

ANC

MANHUNT

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

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SKIP A BEAT

By

Henry Kane

Plus —

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CRAIG RICE

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EVERY STORY NEW!



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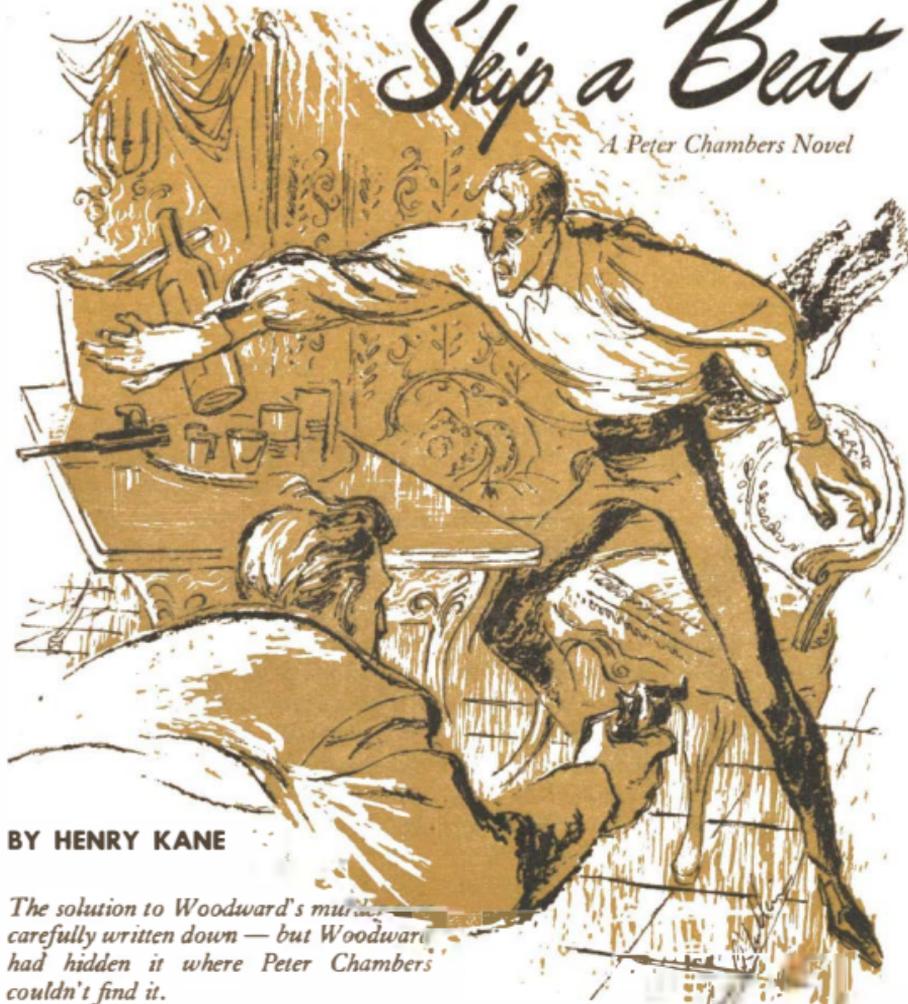
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Skip a Beat

A Peter Chambers Novel



BY HENRY KANE

The solution to Woodward's murder was carefully written down — but Woodward had hidden it where Peter Chambers couldn't find it.

The office was immense: vast, square, high-ceilinged and sound-proofed. The walls were of dark red, dull-lustre wood panels; the floor of soft grey ankle-deep carpeting. The furnishings were simple, bulky and

very expensive. There were few adornments. One wall had a subdued Van Gogh, ancient and portentous, a large oblong canvas, rimmed within a ridged ebony frame (willed upon death to the Metropolitan Museum

Of Art). Upon the opposite wall hung a letter framed too in ebony, but in narrow strips. It was signed by a former President of The United States. It was addressed to Adam Woodward, 20 Wall Street, New York, New York, and it bore the following, all handwritten: "Dear Adam: You have been a friend, citizen, patriot, and solid adviser. Thank you for a long and continuing assistance. Men like me always have need of men like you, and always shall, and you have been unstinting and unselfish — and unlauded — in your service to your Government. Thank you again, and best wishes."

Adam Woodward was seventy years of age, fabulous, fearless, and world-known. The Woodward family had been bankers since 1800, all except Adam, who had early entered politics, had been a Congressman for eight years, and the Governor of a Western state for eight years, and then had retired to become a newspaperman; a columnist who wrote them as he saw them, a stormy petrel, a man of independent wealth and independent thought and independent politics; twenty years a columnist, twenty years a confidant of men in high places, twenty years a member of national and international councils, twenty years a world-statesman and speech-maker, and twenty years, day in and day out, his column appeared, nationally syndicated, and read by millions.

At nine-thirty of a gusty Monday morning in March, Adam Woodward

pointed an excited finger across his massive mahogany desk, and the file-rasp of his whiskey-and-cigarette voice rose in pitch:

"I will declare to the world that you're a Commie. I will shock and startle the populace. I'm a newspaperman, and as a newspaperman, I love it, though, as an American, I detest and am ashamed of it. I don't hit below the belt. I don't sneak up on people. This is the third time, privately, that I've given you the opportunity to show me that my facts are wrong — and it's the third time that you've failed to do so. So I'm going to print, column after column, fourteen columns, and I'm going to expose you for what you are. I've put in eight months of intensive investigation, and I've got a file this thick. Facts, and authenticated documents. And I know just who was behind my office being broken into, and my home ransacked. But you didn't find anything there, did you? And you're not going to. And I know of your efforts to tie up my bank vaults, and that won't help either, because the stuff isn't there. I've got it temporarily secured in a place where nobody — nobody — would think to look, not even you. And after I've run it, all of it, from beginning to end, with, of course, my own brilliant comments appended thereto, that file will be turned over to the proper authorities, and from there on in, you're on your own. All right. That's it. Now get out of here."

It was a long speech.

It was, as it turned out, the last

long speech Adam Woodward ever delivered.

MONDAY is not for bachelors. Monday, for bachelors, should be obliterated . . . but then, of course, and unfortunately, there would be Tuesday. Monday is a trial, and it has been my assiduous effort, most of my life, to avoid as much of Monday as possible, and, sort of, to limp, as it were, painstakingly but correctly, into the thriving world of humdrum Tuesday.

The week-end had been verdant, suburban, partyful and moist — gaiety merging with headache and blending with fun and hangover — but now I lay a-bed of a Monday at home with the cover over all of me, shutting out, it was my trust, the golden alarm of sunshine and the pealing of telephone bells. It worked with the sunshine. But the phone drove me crazy. Finally, I emerged from the cocoon of quilt, flicked a haphazard glance at the clock which returned an amazing one-thirty in the afternoon, strode to the phone, lifted the receiver, and then buried the separate parts of the instrument beneath the cushion of an easy-chair to avoid thereby the thin, plaintiff, irresistible whirr-wail of a sundered phone-piece.

But that did not work either.

I returned to bed, re-assumed my crouch beneath the all-enveloping cover, shut my eyes, and was permeated with slumber . . . and then

hell broke loose . . . doorbells buzzing and doors being pounded upon.

I flung off the cover and, mayhem in my heart, I made for the door, opened it and was at once subdued by the baleful expression on the face of Miss Miranda Foxworth, my secretary. "You?" I said.

"Me."

Miranda Foxworth: short, squat, thick and earnest, and gasping slightly from the excitement of her excursion.

"You," I said. "Of all people, you ought to know better, breaking in on me in the middle of the morning, practically."

"It's half past three."

A look at the clock verified that. "Time," I said, "flies. Does it not? All right. Just don't stand there with that accusing look. Come in." She did that and I closed the door behind her and hitched at my pajamas. I said, "Who's at the office?"

"Nobody."

"Very efficient. A lousy boss figures for a good secretary, so now you go and upset that. You can be replaced, you know."

"Can I?"

That's all I'd need. I simmered down fast. "I'm sorry, Miranda. Grouchy. You know how it is. Monday morning."

"It's half past three."

"Yeah. You know how it is. Monday afternoon. Must be real special, you leaving the office alone, and coming all the way up here."

"It wouldn't have been necessary, if you'd answer your phone." She looked about, went to the easy chair, disinterred the phone, put it together, and restored it to its rightful place. "Adam Woodward called."

"Who?"

"Adam Woodward."

It was a long double-take, but when it happened I flopped about as though I'd thrown a convulsion.

"*Adam Woodward?*"

"Correct."

"*The Adam Woodward?*"

"There is only one Adam Woodward of consequence."

"What he want?"

"You."

I found cigarettes, broke open the pack, lit up with stiff fingers, and pulled smoke into my lungs. "Adam Woodward," I said in wonderment, "calling Peter Chambers, and me sleeping like a bum in the middle of the afternoon. Miranda," I said, "I apologize. To you, to Mr. Woodward, to the entire world."

Her voice grew more kindly. "Do you know him?"

"Never met him in my life. Wouldn't believe that he even knew I existed. When'd he call?"

"Twelve o'clock this afternoon."

"Twelve o'clock," I mourned. "A real world-famous client — possibility, that is — and me like a bum in bed."

"He's called twice since then."

"What he want? Did he say what he wanted, Miranda?"

"I stalled him in my best English.

I told him you were out on a case, and that I'd do my best to locate you. I said most probably you'd call in."

"And what did he say to that?"

"Said for you to call him. Said it was urgent. Said that he wished to retain you on a matter. Said that he had three other private detectives in mind, but that you were on top of the list, and that he'd wait until four o'clock, but that he couldn't wait after that, that if you weren't in touch by four, he'd have to look to someone else."

I jumped to the phone. "Did he give you a number?"

"He did."

She said the number, and I dialed it. A female voice came on and I said, "Mr. Woodward" and the voice said, "Who's calling?" and I said, "Peter Chambers" and the voice said, "Just one moment, please" and then there was a pause, and then a rasping voice said, "Mr. Chambers?"

"This is Peter Chambers."

"Are you calling from your office, Mr. Chambers?"

"No, sir."

"Where are you calling from?"

"My home."

"All right. Hang up. I'll call you back."

"Don't you want the number?"

"No."

"But it's an unlisted number."

"Hang up. I'll call you back. Keep the wire from being busy."

He hung up, and I hung up, and

I said to Miranda, "This guy's worried. He's even worried about me."

"What do you mean?"

I repeated my conversation with him.

Miranda said, "I don't understand."

"He's worried. He doesn't know me. When he calls my office, he knows he's getting me. When I call him — he doesn't know who, really, is calling. I tell him I'm home. So he checks that. A big shot like him . . . there are no unlisted numbers. So right now he's making the check. Then he calls back . . . and he *knows* he's talking to the right man."

Admiration from Miranda is as reluctant as a rich man's consent to a pauper for a son-in-law, but I got a nod and a blink and the suspicion of a smile, and from Miranda, that's about it . . . Miranda had small patience with the modern private richard type of operator; Miranda was a Sherlock Holmes fan. I didn't have much time to preen. The phone rang.

I grabbed it. "Hello?"

"Mr. Chambers?"

"That's right."

"Mr. Woodward. The reason I called back —"

"I know the reason."

"You do?"

I told him.

"Very good," he said. "Excellent. I'd like you to come down to my office."

"When?"

"As soon as possible. It's at 20

Wall. Suite 1901. But don't come in there."

"Where, then?"

"My suite has outer rooms and anterooms, a good deal of that. But when I handle very private business, I don't choose even to have my secretaries know who my caller is. The suite is a corner suite. Around the bend is a door marked 1910. That door leads directly into my private office. If you'll call from downstairs, then I'll know it's you when you knock, and I'll open for you. Is that understood, Mr. Chambers?"

"Yes, sir."

"How soon?"

"Within an hour."

"Very good. The sooner the better. Goodbye, then."

"Bye."

2.

20 Wall Street looked like 20 Wall Street: steel and concrete jutting into the sky, a huge marble entrance facade, busy people whirling in and out of brass-bound revolving doors, hundreds of windows ablaze with the reflection of the sinking sun. I called from downstairs, was borne upward in a majestic elevator, made the journey around the bend to 1910, knocked, and the door was opened by Adam Woodward. No need to describe him, you've seen him in the newsreels, the tall gangling figure; and the head of him at the masthead of his column, the long thin nose, the

pointed chin, the bushy eyebrows; but I was surprised at the youthfulness of his movements, the keen, constantly-moving, alive-grey eyes, the vibrant tight-to-bone skin of his face. He said, "You're Chambers; you're younger than I'd expected; come in, come in."

He went behind his desk, inserted a cigarette in a holder. I struck the match for him, and he said, "Thank you, thank you, you were most highly recommended to me," and I said, "By whom?" and he said, "Fogarty out of Washington," and I said, "Great guy, Mr. Fogarty," and he said, "A credit to his Department, a brilliant mind, but that's water over the bridge, let's get down to cases, you and I."

"Yes, *sir*," I said.

"Sit down."

I sat.

He said, "I've inquired about fees and things, I'm going to pay you more than you usually receive."

"For what?"

"I want you as . . . as a bodyguard, I suppose. I want you as a bodyguard until further notice. I want all of your time, twenty-four hours a day. I know I'll be taking you away from other business, and, therefore, I'll pay you one hundred dollars a day, starting now. Is that agreeable?"

"Well . . ."

He reached into the left pocket of his trousers, pulled out a wad, peeled off seven one-hundred dollar bills, and handed them across the desk.

"All right, Mr. Chambers? One week's pay in advance?"

You resist seven hundred dollars in cash. Me, I said, "You've hired yourself a man, Mr. Woodward. May I know what it's all about?"

"I'll give you a bit of it, sketchily. I've uncovered a Communist, but not an ordinary one. I believe it will make interesting copy, frantically interesting copy. So I've planned a series of articles, all of them dealing with the facts, and all of them gradually leading up to the final article, in which I shall declare the name of the individual. At that time, I shall turn over all of my data to the authorities, and at that time, I think —" his lips pulled up in a saturnine grin that gave him the mien of a benign wolf — "your services will be at an end."

"I can assume, then, that the person whom you're going to expose has at least a suspicion that you're going to do just that."

"More than a suspicion, Mr. Chambers. I've declared my intention to this individual. I've given the individual every opportunity to show me I'm wrong, and I've been stalled, three different times, the last time this morning. I'm utterly convinced the individual has absolutely no defense."

"And you think the party may resort to violence?"

"In moments of stress, violence flares. It may be directed at me, or it may be turned inward, as in suicide. The latter is not my affair,

and I'm retaining you for the purpose of circumventing any attempt at the former. I don't believe, really, any attempt will be made, but —" he shrugged — "all of us, psychologically, reject the fact of violence directed at us, and I want to avoid falling into that trap. Hence — you."

"And the name of this person?"

"I'd rather not mention it."

"Male or female?"

"Let's get off that line, Mr. Chambers. I'll tell you this, though. Since my original declaration, my home in Riverdale has been ransacked, my office has been broken into, and it may be that my safe deposit vault has been tampered with. Safe deposit vaults are not impregnable, despite the two keys and the aura of a bastille — if one's connections are strong enough — and in this case, the connections may be strong enough."

"And what would they be looking for?"

"The data I mentioned before. I've got quite a file on my pigeon, documented evidence, that will feed into a beautifully juicy story. I have that, as they put it, stashed away, in a temporary place. I'm going to want your advice on that. You're the expert. It may be that the temporary place shall be changed up, dependent upon your views, and dependent upon the ingenuity of your methods of transportation. We shall talk about that."

"When, sir?"

He chuckled, removed the cigarette from the holder, tapped it out in an ashtray, and stood up. "We'll leave now. You'll have dinner with me, if you please. At home. I live in Riverdale, I believe I mentioned that. Coming, Mr. Chambers?"

He went to the heavy wooden door by which I had entered, and turned three different locks on it.

I rapped a knuckle against the wood of the door. I said, "Pretty solid."

"Sheet-metal in between, and specially hinged on the inside. So is this one." He took me to another door, ushered me past it to a small ante-room, then used three keys locking that door.

I said, "But you told me they ransacked this place."

"I didn't say ransacked, not for the office. I said, broke in. They looked over every other room, but couldn't get into this one. They — he or she — just weren't prepared for sheet-metal."

"This where you keep it, then?"

"What?"

"The data you were talking about."

"No. You can get through sheet-metal too, if you know that's just where you want to go. No. The office was the first place they tried. As I told you, I talked to the individual three times. The second time I vouchsafed the information that the stuff was not in the office and that it would be stupid to try again, to attempt to blast through

sheet-metal on a fool's errand. I think that took, because they didn't try the office again. I've also tipped the building-guard to check the office each half hour. It would certainly take more than a half hour to get through either of those doors to my inner office."

"Then why haven't you kept the stuff in there?"

"Because others can tip a building-guard too. Or kill him."

"You've got a point there, Mr. Woodward."

He took me through other rooms, where secretaries were working, and other office help, heads down and busy, and he said good night as we went along, and they said good night to him, and then he waved to the receptionist in the outer office, and then we were riding down in the elevator and coming out through the revolving door and I was matching his long strides as we walked east. "My garage," he said, "is just off Pearl." I tried for more conversation as we legged it.

"*The New York Bulletin*, that's your one outlet in this city, isn't it?"

"Yep."

"I'm a fan. Read the column every day."

"Good."

"Don't know a soul on that paper, except one guy."

"Who?"

"The guy that does the Broadway gossip column. Paul Kingsley."

He stopped suddenly, and I flew ahead of him. When he caught up

with me, he said, "An ambitious young man, isn't he?"

"Who?"

"Kingsley."

"Is he?"

"Overly ambitious."

"I wouldn't know."

At Pearl we made a right turn, and then another turn toward the river to the dimness of a wide street with warehouses and the smell of spice from the import houses. "Garage is here," Woodward said. "Right there." And then I saw the car rolling toward us, rolling from the east, from the river, long and black and picking up speed, and I saw the thing sticking out the window, and I hit him hard and he went down, and so did I, two falling bodies in the dimness, but me with my head up if I had to lose an eye, and I saw the thing spurt flame, and I heard the shots and the skipping whine of the bullets that missed, and I saw them both, the one with the sawed-off in his hands and the one at the wheel, the car a souped-up streak of murder past us, screeching on two wheels around the turn, and I knew them both.

Then there was silence, the weird-silence after noise, and then the running feet, and the screams, and the gathering crowd, and I was an anonymous one of them, risen to my feet, one of the crowd.

Adam Woodward was dead, three slugs through his skull, the benign wolf-grin a thing of torment on his face, and I shuffled away, the crowd

losing one spectator, as the clang of the ambulance came near.

I knew them both: the wheel-guy, Harry Strum, and the trigger-man, a guy with more guts than a butcher's trash-casket, a palely-cold killer with a girlish giggle known on the town only as Faigle.

I trudged to a cab and went home with a problem.

3.

In the apartment, I walked around with my problem. I made and drained a couple of highballs. I took off my clothes, let the water run in the tub, made a new ball, grabbed up my cigarettes and took the highball, the cigarettes and my problem into the bath with me. I sipped, I smoked and I wrestled with the inner man.

Adam Woodward had hired a bodyguard. That was a laugh. A bodyguard that didn't even have a gun on him. Well, there were extenuating circumstances for that: the bodyguard hadn't known he was being hired as a bodyguard. It had been my intention to have him stop off so that I could pick up the plumbing on the way to Riverdale. It had also been my intention to ask more questions, one of which would have been the usual: why a private detective, why not the cops? I knew what the answer would have been. He had been worried about the "individual's" connections and he had been worried about leaks. When

you ask cops for a bodyguard, you've got to give an explanation, and you never know when an explanation will spring a leak, nor do you know what calibre of man is assigned to the job: you can't pick your bodyguard out of the public weal, he's handed to you.

Which brought me smack up against my problem. I had seven hundred solid bucks, a quickly-dead ex-client, and a crawling conscience. The least I could do was to jerk justice around to put the clobber on the intelligence behind the hoods that had put the squash on Adam. Which ran me up against my problem again. I had recognized the torpedoes, and I was sure they had not recognized me: Faigle was a genius with a tommy, but he had used the spray solely on the assigned target; certainly, he could have spared a few slugs for me, had he known I was I, going by the first rule of gangsterism: there's no witness like a dead witness. But the boys were in a rolling car, with a definite objective in view, and it was dim, and I was just another long-legged guy who happened to be walking near Adam Woodward—who was destined for death. So, once again, the problem: do I go to cops with it? Cops, teletypes, nine-state alarms, descriptions on radio and TV. The word is out, the boys get holed up, and it becomes another long-drawn police action.

I didn't want it like that. I wanted it sure-fire, no word, no leak, no

nothing. I wanted the boys out celebrating a quick and easy kill, I wanted them spending the money they had earned, I wanted them around and junk-happy and loose . . . and available . . . to me. I sighed and sipped and traded in a soggy cigarette for another soggy cigarette. I was going against principle. I'm against the theory of taking the law into your own hands. So I rationalized. I'd be an arm of the law, a private arm, as it were: I'd reach for them, and get hold of them — get behind them if possible — and then bring in the whole kit and caboodle, and offer myself and my testimony as witness to murder.

So that was it. No cops. Not yet.

I got out of my bath and dried up. I shaved and dressed up to open-collar shirt and no tie. It was eight o'clock. I called down and had supper sent up. It was far too early to go out into the jungle looking for animals. The jungle wasn't a jungle yet, it was a city of eight million people, preponderately decent, bent on work or pleasure or recreation. Later, much later, when most of them were safely bedded down: that would be my time for hunting.

But what now? What opening? What wedge? Whom do I talk to? How do I learn more about Adam Woodward? I made phone calls and came away with nothing. He was an old man, long a widower, with no children. I made another phone call, to the City Desk of *The Daily News*, and I asked for Al Davis,

twenty years with the paper, a rewrite man and an old friend. I got through and I said, "Al? Pete Chambers?"

"Hi, sleuth."

"A favor, Al."

"What else?"

"You know Paul Kingsley?"

"Everybody knows Paul Kingsley."

"What about him?"

"A young shmigeggie with a lot of drive. A little big shot. Writes a pretty lousy column but knows everybody in town, upstairs and downstairs. Always punching, but always punching upward. Loves the newspaper business, but wants to be among the muckie-mucks. Give his right arm to be an executive. He might make it too. Knows where to play it rough, knows where to suck around. I hear he's in pretty good graces with his boss."

"Who dat?"

"Lincoln Whitney. Owns *The Bulletin*."

"What's he like?"

"Search me, pal. That's way upstairs. I'm only a reporter."

"What about Kingsley?"

"What about him?"

"I mean what kind of a guy, you know what I mean. Al."

"A shmigeggie, like I said."

"Means what, for this particular guy?"

"Means an angle-bird, a pusher, a dance-to-whatever-the-music-guy. In short, no class, no integrity."

"You really love him."

"Don't love him, don't hate him."

"How do I get to him?"

"What's today?"

"Monday."

"You're in luck."

"How come?"

"Monday nights Prince Charming holds court at home. Interviews, bribes, pay-offs; Monday night's his night in."

"Where's home?"

"Lemme check." He went away and came back. "Pete?"

"I'm still holding."

"262 Central Park West."

"Know the apartment?"

"It's a private house."

"Thanks, Al."

"You owe me a dinner."

"You got it. Bye now."

I knew Paul Kingsley from the late spots, I'd been an item in his column once, and he'd called me five or six times during the past couple of years for trivial information and I had obliged. I was going to collect on that obligation now. Adam Woodward had been acquainted with Paul Kingsley. I was curious as to how well acquainted. So I buttoned the shirt collar, slung on a tie, hooked a rig over my shoulder, examined a pistol and shoved it into the rig, slid into a jacket, topped that with a light coat and went to 262 Central Park West, which turned out to be a sombre-brown three-story house with a large white button on the right side of a shiny black door. I put a thumb on the button and

listened to the bell ring inside. I listened for a long time but that's all that happened, I listened. I took my thumb off the bell and backed away and looked up. There were lights on the top floor so I went back to the shiny black door, tried it once and found it locked, leaned on the white bell and let it work for me. It took time but I had no other engagement for so early in the evening. Finally there was a click and the door swung open. The young lady said, "You've been ringing a long time."

"That," I said, "is the understatement of the year."

"Sorry."

"Honey, if you're the maid, and I were the boss, I'd fire you right now."

"I'm not the maid."

I shrugged. "I'm not the boss."

She was a little package in a compactly-filled turtle-neck white sweater, a black velvet skirt, neutral nylons and black patent-leather spike-heeled pumps. It added up small, maybe five feet two, but all of it cute. She had silver-blond short-cut hair, absurdly heavy studious-type black goggles on a small nose, lively blue eyes, pale smooth cheeks without rouge, a small red puckered mouth, and a prim expression. She said, "What is it, please?"

"I'm to see Paul Kingsley."

"You have an appointment?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Peter Chambers."

"Please come in."

I came into a square foyer with wall lights and a light-blue rug and followed her softly along the light-blue rug through an archway into a wider anteroom, wall to wall with the light-blue rug, yellow walls, light coming down from a chandelier hanging by a gilt-type chain, modern blond-mahogany furniture tastefully arranged. There was a door on the right and a door on the left and a blue-carpeted stairway in the middle, going up. She turned away from me and went to the door on the right. She had trim slender ankles and the back of the skirt billowed engagingly. She knocked once, knocked again, and turned back. She smiled for the first time, and it took some of the primness off her face. She said, "When he's really busy, he won't even answer a knock. In here, please." She crooked a finger. "It's sort of the waiting room." She opened the other door.

We had a maroon carpet this time, dark green walls, a room lighted only by finely-wrought lamps, dark carved furniture, a lot of easy chairs, and, in a corner, a liquor cabinet with most of the bottles on top. My gaze must have lingered, because, before it returned to her, she said, "Help yourself."

"How about you?"

"A little brandy, if you insist."

"I don't insist."

"A little brandy."

I couldn't find ice, so I made my ball without ice, and I brought her

brandy in a pony glass. She nodded her thanks, said, "I'm Marcia Kingsley."

"Paul's wife?"

"No."

"Sister?"

"No."

"You're not his mother."

"I'm a sister, by law, that is. I was adopted by Paul's parents. A long time ago. They're both dead now."

"I see." I strolled. I said, "how long do I stay here?"

"He'll come asking for you, as soon as he's ready. I like the way you walk."

"Pardon?"

"It's lithe."

"That good?"

"Very. Like a tiger. You want to know why you had to wait so long at the door?"

"Sure."

"It's the maid's day off. We also have a part-time butler. It's his day off too. On Mondays, starting at about five o'clock, any of us that are at home, we're upstairs, mostly. Paul has all sorts of company on Monday, and we like to keep out of the way. He answers the door himself."

"Didn't do a good job on my ring, did he?"

"He gets tied up sometimes. Then he just doesn't give a damn. I came all the way down for you."

"Thanks. Something I can do in return? Walk specially lithe, maybe?"

"You can sit down."

She sat, and I sat, and I was just about getting comfortable, when she cracked: "What do you think about Adam Woodward?"

That brought me up out of the chair, one leap and a balanced glass. I tried to tone it down. "Woodward?" I gurgled, mildly as I could manage. It came up a croak.

"He's dead."

"Adam Woodward."

"Killed on a street downtown. Murdered."

"How do you know?"

"It's a news flash all over radio and TV."

"Adam Woodward," I said and went back to my seat.

"Did you know him?"

"Met him once. Did you?"

"Oh yes. A fine man. Poor Edwina."

"Edwina?"

"Edwina Grayson."

"The dancer?"

"That's right."

"Now what the hell did . . . pardon. What's the connection between Edwina Grayson and Adam Woodward?"

"I suppose that's going to become public gossip now."

"What?"

"Their relationship."

"What relationship?"

She sipped her brandy. I'd say she was about twenty-six, private school, finishing school and college. Her voice was deep and throaty and a tinge of culture clung like a South-

ern accent clings long after North Carolina has become a faint memory. She said, "They knew each other a long, long time." Then she shook it off and I knew she wasn't going to talk about it any more.

I got up and put more strength into the highball. I waved the glass and I said, "Paul does pretty good. Nice shack here."

"It doesn't belong to him."

"To whom?"

"Victor Barry."

It sounded familiar but it wouldn't stick. "Barry . . . ?"

"City Editor of *The Bulletin*."

"Oh yes. A lot of loot, eh?"

"Not really."

"But a joint like this."

"That's all he's got, really. Got it by inheritance. We're sort of tenants here. Paul, Rita, and I —"

"Who's Rita?"

"Paul's wife. Then there's Mark Dvorak. We all pay rent."

"Dvorak? The scientist?"

"Fellow-scientist."

"You kidding?"

"You against women?"

"I'm all for them."

"Then what's wrong with a lady-scientist?"

"Nothing. If she looks like you."

"Child prodigy. I was graduated from college at sixteen, and that's a fact, sir. Did graduate work, on scholarships, in most of the universities of reputation in the world. Science. Got the bent, got the inclination. Studied under all the masters. Don't let the little-girl look

fool you. I've been hitting the brandy ever since I heard about Woodward. I'm a big shot in my business. I used to be at Oak Ridge. Now I work with Dvorak as part of the civilian scientists group of the Signal Corps Laboratories out at Fort Monmouth."

"Well . . ." I said and my mouth hung open like I'd grown weights on my chin.

"I'm real famous. Check me sometime."

"Well . . ." I said.

"What do you do?"

"Me?"

"You."

"I'm a private detective."

"Really?" Now *her* mouth opened. "First time."

"Two firsts. First time for me with a lady-scientist."

She laid away the pony glass. "Let's go check with Paul."

I set my empty glass beside hers and followed her out the door and across the blue-rugged room to Paul's door. She knocked and we waited. She knocked again and we waited again. "Don't," she said as I reached for the knob, but I'd had it. If Paul had company, he was going to get more company.

Paul didn't have company.

Paul was alone. He was sitting in a brown-leather armchair. He was wearing a blue suit, a white shirt, a red tie, and black pointy shoes. He had sandy crew-cut hair, a wide knobby jaw, and a long thin nose. He stared directly at us with a grin

that wasn't funny. His legs were spread apart and the heels of the pointy black shoes dug into the nap of the maroon carpet like the one in the other room. His ears were wax-white and his eyes were white-rimmed and there was a wide rust stain on the white shirt in the vicinity of the left breast. A thin golden knife-hilt grew out of the middle of the stain. You didn't have to touch him to know he was dead.

She screamed, piercingly, again and again.

You wouldn't think a little lady-scientist had that much lung power. Then people started piling in.

4

The people were still there, the body was gone, and of the police, three detectives remained: Abramowitz, First Grade, burly and silent; Cassidy, First Grade, burly and silent; and Detective-lieutenant Louis Parker, stump-figured and loquacious. The people were Rita Kingsley, Victor Barry, and Mark Dvorak. Marcia Kingsley and I were also people.

Rita Kingsley was tall and blonde and white-faced, with a full figure in yellow silk lounging pajamas. Victor Barry was tall, thin, brown-haired and brown-eyed, with tight lips and twitching jaw muscles. He wore moccasins, tan slacks and a white sport shirt. Mark Dvorak: grey-templed, grey-eyes-in-black-lashes, patrician high-boned nose,

and a slender black mustache. He was lanky and broad-shouldered in a black velvet smoking jacket, black pants and black pumps with tassels. Rough guess, Rita was thirty, Victor thirty-five, Mark on the sunny side of forty.

Parker was saying: “. . . you were all here, all available, all a possibility. It is my duty to inform you that you have no immunity; anything you say may be used against you.”

Mark Dvorak said, “Is there a possibility of suicide?” He had a faintly foreign voice, marshmallow-soft and musical. He moved about nervously, springy in the legs, an athletic type.

Parker said, “We don’t rule out nothing. Yet. Fast figure, it ain’t suicide. Quick dusting showed no prints on the hilt. A suicide don’t wipe off his prints. And if he used gloves, he’d still be wearing them. He ain’t.”

Marcia wiped her palms on her skirt. “Fingerprints are most difficult to bring out on a surface like a knife-hilt, especially a corrugated hilt like that one was.”

“You got a point there, lady. Which is why the knife is down at the laboratory right now. Autopsy ought to give us some viewpoints along that line too.” He went near her. “How do you know what that hilt looked like?”

“I saw it. In him.”

Parker looked about. “Any of the rest of you have a look?”

Nobody answered. Rita Kingsley shivered. Part of the jacket of her pajamas fell away revealing the upper portion of a full breast, the flesh young and warm-glowing. She adjusted the jacket, put a loop button-hole over a large button. Her eyes were round and blue and without tears. She was his wife but she wasn’t crying. She said, “You’re making a mistake if you limit your suspects — to us.” She had a high voice and a slightly affected intonation. The words came out round but they ran together. She talked like she had peas in her mouth. “My husband had visitors all evening. The bell kept ringing.”

“Anybody know who his visitors were?”

Nobody answered. That had been the way it had gone since Parker arrived. To most of his questions — nobody answered.

“All right,” Parker said. “Let’s get the suicide thing out of the way. We got his wife here, his sister, and two of his friends. You all live here in the house. This guy have any reason for suicide?”

Nobody answered.

The bell rang. Sharply.

Parker said, “That ought to be Mr. Whitney.” He cocked his head at Cassidy. “Get it.”

Cassidy went out and came back with a powerfully-built, tall man. A square man. Square shoulders in a charcoal-grey suit, the handstitching faint but patent. A thick neck, at least size eighteen, rising out of a

white pleated shirt to a square red thick-jowled face, closely shaven to shiny-smooth. A square patch of fleshy nose, a square pugnacious chin, a square upper lip over a tight wide mouth. A black homburg and a black knit tie gave him, momentarily, a priestly look. His eyebrows were angled and had stick-out jumpy hair like the antennae of an insect. The eyebrows rose from one corner of each eye, to a point, and dropped to the other corner. The eyes were small, blue, quick-moving and commanding. They squinted at each of us, picked the man in charge, Parker, and stayed on him. "I'm Lincoln Whitney. This is terrible, absolutely terrible. What the hell is this city coming to? Two in one day."

Cassidy grunted: "Two?"

Whitney wheeled on him. "Adam Woodward. Paul Kingsley. Two." He took off the homburg and placed it on a desk. He had sparse blondish hair, parted in the middle, and a high forehead going up to a much-revealed large red shiny skull. He went to Parker. He said, "I take it you're Detective-lieutenant Parker."

"That's right, sir."

Whitney's tight expression eased off as he waved a hand. "I hope you're not giving these people too much of a difficult time. I doubt you'll find a murderer among them."

Parker said, "We were trying to clear up any suicide possibility."

"Suicide. Nonsense."

"Why not, Mr. Whitney?" This from Mark Dvorak. He nudged a

pinky-point at his thin mustache.

"Because he was not the type, that's why not. Because he had everything in the world to live for, that's why not." Whitney's eyes jumped to Victor Barry. "Didn't you tell them?"

Barry was a casual man, lean and loose and handsome, the brown eyes soft, almost tender: a controlled man under a casual pose, only the twitching jaw muscles gave him away. Even his voice was casual. "No."

"Why not?"

"Because I didn't think it was right, coming from me. There had been no public announcement. Only you knew, I knew, and he knew." He shrugged and left one shoulder hunched. "You might have wanted to change your mind. I'm an old hand in the business. I don't like to talk out of turn."

"Talk," Parker said, "about what?"

Whitney said, "Berger, my managing editor, retired last week. Today, this afternoon, I called in Paul and told him the job was his. Managing editor. I told him to keep it under his hat, until I made the announcement."

"Which he didn't," Barry said. "He told me. And I went in to Mr. Whitney and told him that Paul had told me."

"Why?" Parker said.

"It was a squawk. I thought that guy should have been mine. I'm a guy who likes to say his piece. I said it."

"Whatever," Whitney said, "Paul Kingsley had achieved what he would have given his right eye for. He didn't go home and kill himself — out of pure joy. You can rule out suicide, Lieutenant. Your Captain gave me the whole story, when he talked to me on the phone. No, it wasn't suicide, and none of these good people here is a murderer. Paul wrote a column, and rather a nasty one, and he made a good many enemies. That's where I'd look, Lieutenant. Among his enemies. Not his friends."

Parker knew when to bunt. "Yes, sir," he said.

And now Whitney came to me. "Who're you, young man?"

"Name's Peter Chambers."

"He's a private detective," Parker said.

"Already?" Whitney's forehead creased and his eyebrows grew more pointed. He moved near and the quick little eyes examined all of me. "What are you doing here, young man?"

"Mr. Kingsley called me. I came in response to his call. I'm the feller discovered the body."

"I see. Were you here alone with him?"

"No soap on that, Mr. Whitney. Furthermore, when I kill people, stabbing is too bloody. I like to choke them to death."

Whitney smiled, reached out a freckled hand, patted my arm.

"He's clean," Parker said.

"I'm sure of that." Whitney went

back to Parker. "I think you ought to let these people go to bed, Lieutenant." He looked at his watch. "It's close to midnight."

"Yes, sir," Parker said.

I said, "Okay if I cut out?"

"Cut," Parker said. "But keep in touch."

5.

I did the merry-go-round of the jazzier late spots and it was two-thirty before I hit the brass ring. Two brass rings. I'd missed them in a couple of traps but I'd dropped money like my faucet was leaking and at least I knew they were together and the word was that they were headed for Benjie's. Benjie's was two flights of stucco on a dim corner of Thompson Street in the Village. It was a privately owned home, but nobody knew who owned it: it was syndicate property and it catered to friends, but you had to be a friend with a good deal of money. Because there was nothing penny-ante about Benjie's. If you liked to gamble, and you could afford it — and you were a friend — you went to Benjie's. Benjie's was Las Vegas telescoped to one private house in New York City. Every indoor game of chance ever devised was practiced in Benjie's. And it was top-bracket stuff. No floating crap game, Benjie's. No two-bit faro, no nickel slot machines. This was the top, Number One, and the real gamblers from all over the world,

sooner or later, passed through the portals of Benjie's, and congregated about its tables. All the frivolous boys and girls, all the easy-money guys, everybody with a loose buck, from the top layers of society to the deepest dirt of the underworld. Off from the big gaming chambers, there was food, and there was drink, and there were cute little rooms in which to enjoy them. Every room was sound-proofed, and every window was black-draped. No light ever showed through.

I was in the right place. I'd got out of the cab a block away and I was walking. Two people came out of Benjie's. One of them was Harry Strum. The other was not Faigle. The other was a big blonde swaying against Strum, and Strum held her up. Strum was tall and slender and graceful and never drunk till he passed out. He walked her across the street to a good-looking, quiet-painted, late model sedan, opened the door with one hand, shoved her in with the other, shut the door, walked around to the other door, got in, started the motor, and pulled off.

I went into Benjie's.

The lobby was clean and conservative, the lighting correct, the silence impressive. There was a beige carpet, and French Provincial furniture, and a wide beige-carpeted stairway. There was no elevator. There was a small room on the right, with an open door. The room was immaculate: hardwood polished floor, an

oval Chinese rug, yellow and pink and black, delicate teakwood glistening furniture, and a teakwood desk. The desk had six push-buttons and a telephone, nothing else. The telephone could produce joy and laughter, the buttons, death and disorder. There was a door at the far end of the room. I didn't know what lay behind it and I didn't care to find out. Seated at the desk was a cherub-faced, white-haired, kindly-looking man. His name was Danny Madison.

Danny Madison looked like a successful missionary, about sixty years of age, who had devoted his life to soul-saving. Danny Madison was a three-time loser, con-man and embezzler, but that was thirty years back. Since then Danny had found his niche. Danny Madison had probably seen everything evil a man can see, but his face remained the sweetly-smiling face of an angel. As he had grown to maturity, Danny had learned the cardinal rules suited to his nature: look but don't talk, live but don't talk, see but don't talk. Danny Madison didn't know from nuthin — he'd been racked by hoodlums, tortured, and, on the other side of the fence, quizzed acutely by the law — but Danny Madison never knew from nuthin — it was said that he enjoyed the pain, and he'd linger until he fell unconscious — but he never knew from nuthin: he would blink his eyes, shrug his shoulders, and smile sweetly. It was a tribute to the intelligence of the upper echelons of the syndicate people that

Danny Madison was behind the teakwood desk at Benjie's, had been for the past fifteen years.

Danny looked up when I came in, and guess what, Danny smiled sweetly. There was a thing I knew about Danny that others probably knew: Danny talked when Danny wanted to talk, only then. And Danny, like everything at Benjie's, was expensive. I reached in for one of Adam Woodward's hundred dollar bills and laid it on the desk. I said, "I've got a message for Faigle."

"That so?"

"I saw Harry Strum leave a few minutes ago."

"That so?"

"Strum gave me a message to deliver."

"That so?"

I took out two more of Woodward's bills and laid them beside the other. "I don't have time, Danny. I got a message to deliver."

"He's a crumb."

"Who?"

"Faigle. A miserable insulting crumb. I'm glad you got a message for him. I don't like his guts, he's got bad manners, got no respect for old age."

"What table is he working?"

"No table. He's through gambling for the evening. He's having a drink. With a lady."

"Where?"

"iG."

"First floor?"

"Yeah."

"Must I knock?"

"You don't have to, if you have a key." He opened a drawer. There was a key. I took it. He said, "Leave it in the lock. Any real trouble, you hit me with a soft billy and took it. I don't bruise easy, don't show no marks when I get hit right."

"Thanks."

"Go deliver your message. And don't worry. They won't find him here. They'll find him in the gutter where he belongs."

"It's not that kind of message."

"You never can tell." I started to go. He called softly: "Hey."

"Yeah?"

"He's heeled."

"Thanks again, Danny."

"The hell with you."

I didn't have to walk softly: the carpets in the corridors were lush. I had my gun in my left hand and I tried the knob with my right. I didn't need the key. The door opened. Faigle was being careless. One look at his eyes and I knew why.

The room was fitted up like a nightmare out of Boccaccio: gold tapestries, red walls, four gold-covered divans with green silk pillows, red light going upward from gold wall-brackets, a plate-glass mirrored floor, and a plate-glass mirrored ceiling. Soft music came from a wiring-system. There was a bottle of whiskey and an ice bucket and soda and glasses on a gilt table with long graceful legs. There was also a Luger. And Faigle was in a chair at the table, very near the Luger. He

was wearing black shoes, black tight-fitting trousers (you could see the muscle of his thigh right through the pants), a black sash, and a white, tight-cuffed loose-sleeved silk sport shirt open at the throat. The lady sitting near him at the table went with the decor of the room: tight green dress over one shoulder and under the other, a wide gold belt, gold high-heeled shoes, red frizzy short-cut hair, heavy make-up, and false eyelashes.

The gun was in my right hand now.

I stayed near the door and let them look at me. Faigle said, "How's with the peep-show, peeper? Ha."

Frizzy-hair said, "You know him?"

"Big man with a gun. If he pulls the thing, he drops dead of a nervous break-down. Ha."

I said, "You."

Frizzy-hair squeaked: "Me?"

"Out. Hurry up."

Faigle had a pushed-together narrow face, and a long chin. He was blond, straw hair falling in a cow-lick over his forehead. He had pale grey eyes but the grey was pushed to an inhuman white rim around the black enormously dilated pupils. He had a habit of pulling his upper lip to the gum, revealing long yellow teeth spaced like fangs. Now he giggled and clapped a hand on the back of Frizzy-hair. "You heard him. Big man with a gun wants to talk. Wants to talk private. Wait upstairs. Blow. Musn't keep the peeper waiting."

Frizzy-hair scrambled out of the chair and scampered past me. I closed the door and leaned on it. Faigle got up, unsteadily, one hand leaning on the table. The hand was near the Luger. He said, "What's the pitch, pal?"

"Who paid for Woodward?"

The upper lip pulled high. He sniffed a couple of times. He said, "Where'd you buy it?"

"Why?"

"Because the law's got nothing. The law's got a blank. I got information."

"Who paid for him, Faigle?"

"What's it to you?"

"I'm working."

"Then work the other side of the street, pal. Who sold you that Faigle's a canary?"

"You want law? Would you rather have law than me?"

Faigle wasn't waiting for any more. Faigle was finished with talk. He grabbed at the Luger and let go, but Faigle was a genius with a long one, with a side-arm he was noplacé, but he could get lucky, so I pointed it low and went for his legs, but Faigle outsmarted himself. I figured if I had him lame, I could squeeze it out of him, but Faigle had watched too many Westerns, and after he'd let fly with two wild ones, shattering a section of the ceiling-mirror, he threw himself to the floor where he caught one in the eye. Blood gushed like a geyser, and he was dead.

I wiped the key with my handkerchief, put it on the table, smeared

the door-knobs, went downstairs, walked out of Benjie's, and kept walking till I found a cab.

6.

The clock was a snarling prong that yanked me from my dreams. It was eleven o'clock Tuesday morning, but the boy had work. I went to the shower and let the water wake me up. I wiped, shaved, had breakfast and went to Police Headquarters. Parker looked weary. I said, "How goes it?"

"Stinks." Then he narrowed his dark eyes at me. "What's your interest?"

"I found the guy. I've got a professional interest."

"No, sir. That wouldn't get you out of bed this early and all the way downtown to here."

I said, "I'm grinding my own little axe. I don't want to talk about it yet."

"But you will?"

"Promise."

"It's a long time we've known each other, Pete."

"And we haven't crossed each other yet. Stay with me, Louie."

"Okay."

"How's it going?"

"Stinks, like I said. Got pressure from the brass too. Lincoln Whitney is a big man, and he's riled."

"Woodward your package too?"

"No, thank God. Kingsley is enough. The suicide is out. Laboratory showed the knife had been

wiped clean. Then, of course, somebody wore gloves."

"Autopsy?"

"Showed nothing unusual. We ain't got him any more. He's up at the Manning Chapel, on Seventy-ninth."

"What kind of a knife?"

His eyes opened to a gleam. "There we got something, but I'm holding it close to the vest, and you keep clammed on it."

"Of course, Louie."

"It's a foreign-make job. Like our switch-blades here, but a European job. I've got twenty men out on it right now. That's a break, that knife."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing. What have you got for me?"

"Nothing. Yet. Will you check an address for me, Louie, please?"

"Sure."

"Edwina Grayson. The ballet dancer."

He pushed a key and talked into the inter-com. Then he smiled at me, tiredly. "That mixed with this?"

"Nope. With Woodward."

"Woodward?" He jumped. "There a connection? Woodward and Kingsley?"

"I don't know. But that's my primary interest — Woodward."

"Don't hold out on me, kid."

"Don't worry, Louie."

A uniformed man came in with the information. Edwina Grayson. Address and phone number. She lived on the other side of the Park,

15 East 84th Street. I thanked the man, I thanked Parker, and downstairs I called her. If it was early for a private detective, it was early for a ballet dancer. She was entitled to a warning. I told her who I was, that it was important, that it was about Woodward. She asked me to give her a half hour. I said fine, a half hour was fine. Then I called the office. I had one message. Lincoln Whitney wanted to see me at three o'clock. I said thanks to Miranda and went out into the warm sunshine of March and bought myself a *Bulletin* from an old lady at a corner kiosk. Adam Woodward was a big story, Paul Kingsley was a smaller one, and on a back page there was a nine-inch squib about the death of a hoodlum, Warren (Faigle) Clitterhouse, obviously a gang killing, found in the gutter on Rivington Street with a bullet through his eye. I went back to the Adam Woodward story. It had nothing, but it had this: *The Bulletin* offered a five thousand dollar reward for the apprehension of the murderer or murderers of Adam Woodward. The axe I was grinding began to make a little more sense. I folded up the paper and returned it to the old lady, who looked at me as though I wanted my nickel back.

7.

15 East 84th Street was white, narrow and tall with a marble lobby and pearl-type buttons along a well-

kept brass oblong with names. I touched the one next to *Grayson* and the tick back was quick. I caught the door and had to peer back for the apartment number: 6B. The elevator was small and sparkling-clean. She was waiting for me at the open door. A ruffle went through me like my stomach had begun a card-game with my heart. The best description of Edwina Grayson is wow.

Starting from the bottom is was like this: white, high-heeled, cork-platformed mules; long, tapered, gold-tan, bare legs; long-muscled, supple-smooth, gold-tan, bare thighs; fresh, white, short tennis pants tightened about a wasp-waist with a braided white belt; bare, supple-smooth, gold-tan midsection; and then a white-wool, Bikini-type, pull-over sweater, that started where the arms meet the shoulders and ended just beneath a bosom that pointed outward and up. She said, "Mr. Chambers?"

"Yes."

"Please come in."

She was dark, black hair done up to a bun in back, a pointed nose, the tip of which moved when she talked, high cheekbones, a cleft chin, a full-curved mouth, the lower lip slightly pouting and wet — and eyes. That was the face: the eyes. They were huge, black, shining, bold, possessive, almond-shaped. They were wide-set and curiously tilted at the corners, the lids purple-dark, the lashes thick and long; restless eyes, intense, devouring.

"You said it was important, Mr. Chambers."

"I'm a private detective."

"You said it was about Mr. Woodward."

"He retained me yesterday. As a bodyguard."

"Yesterday?"

"Before he was . . . murdered."

She turned away from me but I stayed with her. It was like watching a performance, every graceful balanced motion the movement of a dancer. She said, "Why do you come to me, sir?"

"Because I heard you two had been friends, good friends."

"That's right." It was a challenge. She turned back to me. "I knew Adam Woodward for ten years. He was devoted to me."

I didn't even try to guess at her age. Edwina Grayson, all Edwina Graysons, are ageless. I had seen her perform many times. This was an artist, a superb artist, ageless, beautiful, inbred, impetuous, tempestuous, with no regard to the conventions, honored throughout the world, and living in a world of her own fashioning. There were no barriers. She made her own rules. There was always scandal attached to her, never brutal, always amusing, and always, she was above the scandal, even the scandal-mongers knew that. But I'd never heard anything about her and Adam Woodward.

I offered her a cigarette and she shook it off. I lit up and began to walk. It was a large room with a good

deal of furniture. It was a woman's room: white carpet, blue walls, pink and grey drapes, pink and grey for the fabric of the furniture, soft, loungy and comfortable, pink and grey for the accessories.

She said, "Were you ever a dancer, Mr. Chambers?"

"No."

"I like the way you walk."

"Is this a new line?"

"Pardon?"

"Nothing."

Now she was near me. "You're tall and you're handsome and there's a romantic flare about you. I bet you're a bear with the women."

"Can it."

She touched my arm. "And very strong;" Her long red fingernails bit in. I blew smoke at her. She said, "Doesn't it hurt?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you move away?"

"Not from you, sister."

"Sister." She laughed. Her teeth were white, square and even. "Anything — but not sister. I've an insane impulse. I'd like to kiss you."

Go fiddle with a ballet dancer. I said, "Are you kidding?"

"Try me."

"Some other time."

The nails went deeper. "Now."

"Some other time." I knocked off the hand and backed away.

"You know," she said, "I'm enjoying myself."

"Look. Come off it, lady. I'm here for work."

"Why?"

She had me for a moment.

She said, "He was an old man. He died quickly. That is the way it should be. I should like to die like that."

"But . . . but . . . he was killed. Somebody killed him. There are laws."

"Are you a policeman?"

"I'm a private detective."

"Are you a policeman?"

"No."

"Then the enforcement of the law is not your concern. Why do you intrude yourself on this?"

"He hired me, remember? As a bodyguard."

"And since he's dead, since he was murdered, you failed him. Obviously, you are not too efficient" — the bold eyes travelled over me and the nose tightened — "as a bodyguard. I have an overwhelming intuition that you are much more efficient . . . as a man."

You deal with an artist, you're in another world. I said, "Look, lady, please . . ."

"Why do you concern yourself with this?"

I walked. I dumped my cigarette. I marshalled reasons which would work with her. I was going to have to crawl. I tried it. I said, "Failed as a bodyguard, maybe. I have an excuse, I have lots of excuses. Let's skip that. You're an artist. You've got professional pride. I can't say that I'm an artist but the thing I do is my' work, as the thing you do is

your work, and I too have a form of professional pride. Mr. Woodward paid me seven hundred dollars. Maybe it's chicken feed, that doesn't matter. He wound up dead and I don't like it. So I want to catch up with the people who made him dead. Call it professional pride. I don't give a damn what you call it. I got a job to finish."

Her hands were on her hips and her chest was heaving and her eyes were shining and she was looking at me like she was mama and I was sonny delivering the valedictory at the high school commencement. She said, "I love you."

"Some other time."

"What, exactly, do you want to know?"

"Thanks."

"It was a beautiful speech."

"Thanks."

The smile was a girl's grin now. "I'm sure you're a wonderful lover."

"Some other time."

"Promise?"

"And how."

"What do you want to know?"

I rubbed my hands together. They were wet. It ran against my nature to play hard-to-get. I said, "Do you know anybody — anybody — who hated Woodward enough to want to have him killed?"

"No."

"That's a quick answer."

"I've thought about it, Mr. Chambers. What's your first name?"

"Peter."

"Peter. I've thought about it,

since the moment I heard about what had happened. If there was anybody I knew, I would have gone to the police, despite the fact that that would have aroused, oh, a bit of gossip . . . it could be lurid, Adam and myself. But there was nobody, nobody that I knew of. He was involved in a good deal of politics, he was a brilliant man, he must have made enemies, but there wasn't one solitary soul that I knew about. That's it. I'm sorry. I can't help you."

I was through here. For now. I said, "Thank you very much."

She said, "Have a drink."

"No, thank you."

"Look, all kidding aside, I like you. I'd like to know you." She went to a table, pulled open a drawer, took out pen and paper, scribbled a note. She brought it to me. "Here. It's for the theater. Come backstage. Come tonight. Give this note to the man at the stage door. Let's have late supper. Wait for me in my dressing room."

I took the note. I didn't look at it. I folded it and shoved it into my pocket. I said, "Hear about Paul Kingsley?"

"Yes. Terrible."

"You know him?"

"Of course. I visited on Central Park West quite frequently. So did Adam. Quite a household." And now her eyes narrowed down and she smiled with a corner of her mouth. "By the way, *which* of them told you about Adam and myself?"

"Victor Barry." What did I have to lose?

"So?" Now there was a female viciousness about the mouth. "Did he tell you about him and Rita?"

"Rita?"

"Kingsley's wife. Did he tell you Rita hated Paul? Did he tell you that they were carrying on an affair right under Paul's nose? Did he tell you that for three years they've been asking Paul to divorce Rita, and Paul wouldn't?"

"Why not?"

"Pure spite, I'd say. Rita had nothing for Paul any more, Paul flitted around the town with every new beauty that came up from Texas. But he wouldn't give her a divorce, though both of them, Rita *and* Victor, were begging for it, frantically."

I went to the door. "It's motive."

"For what?"

"Murder. Paul's."

She hadn't thought of that. Her eyes widened and she looked guilty. "I doubt that. They wouldn't have the nerve, either one of them." *Maybe* she hadn't thought of that. Anyway, she *looked* like she hadn't. She said, "Should I be sorry?"

I opened the door. "For what?"

"Giving in to the temptation for vengeful gossip."

"Talk it over with your conscience." My hand was on the lock. There was only one lock on the door.

She smiled now, widely. "I have. Already. I'm not sorry."

I looked at the lock. I said, "Gotta go."

"Will I see you tonight?"

"I'll try my best."

"I'll be expecting you."

"Bye, now." I closed the door behind me.

One lock. And an old-fashioned one.

8.

I was too early for Whitney. It was a beautiful afternoon. I walked through the transverse to the other side of the park and skimmed a finger at the white bell at 262 Central Park West. The door was opened by a round-faced colored girl. She said, "Whom would you wish to see?"

"Mr. Dvorak home?"

"No, sir."

"Mr. Barry?"

"No, sir."

"Mrs. Kingsley?"

"No, sir."

"Last call. Marcia Kingsley."

She smiled broadly. "Yes, sir. She's at home, sir. Please come in." She ushered me into the room with the green walls and the liquor cabinet. "Who shall I say is calling, sir?"

"Peter Chambers."

"Thank you, sir."

The Scotch bottle and the brandy bottle were looking at each other atop the liquor cabinet and the brandy bottle looked like it had gotten a lot of use. There was no

ice, no water, no soda, so I sampled Scotch neat, and then Marcia Kingsley was beside me smelling of musky perfume and smelling, also, of brandy. She said, "Hi. Brandy for me."

The prim expression was the same, and the no-rouge cheeks were the same, but the blue eyes were wide and glistening behind the heavy black specs and there was a jauntiness about her that hadn't been there yesterday. I wondered about her without the goggles. She was excitingly pretty in black corduroy slacks, a red ribbon around her blonde hair, red shoes, red belt, and a red blouse open at the throat and giving off an alarming amount of cleavage for so small a girl.

I poured brandy into a pony glass and she said, "More," and I added more brandy and she took it from me and leaned against me. "Tell you something," she said. "I'm squiffed."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I'm not one to praise the dead, I never had much use for Paul, but it's happening like that —"

"I know."

She leaned against me harder. Her body was soft and warm. She said, "I'm glad you came. I've been thinking about you. I tried calling you. The only number listed in the book is your office. You weren't in. I asked for your home number and the lady wouldn't give it to me. I didn't leave a message."

"Something special?"

"No. I just wanted to talk to you. Nobody's here."

I gave her my address and phone number. I said, "Write it down."

"I'll remember."

"Sure."

"I'll come calling on you one of these days."

"Sure. Where's everybody?"

She leaned away from me and I missed her. She sipped the brandy. "Mark and I took the day off, but he's out, and so's Rita, and Victor plays big shot today."

"Big shot?"

"He got what he always wanted. Mr. Whitney appointed him managing editor."

"Paul's death did that guy a lot of good."

"Now that's not nice."

"Sorry."

She went to an easy chair and pulled her legs up under her. She said, "You're cute. Walk. Walk like a tiger."

I wasn't walking like a tiger. Not today. Today I had a mess of affairs to straighten out. I nipped more Scotch and it warmed my stomach. I looked at her, cuddled in the chair. I'd like walking like a tiger for her, I had a hunch I'd like it very much. But not today. Some other time. I chuckled. She said, "What is it?"

"Some other time. This is my day for postponement. I must be going soft. In the head."

"Cryptic," she said. "But cute."

"See you around," I said.

"Where you going?"

"Business."

Business got me to the offices of *The Bulletin* on East Thirty-fourth Street at precisely three o'clock where I went through the do-you-have-an-appointment routine with a receptionist and then I got together with Lincoln Whitney in a many-windowed office, Whitney in blue serge today and a blue tie with a pearl stickpin. He said, "I'm glad you could make it, young man."

Sunshine was a spotlight on his square red face: he was no more than fifty, a pompous, assured, domineering fifty: he'd looked older than that last night.

"Made it special," I said.

"I appreciate that. It's about Paul, of course. The police are doing all they can."

"They always do."

He rubbed a stubby finger at one up-pointed eyebrow. "I want a little extra on it, and I want to keep apprised of exactly what's going on. The police do co-operate, but, of course, essentially it's a closed corporation."

"You offering me a job, Mr. Whitney?"

"Yes. I've made inquiries about you. You'll do. How do you work, flat fee or daily pay?"

"You pick it."

"How's five hundred dollars?"

"Sounds all right, unless it gets drawn out too long."

"If it does, don't hesitate to ask for more." He pulled open a desk drawer, brought out a sheaf of bills,

flipped off five and gave them to me. It goes like that sometimes, cash payments and hundred dollar bills. Other times, it's pork and beans.

He gave me a white paper and motioned to a pen in a marble base. "Would you write out a receipt, please?"

"Sure."

While I was doing that, he said, "What was it Paul wanted you for, in the first place?"

"I don't know." I gave him the receipt.

"Pardon?"

"I don't know. He called me and asked me to come over. He didn't tell me what it was about."

He stood up, big, bulky and square in his banker's grey. "I want a daily report, Mr. Chambers. And — I suppose you have your connections — I want to know if the police are making any progress. By the way, you know about the reward the paper posted . . . about Woodward?"

"Yes. I read."

"It's been posted with our attorneys. Five thousand dollars. You're in the business, young man. As long as you don't neglect what I'm paying you for — go to it."

"Thank you, sir."

The corners of his mouth turned up in a smile and he stuck out a beefy freckled paw. "All right, then . . ."

We shook, and I blew, and on the way out I inquired for the managing editor's office, and I was directed to

it, and I opened the door without knocking, and Victor Barry was clinched with Rita Kingsley, and they didn't even hear me come in.

"My, my," I said. "And the guy not even buried yet."

They broke, and the color came up in Barry's face like a mask of wrath, and he started for me, his jaw muscles lumped, but she got in the way and held him off.

"You should have let him," I said.

She turned her back on me, poked at him with open fingers until she got him back behind his desk, then she sat down in a hard chair. She looked good, in a tight-thighed brick-red suit and a wisp of a hat with a veil, and when she swished one knee over the other, there was a lot of leg, a little plump in the calf but shapely.

Barry leaned on his knuckles. "What do you want here?"

"Chatter. About Paul Kingsley."

"What the hell is that to you?"

"Wipe the lipstick off your mouth."

"Get out of here."

I cocked my head. "No talk?"

"Talk. What the hell about? You're an intruder here, fella. Get out before I have you thrown out." He was neat and tall and lean in pin-stripes and a button-down collar but blood still clotted his complexion and there was the glitter of sweat at his temples.

"Intruder?" I said. "Not exactly. Kingsley's part of my job. I've got a client."

"Client?"

"Lincoln Whitney."

The knuckles on the desk got whiter.

I said, "Murder needs opportunity and you two are loaded with opportunity. Murder also needs motive. The lady with the veil here hated her husband, and death is as good as a divorce. That's motive. The guy with the lumps in his jaw and the lipstick on his mouth—same motive. Plus it also gives him a job that he was almost done out of. That's more motive." I went to the door. "A pleasant good afternoon, kiddies. Go kiss each other."

Downstairs, I whistled for a cab, and went to the office, and listened to lectures from Miranda. When she stopped for breath, I told her I was hungry and the mother in Miranda took precedence over the preacher, and she went out to get me lunch. I dialed Edwina Grayson's number, and the phone kept ringing, and then a sing-song voice said: "Grayson residence."

"Miss Grayson."

The voice sang: "Not in, sir. Would you leave a message?"

All answering services chirp the same. I said, "This her service?"

"That's right, sir."

"When's she due back?"

"Who's calling, sir?"

"Peter Chambers. It's business. And it's important."

"She's not in, sir. Sorreee."

"Got a number for her?"

"No, sir. She'll be out all day.

Then she can be reached at the theater."

"Thanks. Large."

"Thank you, sir."

I opened the safe and took out a tool-box and looked over a set of equipment that would make a burglar drool. I selected the pick I wanted, and then Miranda was noisily sucking her cheek beside me, making noises of disapproval. "Sooner or later," she said, "you'll go to jail."

"Miranda, please . . ."

Gloomily: "Sooner or later . . ."

"Look, a guy like me, I have no authority, I'm not cops, I've got to skip a beat here and there."

"Sooner," she insisted, "or later . . ."

"Miranda, I'm a knight without a charger, a hero without heralds, a gladiator without trumpets. There are guys like me in every business. I am what is euphemistically called a private richard. You mention your line of work and it produces a joke, a sneer or a giggle. I operate within a rigid code of ethics — of my own — and a little bit, I think, I do some good in this world. Yeah, go ahead, sniff . . . but even you'll admit, my lovely Miranda: murder is naughty —"

"Eat your lunch, gladiator."

I ate my lunch and I took my pick and I hied off to 15 East 84th Street and I rang a few bells and I got a few ticks and I waited ten minutes in the inner lobby and then I rode up to six and I applied pick to lock at 6B

and then I was inside and I locked myself in. The blinds were all drawn which gave me a cool dim atmosphere in which to work, and work I did. In an hour I did more exploring than a couple of teen-agers in the back seat of a parked car in the middle of the night. Nothing. Not one item of interest and I'll admit to a hollow growth of disappointment because it had been my hunch that this was it. I had it cleaned up and I was about to kiss it off when I heard a key in the door. I moved to a spot where the opening door would shield me and I was preparing a speech for the lady of the house, but it wasn't the lady of the house, it was a man, so, naturally, I jumped him. We tussled like we were wrestlers for TV, and then I had his shoulders pinned and I was able to get a look at him, and it turned out to be Mark Dvorak, and I was more surprised to see it was he then he was to see it was I. He said, "For Chrissake, what's the matter with you? Get off me."

I obliged and he straightened up and I said, "What the dickens are you doing here?"

He ruffled his jacket back over his shoulders and he did a quick jab at his mustache. Then the musical voice was back, and the smile, and the old-world languor. "I've got a key. What's your excuse?"

"Key?" I said.

He said: "Key."

Even a new-world blockhead can capture a sliver of a hint when the

hint is exploded all over him, and I looked at Mark Dvorak with new admiration. I said, "I thought it was Woodward?"

"Woodward was an old man."

"You young?"

"That's debatable." He took out a pack of filter-tips, lit up, and squeezed the tip between his teeth. "Now what about you?"

"Maybe I'm your successor."

It didn't throw him an inch. "I doubt whether successor is the precise word. With Edwina, lovers lap-over. Concurrent, I would venture to say, rather than consecutive. My congratulations."

"Well, thanks a bunch. And as long as you're here, and we're practically brothers-in-law, let's chat."

"About what?"

"Oh, small talk. Let's pick a light subject. How's murder?"

The guy was cooler than a big toe with bad circulation. "Murder's dandy. Whose?"

"Let's keep it close to home. Say somebody like Paul Kingsley."

"Quite appropriate." He inhaled and let smoke dribble from his nostrils. "Do we take up any particular segment of our frothy subject?"

"Let's talk about the instrument. Seems nobody's talked about the instrument so far."

"You mean the knife?"

"I mean."

"Unfortunately, I can't discuss that since I had substantially no opportunity to observe it. Marcia screamed, and we all chased in, but

you, quite officiously, had us all stand back a distance so as not to disturb things. Sorry, I'll have to pass on that."

"Check," I said. "Let's go old-hat. Let's do motive."

"Let's put the lights on first. I'm beginning to lose you."

He was right. It was getting dark. I switched on some lights. I said, "It's not quite an idle discussion. Mr. Whitney retained me to do what I could on Kingsley's death."

"Whitney?" Magic name. He tried not to look impressed but it made a dent.

"Okay, Mr. Dvorak. In the interests of small talk and large justice, you go first."

"All right, sir. I give you Victor Barry, an estimable gentleman, but one to whom the death of Paul Kingsley meant an advancement to a position which he has long coveted."

I applauded. "Very good. And I give you Rita Kingsley. In love with Victor, in hate with Paul. With Paul out of the way, the decks are clear for a marriage to Victor."

It set him back. He pulled hard at the cigarette and ditched it. He said, "You *have* been working. My respects, sir."

"Your turn."

"Marcia. Paul returned Rita's hated double-fold. His life insurance policy, for fifty thousand dollars, I believe, was to the benefit of Marcia. Would you say the possibility of motive can there be spelled out?"

"I would. And so, three of the oc-

cupants of the household receive some certain form of benefit as a direct result of the demise of Paul Kingsley. Now, what would you say of the fourth?"

He clicked his heels, smiled, did a small bow. "A charming gentleman, a scientist preoccupied with tremendous affairs, and one totally disinterested in the life or death of a fellow-tenant whom he considered a foul-mouthed, ultra-modern, ineffable bore."

"You didn't like him?"

"That's putting it mildly. But the dislike was not strong enough unto death, if you choose to comprehend that."

"How'd you ever get linked up there?"

"Very simple. Barry, by inheritance, had a large furnished house, and Barry had little else, except his salary from the paper. Paul and Rita moved in, a long time ago, at quite an enormous rental. Then, when Marcia came back from Oak Ridge, she moved in, at, may I add, an excellent rental too. I'd been working out at Monmouth, Marcia became an associate of mine, and she prevailed upon me to give up the solemnity of a hotel suite, for more livable quarters." He grinned. "At an excellent rental too."

I gave him a small salute. "Thanks for the chatter, Mr. Dvorak."

"Not at all. And now, at least for me, a more practical matter."

"Yes?"

"Which one of us stays?"

"That's easy." I went to the door. "Protocol. You're still at the head of the table. Give her my love."

"Sorry. I'll give her mine."

9.

It had turned warm and the night had stars. I needed sleep and I needed air, and I didn't know which I needed more, so I walked; I walked a long way, kicking at kinks in my mind, and pretty soon I stood in front of the Webster Theater and I admired the full-length figure of Edwina Grayson on a poster against the brick wall. There was a sold-out slab smeared against the bottom of the poster: they were doing twenty weeks, they had started three weeks ago — ballet — and they were sold out every night. Edwina Grayson. It had taken a murder, two murders, for me to meet her, and I had played hard-to-get. I shrugged. When I'm working I've got rocks in my head. I went to the curb, tapped the window of a parked cab, and told him to take me home, where I paid, got out, tossed a joke at the doorman, took the elevator upstairs, opened my door, switched on the lights — and looked at Harry Strum seated wide-kneed on my divan.

He said, "Make with the hands on top of the head. The lock stinks. A baby could come visit you."

I made with the hands on top of the head. "Locks all stink. I knew a guy with sheet-metal doors but he wound up dead anyway."

Harry Strum. Very tall and very slender with his knees up on the low divan and his elbows on his knees and a snub-nosed .38 in his delicate white hands. He had both hands on the gun, loose and casual, a loose and casual guy with a face like a gargoyle and white as a leper's, but handsome nevertheless. Hollows where the black eyes were set, straight across black eyebrows, deep hollows in the cheeks, a thin wide mouth like a slash across the face, and a jutting chin. Harry Strum, in a perfectly-tailored black suit, a roll-collared white-on-white shirt, a narrow yellow tie, high-shined black shoes, and tight black ribbed hose. Harry Strum, skinny and long, the gun loose in his white hands, the gun a part of him, the star sapphire glinting off the pinky.

"You're nuthin," he said. He had a hushed confidential way of talking, the lips moving, the face remaining like stone, the eyes expressionless. "You're dead already. You're a cipher. You got holes in you."

Harry Strum. All gun. No gun, no Harry Strum.

I said, "Easy, Harry-boy. You're parked in the wrong lot."

"Maybe. But I bet against it. You heated?"

"Yes."

"Honest. I like an honest guy. I appreciate it. I'll do it for you real good. I won't hurt you. You know Harry, pal. Harry's done it a lot. Harry can make it hurt. For you, it won't hurt. I like an honest guy."

Chalk one up for me. Harry Strum was talkative. That was good for my side. A real gun is all piano-wire, as temperamental as an Edwina Grayson. He uncoiled off the divan, tall and lean and loose and graceful, and he came to me and stuck the muzzle of the snub-nose into my ear. He reached a hand into my holster, took out my pistol, backed toward the divan, tossed my gun to the floor, sat down. I took a step forward and the snub-nose came up like the head of a reptile. "Where you going, pal?"

"Can I take my hands off my head, Harry?"

"Sure, fella."

But I made it. I was one step nearer. I said, "What are you doing here, Harry?"

"You invited me."

"I don't remember, Harry."

"You spit in his eye. What'd you expect? I come around with a medal?"

"Who?"

"Faigle."

"You're making sounds, Harry. You're not making sense."

Now he had expression. He looked sad. Harry was sensitive. "Don't talk like that, fella. Harry makes sense. Harry ain't no two-bit gunsel. Harry's an uptown boy. Harry don't go for a kill for laughs. It's business or it's personal. Harry's got other things to do."

"What's this?"

"Personal."

"Somebody gave you a bum steer, pal."

"I'm bettin' against it."

I pointed at a side table with a box. I took another step forward, said, "Cigarette? Can I smoke?"

"No."

But I made it. Two steps. That was all I needed. He was within reach. Now he had to stay talkative. If he did, and I could distract him, even for a moment . . .

I said, "If it isn't business, Harry, you ought to go and do your other things. Somebody threw you a curve."

"Look, liar. You were looking for us last night, the word's on the town. You caught up with Faigle in Benjie's. His red-headed friend's been swooning all day, but in between swoons, she delivers the picture. The picture's you. Now go tell me you didn't see Faigle in Benjie's last night."

"Sure I saw him."

"Why?"

"Because *he* put the word out that he wanted to see *me*."

"You kiddin'?"

"I wouldn't kid you, Harry."

"Why should he wanna see *you*?"

"Because he wanted to make a deal."

"With who? With you?"

"With the law."

"Your brain is leaking."

"Listen hard, Harry. Faigle got word that the law had you two staked on a-killing you guys pulled yesterday. Faigle got the word good, positive identification by a disinterested witness. Faigle always had

brains. He knows I've got connections. So he dropped the word for me to see him. Think, Harry. How would I know to go to Benjie's? Just ask that frizzy-haired girlfriend of his. The swooner. Ask her if Faigle didn't tell her to blow out, that he wanted to talk to me alone."

"You were carrying heat. You had it pointed."

"Sure. I didn't know what he wanted till he started talking. When I read today he got bumped, I figured that for you."

I was getting to him.

He said, "What did he want?" There was a gleam lurking in his eyes now.

"He wanted me to go to cops, and offer a deal. He'd throw them you, if they'd let him cop a plea."

He tensed. "Rat bastard." Then he eased. "You're a liar." Then he got crafty: "Who got chilled yesterday? How?"

"Adam Woodward. Downtown near Pearl Street. You were at the wheel. Faigle used a long job."

His knees came together and he quivered. I jumped him.

I knocked the gun out of his hands, yanked him up, swung from the bottom and it caught him on the mouth. It ripped the skin off my knuckles but it knocked his teeth clean through his upper lip, and he looked like he was smiling some sort of ghostly unearthly smile, the blood all over him, before he went down. I put a finger in his collar and got him up. I grabbed the lip be-

tween my forefinger and thumb and pulled it clear. It was cut bad but the teeth didn't show any more. I said, "Let's have music, pal."

He was shaking like he had a chill. Harry was nothing without a gun. I said, "Let's have it." I shoved him back onto the divan and I picked up the guns, my own in my right hand. Two-gun Chambers. All I needed were my spurs, my chaps, a horse, a prairie, and a beautiful girl. I didn't need menace. Menace was crumbled on my divan slobbering blood through a gash on his upper lip like a crimson mustache. I said, "Let's have it, Harry."

"Look, shamus, a deal, you and me, let's work it out, I don't carry no grudge." He lisped when he talked, the blood down over his chin. He rubbed a hand across his mouth, smearing his face.

I put his gun in my pocket, switched mine to the other hand, pulled him up by black greasy hair, and held him half way up. "Who gave you the contract, Harry? Spill, or I really work you over." I threw him back on the divan.

He looked at the gun in my hand. He said, "Shoot, for Chrissake. Shoot, bastard."

I swung, not too hard, and the side of the gun opened more flesh, over the cheekbone. I didn't like it but I was beginning to breathe hard. The guy couldn't take it — Harry was nothing without a gun — and the tears were leaking from his eyes. "You're a killer, Harry," I told

him. "You're neat. You're a rod man. You're no strong-arm guy, give or take. I'm different. Look at me, Harry. I'm not going to shoot. I'm going to chop you, Harry." I pulled him up by his tie. "I go for the gut now, Harry. Last call. Who gave you the contract?"

"Paul Kingsley."

It took the wind out of me. I dropped him. He ripped down his tie, tore open his shirt collar. He was gasping, touching his hands to his face, discovering the holes, ministering tentatively, looking at his bloody fingers. "I need a doctor, shamus. It's backing into my throat. I'm choking."

"Paul Kingsley. Why?"

"He didn't tell me why. He give us a contract. He paid good."

"How much?"

"Six big ones. Three apiece. Me and Faigle."

I threw him a handkerchief. "Hold it to your lip."

"I need a doctor."

"You'll get a doctor. Keep your drawers on."

I backed to a closet, pulled out a tape recorder, and told him to talk. He talked. I called Police Headquarters.

10.

My place was lousy with cops. Harry Strum was patched and manacled. The tape recorder had played back four times. New stuff had been added: questions and answers: Par-

ker and Strum. Then Parker said, "Okay. We get a positive identification, and we're through," and then the party moved to the Manning Chapel on the ghoulish mission of pulling out the body and having Harry point the finger. Harry pointed, and the boys took him downtown, and Parker and I repaired to a neighborhood delicatessen where we had tea and lemon in a glass and salami sandwiches on rye bread, pickle on a side. I gave him the story, all of it, from Woodward's original phone call. Parker lit a cigar.

"Quick figure," he said. "Kingsley was a Commie, Woodward caught up with him, and Kingsley had him belted."

"Good enough," I said. "But who belted Kingsley?"

"We're creeping up on that."

"How?"

"We got a line on the guy who sold that knife. Foreign guy, now lives out in Staten Island, runs an antique business here in New York. The boys are out on it right now."

"Will you let me know?"

"Soon as it happens. You're doing all right. Five thousand bucks reward. It's all yours, and good luck to you. You got the roscoe that cooled Faigle?"

"At your service, Lieutenant." I took it out of the holster and gave it to him. The eyes of the man behind the delicatessen counter popped like a pastrami had reared up and bitten him. Parker noticed. Parker

called: "Settle down, bo." He flashed his shield. "I'm a policeman."

"Yes, sir," the man said, his eyes still popped. "It is an honor."

"Let's get out of here," Parker said. "You pay. You're the rich one."

"My pleasure, Lieutenant."

Outside, he said, "Wanna come downtown with me?"

I looked at my watch. "Can't. Got business."

"Always business." He sighed. "It's a racket that's getting better and better, private cop. Where'll you be when we catch up with the knife seller?"

"Home."

"Good. I'll be in touch. Drop you somewhere?"

"Webster Theater."

He gave me a wry look, and we went to the car, and it was a quick trip with the siren going, and then I said, "Don't forget to let me know," and he said, "Don't worry, I will," and then I was handing the stage door man a note that I hadn't even looked at, but it must have had the right words, because he said: "Yes, sir. Go right in. Dressing room's one flight up, first door to the right."

When I came in, Edwina Grayson was stretched on a couch in a costume that gave off all of her body, the long, full, graceful legs exposed all the way to the hips. She said to her dresser, a plump grey-haired woman: "All right, Anna. You can go out to the wings now. And stay

there, please. I'm going to need an arm for support after the next number."

"Yes, Miss Grayson. You've got five minutes."

"I'll be out in three."

The woman went away. Grayson sat up and flashed all her teeth at me. She stretched, ran her hands down the sides of her breasts. "Resting. I have two more numbers. I hope you'll wait."

"Sure."

She got off the couch, and I admired every inch of her. She sat down at the dressing table and started doing things to her face. I looked around. Dressing room: a couch, chairs, a table, a phone, a dressing table, a tall screen, an open door to a toilet and shower, and a tremendous trunk. I pointed at it. I said, "Nobody's got enough costumes to fill that."

"You're right." She talked at my three reflections in the three mirrors of the table. "That monstrosity contains things I haven't seen for years. A performer's trunk is like the attic of an old farmhouse." She stood up. "Got to go be a ballerina. Please wait."

"Sure."

I closed the door behind her, and I shot the bolt. I started in the toilet and worked my way out. It took time, but there was nothing, and then I got to the trunk, which wasn't locked, and that took more time, and then I came up with a fat brief-case out of the very bottom

of the trunk. It was brass-locked and expensive and the discreet gold initials started the sweat going on the back of my neck: A. W.

I folded the stuff back into the trunk, opened the bolt on the door, opened the door, and there she was, coming at me with her dresser. I still had the brief-case in my hand. She said, "You weren't going, were you?"

I joined them in the room. Very carefully, initials downward, I laid the brief-case on the dressing table. I said, "Got to go. Made a phone call. I gotta go."

The black devouring eyes looked straight into mine. "But I have just one more number."

"I should be home later. I wish you'd take some statistics."

The grey-haired dresser came at me with pencil and paper and I recited my address and phone number. I said, "I thought I could stay." I started for the door.

She called: "You forgot your leather case."

I came back. I kept looking at her.

A wrinkle formed on her forehead. "I didn't even see you bring it in. Ah, work. You concentrate even while you're resting. You've caught me at my worst time, Peter. I usually don't allow visitors here, not during a performance. I'd hoped you'd come *after*."

She didn't have another glance for the brief-case. I said, "Sister, I love you," and picked it up.

Her teeth gleamed and one lid came down in a solemn wink. "Mutual, brother."

The dresser said: "You must change, Miss Grayson."

"Bye," I said.

She waved at me. "I'll be in touch. I don't know when. But I'll be in touch. And don't be surprised. Ever. It's bruited about that I'm unpredictable."

I got out of there, and down the flight of iron steps, and out past the man at the stage door, and into a cab. I kept thinking about Adam Woodward. Sure, he'd stashed it away, and in a place where nobody would look, not even the owner of the trunk, and she was operating there for twenty weeks and he'd be able to reach in for it whenever he wanted. No bunk like a casual bunk, who would think to look there? But it must have been an impulse, probably slipped it in while she was on stage, and he worried about it: it was a topic he was to take up with me, and one on which he wanted advice.

The cab stopped and I paid fast and tipped big and flew past the doorman and upstairs I went to work on the lock of the briefcase and I just had it opened when the phone rang. It was Parker.

"If you come quick, you can be in on the finish."

"Where?"

"Where Kingsley lived. I've got them all assembled. Move it, guy."

"Be right there, Lieutenant."

I scooped up the brief-case, and locked the door, and noted in passing that Strum hadn't even left a scratch. Downstairs, my doorman said, "This is for you." He handed me a white envelope.

"Where'd you get it?"

"A boy delivered it."

"Thanks." I shoved it into a pocket, breezed out, blew for a cab, got in, gave him the address, and turned on the roof light. It worked. I scurried through the contents of the brief-case and then the driver said, "Two-sixty-two, mister," and I was pushing the white button again.

Victor Barry opened the door. He looked at me like he'd swallowed cold coffee that he'd expected to be warm. "Just for the record," he said. "I didn't invite you." Then he ushered me in.

They were all there, including Lincoln Whitney, and they all looked the same with the exception of Marcia, who was absolutely ravishing in an off-the-shoulder cocktail gown, black and clinging. There was also Parker and a lot of uniforms.

Parker said, "Okay, we got a quorum." He thumbed a cop. "Bring him in."

The cop went out and came back with a small, bald man in a dark suit with shiny seams and a leathery face with more wrinkles than a fat man's vest. Parker said, "Okay, we go from here. What's your name, sir?"

"Anton Amsterdam." The deep

voice was a surprise from so little a man. The accent was peculiar, it could have been French.

"How long in this country?"

"Eight years. And I am now an American. And I am proud."

"What's your business?"

"I deal in antiques."

"Where you from, originally?"

"Antwerp. I had a fine business in Antwerp. I was —"

"All right," Parker said. "I show you this knife, and I ask you if you recognize it." Parker took the object from his pocket and handed it to Amsterdam.

"Oh, yes." He handled it fondly. "I have already informed you that I recognized it."

Parker grinned. "I know. We're doing it over. Sort of legal-like. You recognize the knife."

"Yes. It is a form of push-button knife, not like the American switch-blade. It was made in Italy, during the Renaissance period, probably the sixteenth century. It is gold, completely handworked, with a cunningly concealed blade which springs straight out from the end upon pressure on this shielded button. Like so." A murderous six inch blade appeared as out of nowhere. "And it is returned by pressure on a lower button, also shielded. Like so." The blade disappeared into the hilt. The thing now looked like an ornate paper-weight. He returned it to Parker. He continued: "This item was part of my stock in Antwerp. It is there I sold it."

"Bill of sale?"

"Of course. And also a record of the purchaser."

"You have such record?"

"Yes, sir. I brought all my papers with me to America."

"May I see such record?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please hand it over."

"I cannot."

Parker looked puzzled. "Now look, Mr. Amsterdam—"

"I have already handed it over. You have it, sir."

Parker laughed. Out loud. "Cop, maybe. Lawyer, no." He drew a sheet from his pocket and gave it to Amsterdam. "I give you a sheet of paper. Will you please identify it?"

"It is a record. I kept such record in my old establishment in Antwerp. It contains the facts of the sale of the Renaissance knife."

We had a diversion. Mark Dvorak walked up to Parker, said, "I think that's enough of this courtroom poppycock. May I see the knife?"

Parker showed it to him. Dvorak examined it and returned it. He went to Amsterdam, peered at him, smiled, said, "Of course." Then he spoke in French to Amsterdam, who smiled, and then they started jabbing French at each other, and practically embraced.

Then Amsterdam went to Parker and pointed an apologetic finger at Dvorak. "He is Mark Dvorak. A famous scientist. He is the one who purchased the Renaissance item in Antwerp."

"Okay," Parker said. "Take him out." A cop obliged. Then Parker spread his feet in front of Dvorak. "All right, sweet-boy, your turn."

"It is correct that I purchased the knife. I think it a beautiful object. Useful also." Rita gasped. Dvorak turned to her: "I mean, well, as a letter-opener, not as a weapon." He turned back to Parker. "However, my dear Lieutenant, I disassociated myself from it, oh, more than a year ago."

"We're going to need more than just your word for that."

"You're going to have more than just my word."

"Disassociated. How?"

"I gave it away. As a gift."

"Oh, like that? And now you're going to tell me that the donee got lost on a mission to Greenland."

"Quite the contrary. The donee is present in this room." He bowed, turned, and produced an upturned palm. The fingers were pointing at Lincoln Whitney.

Parker sounded like he was gargling his throat. "Lincoln Whitney?"

Whitney approached, said, "May I see it, please?"

Parker showed it to him. Whitney turned it over in his hands a few times, smiled, gave Parker the knife. "It's a fact, sir. Mark presented me with this thing about a year ago. I used it as a paper-weight in my office."

"Didn't you miss it?"

"As a matter of fact, no. I have

a confoundedly cluttered desk. Practically everybody in this room can attest to that."

"Well . . ." Parker said. "You could have informed me, sir, that you had some connection with it."

Whitney's voice climbed up in his throat. "Inform you? Inform you, sir? Yes, I might have, had somebody shown me the knife. Nobody did, if you remember." Purple began to blossom in his ruddy cheeks and his jowls shook. "If this is some kind of veiled accusation, officer, you're crazy. Anybody could have picked this damned thing off my desk. Hundreds of people have access to my office . . ."

"I'm not accusing you, Mr. Whitney —"

I said: "But I am."

Silence fell like it was a house caving in. Everybody stood stock-still. Parker's mouth was open. Then Whitney came tearing at me, "Look, you crazy little whippersnapper . . ." He reached his thick freckled hands for my throat.

I rapped him.

I hit him on one of his jowls and the other one trembled like jelly and he went over like a barrel of beer and when he came up there was a small .22 in his hand and the flap hung open from his jacket pocket. But I wasn't having any. I hit him again, and the breath came out of him like exhaust from a bus, and then I clubbed the gun-hand, and the .22 bounced on the maroon rug. Then cops broke it up, and they had me

by the arms, and they had him by the arms, and the brief-case lay on the floor near the .22, and then Parker came at me, his eyes a-blaze and his face white, and he spluttered like fizz-medicine for heartburn.

"Pete . . . Peter . . . you crazy? . . . you going out of your mind? . . . what the hell's the matter with you?"

I eased out of the cops' hands. I said, "Take a look at that brief-case. It belonged to Adam Woodward." Parker picked it up. "It's crammed full of documents and every one of them says —" I pointed — "that that fat slob is a Communist. Facts, figures, dates, and associates."

Parker gasped. "Whitney?"

Whitney wriggled, but the cops held him.

I said, "Guys get old, they sometimes go a little nuts. Guys with a lot of dough, sometimes they need something else. Power, maybe. Maybe under our kind of government a bastard like this can't get enough. Maybe he wants to be a Commissar, or Mister Number One Man himself. Search me what he wants, but this guy was actively engaged in subversive activities with enemy agents of the top-bracket echelons. Somehow, Adam Woodward found out."

Victor Barry said, "It's unbelievable."

"That's what Woodward thought. Figured maybe all the evidence, unlikely as it seemed, was a plant or something. So he called him in. And

he put it to him direct. And he gave him a chance to straighten himself out. But he couldn't. Three times he called him in, the last time was yesterday morning. Yesterday morning he told him he was going to do a series of articles on it, blast it wide open, and then turn the stuff over to the authorities."

Dvorak said in wonderment: "Lincoln Whitney . . ."

"Yeah, Lincoln Whitney. And by the way, what are you doing here?"

He smiled. "I called from a lady-friend's house."

Parker said, "What's this? What's this? What's the interruption?"

"There was a message," Dvorak said, "that the police wanted me here. So I came. Please go on."

"Yeah, go on," Parker said.

"Whitney tried to stymie it by getting to the stuff. He had Woodward's house searched, and his office, and he may even have gotten to his bank vaults. But the stuff wasn't there."

"Where was it?" Parker said.

"That's not for public consumption, Lieutenant. That's for my statement downtown."

"Okay."

"Yesterday morning, he was up against it. He'd get rid of Woodward, and hope against hope, the stuff wouldn't turn up, and — if and when it did, he'd cope with that then. But the major problem was Woodward, and Whitney had to act fast. He got to Kingsley, man-about-town, runner-with-hoods, wise-guy-

with-ambition. This part is a guess, but —"

"Keep guessing, guy," Parker said. "Look at him."

The sweat was pouring out of Whitney, and he sagged in the arms of the cops, and his little eyes were bloodshot, fixed on me as though he were hypnotized.

"Okay, he got to Kingsley and he propositioned him: get rid of Woodward and you're my managing editor, plus, maybe, a lot of dough. Kingsley got to two hoods named Faigle and Strum, and they did the job. Faigle is dead now, I killed him. Strum has confessed to the murder, implicating Kingsley."

Parker said, "Let's get back to yesterday."

"Right. Woodward was murdered, and Kingsley was behind it, but the Commissar's no dope. Kingsley was an open door, and there was a draft. Kingsley alive was a threat — two ways — it implicated Whitney in murder, and Kingsley might go prying to find out why Whitney had arranged Woodward's murder. Monday nights, anybody could visit Kingsley, nobody in the household intruded, and Kingsley answered the bell himself. So the Commissar came visiting, and he brung his trusty blade with him. That's it."

Parker said, "Good boy."

"He even hired me today. I was supposed to look into the Kingsley killing. But roundabout he asked me a question: did Kingsley tell me why he had called me? The good old

Commissar, plugging every hole. Matter of fact, Kingsley never called me. I came here on the Woodward thing, the old man had hired me as bodyguard, but he'd thought of it too late, he got killed as we left his office going to his garage. He was even plugging holes in advance, the old Commissar; part of my job was to keep him informed on how the cops were doing on Kingsley's murder."

"Take him out of here," Parker said.

I said, "I'm going with you."

II.

I was home, and it was two o'clock in the morning, and I was feeling good, and I wasn't sleepy any more, I was over-stimulated. I'd promised Parker to be down in the morning for statements to complete his file. I had Scotch and water, repeat and repeat, and I thought about how maybe Whitney's expensive lawyers might pull him through the murder rap because Kingsley was dead and Strum couldn't finger the guy behind Kingsley, but the treason thing would stick, and one way or another, Whitney was more washed up than an infant's diaper, but none of that was my business any more, my job was finished. There was a net of four hundred on Woodward's fee, and I had earned five hundred from Whitney, and there was a five thousand

dollar reward to pick up, which made a grand total of fifty-nine hundred dollars, and here it was Tuesday night, and me over-stimulated, so I began to think about company and phone numbers and who could be up this time of night, when I remembered the envelope my doorman had given me.

I got it and opened it and read: "Three o'clock is not the witching hour, but I'm coming to call at three o'clock. I hope you'll be home."

I showered and I shaved and I dressed in black slacks and black loafers and a white silk sporty shirt like the touts-wear at the track, and I thought about her full long dancer's legs and her wild black eyes and her gold-tan skin, and I celebrated in advance. I broke out champagne and iced a bucket and prepared snacks and cleaned up the apartment, and then it was three o'clock and my buzzer was making friendly noises and I skipped across and opened the door to — Marcia Kingsley.

I stood rooted like a tree. An old oak.

"Well," she said. "Don't just stand there. You got my note, I hope."

There's a lot of them you can figure, and a lot of them you can't, but I defy you to figure the studious-spectacle type, with the no-rouge cheeks and the prim expressions.

Brother . . . them you can't. Nohow.

*Leo was going to kill
Andy Corkin, and there
wasn't a thing Andy
could do except wait for
the bullet . . .*



BY

FLETCHER FLORA

Points South

I DREW AN ACE, and I needed it. With the pair that I already had, it established something substantial. Luck was going my way. I lifted my eyes from the cards to the face of Leo Gall, and I thought to myself again that it was like a fat olive with features. His eyes were screwed back

into little puffs of skin as he examined his hand, and his pimento-red lips were pursed into the shape of a wet kiss. It was a face I didn't like, though I pretended to like it for my health's sake, so I slanted my line of vision off over his shoulder to the face of Hilda Hearn.

Hilda was tired. About midnight, she'd gone into the bedroom for a nap, but when she'd returned a couple of hours later, it was obvious that the nap had been too late and too short to do her much good. The muscles of her face had a tight, drawn look, her eyes were smudged, and her mouth was a soft scarlet smear. She slept too little and smoked too much, ate too little and drank too much, did too much of everything bad for her and too little of anything good, but tousled and smeared and worn to the bone, she was still a lovely assembly of female parts. Sprawled on the sofa with a highball in her hand, she combed free fingers through copper curls and sent me a smoke signal from smoldering eyes.

"One grand," Leo Gail said.

Beside me, between me and Leo as the betting went, Hugh Lawson cursed softly and bitterly, slapping his hand into the discard. His mouth and eyes were pinched at the corners by the long strain of losing, and his fingers shook as they fumbled a cigarette out of a limp pack and carried it to his lips. I did some quick calculation and figured he must have dropped at least twenty grand. Just about what I'd contributed myself to the fat welfare of our host. I also figured Hugh could afford it about as much as I could, which was not at all. He was a slim guy with a lean, hungry face and blond hair cut very short and square on top the way a lot of college boys wear it. He'd

got most of his education in pool rooms and clip joints, but he looked a hell of a lot like a college boy

"Out," he said.

I put my faith in three bullets and met the thousand. I couldn't bump it, because I didn't have a good bump left. A couple of hundred in chips, that was all.

"One raise, I'm a dead duck," I said.

Leo laughed softly and wetly behind a red, white and blue mountain. "Credit's good, boy. With me, it's always good."

Around the circle 90 degrees, Kal Magnus sighed and rolled his soaked cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. His hand struck the discard and flew apart, but his expression was genial, signifying his indifference to luck that always ran one way or the other and would be good next time, or the next or the next, if it happened to be bad tonight. Being able to carry your luck comfortably from bad to good makes a hell of a difference in your attitude. Kal's was bad tonight, all right, ten grand bad, but you'd have thought he was playing for matches.

He said, "If you're worried about me, you're wasting it. I'm out."

Leo smiled. It was a very small smile, slightly sad. It was the one he'd been using all night. The one he used when he was looking down your throat.

"No raise? That's too bad. Well, you paid to see them, Andy, so have a good look."

He spread them slowly in ascending order, five little cards worth my last grand, and whichever end you read them from, going up or down, they came out straight. Better any time than three lousy aces.

I added my junk to the discard and said, "Take it away."

He took it. On the ring finger of his right hand was a diamond worth more than the pot. In the thick nest of black hair growing above the second joint of the finger, it looked like a glittering egg. And it was then, watching his fat hands rake in my dough, that I got one of those crazy ideas a guy sometimes gets when it's late, too late, and the world's gone sour. It was then that I began to think what fun it would be to clobber him. We began to settle the score, and all the time we were settling it, I kept seeing those fat white fingers with the black hair growing out of them. I saw them over and over in a dozen repellent engagements — dealing cards that brought me no luck, dragging in the fat pots, creeping like slugs over the soft flesh of Hilda Hearn.

I closed my eyes and kept them closed for half a minute, but the fingers were there behind the lids, so I opened them again, and the first thing I saw was his red, wet mouth. The lips were so soft and thick and full of blood. They looked as if they'd smash on his big white teeth like a glutted leech.

I went sort of blind, I guess. Blind to everything and everyone but Leo

Gall. And I functioned for a few seconds in the terrible urgency of a single grim compulsion.

I stood up and leaned across the table and clobbered him.

He got a glimpse of knuckles coming at him, and his face had, for a split second, a ludicrous expression of surprise. His chair rocked back on its rear legs, hung for a moment in balance, and then crashed over. He hit the floor on his shoulders and skidded like a clown on ice, but there wasn't really anything funny about it. His head smacked the sharp edge of the frame of the sofa Hilda was sprawled on, and there was a dull, sodden sound like the bursting of a rotten melon, and he lay very still on his back with his fat gut rising like a strange and ugly growth from the floor, and it was not funny at all.

Hilda stood up very slowly, the movements of her arms and legs possessing the unreal quality of action in slow-motion. She stood looking down at Leo. "Jesus," she said. "Oh, Jesus."

Hugh Lawson's breath whistled shrilly through his nostrils, and Kal Magnus heaved his ponderous bulk erect. He turned his eyes from Leo's prone carcass to me, and his broad face was flat and still and hard as stone.

He said tonelessly, "You tired of living, Andy?"

I didn't bother to answer. I went over and knelt beside Leo. I felt for his pulse and found it. Then I passed

my hands swiftly over the obvious places for a gun, but there was no gun on him. I knew he would come out of it soon, and I didn't want him coming with death in his hand. My death, I mean. Chances were it'd come soon enough. Soon and sudden, if I was lucky. Soon and not so sudden, if I wasn't.

Standing, I looked across the body at Hilda. Her lips were slightly parted, and the tip of her tongue appeared between them to slip slowly around the red circumference. Her eyes were hot and cloudy behind lids descending to veil an intense inner excitement.

On the floor between us, Leo stirred and shuddered and came up jerkily from the hips, leaning back for support against braced arms. He shook his head from side to side and brought one hand forward and up across his split lips. He sat there on the floor and looked in a stupefied way at the smear of blood on his hand. At last, moving like an old, old man, he got one knee under him and rose slowly to his feet. His eyes were as dull and lifeless as dirty metal disks. They slid from face to face until they reached and remained on mine, and his voice was a gassy whisper escaping through loose teeth and blood and swollen flesh.

"You dirty bastard! You scummy little louse! Get out of here! Get the hell out of here fast! And right now you better start living it up. Right now you better start to live up all your God-damn life in the next

twenty-four hours, because maybe you'll have that long and maybe you won't."

Hilda took a step toward him, lifting one arm with a jerk, as if she were breaking ice in the joints. "Look, Leo. It was just one of those crazy things. Andy just went nuts for a second, that's all."

He turned to face her. His mangled lips were working, and a trickle of saliva leaked out of one corner of his mouth and down across his chin. "The hell you say! So we just forget all about it, is that it? So we kiss and make up? Well, it's nice to know you're so damn concerned about the lousy punk. If that's the way it is, maybe you better get the hell out, too."

"It's not that way, Leo. You know it's not that way."

His voice broke controls, skidding up to a high, feminine scream. "Get out! Get the hell out, you God-damn tramp!"

She stood very still for a moment, her breasts held high against her dress, and then she turned without speaking and went into the bedroom. She returned immediately in mink and went over to the hall door and out, still without speaking and without looking at any one of us. When she was gone, I helped myself to my hat and followed. Behind me, Leo's shrill voice said, "Don't try to run, punk. Wherever you go, wherever you try to hide. . . ."

There was more, but I never heard it, because I cut it off with the

door and went down the hall to the elevator. Hilda had left the car in the lobby, and when I'd brought it up, Kal and Hugh still hadn't come out of the apartment. Taking time to clear themselves, I thought. Making certain that none of Leo's trigger men came looking for them in whatever good time was convenient for killing. On the same trip, probably, when he came looking for me. God knows I couldn't blame them. I could blame them in no way for not wanting to share Andy Corkin's suicide. Descending alone in the elevator, I cursed myself in the bleak and passionless futility of irreparable idiocy, but it only came to the same result that most things had come to in the life of Andy Corkin. To nothing, that is.

Outside by the curb, the taxi was waiting with its engine running. The back door opened as I came out, and I scooted across the sidewalk and inside. The taxi lurched forward, swerving out into the traffic lane, and Hilda came over against me with a kind of restrained violence, her body twisting around to a frontal approach, her soft mouth hungry and aggressive. I snarled fingers in her short copper hair and pulled her face down so hard that I could feel her lips flatten and spread and her teeth click sharply against mine. Her breath was hot and labored, and after a long time she twisted away and fell back in the seat, her breasts rising and falling in slow cadence with deep, ragged gasps.

"Andy," she said. "Andy . . ."

"I just thought we'd better be making hay, honey."

"Don't say it that way. Don't ever say it that way."

"You heard Leo. Live it up, he said. Twenty-four hours, he said."

"Why, Andy? For God's sake, why'd you do it?"

"I went blind, honey. I saw his fat fingers, and I thought of you, and I thought of the fingers and you together, and so I smashed his ugly mouth. Besides, maybe it was just getting too late. Maybe I'm just a sour loser who should've stuck to penny ante. Who really knows what makes a guy do something crazy? He does it, that's all. First thing he knows, it's done."

"Now what, Andy? What're you going to do now?"

"Something pleasant, I hope. It's up to you."

"You've got to get away, Andy. Just till I've had time to try to fix things."

"Run?"

"Call it what you like. If I can't get it fixed, I'll run after you."

I shook my head. "There's no place far enough, honey. And if there were, there's nothing fast enough to get me there."

"Jesus, Andy, you can't just sit and wait for it. There has to be something we can do."

"There is. I said it was up to you. Something pleasant, I said."

She came back then, and my hands crept in under mine, and it

was as if she was trying desperately to give me everything in no time at all, but a taxi's no place for it, a taxi prescribes limits, and so pretty soon I said, "We'd better go to my place, honey."

"That's where we're going. I told the cabbie."

"Sweet baby."

"I can't stay, though, darling."

"Why the hell not?"

"I've got to get back."

"To Leo?"

"Yes."

"Don't be a fool. He kicked you out. Remember?"

"Look, Andy. It was just because he'd been humiliated, and I'd seen it happen. It was just because his bloated little ego couldn't stand my seeing it. When I get back, it'll be different. By that time, he'll be wanting me so bad it'll be stronger than anything else, even stronger than the effect of my seeing him slapped in the chops like a fat brat." Her voice sank to a thin complaint. "I've been earning the rent, Andy. Believe me, I earn it in plenty of service and a thousand futile damn regrets."

"Don't tell me. I don't want to hear it."

"It's for us, Andy. If I left him, it still wouldn't clear things for us. He'd have us both killed. Can't you see it's for us? You're the only one I really ever want it from, darling. Just you."

"You're forgetting something, honey. I'm the guy who clobbered

him tonight. He's going to have me taken care of, anyhow."

"Maybe not. Maybe I can stop him. If I go back tonight, I think I can stop him. Not entirely, of course. He'll want something out of you. Something to salvage his pig's van-ity. But I can make it something less than death. Then it'll be you and me, Andy, the same as now, and there'll be a thousand nights together to make up for this one."

"Sure. You and me. You and me and Leo."

"We'll find a way to eliminate Leo later on. A safe way. Sometime, somehow, we'll find a way."

I was tired. I was a tired, broke, sick damn fool, but I had no particular desire to die, and I wanted Hilda wholly or on shares, any way I could get her whenever she wanted to come. I leaned back in the seat and said, "You save it for us, honey. I'll be waiting around."

The taxi wheeled into my street and stopped, and I got out and stood beside it on the curb. Hilda leaned out after me, her face lifted above her white, arched throat, and I leaned down and kissed her without touching her with anything but my lips. Then the taxi pulled us apart, and I went inside and upstairs alone.

What do you do with the twenty-four hours that may be your last? Get drunk? Get religion? Go crazy? I guess it depends on who you are, how much that next breath means to you. For what it signifies, I had

one drink, one cigarette, and went to bed. I also slept. I slept long and well, and when I woke up I saw by the watch on my wrist that it was far past noon. I got up and oriented, and I didn't feel so good, but I didn't feel so bad, either. Sort of so-so. Sort of like almost any garden variety day. I went into the bathroom and showered and shaved and brushed the fur off my teeth. I dressed and asked myself if I was hungry, and I decided that I wasn't hungry but that I could do with a drink. I had the stuff available, rye and bourbon, but I didn't want a drink alone in the apartment. I wanted a drink in a bar. This seemed a reasonable desire for a guy well into his last time around the clock, so I went out to gratify it.

I got the drink at Stony's. Stony himself poured it for me. He asked me how I was, and I said I was all right. After drinking half of what he'd poured, I almost believed it. Someone in a booth paid a nickel for *Many Times*, which isn't a bad tune in itself, but it started me thinking about Hilda trying to make Leo see that I wasn't worth killing, and that wasn't good. I tried to quit thinking about it, but little details kept forcing their way into my mind which may or may not have been parts of the way it actually happened, so I lifted my drink to finish it, and in the process I saw something that made me think for a moment that it hadn't happened at all. In the mirror behind the bar, I saw a character

named Jack Steap, a thin guy with a body like ten-gauge wire and a face like the edge of a razor. He was a guy for hire who worked for Leo Gall when Leo needed a fast, professional job, and he was standing precisely behind the empty stool on my right. One hand was in the pocket of his coat, very casually. I felt, suddenly, dry and withered inside, all dead and done and ready for the fire.

He said softly in a thin tenor voice, "Okay, hero. Let's go."

I turned on the stool, and it was then that I realized that he hadn't spoken to me at all. His eyes and voice were directed toward the customer on the other side of the empty stool. He'd come in a few minutes after me, and we were now the only ones at the bar. He looked like a college guy. He was wearing a hat, but the hair that showed below it was blond, and I knew it was cut short and square on top. I was a little surprised to see that he still had the price of a drink. Hugh Lawson, I mean.

If he ever recognized me, he didn't show it. He looked over his shoulder at the gungel and said, "You talking to me?"

"You, hero. Let's go."

"What the hell you talking about?"

Jack Steap showed his teeth in a smile that was all on the plane. No depth, no meaning. "You know, hero. Just for kicks, though, I'll brief you on it. I'm talking about your dropping a bundle to Leo Gall last

night. I'm talking about your coming back later to reclaim it. It and the other lettuce Leo'd won, plus fifty grand or so he had lying around for household expenses. It was real messy, the way you did it. Smashing his skull that way. Leo's head was a real mess."

Hugh Lawson spun around slowly on his stool. His face had gone white and slack, and the first wash of fear was coming up into his eyes. His voice was a sick croak. "You're crazy! Leo was alive when I left. Kal Magnus and I went together."

"I know. Kal went and stayed. You didn't. You went back."

"I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

"Sure you swear you didn't. But you did. You were seen, hero. You were seen leaving the apartment by someone else who went back. Someone on Leo's team. So the word went out to Leo's boys. So the boys sent me out to find you. So here I am. And so let's go."

A greenish tinge began to creep into the dead white of Lawson's face. It was the face of a man who knew that nothing he could say would make any difference. His mouth labored to create sound, but the most it managed was a whimper, and his eyes slithered around desperately for help that wasn't there. They crossed my face, his eyes, but I don't think I registered in them. Then he was off the stool and running parallel to the bar. He must have intended to duck around it and out the back way into the alley,

but he never made it. Jack Steap's hand came out of his pocket, and there were two muffled detonations so close together that they almost blended, and Hugh Lawson stopped and turned half around and leaped back against the bar like a guy who might have stopped in for a short beer. After a moment, he slipped down to a sitting position and toppled over sideways.

There was a long moment of dead silence in the bar, and then the five or six customers in booths got up and out before the cops got in.

Jack Steap walked down along the bar, stepped over Lawson's body, and went on out the way Lawson had wanted to go.

I went that way myself. I went out into the alley and down the alley to the street and back to my apartment.

I went inside and closed the door and leaned back against it with my eyes closed. Something was hurting inside me, and the hurting was related to the death of Hugh Lawson. He was a guy I hadn't known well and had neither liked nor disliked, but I didn't want him dead at the hands of a thin weasel like Jack Steap for the sake of a fat pig like Leo Gall. Not even when his death was maybe my salvation.

Hilda's voice said, "What's the matter, darling?"

I opened my eyes, and there she was. She was there like something beautiful and warm and real that I needed like hell. I started for her,

and she started for me, and we met and merged somewhere between our starting places.

"It's all right, darling," she said. "Leo's dead."

"I know he's dead. So's Hugh Lawson. I just saw him shot down in Stony's place."

"Leo's boys think Hugh's the one who killed Leo."

"I know. That's what the gungsel said."

"Don't you see what it means, darling? It means you and me in the open. You and me without a worry. We can go away for awhile. South, I think. Somewhere a long way south of the border."

"Using what for money?"

She broke out of my arms then and went for her purse in a chair. It was a big job, almost as big as an overnight bag, one of these things on a strap that's worn over the shoulder. She picked it up and brought it back and turned it upside down, and paper began to fall out. Green paper. I thought it'd never quit falling. It fell and spread and piled up around my feet.

I raised my eyes to her face, and it was still the loveliest face I'd ever seen, smooth and creamy under copper, with a bright and gifted mouth and smoky eyes.

"You," I said. "You killed Leo and put the finger on Lawson."

She shook her head. "No. I put the finger on Lawson, all right, but I didn't kill Leo."

"Lawson really did, then?"

"No. Neither me nor Lawson."

"Who?"

She looked at me and smiled and said, "You did, darling."

I reached out and took her by the shoulders and dug in. "What the hell's this? I never went back there."

"I know you didn't. Look, Andy. When I was a kid on southside, I used to watch the fellows play ball in the street. One day a kid we called Fats got hit in the head with a bat. He was out for a few minutes, and his head hurt for a while, but pretty soon he started to play again, and it was almost half an hour later when he dropped dead. Concussion acts like that sometimes, and that's the way Leo died. You remember how his head smacked the sharp frame of the sofa? He got up and chased us out, and he got ready for bed, and he dropped dead."

"Wait a minute. The gungsel said his head was a mess."

"That was just for looks, darling. He was already dead when I got back. If I'd left him the way I found him, it would've been easy to figure what had really happened."

"So you mess him up and help yourself to his money and finger an innocent guy for the rap."

"For you, darling. For you and me."

"You think I'd touch the lousy money now? Or you?"

"Yes, darling. The money and me. Without us, it's so much paper. With us, it's more fun than you ever dreamed of in that place we'll find

below the border.”

I kept on looking at her, and I kept on wanting her, in spite of everything, and I told myself that there's a point beyond which you can't go. You can skirt the dark edge, you can do things that later make you sick to your stomach, but

there's a point beyond which you can't go if your soul is ever to be your own again. That's what I told myself, and I told myself that I had reached the point.

Now I'll tell *you* something: it's hot down here. It's hot as hell below the border.

My Enemy, My Father



Other guys' fathers played with them and liked them. Bruce's father hated him — so Bruce decided to do something about it.

BY JOHN M. SITAN

BRUCE BARLOW took a long puff on the cigarette and blew the smoke out. He had taken a pack of cigarettes from one of the several cartons his father kept in a closet off the kitchen. Bruce was taking an-

other puff when he was struck on the side of the head and knocked to the basement floor. The open pack of cigarettes scattered around him. He had been sitting on an apple crate behind the furnace. His father stood

over him, stern-faced. It was the first time Bruce had ever tried smoking. He was eleven years old.

Bruce had two other brothers and a sister. The two brothers were a year older than he, and twins. His sister was three years older. Bruce was the only one out of the family who had ever stood up to his father. He had been punished often and it was seldom that his back wasn't angry with purple welts. He had not, as his brothers and sister, learned to give in completely to his father's iron will.

Bruce looked up at his father for a moment and then scrambled to his feet and ran into the back yard. His father shouted and came out of the basement a moment later carrying a length of lath he had taken up from the kindling pile for the fireplace. He didn't see Bruce for a moment and then located him on the other side of the garden patch next to the tomato vine racks. He started purposefully toward his son and was hit by the first ripe tomato of the four Bruce held lightly in the crook of his arm. The second tomato missed and the third hit an elbow. The fourth was a strike on the forehead and left a dribble over the enraged man's face.

Bruce turned and ran up the alley as his father stumbled in blind anger across the garden patch toward him. When he turned at the alley's entrance to run up the street, he glanced back to see his father standing in the alley opposite the back yard gate.

He was shouting and one fist was raised in an angry gesture.

Bruce did not stop running until he reached the cave he had found above the river that wound through Leavenworth, the small town he lived in. He waited a long time back in the shadows of the cave. Occasionally he looked out. When he had first reached his cave he had been short of breath and his body had shaken uncontrollably.

The tears did not come until he had been there a while. When he was finally quiet he began to mold some of the clay from the wall of his cave into balls. When he had formed four balls he made two large ones. It was a painstaking process but he finally molded the shapes into the recognizable form of a family group. Three boys, a girl and a mother and father. When he had finished this work he paused to stare at them. He looked down at the river after a while and then ran down to its bank. The clay figures were left behind. The father and one boy figure had been paired apart from the rest of the group. A small twig served as a threatening father's hand over the clay lump representing the boy.

A pathway followed the winding course of the river. Bruce walked along it. Sometimes he marched militarily and other times he kicked and shuffled his feet. At one place the pathway lifted up over a bluff leaving the river below. When Bruce looked down from the edge of the bluff he saw a man and boy sitting

beside the river fishing. He recognized the boy as a friend of his from school. The man was the boy's father. As Bruce watched the man put his hand on the boy's shoulder and they both laughed.

There was a loose rock on the path and Bruce picked it up and threw it violently in the water not far from the two below. He ducked back so they could not look up and see him. The laughter stopped and Bruce quickly ran back into the woods where he could not be seen if the father and son should come up to the bluff to investigate. He was smiling as he ducked behind a bush. He lay behind the bush for several minutes and when no one appeared he frowned. Suddenly he gritted his teeth and kicked violently into the dirt and pounded his fist against the earth. He waited longer but no one came up the bluff to investigate. He began crying, holding his sobs in, and again pounded his fist on the earth. For several moments he pounded harder and harder. Finally his desperate anger abated and he walked to the edge of the bluff again and carefully peered over the edge.

The boy and man were still fishing quietly below. It was a contented scene. They had paid no particular attention to Bruce's thrown rock. The boy had just caught a fish and his father was watching him take it from the hook and drop it in their fish creel. For an hour Bruce watched the two below until they finally left. When they walked away the man

put his hand on the boy's shoulder and they talked earnestly. Before they went out of sight around a bend of the river they were laughing together again.

When Bruce got back to his cave the little figures he had molded earlier were where he had left them. He sat down for a while and listlessly moved the group of mother and children with his finger. He did not touch the father and boy. He sat quietly for a long while and then as it started getting dark he stood up. He took a small piece of chocolate from his pocket and ate it hungrily. His glance fell on the figures of the boy and father. Stooping he carefully twisted the arms of the father doll off. When he had done that he smiled triumphantly and picked the doll up and jabbed at it with his finger. It was almost shapeless when he clenched his fist and slammed it into the blob of clay that had been the father doll. He dropped the lump of clay at the cave entrance way and began stamping on it. He did not stop until he had stamped the lump into the ground.

It was almost totally dark when he left the cave. He walked slowly home stopping before a drug store on a corner two blocks from his home. He finally went in. The druggist did not bother Bruce when he began thumbing through comic magazines. Bruce had looked at a half dozen when his gaze began wandering from the comic magazine he held and to the door. He was chewing on his lower

lip when he finally got up and left the drug store.

At his home he found the back porch light on. He stood for awhile looking at the house from the alley. Suddenly the door opened and one of his brothers brought out a paper sack of garbage and put it in the garbage can. As his brother was going back to the house the back door again opened and his father stood there looking out into the dark. Bruce watched from behind a telephone pole in the alley until the door closed. When the door had remained closed for several moments he walked to the gate and stood there with his hand on the latch catch. The back door to the house remained closed. Finally Bruce went into the yard. He walked to where he could see his family. They were sitting down to dinner. He saw that no plate had been set out on the table for him.

Bruce almost ran when his father turned and looked directly at him. But it was dark where he stood and his father had not in reality been looking at him. Bruce watched as his father handed around a large pot roast. It was followed with potatoes and gravy and a salad.

When Bruce did move he went to a basement window. He felt with the tips of his fingers until he found a tiny hole drilled at one edge of the window. He took a curved wire from his pocket and inserted it in the hole. A catch slipped inside and the window opened easily.

It was dark in the basement and Bruce lowered himself carefully through the window. Moving with his arms outstretched across the floor he found the first of three beams that supported the floor above. Stepping up on a crate he reached into a space between the floor stringers and took down a small flashlight.

Bruce held his hand over the end of the flashlight before turning it on. The light showing was controlled by the clenching or loosening of his fist. When he was under the dining room he stopped to listen to the muffled voices above. He stood listening until the meal was over. His mother was worried about him. His father was not. His father expected him to come home as he had before when he'd run away. Bruce heard his father instruct one of his brothers to get him his razor strop from upstairs as the meal ended. His father also ordered his brothers and sister to their rooms. His father was not in the habit of whipping him before an audience.

Shortly afterward his mother went to her sewing room. His father's footsteps sounded heavy as they went to the kitchen. He heard the back door open and a moment later his father's legs went by the basement window against the shining porch light. Bruce watched as his father look around the yard and finally came back to the house. The footsteps went into the living room. There was the slight scraping sound

as a chair was moved on the floor above.

Bruce turned on his flashlight again and searched in a corner until he found a coil of piano wire hidden at the back of a shelf holding cans of paint. When he had uncoiled the wire he went to the stairway leading down into the basement and fastened one end of the steel wire to a hooked nail on the stairwell. He stretched the wire across a stair five steps up from the basement floor and fastened it to another nail. He tested the wire to see that it was tight and then went to the basement door and unlocked it. He had gone to the door when he heard his father stir upstairs. He stood by the door until he was sure that his father was moving no longer.

Bruce next uncovered a cardboard box hidden under stacked newspapers. He took the splintered remains of several broken glass gallon jugs from it. He placed the broken shards of glass at the bottom of the stairwell. He then stood on the wash tub to unscrew the light bulb that lighted the utility room and the bottom of the stairwell. He replaced it with a burned-out bulb that had been in the cardboard box. The good bulb he put on the shelf with the paint cans.

Using his flashlight he traced a pathway from the stairway to the basement door. He removed a basket

of dirty clothes from his pathway and tested its clearance by retracing it silently in the dark several times. When he was ready Bruce tipped over a crate near the basement door and listened. His father's footsteps were quick and the door leading down into the basement opened suddenly. His father stood in the square of light at the top of the stairway.

Bruce heard his father call and then an exasperated oath as the light switch snapped back and forth. When his father finally came down the stairs Bruce waited with calm inviolability. There was a sudden grunt and a startled cry.

Bruce ran forward and removed the wire that was now slack. He heard his father groan and a questioning call from his mother upstairs. In a moment he was out of the basement door and back in the dark alley.

Bruce waited in the alley until an ambulance came. After a while his father was taken out to the ambulance. His father's face was covered with a sheet. A man was holding his mother and leading her back into the house.

Bruce waited a moment longer until the ambulance was driving away before he opened the back yard gate. He deliberately let it slam loudly. He was humming under his breath as he walked boldly up to the kitchen door.

The Murder Market

BY H. H. HOLMES

MYSTERY fans can, and will, argue all night as to the proper place of humor in the murder novel. Most will admit that a certain amount of wit and lively observation is not amiss in any type of writing, and that a judicious proportion of humor in murder has a tradition that goes back through Hammett and Doyle to Poe, and even beyond him, to the murder plays of Shakespeare and Euripides.

For those of you who, like me and Euripides, relish a little absurdity along with your tragedy and intensely regret the absence from recent publishers' catalogs of the two masters of humorous homicide, Alice Tilton and Richard Shattuck, the most diverting item in many months is Richard Powell's *Say It With Bullets* (Simon & Schuster, \$2.50). It's hard to think of anybody, in or out of the mystery field, who writes quite such smoothly entertaining dialog as Mr. Powell, or who has quite so much fun pitting hero and heroine in an all-out Battle of the Sexes while allowing each to be a likable human individual rather than a slick automaton. He has a good, almost Woolrich-like suspense-pursuit plot to frame his humor this time, and incidentally he conducts the reader on a guided tour

of Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and California, with descriptions at least as accurate as those in any guidebook, and much funnier. In all, it's a most neatly blended novel, and one only wishes that such charmingly unserious specimens turned up more often.

As often happens, the latest Mr. and Mrs. North novel is less overtly funny than their radio and TV adventures. The Lockridges' *Curtain for a Jester* (Lippincott, \$2.50) is, indeed, a sort of diatribe against the crude humor exemplified by the practical joker and novelty-shop gagster, and draws so poisonous a pen-sketch of such a character that one greets his murder with cheers. The stock and workings of a Novelty Emporium make for some strikingly macabre situations; the detective puzzle is a strong and solid one; and serious though the general tone may be, there are bound to be captivating moments of humor in any novel featuring Pam North, who this time is trying to prove that cats understand human character—a theory which markedly fails to impress the cats, who have better things to do.

You may remember a fine humorous story of swindling and a sort of screwball justice, *The Loaded*

Tourist, in *Manhunt*, March, 1953; now that and six similar adventures of Simon Templar are gathered together in Leslie Charteris' *The Saint in Europe* (Crime Club, \$2.75), the first new Saint book in five years and a wholly amusing one.

End of humor in recent detection; now to more serious matters:

CHARACTER AND KILLING: William Campbell Gault moves from a fine novel of prizefighting (*The Canvas Coffin*) to an equally detailed and believable study of Little Theatre people in *Blood on the Boards* (Dutton, \$2.50). Prose and plot-movement are as hard-punching as in the boxing story; and I can't think of a book in a dozen years that has so accurately shown the real, unglamorous side of hardworking amateur acting. I'm beginning to think there's no subject this boy Gault can't write about sharply and convincingly. Val Gielgud essays a highly complex job of detection-by-character-analysis in *Ride for a Fall* (Morrow, \$3), the story of a minor British diplomat who jumped off a New York windowledge . . . because he was a traitor, or because he was a failure in his private life? The answer is something of an anticlimax; but the buildup is skilled and suspenseful, and deals with Communist espionage in a far more plausible way than most recent fiction. Another complex and tormented figure is the hero of Gordon Davis' *I Came To Kill* (Gold Medal, 25c), an innocent fugitive from a

murder charge so embittered as to hire out as a professional assassin in a South American revolution. The echoes of Hemingway's *Bell* may toll a little too frequently; but it's still an absorbing off-trail suspense item. The echoes in Wade Miller's *South of the Sun* (Gold Medal, 25c) are those of Vicki Baum's *Grand Hotel* — same technique of a half-dozen unrelated personal plots gradually crossing in a luxury hotel, this time in Acapulco, with the plots fused by the almost innocent debut as sneakthief and murderer of an unobtrusive bellhop. It's an adroitly told story — and might make as good a film as the Baum classic.

THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION: Andrew Garve, who has in the past shown himself equally skillful at the deductive puzzle and the novel of character, combines them in *The Cuckoo Line Affair* (Harper, \$2.50), which starts off as a serious study of an admirable aging eccentric who is unexpectedly charged with assault in a railway carriage, and goes on to an elaborate "pure" detective story of timetables and tide-schedules, attractively investigated by a Bright Young Couple of mystery writers. The focal character of the eccentric gets somewhat lost; but in exchange you'll receive much of the best formal detection to cross the Atlantic in some time. Shortly after this column appears, America's master of strict deduction, Ellery Queen, will celebrate his Silver Anniversary as a mystery writer. I haven't seen the

Anniversary book yet, but in preparation you might look into *The Scarlet Letters* (Little, Brown, \$3), one of the most experimental Queen jobs, in which Ellery spends 194 pages as onlooker to a curious love affair, and then steps in as deductionist to solve the resultant murder. Some old Queen fans may, like me, find it disappointing — and others refreshing. Even further off the deductive trail is Josephine Tey's recently revived 1929 novel, *The Man in the Queue* (Macmillan, \$2.75), in which the most orthodox and intelligent Scotland Yard methods of Inspector Grant lead to a most unorthodox (and, for a reviewer, unmentionable) conclusion. Prose and characterization are as subtly flawless as in more recent Tey books; and whatever you think of the ending, you'll have a wonderful time reaching it.

SHERLOCK HOLMES: The character of the greatest deducer of them all is superlatively analyzed in S. C. Roberts' *Holmes & Watson: A Miscellany* (Oxford, \$3), a collection of all Dr. Roberts' many writings on the subject over a period of twenty-odd years, adding up to probably the best book on the immortal detective since Vincent Starrett's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*.

THE FACTS OF DEATH: This department doesn't usually list paperback reprints; there are too many to keep up with. But an exception must be made for Russell Crouse's collection of twelve unsolved New York murders, *Murder Won't Out* (Pennant,

25c), scarce and out of print for twenty years, and eminently deserving revival at this attractive price; among American collections of murder essays it ranks not far after the books of Edmund Pearson. *The Girl in Poison Cottage* by Richard H. Hoffmann, M.D., and Jim Bishop (Gold Medal, 25c) is more crudely written and less objectively reported than previous volumes in this fine series of condensed trial transcripts; but its subject — the sordid, shocking, and still perplexing Creighton-Appelgate case on Long Island in 1935 — is so intensely fascinating that one could overlook worse flaws in this first full-length treatment.

. . . AND SOME OTHERS

Cartoon books seem to be getting more and more popular of late — and deservedly so. Several fine ones have appeared of late: for example, a devastating book of sketches entitled *Dreams of Glory* by William Steig (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, \$3.95). For those who've seen the omnibus *Steig Album*, reviewed here last month, no further word is necessary. For the others: this is the first appearance in book form of Steig's famous series depicting those grandiose fantasies you, too, used to have when you were younger. There's a hilarious ring of truth to the book; if nothing else, these drawings will enable you to understand your own bewildering offspring a lot better.

Another highly recommended car-

toon book is Walt Kelly's latest addition to the saga of the world's most surprising possum: *The Pogo Papers* (Simon and Schuster, \$1.00). Pogo-philes don't need this recommendation; they've undoubtedly purchased the book already. If you're one of the few benighted souls who has never heard of Pogo, Albert Alligator, Churchy the Owl, Porkypine and the other inhabitants of Okefenokee Swamp Township, this book will serve as a formal introduction. There's nobody else quite like Walt Kelly now in print — which is a shame.

The Best Cartoons from France (Simon and Schuster, \$2.95) is a somewhat uneven collection of Gallic humor which is, nevertheless, worth your attention. Though an occasional cartoon may not strike you as hilarious (and though a few, frankly, are bewildering) the general level of the book is high, and it con-

tains several master-strokes, from the drawing-boards of France's foremost cartoonists.

Not a cartoon book, but having something of the same quality in its incisive, colorful prose pictures, *Monster Midway* by William Lindsay Gresham definitely deserves your attention. Gresham, of course, is the author of *Nightmare Alley*, and *Man-hunt* readers will recall his fine story, *Teaser*, which appeared some issues ago. In *Monster Midway* his subject is that completely different way of life known as "the carnival," and it ranks among the most startling books of the last few years. Gresham is an expert knife-thrower, magician and "mind reader" and has tried his hand at fire-eating; he obviously knows his subject and loves it. He'll make you love it, too. The book is published by Rinehart, and priced at \$3.75.

— HW



THE THING I want to get across is that I'm an honest man. In all my years of public service I've never accepted a dishonest cent.

In most other respects too I think I'm what society calls a "good citizen." I'm a kind father and a good husband. I'm active in church and community affairs. And even beyond that, I've devoted my whole life to public service.

The Choice

It isn't a matter of honesty. There's nothing else I can do. I've got to play along with the syndicate — or else.

BY RICHARD DEMING

At the moment I serve as district attorney of St. Michael County.

In case my stressing of my respectability gives you the idea I am building up to confessing some crime, I'd better explain that I'm not. I don't want to create a false impression. I merely have a choice to make.

No matter how I choose I'll remain a solid and respected citizen. If I choose

one way, I can look forward to spending the rest of my life pleasantly but unexcitingly in private law practice, probably at a better income than my salary as district attorney. If I choose the other way, almost certainly I will be my state's next governor and possibly, though I admit improbably, even end my political career in the White House.

The only way I can explain my position is to say I drifted into it. Each compromise with my moral precepts seemed so small at the time, and the consequences of not compromising seemed so drastic, even now when I look back I can't honestly blame myself.

I can't really blame the System either, for that would merely be blaming all humanity.

My first contact with what I have come to think of as the "System" was over the Max Bloom case, when I was a green young assistant district attorney. I was twenty-six at the time, and the junior of eight assistants.

Max Bloom was a bookie, and there was nothing exceptional about the case. Two officers had raided his bookshop, caught Max in the act of accepting bets and placed him under arrest. Since there seemed to be no possible defense, I contemplated a single appearance in court, where the defendant undoubtedly would plead guilty and accept the usual fine.

Instead, Big Joey Martin dropped in to see me.

I knew who Big Joey was, though I had never before met him. He was political boss of the Sixth and Seventh Wards, and also reputed to have some sort of connection with organized gambling. He was a huge man, at least six feet four and weighing probably two hundred and seventy pounds. Some of this was muscle, but a good deal of it was plain fat.

He came into my cubbyhole office without knocking, carefully lowered himself into a chair, squirmed until he was comfortable and began fanning himself with his hat.

"You George Kenneday?" he asked when these preliminaries were over.

I nodded.

"I guess you know who I am."

I nodded again. "Joey Martin."

For a moment or two the fat man merely fanned himself with his hat. Then he said, "They tell me you got the prosecution against Maxie Bloom."

I nodded for the third time.

"Somebody slipped up. It ain't Maxie's turn for two more months, and he's sorer than hell about losing two weeks' business. I tried to tell him I'd get his next tumble postponed two months overtime, but I can't talk no sense into his head. He's kind of a psycho, you know. I'm afraid he'll blow his lid in court and start yammering to the judge about getting his protection money back. So I think we better work out a dismissal or something."

I looked at the man with my mouth open. "Are you asking me to drop charges against a lawbreaker?"

"A lawbreaker?" Joey Martin repeated in a surprised tone. "Maxie's a bookie, not no criminal." He eyed me narrowly, then said, "I ain't asking you nothing if you're going to get horsey about it. I guess I just took it for granted you knew the setup. Forget I bothered you."

Heaving himself to his feet, he nodded indifferently and ambled out of my office. And I was so flabbergasted by the whole performance, I just sat there open-mouthed and watched him go.

Fifteen minutes later I was called into the office of First Assistant District Attorney Clark Gleason.

"How are you, George?" Gleason said in a friendly voice, waving me to a chair. "Beginning to get the feel of things?"

I told him I was getting along fine.

"Reason I called you in, George, I'm taking over the Max Bloom case myself. Mind dropping the folder next time you pass my office?"

Carefully I folded my hands in my lap. "Has Joey Martin been to see you, Mr. Gleason?"

"Well, yes. As a matter of fact, he just left."

"I see. Mr. Gleason, only a few minutes ago Joey Martin practically ordered me to get Bloom's charge dismissed. He said something about protection money and that Bloom's arrest had been a mistake in timing on the part of the police. When I

started to jump him, he seemed more surprised than alarmed, and walked out. Now I learn he's been to see you, and you're taking over Bloom's case. I think I'm entitled to an explanation."

Gleason examined me thoughtfully for a long time before answering. Eventually he asked, "Why do you think I'm taking over the case?"

I said with a mixture of caution and belligerence, "I must be mistaken, Mr. Gleason, but on the surface it looks as though this office takes orders from a two-bit racketeer."

Gleason's smile was rueful, but it didn't contain any anger. "This office doesn't take orders from anyone, George. But sometimes we have to do political favors. Do you know who Joey Martin is?"

"Sure. A professional gambler."

"A little more than that, George. Joey is the boy who delivers the votes down in the Sixth and Seventh Wards. *All* the votes. Election after election he turns out a solid majority for the party. In return he occasionally asks a small favor. Never much of a favor and never very often. It's just practical politics to go along when he asks."

"Even if you have to violate your oath of office?"

"Oh, for cripes sake, George," Gleason said impatiently. "Max Bloom isn't a murderer or bank robber. Everybody knows bookshops are tolerated in St. Michael and what raids are made are only token

raids. Two weeks after his trial Max would be back in business in the same spot even if we got a conviction."

I said, "What you're saying in effect is that this office knows the police deliberately protect illegal bookshops. Even that they accept protection money for it. Yet we condone it because it wouldn't be practical politics to crack down. Why doesn't the D.A. swear out warrants for everybody concerned, including a few crooked cops?"

"Because next election there would be a new district attorney. If you intend to follow a political career, George, now is as good a time as any to learn the hard facts of political life. We're aware that the police to some extent connive with Joey and his kind, and we don't approve of it. But attempting to stop it would be tilting at windmills. No one in this office has any direct connection with men like Joey and no one receives any payoff. But as a matter of practical politics we sometimes have to rub the backs of such men, because it's the votes controlled by ward leaders like Joey Martin that keep our party in power. Call it a violation of public trust if you want, but what's the alternative? Kicking Joey out of the office and having two wards refuse to back John Doud for D.A. in the next primary?"

"Your job and mine aren't elective," I said. "We're appointed."

"By the D.A.," Gleason agreed.

"Whose job *is* elective. And you're only kidding yourself if you think your appointment was entirely on merit. Weren't you sponsored by someone?"

Reluctantly I admitted, "My Uncle Crosby is an alderman."

When I left Gleason's office there was no question in my mind that the whole system was wrong in spite of the first assistant D.A.'s glib argument about practical politics. But I couldn't think of anywhere to go with a complaint. It would have been silly to go to the police, who seemed to be party to the arrangement. And just as silly to expect action from the D.A. or any other elected official who owed allegiance to the System.

In the end I did nothing, justifying myself by deciding I would have taken *some* kind of action if I had been asked to get Max Bloom a dismissal myself. But since the case had been taken out of my hands, there really wasn't any action I could take.

Looking back, I still can't see anything I could have done. I have come to regard the Max Bloom case as the first compromise with my principles, but in a way it wasn't a compromise at all. At least not in an active sense. All I actually did was accept a situation about which I could do nothing. How many sincerely honest men in the same position would have done anything else?

Would you have?

It was nearly four years before I

was called upon to make the next big compromise, though in the meantime I found myself making more and more small ones. Even now I can't put my finger on any one point of my career and say, "Here is where I should have resisted," because it was a gradual process. The mere mental act of accepting the System as a necessary evil of politics opened the way for greater and greater departures from what I knew to be right.

Yet if I had the chance to live this period over, I know my reactions would be the same. There was no fighting the System. Either you conformed, or you retired to private life. And since the party had begun to regard me as a bright young man with a political future, I conformed.

My growing influence in local party affairs was largely the result of the reputation I was gaining as a prosecutor. Actually this reputation was based almost entirely on a single murder case which the papers seemed to think I had handled with some brilliance, but the party didn't care about that. What counted was that I had the public's confidence. As a result when Clark Gleason resigned to accept a job in the State's Attorney's office, I was appointed first assistant district attorney in his place.

During this four years I learned a lot about how the System operated. For the most part what Clark Gleason had told me was quite true. Most elected officials were honest

men who had no direct connection with the underworld-controlled political machine which maintained them in office. Yet the influence of ward leaders such as Joey Martin was tremendous. In return for the votes necessary to elect them, officials usually found it expedient to wink at the illegal side activities of Joey and his kind, and occasionally grant favors which came close to criminal conspiracy.

At the time I was appointed first assistant district attorney I hadn't held, or even run for, any elective office, but I was aware of hints within the party that I might make a good district attorney when old John Doud finally decided to retire. I kept these hints alive by actively engaging in party affairs, which brought me in frequent contact with local political bosses.

With an eye on my future, I deliberately cultivated friendly relations with these men, with the result that I was asked for a lot of minor favors. For example, Willie Tamm, president of the Dock Worker's Local and also party leader of the three wards in the dock area, routinely mailed me his traffic tickets to have fixed.

Many similar minor favors were asked of me, but the one *big* favor I performed was done tacitly without being mentioned by anyone. This was a passive favor. It was simply closing my eyes to the rackets going on in the districts run by the men who controlled the votes.

That is, this was my one big favor prior to the evening Timothy Grange called at my house.

Tim Grange ranked higher both politically and in the underworld than Big Joey Martin. He owned the wire service which brought horse race results into town from all over the country, and his business was leasing this service to individual bookies. He also controlled the party organization for the entire East Side, including the two wards run by Joey Martin.

Grange was one of the men whose friendship I had been deliberately cultivating, but aside from passing time with him at a number of political rallies, we hadn't had much contact prior to the Friday evening he unexpectedly showed up at my house.

He was a tall, slim man in his late forties with iron gray hair. He arrived about nine o'clock, after both the children were in bed. When he rather nervously refused Mary's offer of a drink with the statement that he had urgent business with me, she went into another room and left us alone in the front room. Grange stated his business at once.

"My kid's in a jam, George. Tim Jr. He's killed a man."

The abruptness of it startled me. "My God!" I said. "Murder?"

He shook his head in nervous impatience. "A traffic accident. He ran over a pedestrian at Fourth and Locust about an hour ago. An old man named Abraham Swartz. I just

checked with City Hospital, and the man's dead."

"Oh," I said, partially relieved that it wasn't as serious as I first thought. "Was it Tim's fault?"

Grange paced up and down a moment before answering. Then he said, "He says he wasn't speeding. At least not much. He claims he was going about thirty-five in a thirty mile zone when this Swartz suddenly stepped from the curb right in front of him."

"I see. Then what are you upset about? It's unfortunate, but those things . . ."

"He didn't stop," George interrupted. "He raced home and hid the car in the garage. Fortunately I happened to be going out just as he came in, and when I saw how upset he was, I forced the story out of him." He paused, then added in a flat voice, "He was drunk."

For a moment I just looked at him. Then I walked over to stare angrily out the window. When I turned again, I said, "At the risk of hurting your feelings, Grange, young Tim is a damned fool."

"I knew that before I came, George. The kid panicked. What's he up against?"

"Manslaughter, probably," I said bluntly. "The combination of hit-and-run and drunken driving almost automatically means a manslaughter charge, no matter whose fault the accident was."

"He's not drunk now. I threw him in a cold shower, and when I left I

had my wife pouring black coffee in him."

I said, "The police make a blood test for alcohol content. It's routine in hit-and-run cases. Even if you have him walking straight and talking coherently, they'll be able to judge how drunk he was at the time of the accident."

"Suppose they didn't find him till tomorrow?"

I looked at him. "He can't wait till tomorrow. He'll have to turn himself in at once. If he turns in voluntarily, he may just possibly scrape out of the manslaughter charge. But it's already too late for him to get out of the hit-and-run. The law requires any driver involved in an accident to stop immediately and identify himself either to the other party involved or to the police. The law allows the alternate procedure of reporting directly to the nearest police station, but young Tim didn't do that either. The kid is in a jam, and the longer he waits before turning in, the worse the jam is going to get."

"Suppose he reported to the station closest to Fourth and Locust now, George? It was only a little over an hour ago."

"It might as well be a year. The law says immediately."

"Couldn't the report be . . . set back a little?"

I said, "Are you asking me to get the police to falsify a report? This isn't like fixing a parking ticket. Manslaughter is a felony."

"But it's only technically manslaughter," Grange said in a reasonable tone. "If he'd stopped, he wouldn't be in any particular trouble. Manslaughter's kind of a tough rap just for getting panicky."

"Death is kind of a tough rap just for stepping off a curb."

"I'm not excusing the kid, George. But he *is* my kid. I know you're hounded for favors by every ward heeler in town, but I've never asked you for one before. I'll put it right on the line. Get my kid out of this and I'm your friend for life."

He didn't put it into words, but his tone meant I would have the solid backing of the entire East Side any time I wanted to run for any office at all. It also meant I could count on its solid opposition if I failed to help his son.

I think I would have thrown him out of the house if he had offered me money. Even if he had come right out in the open and used his political influence as a weapon, I think I might have turned him down. But he offered me nothing but his friendship, and let the rest dangle there by inference.

There wasn't any middle course I could take. I couldn't, like Pilate, wash my hands of the whole affair. For if I refused to help young Tim out of his jam, I was going to have to prosecute him.

I thought about the talk within the party about my replacing old John Doud when he finally got around to retiring, and realized that

with Tim Grange behind me, I wouldn't have to wait for his retirement. I could have the job at the next election.

But not if I refused Timothy Grange. If I insisted on trying his son for manslaughter, from the moment of that decision I could forget all political ambition.

Going to the phone, I dialed the Fourth Street Precinct House, got hold of the night captain, who happened to owe me a favor, and arranged for the log book to show that Timothy Grange Jr. had reported there five minutes after the accident at Fourth and Locust and that he'd been checked and found cold sober.

Conspiracy to compound a felony? Of course it was. But *you* tell me what else I could have done.

In the nearly eight years that I have been district attorney of St. Michael County I've thought back on this incident often. From the standpoint of abstract justice I admit there is no defense for my action. I was pledged to uphold the law impartially, and in my own mind I know that if Tim Grange Jr. hadn't been the son of an influential politician, I would have prosecuted him for manslaughter.

Yet I can't blame myself for deciding as I did. Kicking the elder Grange out of my house would have accomplished nothing but ending my political career. It wouldn't have brought the dead man back to life.

I can't even blame Timothy

Grange Sr. for bringing pressure to save his son. What normal father wouldn't? I've decided that if anything is to blame, it's the bad luck which created an impossible situation.

Nevertheless I recognize my action as the first *great* compromise with my principles. I also recognize that once having made this major step, future compromises became easier and easier.

This was just as well for my peace of mind, for from the moment I was elected district attorney I found it necessary to make more and more compromises. But I was no longer under constant pressure to perform minor favors. This nuisance now fell to my new first assistant, a young man named Edmund Rowe, who as chief prosecutor for the county was in closer contact with both the police and those on the other side of the law than I was.

This was because the district attorney of a county including as large a metropolitan area as St. Michael is a policy maker rather than a courtroom lawyer. He has too many administrative duties to handle prosecutions personally. His concern is crime in a general sense. Specific crimes are the business of his assistants, and I had eight to relieve me of this responsibility. Even important cases were tried by Edmund Rowe.

The compromises I was now forced to make came from my policy-making power. And this power was considerable.

At any time after I assumed office I could have eliminated any racket I chose from St. Michael simply by issuing an order to the police. The police wouldn't have liked it, but even though they were to some extent in partnership with the racketeers, they wouldn't have dared to refuse cooperation. The constant dread of any crooked cop is a shake-up in the police department, and the moment a crusading district attorney turns on the heat, every cop, even on a crooked force, becomes a crusader too.

I was aware of my power before I ever assumed office, and I gave a lot of thought to just how I was going to use it. If I wanted to conduct a crusade, I had four years to do it and nothing but the next election could put me out of office. Undoubtedly I could clean up the city and keep it clean during that four years.

But just as undoubtedly I would never again be my party's candidate for any office whatever.

The alternative to fighting crime as I was sworn to do was no longer as simple as it had been when I was merely first assistant district attorney. Then I had been forced to close my eyes to many of the things going on around me, but my cooperation with the underworld had been merely passive. My role had been that of chief public prosecutor, and I lacked the policy-making power of the district attorney.

But now my cooperation had to become active if I was going to co-

operate at all. As D.A. it was not enough merely to ignore the rackets controlled by local political bosses. I was now in a spot where I either had to fight racketeering or help cover it up.

For example I often met with volunteer citizens' groups formed to combat organized crime. Sporadically such groups rise in every metropolitan community, and since they usually represent segments of the independent group, they can't just be brushed aside. It's only practical politics to avoid arousing unnecessary resentment in representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary International and other business groups out of which citizens' committees arise.

Consequently it was necessary to go through the motions of running cleanup drives against gambling, vice and other rackets whenever such a group offered its services. I had a standard procedure for handling such groups.

First I would make a public declaration of war against racketeers. Next my office and the police jointly would release to the papers that city-wide raids had taken place and large numbers of arrests had been made. Actually probably a half dozen bookies and an equal number of house madams, all thoughtfully tipped off in advance of the raids, would be dragged in and booked. But since about six cases in addition to the routine parade of drunks and traffic violators was all police court

could handle in one day, this was enough to keep a steady stream going before the judge for at least two days. Any of the citizens' groups interested enough to follow up as far as the courtroom usually tired after one day of watching and went away satisfied that justice was being done.

The newspapers, too, occasionally ran editorial campaigns against organized crime in St. Michael, and again it would be necessary to simulate ruthless war against racketeers. In either event, I became so adept, I actually began to gain something of a reputation as a crusading district attorney.

Never once did Timothy Grange or any other racketeer openly ask for this sort of protection. And never once during my entire political career was I ever on the payroll of any racketeer. I cooperated solely to weld a solid voting force behind me.

I succeeded too. When I was elected for my second term as district attorney, I got the most overwhelming majority in the history of St. Michael politics. And that thumping majority put me in line for at least consideration as the party's gubernatorial candidate in the following election.

My hope was only for consideration up to the time Tony Manetti and Arnold Price got interested in me. It is one thing to have the solid political support of a single county, and a different proposition to get an entire state behind you. But after Tim Grange brought Manetti and

Price to see me, I began to think of my nomination for governor as almost a certainty. Which, in our one-party state, is the same as election.

This meeting, like my previous one with Grange, took place at my home instead of at my office. Both men were from out of state, Tony Manetti from New York and Arnold Price from Chicago, but they both represented the same organization.

Their organization was the national crime syndicate.

Tony Manetti was a squat, swarthy man with heavy features and kinky, close-cropped hair which fitted his head like a skullcap. Arnold Price was tall and lean and slow moving, with gaunt features and the homespun manner of a backwoods farmer.

After the four of us were settled with drinks in the front room and Mary had gone off to another part of the house, Grange opened the conversation.

"I guess you know who Mr. Manetti and Mr. Price are, George," he said. "I been telling them about you, and they thought maybe we ought to have a little political conference." He laughed genially. "You know. Smoke-filled rooms and all that stuff."

Neither man smiled at the joke. Noncommittally I said, "I see."

"As you probably know," Grange went on, "the boys here have been quietly building a political organization throughout the state. Now they're looking around for a candidate to back for governor."

I felt my heart skip a beat. Here, possibly, was the one big break of my career. The backing of a new, but rapidly growing, state-wide political machine.

I wasn't for a moment under the impression that syndicate interference in state politics would be a good thing for our state. But neither was I starry-eyed enough to believe anything I did could stop the syndicate's growth. I knew all about what was going on in the state politically, and had accepted it as an undesirable but inevitable development.

Before the arrival of Tony Manetti and Arnold Price in our midst, state politics had been far from clean, but there was little centralization. The two big-city machines, St. Michael's and Tailor City's across the state, were powerful but autonomous units. Numerous smaller but equally autonomous machines ran things in the lesser communities and in the rural areas. Though they were all of the same party, no one unit was strong enough to dictate statewide policy. State conventions were matters of give and take, with the small rural machines often forming combines strong enough to force through platforms and slates of candidates opposed by both big-city machines.

The syndicate was attempting to weld these divergent groups into a solid, statewide organization whose policy could be controlled from the top. It was common knowledge to the politically informed that Ma-

netti and Price had been spreading huge sums in the form of campaign contributions in the rural areas. It was not so well known that Tailor City had joined forces with the rising new machine, but I happened to be one of those who knew it. And now the appearance at my home of the two men with one of St. Michael's strongest political bosses could only mean that the local machine was falling in line with the rest.

It also meant the syndicate undoubtedly would be powerful enough by the time of the next state convention to put into the governor's mansion the candidate of its choice.

All these thoughts skipped through my mind while Grange was talking. And while they were passing through my mind, I dispassionately considered just what the syndicate was.

It is, as anyone who followed the televised congressional investigation of crime knows, a nationwide federation of professional gamblers, procurers, dope peddlers and racketeers. No decent citizen could feel anything but abhorrence for all that Manetti and Price stood for.

On the other hand my refusal to deal with the syndicate would merely transfer its interest to some other candidate who was willing to accept its backing. And if it was inevitable that a syndicate-backed governor was going to administer our state, I might as well be it.

I asked, "What does this backing involve?"

Tony Manetti spoke in a slurred voice which still contained a trace of Sicilian accent. "We're willing to drop two hundred grand into the campaign kitty."

The amount startled me, for the dark man mouthed it as casually as I would mention a dime.

I said, "How did you happen to pick me?"

"I sold them," Grange said. "You're a natural. Who else in the state can pull in the independent vote and at the same time draw machine backing? With the rubes you have a reputation as a crusader. With the smart boys you have a reputation for . . . cooperation. How could we lose?"

I asked, "What sort of cooperation would be expected of me?"

Arnold Price drawled, "Nothing much, Kenneday. We might ask for a few appointments. The police commissioners of St. Michael and Tailor City, for instance."

"I see," I said dryly.

I toyed with the thought of refusing point blank, as my ability to compromise didn't extend to turning the state over to a gang of murderers. But I only toyed with it. The next instant I thought of a number of justifications for accepting syndicate backing.

The first was the argument that if I refused, some other candidate would be bound to accept and the state would be no better off than if I accepted. The second was that any promises I made to a gang of killers

I was not morally bound to keep. I told myself I could never get into the governor's mansion without syndicate backing, but once there I could stop being a politician and start being a statesman: I decided I would administer the state government to the best of my ability if I managed to get elected, even if it meant being kicked out of office after four years.

I said, "I would appreciate your backing for the governorship very much, gentlemen. And you won't find me ungrateful."

After the three men left I felt rather proud of myself. It pleased me to think Manetti and Price would go to great trouble and expense to put me in office, only to discover after election that they had made the mistake of backing an honest man. Somehow the situation seemed to counterbalance all the moral compromises I had made in the past in order to gain votes.

But I might have known syndicate representatives wouldn't be naive enough to be satisfied with mere verbal assurance that I'd cooperate after election. I should have been prepared for the next move. My only excuse for being caught by surprise is that I underestimated Manetti and Price.

In the month since my meeting with Tim Grange and the two syndicate men, political forces have been whipped into line, and it's now a practical certainty my nomi-

nation for governor will pass on the first ballot at the state convention. Meantime I still have my job as district attorney to perform.

I wish I could resign tomorrow, for finally I am confronted with a decision for which I can find no self-justification by calling it practical politics.

I've known all along, of course, that the syndicate's political maneuvering is merely a means to an end, and the end is opening wide the whole state to gambling, vice, narcotics and every other illegal racket into which it can get its fingers. I should also have known that a group so ruthless would not confine its bid for power to mere dabbling in politics. Some local opposition by racketeers who preferred to remain independent was inevitable, and the syndicate's solution to such opposition is murder.

There's already been one gang killing in St. Michael County. My old friend, Big Joey Martin, who was my first contact with the System. The underworld rumor is that Big Joey refused to throw in with the syndicate, and his death was a warning to others who might be slow about falling in line.

It's only a rumor though. There is no evidence pointing at anyone, which might be expected in a murder arranged by so efficient an organization. We have a body, three .45 caliber slugs from a gun which is probably at the bottom of the river, and nothing else but the rumor.

But even though I haven't enough evidence to justify an arrest, I know why Big Joey died. It's been bad enough to carry that knowledge in my mind, but my present situation is impossible.

An hour ago I got a phone call from Tony Manetti, who asked a small favor. The publicity over Big Joey Martin's killing was a bad thing only six months before election, he said, and it would be smart to avoid any such future publicity. He wanted to know how well I knew the coroner.

When I told him Howard Jordan was a personal friend of mine, he said arrangements had been made with Jordan to find accident the cause of death in the case of Willie Tamm, president of the Dock Worker's Local. There was the matter of paying the coroner a small fee for his trouble, however, Manetti went on, and he wondered if I would be willing to relay this fee on if he had it dropped by my office.

The meaning behind his words was unmistakable. The syndicate is not satisfied with my verbal promise to cooperate. It wants me involved beyond backing out in the compounding of a murder.

For you see, Willie Tamm is not yet dead.

Manetti gave me one hour to think things over and call him back. But, in the face of the horror of the situation, I can hardly think.

The insidiousness of the thing is appalling. If I refuse, I'm certain

Willie Tamm will not die, for Manetti could hardly afford to go ahead with a murder he'd discussed with an uncooperative district attorney. At the same time, he hasn't run any risk, since I can hardly charge him with a crime which remains uncommitted.

But if I refuse to cooperate, I know my hope for the governorship is gone forever. Without putting it into actual words, Manetti has served notice that I'll become governor on the syndicate's terms, or not at all. Almost certainly, arrangements have been made with Coroner Jordan for some kind of deposition confessing I paid him to cover up a murder. A deposition which they'll keep as a secret weapon to force my future cooperation.

I wonder how huge a sum the syndicate had to pay Jordan to get him to risk his own neck.

The thing which makes it impossible is that I'm an honest man. My moral precepts are probably as high as those of any other member who attends my church. Never in my life have I accepted a penny of dishonest money. My worst sin has been accepting the compromises any practical politician must make if he expects to stay in public life.

How could I possibly have drifted into such an untenable position? Obviously I can't be party to a deliberate murder.

On the other hand, until an hour ago the governorship was right within my grasp.

How can I turn it loose now?

Homicide, Suicide, or Accident?

BY FRED L. ANDERSON

THREE MEN were in a car speeding along a road parallel to a railroad track. It was a dark night, the headlights of the car were in poor condition, but the driver of the car kept pushing it along at top speed. Suddenly, a man appeared in the dim light of headlights. He was crossing the road directly in front of the car, but by the time the driver of the car had seen him it was too late to do anything. The car struck the man, killing him instantly.

The three men were panic-stricken for a moment. They all realized that, even though the killing was accidental in nature, they were all liable to serious penalties because of the speed at which they were travelling and the poor condition of the headlights.

After a hasty conference, one of the men remembered that a fast express train was due to pass along the railroad track in a few minutes. In order to cover up their crime, the three men picked up the body of the dead man, carried it to the tracks, placed it across the rails, and then got into the car and drove away. The train came along on schedule, hit the body, and decapitated it. Police investigators were

thus left with a headless and badly mutilated body.

The first move, of course, was to determine if the man had been hit by the train accidentally while crossing the tracks, or if he had deliberately placed himself on the tracks in order to commit suicide, or if he had been killed in another spot and then left on the tracks. The answer was found very quickly. An examination of the body showed tire tracks on the legs, and after this it was merely a matter of painstaking and routine investigation to find the car and the guilty men.

While this case was one of the more simple ones, the police do not often have it so easy. In any death not due to natural causes, the police always have to determine whether it was homicide, suicide, or accident. Sometimes the facts are quite clear—for example, a man stabbed in the back. But what happens when a death occurs because of a fall from a high building? Did the victim jump? Was he pushed? Did he fall?

In such a case, the police may be able to prove suicide if the victim called members of his family before he jumped, or if there is a history of suicide in the victim's family. Also, a clue to possible suicide may be

provided if the victim had previously threatened to kill himself. However, this cannot always be taken at its face value. False suicide threats may be mentioned by the murderer merely in order to cover up the killing. Also, relatives may not mention previous suicide threats because of family pride.

If there are marks on the victim which wouldn't be there ordinarily from a fall — marks such as fingernail scratches, blows from a "blunt instrument," etc. — the police can then assume it wasn't a suicide. Also, if the victim has a previous medical record of dizzy spells, epileptic fits, and so forth, then, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, the police can assume the fall was an accident.

In any event, it's a tricky decision to make, and the police have to take all factors into consideration.

Death by hanging is another common form of suicide, but here, too, the police can run into difficulties. For example, hanging an already murdered person will leave the same marks on the skin as would be if the victim were hung while still alive. Thus, the police have to look to other means to prove suicide or homicide in cases of hanging. It's pretty difficult to hang a living person without leaving some evidence of the crime. If the victim is an adult, then signs of violence are bound to be present, and this will, of course, point to a murder by hanging.

If a murdered person has been hanged by the killer in order to make it look like suicide, then an examination of the rope usually helps the police find this out. The usual procedure in such a case is for the murderer to throw the rope over some support, fasten it around the dead victim's neck, and then haul the body up to simulate suicide. However, in pulling the body up, the fibers on the rope will all point upward on that section of the rope pulled by the killer. This is because the rope, in passing over the support, will be pressed down on it, with the result that the rope fibers will all point in one direction on that part of the rope. However, the police also have to take into consideration the fact that the murderer may have fastened the rope first and then lifted the victim and placed his head in the noose. In such a case, there will, of course, be no indication of pulling on the rope fibers.

If the victim has been hanged with the knot in the rope placed against the side of the neck, then there are clues possible here which can help the police. With the knot at the side of the neck, the blood is cut off in arteries and veins on that side, with the result that the face will become red — if the victim is still alive at the time of hanging. Thus, if the victim is found with the rope knotted at the side of the neck and the face is pale, the police can assume that the person was al-

ready dead when the hanging took place.

Suicide by hanging needn't necessarily involve having the body fall free at the end of the rope. Death by strangulation can occur without much strong pressure on the neck. The pressure has to be strong enough only to cut off the blood supply to the head. This causes unconsciousness, and then death follows soon after that. Therefore, suicides have been found in sitting, kneeling, squatting, and lying positions. There is a case on record where a man committed suicide by kneeling on a chair with the rope already tied around his neck. He then took the free end of the rope, passed it through an open transom over his head, pulled it taut, and then tied the free end to his ankles. Still kneeling on the chair, he rocked back and forth until the chair fell out from under him and the rope, tied to his ankles and his neck, tightened enough to strangle him. At first glance, a man hanging from a transom by a rope tied to his neck and ankles might look like homicide, but the position of the chair and the fact that it was there helped the police prove it was suicide.

The presence of an ordinary chair or other article of furniture can often be the deciding factor in such cases. If the victim is found hanging, with the body swinging free, then there has to have been something on which he could support himself while fastening the rope around his

neck. If no such means of support can be found, then suspicion of homicide is a good bet.

While rope marks made during hanging are easy to spot and can mean either homicide or suicide, choke marks are definitely signs of a homicide. A rope mark will usually be interrupted by the mark of the knot in the rope, but a choke mark will have no such interruption. Also, impressions of the fingers used in the choking (bruises in the general shape of the fingers) can be found. Since it's impossible for a person to choke himself to death with his own hands (the hands gradually lose their strength as unconsciousness comes on), any choke mark on a victim's throat is indicative of homicide. Moreover, anyone being choked to death will usually put up a struggle, and signs of violence can then be found on the body of the victim.

The most common form of suicide is by drowning. However, since a murderer will often throw his victim into a body of water in order to hide it, the police are again faced with the question of homicide, suicide, or accident. In the case of drowning, it isn't too difficult to determine this. As is true with hanging a living person, it's hard to drown a live adult without leaving traces of violence on the body. Of course, the police have to take into consideration the fact that the body may have bumped into different objects in the water, and this, too, could leave marks.

Of particular importance to the police investigating death by drowning is the water in the lungs and the examination of the blood in the left side of the heart. If the water in the lungs is the same as that in which the person was found, it can be assumed that the victim drowned in that particular body of water.

As far as the blood is concerned, it's been proven that when a person drowns, water tends to pass from the lungs into the bloodstream. Therefore, by checking the chloride content of the blood in the left side of the heart, the police can determine whether the drowning occurred in fresh or salt water. Also, if the person is dead before being placed in the water, then no water at all can enter the bloodstream on the left side of the heart.

In the case of death by shooting, there are many clues which can point to suicide, homicide, or accident. A person cannot shoot himself from a distance of more than twenty inches, as a rule, so any shot fired from a distance greater than this can be assumed to constitute a homicide. Also, as is well known, a shot fired close to the body will almost always leave powder burns on the wound. If powder burns are found, if the position of the gun and the wound are such as would be found in a suicide, and if there is other evidence supporting this, then a case of suicide can sagely be assumed. However, the police have to bear in mind that many freak

accidents can occur when cleaning guns, and this can easily lead to a false conclusion of suicide or even homicide.

Suicides by shooting usually involve only the temple, the heart, the forehead, or the mouth. A wound on any other part of the body can be viewed with suspicion in most cases. Detectives try to reconstruct the scene by noting the position of the wound, the direction the bullet took, the position in which the weapon had to be held, the position in which the body fell, the place in which the shooting occurred, and any other factors which will help them determine the nature of the death.

Of course, a suicide generally has to shoot himself only once, and a series of bullet wounds in a body usually means a homicide. However, a suicide has been known to shoot himself in the head several times before finally killing himself; and there's a case on record where a potential suicide lived with a bullet in his head.

One clue especially valuable to detectives is the fact that most suicides will not shoot or stab themselves without first uncovering that part of the body. In other words, a suicide who wants to shoot or stab himself in the heart will first bare that part of the body. Even though some suicides have been known to shoot themselves through their clothing, a fatal wound on a part of the body covered by clothing should

not be classified as suicide without thorough investigation of all possibilities. For example, a detective can be pretty certain that a man will not try to slit his throat without first loosening his collar and tie; nor will a person attempt to slash his wrists without first rolling up his sleeves or removing his coat and shirt.

Slashing, of course, is another means of committing suicide — but it can also be used as a method of homicide. In cases involving death by throat-cutting, detectives will look to see which way the cut runs. If the victim was right-handed, then the cut should run from left to right, from under the left ear and over the front of the neck in a line which would be made by drawing the knife or razor across the throat with the right hand. If this isn't so, then the detectives can start looking for other evidence of homicide.

Bloodstains also play an important part here. If a suicide cuts his own throat, then all the bloodstains are generally on the front part of the body. If not, then it's a good chance that a homicide has been committed. Same thing holds true for the depth of the cut. If it goes clear through to the spine, then it's likely to be a homicide.

Suicides often make what is known as "hesitation marks." These are tentative cuts and slashes made while the suicide works up enough nerve to finish the act; or else the marks are made because the suicide

is uncertain as to just how to go about the slashing and doesn't cut deep enough the first few times.

Also, a person who has committed suicide by slashing his throat will sometimes show cuts on the fingertips and fingernails. This comes about because the suicide has usually tried to stretch the skin over the place to be cut with his free hand, and has then inadvertently cut his fingertips while drawing the weapon across his throat. In addition, he may have grasped the knife or razor with both hands in order to put more pressure on the blade. If the palms of the victim show knife cuts, though, these may easily be "defense wounds" received while the victim tried to ward off an attacker and grabbed the knife wielded by the killer.

Explosives are sometimes used for both suicide and homicide. Men who have access to dynamite (miners, for example) can make use of this method. In the case of a suicide by explosives, the dynamite or other explosive is either placed in the mouth or on the top of the head. The wounds and mutilations which occur because of a suicide of this type are typical and can be recognized by detectives.

There's a case on record where a man committed suicide by using both a firearm and the principle of explosive power. He filled the barrel of a shotgun with water, used a blank cartridge, and then placed the end of the barrel in his mouth. When

he pulled the trigger, the explosive force of the column of water propelled by the blank cartridge almost tore his head off.

Death by burning is not too common a method of suicide or of homicide — but it has happened. By considering all evidence at hand, detectives can usually determine the nature of the death. However, in cases involving burned bodies, the police have to be on their guard for one thing. When a body is burned, it generally assumes a position with the arms and feet drawn up — as though the person had been crouching and punching. This can lead to a false assumption that the victim died while fighting off an attacker.

Poison is often found in cases involving all three types of death — homicide, suicide, and accidental death. In such instances, detectives have to check on who bought the poison, how it was administered, and the type of poison used. As a general rule, a murderer will not use a poison which will cause suspicion in the victim because of a strong and disagreeable odor or taste. A suicide, though, may take a poison even

though the smell and taste are far from pleasant.

Detectives have learned to be particularly careful not to assume homicide in “locked room” cases. Professional criminals can pick a lock from the outside, leave the pick in the lock, and then relock the door when leaving. Of course, such a method will leave traces of the picking on the inside of the lock. Thus, a criminal could murder a man by shooting him in the temple, place the revolver in the victim’s hand, where it will later be held there by rigor mortis, then leave the room and lock the door.

This is far from being a common occurrence, of course, but detectives do have to be on their guard for all sorts of tricks calculated to make a homicide look like suicide or accidental death.

In the long run, routine investigation, careful checking, the work of the police lab, and the body of experience built up by years of police work, will enable detectives to give a satisfactory answer to the ever-present question — homicide, suicide, or accident?

*He knew Holly Laird was guilty.
She had to be. She was beautiful,
wasn't she?*

BY BRUNO FISCHER



THE GIRL woke up gradually. I didn't shake her or say her name. I just stood at the side of the bed looking down at her.

Holly Laird, a small-time actress, but she could have been Martha seven years ago. That stubborn little chin and that trick of a nose, but mostly the hair.

Hair that lay spread like gold on the pillow.

Actresses slept late. It was close to ten in the morning and the sun was high, streaming in through

Double

the east window and touching her face. She brought up an arm as if trying to brush the sunlight away; her other hand pushed down the blanket to her waist. Her breasts were beautiful, and the rose-colored nightgown did hardly anything to cover them.

Martha used to go in for nightgowns like that, fragile and transparent. I remembered how I used to watch Martha asleep beside me — how mornings I would prop myself up on one elbow and never take my eyes off her.

Three years of marriage and being crazy in love with her, and then Martha had run off with another man — a public accountant, of all things, a skinny guy I could have broken in two with one hand but never got a chance to. And now it was as if I'd gone back through all the years and I was looking at her in bed, and the bitterness seized me, welling up in my throat so I almost choked.

Holly Laird's eyelids fluttered. I'd made no sound; in sleep she must have sensed me standing there. I took a step back from the bed, and suddenly she was staring at me. Her eyes went wider and wider.

I didn't tell her there was no reason to be scared. I wanted her to be scared, to start her off with a taste of shock that would make her plenty jittery.

Then she came all the way awake and her breasts stirred as she let out her breath. "You're the detective,"

she said. "The one who asked me most of the questions at the police station yesterday."

"That's right, miss. Gus Taylor. I'm in charge of the case."

I sat down. It was a small apartment — one cramped room and bath and kitchenette. She rented it furnished. I had found out a lot about her.

"But how did you get in?" she said. "I'm sure I locked the door."

"I got in."

She sat up. "Picked the lock or used a passkey, I suppose. You . . . ! Even though you're a policeman, you have no right . . ."

In the dresser mirror I could see myself sitting with my hands curved over my knees. They were big hands, strong hands. I was proud of their strength. I was a big, hard guy who didn't take anything from anybody, and I was proud of that, too.

"I don't stand on ceremony with murderers," I said.

"But I told you and told you I didn't kill him."

"Yeah, you told me."

I smiled at her. She glanced down at herself sitting up in bed and she saw how little of her the bodice covered and how the rest of her from the waist up shimmered rosy through the rose-colored nylon. She snatched up the blanket to her throat.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"You know damn well, miss. The truth. Night before last you pushed a knife into John Ambler's heart."

"No!"

I took out a cigarette and slowly turned it in my fingers. She watched me with blue eyes — the same shade as Martha's. Or Martha's had been a bit lighter. It was hard to remember exactly after so long.

After a silence Holly Laird said tartly, "I'd like to get dressed."

I put a light to my cigarette and didn't move from the chair facing the bed and didn't say anything.

"So it's a form of third degree?" she said. "You're going to sit there and sit there."

"Only till you tell me you killed him."

"You're so sure, aren't you?"

I said, "It figures, miss. Let me tell you how close it figures so you'll know you can't hold out. You're a smalltown girl who got the acting bug. Like thousands of others. You went to New York to set Broadway on its ear. The nearest you got to a stage was when you bought a ticket to a show. But in New York you met John Ambler, who spent a lot of time there because he was backing a play. What they call an angel. You got chummy with him."

"Acquainted, that was all."

"I know how girls who want to get on the stage get acquainted with rich angels. And I know a thing or two about the late John Ambler. He has a good-looking wife, but I hear he likes to play outside the homestead, especially with young actresses. That was why he went in for backing plays on Broadway, and

here in his home town he's the big money behind the repertory theater. So he brought you here to Coast City and told the director to give you big parts in the different plays they put on every few weeks."

"I earned every role. I can act."

"Maybe. But there are lots of others can act and don't get leading parts right off, not even in a small-city theater like ours. George Hoge, the director, says Ambler ordered him to use you no matter what. Ambler's the angel, so Hoge had to do it. And if I knew Ambler he kept wanting payment from you. He was that kind of a guy."

"But I'm not that kind of girl."

I laughed harshly in my throat. Nobody could tell me anything about women. I'd been through it; I knew. They were every last one of them like Martha.

"Besides," Holly said, "everybody in the theater can tell you I'm in love with Bill Burnett. Doesn't that prove I wasn't carrying on an affair with Mr. Ambler?"

"All it proves is you're like the rest of 'em."

"The rest of who?"

"Two-timing bitches," I said, and took a drag at the cigarette. "All right, let's see about Burnett. Mostly he took you home after the show. But not the night before last. He's on the stage till the final curtain, but you're through before the last scene. You left with Ambler. Witnesses saw you go."

"I never denied I went with him.

·I told you yesterday I had a headache. It was killing me; I could hardly remember my lines, I asked George Hoge if I could leave before the curtain call. Mr. Ambler happened to be backstage and heard me and offered to drive me home.”

“Neat. Ambler happened to be backstage. Happened to drive you home. Happened to get himself murdered while you were in the car with him. How dumb do you think cops are?”

She cowered against the headboard of the bed, but she wasn't anywhere near breaking. Those blue eyes of hers were defiant. She said, “He dropped me off at the house and drove away.”

“Drove away?” I caught her up on that. “Then how come in the morning his car was still down there in the street in front of the building and he was slumped over the wheel with a knife wound in his heart? Answer me: how come?”

“I don't know.”

“You said he drove away.”

“Well, I didn't actually see his car move off. I assumed he left after I got out.”

“You assumed!” I pointed the cigarette at her. “He never drove away because he couldn't. The medical examiner says he was stabbed by somebody sitting on his right, beside him in the front seat of his car. No sign of a struggle. It had to be somebody he knew, somebody he was talking to or necking with. Maybe somebody he was kissing

when the knife was slipped into his heart. In other words, you.”

Her head jerked as if I'd hit her. “But what reason would I have had? You can't find any.”

“That's another thing you'll tell me before I'm through with you. Let's try it like this. You really love this pretty-boy actor, Bill Burnett, and you tried to call it quits with Ambler. But Ambler wouldn't play. You're something special in looks; I can say that much for you. He said he'd tell Burnett you'd been sleeping with him. You had to stop him. You stopped him with a knife.” I flicked ashes on the floor. “Yeah, the more I think of that motive, the better I like it.”

She stared at me. “You sound as if you're anxious for me to be guilty.”

I stopped looking at her. I muttered, “I'm doing my job, that's all,” and rubbed my sweaty hands on my thighs.

2.

This was one of these cases where you had nothing to go on but what you figured out in your head. No clues you could take to the laboratory. Fingerprints in the car were mostly smudges or belonged to people who'd had an excuse for having been in the car — Ambler's, of course, and Mrs. Ambler's and Holly Laird's. As for the knife, the killer had pulled it out and disposed of it where probably we'd never find it.

There had been no blood spattered because heart wounds that kill instantly don't bleed to amount to anything.

Nothing but circumstantial evidence, and how did you make it stick without a confession?

"At least," she said, "let me put on my robe."

Damn her, sitting there so calmly with her golden hair like Martha's rippling down to her shoulders! Calmer than I was.

I stood up. My hands were sweating more and more and I felt them shake.

"You killed him!" I yelled at her. "Admit it, you killed him!"

Holly looked me in the eye. She said quietly, "You've been wrong about everything."

I could make her talk. I'd done it with others. I'd taken tough guys down to the basement room in headquarters and after a while they talked their hearts out. I couldn't do it with her because she was a dame. The Skipper didn't approve much of rough stuff anyway — and she was a dame.

This was my case. I was the detective of record. I'd be goddamned if I'd let a dame get away with murder just because she was a dame.

"You killed him!"

"No."

My hands went to her. I didn't reach out for her; my hands just went to her. She tried to jerk away and the blanket slipped down a little way and my hand was on a

bare shoulder. I felt the smooth, warm skin, and my fingers contracted.

"Say it, bitch! You killed him!"

Sounds trickled past her lips, but she wasn't trying to utter the words I wanted to hear, or any words at all. A scream of pain was building up in her throat. I clamped my other hand over her mouth and kept grinding her shoulder. I have very strong hands; it must have hurt like hell. She clawed at my arms and writhed on the bed and her eyes rolled in their sockets.

"You sat in the car with him and put the knife in him. By God, you'll say it!"

Her heaving torso and her wildly kicking legs pushed the blanket down about her knees. A blur of white skin and rose-colored nightgown thrashed on the bed and I could feel her screaming soundlessly against my hand.

Suddenly I let go of her. I stepped back from the side of the bed, and I was very tired. It didn't make sense. Me, strong as an ox, and this little effort had pooped me.

She was crying. The blanket was over her again and I could see the outlines of her body curled up in a ball and her hand massaging her shoulder.

Tears never bothered me. "Talk," I said, "if you don't want more of the same."

She gasped, "You've no right. I'll report you."

"I don't think you will, and I'll

tell you why." I took my time re-lighting my cigarette while she lay sniffing. "You try making a complaint and I'll haul you in for prostitution."

Holly Laird gawked at me as if she couldn't believe I was real.

"Soliciting," I said. "I came up here to question you and you wanted to do some business. Your price was twenty bucks."

"You — you wouldn't!"

"If you make me, sure I would. I don't have to make the charge stick. All I have to do is take you in and charge you, that's enough. Word would get to your home town, to your folks. People are ready to believe anything about an actress. How'll your folks feel? How'll they be able to face their friends and neighbors? You want that to happen?"

She pushed her face into the pillow. She cried some more. I stood looking down at her.

After a minute she wiped her eyes on the corner of the blanket. "Please, please let me alone."

"Sure, miss," I said. "Glad to. All you have to do is tell me the truth."

She jumped out of the bed. The blanket trailed after her and then dropped away from her, and she was a white-and-rose form dashing toward the bathroom where she could lock herself in.

I lunged and caught her by her loose golden hair that was like Martha's.

Her head jerked back and she uttered a shrill cry, and she stood there with her head way back, held back by her hair bunched in my hand. "Talk!" I said. She started to whimper like something small and hurt and helpless, and with her head back like that I could see her eyes bulging not so much with pain as with terror.

I don't know why I let her go. Maybe she was at the breaking point and just a little more and she would have broken. Like a slap across the face. I'd learned that a slap, almost more than anything else, makes even the tough ones go to pieces. But my hand fell away from that golden hair.

Outside in the street there were traffic noises, but it was very quiet in the room. That tiredness was in me, going deeper than bone and muscle.

Holly was across the room at the closet. The nightgown clung to her back. She reached in and pulled out a robe. As she was putting it on, the doorbell rang.

She turned then, tying the cord of the robe. Her eyes were dead.

"Remember," I said, "you don't want me to pull you in for soliciting."

She just looked at me.

3.

The bell rang again. She went to the door and opened it.

In the hall a cheerful voice said,

"Morning, sweetheart. Hope we didn't drag you out of bed."

"No. Come in."

Bill Burnett stepped into the apartment. He was what they call the juvenile lead, the love interest in the plays. He had wavy hair and good shoulders and a pretty face.

He wasn't alone. Behind him came George Hoge, the director. He was one of those slim, intense, nervous guys who always had a cigarette on his lip.

They stopped when they saw me. I'd had both of them on the grill yesterday; everybody connected with the theater had been questioned. I nodded to them and they nodded to me.

"Anything up?" Burnett asked.

"A man was murdered the other night," I said. "Remember?"

"Very funny," Hoge said sourly.

I rolled the cigarette in my mouth.

They were looking at Holly. She stood barefooted, holding her robe together. She wet her lips and said, "Detective Taylor has been asking me questions." She turned her face to me without looking at me. "Is there anything else you want of me?"

"Yeah. One thing. You know what it is."

"I told you all I know."

I grinned at her and she cringed. Then I said to the two men, "What's this, a conference or something?"

Hoge answered, the cigarette bobbing in the corner of his mouth. "I brought the script of our next play."

He tapped the briefcase under his arm. "I want to go over it with Holly and Bill, who will have the leads. A repertory company like ours must always be preparing one play ahead."

"That all you folks have on your mind?" I sneered.

"Of course, it's been rough, losing Mr. Ambler, who has done so much for us, and on top of that you policemen disrupting everything. But the show must go on, you know."

"That so?" I started toward the door and stopped. Burnett had his arm around Holly's waist and she was leaning against him. I said, "I didn't annoy you too much, did I, miss?"

She hesitated, but not long enough for anybody but me to notice it. "No," she said.

I struck a match. They watched me silently, all three of them. I rolled the flame around the tip of the cigarette and blew out the match and left the apartment.

4.

Five minutes after I was at my desk the Skipper called me on the phone from his office down the hall.

"Why didn't you report in this morning, Gus?"

"I've been out trying to catch me a killer," I said.

"None of your lip, Gus. I'm having a tough enough time with the Mayor and the Commissioner. Seems they think it's against the law for big-shots like John Ambler to be

murdered and want me to do something about it. As if I haven't got the whole department looking for knives and witnesses. Who'd you see?"

"The killer," I said. "The girl."

"How'd you make out?"

"Not so good. But I will."

"Look, Gus. You may be a bit too — uh — single-minded. We don't know enough at this time to be able to concentrate on one suspect."

"You call her the suspect. I'll call her the killer."

There was a silence on the line. Then the Skipper said, "All right, Gus, keep at it," and hung up.

I went through the reports of the half a dozen other detectives working along with me on the case. Nothing.

I sat back in the chair and lit a cigarette. When I'd had her by the hair in her apartment, I should have kept the pressure up. A little more pain, a couple of slaps across her damned pretty face, and she might have broken before Burnett and Hoge had arrived. But I'd let her go. I'd let her walk to the closet with that clinging rose nightgown molding every curve of the back of her.

I closed my eyes, remembering how sometimes I would come home from lunch and find Martha not yet dressed, puttering around the house in nothing but a sheer nightgown, with her golden hair unpinned and loose down her back. I would pull

her down on my lap and stroke that hair and bury my face in it, and I would push down her nightgown and spread her hair over the fullness of her breasts, making a golden, transparent net over the white, richly curving flesh. But then she would smile and she would say, "Not in the daytime," and I would say, "What's wrong with the daytime?" and she would say, "I've got to get your lunch," and wriggle off me, tugging up the straps, and head for the bedroom, her nightgown clinging, her hair flowing, and come out wearing a housecoat. Not in the daytime, and toward the end seldom at night either. Because by then there must have been the accountant, the skinny guy I never suspected, and one evening there had been that note from her saying she would never be back. She never was.

Something snapped. It was a pencil I had been holding between my fingers. I stared at the two pieces and then dropped them into the wastebasket. After a while I went out to lunch.

When I returned, Bill Burnett was waiting for me outside the headquarters building.

He stood against the wall, and when he saw me he came out on the sidewalk to meet me. Both his hands were sunk deep in the pockets of his jacket and there was a fever in his eyes. I could guess what had happened.

"If you ever go near her again," he said, "I'll kill you." -

Burnett's right pocket bulged more than his left, which meant that was where he had it. "What are you talking about?" I said, watching his right hand.

"You beat Holly up, you bastard!"

"She told you I did?"

"I made her. After George Hoge left. I knew something had happened. She'd been crying. She didn't want to tell me. You'd threatened her, frightened her, I don't know how. But I made her tell me." He took his left hand out of his pocket and put it on my arm. "I'm warning you, I'll kill you!"

Imagine a pretty-faced actor punk trying to throw his weight around with me! I drove my left up to his jaw. It slammed him back against the wall where he'd been waiting for me.

That was a busy street and a couple of women seeing me hit him screamed. They didn't bother me. I leaped after him and rammed my fist into his belly.

I'll say this for the actor — he wasn't soft. Most other men would have gone down after having been socked twice by me. He stayed on his feet, swaying, and his right hand came out of his pocket. I could have beaten him to it with my own gun, but I couldn't be bothered with a punk like that. I swung at his pretty face, and that did it. He slid down along the wall.

His right hand was in sight and empty. But there was a gun in his pocket, as I'd guessed. Hardly more

than a toy, a .22 automatic, but at close range it could have done damage.

Burnett wasn't out. Sobbing brokenly, he was trying to get up to his feet. I raked his face with his own gun, slashing a bloody swath down his cheek.

He wasn't so pretty any more.

By then people were all around us. A woman was shrieking, "Stop that man! Stop him!" I tried to explain that I was a cop, but I couldn't be heard. Then three harness bulls poured out of the building. They knew me, of course. I told them the punk had tried to assault me with a gun and let them take charge of him.

Burnett was sitting up, holding his bleeding face. He was able to walk hanging onto two of the harness bulls. I followed them in and had the desk sergeant book him for armed assault. After he was patched up, he was thrown into the can.

If I had any regrets, it was the one I usually felt at a time like this — that the guy I had beaten up hadn't been the accountant who had run off with Martha.

5.

Yesterday John Ambler's wife had been questioned along with a lot of other people, but since then a question or two had come up that hadn't been asked her. Especially about Holly Laird. I drove up to that big fieldstone house on the hill and

found her on a side terrace with George Hoge.

She was stretched out on a chaise longue, getting the sun on her body. Since all she had on were a pair of shorts and a skimpy halter, plenty of her body got it. Hoge sat on the grass, a cigarette bobbing in the corner of his mouth as he talked to her. They both looked up when they saw me appear around the corner of the house.

"Hello, Gus," Celia Ambler greeted me. She sounded very cheerful considering she'd become a widow so recently.

"You seem to know each other well," Hoge said, surprised.

"Oh, but we do. Gus and I went to high school together here in Coast City." She stretched like a kitten, her tanned skin rippling. "I imagine, Gus, you're here strictly in your professional capacity."

"Why else? What's the chance of seeing you alone for a few minutes?"

"George was just about to go." She threw him a smile. "Weren't you, George?"

His pinched, intense face scowled. "Everywhere today I keep running into this cop. But all right, I'm dismissed." He got to his feet. "Then it's agreed, Celia. You'll continue to support the theater as generously as John did."

"I said only for the remainder of the season. After that, we'll see." She turned her head to me. "Poor George is worried about his job."

"That's not so," he said indignantly. "I can make ten times as much in Hollywood. Any time. But I prefer working in a little theater. It gives one a chance to fully express oneself." He took the cigarette out of his mouth for the first time since I'd arrived; it was less than an inch long. "How is the case going, officer?"

"We're getting there."

"I hope you do. Thanks for giving me your time, Celia." He walked off across the terrace.

When he was gone, Celia Ambler sat up. She pulled her halter up a bit, but it didn't do any good. She continued to bulge lushly over it. She was a full-bodied fine-looking woman who, you'd think, would make a man want to stay home more than her husband had.

"More questions, Gus?" she asked.

"A few. When your husband didn't come home night before last, why didn't you report it to the police? Weren't you worried?"

"I didn't know he wasn't home until a policeman came and told me he had been found dead in his car."

"That was around nine in the morning."

"I assumed he was in his room asleep. You see, we had separate bedrooms."

"Uh-huh. There's the penalty of being rich."

"Not necessarily, but in our case that was the way we preferred it."

"You didn't get along, eh?"

"Gus, you're not suspecting me?" She seemed to be amused at the notion.

I didn't tell her I knew who'd killed him. There was no point until I could prove it. I said, "I'm merely trying to get things straight, that's all. What do you know about Holly Laird?"

"She's a competent actress."

"I mean Holly Laird and your husband."

"Oh." Her fingers trailed along a bare, sun-baked thigh. "I really have no idea. As a matter of fact, I understand that she and Bill Burnett are very much in love with each other."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"I suppose it doesn't, if you want to be cynical. It's no secret that John had a penchant for sweet young girls. Holly would have filled the bill."

"And you didn't care?"

Her tan shoulders shrugged. "John and I had an understanding. We each lived our own life. I didn't question him and he didn't question me." She gave me a sidelong glance. "Does that shock you, Gus?"

"What's the difference if it shocks me or doesn't? I just want the truth."

"Well, I didn't kill him. In a detached sort of way, I was rather fond of him."

"Yeah. Fond of being the wife of a rich man."

"Why, Gus, I didn't think you cared," she said brightly. "We haven't seen each other in so many years, and even in high school we never went out together. Don't tell me you've been carrying the torch for me?"

So that was what she was, a teaser, even with a cop she had never known well. Me, I'd never had a thought for her.

I growled, "Don't flatter yourself."

"Shouldn't I?" She got off the chaise longue and ran her hands sensuously over her half-naked body. "Look at me, Gus. Don't you think I have a right to flatter myself?"

"All right, you've got a body." She was standing close to me; she made me uneasy. "Now about your husband's other girl friends?"

"I can't answer. I told you I hadn't been interested. But you, Gus — do you know I had a crush on you in high school? You didn't give me a tumble. You were the big football hero, so strong, so virile-looking. You still are, you know, only more manly."

And she kissed me.

There under the hot sun, wearing next to nothing, and more likely than not with the servants watching from the house, she pressed herself against me and kissed me.

It was a long time since I'd been kissed like that by any woman. It felt good, to my mouth, to my body, to my hands, but at the same time it made me sick to my stom-

ach. Her husband wasn't dead two days, and here she was. And if he had been alive, she wouldn't have acted any differently. They'd had an understanding, she'd said. And I didn't think she went for me in particular. Almost any man would have done who appealed to her at all.

"The bitch! Like Martha. Like Holly Laird. Like every goddamn woman.

I tore her arms from around me and shoved her so hard she fell back against the chaise longue and sat down on it. I said, "I'd like to wring the necks of every one of you," and strode off without a backward glance at her.

I hadn't any more questions, and those I'd asked hadn't gotten me anywhere. I was shaking all over as I climbed into my car.

6.

Back at headquarters, I learned that Detective Lou Fox had found a witness. He had been assigned to question everybody in Holly Laird's building, in front of which the murder had taken place, and he had come up with a teen-aged girl named Ann Danderman. He left off typing up his report to tell me about it.

"This kid lives a couple of floors below Holly Laird. Seventeen. Real pretty. She was out on a date and the guy brought her home around eleven. Her folks had told her to be

home by eleven-thirty, so of course they hung around necking in the doorway for half an hour. There's a street lamp close by and she could see a car parked at the curb and Holly Laird sitting in it with a man. She knew Holly well by sight, being a fan of hers. She didn't know Ambler and didn't see him clearly, but it must have been him."

"Were they making love?"

"You mean Holly and Ambler in the car? The girl says no. Just talking. At eleven-thirty sharp Ann went upstairs. The two in the car were still talking."

"Is that all she saw?"

"It's something. We got them spotted out there from eleven to at least eleven-thirty."

"Does the Skipper know about this?"

"I told him first thing I got back," Lou Fox said. "By the way, he said send you in as soon as you showed up. He's sore at you."

I went down the hall to the Skipper's office. A captain has an easy life. He was tilted back in his swivel-chair, cleaning his fingernails.

"This time you've gone too far," he said as soon as I had the door closed behind me. "A dozen witnesses saw you beat up Burnett in the street."

"He had a gun in his pocket. Did you want me to give him a chance to plug me first?"

"They say you slashed him with his gun after you'd taken it away."

"So I got a little excited. Wouldn't you be if somebody was out to shoot you down?"

The Skipper leaned forward and put his elbows on the desk. He had a beak like an eagle's and small, dark eyes that could bore right through you. He said, "If somebody slapped around the girl I loved, I think maybe I'd lose my head too and grab a gun and go after the guy."

"What're you talking about?"

"He told me that's what you did this morning to Holly Laird."

"He's nuts." I drew on my cigar. "Did you ask her?"

The Skipper lost some of his fire and I knew it was all right. "I spoke to her on the phone."

"And?"

"She says you didn't touch her. But I don't know. Something screwy about this. The way you sometimes act I wouldn't put it past you to . . ." He sighed. "What gets into you every now and then, Gus?"

"She says I didn't touch her," I reminded him gently.

"Lucky for you she does. You're a good man, Gus, the best I've got, but I'm getting fed up with some of your stunts." He picked up his nailfile. "Did you hear about Lou's witness?"

"Yeah. Holly Laird said Ambler dropped her off at her house and drove away. Now we find out they were sitting outside in his car at least half an hour. I've been telling

you she lied, and this proves it. They talked and talked and then she stabbed him."

"There's something else. This knocks hell out of the alibis of the others in the cast."

"I see what you mean."

"Like this," the Skipper said. "Holly and Ambler left the theater twenty minutes before the play ended. The curtain came down at eleven-twelve. It's no more than five minutes from the theater to where they were sitting in the car. Burnett went there and saw them together. He was crazy jealous. He had a knife."

I nodded. "And she lied about how long she was in the car with Ambler because she was covering up for Burnett. So it was either one of them."

The Skipper was a cautious guy. "Not necessarily, but it's worth thinking about."

"Either one," I said, drawing smoke into my lungs.

7.

In spite of my badge, they refused to give me a free ticket at the box office of the Empire Theater, so I had to buy one, charging it to expenses. I wasn't stingy with the city's money; I got me a seat in the third row orchestra.

Before the curtain rose, somebody came out and announced that Bill Burnett's part would be played by an understudy. He didn't men-

tion that Burnett couldn't show up because he was in jail.

The play was one of these grim dramas about people suffering from the weather and each other in New England. Holly Laird had her golden hair piled up on top of her head and wore a gingham dress that was cut so as not to hide her figure — the figure I'd seen a lot of this morning. And she could act. I wasn't much for the theater, but I could tell an actress when I saw one. She was so good and, along with her talent, so easy to look at, that she wouldn't need an angel to persuade a director to give her leading roles.

I began to have a doubt, but only a small one.

I knew she wasn't going to be in the last scene, which was the third scene of the second act. Just before the second scene ended, I went backstage. My badge was good for something after all; it got me past the doorman.

I caught Holly Laird as she was on the way to the iron stairs running up to the dressing rooms. "Just a minute, miss," I said.

If ever a girl looked hate at a man, she did. So what? Why should I care what a golden-haired bitch felt about me?

"We know you were sitting in the car with Ambler for half an hour or more," I told her.

She took time to think it over, trying to make up her mind if she could get away with denying it. "We were talking," she said.

"That's not what you said yesterday and this morning."

"I didn't think it was important. We were discussing plays to do later in the season. He was interested in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and I became quite excited at the prospect of playing Eliza Doolittle."

"You sure that's what excited you, miss?" I drawled, striking a match.

She took a step backward and gripped the banister of the iron stairs. "Why are you persecuting us?" she said.

"I've got a job to do, miss. I do it."

Behind me a voice said, "My God, the demon detective again!" George Hoge came up to us, intense eyes and dangling cigaret and all. "Haven't you done enough damage, depriving me of my male lead?"

"Get used to it," I said. "Maybe you'll be losing your female lead too."

Holly uttered a cry and dashed up the stairs.

"Cops!" Hoge said, spitting the word.

There was nothing to be gained by answering him. I went outside.

The parking lot back of the theater was empty of people. The play wasn't over yet; they were still inside. I moved between two rows of cars toward mine at the far end, and I didn't see him or hear him. My first warning was a terrific weight slamming down on

the back of my neck, and then it was too late to do anything about it.

My legs buckled. I clawed air and fell forward and my hands came to rest on the cindered ground. On hands and knees I started to twist around. The light was dim there at the fringe of the parking field floodlights; I glimpsed a shape, a pair of pants, a foot leaving the ground. I tried to pull away from that oncoming foot, but the blow on the head had made me sluggish. The toe of the shoe caught me in the temple and knocked me over on my side.

Before I could get my gun out from under my shoulder, he kicked me again, this time flush in the face. Then he faded into the night.

After a while I heard people coming out of the theater and heading toward their cars. I roused myself. I climbed up off the cinders and staggered to my car and threw myself in.

Nothing was broken in my face, though I could feel the swelling over my left cheek. Blood trickled down the back of my neck. I sopped it up with my handkerchief. The punk hadn't done a very good job on me.

But he was in jail, so how could he have done it?

The cars rolled out of the parking lot. By the time most of them were gone, I felt strong enough to drive. I drove to the city jail.

Ernie Crull was the turnkey on duty. He grinned at my swollen

cheek and discolored temple. "I'd like to see the other guy," he said. "Where is he—in the hospital?"

"Not yet," I said. "How's Bill Burnett keeping?"

"Left our bed and board an hour ago when his bail was paid."

"Bail this late at night?"

"You got influence, you can get a judge to work all hours. He had influence. None other than Mrs. John Ambler. She also put up the bail money."

I fingered my swollen cheek.

8.

Home was a couple of furnished rooms at a second-rate hotel. I'd lived there for seven years, and it had never stopped being a lonesome place.

The alarm clock on the dresser said one-thirty when I let myself in. I looked at myself in the mirror. In addition to the marks from the two kicks, there were now scratches on my face. The knuckles of both my hands were split open.

I couldn't remember it clearly, that last hour. I couldn't even remember driving from the city jail to that street, but there I'd been, standing in the shadow of the building in front of which John Ambler had been murdered, and after a while Martha had come up the street, light from a lamppost catching the gold of her hair, and she was hanging onto the arm of her lover, the skinny accountant.

Was I going nuts? That hadn't been Martha, of course. I'd never see her again. It had been Holly Laird being taken home by Bill Burnett.

And I'd taught the punk that he couldn't slug and kick me, Gus Taylor, the hard cop, and get away with it.

Nobody else had been on the street at that late hour. But pretty soon lights went on in windows and people were sticking their heads out because Holly Laird was screaming. She clawed at my face and screamed while Burnett was trying to get up from the sidewalk where I'd knocked him. I brushed her aside and helped him get up and pounded him with both fists till he went down again.

Then a harness bull had been there, a young squirt I knew but whose name I couldn't think of, and who knew me, and he was saying over and over, "What the hell, Taylor! What the hell!"

"Get your paws off me," I said and squirmed away from the harness bull. But I didn't go after Burnett again.

It had become quiet on the street, though some people had come out of the houses and others had their heads poked out of windows. Holly Laird sat sobbing on the sidewalk with her boy friend's head on her lap.

I heard myself say to the harness bull, "Look at my face. The punk slugged me and kicked me in the Empire Theater parking lot."

Burnett's battered head stirred on the girl's lap. "He's crazy!" he said thickly. "I haven't seen him since" — he swallowed blood — "since early this afternoon."

"He hates us, officer," Holly said to the harness bull. "I don't know why."

I had walked away from them then, my feet shuffling, my shoulders heavier than I could carry. I had gone a block past my car before I had remembered it and turned back for it, and now here I was in the loneliest home a man had ever had.

I slumped in my armchair, sucking my cracked knuckles.

Burnett said he hadn't slugged me in the parking field. I believed him. Because if he had slugged me, wouldn't he have admitted it? Lying battered by my fists on the sidewalk and hating my guts, wouldn't he have boasted of it? Would he have denied it after what I'd done to him, and more than that, to the girl he loved?

All right, but if he hadn't, who had and why?

After a while I got up from the chair. There was no use going to bed. Tired as I was, I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep. I washed my hands and face and left the hotel.

9.

He lived in a couple of small rooms on the second floor of a small frame house on a street of small houses. The light showing in two of

his windows was the only light in the block, so I knew he was still up. Even if he had been sleeping, that wouldn't have stopped me any more than it had this morning when I had visited Holly Laird.

There were two doors and two vestibules off the open porch. The one on the right had his name over the bell. I was about to press it when the door at the top of the stairs opened. He closed the door and started down, and then by the light of the dim night-bulb he saw me in the vestibule.

His jaw hung slack. I said, "I want —" That was all I could get out. He turned and scurried back up the stairs.

I dashed after him. I reached the door as it slammed in my face. He had no time to lock it. I plunged into the apartment and found that he'd turned the lights off.

It wasn't totally dark. The night-light from the stairs showed shadowy masses of furniture. But showed no movement. I stood inside the door, peering, listening, hearing only my own breath, while my hand groped for the switch which would be beside the door.

I felt it and snapped it and there was light. I stood at one end of a living room. He wasn't in it, but Celia Ambler was.

That first look at her told me she was dead and how she had died. She lay sprawled on the floor, and her eyes were open and staring and her tongue showed.

Ahead of me there were two closed doors. He would be behind one of them, cowering, scared stiff. The only thing I had to worry about was that he would try to escape through the window. I started across the room. When I reached the dead woman, I paused to bend over her, to touch her. The marks of the fingers that had strangled her showed on her tan throat. She was still a little warm, which meant that it had happened a short time ago.

I straightened up and one of the two doors opened, and he stepped into the room. George Hoge. His pinched face looked like a skeleton's in which two glowing coals had been put in for eye sockets. He had a rifle.

"Don't make a move for your gun," he said.

I should have had my gun in my hand. I should have remembered that it was always a mistake to underestimate anybody, especially a killer.

I glanced at the dead woman. "A knife for her husband and your hands for her," I said. "A rifle for me. You like variety."

"I should have killed you in the parking field."

"Sure," I said. "Kill and keep killing. But where did it get you? It didn't get you Celia."

"No." Hoge shivered. "How did you guess?"

"Don't know if I did. Not all of it, anyway. I got the idea you were the one slugged me tonight. If not Burnett, who then? Well, this after-

noon Celia Ambler had kissed me on her terrace. Out in the open where anybody could see. You'd left, but maybe you were still hanging around. Spying from around the side of the house. Maybe spying on her, or maybe wanting to hear what a cop would have to say about her husband's murder."

"In other words, you knew nothing," he said.

"Not too much," I said. "I'd gotten myself on the wrong track all day. Then a little while ago I thought there had to be another track. I'd learned the kind of dame Celia Ambler was. I'd noticed the way you looked at her this afternoon. I'd been slugged right after you'd seen me in the theater. I came here to talk to you about it." I looked at the dead woman. "And now I know."

"I'm going to kill you," Hoge said.

I shrugged. "Your other killings didn't do you any good. You figured if you knocked off John Ambler you'd have his wife to yourself. She would come up here now and then to this place of yours and have a time with you, but didn't suspect you were merely one more guy on her string. Right?"

His rifle wavered. "Tonight she told me. We had a fight because I saw her kissing you. Then she told me there had been others. She was laughing at me."

"Did she know you'd killed her husband?"

"No. I told her. I said I'd killed

for her, and now she —" He choked on his own voice. "She looked at me with — with utter horror. She started to run out. She was going to the police. I had to stop her. I took her by the throat. I — I —"

He passed his hand over his face. I'd been waiting for something like that. I lunged at him.

It was easy. I had the rifle barrel knocked aside before he knew what was happening. I tore it from his hand and scaled it across the room and had my arm back to drive my fist into his face.

I didn't hit him. I'd done enough hitting for one day.

10.

When I entered the hospital room next morning, Holly Laird was sitting beside his bed. Most of Burnett's face was bandaged.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am," I said.

They didn't say anything.

"I've been suspended from the force," I went on. "There will be a departmental trial. Maybe because I brought the killer in last night they'll go easy on me. Maybe not. I guess I don't care much either way."

She put her hand on his arm. They remained silent.

"I had to come here and explain," I said. "You kids are in love. I was in love too — once. And you look like Martha. Your hair especially. I had to hurt Martha, hurt Martha when

I was hurting you, and hurt the guy who loved you because —” I stopped. “It sounds mixed up, but it isn’t. Not that I’m trying to make any excuses for myself, but if you two could understand . . .” I stopped, because I could see that I wasn’t going to get an answer. Things had

gone too far for a few words to fix things. Neither Holly Laird nor Burnett said anything. I could see their hate and feel it. I had to do something to make things right, but there was nothing to do.

“I’m sorry,” I said again. I went out. Suddenly, I was sick.

It looked like an ordinary bundle lying forgotten in the road. But when Shell Scott opened it, it turned out to be a leg . . .

Butcher



A Shell Scott Story

BY RICHARD S. PRATHER

IF YOU'VE been around Los Angeles much, you know that desolate, unlighted strip of highway, Chavez Ravine Road, that stretches from Adobe Street to Elysian Park. It's solitary and lonely enough in the daytime.

Wednesday night about eight P.M. I swung off Adobe Street, headed for Hollywood and home. Things had been slow for over a week at the office of Sheldon Scott, Investigations, so I'd closed up early and spent the afternoon jawing with the guys at City Hall, then stopped off on Adobe for a beer. I was about half a mile down Chavez Ravine Road when I saw the dog.

It was a big, mangy-looking mongrel sniffing a dirty white blob at the road's edge. In my headlights the blob looked like something wrapped in newspaper, part of the paper darkly stained.

I kept on, angling toward Sunset, but that brown-stained paper stuck in my mind. It was a sort of creepy night to begin with; thick clouds were massed overhead

blotting out the moon and stars, though it hadn't yet started to rain. Thunder rumbled softly far away and the air was heavy, damp.

When I hit Sunset, the sight and sound of all the cars, instead of making me forget that thing I'd seen, brought it even more clearly into my mind. I turned around and drove back. The dog ran a few steps away and squatted close to the ground when I parked. Leaving the Cad's headlights on I walked to the newspaper-wrapped bundle, looked at the mud smears on it — and at another brown stain. Then I gripped a corner of the paper and unwrapped it from the thing inside.

I didn't know what it was at first. But two minutes later, using the phone in a nearby house, I was talking to my good friend, Phil Samson, Captain of Central Homicide. "Sam, this is Shell. Get somebody out here on Chavez Ravine Road. I think I've found a — a leg."

"Oh, my Christ," he said. "Another one."

"Yeah." This was number three. Three murders, parts of three dismembered bodies — three that we knew about. Sam was swearing. I told him where I was and hung up.

There were two others with me in room 42 at City Hall. Samson, a big pink-faced guy with a jaw like a boulder and a black unlighted cigar clamped in his strong teeth; and bald, brush-browed Louis from the Vice Squad. This was in Homicide's lap, but the Vice Squad is interested

in murders that show the work of a twisted mind.

We'd been kicking the case around and anyone eavesdropping would have thought there was a little respect for the dead here. They'd have been wrong. In any large police headquarters death becomes, finally, so common that it's treated more casually, more flippantly, than by most people, and here in L.A. Homicide the boys had got to calling this particular killer The Butcher.

Louis, the Vice Squad Lieutenant, poured more coffee into my paper cup and I said to him, "Lou, you're the psychologist. What the hell kind of guy would cut them up?"

He raised a shaggy eyebrow and patted his bald skull. "Two kinds. The practical guy, because it's easier to get rid of an arm or leg than a body; and the nut. The nut likes it, gets a charge. This one's a nut."

"Why not practical?"

"Because the same guy did it. Three times is getting goddamned unpractical. At least it looks like the same guy, right, Sam?"

Samson bit into his black cigar. "So far. They're still working on it." He grabbed his phone and growled into it for a minute, then hung up. He looked at me. "Young girl again, about eighteen, five-two, hundred-ten pounds, blonde. Jesus." He banged a big horny fist against his desk top and said, "All that they give me from a leg. Why in hell can't they look in a test tube and come up with her name and who

killed her?" He swore. "Same guy. This one had been frozen, too. Cut up while she was frozen stiff."

Louis perched on Sam's desk and leaned toward me. "Add that in, Shell, if you want to know what kind of guy. We get the dregs, chum. And the hell of it is you can't tell it by looking at them. Take a number from one to two million, and that's our boy. Could be you, me, even Harrington Harrington the Fourth. And it always gets worse, like a bug multiplying in the blood. First maybe a pin to stick a woman with, then a rape, then you find a leg." He shrugged. "They run amuck, but they look O.K.; they run amuck in their minds."

The conversation drifted to the Black Dahlia; to Albert Fish, who killed a little girl, cut her up, and ate her flesh — cooked with carrots and onions and bacon; to some of the things that never hit print and that are difficult to believe even though you know they've happened. When the morning watch came on at midnight I left, and drove home on brightly-lit Sunset.

In the morning, I couldn't get the murder out of my thoughts. I'd dreamed a crawly cold-sweat dream, and awakened with the picture of that severed limb in my mind. Ex-Marine, long-time detective, I'd seen worse things, especially in the war; but even the mass insanity of war didn't seem quite so personal or frightening as a guy who would kill a kid, freeze her, and cut her up.

Just before nine A.M., when I was getting ready to leave for my office, Samson phoned. Some more of the girl had been found. "Thought you'd want to know, Shell," he said. "Rolled prints off the hand and made identification. Judith Geer."

"Oh, no, Sam. Not one of those sweet little gals."

"Yeah. Sister listed this Judith with Missing Persons two days ago. Thought maybe she'd been hurt, hit by a car or something."

I told him to hang on a minute while I lit a cigarette. The identification had rocked me. I know both of the gals he was talking about. Judith Geer — the dead one — and Norma Geer, her sister, worked at a Carpenter's Drive-In where I'd had innumerable hamburgers and beers, and kidded with both girls a lot; they had shared an apartment on Melrose.

I thought about Judy, little and cute and blonde as sunshine, trotting out to my car and laughing with me over nonsense, and I thought of that ugly unreal thing I'd found last night. I said, "Sam, are you sure? It doesn't seem possible —"

"Hell, yes, we're sure. Look, you knew them pretty well, didn't you?"

"Just to yak with. I know their names, and they know mine, and we had a lot of laughs. That's about all. Jesus, Sam, what kind of a sonof-a-bitch would . . ." I let it die.

He said, "If you know the sister well enough to drop in later you might pick up something we haven't

got. You know, you're unofficial, no uniform."

"Yeah. I'm hamburger with onions and two beers. Sure, Sam."

"We want this one, Shell, the worst way. The guy must be clear off now, gone, nuts; Christ knows what he'll do next."

"Uh-huh. You get anything, give me a buzz. I'll see you later."

Nothing happened at the office except the phone rang once. It was a gal with a throaty voice asking that I please hurry to her address because tiny saucer-shaped men were on her roof, screeching down the chimney at her. I told her to call 2680 at City Hall: the police psycho detail; they got calls like that every day.

It wasn't funny. When I hung up a shiver ran over my spine again, and I swore, phoned Norma's place on Melrose. Norma said she was glad I'd called and, sure, come on over; she could use some company. She could use a few laughs, she said. She was trying to sound adult, brittle, not frightened. But she was seven teen, and she couldn't quite pull it off.

There weren't any laughs. Norma was scared, shocked: all through with crying for now, and white-faced scared. Tall and slim and blue-eyed, she sat with her legs curled under her in an easy chair. I could tell she was thinking that it might have been her instead of her sister, that maybe it might still be.

I tried to convince Norma that whoever had killed Judy would cer-

tainly stay clear of her, and I really opened my mouth and put my foot in it. I'd been thinking about the talk at Homicide last night, and for a moment I must have forgotten who I was talking to.

I said, "Hell, doll, we were talking about The Butcher last night, and it's not . . ."

Norma straightened up in her chair, rigid. I could have yanked out my tongue; she might not even know how Judy had been mutilated.

I started to apologize for my choice of words, but Norma interrupted, "It's all right, Shell. It just shocked me when you said butcher, because it made me think of Mr. Hecker."

"Who?"

"Mr. Hecker. He's our . . . butcher, where we get our meat."

"This Hecker," I said slowly, "you know him very well?"

"Just from the market. Oh, he tried to date . . . both of us, but naturally we wouldn't have anything to do with him."

"Why 'naturally,' honey?"

"He's an old guy — and he's married. Oh, he's sort of an ugly geek, and kind of funny, but we still wouldn't have had anything to do with a chaser like him. He's tried to date other girls around here, too."

"He go out with any that you know about?"

Norma shook her head, frowning. She described Hecker for me and told me his wife worked in the market with him. Finally I told Norma

I'd kept in touch and left. Hecker's was only a block and a half down Melrose, so I walked. On the way I picked up a newspaper, just out, at a small store; the Judith Geer murder was on the front page.

Hecker's Market was kind of run down and needed a coat of paint. Inside, the meat case was on my left; shelves along the right wall held hams and canned goods; a couple frozen-food lockers stood before them. There weren't any other customers, and Hecker was behind the glass-fronted meat case. He turned to look at me as I came in.

Hecker was built like an ape. An inch or two shorter than my six-two, he must have weighed 300 pounds, almost 100 pounds more than I, and his enormous wrists were nearly as big as my forearms. He was heavy-featured, with eyes that looked too round, too big, in a pasty-white and red-veined face. When I stopped before the meat display he said, "What you want?" in a deep voice that rumbled in his thick chest.

"Top sirloin," I said.

He slid open the rear glass of the case and grabbed a steak, flopped it onto a paper on the scales. Behind him was an oversized meat block, pitted and stained; a lot of sawdust was on the floor, and dark stains were around the chopping block. Above the block a green-shaded light hung on a cord from the ceiling.

He slid the wrapped meat to me and I tossed the newspaper on the

counter while I got out my wallet. Paying him I said, nodding at the paper, "Hell of a note, huh? That kid?"

I thought he wasn't going to answer. Then he said, "What kid?" I pointed to the story. He picked up the paper and glanced at it. "Yeah." His fingers left blood-marks on the newsprint.

I heard a noise behind me and looked over my shoulder as a woman walked toward us from the rear of the store. From Norma's description, I recognized her as Hecker's wife. She walked behind the meat counter and stood beside her husband.

Mrs. Hecker was a frail, plain-looking woman, bony and angular, wearing no makeup and with short dark hair matted on her head. She looked almost like a small wizened boy, standing there next to her huge, thickly-muscled husband.

I said to Hecker, "This Judy and her sister shopped here?"

He turned his head slowly to stare at me from the large too-white eyes. "Who'd you say you were?"

"Shell Scott." I hadn't said.

"What you so gabby for, mister?"

I could feel a warm flush on my face and neck, but I pulled my wallet out again and flipped it open so he could see the photostat of my license.

"Cops," he rumbled. "Geezus, all the crudding cops."

"Since the girls lived so close, I wondered if you ever noticed any-

body hanging around them, following or watching them."

He grinned, showing square, too-short teeth, a film of yellow coloring them. "You didn't want no steak, did you?"

Before I could answer he walked from behind the meat counter and across the floor to the door of a walk-in refrigerator. Keys jangled as he unlocked a big padlock, then slid a heavy bolt back, flipped on a light and went inside; in a moment he came out with what looked like a whole half cow balanced on one of his heavy shoulders. Holding it with one upstretched hand he bolted and locked the door, then carried the beef back to the meat block, carried it effortlessly, big muscles swelling.

He dropped the beef with a sodden thud onto the block, picked up a long wide-bladed knife and conical stone, began sharpening the knife with a whispering grate, grate, grate of steel on stone, ignoring me.

I said, "You didn't answer my question. Might be you could help."

Without looking at me he said, "I don't know nothing about them. They bought meat here is all. Beat it." The knife moved faster as he sharpened it, then he slid the stone into a metal bracket clamped on the block, ran the keen blade over the meat, sliced easily down to the bone.

I rephrased my question, asked it of Mrs. Hecker. She shook her head wordlessly, looking tired and nervous. In silence Hecker deftly sliced around the bone, put down the knife

and picked up a massive cleaver, raised it over his head. He swung it in a swift arc and I heard it crack completely through the bone, bury its edge in the wood beneath. Then he turned and stared fixedly, soberly at me, still in silence. Finally he turned back to the block. I left.

Driving downtown in the Cad there was a tightness between my shoulder blades; all I had was a funny feeling about Hecker, a hunch, no real proof against him. But he had acted damned strange. And I kept seeing that knife rub on stone, hearing the grating sound, hearing the crack of a cleaver slicing bone. I went to Homicide.

Samson had his inevitable cigar going, so naturally there was a horrible smell in his office. I gave him the story of the last hour. "This guy's a bug," I said to him. "He's non compos whatever, not at all pleasant. He could sure as hell stand a check."

Samson sighed, fumbled in his desk, found some papers and flipped through them. "Robert Hecker, fifty-two years old, married, no kids—he's been checked. Along with a hundred and forty others."

"You mean he's clean?"

"Not clean. Just nothing that looks wrong."

"You got a man on him?"

A slight trace of annoyance flickered over his pink face. "How many men you think we got, Shell? I put men on some other guys that look better and got records that fit this

better. I'd like to have a man on all hundred and forty. And it still could be the hundred and forty-first."

"Answer me this, pal: you told me yourself the guy that did the others, and this one, knew what and where and how to do it; that he could be anything from a meat cutter to a brain surgeon." He nodded. "And they were all three frozen stiff; this guy's got a cold room, a freezing room with beef hanging in it; easy enough to drop the temperature lower than usual if he wanted; he's got frozen-food lockers."

"Yeah. So has every other butcher in town," Samson growled. "You want to watch the guy, watch him. Get me some more cops. Take the butcher to dinner and show him ink blots."

"Yeah, sure. I'll get you a good cigar."

He blew foul smoke in the air. "O.K., Shell. This guy's got me jumpy, but we'll put him through the wringer, give him a closer look."

I spent a long afternoon at the office. Samson phoned me before he went home for dinner. "No soap on Hecker," he said. "Nothing yet, anyway. No past record, not even any complaints; far as we can tell he never even went out with any of the girls that live around Melrose there. He tried to date some — but according to the boys that saw his wife, you could hardly blame him for trying."

"I know what they mean. If she were married to anybody but

Hecker, she'd look more like a man than her husband."

"We'll go over him some more, but he looks clear."

"Thanks, Sam." We hung up.

Maybe I was a little off balance about it, but thinking of Hecker still gave me the creeps. When I headed the Cad out Sunset I remembered how carefully locked and bolted that walk-in refrigerator had been. Seemed funny that it would be locked during the daytime, when Hecker was in the market himself. He must be damned careful about his meat. Or something.

I swung over to Melrose and when I got close to Hecker's it looked dark. I doused the Cad's lights, parked at the curb and poked the glove compartment open, fumbled for a ring of keys I keep there. I wanted a look in that big refrigerator.

When I got out of the car I could see that the front door of the market was closed, but a thin strip of light slanted out the window from behind drawn blinds — and I could hear the soft, measured thud of that cleaver. I hesitated, and my right hand went to my shoulder where my gun should have been — only the gun was in my office desk. Then I made up my mind. The sodden chop, chop, persisted inside as I tried the door, found it locked, and selected keys on my ring until one worked. I unlocked the door, eased it open, slipped inside and pulled the door closed behind me.

Light from the green-shaded bulb behind the meat counter spilled down over the bulky shape of Hecker, reached out to touch me here by the door, glanced from the cleaver as Hecker raised it above his head and slammed it down onto the block. He wore only an undershirt covering his huge chest, and perspiration glistened on his hairy shoulders and arms. I moved forward, bent so I'd be out of his line of vision, then straightened until I could see a quarter of beef on the chopping block. Cold sweat beaded my forehead. There was something odd about Hecker's actions, the way he chopped at the meat, and I could hear grunting sounds in his throat. His arm rose and fell rhythmically.

Suddenly he stopped and turned. I thought he'd heard me but he wasn't looking at me, was staring across the room, yards beyond where I stood in partial shadow. I glanced to my right; the door to the walk-in refrigerator was closed, but a red bulb burned above it. He stared fixedly at the refrigerator, seemed strangely agitated.

He turned back to the block, picked up the long knife, the conical stone, and again I heard the grating scraping noise of steel rubbing stone as he sharpened the knife. He slid the stone into its bracket with a crash, sliced at the meat before him on the block.

His back was to me and I bent over, moved toward the refrigerator door. It was closed but unbolted, the

padlock hanging open. As quietly as I could I cracked the heavy door. Cold air seeped from it and its inside surface chilled my fingers as I touched it, pulled it out far enough to let my body through. The chopping didn't falter.

I pulled the door shut, turned and looked inside the freezing room, cold swimming over my flesh. In the dim light I could see naked carcasses of beeves hanging from iron hooks. I walked forward, the light throwing eerie shadows on the wall ahead of me. And finally, far in back against the wall, hidden among the suspended meats, I found something that was different.

It was a white and bloodless thing like something made of wax, an artfully fashioned image of a woman — of part of a woman. It was a human slug suspended from a pointed iron hook. Then I saw the matted, clinging hair, and part of it was blonde, blonde as sunshine. This was what was left of Judy.

I became aware of quietness without at first realizing what it meant; and then dimly I heard a door slam out in the market, heard the murmur of voices. Footsteps thudded over the floor toward the refrigerator as my momentary paralysis ended and I whirled around.

The door swung wide and Hecker loomed before me. He yelled aloud as he saw me, then leaped backward so quickly that I almost didn't follow after him in time. He started to swing the door shut before I under-

stood what he meant to do, but I leaped forward, jarred into it a moment before it closed.

I strained against it with all my strength, then suddenly the weight was gone from its other side. The door swung open and I saw Hecker running across the floor toward the meat block, saw him grab the massive cleaver in his right hand, whirl and run back toward me raising the cleaver above his head.

On the far side of the room stood his wife; it was she I had heard come in and speak moments ago. I glanced around for something, anything I could use as a weapon, knowing Hecker could send that cleaver slashing through my skull and brain and neck in one blow of his thickly muscled arm. Hanging from iron rods behind and above me, stretching from wall to wall were several unused hooks, S-curved and double-pointed like those from which the beeves hung. I grabbed one of them, leaped out of the refrigerator room as Hecker slowed his rush, stopped and stared at me, the cleaver held on a level with his head.

For a second he didn't move, then he walked toward me, not hurrying, just steadily coming closer, holding the cleaver tightly. I let him get six feet from me, then backed away toward the market's rear wall. I took my eyes off Hecker's face for one quick look at his wife, but she stood motionless near the meat case, eyes fixed on us.

The wall, I knew, was close behind

me. I stopped. Hecker didn't falter in his slow stride but he raised the cleaver higher, his face almost expressionless.

I moved back and turned sideways until my left elbow brushed against the wall. Holding the hook in my right hand I crossed my arm in front of my body just as he jumped toward me swinging the cleaver down in a blurred arc at my head.

With the wall for leverage I shoved hard, let my body drop toward the floor, slashing my right arm toward his face with all my strength. The cleaver hissed past my head and struck the wood behind me as I felt my hand jar against him, pain ripping through my palm as the second point of the hook dug into it. It ripped across my skin and the hook was jerked from my hand, but as my knees hit the floor I saw where that other point had gone. It had entered Hecker's throat, the curving metal hanging down upon his chest. But it hadn't killed him.

He jerked the cleaver from the wood as I rolled a few feet across the floor and scrambled to my feet, then he jumped toward me, swinging the cleaver downward. I threw my left hand up, clamped my fingers around his huge wrist, but couldn't stop the blow. I slowed it, changed its direction, but felt the cleaver's edge bite into my chest muscles as I slammed my right hand up to grab that dangling hook, to jerk and twist it. His weight hurled me to the floor and the cleaver thudded against the

boards as I rolled away, pain burning in my chest. When I got to my feet I swung around, but Hecker was on his hands and knees, coughing horribly, his life draining from his throat.

Then he rolled over and lay on his back, eyes staring upwards, and I saw that he was trying to talk. I went over and listened, and I was damn glad I did, because the thing he told me was the craziest fact in the whole crazy case. He managed only a single sentence before he died, but it was enough to make me realize that he wasn't The Butcher at all. . . .

It took quite a few hours for the medics to patch and bandage me up, and it was late afternoon before Samson, Louis, and I sat in Room 42 again. Sam had just been talking on the phone, and he turned and said, "They've got Hecker's wife in a padded cell."

"I'm not surprised," I said.

"Me, neither," Sam said. "She's been raving for hours — drooling about the killings. Well, there's no doubt about your story any more, anyway . . ."

I shook my head. "I'm getting old," I said. "I should have been tipped the minute Norma told me

Hecker'd been trying to date every dame in that neighborhood — I should have realized that a sex killer has got to have violence and attack, and wouldn't be trying to *date* women." Sam pushed a bottle into my hand, and I took a deep slug of it. I coughed, and went on, "It just never occurred to me that Hecker's wife was the way she was, and Hecker was just looking for some normal, natural outlets. Who the hell would ever figure that Hecker's wife was The Butcher, that she was so dominant that Hecker was under her thumb and cutting up the bodies for her after *she* did the killings?"

Sam took the bottle out of my hand, and took a deep dip before he answered.

"Nobody'd figure it," he said. "Nobody'd figure it because it's the kind of fact that just never occurs to people — even people in jobs like ours. A cop's bound to go looking for a man when he's got some sex murders to solve. But it makes just as much sense the other way now that we know the whole story."

He paused, and I guess we all looked a little sick. "Because naturally," he went on, "it would also be women who were murdered if the sex killer was a female queer . . ."

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Repentant Robbers

A burglar in South Bend, Ind., took \$80 from the home of Jack Lovitt and left a note praying forgiveness and promising to repay the money twofold. Ignoring \$140, the thief also left a woman's night gown and two men's shirts, and observed in the note: "Keep the clothes. If they don't fit, sell them. They're new."

In Chicago, a young thief who needed a couple of dollars and found nearly \$10,000 in a purse he snatched became so frightened he returned most of the money to his victim. Mrs. Wilma Gardner, a 58-year-old widow, told police her life savings were in her purse when it was taken. Several days later she received four envelopes in the mail containing \$9,870.

In one of the envelopes was a penciled note. It read: "I was just as scared as you were. I never expected to find that much money. I needed a couple of bucks fast and I know I learned my lesson."

Poetic Judge

Memories of his childhood came to Judge Jake Smith, of Chesapeake, O., in city court when a woman charged with a traffic violation appeared before him. He recognized

her as one of his former school-teachers. On her plea of guilty, Judge Smith said: "I sentence you to either pay \$5 or write on a piece of paper 'I shall not cross the yellow line' 200 times." The teacher replied: "I'll pay the five dollars."

Futility

A burglar in Portland, Ore., decided to enter a dry-cleaning establishment. He climbed a 30-foot power pole, jumped onto the roof, pried open a skylight, squeezed between bars nine inches apart, lowered himself inside on a 13-foot length of rope, climbed through the window panel of an office door, then pulled himself over a seven-foot partition to an inner office. The loot was 39 cents.

Radio Robbery

In Van Nuys, Calif., Mrs. Barbara Farrell received a telephone call from a man who identified himself as a radio quizmaster. He told her she was the lucky winner of twice whatever amount of money she had in her house. Mrs. Farrell replied that she had \$64 on hand. An hour later the man called at her home, took her \$64 cash, and gave her a check of \$128. The check bounced.

Optimistic

A man arrested in Bellingham,

Wash., for being AWOL from the army for 20 years, told officers: "I must have a lot of back pay coming."

Rockhead Dick

A private detective in Amarillo, Tex., walked around for ten hours with a pistol slug and two bullet holes in his head to the amazement of doctors. In fact H. S. Arnold, 45, wasn't convinced that he had been shot in a tussle with a burglar until he returned to the scene and found the slug that had flattened against his skull.

Arnold said he had no suspicion that he had been shot until a friend told him: "It looks like you have a bullet hole in your head." Surgeons found that one bullet had split on Arnold's sinus bone, and the two fragments had lodged in the sinus area in front of his brain. The other slug, which was found at the scene, had hit his right forehead, followed the skull under the skin, and come out the top of his head.

Service Charge

In Hartford, Conn., police were sent in pursuit of Robert M. Shute after he refused to pay a restaurant check.

After the chase was over, he was charged with running through a red light, operating a motor vehicle while his license was suspended, and disorderly conduct. He was fined a total of \$140. The check, it turned out, was for 80 cents.

Homebrew Hero

Expecting a jailbreak, Deputy R. B. Jones rushed into the sheriff's office in Tulsa, Okla., with drawn gun after he thought he heard shots. Instead, he found that six jugs of homebrew being held for courtroom evidence had blown their tops.

Patron Saint

According to the late Bob Ripley, St. Nicholas, whom we know as Santa Claus, is the patron saint of thieves, and the "Knights of St. Nicholas" is another name for the light-fingered gentry. Perhaps the burglars who broke into a costume factory in Sunset Beach, Calif., last November were only honoring St. Nick. Sheriff's deputies said they stole 60 Santa Claus suits.

No Sale

Louis Rosansky, operator of a pawn shop in Steubenville, O., told officers that a stranger entered his establishment and asked if he could inspect a pair of handcuffs. The man examined them, suddenly snapped them on Rosansky's wrists, and fled with \$900.

Double Check

In London, Eng., James James (correct) thought he had found the perfect crime. His neighbor, William Hood, couldn't write, and always signed checks with an "X." James forged the symbolic signature of Hood on \$354 worth of checks over

a period of 12 weeks. But James made a mistake that sent him to prison for two years. He failed to notice that Hood made his "X" like a plus sign.

Reply Received

The Rev. William H. Kepler, pastor of a Washington, D. C., church, advertised that the subject of his sermon one recent Sunday was "Will a Man Rob God?" At the conclusion of the service, choir members found that a thief had taken \$75 from their coats and purses.

Stainless Steal

Police in Moberge, S. D., are looking for a man who stole a \$65 set of stainless steel cooking utensils from a restaurant, sold the set to a tavern operator for \$30, and then broke into the tavern and re-stole it.

Napper Nabbed

In Detroit a napping bandit was nabbed by police after he was driven to a police station by his prospective victim. Arthur Stevens, a cab driver, told officers the man entered his taxi, drew a pistol, and said: "This is a stickup. Keep on going, and don't try to call the law."

After driving for several miles, Stevens said he noticed the man was sprawled across the seat sound asleep, his pistol dangling from his hand. The cabbie drove to the nearest police station, jumped out and ran into the building, calling for help. Officers surrounded the taxi, then seized the slumbering bandit.

The man, identified as Marvin Carmony, was booked for investigation of armed robbery, but questioning was delayed. He went to sleep as soon as he was locked in a cell.

IT HAD been a particularly brutal and senseless crime, and ordinarily John J. Malone would have given it only a brief glance before turning the pages of his *Herald-Examiner* to the west coast race results. But something had caught his attention and held it for the past two or three days. Perhaps it was that the suspected murderer was still at large, and that Malone felt an instinctive sympathy for the hunted man.

This hot July morning had brought no new developments. The little lawyer sighed, tossed the paper inaccurately at the wastebasket and leaned back in his chair. The suspected murderer would probably and eventually give himself up to some incredulous but grateful city editor. Malone yawned and thought idly about the case.

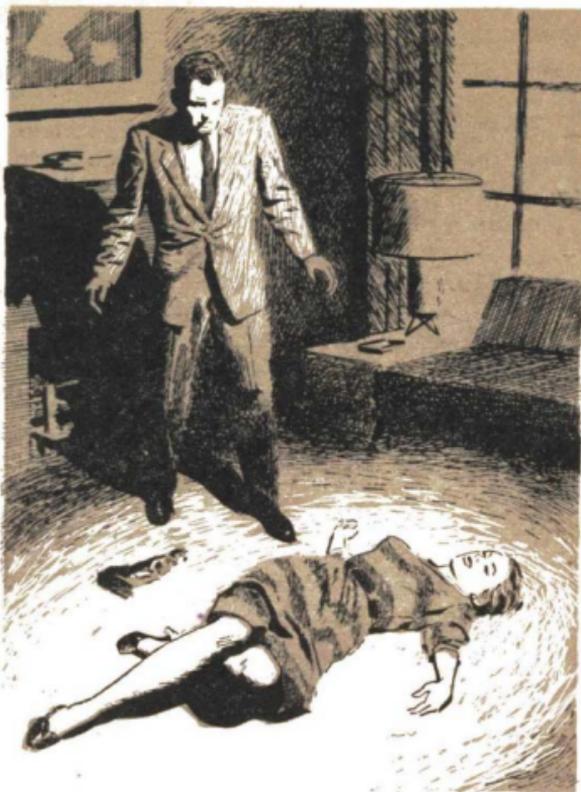
The victim, Inez McGlitchy, had apparently been as

No Vacancies

For a while, it looked like a run-of-the-mill case. Then Malone was hired to evict a ghost.

A John J. Malone Novelette

BY CRAIG RICE



brutal and senseless as the crime which had ended her more-or-less pointless existence. Though the newspapers described her as an attractive young society matron, actually she had been in her mid-thirties, with the kind of red hair that is often accompanied by a pale, freckled and generally poor complexion, slightly myopic light blue eyes and an inclination to plumpness. Moderately wealthy and very spoiled.

Bob McGlitchy, the hunted man, had been her fourth husband. According to a rather fuzzy snapshot reproduced in the newspapers, he was tall and broad-shouldered, with an amiable, not too bright face and a lot of fluffy-looking hair. He was described as twenty-four, an ex-football hero, and neurotic. A neurotic football player, Malone decided, was something he had to see.

The McGlitchys, still in their first year of marriage, had travelled with what seemed to be a fairly unsavory crowd of second-rate artists, musicians, poets and hangers-on. A few of the more lurid newspapers had ventured enthusiastically, if occasionally -inaccurately, into the darker depths of abnormal psychology. But the facts of the murder, as divulged so far, were simple.

Bob and Inez McGlitchy had quarrelled, loudly and drunkenly, at a loud and drunken party. That was nothing new. Inez, after a particularly nasty thrust, had gone home to the apartment they had recently

rented. That also was nothing new.

Malone winced uncomfortably at the address of the apartment. It had been the starting point for what had been one of his rare but, in this case, conspicuous failures.

The violently angry young husband had followed a few minutes later, it apparently having taken a little time for him to think of a suitable retort. Not long after, occupants of the apartment building had been roused by a scream, a scuffle, and the sound of a crashing blow. The superintendent had been called and had rushed to the half-open door to see the football hero standing over the body of his wife, whose skull had been crushed by a heavy statuette that had been one of a pair on the mantelpiece. By the time the thoroughly frightened superintendent had called the police, and by the time they had arrived, Bob McGlitchy had prudently vanished. And there the matter rested.

It was still resting there a few hours later, as far as Malone was concerned, when the phone rang and Maggie came in from the outer office to announce that the man on the phone refused to give his name. The expression on her face indicated that the caller was probably an indignant creditor.

"Malone," a hoarse voice said, "can you come here right away?"

"I can," Malone said amiably, "but why?"

"It's a murder," came the voice.

"I don't know just what to do." It added, "I'm in Connelly's bar on upper State Street."

Malone knew where it was. "Buy a drink," he said, "and don't do anything else until I get there. By the way," he said as an afterthought, "who are you?"

"Why, I'm Bob McGlintchy." The voice sounded as though Malone should have known.

The little lawyer swore softly. "Buy two drinks. And stay right there."

Well, he'd wanted a look at a neurotic football hero. Possibly, he thought a little uneasily, this one was also a homicidal maniac.

2.

He looked a little like one at the moment, Malone decided as he slid into the booth and ordered rye. Bob McGlintchy was a big man and probably a handsome one, far more so than the newspaper snapshot had indicated. But at this moment his light brown hair was mussed and matted, his almost boyish face was haggard and showed a good three-day growth of beard. His eyes were red-rimmed, his tieless shirt was dirty and his expensive suit had been slept in.

"This is the damnedest mess," he understated without preface. "I thought and thought what I'd better do, and finally I remembered reading your name. So I telephoned you. I don't know why I was so sure

you wouldn't call the cops, but I was." He drew a long, shaky breath.

"Where have you been hiding?" Malone asked very gently.

"In a — a kind of a hotel on West Madison Street. I didn't dare go out to eat. Then my money was running out. I just started walking. Nobody seemed to recognize me. Somehow I got up here. I had just enough money left to buy a couple of beers and to telephone you." He paused. "I don't know how I'm going to pay you."

Malone almost said that he didn't either. "We'll worry about that later." He went on: "Right now you're all wound up. Drink your drink. And unwind. Run down."

The young man tried to grin. It wasn't an outstanding success. Malone lit a cigar, taking his time about it. He didn't like to think about those three days in a West Madison Street hotel room.

"Malone," Bob McGlintchy said shakily, "I didn't."

"I didn't think you did," Malone said, nodding; "it's my business to believe you. But what did happen?"

"I don't know. It's all mixed up." He blinked and gave his head a quick shake as though to bring his thoughts into focus.

This, Malone realized, was going to take a little time. "Start from page one. How did you happen to marry her in the first place?"

"I — she sort of suggested it, I guess. We met last year. I'd had a couple of offers to turn pro. You see,

I haven't any money. But what I wanted to do was get a job as a high school coach. Only I met Inez. We sort of got to going around together. It wasn't the kind of life I'd been used to, and I guess I sort of got to like it. But she didn't want me to be a coach in a high school."

"What did she want you to do?" Malone asked.

"Well, I guess, nothing much, except be around her. It was all right for a while, but we got to fighting about stuff and things. We fought a lot, all the time. I guess I get mad awful easy, and she could say real mean things. Like my not having any money. You know. I hauled off and hit her a couple of times. But nobody knows about that except she and — I mean — except me." He stopped suddenly.

"And now, me," Malone said helpfully. He signalled to the bartender. "About this last quarrel, now —"

Bob McGlitchy felt in his pocket and started to shake his head. Malone hastily laid a dollar bill on the bar and held up two fingers.

"Thanks, Malone." He gulped his drink. A little color began to come back in his face. He pushed back his hair with both hands. "We went to this party. We'd been fighting all that day and we just kept it up. Then she blew up and went home. I stuck around a few minutes and then I decided to go home myself and go on with the fight. When I got there —" He fumbled for a cigarette

and managed to light it on the third try.

"Slow down," Malone said. "This is the important part."

"I — she was dead." His breath caught for a moment. "I mean she looked dead." He stopped again. "I unlocked the door and went in."

"The door was locked?" Malone asked.

Bob McGlitchy nodded. "I went in," he repeated. "She was on the floor. Dead. She looked just like she did in the newspaper picture. And then someone pushed past me and went out the door fast."

"Hold on," Malone said. "Someone. Man or woman?"

"A woman, I think. I didn't get much of a look at her. I was looking at — Inez. But I think she had on something gray. And something over her head. A scarf, maybe. She was gone so quick. Like a shadow."

There was a silence. "What did you do?" Malone said at last.

"I just stood there. Then someone came to the door."

"The superintendent?" Malone said.

Bob McGlitchy nodded again. "So the newspapers said. I didn't really see him. I just knew someone was there. So I ran." He drew a long, sighing breath. "I knew right away they'd think I killed her. So I ran. And here I am."

"Exactly what they do think," Malone said, scowling. He looked gloomily at the end of his cigar. "I'm your lawyer, and I believe you. But

you've got to admit it's a damned flimsy story." He began moving his glass on the polished surface of the bar in a series of little circles. "You'd been quarrelling. Violently. It had happened before and you'd struck her. Though thank goodness no one ever needs to know that. But even so—" He picked up the glass and stared at it moodily. "A gray shadow. A jury will love that."

He looked up at his new client. The unshaven face was the color of old newspaper; the big hands were behaving like leaves in a high wind.

"But it's all the truth, Malone. What am I going to do?" His voice almost cracked.

The newspaper description of a neurotic football player was fairly accurate, Malone decided. "First, we go to the cops." He added hastily, "Now wait a minute, and don't jump like that; it makes me nervous." He paused and chewed savagely on his cigar. "One of two things are true. First, that you're telling me the truth. That's the theory we're going on. In that case, whoever murdered your wife undoubtedly doesn't know that you didn't get a good look. Or there may be some reason for getting rid of both of you. Who inherits her dough?"

"I don't know. Is it important?"

"It could be." Malone made a mental note to find out, for more than one reason. "What I'm trying to get across is that whoever murdered your wife may need to murder

you, too, and you'd be safe in jail."

The neurotic football player frowned. "I can defend myself," he said stiffly.

"Against a gray shadow?" the lawyer said mildly. "Anyway, I'll feel better with you safe in jail. And you can't go on hiding in flophouses forever."

"I suppose you're right," Bob McGlintchy said. "But Malone, suppose —"

"Suppose nothing," Malone said. His voice was almost cross. "I'm your lawyer and you do as I tell you. Since we're going on the assumption that you're telling the truth, I can do a better job of gray-shadow-shadowing if I have you tucked away out of harm's reach. And once I can turn that shadow into reality, your troubles will all be over."

There was another unsuccessful attempt at a grin. "And suppose you can't?"

"Then," Malone said, "you just don't remember what happened and leave the rest to me. Don't worry," he added heartily, "I've never lost a client yet."

Except, he thought, Big Joe Williams. He found himself wishing that it weren't the same apartment. Not, of course, that he was superstitious. But it gave him an uncomfortable feeling just the same. He crushed out his cigar almost angrily.

"Something?" Bob McGlintchy asked anxiously.

The little lawyer said, "Yes. A

shave, a new shirt, a necktie, a quick pressing job, a bath, and a lot of food. Immediately. For you. Before we go to the cops. The next stop is my hotel." He finished his drink and stood up.

"But," his client said, giving him a worried look. "But the people at your hotel."

"I've lived there twenty years." Malone reassured him, "and they're used to anything. Besides," he added, "there's a freight elevator in the rear."

3.

The Bob McGlitchy who sat in the office of Inspector von Flanagan, of Homicide, several hours later, was distinctly different in appearance if not in state of mind. The freshly shaven face was definitely boyish, but wore a serious look. The Sulka tie, one of Malone's own, added an almost courageous touch.

"Damn you, Malone," von Flanagan said, "you always make things hard for me. I never wanted to be a cop. Never would have been, if the alderman hadn't owed my old man dough. Then I never wanted to be promoted to this job." He scowled at Malone, who had heard the story before, and many times. "Here's a nice simple murder like I can understand, guy gets drunk, gets mad at his wife, and bashes her head in. Excuse me." This last to the pale Bob McGlitchy. "Then *you* come to the party, Malone, and right

away I don't feel good." He glared impartially at them both.

"For the record," Malone said, reaching for a fresh cigar, "my client did quarrel with his wife, but he did not bash her head in, as you so crudely put it."

The big red-faced police officer looked at Malone with suspicion. "Who did?"

"A gray shadow," Malone said in his most innocent voice.

Von Flanagan swore enthusiastically and fervently for several minutes. At last he added, "Nothing personal, y'understand," to Bob McGlitchy.

"But I did see it —" Bob McGlitchy began in protest.

"Shut up," Malone told him amiably. "And stay shut up. Any talking to be done, I'll do it." He turned to von Flanagan and briefly outlined what his client had done and seen, omitting the matter of the previous quarrels.

"No more story than that," von Flanagan said in an almost awed tone, "and you bring him in. You must have been expecting a bounty."

"I saw it as my duty to my client," Malone said smugly.

Von Flanagan remarked something almost unnecessarily profane about Malone's sense of duty. Malone ignored him and turned to the anxious young man. "That's your statement and stick to it. Don't talk to anybody even if I'm present. I'll see to it you have cigarettes,

candy, magazines and all the comforts of home. And don't worry." He wished he felt as confident as he sounded.

Later, alone with von Flanagan, he said "You haven't such an airtight case as you think. A quarrel. One witness who says he saw McGlintchy standing over his wife's body. It's not enough."

"It is for me," von Flanagan said, trying to act as though he meant it.

Malone finally got his cigar lighted. "I suppose you have his fingerprints on the statuette," he said idly, shooting in the dark.

Von Flanagan started to say, "Of course," thought better of it, and growled. "The only fingerprints on the statuette belonged to the maid. Doesn't mean a thing."

The little lawyer strolled to the window and gazed out at the traffic. "One of the hottest Julys in the history of the weather bureau," he remarked, apparently to himself, "and I'm asked to believe that the guy wore gloves. Or that, being in a violent and drunken rage, he carefully donned gloves before picking up the lethal weapon. Or that, being in said violent and drunken rage, he later wiped off the lethal weapon so carefully that he did not disturb the fingerprints left there by the maid."

"Stop rehearsing for a jury in my office, damn you," von Flanagan said angrily. "I said, the fingerprints don't mean a thing."

"A violent, murderous, drunken

rage," Malone mused, "the kind of rage that would drive a man to batter his victim with cruel, almost maniacal blows. How many blows were actually struck, von Flanagan?"

"Only one," von Flanagan said before he had time to think. He caught himself. His red face turned almost purple. "And I suppose that if you can't think of anything else, you'll have him tell the jury that everything went black."

"Black as the bottom of a coal mine on a rainy Friday," Malone said cheerfully and went out.

4.

Out in the street he began thinking about the apartment on Goethe Street and on a sudden impulse decided to visit it. He hailed a passing cab and rode up Michigan Avenue through the steaming heat that had already turned his Finchley suit into something resembling a damp accordion. He mopped his brow, ran his fingers through his damp black hair and made an ineffectual attempt to straighten his tie, which was already slowly creeping toward his left ear.

The apartment building was small and chastely expensive in appearance, boasting a small square of lawn whose cash value as real estate was probably approximately that of its equivalent per square foot of platinum. He paused for a moment, looking at it. Here Big Joe Williams had lived comfortably and lavishly,

going forth to restaurants, night-clubs, theaters and race tracks, while the police of forty-eight states and the FBI searched for him diligently. Here he, Malone, had sat over many a long cool drink while his client cheerfully refused to say anything one way or another about the fifty thousand dollar robbery of the Hamilton Trust and Savings Bank. And here Big Joe Williams had surrendered, politely and still cheerfully, to the police after someone had turned him in. Malone sighed.

If Big Joe Williams had only confided the hiding place of the loot, he might be living here today, and Malone might be coming on a more pleasant errand. But that had been long ago, and Big Joe Williams was still serving his stretch.

The little lawyer shook his head sadly and pushed the bell marked *Superintendent*.

The superintendent, a skinny, pallid little man, came to the door scratching his long, thin neck. "I guess it'll be all right, Mr. Malone," he said in answer to Malone's question, "if the new tenants don't mind."

Malone lifted a surprised eyebrow. "Rented so soon?"

The small men nodded. "Apartments are awful hard to get these days, and this one's real nice. Elegant furniture. Oh sure, of course you remember. Haven't changed one thing. Rents on a month to month basis. Real nice young couple took it, day after the killing. Seems

they read about it in the newspaper." He accepted a cigar and said, "Thanks, Malone. Oh, they kept a coupla cops hanging around, just in case the killer came back, but they took 'em' away just a little while ago."

Malone thanked him and knocked on the door of 1-B. It was opened a few seconds later, and the superintendent said "Mrs. Atwater, this is Mr. Malone. Lawyer. Real nice friend of mine. Just wants to look around the place where the killing happened."

"Come on in," the woman said agreeably to Malone. The superintendent gave a last curious, half wistful look into the apartment and went away, closing the door behind him.

Malone looked around reminiscently. Yes, not a thing had been changed. The pleasant creamy yellow walls had undoubtedly been repainted, but in exactly the same shade; the comfortable chairs might have been recovered, but in the same pale green brocade. Even the little ornaments were the same, the pleasant-faced red-and-gold painted Hindu god sitting in an uncomfortable position on the desk, the odd-shaped vases on the bookcase. Nothing had even been moved, from the appearance of things, since Malone had last seen it more than three years before.

But suddenly he realized that there was one difference. There was only one bronze statuette on the mantelpiece. There had been two.

Mrs. Atwater's eyes followed his. She laughed. "That super — he kills me — apologized all over the place about that damn statue. Seems the cops took it for evidence. He says he expects to get it back sometime."

The little lawyer looked at her curiously. She was a smallish woman, thin and very pale. Thin, but not bony, Malone observed admiringly. Her lacy off-the-shoulder blouse showed a lot of creamy skin that looked as if it would be smooth to the touch. Her fluffy hair was a glistening black, her mascaraed eyes were a kind of blue and green and gray all at one time, her full mouth was lipsticked a brilliant scarlet. She seemed restless, quick-moving, and nervous as a rabbit near a dog track.

"Sit down, won't you? Ted, let's make a drink."

Ted Atwater shoved the morning paper from his lap and stood up lazily. He was a tall limp man, with a pleasant, homely face, brown hair, and friendly brown eyes. He yawned, stretched and grinned apologetically. "Day off," he explained. "Supposed to still be getting moved. Though all we moved were a bunch of suitcases. I'd been living in a club, and Edna here didn't even own a pair of guest towels." He moved slowly off to the pantry.

"Newlyweds?" Malone asked politely, making himself comfortable and reaching for a fresh cigar.

She nodded. "Three weeks. Been living in a hotel. Don't know what

we'd have done if this McGlitchy guy hadn't bumped off his wife."

"Minute Edna read about it in the paper she said we'd better come right up, there'd be an apartment vacant," Ted Atwater called through the open door. He came back carrying a pleasantly tinkling tray. Malone recognized it and the decorated glasses. "Anything in particular you wanted to look at?"

Malone shook his head, accepted a drink, and said, "No, just wanted to get a quick look at the scene."

"Well, it's just the same," Edna Atwater said brightly. "The body was right down there. But I guess you saw the newspaper pictures. The McGlitchys had a little personal junk scattered around, but the super took it out. And the old lady who lived here before they did had a lot of stuff and had it arranged different, but it was all changed back."

"What do you think'll happen to the guy?" Ted Atwater asked, turning his glass around between his palms.

Malone shrugged his shoulders noncommittally. "The police have him. I'm his lawyer. But that's about all I can tell you."

The woman lifted her eyebrows interestedly. "Well, I wish him luck. And you too. She must have been a bitch."

The little lawyer nodded. The apartment didn't tell him a thing. There was the mantelpiece where the statuette had been, there was

the place on the raisin-colored carpet where the body had lain, still showing a very faint trace of police chalk-marks, and there was the door through which a gray shadow had flitted to disappear, perhaps forever. If it had ever been there at all. Malone felt a little unhappy, and for the first time that week stopped noticing the July heat wave.

"You're a lawyer," Atwater said suddenly; "perhaps you can help us out. I want to move out of this place, and we've paid two months' rent in advance. Do you think we can get it back?"

"Ted!" she said reprovingly. "We'll never find another place as nice as this."

Malone looked from one to the other and decided to stay neutral. He looked at Atwater and said "Why?"

"Just something about it." He laughed nervously. "It seemed a little ghoulish to me anyway, running up here the minute Edna read about the killing, and taking the place while it was still warm, if you know what I mean. And somehow it doesn't feel right. We come in and there's a feeling like somebody's been here, and the super swears there hasn't." He drank deeply and went on: "I keep thinking there's a jinx. First there was a bank robber here, and he went to jail. Then there was a bed-ridden old lady, and she died here. And then this guy murders his wife. I just don't like it here."

"You're silly," his wife said.

"For instance," he said, ignoring her, "I came in and found the furniture had all been moved around differently. Oh, it looked all right, so we left it that way. But the super swore he — or anybody else — hadn't been in here."

Malone twirled his glass thoughtfully. "I don't know. Maybe you could get your rent back, and maybe you couldn't. And as far as the other is concerned —" he managed to speak lightly in spite of the ice-cube that seemed to be sliding up and down his spine, and forced a smile — "as a lawyer, I've been called on for a lot of things, but I've never been retained to evict a ghost."

Edna Atwater laughed. It was a thin, half-irritated laugh. "You see, Ted? You'll make yourself sound half gone, talking like you do."

But Ted Atwater didn't smile. He said stubbornly, "Well, I just don't like it, that's all. I'm not a lawyer, I'm just a bank cashier — Hamilton Trust — but I bet I could get that rent paid back if I tried."

"You'd better not," his wife said almost grimly.

Malone decided it was time to go. He finished his drink, rose, and said, "Thanks for the drink and for letting me in. And I hope you get rid of the haunts."

He hoped he could get rid of some of his own, he thought on the way back to the office. The cold chill was still with him, not a haunting of past robbery, death and murder, but a premonition of something very defi-

nately unpleasant that was going to happen in the future. All the more unpleasant because he didn't know what it was.

5.

Back at the office his dark mood persisted. It didn't help that Ted Atwater was a cashier at the Hamilton Trust and Savings Bank. Pure coincidence, of course. It had to be. Coincidence and nothing else that he had moved into the apartment that had been lived in by Big Joe Williams. He sighed and tried to concentrate on gray shadows and their probable whereabouts.

It didn't make him feel any better when Maggie came in from the outer office and said, "Well, what?"

"Is it the rent again?" Malone asked unhappily.

"Due on the first," Maggie said, "and so is my salary. And there's a bill from Saks for twelve pairs of nylons and some French perfume. And the guy who runs the newsstand called to say he'd sent a carton of cigarettes, a dozen candy bars and all the new magazines to Robert McGlitchy in the jail, and would you be sure to stop by and pay him this afternoon."

Malone went through his pockets, dug out an accumulation of wrinkled bills, all ones, and a handful of change. "I can make it."

"Malone." She seemed to soften a little. "Did he do it? Are you going to get him off?"

"I hope not," Malone said, "and I hope I do."

Maggie said, "Well, you'd better. Because he hasn't any money of his own, and he won't inherit his wife's if he's convicted of her murder."

"I know it," Malone said. "I wish you'd go away."

"And one more thing, Malone—"

The telephone interrupted her. She lifted it, said, "Yes," and handed it to Malone. "A Mrs. Atwater."

A lilting voice said "Mr. Malone, I'm around the corner in Henrici's. Will you come down and have a drink with me?"

"I'm as good as there," Malone said. He scooped the money into his pocket and said, "I'll take care of the newsstand later. Now don't worry about a thing."

6.

In the soft light of Henrici's, Edna Atwater seemed a shade less restless. She had changed into something very cool and simple, of a dull rose color, and redone her lips to match. She smiled warmly at Malone as he sat down.

One daiquiri and a little light conversation later, she said, "I hope Ted can be talked out of that notion of moving. I do like the place, in spite of how we got it. But he'll come around."

Malone had a quiet idea that she could talk any reasonably susceptible male into anything. "He probably will."

"After you left I had a sudden wild idea. Maybe that bank robber hid his money in the apartment. Do you suppose I could find it? Is there still a reward out for it?"

"There still is," Malone said, "but the police really took that apartment to pieces searching." He didn't add that he'd done the same. "And no doubt the other tenants had the same idea."

"Even the bed-ridden old lady?"

"She had a nurse and a maid," Malone said. He remembered the nurse. A slightly gorgeous blonde named Irene. It suddenly occurred to him that he ought to look her up, strictly in the interest of his client.

Edna Atwater smiled, and her eyes said that she liked him very much. "You were his lawyer, weren't you? Haven't even *you* any idea where he hid it?"

Malone smiled back at her and felt a sudden pang of envy for Ted Atwater. "Not the least idea." He suddenly decided the hell with Ted Atwater, signalled the waiter, and said, "Enough of all that. Let's talk about you."

He felt just a little happier when he got back to the office. But, he reminded himself, he was no nearer to a solution of Bob McGlintchy's pressing problem. He made a note to call the blonde Irene, firmly put Edna Atwater's gray-blue-green eyes out of his mind, and settled down to work.

It was mid-afternoon when he sat back and realized that he still was

getting no nearer. The murdered woman had had a host of mostly chiselling acquaintances, no close friends, no lovers nor ex-lovers, and three ex-husbands scattered in different parts of the country. No one in her life could even remotely be described as a gray shadow. There simply was no motive at all except for the now famous violent and drunken rage. The little lawyer sighed, and sent a message to his client that everything was fine and he was not to worry.

He prowled about the office restlessly and gloomily. He opened the file marked "Confidential," took out the half-empty bottle of gin, looked at it and put it back again. He straightened the window blind. He picked up the cigar box from the bookcase where Maggie had inadvertently left it while dusting and put it back on the desk where it belonged. He stood still, thinking.

Suddenly he called Maggie and said, "Get me a round trip airline ticket to Joliet."

"But Malone —"

"I'm going to see Big Joe Williams."

"But Malone, what money —"

"There's an emergency fund," he told her. "This may be one."

While he waited he called up Irene and made a date for dinner. "I may be late," he warned her. Also, he reflected, he might be broke. He made a few other calls, and hoped that he'd find Big Joe Williams in a receptive mood.

The bank robber was receptive and amiable. Three years had changed him very little. He was still a big, paunchy man with thinning gray hair and a friendly smile. He was delighted to see Malone.

"I'm up for parole," he greeted the lawyer.

"You may be out sooner than you think," Malone told him.

"Same deal?"

"Same deal."

"Maybe I'll buy, this time." He frowned thoughtfully. "First, I figured I was earning the fifty grand. Earning the hard way, but even looking at it as so much a year, it wasn't too bad. But I'm getting bored."

Malone nodded.

"Besides, there's my girl. Bonnie. Remember her, Malone?"

He remembered her vaguely from one or two occasions. A rather loud, brassy blonde. "You mean to say you're still thinking about her, after all this time?"

"I sure as hell am," Big Joe said. "She turned me in."

Malone looked his surprise and said nothing.

"Should have seen it coming," the big man said. "Never did trust her, but we got along. Then she got sore about something and turned me in. Well, how do we work it, Malone?"

"Same setup," Malone said. "Just tell me where the money is and I'll

do the rest. And I'll do it fast."

Big Joe Williams sighed, shook his head sadly and said, "For a character who's just about to kiss fifty grand goodbye, I feel pretty good." He grinned. "I bet that apartment really got a going over."

"That, and every other place you'd ever been since the hold-up," Malone told him.

The grin became a laugh. "As if I'd let that much dough kick around loose. With everybody and his second cousin looking for it. And a reward for its return in case any honest citizens got into the act."

"Where is it?" Malone demanded.

"In a safety deposit box," Big Joe Williams said, again with that deep, rumbling laugh. "Naturally. A safety deposit box in the Hamilton Trust and Savings Bank on Milwaukee Avenue."

The little lawyer counted to ten slowly. Then he started to say, "You're a liar," decided to change to, "You're kidding," and finally was about to settle for, "You're out of your mind."

"I thought it was pure and simple justice to put it in the same bank I took it away from," Big Joe Williams said cheerfully. "And besides, it's the last place anybody would ever look for it. Work quick, will you, Malone? Now that I've gone this far, I'm getting impatient."

"It's practically a matter of hours," Malone promised.

"First thing, I'm going to find Bonnie and take three years of my

life out of her hide," the big man said.

"Offer a reward," Malone said, "and I'll help you look."

8.

On the way back he reflected that he hadn't accomplished a great deal. He'd only confirmed what he had believed all along, that Big Joe Williams' loot was tucked away in a good, safe, undetectable place. A sudden and disagreeable thought struck him. It was Big Joe Williams who would turn the money in; he, Malone, hadn't located it. There wasn't going to be any reward.

Oh well, he'd done his good deed for the day. And Big Joe Williams, out of jail, would probably be a profitable client for the future.

Maggie was waiting for him, still looking worried. "I paid the newsstand. And the newspapers have been calling about the McGlintchy thing."

"Tell them my client is innocent and I intend to prove it," Malone growled. "And find out what lawyer handled Inez McGlintchy's will." He went on into his office.

There was something in the very back of his mind that refused to come forward. Something maddeningly just beyond his mental fingertips. He knew that it was important, and he couldn't think what it was.

"It's Ervin Smallgrass, of Ballard, Ballard, Ballard and Smallgrass," Maggie called. "I'm getting him."

Mr. Smallgrass was delighted to give his colleague the information, and did. Malone put down the phone, feeling that that was all he needed to finish ruining the day. Inez McGlintchy's small fortune had been a life trust, ending with her death — in this case, her murder. Bob McGlintchy wasn't going to inherit any money at all.

It looked, Malone reflected, as though he were going to be broke for a long time to come. And it also looked as though he had taken on a long and difficult job of defending the football hero in court. Oh well. He'd use the gray shadow. Violent and drunken rage. A gray shadow. Everything went black. A neurotic football player.

"It wasn't really a neurosis," Malone said aloud. "It was Four Roses." That should have made him feel a little better, but it didn't.

He sat for a long time staring at the embossed cigar box on his desk. At last he reached for a cigar, slid off the cellophane, started to light it, and stopped halfway, not moving until the match began to burn his fingers. Then he put down the cigar, reached for the telephone and called Ted Atwater.

"I thought you'd be interested," he said casually. "Big Joe Williams gets out tomorrow. You may get the rent back after all, if he decides he wants his home back."

Then he called von Flanagan. "Meet me at the apartment where the McGlintchy woman was killed.

Yes, of course I know what I'm doing."

Then he was on his way.

A white-faced Ted Atwater was in the hall. "Mr. Malone! She asked me to go on an errand. Now she's locked me out. I left my keys in here. She won't let me in. Malone, what is it?"

The superintendent came running, passkeys in hand. Malone reached for them, Ted Atwater beat him to it.

"Wait—" Malone said desperately, pushing forward. Ted Atwater, in a burst of fear and rage, shoved him aside. Something that felt the size of an elephant's foot landed in his eye, hard.

"Wait, damn you," Malone half screamed. "Can't you see, she'll have to kill you too —"

The door was flung open, he was momentarily conscious of a room that had been torn up in a last, wild frenzy of searching, of a small, white-faced, black-haired fury who turned on them. Something hurtled past his head; he had a feeling that it was the survivor of the pair of bronze statuettes. Then von Flanagan arrived, and it was all over.

9.

"If you must know," Malone said crossly, explaining his black eye to Big Joe Williams, "I came in contact with a guided muscle."

He sat down heavily behind his

desk. Then he bounded up, opened the file drawer and brought out the gin and two glasses.

"She'd dyed her hair, of course," Malone said, sitting down again. "But that shouldn't have thrown me off: Just one thing started me thinking, and the rest fell into place."

Big Joe Williams lifted his glass in silent appreciation.

"She was sure the money was in the apartment in spite of the searching that had been done," Malone said. "I was half sure myself. After all, you would be pretty damned smart about a hiding place for that kind of cash. But after you went to jail, the apartment was taken over by a bed-ridden old lady and her nurse, and she didn't have a chance to get in and search."

He paused, sipped his gin, and remembered that something would have to be done toward financing his date with the blonde nurse.

"But she waited. The McGlintchys moved in, and she watched for a chance to do a really good job of searching. I should have realized that she'd still have the key you'd given her."

"I thought of that too," Big Joe Williams said, "but it didn't matter to me."

"Well anyway," the little lawyer said wearily, "She'd changed her name and dyed her hair. Somehow she met the cashier of the Hamilton Bank and married him. She evidently thought he could unintention-

tionally give her some kind of a hint, Heaven knows why. Or maybe she thought it had been an inside job and he could get her next to the other party without knowing it."

"But it wasn't," the big man said. "I did it all myself." There was a craftsman's pride in his voice.

"She saw her chance when the McGlintchys went out to a party," Malone went on. "But Inez went home unexpectedly soon and walked in on the search. Maybe the blow wasn't meant to be quite that hard; we'll never know. But now Edna — Bonnie — saw a Heaven-sent opportunity and talked her husband, poor devil, into taking the apartment. Last night, when she was told that you were on the loose, she knew she had one last chance, and that she had to take it fast and get out of town." He sighed.

"I should have guessed before," he said at last. "It was the cigar box that tipped me off." He opened it, passed it, and took one out. "Yesterday it had been left on the bookcase. Instinctively, without thinking, I put it back where it had always been. People do that when they've been around a place a long time. Just as she had done in the apartment. Her husband told me that he'd come home to find all the furniture moved around from the way it had been when they moved in. But I remembered it as exactly the way it had been when I'd seen it when you lived there. She'd remembered it that way too, from the

time she spent there with you and — almost unconsciously, perhaps, had moved it back. That should have made me know what had happened right away. Once I knew that, the rest followed."

He didn't add that he'd had a few minutes of horrible fear after he'd called von Flanagan that his hunch wasn't correct.

For a little while he sat playing with his cigar. Things had worked out for everyone else. Bob McGlintchy was a free man, and the chances were unless he met another heiress, that he'd end up as athletic coach in some small-town high school and, in time, happily married. But he, Malone, wasn't going to get any fee. The bank had its money back, and everyone was very happy about it. But he, Malone, wasn't going to get any reward. Edna, or Bonnie, was in jail, and von Flanagan was very happy about everything. For a moment Malone wondered if Big Joe Williams would care to finance her defense, and decided that he wouldn't.

It was at that moment that Big Joe Williams put down his cigar, took out his wallet, and began counting out hundred dollar bills until he'd piled up an even ten of them. "You've been talking for a long time about a trip to Bermuda," he said.

Malone looked at the money. "For what?"

"For handling everything so fast." Big Joe Williams said. "And for

finding Bonnie." He shoved the bills across the desk.

Malone looked at the bills. He wanted to count them, but he was afraid to touch them. They might disappear. The whole thing, he told himself fuzzily, was a dream.

It was some time before Malone moved or spoke. At last he picked up the bills. "I thought you'd be broke," he said, almost incredulously. "After

all, you had to give up the fifty grand."

He riffled the bills. They crinkled. They didn't disappear. "Where did you get all this money?" he asked suspiciously.

Big Joe Williams' smile widened into a broad and happy grin. "Hells' bells, Malone," he said. "The Hamilton Trust and Savings wasn't the *only* bank I ever robbed!"

Portrait of a Killer

No. 10 — Rose Palmer

BY DAN SONTUP

SHE has been called "the most remarkable of all Caribbean women," but on the island where she lived, Rose Palmer was better known as "The White Witch of Rose Hall."

It was in the days when slavery still flourished in the West Indies, and Rose lived on the huge plantation known as Rose Hall. She was a strikingly beautiful girl, who had only one failing — she had a penchant for killing off husbands while they were looking out the window.

Her first husband was named Percy, and he came to Rose Hall from his home in England. They lived together in the big mansion on Rose's plantation, and life was quite simple and easy for them. The slaves did all the work, and Rose, through her overseer, saw to it that the slaves were kept busy in the cane fields and never stepped out of line.

At first, Percy and Rose got along very well. They were happy together, they lived quietly on the plantation, and the only bit of unpleasantness in their lives was an occasional whipping of a slave, which Rose or Percy had to supervise.

So life went on for them like that until, without any apparent reason, Rose suddenly tired of Percy. She

snapped at him, they began to quarrel, their marriage was no longer a happy one — and that's when Rose decided to get rid of Percy.

Her plan was a simple one. She stood by one of the big windows in the house, and after making sure that no one was watching, she opened the window halfway. Then she called Percy.

He came over to her and stood by the window with her and asked her what she wanted. Rose didn't answer him at first, just pointed out the window. Percy glanced out the window, but couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. Rose stepped closer to the window and, pointing downward, said "It's down there, on the ground."

Percy was puzzled, and he stuck his head through the window and leaned out and looked down to the ground. Rose stepped closer to him, reached for the window, and then brought it down with all her force on the back of Percy's neck.

Her timing was perfect. Percy's neck was broken, and he died looking down at the ground.

Rose was properly grief-stricken when the doctor and the local police arrived. She told them it was an

accident, and, of course, there was no one to contradict her. Percy was buried on the grounds of Rose Hall, and Rose went back to being mistress of the plantation all by herself.

There was some talk in the slave quarters about the death of Percy. Someone must have seen what happened, because the story of Percy and the window was whispered about. Perhaps one of the household slaves was a witness to the crime. Rose never found out, but a few more whippings by the overseer, at Rose's command, hushed the rumors and stopped most of the talk. Rose had nothing to fear from the slaves, and she knew it.

Then Rose began to get a bit lonely, and it wasn't long before she brought another young husband home with her to the plantation. This one was named Kent, and he, too, was an Englishman.

He lasted just about as long as Percy did.

When Rose had had enough of Kent, she summoned him to the window, had him look out, and, once again, her timing was just right.

This time, of course, the police were a bit suspicious, but they couldn't prove a thing. The slaves wouldn't talk, and, even if they had, it's doubtful if their word would have been accepted. So, once more, a grave was dug and another husband was laid to rest in the soil of Rose Hall.

The third husband wasn't an Englishman.

Ramon was a Spaniard, another master for the slaves, and another husband for Rose to love and then grow weary of.

The records aren't too clear about Ramon's death. Local legend has it that he, too, kept his head out the window a split second too long; but all that's known about him is that he "sickened and died."

So, Rose was a widow for the third time, and for the third time the police couldn't do a thing about it. Ramon was buried on the grounds the same as his two predecessors.

By this time Rose had earned her title of Witch, but it didn't seem to bother her at all. If she felt anything she didn't show it. However, the slaves knew that Rose had changed; she was even more harsh and brutal with them now — and that's what proved Rose's undoing.

Late one night, one of the slaves got loose and somehow managed to get hold of a machete. He cornered Rose in her bedroom, raised the machete over his head, and the last thing Rose saw was the blade of the knife coming at her.

After her death, the whole story came out, but Rose, of course, was beyond punishment then.

Since that time, all sorts of legends have grown up around her — legends of even more graves at Rose Hall, stories of voodoo, poisoning, Zombies, and witchcraft. But, when we come right down to it, Rose Palmer was just a woman who found a different way of killing husbands.

Die Like a Dog

The old guy had money. So when he asked Jack to watch somebody die, Jack was glad to accept

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

I WANT to get this written down on paper fast, while there's still some Sneaky Pete in the bottle, just in case my hand gets shaky and I need it. Not that I'm stooling, understand. When you're a wino on Skid Row you don't holler copper. But this is different from stealing the shoes off a mission stiff or jack-rolling a lush. This is murder.

I want to have this all written down on paper with a date on it and somebody to witness it, then I'm going to seal it



up in an envelope and leave it with a character I can trust. Maybe a Holy Joe at the Sally Ann — the Salvation Army — or the bartender at Grogan's gin mill on the Bowery. Just in case the cops get to smelling around with their big noses, understand. Because this is the first time that I was ever mixed up in a murder and I got to protect myself. I'm not really mixed up in it, I guess, but just kind of a witness. And I'm not even sure it's murder.

Don't start laughing and thinking I'm going off into the rams or counting the lavender leopards on the ceiling just because I'm a wino. This happened. It happened just today. And by now maybe they got the old doll that was chilled in the top drawer of the ice box at the morgue on East Twenty-ninth Street.

I'll take another snort of the sweet wine I got right here beside me in the cubbyhole at the Castle Rooms I just paid the man six bits to occupy until tomorrow morning. Then I'll begin at the beginning. There, that's better. Stuff warms up your insides, know what I mean?

I-woke up in this same flophouse this morning. Only I didn't wake up in a six-bit private room. I woke up in what they call the dormitory where a bed costs thirty-five cents. I didn't wake up until nine o'clock when they come around to fumigate the place. They run you out of here every day at nine so they can fumigate and you can't get back in until four in the afternoon.

I felt awful, worse than I ever did feel before, but when the man started hollering to hit the deck I did all the usual things mechanically before I tried to get up. I felt for the Army shoes with the waterproof soles and they were tied around my neck like usual. I reached down inside the old gray sweatshirt and the little tobacco pouch where I keep what's left from the stakes I make by bracing guys was there, pinned to me, but it was empty. That didn't surprise me because I knew I'd spent my last cent on a pint of Sneaky to get up on. I felt my leg. I always tied the morning pint to my leg, inside my trousers, in a special way I had invented. I hadn't even opened the bottle the night before, but it wasn't there. Some mother-lover had split my trousers leg with a razor blade and got the pint while I was sleeping off my binge.

I damn near blew my top right there. I had the green-paint horrors and I didn't have a cent and the brand new full pint that would have saved my life was poured down some mother-lover's gullet. I tried to get out of bed and I could hardly stand on my own two feet, I was shaking so. I didn't know what the hell to do. I'd be lucky to make the street without a shot the way I felt, and in order to brace enough of a stake for a drink I'd have to get off the Bowery. You can't bum from bums. Maybe I'd have to walk up Fourth Street all the way

to Washington Square and I couldn't ever make it without a drink.

I staggered into the lavatory and splashed some water on myself and looked around at the empties on the floor, hoping maybe some guy might have left even a few drops in a bottle. I'd been on Skid Row long enough to know better. Somehow or other I managed to get down the steps and out into the street. I kind of leaned against buildings until I was outside Grogan's Palace Bar about a block away. I'd been drinking there the night before. It's funny how they give Skid Row pads and wino traps such high-faluting names. The Castle and the Palace, for instance. And just a little further on there's a flea flop called the Berkshire Arms. The Bowery businessmen have got a funny kind of humor.

All around me were little groups of guys pooling the change they'd saved from their bracing operations of the day before so they could make a crock. There's two kinds of winos on the Bowery. One kind tries to hold on to enough change overnight so they can get in a morning pool that's trying to make a crock to pass around. The other kind buys their pint or fifth the night before and tries to hang on to it till morning. I'm the second kind. I got something wrong with my throat and I can't take big swallows. Usually you only get one swallow at a crock when you're in a pool, so I always get gyped. Also, some of these pools

buy Sweet Lucy, which is port, and I go for Sneaky Pete, which is sherry or muscatel. Not that it makes much difference. When I feel like I felt that morning, I'll drink anything, including kerosene.

I shuffled into the Palace and I walked right into murder, although I didn't know it then and I was too fogged to think about murder or anything else, anyway. I said to the bartender, "Suds, some mother-loving bastard ripped my jeans and stole my life insurance, a whole pint of it. Suds, I got the heavens and jerks and I'm going off into the rams if I don't get one quick. You give me just one big-boy on the cuff, Suds, and I'll be in shape to brace a stake and pay you inside half an hour. I spent a lot in here last night. Almost three bucks, Suds."

Suds just laughed like that was funny. He said, "You been around long enough to know better than ask for a cuff in Grogan's trap. Grogan wouldn't cuff his sweet old drunken grandmother. Fall down in the gutter and drool a little and maybe Kerrigan, the cop, will take you up to Bellevue. They got some stuff there called paraldehyde makes your eyeballs pop like the buttons on a fat man's vest."

I was really shaking now and the sweat was rolling off me so hard it bounced on the bar. A guy at the bar was looking at me. He was just another Skid Row grifter, dirty as I was, needing a shave. But he had a

kind of air about him like he'd seen better days. He had a big, fat purple goblet of vino in front of him that made my tongue hang out a foot, and he had a dog. It was the damned ugliest dog I ever saw in all my life. A kind of mongrel bull, I guess. It was so old it could hardly walk. It had nasty-looking sores and a swelling in its belly like a tumor. Its eyes were two big milky moonstones. Cataracts. The old dog was blind.

The dog's owner had evidently been belting himself with the Pete for quite a spell because he was beginning to glow like a wino does when the stuff gets in his bloodstream. His cheeks were pink in his dirty-gray face. He kind of smiled at me and showed a set of jagged teeth stained purple-brown by wine. He waved a fan of dirty fingers at me and said to Suds, "This man is sick. I was a doctor once and I know. Alcohol is a strange element. It's the only poison that serves as its own antidote."

Suds said, "So what you want that I should do? Give every sick creep that crawls through the door a shot of bonded bourbon on the house?"

The man put money on the bar. He gulped the whole goblet of wine, then he said, "Refill my glass. Give our friend a blockbuster on me. He requires strong medicine."

I almost started to laugh and cry at the same time. If you'd given me a choice between a million cash or the most beautiful broad in the

world with all her clothes except her stockings off or a blockbuster, right then, I'd have taken the blockbuster. A blockbuster is a beer goblet full of sherry with a shot of cheap rye poured right into it. If that don't fix you up, it's time for the embalming needle.

The guy who saved my life was a wino himself and he was smart enough not to talk any more until I got the blockbuster down. It took a little while because like I say I got something wrong with my throat and I got to kind of sip, but I held that goblet in two hands and I kept on sipping and didn't put it down till it was empty. I could feel the stuff flowing through me nice and warm every inch of the way. Down the hatch, into the lungs, out into the arms and hands, into the belly and right down to the groin and the legs and the numb feet. In thirty seconds by the clock my hands that had been fluttering like the tassels on a strip-dancer's brassiere were steady.

The man tugged at his old dog and dragged him up the bar toward me. The blind dog walked stiff like a zombie in one of those horror films they show at the all-night picture houses.

"Feel better?" the man asked.

I nodded. "Mister," I said, "you ought to get the medal they hand out for lifesaving."

He chuckled, or kind of cackled rather. He waved his dirty paw at the bartender, put money on the

bar, said, "A bird can't fly on one wing. What's your name, son?"

"Jack," I told him. Nobody ever gives their right name on Skid Row and that was what they called me when they called me anything. As Suds filled up the glasses, I said, "You must have just come into an inheritance."

"Not yet." he said, "but I'm about to do so. Today, I think. A friend of mine is very ill. High blood-pressure. Heart disease. Partial paralysis. And it's all complicated by old age and chronic alcoholism. I've been watching her closely. I'm a doctor, you know, even though they took my license. The slightest shock will carry her off. I don't expect her to last the day." He gulped at his wine and looked happy.

A thousand guys you meet on Skid Row expect to inherit a fortune any given minute. I didn't take this character seriously. But I was hurting and he was buying, so I was willing to let him talk.

"She leaving you her money?" I asked.

He thought it over. "Well, not exactly," he said. "She hasn't any money. I've kept her alive for a long while now. I'm a doctor, even if they took my license. I let people impose on me, you see. So now I live on city charity and an occasional handout from my brother. I never could refuse poor, suffering people who wanted prescriptions for sedatives — goof balls, you know. One

girl killed herself with an overdose. And another girl talked me into performing an illegal operation. I almost went to jail. I was too soft-hearted to practice medicine. We may as well have another one. I just cashed my relief check. And if the old lady dies today I'll have plenty."

Suds filled them up. The man said, "You can call me Doc, Jack. Doc Trevor, that's my name. This old woman's name is Marge. Marge Lorraine. It was a famous name once, but you wouldn't remember, you're too young. She was an actress. Booze and age and sickness got her. When she was still young enough she became a street-walker to get her booze. Then she hit Skid Row and the lousy bums would make her dance and kick her heels up so they could laugh at her. That's the only way she could get booze. And she was old then, Jack. Old enough to be a grandmother. To think that she'd been a fine actress once, with her name up there in lights."

He couldn't stand the thought of it and drank down the wine in his goblet.

"I used to see her in the joints, kicking her heels up for the stinking bums so she could get a drink to stop the hurting. I couldn't stand it. She was old enough to be my mother. I remembered how I used to worship her up there behind the footlights when I was a kid. One night I took her home with me to the coldwater flat I've got in a

tenement on Hester Street. She's been there ever since, a couple of years now. I was interested in her complication of diseases. It's a miracle she's alive at all. I don't have money for the drugs she needs, but a little booze, a little food, what medicines I can buy, they've kept her alive. The main thing that's kept her alive, though, is this old dog here. His name is Pasteur. I found him when he was a pup. He was homeless, like the old woman was, so I took him to my flat. That was seventeen years ago. Most dogs don't live seventeen years. Pasteur's like the old woman. Old and sick and useless. Everything the matter with him but he keeps on living somehow. He gives the old woman courage. She figures so long as the dog can live, the shape he's in, she can live, too."

He said, "It's what they call 'Identification' in psychology. She identifies herself with the dog, you see. You interested in psychology, Jack?"

"I used to be," I told him. "I used to be interested in lots of things. Right now I'm only interested in another drink."

He waved his dirty hand and got the beakers refilled again. "Psychology," he said. "If the booze or life or something hadn't got me a long time ago, I'd do a paper about the old woman and the dog for the medical society magazine. When Pasteur feels good and gets the idea he's a pup again and frisks a little,

the old woman feels good, too. When he's sick and moping and whining, she's that way. High blood-pressure affects a person's eyesight. She isn't blind yet, but she can't see too well. Her eyes started going about the time the dog developed cataracts."

"It's too bad he's blind like that, poor old dog," I said.

"He doesn't mind too much," the doc replied. "Dogs don't go much by their eyes anyway. It's the nose with them. The nose and ears. Pasteur can still do tricks, even. Watch him." He snapped his fingers. "Sit!" he said. "Sit up, Pasteur!"

The old dog scrambled to his feet and tried to balance himself on his rump and you could tell it hurt him like hell. It was like an old man with rheumatism trying to do a hand-spring. The doc kept barking, "Sit! Sit up!" and he seemed to be enjoying himself because this old dog was the only thing on earth would take orders from him. The dog finally managed to sit up on his rump, kind of swaying. "Good boy," said the doc. "Pasteur knows lots of tricks. The old woman claps her hands when she sees him do them. He's just learned a brand new trick. We're going to show the old woman when we get back, aren't we, Pasteur?"

"Please don't make him do any more tricks for me," I said. "He's too old for tricks. It hurts him, sitting up like that."

"You don't understand the psy-

chology of the old," the doc answered. "Pasteur loves doing tricks. It makes him feel important. When the old cease to feel important, they know they're useless, and that's when they start to die."

I didn't want him to make the old dog do any more tricks, so I tried to change the subject. I said, "If this old lady hasn't got any money, how you going to inherit any money when she dies?"

"Insurance," said the doc. "When I got her things from the place they'd put her out of before she moved in with me, I found an old insurance policy. It was made out to her daughter, the only policy she had that hadn't lapsed. The daughter walked out when Marge got to be a lush and Marge has never heard from her. Doesn't even know if she's alive. But one way or another, she'd kept the payments up right to the year before. It was an annual premium and it was due again. I got her to sign some papers from the insurance company making me the beneficiary and I've been paying the premium ever since."

"Is it for a lot of money?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "Not much, or I couldn't pay the premium on it. But it's a lot for guys like you and me. Two grand."

"What makes you think she's going to die today?" I asked.

He was pretty drunk. He winked at me. "I'm a doctor," he said. "I know. I know the signs." Then he

kind of bit his lips with his wine-stained teeth and said, "There's a friend of mine with the city relief agency. He always tips me off when investigators are coming around. They'd cut me off the relief rolls if they knew I had Marge up there with me. You're not allowed to keep another person in the place they rent for you. Up to now I've always got her out in time when the investigator was paying me a call. Parked her in a gin mill and hid what rags she's got and got rid of all the empties. But now she's going blind and almost paralyzed, I can't get her down the steps. And I've been tipped off the investigator is coming around tomorrow. I can't lose that relief." He drew himself up straight, said, "I'm too much of a gentleman to brace men on the street for my flop and booze money."

The blockbusters he'd bought had really busted inside me now and made me kind of cocky. Besides, it made me sore, him throwing off like that on guys who brace marks on the street. After all, he was just another wino himself. I should have strung him along, of course, since he was buying and I was needing. But I said, "Look here, Doc, you trying to tell me you're going to bump this old doll today so you can collect her insurance money and this investigator won't find her in your pad?"

"That's fantastic," he replied. "I couldn't harm a hair of her poor old head. Why, I'm the one who's kept

her alive as long as this. But I'm a doctor and I know she's dying, and since she's dying I might as well see the undertaker gets her out before the relief investigator arrives."

He looked me full in the face. "That's only common sense," he said. "And I'll give her a nice funeral on the insurance money, too."

I was still talking against my own best interests, my best interests being for him to keep hanging around and buying me blockbusters. But I was getting tight and I said, "If you think she's dying why aren't you up there with her?"

He said, very serious, "You've got a point. A telling point. Fact is, I don't want to be alone with her when she dies, Jack. I'm a drunk. I might get the horrors. You could do me a favor, Jack."

Uh-uh, I thought, here it comes. I'm old enough to know guys don't buy you three blockbusters in a row without expecting something. Usually with guys like me who are big and young and kind of rough, it's the fags slumming on Skid Row who make the propositions. Sometimes they only want you to come up to their fancy Park Avenue apartments and beat the holy hell out of them. That's a funny kind of kick, you ask me. But this guy wasn't gay and he wasn't any slummer. He was a wino who belonged right where he was — on the Bowery.

He was saying, "I'd appreciate it a lot if you'd come up with me, Jack.

We can pick up some bottles of wine on the way. Enough to last all day. I'd like you to be there when she dies, just so I could have a little company. A man needs a friend at a time like that."

It's funny the things an alky will do to get the stuff. I knew damned well he was framing me somehow and I thought he might be planning murder, but all I was thinking about was those bottles of wine he was going to buy.

I said, "Well, maybe if I could have another blockbuster first. It's quite a walk."

"Sure," said the doc. "Put two ryes in my friend's sherry this time, bartender."

The Bowery is used to sights, but the procession we made on our way to Hester Street was one that attracted attention. The blind old dog could hardly walk at all and he moved along in his zombie fashion putting one stiff leg out in front of the other, his nose scraping the sidewalk like a bloodhound on the scent. The hangover and four blockbusters, including a double, had made my own legs wobbly. And the doc was glaze-eyed drunk and stared straight ahead like he was hypnotized. We stopped at a liquor store and bought half a gallon jug of wine plus an extra fifth, just in case the old lady didn't die right away and we might need it. There were several flights of steps to climb in doc's tenement, but we didn't mind 'em too much because we stopped on each landing

and had ourselves a snort. I carried the jugs and the doc carried the blind and crippled old dog upstairs.

The doc's flat was a railroad, three tiny rooms in a row. The first one was the kitchen with an oil stove and a sink and an old fashioned ice box and a table and some chairs in it. The second was the doc's bedroom. The door to the third was closed. The place was pretty bare and was furnished with stuff from junk shops, but the doc had kept it neat and clean. I guess it was his hospital training. Most drunks like doc are pretty messy.

The doc told me to sit down in the kitchen. He left the jug and the dog with me. Then he tiptoed to the old lady's room, the closed one, and opened the door. He came back in a minute or two. He put a finger to his mouth and said, "She's asleep now." But he didn't close her door.

We sat in the kitchen drinking wine and talking about this and that and once or twice I nodded off and put my arms on the kitchen table and slept maybe an hour or more. Every time I woke up the doc was there. He was one of those winos that seems to drink himself sober. Each time he'd tell me the old doll was still sleeping. The old dog would be sleeping, too, snoring loud.

Once I woke up and saw there was hardly a drink left in the half-gallon jug and that we'd have to start on the fifth if the old lady didn't die pretty soon. I figured the

vino wasn't lasting as long as the doc had thought it would till I looked out the window and saw it was dark. We'd got to the flat before noon. Now it was night already. A drunk sure loses track of time, sleeping and waking up like I'd been doing.

The doc looked worried. He said, "It's getting late and the investigator comes tomorrow. I've got to get old Marge out of here."

I was rumdumb and stary-eyed and the nasty part of sitting there and drinking and waiting for a sick old woman to die didn't mean a thing to me. I was only worried if the wine would last. I said, "You mean she's already dead and the undertaker hasn't come to get her?"

He shook his head. "No," he said. "She hasn't died. Not yet, she hasn't."

Then he went over and shook the old blind dog named Pasteur and woke him up. He said sharply, "Come on, Pasteur. We're going to show old Marge the new trick that you've learned."

Like I say, I was rumdumb and stary-eyed and my brain was numb from the blockbusters and the Pete and I just sat there grinning like a halfwit, not realizing what the hell he was up to.

"Play dead, Pasteur! Play dead!" he said.

The poor old dog got down on his side and after a few painful tries he rolled over on his back and lay there with his stiff legs stuck up in

the air and the milky cataracts over his eyes glowing in the ceiling light. The doc had told me all about the old doll identifying herself with the dog, but I was so drunk, I'd forgotten.

The doc had an old-fashioned battery radio in the kitchen in one of those dome-shaped stained-wood cabinets. He turned a dial. For a minute nothing happened. Then there was the most God-awful blast of shrieking sound I ever heard in all my life. I jumped half-way to the ceiling. He grinned at me, turned off the radio, said, "You're nervous, Jack. You need a drink. The radio always does that when you first turn it on. I wanted to show you how well-trained the dog is. He hasn't even twitched. You can't even see him breathing. An atom bomb could go off and he wouldn't move until I snap my fingers."

The old dog hadn't moved. He still looked about as dead as any dead thing I ever saw. But the sudden blast of noise had awakened the old woman. She was calling to him in a croaking voice. The doc said, "Come out here, Marge, and take a look at poor old Pasteur."

To my drunken eyes, Marge was a shapeless bundle in an old gray wrapper with a pale face and toothless mouth and clouded eyes and wild white hair. She looked like she must be about a hundred. She hobbled slowly toward the kitchen. She walked as stiff as the old dog.

Finally she saw the dog lying

there and she let out a blood-curdling scream, the most awful sound I ever heard. "He's dead!" she shrieked. "He's dead!"

The doc said nothing. He just sat there looking kind of interested, like one of those scientists who do things to white mice.

I couldn't say anything, either. I was too stupefied.

Marge's scream changed to a kind of gurgling in her throat. Her face started turning black, right therein front of my eyes, like she was choking to death. Then she crumpled to the floor, real slow, like one of those trick motion pictures you've seen.

I've lived rough and I've seen some things but that was the most horrible thing I ever saw. Between the booze and the shock I couldn't move. Not for several minutes. I just sat there with my mouth open, kind of gasping.

The doc knelt down beside the old woman and felt her pulse. Then he went into his room and got a stethoscope and listened to her chest. Finally he got up, cool as you please, and said, "She's dead. The shock was too much, seeing the dog like that. I'll have to call a doctor to issue a death certificate. And then the undertaker."

He noticed the old dog, still stiff there on his back, and grinned. He snapped his fingers, said, "It's all right now, Pasteur. You did the trick just fine."

He said to me, "You're sober enough to know what you just saw.

A perfectly natural death. An old woman with a heart ailment. She came out here and keeled over with a stroke, a heart attack."

The old dog finally scrambled to his feet. And I came to life, too. I swung one at the doc. I was so drunk and weak I couldn't have hurt a healthy fly, but it was a fluke punch and it landed right on the point of doc's chin, the button. He went down and his head banged hard. He lay there with his eyes staring up at me and they looked as sightless as the old dog's eyes.

It's hard to say why I swung at him. It wasn't feeling sorry for the old woman made me do it. In a way, her dying was what they call euthanasia, mercy killing. But when I was a kid back in Ohio I had a dog. It was a little fox terrier named Spot. I guess Spot was the only living thing I ever cared much about. I cried my eyes out when he died. I remember that, all right.

What I did next was pure instinct. I stuck the fifth of wine in my pocket. I figured I was going to need it. I'd seen the doc had bills left from his relief check when he paid for the liquor. He'd had them in an old wallet in the inside pocket of his coat. I bent down and got the wallet.

I guess the doc had a weak heart, too. Anyway, when I leaned down to get the wallet my hand was up against his chest. And his heart wasn't beating. I wonder who's going to get the old doll's insurance money. You can buy all the Sneaky

Pete on the Bowery with two grand in your jeans.

I picked the old dog up in my arms. He was heavy, but I ran down four flights of steps with him. I brought the old dog here. He's right alongside me now. The dog and the bottle. I had to give the clerk downstairs \$5.75 of the doc's money for this cubbyhole I'm in. Six bits for the room rent and five bucks bribe for letting me bring the dog up. I guess you could get a big room in the Waldorf-Astoria for that kind of money, but maybe they don't take dogs and wines.

I don't know what I'm going to do about the dog. Maybe I can give him to some home for dogs like the SPCA runs. I don't understand at all why I took the dog in the first place, any more than I understand why I hit the doc. Maybe it was because I remembered my own dog, Spot. Maybe it was because I was afraid the blind and helpless dog would starve to death if I left him up there in the room with two people who couldn't feed him.

Mostly, though, I think it's just that I want to try to make it up to the poor old dog for what the doc did to him. People like the doc and the old doll, Marge, and me don't count. We stumbled over something a long time ago and we took the wrong turn and landed on a street called Skid Row. The doc and the old doll are dead anyway. I'm still young and if it was only the booze with me, maybe I could join Al-

coholics Anonymous or something and start all over again. But a city croaker told me some time back that this thing I got in my throat that keeps me from taking big swallows is going to kill me pretty soon, booze or no booze.

But the dog, he's different. All he ever wanted to do was please the doc and this old doll. He's old and

crippled and blind and he's got sores on him and he hurts all over, but he kept right on trying to please the doc and the old doll by sitting up on his rump and doing tricks for them.

So I say it's not right what the doc did to the old dog.

He made the dog a murderer, that's what he did.

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