "What did you want to see me about?"

"I want to be transferred to the laundry."

"You got me down here for that? Why, I can't—"

"There's somebody I got to get next to."

"Why?" The old voice cracked like a whip.

"This guy was Russ' buddy. He's on the office force and he got there by squealing on me. He goes through the laundry every day for a check."

"You've gone stir-crazy! You think I'd help you kill a man, even a con? You think Principal Keeper Odell wouldn't know he had to keep you apart?"

"He's a sadist," Macalay said. He finished his liquor and reached for the breath-killers. "He'd like to see this Hanning hurt. He'd like to see me hurt, too. He'd like to see every con hurt. This Hanning was Russ' buddy. You know Russ is dead? I take it, you know that."

Strane nooded, watched Macalay chew the breath-killers.

"I was getting somewhere before I got into The Hole," Macalay said, "and to go on, I'll have to work in the laundry. I tell you I'm onto something good."

"You got guts," Inspector Strane said. "I'll be damned if I don't want to see this work out for you."

"Thanks," Macalay said bitterly.

"Stop and think, will you? What am I going to tell Odell? I got no reason to ask him to transfer you."

"You're not much help."

Strane swore. "And you keep your hands off that Hanning."

"I'll get to him," Macalay said. "I have to."

The P.K. laughed. "He's a real dyed-in-the-wool lowdown con," he said. "They never talk. Supposed to be a first offender, but I've sent out tracers. I'll bet you he's served time in a half a dozen other places."

Macalay stood at attention.

"He's not your favorite prisoner, eh?" Inspector Strane took out a cigar, handed it to the P.K.

"I got no favorite among the cons," the P.K. said, heavily. "A nestful of snakes, the whole bunch. I'd like to pump poison through the cells."

Strane said: "Well, if there weren't any criminals, we'd both be out of jobs."

The P.K. chuckled his heavy, belching chuckle. "A thought. Need this boy any more, Inspector?"

"No," Inspector Strane said. "But think it over, Macalay."

"Hold that boy outside, Strauss," the P.K. said. "I want to talk to him . . ."

Strauss snapped his fingers at Macalay, who about-faced and marched out with the guard. Outside, Strauss sat down on a bench, staring at the convict-clerks; Macalay started to sit down next to him. Strauss snapped his fingers. "Attention!"

After awhile Inspector Strane came out, putting on his hat. He never glanced at Macalay, standing stiffly at attention.

One of the clerks, a little nance Macalay couldn't remember seeing before, was giggling at him, for no apparent reason. By the time the P.K. sounded his buzzer, Macalay was considering violence.

Strauss snapped his fingers again —he was really a natural to turn out just like the P.K.—and Macalay marched back into the office, stood at attention in front of the desk.

After awhile the P.K. looked up. "All right, Strauss." He waited till the screw had left. Then his sour gaze went up and down Macalay. "So you didn't tell that city dick anything."

"No, sir."

"Pretty anxious for you to talk. Wanted me to bribe you."

"Sir?"

"Give you a laundry job so you'd talk. Yah! Why should I? What did these cops ever do for me, except send more renegades in here to make me trouble? I wouldn't do a city inspector a favor if he paid me!"

Macalay waited. So Strane had tried and it hadn't worked. So—

"Yeah!" the P.K. snarled again. "I never liked you, Macalay. I don't like cons, and you're the worst kind. Aren't you?"

"I don't know, sir."

"But I got you trained," the P.K. said. He ran a finger over the desk, inspected it for dust. "You don't talk to cops, and that's because I trained you. You're a real con, now. You know what that inspector gets a year?"

Macalay felt very tired. He said: "No, sir."

"Twenty-three hundred bucks more than I do. And he gets to go home at night, not live in a lousy stir. And he gets to go to dinners with all the big shots in town, and get up an' make speeches about how we're putting down crime, an' all."

Apparently the P.K. hated cops as well as cons. Macalay wondered how he felt about civilians. Probably hated them, too, because they didn't have to take state jobs. Probably hated himself for that matter.

"Yeah," the P.K. said, "that inspector sure went off with a bee in his high hat. You, Macalay. I'll transfer you, but where I want to transfer you. You think you got brains enough to hold down an office job?"

"I could try, sir," Macalay said, and held his breath.

"Yeah. I'll have you transferred. You start tomorrow. Can you type?"

"Yes, sir." This was too damn good to be true.

"Good, boy, good. A big boy like you in with the fags. Be nice."

Macalay nodded imperceptibly. The sadistic sonofabitch wanted to see him and Hanning tangle. He wanted to see two cons knife one another. His own perverted pleasure was all the sonofabitch ever thought about.

6.

The office job was okay. Only the P.K.'s office—the fancy one where he did not interrogate prisoners—was air conditioned, but there were fans in all the clerical rooms, and, as winter came on, heaters. There were washbasins where the convict-clerks could wash their hands if they soiled them on the carbon paper; there were pots of coffee sent up from the kitchen whenever they wanted them, because the office staff could do a lot for the other convicts, could transfer their cells or their work-assignments.

Several of the clerks were punks, pansies, girl-boys; these were the various phrases the prison world used to describe them. They flirted with the normal men on the convict-staff, and two or three couples of clerks were "married." Of course it was a cinch for a clerk to see that he shared the same cell with his beloved. But in addition to all this, they were cons. Especially vicious ones. The limp wrists and the wiggling behinds didn't make you forget that.

The arrival of Macalay, a new man in the office, had given the pansies a great big old thrill, as Macalay put it to himself. One of them had presented him with a personal coffee cup with his name painted on it in the fluid they used to correct mimeograph stencils; another had put flowers on his desk, and a third had given him a chair pad, hand-knitted.

But when he didn't respond to their attentions, the girl-boys re-

laxed back into routine, and left him alone. Quizzically, he noticed that inside himself he rather missed the fuss they'd made over him, and, shuddering, he told himself he had to finish this up quick, make his play before he slid down the easy chute of convict thinking.

So he concentrated on Hanning.

It was a thing he could do well—hate Hanning. The convict part of him and the copper part of him could hate Hanning equally.

Hanning didn't bat an eye when he found Macalay in the office. He didn't allow himself to be stared down. What Hanning might be cooking up for him, he had no way of knowing. But he was wary, even as he knew Hanning to be wary of him.

He found out something right away: Hanning was "married" to one of the file clerks. Somehow or other this surprised Macalay; it changed his opinion of Hanning from sheer hatred to something pretty close to contempt. Still, he worked on how he could put this information that he'd uncovered about Hanning to use.

For two weeks he didn't speak to the squealer. Then the time for the annual report to the Governor came up, and the office staff were put on overtime. It meant they had to eat dinner, at least, in the office, while the rest of the population got supper in the mess halls. The P.K.'s whole career depended on those reports; if anything went wrong with them, the Warden might stop writing his book, the Deputy Warden might stay home for a while, and the P.K.'s life would be wrecked. So nothing was too good for the clerks who made out the report.

Macalay searched and searched, and finally found an opening. There was a nice little thing in the annual mess report he could use. But, instead of going right to the P.K. with it, he waited. That night he took his supper plate over to Hanning's desk. "Hi, boy."

Hanning looked up, startled, his face an angry white.

"I don't want these mashed potatoes," Macalay said. "I'll swap them for your string beans." Macalay made the swap quickly with his fork. Then he pulled up a chair and sat opposite Hanning. He said: "Brother, I was sure out to get you." He forked overdone beef into his mouth. "When a guy first gets out of that Hole, he's like an animal. Hell, man, if you hadn't yelled, I was gonna do it myself. You probably saved my life, yellin' when you did."

Hanning was getting back to normal. "Well, yeah, that furnace. We'd've all croaked in a little while, and the P.K.—he woulda found some way of covering up."

"That's right," Macalay said, and went on eating. "You holding that against me? You know – about Russ?"

Hanning shook his head, his eyes glistening with relief. "That bas-

tard?" he said shrilly, in his eagerness to square things with Macalay.

Macalay dropped it then, but he kept on talking to Hanning once in awhile — just casually for a couple of days. At the end of that time he gave Hanning's sweetie—they called him Pinie—a knitted muffler Leon's mother had sent him.

Then Macalay went to the P.K. He was very careful to stand at attention while he talked. "Sir, about the mess hall report."

The P.K. growled, but it wasn't the growl he'd used at previous interviews. This one took place in the polite office, too. "What about it?"

"I notice the Principal Keeper says that food costs went up three percent in the last year."

"Yeah?"

"I went over to the library and looked it up. Overall food costs in the country went up eight percent. Instead of apologizing, the prison can claim an actual reduction in costs of five percent."

The P.K. looked pleased. But he hated to be nice to anyone. "Yeah?" he said. "I can claim it, but can I make it stick?"

"I want to make a chart on it. A graph."

"Hey, that's all right. Yeah, you do that."

"I'll need some help. I'll have to go talk to the steward, and the chief cook. Get the real dope. Make it look professional. I could do it myself, but it'd take me a week. Two guys could get it all done in half a day."

"Okay. Take any of the clerks you want."

So the next morning found Macalay and Hanning in the kitchen. Macalay had worked it smoothly; Hanning's last suspicion was gone. He should have known all along that a squealer would also be yellow. Hanning behaved like any other greedy weakling let loose in the kitchen; went around nibbling stuff, bumming coffee, flirting with one of the fry-cooks till he got a steak broiled in butter.

The kitchen activity was rising to the noontime peak. Lunch had to be gotten out; three thousand cons had to eat. Nobody paid any attention to anybody else.

Macalay got a piece of rag out of his pocket; it was used to dust typewriters, but this one was fresh. He slipped a boning knife from a butcher block, wrapped the rag around the handle, moved it up and down a couple of times to remove prints, and palmed it under the clipboard he was taking notes on.

He said: "Hanning, you got to help me a couple of minutes."

Hanning was talking to his friend, the fry-cook. "Aw, Mac . . ."

"You've goofed off all morning. I'll have to bring one of the other clerks back with me after lunch if—"

"All right, all right."

Macalay led the way to a meat box. If Hanning had any suspicions

left, they must have disappeared when he saw how casually Macalay let him take the rear. They walked into the box, and Macalay gestured with his pencil hand; the other held the clipboard and the knife. "We gotta make a count of those carcasses," he said. "You go along and call out to me, lamb, beef, pork, whatever they are. Only take us a minute."

Hanning stepped forward towards the chilled meat. Macalay kicked the heavy vault door shut, and put the pencil in his pocket.

He said: "Turn, Hanning. Turn and take it."

Hanning turned, his mouth open to say something. Then he saw the knife, and his mouth stayed open. But the color ran out of his face. He was standing by a big side of mutton, and his face, which had been the color of the red meat, ran down the scale until it just matched the suet.

"You think you were going to squeal and get away with it?" Macalay asked. "You got soft in the head, just because I talked easy to you."

Hanning's Adam's apple was jerking up and down like there was a fish hook in and somebody was playing it with a reel.

"Go on and yell," Macalay said. "These boxes are soundproof."

"You—you—"

"Let me do the talking," Macalay said. "You're trying to say I can't get away with it. You're wrong. Nobody saw us come in here. And in this cold, your body'll stiffen so fast, the docs'll never be able to say what time you got it. And I got alibis for every minute of my time—from when I checked with the steward out there, and him with one eye on the clock that tells him when to serve lunch, till ten minutes ago, when your friend Piney's gonna swear I was in the office with him.

"Piney?" Hanning asked. Blood—maybe the blood that had drained out of his cheeks—was flooding the whites of his eyes, tracing red veins across them. "Piney's gonna—"

"Piney don't love you any more," Macalay said. "Nobody loves a squealer. Anyway, Piney wants a guy who can look after him. Dead men don't."

He raised the knife, holding it in front of his chest, fist around the wooden handle, hand turned over. He walked towards Hanning.

And it was hard for him not to hurry, not to step forward fast and let the knife do the work. The dirty squealer! It wasn't right that a snitch should live in the world of decent cons!

The knife would do it. It was sharp and thin, worn down to a sliver of the finest steel. It would go in the soft space between the breast bones and slide up, easy as taking a drink, up to the left and into the heart, and there'd be one squealer less to stink up the world.

Macalay fought it back, made

himself go slow, slow for effect, slow for the big one, the play that he'd suffered for; in the fish tank, in cells, in The Hole, in the concrete block plant . . .

Slow, he told himself, slow to scare him, not fast to kill him. He's a squealer and a yellow belly and he'll break right down the middle. Take it slow, slow . . .

Then the mutton-fat face split, and Hanning was screaming: "Don't kill me! Lemme go, I can give you some dope you can use. You were a cop." He was playing his hole ace; every con had one, fondled and held onto, for just such a time. "It could do you good. Yeah—yeah, it could."

Macalay hesitated. This had to be right, this had to be acting like no guy on the screen had ever done. His voice had to be hard and contemptuous. "What you got? You got something on the P.K.? You going to tell me he's a swish?"

"It could maybe spring you," Hanning screeched again. "I know the guys who—" he stopped.

Macalay's heart began to pound, hard. But he had to keep that sneer on his face, in his voice. "Still squealing, huh?"

"Russ knew the ones pulled that loft job," Hanning said. "His brother got it on that job. Ya—ya, just like that buddy-cop of yours. I'm levelling with ya. Russ told me when we first saw ya. Told me who—" He broke off.

"What good'll that do *me?*" Macalay asked. He moved the knife forward; it touched Hanning's shirt, just below and to the right of the number sewed on the pocket. "What *good,* squealer?"

"I can give you names and dates and where to pick 'em up," Hanning said. "I got it all. You wanta get them, don't you? They killed that cop pal of yours. You wanta get 'em don't yuh?"

"Yeah," Macalay said. "Yeah, I want to get them. Start talking. An' it better be right, because if it ain't, I'll still be in here, and so will you."

He shifted the knife to his left hand, under the clipboard, and started writing as Hanning babbled.

He could sneak a letter out with the noon mail that went from the office. Inspector Strane would get it tomorrow, and come get him.

He'd be out soon—a free man, a rich man . . . But, hell, it would be a pleasure to kill Hanning when the squealer got through squealing. It sure would. And maybe necessary now, to keep Hanning from squealing on him. In any case, he'd have to travel fast and far to get beyond the clutch of the grapevine.

Suddenly, Macalay threw the knife away, hard, into the far black depths of the icebox. It landed in the sawdust, barely made a noise. Looking at Hanning, crouched, panting, the refrigerator light glinting off his cold sweat, Macalay wondered if it was going to be as hard living what the hundred grand as it had been getting it.

Find your wife in the wrong bed, you do something about it. Markham certainly did.

Payment in Full

BY DAVE LEIGH

COLE KNEW goddam well that he shouldn't have gone out in the boat with Markham. Sure, Mark had acted like he hadn't seen anything when he busted into the bedroom the night before, but Cole couldn't shake the feeling that he had. But what in hell could he do? He'd said he didn't feel like fishing, but Markham had coaxed and kidded him until he got into the boat. So here he was, heading

straight out into the lousy ocean, with Markham's pistol aimed at his belly.

The three of them had driven up to Markham's beach cottage after work on Friday, for a week end of fishing and swimming. Cole was supposed to bring a girl, but the one he'd asked had broken the date at the last minute and both Markham and Sally had insisted he come anyway.

They were all pretty beat when they got to the cottage, for it was a long drive. They just brought the bags in and put away a couple of stiff drinks and had gone straight to bed. Saturday had turned up foggy and damp; so they'd gone fishing in the morning and then had lunch and started drinking. They'd played three-handed gin for an hour or so; then Markham had started reading a book and Sally and Cole had danced for awhile and then gone for a walk on the beach.

That was when it had all started. He'd been walking a little distance behind her, watching her as she bent over to pick up shells, and suddenly he realized what a goddam good looking woman she really was. He had caught up with her and kidded around a minute and then he had kissed her long and hard. She had resisted for a moment and then melted against him and when he let her go she just smiled up at him and said "Well . . ." in a slow, pleased voice. That was all that had happened, but Cole had known that she was there for the asking. And he was damn well going to ask.

They had gone back to the house and Cole had fixed them all a fresh drink, deliberately making Markham's about half whiskey. Cole kept the drinks moving for the rest of the afternoon, keeping his own drinks weak, watching Markham getting drunker and drunker. They'd gone out for steaks about eight-thirty and had a couple more drinks in the restaurant, and then started hitting the bottle again when they got back. Markham had finally passed out, about a quarter to one.

Cole had gone over and shaken Markham and then slapped him and Sally had said, "He's out for the night." Cole had grinned and gone over and pulled her to her feet. She had tried to hold him off, but not very hard, and he had picked her up and carried her to his bedroom. After that first struggle with her conscience, she had been easy. More than easy.

When it was over, Cole had told her to go back to her own bed, but she had just nuzzled her face against his chest and murmured something sleepily. He had known he should have gotten her out of there, but she was pressed close to him and it felt good and he was too sleepy to argue. So she was still there when Markham had stumbled into the bedroom.

It was almost light and Cole sat up in bed and looked at Markham and said nothing. Markham had stood there for a few seconds, swaying slightly, his eyes dazed and red, and then he had turned and shambled down the hall toward his own bedroom. Cole had tried to believe that Markham had been too drunk to know what he had seen, but he had known even then that he was lying to himself.

Cole had shaken Sally awake and told her what happened and she had looked very frightened and asked him to tell her everything Markham had done. She was trembling and Cole put his arms around her and wanted to take her again, but she had pushed away and gotten out of bed and gone quickly to her bedroom. He had lain there, wondering if there would be trouble, knowing he should have gone with her in case Markham had gotten nasty. But he had heard nothing and then had fallen asleep.

Markham had made no sign that morning that he had seen or heard anything, talking only of his hangover and apologizing for passing out on them. Cole had gotten Sally aside and she had told him that Markham had been sprawled across the bed when she went in and she had just pushed him aside and nothing had happened.

Cole told himself it was only a guilty feeling that gave him that sense of disaster, but it stayed with him. And then Markham had suggested a couple of hours fishing and he had known he shouldn't go, but here he was. Out here in the gray empty fog with the last man in the world with whom he wanted to be alone. With the boat heading out steadily over the ocean, and the gun pointed at his stomach.

They were almost two miles out now and still Markham hadn't said a word. Finally, Cole said, "Isn't this far enough?" And Markham just kept that rusty old .38 aimed at his target and said, "You're going a lot farther than this, boy."

"Listen, Mark," Cole said quickly. "Be reasonable. I'll take the train this afternoon and never see you or Sally again. There's never been anything between us before and there isn't now. We were just drunk—"

Markham's eyes flicked up to Cole's face and he smiled humorlessly without speaking. The minutes dragged by as the boat chugged outward; it began to pitch as they entered more open water. The fog was closing down so that Cole could barely see the shore past Markham's shoulder. He thought for the hundredth time of leaping forward and trying to get the gun away, but he knew he wouldn't have a chance. Though the boat was only about eight feet long, Cole knew he couldn't cross even that distance before the bullet would hit him.

"You're bound to be caught,

Mark," he said. "A dozen people along the beach could have seen us leave. How are you going to explain coming back without me?"

"You let me worry about that, boy," Markham said. "I know what I'm doing."

The fog was growing thicker, swirling around them in clouds, and Cole could see no further than ten feet beyond the boat. He was again thinking of trying to jump Markham, when suddenly the other man stood up.

"What're you going to do?" Cole cried.

"You're the smart one," Markham said. "I didn't think I'd have to draw you a picture."

"You can't get away with it!"

Markham stood there looking at him, a smile flickering across his face. "The sea's rough out here," he said. "The boat capsizes and you go down and I dive for you, but I can't find you. The boat must have hit your head as it went over. The tide's going out now. Nobody'd be surprised if the police couldn't find your body."

"No!" Cole said.

Markham took a step down the boat toward him, steadying the pistol; the boat lurched and his foot slipped. As Markham fell heavily to his knees, his arm hit the side of the boat and the weapon flew from his hand.

Cole grabbed the pistol and aimed it at Markham. This was too good to be true, he thought. Markham had all but handed the gun to him. "So you're going to kill me," he said, panting.

Markham appeared to be trying to speak, but only a gurgle came out. Then he said weakly, "I . . . I was only trying to scare you. I just wanted to—make sure you left Sally alone. That's the truth, Cole."

Cole laughed harshly. "You know, I couldn't have asked for a neater setup. You've given me the situation and the method and even the gun. It was a clever idea, Mark. Too bad you won't live to enjoy it."

Markham threw his arms in front of his head. Cole pulled the trigger and there was a blinding red flash and a scalding searing flame blasted his face and chest and then he was falling forward into blackness . . .

When Cole regained consciousness he was lying in a bed. A woman's voice was saying, "I think he's coming around."

"How is he, nurse?" It was Markham's voice.

"He'll be blind," the voice said. "And he'll lose his right arm. It's too soon to tell yet whether he'll live."

Then Cole heard the rustle of starched cloth, followed by the sound of a door closing.

"You bastard," Cole thought. He tried to say the words, but his lips felt like they were stuck together. His face seemed to be completely

covered with bandages, and he couldn't move his arms or legs.

"You shouldn't have tried to kill me, fella," Markham was saying. "Not with that old pistol, anyhow. Been plugged up for years."

Cole tried to move, to shout his hatred, but it wasn't possible.

"Never did get around to cleaning out the barrel of the thing," Markham went on. "Should have. And now, you know, the nurse says you may even die. Sally and I'd take that mighty hard. You know how Sally feels about you."

"Bastard, bastard!" Cole thought.

In New York, Charles C. Chitty, 33, recently founded the Anti-Forgery League of America. Chitty's plans for protecting merchants, however, were suspended when he was placed under arrest. The charge: forgery.

In Detroit, Patrolman Donald La Pasky recovered his stolen uniform, but he refused to wear it. It was found by detectives in the apartment of Alva Perkins, 49, who had cut the trousers down to Bermuda shorts.

Eugene C. Bennett, 50, was sentenced in Long Beach, Calif. Municipal court to five days in jail for damaging telephone equipment. He told Judge Martin DeVries that he cut his telephone wire with a knife because he "got tired of hearing his wife talk with her mother for an hour and a half at a time."

A bearded man wearing a derby hat and black coat of circa 1900 robbed the Acme Oil Company office at Gary, Ind. of $1,300. The bandit made his escape without difficulty. The robbery occurred while hundreds of men were growing long beards and wearing old time clothing in celebration of the city's 50th anniversary jubilee.

Springfield, Ohio police, on a tip, raided a poker game. They found all the participants asleep around the table. No charges were filed.

Lust Song

BY
STUART
FRIEDMAN

"CHA CHA *cha-tiyata* . . . cha-ta-*cha*," her chirpy voice sang. The melodious sound penetrated the closed windows. "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha-ta-*cha*."

In the dim old bedroom, Barton stood listening behind lowered blinds. Tall and gray in workshirt and overalls, his sinewy old body was bent forward and motionless like a taut bow and his mouth was open slightly like a crater in the dry crust of the seamy skin of his face. His big, knuckly hands were clenched and still as weights. "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha-ta-*cha*." He straightened up, moistened his lips, drew a long breath and shook his head. His hands opened. He turned and started for the door, but some counter-will in him made him veer to the bureau. He opened a drawer and took out the binoculars.

He went to the window, inched it up and raised the blind two inches from the sill, squinting

Her dancing legs naked to the hips, she taunted: "Get up, big old Daddy Lover . . . cha cha cha—tiyata—cha ta cha . . . "

briefly against the glare stripe of sunlight. He went to the chair at the end of the room, where light wouldn't catch on the lenses, and put the binoculars to his eyes, his heart beginning to thump against his ribs. Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha-ta-*cha,* he whispered as the sound of her came again, louder, richer through the opening. His thick fingers became tremulous on the delicate adjustment wheel as he found her and brought her into focus, her red hair in the wind glowing like embers in a forge.

Deena May, his hired hand's wife . . . the "child bride" as Barton thought of her . . . was hanging clothes in her yard and dancing to her own foolish, delicious music. She wore a loose, carelessly buttoned, pink house dress . . . and probably nothing else . . . and she came toward him from the clothes basket to the line, lifting her knees in quick, prancy steps. She was a pretty little thing, as lively and mindless as a bird, with a tiny waist and dainty legs. She wasn't fully fleshed out yet and her lines were clean as stems and from the front or back or side views, the roundings of her femaleness showed clearly when the wind pressed the thin dress to her flesh.

She moved back to the clothes basket, not in a straight line, but in a prancing, dancing half circle to the beat of the "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha-ta-*cha* . . ." On the "tiyata" part her thin voice rose high as a cat's, then swiftly dipped with an oddly stroking sound that was nakedly voluptuous in quality. She accompanied the sound with a tantalizing motion: a fluid roll, tilt and swish of her hips. She came back to the line with another garment . . . a pair of her husband's underwear shorts . . . and as she pinned them up her knees flashed higher than ever, showing the smooth pale nakedness of her inner thighs. Pain stabbed at Barton's eyeballs and he shut his eyes, resting the binoculars on his knees. Warm, warm her young body would be, warm as new milk . . . or cool in the fresh breeze, cool as silk. Warm, cool, whichever, whatever, it didn't matter.

He pulled her to him again with the binoculars. She had a saucy round face with round blue eyes and a round dimple in her chin. Down in the mule country, where she came from, the dimple meant the devil was in her, Deena May said. Ignorant superstition. But Barton supposed it had been drilled into her child mind till she believed it. With her showing her flesh and singing and stepping high to the devil's beat, anyone could believe it.

He saw she kept turning her head to her shoulder and he was so enrapt with the brilliant image of her red hair, like a wanton brand of flame on her cheek, that he didn't realize she was looking back at the house. Then the screen door flew

open and her husband Hugh charged out. Barton realized then that Hugh had been watching from inside and Deena May had been putting on the show to work him up. She whooped and shrieked and took off across the yard. He caught her by the hair in a dozen long-legged strides and dumped her. She kicked her bare legs in the air and rolled onto her knees and tackled his lanky legs and in a moment he was on the ground with her, scowling and mussing her up. She got away and he chased her out of sight around the front of the house. In awhile he came marching her in front of him, twisting her arm. She stopped every few steps and bumped her bottom back against him, a look of high glee on her excited face. She boasted how she could get him excited any time, morning, noon and night, and could wear him down to a frazzle even if she was only fourteen and he thought he was a man because he was twenty-one. Hugh pushed her inside the house with a loud spank and the screen door whacked shut. Barton lowered the binoculars, his mouth clamped in a straight line.

Barton thought of Hugh with a bitter scorn. For all his big talk about being man enough to handle her, all she had to do was swish her tail to bring him down on all fours and use him up. He went to the bureau, dropped the binoculars in the bureau drawer and kneed it shut with an air of finality. That's all there was these days, animals yielding to their pleasures, no discipline, no pride in strength, only in weakness. Barton caught sight of himself in the bureau mirror, which was flaking and yellowed, decaying like everything else in this dying house. Light from the peephole opening of the window shone on one side of his face, leaving the other in shadow, and an uneven line ran down the center as if a jagged axe blade had tried to split his head—and struck granite, he told himself. He had lived his life on his hind legs, and nothing, nothing short of God could bring him low at the end . . . no, not even the devil.

He left the bedroom and went along the hall, past the shut doors of the long-empty bedrooms, where the rugs and curtains and chairs and made-beds remained, unused, and giving off the silent musty breath of slow decay. He went down the gloomy central stairs and looked in at the big, glassed-in porch that had served as a play room and sewing room and second parlor, where the girls could entertain their beaux, and in the final years Melly, his wife, had made it her afternoon headquarters, for reading or sewing or just contenting herself looking out at the side lawn and her flowers and their fields. Often she would have her nap there after the midday meal and he'd come down from his own nap and they'd have coffee together

before he went out to work. Sometimes he thought a belief in ghosts would be a help, so he could imagine her there smiling and asking if he'd had a good nap . . . thougn he was inclined to wake grumpy and had usually been aggravated by the question. On an impulse he went over and started to raise the blinds; a little clean light in this room of Melly's might give the whole dreary house a better feel.

He glanced around to look at the furnishings when the first blind was up. Slowly, he lowered the blind again. The furnishings were shabby and graceless and heavy, nothing anybody would want today. It had been mighty pretty once. He shrugged. Better to leave it with the dead past.

He went to the kitchen and set coffee warming while he tidied up the mess from his dinner, his mouth down at the corners, a sourness in his stomach and at the base of his tongue. He took some baking soda and belched, looking with distaste at the leftovers in pans and skillet. He still ate the same old greasy food, and too much of it, just as if he still worked from "sun to sun." He drank his coffee standing up; then marched out like a man going to work, but he wasn't going to do anything but putter . . . maybe fix up that board in the corn crib, or maybe mend harness. He shook his head; damnfoolishness mending harness for a team of horses that never did anything but pasture and once in awhile some light hauling. The tractor did their work better and cheaper, and there wasn't really enough land left to require a tractor. He had sold off all but the sixty acres he and Melly had started out with. He'd saved his three boys and two girls the trouble of waiting for him to die by giving them their patrimony shortly after Melly passed on. He had a few thousand and this place and he wouldn't have to crowd any of his grandchildren out of their rooms, which was probably luckier than an old man had right to be.

He dawdled around in the barn, feeling that there wasn't any point in doing anything in particular. He went and stood in the barn door and looked out over the green expanse of growing corn and beyond it in the south field to the vast great yellow square of young wheat. It would grow and ripen and then be cut down and there'd be another winter and maybe another spring...

He spat! God damn a self-pitying man. Whining at *his* age, worse than a whelp. He heard the tractor start up and located it out in the field with Hugh on the seat, riding young and high and mighty. Then his gaze slid toward the little house, the one he and Melly had started out in. Deena May would be up and chippying around at her chores . . . or maybe sprawled in the bed, sleeping and renewing that radiant, lustrous, sweet vital young body. The mere sight of that little

house roused his belly to life.

He walked up the lane, toward the houses, toward the old barn, thinking of his Bible and the times of greatness when the old men were kings and Solomon lay cold on his bed and they brought to his bed the choicest virgins and . . . The land swirled in the bright heat and Barton stopped and lighted a cigarette . . . and there had been King David who had looked upon the flesh of Bathsheba . . . the smoke dry-tickled his throat and he coughed violently . . . and the great king had sent the young husband off to his death . . . in the Bible, yes, in the good Book, and it had been recorded, the living truth . . . wicked though it might be, it was the nature and the Fate of Man . . . and when a man grew cold with age he could not help himself if he went to the life-saving fire . . . it was his own life he saved, even if it came to King David's way . . . Scraped down to the raw an animal had to choose to save his own life . . .

An animal, yes, an animal killed or was killed . . . but not a man, not a human standing on his hind legs. NO! He didn't wipe out the pride of all his achievements at his life's end . . .

Barton turned into the old barn, got into his car and drove to town. Maybe there would be a few cronies around the grain elevator or the feed store. He parked on Main Street. He sat, debating. He didn't have many cronies left. And all they could do together would be to carp about the way things were and down in all their bellies was nothing but the cold fear of death and the fear of life and the aching, hopeless wish to be men again. He didn't want the smell of them. He went over to the bank and cashed a check and drove on into the city. He parked and roamed the bright, busy streets, looking sharply in at the women's shops, tempted and afraid to go in and buy some pretties for her. Panties and stockings and shoes and perfumes and dresses. He felt flushed and excited and he stopped at a travel agency window with its pictures of gay, carefree foreign places and girls in bathing suits and without exactly knowing what he was doing he got the car again and drove to the airport. He watched the great, shiny planes, landing and taking off; he mingled with the moving, lively crowds waiting to go or going and he longed to have Deena May there to see it and feel it and catch the fire and enthusiasm. He could take her and give her the sparkling brightness and the go go go that she craved. What did it come to, all his hard work and sober virtue? It came to dullness and death.

Hugh was at the milking when Barton got back and Barton, remembering all the hostile thoughts he had had toward the boy, took pains to praise him.

"Sorry to leave you with all the

work. Had some business in town. But I'll grant that you're handling things fine, just fine."

Hugh took it with clear pleasure. And after some easy talk about farm matters he said: "I hope she never bothered you, woke you up from your nap. Did she?"

Barton laughed. "Why no. Why? Was she cutting up?"

Hugh shook his head, looking comically earnest. "She was singing around in the yard and carrying on. The thing with Deena May, Mr. Barton, is she is a good-hearted little thing, only she's childish. She was the young'un of a big family and they catered to her something awful. But I've got real confidence that right down in her heart she ain't really spoiled, but will turn out a first-class woman." He sighed. "I do have a time with her, she's that childish. She's enough to wear out your patience sometimes. But I won't leave her get on your nerves."

"Don't you let it worry you. You just keep up your good work . . . and keep on reading those Agricultural pamphlets and the papers and learning, the way you have been, and improving yourself. I like the both of you. Fine, just fine."

"Would you like to come down to supper?"

"Not tonight. Young folks should be alone, and I take Sunday dinners with you . . . that's plenty . . . not that she's not a grand little cook. She is."

"Thanks. She'll be tickled to hear you said that."

"Didn't I ever tell her?"

"Well . . . " Hugh began uncomfortably. "No. And . . . well, I always was a little scared you don't like her much . . . " He waited and Barton assured him. "I sure am relieved. I kind of thought you sometimes look at her . . . well, stern-like."

"That's mainly how old men do look, you know."

Hugh chuckled. "Funny thing, but Deena May says she ain't fooled the way you look stern because you like her."

Barton felt a quick uneasiness. "I do, indeed I do."

"And she sure likes you. Wants to come up and live in the big house. Says it's a pure shame you got to cook yourself and stay around that big old empty place alone. I said to her: 'Deena May, it would just aggravate him out of his wits to have to put up with your childishness right in the same house.' "

"But not at all . . . why, that's a splendid idea . . . I mean, Hugh . . . if you'd want to . . . the pair of you would give the old place life, and the stove's a good one and there's that fine refrigerator and a nearly new bathroom . . ."

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Barton, it's only her idea." He shook his head. "You see, even if you could stand her childishness . . . well, you understand, I got my

hands full already to make a woman out of her . . . and if you both like each other why you'd cater to her like she had it back home with old . . . older people . . . No offense, but, well, that little house is just nice. Sure you wouldn't take supper with us, though?"

Barton hesitated; he dreaded cooking his own meal and eating alone in that oversized coffin of a house. Talking with Hugh, face to face, Barton liked him and shared with him, from Hugh's viewpoint, his problems with the "child bride." But Deena May in the flesh was something else. In his presence, they both became kids and meals with them were full of bickerings, and each would turn to Barton for support. He had always found it amusing, but inevitably he had had to side with Hugh. Still he didn't want to go over there and be forced to sit like a gray sage passing down moral pronouncements. He didn't want to say a word against her, nor uphold a set of principles that smelled of must and decay.

"No, thank you just the same," he said. "See you tomorrow, Hugh."

Barton sat in the parlor with the evening paper, rereading grain market quotes without absorbing them. He didn't give a damn. There was something else, like a small, pleasant glow in his belly, holding his mind. Hugh had said she wasn't fooled by the look of sternness; she knew with the sure female animal instinct that the sight of her stirred the still-living male in him. And she wanted to take over the big house, where he'd cater to her.

He turned off the parlor light and went up to the bedroom and turned the bedroom light on for a few minutes, as though he had come up to bed. He didn't undress. Presently, he turned off the light and waited, listening near the open window. It would be awhile. She'd peer over to make sure the big house was dark and that he slept.

She was looking out her window. She vanished, and her front screen clapped shut and the hound, put out, whimpered for his mistress like an exiled lover till she shrieked at him. Then the lights went out. Barton tensed and rubbed his thick, calloused fingers against his dry palms. The beat of his heart quickened in anticipation and he could feel the juice of life rising in him, even his mouth salivated and his lips were warm and wet.

He began to fear that Hugh had, in a sense, won, that he was lying there cold beside her fire, sober and resolved to hoard his strength, and sleep like the goddamned fool he was . . . Then it came. A squall and a moan. Barton blinked, brightening. Hugh handled her roughly, but with no genuine air of mastery. Instead, his roughness seemed against the grain, something he did because she willed it. But one Saturday night they had gone to a dance, and, from the gos-

sip Barton heard, Deena May had slipped out to the parking lot and serviced a squad of young bucks before Hugh caught her. He'd bloodied some noses and got a whaling himself and the sounds coming from the little house that night had been pure hell. But tonight, as usual, Barton heard her song of lust, a primitive sound of combat and terror and wild joy that set a serpent crawling in his belly.

In the long wake of silence, Barton found himself shivering and disgusted with himself. What had he come to? Turning his eyes and ears and mind into sneaking, slimy things that degraded everything he had ever been. The most shameful, the most intolerable part of it was that he was reduced to this cowardly caricature of manhood, as if he was a eunuch. He slept fitfully, waking repeatedly till almost dawn, when he dropped into a deep sleep.

He woke to the sound of her "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . .

Light flooded the room and he knew from the slant of the sun that it was very late. Past ten. My God, he hadn't overslept this way in years. He sat up and got heavily out of bed. He heard the tractor in the field. Everything was going on without him.

"Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha ta *cha* . . . "

He shut the window and the blind, but her chirpy, teasy little voice penetrated the dim bedroom with an insistent, irresistible rhythm. It stroked his waking senses and thrummed through his tired body like another pulse. He had to see her, he had to see her. He got the binoculars. His trembling thick fingers fumbled at the blind. It got away with a startling zip and hiss and flapped around the roller at the top. He found himself standing flatfooted and exposed at the window in his old nightshirt. He jumped aside, and had to stand gripping the bedpost for balance until his heart quit slamming and the dizziness passed. He edged back into the room and in the mirror caught sight of his scarecrow old body, in the old fashioned nightshirt, and turned his face.

He couldn't eat. He went out to the car in his best suit. He drove into the city and made some purchases.

He was back at two, the funereal old Sunday suit behind him, splashed out now in brown and white shoes, light tan suit, coconut weave straw hat with a band matching his turquoise sport shirt. He carried packages of vivid socks, underpants, pajamas, and straw shoes in two pieces of airplane luggage.

He put the binoculars, which he'd used at the State Fair races, into their case. He hung them by the strap across his shoulder and gave himself a sporty grin. For awhile he just walked around acquainting himself with his new clothes and personality.

He stopped in the middle of the kitchen, frowning. He should have saved the old suit. He'd have to go to the bank and tell them to put the place up for sale, because the new life would be impossible in this community where he had a set meaning and where, if he changed the meaning, they'd think he was crazy. They'd snicker and wag their heads if they saw him in these clothes, and figure him insane because he didn't just sit and wait to die.

He shuddered. Most of the acres were gone, most of the rooms closed . . . the dimensions were narrowing, narrowing . . . the old dark house had the feel of a coffin.

He wanted to hear the sunlight sound of her "Cha cha *cha* . . . " He kept listening vaguely, wondering where she was. The tractor was out in the field; he could hear it. Hugh was accounted for, but where was Deena May? In the little house . . . alone . . . on the bed . . .

"Andrew . . . "

He turned without thinking and went toward the sound of the voice and opened the door to the glassed-in porch. He was about to say: "What is it, Melly?" before he caught himself.

You're crazy! he thought, frightened. Hearing voices. He stood, silent, wondering. Maybe there *was* some something, some communication somehow . . . not voices, but a *feel,* a presence. There was no feel of her here; she was dead.

He had to get out of this coffin house. He walked out into the front yard and let the sunlight soak into him and the warm air fill his lungs. From miles away he heard the bark of a dog, then a second nearer barking, and the sounds came down the line of farms like a string of firecrackers till Deena May's hound took it up. The hair stiffened on the back of his neck as he heard her sharp little voice silence the dog. She was in the back yard of the big house . . . near the grape arbor, he judged.

Barton went around the side of the house, his step cautious on the grass, his whole body caught up in a helpless, trembling anticipation.

The arbor enclosed a rectangle of space and through the wall of vines he saw her lying on the grass within. She was propped on one elbow, her other arm lifted in a slim bare curve as her little fist crushed slowly into a succulent bunch of grapes above her upturned face. The juice streamed into her wide-open red mouth and he could see the rolling sliding motion of her arched throat as she swallowed greedily. Some of the juice ran over her chin and down her throat and ran in purple rivulets across the smooth white skin between her breasts. He could see the soft-rising slope of the side of one breast, in the blue shadow, where an upper button of her cotton dress was open. She was barefoot and barelegged. One knee was

raised a few inches and a tantalizing bit of her thigh showed. She dropped the grape husks and reached her hand to the hound who licked her fingers, then licked the juice from her throat and from between her breasts. She pushed the dog away and slid her vivid blue eyes to their corners. She saw Barton and grinned slowly at him.

"Y'all dressed up sharp, Mr. Barton." She wagged her knee lazily from side to side and watched him from the corners of her eyes.

He had scarcely been aware that he'd moved, but here he was within the enclosure. It was airless behind the thick vines and the sweet tart smell of the crushed grapes hung over her in the motionless heat and his throat was trembling so much he couldn't speak.

She sat up, pivoted around on one hip to face him, both knees up and apart for an instant so he could see she wore nothing under the thin dress. She folded her feet under her and covered her legs with her skirt, her expression exaggeratedly demure. "Y' scowling fierce. I do something to make you mad at me, Mr. Barton?" she said, her tone mocking and knowing. She indicated two heaped baskets. "You *said* I could just come and take all of the grapes I wanted to take. Can't I?" She gave him a pouty look. "Or must I go on away. Y' want me to go on away, Mr. Barton? H'm?"

"Deena May. Never go away . . ." He began hoarsely. His face was hot and he needed to sweat and he couldn't. He was feverish. He blurted. "I want you. I want you to come away with me . . ."

She shook her mass of fiery hair back and opened those round blue eyes wide at him. "Where to? C'mon down where I can hear you sweet talk." He got awkwardly down on his knees. "C'mon, clear down," she urged. "Where y' gonna take me, big old Daddy Lover?"

He sat almost touching her, his eyes fixed trance-like on her, his mouth twitchy at the corners. "New York. California. Mexico, foreign places, races, nightclubs, beaches . . . Deena May, come with me. Fly. You ever fly in an airplane?"

"No, I never. When? Buy me purties?" She thrust her leg out from under the skirt, fit the curve of her arched foot warmly against the bony round of his knee, stroking him. She wriggled her toes. "Purty high-heel shoes . . . stockings," she touched her leg, then her hip and giggled, lowering her eyes, "and *all*? I'd leave you put them on me, even . . ." In a sudden burst of enthusiasm she came upright, standing on her knees before him. She hunched her shoulders and ran her hands slinkily across her chest. "Naked looking green dresses and blue and skin color ones and my hair piled zoop, up like this . . ." She pushed the flaming mass of her hair in a high wad and turned to show her ears and the lovely line

of her neck. "And loop earrings and pearls wound in my hair. Whoo-eee . . . " She shook her shoulders and hips, standing there on her spread knees, and sang, grinning straight and dazzlingly close into his face. "Cha cha *cha*—tiyata . . . cha-ta-*cha*." She pitched forward, winding her strong wiry little arms around his neck. She pushed her wet red mouth against his, hot and open and tasting like sugar. He toppled over onto his side on the grass, panting, his hands starting over her maddening body.

She rolled away out of reach. He pawed for her, scrambling, his eyes glazed and senseless. "Naughty big old Daddy Lover . . ." She got to her feet, kicked his hand from her ankle and danced away. She came within reach, teased him with her toe, jumped clear again. "Want it bad?"

"Please . . . "

She touched the dimple in her chin. "Devil's in me. I set out for you, old man. My maw always said if an old man scowl at a purty young girl it ain't natural; he's fightin' off young-man ideas and bound to lose and watch out. I been watchin' the fierce way you look at me. Promise you'd cater to me, old man?"

"Anything. I—I promise. Come here."

"No, no. You cool off and chicken on me, that's what you'd end up. You chicken?"

Her eyes were blinking and dancing. He got himself to a sitting position and stared at her, sensing her meaning.

"What d'ya mean"

"Hugh. He'd prevent us. And he's got it comin' to him, the way he won't cater to me. I got it all set, but if you chicken out, y'can't never get no closer'n them spy glasses you look at me through. I seen you once, don't think I never . . . " She giggled, strutted and sang tauntingly, shaking her behind at him. "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha-ta-*cha* . . . Well . . . ?"

It was dark. Heat prickled at his scalp as he sat in the crotch of the tree by the turn in the creek, a shotgun on his knees. He knew he was there to ambush and kill a young man in cold blood, and yet he wasn't. It wasn't really him, Andrew Barton, but something else in him compelled to do it, to do what he had to do to hold onto the brightness of life against . . . He couldn't think it through; he needn't try . . . the past was dead, only the future was living . . .

"You can drop your shotgun now, Mr. Barton."

Barton froze. That cold, strange voice wasn't real; it was just fear and guilt working at his ears and mind . . .

"Drop it!" Hugh's voice chopped at him. "I got a rifle at your back."

Barton threw the shotgun down. "Shoot me," he said. "Go ahead and shoot me."

"I just want my pay so I can head out. Now, climb down. I found her hiding up in your house, hound led me straight to her. I scared the truth out of her. I never thought you could lie to me, Mr. Barton. Tell me she was hustling down to meet a feller so's I could come and you could shoot me." His voice cracked. "I never would of believed it, except I seen it's so. Now, march!"

Barton moved along ahead of him, looking down. "Hugh, boy," he mumbled. "I wouldn't have gone through with it. Believe me."

"Mr. Barton, you don't know if you would of or not."

Deena May stood scowling in a corner of the kitchen. Hugh ignored her. "I want my pay plus pay for the use of my wife."

"I swear nothing's happened."

"If you're the one who ain't had her, no charge. Otherwise, kindly add twenty-five." He spun, red-faced and furious and shouted at her, "Cents!" He turned, wiped at the sudden tears in his eyes. "Now will you please pay me my money so I can get the hell away from here?"

Deena May and Barton stood in the same room, not looking at each other. They listened after Hugh had gone and finally the old car coughed and started and went sputtering down the lane. They watched its lights turn onto the road. Then it was out of sight.

"Good riddance of bad rubbish," Deena May sniffed. She slid a glance at him and frowned. "What're you moping around about?"

He turned up his hands.

"You ain't going to try kissing me off, too, are you?"

"I–I–" He couldn't look at her.

"Lookit, big old Daddy Lover . . . Cha cha *cha*-tiyata . . . cha ta *cha* . . . " She sang and danced, shaking herself, and Barton couldn't keep himself from watching. "That's better," she cried. "C'mon. There's nothing to bother us none now. *C'mon!*"

She went up the stairs. After a moment, he lowered his head and followed.

It was past midnight. Light from the setting moon lay like winter frost over his old body as he looked out the bedroom window at Deena May and her hound coming back across the field. She'd sneaked down there again to slut with those hoodlums she ran with. Maybe when all the negotiations on the sale of the farm were completed in a few more days and they could get away from this old coffin of a house, she would be different. He shook his head wearily. No, wherever she went she would attract the scum of creation to her.

She reached the yard, moved out of sight at the arbor. She would be coming in shortly, he realized with a vague dread, and he wanted to get to bed and feign sleep. But

he was dull and slow with fatigue and she was already in the house and coming noisily up the stairs before he could break his inertia and crawl under the covers. In two weeks she had lived up ninety percent of his remaining life, he thought hopelessly. He kept his eyes shut as she flung open the door and snapped on the light.

"I been taking that ole hound dog for a run," she lied stupidly. She sounded half-drunk. He didn't bother to answer. She flaunted off to the bedroom she had taken over, calling back: "Quick's I take me a bath I'll be back, and don't you go try and beg off like last night and this morning, you big old Daddy Lover, you—"

She was burning him out like dry old tinder, and he knew what hell was like. It was fire, fire; it burned unquenchable and insatiable in her. He couldn't stand it . . . he *couldn't* . . . He moaned softly, a bone-deep ache of triedness in him. If she would just let him alone, let him rest in peace . . .

Then she was back in a filmy nylon shorty nightgown that left her luscious, dancing legs naked to the hips; her eyes teased and her lips taunted: "Get up, big old Daddy Lover . . . Lookit!" She began to prance, tilting her hips and shaking her breasts and rolling her bottom as she sang: "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata—cha ta *cha* . . ."

He crammed the pillow over his head, and writhed. "Please let me sleep!" His voice rose to a bellow of anguish.

She laughed. "C'mon," she taunted, and pulled the pillow away, and moved her body tantalizingly, and his cold hands reached toward her. "Cha cha *cha* . . . " she teased, backstepping daintily. "C'mon, you get up and dance that cute way you do, big old Daddy Lover."

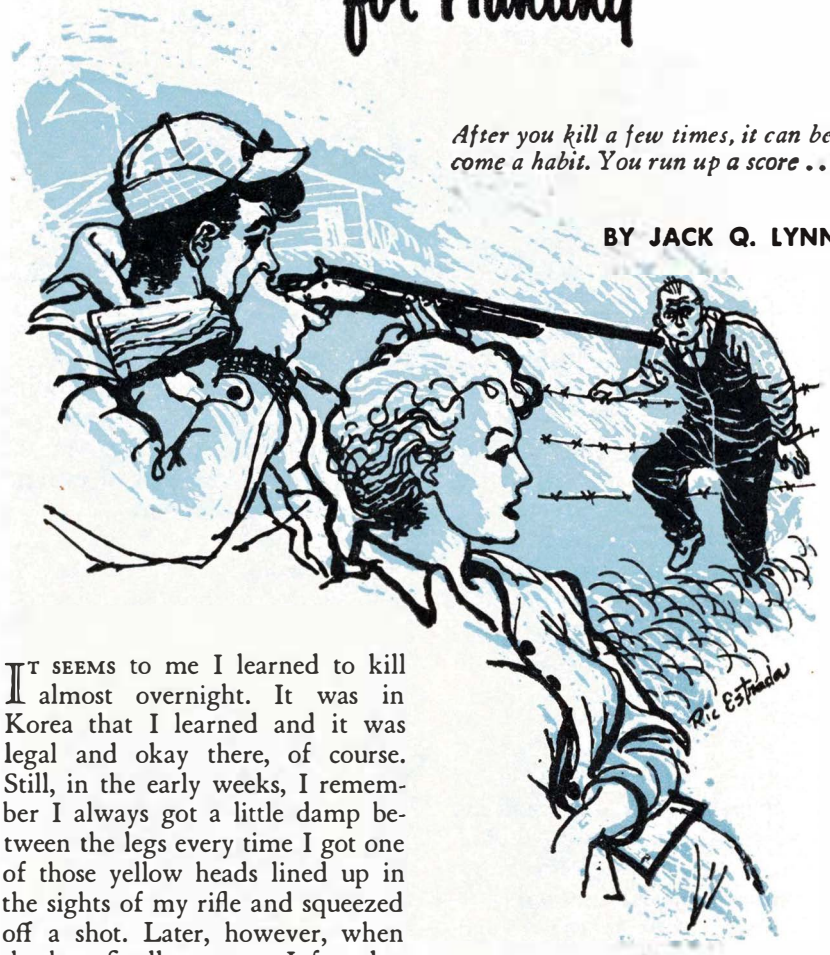
He sat up and got up and began to lift his knees and wag his rump and he heard his voice croaking, "Cha cha *cha*-tiyata—cha ta cha—" And then he caught sight of himself in the old bureau mirror, like a grotesque, mindless performing animal. He stopped and stared at that beautiful fire burning him to death and he knew he had to put out that fire to save himself.

At last he lay quietly, an old man in his bed. But his bony fingers still ached from the unaccustomed tension and violence they had just endured. His heartbeat had finally calmed. His hand moved over and rested on her briefly. It were as though she were sleeping beside him. Already, her flesh was beginning to lose its heat, just as her throat had forever lost its song of lust. He sighed and shut his eyes, his body yielding to the deepest craving in it, the craving for an old man's rest.

A Clear Day for Hunting

After you kill a few times, it can become a habit. You run up a score . . .

BY JACK Q. LYNN



IT SEEMS to me I learned to kill almost overnight. It was in Korea that I learned and it was legal and okay there, of course. Still, in the early weeks, I remember I always got a little damp between the legs every time I got one of those yellow heads lined up in the sights of my rifle and squeezed off a shot. Later, however, when the bug finally got me I found a lot of pleasure in slamming a .30 slug between a pair of sloe eyes.

One thing about killing: if you're

good at it, you get a reputation, even in the Army. That was me. I got the reputation. I became more than just another corn-fed boy in the ranks. I was the guy the sergeants wanted on their patrols; I was the guy the other privates wanted to buddy with on the outposts; I was the guy everybody wanted around when the scrap was the hottest.

In short, I suddenly got to be a somebody.

Then, just as suddenly, I was a nobody again. The docs had a fancy name for it, but all I've ever been sure of is they took everything away from me—my fun, my reputation, my sense of being top dog.

It was easy, the way they did it. One day they pulled me out of the ranks, whisked me off to a hospital, fired a basket of these association tests at me and then sent me back to the States. I used up the next six months shuffling from hospital to rehabilitation center, to hospital to rehabilitation center. Then the Army handed me some papers and some green and told me to go home.

That home business was funny. Of course the Army didn't know I was conceived in one town, carried through a hundred others, and, finally, deposited in Crawford, Iowa with an old couple named Karston.

Crawford was no more than a spot on the prairie. Population, 2,867. I grew up in that town. When I left Crawford, I thought I'd never go back. But the Karstons died while I was gone, the old lady, then the old man a couple of months later. And, surprisingly, I found myself the old man's heir. A lawyer named August Jones, whom I vaguely remembered, wrote me a letter while I was in one of the Army hospitals. He was taking care of Mr. Karston's affairs. There was some money for me. Would I please correspond with Mr. August Jones immediately.

I did more than correspond; I went back to Crawford.

My first afternoon in town, Mr. August Jones gave me a check for one thousand nine hundred and fifty-five dollars. No cents.

"Mr. Karston's estate is settled," he said with a smug smile. "I took care of things. The amount of the check is what is left. It's yours under the terms of Mr. Karston's will. And—and, naturally, I retained a fee."

"Naturally," I said, wondering just how crooked Mr. August Jones really was.

That same afternoon I stopped at the only bank in town. Some of the people there remembered me. I cashed the check and then went to the Crawford Hotel and got a room. I needed time to think. I wasn't sure where I was going next or what I was going to do. All I was sure of was I was a nobody in a fraternity of nobodies, and I wanted elevated.

As things worked out, my worrying that cold November afternoon was for nothing. Because I got elevated fast. I killed a guy, right there in Crawford.

Across the street from the hotel was the Koffee Korner. My first morning in town I crossed the street, my shoes creaking against the hard-packed surface of snow, and entered. It was a small place with a counter up front and three booths lining each wall near the back. I sat down at the counter and opened my coat.

A waitress came up. I didn't recognize her.

"Coffee and roll," I said.

I watched her while she drew the coffee. She was young—four or five years younger than me, probably. That made her about seventeen. A red-head. Nice figure.

She came back with the coffee and roll. "That's eleven cents."

I put a dime and a penny on the counter.

She picked up the coins, started away from me, then came back, giving me a small smile. "You're the Karston boy, aren't you?" she asked. "You just got back in town."

I looked at her, thinking I'd been wrong when I didn't recognize her. But I hadn't been wrong.

"I'm Pearl," she volunteered. "Your name is Ralph, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"You know how it is in a small town, everybody has to know everybody else."

"I'd almost forgotten," I said.

"Have you been away *that* long?"

I sipped at the cup of coffee. "What do you want to know about me, Pearl?"

She wrinkled her nose and smiled. "Well, let's see... Are you going to stay in Crawford?"

"I doubt it."

"Why not?"

"I don't like the town."

"Maybe you'd like it better if you didn't room at the hotel."

"What do you mean?"

"A hotel is so expensive."

I shrugged. "Right now I can afford three-fifty a day."

"Maybe you can. I wouldn't know. But compare three-fifty with five dollars a week and what have you got?"

"Just a little longer that I don't have to look for a job."

She nodded. "You should go see Mrs. Arnold."

"And just who is Mrs. Arnold?"

"Mrs. Arnold rents rooms. Five dollars a week. Of course you have to eat out. But it's a nice house and right now she's got a vacancy."

"I could move right in, huh?"

"Sure."

"Hmm. Tell me something, Pearl. Where do you live?"

"At Mrs. Arnold's."

I gave her a wise grin. "That's what I thought."

"You have a nasty mind," she said with a big smile.

Twenty minutes later I found

Mrs. Arnold's house. It was four blocks north of the courthouse square, a large, white, two-story place set back from the street. The woman who opened the front door in answer to my knock was somewhere in her late thirties, blonde, tall and skinny. She wore a simple print housedress.

I said, "My name is Ralph Karston. I need a room."

She swung the door wide, "Come in, come in. You'll freeze to death standing out there."

I walked into a short, wide hall. In front of me, stairs went up to the second floor. I turned around.

The woman was closing the door. She shivered and hugged herself with her arms. "God, it's cold."

I agreed.

"So you're looking for a room, huh?" she said, looking me up and down.

"Pearl said—"

"Pearl!" The woman laughed. "Leave it to Pearl. Never misses a trick. Not Pearl." She stepped forward then and jerked my cap off my head. "Take off your coat. I want to see."

I looked at her closely. And she looked right back at me, her face a little tight, I thought. "Come on, come on," she said impatiently. "Take off your coat."

I unbuttoned my coat slowly and shrugged out of it. She grabbed it out of my hand and put it with my cap on a nearby table. And then she studied me from head to foot.

"Okay?" I asked.

"Okay," she said. "The room is upstairs. You want to see it now?"

I said I did.

Following her up the steps, I became conscious of the movement of her hips under the print dress. I had already decided she jutted too much to be a good-looking woman. All of her lines—of face, breasts, hips—were too sharp. Still, there was something about her . . .

Maybe it was the lust in her eyes.

The room was at the head of the stairs. It was a large, carpeted, airy room with a double bed, bureau, overstuffed chair, large table, three lamps and two windows. From the windows, I could look down on the front lawn and driveway.

"The last guy that had this room died in here," Mrs. Arnold said.

I turned away from the window. She was slouched in the doorway. Now she laughed softly. "Take it easy, boy. It was a natural death. He was eighty-two. And Pearl hated him for it, for being so old."

I took a deep breath. "Okay, so Pearl likes men."

"Sure she does. She should. She's young, gay and all that crap." Mrs. Arnold pushed away from the door and walked halfway into the room. "Now you. Do you like the room?"

"It's okay."

"It's five dollars a week. You pay every Saturday."

"I'll take it."

"I have three other roomers. Pearl and two men. You're all upstairs.

I live downstairs. Alone. There are two baths, one up here, one down. You people use the upstairs. Pearl doesn't mind sharing."

I measured Mrs. Arnold with my eyes then. "You don't like Pearl."

Her eyebrows shot up. "Don't like Pearl? Really, Ralph, I love her. After all, she may be my daughter some day."

Mrs. Arnold turned then and walked out of the room.

That night I asked Pearl, "What kind of a dame is this Mrs. Arnold?"

She rolled away from me. "What do you mean?"

It was dark in Pearl's room and hot. My body was wet with sweat. I found a matchbook on the table beside the bed, lit a match and looked at my wrist watch. Almost two o'clock. I found a package of cigarettes near the matches, got out two, put them in my mouth and lit them. Then I handed one to Pearl.

"She strikes me as being kinda—well, strange," I said, "What makes her tick?"

"Marcia isn't strange," Pearl said in the dark. "Just jealous. Of me, I guess. I'm young. She isn't. Oh, I don't mean she's an old woman. She's only thirty-eight. But *she* thinks she's old, and—well, men just don't pay much attention to her."

"She isn't exactly the most beautiful dame in the world," I said.

"That's part of it, too."

I smoked slowly. "She doesn't like you, Pearl."

"I know it."

"Then why do you stay here?"

"I—I'm not real sure."

"Maybe you should look for another place."

She turned up on her side then and I felt the full length of her warm body pressed against mine. "Not now," she breathed into my ear.

I lifted my arm and put it around her bare shoulders and pulled her tight against me and smiled in the dark. We smoked in silence, for a long while. Then Pearl said, "Marcia's got a boy friend. A nice guy, really."

"Yeah?"

"His name is Harry Schmidt. He's a widower. Lives alone on a farm 'bout ten miles north of town."

"He's your father."

It was quiet for a moment. Then she asked, "How did you know?"

"She told me you might be her daughter some day," I said.

"Dad's a nice guy. Too nice for her, I think. You should meet him."

I took the cigarette out of her hand and butted it along with mine in an ashtray. Facing her again, I said, "Do I have to meet him right now?"

I heard her breath catch in her throat. "If you did, I think I'd be embarrassed," she said softly.

"Really?"

"Christ, quit talking!" she said against my mouth.

Morning came faster than it

should have. I opened my eyes slowly and looked around. For a minute, I was confused. Then I remembered having tip-toed back to my own room, probably no more than a couple of hours ago. I laughed softly and flopped over on my back and lit a cigarette. The bright morning sun poured into my room through the two front windows. I dozed until the sudden pounding on my door brought me sharply awake.

"Yeah?"

The door opened and Marcia Arnold stood there looking in at me. She wore a heavy, red robe and fluffy, red slippers. The robe was wrapped tightly around her thin body. She said, "It's after eight-thirty. You overslept."

"What do you mean, overslept?"

"The other men have left the house, and Pearl—"

"I don't have a job," I said evenly. "I can stay in bed all day if I feel like it."

"After last night, you should feel like it."

I butted my cigarette in an ashtray. "Come here."

She stood rooted. "Pearl's using the bath downstairs. I want to use this one up here—that is, if you're not going to use it right away.

"Come here," I repeated.

She moved then, came toward me cautiously, eyes funny. She stopped about two feet away from me. I leaned forward, reached out with one hand and pulled her down across me. Then I pushed her back and hovered over her, my mouth inches from her lips. She stayed very still. Her breathing was harsh and quick. I took her hands and locked them over her head.

"What about Pearl?" she asked.

"To hell with Pearl."

She freed her hands then and put them on my bare chest. Open-palmed. "Pearl isn't downstairs," she said. "She's gone to work."

"That's what I thought."

We stayed silent then, measuring each other with our eyes. Finally, she breathed, "You're so young, Ralph. So beautifully young."

I kissed her.

Marcia Arnold was not a beautiful woman, you understand, but she had an unsatiated need that had a terrific aphrodisiac effect on me. And I'd be a liar if I said I didn't slip happily into a phantasmagoric world of soft arms, live mouth, and yielding bodies. I wallowed in it. Pearl at night. Marcia in the morning. I was living, really living. Then Marcia jolted me like I'd never been jolted.

"Ralph," she said one morning, "what do you want out of life? I mean, what do you *really* want?"

"I've got what I want."

"Have you? What about me? You don't have me."

I ran one hand over her long body. "I've got you, baby."

"I belong to Harry Schmidt."

"Do you?"

She looked at me wickedly then.

"Let's kill Harry," she said.

She said it softly, but with intensity. I felt a tremor pass through her body. And then I fastened one hand in her wild blonde hair and jerked back her head and lowered my mouth to her lips. But I didn't kiss her.

"He's a wealthy man, Ralph."

"So?"

"He's got everything in my name. His farm, everything. I know."

"He's crazy."

"I've told him I'd marry him."

"Maybe you should."

"I can't. Not now, Ralph. Not after you."

I laughed out loud.

"With the insurance, it's thousands," she said. "I don't know how much, but plenty. We'd be set."

"For the electric chair."

She shook her head violently. "No! Not my way!"

"A lot of men have died because they figured their way was the right way. A lot of women, too."

"Ralph, this is so simple it'll make you laugh. You read about these kinds of accidents every day, especially this time of year."

I looked at her with a smile that said I still wasn't convinced. "Accident? Okay, baby, tell it slow."

She kept her voice low, never looking away from me as she talked. The way she had it all laid out in her mind, she must have been thinking about it for a long time. Because she gave it to me quickly, simply. And she didn't let me interrupt while she told me.

When she finished, I kissed her, a long, hard, bruising kiss. Then I lifted my head and said, "You're a strange woman, baby. Real strange. But you got me. You know that?"

"Right where the hair is short."

I heard her say this, but I wasn't paying any attention to her just then. It was as though some hidden part of me was awakening after a long sleep. I felt a stir of excitement inside me. I hadn't had such a feeling since Korea.

The day I killed Harry Schmidt was a cloudless day. The November sun was shining warmly, when Marcia and I walked out of her house about two o'clock in the afternoon. We wore wool, hip-length coats, caps, cord pants, heavy boots. We got into her car. She backed the car out of the driveway and turned north. It took us fifteen minutes to reach Harry Schmidt's farm.

Harry Schmidt was a portly man of medium height, maybe forty, maybe forty-five. His hair was thin, his face round and ruddy. He had big hands. When Marcia introduced us, the pressure of his grip was near bone-crushing.

He gave me a big smile. "So you want to hunt some birds, huh?"

"Sure thing," I said.

"Ralph's been in a hospital," Marcia explained. "He was hurt in Korea. He's still recovering."

"Korea, huh?" Harry Schmidt looked at me closely. "Well then, I guess you can handle a .410 okay."

"I think so," I said.

"That's what I got. You go ahead and use it. Marcia and me will wait for you here at the house and see you later."

"Sure," I said. But I don't think he heard me. He'd wrapped one of Marcia's hands in his and he was beaming at her.

She wrinkled her nose at him. "Let's go with Ralph."

"You want to go?" he said in surprise.

"I want to walk," she said.

He laughed then. "Okay."

We walked north past his barn and followed a fence lane through one downed corn field into another. After we went over a rise in the terrain, the farm house and the road were out of sight. The air was warm and clear and the sun reflecting off the snow-covered field was dazzling bright. I walked slightly ahead of Harry Schmidt and Marcia. We didn't talk much, just a few words as we climbed through the fences. I didn't look at Marcia any more than I had to.

There was a lot going through my mind. Harry dead, the victim of a hunting accident. Marcia inheriting everything he owned. Marcia and I married. The only trouble was, could I stand having Marcia around all the time? She was nothing for looks. And I was already getting tired of her, the other way. Now if she was Pearl . . . But I had to forget Pearl. Because Marcia was going to be the one with the dough. Then the idea came to me. It was wild, but still it made sense and would give me what I wanted.

She jerked me back to reality. "Ready to give up, Ralph?"

We'd been tramping for over an hour without raising a pheasant. "Might as well," I said.

"Sometimes these birds are thicker than flies on a cow's tail. Then again—" Harry Schmidt shrugged. "You know how it is."

"I know," I said.

We turned back. I figured we were almost a mile from his place; the long, gentle hill blocked our view of the house. About halfway up the slope. we had to go through a barbed-wire fence.

As we approached the fence, Marcia marched ahead. "I'll get the wire," she said.

My heart was pounding hard now. I knew this was it.

Marcia put one foot on the middle strand of barbed wire, pushed down and, at the same time, lifted the top strand with her fingers. "Harry?" she said.

She was facing me. Her eyes were narrow slits and I could find no pity in them. And then as Harry Schmidt went through the opening in the wire, I saw her lips round out the silent word, Now!

He was standing erect, facing me. I pulled the .410 up to my shoulder

and saw the color drain from his face. His eyes became riveted on me. He didn't move.

"D-don't," he said.

I stopped breathing and squeezed the trigger. The recoil jarred my shoulder, but I saw the top of Harry Schmidt's head fly off and his brains spray out like the vomit from a sick drunk. And then he was sprawled in the mess, flat on his back. There were empty holes where his eyes had been. His nose was shattered. But his mouth and jaw were intact.

I grabbed her arm and we ran toward the farm house.

Inside the house Marcia was sick again. She went into a bathroom off the kitchen and leaned over the stool.

Meanwhile I got out a handkerchief and wiped the .410 clean. After that, using the handerchief, I hooked the butt of the gun under my arm and let the barrel rest on my forearm. All this done in accordance with the wild, but sensible little plan that had come to me.

When Marcia came out of the bathroom, my handkerchief was back in my pocket and I was standing at the telephone, ringing the sheriff's office.

"Come here, baby," I said softly. "Take this, will you?" I wiggled the .410.

She took it off of my arm and stood beside me, running her hands nervously back and forth over the length of it. I told her to sit down. And then I faced the telephone so that she wouldn't see me smiling.

The only fingerprints on the gun now were hers.

It took the sheriff and his deputy about fifteen minutes to get to Harry Schmidt's farm. Leaving Marcia at the house, I took them out to Harry. An ambulance swung into the farm yard as we walked out of the house. The sheriff waved the ambulance to go along with us. When we got there, I watched the sheriff, his deputy and the driver put Harry Schmidt into the ambulance. Something leaked out of the dead man's head as they picked him up.

A half-hour later, Marcia and I sat in the sheriff's office in the basement of the courthouse. The sheriff sat behind his desk; his deputy sat in a straight-back chair near the door. "Okay," the sheriff said, "who's gonna tell it?"

"I will," said Marcia softly.

That was the way she had planned it. She had figured it would be better if she told the story because she was acquainted with the sheriff, whereas I was a stranger to him. It suited me fine, too.

"We'd been out about an hour, maybe an hour and a half," she said, "and hadn't raised a bird so we decided to go back to the house. We came to this fence and I went ahead to hold the wire. Harry went through the fence first. Then Ralph bent over, threw one leg through the opening in the

wire and then—it happened. The gun discharged. I don't know how or why. It just went off. Well, the next thing I knew, Harry was sprawled on the ground and there was a lot of blood. We stood there for a minute, Ralph and me, and then we started running, just like that. No reason. We just started running and yelling. When we got to the house I was sick and Ralph called you."

The sheriff sat very quiet for a long while. His eyes were fastened on some unseen object on the desk top. It became strangely quiet in his office, and I began to fidget uncomfortably.

Then he looked up. His calf-like brown eyes hung on my face, moved over for a look at Marcia. They'd come back to me, when he said, "Which one of you killed him? And I don't mean accidentally."

"Ralph did it!" Marcia came right back at him. "Just—just like I told you. But it was an accident. Going between the wires—"

"Calm down!" the sheriff ordered her, lifting his hand. "Now I want to know which one of you murdered him. It wasn't an accident because the angle's all wrong. Harry was shot straight on, not at an angle at all. Now I want the truth."

It was now or never, I knew. As I said, "Mrs. Arnold killed him," I heard Marcia gasp. But I went on talking fast. "I never had the gun in my hand. She shot him right in the face. Harry Schmidt has everything in her name—his farm, insurance, everything."

"No, no!" Marcia cried out. "That isn't true. *I'm* the one that never had the gun in my—"

She broke it off quick. And I could almost see what was going through her mind. Right then, I would have bet the world she was remembering taking that .410 from me.

"Check the gun for prints, Sam," the sheriff said, looking at his deputy. Then he faced me again. "How come you know so damn much about Harry Schmidt, son?"

"She told me," I said. "Look, sheriff, I'm in this thing up to my ears just because I tagged along on a pheasant hunt. No other reason. None at all. Why the hell would I kill the poor devil? What would I gain? If I—"

The sheriff waved me down with a gesture of his hand. "Okay, Mrs. Arnold, let's have it all over again. But this time give me the truth."

Marcia didn't talk then. She rattled. She was scared, which was one of the things I'd been counting on. She told the sheriff how much she loved Harry Schmidt, how he was going to marry her, and how I had forced my attentions on her, forced her to help kill Harry. She told him a lot of things. But I didn't pay any particular attention to her because she was going to have one hell of a time prov-

ing any of it. On the other hand, it wasn't going to be too difficult to establish a motive for Marcia wanting Harry Schmidt dead. And, of course, there would be the prints on the gun, her prints.

I guess Marcia must have figured it that way, too, because that same night she went to pieces. She stood up on the bed in her cell in the county jail, took the material she'd ripped off the mattress, looped one end around her neck and the other over a ceiling steam pipe, and jumped off the bed. They found her hanging there next morning.

Well, the way things turned out then, I moved right into the clover. After some legal work, Pearl inherited her father's estate and then a couple of months later we were married. It was no trouble at all talking Pearl into putting everything in my name after we moved out here to L. A.

But I'm getting restless now. There's a difference between having things in your name and having them—all yours, completely. I think I'll try again. I don't know exactly how I'll set this one up, but I'll find a way . . .

Police in Sweden have a problem. As a result, according to a recent report from Stockholm, they do not consider a person drunk until they "fall flat and lie prone." Drinkers who stagger are ignored because there aren't enough jails to house them.

In Pasadena, Calif., the owner of a machine shop notified police of the loss of "what we think is a valuable piece of art." Burglars had entered the shop and carried off a Marilyn Monroe calendar.

Deputy Sheriff Keith Averill, of Coopersville, Mich., sped to the edge of town when he heard a report that fleeing burglars were headed his way. He stopped the first car he saw and asked the driver and a passenger to help set up a road block.

A few minutes later Deputy Marvin Pratt arrived at the barricade. "Grab those men!" Pratt shouted, pointing to the two men manning the road block. "I think they're the guys we're looking for."

A search of their car disclosed the burglary loot.

So Much Per Body

BY JONATHAN CRAIG

EDDIE BLIVENS was sweating, and that wasn't good. A man applying for a job like this one should appear calm and relaxed, perhaps even a little indifferent. He shifted his position on the straight chair beside Summerlin's desk and smiled at the older man politely, wondering whether he should take out his handkerchief and dry his forehead. No, he decided; the handkerchief would only help to attract Summerlin's attention to his sweating. But maybe Summerlin

Nothing to do for months maybe, the boss said. Then as many as two in one night. Eddie nodded, hiding his eagerness.

wouldn't even think anything about it. After all, the office wasn't air-conditioned, and this was one of the hottest nights of the year.

Summerlin leaned back in his swivel chair and stared at Eddie appraisingly. He was somewhere in his late fifties, Eddie judged, a heavy-bodied man with a florid, flat-featured face and thick white hair parted exactly in the middle.

"You've thought this over very carefully, Mr. Blivens?" he asked.

Eddie nodded. "Yes, sir."

"If there's the slightest doubt in your mind . . ."

Eddie let his smile widen "There isn't, sir."

"No misgivings at all?"

"No, sir."

"You needn't say 'sir.'"

"Yes, Mr. Summerlin."

"You're thirty-four?"

"Yes. I'll be thirty-five next month."

"And you have a wife and daughter, I believe?"

"Yes, I have. And there's another baby on the way." He paused. "That's the main reason this job's so important to me, Mr. Summerlin. My regular job with the power and light company in my home town pays pretty well, of course, but there's bound to be a lot of extra expenses, what with the baby coming on and all. Nadine—that's my wife—she isn't the healthiest girl in the world, you know." He stopped and shifted his position on the chair again. This wasn't the right approach at all. "I was in the service," he went on quickly. "In the Army. Naturally, I had to—"

"Kill men?"

"Yes," Eddie said. "I got so I didn't think a thing about it."

"I see. Still, killing men in a war is quite different from killing . . . from the kind of thing you'd do for me. Killing an enemy soldier can be almost completely impersonal, but—"

"You wouldn't have to worry about me on that score, Mr. Summerlin," Eddie said. My God, he thought, how can he be so cool? You'd think he was just a businessman hiring a bookkeeper or something.

"We've investigated you thoroughly, of course," Summerlin said. "Frankly, we're very much impressed with your background and qualifications, Mr. Blivens. We think you'll make us a good man."

"Thank you," Eddie said. It's almost unbelievable, he thought. This kind of hiring shouldn't be done in a place like this, not across a desk in an office with Summerlin talking just like a big executive and all. Of course, he was an executive, in a way, but . . .

"However," Summerlin went on, "there's no way we can be quite sure—until we give you a tryout." He smiled faintly. "That, of course, will be tonight."

Eddie nodded. "That suits me fine, Mr. Summerlin."

"Do you understand exactly what is required of you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know that you must do this thing right the first time? There will be no second chance, Mr. Blivens. This is one job that permits no bungling."

"I know my trade," Eddie said. "You won't be sorry you hired me, Mr. Summerlin."

"I trust not. But as I say, tonight is just a trial. If you complete your assignment satisfactorily, I'll consider you my regular man. You may expect at least three or four jobs a month. At least it will average out to that during the course of a year. Naturally, there will be some months when we'll have nothing for you to do. Then again, there may be two or more assignments the same week. Perhaps even the same night."

Eddie nodded, hiding his eagerness.

Mr. Summerlin said, "You have any particular squeamishness about women?"

"None at all, sir."

"Good. There may be one of those occasionally, too."

"It's all the same to me, Mr. Summerlin."

"That's fortunate. I explained about your pay the first time you came to see me. It will be in cash, of course, and payable immediately upon the completion of your assignment. If you prove satisfactory tonight, you'll be able to draw against future pay at any time you wish."

"That's very generous of you."

"Not at all. There's one thing more, Mr. Blivens."

"Yes, sir?"

"We've learned that you like to take a drink."

Eddie took out his hankerchief and mopped at his forehead. "Only ever so often," he said. "Just on special occasions, like New Year's and Christmas. And even then, I—"

"Of course," Summerlin said. "If you were a really heavy drinker, you wouldn't have been considered for the job to begin with. My point is that there must be no drinking at all. Not on the days I require your services. Is that entirely clear?"

"Yes, sir. That's something else you won't have to worry about."

"Your predecessor was equally sure. Yet, he drank himself out of his job in less than a year. In fact, he botched his last assignment so horribly that—" Summerlin broke off for a moment. "I'd rather not talk about it, but I think you know what I mean."

"I sure do. That'll never happen with me, Mr. Summerlin. I swear it."

"He started drinking after assignments, to forget. Then he began drinking before them, to give him sufficient courage to carry them out." Summerlin glanced at the clock on the wall. "I see there's

very little time left, Mr. Blivens. Perhaps we should be moving along." He got up, crossed to the door, and held it open for Eddie. "I'll explain the details to you on the way. If there's any point you're not completely sure of, ask me about it. It's far better to go over the procedure even a dozen times now than to have something go wrong. I certainly wouldn't want another botched job on my hands, Mr. Blivens."

"You don't have to worry about me a bit," Eddie said as he waited for Summerlin to lock the door behind them. "I'll do a job that'll make you proud."

Twenty minutes later, Eddie Blivens was ready for his tryout. He had computed the exact voltage necessary to electrocute a man of this one's size and weight and age, and he had checked every possible adjustment on the control panel hidden by the one-way glass in the alcove behind the electric chair. There was nothing to do now but wait for Warden Summerlin's signal to pull the switch.

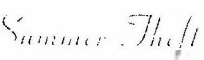
The guards finished with the straps and electrodes and moved away. With his hands on the handle of the switch, Eddie Blivens glanced briefly at the hooded man in the chair.

"This is mighty damned important to me, fella," he said softly. "Don't give me any trouble."

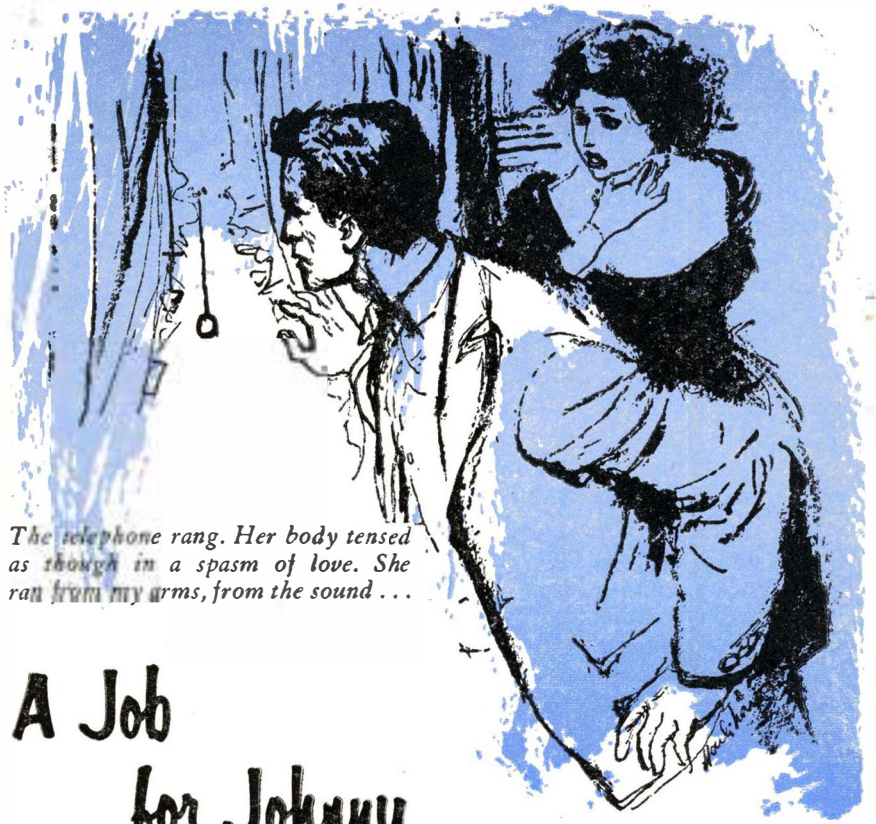
It happened in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Two waitresses walked into the office of Attorney Fred Schmuck to file divorce suits. Each said that she had been beaten by her husband. Schmuck questioned the two women and found they had the same husband, too.

Thomas Coker, Jr., assistant solicitor, said bigamy charges would be filed against the dual husband, Joseph C. Phelps, 28.

A federal grand jury in Atlanta, Ga. indicted Carnel Sprinkles for operating a whisky still within the walls of the federal penitentiary. Sprinkles is serving a term for moonshining.



In Chicago, while the mercury hovered around 90 degrees, a thief stole 30 snowsuits from a salesman's trunk.



The telephone rang. Her body tensed as though in a spasm of love. She ran from my arms, from the sound . . .

A Job for Johnny

BY LAWRENCE BURNE

I CRAMPED THE wheels of the U-drive Ford hard into the curb, set the emergency against the incline of the hill, and climbed out through the right hand door.

The building I wanted was an ancient San Francisco Gothic frame house. Two men in coveralls were laying asbestos shingles against the side facing the bay. They weren't making a production of the job; there was a quart bottle of beer between them on the scaffold, and they each had a red plastic thermos cup in their hands.

"Podestas live here?"

The paunchy, black-haired one put down his cup. "What do you

want?" He made it sound like I'd flatted his beer. "Joe's out on the boat. They won't be back until Friday morning, likely."

"I want to see Mrs. Anna Podesta. It's about her sister Marie. I want to talk to Mrs. Podesta about her."

The young, blond man jerked, spilled his cup down the front of his coveralls.

The paunchy man's face darkened. "My sister's upstairs you want to talk to her. I don't think she's got anything to tell you, but you talk to her if you want to." He thought for a moment. "You work for Mangano?"

"I don't know the man."

I climbed up the high, seamed stairs to the porch. They had torn off the gingerbread and I could see out over the embarcadero to the Bay Bridge. Alcatraz was out there, a yellow fortress in the afternoon sun. Mangano had called it home back in the thirties—five years for income tax evasion.

Anna Podesta was having a bad pregnancy. She was puffy overweight; under her eyes the pouches were black pads of fat. Clumsily, she turned herself through the door and put her hands against the sides of the opening. She posed there like a crucifixion scene.

"Joe's fishing. He won't be back until Friday morning," she mumbled.

"I want to see you, Mrs. Podesta. About Marie. Not about Joe."

Fear, like an incision, cut across her features; she stepped back into the hallway, awkwardly trying to close the heavy door. "You tell him I don't know where she is. It's none of his business anyway. She don't want to live with him, she don't have to." Anna looked at me in sudden fury, blood rising in her face. "Maybe that's the reason she don't want anything to do with him. Any kind of a man would come himself; he wouldn't send a hired man to bring his wife back."

"I'm not from Mangano. My name is John Cherne. Maybe you heard Marie talk about me before she got married. We saw quite a lot of each other then. It is very important that I find her and talk to her before he locates her. She's in a great deal of danger. I don't want to see her hurt."

"You were going to marry Marie?"

"Yes."

She squinted at me. "You look like the picture. You want to come in?"

The living room had recently been redecorated. The wallpaper was covered with a flat green water-base paint and the floor was painted a reddish brown. They hadn't done anything about the lighting though; a tarnished gold chandelier with orange lightbulbs hung down from the ceiling like a grappling hook.

On the table in front of the

couch there was a square bottle labeled *Gilbey's,* a bowl of half melted ice cubes, and a heavy, restaurant-style water glass. "Want some?" she asked. She didn't make any attempt to get another glass. I shook my head. Anna chased an ice cube around in the bowl and dropped it into the glass; she splashed some of the gin in after it. "I'll sure be glad when this baby of mine gets here. My legs—killing me."

"Do you know where Marie is?" I asked her.

"I'm not supposed to tell anybody." She took a pull on the glass and sighed.

"Look," I said, "Marie's in trouble—real bad trouble. I got the word down in L. A. This isn't just a family spat, Anna. Mangano could have her killed."

"My sister can take care of herself. Maybe she'll get a bouncing around, a few bruises. She's had them before. This isn't the first time she's left him. He never hurt her bad. Just let him cool down a little, that's all."

"She never tried blackmailing him before, either."

Her eyes rolled up like I'd pulled a handle. "I told her—Marie never had good sense about some things. Sure, I'll get you the address. She's staying over in Oakland." Anna waddled over to a table, with a cracked glass top and a long black panther that had ivy growing out of his back. She shoveled through the drawers and came up with a black spiral address book that had a good many of the pages torn out. She thumbed through the remaining pages.

"Twenty-two, twenty-two Tenth Avenue. She's in apartment ten. She's calling herself Joan Perry."

I thanked her and went to the door.

Anna tapped her glass against the jamb. "What's this to you, um?"

"You don't forget somebody you were going to marry, Anna. I don't anyway . . . "

Marie's address was hanging on the edge of gentility by greasy fingernails. A muddy herd of kids were in the vacant lot next to her apartment fighting a sod war. The ones at the far end of the lot had the best of it. The grass was longer there and they could get more of a handle on the clods of dirt.

I parked the Ford across the street and locked it. There was a long, thin drink of water doubled up in the baby Studebaker that was parked in front of the lot. A bad overthrow by one of the kids, trailing a streamer of wild grass, slammed into the far side of the car. The drink of water looked at the kids with eyes like ice picks, and made a threatening gesture with his fist.

I crossed the street and walked between the lot and the Stude. There were half a dozen hits on the

car beside the fresh one. The kids had been at it quite a while; two of the hits had dried to a light brown. The car was a mess.

Marie's apartment had been built back in the late twenties. The first floor was garage and foyer. There was a house phone that had an out of order sign on it. The doorbells below listed Joan Perry in Apartment 10. I used my car key to open the front door lock.

The foyer smelled of mildew and insect spray and the green patterned flooring was patched by a stretch of brown carpet that ran from the entrance to the stairway. Lint and bits of paper were scattered across the floor. There was a broken baby carriage in the corner and a worn out broom leaning against the wall. Getting to the stairs was like cutting through an abandoned dump.

Apartment 10 was on my right at the head of the flight; it overlooked the street—probably from the bay windows I had noticed down below. I avoided the bell and knocked lightly on the door. There was a muffled creak of fatigued floorboards. Someone was freezing in mid-motion.

"Miss Perry—Miss Perry!" I said softly.

" . . . Yes. Who is it?" Marie's voice was strained and unnatural. There was a hesitancy in the blurred velvet voice that I did not remember. Pete Mangano had her scared all right. I couldn't imagine what she looked like in there, frightened and alone. I couldn't ever remember her being either of those things.

"It's the manager," I said, upping my voice an octave. "I'd like to talk to you, miss."

" . . . Just a minute." Nervous high heels came to the door; the knob turned.

"Johnny!"

Even pale and tense, Marie was more of a woman than she had ever been before. She wasn't the girl I had been going to marry, but she was mature now with the womanliness of kept promises. Under the black wool dress, her body was full and ripe and sweet. The sickness of desire I had always felt with her was in me again, as strong as it had always been. Perhaps even stronger now, seeing her this way.

"God! Oh, God Almighty . . . Johnny . . . Johnny . . . " She fell against me—breasts and belly and thighs like flesh I had undressed—crying hysterically and worrying her head into my chest. I half carried, half pushed her into the apartment and closed the door. Then I found the orchid meatiness of her mouth. There was the salt of tears and the thick heat of her breath . . .

"Besides Anna, who knows you're here?" I began.

"Johnny, you've got to get me away from him. Pete'll kill me. He will, really Johnny."

The telephone rang. It rang like a churchbell on Monday. Her body

tensed and coiled, almost as though in a spasm of love. She ran away from my arms, away from the sound.

I said, "Who knows your phone number? Who else knows you're here?" Marie stood there, white as a glass of skim milk. "Who knows you're here?" I asked again, and grabbed her violently by the shoulders. I had to know.

"Just Florence . . . Florence Rebeck. You remember her—Johnny, it's Pete! I know it's him. He got to her!"

I picked up the receiver. "Garrick Finance. Mr. Gordon speaking. May I—" With a muffled growl, whoever was at that other end of the line slammed down the phone. "I don't know, Marie. Maybe it was Mangano." I hung up. "Look, I've got to know what you've done to set him off like this." I grabbed her wrist and pulled her into the living room. She came like an animal fighting the leash, her thighs trembling, her red mouth open and gasping.

I pointed out of the bay window to the Studebaker below. "How long has that car been there? Just today, yesterday—how long?"

"The last couple or three days, I guess. I've been afraid to go out. I guess a couple of days."

"There's a tall, thin man down there. Getting gray at the sides. Black, curly hair—"

"That's Joe Haas." She fell into a chair like a stringless puppet. "Pete's errand boy. He knew I was here all the time. Why hasn't he done anything? My God, Johnny, what's he going to do to me?"

"You tell me what this is about and maybe I can get us out. I have to know everything, every last goddamn thing that started this. If you want to save that fine white neck of yours from Mangano." I cupped her shoulder in my hand and kissed her on the lips. "You and me, sweet, just the way it used to be."

Marie crossed her legs and rested her head against the back of the chair. The motion stirred the heavy lift of her breasts. Even while she was sick with fear Marie excited me. Perhaps her fear was some sort of the excitement.

"Why did you ever marry him?" I asked her.

"I shouldn't have married Pete," she said, stealing the words from my mind. "It never had a chance to work out, not with the way he is. It wasn't too bad at first—plenty of money, clothes. Pete's a big spender when you get him going, you know. Knocked me around a little bit. That wasn't too bad. He never really hurt me too much and he was always sorry afterwards.

"Then he started with some bitch down the Peninsula. Railroad money, she had. Pete's good in bed, don't think he isn't." She touched her throat with the tips of her fingers. "And he's a gentleman of a racketman—just the thing

for her to show off. Sell you heroin with one hand and slip you change for the March of Dimes with the other.

"I figured I needed some protection. I began to pick things up. A little here, a little there. Pete's drug tie-up is with Louie Carbo—down south, you know. I figured if I could get evidence of his purchases, maybe I could use that to get a kind of guaranteed annual wage out of Pete, instead of living on the dole he hands out when he feels sporty."

"And now you have something," I said. "And Pete knows you've got it."

Marie had been working a sodden pack of cigarettes around in her hands. She tried to fish a whole one out of the package. I gave her a fresh cigarette and lighted it and one for myself. She must have been living on them; all the trays were heaping full and there was the cold stink of stale smoke heavy in the room. She puffed on the cigarette like she was inhaling mustard gas, in shaking, gasping drags.

"Sure I got it," she said.

"On paper?"

"Up here," she said, tapping her forehead.

"That was your first mistake; stuff like that you should always have down on paper."

I had been standing at the window down and now I moved back, out of the line of the afternoon sun that slanted through the curtains. A '55 Lincoln Capri was parking across the street, just on the other side of my U-drive. A medium sized man with smooth, black hair got out and crossed to the Stude. Mangano. While I was on my way up to the apartment, Haas had probably called from the corner grocery. That was what Pete's call had been for. He was checking on Joe Haas, making sure that I was there.

"He made two buys of the heavy from Louie Carbo. I got it in my head, names dates, figures. Pete can't wiggle out of this, not if I get away."

Mangano and Haas were still talking down on the street.

"You should have gotten it on paper, sweet—or told somebody, anyway." I shook my head. "You aren't going to take him like this. Not alone."

"I tell you I didn't have time. Besides, I knew I'd be cutting my throat for sure if I told anyone. Pete'd never stand still for that . . . Oh, Pete and I got in a beef and the first thing I knew I was shooting my mouth off. Jesus, what he said to me . . ."

Haas got out of the car. I watched him ease the door shut. Mangano pointed toward the entrance.

"Now hold on to yourself, sweet," I said. "You do what I tell you and we'll be out of here in five minutes. Pete and Haas are

coming upstairs now. I'm going to go up to the next landing. When they ring, open the door and step to the left. I'll be right behind them."

She started some worried chatter, but I told her she'd be okay. I slid out of the door and eased up the stairs, keeping close to the wall where the steps were still solidly nailed.

The door below clicked open; the two of them came up the stairs. I heard Haas's long stride pace the length of the hall and return to the head of the stairs. They were being careful. Then there was the dim *brrrrr* of Marie's doorbell. I heard the spring lock turn. I took the .38 from back of my belt buckle.

In nine steps I was down the stairs and behind them, before they heard me.

"Fold your hands together and hold them over your head! March!" They did and I kicked the door shut behind me. "Okay, now on into the living room. Slow. Sweet, you all right?"

"Sure Johnny . . ."

Marie came to my side. I said, "Not so close. Don't get between us. We have plenty of time later."

There was the thick sound of hate in Mangano's throat.

I stood them against the wall and shook them down. Haas was carrying an S&W .38. Mangano had a transparent plastic pocket comb. He was a member of the leisure class; he had all his work done for him.

"The two of you! Fold your arms and get down on the floor. On your bellies. Keep your hands against your chests. And don't make any noise or I'll let you have it right now."

They sprawled out like two hamstrung wolves.

"I don't want to kill you, Pete. No beef and you won't get hurt bad." I stood between them and brought the pistol down in two arcs, burying it in the base of each neck. In a daze, Haas tried to get to his feet. I caught him back of the ear and tore the muzzle forward, half ripping his earlobe off. He fell forward on his face, twitching, the muscles in his legs drawing them up like a grasshopper's. Mangano lay on the floor like it was two hours to breakfast. He wouldn't be getting up soon.

I put the .38 back in my waistband. From my left inside breast pocket, I took a bone handled switch knife. I pressed the switch, watched the thin-edged blade slide out smoothly.

"Pete just wanted you scared, sweet," I said. "Frightened back into line. He didn't want to hurt you. Haas was only keeping an eye out. Maybe it would have worked for awhile, but sometime you'd have talked. Women always do."

"What . . . ?" Comprehension was coming to her. Slowly, but it

was coming. That fine body, naked in its clothing, began to tremble again. Then her face fell apart like a broken jig-saw puzzle, her eyes wide with disbelief. "But you can't be from—"

"I'm a volunteer, sweet. I'm from Louie Carbo."

The blade was in Marie's heart before she could scream.

One of those young punks . . . he'll get a slug in the back, or the front. It don't make a damn to me. I'm going to play it their way . . .

Showdown at Midnight

BY
EDWARD L. PERRY

IT's midnight on a steaming Saturday. The air is heavy with the smell of overflowing garbage cans from the tenement block, and the temperature is hovering around eighty, but I'm as cold inside as an iceberg.

I stop under a street lamp to check my service revolver, handcuffs, and night stick. I have a feeling I may need them. I hope I do. I want somebody's blood, and the first time one

of those young punks gets rough he'll get a slug. In the back, or the front. It don't make a damn to me. For the first time in my life, I'm going to play it their way. Only rougher.

Maybe it's my fault the Pirates raped that sweet little kid. Maybe if I'd been harder down through the years, it wouldn't have happened. It's the job of a beat cop to keep young punks on the straight and narrow. But I'd failed my duty. Now I'm going to straighten them out. Once and for all.

The Pirates is the smallest gang around. There are three of them. in it. Leo, the leader, short and stolid, with a chip on his shoulder, a mile long. Big mouthed and cocky. The kind of bastard you can hate without trying. Tony is a run-of-the-mill J.D. I don't see him around much. He's got the habit bad and lives on the joy weed. But I know where to find him. Then, there's Julien. He's a tall skinny kid. Black wavy hair and restless eyes. A regular lady killer. He's the nervous type, reminding me of a rattlesnake coiled to strike. I've met plenty of his kind before. He's a border-line sex maniac. Maybe he's crossed over the border.

Yeah, I knew 'em all. And why not? I've been on this beat for eighteen years. I've seen 'em grow from soft-eyed little pups into malignant wolves. Guess I haven't done much to stop them. Why not? You might ask that. Well, it's not easy to explain. I guess I felt sorry for them. The slums is no place to raise a kid. It's a jungle. Dog eat dog, and be damned to the weak. The kids grow old before their time. They have to. They see a lot of life. The worst of it. So I feel sorry for them and because I do, I get a reputation on my beat. The worst kind. I'm chicken in the eyes of juvies. The more I try to help them, the worse it gets. They don't have any respect for me anymore, or the badge I wear. I can't help it.

Maybe it would have been different if Ann had been a boy. No doubt about that. Now, don't get me wrong! I always loved her—and always will. An only child is bound to mean the world to you. But I had hoped for a boy. You know what I mean? Someone to play baseball with, and all that. But Ann turns out to be a regular little lady, so I try to father every young punk I come across. I try to talk to them. I go easy. Sometimes look the other way when it will help them. This makes me yellow in their eyes. So to show their contempt they rape this sweet innocent child—and right on my beat. It's more than a rape case to me. A hellva lot more. Any parent would know how I felt. I went half crazy when I heard about it.

Nobody knows who did it. But I've got a pretty damn good idea. So now we have a showdown. Just

me and the Pirates. I sent them word to get out of my district before midnight or I'd be coming after them. They haven't left. I hadn't really expected them to. They're real tough punks. I want it this way. I can almost hear them now, "That lousy chicken hearted flatfoot telling *US* to get out! Man, he's asking for trouble!"

Yeah, they're right. I want their kind of trouble and I want it bad. I'll hound them until they fight back; then I'll get them.

I start down the deserted street. It's after twelve already. My number tens resound on the hot empty pavement. I wonder how it will be. Will they rush me all at once? No —not likely. Each one'll try to get the honor of burning a cop. It will make him a big man. So I figure they'll try it one at a time. It couldn't suit me better.

I head for Allen's Candy Store. The Pirates hang out there. It's closed, of course, but that don't mean a thing. They'll be around. I keep walking and I can feel eyes boring into me as I make my way up the street. I stop to gaze into a hock-shop display window. Everything is closed and only the street lamps hold back the darkness. I stroll casually on, my night stick held loosely in my right hand, my shoes clunking dully on the smooth surface of the sidewalk. My heart is beating like a bass drum. I'm really keyed up. A hot rod tears down the street, tires squealing. I hear some young punks laughing and an empty beer bottle slams onto the sidewalk at my feet. More laughter. The hot rod is gone in a roar of engine. The streets are silent again. Waiting.

There's an alley dead ahead. From its depth, I hear the slight noise even before I reach the mouth of it. My hand tightens on the night stick. The alley *is* dark, but I know it's not a cat playing with the garbage cans. It's a human rat. I don't bother with my flashlight. I stop in front of the alley and brace myself.

"O.K. punk, come and get it!" I snarl, and my voice don't sound normal. It sounds like a frog's. I'm speaking for every father in the whole country.

There is a slight movement in the darkness; then this kid staggers out of the alley, stops a few feet from me. His face is a mask of amusement. It's Tony. He's doped up. High as a kite on the joy weed.

"Well—well!" he jeers. "So it's the big brave copper. And all by himself, too! Ain't the big brave copper scared to be out after dark?" He moves a step forward and giggles. I see the flash of the switchblade in his hand. "You surprise me, copper. You sure do. I thought you had better sense than to pick a diddlebop with us."

"Give me the knife, punk."

"Come and get it, you lousy bastard!" He grins. "Or maybe you're scared of a little ol' sticker. Is that

it, copper? You scared, huh?"

"Not of you, punk."

He makes a clicking noise with his tongue. "Ahhh, ain't this a shame now. I'm going to have to get blood all over the copper's nice clean uniform."

"I said, give me the knife, punk!"

Tony giggles again, but I can see he is getting mad. "Look, copper, don't call me punk. See? I don't like being called that."

I decide to force the issue.

"Why not?" I taunt him. "You're nothing but a punk. That's all you are. Just a dirty minded little punk. You like to rape helpless girls, don't you? They can't fight back. You're a big he-man, ain't you, punk?"

His lips curl up and he snarls, "You're asking for trouble, man. Real trouble!"

"I'm waiting, punk." I say real soft.

He starts towards me. The knife swinging in a wide arc.

I hate his guts. Hate his kind of filth. Hate him for what he did. I throw the night stick at his belt with all my might. It slams solidly into his guts, just above the navel, and he snaps shut like a switchblade. I open him up with an open handed slap that'll leave my finger marks on his face for a long time. The knife goes sliding towards the gutter. Tony makes a dive for it. I let him almost reach it; then I come down with the night stick into the kidneys. He goes down on all fours, puking his head off.

"Now you listen to me, punk," I say between my teeth. "I'm sending you away. For a long time. And don't ever come back here again, or I'll be waiting."

He opens his mouth to speak, but he don't. His eyes search my face. Something there makes him shudder.

In the corner is a police box. I use it. In less than two minutes a squad car pulls up to the curb and Bledsoe jumps out.

"Hi, Sam, what's the beef?"

I hoist Tony to his feet. He's got a dazed expression on his face like maybe things has happened too fast for him to understand. The toughness has been whipped out of him. "Man, we figured you'd chicken out," he mutters.

I turn to Bledsoe. "This punk pulled a knife on me, so you can book him on an assault charge. But first, you'd better take him to the county hospital. He's on dope. Maybe they can take the monkey off his back."

Bledsoe nods. "Okay, Sam. Anything else? You having any trouble?"

"Not a damn bit," I say. "But you can cruise the neighborhood. I may have more customers for you later on."

Bledsoe frowns. "What's the pitch, Sam? A rumble?"

"No. Just me and the boys have been misunderstanding each other for awhile. But we'll get straight-

ened out and all squared away."

Bledsoe prods Tony into the car. Tony's still cursing when I walk away. I know that with an assault with a deadly weapons charge and another for possession and use of narcotics against him, it'll be a long time before Tony Basco walks Third Street again. I should have pulled him in long ago. You just can't be nice to some people. I know something else. It was easy to take Tony. It'll be harder to take Leo and Julien.

There is a small all night joint on the corner of Fifth and Martin. I go in for coffee. The joint is run by an ex-con. He doesn't like my presence, because I have a suspicion he's running a book on the side. I've never done anything about it. No proof. Just suspicion.

"What d'yuh want?" he demands.

"Coffee."

He draws one and slides it down the counter.

"You give my place a bad name, copper," he says. He's been saying it for years. I've been ignoring it for the same length of time. Tonight I'm not in an ignoring mood.

I take a drink of the coffee.

"This coffee is lousy," I say. It's the truth.

"If you don't like it, you can get the hell out of here."

I put the cup down and look at him. Hard. "My friend," I say real easy like, "sometimes when a man gets out of stir, he goes straight. Sometimes he don't. Maybe just for the hell of it I'll take you apart and see which way you've gone. Besides, maybe you'd look cute without any front teeth."

He turns a little pale under the gills. "Ah, don't get roused up, Sam," he says. "I didn't mean nothing by it. Someone must have rubbed your fur the wrong way. You're mighty touchy tonight. Besides, maybe you won't be around long enough to take anybody apart."

"That so?"

"Yeah. I know all about you and the Pirates. You told 'em to get, but they ain't gettin'. Talk's around that you'll punk out. That maybe you've bitten off more'n you can chew."

"I've got a big mouth."

"You'd better have, copper," he said seriously. "Leo and Julien was in here earlier tonight. They were bragging that they'd burn you. They're tough kids. I wouldn't give a plug nickel for your chances."

"Where'd they go?"

"Don't know. They're shacked up somewhere near here. But I wouldn't go looking for them if I was you, copper. They'll find you!"

"I'll save them the trouble."

I flipped a dime on the counter and started for the door. The ex-con rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"One more thing, copper," he yells after me. "They've got rods."

"Thanks," I say, without turning.

Outside, it seems hotter then ever. The streets are deserted and the silence is like something alive. Sweat pours down my face and I itch all over. I get to thinking that maybe I'm a fool tackling this job alone. I'm pushing my luck. Asking for a slug in the back. But I've got to do it. Leo and Julien haven't done anything I can pin on them. I've got to provoke them into a rumble.

Somewhere in the dark tenement buildings around me a girl giggles drunkenly, and I think of Martha and Ann. A man gets lonesome on the graveyard shift. But I'm thinking too much. Think too much and you get careless. Think too much and you're dead.

"Hey, copper. Looking for me?"

The voice is low and evil. I spin around, my hand clawing for my .38. I don't make it. The sound of the explosion jars my brain and something hot slams into my leg. For a moment I'm numb all over. Then the pain comes. I'm lying in the gutter. My hand goes to my leg. It comes away wet. The second shot clips the sidewalk at my face and goes spinning off down the empty street.

But I've spotted my man. He's standing in a dark doorway across the street from me. The flash from his gun gave him away. I fit the butt of the .38 into my hand. A third shot wings over my head and I fire. Four rounds pulled off at maximum speed. The shadow in the doorway lets out an animal scream and twists up like a pretzel. I see him crumple and then fall forward on his face, no more screams.

I stagger to my feet and make my way to the door. I move carefully now, but I find I didn't need to. I turn the body over with my foot. It's Leo. He's dead.

I hear a squeak on the stairs that lead upward into the darkened apartments. I hug the wall quickly, but nothing happens. I strain my ears, but it's like I'm standing in the middle of a graveyard. Yet I know Julien is up there. I can feel it. Then somewhere a door is slammed shut. I start up the stairs. I go slow. My leg aches and I can feel the blood trickling down it. I don't know how much longer I can hold out, but I'm determined. Julien's going to get his, too.

Anger wells up inside me, driving the numbness and pain from my leg. I grin to myself. I make it to the top of the stairs. A single naked light bulb does crazy tricks with my shadow as I inch my way down the long, narrow hall. My nerves are all twisted up inside me. My finger tightens on the trigger. Any minute I expect a door to fly open and feel hot lead ripping through me. But nothing happens. Then I hear a soft thump over my head and I know someone's above me. I see the small red-lighted exit sign over the door that leads to the roof. I go through it and find myself in darkness.

The hot air is blasting across the rooftops of the tenement buildings like its coming straight from hell. I feel suddenly sick at the stomach and my legs want to buckle under me. I fight to hold on. It's pitch dark. I can't see a thing. But Julien is close. I can almost smell his rotten breath.

"Okay, Julien, it's your turn."

"You sonuvabitch!" he says, and I hear him laugh nervously. I try to make out where it's coming from, but I can't. I keep my back against the wall and the .38 ready.

"Where do you want it, punk? In the head, or the guts like Leo got it?"

He doesn't answer, but I can hear a scraping noise around me. I strain my eyes, but I can't see him.

"What's the matter, punk?" I sneer. "Are you afraid to die?"

"You're going to be sorry you started this rumble, copper!"

"Prove it to me, Julien boy, prove it."

A shot rips into the brick wall right beside me. I don't see the flash.

"You're a bum shot, Julien. Try again!"

He does. Three quick ones that fill my face with flying rock dust. These kids have got guns, but they don't know how to use them, except close up.

"You're lousy, Julien." I taunt, hoping to get him mad, to get him out into the open.

I can hear him cursing in the dark. I fire at the sound of his voice, but my shot goes wild.

"What's gotten into you, copper!" he shouts. Some of the cockiness has left his voice. He's scared. Mauling a little girl is his speed. "You gone mad, huh?"

"Murder. That's what's gotten into me. I want your blood, you punk, and I intend to get it."

He curses again. Then silence. Maybe he's thinking about surrendering. I don't want that.

"I'm yellow. Remember, punk? I'm the lousy yellow bastard you've been pushing around the last couple of years. I'm real soft, Julien. Why don't you come out and find out how soft I am, huh?"

More silence. So I go on, "what's the matter, Julien? You afraid of a soft, yellow copper?"

He fires again and I find him by the flash. He's hidden behind a chimney dead ahead. Somewhere in the night a siren wails. Coming closer.

"Know what I'm going to do, Julien? Listen carefully to what I'm saying and think about it, punk, because you've only got a few minutes left. I'm going to fill your guts full of lead. You're no good, Julien. You never was; you never will be. You're like a wild animal and I'm going to kill you before you kill somebody else, before you rape somebody else's little girl. You three raped the kid, didn't you?"

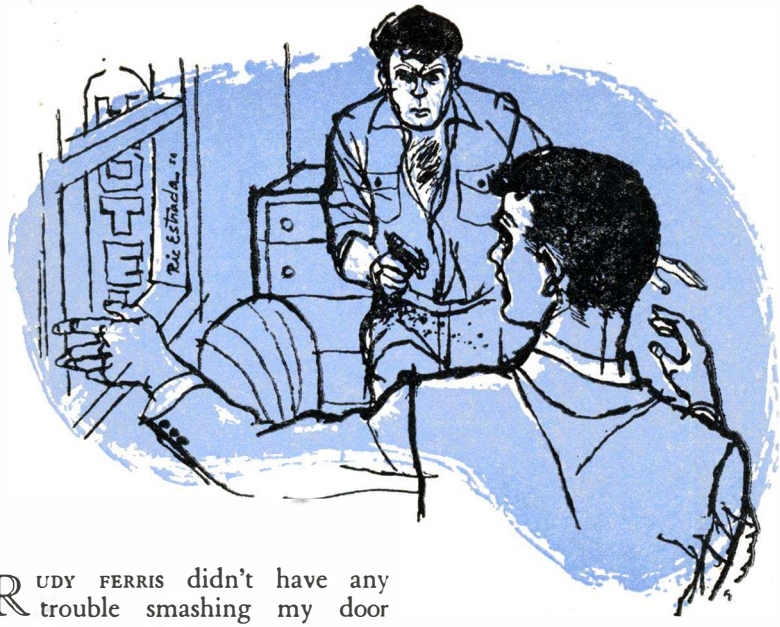
I can hear him laugh. The siren is right on top of us now. I can

hear the car doors slam down in the streets. I'm feeling like hell and I know I'm going to pass out pretty soon.

"Yeah—yeah, copper. We fiddled her all right. But you ain't going to live to do anything about it!"

Something in his voice warns me he's coming out. He comes. I see his shadow spring up from behind the chimney and for a second he's a clear, black target against the sky line. I pull the trigger again and again. He squeals like a monkey in a cage. The force of the .38 slugs throw him against the low wall at the edge of the roof. For a fraction of a second I see his face. It's white, dead white. Then he disappears over the side. He screams all the way to the sidewalk.

"That, punk," I mutter, "is for raping my daughter!"



The Fast Line

Sometimes a guy can talk faster than a bullet. Sometimes . . .

BY ART CROCKETT

RUDY FERRIS didn't have any trouble smashing my door open because he's a real big guy. He stood facing me, his black automatic pointed straight at my throat.

It didn't take me long to figure out what had happened. Ella had told him—everything. *That little fool!*

I spread my hands helplessly. "Now, look, Rudy. Let me—"

"Shut up, Chuck!" The guy's massive chest was heaving like a ground swell. "I don't want no talk. That's all we got since you blew in."

I shut up. Nothing I could say would wipe his brain clean. He was too far gone. Mad. Killing mad. So I shut up and watched his small eyes as they snapped to

both sides of my room and then back to me. "You alone here?"

I nodded, wishing I wasn't. Rudy closed the door, its lock dangling, as if a closed door would muffle the blast of that cannon he held. That door was the only way out, unless I chose to leap out the window, which was two stories up, and kill myself that way.

Maybe I had it coming. In Rudy's eyes I guess I was a heel. But the big, overgrown jerk was stone blind and had been ever since Ella had decided he was her boyfriend, long before I had shown up in Leadsville. Otherwise he'd have known she was the type who got a charge out of anybody who could put some kicks into her miserable life.

Ella Barnes was fresh out of a haystack, like all the dames in Leadsville. But with her there was a difference. There was a restlessness in her that kept her on edge every minute, a restlessness that kept her dissatisfied with herself even though she'd snared the biggest, best-looking hayseed in town.

And there was something else about Ella. I found this out during the night I spent with her in her old man's barn.

We were in the loft. Her eyes lit up as she said, "Chuck, I'd like to stir up this town before I leave. I mean really stir it up. I'm so sick and tired and bored with everything in it that I'd like to give them a jolt they'd never get over."

Those were approximately her words. I'd only half listened. I'd already had what I'd come for so I wasn't much interested in her babbling. But now her words were coming back to me, or at least the gist of what she had been trying to say.

But I couldn't dwell on it. Rudy Ferris was coming forward, the .45 steady in his hand. "I'm gonna blast your brains out," he was saying. "You got it comin' to you."

He was so close I could smell the stench of his sweating body and the cheap whiskey on his breath.

I swallowed hard. "Ella tell you about it?" It was a stupid question, but I had to say something for a stall.

"I saw you an' her sneakin' outa the barn. After you left, I grabbed Ella an' made her tell me what you did."

He raised his gun to my head.

"Hold it, Rudy!" My voice was scratchy and cracked, because I was scared. My only defense was to keep talking. "Let me have my say, Rudy. What harm can it do? I can't get out of here, can I? Just let me tell you . . ."

He brought the gun up close to my temple and clicked off the safety.

"All right, Rudy. Go ahead and shoot!" I was practically screaming at him. "I wasn't Ella's first. She's already pregnant by somebody else."

The words had flowed smoothly out of my mouth. It was all a big lie. But I had to shock him with something. For the time being, it appeared to have done the trick.

I'd stunned him. His gun hand relaxed a little. I kept talking so he wouldn't have a chance to think about me. "Ella played you for a fool, Rudy. Can't you see that? All she wants is kicks. She told me so. She told me she was bored stiff with everybody in this dead town, including you."

All the things Ella had told me up in the hay loft were coming out now. I kept talking because I didn't want to stop and give him a chance to do his own thinking. He was listening all right. And that was what I wanted. His mouth hung open goonishly now and his gun hand was down at his side.

"I didn't force Ella to do anything she didn't want to do. Lord knows how many others she's had. She's sick, Rudy. Sick for the want of thrills. She'd do anything to stir up a rumpus."

A real out was hitting me now. It made me a little sick to think of it, but it was all I had. After all, it was my life that depended on it.

"That's why she told you about what happened in the barn. She knew you'd come here to kill me. And after you're finished with me she'll tell you about the other guy, the one who made her pregnant."

Sweat rolled down my face and some of it went into my mouth. Rudy's head was swaying with disbelief, but my words were reaching him, digging into him cruelly.

"Want to know something else, Rudy? I'll bet you anything that Ella is outside right now waiting to see what happens."

I backed toward the window. "Bet she's out there, Rudy. Take a look! She's waiting for you to kill me, then the other guy. You know why? So all the dames in this burg will look at her as the gal Rudy Ferris knocked off two guys for. She'll have what she wants. Recognition. Excitement. Plenty of it. And the other hayseeders around here will think she really has something because two men died for her. So they'll make love to her, Rudy, while you're sweating your brains out waiting for your turn in the electric chair."

"No! It ain't like that! You're just trying to lie your way out of a bullet."

"I am not. All you have to do is look outside. Go ahead, Rudy. Put the lights out and take a look."

He motioned to me with his gun. "Get over by the window. Stand there so I can see you."

I did as I was told, feeling sick to my stomach because of what I was doing. Rudy snapped off the wall switch and moved toward the window. He pushed the curtain aside just a crack. I took a look myself, and let out a sigh of relief.

In the lighted doorway of a store across the street, a bare leg swung back and forth. It was a woman's leg. Ella's. She was sitting on a stool just inside the door.

"What'd I tell you, Rudy?" I whispered. "She's waiting to hear your gun go off. She sent you on the errand and now she wants to see that you carry it out."

He was quiet for a long moment. Then he said, "Pack your bag and get outa here!"

"Yeah, sure, Rudy." It took me no more'n three minutes to shut my suitcase on a full load.

"So long, Rudy."

He didn't answer, nor turn his head away from the window. I squeezed hurriedly out of the door and then took the back stairs on the double down to the alley that circled the hotel. I wanted to get away from there, fast.

I was in the alley when I heard the shots. I counted six. I felt like throwing up. All the way to the bus station I kept trying to rid my brain of the promise I'd made Ella up in the loft. I'd promised to take her away from Leadsville that very night.

I told her to wait for me across the street from the hotel.

George E. Morisette, 42, was apprehended in Tacoma, Wash. when he returned to a grocery he had robbed previously to purchase a package of coughdrops. He told police he was curious to see whether the proprietor would recognize him. The proprietor did.

Officials at the county jail in Little Rock, Ark. were unconcerned when 17 prisoners went on a hunger strike. A check disclosed that they had purchased $7 worth of candy bars the day before the strike. The strike lasted 30 hours.

Police in Kalamazoo, Mich. had little difficulty in solving the theft of a quantity of beer and wine from a tavern. On the following morning, two 15 year old boys staggered into the local high school drunk.

Patrol Car Puzzle

Sgt. Francis Gillis, of Leominster, Mass., called a patrol car over the police station radio during a thunder storm, but he was puzzled by the voice of the man who replied. "Who are you?" Gillis asked.

"This is car two in Stokes County, North Carolina," the voice replied. "Where you all from?"

a spicy gem for REAL MEN

a rollicking dish of pungent humor seasoned to the taste of the man with a funny-bone!

nugget

From a holiday in Rome to a Bachannalia in New York, from Nelson Algren's New Orleans misfits to a girl on a lonely beach, from appraisal of milady's bath to the finest in modern fiction—that's the range of sparkling entertainment in the current issue of NUGGET.

MANHUNT
DECEMBER, 1956