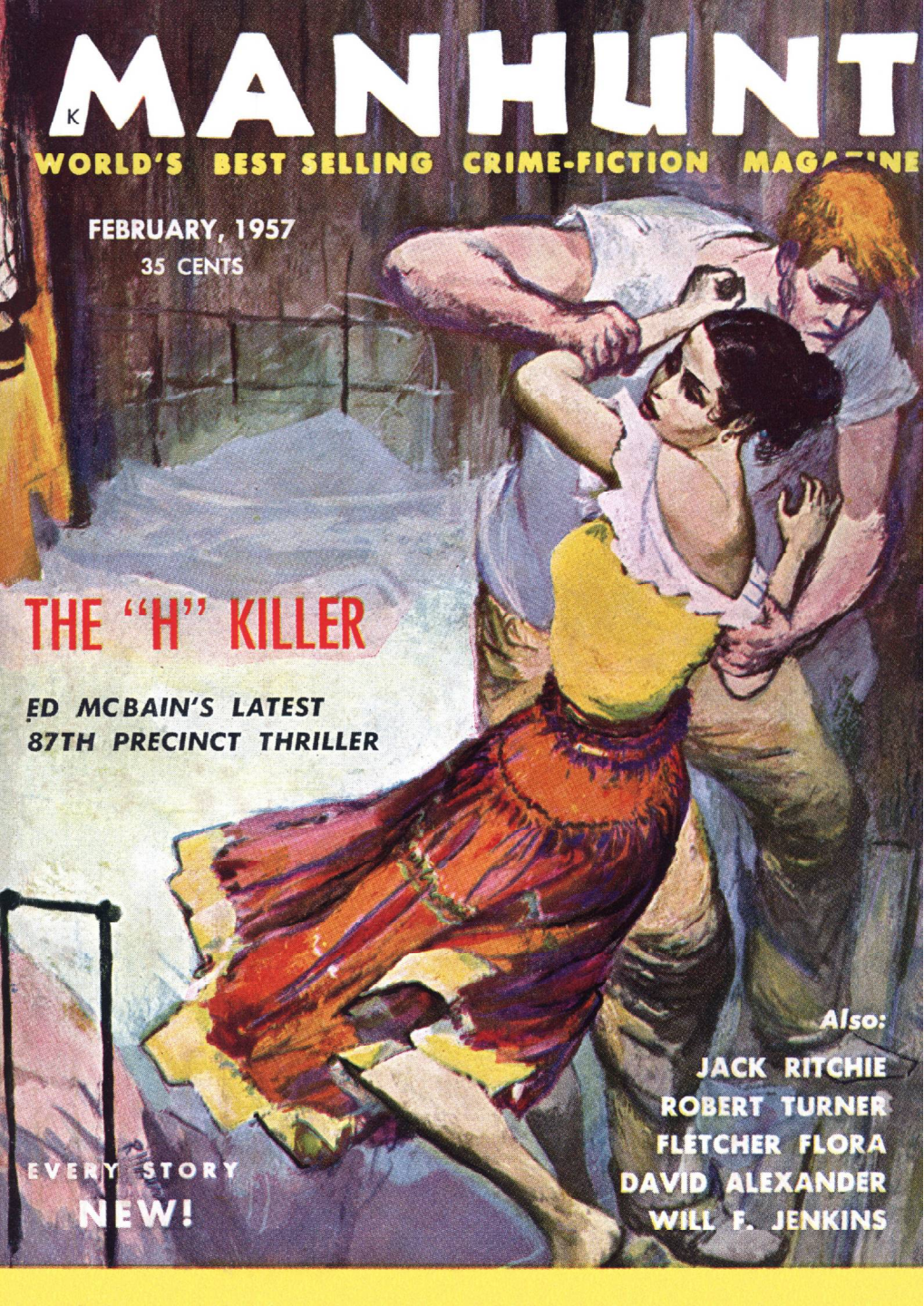
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MANHUNT

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Cover by Ray Houlihan

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His pitch was American History. And this was her first day at the new high school . . .

The Teacher

BY ROBERT TURNER

THE SCHOOL BUS wasn't due at that stop until eight fifteen, but Norma Farriss didn't want to take a chance on missing it, this first day of school. She allowed herself extra time to walk the quarter mile along the dirt road from her house to the main highway. When she arrived there, she looked at her wrist watch and saw that there was still almost ten minutes before the bus would arrive.

She fidgeted nervously, straightening her tight skirt, tugging at the bottom of her red cardigan sweater and fluffing-up her long blonde hair. She had to look right, her first day at a new school, her first day in *high* school. After awhile she was pretty sure that she did look okay, because several times men

driving past in cars did a double-take when they saw her, craning their heads around for another dangerously long look at her after they were past. This embarrassed her, yet reassured her at the same time.

Then a car came along whose brakes were jammed on right after it passed her. Norma heard the squealing sound, heard the motor speed cut down, but she didn't dare turn around. She didn't know who it was in the car; she'd hardly noticed him as he passed. Her heart began to pound against her ribs as she heard the car go into reverse, heard it back closer and closer to her.

She held her head high and, she hoped, disdainfully, but at the same time panic was running through her. She wondered what she should do if just ignoring him didn't send him on his way. She tried to think what the best thing to do would be. Of course, if he started to get out of the car, she'd turn and run. Meanwhile, maybe if she just ignored him . . .

The car had backed right close to her now. She had all she could do to keep from jumping like a ninny when she heard him speak.

"Hi," he said. "Don't be nervous. You go to Northwest High, don't you?" The voice was polite, well-modulated, educated sounding, Norma was surprised to note. Then he gave a pleasant, reassuring laugh. "I don't blame you for being careful, but I assure you it's all right, my stopping to speak with you. You see, I'm Mr. Simmons, one of your teachers at Northwest. American History. I just stopped to see if I could give you a lift."

This took Norma completely by surprise. "Oh," she said and forced herself to look around at the car, at the driver. She saw that the car was a middle-priced coupe, about two years old, and the man leaning across the seat toward her was about thirty-five, balding slightly at the temples and quite nice looking as older types went. He had a nice easy smile that showed good, clean white teeth.

"I—thanks, just the same," Norma said, still nervous, but in a different way, now. "I might as well wait for the bus. It'll be along in a little while."

"Well," Mr. Simmons said, "if you'd rather. You're a freshman, aren't you?"

"Why, yes."

"That's why I thought maybe we could compare notes on what we've both heard about Northwest. You see, in a way, I'm also a frosh. I'm new there, too. I was transferred from upstate. So, why don't you just hop in and we'll have a pleasant little chat on the way? You'll beat the other kids on the bus, too, be one of the first in line to get your room assignments. What do you say?"

Norma thought about it. Maybe it would be better than getting on

a crowded school bus, especially since she was a perfect stranger. She'd dreaded the hooting, whistling and catcalls she'd surely have to endure from some of the fresher boys. And it was always a good deal to be in with one of the teachers.

"Well . . ." she said hesitantly.

"Fine," he said, reaching across and opening the door on her side. "Get in. It'll be nice to have company and to be able to get acquainted with one of my students."

Norma got into the car and placed her plaid-covered school supply box on her lap and primly folded her hands on top of it.

As the car started up, he said, "Have you always lived here in Gulf City?"

"No, sir. We moved here this summer from Miami."

"Well," he said, "sometimes it's fun to go to new places, meet new people. You'll get along all right." He turned and looked at her. "You're a very attractive young lady, you know."

"Thank you," she said and couldn't help fidgeting her feet at the unexpected compliment.

They rode in silence for awhile, until suddenly Mr. Simmons turned off the main highway and down a narrower, black-tarred State Road. When he did this, Norma sat more stiffly and erect on the seat. For several moments her mouth was so dry she couldn't speak.

"Why are you going this way?" she finally blurted. "Northwest isn't in this direction."

"I know," he said, laughing. "You are a worry wart, aren't you? I have to pick up one of the other teachers who lives over this way. It's only a little out of the way and we've plenty of time. What are you so frightened about? You're not scared of me, are you?"

"No – I – when you turned off there, I was just a little surprised, I guess." For the moment her nervousness vanished, but then she noticed that the country along this road was very sparsely populated. On each side, for as far as she could see, there was nothing but fields dense with Palmetto and scrub pine, with an occasional fenced-off ranch section. But there were no dwellings, no stores or gasoline stations.

"Kind of an out-of-the-way section he lives in," Norma said, after awhile. "This other teacher."

"Yeah," Mr. Simmons said. "We'll soon be there. After we pick him up, there's a short cut over toward the school, we'll take."

A moment later, he slowed the car, then abruptly swung it into a narrow, rutted dirt lane that twisted out of sight between dense growths of trees and shrubbery.

It was then that Norma *knew*.

"No one lives down here, down this road," she said. Her voice sounded high and squeaky; it didn't even sound like her voice.

"What makes you think that, honey?" he said, calmly.

"I–I just *know*," she said. "And you're not a teacher, either. Are you?"

"Well, maybe not exactly. But in some ways I am. For instance, I can teach a sweet girl like *you* a lot of things."

At the same time, his right hand shot out and cleanly, firmly clasped her left wrist. She tried to yank it away, but couldn't. It was as though her wrist were held in a steel vise. She edged over as close to the other door, as far away from him as possible, not looking at him, staring straight ahead through the windshield. She was trembling badly.

"Now, take it easy, sweetheart," he said. "Behave yourself and there's nothing to be afraid of. Nobody's going to hurt you. Just don't get smart, but do exactly as I tell you and everything'll be all right."

Frantic, she tried to twist and jerk her wrist from his grip, but without success. She half-screamed, "You leave me alone! Take me back! Take me out of here! Take me back, you hear!"

"Shut up!" This time his voice, viciously tough, struck at her like a whiplash.

He stopped the car. Using both hands, he jerked her across the seat toward him. She was crying now and he was holding her by both wrists. He kept telling her to stop crying, but she couldn't; in fact, the sobbing grew louder, more uncontrolled, almost reaching the hysteria.

He slapped her, stinging hard. That did it. The crying cut off in the middle of a sob and she just sat there, staring at him in numbed surprise, trying to get her breath.

"That's better," he said. "Much better. Now, you listen to me, do you hear? I want to tell you something."

He was staring hard at her breasts, and she tried to stop their agitated heaving but couldn't. She kept telling herself: *He won't hurt me. I won't let him. He won't dare hurt me. I can have him arrested if he does. I'll fight him and stop him from doing anything really bad to me.* Yet, even as she thought this, she knew her fighting him was impossible; he was so much bigger and stronger than she. She began to pray to herself, but she was so desperately frightened she kept getting the words all mixed up in her mind.

"I want you to understand this," she heard him say. "I'm no ordinary rapist. I've never done anything like this before in my life. I don't know whatever came over me. I'm a respectable business man. I'm not really bad, do you understand? It was just that—well, when I first went past you, saw you standing out there waiting for a bus, I went crazy. I'd never seen anybody as beautiful as you. I couldn't control myself. I knew I had to have you, no matter what."

She didn't answer. She just sat there, stiffly, her face turned as far

away from him as she could turn it, sucking in ragged, half-sobbing breaths.

"Look, now," he said, softly. "Look at me. I'm not so bad to look at. I'm not very old, really, not nearly as old as some of the movie stars you probably admire. I'm clean and respectable. It's not going to be so bad."

"No," she said, shrilly. "No, no! Stop talking to me like that. Take me out of here. Please! Please, mister!"

"I can't," he said. "I've got to go through with this, now. I'll go crazy if I don't. Listen, don't try to kid me. You've got a boy friend, haven't you? This won't be the first time with you, so what have you got to lose? I've heard all about you teen-agers and what goes on in the high schools. C'mon, snap out of it and be a sport."

"You're wrong. I—I've never—"

"God," he broke in, dropping one of her wrists. Then his hand brushed lightly across the front of her blouse. "Look at 'em! What a gorgeous figure you've got, honey!"

At the touch of his hand, she went a little crazy. She balled the fist he'd freed and swung it at him, hitting him soundly in the face, at the same time wrenching to free her other wrist.

"Don't touch me!" she screamed. "Let me go! Let me *go!*"

Swearing, he quickly caught her free wrist again. He shook her and swung her around in the seat, twisting one of her arms up behind her back, forcing her to bend forward. As he did this, her school supply box tumbled from her lap to the floor of the car and burst open. A few pencils and a sharpener, some pen nibs and compasses for drawing circles, fell out of the box, but neither of them paid any attention to that.

Norma cried out from the pain of having her arm twisted up behind her.

"You don't like this, huh?" he said. "Well, listen to me. Fighting like that will only get you hurt. The other way you won't get hurt. Why don't you be smart? Now, if I let your arm go, if I don't hurt you any more, you promise not to try to stop me, not to try to get away? If you don't . . ."

He shoved her arm up another quarter of an inch and Norma cried out again, quickly saying, "Yes, yes. I promise. Don't. Stop it. Stop it. My arm, oh, my arm!"

"All right then." He let the arm go. She slumped over, her head on her lap, crying again, but softly, hopelessly, this time.

He waited a moment and then his hand went up under the back of the Cardigan sweater, yanked the back of her blouse out from her skirt. His hand moved, almost caressingly, up her spine to the back of her bra strap.

At the touch of his hand, she stiffened and half-straightened up, but he said, "Steady. Steady, now.

You don't want to get hurt again, do you?"

He was breathing hard now and she could feel his trembling. His voice was even unsteady. She endured, somehow, the feel of his fingers fumbling with the bra strap clasp and then she felt it come loose. She felt his palm, moist with perspiration, slide along her ribs, around to the front of her body.

A million things ran through her mind, at that moment: The things her mother had told her when she'd first started to develop, about how sinful it would be, the terrible things that might happen to her if she let boys or *anybody* touch her there. She thought about what would happen to her after he got tired of touching her there. She might get some horrible disease that rotted your flesh; she might even have a baby—and probably not even a normal one at that. And worst of all, everyone would *know;* all they'd have to do was look at her and they'd know, they'd *know*. She couldn't stand that.

As both his hands reached around her, she saw the compasses that had fallen out of the school box. It was stretched all the way open, both slim metal legs out straight, to fit into a groove of the school box. She saw the needle-sharp point at the tip of one of the legs of the compasses. She acted instinctively, out of the deepest roots of terror and disgust, hardly conscious of what she was doing.

She reached down and grabbed the compasses and wheeled around and away from him. She saw him rear back, his eyes fastened on the needle-sharp weapon she was holding.

"Hey, wait!" he exclaimed. "Don't—"

"I told you," she interrupted. "I *told* you to leave me *alone,* you horrible, disgusting thing, you! I *hate* you!"

Then she thrust her arm forward and saw the point of the compasses sink easily, without resistance, into his shirt front. She yanked it out and saw blood bloom redly on the front of his shirt. She saw him go deathly pale and his eyes roll back. She raised the hand holding the compasses, but not to strike again. He didn't know that, however, and twisted violently sideways to dodge, throwing up his hands at the same time to protect himself. Doing this, he banged his head violently against the dashboard and slumped loosely, inertly, on the seat, his hands falling down into his lap.

Still not knowing, really, what she was doing, she dropped the compasses. She turned and scrabbled out of the car. She ran as fast as she could back along the narrow dirt lane and finally came out onto the tar road. There, exhausted, she stopped running. She became aware that her bra strap was still loose and reached back and fastened it. She started walking, her breathing becoming steadier, up the tar

road toward the main highway. She looked at her wrist watch. It was now eight forty-five. She should be at school, by this time. She was going to be late, quite late. What was she going to tell them?

Then she remembered her school box. She'd forgotten, in her panic, to pick it up. It was still in that man's car. She thought about going back for it, but knew she couldn't. Not with him lying there dead in the car . . .

Dead.

Yes, dead. The man was dead. She'd killed him. She'd stabbed him to death. She had done that—she, Norma Farriss, fourteen years old. What would they do to her when they found out about it? Well, she'd *had* to kill him, hadn't she? In self protection. They wouldn't do anything to her. But there'd be a big investigation, maybe even a trial. Everybody would hear what had happened; she'd be forced to tell the horrible things that man had tried to do to her. Maybe they wouldn't even believe that he hadn't succeeded.

Suppose, she thought, I just don't tell anybody about it? He'll be found there, but there's nobody can prove it was I who did it. It could've been anybody. But what about the school-box? Well, what about it? There were a million like it in stores that sold school supplies. Nobody would know that one was hers. How could they?

The more Norma thought about it, the more firmly she decided that was the only thing to do. She would go on back home. It was still a long walk, but she could make it. She'd tell her mother that she'd become ill in school, sick to her stomach or something—or better yet, that after registering and everything, they'd been let out early. Sometimes that happened on the first day of school. Her mother wouldn't know any different.

When she reached the main highway, she waited for a bus to come along, using some of her lunch money for the fare, and took the bus to the side road that led to her house. On that familiar road once again, in sight of the old clapboard house where she lived, Norma was almost in full control of herself once again. Looking back she could scarcely believe that what had happened had happened.

Her mother looked surprised and a little annoyed when she opened the front door and saw Norma there. She clucked her tongue and said, "What on earth? What are you doing home from school this early?"

With the sudden shock of being home, safe at her own home, after all that had happened, seeing her mother, hearing her voice, Norma couldn't seem to remember what she had planned to say. The words got all jumbled up in her mind. She opened her mouth and made some noises, but that was all.

"Oh, never mind trying to tell me," her mother said, disgustedly. "I can tell by looking at you, so wild-eyed and pale and sweating and all distraught. I was *afraid* something like this would happen, your going to a new school and all. I *knew* I should have gone with you. I swear, Norma, when are you going to get over this shyness and self-consciousness that's so bad you get yourself all upset and even physically sick, every time we move to a new neighborhood or you have to go to a new school? Honestly, at your age! I don't know what I'm going to do with you. Now, that *is* what happened, isn't it?"

Norma, still speechless, nodded slightly.

Not too gently, her mother took her arm and pulled her inside. "Just when I've got to go downtown and see about a job, now I've got you on my hands. Come in here and let me get some rhubarb-and-soda into you and then lie down for awhile and you'll be all right. You'll have to be, because I've *got* to keep that job appointment."

Once again Norma just nodded. She followed her mother into the kitchen to get a spoon and then into the bathroom. Without objection, she silently took the spoonful of medicine, but when her mother started to shoo her into the bedroom, Norma turned, her eyes large with fright.

"Don't go downtown, mother," she said. "Not today. Please don't. I—I don't want to be here all by myself."

"Oh, stop it, Norma. Stop acting like a baby, for goodness sakes," her mother said. "You'll be all right. You're big enough to get your own lunch, although I'll probably be back by then. Now, you lie down like I told you and calm yourself. Do you hear?"

The prospect of being in the house all alone, of being alone with her thoughts, her knowledge of what had happened, loomed horribly before her. "But, mother," she cried, "I—"

"You what?" her mother cut in, picking up her compact, putting a last dab of powder on her face, looking into Norma's bedroom mirror. "What is it *now,* Norma? Please don't get me more upset than I am. If I don't get this job, I don't know what we'll do for food money next week. Now you behave like a good girl. All right?"

She came over and bent over Norma and pecked her lightly on the forehead. Looking up, Norma's eyes tried to catch her mother's but couldn't. She suddenly felt an overwhelming impulse to blurt out the truth, to tell her mother everything that had happened and get it over with. That would keep her mother here. She wouldn't leave, then.

But her mother turned away without looking at her again and hurried out of the room. Norma flopped down on the bed and bur-

ied her face in the pillow and began to cry. She heard the front door slam. She heard her mother's old car starting up outside, heard it take off down the road. And then there was nothing but silence. There were no other houses within a quarter of a mile. It was very quiet out here in the country.

Norma lay on the bed a long time—the crying stopped, once her mother left the house—and listened to the oppressively heavy silence of the empty house.

A moment later, she heard the motor of a car on the road outside. She heard it stop outside the house. She heard a car door slam, footsteps coming up the walk. Norma sat up on the bed, stuffing her fist against her mouth, her heart suddenly hammering so hard it hurt. Along with the thick pounding of her own pulse in her ears, there was soon another sound—a thumping on the front door.

She sat very still, telling herself that it was only a salesman—there'd been a lot of them around since they'd moved in last week—and he'd go away, soon, if nobody answered. But the knocking on the front door went on and on. Then it stopped.

Norma waited for the sound of the footsteps to go back down the front walk. She waited and waited, but there was no such sound. Instead, there was another sound—the creaking of a floorboard in the hall outside. It was then that Norma remembered that the front door didn't latch properly if it was slammed very hard, the way her mother had slammed it when she went out. You had to shut the door slowly, carefully, sometimes doing it two or three times before it caught just right and locked. Her mother had said a man was coming to fix it.

Norma started to breathe a little sigh of relief. That was who it was, the locksmith, come to fix the door. When there'd been no answer, he'd tried the door and let himself in.

"Who is it?" She thought she was shouting, but her words came out in only a hoarse whisper. "Who's out there?"

The answer came from the doorway of her room. A man's voice said, "Me. Remember me?"

She saw that the blood stain on his shirt, just under the right ribs, had almost dried now. She saw the bump on his forehead. She tried to say something, couldn't. She wanted to move, but couldn't because now her whole body felt as though it was made of wet rags. All she could do was sit there staring at him, feeling an awful sickness filling her stomach.

"What's the matter?" he said. "You look surprised. You didn't think you'd killed me, did you? You didn't really stab very hard, you know. Just a small puncture, a flesh wound."

She didn't say anything. She just sat there looking at him, wonder-

ing how she'd ever thought he was nice looking, how she could have possibly believed he was a teacher, the expression in his eyes, the loose wetness of his mouth, the sweat pearled on his forehead and upper lip.

"It was bumping my head against the dash, when I thought you were going to stab again, that knocked me out," he said. "But not for long. When I came to, I went after you, followed you—at a discreet distance, of course. I watched you get onto the bus and followed that. Then I parked up near the intersection of this road you're on and waited to see if any cops were going to come. But I was pretty sure you wouldn't tell what happened. None of you ever has before. That's the beauty of it; you're always too ashamed to tell anyone. Isn't that right?"

She didn't answer. She was looking at her school box, that he was holding in one hand. She watched him open it and take out the compasses. It looked like there was still some blood on the point. She watched him spread the compasses wide open.

"Then," he said. "When no cops came, I drove up the road. I was going to go past your house and see how things looked, if there was any fuss or excitement. If there wasn't, then I'd know by that time I was safe, that you wouldn't tell. But I got a real break, then. I saw your mother leave. I saw that she was all dressed for town . . . It'll take her at least fifteen minutes each way. Whatever she's gone in for, will take her say another fifteen. We have plenty of time, don't we?"

He started toward her. "Well," he said. "This is fine. A bed and all." He looked down at the compasses that he now held in his hand like a dagger. "See this," he said. "Just because it didn't get *me*, don't think it *can't* kill. You do as I tell you, this time."

Relief that she hadn't killed him flooded Norma beyond all else. Deep, grateful relief that was almost a prayer.

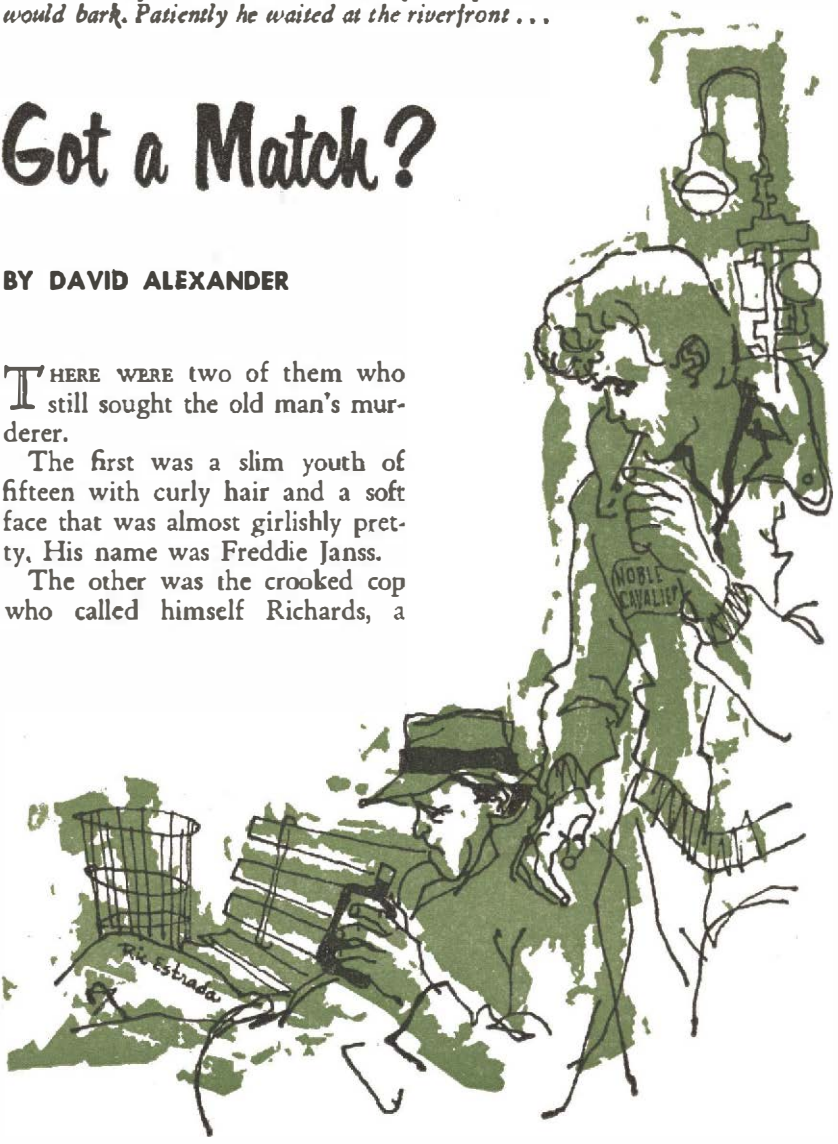
No one would know now. She was safe.

"Yes," she said, "I'll do as you tell me."

One small question, and the crooked cop's .45 would bark. Patiently he waited at the riverfront . . .

Got a Match?

BY DAVID ALEXANDER



THERE WERE two of them who still sought the old man's murderer.

The first was a slim youth of fifteen with curly hair and a soft face that was almost girlishly pretty. His name was Freddie Janss.

The other was the crooked cop who called himself Richards, a

beefy man with broad shoulders and the puffy, red-rimmed eyes of a drunk. He was jowly and paunchy, and he was also very tough, for cruelty was a thing that he enjoyed. His real name was Vossmyer. He was the old man's son.

The kid continued his search for the murderer long after the cops had given up for a simple reason. He had loved the old man and had worshipped him as a hero.

The motives of the man who called himself Richards were more complex. He had never shown affection for his father and had neglected the lonely old man shamelessly. Perhaps his compulsion was mainly ego, the outraged feeling that the murder of his father had been a personal affront. Or perhaps he merely enjoyed killing when he could get away with it in his role of cop. He had been on the force for more than twenty years and in that time he had killed four men. He had shot all of them in the belly. It takes awhile for them to die when you shoot them in the belly. Three of the men he had killed were hoods and there were no questions asked. He had a rule about hoods. You shot first and asked questions later if they happened to live. The fourth had been a drunken sailor who wasn't doing much except throwing his weight around a barroom. There'd been a stink about that one and an investigation, but he'd been whitewashed. Richards, to give him the name he chose for himself, was seeking his father's murderer long after the police had put the case in the back of the files, but he had no intention whatsoever of arresting the punk he sought.

The old man's murder had been a jaydee job. The cops knew that and very little else. It was a good thing Vossmyer had been a meticulous old man who carried a wallet full of identification cards. Otherwise they might have dumped him into a hole in Potter's Field instead of giving him the decent Department funeral he was entitled to because he was a retired fireman. Nobody could have recognized the face of the thing they shoved into the ice box of the Bellevue morgue. The jaydees had given the old man a stomp job. It was just for kicks. They hadn't taken the eight dollars and change or the gold watch the old man had on him at the time.

They'd done the job on the strip of pavement that runs beside the East River on the edge of Yorkville, the German-American settlement in New York. They'd done it just a few yards from the millionaires' apartments in Gracie Square and not very far from the Mayor's Mansion. The punks had been cocky and contemptuous. They'd done it in one of the best policed areas of the city. Jut a block away the regular patrolmen were augmented by Holmes men, private

guards the millionaires hired to protect their property. The jaydees hadn't even bothered to kick the old man's body a few feet off the ledge into the river. They just left the thing without a face lying there for the first passerby to see.

To tell the truth, Vossmyer was a well-meaning old man. Retirement had made him feel of no use in the world. So he decided he would make his idleness less of a burden, by helping kids, especially those headed for trouble. But no kid, except the one named Freddie Janss could stand to be around him very long. Age had made Vossmyer talkative. And his favorite topic was the Younger Generation. To him the Younger Generation meant the punks who hung around old Hoffman's candy store on East Eighty-fifth. The punks belonged to a social club they called the Noble Cavaliers. Whenever Old Man Vossmyer passed a bunch of the Noble Cavaliers, loitering in front of the candy store, he stopped and sincerely tried to get them to see the error of their ways. He told them they should be in school. He spoke seriously to them about the harm of smoking cigarettes and pitching nickels. He advised them to go to the Y, to get jobs and save their money for college. Psychologically, of course, his approach was cockeyed. The punks never answered him, except to blow a flatulent sound from their mouths occasionally. Sometimes they blew the smoke of their cigarettes into his face. Mostly they just stood and stared at the old man with hard, appraising eyes. Oh, the old man asked for it, all right. And he got it the night they found him without a face.

The old man wouldn't listen to advice. Lots of people, including the beat cop, had told him it was dangerous to sit there by the river late at night. The Noble Cavaliers had worked over a couple of old bums who used to sit by the river after dark drinking Sneaky Pete from crocks they carried in a paper bag. They hadn't killed the two vagrants. Just worked them over for kicks. One of them wound up with a broken back but he didn't die.

The old man scoffed at the idea of youngsters injuring him. Wasn't he on their side, interested in their welfare? And at seventy-three he believed he was still virile enough to take care of himself in any situation. He'd spent his life climbing tall ladders into the windows of flaming buildings and he'd won a Department medal for bravery in the line of duty. If he were to be scared away, he would be setting an example of cowardice for the Younger Generation. Besides, he liked to sit beside the river on warm nights and watch the excursion boats and barges sailing by.

So he sat beside the river, stubborn to the end, and one night the Noble Cavaliers found him there.

There'd been a witness to the murder, something not usual in the annals of jaydee crime. The witness was a caretaker in Carl Schurz Park. He'd left a toolshed unlocked that afternoon and he'd come back late at night when he'd realized what he'd done. He'd seen the punks working the old man over, but he'd been careful to keep out of sight himself. At first he wouldn't talk at all because he was scared to death, understandably so, since he had to work in the park where the Noble Cavaliers roamed at will. Finally, he'd told the cops that there were six or eight of them, that they'd all pushed the old man around, but it was just one who had done the stomping. One, who seemed to be the leader.

That was the punk that the crooked cop who called himself Richards was looking for.

They'd paraded the whole lot of Noble Cavaliers and some neighborhood kids who didn't even belong to the club before the caretaker, but he hadn't identified a one of them. He wouldn't even say if the one who did the stomping was tall or short or thin or fat. He said it had been too dark to tell. The caretaker didn't want his own face to look like Vossmyer's.

Because it was the third crime of the type, and because this one was murder, and because it happened near the sacred premises of millionaires, and because the Mayor had his official residence just a block or two away, the papers made a stink and the cops put everybody they could spare on it. They found nothing that would stick. If old Vossmyer had been a cop instead of a fireman they might not have shoved the case in the back of the file quite so soon. The case of a cop-killer is never closed. This case wasn't officially closed, of course. A murder case never is. But for all practical purposes it was closed when the crooked cop changed his name from Vossmyer to Richards and started a private investigation. As Vossmyer, Richards had never been a very good cop. He'd made detective first-grade and a lieutenant's pay largely through playing department politics. He was good at that. He did not lack physical courage and although he wasn't brilliant, he had a certain shrewdness. The trouble was that he'd become a cop largely because he saw the job as a source of small graft. He wanted the handouts a lot more than he wanted glory and he'd bought himself a home on the Island and a big car and all the Scotch he could drink with the handouts he promoted. Old Inspector Sansone once said that Vossmyer earned his salary only on the occasions when they locked him in the back room with a hood who wouldn't talk. "It's the only thing about being a cop he likes," the Inspector had declared at that time. He was half-right. Vossmyer also liked the handouts.

Vossmyer had had his father out to the house on the Island a couple of times on Christmas after the old man retired, but it hadn't worked out. The old man liked his daughter-in-law, Carlotta, a plump Italian girl. But he complained of her cooking because it was too spicy. He tried to persuade her that she should switch to the plain, solid food of German cookery. He also told his son that he drank too much. And gave him advice on bringing up his child, suggesting kindness as a substitute for razor-strap lickings. For years Vossmyer hadn't even bothered to check up and see if the old man was still alive in the little furnished room he'd taken up in Yorkville. What the hell, he had his pension. He wasn't going to starve. Then one day they'd taken the younger Vossmyer down to the morgue and asked him to look at a body without a recognizable face.

The cops had put on a real show in the homicide investigation. But after two months they had produced nothing the D.A. could make into a case, so they just quietly pushed the murder of the old man into the back of the file. That was when the crooked cop named Vossmyer became a whisky-sodden vagrant named Richards. He went to old Inspector Sansone and asked to be put on detached duty to investigate his father's murder on his own. He wasn't going to lose a month's pay by taking a leave, of course. Sansone consented. After all, you have to make allowances when a cop's old man is murdered. Also, if the papers should suddenly revive their interest in the case and ask what was being done, Sansone could point out that an undercover investigation had been going forward all the time.

The role of a drunken vagrant wasn't a difficult one for the man known as Richards to assume. He wasn't a vagrant, but he was a drunk. He didn't overdo it. He didn't dress like a Bowery bum. His disguise, if you could call it that, was worn, shabby-genteel clothes, slightly soiled dark shirts, a necktie that was a little frayed, a hat that was shapeless and needed reblocking. He didn't have to disguise his face, although he let his beard grow for two or three days at a time. That was in character. Nobody but the beat cop in Yorkville knew who he was, and he was sure the beat cop wouldn't talk. He'd been born in Yorkville, but he'd been hardly more than ten years old when he'd moved away and that was more than thirty years before. Old Man Vossmyer had returned to this section of the city after his wife's death and his retirement. He'd returned all alone.

Richards' routine was simple and for him not at all unpleasant. During the day and early evening, he hung around the bars and drank, being careful never to flash a large bill, never to spend too much in one

place, never to become too garrulous with anyone. To the bartenders and the customers, he was just another drifter in the half-world of alcoholism, a man who looked as if he'd been a respectable citizen with a steady job until the booze got him. He drank and listened. Late in the evening he went to the strip of pavement that runs between the river and Carl Schurz Park and sat and waited. Sometimes he took a bottle along with him.

Richards knew what he was waiting for. There was just one lead to the stomper. The two old bums who had lived through the stomping had been too scared and too drink-fogged to tell the cops much. But they agreed on one thing. Each had been approached by a young punk who had asked for a match. Then others had emerged from the bushes and shoved them around and when they were helpless on the pavement the punk who had first approached them stomped them. The other punks just stood around and watched. There was further verification of this method. The caretaker in the park had not only seen, but had actually overheard, the jaydees who were killing Vossmyer. One had approached the old man alone and asked him for a match. That was the one who'd done the stomping a little later. The caretaker wouldn't describe the young hood, but he did tell the cops that much.

During the day the man called Richards gathered what bits of information he could and drank a lot of whiskey. At night he sat on the bench beside the river, with a gun in his pocket, and waited for a punk to ask him for a match. He planned to shoot the punk, of course. He'd shoot him in the belly and stand there for awhile and watch his dying.

At about the same time that the crooked cop named Vossmyer became a drunk called Richards, the kid named Freddie Janss became a Noble Cavalier. Freddie's mother was a widow. For the past four years she'd helped to eke out a living by renting a room in her railroad flat to Old Man Vossmyer. The old man had been the only real friend that Freddie had. At his high school, the kids were tough and they pushed him around. They didn't like him because his hair was curly and bright gold and his face was smooth and rosy-cheeked. He tried to avoid the kids at school and the Noble Cavaliers who hung out at the candy store. They called him a nance. If he protested against the filthy insinuations they flung in his face whenever they were near him, they ganged up and beat the hell out of him. That had happened more than once. Despite his timidity and effeminate manner, he was a well-grown, muscular kid and the bobby-soxers liked him, but the girls frightened him almost as much as the Noble Cavaliers. His

father had died when he was a baby and he'd been brought up by women. He'd never known male companionship until the old man took a room in his mother's railroad flat.

The kid read a lot. That was one of the things that made his schoolmates and the neighborhood punks think he was some kind of a queer. In the fiction he read, Right always triumphed and Evil was invariably avenged.

The old man who died without a face had seemed to the kid to be the only real, live hero he'd ever met. There was a framed citation and a medal and yellowing newspaper clippings in his little room to prove he was a hero. Freddie worshipped the old man. And the old man liked him, said Freddie proved there was still hope for the Younger Generation. Freddie spent hours listening to his rambling tales and his opinions and his advice. The old man, with his ill-fitting false teeth and his bald head, bore little resemblance, spiritually or physically, to a swashbuckling guardsman out of Dumas, but Freddie felt that knowing him so intimately was almost like having D'Artagnan for a father.

A couple of months after the old man's death, Freddie decided the cops had given up. He was scared, but he felt there was no one left to avenge the old man's murder except Freddie Janss. Just about the time that the man called Richards began to haunt the Yorkville bars, the kid set out to find the old man's murderer. He knew, almost for certain, who had stomped his friend to death. It had been Pudge Holtz, leader of the Noble Cavaliers. Pudge was barely sixteen, but he was man-sized, with bulky shoulders and a bug-eyed cretin's face. Once, when he was about ten years old, Freddie had seen Pudge throw a puppy into a bonfire in a vacant lot. It had made him so sick he could hardly eat for a week and his mother had forced him to go to the clinic. The doctors said he had a nervous stomach.

Freddie knew for sure that Pudge had been the one who had stomped his friend to death, but he couldn't prove it. There was only one thing to do, he decided, with a sick feeling in his guts. He had to join the Noble Cavaliers. He started dropping around to Hoffman's candy store, a place he had always avoided like the plague, and he let it be known that he wanted to join the gang.

The next three weeks were a living hell for Freddie Janss. It wasn't just the pushing around he got. He found to his surprise that he could take a lot of physical pain. It was the filthy things they said to him that were the worst part. He had to stand and take it and try to grin.

They told him that a Noble Cavalier had to prove he was a man. They got one of the spik girls who

had recently moved into the neighborhood and took her to the cellar headquarters of the gang and turned Freddie over to her and stood around and watched. Finally they framed a fight with Batty Himmel. Batty was tall and at first glance he seemed scrawny. But his loose-jointed body was made of steel springs. He'd been to the psych ward three times after they caught him doing things that nobody with all his buttons could conceivably do. He packed a switch blade and a set of brass knucks at all times. He was always grinning and licking at his cracked lips with his tongue. It was Batty who set up a lot of the rumbles for the gang. He'd set up the three old men they'd found beside the river, among other things.

Freddie Janss stood up pretty well in the fight with Batty so long as it was only fists. Old Man Vossmyer had persuaded him go to the boxing classes at the Y and he could handle himself. He didn't win, of course, because Batty finally used the brass knucks when things got tough. There was a scar down Freddie's right cheek he would carry to his grave after it was over and his mother was scared to death. But the fight did the trick, finally. When they picked him up from the corner of the alley, Freddie was bleeding like a hog in a slaughterhouse, but they told him he was a Noble Cavalier. Pudge had ruled that Batty couldn't finish with a stomp job.

During the three weeks of Freddie Janss' initiation into the Noble Cavaliers, the man called Richards had been drinking and listening and sitting on a bench and he thought he had learned a lot. Nobody had come up to ask him for a match but he had narrowed it down to three in his mind. It was the punk with a wrestler's shoulders and goitrous eyes called Pudge, or it was the ungainly half-wit called Batty, or it was the pretty-boy called Freddie. He was convinced that it was one of them.

The truth was he didn't have much against the punk called Freddie. He just didn't like effeminate males. The mere sight of them made him unreasonably furious. When he'd been a harness bull the thing he'd enjoyed most was clubbing the queers who haunted city parks.

The only trouble was that the time was growing short. The inspector had given him a month for detached duty with pay and three weeks had already gone by. Every night he'd sat beside the river waiting for the punk who would ask him for a match and all he'd seen were millionaires walking their dogs and a couple of interesting necking parties and some old bums drinking from their paper-wrapped crocks of Sneaky Pete. By this time the thing had become a fixation with him, though. He knew he was going to keep on sitting there, even if he had to do it on his own time

instead of the city's. But he had become wildly eager for the punk to show up. He was like a man who wants a woman so bad he's about to explode, a lecher awaiting the arrival of his sweetheart. His hand would fondle the cold steel of the gun in his pocket and it would feel as warm and soft and desirable to him as a woman's flesh had ever felt. He tortured his imagination thinking how it would be when he took the gun out, finally, and pressed it up against the belly of the punk and squeezed the trigger.

A time came when he could stand it no longer. He thought of accosting one of the three Cavaliers that he suspected, any one of the three, and killing him for the murder of his father. But that might stir up a stink, and he didn't want to stir up another one—remembering only too well what had happened after he'd killed the drunken sailor. And then he knew that he must bring on the attack, provoke it, by making the bait more desirable. What better way, he thought, finally, than to let the punks know he was a cop, a cop who was out to get them. How to tip off the Cavaliers then became his problem. He thought hard, trying to figure out a way. Then a way in which he might use the beat cop came to him.

It was a Saturday and Freddie was still wearing a bandage over the gash that Batty's brass knucks had made when he got the word from Batty that there was an emergency meeting of the Cavaliers in their cellar headquarters. And Batty, to shown no hard feelings, remained after their fight, told Freddie in detail what was up.

When Pudge called the meeting to order there was a big, sly grin on his usually expressionless face. His eyes were bugging out so far they looked like squeezed grapes. And because Batty was in on it, his tongue kept flicking in and out of his ugly mouth and licking at his lips. That was usually his way of showing he was excited.

"You guys know that old beat cop, Harkness," Pudge said. "He got his pot-gut full of beer the other night at Pete's gin mill and let something slip. You know that drunk that Batty's told us about, the one sits by the river every night? We ain't touched him because things ain't quieted down since the last one. But old Harkness let it slip that he's Law. He's a goddam dick. And that ain't all the bastard is. He's the son of the old man that got stomped a couple of months ago."

Batty looked like he was going into what his old lady called "one of his spells." It wasn't only his tongue flicking in and out like an adder's. He was jumping up and down on his skinny legs like a reefer-happy hipster with St. Vitus Dance might do when he listens to rock 'n' roll. "So what?" he asked, his voice hysterically shrill. "So

what we do, huh, boss?"

"We take him," Pudge said. "Tonight. He's down there every night from ten till after midnight. We wait till late, about ten to twelve. There won't be nobody around, not even cops any more. Just him. Him and us, understand? That flatfoot, Harkness, wouldn't walk that pavement at midnight if they made him the Commissioner."

Batty was fairly shrieking with excitement. He began to hop around the room in a kind of Indian war dance, shouting in a sing-song voice with a crazy rhythm. "Stomp, man, stomp! Stomp, stomp, do that stomp!"

"We drift together the usual place in the park," Pudge said. "Make it about a quarter to twelve. *Everybody* be there understand? Where'n the hell's Freddie? Wasn't he told to be here?"

"Yeah," Batty said. "Yeah."

"Who needs the fag?" somebody called out.

Spanish, a hollow-cheeked Mexican boy, objected. He lolled against the wall sensuously. He was stripped to the waist, his torso, coffee brown and non-muscled; wore tight dungarees, no belt. Freddie was a member, so he had a right to be in on this deal, that was Spanish's argument. But he was soon shouted down. To regain the prestige he had lost, Spanish belligerently brought up another objection.

"You're all nuts!" he blasted at them. "That cop's got more brains'n you. He's got a rod—and he's goin' to use it. You're actin' like he's one of those old winos Batty set up. He's got a rod. You're not takin' him like you took those winos."

Silence followed, and mutterings, but no disagreement.

Right after the meeting, Pudge did a little shoplifting in the neighborhood pawnshop. For some time he'd admired the scope for a .30-06 rifle on display in the pawnshop window. He knew it was a six power scope and had a cross hair reticule that made it impossible to miss a distant target. The scope would fit his rifle, a rifle he'd stolen from the gun room of a big estate in Jersey, where he and the boys in the block had been taken by some social workers for a day's outing two summers ago.

With the rifle, the scope now attached to the rifle's receiver, under his coat and down his pants leg, Pudge went directly to the building in which one of the fellows lived. The Cavaliers—except for Freddie—were on the sidewalk at the entranceway waiting for him. In a body, they then climbed the five flights of the walkup and the additional run of steps that took them to the roof.

Before they went on, over roofs, to a roof that would be directly opposite the spot where Richards was in the habit of sitting, Pudge pulled the rifle out of his pants leg. It was safe to bring it out now. And

besides, the stock of the rifle had been chafing his thigh; it hurt.

Freddie couldn't understand how he had missed Harkness; he had covered all of the cop's beat, even backtracking over several blocks, without seeing him. But like Vossmyer — Richards — Harkness was corruptible. And this evening he had departed from the pattern of his beat, had purchased a pack of cigarettes in the Eagle Cigar Store, gone up an inside stairway to a second floor horse room where he met three men who had a "little proposition" to make to him.

Finally, in desperation, and it were as though Fate had him by the hand, Freddie headed to the park bench where Richards sat. It was dark now, but Richard's bench was under a light. It was a clear, cool night with a fresh breeze coming in off the river. Freddie stood off at a safe distance, watching as Richards shifted his big body impatiently, crossing and uncrossing his legs. For all Freddie knew, the Cavaliers were lurking, waiting in the shadows. His stomach was doing nervous flip-flops because he was scared to death of being seen by the Cavaliers.

From their vantage point on the roof, Pudge and his followers saw both Richards and Freddie. Pudge kept lifting the rifle—getting beads on Richards—while he feared the consequences of killing a cop, and also equally feared being thought chicken. He therefore welcomed the argument going on over Freddie.

"Give him a chance," Spanish was whining. "Christ, all the little guy wants is to get in solid with us. Hell, yes. No wonder, the way we keep shovin' him around."

"He's a fag."

"Whyn't we see what he does? What's the rush?"

"I'm getting first crack at mister cop," Pudge said.

"Between the eyes," Batty urged, licking his lips. "Or in the eyes. You can put the slug anyplace you want, deadeye. Why you waitin'? Time's a flyin'."

Pudge lifted the rifle again, but tentatively, lowered it somewhat when he heard Spanish reverse his position in the argument. "Go on," Spanish said now. "I just didn't think. The kid ain't wise this guy's a cop. So can he take him by hisself? Why hell, he'll get plugged."

"He knows he's a cop," Batty said. "He knows. I told him."

"So what's he doing down there?" Pudge growled. "The bastard's tippin' the law off. Sure. Sure, that's what he's doing."

"Ah, that don't figure," Spanish objected. "He could still be trying to get in solid—"

"He's a stoolie," Pudge said.

"Get with it!" Batty urged. "Get with it, deadeye."

Spanish argued they were calling the kid a stoolie without proof. And he had some backing. There was one fellow who pointed out that

they could tell fast enough, if Freddie was a stoolie, by what he did. Others agreed that that was right. So wait. See if Freddie would tackle the cop or not.

Richards gripped the gun hard when Freddie moved hesitantly up to him. He arose very slowly. Delay increased his pleasure, his elation. He figured when the request for a light came, would be soon enough to give it in the gut to the pretty boy. The story Freddie was telling about how he was a friend of old man Vossmyer and how he happened to join the Cavaliers and that the Cavaliers were planning to kill Richards got through, but Richards didn't believe any of it—and besides, he was concentrating on the joy of killing the punk.

"Go!" Freddie was pleading. "You got to go right now!"

Freddie saw Richards just standing there, as if he hadn't heard him.

"I'm telling you, you gotta go!"

Richards remained silent, immobile. Jerkily, hurriedly, Freddie dug a pack of cigarettes from his hip pocket. He'd started smoking since he'd joined the Noble Cavaliers, and his going for a cigarette now was nervous reflex.

"As soon as he asks for the match," Richards told himself. "Soon as he asks for it." The waiting now was pleasure. He didn't want to hurry the shot that would end it.

Freddie poked the cigarette in his mouth. He shoved the pack back into his hip pocket. Then he patted his chest with both hands, clearly trying to locate matches.

"Go on, ask for that light, you goddam punk," Richards thought. "Go on. Ask for it!"

Freddie worked a book of matches out of his watch pocket. The first match broke; the second went out.

Freddie ripped another match out of the book. But he didn't strike it, just held it. He told Richards, "What makes it worse is, they know you're a cop. What's the matter? Don't you—don't you believe me? You got to! I don't know when they'll get here," he looked about worriedly, "but—"

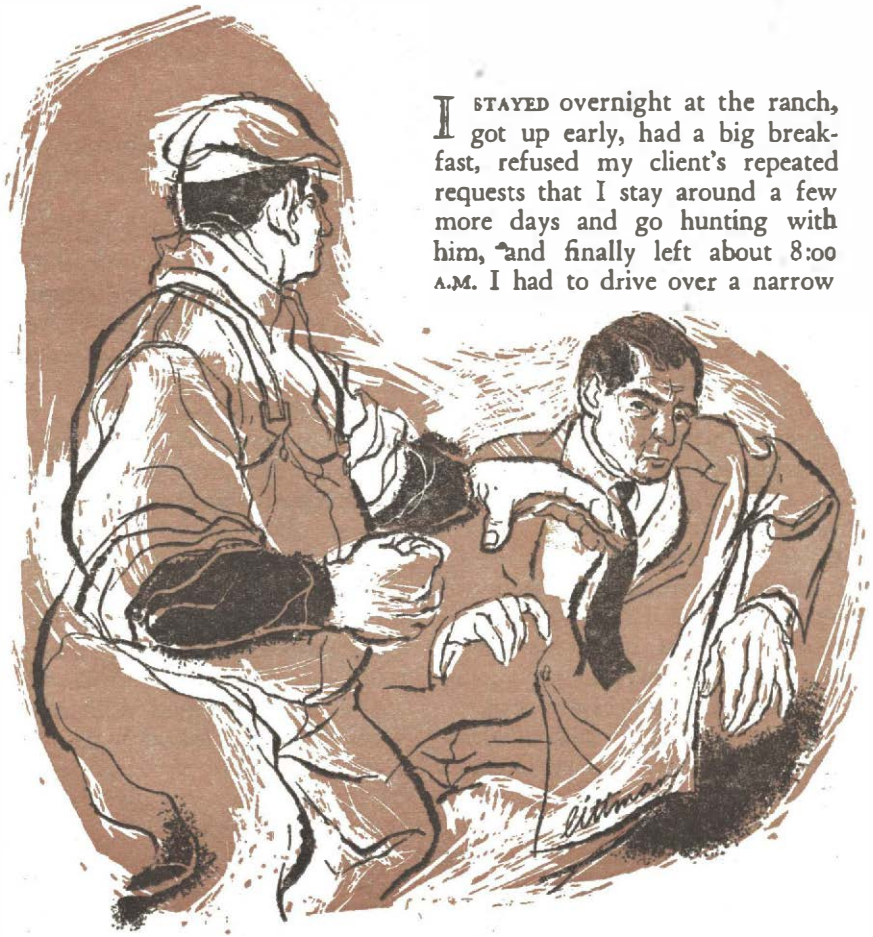
Freddie hestitated, then went on. He struck the match and Richards believed him, was already thinking how he could get the whole damn gang. It was as much a friendly gesture as it was being helpful when Richards put forth his hand to cup the flame of Freddie's match.

The two, high-powered rifle shots in the darkness sounded like two snaps of a whip.

I was doing seventy when they nudged my car into a spin. I knew they'd never quit now . . .

Troublemakers

BY EARL FULTZ



I STAYED overnight at the ranch, got up early, had a big breakfast, refused my client's repeated requests that I stay around a few more days and go hunting with him, and finally left about 8:00 A.M. I had to drive over a narrow

range of mountains; it was very pleasant that early. The road twisted tortuously but I scooted along at a pretty good clip.

I was just about through the mountains when this red hardtop caught up with me. I was going around a curve at the time and this hardtop, its horn blasting and without slowing down, started to pass. Just as it got alongside, a truck came rolling toward us from around the curve. I pushed down on the gas and also pulled right as far as I could. The hardtop's brakes squealed and it somehow got back in behind me just as the truck roared by.

I'm not a particularly nervous type, but that one had me sweating. I was sore. I don't mind fast drivers, but I sure as hell resent careless ones. Since the road was still a long series of curves, I pulled out in the center of the road and stayed there. The hardtop honked and honked, but I wouldn't budge. When there was a straight stretch, I pulled over to let him pass.

He passed all right. He whipped by at seventy miles an hour and so close I swear I heard his fender tick against mine. He was going so fast and his passing was so unexpected that he almost overturned me. There were two men in the car and one of them yelled something at me as they went by. For a moment my hands were like ice on the wheel. Then I told myself it was one of those things that happen when you drive. Forget it. I had plenty of other things to think about than those two jerks.

I guess if my wife had been along, nothing further would have come of it. For one thing, I would have considered her safety. What's more, she would have said something about "Is it *that* important to you?" in a voice designed to make you feel like a small boy walking a fence to show how brave you are.

Well, I didn't yet know how important it was to me; at the time I reached the ferry, it seemed very important . . .

I live in Brownsville, Texas, right on the border. I'm a lawyer, thirty-eight, wife and three kids, ranch-house with a mortgage, three-year old car. I have clients on both sides of the border. I make out.

This client of mine, whose place I'd left at eight, had a big *ranchero* about two hundred miles south of the border in Mexico. I won't go into my business with him; let's just say he needed a loophole in some import regulations and I had found it for him. I'm that kind of a lawyer, not much good in a courtroom, but give me a problem and a set of law books and if there's a way, I'll find it. All very legal. I'm a very law-abiding citizen; I've seen too many people put away not to want to stay legal.

Once out of the mountains, it was a hundred and seventy-five fairly level miles to Brownsville,

easy driving except for the little two-car ferry across one of the rivers where there always was a wait. I had gone about thirty or forty miles when I saw the red hardtop ahead. They had a flat and one of the two men, a big fat-gutted guy, was standing in the middle of the road waving me down.

Like anyone else, when I see someone in trouble I stop. But these two—I just poured on the gas and roared by. In the rear-view mirror, I could see the beefy guy looking after me, outrage in every gesture. I grinned. That'll show those s.o.b.'s, I thought.

I got to the ferry about an hour later. There were eight cars ahead of me and the ferry, as usual, was moving so slowly across the river you had to line it up with something on the other side to make sure it was moving at all. I got out my briefcase and started to work on a case. This was a rough one, at least for me. A long-time client of mine had a rather wild son who had gotten himself involved in a car smash-up. The kid was coming up for trial on a manslaughter charge and it was my job to get him off.

Well, I'm a pretty good lawyer, but I'm not much of a courtroom man. I can't put on the big act and browbeat witnesses and play on the jury's emotions. I guess you could say I don't have the killer instinct that a good trial lawyer has to have. I didn't want the case, but my client insisted and mentioned a fee that would get me a new car, reduce the mortgage and give my wife and me a vacation in Canada.

I sweated over my notes for about an hour. The ferry came and went a couple times and I kept moving up and, finally, I was at the head of the line. I closed my briefcase and was just getting out to stretch my legs when the red hardtop slid by, its motor throbbing, and stopped with a jerk a half length in front of my car. The beefy gentleman in the right front seat looked back at me, his face expressionless, but his attitude saying: "Go ahead, make something of it."

The occupants of the eight or ten cars lined up behind me came flooding around the hardtop, grumbling and angry.

"Who do they think they are anyway?" a woman said to her husband as they went past my car. There was a surge of angry voices and a sudden commotion as the right front door of the hardtop burst open. The man who got out was immense, at least six feet tall and with a bloated tub of a body like a pro wrestler. He looked about thirty.

"Who says we can't?" he said in a loud voice. By this time the driver was out too. He was as tall as his partner, but hard and lean and he moved with the savage grace of a

stalking mountain lion. He opened the trunk of the car and got four bottles of beer out of a portable ice chest, knocked the caps off two on the bumper and gave one to his partner. I noticed the car had a year old Texas license and in the back-window were two hard hats of the type oil workers wear.

I felt like such a coward, sitting there, that I got out and joined the group of people who were ringed in a half-circle around the two men.

"You all just clear out of here now," the beefy man said with a grin. "We're in a hurry."

"We've been waiting an hour," bleated a young fellow who was next in line behind me.

"Then you won't mind waiting a few more minutes. Now will you?"

The youngster said something under his breath and the big bully sprang forward at him with surprising agility and pushed him sprawling against my car. The driver knocked the bottom off his beer bottle and moved alongside his partner.

"Beat it," the driver ordered, determinedly, viciously. He made a menacing gesture with his shattered bottle and the crowd fell back. I got elbowed off balance and was left alone a pace or two from the others and the beefy guy saw me.

"That your car?" he said, jerking a beefy thumb.

"Yes," I said, rather pleased that my voice was firm and steady.

"Let me give you some advice," he said, towering over me and breathing beerily into my face. "You do like you did back there again and you're going to get run right out into the cactus."

"And you're going to kill yourself passing on curves," I said. He hadn't expected me to answer and his face was red and stupid as he tried to think of something to say.

"I'm telling ya," he said and gave me a shove. I kept my feet only because I hit my car.

The pair swaggered back to their car and got in. I stood where I'd been shoved and was getting so angry I shook. They evidently had been pushing people around for a long time. It was time someone stood up to them. The ferry was only about two hundred feet from shore, so if I was going to do anything I had to do it fast.

"Listen," I said to the man who was second in line, "those bastards will have to move back to let the cars off the ferry. As soon as the cars are off, I'll pull up fast and block them off. You go on the ferry first; I'll go second."

"Good," the man said. "We'll show the mother-lovers."

"Henry," the man's wife said, "what's got into you? What difference does it make if we have to wait a few more minutes."

As I went back to my car, Henry was absorbing a lot of verbal punishment.

I locked the doors, rolled up the

windows, started the motor and waited. The ferry scrunched against the bank and the first car came part way off, then honked at the hardtop to back up. The beefy man got out and came over to me.

"Back up," he commanded.

"No room," I said, which was true. He went around to the front of my car and waved his partner to back up. Wheels spinning, the hardtop shot back to a point where its front bumpers were even with my rear ones. As the second car came off the ferry and slid by, I cramped my wheels left and jammed on the gas. The beefy guy had to jump back and the hardtop, already moving, slammed into my rear end. I heard the tinkle of glass.

The young fellow behind me moved by and onto the ferry. The hardtop backed up furiously a few feet and tried to cut around on my right but I backed up too, forcing him to stop. The way was now clear for me to go on the ferry. And what did I do? I killed the motor.

It started right away, but by then the two bullies were on me. I got excited and poured the gas on so hard my wheels dug down in the soft sand and I was stuck.

The big ox walked around in front of my car and stood grinning at me. Then they both got on the right side and started bouncing the car back and forth. I was pitching back and forth like a row boat in a storm. The car bounced so hard the wheels lifted. One more bounce and it lurched up, tilted precariously, then toppled over onto its left side.

My head bounced from steering wheel to window and back again like a ping pong ball. I could feel blood running down my face. By the time the others had helped me out, the ferry, with the hardtop on it, was half-way across the river.

There was a general, indignant buzz from the people around me. A woman gave me a towel and helped stop the bleeding. Someone else spread a blanket for me to sit on and gave me a shot of Scotch. I was shaking from anger and frustration. About twenty men got together and with a great deal of pushing and grunting got my car onto its wheels again.

"Any of you guys got a gun?" I said, as I stood up and moved toward the group.

"Son," an elderly preacher-type man said, "you'd better quit while you're no bigger loser than you are."

"I want a gun," I said. "I live in Brownsville and you'll get it back."

"I got me a little .22 automatic," a man said. "You can borry that." He went to his car. When he came back with the gun, he gave me a couple extra clips. "Hope you don't need it," he said.

"I hope I do," I told him.

But it's hard for a guy like me to stay that angry very long. I was

sore, of course, but I got to thinking of all the people I'd seen in court who were in trouble just because they let their emotions run away with them. So by the time the ferry got back, I was rational and logical again. Due process of law and all that. I'd stop at the first town that had a phone and call the border. I knew many people there. I took down the names of witnesses who were willing to give statements if necessary. And I gave the man back his gun.

The preacher-type nodded approvingly. "Revenge is not a wholesome emotion," he said.

So the ferry, finally, got back and my car seemed to work all right, though I had lost some gas. I filled up at the little town on the other side of the river, but they didn't have a phone and so I headed my battered car toward Brownsville.

She got up to fifty all right and as I drove along I tried to figure who to call, the U.S. or the Mexican authorities. A man named Luis Flores was a big wheel on the Mexican side and he owed me a big favor. Luis had a brother-in-law who was somebody important in the police. I could really get that pair of hoodlums in trouble for a year or two.

I was about half-way to the next town and feeling pretty good about what I'd do to those two goons, when I came up over the top of a hill and there was the red hardtop parked at the side of the road. The beefy guy was leaning nonchalantly against a front fender, a beer in his hand. He saluted me with it as I went past.

I pushed my car up to seventy, but within a minute or two the hardtop was in sight behind me, pitching and rolling and coming fast. They came in close behind me, matching my speed; then they nudged me. They bumped me again, harder; then still harder, I went into a brief skid. By the time I was out of it, I was down to forty.

I was scared. Obviously these two didn't feel they had settled the score. I wished I had that .22.

They started to move in again and my first impulse was to speed up. But the faster I went, the more dangerous it would be. I suddenly remembered a multiple crash I'd seen of five cars, each car with its grill neatly smashed in under the rear bumper of the car ahead of it. A car's front goes down when you brake; its rear up.

I got up to about fifty-five, let them get close and then slammed on the brakes. There was the smash into my car's rear, but it didn't seem big enough to get to their radiator. The bumpers hooked briefly, then came free.

I started to pick up speed at once, but the other driver caught up with me and began to push. I hit the brakes and started to skid. I pushed down on the gas, but the car back of me could accelerate faster than my old car. I shifted

into second, but they soon had me doing sixty in second. I kept touch-the brakes, but they had begun to smell. They wouldn't last long.

The road ahead was a level stretch and I could see that the macadam had some deep pits in it. I steered right for the deepest. My head hit the ceiling as the car slammed into it. The hard jolt caused them to drop back.

But I knew they'd never quit now. In a few seconds their car leaped forward, came alongside and the Burly man half-leaned out, his face livid, as he hurled bottles. The first one shattered against the door window and a spray of glass slivers hit my face. The second bounced off the windshield. Before he could throw a third, I pulled my car hard left. His head and shoulders disappeared in a hurry. There was a shriek and grind of metal as the two cars slid against one another, the tires squealing.

They managed to pull up ahead of me, decreasing their speed and pulling over in front of me if I tried to pass. When we got down to about fifteen an hour, they braked abruptly. I almost went into them. The two men boiled out of the hardtop. I tried to back up fast and killed the motor. It was so overheated, it flooded. I was helpless.

"'Get out," snarled the husky hoodlum.

"Listen," I said, "this has got out of hand. We're about even. My car's a wreck. I think—"

"Come on or I'll haul you out."

A car coming from Brownsville slowed, but they waved it on. As soon as it had passed, the beefy guy reached in the broken window to unlock the door. I grabbed his arm and pushed it down on the shattered glass. He roared like an injured bull and pulled his arm out, looked at the blood. He called to his partner.

"Eddie," I heard him say. "Get the rifle. I'm going to kill this son of a bitch. I'm going to drill this son of a bitch right between the eyes."

The lean one went back to the hardtop.

I swore as I touched the starter button. I shifted into low and headed straight for the rear end of the hardtop.

The lanky guy was just reaching into the back seat for the rifle, when I slammed into the hardtop with a crash that sent him sprawling into the road. My tires screamed and smoked as I frantically got the bigger car moving, slowly at first, then faster and faster. One of the pair was running after me, but it didn't do him any good. I was on my way.

I kept waiting for the hardtop's wheels to cramp so it would go into the ditch. They didn't. The damned car ran right down the middle of the road, as if it had a driver.

I had gone about a hundred yards, when the road began to rise

where it went through a cut in a small hill. Just as I got to the top, the hardtop finally began to drift to the right. As I started to push it down hill, it cramped abruptly and ran its nose into the soft earth of the "cut," the sloping side through which the road had been sliced. Because my bumper was caught on the hardtop's, it pulled me with it.

I got out quick, to see about getting unhooked. Only one of my bumper guards was left, so I was able to work the two bumpers apart. As I got back into my car, I noticed a silvery streak on the highway. I thought at first that it was my radiator. I ran back around front. It wasn't my radiator; it was their gas tank. I had apparently smashed their bumper right into the tank.

I jumped in my car and backed up. As I put my car in low again, I saw in my rear-view mirror that the two men were running toward me over the hill. The one who'd been knocked off the car when I slammed into it was limping, slowing their speed.

I knew that though the hardtop was losing gas, they'd probably have enough to catch up with me. And that, by now they were so enraged that they'd kill me. I had a picture of them slamming into me from the rear at ninety miles an hour, not caring any more what happened—or just shooting the hell out of me with the rifle.

As I pulled around the hardtop, my rear wheels suddenly spun, almost throwing me into the ditch. The reason was obvious. Gasoline from the hardtop was running at angles across the road, in a thin little line. Fear prickled the hairs at the back of my neck; I felt cold inside, but I *knew* I had to act . . . had to *do* something. I saw the one way out. I braked to a stop. I was already beyond where the stream of gas had run. I got out and sprinted back. I fumbled for my matches. My hands were sweaty and shaking. Finally, I struck a match and lit the entire book and threw it down into the little stream of gas. The men came over the hill, shouting obscenities at me.

I saw the gas puff into blue flame as I ran for my car and took off. I glanced into the rear-view mirror as I shifted, but the slope of the hill cut off my view of the top of it. And all I could really think about was whether or not it would work.

By the time I got to the bottom of the hill, I was doing sixty. Wreck that my car was, I was afraid to take my eyes off the road long enough to look back. But I sneaked a quick look after a few seconds. A column of dark smoke was rising from the top of the hill. I knew then that the flame had followed the trail of gas back to the hardtop.

I slowed down, turned and looked out the rear window. Even as I looked back, I saw the hardtop

pull into the middle of the road, ready to chase me, smoke pouring from its rear end.

Just as I told myself that they were crazy to try to drive that car, the explosion echoed in the hills.

If they were alive, they'd need a lot of help. But I didn't go back. I drove on to Brownsville. My anger was gone. I was tense and nervous and utterly exhausted, but I wasn't angry anymore—and I wasn't sorry.

I'm still not sorry.

Bad Day at Bad Axe

Earl Rapson's debut as police chief at Bad Axe, Michigan, was an embarrassing experience for him. He parked the town's only squad car, and walked away from it. At the corner he happened to turn around just in time to see the car disappearing down the street, a reminder that he had left the keys in the ignition.

Circumstantial Evidence

In Bismarck, North Dakota, a church was robbed of $800 by a sneak thief. Jerry Imus, 14, led police to a man who later confessed the theft. Asked how he happened to suspect the man, Jerry replied: "A man just don't pull his hat down and walk into a church eating an ice cream cone."

Harvest Time

Augustin Cabellos was arrested by police in Villa Juarez, Mexico, in the midst of his harvesting work. His crop consisted of 13 tons of marijuana.

Reverse Ride

Gregory Hughes, of Hudson, Wisconsin, was enroute home from northern Minnesota when the clutch on his car broke. The only direction the car would move was backward, and Hughes didn't have enough money with him to pay a garage bill.

So Hughes drove backwards. He had traveled 54 miles before he was arrested at St. Cloud, Minnesota, for reckless driving. After paying a $15 fine, Hughes wired home for money to repair his car. Then he continued his journey—going forward.

They were forced to do as he ordered: put their guns against each other and start firing. Each gun held one bullet...

Possessed

BY
WILL F. JENKINS

THE SHERIFF mentioned devils when they were half a mile out of Laurelton. Up to then he hadn't spoken. He drove like a man of stone until Joe Hansford moved his hands and his handcuffs clanked. Then he did speak, in a sort of grim calm as if he were too much moved for hatred.

"If," he said steadily," if you ain't possessed of a devil, there's no explainin' what you did. Tom Kennedy was a good friend to you!"

Joe did not answer.

"I'm not a superstitious man," said the sheriff. "I can figure out why people steal an' do all kinds of meanness. I'm not so good I can't understand even wanting to kill somebody you hate. But why you did what you did to Tom Kennedy I can't understand!"

Joe did not listen. He stared unseeingly ahead as the car rolled over

the patched, not-often-used highway. The sheriff was taking him to Bradenton jail for safety. It was his duty to keep Joe unharmed for the due processes of the law, but even so he was probably over-cautious. Tom Kennedy had been found dead in his store only two hours ago. It would take time for details of the murder to spread and meditation to bring up the deep, corrosive wrath which might imperil Joe.

The second-growth pine that had been along both sides of the road drew back and there was a stream — a little creek with reeds on its banks, and a plank bridge over it. The car-wheels made a drumming sound as they went across and into untidy, ill-kept woodland beyond.

"There was a time," said the sheriff, again," when they'd blame what you did on Satan. It seems pretty reasonable to me. It ain't easy to figure out a human thinkin' of a thing like that!"

Joe licked his lips. He'd come to Laurelton three months before to work in Mr. Kennedy's General Store. It was the tiniest of villages, but he liked it. He'd met Nancy — whose father now drove him to prison and perhaps to trial and execution. The sheriff had been suspicious of Joe, as any man may be when a stranger appears to win his daughter away from him. And as a clerk in Kennedy's General Store, Joe hadn't been an especially glamorous suitor.

But the sheriff had been no more than suspicious until two hours ago. Tonight. Then Mr. Kennedy had been found robbed and murdered with a deliberate, unnecessary zest. And the sheriff had come to ask Joe if there'd been any strangers in the store during the day — there'd been only one. And the sheriff had found Joe with his suitcase packed to leave town, and four hundred and sixty-eight dollars in cash in his possession. It was not reasonable for Joe to be prepared for secret flight— which he was. It was not credible that the money was any other than the money of which the store had been robbed. And Mr. Kennedy had grown up in Laurelton with the older citizens, and had watched the younger ones grow. Nobody but a stranger would have murdered him. Joe was a stranger.

The sheriff turned his head to glance at Joe.

"I never said this to a prisoner before," he rumbled on unhappily, "but if you was to try to get away from me, I don't believe I'd try to stop you half as hard as I'd try to kill you!"

Joe found his stiffened lips cracking in an imperceptible smile at the sheriff's attempt to keep down his rage. He and Nancy had planned to elope tonight. That was why his suitcase was packed. That was why he had all his savings in his pocket. If it were found out now, though, nobody would consider Joe proven innocent. Rather, they would think it revealed the motive

for the murder and a plan for a more monstrous sequel still—which had been prevented only by his arrest. And suddenly he hoped desperately that Nancy never believed him guilty!

There was a slight curve in the road. As the car rounded it, there was a figure visible a long way ahead. It was a man, walking with a crutch. When the headlight beams struck him, he turned and seemed to squint at the oncoming car. Then he moved to the side of the road and stood there, making room for it to pass. The sheriff slowed, however.

"I'll have company," he said heavily to Joe, "You – ain't."

He came to a stop alongside the man with the crutch.

"Lift?" he asked formidably.

"Don't mind if I do," said a cheerful voice. "Mighty good of you. How far you' goin'?"

"Bradenton," said the sheriff grimly. "Get in the back. I'm the sheriff, and I got a prisoner up here."

The man with the crutch swung deftly beside the rear door and opened it. He got in nimbly. He tucked away the crutch.

"I'll go all the way," he said comfortably, as he closed the car-door and the sheriff started off again. "I'd never ha' made it tonight."

"Long way to be walking," the sheriff said. "Don't think I know you. Live around here?"

"Nope," said the man in the back, again cheerfully. "I'm travellin'. Not that I have to do much walkin'! People are mighty nice about pickin' up a fella."

The sheriff stepped on the accelerator. Joe Hansford did not speak. He thought despairingly of Nancy.

"Prisoner, huh?" said the man in the back seat. "What'd he do?"

"Murder," said the sheriff harshly. "He worked for Tom Kennedy in Laurelton. Tonight he killed him an' robbed the till."

"My! My!" said the man behind Joe. "How'd he do it? Shootin'?"

"No!" said the sheriff. He voice grated. "He tied him hand and foot with a noose around his neck. Gagged him. Tied one foot up behind his knee. Then this fella stood Tom on the other foot an' tightened the noose. Tom Kennedy had to balance. On one foot! When he lost his balance — he died!"

The man in the back seat made clucking noises.

"That's not nice!" he said. "But I guess he thought it was fun to make the old fella try to balance until mornin'. And he might think it'd be fun to listen to people talkin' about it, too. We got a young fella here . . ."

The car ran on. Joe sat stiffly on the front seat beside the sheriff. He heard the other man talking, but he did not note the words. He was conscious only of what Nancy must be going through.

"But there ain't no devils," the man in the back seat was saying. "No, sir! No devils! Just people!

But us people could give those old-time devils lessons, if we wanted to!" He chuckled. "Over across the state last year, there was . . ."

He narrated, in detail, a murder equal in ghastliness to the killing in Laurelton tonight. Joe barely heard it.

The sheriff said harshly; "I remember that. They never caught the killer, either."

"I c'n tell you another," offered the man in the back seat, brightly. "Over yonder, three-four hundred miles . . ."

He chirruped another equally grisly tale. Somebody bound and left to watch death approach him, utterly helpless to prevent it.

When it was finished, the man in back giggled.

"It's a hobby of his," chuckled the man with the crutch. "That it, young fella? Maybe he likes thinkin' of somebody helpless, waitin' for what'll kill him an' goin' crazy because he can't do a thing! Maybe he likes to hear talk about it, too, the way some folks like to shoot ducks from a duck-blind and some like makin' a smart business deal, an' some like catchin' criminals like you do, sheriff."

He chuckled again.

"It's reasonable! What's the use of havin' money? It's only worth what you can buy with it! A duck-hunter won't stop huntin' ducks because he's got money enough to buy 'em! A smart business man won't stop makin' smart business deals because he's rich! If there was a fella that liked fixin' folks up so they couldn't do a thing but die, what'd a fella like that want with money?"

The car purred and rolled and jounced through the night. The moon shone brightly as it came from behind a cloud. There was a swamp somewhere nearby, because the sound of innumerable croaking frogs rode on the night-wind.

"There ain't any devils, though," said the man in the back seat. No, sir! When they talked about folks possessed of devils, in the old days, they was talkin' about fellas that had hobbies. They knew what they was doin'! They just didn't care about what other folks cared about — like some folks don't like duck-hunting. And they knew money wouldn't help in their hobbies! Like it wouldn't help in — mine."

The car swerved sharply, and then straightened out again. The sheriff's hands had quivered on the wheel. Now he sat frozen. But his foot eased up on the accelerator, and the car slowed to a crawl, and presently it jerked and stalled. There was a very singular stillness save for the sound of night-insects outside and the very faint and far-away croaking of frogs.

The man in the back seat giggled.

"Yeah," he said zestfully. "It is a pistol-barrel I got touchin' your head, sheriff. Funny, ain't it? This ain't exactly my hobby, but it's a chance to broaden out a little. Y'see,

what I like mostly is thinkin' about people bein' helpless. An' you're helpless. And that young fella – he knows if he tries anything I'll kill him . . ."

He snickered.

"People are mighty kind to a fella like me that they think can't walk good. They never think he might be a fella that can. I could tell you stories. Want to hear 'em?"

The sheriff said thickly, and it was fury which thickened his voice, "Did you kill Tom Kennedy?"

"Shucks!" said the man in back, reproachfully. "He killed himself! Just carelessness! He didn't balance right! Now hold still, sheriff! I'm goin' to take your pistol, an' if you try to grab my hand I'll blow the whole top of your head off!"

Joe Hansford turned stiffly. He stared, and his hands stirred, and the chain of the handcuffs made a tiny tinkling sound.

The man in the back — and he did not move, now, like a man who needed a crutch — slid his left hand over the sheriff's left shoulder.

"Shoulder-holster," he said, delightedly. "Nice!"

The sheriff swore in a thick, shaking voice. The man behind him withdrew his hand with the sheriff's pistol in it. He settled himself comfortably into the back seat again.

"I'm goin' to do somethin' new, now!" he said brightly. "Y'know, my hobby's always had one drawback. I couldn't practice it on but one person. But I never did have two, anyways, before now. I got to think this out. It's off the regular line of what I like to do."

Joe Hansford said with a certain earnest calm, "Sheriff, I can tell you now that Nancy and I — we were going to run off and get married tonight. That's why I was packed up. It wouldn't have done any good to tell you before."

The sheriff growled.

The man in the back seat said with a sort of meditative brightness, "I think I'll let one of you stay alive, because it'll be fun to see you findin' out which one it's to be."

Joe said with the same earnestness, "And sheriff, I'd saved some money. That was what I had when you came to my room! It was to be our honeymoon money."

"This is goin' to be good!" the man in the back seat said zestfully. "Nobody ever did anything like this before! Sheriff, I want you to take off one of his handcuffs an' cuff yourself to him. Go on! Do it!"

The sheriff raged. He'd let his weapon be taken merely because he'd have died if he resisted. Now he was shamed. He snarled, "What if I don't?"

The man in the back seat said in mild reproof, "I'm goin' to leave one of you alive! But if you won't do like I say, I can't!"

There was a small clattering, and a click.

"Hold up your wrists," said the man in the back, "so I can see. I wouldn't put it past you to try to

cheat!" The sheriff, panting, held up his arm, and Joe's wrist was fastened to it by the handcuff-chain. "That's right! Now — "

He opened the back door and got out very nimbly. He had a front door wrenched open before either of them could stir. He grinned excitedly. In the moonlight there was no suggestion of madness on his face. And that was more horrible than madness would have been.

"Come out together, now! I'm goin' to leave one of you alive, but if you don't do like I say, I can't!"

The sheriff followed Joe as Joe got stiffly out of the car.

"Up front, there," the man said zestfully. "Out yonder where there's light! That'll do! Stand still, now!"

He moved himself into a headlight beam and held the sheriff's weapon between his knees, where he could get it if he needed it. He took another revolver from his pocket, broke the shells out of its cylinder; he put one back and showed it to them, beaming.

"One bullet," he said brightly. "This gun was in the store back in the village. In the money-drawer. I'm goin' to give it to the young fella." He chuckled. "It won't go off the first time you pull the trigger, young fella, so you'd better not try to shoot me!" He took out another weapon — presumably his own — and put it between his knees while, as carefully as before, he broke the sheriff's heavy-caliber revolver and removed five of the six bullets. He snapped the cylinder shut. He grinned at them. "Now I put your guns in the road. You pick 'em up. Neither one will shoot the first time the trigger's pulled. So if I hear either gun click I'll kill you both."

His voice was rapt, absorbed.

"You'll get the guns," he went on, "an' you'll point 'em at each other. When I count three, you both pull the triggers. The first time, nothin'll happen. Either one might go off on the second. There's no way to tell which'll be the first to go off. But when one does — why — I'll let the one that shoots it live!"

Joe Hansford thought of Nancy. If her father killed him, for shame he could never tell how he'd come to do so. He'd have to pretend that Joe tried to escape, — Nancy would be convinced of his guilt and want to die. And if he should kill the sheriff, he would never be believed. He would have to flee with two murders charged against him. And Nancy would want to die of shame because she loved him.

From the back seat, his eyes very bright, the man said: "Play it out an' one of you'll live. But you can't help yourselves! One will die. Get ready!"

The man waved them on. Joe and the sheriff went for the weapons. Holding the pistol now, that had belonged to Mr. Kennedy, Joe was dragged at by the handcuff that held him to the sheriff. He stumbled. His shoe-soles made rasping

noises on the hard gravel road.

"Now," said the voice behind them, eagerly, "You two put y'guns touchin' each other's bodies. Nothin'll happen the first time, but when I count three . . ."

The sheriff glared at him.

"If you ain't possessed by a devil," he said, "there's no explainin' you."

"One," said the man, and snickered.

Joe thought of Nancy as he turned his head to watch the man the sheriff had picked up, as he began the count for someone to die.

"Two," said the man.

He giggled.

"Three!"

The sheriff moved quickly. His heavy-caliber pistol kicked and spat flame.

There was a monstrous silence, save for night-insects shrilling on either side of the road. The man began to buckle at the knees. Then he toppled and lay still.

The sheriff let out a long-held breath. He fumbled for the handcuff key.

"Smart, that fella," he said. "Any time he did somethin' an' they set up road-blocks, somebody'd pick him up an' carry him right through. An' they mightn't ha' hung him if he was caught! They woulda said he was crazy. You believe he was?"

"No," said Joe flatly.

The handcuff fell from his wrist. The sheriff pocketed the pair with a gesture that was somehow formal.

"I shoot better left-handed," he said, "and I didn't take no chances. More'n likely he wouldn't ha' left either of us alive."

He walked over to the man lying on the highway. He started to bend over him; turning somewhat he said over his shoulder to Joe. "Take his feet, will yuh? We got to get him in the car."

Joe moved silently, quickly, to do what the sheriff had asked. Helping to carry the body gave him a feeling of closeness to the sheriff that he'd never had before. Somehow he was sure the sheriff understood.

He was able to ask, now, as though he and the sheriff were old friends, "How'd you do it? The gun was—"

The sheriff frowned at Joe in the moonlight, stopping him from finishing what he was about to say. He didn't answer either, but went about the business of getting the dead man into the back of the car, grunting and wheezing seemingly out of all proportion to the effort.

The job done, he straightened up outside the car and said, as though there had been no interruption, "Only one thing I could do. Felt with m'thumbnail 'til I found the bullet an' twisted the cylinder 'til it'd fire first time."

And as the sheriff slid back of the steering wheel, he growled that it seemed like some folks were just possessed by devils—and that there were no two ways about it.

"Oh, we'll do the job all right," Morgan said. "If he comes, he's dead."

Long Distance

BY FLETCHER FLORA

WHEN THE KNOCKING sounded on the door of the small hotel room at precisely two o'clock in the afternoon, the girl was in the bathroom brushing her hair. She was not brushing her hair because it particularly needed brushing, but because she always spent her idle time doing something to herself, or some part of herself, her hair or lips or eyes or nails or legs. This time, at two o'clock in the afternoon of this day, it just happened to be her hair. She stopped brushing and stood, with the brush suspended above her head, in an attitude of listening until the knocking was resumed after an interval of silence, and then she placed the brush on the back edge of the lavatory and went out into the other room. On the way to the door, because she was wearing only panties and bra, she stopped long

enough to pull on a robe that didn't actually conceal her body, but at least made it less apparent.

The man in the hall who had done the knocking was thin and tall, but not so tall as he would have been if his shoulders had not been so stooped. He had a long bony face with one eyelid that drooped, and this gave his face the expression of a rather lewd leer which was contradicted by the sour twist of his mouth. The skin of the face was fish-belly white, and the girl wondered vaguely how this was sustained in an area where the sun shone so hot and so brightly.

"I'm Morgan," the man said. "Police."

He said it as if there were something unpleasant about it, a bitterness in the name or the job or what he was looking at. The girl stepped back, holding the skirt of the robe, which was fastened only by a belt at the waist, somewhat together over her long golden legs.

"Come in, then," she said.

Morgan walked past her into the room, removing his wilted panama to expose a bulging naked skull with a few surviving hairs plastered across it with perspiration. He looked around the room while the girl closed the door and locked it. When he heard the bolt slip home behind him, he moved across to a chair that was placed in reference to the door at so acute an angle that the door itself, when open, would hide it from anyone entering the room. Morgan folded himself into the chair and removed a .38 automatic from a shoulder holster under his wrinkled cord coat. He laid the .38 beside a glass ash tray on a small table beside the chair. Leaning back, he looked at the girl, his sour mouth moving slightly in what might have been a sour smile.

"This ought to do fine," he said.

"I wasn't expecting you yet," she said. "You're two hours early."

He shrugged. "I know. Four o'clock, he said. Maybe so. Maybe earlier or maybe later. A guy like him is shifty. You can't depend on anything he says."

"Couldn't you do it in the lobby?"

"Maybe. A couple of guys are down there to do it if they can. But he might get through. A guy like him is smart. You can't tell."

It was the girl's time to shrug. The movement was abrupt, jerky, as if she were certainly annoyed and possibly angry. The skirt of her robe fell slightly apart to reveal a golden strip of flesh. Morgan looked at the revelation, looked up at the girl's face, looked back.

"What the hell am I supposed to do in the meantime?" she said. "Talk with you or something? Amuse you or something?"

He repeated his sour shadow of a smile. "You sound irritable. Nervous, I guess. You scared?"

"No." The girl laughed, injecting into the short sound a tone of scorn.

"Why the hell should I be scared?"

"Well, you could have reasons, as I see it." Morgan lifted his eyes to her face again, and she had a sudden peculiar impression that he was about to spit on the floor. "A guy like this is dangerous. Knocked off this bank solo in KC. Knocked off this teller while he was knocking off the bank. He's got a lot of dough on the line, as well as his life. What I mean, he's got nothing to gain by being cautious."

The girl returned his gaze steadily. If his words disturbed her in the least, she didn't show it. A real looker, he thought. Big brown eyes you could drown in. Soft damp mouth you could quench your thirst at. Pale blonde dye job that looked damn near real, soft and shining and uniform all through. Beautiful, beautiful chassis, a shadow under silk. No wonder a man was making a damn fool of himself. No wonder a man would risk far too much to take it to South America with him.

"*You're* here, aren't you?" the girl said. "You and two more in the lobby?"

"Sure. And six more in the street."

"Can't you do a job? Can't nine of you? Does a girl have to be scared?"

"Oh, we'll do it, all right. If he comes, he's dead. Still, you might naturally be a little scared. A guy like him won't like being double-crossed. He's bound to feel nasty about it. What I mean, you never can tell where a stray bullet may strike before things get settled down. It's a pretty big risk to take, seems to me, even for ten grand. Ten grand's the reward, isn't it?"

"What the hell business is it of yours?"

"None. None at all. There's something I can't get clear, though. Something doesn't seem to make sense. Ten grand's a big piece of dough, I admit, but fifty grand's bigger. That's what he's figured to have from the job, I hear. About fifty grand. Looks to me like it would've been smarter to stick with the fifty instead of going with the ten."

"Sure." The edge of scorn was in the girl's voice, as it had been in her laugh. "Stick with the fifty and sweat out the cops the rest of my life. No, thanks. I 've got other things to do."

Morgan closed his eyes, as if he could no longer stand the sight of her. He pursed his lips and began to breathe deeply and evenly. He appeared to have dropped off to sleep in an instant—judging from his expression, to a troubled sleep of unpleasant dreams.

"You're smart," he said. "Oh, you're a brave, smart girl."

She continued to look at him, expecting him at any moment to open his eyes and resume the conversation, but he did not. After a couple of minutes, she turned and went back into the bathroom, leav-

ing the door slightly open behind her, but after she was there, she didn't know what to do with herself. It was still nearly two hours until four o'clock, the time that Bruno had said he would come, and it was clearly impossible to continue to brush her hair for all that time. Nevertheless, while she was trying to think of something else, she picked up the brush from the edge of the lavatory and began brushing again. Looking at her face in the mirror, she thought that she looked very nice with the brown eyes and suntan under the pale hair. Rather striking and unusual, as a matter of fact.

After a hundred strokes, which she counted carefully from habit, forming the shapes of the numbers silently with her lips, she laid the brush down again and thought that it would be pleasant to sit for a while in a tub of hot water. She wasn't so sure that she ought to, though, on second thought, what with Morgan out in the other room and all, and besides, she had the call being put through to KC, and she didn't want to be caught in the tub when the operator called her back. She could redo her nails, however. Redoing her nails was something that took a lot of time because the old enamel had to be removed and then the new enamel applied carefully with the little brush, and this was really a meticulous job, a time-killer.

She had just about decided to redo the nails when the telephone began to ring in the other room. She went out to answer it and saw that Morgan was sitting erect in the chair, staring intently at the shrilling instrument. He turned his head slowly in her direction to meet her gaze.

"I've got a call being put through to Kansas City," she said.

"Who to?" he said.

"Just a friend. His name's Bunny. That's what they call him. Bunny."

"Okay." Morgan leaned back and let his good lid droop to match the bad one, watching her through slits. "One of the boys in the lobby will monitor it at the board."

She flushed angrily and went on to the telephone. From where she stood with her back to Morgan, she could look out through glass across an expanse of sand and glittering blue water. She picked up the receiver and said hello.

"I have your party in Kansas City now," the operator said.

"Thank you," the girl said.

She stood looking through the glass across the sand and the blue water, feeling a little tingling in her flesh in anticipation of his funny, fuzzy voice that sounded like he had a bad case of laryngitis all the time. It was funny how she went for him in such a big way, and missed him like hell when she was away from him even for a short while, and had to call him up in the middle of the night or long

distance like now, especially funny when you considered how long it had been going on and how she could certainly do a hell of a lot better any old time from a financial point of view. Well, he was pretty talented, though, and he had this little band that played around some of the small spots in KC, and it was only a matter of time, that was all, until he got his chance to move up, and the ten grand would certainly help.

"Hello," his voice said. "Are you there, baby?"

"Darling," she said, "I've been waiting and waiting for you. Where have you been?"

"I've been out talking with Lew Sulla. You know. About the job in his club I told you about. It pays better than anything we've had yet, and it's for a month minimum with a good chance for extensions at a raise if we're solid."

"Did you get the job?"

"Well, he's thinking it over until tomorrow, and he's got a couple other possibilities, but I got the impression we're pretty well in. He caught us a couple times this week, and he never says much, never hands out bouquets or anything like that, but I could tell he liked us."

"That's wonderful, darling. I simply couldn't imagine where you'd gone. I know you always sleep in till around four, five o'clock, and when you didn't answer, I simply couldn't imagine. I had the operator keep ringing back every half hour, and I've been waiting and waiting."

"I'm sorry, baby. If I'd known you were going to call, I wouldn't've gone out even for the job with Sulla."

"Oh, no. You can't afford to pass up anything good like that. You know how it is, though. You keep wondering and thinking something may be wrong and imagining things, and it's all silly, of course."

"Well, you know how I feel, baby. When it comes down to you, to hell with everything and everyone else."

"Sure, darling, I know. It's like that with me, too."

He didn't say anything for a few seconds, and she knew he was thinking about this other thing, the thing she was here for in regard to Bruno, and she wished she could say something to him directly, something reassuring about how much she loved him and how she had lain awake last night and wished he were with her in the bed, just like he'd been so many other times without its ever getting old or boring, times that reached clear back to when Bruno had still been around town before the crazy bank job and it was pretty dangerous. She couldn't say anything like this, though, because Morgan was there, and she felt angry with Morgan and wished to hell he would get out. If he were any kind of gentleman, he'd at least go out into

the hall or into the bathroom and close the door until she'd finished talking. Not that it would make any difference, really, if there was actually a cop listening at the board downstairs.

"Look, baby," he said. "Are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be?"

"I mean, is every*thing* all right? You know what I mean."

"It's all right, I tell you. You don't need to worry."

"That's easy to say, baby, but a guy can't help worrying about something like this."

It made her feel sort of good and bad at once that he was worrying about her. She felt a hard knot in her throat that slowly dissolved.

"There's nothing to worry about," she said. "Nothing at all."

"Has he contacted you again like he said he would?"

"Yes."

"What's the deal?"

"He's coming here this afternoon."

"To the hotel?"

"Yes."

"Jesus! Is he crazy?"

"Bruno was always crazy. You know that. He thinks he can do anything and get away with it. Anyhow, he's got no reason to think anything's wrong. He thinks we're going to hop a plane to South America in a couple of days. Buenos Aires or someplace like that where he'd be safe."

"Well, I don't like it, just the same. What I wish, I wish you'd hop a plane back to KC. Alone."

"Look, darling, we've been over and over that. Over and over it. Even if there wasn't any other reason, we'd never feel safe with Bruno loose somewhere. You like to think of Bruno looking for us, never knowing when he'd catch up?"

"To hell with Bruno. You think I'm afraid of Bruno or something? You think I'm a coward? I'm not afraid of Bruno, baby."

She knew he *was* afraid of Bruno, but it didn't make any difference. Not to her. The truth was, it made her feel all soft and funny and motherly, sort of, the way he was afraid and kept saying he wasn't and trying to act tough about it and all."

"I know you're not. I didn't mean you're afraid or anything."

"Well, okay, then. Just so everything's all right."

"Everything's fine. It's all set."

At that instant, just as she finished saying the words, someone knocked softly and suddenly, and she twisted around quickly, in a kind of reflex action, to look at the door. Then, almost immediately, she looked at the chair in which Morgan had been sitting, and he wasn't there. He was over against the wall with the .38 in his right hand, and it was incredible that he had been able to move so quickly and so quietly. He jerked his head

toward the door, indicating that she should answer the knocking, and she turned with her back to him again and spoke into the telephone.

"Just a minute, darling," she said quietly. "There's someone at the door."

She laid the receiver beside its cradle and went over to the door. Without hesitating or looking again at Morgan, she unlocked it and opened it, and it was Bruno out there in the hall, all right. She recognized him right away, even though he had changed, and had tried to change even more than he had managed. He had dyed his hair black and combed it differently and had grown a mustache, which was also dyed black, and he was burned brown by the sun and wore dark glasses, and he looked altogether phony to her immediately, but maybe that was only because she *knew* he was phony.

"Hello, beautiful," he said.

He'd always called her beautiful. It was his word, like baby was Bunny's. He smiled and came quickly into the room, his teeth looking extremely white under the black mustache, against the brown skin. When he was beyond the edge of the open door, Morgan said something in a soft voice that was almost a croon, and Bruno twisted and saw him and registered in his face in an instant the terrible knowledge of what was happening to him, and almost in the same instant he reached for his gun and was dying. He was on the floor and dying while the sound of Morgan's single shot was still bouncing off the walls, but before he was dead entirely, he lifted his gun and tried to find the girl with his glazing eyes. Fortunately, there wasn't time, and even if there had been time, Morgan had the .38 ready to prevent its being used for anything.

Turning away, the girl walked back to the telephone and picked it up.

"Darling?" she said.

His voice sounded wild. "What happened? I heard what sounded like a shot. Jesus, baby, what happened?"

"It's all right. Just like I told you, it's all right."

"I heard what sounded like a shot, baby. What happened?"

"I've got to hang up now, darling. I'll see you soon. In a couple days. Maybe tomorrow night."

She hung up and turned toward Morgan. He looked at her and shook his head slowly and did what she thought he was going to do earlier. He spit on the floor and walked out. When he was gone, she returned to the bathroom. While she waited for Morgan to return with the others, she began to brush her hair again just for something to do.

They'll Find Out!

BY

RICHARD HARDWICK

THE MOON disappeared behind a ragged froth of pale night clouds and Arleigh slipped across the dark space between the two houses and crouched silently beside the big flowering oleander. For several seconds, all the sound that reached his attentive ears was the deep unhurried rumble of the surf. Even with the moon gone, he could see the long white lines of the breakers as they slowly lifted, curled over, and crashed down on the wet sands. Then he heard her.

He knew she was bad, and he wanted to be good . . . because of that other time.

He couldn't make out the words, but he recognized the sound of her voice. Arleigh didn't have to hear what she was saying. He had heard her talking in there on other nights when the boom of the surf was not so loud. Almost every night since his mother and father had gone away, Arleigh had spent his evenings beneath the woman's window, under the big oleander.

He didn't know the woman's name. She and another woman had rented the house on the beach next door to where Arleigh lived with his parents. Men came over every night and they sat around the porch and drank whiskey and laughed or went out on the beach and swam in the ocean when the nights were warm and there wasn't much wind. Sometimes the woman would walk up the beach with one of the men and Arleigh would follow them, keeping in the dark shadows of the dunes. He would watch them when they got up beyond the last houses and what he saw had a strange effect on Arleigh. It made him feel almost scared, because he knew what he saw was wrong.

But it was the other feeling that brought him there. He was seventeen years old now, and when he felt like the way he felt about the woman it brought back the awful day six years before when his mother had found him in the basement back in the city with the Watkins girl. His mother had beaten the girl, screaming and lashing her with the heavy belt until the girl lay whimpering on the concrete floor. When Arleigh's father came home that night, his mother told him what had happened. They looked at their son with disgust and Arleigh's father got the belt and took him down in the basement. He made Arleigh show him where it had happened and then he started in with the belt.

"That's sinful, Arleigh," he said each time the loud pop of the belt fell across the boy. "That's sinful. The devil put you up to that, son."

Arleigh remembered wondering why he was getting thrashed, if it was the devil that had been responsible.

Arleigh never forgot the punishment of that day. Even sitting there in the dark seven years later, the humiliation of it burned fresh inside him. He tried to take his thoughts off his mother and father. The voices inside the house were quiet now and he heard the high pitched complaint of bedsprings compressing. He tried to see under the shade, but the woman had pulled it all the way to the bottom this time. Arleigh poked a big hand across the sill through the open window and hooked a forefinger under the shade. He was terribly curious. He lifted the shade—gently. Pale light filtering in from the room beyond the bedroom spread across the floor and he lifted the shade a little higher, then a little higher.

Whirr-flap-flap-flap-flap . . . Without warning, the shade had flown to the top. Arleigh fell back into the bush and, scrambling to his feet, raced – half stumbling – across the yard toward the low line of dunes bordering the beach. Voices followed him. The woman was shouting something out the window and he heard the man's voice. Then quiet. Only the sound of the surf and the hammering of his heart from the running and the scare the shade had given him.

Arleigh lay curled on the cool dry sand. Fear holding him immobile. What if she told his mother! He couldn't stand the humiliation that would be certain to follow.

But she couldn't know. It was dark and she couldn't have seen who was at the window. Anyway, the woman didn't know he existed. She didn't know the feeling he got whenever he saw her. She didn't know the thoughts that went of their own accord through his mind when he saw her in that tight bathing suit. She couldn't possibly know that he crept along in the sand dunes when she walked up the beach at night with the men.

Arleigh turned slowly onto his back, looked up at the moon as it moved through the broken field of clouds. He felt better. He always felt his best when he was alone. Then he didn't have to worry about what people were thinking. The way they looked at him–as if they didn't believe their eyes. But he was familiar enough with the huge, gangling body and the wild red hair that looked like a flaming bush and the exaggerated features. He had looked at himself in his mirror often enough, always wondering why he was afflicted as he was. He had listened often enough to the girls at school snicker when he went by.

The moon broke out into the clear night sky. The clouds scuttled away toward the west, and Arleigh picked himself up and walked slowly back to his house and his lonely room.

The woman was sitting out in the front yard reading a book when Arleigh came out next morning. To his knowledge she had never before looked at him, but as soon as he started out toward the beach, she got up and spoke.

"Good morning!" she said.

Arleigh looked around slowly at the sound of the voice, certain she must be speaking to someone else and wanting to see who it might be. But she was looking directly at him and smiling. She had a cup of coffee in her hand and she wore a knee length towel robe.

"Good morning!" she said again.

Arleigh swallowed hard. He couldn't remember a woman ever having started a conversation with him and he didn't know what to say. He gulped again. "Good m-m-morning." he croaked.

The woman walked over to the low hedge that divided the front yards of the two houses. "Do you live here by yourself?" she asked. "I haven't seen anyone but you since we came."

"N-no ma'am. My father and—I mean I live here with my parents. They're out of town." His voice almost got out of control toward the end of the sentence.

After watching her for so many days it was unbelievable that she was talking to him and standing so close to him that he could reach out and touch her. Arleigh's eyes roved over her against his will. When they returned to her face, she was smiling.

"Did it frighten you?" she asked.

Arleigh's jaw fell.

"The shade," she laughed, "did it frighten you?" She was looking squarely into Arleigh's eyes and laughing.

His voice cracked as he tried to speak. "I—I—didn't—"

"It's all right," she said, her face softening. "I understand better than you probably think." She stepped over the low hedge, brushing against Arleigh. "You don't mind if I come over, do you?"

Arleigh felt that she was making fun of him. Her eyes twinkled when she talked and she seemed on the verge of laughing as she watched his face.

As though she were reading his thoughts, she said, "I'm not laughing at you. It's just that you're different—" and added hastily, so he wouldn't misunderstand, "I mean, you're nice."

How could she think he was nice, Arleigh wondered. He didn't quite trust that smile either, but that wasn't what bothered him most. She stood close to him and it made him feel like he had that day long ago when Susie Watkins led him down into the basement. He could almost feel the blood as it poured like a torrent through his veins.

She sat on the front step of Arleigh's house. "Don't you like girls?" she asked.

Arleigh didn't sit down. The woman was at least ten years older than he was. Why was she asking these questions? He wondered what his mother would say if she knew the woman had sat on the front steps. He didn't answer her question. He forgot what she'd said as he stood there watching her. He wanted to do something—touch her, feel her skin—but he couldn't move. The urge was almost uncontrollable, but he was afraid she would say something to his mother or father if he touched her.

"Sit down," the woman said.

Slowly, uncertainly, Arleigh sat down at the other end of the steps. He placed his hands palm down on his huge knees and tried to look straight ahead.

The woman slipped over until her leg was almost touching Arleigh's. He felt his heartbeat quick-

en and a lump came in his throat. "You didn't answer me," she said. "Don't you like women?"

She placed her hand on his and he looked over at her, startled. His eyes were wide, like a frightened animal.

"I won't bite," she said softly. "And I like boys." She was smiling again.

Then she drew her hand away. "Do you have any coffee?" she held out the empty cup. "I'd like some if you have it."

Arleigh leaped to his feet. Another second and he knew he'd have grabbed her. Now he had an excuse to move, to get up and move away to where he wouldn't be so close to her. "Yes ma'am, I've got some on the stove!" He stumbled up the steps and went into the house. He couldn't think straight as he turned the burner on to warm the pot.

"Can't I help?"

Arleigh whirled. She was there! Standing there in the kitchen, almost touching him, drawing him like a magnet. He knew it was wrong, but he couldn't do anything with his head roaring and his heart pounding. His big hands moved out jerkily and took hold of her arms. Without hesitation, she came to him, and Arleigh felt his hands at her back, fumbling at her robe.

"Wait a minute, baby," she whispered. "You don't have to tear it."

In his last second of clarity, Arleigh looked down. The woman's face was a smile as he saw the towel robe slip to the kitchen floor.

Arleigh lay on his back on the cool sand. The woman had been gone from the house next door for two days and now she was back. As soon as he had heard the sounds of the car stopping, it was late at night, Arleigh had run to the beach and hidden in the dunes. He couldn't look at her. He couldn't face her smile and the knowledge he shared with her. Arleigh didn't understand what had come over him in the kitchen two days before, but he knew it was bad, terribly bad, and if his mother or father found out about it—well, he'd have to get his father's pistol out of the hall closet and shoot himself. He couldn't stand to have them look at him and know the wrong thing he'd done.

Laughter came from the woman's porch. She was laughing as though nothing had happened. She mustn't feel that it was bad, and yet, Arleigh knew that he would do the same thing again if she came close to him. He couldn't help it. He couldn't stop it any more than he could stop the sun from rising. He guessed no young fellow could.

The cool sand didn't feel as good under him as it usually did. There was something about the woman, something he could not get out of his mind. Everywhere he turned his eyes, her face was there. It was in the stars above him, smiling.

Arleigh's mother and father would be home in less than a week. Maybe she was smiling because she was just waiting for them to get home. If she tells them . . .

His hands dampened. The blood rushed to his face. She won't tell, he thought. She said she liked me. I'll ask her not to tell them.

Arleigh knew she had been lying. She *couldn't* like him. He had looked in the mirror enough to know that no one could like him. His mother and father didn't like him. They never said it, of course, but Arleigh knew it just the same. You can tell when someone likes you or doesn't like you.

He didn't know how long he had lain there on the sand. The moon was over his shoulder and he listened for sounds from the woman's house. It was quiet. She was in the room with one of the men! Arleigh's heart thudded dully. He went off into the brush and waited. It was a long wait. Maybe she would not come . . .

Someone was humming, someone was walking alone. He peered closely. Yes, it was the woman! He let her get by. She was alone. Walking along the edge of the water and humming a song.

The strange feeling came over Arleigh. His mouth was suddenly dry and his heart hurt as it pounded in his chest. By the time he moved, the woman was fifty yards up the beach. The sand and water were bright in the moonlight. She walked slowly, aimlessly, along the water's edge. The waves broke, pushing a thin sheet of water up the sloping sands and the woman followed the curved edges of the wet line.

There were no more houses. Keeping to the dunes, Arleigh continued following her. There was only the ocean and the sand and the dark woods behind the dunes. As he watched her, Arleigh flicked his dry tongue out over his lips. She was drawing him to her. He came silently from the shadowed dunes and crossed the beach. She was ahead of him and still apparently unaware of his presence. Then she turned intuitively and saw him standing there staring after her. Arleigh heard the quick intake of breath.

"Oh, it's *you,*" she said, recognizing him. She walked back toward him. "Did you miss me, honey?"

Arleigh couldn't speak. Something blocked his throat and he could only breathe. His breathing came heavily and she laughed.

"It was the first time you had a woman, wasn't it?" she said to him gently.

Arleigh felt his face redden.

The woman stood very close to him and Arleigh tried to make his breathing slow, but it wasn't any good. Instead, he seemed to breathe even faster.

She was touching him and he knew it would happen again. She

put her arms about him and he felt her hands running slowly up and down the small of his back again.

"I like boys," she said. "I like big boys like you."

She's bad – They'll find out! They'll find out, like with Susie Watkins. A feeling of horror swept through him.

Her face smiled up at him in the moonlight. It seemed that he was standing by and watching as the huge, ugly creature pulled her to the sand.

"Take it easy, honey," she laughed. "Don't hurt me!"

Arleigh knew he had to do a lot worse to her than just hurt her, but he wondered how many more there were like her.

In Los Angeles, Ralph W. Pattison was arrested on a gambling charge. Police testified that they found $3,200 in cash and bookmaking materials when the arrest was made. But the municipal judge dismissed the case on grounds that the search had been an invasion of privacy. The officers had found the evidence in Pattison's artificial leg.

In Los Angeles, Roberta Huggins, 25, refused to sign a ticket for speeding. "I was not driving at 75 miles an hour," she told the arresting officer, "although I may have been going 74."

Speechless

Two suspects were picked up on narcotics charges by Oklahoma City police. Officers said the pair were unable to explain the theory of relativity. They were also unable to explain how a quantity of marijuana happened to be concealed between the pages of a book in their car. The book was titled: "The Universe and Dr. Einstein."

Art Lovers

Thieves who broke into the Perth Amboy, New Jersey, Rifle Club ignored what members termed a "sizable amount" of cash in a small safe. Instead, they stole some of the club's art work—twelve spicy pin-up pictures.

Divide and Conquer

BY JACK RITCHIE

They were the type baboons who could be most dangerous, unless you handled things just right.

CHARLEY phoned for me at around eleven and I walked the block and a half to the Green Dollar. The blackjack tables were going all right and the one-arms were taking heavy play, but I thought that something would have to be done for the faro games.

The Green Dollar is the one I started with, but now I've got two more places up the street. When I'm not around, I've got Charley running things.

He was sitting at the desk and looking worried when I opened the office door.

"We got trouble, Tommy," he said.

I lowered myself into a chair and lit up a king-size cigarette. "Don't we always have something on hand to annoy us?" I said.

"This is something different." Charley swiveled his chair to face me. "Maybe we got nothing to worry about and maybe it's big."

I bent the match and flipped it into a ash tray. "Somebody moving in?"

"Looks like it," Charley said. "A big gorilla was here sticking a finger in my chest. He let me know that he and his associates would appreciate a five hundred dollar weekly donation regular every week."

"You should have had him tossed out," I said.

Charley snorted at my suggestion. "I'm a cautious married man with two growing children. I didn't know how many friends he had and I wasn't anxious to find out."

"Anybody we know?"

"From the sound of him, I'd say mid-west. He couldn't be from around here. He thought I owned the joint."

"Think he might really be working alone?"

"Not completely, at any rate. I got the buzz that a runty little character is working the other side of the street. The big boy should get to the Four Deuces pretty soon."

I blew smoke into the air and rested my feet on a hassock. "Did he mention any names?"

"Said I could call him Mugger and that's as far as it went."

Charley took a cigar from the desk humidor and bit off the tip.

"Is anybody kicking in?" I asked.

"The way I get it, these boys just started." Charley lit the cigar. "Everybody's stalling and waiting to see what you're going to do about it."

Charley's eyes met mine. "I'm worried, Tommy," he said. "Gambling's legal in this state and pretty clean. I'd hate to see it spoiled."

The Four Deuces is the biggest and newest of my places. It's part nightclub and I run a floor show to keep the people entertained when they're not gambling.

The food costs me money and I break even on the liquor, but that's the way it always is in a place like mine. It's the big room with the machines, the dice, and the cards that makes it all worth while.

When I walked into my office, I found Juanita Reyes with her sandaled feet on my desk and making herself at home with a Manhattan.

She has a nightclub act with feathers and a lot of confidence and right now she was wearing her costume. It consisted of a little here and not so much there, and she had left her feathers in the dressing room.

She waggled a few fingers at me and smiled. "I knew you would come back," she said. "I'm irresistible."

Juanita took her feet off the polished desk and stretched herself lazily for my benefit. "How do you like my new costume? Just feel the material. It's the best."

"Why don't you take it off," I said. "It's a stifling hot night."

She fluffed her Mexican black hair. "It must be dreadfully warm for you, too." Juanita had long slender legs and softly curved thighs. She took a deep breath that put considerable strain on her black net brassiere and held the pose.

"Well," I said, grinning. "What I see seems all right."

She was reaching up behind her for the fasteners when the damn buzzer on my desk sounded.

I clicked on the switch and got the voice of Sid, the chief houseman.

"Something big out here is panting to see you. I smell trouble. You want to see him or do I form a posse and have him thrown out?"

"Send him in," I said. "But stick around in case I scream for help." I looked at Juanita. "You can toddle along. If you stay you'll just distract me."

"No," she said. "I want to watch. But impatiently."

The guy who came in was under six feet, but he carried the weight for somebody a good foot taller. You could blame heredity for his face, but you'd have a better case if you considered what a dozen barroom brawls could do.

He lifted a bushy eyebrow when he saw Juanita and she gave him a slow wink and a twitch of the hips. He stopped in his tracks and stared at her.

Standing at my desk, I snapped my fingers a couple of times. "I'm over here," I said.

He regarded me with acute distaste, but decided he might as well get down to business. "You the guy, Tommy Harrigan what owns dis joint?"

"Dat's me," I said. "And dat's me doll. Don't lay no finger on her."

He scowled at me. "Gettin' immediate to duh point, from now on you pay me five hunnert clams every week. Dis is for me bein' tender to you and not violunt. If you get what I mean."

"I bet he can scratch his knees without bending down," I said. "Juanita, will you see if the cook has any bananas."

"Personally," Juanita said. "I think he's kind of cute."

Mugger's cauliflower ears were reddening. "Dat wise lip makes it six hunnert a week."

"Is there anything else you might want, Bonzo," I asked. "I'll admit your case stumps me. I'm just used to feeding people."

He came toward me, his big ham fist beginning its swing. "Seven hunnert," he growled. "And dis is your receipt in advance."

I stepped away from the punch and picked up a piece of petrified wood I use for a paperweight. After I slipped under his second swing, I let him have the stone with a wallop to his jaw.

His eyes glazed and he dropped without argument to the rug.

Juanita watched his peaceful breathing. "Do you think that was quite fair?" she asked.

"Sure it was fair," I said indignantly as I hefted the paperweight. "This thing isn't heavier than two pounds. He still had a weight advantage of over forty."

Juanita lit a cigarette. "There's something wrong with your logic, but at the moment it escapes me."

I bent down beside Mugger and went through his pockets. Along with the usual things, he had a .45 automatic and a key to room 424 at the Holder Hotel. His wallet told me that his real name was Quincy Elwood Dowd.

"He's got seventeen dollars," I said, grinning up at Juanita. "He could really show you a good time."

"Ha!" she said, shrugging her shoulders. "Money isn't everything."

I unstrapped Mugger's holster and transferred it to my person.

"Why don't you call the police," Juanita said. "It would be so much simpler."

Sid stuck his head through the doorway just then and I had him get a couple of porters to carry Mugger out into the alley.

When I had on my hat and was ready to leave, Juanita put her hand on my shoulder. "Be careful," she said. "You don't know what you'll be missing if you should get killed now."

"Talk, talk," I said, brushing a strand of hair from her forehead. "I'll bet you're a virgin."

Some embarrassment touched her cheeks. "What a nasty thing to say about a modern girl."

At the Holder Hotel I went directly to Freddie, the desk clerk. "You got a big jerk registered here? Dowd is the name."

"Yeah," Freddie said, eyeing the bulge in my coat. "What for you packing a gun?"

"Was he alone?"

"He's got a single," Freddie said. "But he seemed to be traveling with a dame and a small guy." He spun the register around to show me. "They got three next to each other. 423, 424, and 425."

Dowd had number 424. Number 423 was registered in the name of a Miss Mavis Frawley and 425 to a Jim Beaker.

"The dame draws a whistle out of you," Freddie said. "Everything stacked right, but strictly out of stone. Doll face, but not a smile in a carload."

I drummed my fingers on the desk while I thought. "Freddie," I said. "Can you get me a clear empty medicine bottle? And fill it full of water, will you?"

"Okay," he said. "But I won't sleep tonight if you don't give me a glimmer of what's going on."

The smile I gave him was fond and affectionate. "It's too horrible for your young ears."

The man who opened the door to room 425 was a little squirt, but sharp. He had on a blue pin stripe shirt with button-down collar and

a nifty blonde hair-line moustache.

I smiled gently as I put the heel of my hand on his nose and shoved hard.

"Hey!" he yelled as he went staggering back on his heels. "What's the big idea?"

I let the front of my sport coat dangle open so he got a look at the gun.

"You a cop, or something?" he asked suspiciously.

"Do I look like a cop, Shorty?"

I gave him a casual swipe with my open palm.

"Hey!" he yelled again. "Cut that out! Just who do you think you are, slappin' a innocent citizen around?"

"I'm practically nobody," I said, regarding him with a quiet smile. "But I represent the *Syndicate.*"

"The Syndicate?" he squeeked. "What Syndicate?"

I shook my head sadly at his stupidity. "*The* Syndicate," I said. "And I'm from the Enforcement and Retaliation Division." I fixed him with a gimlet eye. "I've been briefed by the big boys that three of you Easterners are thinking of setting up business here."

He cringed when I lifted my hand to scratch my ear. "Just talk," he said nervously. "I kin listen without you getting free with the hands."

Beaker sweated while I studied him long and carefully. "Yes," I said finally. "You're the spitting image of Hoppy Nolan. Same type. Same build."

Beaker licked his lips. "Who's Hoppy Nolan?"

"Hoppy *was* a small time hood from Philly," I said. "He tried to buck the Syndicate about a year ago." I took off my Panama and held it over my heart for a few solemn seconds. "He got run over by an automobile."

Beaker's Adam's apple was traveling up and down.

"It was a tragedy and never should have happened," I said. "But the bottoms of Hoppy's feet were burned pretty bad and he wasn't so nimble."

I gave him a friendly shark grin and teetered a few inches toward him. "But how thoughtless of me," I said. "I forgot to introduce myself." I extended a hand. "The moniker is Matches O'Tool."

His head ducked between his shoulders and he stepped back. "You got me wrong, mister," he said quickly. "I was just passing through this burg. This minute I was packing to catch my train."

I got out a cigarette and after I lit it I allowed the match to burn almost to my fingertips before I blew it out. Beaker watched the small flame with horrified fascination.

"I'll be back in about an hour," I said. "You'll be on the train by then though, won't you?"

"Even," he said emphatically, "if there's no train."

The door of 423 was opened only part way by Mavis Frawley.

Mavis had flaming red hair, green eyes, and the warmth of a bowl of ice cubes.

"Get that damn foot out of the door," she said, "or I'll scream for the cops."

"Go right ahead," I advised her, shoving my way in. "But you look to me like the type that doesn't do much screaming."

She watched me with smouldering eyes. "I charge a thousand bucks a minute," she said. "If you got less than that, see some of the girls down the hall."

"How unkind," I said. "Do I look like that kind of a man?"

Mavis walked over to a small table and put her hand on the phone. "Do I have to get someone to throw you out, or do you get what I'm hinting at?"

I smiled at her amiably. "Before you could get the operator I could toss you out of that window."

"You go to hell!"

"No need for animosity," I said. "I'm prepared to be friendly . . . this time."

Her eyes crackled with hate. "What do you want?"

"I wish it were you, baby," I said. "But this is business." I ground out my cigarette in the ash tray. "The name is Splasher O'Tool," I said. "The boss tells me that you've got a couple of monkeys trying to set up a stand in this town."

Mavis took her hand away from the phone. "The boss?"

"The boss," I said. "This town is sewed up tight and right. We can be downright unfriendly to competition."

"Why don't you try telling that to my 'boys', as you call them?"

"They've been informed," I said. I met and held her eyes. "Beaker got the idea right away, but Dowd is a little damaged."

For the first time, she seemed uncertain, but she said, "You're not scaring me!"

"Of course not," I said.

We studied each other for awhile and she was becoming uneasy.

"Did I ever tell you about Myra Lawson?" I asked.

Mavis said nothing.

"Well," I said, cheerfully, "Myra used to deal blackjack at one of our places. Her take wasn't what it should have been and so we watched her until we found out why.

"She's still around, but she washes dishes for her meals now and doesn't go out in daylight," I said. "The acid, you know."

The little medicine bottle was now in my hand and I held it up. "Looks just like water, doesn't it?"

Her face got white and I gave her time to think.

Finally she asked, "How much time do I have to get out?"

"One hour," I said, as I rose and went leisurely to the door.

"I'll take it," she said bitterly. "But only because I can't operate without the boys."

Downstairs at the desk, Freddie beckoned to me. "Got a phone call from Sid. He says to call him right away."

In the phone booth I dialed the Four Deuces and asked for Sid.

"That baboon you laid out," Sid said, "left here fifteen minutes ago. On a hunch I had one of the porters tail him."

"And he's waiting for me?"

"Right. He ambled away but circled back. He's in the alley now with a piece of pipe. Should I call the cops?"

"No," I said. "I'm on a winning streak. I think I can handle it."

I walked back to the Four Deuces, but turned into the Bar & Grill that was on the other side of the alley. I went all the way through and into the back yard.

Peaking over the wood fence, I could make out Mugger in the shadows next to the rear exit. Evidently he was hoping that I'd step out for a breath of air.

Taking out the gun and reversing it, I tip-toed up behind him. Mugger had his attention glued to the door and so I had no trouble giving him a swipe behind the ear.

He sighed wearily and caved in, but before he could fall I got under him and slung him over my shoulder. He made a heavy load and I staggered as I carried him into the office and put him on the couch.

I put a glass and a bottle of whiskey next to him and waited. Mugger slept for ten minutes before painful consciousness returned. He groaned and grunted before opening his blood-shot eyes.

He directed a bleary glance at me. "Was dat you again?" he asked.

"Face it," I said. "I'm too damn tough for you."

Mugger kept his eyes closed. "Don't be so proud. You ain't touched me wid flesh and blood yet. What was it dis time? A gat?"

He forced open an eye to glare at me, but the whiskey bottle interrupted him. Aching every inch of the way, he managed to drag himself up to a sitting position and pour four fingers of the stuff.

Mugger drank deep and wiped his mouth with a sleeve. He stared moodily at the floor. "I feel ruint," he said.

"Don't take it so hard," I said. "Your friends didn't do any better and they're leaving town."

Mugger polished off the rest of the glass and tilted the bottle for a refill. "I knew it wouldn't work, but it's still discouragin'." He winced as he touched his head. "I'm gettin' too old for dis rough stuff."

He tasted the liquor again and examined the office and its furniture. "You get all dis splendor honest?"

"More or less," I said. "Brains had something to do with it."

"Don't rub it in," he said, brooding. "Well," he had a note of sadness in his voice, "I guess I better be leavin'. You ain't got a sawbuck

or two for train fare? I'm near busted."

I considered his dejection for awhile. "The cops interested in you in any way?" I asked.

"Unless you're thinkin' of makin' a complaint, I'm pure as the driven snow right now," he said. "I just got out of the government boarding school and ain't had much time for bein' bad."

"You're getting gray hair, Mugger," I said. "Ever thought of trying legitimate? Like wearing a tux and a carnation and acting like a bouncer. Pays ninety-five a week."

"You serious?" Mugger's eyes rested on my face.

"But no pawing around Juanita," I said. "She's my claim."

"You're takin' the joy outta it," he said. "But I accept. The tear in my eye is hand-lickin' gratitude." He picked up his battered hat. "Only I need a day or two vacation. My head hurts."

When he left, I removed my coat and tie and stretched out on the couch. I thought, this divide and conquer business sometimes works. I closed my eyes.

I opened them when Juanita came in wearing a smile and an outfit that wasn't much more than the ribbons and bows holding it together.

She snapped the lock on the door and went around dimming the lights. "You look tired," she said.

"Had a hard day at the shop," I said.

She sat down beside me. "I've got a sparkle in my eyes," she said. "What are you thinking of?"

I reached for one of the bows.

She smiled and relaxed against me . . .

City Boy

The policeman in Knoxville, Tennessee, who was assigned to write a report on a missing cow obviously never lived on a farm. He described the cow as yellow, about seven years old, weighing 700 pounds and "with a missing milk spout."

Dead End

Truck drivers complained to police at Port Clinton, Ohio, that something was wrong with the signs on state route 53 directing them through the town. Officers investigated and found that pranksters had changed the signs and the truckers were winding up in a cemetery.

His name was Gonzo. He was a pusher. He'd murdered three people. With all this information, Lt. Byrnes wondered why the hell his 87th Precinct couldn't bring Gonzo in!

The "H" Killer

A Novelette

BY ED McBAIN

PATROLMAN DICK GENERO walked his beat and he was cold. He didn't like winter, especially at two o'clock in the morning.

He saw the light. It came from somewhere up the street. The street was black except for the light.

Genero quickened his step. Ordinarily, there never was a light there. Quite unconsciously, he drew off his right glove and yanked his service revolver from its holster. The faces of the building were closed with sleep. Only the light pierced the darkness, and he approached the light warily, stopping

before the steps where they descended beyond the hanging chain to enter the bowels of the tenement.

A door was hooded in shadow beneath the brick stoop of the building, and a window was set high up in the brick alongside the door. The window was caked with grime, but it glowed like a single wakeful eye. Cautiously, Genero climbed over the chain, went down the steps and to the door. He held the revolver ready in his right hand, and with his left hand, he twisted the doorknob.

Surprisingly, the door swung open.

Genero backed away suddenly. He was sweating. He was still cold, but he was sweating. He listened to the sound of his own breathing, listened for other sounds for a long time, and then he entered the basement room.

The light came from a naked bulb suspended from a thick wire cord. It hung absolutely motionless. An orange crate rested on the floor beneath the light bulb. There were four bottle caps on the crate. Genero pulled out his pocket flash and swung the arc around the room. There were pinup pictures on one of the walls, pasted close together, breasts to buttocks, cramped for space. The opposite wall was bare. There was a cot at the far end of the room, and there was a barred window over it.

Genero swung the light a little to the left and then, startled, pulled back, the .38 jerking upward spasmodically.

A boy was sitting on the cot.

His face was blue. He was leaning forward. He was leaning forward at a most precarious angle, and when the first cold shock of discovery left Genero, he wondered why the boy didn't fall forward onto his face. That was when he saw the rope.

One end of the rope was fastened to the barred window. The other end was knotted around the boy's neck. The boy kept leaning forward expectantly as if he wanted to get up off the cot and break into a sprint. His eyes were wide, and his mouth was open. Several inches from one hand was an empty hypodermic syringe.

Tentatively, somewhat frightened, somewhat ashamed of his superstitious dread of a dead body, Genero took a step closer and studied the blue face in the beam of the flash. Then he hurried from the room, trembling, and headed for the nearest call box.

The dead boy's name was Aníbal Hernandez. The kids who weren't Puerto Rican called him "Annabelle." His mother called him Aníbal, and she pronounced the name with Spanish grandeur, but the grandeur was limp with grief now.

Detectives Carella and Kling had trekked the five flights to the top floor of the tenement and knocked on the door of apartment 55. She

had opened the door quickly, as if knowing visitors would soon be calling. She was a big woman with ample breasts and straight black hair. There was no makeup on her face, and her cheeks were streaked with tears.

"Police?" she asked.

"Yes," Carella said.

"Come in, *por favor.* Please." The detectives followed Mrs. Hernandez into the parlor and sat facing her.

"About your son . . ." Carella said at last.

"*Si,*" Mrs. Hernandez said. Aníbal would not kill himself."

"Mrs. Hernandez . . ."

"No matter what they say, he would not kill himself. This I am sure . . . of this. Not Aníbal. My son would not take his own life. He is too happy a boy. Always. Even in Puerto Rico. Always happy. Happy people do not kill themselves."

"Did you know your son was a drug addict?" Carella asked.

Mrs. Hernandez did not answer for a long time. Then she said, "Yes," and she clenched her hands in her lap.

"How long has he been using narcotics?" Kling asked, looking hesitantly at Carella first.

"A long time."

"How long?"

"I think four months."

"Do you have any idea how he started?"

"*Si,*" Mrs. Hernandez said. She sighed, and the sigh was a forlorn surrender to a problem too complex for her. "Maria," she said, beginning to sob. "Maria started him."

"Your daughter?" Kling asked incredulously.

"My daughter, yes, my daughter. Both my children. Drug addicts. They . . ." She stopped, the tears flowing freely, unable to speak. The detectives waited.

"I don't know how," she said at last. "My husband is good. He has worked all his life. This minute, this very minute, he is working. And have I not been good? Have I done wrong with my children?"

"Mrs. Hernandez," Carella said, wanting to reach out and touch her hand, "we . . ."

"Will it matter that we are Puerto Rican?" she asked suddenly. "Will you find who killed him anyway?"

"If someone killed him, we'll find him," Carella promised.

"*Muchas gracias,*" Mrs. Hernandez said. "Thank you. I . . . I know what you must think. My children using drugs, my daughter a prostitute. But believe me, we . . ."

"Your daughter . . ."

"*Si, si,* to feed her habit." She sucked in a deep breath, holding back a racking sob. "*Perdóneme,*" she whispered, after she released her breath. "Pardon me."

"Could we talk to your daughter?" Carella asked.

"*Por favor.* Please. She may help you. You will find her at *El Centro.* Do you know the place?"

"Yes," Carella said.

"You will find her there. She may help you. If she will talk to you."

"We'll try," Carella said. He rose. Kling rose simultaneously. Both men were silent on the way down to the street.

2

El Centro, crouched in a side-street, one of the thirty-five running blocks which formed the East-to-West territory of the 87th Precinct. And though there were Italians and Jews and a large population of Irish people in the 87th, El Centro was in a street that was entirely Puerto Rican.

There were places in the city where you could get anything from a hunk of cocaine to a hunk of woman; El Centro was one of them.

Maria Hernandez did not walk into El Centro until three that afternoon. Carella did not know her. He looked up from his drink when she walked into the bar, and he saw a somewhat slight girl who looked no more than eighteen. Her hair was black, and her eyes were very brown, and she wore a green overcoat open over a white sweater and a straight black skirt. She wore nylons and loafers.

"There she is," Terry Donahue, the big Irishman who ran the place, said, and Carella nodded.

Maria sat on a stool at the far end of the bar. She nodded hello to Terry, glanced at Carella to quickly ascertain whether or not he was a prospective client, and then fell to staring through the plate glass window at the street. Carella walked over to her.

"Miss Hernandez?" he said.

She swung the stool around. "Yes?" she said coyly. "I'm Maria."

"I'm a cop," Carella said, figuring he'd set her straight from go before she wasted any effort.

"I don't know anything about why my brother killed himself," Maria said, all coyness gone now. "Any other questions?"

"A few. How long have you been on the junk?"

"What's that got to do with my brother?"

"How long?"

"About three years."

"Who supplies you?"

"Oh come on, cop, you know better than that."

"Who supplied your brother?"

Maria was silent.

"Your brother is dead," Carella said harshly.

"What do you want me to do? He always was a stupid little snot-nose. If he wants to kill himself . . ."

"Maybe he didn't kill himself."

Maria blinked, seemingly surprised. "No?" she said cautiously.

"No. Now who supplied him? You probably made a contact for him after he was hooked. Now who was it?"

"I didn't make any contact for him. He always went his own way."

"Was he pushing?"

"I don't know nothing. Why knock yourself out?" Her eyes clouded momentarily. "He's better off dead, believe me."

"Is he?" Carella asked. "You're holding something back, Maria. What is it?"

"Nothing."

Their eyes met. Carella studied her eyes, and he knew what was in them, and he knew she would tell him nothing more.

"How come they sent you?" the coroner asked Bert Kling. "Couldn't they wait for our official report? What's the big rush?"

"Carella asked me to check with you, Dr. Soames," Kling said. "I don't know why, but I suppose he wants to get moving on this thing, and he figured he didn't want to wait for the report."

"All right, all right, all right," Soames said testily. "All this fuss over a drug addict." He shook his head. "Does Carella think this was a suicide?"

"He's waiting to her from you people on it."

"Do you know anything at all about asphyxia, Mr. Kling?"

"No, sir. Choking is something I—"

"We are not talking about choking, Mr. Kling," Soames said, gaining momentum, annoyed by strangers, equally annoyed by ignorance. "Choking, in police work, presupposes hands. It is impossible to choke yourself to death. We are now discussing asphyxia induced by pressure on the neck arteries and veins through the use of ropes, wires, towels, handkerchiefs, suspenders, belts, garters, bandages, stockings, or what have you. In the case of Aníbal Hernandez, I understand the alleged means of strangulation was a rope."

"Yes," Kling said. "Yes, a rope."

"If this were a case of strangulation, pressure from the rope on the neck arteries . . ." Soames paused. "The neck arteries, Mr. Kling, carry blood to the brain. When they are pressed upon, the blood supply is terminated, resulting in anemia of the brain and loss of consciousness.

"I see," Kling said.

"Do you indeed? The pressure on the brain is increased and further aggravated because the veins in the neck are also under pressure from the rope, and there is interference of the return flow of blood through those veins. Eventually, strangulation proper — or asphyxia — will set in and cause the death of the unconscious person."

"Yes," Kling said, swallowing.

"Asphyxia, Mr. Kling, is defined as the extreme condition caused by lack of oxygen and excess of carbon dioxide in the blood."

"This is . . . is very interesting," Kling said weakly.

"Yes, I'm sure it is. The knowledge cost my parents something like twenty thousand dollars. Your own medical education is coming at a much cheaper rate. It's only costing you time, and *my* time at that."

"Well, I'm sorry if I . . ."

"Cyanosis in asphyxia is not uncommon. However . . ."

"Cyanosis?"

"The blue coloration. However, as I was about to say, there are other examinations to be made in determining whether or not death was due to asphyxiation. The mucous membranes, for example, and the throat . . . let it suffice to say, there are many tests. And, of course, cyanosis is present in many types of poisoning."

"Oh?"

"Yes. We have, considering this poisoning possibility, conducted tests on the urine, the stomach contents, the intestinal contents, the blood, the brain, the liver, the kidney, the bones, the lung, the hair and nails, and the muscle tissue." Soames paused. Drily, he added, "We *do* occasionally work here, you know."

"Yes, I . . ."

"Our concern, despite popular misconceptions, is not chiefly with necrophilia."

"No, I didn't think it was," Kling said, not at all sure what the word meant.

"So?" Soames demanded. "Add it all up, and what do you get? Do you get asphyxia?"

"Do you?" Kling asked.

"You should wait for the report," Soames said. "You should really wait for the report. I like to discourage these special requests."

"Is it asphyxia?"

"No. It is not asphyxia."

"What then?"

"Alkaloidal poisoning. An overdoze of heroin, to be exact. A large overdose. A dose far in excess of the fatal 0.2 grams." Soames paused. "In fact, our young friend Hernandez took enough heroin to kill, if you'll pardon the expression, Mr. Kling, a bull."

There were about eight million things to do over and above trying to get the significance of Soames' report. The holidays just ahead would add to the load.

There always seemed to be more things wanting doing than a man could possibly get to, and sometimes Peter Byrnes wished for two heads and twice that many arms. Byrnes was a detective and a lieutenant, and he headed the squad of bulls who called the 87th Precinct their home.

Though devoutly religious, Byrnes was devoutly thankful that Christmas came but once a year. It only brought an influx of punks into the Squad Room, and God knew there were enough punks pouring in all year round. Byrnes did not like punks.

He considered dishonesty a per-

sonal insult. He had worked for a living since the time he was twelve, and anyone who decided that working was a stupid way to earn money was in effect calling Byrnes a jackass. Byrnes liked to work. Even when it piled up, even when it gave him a headache, even when it included a suicide or homicide or whatever by a drug addict in his precinct, Byrnes liked it.

And Byrnes had a headache on his hands now. The coroner had reported that Hernandez had died of an overdose of heroin. The syringe lying next to Hernandez' hand had been scrutinized for latent prints, and those prints were now being compared by the Identification Bureau with the prints lifted from Hernandez' dead fingers. Byrnes was sure the prints would not match. Someone had tied that rope around Hernandez' neck *after* he was dead, and Byrnes was willing to bet that the same person had used that syringe to administer the fatal dose of heroin. But why hadn't the murder weapon — the overloaded syringe of heroin — been removed from the scene of the crime? And why, apparently, had the body been hoisted in an attempt to simulate a hanging suicide? A headache—a real headache.

When the telephone on his desk rang, he resented the intrusion. He lifted the receiver and said, "Byrnes here."

The sergeant manning the switchboard behind the desk downstairs said, "Your wife, Lieutenant."

"Put her on," Byrnes said gruffly.

He waited. In a moment, Harriet's voice came onto the line.

"Are you very busy?" she asked.

"I'm kind of jammed, honey," he said, "but I've got a moment. What is it?"

It was about a roast she'd ordered from the butcher that hadn't been delivered. And Larry couldn't go for it because he was at school rehearsing for the school play.

What did she want him to do, send a squad car to the butcher?

After he had hung up, Byrnes wondered about Harriet. She had coped with a policeman-husband who was very rarely home, and had managed to raise a son almost singlehanded. And Larry, despite his damned un-Byrnesian leaning toward dramatics, was certainly a lad to be proud of. Yes, Harriet was capable, levelheaded, and good in bed most of the time.

And yet, on the other hand, something like this roast beef thing could throw her into a confused frenzy.

Sighing heavily, Byrnes turned back to his work. He was reading through Carella's DD report on the dead boy when the knock sounded on his door.

"Come," Byrnes said.

The door opened. Hal Willis came into the room.

"What is it, Hal?" Byrnes asked.

"Well, this is a weird one," Willis declared. He was a small man, a man who—by comparison with the other precinct bulls—looked like a jockey.

"Weird how?" Byrnes asked.

"Desk sergeant put this call through. I took it. But the guy won't speak to anyone but you. And he wouldn't give his name."

"Tell him to go to hell," Byrnes said.

"Lieutenant, he said it's got something to do with the Hernandez case."

"All right," Byrnes said. "Have the call switched to my wire."

Byrnes and Havilland had at least one thing in common, their distaste for punks.

There was therefore nothing Roger Havilland liked better than questioning suspects—for they were all punks in his book—especially when he could question them alone. Roger Havilland was probably the biggest bull in the 87th Precinct, and undoubtedly the meanest son of a bitch in the world. You couldn't really blame Havilland for his attitude about punks in general. Havilland had once tried to break up a street fight and had in turn had his arm broken in four places.

So there was nothing Havilland enjoyed more than questioning suspects, especially when he could question them alone and unassisted. Unfortunately, Carella was with him in the Interrogation Room on that Wednesday afternoon, December 19th.

The boy whom Carella had caught with the deck of heroin sat in a chair with his head high and his eyes defiant. The two boys who'd been in the back seat of the car near Grover Park, and had been waiting for the boy with the heroin, were being questioned separately and respectively by Detectives Meyer and Willis outside. The objective of these related questioning sessions was to discover from whom these kids had made their buy. There was no fun in picking up a hophead. He took a fall, and then the city bore the expense of a thirty-day cold turkey ride. The important man was the pusher.

Hemingway, the boy who'd made his buy in Grover Park, had been caught holding a sixteenth of H which had probably cost him something like five bucks. He was small fry. The 87th was interested in the man who'd sold the stuff to him.

The boy wouldn't talk, at first. But when Havilland started bearing down, Hemingway revealed that the pusher was a guy by the name of Gonzo.

"How'd you contact him?" Havilland asked.

"This was the first I heard of him," Hemingway said. "Today, I mean. The first time I ever copped from him."

"Yeah, sure," Havilland said.

"I snow you not," Hemingway answered. "I used to buy from another kid. The meet was in the park, near the lion house. I used to get from this other kid there. So today, I go to the meet, and there's this new character. He tells me his name is Gonzo, and he's got good junk. So okay, I gambled on getting beat stuff. Then the law showed."

"What about the two kids in the back seat."

"Skin poppers. You want to be smart you'll throw them out. This whole business has scared them blue."

"Gonzo, huh?" Havilland said.

"Yeah. Listen, you think I'll be able to get a fix soon? I mean, I'm beginning to feel a little sick, you dig me?"

"Mister," Havilland said, "consider yourself cured."

"Huh?"

"Who'd you used to buy from?" Carella asked.

"What do you mean?"

"At the lion house in the park. You said this Gonzo was new. Who pushed to you before?"

Hemingway sighed wearily. "A kid named Annabelle."

"A broad?" Havilland asked.

"No, some spic kid. Annabelle. That's a spic name."

"Aníbal?" Carella asked, his scalp prickling. "Was it Aníbal Hernandez?"

"Yeah, I think so. Yeah, that sounds like it. Listen, can't I get a fix. I mean, I'll puke."

"Go ahead," Havilland said. "Puke."

3

The lab report on the rope and the I.B. report on the fingerprints came in later that afternoon. There was only one piece of information in either of them that surprised Carella—whose thinking had been approximately the same as Byrnes.

Carella was not surprised to learn that an analysis of the rope found around Hernandez' neck completely discounted the possibility of the boy having hanged himself. A rope, you see, has peculiar properties of its own, among which are the fibers of which it is constructed. Had Hernandez hanged himself, he undoubtedly would have first tied one end of the rope on the barred window, then tied the other end around his neck, and then leaned into the rope, cutting off his oxygen supply.

The fibers on the rope, however, were flattened in such a way as to indicate that the body had been pulled *upwards*. In short, the rope had first been affixed to Hernandez' neck, and then the loose end had been threaded through the bars and pulled upon until the body assumed its leaning position. The contact of the rope's fibers with the steel of the bar had given the fibers

a telltale direction. Hernandez may have administered his own fatal dose of heroin, but he had certainly not strung himself to the barred window.

The fingerprints found on the syringe seemed to discount the possibility of suicide completely, and this hardly surprised Carella either. None of the fingerprints—and there were a good many, all from the same person, all clear sharp prints—matched up with the fingerprints of Aníbal Hernandez. If he had used the syringe at all, then he had wiped it clean before handing it to a second unknown party.

The *unknown party* bit was the part that surprised Carella. The Identification Bureau had done a runthrough on the prints, and come up with a blank. Whoever had handled the syringe, whoever had allegedly pumped that heroin into Hernandez, did not have a criminal record. Of course, the F.B.I. had not yet been heard from, but Carella was nonetheless disappointed. In his secret heart, he was halfway hoping that someone who had access to a syringe and the staggering amount of heroin it had taken to kill Hernandez would also be someone with a record.

He was mulling over his disappointment when Lieutenant Byrnes poked his head out of the office.

"Steve," he called. "See you a moment?"

"Yes, sir," Carella said. He rose and walked to Byrnes' door. The lieutenant was silent until Carella closed the door.

"Bad break, huh?" he asked then.

"Sir?"

"Couldn't get a make on those fingerprints."

"Oh, no. I was kind of hoping we would."

"I was, too," Byrnes said. "I'd like a copy of the prints."

"Well, it's already been checked. I mean, we couldn't . . ."

"I know, Steve. It's just that I have an idea I want to . . . to work on. Get me those prints before you check out."

"Sure," Carella said.

And as Carella left Byrnes' office he continued to wonder—in pretty much the same way that Byrnes had—why anyone would leave a perfect set of fingerprints on a murder weapon, and then leave the weapon where even a rookie cop could find it. And why anyone would try to simulate a hanging afterwards.

That night, long after Carella had given him the copy of the prints, Byrnes sat in the living room of his home and listened to the methodically monotonous tocking of the grandfather clock. He had just come from Calm's Point High School. And he waited to confront Larry, his son.

The house creaked.

He had never before noticed how the house creaked. From the bed-

room upstairs, he could hear Harriet deep in slumber, the sound of her even breathing superimposed on the dread tocking of the clock and the uneasy groaning of the house.

And then Byrnes heard a small sound which was like an ear-splitting thundercrack, the sound he had been waiting for and listening for all night long, the sound of a key being turned in the front door latch.

"Larry?" he called.

"Dad?" The voice was surprised, and the voice was young.

"In here, Larry," Byrnes said.

Larry came into the room. He was a tall boy, much taller than his father, though hardly eighteen. His hair was red, and his face was long and thin, with his father's craggy nose, and his mother's guileless gray eyes. His chin was weak, Byrnes noticed, nor would it ever be any stronger because adolescence had forged the boy's face, and it was set now for eternity.

"Where were you, Larry?" Byrnes asked.

"At school," Larry said. Byrnes took the lie, and it did not hurt as much as he expected it would, and suddenly something inside the man took over, something alien to a father-son relationship, something he reserved for the Squad Room at the 87th. It came into his head and onto his tongue with the ready rapidity of years of familiarity. In the space of three seconds Peter Byrnes became a cop questioning a suspect.

"Late to be getting home, isn't it?"

"Is that what this is all about?" Larry asked.

"What kept you so late?"

"We're rehearsing, you know that."

"For what?"

"The senior play. Holy cow, dad, we've only gone over this about a hundred times."

"What time did you break up?"

"About one o'clock, I guess. Some of the kids stopped for a soda afterwards."

"The rehearsal broke up at ten-thirty," Byrnes said clearly. "I was there then, saw all the kids leave. You weren't there. You're not in the play, Larry. You never were. Where did you spend the time between three-thirty this afternoon and two o'clock the next morning?"

"Jesus!" Larry said.

"Don't swear in my house," Byrnes said.

"Well, for Christ's sake, you sound like a district attorney."

"Where were you, Larry?"

"Okay, I'm not in the play," Larry said. "Okay? I didn't want to tell Mom. I got kicked out after the first few rehearsals. I guess I'm not a good actor. I guess . . ."

"You're a terrible actor, and a bad listener. You were *never* in the play, Larry. I said that just a few seconds ago."

"Well . . ." Larry stammered.

"Why'd you lie? What have you been doing?"

"Now what would I be doing?" Larry said. "Listen, dad, I'm sleepy. If you don't mind, I'd like to get to bed."

Byrnes came up out of the chair suddenly. He walked up to his son and said, "Empty your pockets."

"What?"

"I said . . ."

"Oh now, let's just hold this a minute," Larry said heatedly. "Now let's just slow down. What the hell is this, anyway? Don't you play cop enough hours a day, you have to come home—"

Byrnes slapped his son suddenly and viciously. He slapped him with an opened, calloused hand that had been working since its owner was twelve years old, and that hand slapped Larry hard enough to knock him off his feet.

"Get up!" Byrnes said.

"You better not hit me again," Larry muttered.

"Get up!" Byrnes caught his son's collar with his hand. He yanked him to his feet, pulled him close and then said through clenched teeth, "Are you a drug addict?"

Silence crowded into the room, filling every corner.

"Who . . . who told you?" Larry said at last.

"Are you?"

"I . . . I fool around a little."

"Sit down," Byrnes said wearily.

Larry sat in the chair his father had vacated. Byrnes paced the room for several moments, and then stopped before Larry and asked, "How bad is it?"

"Not too bad."

"Heroin?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"I've been on for about four months now."

"Snorting?"

"No. No."

"Skin pops?"

"Dad, I . . ."

"Larry—Larry, are you—mainlining?"

"Yes."

"Then you're hooked solid," Byrnes said.

"I can take it or leave it alone," Larry answered defiantly.

"Sure. Where do you get your stuff?"

"Listen, dad . . ."

"I'm asking as a father, not a cop," Byrnes said quickly.

"Up . . . up in Grover Park."

"From whom?"

"What difference does it make? Look, pop, I . . . I'll ditch the habit. Okay? I mean, really, I will."

"Did you know a boy named Aníbal Hernandez?"

Larry was silent.

"Look, son, you bought in my precinct, in Grover Park. Did you know Aníbal Hernandez?"

"Yes," Larry admitted.

"How well?"

"I bought from him mostly. I mean, you know, you fall in with

a pusher and if he gives you good stuff you stick with him. Anyway, he . . . he was a nice guy. Few times we . . . we shot up together. You know? Free. I mean, he didn't charge me anything for the junk. He was all right."

"You keep saying *'was.'* Do you know he's dead?"

"Yes. He hanged himself, I heard."

"Now listen to me carefully, Larry. I received a phone call today. An anonymous call. I took it because it was related with the Hernandez death."

"Yeah?"

"The caller not only told me that you were a junkie, but where you were and what you were doing on the night of December 17th, and the early morning of December 18th."

"So where was I supposed to have been?"

"In a basement room with Aníbal Hernandez. Is that true?"

"Maybe."

"Larry, don't get smart again! So help me God, I'll . . ."

"Okay, okay, I was with Annabelle."

"From what time to what time?"

"From about . . . let me see . . . it must have been nine o'clock. Yeah, from about nine to midnight, I guess. That's right. I left him about twelve or so."

"And he shot up, too, is that right?"

"Yes."

"And you left him asleep?"

"Well, nodding. You know—not here, not there."

"How much did Hernandez shoot?"

"We split a sixteenth."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure, Annabelle said so when he took out the deck. He said it was a sixteenth."

"You say you shot up together? Did you both use the same syringe?"

"No. Annabelle had his spike, and I had mine."

"And where's your outfit now?"

"I got it. Why?"

"Tell me exactly what happened. After Annabelle showed you the deck."

"I got out my spike, and he got out his. Then we cooked the stuff in some bottle caps, and Annabelle picked up his spike, and I picked up mine, and we loaded them and fixed ourselves."

"Is it possible he picked up the wrong syringe? I mean, used your syringe?"

"No. I know the feel of mine. No, it's impossible. I shot up with my own syringe."

"What about when you left? You were high at the time, so you might have taken the spike Annabelle had been handling, leaving your own spike behind."

"I guess so, but . . ."

"Where's your syringe now?"

"On me."

"Look at it."

Larry reached into his pocket. He turned the syringe over in his hands studying it. "It looks like mine," he said.

"Is it?"

"It's hard to tell. Why? I don't get it."

"There are some things you should know, Larry. First, Hernandez did not hang himself. He died of an overdose of heroin. Second, there was one and only one syringe found in the room with him."

"Well, that figures. He . . ."

"The man who called me is after something. I don't know what yet. He said he'd call me again after I talked with you. He said you and Hernandez argued that afternoon. He says he has a witness who will swear to it. He says you were alone with Hernandez all that night. He says—"

"Me? Hell, I didn't argue with Annabelle. He laid a fix on me free, didn't he? Does that sound like we argued? What's this guy trying to say, anyway? Is he trying to say I gave Annabelle that overdose? Is that what? Let him get his goddam witness; go ahead, let him."

"He doesn't need a witness, son. The man who called me said we'd find *your* fingerprints on the syringe in that basement room."

4

At three o'clock, the morning Byrnes had cross-examined his son, Maria Hernandez was ready to call it a day. She had thirty-five dollars in her purse, and she was tired, and it was cold, and if she fixed herself now and then went straight to sleep, she'd be set for the night. There was nothing like a nice warm fix before hitting the sack. But thirty-five dollars was not forty dollars, and forty dollars was what Maria needed for her next day's supply, and so her relief at the day's work being over was partially clouded by a reluctance to quit with that additional five dollars lacking.

When she heard the footsteps behind her, she became a little frightened. Muggings were not uncommon uptown, and she didn't want to lose the thirty-five dollars she'd worked hard for all day. Her fright ebbed when a voice behind her whispered, "Maria."

She stopped, and then turned and waited, squinting into the wind.

"Hello, Maria," he said.

"Oh, you," she said. "Hello."

"Where are you going?"

"Home," she told him.

"So early?"

There was a lilt to his voice, and Maria had been in the business a long time, and whereas she had never been very fond of this particular man, and whereas she really did want to get home to that waiting fix, she nonetheless considered the five dollars, or perhaps more,

which could just possibly be earned in a very short time. So she accepted the lilt in his voice and answered it with a mechanical smile. And after a little banter, he was suggesting that they get a room. She agreed to get it.

When Maria came out of the tenement to which she had led him, he was still waiting in the street. "I got a room from Dolores," she said.

"Who?"

"Dolores Faured. An old woman who . . ." She stopped and grinned. "Come," she said, and she led him to a room at the rear of the ground floor. She opened the door, flicked on the wall light, and then locked the door behind him.

He reached for her almost instantly, and she danced away from him and said, "Didn't I hear a proposal of twenty dollars?"

He took out his wallet, grinning. He handed her the bills which she immediately stuffed into her purse. "I've been looking for you all night," he said.

"Really?" She walked toward him, wiggling suggestively. "Well, you found me, baby."

"I wanted to talk to you about Gonzo. About that arrangement with Gonzo and your brother."

"Go ahead," she said, "talk."

"Where you promised Gonzo you'd swear you saw your brother and this Byrnes kid arguing."

"Yeah?" she asked suspiciously, and began unbuttoning her blouse.

"Yeah," he answered. "Gonzo was working on my orders. He gave you twenty-five dollars, didn't he?"

"Yes," Maria said.

"And he said there'd be more, didn't he, if you swore you heard them arguing."

"Yes," Maria said. She took off the blouse and draped it over the back of a chair. She shivered and said, "I'm cold. I'm getting under the covers." Unselfconsciously, she slipped out of her skirt, and then ran to the bed in her brassiere and panties and pulled the covers to her throat. "Brrrrrrrr," she said, shivering from the cold.

"Did Gonzo tell you what it was all about?"

"Only that this would be a good deal, and that my brother was in on it. Who is this Byrnes kid, anyway?"

He was sitting on the bed now. "That doesn't matter. He argued with your brother. Just remember that. *Anyone* who asks you; cops, anyone."

"I already spoke to one cop," she said.

"Who?"

"I don't know his name. A good-looking one. He said maybe Aníbal didn't commit suicide."

"What did you say?"

Maria shrugged. "He must have committed suicide." She paused. "Didn't he?"

"Sure, he did," the man said. He lay back on the bed, taking

her in his arms. "Maria . . ."

"No. No, wait. My brother. He . . . he didn't die because of this deal, did he? This deal had nothing to do with . . . I said *wait!*"

"I don't want to wait," he told her.

"Did he commit suicide?" she asked, trying to hold him away from her.

"Yes. Yes, damnit, he committed suicide!"

"Then why are you so interested in making me lie to the cops? Was my brother killed? Who killed him? Did you kill him?"

"Shut up! For Christ's sake, shut up!"

"Did you kill my brother? If you killed him, I'll never lie. If you killed him for one of your deals . . ." She felt something warm on the side of her face quite suddenly, but she didn't know what it was and she kept talking. ". . . I'll go straight to the cops. He may have been a crumb, but he was my brother, and I'm not going to lie to . . ."

There was more warmth on her face, and then her throat. She reached up suddenly and then, over his body, she studied her hand, and her eyes went wide with terror when she saw the blood. *He's cut me,* she thought. *Oh God Jesus, he's cut me!*

He backed away from her, arching his body, and she saw the knife in his right hand, the blade open, and then he slashed at her breasts and she rolled with all her strength, flinging him off her. He caught her arm and flung her back into the room, coming at her with the knife again . . .

A half-hour later, as he was making his round, a patrolman named Alf Levine found Maria. She had managed to crawl out to the sidewalk. He called an ambulance immediately.

Because the room in which Maria Hernandez kept her fatal assignation with a person or persons unknown was the last known place to have enclosed her murderer, it was open to particular scrutiny by the police.

And if these men of the 87th Precinct devoted long hours to discovering who had brought about the death of one junkie, another man was devoting long hours to the *life* of another junkie.

The junkie happened to be his son.

Peter Byrnes would never know how close he had come to washing his hands of the whole matter. He had fought first with the idea that the entire concept was a hoax. *My son a drug addict,* he had asked, *my son? My son's fingerprints on an alleged murder weapon?* No, he had told himself, it is a lie, a complete lie from start to finish. He would seek out this lie, pull it from beneath its rock, force it to crawl into the sunshine where he could step upon it. He would con-

front his son with the lie, and together they would destroy it.

But he had confronted his son, and he had known even before he asked "Are you a drug addict?" that his son was indeed a drug addict, and that a portion of what he wanted to believe was a lie when it had come to him over the telephone was not a lie.

Byrnes had checked his son's fingerprints against those which had been found on the syringe, and the fingerprints matched. He revealed this information to no one in the department, and the concealment left him feeling guilty and somehow contaminated.

The lie in its entirety, then, had not been a lie at all.

It had started out as a two-part falsehood, and had turned into a shining, shimmering truth.

But what about the rest? Had Larry argued with Hernandez on the afternoon of the boy's death? And if he had, were not the implications clear?

Were not the implications that Larry Byrnes had killed Aníbal Hernandez perfectly clear? And were not the implications just as clear that Larry was responsible for the death of Aníbal Hernandez' sister. These junkies ran in packs, gangs. And it was a commonplace that one gang killing beget another and another . . .

And so, on that Thursday, December 21st, Byrnes waited for the man to call again, as he had promised; and he bore the additional burden now of a new homicide, the death of Aníbal's sister. He waited all that day and no call came, and when he went home in the afternoon it was to a task he dreaded.

Harriet met him in the hallway. She took his hat and then she went into his arms, and she sobbed against his shoulder.

"How is he?" Byrnes asked.

"Bad," Harriet said.

"What did Johnny say?"

"He's given him something as a substitute," Harriet answered. "But he's only a doctor, Peter, he said that, he said he's only a doctor and the boy has to *want* to break the habit. Peter, how did this happen? For God's sake, how did it happen?"

"I don't know," Byrnes said.

"I thought this was for slum kids. I thought it was for kids who came from broken homes, kids who didn't have love. How did it happen to Larry?"

And again, Byrnes said, "I don't know," and within himself he condemned the job which had not left him more time to devote to his only son. But he was too honest to level the entire blame on the job, and he reminded himself that other men had jobs with long hours, irregular hours, and their sons did not become drug addicts. And so he started up the steps to his son's room, walking heavily, suddenly grown old.

He knocked on his son's door.

"Larry?" he said quietly.

"Dad? Open this, will you? For Christ's sake, open it."

Byrnes unlocked the door, and then stepped into the room.

Larry stood just before the bed, his fist clenched.

"Why am I a prisoner?" he shouted.

"You're not a prisoner," Byrnes said calmly.

"No? Then what is it when the door's locked? And you board up the window with goddam spikes?"

"The doctor doesn't want you to leave this house. You're sick. We're trying to cure you."

"How? With that crap your doctor friend gave me? What was that crap, anyway?"

"A substitute drug of some sort."

"Yeah? Well, it's no damn good. I feel exactly the same. You could have saved your money. Listen, you want to do me a real favor? You want to really cure me?"

"You know I do."

"All right, go out and scare me up some junk. There must be plenty of it down at the station house. Listen, I got a better idea. Give me back that eighth you took from my dresser."

"No."

"You big son of a bitch," Larry said, and the tears suddenly started on his face. "Why don't you help me? Get out of here! *Get out of here,* you lousy . . ." and the sentence dissolved into animal sobs.

"Son . . ."

"Don't call me your son! What the hell do you care about me? You're just afraid you'll lose your cushy job because I'm a junkie, that's all."

"That's not true, Larry."

"It *is* true! You're scared crap because you think somebody'll find out about my habit and about those fingerprints on the syringe! Okay, you bastard, okay, you just wait 'til I get to a telephone."

"You're not getting to a phone until you're cured, Larry."

"That's what you think! When I get to a phone I'm gonna call the newspapers, and I'm gonna tell them all about it. Now how about that? How about it, dad? *How about it?* Do I get that eighth or don't I?

"You're not getting the heroin, and you're not getting near a phone, either. Now relax, son."

"I don't want to relax!" Larry shouted. "I *can't* relax! I . . ." He stopped suddenly and clutched at his stomach. He stood doubled over, his arm crossing his middle. Byrnes watched him helplessly.

"Larry . . ."

"Shhhh, shhhh." Larry stood rocking on his heels, back and forth, clutching his stomach, and then finally he lifted his head, and his eyes were wet, and this time the tears coursed down his face, and he said, "Dad, I'm sick, I'm very sick."

Byrnes went to him and put his arm around his shoulder. He tried

to think of something comforting to say, but nothing would come.

"Dad, I'm asking you, please. Please, dad, would you please get me something? Dad, please, I'm very sick, and I need a fix. So please, dad, please, I'm begging you, get me something. Please get me something, just a little bit to tide me over, please, dad, please. I'll never, never ask you for anything else as long as I live. I'll leave home. I'll do whatever you say, but please get me something, dad. If you love me, please get me something."

"I'll call Johnny," Byrnes said.

"No, dad, please, please. That stuff he gave me is no good, it doesn't help."

"He'll try something else."

"No, please, please, please, please . . ."

"Larry, Larry, son . . ."

"Dad, if you love me . . ."

"I love you, Larry," Byrnes said, and he held his son's shoulder tightly, and there were tears on his own face now, and his son shuddered and then said, "I have to go to the bathroom. I have to . . . dad, help me, help me."

And Byrnes took his son to the bathroom across the hall, and Larry was very sick. At the foot of the stairs, Harriet stood with her hands wrung together, and after a while her husband and her son crossed the hall again, and then Byrnes came out of Larry's bedroom and locked the door on the outside and went down the steps to his wife.

"Call Johnny again," he said. "Tell him to get right over."

Carella sauntered through the park. He was wearing gray corduroy slacks and a gray suede jacket.

Come on, Gonzo, Carella thought. I'm dying to make your acquaintance.

Carella glanced casually at a young boy who turned the corner of the lion house. He was no older than nineteen. He walked with a quick birdlike tempo. He wore a sports jacket, the collar turned up against the cold. His head was bare, and his blond hair danced in the wind.

Carella noticed the boy, pacing in front of the outdoor cages. He looked at his wrist, and then seemingly remembered he didn't have a watch. He spotted Carella and went over and asked him for the time.

"About a quarter to five," Carella said.

"Thanks," the boy answered. He looked off up the path, turned back to Carella and studied him for a minute. He looked at the bag of peanuts Carella had taken out of his pocket. "You come here to feed the pigeons or something?" he asked.

"My business is my business," Carella said.

"What're you getting sore about? I was only trying to find out . . ." He stopped abruptly. Carella pretended to be interested in his pea-

nuts, but the boy went on. "Listen, we're here for the same thing, ain't we?"

Carella hesitated; then asked suddenly, "You're new at this, ain't you?"

"Huh?"

"Look, kid, my advice to you is don't talk about the junk to anybody, not even me. How do you know I'm not a bull?"

"I never thought of that," the boy said. Then, "I was told four-thirty. You think anything happened to him?"

"Jesus, I sure hope not," Carella said honestly.

"You know this Gonzo character?" the boy asked.

"Shhh, Jesus, don't use names," Carella said, making a big show of looking around. "Boy, you're real green."

"Ah, nobody's here to listen," the boy said cockily.

"This is my first time with him," Carella said. "I don't know what he looks like."

"Neither do I," the boy answered. "Was you getting from Annabelle?"

"Yeah," Carella said. He looked at his watch again. "He should've showed by now, don't you think?"

"What time is it?"

"A little after five."

A patrolman suddenly appeared, coming down the walk towards them. The boy panicked; without a word to Carella, he took off at a run.

5.

A feather.

It was only a feather, but it was perhaps the most meaningful bit of evidence turned up in the room where Maria was stabbed.

There are all kinds of feathers.

Feathers are divided into two groups: "Down feathers" and "contour feathers."

The feather found in the room was a down feather.

It was allowed to soak in soapy water for awhile, then rinsed under running water, and then rinsed again in alcohol, and then put under the microscope.

The feather had long knots consisting of several protruding tips.

In the order of sparrows, the knots are close together and conical.

In the order of wading birds, the knots are pointed and conical, the barbules hairy and hard.

Climbing birds have feathers with strongly protruding knots with four tips.

Aquatic birds have strong knots with dull points.

Chickens and other birds in the Gallinae order have feathers with the same characteristics as wading birds.

Pigeons . . . ah, pigeons.

Pigeon feathers have long knots consisting of several protruding tips.

The feather in the room was a pigeon feather.

The feathers in the one pillow on the bed were duck down. The feather found, therefore, had not come from the pillow. It was found stuck to a smear of blood, so chances were it was left by the killer and not left by someone who'd been in the room previous to the killer.

If the killer, therefore, had a pigeon feather stuck to his clothes, chances were he was a pigeon fancier.

All the cops had to do was track down every pigeon fancier in the city.

That job was for the birds.

"Check on the pigeons!" Byrnes shouted into the intercom. "If you've got stoolies, why the hell aren't you using them, Steve?"

At the other end of the instrument, Carella sighed patiently, unable to understand Byrnes' curious irritation these past few days.

"Pete, I *have* been checking with our stoolies. None of them seems to know anybody named Gonzo. I've got a call in right now to Danny Gimp. As soon as I . . ."

"I find it impossible to believe that nobody in this goddam precinct has ever heard of Gonzo!" Byrnes shouted. "I find it impossible to believe that with a squad of sixteen detectives, I can't locate a two-bit pusher when I want him! I'm sorry, Steve, but I find that pretty damn impossible to believe."

"Well . . ."

"Have you checked the other precincts? A man doesn't simply materialize out of thin air. That doesn't happen, Steve. If he's a pusher, he may have a record."

"He may be a new pusher, Carella answered.

"Then he may have a J.D. card."

"No, I've checked that. Pete, maybe the Gonzo is a nickname. Maybe—"

"What the hell do we have alias files for?" Byrnes shouted.

"Pete, be reasonable. He may not be an old-timer. He may be one of these young punks who's just cut himself into the business. So he has no record."

"A young punk suddenly becomes a pusher, and you're telling me he has no J.D. record?"

"Pete, he doesn't necessarily have to be listed as a juvenile delinquent. It's just possible, you know, that he's never been in trouble. There are hundreds of kids in the streets who don't have cards on—"

"What are you telling me?" Byrnes said. "Are you telling me you can't find a snotnosed punk for me, is that what? This Gonzo took over Hernandez' trade, and that's a possible motive for murder, don't you think?"

"Well, if it were a big enough trade, yes."

"Have you got a better motive, Steve?"

"No, not yet."

"Then find me Gonzo!"

"Ah, Jesus, Pete, you're talking

to me as if we know who he is and all we gotta do—"

"I'm still running this squad, Carella," Brynes said angrily, "and I say, 'get him'."

"All right, look. Look, I met a kid yesterday in the park who was ready to make a buy from Gonzo. I know what the kid looks like, and I'll try to scout him up today, okay? But first let me see what Danny Gimp has."

"You think this kid knows Gonzo?"

"He said he didn't yesterday, and he made tracks when a patrolman showed. But maybe he's made contact since, and maybe he can lead me to Gonzo. I'll look around. Danny should be calling back in a half-hour or so."

"All right," Byrnes said.

"I don't know why you're getting so hot about this case," Carella ventured. "We're getting hardly any pressure at—"

"I get hot about *every* case," Byrnes said tersely, and he snapped off the connection.

He sat at his desk and stared through the corner window of the room, looking out over the park. He was very weary and very sad, and he hated himself for snapping at his men, and he hated himself for concealing important evidence, evidence which might possibly help a good cop like Carella. But again he asked himself the question, and again the question had the same hollow ring to it: What's a man supposed to do?

Would Carella understand? Or would Carella, being a good cop and a smart cop, beat those fingerprints to death, track them down, get to work in earnest and come up with Larry Byrnes?

My son Larry may have killed that Hernandez boy, Byrnes thought.

The phone on his desk rang. He listened to it ring for several moments, and then he swung his swivel chair around and picked up the receiver.

"87th Squad," he said, "Lieutenant Byrnes here."

"Lieutenant, this is Cassidy at the desk."

"What is it, Mike?"

"I've got a call for you." The guy won't say who it is."

Byrnes felt a sudden sharp pain at the base of his spine. "All right," Byrnes said, "put him on."

Byrnes waited. His hands were sweating.

"Hello?" the voice said. It was the same voice as before. Byrnes recognized it instantly.

"This is Lieutenant Byrnes."

"Ah, good afternoon, Lieutenant," the voice said. "Have you had a chance to chat with your son, Lieutenant?"

"Yes," Byrnes said. He shifted the phone to his left hand, wiped his right hand, and then switched again.

"And he has confirmed the accusations I made"?

"He's a drug addict," Byrnes said. "That's true."

"A pity, isnt it, Lieutenant. Nice kid like that." The voice grew suddenly businesslike. "Did you check those fingerprints on the syringe, Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"Are they his?"

"Yes."

"It looks bad, doesn't it, Lieutenant?"

"My son didn't argue with Hernandez."

"I've got a witness, Lieutenant. Of course anything you say'll sit pretty nicely with a jury, won't it? Especially when the jury learns Pop has been concealing evidence." There was a pause. "Or have you told your colleague about your son's prints on that syringe?"

"No," Byrnes said hesitantly. "I . . . I haven't. Look, what is it you want? Are you looking for money? Is that it?"

"Lieutenant, you underestimate me. I . . ."

"Hello?" a new voice said.

"What?" Byrnes asked. "Who?"

"Oh gee, I'm sorry, Lieutenant," Cassidy said. "I must've plugged into the wrong hole. I'm trying to get Carella. I've got Danny Gimp for him."

"All right, Cassidy, get off the line," Byrnes said.

"Yes, sir."

He waited until the clicking told him Cassidy was gone.

"All right," he said. "He's gone."

There was no answer.

"Hello?" Byrnes said. "Hello?"

His party was gone. Byrnes slammed down the receiver, and then sat morosely at his desk, thinking. He thought very carefully, and he thought very clearly, and when the knock sounded on his door five minutes later, he had reached a conclusion and a certain peace.

"Come," he said.

The door opened. Carella came into the office.

"I just spoke to Danny Gimp," Carella said. He shook his head. "No luck. He doesn't know any Gonzo, either."

"Well," Byrnes said wearily.

"So I'm going to take another run over to the park. Maybe I'll see this kid again. If not there, I'll try around."

"Fine," Byrnes said. "Do your best."

"Right." Carella turned to leave.

"Steve," Byrnes said, "before you go . . ."

"Yes?"

He couldn't say it. He just couldn't. "Nothing, Steve. It can wait."

6.

There's a drawback to murder.

There are, to be truthful, a lot of drawbacks to murder—but there's one in particular.

It gets to be a habit.

The man who killed Aníbal Hernandez had a very good reason, according to his own somewhat curious way of thinking, for wanting Aníbal dead. The reason for killing Aníbal's sister also seemed to be a pretty good one at the time. Hadn't the fool girl exhibited all the symptoms of a tongue about to start wagging?

Standing now in his pigeon coop on the roof, he could see how dangerous it would be if Gonzo got picked up. He was still a little rattled by Byrnes having put a tap on their call.

God, it was windy up here on the roof. He was glad he had put tar paper over the wire mesh of the coop. Sure, pigeons are hardy, don't they go galivanting around Grover Park all winter long, but still he wouldn't want any of his birds to die.

How had a dick got onto Gonzo's tail?

Was it possible the girl had talked? Before she'd died? No, that was not possible. If she had talked, the police would have come to him directly and damn fast. They wouldn't be fooling around trying to pick up Gonzo. Then how? Had someone seen Gonzo talking to her on the afternoon of Annabelle's death. That was possible, yes.

How had this thing got so complicated?

It had started as a simple plan, and now the plan didn't seem to be working. Should he call Byrnes again, tell Byrnes there had better not be anyone listening this time, tell him the whole damned story, lay the cards right on the table? But who could have seen the girl with Gonzo? Had they talked together in the same room she'd taken him to? The room Maria got from that woman, what was her name? Dolores? Wasn't that what she'd said? Yes, Dolores. Had Dolores known about Gonzo's talk with Maria? Had she recognized Gonzo from seeing him before, not knowing his name perhaps but... no. No, the police were probably simply keeping all known pushers under surveillance. But Gonzo is *not* a known pusher.

Gonzo is a punk who happened to stumble across some valuable information and who fortunately placed that information into the hands of someone who realized its potential: Me.

Gonzo has no record, Gonzo is not a known pusher, Gonzo is in this only for the promise of quick unhindered riches, and he is not even known in the neighborhood —not as Gonzo, anyway. So if he has no record, and if he is not known as Gonzo, and if he is not a known pusher, how did the police find out about him?

The woman.

Dolores.

No, not her, but someone perhaps saw them talking together that afternoon, saw him extract from

her the promise of a lie, saw the twenty-five dollars exchange hands. Someone perhaps . . .

How much did Maria tell the woman Dolores?

Good Christ, why am I worrying about Gonzo? How much did Maria tell that old woman? Did she mention my name to her? Did she say, "I have this friend who wants to sleep with me, and I need a room." Did she then say who the friend was? Could she have been so stupid?

What does Dolores know?

He took a look at one of the female fantails, stepped out of the coop, locked the door, and then went downstairs to the street. He walked with a brisk spring in his step. He walked with a purpose and a goal, and that goal was the tenement building in which he and Maria had shared a room.

Steve Carella spotted the boy.

The same boy he'd talked to yesterday afternoon, only the boy wasn't heading for the lion house this time. Was it possible that run-in with the patrolman yesterday had scared Gonzo into calling the meet for elsewhere in the park?

The boy had not seen him, and chances were he would not recognize him even if he did see him. Carella was wearing a battered felt hat the rim rolled down front, sides, and back. He wore a wide box raincoat which gave him an appearance of girth. And, even though it made him feel a little silly, he was wearing a false mustache. The raincoat was buttoned from top to bottom; Carella's .38 was in the right-hand pocket.

Quickly, he took off after the boy.

The boy seemed to be in a hurry. He walked straight past the lion house, up the knoll in the path, and then hesitated at a sign which read—pointing in several directions—Seals, Reptiles, Children's Zoo. The boy nodded, and then began walking in the direction of the reptiles.

Carella thought of overtaking the boy and asking him some pointed questions. But if the boy were rushing to meet Gonzo, as it had been his intention yesterday, wouldn't it be a little ridiculous to stop him? The object was to net a pusher who might have had something to do with the demise of Aníbal Hernandez. And Carella also thought of Byrnes, his immediate superior, and wondered what had him in such an uproar. The way he was about to confide in him, and then changed his mind was puzzling, too.

The boy seemed in no particular hurry. He seemed intent, instead, on making a thorough inspection of what the zoo offered. But he suddenly started traveling at a fast trot in the direction of the Reptile house. Whatever other faults there may have been in the boy's judgment, Carella could not venture to

guess. But he had certainly been astute in choosing the snake pit as an appropriate spot to meet a pusher.

A crowd magically appeared. It consisted of the students of a junior high school science class, led by a slightly embarrassed-looking male teacher. The kids were the noisiest damn kids Carella had ever seen or heard.

Behind him, one of the kids was shouting, "They got a snake in there can eat a pig whole, how about that?"

Fascinated as Carella was by this observation he concentrated on his quarry. His quarry was entering the house with the snakes, and Carella did not want to lose him.

His quarry was undoubtedly a snake lover. He was making sounds at the cobra cage, and he was rapping on the plate glass front of the cage.

But Carella couldn't hear any of the sounds emanating from the vicinity of the cobra cage because the junior high school class suddenly burst noisily into the Reptile house *en masse*. Carella's quarry was no longer rapping on the glass. A second boy had come up to the cobra cage, a boy with a mane of wild black hair, wearing a black leather jacket, wearing black, pegged trousers and black shoes.

Carella took one look at the newcomer and instantly thought: Gonzo.

Gonzo or not, the newcomer was the person Carella's young friend had been waiting for. Still unable to hear anything because of the science class, Carella was nonetheless able to see a quick shaking of hands. Then both boys reached into their pocket simultaneously, and then there was another shaking of hands, and Carella knew the junk and the money for the junk had been exchanged.

Carella was no longer interested in his young friend. He was now interested in the boy with the black leather jacket.

He started taking off after the black leather jacket when a blood-curdling shriek split the air.

"There he is!" an adolescent voice screeched.

The kid had spotted the python cage, and was rushing over to it to see if any pigs were being devoured whole that afternoon. In another moment, Carella was caught in the direct path of a headlong stampede. He sidestepped fast to save himself. When he turned, the black leather jacket was gone.

He rushed to the door. The black leather jacket was nowhere in sight.

He began running, running aimlessly actually. He kept running until it became obvious he had lost him. Then he spotted the blond boy he'd been following.

The blond boy was certainly not the one he wanted, but the kid had just made a buy from Gonzo, hadn't he? All right, maybe he

knew where Gonzo could be located.

He came up behind the boy almost soundlessly, and then he moved alongside him, and reached for his sleeve. The boy shoved out at Carella the instant he saw through the disguise, surprising him, knocking him backward several paces.

"Hey!" Carella shouted, and the boy was off.

Carella took after him, following him off into the trees, climbing over big boulders. He swung around a huge outcropping of rock, and then pulled up short.

He was looking into the open end of a .32.

"Don't open your mouth, cop," the boy said. "You think you're going to tie me in to something big, don't you? Well, you're wrong, cop."

"Goddamnit, what do I want with a two-bit junkie?" Carella said. "I'm not after you. I just wanted to ask some questions about the guy you met. I don't want you. I want him."

"I thought you weren't interested in two-bit junkies," the boy said.

"He's a pusher," Carella said.

"Him?" The boy began laughing. Then he sobered suddenly. "You were tailing me yesterday, cop, and you were tailing me today. I'm carrying enough junk on me right now to make a pinch pretty much worth your while. You can throw the book at me. And if I cut out now you'll grab me tomorrow, and then it's your word against mine."

"Listen, put up the gun and take off," Carella said. "I'm not looking for a slug, and I'm not looking for trouble with you. I told you I want your pal." Carella paused. "I want Gonzo."

"I know," the boy said, his eyes tightening. *I'm* Gonzo."

The only warning was the tightening of Gonzo's eyes. Carella saw them squinch up, and he tried to move sideways, but the gun was already speaking . . .

Carella was not found until almost a half-hour later, at which time the blood around him resembled a small swimming pool.

But another act of violence had been done in the 87th at about the same time Carella was being shot outside his precinct. The patrolman who called it in said, "She's an old woman. Her neighbors tell me her name is Dolores Faured. Her neck is broken. She either fell or was pushed down an airshaft from the second floor."

7.

Detective-Lieutenant Peter Byrnes went down to the lobby at six-fifteen that evening. He had been waiting in the corridor outside Carella's room all day long, hop-

ing he could get to see him again. He had seen Carella only for a brief moment before Carella went unconscious again.

Carella had whispered a word, and the word was "Gonzo."

But Carella could say nothing more. And because no one else had heard of Gonzo, how could Byrnes possibly pick him up? If Carella lived . . . A small part of Byrnes feared the possibility.

He had put this thought out of his mind, sitting in the corridor. He called the precinct every half-hour. And every half-hour he called home. The precinct had nothing to report. There were no leads to the new death of Dolores Faured. There were no leads to the old deaths of Aníbal and Maria Hernandez. There were no leads to Gonzo. They were still trying to get word to Danny the Gimp, per Byrnes' order, that Carella had been shot. Danny and Carella were close, Byrnes had reasoned, and with Carella on the critical list, Danny might be induced to part with some information.

Things weren't much better at home. Larry was still in the process of shaking his sickness. The doctor had come again, but nothing seemed to displease Byrnes' son more. Byrnes wondered if he would ever be cured, and he wondered if they would ever find the man or men who were committing murder in his precinct and if his son was responsible for the first of the series. He considered the possibility that Larry was being framed, but framed was the cry of every punk pulled in. It was two days before Christmas; Christmas, he knew, would be a bleak time this year.

At six-fifteen, Byrnes left the corridor and went down to the lobby, thinking of going out to get something to eat. He was heading for the revolving doors when a voice called, "Lieutenant?"

Byrnes turned. He didn't recognize the man at first. The man was small and thin and he looked seedy. And then the face of the stoolie fell into place, and Byrnes said gruffly, "Hello, Danny. What're you doing here?"

"I came to see Carella," Danny said. He blinked and looked up at Byrnes. His anxiety was apparent. "How is he?"

"Bad," Byrnes said.

"Desk sergeant said they was pumping this plasma into him. He's bad, huh?"

Byrnes nodded, his face somber. Danny had told Carella he didn't know Gonzo, maybe he'd know Gonzo if he thought Carella was dying.

"This plasma's good ain't it?" Danny asked eagerly. "What they used in the war."

"Who the hell knows if it's good. You're dying nothing's good. Gonzo put three slugs in him, three right in the chest."

"Gonzo?"

Byrnes didn't say anything, cer-

tain he'd caught a note of recognition along with surprise in Danny's question.

"You're telling me a punk kid like Gonzo took Steve Carella?"

"What do you mean a punk kid?" Byrnes asked. He saw Danny stiffen and he knew he'd rushed things. "What you know, Danny?" It was an order.

Danny shrugged his thin shoulders.

"I thought Carella was one cop you gave a damn about," Byrnes said angrily.

Danny's eyes shifted away from Byrnes.

"Didn't Carella ask you to get the dope on Gonzo?"

"Yeah," Danny said, "yeah, he asked me to scout around. But nobody knew this Gonzo, you dig?"

"You saying you didn't find out anything?"

Danny hesitated.

"Carella was depending on you. I know you got something. If you'd have come forward with it sooner, your friend Carella wouldn't be flat on his back now."

"I just found out," Danny said. His face was pained and he was pleading. "Like I told you, nobody knows him so I got to race around. By God it ain't my fault that Carella—"

"All right. Now—now what'd you find out?"

"Nobody knows this Gonzo. So I ask myself, if he ain't from the neighborhood, how come he inherits the dead Hernandez' route? This don't figure. I mean, it looks like he at least knew Hernandez, don't it? So I went to see the old lady, Mrs. Hernandez. I talked to her, you know, fishing around, figuring this Gonzo was maybe a cousin or something. You know these Puerto Ricans—strong family ties."

"Is he a cousin?"

"No, but she tells me her son had a friend. He used to belong to the Sea Scouts, she says, and he used to go to these meetings up in Riverhead at a high school there. I check around, and I find out this is called the Junior Navals. Hernandez goes there to push his junk. Anyway, the kid he knows there is called Dickie Collins."

"How does this tie with Gonzo?"

"Well, listen," Danny said. "I start snooping around about this Dickie Collins kid. He used to live around here. Comes back every now and then and visits the boys—including Aníbal Hernandez, the late. Met the sister a couple of times, too. Okay, so one night there's a card game. Small time, penny ante stuff. This was only about two weeks ago, so it explains why there's nobody knows this Gonzo except four people, one of which is now dead. Now you can see why it took me so long to get the dope."

"Spell it," Byrnes said.

"There was four people in the game. A kid named Sam Di Luca,

this kid Dickie Collins, Maria Hernandez, and an older guy from the neighborhood."

"Who was the older guy?"

"The Di Luca kid don't remember—and Maria Hernandez is past saying anymore, as you know. From what I could gather, they were shooting up that night, and this Di Luca's only sixteen, so he was probably blind . . ."

Byrnes' thoughts started wrestling with the possibility that the older guy in the card game had been Larry. Older didn't necessarily mean old. From a sixteen year old's point of view, seventeen was older, and Larry was seventeen. And Byrnes remembered now, vaguely, that Larry had talked a lot about the Navy; but he'd been too busy—thought he was too busy—to pay attention and take an interest in what his son was saying. Larry's interest in the Navy tied in with this navy club or whatever it was.

"I got to explain about this Di Luca kid," Danny was saying. "He calls himself Batman. That's his nickname. They all got nicknames, which is maybe why this Gonzo thing appealed."

"Get to the point Danny."

"Okay. Sometime during the night, the older guy—"

"How old was he?"

"I don't know. What I was saying, he mentioned something about a cheap gunsel in the neighborhood. Well, it turns out this kid Dickie Collins, he's never heard the word 'gunsel.' He says, 'A gonzo? What the hell's a gonzo?' Now this broke up the joint. Maria fell off her chair, and the older guy was practically rolling on the floor and Batman damn near wet his pants, it was so funny."

"I see," Byrnes said thoughtfully.

"So for the rest of the night, they kept calling him Gonzo. That's what this Batman tells me, anyway. But there's only the four of them who know about it—Batman, Maria, Dickie, and the older guy."

"Dickie Collins is Gonzo," Byrnes repeated blankly.

"Yeah. Lives in Riverhead now. One of the cheaper neighborhoods there. You going to pick him up?"

"He shot Carella, didn't he?" Byrnes said. He reached into his wallet and took out a ten dollar bill. "Here, Danny," he said, offering the money.

Danny shook his head. "No Lieutenant, thanks."

Byrnes stared at him unbelievingly.

"One thing you can do for me, though," Danny said, somewhat embarrassed.

"What's that?"

"I'd like to go upstairs. I'd like to see Steve."

Byrnes hesitated a moment. Then he walked to the desk and said, "I'm Detective-Lieutenant Byrnes. This man is working on the case with us. I'd like him to go upstairs."

"Yes, sir," the girl said, and then she looked over toward Danny Gimp who was smiling ear to ear.

8.

They caught Dickie Collins on Christmas Eve. Carella was still hanging onto his life.

They caught Collins as he was coming out of church, where he had just lighted a candle for his dead grandmother.

They took him to the Squad Room of the 87th Precinct, and four detectives surrounded him there. One of the detectives was Peter Byrnes. The others were Havilland, Meyer, and Willis.

"What's your name?" Willis asked.

"Dickie Collins. Richard."

"What aliases do you go by?" Havilland asked.

"None."

"Ever own a gun?" Meyer asked.

"No. Never."

"You know Aníbal Hernandez?" Byrnes asked.

"The name sounds familiar."

"Did you know him, or didn't you?"

"Yeah, I knew him, I guess. I knew lots of kids in the neighborhood."

"When did you move?"

"Coupla months ago."

"Why?"

"My old man got a new job. I go where he goes. What's all the questions for? What did I do?"

"What were you doing on the night of December 17th?"

"I don't remember."

"Were you with Heranadez?"

"No, I wasn't with Hernandez. What was that, a Saturday night?"

"It was a Sunday night."

"No, I wasn't with him. I go to church every Sunday night. I light candles for my grandmother."

"And after church what'd you do?"

"I drifted around."

"Who saw you drifting?"

"Nobody. What do I need witnesses for? You trying to hang the Hernandez suicide on me?"

"Why should we try to hang a suicide on you?"

"How do I know? What else you got me in here for, if not that? You're asking questions about that night, ain't you? You're asking me if I knew Annabelle, ain't you?"

"You did know him."

"Sure, I knew him."

"From the neighborhood or from the Sea Scouts?"

"What Sea Scouts?"

"In Riverhead."

"Oh, you mean the Junior Navals. That ain't the Sea Scouts. Yeah, yeah."

"Where'd you know him from?"

"I used to say hello when I lived in the neighborhood. Then, when I met him at the Navals, we got a little friendly."

"Why'd you go to the Navals?"

"I didn't belong. I only went to watch the marching. I like to watch guys march."

"You'll do a lot of marching where you're going," Havilland said. "You're a pusher, aren't you, Collins?"

"You're dreaming."

"We've got three kids who made a buy from you. One is ready to identify you."

"Yeah? What's his name?"

"Hemingway. And he bought a sixteenth of heroin from you on the afternoon of December 20th. One of our detectives nabbed him right after he made the buy."

"If your Hemingway made a buy, he didn't get it from me."

"He said he did. He said it came from you. Did you know Hernandez was a junkie?"

"Yeah."

"He ever shoot up with you?"

"No."

"You never saw him shoot up?"

"No."

"How do you know he was a junkie?"

"Word gets around."

"Ever see him with any other junkies?"

"Sure."

"Who?"

"I don't know their names."

"Ever see him with a junkie named Larry Byrnes?" Byrnes asked.

Collins blinked. The room went stone quiet.

"I don't get this," Havilland said.

"I said Larry Byrnes," Byrnes repeated, ignoring Havilland, Meyer, and Willis.

"Never heard of him," Collins said.

"Think hard. He's my son."

Byrnes could feel the three 87th Precinct men staring at him.

"No kidding? I didn't think cops had junkie sons."

"Did you happen to see my son on the night of December 17th."

"I wouldn't know your son from a hole in the wall."

"How about the morning of December 18th."

"I still don't know him, night or morning. How would I know him?"

"He knew Hernandez."

"Lots of guys knew Hernandez. Hernandez was a pusher, didn't you know that?"

"We knew it. How'd you know it?"

"I seen him sell a couple of times."

"To whom?"

"I don't remember. Listen, you think I know the names of every junkie in the neighborhood. I never fooled with that crap myself."

"You fooled with it on the twentieth, Collins. Two days after we found Hernandez dead, you were fooling with it. This Hemingway kid used to be one of Hernandez' customers."

"Yeah? Maybe he bought that sixteenth from Hernandez' ghost, then."

"He bought it from you."

"You're gonna have a hell of a time proving that, cop."

"Maybe not. We've had a man following you for the past few days."

"Yeah? So why didn't he pinch me? Listen, you find any stuff on me when you pulled me in? What am I here for, huh? I want a lawyer."

"You're here on suspicion of murder," Byrnes said.

"Hernandez hung himself. Just try pinning that one on me."

"Hernandez died of an overdose."

"Yeh? So he was careless."

"Who put that rope around his neck, Collins?"

"Maybe your son did, Lieutenant. How about that?"

"How do you know my rank?"

"What?"

"If you don't know my son, and if you don't know anything about my son, how the hell do you know my rank?"

"One of your bulls called you Lieutenant. What do you think?"

"Nobody's called me anything since you got here, Collins. Now how about it?"

"I guessed. You look like you got leadership qualities, so I figured you were the boss. Okay?"

"Larry says he knows you," Byrnes lied.

"Who's Larry?"

"My son."

"Yeah? Lots of guys know me who I don't know. I'm popular."

"Why? Because you're pushing junk?"

"Only thing I ever pushed was my sister's baby carriage. Get off that kick, cop. It leads nowhere."

"Let's try another kick, Collins. You ever play cards?"

"Sure, I do."

"You ever play with a kid named Batman Di Luca?"

"Sure."

"Who else was in that game?"

"Which game?"

"The night you played."

"I played cards with Batman a lot. He can't play to save his ass. I always win."

"Was my son in that game?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

"What's a gunsel, Collins?"

"Gunsel? Say what is this, an English class?"

"When did you find out what a gunsel was?"

"I always knew."

"You found out that night of the card game, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't. I always knew."

"Which night, Collins?"

"Huh?"

"You said you knew what a gunsel was before that night of the card game. Which night are we talking about?"

"The . . . the last time we played I guess."

"And when was that?"

"About . . . about two weeks ago."

"And who played?"

"Me, Batman and another guy."

"Who was the third guy?"

"I don't remember."

"Batman says you brought him down."

"Me? No, it was Batman. I think he was a friend of Batman's."

"He wasn't, and he isn't. Why are you protecting him, Collins? Was it my son?"

"Why'd I protect him? I don't even know who the guy was. Listen, I'd still like to know what you're driving at. You guys think—"

"Shut up! On the night of that card game, who first mentioned the word 'gunsel'?"

"I never heard it mentioned."

"If it wasn't mentioned, where'd you get the nickname Gonzo?"

"Gonzo? Who's got a nickname Gonzo? Everybody calls me Dickie."

"Except those three kids who came to make the buy from you."

"Oh? Well, that explains it. You've got the wrong guy. You're looking for a Gonzo. My name is Dickie. Collins. Hey, maybe that's where you slipped up. Collins and Gonzo sound a little . . ."

"All right, let's cut the crap," Havilland said sharply.

"Well, I . . ."

"We know what happened at the card game. We know all about the gunsel routine and the way you goofed and called it 'gonzo' and the way it brought down the house, and the way you were called Gonzo the rest of the night. Batman told us all about it, and Batman'll swear to it. We figure the rest like this, pal. We figure you used the Gonzo tag when you took over Hernandez' trade because you didn't figure it was wise to identify your own name with your identity as a pusher. Okay, so these kids were looking for Gonzo, and they found him, and one of them bought a sixteenth from you, and he'll swear to that, too. Now how about the rest?"

"What rest?"

"How about the cop you shot?"

"What?"

"How about that rope you put around Hernandez' neck? You knew we'd see through that phony suicide. You wanted us to know it was murder. Why?"

"What are yuh talking about?"

"How about the slash job you did on Maria?"

"Listen, listen, I didn't . . ."

"How about shoving that old lady down the airshaft?"

"Me? Holy Jesus, I didn't do—"

"Which one did you do?"

"None of them! Holy Jesus, what do you take me for?"

"You shot that cop, Gonzo!"

"No, I didn't."

"We know you did, Gonzo. He told us."

"Stop calling me Gonzo. My name's Dickie."

"Okay, *Dickie*. Why'd you kill Hernandez? To get his two-bit business?"

"Don't be stupid."

"Then why?" Byrnes shouted. "To drag my son in on it? How'd Larry's fingerprints get on that syringe?"

"How do I know? What syringe?"

"The syringe found with Hernandez."

"I didn't know there was one."

"There was. Were you trying to frame my son for this? You got his prints on the syringe. To make sure we didn't think Hernandez committed suicide with an overdose, you used that rope gimmick. Why? Why were you trying to stick a murder rap on my son?"

"Stop harping on your son. Your son can go drop dead, for all I care."

"Who's the man that phones me, Gonzo?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Somebody called to tell me about my son and that syringe. Was he the guy at that card game?"

"I don't know who that guy was."

"The same guy who called me, isn't he?"

"I don't know who calls you."

"The guy who helped you kill Hernandez, isn't it?"

"I didn't kill Hernandez."

"And Maria, and the old lady . . ."

"I didn't kill anybody."

"You killed a cop," Willis snapped. "A cop named Steve Carella. You shot him on Friday, Collins, and he's still fighting for his life. He *told* us you shot him. Why don't you tell us the rest of it, and make it easy for yourself?"

"There's nothing to tell. I'm clean. If your cop dies, you ain't got a thing on me. I ain't got a gun, and I wasn't carrying no junk. So do me something."

"We're gonna do you a lot, pal," Havilland said. "In about three seconds flat, I'm gonna beat the hell out of you."

"Go ahead. See what that gets you. I ain't involved in none of this. Your cop is crazy. I didn't shoot him, and I got nothing to do with Hernandez, either. You want to know something?" He was putting the question directly to Byrnes. "You're always asking me about your son, well I'll tell you something about him. I know for a fact that he had a big argument with Hernandez the day he was killed. And the funny thing about it, the only witness to it was his sister, Maria, and she gets bumped off."

"My son was with me on the night Maria Hernandez was killed," Byrnes said flatly.

"Sure. You was holding hands, wasn't you? All right. So what you going to do, build a friendship at the Junior Navals into a federal case?"

"No," Byrnes said, "but we're going to build your footprint into a murder case, that's for sure."

"My *what*?"

"The footprint we found near Carella's body," Byrnes lied. "We're

going to check it against every pair of shoes you own. If it matches up, you're . . ."

"We were standing on stone!" Collins shouted.

And that was it.

Collins blinked, realizing it was too late to turn back now, realizing they had him. "Okay," he said, "I shot him. But only because he was going to take me in. I didn't want to get tied in with this other stuff. I had nothing to do with killing Hernandez or his sister. Nothing. And I never saw that old lady in my life."

"Who killed them?" Byrnes asked.

Collins was silent for a moment.

"Douglas Patt," he said at last.

Willis was already starting for his coat. "No," Byrnes called, "I want him. What's his address, Collins?"

It was very cold up on the roof. You could see almost the entire city from up there, the lights winking.

He stood for a moment and looked out past the rooftops, and he wondered how everything could have gone so wrong. The plan seemed like such a good one, and yet it had gone wrong. *Too many people,* he thought. Whenever there are too many people, things go wrong. They don't work out.

He sighed and turned his back to the cutting wind. A plan so good should have worked out better. Despondently, he walked to the pigeon coop. He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door, hanging the lock back on the latch. He stepped into the coop, and the pigeons—alarmed for a moment—beat their wings and then resolved their private fears and settled down again.

He saw the female fantail almost instantly.

She lay on the floor of the coop, and he knew at once that she was dead. Gently, he bent down and picked her up, and he held her on his widespread hands, staring at her, as if staring would bring her back to life.

Everything seemed suddenly too much to bear. Everything seemed to have been leading to an ultimate, crushing defeat. He kept watching the bird, aware that his hands were trembling, but unable to stop them. He went out of the coop then, still holding the bird in his hands. He walked across the roof, and he sat with his back to one of the chimney pots. He put the bird down gently at his feet, and then — as if his hands were too idle now that they were empty—he picked up a loose brick and turned it over and over in his hands, like a potter working with wet clay. He was turning the brick, slowly, slowly, when the man came up onto the roof.

The man looked around for a moment and then walked directly to where he was sitting.

"Douglas Patt?" the man asked.

"Yes?" he answered. He looked up into the man's eyes. The eyes were very hard. The man stood with his shoulders hunched against the wind, his hands in his pockets.

"I'm Lieutenant Byrnes," the man said.

"Oh," Patt answered.

They looked at each other silently for a long time. Patt made no motion to rise. Slowly, he kept turning the brick over in his hands, the dead bird at his feet.

"How did you get to me?" he asked at last.

"Dickie Collins," Byrnes said.

"Mmm," Patt said. He didn't seem to care very much. "Too many people." He looked down at the bird. He gripped the brick more tightly in one hand.

"What'd you hope to get out of this, Patt?" Byrnes asked.

"Me?" Patt said. He made a motion to rise, and Byrnes moved quickly and effortlessly, so that by the time Patt was squatting on his haunches he was looking into the level muzzle of Byrnes' pistol. But Patt seemed not to notice the gun. He seemed intent only on studying the dead bird at his feet. He moved the bird with one hand, holding the brick in the other hand. "Me? What did I want out of this? A chance, Lieutenant. Big time, Lieutenant."

"How?"

"This kid, Gonzo—you know about Gonzo, don't you? This kid, Gonzo, he came to me and said, 'How do you like that? Annabelle tells me he's got a junkie friend whose old man runs the dicks at the 87th.' That's what Gonzo said to me, Lieutenant."

Byrnes watched him. Patt had lifted the brick slowly, and now he brought it down almost gently, but with a gentle force, smashing it against the body of the dead pigeon. He brought back the brick again, and again he hit the bird with it. There was blood on the brick now, and feathers. He brought it back unconsciously, and then down again, almost as if he were unaware of what he was doing to the bird.

"So I had your son rigged for a murder rap, Lieutenant. I was sure you'd cooperate."

He kept pounding with the brick. Byrnes pulled his eyes away from the disintegrating bird.

"I figured that was what you'd done. What kind of cooperation did you expect?"

"I push," Patt said. "I wanted hands off from you or any of your dicks. I wanted to be free to roam the precinct and push wherever I wanted to, without being afraid of getting pinched. That's what I wanted, Lieutenant."

"You'd never have got it," Byrnes said. "Not from me, and not from any cop."

Patt shrugged. "It looked sweet,

Lieutenant. I sold this little Annabelle jerk a bill of goods. I told him all I wanted was a syringe with your son's prints on it. He got your son in and gave him a free fix, and then he switched syringes before your son left that night. I was waiting. When your son took off, I went in to see Annabelle. He was nodding, half-blind. I loaded a syringe with enough H to knock the top of his head off. Then I put the rope around his neck. I figured the police would be smart enough to know it was tied there after he was killed. I wanted them to know it was homicide, because I was measuring your son for the rap. Your son was my bargaining tool, Lieutenant. My bargaining tool for a free precinct."

"A free precinct," Byrnes repeated.

"Mmm, yes," Patt said. "But it didn't work out, did it? And then there was Maria who knew too much and the old woman who talked too much – how do these things get so complicated?"

He stopped pounding and looked down at the tar suddenly. The bird was a crushed mass of bloody pulp and feathers. The brick was stained with blood, as were Patt's hands. He looked at the pigeon, and then he looked at the brick and his hands as if he were seeing them for the first time. And then, he looked at Byrnes.

"You'd better come with me," Byrnes said.

They booked him at the 87th. They charged him with the murder of three people. And after he'd been booked, Byrnes went up to his office, and he stood looking out over the park, and then he saw the clock in the park tower, and the clock told him it was five minutes to midnight.

Five minutes to Christmas.

He went to his telephone.

"Yes?" the desk sergeant said.

"This is the Lieutenant," Byrnes said. "Can I have a line, please?"

"Yes, sir."

He waited for his dial tone, and then he dialed his Calm's Point number, and Harriet answered the phone.

"Hello, Harriet," he said.

"Hello, Peter."

"How is he?"

"I think he's going to be all right," she said.

"He's better?"

"Better than he was, Peter. He doesn't seem . . . he hasn't been vomiting or fidgeting or behaving like a wild man. I think he's licked it physically, Peter. The rest is up to him."

"Yes," Byrnes said. "Is he awake?"

"Yes, he is."

"Let me talk to him."

"Certainly, darling."

"Harriet?"

"Yes?"

"I know I've been chasing around, but I wanted you to know —I mean, all this running around

these past few days . . ."

"Peter," she said gently, "I married a cop."

"I know you did. I'm grateful for it. Merry Christmas, Harriet."

"Come home as soon as you can, darling. I'll get Larry."

Byrnes waited. In a little while, his son came to the phone.

"Dad?"

"Hello, Larry. How are you feeling?"

"Much better."

"Good, Good."

There was a long silence.

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry for the way . . . for, you know, what I've done. It's going to be different."

"A lot of things are going to be different, Larry," Byrnes promised.

"Will you be coming home soon?"

"Well, I wanted to wind up . . ." Byrnes stopped. "Yes, I'll be home very soon. I want to stop off at the hospital, and then I'll be right home."

"We'll wait up, Dad."

"Fine, I'd like that." Byrnes paused. "You really feel all right, Larry?"

"Well, I'm getting there," Larry said, and Byrnes thought he detected a smile in his son's voice.

"Good. Merry Christmas, son."

"We'll be waiting."

Byrnes hung up and then put on his overcoat. He was suddenly feeling quite good about everything. They had caught Patt, and they had caught Collins, and his son would be all right, he was sure his son would be all right, and now there remained only Carella, and he was sure Carella would pull through, too. Damnit, you can't shoot a good cop and expect him to die! Not a cop like Carella!

He walked all the way to the hospital. He took the elevator up to the eighth floor, and the doors slid open and he stepped into the corridor, and it took a moment to orient himself and then he started off towards Carella's room, and it took another moment for the new feeling to attack him. For here in the cool antiseptic sterility of the hospital, he was no longer certain about Steve Carella. Here he had his first doubts, and his step slowed as he approached the room.

He saw Carella's wife then.

At first she was only a small figure at the end of the corridor, and then she walked closer and he watched her. Her hands were wrung together at her waist, and her head was bent, and Byrnes watched her and felt a new dread, a dread that attacked his stomach and his mind. There was defeat in the curve of her body, defeat in the droop of her head.

Carella, he thought. *Oh God, Steve, no . . .*

He rushed to her, and she looked up at him, and her face was streaked with tears, and when he

saw the tears on the face of Steve Carella's wife, he was suddenly barren inside, barren and cold, and he wanted to break from her and run down the corridor, escape the pain in her eyes, escape what he saw there: Steve was dead.

But she threw herself into Byrnes' arms, and Byrnes held her close to him, feeling for all the world as if she were his daughter, surprised to find tears on his own face.

Into the hospital, faintly, came the sound of church bells tolling.

It was Christmas day.

Exhibit A

The evidence in an illegal liquor trial scheduled in South Norfolk, Virginia, will be a large kettle of dishwater. Police said they raided a restaurant and the owner tried to dispose of the liquor by mixing it with the dishwater in the sink. The trick failed, officers added, because the owner had far more liquor than dishwater.

Self Study

Harold Garrison, county probation officer in Los Angeles, told police that a thief broke into his locked car and stole five books from the front seat. The books were on criminal psychology, juvenile delinquency and probation procedures.

Good, Clean Fun

State excise police raided a country club at Mt. Vernon, Indiana, but quickly retreated with apologies. The club had advertised a Las Vegas Night program, complete with roulette wheels. But the officers found the guests playing with phony money with proceeds of the party to be donated to a mental health campaign.

Unofficial

Gov. Orville Freeman of Minnesota recently made a tour of the state prison at Stillwater. After the visit one of the prisoners, writing in the prison weekly, said he accidentally bumped into the governor's elbow. "Pardon me," said the convict. "Certainly," replied the governor. But, complained the writer, the governor didn't put it in writing.

They kept pounding away at me: "Ellison's dead — murdered. Where's the gun?" I wanted them to find it; but I couldn't tell.

The Broken Window

BY EARLE BASINSKY, JR.

"WHERE's the gun?" they demanded.

"I don't know," I said wearily. "Honest to God, I don't know. I didn't see it. I've never seen it."

Somebody laughed and I closed my eyes. But that didn't help. The glare of the overhead light leaked

in redly through my tightly shut lids. The straight armless chair was hard and uncomfortable. My mouth was cotton fluff. I felt like I hadn't had any water in days.

"Open your eyes," somebody said, "and answer our questions. This isn't any fun for us either. Now let's have some straight answers. You think Ellison was shot without a gun? Or maybe that hole in both sides of his head got there because he sneezed just a little too hard."

I licked my lips. That didn't help my thirst. I opened my eyes, but I couldn't see anything; the light was too strong. "Listen," I said desperately, "there wasn't any gun. You've got to believe that. I never was in any trouble before. I never even saw the inside of a police station except to pay a parking fine. I never was mixed up in a crime of any sort. I wouldn't kill anybody—I—"

Somebody laughed again, harshly, without humor. "We've heard all this before, now go over it again. Go slow. Go easy. We're your friends here. We're trying to help you."

Yes, I thought, you're my friends. Like hell. Something has happened, there's been a murder and you can't find the gun and I, apparently, can't find the gun, and you're my friends all right. Like hell. If I heard about that gun one more time, I'd scream 'till I bust a gut. I took a deep breath. "Ellison called me up about seven-thirty last night, asked me to come out to his house. I didn't want to go, but he said he had something for me. A wedding present for me and Susan. I'd been avoiding Ellison for weeks, but, I—I—"

A voice broke through. "Susan Anderson. She's the girl you were going to marry?"

"Yes. I've told you that."

"Didn't Ellison think she was *his* girl?"

"I don't know what he thought. I don't care. She was ***my*** girl and we were going to be married. That's all I know. She loved me, not him!"

Somebody snorted. "Maybe you had a fight over the girl. It looks that way you know? And then you killed him."

Silence.

"What did you do with the gun after you shot him?"

"No. No!" I was shouting. "It wasn't that way. Not at all. You've got to believe me. I went to his house. He wasn't there. I called his name. He didn't answer. Then I remembered his little work room that he'd built out back. I started out the kitchen door when I heard the shot. I started to run. When I opened the door of the shack and went inside, he was lying on his face . . . dead."

Nobody said anything.

"I went back to his house and called the police. Right away. I didn't see any gun then or ever. I swear it. You've got to believe me!"

But they didn't. They took me

back to a cell where it was dim and cool and remote. And left me there with my head buried in my hands.

I told myself to take it easy, to bide my time. I thought about James Ellison. The first time he ever saw me—way back in grade school—I think Ellison hated me. I could see his hate shining strong and clear even then, in his little, black, beady eyes.

Outwardly, he was a smiling loser, a good sport. People said winning or losing didn't matter to him. It was the game, whatever it might be, that was all important.

But they were wrong. Because underneath that smooth, suave exterior, hate and terror slept side by side. I *knew,* because I had beaten James too often—I'd beaten him in everything we had done.

But when I took Susan away from him, that was the last straw. He threatened to kill me or her—or both of us—and I knew he meant it.

Susan, lovely Susan, with the fresh smile and eyes so clear it was like looking into crystal springs; with a lithe body and high pointed breasts, full, and ripe. Anything, everything was worth doing for her.

I figured I'd already let enough time go by and so I jumped to my feet and ran to the cell door. "Shalley!" I called. "Shalley! Get me Shalley!"

A bored looking guard stuck his head around the end of the corridor. "You want Shalley?" he growled.

"Yes. Now. Right away."

He disappeared. Shalley was the detective assigned to the case. I think he felt from the beginning that I was telling the truth. But he was the only one, and he was small fry. I had to make them all believe I was telling the truth.

Finally, Shalley came down the corridor—a thin, stooped man with iron gray hair. He stopped in front of my door. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes. Let's go out to Ellison's place again." I had to make him do that—somehow.

"You nuts or something. We've been over that place a hundred times. With a fine tooth comb. And the blocks around it. We found nothing."

"I know, but this is different. I've got an idea. I think I know what happened now. But we've got to go out there. We've got to!"

Shalley's eyes were a metallic blue and, right then, they were just a little incredulous. He scratched his head. "What do you know now that you didn't know a while ago?"

"I just remembered something," I said. "After I heard the shot, I heard the sound of glass breaking. A tinkling sound. That could have had something to do with Ellison's death. It must have!"

"I'll go see the Captain," Shalley said. "And we'll see. But I can't promise anything."

A half-hour dragged by and then he was back with the guard. They let me out and we drove over to Ellison's house—Shalley and myself and another detective. Before we got out of the car, Shalley said coldly, "No funny stuff, remember. I'd hate to have to put a bullet through you."

I didn't say anything and we walked back to the place where I'd found Ellison. We went inside and stood there looking around at the dust and the power tools in the place.

"You say you heard glass breaking?" Shalley asked.

"Yes." My heart was pounding like a crazy tom-tom. He had to find that damned gun now.

Shalley went outside. He came back in a few minutes with some shards of broken glass in his hand. "This was outside," he said. He looked up. There by the ceiling you could see where one pane of glass had been knocked out of the small windows. Up high. "Get me that ladder," Shalley said, pointing to a ladder by the door.

I got the ladder and opened it; Shalley climbed up slowly.

He found the gun. In the ceiling. Shalley came down and he was smiling. He wrapped the gun in his handkerchief. "A very clever contraption," he said, clapping me on the back. My knees felt weak with relief, and I wasn't sure if I could keep from caving in. There was a taste of bile in my mouth.

"It was a roller from a window shade," Shalley said. "The gun was in that little trap door, well concealed," he said. "Came down on a piece of twine and when you release the gun it'll draw back up and the door'll close. Very ingenious."

"It certainly was," I said.

"We never thought about the ceiling," Shalley said.

"No," I said, "you didn't."

"Who would?"

We went back to headquarters and the prints on the gun were Ellison's. There was much handshaking and much smiling and plenty of good will. Like at a Rotary meeting. Oh, they were nice about it, all right. I was the wrong man and they were sorry and they were nice about it. Forget it, they said. Go on home, now, and get a good night's sleep.

Sure.

"Ellison must have hated you very much," Shalley told me. "He didn't have the guts to kill you, but in that crazy warped mind of his, he figured he could knock himself off and get you blamed for it. You'd either get life or the chair. And he almost got away with it, didn't he?"

"Yes," I said, "almost."

"If Ellison hadn't given that gun a push when he fell forward and knocked out that pane of glass, he'd of had you."

"Yes," I said.

Shalley smiled. "He was dead

when he let go of the gun. Funny, but he must've given it a push when he fell forward and it swung against the window. That's what knocked out the glass. Instead of killing you after death, he freed you."

"That was nice of him," I said.

"It's good you remembered about the glass."

"Yes."

"Well you can go now," Shalley said. We shook hands and I went outside and stood on the steps of the station, looking out into the street at the cars and the throngs of people on the sidewalk.

Air never smelled sweeter.

I walked down the steps and turned right on the sidewalk. I was a free man.

Susan was waiting somewhere and I had to see her. With Ellison dead, out of the way, I no longer had to worry about her safety.

And I didn't have to worry about myself, either. The cops would never know that I'd gone out to Ellison's place while Ellison was at work and that I'd rigged the trap door in the ceiling, and the roller, and the twine. They'd never know how I got Ellison to handle the gun so it would have his prints on it, and then kept it wrapped in a piece of silk for weeks. They'd never know any of this, because I'd played it all very smart. I hadn't missed up on a detail. I'd taken my time to make it all convincing. I hadn't even hurried to tell them about the glass – which I had broken, of course, when I'd rigged everything else.

I walked faster, excitement coursing through me. They'd never know how much I wanted them to find that gun.

Costs Multiply

Luther Lairson, Lexington, Kentucky, was fined $25 for dumping garbage on the roadside. Police said Lairson was apprehended when they found a letter addressed to Lairson in the garbage. The letter was a bill from a commercial garbage collector for less than the amount of the fine.

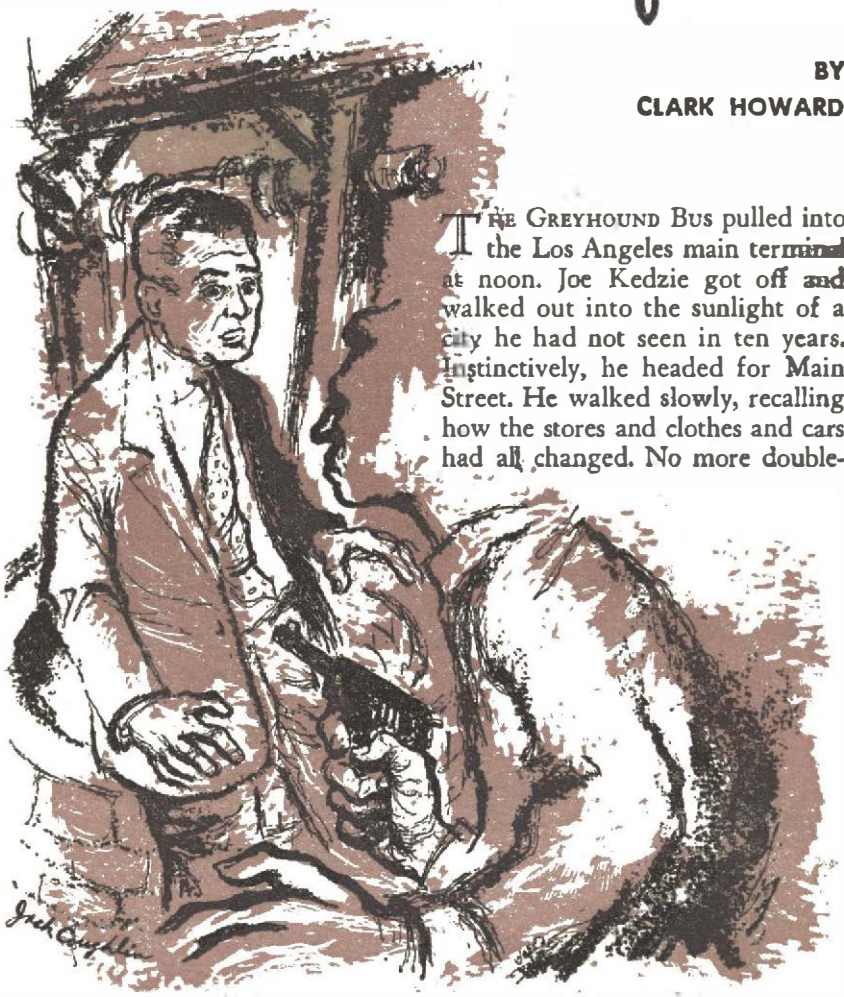
Joy Knows No Grief

Francis L. Klein Jr., 20, was so delighted when his 15 day jail sentence at Centreville, Michigan, for petty larceny was completed that he ripped his jail overalls to shreds. He was immediately charged with malicious destruction of jail property and received another 15 day sentence.

Enough Rope for Two

Ten years of his life, that's what he'd paid for the hundred grand. He intended to get every cent of it.

BY
CLARK HOWARD



THE GREYHOUND BUS pulled into the Los Angeles main terminal at noon. Joe Kedzie got off and walked out into the sunlight of a city he had not seen in ten years. Instinctively, he headed for Main Street. He walked slowly, recalling how the stores and clothes and cars had all changed. No more double-

breasted suits. Very few black cars —mostly red and yellow and pink and chartreuse now. The stores were all modern, larger, with a lot of glass. And the skirts—a little longer maybe, but tight in the right places. He pushed the thought of women from his mind. There would be time for them later. After he had his hundred grand.

At Main he turned the corner and began to pass the cheap bars and honky tonks he had known so well. He remembered the shooting gallery, the penny arcade, the strip joints, the cafe where the pushers made — and probably still make — their headquarters. This part of the world will never change, he thought. If I was sent up for another ten years, it would still be the same when I got back again.

Between a bar and a Chinese hand laundry was the entrance to the Main Line Hotel. Kedzie opened the door and walked up the six steps to the lobby. A young, pimply-faced man was behind the desk. He held a racing form and studied it sleepily. Kedzie stood at the desk until it became apparent that the youth was ignoring him; he then reached across the counter and yanked the racing form out of his hand. The clerk jumped up, his face flushing.

"What's the idea!" he demanded.

"Just want a little service," said Kedzie calmly, laying the paper on the desk. "Does Madge Griffin still live here?"

The desk clerk tried to act tough. "Who wants to know?"

"Don't play games with me, punk," said Kedzie harshly, "or I'll break your arm! Does Madge Griffin live here or doesn't she?"

"She lives here," said the clerk, scared now. "Room two-twelve."

Kedzie nodded. He left the desk and walked across the lobby and up a flight of stairs. Two-twelve was the last room at the end of the dingy hallway. He stood before the door and lighted a cigarette, then rapped softly. Madge's voice came through the door.

"Who is it?"

"Errol Flynn. Open up."

He heard her walk across the room; then the door opened. She stood framed in the doorway, her eyes widening, plainly startled.

"Joe!"

"Hello, Madge."

She moved aside, as he moved forward, to let him enter. The room was small, not as crummy as he had expected, but still crummy enough. He walked to a chair and sat down. She watched him curiously for a moment, then closed the door and leaned back against it.

"How've you been, Madge?" he asked in his matter-of-fact tone, as if he had seen her a month ago instead of ten years ago.

"I've been getting along, Joe. How have you been?"

He grunted, but did not answer. He looked her over, taking his

time. Ten years older, but she still had it, and just enough of it wherever it belonged. He decided that she was just a little heavier in the hips than when she had been his girl. Still—and this thought amused him—she wasn't then, and still wasn't now, the kind you would want if you had a hundred grand.

"How'd you know where to find me, Joe?" she asked suddenly.

"Just a guess. I figured you'd come back here. It's just about your speed."

"What's that supposed to mean?" she demanded, her eyes flashing angrily.

"Forget it, baby," he said easily, and to change the subject added, "Have you got a drink?"

She walked over to the closet and took a nearly full bottle of gin from the shelf. "There's nothing to mix it with," she said. "Want it straight?"

He shook his head. "It would probably knock me out. Forget it."

She put the bottle back on the shelf. Kedzie crushed out his cigarette and lighted a fresh one. It figures, he thought. A bottle of gin in the closet. Madge never could stand the stuff. But gin was always Maxie's drink. He's not far away. Just wait and be patient. He'll show up.

Madge walked over to the bed and sat down. They began to talk, idly, pleasantly. Two people have a lot to talk about after ten years. Kedzie waited for her to mention Maxie, but she did not. That convinced him that she knew where he was. And the minute she left the room and got to a telephone, Maxie would know that he, Kedzie, was back in town.

They talked until five o'clock. Finally she asked, "What are you going to do now, Joe?"

He decided to play it straight. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, have you got a place to stay tonight?"

"No, not yet. I'm so used to having my bunk waiting for me, I guess I forgot that I have to take care of those things myself now." The bait had been dropped. He waited for her to snap at it. After a moment's hesitation, she did.

"Why don't you let me get you a room here, Joe? Then you won't have to bother looking for a place."

"Well, I don't know, Madge. I don't—"

"Look, I'll tell you what—I'll go down to the desk and get you a room, and then go down the street to Jasi's and get a pizza and some cold beer. You can lay down and rest while I'm gone; then when I get back, we can eat right here in the room. You looked tired, Joe. Why don't you take off your coat and lay down for awhile."

"Well, I am pretty tired. First bus ride in ten years, you know."

"You just rest, Joe." She picked up her purse quickly. "I'll only be a couple minutes."

When she was gone, he took off

his coat and stretched out on the bed. It won't be long now, he thought. Five minutes from now she'll be in a phone booth. Maxie should be here by eight o'clock.

Madge returned an hour later with the food. Kedzie pulled a small writing desk up to the bed and put the pizza on it. He sat down on the side of the bed and began to eat. Madge opened two cans of beer and brought them to the table. She drew up a chair opposite him and sat down.

Kedzie ate sparingly and left half the beer in the can. He was not accustomed to highly seasoned food, much less alcohol. Later, when he had his money, he would eat only of the best.

It was nearly seven when they finished eating. Kedzie lighted a cigarette and walked over to the open window and the lights of Main Street.

Madge walked over and stood beside him. "What are you thinking about, Joe?" she asked.

"Just the lights, down there—how many times I dreamed about them while I was in the Joint."

"Was it really bad, Joe—all those years?" Her voice was gentle, sincere. It was a tone that Joe Kedzie did not accept coming from her.

"No," he said sarcastically, "it was a hell of a lot of fun. I wanted to stay, but they wouldn't let me. Said you had to leave when your time was up."

Once again he saw the anger flash in her eyes. He didn't care. She had served her purpose as far as he was concerned, for she had told Maxie where to find him.

"You always were like that, Joe!" she said hotly. "Always crawling into your shell, always keeping everything to yourself, never trusting anybody. You haven't changed a bit in ten years!"

He looked at her coldly, feeling the urge to slam his fist into her face. He wanted to tell her he hadn't grown stupid in ten years, that he wasn't so blind he hadn't figured out she and Maxie had caused him to fall after the payroll job. He wanted to scream out to her that he had thought about that possibility even before the job. He wanted to let her know the reason they hadn't pulled off their little double-cross completely was because he had figured out another hiding place for the money beforehand, had put it in a place only he knew about.

Kedzie was at the point of cursing her, when a knock sounded at the door. A moment's hesitation, apprehension, and Madge walked over to the door, opening it.

For the second time that day, Joe Kedzie looked upon a face he had not seen in ten years. Maxie had not changed much. He still looked like what he was—a sharpie. You can spot a guy like him anywhere, thought Kedzie. Handsome,

always smiling, shifty-eyed, overdressed. The kind that's always on the make for a fast buck.

"Hello, Joe-boy," said Maxie, with a false air of friendliness.

"Hello, Maxie." You son of a bitch, thought Kedzie, you took ten years away from me!

Maxie stepped in and closed the door. He walked casually to the bed and sat down. Madge moved to a chair in the corner, away from both men. Kedzie dropped his cigarette out the window and sat back against the sill.

"Heard you were out, Joe-boy," said Maxie. "Thought I better look you up before you left town."

"What makes you think I'm leaving town?" asked Kedzie calmly.

Maxie flashed the wide smile that was his trademark. He leaned back on his elbows. "Just thought you might be heading back toward El Paso. Thought maybe you might have left something around there someplace."

"The only thing I left in El Paso was a day of glory for the local cops."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing that you've got any interest in, buddy."

Maxie sat up quickly. His jaw tightened and both hands closed into fists. "Look, Joe," he said harshly, "I've waited for that dough as long as you have! I've got a right to my share!"

Kedzie remained calm. He casually lighted another cigarette. "The only difference is, Maxie," he said easily, "is that you waited outside while I waited inside."

"That's the breaks, Joe." Maxie stood up. His face was serious, challenging. "The money's still only half yours."

Kedzie looked down at the floor. There was a hundred thousand dollars riding on this play. There was no sense in risking it all with Maxie at this late date. He thought of the tail that had followed him from prison, that had expected to be taken right to the dough; the trouble he'd had throwing the tail clear off the track. After all that, it made sense to play it easy for awhile longer.

"I'll lay it on the line for you, Maxie," he said. "I figure I'm entitled to that dough more than you. I figure I've earned it by taking the rap for the job. So I don't intend to split that package with you or anybody else."

Anger showed plainly on Maxie's face. Got to make it good, thought Kedzie. If this doesn't work I'll have to kill him right now, right here. He continued talking.

"The only thing that's holding me back is that I need a stake to get to the dough. I need some cash —a couple of hundred at least—and a car. I want some clothes, so I can get out of this burlap I'm wearing."

Maxie's anger had clearly changed from anger to curiosity. It's working, thought Kedzie.

"I'll make a deal with you," Kedzie went on. "You get me a car, a couple of hundred bucks, and some decent clothes, and I'll cut you in for a quarter of the dough. You'll get twenty-five grand, no strings attached. How about it?"

Maxie looked thoughtfully at Kedzie, thinking that it wouldn't be easy to force Kedzie to tell him where the money was hidden.

"I'll go along with that, Joe-boy," he said, and added quickly, "—but only on one condition."

"Name it," said Kedzie.

"I stay with you every minute from here on out, and we go for the money together."

"How about the car," asked Kedzie, "and the other things?"

"I'll fix it so Madge can get everything you want. You and me will stay right here in this room until we're ready to go for the money."

"It's a deal," said Kedzie. "And if you can get what I need tonight, we'll leave in the morning."

"The sooner the better," grinned Maxie eagerly. "Madge can go out and rent a car tonight. On the way back she can stop at my place and pick up clothes for you."

"How about the two hundred?"

Maxie smiled. "I've got three bills in my pocket right now. A long shot came in at Hollywood Park today. So we're all set, Joe-boy. Two days from now we can be in El Paso."

It was Joe Kedzie's turn to smile. "We're not going to El Paso, partner," he said slyly. "Surprised?"

Maxie's grin vanished and suspicion shadowed his face. "What do you mean," he asked quickly.

"The dough isn't in El Paso. It's in New Mexico—right out in the middle of nowhere."

Suddenly Maxie began to laugh, somewhat hysterically. He laughed long and loud. He was thinking of all the hours and days he had spent asking questions in El Paso, trying to follow every move Joe Kedzie had made, trying to trace where Kedzie had hidden the money.

Joe Kedzie also began to laugh, but he was not thinking about the past, only the future.

At ten minutes before eight the next morning, Joe Kedzie and Maxie walked out of the Main Line Hotel onto Main Street. Kedzie had shed the rough grey suit the prison had discharged him in, and now wore slacks and a short-sleeved sport shirt. On his arm he held one of Maxie's sport coats. Maxie, following him, carried a small tan suitcase with their extra clothes.

They walked down the block to a green Ford sedan Madge had rented for them. Maxie unlocked the car and tossed the suitcase on the back seat.

"You drive," said Kedzie. "I don't have a license." Maxie nodded and slid behind the wheel. He turned the ignition on and started the motor. Before he could shift into gear Kedzie spoke again.

"How about the two hundred, Maxie?"

Maxie looked at him oddly. "I've got it," he said flatly.

"Give it to me," said Kedzie.

Maxie shook his head in anger and disgust, but he drew a wallet from his inside coat pocket and counted out two hundred dollars in tens and twenties. He tossed the bills, with a display of anger, on the seat between them. Kedzie gathered them up, folded them neatly in half, and put them in his shirt pocket.

They drove out to Sunset Boulevard, then swung onto the Ramona Freeway. Kedzie sat back and relaxed, feeling fresh and invigorated on his first free morning in ten years. He ignored Maxie completely and interested himself in looking out the window at the stores and the cars and the girls.

The car sped along, through Monterey Park, Covina, past Pomona, and on into San Bernardino. By eleven o'clock they had reached Indio. They stopped for gas and Kedzie got out and picked up a roadmap. They left Indio on Route 99, heading south.

At one o'clock they pulled into El Centro. Maxie stopped at the first highway restaurant outside town and they went in and ordered lunch. Kedzie borrowed a pencil from the waitress and spread the roadmap out on the table. He began to figure their mileage. When he was finished, he said, "It's a little over three hundred to Tucson. If we drive straight through, we should make it by nine tonight."

"How far do we have to go past Tucson," asked Maxie irritably.

"Not far," said Kedzie.

"I asked how far," said Maxie.

"Getting anxious, Maxie?" Joe Kedzie asked, smiling.

Maxie cursed as he got up from the table. He went over to a pinball machine and dropped a coin into it. Kedzie watched him, thinking, If you'd spent the last ten years where I did, rat, you'd have more patience.

They pulled into Tucson, tired and dirty, at nine-fifteen that night. All along the highway they saw NO VACANCY signs lighting their path. Finally, five miles past the eastern city limits, they found a motel room.

Maxie registered at the office and they dropped the suitcase off at the room. Then they drove back into Tucson for something to eat. It was nearly midnight when they returned to the motel and went to bed.

By eight o'clock the next morning, they were on the road again. Kedzie decided he'd take a chance and drive; he was tired of just sitting. Fifty miles southeast of Tucson they turned off onto Route 666 and headed north. The highway made a wide, sweeping arc around the Dos Cabezas mountain range, then swung south again. Shortly before eleven o'clock they crossed the State Line into New

Mexico. The first roadsign they saw said: LORDSBURG 20 MILES.

"We're about there," said Kedzie casually. "It's about an hour's drive after we pass Lordsburg." Maxie grunted. "We'll have to stop in Lordsburg," continued Kedzie. "There's some things I have to buy."

Maxie glanced at him suspiciously. "Like what, for instance," he asked irritably.

"Like a long piece of rope, for instance."

"What the hell do we need a rope for?" demanded Maxie.

"You want the money, don't you? Well, we'll need a rope to get it. The package is at the bottom of a forty-foot well that must've gone dry a long time ago."

Maxie's mouth dropped open. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"We'll need some other things, too—a flashlight, maybe a small shovel in case we have to do some digging. I guess a couple of feet of sand could have blown down that well in all this time."

In Lordsburg they stopped at the first large General Store they came to. Inside, Kedzie asked the clerk for sixty feet of strong rope. The clerk led him into the storeroom and showed him several large bolts of rope. Kedzie picked out the sturdiest he could find and the clerk began to measure off sixty feet. Kedzie walked back out into the store and picked up a small hand shovel from a display rack. He handed it to Maxie. When the clerk brought the heavy roll of rope out, Kedzie took this, too, and handed it to Maxie.

"Put this stuff in the car," he said easily. "I'll get a flashlight and be right out."

Maxie turned and carried the things out of the store. After Kedzie had picked out a flashlight and batteries, he walked across the room to a glass showcase. He appeared casual as he looked over the merchandise. When the clerk approached him, he said, "Let's see one of those target pistols."

The clerk opened the case and took out a medium-sized, black automatic pistol. "This is the Sports Standard," he said, going into his sales pitch. "One of the best made. Only weighs half a pound. Shoots .22 shorts or longs. A real accurate piece for targets or small game."

"How much for this one?" asked Kedzie.

"That's the six-and-three-quarter barrel. It'll run you forty-four fifty plus tax."

"Okay," said Kedzie quickly, glancing toward the front door. "Give me a box of shells too, and then figure up the whole bill.

Outside, Maxie closed the door of the car and walked back to the store to see what was keeping Kedzie. When he looked through the window, he saw Kedzie forcing bullets into a magazine. A new

target pistol lay on the counter before him. Maxie's face turned white and his hands began to tremble. He watched Kedzie shove the loaded magazine into the grip of the weapon and tuck the gun in his belt, and under his shirt.

Maxie turned and walked back to the car, feeling sick. He opened the door and slid under the wheel. He looked at the dashboard. Kedzie had done all the driving that morning; he had the car keys. He knows, thought Maxie helplessly. He knows I fingered him after the payroll job and now he's going to kill me for it. He never meant to give me a split of the dough. The whole deal was a trick to get me out here so he could kill me!

Suddenly a thought occurred to Maxie, a possible way out.

He turned in the seat and looked back at the rope and shovel lying on the floorboard. Quickly he reached back and opened the suitcase. He fumbled through the soiled clothing and drew out his shaving kit. His hands shook as he unzipped the case.

When Kedzie got back to the car, he found Maxie sitting calmly behind the wheel. He got in and handed Maxie the car keys. "Take Route 80," he said, "south out of town and keep going until I tell you where to turn."

The highway ran in an almost straight line past Lordsburg. It was a thin grey streak surrounded on either side by dry, flat land. The brilliant sun overhead moved up to a point directly in the center of the sky as the noon hour approached. It cast its heat down onto the sands of the Hidalgo country and made all living creatures look for shade. By twelve o'clock the temperature had risen to a hundred and one.

Inside the car, Joe Kedzie sat sideways with one hand inside his shirt and against the cold metal of the gun. Maxie kept his eyes straight ahead, squinting against the sun. They moved along in silence, passing no other traffic. Kedzie had also taken this into account in his plan. It was common in the desert for people to avoid being out in the noonday heat. Kedzie had counted on having the desert all to themselves.

A half-hour later, they passed a wide place in the road called Separ. Kedzie had remembered that name for ten years—had kept it in his mind by spelling it backwards; what it spelled backwards made it easier to remember.

"You'll come to a turn in the road up ahead," he said. "About three miles past that is where we turn off. First road on the right."

Maxie didn't answer. He had not spoken a word since Lordsburg. When they came to the road Kedzie had indicated, he turned off the highway. The blacktop was pitted, rough. Maxie looked at Kedzie for instructions. "Just keep going,"

said Kedzie. "It's not far now."

They bumped along for eight miles. The terrain around them began to rise slightly in places, forming low knolls and finally small hills. Kedzie watched the mileage dial intently, glancing ahead from time to time for familiar landmarks. Finally he saw the old dirt road cutting off at an angle from the black top. "Turn there," he said, pointing ahead.

Maxie turned off. The dirt road was smoother than the blacktop had been and the car settled down to a level ride again. The road curved down into a washed-out gulley that had once been excavated for mining. Kedzie watched through the rear window until the blacktop passed from sight. Then he turned to Maxie and said, "Pull over, partner."

When the car stopped, Kedzie got out quickly. Maxie stepped out on the driver's side. The two men faced each other across the hood of the car.

"You know, don't you, Joe?" said Maxie simply.

"Yeah, Maxie, I know." Kedzie drew the automatic from beneath his shirt and held it loosely.

"I don't know what made me do it, Joe," began Maxie. "I just—"

"I'll tell you why you did it, rat," interrupted Kedzie harshly. "Two things—Madge and a hundred grand!"

"I don't know what came over me, Joe," continued Maxie desperately. "I just didn't realize — —"

"Never mind!" snapped Kedzie. He waved the gun toward the car. "Get that rope and shovel out."

Maxie dragged the heavy rope out, threw it over his shoulder, and picked up the shovel. Kedzie directed him down a narrow path, following a few feet behind. The path ended at the entrance to a mine shaft which was near the gulley bottom. Twenty feet off to one side was the dry well. It had once been surrounded by a three-foot brick and clay wall, but most of the wall had deteriorated and fallen. Only one beam remained of a pair that once had held a small roof over the then precious supply of water. The wheel that had raised and lowered a bucket now lay broken and rotted in the dust.

"There it is, Judas," said Kedzie sardonically. "That's Joe Kedzie's private bank."

Maxie stopped and half turned when Kedzie spoke. "Keep walking," warned Kedzie, raising the gun. Maxie resumed his pace. Kedzie lowered the gun again.

When Maxie got to the edge of the well, he dropped the rope to the ground. For a moment he stood staring down into the deep hole, his right hand gripped the small shovel tightly. Suddenly he whirled and hurled the shovel at Joe Kedzie's face.

Kedzie stepped easily aside and the shovel slammed into the wall of the mine shaft. He laughed and

said, "Nice try, rat." Then he leveled the target pistol and pulled the trigger.

The bullet struck Maxie in his stomach. He stumbled back, grasping the wound with both hands, but did not fall. Kedzie fired a second time, and a third. Both bullets smashed into Maxie's chest. He fell backwards, dropping head first into the well.

Kedzie stuck the gun in his belt and walked slowly to the edge of the well. He calmly lighted a cigarette, then took out the flashlight and directed its beam into the dark pit. The well was so deep that the beam failed to reach the bottom.

When he had finished his cigarette, Kedzie bent down and picked up the rope. He dragged one end to a large boulder, around which he wrapped it securely, tying it. Then he walked back to the well and dropped the rest of the rope into the blackness. He heard a thud as it struck bottom.

Carefully, he sat down on the well's edge and began to lower himself into the hole. He braced his feet flat against the wall, arching his body, descending one cautious step at a time. Soon the darkness of the well surrounded him. He edged farther and farther below the surface.

The rope snapped just before his feet reached the halfway mark. Kedzie screamed; the darkness rushed up past him for a fleeting second; then he slammed into the hard ground at the bottom.

He rolled over, dazed, his head spinning. He reached out in the darkness and felt the wall. His body ached all over and his head was beating wildly. The rope had fallen on top of him and was tangled around him. He pulled it away from his body and forced himself up into a sitting position. As he leaned back against the wall of the well, he felt very sick. For a moment he thought he was going to faint. He sat very still and sucked in deep breaths of air to calm himself.

It's all right, he thought over and over again, it's all right. I can get back up without the rope. The well isn't too wide. I can brace my feet against one side and my back against the other and I can work my way back up. It'll be hard and it'll take a while, but I can do it. I can make it back up without a rope. I can make it.

He rested for a moment until the nausea passed, then fumbled in his pocket for the flashlight. He felt pain, too, but the excitement of his fall and of his predicament did not allow him to dwell on it. He was relieved when he switched on the flashlight and saw that the fall had not damaged it. He found the piece of rope that had fallen with him, gathered it up until he had the broken end. He was puzzled that such a strong rope would break under so little weight. He examined the end carefully under

the light. Only a few strands, he saw, had been torn apart. The rest had been neatly and evenly cut—and on an angle so that it could not be easily noticed.

Maxie was the only other person who had handled the rope. He must have cut it while he had been in the car alone!

Kedzie flashed the light around until it shined on Maxie's face. He cursed the dead man aloud. Then he laughed. It won't work, Maxie, he thought. I can still make it. I can still get out—rope or no rope!

Kedzie pushed himself to his feet. Excruciating pain shot up through his right leg and he fell back to the ground moaning. He tried again, staggered, and fell a second time. He groaned in agony. The pain in his leg was unbearable. Desperately he twisted into a sitting position again and drew up his trouser leg. He shined the light on his leg and saw that the flesh between his knee and ankle was split apart and that a jagged bone protruded through the opening.

He leaned back against the wall, feeling fear well up in his body and overshadow the pain. His hand dropped to the ground beside him and he felt a hard, square object. He shined the flashlight down on it and saw the plastic-wrapped package he had dreamed of for ten years. Tears ran down his face and he began to tremble. Suddenly he grabbed up the package, swore. To hell with his broken leg. Maxie hadn't beat him yet out of that hundred grand. He had one good leg; he'd make it out of there.

Clutching the package, Kedzie worked his back up the wall in an attempt to get upright. He made it, panting hard, sweating. Now he had to shift his weight onto his broken leg. He waited a moment before trying, waiting for his breathing to still.

Terrific pain knifed through him, the instant he tried to place a little bit of his weight on his broken leg. He fell to the ground in pain and despair. He still held to the package, but the flashlight had fallen from his hand, its beam of light unextinguished and directed straight along the ground to Maxie's face.

The way it looked to Kedzie, the dead man was smiling at him.

John O. Lankston, New Orleans, La., was fined $1,000 after he was found guilty of failure to file income tax returns for 1949 and 1950. Lankston is a professional tax consultant.

THE ELDERLY gentleman was dignified and very worried. In addition to these attributes he possessed a sizeable fortune, a highly respectable family name—he was Donald Norton—and an extremely beautiful young blonde daughter.

The girl had run away from home. He wanted her located. "So we can persuade her to return, Mr.

Run, Carol, Run

BY TALMAGE POWELL

I made a tour of the jazz joints, showed her picture. When I found the missing girl she said: "Leave me alone!"

Gallagher," he explained to me.

I sat looking at her picture. She was a girl who had everything—looks, charge accounts, one of the finest mansions in town for a home, all the liberties a girl could ask for, according to old Norton's statement.

Why should she have run away?

He didn't know.

She was all right—she had phoned her parents twice in the week she had been gone to assure them she was all right. Despite their entreaties and the promise of a trip to Europe if she would return, she had laughed off the idea of giving up whatever kind of life she was living now.

I dropped Carol's picture on my desk. "I'll take it on, Mr. Norton," I said. "I don't make any promises, other than that I'll use all my energies to locate the girl and try to persuade her to return home."

"I can't understand it," Norton said for about the sixth time. "She's had everything any girl could want. Everything most girls dream of."

Everything, except one thing. The one thing that had caused her to run away. What it might be, I of course had no idea.

"My charges are fifty dollars a day and expenses," I said.

"That will be quite acceptable," Norton said.

He rose, picking up his homburg hat and soft gray gloves from my desk. I watched him leave the office, the door of which carried the only advertising I do, a sign reading Joseph Gallagher, Private Investigations.

I rocked back in my swivel chair thinking over what he'd told me about Carol. He'd been in the office over an hour telling me about her. He hadn't wanted to go to the cops because of the publicity—and, in light of those phone calls, she wasn't actually a missing person.

Somewhere in her background must be her reason for running away. She had been brought up in genteel fashion. She had attended private schools and a girl's fashionable finishing school. She had been popular, but had taken little interest in most of the boys in her group. One summer she had been taken with a riding instructor at a girl's camp. The old man had broken it up, after investigating the instructor.

"You understand," Norton had said, "whether he had money or not meant nothing to us. But there were several unsavory factors in his background."

The instructor had been fired for mistreating a horse. He'd departed the camp, leaving Carol to mope and pitch a few tantrums. But he'd faded for good, and that had been that.

She cared little for the afternoon teas and usual social doings of her strata of society. The major trouble she'd given thus far, until her disappearance, had stemmed from having persuaded rich young

swains to escort her into the seamier sections of town for an evening now and then.

Her one hobby was progressive jazz. As a listener. She played no musical instrument. Attempts to have her learn to play the piano had met with failure. She had quite a collection of Brubeck and other moderns in her record albums and a fifteen hundred dollar hi-fi outfit on which to play the records.

Well, it was a lead.

That night I hit a few of the clubs she might go to, but I didn't see her. Pudgies was on my list. When I got there, I observed that the joint wasn't jumping. Joints don't jump when progressive stuff is being played. They crawl, in my opinion.

The usual assortment of characters was there with the heavy black-rimmed glasses and ducktail haircuts. The place was layered with smoke and smelled of martinis and stingers.

Fingers tapped table tops and eyes got glassy and girls with the short hairdos shivered a little. I didn't see anybody that looked like Carol.

I listened to the quartet on the bandstand leave the original chord progression of Honeysuckle Rose and start whimpering it into neurotic chaos.

I waited until the abortion was ended and the quartet took five. The piano man waved his thin white fingers idly at his admirers as he made his way past the tables. He slouched over to let the bar support him and ordered a brandy.

I moved up to his elbow. "Hello, Buzz," I said.

Buzz Delaney looked at me with large hollow eyes set in a thin, white face. "Hello, Gallagher."

"I'm looking for a girl." I showed him Carol's picture. "Ever seen her before?"

"Certainly. That's Carol Norton."

"She come in here often?"

"Not often, but regularly. She needed what we have. The pressure would build up, and she'd come in. Sit at that front table over there. Cool. Real cool. She knew what we were saying. She listened until she was warm and filled and the pressure was gone. Then she would go. Quietly. Like a diminished chord that hangs waiting for the next resolution. But I guess you wouldn't understand."

I ignored his condescending tone.

"When was the last time you saw her, Buzz?"

"About a week ago."

"She was alone?"

"No . . ." his high, pale forehead was wrinkled. "Really regrettable. Distasteful character."

"Who?"

"The monkey she was with. A big bruiser. Looked like an exprizefighter. Cauliflower ears, you know, and nose with no bone left in it. Evil, vicious, tough. Only don't mention I said so."

"You know me, Buzz. You know

the way I treat a confidence."

"Why else does everyone level with you, Gallagher? This character—he didn't dig us. Not at all. Sat glowering the whole time they were here. I do hope he argues with you, Gallagher. Knowing you, I do hope that."

"Well, I'll let you know," I said, "if you get your wish."

"Thanks."

"You didn't recognize the guy?"

"Never saw him before. Can't imagine where she could have picked him up—though she has been seen in some very strange places."

I glanced at his glass. "I'll buy you another brandy."

"No thanks. Really. My edge is fine and right. One more would spoil everything."

"What time did Carol and this bozo leave the place?"

"Around midnight, I guess. I heard him tell her they'd eat at the Pig-N-Pen. I remember because it occurred to me that the guy belonged in some sort of a pen."

"Anything else you can add?"

"No. I don't think so, Gallagher. If she's taken up with him, she must be miserable."

"Why so?"

"Oh, he's the kind who'd mistreat a woman. Badly. I studied him. I watched him look at her, talk to her, take her arm when they went out. A cave man, for sure, Gallagher. I know. I majored in psychology in college, you know."

"She could leave him," I suggested.

"Perhaps he won't let her," Buzz said.

It was a thought. I taxied over to the Pig-N-Pen.

The Pig-N-Pen had only one thing in common with Pudgie's, the quantity of cigarette smoke each contained. The Pig-N-Pen smelled of crabcakes and beer and the people were a lot noisier. Elvis Presley was hollering out of the juke box at some of his country cousins.

Up near the front window Tom Ellison was tossing chunks of chicken into a wire basket to deep fry. I watched him lower the basket into the boiling, erupting grease and when he turned back toward the counter I said, "Hello, Tom."

"How goes it, Gallagher?"

"I need some help."

"Don't you always." He stood with a grin on his fat, good humored face.

"Looking for a skirt," I said.

I showed him Carol's picture and added: "She came in here about a week ago with a guy who looks like a prize fighter."

Tom wiped his fat, grease-softened hands on his apron. "Some dish," he said, taking the picture.

"You sound as if you know her."

"Sure. She was in here not more than an hour ago."

"How about the bozo?"

"Did I say she was with a man?"

"Your tone implied it. Or maybe

it was your eyes that said it."

"Or your imagination, Gallagher. Yeah, she was with the guy. The same guy she was in here with before. You want to be careful, Gallagher."

"Yeah?"

"He's Pard Ankers."

"Hmm. Mixed in some pretty rough stuff, wasn't he, Tom?"

"You can say that again. Dirtiest fighter ever to hit the ring. Finally barred for throwing a fight. Does a little strongarm stuff now and then for the boys who need somebody strongarmed now and then."

"Know where the pair of them went from here, Tom?"

"Nope. But they're staying right down the street at the old Traveler's Hotel. Got an apartment there, from what I hear."

"Thanks, Tom."

"You walk on eggs, boy."

He turned to salvage his chicken out of the fat, and I left the place and walked down the block to the Traveler's Hotel. It was a warm, humid night and a lot of people were on the sidewalk. Clerks lounged in the doorways of late-closing stores, and the beat changed everytime I passed a joint with a juke box.

I spoke to a lot of people and gave one guy four bits. It pays in my business to know a lot of people.

An old guy with a ring of hair as white and fine as baby down was behind the hotel desk. He saw me enter the gloomy, musty lobby and quickly got his wine bottle stashed behind the desk.

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and squinted his washed-out gray eyes. "Well, it's Gallagher."

"How's tricks?" I said. I remembered the old boy only vaguely. I'd seen him around. I didn't recall the name.

"Not what they used to be, Gallagher. Back when I was in vaudeville—"

"Those were the days," I said.

"That's right. You're a right guy, Gallagher."

"I work at it," I said. I leaned my elbows on the desk. The old boy's breath was like a pig's with indigestion from eating rotten grapes. "Listen, what apartment has Pard Ankers got?"

"Geeze, we wish he didn't have any."

"Yeah?"

"All-a-time arguing with that girl. Beating her up. A shame and disgrace. Only—who's here to throw Pard out?"

"I know what you mean. How about the cops."

"Took a chanct. Called them once. The girl wouldn't press charges." He shook his head. "They're living in 201, but they ain't in."

"I'll go up and wait."

"If you're after Pard, Gallagher, and he finds out I—"

"I haven't seen you, pop."

He relaxed a little. "Okay. I

guess that'll be okay. You came in while I was away from the desk."

"Sure," I said. "A guy down the street told me where they're staying."

He was anxious to get back at that vino; so I started upstairs. I almost tripped once on a torn place in the stair runner.

The second floor hall had an old, soured smell. A single naked bulb reflected dim light from the cracked walls.

I stopped before the door of 201 and tried the knob. The door was locked. It was an old lock and I opened it with a passkey.

I pulled the blackjack from my hip pocket and put it in the right sleeve of my coat where it could drop easily into my hand.

I entered the apartment, struck a match, found a light switch.

A tour of the apartment didn't take long. There was a tiny sitting room, bedroom, kitchenette, and bath. The furniture belonged in a junk yard. It hadn't been helped any by its present users. Empty beer cans and whiskey bottles littered the place. The bed didn't look as if it had been made since they'd moved in. Old food was spilled on the kitchenette floor and there wasn't a clean dish or piece of silver in the place.

I stood in the living room, thumbed my hat back, and thought of one of the nicest mansions in town. Charge accounts. Maids to pick up the nylons and clean up the spilled powder. Nice, respectable parents whose hearts were breaking.

I heard voices outside the door. A man's, "Shuddup, will you?"

"Ah, Pard, I didn't mean it," a girl said.

"I tole you, didn't I? Now shuddup."

A key rattled in the lock. I stepped to one side as the door opened.

There was no mistaking the girl. She was Carol Norton, all right. Her face was flushed, her blonde hair a little disheveled. But she was a knockout. Tall, slender, very lovely. Dressed beautifully in black. It was hard to imagine anything that chic stepping out of this apartment.

Behind her was Pard Ankers, as big and mean and ugly as he'd been described to me. The blackjack felt mighty nice against my sweating arm.

"Did you leave this light burning . . ." he began. Then he saw me. His eyes got even smaller. "Who are you?"

"The name is Gallagher. I'm a private detective. I've come to take the girl home."

I expected it now. Trouble, in a big package. Instead, he thought it over, took a handkerchief from his hip pocket, and wiped his face.

"You're welcome to the job, buddy," he said. Then he turned and walked out of the apartment.

Carol moved after him. "Pard—" The door slammed in her face.

She turned on me. "Now see what you've done!"

"Your dad and mother are worried about you," I said.

Her lower lip drooped in a pout. She walked to the sagging couch, shoved some magazines aside, and sat down on it with her feet tucked under her. She sat there sulking for a minute or two, and I said, "We'd better get moving."

"Oh, leave me alone!"

The apartment seemed suddenly to compress on me. I remembered the worry and fear in the respectable old gentleman's eyes, looked at the pouting, sullen, spoiled brat face before me, and I grabbed her by the arm. Instantly, she squirmed around and raked my cheeks with her nails. They were long and left two stinging marks on the flesh.

That did it. I turned her over my knee, and gave her a couple good swats on the behind—what she'd needed for some time. She kicked with her feet and hammered my leg with her fists. I stung her hard with another good smack and kept it up until she was quiet.

Then I set her on her feet. When I caught her wrist this time, she was meek, docile.

She didn't say a thing on the taxi ride across town. I saw her to the front door, accepted the old man's thanks, and went back to the waiting taxi.

That was that, I thought.

Then three days later Donald Norton was again in my office. Would I please have another look around for his daughter? She had skipped again.

I checked on Pard Ankers first. He'd left town the night I'd picked her up. I spent until midnight trying to pick up a trace of her.

No luck.

Well, I thought as I headed toward my two room bachelor apartment, you cannot always make your money the easy way. Sometimes you break a case right off. Sometimes you don't. Anyhow, Carol's worried old man was footing the bill.

I keyed open the apartment door.

She was sitting with her feet tucked under her in a big chair near the bay window. She had a tall bottle of beer in her hand.

"I got the superintendent to let me in," she said. "He didn't want to do it, but I gave him twenty dollars."

A faint smile came to her lips. It caused me to remain standing in the open doorway.

"I guess you could make Pard Ankers look like a sissy if you wanted to, couldn't you, Gallagher?" She stood up, stretched, ran her fingers through her hair. "I'll fix us a bite to eat, honey."

I swallowed some of the dryness out of my throat. "Okay," I said. "You do that. I'll run down and make sure everything is okay with the super."

I went downstairs. But I didn't see the super. I ducked into the

drugstore next door and went to the phone booth.

As I got a dime out of my pocket, I thought that Carol's old man didn't need me to help his daughter; a psychiatrist was his best bet. And if the doc had any trouble figuring why she was running away from home, what she was looking for, I'd be willing to lay five to two I could certainly give him a clue.

Just as I was about to deposit the dime, I changed my mind. I put the dime back in my pocket and headed for the apartment. Why disappoint Carol?

Prison Pals

The first Dale Carnegie Club ever formed in a prison was organized recently at Southern Michigan prison at Jackson. The convicts will be taught how to win friends and get along with other people.

Crime Doesn't Pay

A bandit entered a Detroit store, displayed a gun and warned the woman clerk not to get excited. As the clerk slowly reached into the cash register and gave the robber large handfuls of change, the gunman became increasingly nervous. Finally he shouted, "This ain't worth my time," and fled.

And in Spokane, Washington, safecrackers broke into an office and worked long and hard to open a safe. The loot only amounted to $75. They left a note reading: "You cheapskates! It wasn't worth the effort."

White Lie

Marion Barnett, arrested for speeding in New Haven, Connecticut, was accused of giving the arresting officer a false name. The motorist explained that she was afraid of losing her job as an auxiliary policewoman.

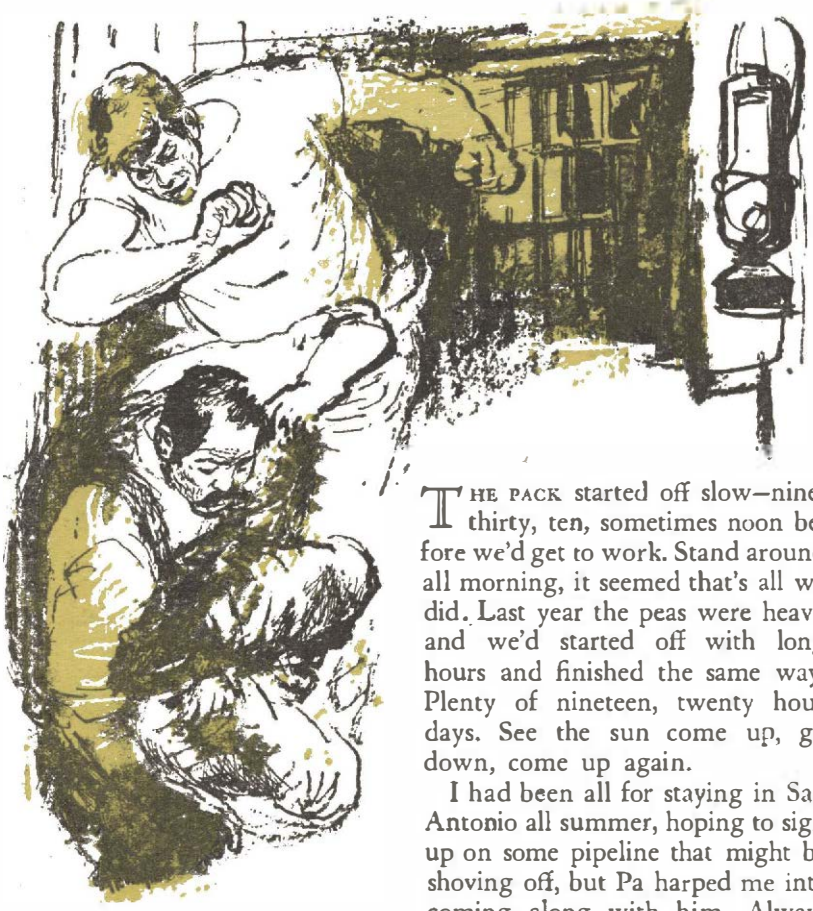
Jokes

In Indianapolis, an anonymous tipster called Capt. Robert E. Reilly, head of the police vice squad, and hung up after telling him that there was a big book operation going on at 40 E. St. Clair. The captain took the trouble to check the city directory before acting. The tipster was correct. At the address given is the Indianapolis Public Library.

The Cross Forks Incident

BY THOMAS P. RAMIREZ

Our next move? "Matarlos," Pa muttered. "Kill them!"



THE PACK started off slow—nine-thirty, ten, sometimes noon before we'd get to work. Stand around all morning, it seemed that's all we did. Last year the peas were heavy and we'd started off with long hours and finished the same way. Plenty of nineteen, twenty hour days. See the sun come up, go down, come up again.

I had been all for staying in San Antonio all summer, hoping to sign up on some pipeline that might be shoving off, but Pa harped me into coming along with him. Always

talking up the fortune we'd make up north. Truth is, he only wanted me along so he'd have an extra hand in the sugar beets. Before, between and after the pea and corn packs we worked the beets. This so we wouldn't eat up our cannery earnings before we got back to Texas.

There were three of us besides Ma and Pa. Two sisters, Rosa and Guadalupe, sixteen and seventeen. I was nineteen. Ma and the girls could work, but Pa knew he couldn't get a contract if he didn't have any men. That's where I came in.

We got nine hours the day the trouble started, the best we'd got so far. It was a devil of a day, hot, muggy, with the sweat clinging like glue, the splashings making your face so stiff and sticky you hated to smile or even blink. The fly and waistband of my pants shone like glass, stiff with sweat and slime from the canner.

My age was against me, and I was thrown on the end of the line with a bunch of snot-nosed high school kids. It was a grind, grabbing cans off the line, four at a time, all day long, slinging them into big steel baskets that were lowered into deep cooking pits.

The old man was waiting for me out by the cooling tanks when I got through. Pa was on the viners, pitching on. When the peas stopped coming in, he was through. It usually took the peas another hour to get to me; so he had to sit and wait for me. Seeing me come out the cooking-room door, he smiled.

Pa was a big man; muscular, his hair black and unruly. A faint odor of the pea stack clung to him, green pea-tendrils hung in his hair. The crow's feet around his eyes gave him a benign look. This threw you off, because Pa was anything but easy-going. He was serious, a hard worker, a regular nut when it came to religion. We didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. He's older than me, so naturally he's got the old outlook. But we hit it off okay.

Born in a small village just north of Mexico City, Pa'd come to the states at sixteen, fleeing service in any of the hundred armies that overran the country then. He worked railroad section awhile, and not long after coming to this country, married Ma. She was as backward as Pa. They made a great pair.

I imagine once she must've been a happy, carefree kid. But nineteen years of hard work would change anybody. Kids had started coming right away, Ma being only fifteen when I was born. At thirty-four she was still a good looking woman. She hadn't had a dozen kids like most of the other Mexican women, who were perpetually pregnant. The men in camp looked Ma over hard whenever she was out walking. It made me want to slug every one of them.

Old as he was, Pa persisted in his Mexican boyhood ideas. The girls couldn't work in the factory; it would be indecent to have other men looking at them. Ma had to chaperone the girls if they went out at night. Even in summer, the windows had to be closed at night; the night air would make you sick. Why, he used to even tell me that urine was the only good cure for cuts. At night he would make a big thing out of his own private revival meeting. We'd all have to kneel together before bedtime while he went through some religious mumbo-jumbo. Still and all I liked the old man. I knew he'd just been brought up different from me, that was all.

But Pa's refusing to learn English did gripe me. He knew a few indispensables—no more. Ma learned, and of course we kids had attended American schools. That's why Pa waited for me after work every night. I had to read his time card for him, to make sure he hadn't been screwed out of any time.

"What's the matter with you guys?" I joked in Spanish. "Cutting the peas off so early?" It was the same routine every night. I wouldn't have even bothered checking the card, but Carstairs was Pa's foreman. Word was out that Carstairs hated "Spigs", liked screwing them every chance he got. He and Skeets, the timekeeper, had a system. They made money when somebody got his time shorted.

I glanced at the card quickly and was ready to hand it back, when I noticed something funny. Pa was punched out at three.

"What time did you start this morning, *Padre?*"

"*A las siete.*" Seven o'clock.

"What time did you quit?"

"*A las cinco.*" Five o'clock.

"Something's wrong with your card, Pa. Where's Carstairs now?" Pa pointed in the direction of the railroad spur behind the plant. "Let's take a walk over there," I said.

Carstairs was talking to two girls who were working in the boxcar, getting empty cans ready to load onto the conveyor belt in the morning. Nobody else was around. When he turned and saw Pa, his jaw tightened and he forced a smile.

"Troubles *paisan?*" he asked Pa.

"Cut the *paisan* crap," I said. "You shorted the old man two hours today." My tone was sarcastic. I was a wiseass. Running the streets of San Antonio will do that for you.

"What're you talking about? Gimme that card!" Carstairs stalled, studying the card. The girls stopped moving the cans around to watch.

"Look here, kid," he blustered, poking the card. "He's punched for three o'clock. That's when he quit. Couldn't find him after that. Must've taken a snooze somewhere."

"You're a goddam liar! The old

man's never goofed off a day in his life. You just hoped he'd be dumb enough not to notice."

"Who you calling a liar?" He clenched his fists. Carstairs was a big brawny blond, all red from the sun. He was big enough to whale hell out of me, but no six-footer like Pa. I didn't expect trouble. He'd back down, I figured.

I asked Pa, "Did you quit at three?" His eyes narrowed in anger as I repeated Carstair's story. It was a lie all right. Pa stammered around, so mad he couldn't talk straight.

Carstairs was winking at the girls, smiling as if to say he'd make hash of these hillbillies.

It made me sore. "The old man says he worked till five!" I shouted. "Come on! Fix this card so we can take off!"

"You'll take off," Carstairs muttered, lunging suddenly, striking me solidly on the side of the face. I folded.

"You black Spig," he said. "I told you to watch your tongue."

I saw the girls smirking. Enraged, I sprang up and got two jabs into his gut before he put me down again.

Pa just stood there at first, too surprised to do anything. The second time I fell he got mad. *"Juan! Quitate de aquil"* he yelled. "Get away. I'll take care of him."

"Have to fight both you, huh?" Carstairs muttered, backing up. "Just like a bunch of Spigs."

Pa went in flatfooted, no cover, no idea of how to fight. Right away Carstairs hung two good ones on him. Pa staggered, his face expressionless, then doggedly moved back into him. Working beets never did a man's muscles much harm, and the next three wallops Pa gave Carstairs almost jolted his head off. Right away Carstair's nose started bleeding. Pa hit him four more, smearing blood all over his face. One more and Carstairs was down and groaning.

"You fix the card now, *diablo?"* Pa gasped, breathless.

The big, blond lug looked at him with bleary eyes.

"Punch the card," I taunted. "Or do you want to argue some more?"

"All right, you black bastards," he said, rising painfully. "This time you win." He punched the battered card, scratching out the other hole with his initials. "But I'll get even one of these days . . ."

"Why don't you get us now?" I laughed, grabbing the card away from him.

"Just be on guard, Mexies," he threatened lamely, as he turned toward the plant. Steam was pouring out of the door where an operator was cleaning his machine with a steam hose. Carstairs disappeared in the white clouds. The girls watched us leave; they weren't smirking now.

That was on Thursday. Carstairs caused no more trouble. He just stood around saying nothing, Pa

told me. I ran into him once in the latrine. He just shot me a dirty look and walked out. The talk got around the plant in a hurry—the girls spreading it—but we heard nothing about being fired.

Friday and Saturday were good days. We got fourteen hours each day. On Sunday things slackened, and we were done by noon. Pa and I headed campward, looking forward to a big dinner and an afternoon of lying around. The camp was half a mile from the plant and consisted of eleven company-owned tarpaper shacks crowded together. There were two rows of five each, with a lone cabin built away from the others.

The day we'd arrived, Pa had all but broken his neck to claim the end cabin. He had to have privacy, keep distance between himself and the others. The rest of the camp, sensing this feeling, took an immediate dislike to him and kept their distance.

There was a kitchen, bedroom and sitting room in the cabin. We used both rooms for bedrooms, Ma and Pa in one, the girls and I in another. They rigged up a sheet on a rope between them and me. I used to hear them talking and giggling over there before I went to sleep.

Our shack was filthy when we moved in, but Ma and the girls swept and scrubbed until it met Ma's strict standards. Like Pa, Ma was proud and refused to live shiftlessly like the other transients. She bought new light bulbs to replace the ones stolen by the cabin's last occupants. She even repaired the window shades. These Pa insisted on having pulled as soon as night fell. Modesty.

Right after dinner I dressed up and headed for Elmdale, a small village about a mile from the cannery.

I was sitting in a bar with a buddy from the line, drinking beer and damning the hours, when Carlos walked in, surprising the hell out of me. Last I'd seen him was in San Antone, in April. We were planning on going pipelining together, when Pa put the damper on the idea.

"Hi, kid," Carlos grinned. "Your ma told me I'd find you boozing uptown somewhere. How you been?"

"Carlos! You old butcher! What are you doing up here? I thought you were pipeline material."

"No jobs, boy. That's a long story." He sat next to me, roughing up my hair. "You're looking good, sport."

Carlos was my uncle, Ma's kid brother. Six years older than I, he'd been around. The army, bumming all over the country, Chicago with the Golden Gloves. He was built to take it. If ever I looked up to a guy, Carlos was it.

"Let's have a beer here for this old drifter," I called. Carlos laughed.

"Where you working? Gonna try at the cannery?" I asked.

"Hell, no. I got 30 acres of beets out on Indian road and another contract cooking. None of that sweat shop stuff for me."

"Will you make enough to get by?"

"Sure. I got a buddy with me. And Marcella can help some."

After finishing our beers, we went to the village movie house and sat through an old western. Later we caught a few more beers, then drove back to camp in Carlos' '50 Plymouth. It was around eight, just getting dark when we got there. The camp was deserted; our shack was the only one sporting lights. The men were in town drinking themselves sick, and the women and kids were at the free show in the village park.

Pa was reading aloud to Ma from a Spanish Bible.

"Where's Marcella?" said Carlos.

"She took the girls to the free show," Ma answered.

"That girl. Can't sit still a minute. I'll drive down and bring them back after the show."

When he left, I got ready for bed. Pa's singsong reading had almost put me to sleep when I heard a car drive up. Carlos with the girls, I thought, putting my pants on. It would be good to see Marcella again. I opened the door and stepped into the kitchen. I was sickened at once by what I saw.

"Well, look who's here. Little Big Mouth. Big Mouth hisself."

Carstairs. Four men were with him. One of them hastily locked the door while another pulled a shade aside to look outside. It wasn't hard to figure what they wanted. Neither Pa nor I said a word; our minds were numb with surprise.

"Manuel," Ma said hesitantly. "What do these men want?"

Pa didn't answer, but looked steadily at Carstairs with hate filled eyes.

"Some babe, huh, Jack?" one of the men laughed. "Not bad for a Mexie."

"Keep your mind on your work," Carstairs said, smiling evilly, turning his fist in his palm.

"Please go," Pa pleaded in Spanish. "We want no trouble."

"What'sa matter? Don't you Spigs like to fight when the odds are even?"

Carstairs had lied to the men about the fight. On top of that he'd got them well liquored-up. They were just drunk enough to be mean and still know what they were doing. Carstairs looked the drunkest. A pint protruded from his back pocket.

"What do you guys want?" I said.

"This," Carstairs answered, shoving me against the wall.

I tensed, and pushing the wall with one foot, I let loose with the hardest punch I had, right at his mouth. Carstairs staggered back to

the middle of the room, almost falling. Right away two of his stooges came at me. Carstairs and another one went at Pa, while the fifth, a red-headed kid of about eighteen, held Ma. She started to scream, and he pulled a towel over her face. Ma fought like a wildcat. In the instant before my two moved in, I glimpsed Pa standing there flatfooted again, taking hard ones in the face. He kept swinging, not connecting much.

The pair that jumped me didn't get away with too much. The liquor slowed them down and I was faster on the upthrust. But one of them grabbed my right arm, giving the other guy a chance to land a haymaker. My head felt like the top had been blown off. I didn't feel any of the blows that landed after that. Both my arms were being held now and the other guy kept pouring fists at me. He stopped for breath and I saw blurred figures through a dim light. Somewhere I found strength to bring my heel up, catching the man behind me in the groin. He fell in a moaning heap and I was free.

Across the room the redhead was holding his shoulder and screaming. Blood welled between his fingers. Ma stood there, a frightened look on her face, a butcher knife in her hand. Carstairs ran to her and clubbed her twice in the face. She staggered and fell.

I started swinging, blindly, instinctively. Someone got a strangle hold on me. I couldn't move.

"Glenn, help the kid!" Carstairs shouted. "I'll finish the old man. Murph, hang onto him . . ."

Carstairs went to work on Pa's face. Pa struggled violently to break loose, but he was getting weaker and finally sagged and fell to the floor. It was all I could do to keep from heaving, for as he fell, his left arm got caught in the rungs of a chair. Pa screamed horribly and I blinked as Carstairs, swinging, lost his balance and fell right on Pa's arm. There was a dull snap; then Pa lay still under Carstairs. Ma, who had been lying on the floor sobbing, tried to get to him, but Glenn held her back. Pa's arm was twisted at a sickening angle when Carstairs arose.

"God, Jack! You broke his arm!"

A shadow of fear crossed Carstairs's face. Then his lips curled. "Serves the black bastard right. Let's finish the kid and blow. Murph. Check the window. Anybody comin'?"

"No. Place is deserted."

"Bill, hold the kid."

Murphy was the only one following Carstairs. The others hung back. I thought my head would burst, I was so insane with anger. Even though I fought like crazy it did no good. They cornered me and kept smashing at my head, smashing, smashing . . .

I was out only a minute or two. My vision cleared slowly. Only two blurred figures remained; the

others had gone. Murphy and Carstairs were taking turns holding Ma and swigging from the pint. Pa was conscious now, but he still lay where he'd fallen, his face wet with bloody tears. He kept moaning and calling alternately to me and Ma.

"Felicita, ayudame . . . ayudame. Juanito . . ."

Murphy passed the bottle and grabbed Ma again. I tried to rise, but there was no strength in my arms.

"Hey, Murphy. The kid's coming around. Let's go. These Spigs'll remember us for awhile, I guess."

"Well, Jack . . ." Murphy said, a smirk on his face as he looked down at Ma. "I kinda thought—you know—thought we might have a little fun with the babe." He put his hands on Ma's writhing body. "Never tried this dark stuff . . ."

Carstairs laughed quietly, looking Ma's body over, savouring his thoughts. Ma fought harder to break loose.

Slowly his words gained meaning in my dazed mind. I felt myself trying to get up once more.

"Good idea, Murphy. But first . . ." Carstairs came at me.

I was on my knees. Maybe one big try—

"You better not watch this, kid," Carstairs said from somewhere above me. "Might not like what you see."

I remember two sharp flashes in my head, followed by dull pain. For what seemed hours, through a deep, overpowering stupor, I heard Pa's groaning, intermixed with the gutteral sounds of Ma screaming in her throat, the thrashing of her arms and legs, the chuckles, throaty and drunken, of the two men.

It must have been ten o'clock before Carlos got back. I don't remember much; it was all confused. Ma hysterical, the girls wailing, Carlos trying to shake me up. I was so dizzy I couldn't see straight. A long time passed and a doctor came. Pa screamed as the doctor temporarily fixed his arm. The girls and Ma took up the screaming too. It came through to me like sirens, rising and falling.

The doc, Carlos told me later, gave Ma a hypo to put her to sleep. Shock—there was nothing else he could do.

"I'm all right, Doc," I said. "Take care of Ma."

He poked all over me to see if I had any broken bones. What really brought me to was the alcohol he poured on the cuts.

"Come in for x-rays, boy. Might have a concussion." His voice came so loud it hurt my head. "You take charge," the doctor said to Carlos. "I've got to get this man to the hospital. Better call the sheriff."

Together, they raised and carried Pa and put him in the doc's car. The girls started putting cold towels on my head.

"El Doctor . . . el doctor . . ."

was all they could answer to my protests. The cold felt like someone was hitting me again.

I felt better by the time Carlos got back, bringing the sheriff and a deputy with him. I heard them talking outside, trying to chase off the nosey neighbors.

"Go on home," Carlos said in Spanish. "Get out of here!"

When the law hollered, they reluctantly left.

Right from the start I knew, from the bored look on the sheriff's face, that he had no intention of doing anything about what had happened. It was just another Mexie fight to him, happened every Saturday, Sunday night. He asked me a lot of questions, writing the answers in a notebook. Writing came hard to him. I could tell by the pained expression on his face, the slow labor of his pencil.

At last he was gone. I didn't expect to hear from or see him again. I didn't either.

I didn't go back to work for a week. Every bone and muscle in my body was so stiff I could hardly move. Most of the time I sat in the hot June sun, shivering and shaking, trying to thaw out. There was plenty of time to think, to form elaborate plans to avenge Ma. Until Pa returned from the hospital, Ma just sat around weeping. When he got home, his arm in a cast, Ma quit crying, went silent altogether.

Pa didn't say much. Complained about his arm a little. Once he started in about getting Carstairs, but then he began on God's ultimate revenge, and I got up and went outside. Once in awhile he came out and sat with me, but mostly he stayed in the house near Ma, trying to console her. I saw him take up his Bible only once, but he put it down after a few minutes.

Carlos didn't know what Carstairs or Murphy looked like, but he kept his ears open in the village, and reported to me every night. Carstairs and Murphy had taken off for parts unknown. The others had made themselves scarce also.

I went back to work on Sunday. We got eight hours, and though it was a scorcher, I wore my shirt most of the time. I got pretty well limbered up, but by nightfall I was feverish again. When Carlos came for me at seven, I had to put on a sweater before I was ready to go.

We went downtown and visited each of the four taverns in the place. Every time we walked into a new place talk died down. Everybody knew what we were looking for, and they were pretty close-mouthed. We heard nothing. Around eleven we gave it up and returned to camp.

The next morning around nine a torrential rain hit. The water sprayed in sheets against the side of the plant; then the windows were rattled with hail. There goes the season, I thought. The peas will

really catch hell now. Out in the yard the men put on black slickers and struggled against the storm to get the last loads into the viners. By eleven the peas were in and we were through for the day. I was drenched to the skin before I got halfway home.

At three Carlos and Marcella showed up.

"I got to go to Cross Forks," Carlos said. "Get a part for the car. Want to come along?"

"Might as well, nothing else to do," I said.

While I got my jacket, Carlos talked to the old man. *"Usted no quedra acompanarnos al pueblo?"* He asked him to come along. Pa nodded slowly. We put him in the back, left Marcella with Ma and the girls, then took off.

Cross Forks was twelve miles from Elmdale. Typical farm whistle-stop, six taverns, a couple gas stations, grocery stores, hardware and implement shops. A mile or so out, like Elmdale, they had a cannery, one of the chain in that valley. As we drove in, I could see their stack. The rain held the black smoke low. They were done for the day, banking their fires, just keeping steam up.

We stopped for a beer. I noticed the barkeep do a double take when he saw Pa's slinged arm. He's heard about it all the way over here, I thought angrily. *Unless*— But that couldn't be. They wouldn't be so stupid as to light so close to Elmdale. Or maybe they would be.

Then it happened. We were just coming out of the parts lot, the universal wrapped in newspapers, when Pa saw them.

"Mira, muchacho!" Pa commanded. *"Los diablos!"*

Carlos and I both looked up like our heads were connected to the same string. Luckily they didn't see us. They were in a '48 Chevy, black, badly rusted on one fender. Our eyes never left the Chevy as it proceeded down the main street, turned off and disappeared.

"So that's them," Carlos said grimly. "Get to the car!"

Turning the same corner, we drove down an almost deserted road. There were a few stores and a tavern facing the road; then it wandered into the empty countryside. On the left, parked in front of the tavern, was the black Chev. Carstairs and Murphy were just getting out. Pa and I ducked down. Carlos looked straight ahead and drove past unnoticed. When we were about a half-mile out into the country, Carlos stopped the car.

"Well, Sport," Carlos said. "Those are our boys. What now?"

My stomach felt all shaky, like something was bubbling inside. My hands and legs trembled, and I felt cold. "God, now that it's here," I said weakly, "I don't know. Just get 'em, that's all."

"Matarlos," Pa muttered. "Kill them."

Carlos smiled, turned the car

and headed back toward town. We parked about 500 feet from the tavern. In the late afternoon light, the Chevy was a dark, rain-hidden shadow. I put on my jacket, but still I shivered.

"They don't know me, *Juanito.*" Carlos shook into his windbreaker. "I'll go down, drink a few beers, see what I can hear."

"Don't stick your neck out any," I told him.

A fine spray blew into the car as Carlos got out. Hunching his shoulders against the rain, he ran with choppy steps toward the dim buildings.

That was about four-thirty. At six Carlos was back, smelling of beer. "They're pretty well oiled," he said. He fumbled inside his jacket and brought out a crumpled bag. "Here . . . eat. We'll need our strength." The bag contained hamburgers, two apiece. I didn't feel hungry, but once I started, I couldn't eat fast enough.

"The bastards," Carlos muttered. "They were even bragging about the other night."

"What did you find out?"

"They're heading into the city for a big time. First they're going to their rooms to change. We'll tail them."

We waited another hour. Around seven they came out and got into their car. Careful to keep our distance, we followed them. They were staying in some hole-in-the-wall rooms above a rundown tavern located on the main drag. Besides the tavern, there was a poultry store and a Nash garage in the same building. A shabby entry between the tavern and the poultry store led up to the rooms.

We parked a half block past the tavern and looked back, watching the line of four upstairs windows intently. In a minute the light in the end window came on, and we saw Carstairs and Murphy moving past the window in their undershirts. Seeing them this way, filth living amidst filth, riled my hate anew. To think that these pigs had handled Ma—

"Matarlos," Pa hissed again.

Ten minutes later they came out, dressed in sport coats and ties, both of the men staggering noticeably as they made for the Chev.

"Boy, aren't we pretty," I murmured, as they drove past. They looked neither right nor left. "Let's go, Carlos."

But Carlos didn't start the engine.

"For Christ's Sake, Carlos!" I shouted. "They're getting away. We'll never catch them. Get going!"

He turned slowly, sending me a tired, hard smile. He half closed his eyes, savouring his private thoughts.

"All right, give," I said. "What're you thinking?"

For answer Carlos dug into his pocket, pulled out his six-inch, pearl-handled switchblade. Lazily

he threw it into the air, caught it. Again. And all the time that same evil smile on his face.

"No—no. I thought you didn't want any part of murder," I said.

"Juanito . . ." he murmured, like he was talking to a small child. "Knives aren't only for murder. Know what I mean?"

Yeah—I knew what he meant. And it was better than the other plan, much better. Carlos leaned over and started telling Pa all about it in Spanish. Pa didn't like it at first, but finally he decided it would be the most appropriate way. And while Carlos and Pa argued, I thought about it, and the more I thought, the better it seemed.

Around eleven o'clock we came back past the place where Carstairs and Murphy were staying. We parked almost opposite to the entry and waited until the one lone man walking the quiet streets ducked into a bar a little ways down. Then Carlos got out. "I'll get the door," he said. "When you see the light, you'll know it's safe." He melted into the darkness when he reached the stairwell.

The door must have been a snap, because it seemed only seconds before Pa and I saw the lights in the end room flash on and off. Checking the street, Pa and I got out and slowly climbed the stairs.

"Fast job," I murmured as I clicked the door silently behind me.

From the darkness of the room Carlos said, "Cheap lock." There was a long pause. "We'd better can the chatter. Can't tell if anyone's in the next room or not."

I lowered myself onto one of the beds, the springs squeaking. Pa and Carlos took chairs near the window, where they could watch the street. For the next two hours all we heard was the sound of our breathing, the cars humming past on the road, an occasional outburst from the tavern below. Once I dozed, and was awakened by the snick, snick of Carlos' and Pa's knives as they sharpened them on the tiny carborundum stone Pa always carried in his pocket.

It must have been one-thirty when Carstairs and Murphy drove up. We were ready for them. The bulbs had been unscrewed, and the towels we'd found in the dresser were laid over the end of the bed. We heard them come stumbling up the stairs, muttering drunkenly between themselves. My heart began pounding wildly, my muscles were all tensed. Suddenly my mouth felt dry. I heard Pa breathing hoarsely all the way across the room.

They had quite a time fitting their key into the lock. "That damn Rose," I heard Murphy mutter, "nothin' but a teaser. What we shoulda' done was go . . . the cannery and get that Mexie woman again."

"Yeah." Carstairs fell against the door. "That was good stuff."

Listening to their talk, I just wanted that door to open, so I

could get at them with my fists.

We stood back as the door swung wide and they lurched into the room. Murphy closed the door, while Carstairs hit the light switch.

"Hey, Murph! Somethin's wrong with the lights!"

Murphy was standing there in a daze, trying to see in the dark when I hit him. Carlos and Pa brought Carstairs down together.

It was easy. They were so loaded with whisky they didn't have a chance against us. By the time Murphy came around from the clout I gave him, I had the towel in his teeth, and was tying his hands behind his back. Murphy writhed on the bed; watching him was a pleasure, a savage satisfaction. Across the room. I heard Carstairs blubbering, trying at intervals to get a scream past his gag as Carlos and Pa took care of tying him up.

Murphy fought to break free, the cords in his neck swelled and purple, as I tore at his trousers. He knew what was coming. Just as Carstairs knew.

"That Mexie was good, wasn't she, Murphy?" I choked, grabbing him. "Real good, wasn't she? Wasn't she?"

Murphy arched his body, twisted on his side, but he couldn't of course escape from what was coming. It took only one stroke.

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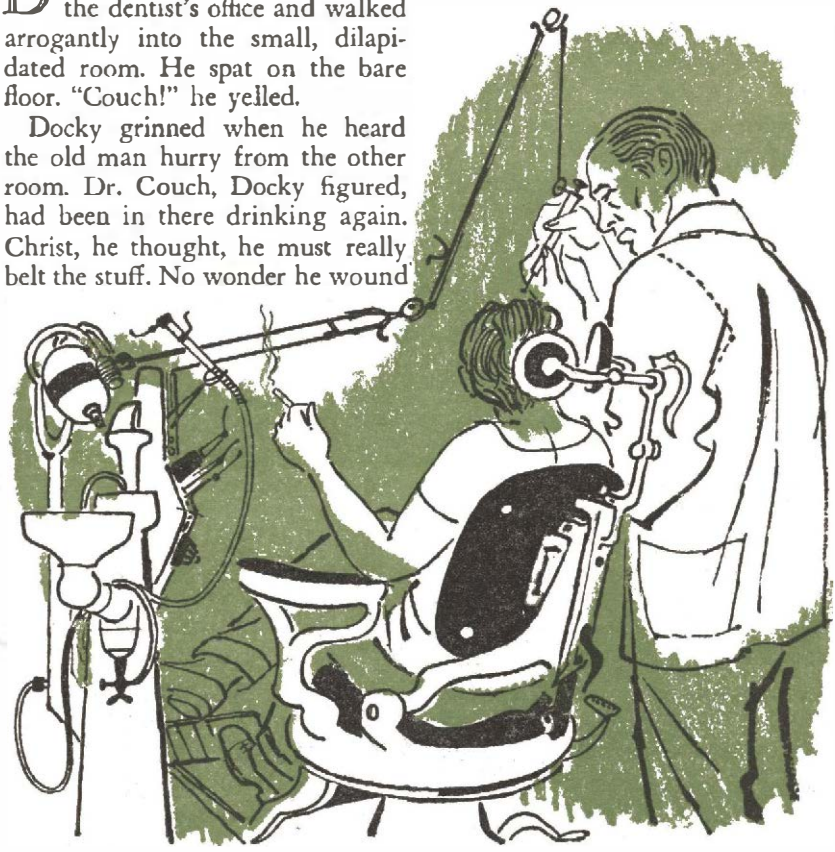
Docky pushed open the door of the dentist's office and walked arrogantly into the small, dilapidated room. He spat on the bare floor. "Couch!" he yelled.

Docky grinned when he heard the old man hurry from the other room. Dr. Couch, Docky figured, had been in there drinking again. Christ, he thought, he must really belt the stuff. No wonder he wound



The Big Smile

Dr. Couch would crawl if Docky ordered him to. There was a very good reason . . .

BY

STAN WILEY

up down in this neighborhood.

A tall, stooped man paused in the doorway. His glasses had slid down his hooked nose and he peered at Docky through the space between his brows and the top of his glasses.

"Quit lookin' like a vulture!" snapped Docky. "My teeth need lookin' at."

"I cleaned them just two weeks ago. Surely—"

"My teeth need lookin' at!" repeated Docky. He pushed up his lip and muttered, "See? I got some dirt or somethin' there."

"A toothbrush would—"

"Shut up!" Docky grinned with the satisfaction only an eighteen-year-old boy can feel when he has made a man of sixty cower before him. Docky spat on the floor again. "Don't gimme no damn backtalk, Couch! When I come in here, you do what I tell you. I know I got the best choppers in town, Doc, and you're gonna keep 'em that way. Now, I say I got some dirt on 'em an' you're gonna take it off!"

When the dentist was finished, Docky got up and smiled into the cracked mirror. The sight of the gleaming, perfect teeth made him chuckle. "Met a dandy broad, Doc. Just wait till she sees these choppers. Christ, all the dames go for 'em."

Dr. Couch said nothing, silently begging the youth to leave.

Docky glanced about the small room, his glance derisive as he noted the old equipment, the torn cushion on the chair, the tarnished instruments. "Oughta fix your place up, Doc."

Dr. Couch shrugged his shoulders.

"Ain't you makin' enough dough, old man?" taunted Docky. He lit a cigarette and let the match fall, still burning, to the floor. He laughed when the dentist stepped on it.

"Be a damn shame to have a fire, Doc. Think of what'd happen if the cops found out you was practisin' without no license. They'd throw the book at a drunken bum like you."

"Get out!" flared the old man.

Docky laughed. "Better take that back, Doc. Be kinda tough if my gang clobbered the joint again." He watched the dentist wet his lips, and shouted, "Take it back!"

"All—all right," said Dr. Couch.

"I'll be back, Doc. Real soon. Gotta keep the choppers polished for the gals. This new one—oughta see her, Doc. She's a cute hunka stuff. Wait'll I nibble on her ear with these pearls!" He tapped his teeth, laughed loudly, and turned away.

Dr. Couch did not move until he heard the door slam shut after Docky. He lifted a bottle of cheap whiskey from a drawer, took a swallow, sighed with despair. He placed the bottle on the shelf with the tarnished instruments and went

to the window and stared down at the filthy street five floors below.

So I've come to this, he thought.

He remembered back twenty years to the time when his dental practice was flourishing and most of his patients were quite wealthy. He thought of the lovely woman who had been his wife, how she had died while giving birth to their daughter Alice and how he had, as a consequence, taken to drink. He'd been half-drunk the day he had worked on the teeth of a small boy; the drill had slipped and had dropped inside the boy's mouth. He remembered how the blood had spilled out and how the torn lips had hung like slivers of red moss from the boy's face. The shame of losing his license and being given a suspended sentence. The horror of Alice's having contracted polio and his drifting back to the comfort of the bottle.

And now without a license, without hope, without his old skill, he had opened this tiny office and had tried to make a living for Alice and himself. He had controlled his drinking and had made a little money—and then Docky had come.

Dr. Couch took another drink. He recalled the day Docky had come for a check-up. When he had demanded payment, Docky had laughed. When he had told the boy not to come again, he had enraged him. The next morning he'd found the office a shambles. That afternoon Docky had returned and told him, with a great deal of pleasure, that he knew he had no license.

Coming out of his reverie, Dr. Couch went with the bottle into what passed for a reception room. No receptionist, no telephone, no magazines, no furniture except a single chair and a battered desk. Dr. Couch lifted the bottle and took a single swallow, went to the desk and looked at the photograph there.

The picture showed Alice's blonde hair, her very pretty face. It did not show the braces on her legs, or the crutches she used when going slowly down the walk to the corner store where she clerked.

Dr. Couch took another pull at the bottle, sat down in the chair, and cried.

Docky came back a week later. The dentist obeyed the young man's order to clean his teeth, and afterwards Docky inspected them in the cracked mirror, and chuckled.

"Doc, you're crazy."

Dr. Couch said nothing.

"Know who I'm gonna show these pearls to?" He lit a cigarette and blew smoke into the old man's face. "You know the babes 'round here go for a guy with shinin' teeth. Man, they practically fall into my arms after one look. Christ, lookit that smile." He admired himself in the mirror, smoothed his thick, dark hair and appraised the duck-cut. "Guess what gal's gonna get this smile tonight?"

"I wouldn't know."

Docky grinned savagely. "A little blonde with steel legs, Doc. A beaut of a little bitch with jockey sticks to help her walk. How come I missed her up to now, I don't know. I get to talking to her and find out she's your kid, I says to myself now I know I got to have some of this. I never had me a cripple. Besides—

"What are you saying? Now you look here. You wouldn't—"

"Play it cool, Doc. Sure, your gal's gonna see these pearls tonight."

"I won't let Alice go near—"

"Shut up!" Docky screamed at him. "You ain't gonna do a damn thing about it. I'm gonna drop down to the corner and walk her home—an' we'll see what happens."

"You—you—"

"Cool down, Doc." Docky laughed happily. "An' you ain't goin' home for no supper, neither. You're stayin' right here."

"Get out! *Get out!*" He rushed at the young man, shouting as he swung his fist.

Docky side-stepped the blow and hit the dentist in the stomach. The old man sank to the floor. Docky kicked him in the ribs. Docky laughed when the old man sprawled against the wall, moaning with pain.

"You're stayin' here, Doc. You try anything an' I'll carve you up."

Dr. Couch did not look up until the bottle was empty. He straightened slowly in the chair and blinked his eyes, as if not believing that the room could be so dark. He stood up, wished he were totally drunk, and turned on the small bare bulb in the ceiling fixture.

God! God God God! He wiped his sweaty face with his hand and stumbled back to the chair. Why aren't I drunk? I can't even get drunk and forget and— He cursed himself. I can't go to the police. If I do, they'll arrest me too. And that bastard Docky would come around again. He'd do—do worse—to Alice!

The old man put his head in his hands. His tears only increased the blackness of his thoughts. Slowly, he raised his head, and stood up. He moved resolutely toward the door. Even the thought of Docky taking later and horrible revenge did not halt him now. He was halfway down the hall when he heard someone running up the steps, and he halted, suddenly very afraid.

Docky appeared at the head of the stairs, and then ran toward him. One hand was against his face; it was blood stained. His eyes were wild.

"That bitch—that God damn bitch—she—" He stopped, drew in two shuddering breaths. "All I did was horse around with her. That's all!" He withdrew his hand and looked at the blood. "Doc, she hurt a tooth. Fix it!"

"What did you do to her?"

"Nothing! Like I told you, I just teased her and horsed around." Docky made a try at a grin. "Shoulda been there, Doc. That gal of yours sure got cute—"

Dr. Couch swung, missed so badly he went off balance. Infuriated, Dockey rushed at the old man, knocked him down, kicked him.

"I oughta kill you! I would, 'cept you're the only dentist 'round here! Lissen, Doc. Lissen!" He kicked the old man again. "I can do anythin' I want. You hear that? I can take her jockey sticks away and make her crawl to me—like I done tonight. I can rip that blouse off an' I can play with her—like I done tonight. I can do it anytime I want! Anytime! An' if you try an' stop me, I'll kill her nice an' slow! Now get up! Get up an' fix my teeth! An' remember that I'll kill you if you try anything."

Dr. Couch nodded slowly, arose with his hand pressed to his side. "I—I'll do—what you say," he whispered.

"Damn right you will." Docky looked at his bloody hand. "I'll teach that bitch to sock me with a crutch. I'll—" He stopped, and shoved the dentist into the other room. "Get with it, Doc! She hurt one of my teeth!"

Dr. Couch washed the boy's mouth and examined it. The crutch had torn off a strip of skin on the gum. It had bled, but Docky's excited concern over his teeth had made it seem worse than it was.

Dr. Couch looked at Docky's eyes. They were wide with concern for his shining, perfect teeth.

When the dentist stepped back, Docky asked, "How—how is—it?"

"It's a good thing you got here in time. I can save it."

Dr. Couch turned, opened a drawer, took out a hammer. "This won't take long," he said and slammed the hammer into the back of Docky's skull.

When Docky came to, he saw Dr. Couch leaning against the instrument table, watching him. Docky tried to move. He couldn't.

"No use trying," said the dentist, and smiled faintly. "You're tied to the chair and your mouth is wedged open."

A guttural sound came from the boy's throat.

"I hit you with a hammer, if that's what you're wondering about," said the old man. He studied the helpless boy for a moment, and added, "I tied you up and left to see Alice. We packed. You've been out for three hours, so we had plenty of time. I found Alice scared and crying. Too scared. She's the last one you'll ever touch."

Docky's face was damp with sweat. His eyes were big with sudden panic.

Dr. Couch moved to the chair. "One more job—one more *free* job —before I go, Docky." He tapped the boy's teeth. Docky's head was bound to the headrest of the dental

chair and the metal clamp kept his mouth arched open. "You like your teeth better than you like any man or woman, Docky. The only thing you're proud of is your teeth. And they're the only things I can hurt to hurt you." He shook his head. "The next dentist you go to isn't going to be pushed around, Docky. You'll have to find the best to get teeth again."

Dr. Couch ignored the boy's guttural plea. Docky's eyes followed the dentist's hand as he took the drill off the hook and started the motor. It sounded very loud.

"Nobody to hear us, Docky—even if you could scream. It's after midnight, and we're all alone." He looked at the drill for an instant. "They'll find you in the morning, Docky, so don't worry about that. Just think of how the girls will react when they see that you don't have teeth." He laughed bitterly when Docky tried to free himself, his eyes bright with fear now. "Wait till I hit the nerves. Think of the fun I'll have. Just like you had fun with Alice tonight."

Doc Couch stepped forward and began to drill the boy's teeth away, right down into the roots.

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