

MANHUNT

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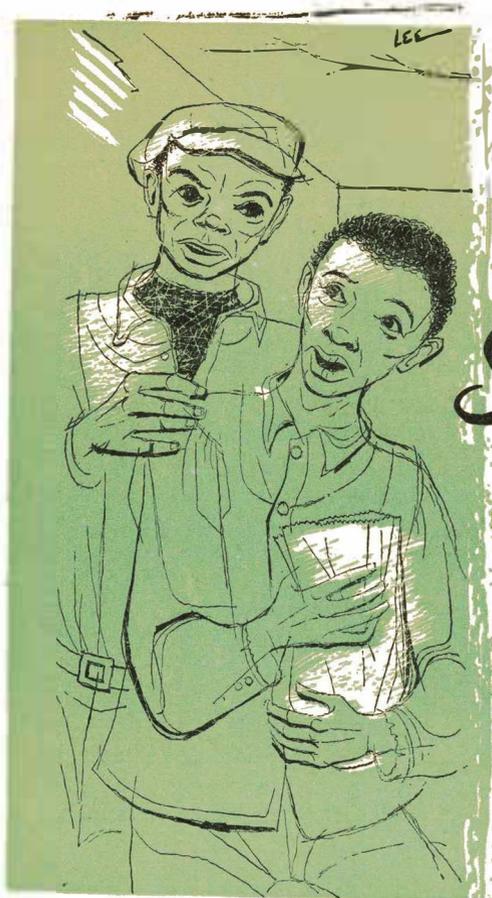
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JOHN McCLOUD, Editor
 CHAS. W. ADAMS, Art Director

HAL WALKER, Managing Editor
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I Didn't See a Thing

Man, I needed that five-spot. I was ready to do anything to get it — anything at all.

A Novelette

BY HAL ELLSON

MOMS is in the living room. I hear her making noise cleaning. I can stroll out and she won't know. But I'm heading for the roof again and she don't like that.

Got to play it cool. I wait, sneak to the door when I hear her turn on

the radio. I'm closing the door and Moms yells, "Where you going? You fooling around on that roof again?"

I don't answer, don't hear footsteps, I run for the stairs. I'm up them in no time. It's only two flights to the roof.

I look at my coop first thing. It's okay. Nobody busted in. A good day for flying, but I'm on business.

I go down the stairs again. I'm taking my time, making no noise. Halfway down I hear somebody coming up. It's like he's creeping. Yeah, I know who that is.

Bug-Eye. He was born unnatural. I don't have to see him to know him. He walk like a cat. Got a weird head, small, like somebody squeezed it together when he was small. Got a small body, long arms, big eyes popping from his face. He's weird all around. Scares you.

I stop and start down again. He's still moving up, like he don't know I'm coming. I try to pass and he lifts his head, gets in the way. I got to stop. He looks at me with them pop-eyes. I don't say nothing, never say nothing to him.

He don't move so I move. Soon as I do, he blocks the way. But I know him now. I shift the other way, get past and run down. I hear him laugh. He's going on up. Up to the roof landing. He sits up there. It ain't sensible-like. I don't like going up when he's sitting. Yeah, I don't like him, nobody does, but nobody bother him. People in this neighborhood mind their own business.

The hell with him. I'm off to the store. Got business. Silver is jingling in my pocket. I got to get me a good bird from Taffy.

That Taffy-man I don't like, either. He's weird, too, a big fat guy

with flabby muscles, but they say he's dangerous. You don't play with him. But he's got birds.

I hit his store, look around. There's plenty of birds, but I don't like them for nothing. This time I want a special bargain.

Taffy don't say nothing. He sits in a rocker in back of the store and pets his cat. He got a big black cat. Them two are like brothers. Every-time you come in you see Taffy petting that cat and smiling to himself like.

There's another guy there, too. A friend of Taffy. That's Mr. Quiet. He don't ever say much. He hangs around, smokes, and watches you like a cop. Snake-eyes he's got, real small, like little marbles. I don't like him for no money.

I walk around the store and don't see nothing but a bunch of clinkers and no-goods. Them birds are almost all bums from the park.

Taffy keeps petting that cat, but I know he's watching me. After a while he says, "What are you having, Dip?"

I'm not having nothing at all, but I make like I'm interested and I point to some Flights. "That one there," I say. "How much?"

"For you, sixty-five cents."

"Keep him," I say.

"That's too much?"

"For what's being offered."

"How much money you got?"

Yeah, that's what he always asks. It's like the National Anthem with him. But I'm not saying.

That made him laugh. "You come into look at them, that's all," he said. "All you kids. You got nothing but holes in your pockets."

I want to tell him he's got a hole in his head from petting that cat. But that's dangerous. He may be grinning but he's a head-buster. I just look at him petting the cat. Then I see that other stud is gone. I hear the door close behind me and I turn. Mr. Quiet is leaving.

When I look back at Taffy he's bent over talking to his cat. The hell with him, I say, and I walk out, hit for home.

2.

Two doors down I see Mr. Quiet. He's got his eye on me like he's waiting. I go to pass and he says, "Hey, Dip."

I don't want to stop, but it's like I got to. "Yeah?" I say.

"You want to buy some real birds?"

I'm suspicious right off, but I smell a deal. "I'm interested," I say.

"How much money you got?"

"That's my business. What kind of birds you got?"

"Good ones. They're a real bargain."

"I didn't know you was in the business."

"I ain't. I fly them. Got too many. I want to get rid of some."

"Then why don't you sell them to Taffy?"

"You know what Taffy offers?"

That sounded reasonable like. Taffy wouldn't give his dying grandmother more than fifteen cents for a pigeon.

"You want to see them?" Mr. Quiet says.

I don't like the sound in his voice, don't like him, but I'm thinking of pigeons, good ones. Maybe he's got real stuff.

I nod and we walk six blocks to his house. It's even worse than the one I live in. The hall stinks, cats is walking around smelling for garbage. We go up creaky old stairs to the roof.

I see his coop. He's got a real set-up, plenty of birds, good ones.

"What do you think?" Mr. Quiet says.

I nod my head. There's a bird I like and I point. "How much is that one?"

"You want only one?"

"That's all now."

"No good. It ain't worth the trouble for me. Get some money and drop around again. I'll give you a real bargain."

I expected him to be sore but he wasn't. He just smiled and I told him I'd see about it and left him there.

Going down the stairs I'm mad cause I haven't got money. All the way home I'm kicking myself. Then I see Bug-Eye.

He's standing in the doorway with that look, like he ain't seeing nothing when he's seeing everything in the world. I don't want to pass but

I'm hungry. I step up and he blocks the way.

"Where you going?" he says.

I feel like kicking his shins off, but I can't even look in them eyes of his. "Going up," I tell him.

"Wait a minute."

"What for?"

"You want to do me a favor?"

"What kind of favor?"

"Run an errand. You got time?"

I'm not hungry now. I'm mostly scared. Something tells me something is wrong, but I'm thinking of them pigeons I seen on Mr. Quiet's roof.

"Yeah, I got time," I say. "How much do you pay me?"

Bug-Eye is smiling now. "A real slickster," he says. "You'll do all right. Will you settle for five?"

"A stinking nickel?"

He laughed. "Five dollars, slickster."

When he said that my heart stopped. I don't answer.

He was talking again, giving me directions. I had to see a man, get a package from him and bring it back.

"You got it?" he says.

"Yeah, I understand."

"Okay, start moving."

I'm off like lightning when he calls me back. "Wait a minute," he says, and I come back.

He don't look the same now. There's evil in his eyes. "What do they call you?" he asks.

"Dip."

"All right, Dip. Just so I know how to ask for you. One thing more,

you don't say nothing about this to nobody. One word and I'll slice your ears off and fry them."

Yeah, big words, but he means them. I can see it in his eyes. I ain't talking to nobody.

3.

Ten minutes later I reach the place he told me to go to. There's women on the stoop, young ones. They look at me like I'm naked.

I go past and up the stairs. Another one is coming down. She smells pretty.

"You looking for somebody?" she asks, and she bugs me with big eyes. They're like black lamps. But her mouth is ugly. I know what she is.

I don't answer. Bug-Eye told me not to. I get to the top floor, see a number, knock on a door.

It's like nobody's there. I don't hear nothing. Then the door opens. I see part of a face, smell something funny. I tell who sent me and the door opens fast. I'm inside in a second. This is a weird cat. A real slim-Jim and he's shaking.

He hands me the package, tells me to put it in my pocket and keep it there. That's all.

I hit for home. I want to run and can't. There's something funny about this package. I want to look at it and can't.

Bug-Eye is waiting at the door. Soon as he sees me he moves. I find him in the vestibule.

"Let's have it," he says.

I take it out and he slaps it away like it's going to bite him. I look at him, waiting for that money. All he does is light a cigarette. Then he smiles and says, "You want something?"

"Yeah, where's my money?"

"Suppose I tell you you ain't getting nothing. What then?"

What could I say to that? I didn't say nothing, not while I'm standing in that vestibule. I got a long face.

Suddenly he laughs at me. "Here," he says, and he slaps a five in my hand. "But you remember to forget." He made a scissors motion with his fingers at my ear.

Yeah, I'm not talking. I don't care about nothing now. I got that five, got them new pigeons.

Soon as I got out the door I legged it back to Mr. Quiet's house. He's sitting out front on a box.

"I want some birds," I tell him right off.

"You got that gold fast," he says, looking at me like I killed somebody for it. "How much you got?"

"Let me see the birds again and I'll let you know."

We went up to the roof and I looked at the pigeons, picked out what I liked, seven of them. I wanted more for that five dollars but I was gone on them birds. I had to have them and that jiving cheap-skate knew it. Anyhow, it was good getting rid of that money. It was like getting rid of Bug-Eye. I handed over the five and took the pigeons back to my own roof.

Yeah, it was a big deal. I kept them behind the screen for five days, fed them the best, then let them out.

Right off, they acted funny. They just stood around like they don't mean to do nothing. Next thing I know, they hit off like bullets straight for Mr. Quiet's coop.

Soon as I see that I go see Mr. Quiet. He was sitting on that same box like he's expecting me. I told him what happened and he said, "I don't know nothing about that, kid. I ain't responsible for you losing your birds, and I ain't got them."

"But I seen them fly back," I said.

"You mean you thought you did. They ain't up there. They wouldn't come back."

Yeah, but he was lying. I couldn't do nothing about it so I walked.

Later, I met my friend Jim-Jim. He's got his own birds. When I told him what happened he laughed and said, "Mr. Quiet played you rough. He got them pigeons. It ain't the first time he pulled that one."

"He's going to pay through the nose," I said.

"How?"

"I'm going up on that roof and clip his whole flock."

"You're talking big."

"No. You want to be in on it?"

"Yeah, but what we going to do with all them birds?"

"Sell them. We ask around, or bring them to Taffy."

"Yeah, that's Mr. Quiet's friend. He'll hand your head over to him."

"That greedy cat? When it comes to money, he ain't got no friends."

"You're dead right. Count me in. But we need somebody else."

"Poker will go along on anything," I said.

"Yeah, he's all right."

We looked up Poker and he was all for the job. We set it for that night.

We got sacks from stores. Poker brought his crowbar and we hung around till late, lining up the job.

5

It was one in the morning when we started out, the streets empty. We cut through a market. The place was full of mean-looking cats. They'd look up and not move.

The big job was getting up to Mr. Quiet's coop. It was no good taking the stairs. We went through a cellar down the block, and came up the back fire escape of Mr. Quiet's house. Me and Poker. Jim-Jim stayed in the yard.

Poker hit the coop with his crowbar and jacked the lock off. Both of us went in with bags. We filled three, tied rope to them and lowered them down to Jim-Jim, then put some birds in our pockets.

Getting down was worse than coming up, and getting out of the yard was real bad. We went through the cellar and waited in the area-way. You could hear cars passing up the

avenue, somebody playing a radio in a house close by.

"We better get," Jim-Jim says, "cause if that Mr. Quiet catch us we're dead meat."

We looked out. No cops. Nobody on the block. Next thing we're walking with sacks on our backs, birds stuffed in our pockets.

We're sweating when we get to my house. There's an alley leading to the yard. We took the alley, came out the back and put the birds in an old yard coop for the night. Then we scattered.

Next morning we took off for Taffy's. He's sitting there in his rocker like a man-witch, petting that cat and smiling.

"Where'd you get them?" he says when we show him what we got.

"Brooklyn," I say.

He don't believe that, but who cares? I know he's interested. But he goes on petting that cat like he ain't.

First we try to trade for some good birds of his, but he don't want to. "You got mostly dirty old clinkers," he says, like we don't know nothing.

But that's cause he's got us. We need to get rid of the birds. Yeah, we keep talking and he pets that cat and jives us down to fifteen cents a bird, and busts his heart throwing in some feed.

Next time I see Mr. Quiet he looks at me with needles in his eyes. Yeah, he knows but he don't say nothing. And Taffy won't say noth-

ing, cause he's with us on that deal. Mr. Quiet got to see some other sucker to sell pigeons to.

6.

I got me a big flock now. All good birds. Nobody can fool me no more. I live on the roof. That's what Moms says, and she ain't wrong. It's best of all when you're alone up there and you're watching them birds licking the sky. Damn, they're pretty to watch when they're up. It's like they own the sky. I could build me a coop and live on the roof. If Moms didn't holler so much, maybe I would.

That Bug-Eye is still around. Yeah, I see him all the time in the neighborhood, at the candy store, in front of the pool room. Yeah, he don't buy nothing in the candy store, and he don't shoot pool. What's he hanging around for?

Most of all I meet him at my door, on the stairs, or sitting like an owl on the roof-landing. For a long time it's like he don't know me no more. He don't ask me for favor-errands. But I don't care. I don't want dealings with a cat like that, and none of his weird friends. They're all funny people. Like they're scared. They look through you. Me, I don't have eyes for them.

Like I say, Bug-Eye don't know me any more. Then one day I'm hitting for the roof and he's sitting on the landing. I go to pass and he puts his leg across.

"Where you heading?" he says.

"For the roof."

"Why?"

"I'm going to feed my pigeons."

"You like pigeons?" he says.

"Yeah."

"I guess they're all right. Everybody to his own sins."

He takes his leg away and I go to pass. He stops me again and says, "You ever say anything about that package you run for me?"

"Why should I?" I tell him. "That's my business."

He gave me a toothy old grin. "Fine, chap, fine. I figured you to be a cool kid."

That chap stuff bugged me. I don't like being called that, but I don't say nothing.

Bug-Eye waves his hand. "Okay, you can go," he says. "Keep your nose clean and I can use you sometime."

I start to go and he stops me again. "Wait a minute," he says. "You ever see any strange men around? Anybody asking questions?"

"I see weird people climbing these steps all the time."

He sends me a look, gives me that toothy grin again, and says, "They're friends. I mean flatfoots, the people."

I shook my head.

"Nobody asking about me?"

That Bug-Eye was watching me, watching my brain like he's seeing if I lie. "Nobody," I tell him.

"Okay, that's all."

He let me go. I hit the roof, smell fresh air. It's like I'm leaving evil

behind me. I send up my flock and watch them.

It's the greatest, like I'm up there with them. There ain't no Bug-Eye, no evil people, bad-smelling halls, nothing but clean sky.

I'm still watching when Moms opens her mouth. I hear her holler out the window. She figures I'm up here. But I don't answer, don't breathe.

She's shut now, the flock overhead, coming in. I see them Tumblers flip-turn, throw out their wings like brakes. They almost like stop in mid-air, then shoot fast ahead again. I like them Tumbler birds best. They're real acrobats.

Another sweep and they move in like dive-bombers. Bam, they hit the roof. Some go up again. Others stand around on ledges. I whistle them others in the air, wave the bamboo pole. They start gliding down from the sky. Got to get them in. Moms will be calling again. It's time for supper.

7.

Next day I got money and an itch. I go to Taffy's and, like always, he's sitting with his witch-cat, petting it. Mr. Quiet's there too. He looks at me, I look at him, and we look away like neither of us seen nothing.

Taffy is waiting. I jingle money and he's all eyes, waiting.

"Got any good birds?" I ask.

"Nothing but."

"Yeah, nothing but filthy old clinkers." I know that needles him, but he keeps smiling, petting the cat. It's like war between us. You're always trying to swindle him and he swindles you. But sometimes he's got a good bird.

I spot this White Owl, walk away, and come back. You can't show Taffy too much what you like, but he knows. Seems like he reads your mind.

I point at the White Owl cause he looks real good. "How much?" I say.

"That's the best White Owl you ever saw."

"How much?" I say again.

"For you, a dollar."

"Give him to your grandmother," I say, and I walk out hot. Next minute I'm back, cause that bird's in my brain now.

"I'll give you seventy-five cents for him," I say. "No more."

Taffy laughs. "I just wanted to see if you'd come back," he said. "Take him, he's yours. A real bargain."

Yeah, I flew home with him. I know I got something. This bird has good eyes, bright. He's warm in my hand. I feel his heart beating against my palm. Got a big chest, fan-tail, a tuft on his head. It's like a little black skull cap on him. Otherwise he's all white with pink feet and bill.

Got a name for him already. Pinto. Once I'm up on that roof, I throw him in the coop. He flew to the top shelf and looked down. Three

boy pigeons look up at him like they mean business. They fly up and peck at him.

Pinto flew to another shelf. Then the leader of the flock gets in on it. He flies up and pecks Pinto on the neck and shoulders.

I'm thinking maybe he ain't got no fight when Pinto dives into him, pecking like sixty. They fall to the floor. The leader flies out the coop into the screen-part. Pinto's after him. Every turn he make, Pinto tails him. They go back in the coop. Pinto knocks him off the shelf. On the floor he pecks him in the eye and that's it. The old leader lays down.

The others fly down, look at him, peck him, like they're waiting a long time for this. He's bleeding on the head and I got to get him out. I put him by himself and they don't bother him after that.

Later, I let him out, and that was it. He flew away and didn't come back till next day.

A sad old pigeon he looked. He hung on the roof and watched but wouldn't come near. I whistled and he'd come and then fly off. Finally he didn't come back at all.

I figured Pinto is the boss now and I take a chance, let him out. I let them all out, but he came first. He looked up like he's wondering about something, then took to the air. Yeah, he puts up speed and the rest take off after him. I thought I was going to lose him. But not Pinto. He's the leader, got his gang

now. Zoom! They're making real speed, a wide circle.

Next day I got my Homers up. They always hang together on the same shelf. They bring in other pigeons. I waved the flag, sent the whole flock up. A pigeon is coming from the East Side. The Homers broke from the others and make a bigger circle. They see this East Sider, surround him, fly five blocks, turn and come back, land on the roof.

The East Sider is with them, nervous, ready to fly. He works his way to the screen, flies up and sees the other birds eating. That brings him in. I tiptoe up the ladder, pull the string. The screen door slams down. He turns and runs into the door, then tries to find his way out.

He's all excited, falls down. He can't get out so he settles down. That's when Pinto moves in. Got to show he's boss. He comes out of the coop, looks around, hits that new bird with his wing. He knocks him down, jumps on him, pecks him, then gets a hold and won't let go. Twenty minutes they fight, and the others watch from the shelf. They're like worrying while the fight's going on. Finally Pinto gets his leg and pulls him, hits him from side to side with his bill.

That was all. That new bird limped aside. I put him in the coop and shut the screen.

Yeah, they're like people. One

got a piece of corn and the other take it. The strongest gets the most.

Two days later I bought me a girl pigeon and put her in the coop. A Baldy with a tuft and a fantail. Right off, she was Pinto's meat. Another one went after her and Pinto beat him to a frazzle. Then he starts after her.

Damn, she thought she was something. She just keep walking, turn, peck him and walk away. But Pinto got a hard head. He keeps after her all day, his chest big as a balloon, his wings and tail dropped like a fan. He danced like an Indian.

Them two flew away on me and I thought I lost them. They came back two days later, and Mrs. Big ain't so big no more. She don't peck him like at first. Yeah, they was on a honeymoon.

8.

Another day I'm coming from Jim-Jim's roof. I walk up the block and I see this man. He's strange around here. This man is a bull. I smell it. Next thing he stops me.

"Where's Bug-Eye?" he says real quick.

I play dumb as him. "Bug-Eye? Who's that freaky creature?" I say.

"You don't know him? I thought he lived around here."

"There's nobody with that name around here. I'd know."

He looks at me and knows I'm lying. But he can't do nothing. "Okay, thanks," he says and moves off.

I go in the candy store first so he don't know where I live. Get a coke, come back. All the while I'm thinking of what happened. They after Bug-Eye. I knew he was doing evil. All them itchy people he knows is no good. Five dollars for carrying a baby package for him. I wonder what was in it. Yeah, he don't sit on them stairs for nothing. One of these days I'm going to see.

I go up the stairs, leg it for the roof. On the last flight I look up. Two men. Bug-Eye and a conkhead. They jump like it's the cops. Bug-Eye puts something under his jacket.

This is no good, I say to myself. I'm halfway up and I feel like going back.

Bug-Eye calls me. "Where you going?" he says when I reach him.

"To see my pigeons."

"You got to be running up and down these stairs all the time?"

"You own the stairs now?" I say.

That's when he hit me. I don't do nothing, don't say nothing.

"You better find another way up," he says. "You don't and you'll get something you ain't expecting."

That was all. He let me go out on the roof. When I came in again he was gone. So was his friend.

9.

Next evening I took the fire escape to the roof. No use running into that evil Bug-Eye when he might be on the stairs.

Soon as the pigeons see me they

get all jumpy. I open the door and let my Homers up after a stray. Moms calls me. She knows I'm on the roof so I come down. Five minutes later I go back up and open the screen for the rest of the flock. Pinto comes out.

He always first. When he don't go up, something's cooking. This time he don't rush out. I watch him and he lifts his head, moves it from side to side. He's seeing something.

I look up and see this bird circling. It's making slow circles and coming down. Pinto is still moving his head from side to side, looking up, following the circles. He steps back and does the same. Next thing he flaps his wings and jumps into the coop. He makes noise and the others follow him on in.

I look up again at that bird. I thought it was a seagull at first. Now I see it's black, with curved wings. That's a hawk, I say.

Damn, three of my Homers are up. They're flying high. Suddenly they split and that hawk breaks from the circle. I see him dive, grab one of them Homers. The other two dove straight down. One almost hit the building. They scramble into the coop like mad.

Fifteen minutes later, Pinto pops from the coop and looks around, up at the sky. He ain't taking no chances on Mr. Hawk. He flies to the roof-edge, looks down, flies to the top of the coop and keeps watching.

At last he takes off. But he's by himself. He makes a few circles,

comes back and struts into the coop. Next second they're all coming out. Yeah, he told them Mr. Hawk is gone.

They stay up twenty minutes. I start whistling, waving the flag. Some birds glide in. The flock is moving in a circle. It goes over the avenue, comes back over the roof. The whole pack curves in and down and swoops away from the corner of the building. When they come down, they sit on the television aerials and ledge a while. I let them sit. They're resting.

I give a sharp whistle after a while and they flap up, land on different roofs, then come in.

It's quiet now. Another hour and it'll be dark. I climb up on the coop and light a cigarette. Maybe it's ten minutes later when I stand up. I happen to look down at the skylight. I can see through to the stairs. It's like a deep well.

Next thing I see Bug-Eye. He comes up from the shadows and stops on the landing. His head looks flat from the top. I see him take a cigar box from under that saggy jacket. He sits, takes out a syringe, puts a little water in it, shakes it out.

Two men come up a minute later. They look in a hurry. Bug-Eye ties up their arms, takes a spoon, puts something in it, adds water, lights a match under it. He fills the syringe, sticks them men in their arms.

Two more men come up. Same thing happens. Then they break a pint of whiskey. They drink it and

a lady comes up. They all jump.

I see that lady talking to Bug-Eye. He nods his head. She rolls down her stocking and he puts that stuff he cooks in her ankle.

I know what it's all about now. Yeah, Bug-Eye and all them people coming to him. He's like that hawk up in the sky. They come up and he gets them. He's real evil.

It's time to go. I moved. Maybe it was my shadow cause I didn't make no noise. I wasn't breathing, but I see that woman look up. Bug-Eye looks.

I ducked fast, got down off the coop and crossed to the next roof. I hide behind the skylight.

That's when I hear one of them men say, "Somebody's up on that coop."

Bug-Eye answers. He say, "Let me go up there."

Yeah, he went up. The coop is locked. Nobody up there. He comes down. I hear footsteps like they coming close. That's when I get real scared. That Bug-Eye walking around, smelling.

After a while I don't hear him no more. I don't hear nothing but my heart. I wait a minute, then hit the stairs in that next house, run all the way down and come out in the street.

10.

Nothing's happening. There's a stickball game in the street. I see Jim-Jim. He waves and comes over.

"What were you doing in that house?" he asks.

"Nothing," I say. I don't tell him nothing. Nobody's ever going to know.

"You want to get in the game?" Jim-Jim says.

I shake my head. I'm not in the mood. His side flied out and he hit the gutter. I sat on the curb till it got dark, watching my door.

There's no sign of Bug-Eye. I'm scared to go up and scared to stay out. Something's going to happen.

I keep watching that door. The stickball game was long over. The guys drifted down to the corner for sodas. I can hear the jukebox from were I'm sitting, hear voices. They seem so far away.

Got to get up. I waited long enough. Bug-Eye must be gone. I cross the street, open the vestibule door, open the hall door.

There's a dim light burning. I see the stairs. Nothing but shadow at the end of the hall. I'm moving for the stairs when that Bug-Eye comes out of the shadows.

I can't move now. All I see is his eyes at first, nothing else. I'm dead, I say. He's got me. Next thing, he's next to me. He puts a hand on my shoulder.

"Dip, was you on the roof?"

"When?"

"Tonight. About eight-thirty."

I shake my head, feel that hand on me, like it's going to move fast and grab my throat. "No, I was playing stickball," I tell him.

“You sure?”

“Yeah.”

“You lying, boy.”

“What I got to lie for?”

He smiled then, in a way I don't like. “Since you wasn't up there,” he says, “I guess you didn't see nothing.”

“What's there to see?”

He's still smiling, like he knows every word out of my mouth is a lie. I'm waiting for him to do something, but I know nobody can help me now. No use calling for Moms. He'll slit me fast. I wait, and after

a while that hand of his slides off me like a snake going away.

It feels like ten tons of brick is off me.

Bug-Eye slaps something into my hand. “Here's something for being sure you wasn't up there,” he says. Then he makes that motion like with a pair of scissors and goes out the door.

I go upstairs, open my hand on the landing and see green paper-money. A five-spot for seeing nothing, saying nothing.

Yeah, I never told nobody.



BY JONATHAN CRAIG

THE DOA was still recognizable as a man, and that's about all you could say for him. A long, man-shaped cinder. He was lying on his back, both knees drawn up, arms slightly flexed, the hands like grasping black claws. This hadn't been a large fire, and it hadn't lasted long, but it had been large enough and lasted long enough to turn a man named Earl Connor into this charred and contorted cinder.

It looked like just another case of a man having gone to sleep with a cigarette in his hand. It wasn't. It was murder.

The third-floor bedroom was small and windowless, and the bed and a small metal dresser was the only furniture. There had been considerable smoke and blister damage, but the fire itself had been confined to the bed. The man from



The cops had nothing to work with — except a corpse and a bedsheet. Now they had to find a killer . . .

The Punisher

the Bureau of Fire Investigation stood just outside the doorway, talking to the patrolman who had been first at the scene. The firemen had left a short time ago, along with the uniform police unit that had responded to the alarm, and now only the lab boys and the photographer were still at work. As for my detective partner, Tony Farrell, and I — our work had just begun.

“A hell of a way to die,” Tony said. “Look at those hands, for God’s sake.”

“It’s a rough way to go, all right,” I said. “You got that cigarette lighter, Tony?”

“Sure.”

“Better give it to me. I’m going down and talk to the wife again.”

He took the lighter from his pocket and handed it to me. “Okay to release the body, Herb?”

“Yeah. We’ve kept the wagon waiting long enough. I’ll tell them when I go down.”

“You sure you don’t want me to go along? This air’s pretty rough on the eyes.”

“Better hang around till the techs finish up,” I said.

“Check.”

I left the room, walked to the back stairs, and went down to the first floor. We’d asked the other tenants in the brownstone to stay in their rooms, but most of them had ignored us and were milling around in the first-floor hallway. I told the patrolman I’d stationed at the front door to go down to the

street and tell the morgue wagon attendants that they could have the body, asked the tenants again to go to their rooms, and then knocked on the door of Mrs. Connor’s apartment.

She let me in, at the same time making a cautioning gesture toward a studio couch where a small girl lay sleeping, her arm thrown across a panda almost as large as she was. The child was about six, I judged, with the same bright yellow hair as her mother.

“She’s asleep, thank heaven,” Mrs. Connor said, closing the door quietly behind me. “It’s a blessing.”

“I’ll try not to wake her,” I said.

She led me to a sofa on the far side of the room, and we sat down. She was extremely pretty, and very young, and it struck me that she looked a lot more like a college senior than she did the mother of a six-year-old daughter.

But the thing that interested me was her apparent lack of any emotion whatever. She’d seen her husband’s body — a hideous sight for anyone — and knew he’d been murdered, and yet she had never lost control. Even now she sat looking at me pretty much as if I were just a friend who’d dropped in to pass the time. For a sudden widow, she was one of the coolest women I’d ever seen.

“You say my husband’s death wasn’t accidental,” she said, almost conversationally. “Just how can you be sure of that?”

"There are several reasons, Mrs. Connor," I said. "In the first place, your husband was so drunk that he had to be carried to that bed up there. He was completely unconscious."

She sighed. "I'm sure he must have gone to sleep with a lighted cigarette in his hand. I mean, he must have sobered up quite a bit after they took him up there. After all, he'd been there for several hours before the fire broke out."

"Only a couple of hours, according to some of the tenants."

"Well, *a couple* of hours, then. That's certainly long enough to recover." Her expression and tone indicated she was trying to be patient with someone who insisted on splitting hairs.

"Not this time, I'm afraid," I said. "I have a little more information than I had when I talked to you the first time."

"Oh?"

"We were able to get enough blood for an analysis. We rushed it to the police lab, and they did a fast check for us. It showed that your husband was in an alcoholic coma. No man in that condition would be able to go through the motions of lighting a cigarette."

"Still —"

"He wasn't smoking in bed, Mrs. Connor, and that's for certain."

She glanced toward the little girl. "Please speak a little more softly. I don't want to wake Doris."

"His cigarettes and matches were

in his jacket, hanging in the closet. A man in his shape wouldn't be likely to walk to the closet, light a cigarette, then replace the pack and matches in his pocket, and go back to the bed."

"You went through that before, I believe."

"And then there was the sheet, Mrs. Connor. The mattress and all the other bedclothing had burned, but the sheet had been thrown off the bed somehow. Part of it was burned, but in falling to the floor some of the sheet doubled back over itself and smothered the corner that had been afire. We —"

"Yes, I know," she said. "We went through that, too. You were able to tell from the position of the sheet on the floor that the fire started at the foot of the bed, rather than at the head." She smiled a little. "Really, I don't see anything significant in that. Why couldn't he have tossed it there? Or maybe it just simply rolled down there."

"The flame pattern shows that the fire was set at the very edge of the sheet, Mrs. Connor."

"I knew very well he'd set the bed on fire one of these days. I must have warned him about it a thousand times. I can't remember just how many times I've actually taken a cigarette out of his fingers, after he'd gone to sleep."

I showed her the cigarette lighter. "Do you recognize this?"

She gave it a brief look. "No."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. It looks just like a lot of lighters. How could I be expected to recognize it?"

"We found it under your husband's bed."

"Maybe it was Earl's, then."

"Did he have a lighter?"

She shrugged. "He might have. I really don't know."

I took a deep breath. If Mrs. Connor kept working at it hard enough, she was going to have a damned mad cop on her hands.

"Mrs. Connor," I said, "my partner and I are trying to conduct a homicide investigation. It'll be a lot easier for all of us if we have your cooperation."

Her eyes widened a trifle. "I'm certainly doing the best I can. You must realize that this is a very difficult time for me."

I studied her face for a full ten seconds — which is a lot longer than it sounds — and not once in that time did she so much as blink. I decided I'd had all I could take for one session. I got to my feet and started for the door. Just as I reached it, the little girl on the studio couch sat up so suddenly she knocked her panda to the floor.

"I was afraid of that," Mrs. Connor said. "You've wakened her."

The little girl jumped off the couch and ran toward me. She grasped my pants leg with both hands and leaned so far back to look up at me that I wondered she didn't lose her balance.

"Who are you?" she asked, and then, before I could say anything, "Did you know my daddy got burned up?"

I glanced at her mother.

"She heard the tenants talking," Mrs. Connor said calmly.

The little girl yanked at my pants leg. "Did you know my daddy got burned up? Did you?" Her face was flushed and her round blue eyes seemed enormous.

"Stop that, dear," Mrs. Connor said, with no inflection in her voice. "Come here."

The little girl let go my pants leg and ran to her mother. "Mom-mie," she said, "I want to go see Daddy!"

I stepped into the hall and closed the door behind me. The hall was empty now, except for the patrolman at the front door. He looked at me and nodded. "They just took the body out, sir."

"Uh-huh. Anybody come in?"

"No, sir." He looked out toward the street, then turned back to me. "Lieutenant Morrison just drove up."

I went down the steps and waited while the lieutenant climbed out of the RMP car. He was the squad commander at the Twentieth Precinct, and my immediate superior.

"Wanted to get over sooner, Herb," he said. "Been jammed up to hell and gone. How are you making out?"

"Well, when I phoned you, we only thought it was a homicide.

Now we know it is. We got a report from the lab. The guy was too drunk to bat his eyes, let alone smoke a cigarette."

"How much alcohol?"

"Four tenths of a percent."

Morrison whistled. "I see what you mean. Give me a run-down."

"Well, it seems the dead man was a real lush. He had a habit of passing out in some pretty odd places. This afternoon, the neighborhood handyman found him in the basement, out cold. The handyman comes around every afternoon to look at the hot-water heater and see if the Connors need any repairs. You know how these neighborhood handymen operate."

"Yeah. The Connors own this place?"

"Yes. It's a rooming house. They live in an apartment on the first floor."

"I thought you told me on the phone that you found the body on the *third* floor."

"We did. The handyman told Connor's wife, and she asked him and one of the tenants to carry Connor up there. They can't rent the room out, because it doesn't have any window, and I understand Mrs. Connor had the bed put in up there especially for the times when her husband was blotto. She says she didn't want him around the apartment in that shape, where their little girl could see him, and all, and —"

"You got any suspects yet, Herb?"

"The wife looks pretty good. She's taking things too coolly."

"She pretty?"

"Yeah."

"Boy friend?"

"Kind of looks that way. She says she was in one of the men tenant's rooms at the time all the yelling over the fire started. She said she'd been there for about two hours, since just after she had the handyman and the other tenant lug her husband upstairs to the third floor."

"You talk to the guy she was with?"

"Not yet."

"Who discovered the fire?"

"Old man on the second floor. He was the only tenant home at the time, above the first floor."

"How about the guy Mrs. Connor says was with?"

"He lives on the first floor. He has a single room next to the Connors' apartment."

"Cozy."

"Yeah."

"So what happened when the old guy discovered the fire?"

"Well, he says he smelled smoke, and went out into the hall to investigate. He checked the second floor, and then he went up to the third. He saw where it was coming from, and tried to get the door open. But it was locked from the inside. It's a damn thick door, and there's a big spring lock on it. Locks itself when you close the door. The old guy couldn't break it in, and

he set up a yell. That brought Mrs. Connor's friend, but he couldn't break it in either. In the meantime, the old guy called the Fire Department."

The speaker in the RMP car began to pop and crackle, and Morrison leaned in the open window to listen to it. When he turned back to me, he looked a little disappointed. "I've got to go back to the station house," he said. "You got anything else to tell me — real fast?"

"I guess not, Lieutenant." I'd already told him about the cigarette lighter and the burn pattern on the sheet and the fact that Connor's package of cigarettes and matches were still in his clothing in the closet.

Morrison looked up at the house a long moment, then sighed and got into the RMP car. I knew what was troubling him. He liked detective work, and hated desk work. He hadn't wanted the job of squad commander, but he'd had no choice. I knew he would have traded his salary for mine, if he could go back to actual detective work again.

"Well, keep in touch, Herb," he called to me as he drove off.

I went back to the house and climbed the stairs to the third floor. The techs and photographer had finished and were repacking their equipment. Tony Farrell stood in the doorway. The man from the Bureau of Fire Investigation had left.

"Any luck?" I asked the chief of the tech crew.

"Doesn't look like it, Herb," he said. "Darn few prints, and most of them only partials."

"Not enough to work with?"

"Nope. Lousy luck, but it happens that way sometimes."

"How'd you make out with Mrs. Connor?" Tony asked.

"No good. She's a hard one, Tony."

"I figured that. You think she's our girl?"

"Could be."

"Or she could have got someone else to do it. The old cat's-paw routine."

"If she did, Sing Sing'll have two to fry, instead of just one."

The tech crew and the photographer moved out of the bedroom. "All through, Herb," the tech chief said.

I left the patrolman posted in front of the doorway, and then Tony and I walked down the corridor to the window that fronted on the street, where the air was a little better.

"The fire inspector told me something more about that sheet," Tony said. "The way he doped it out, Connor was too stoned to do anything *consciously*, but that didn't stop him from throwing his arms and legs around a little when the fire hit him. Seems like there's a part of your brain that takes over in a case like that, no matter what shape you're in. Anyhow, Connor

threshed around enough to knock that sheet off himself.”

I took out the cigarette lighter and looked it over carefully again. “I wish the owner of this thing had been considerate enough to put his monogram on it for us,” I said. “It’s probably the most common brand on the market, and the most popular model. We’ll have a hell of a time tying it to anybody.”

“You think it’s part of a frame?”

“Could be. There are some people crazy enough to set a man’s bed on fire and then leave their calling card. But not too many of them. If it was left there to throw suspicion on some one, you can bet the person that did it isn’t too damn bright. Either that, or they got panicked or something. Anyone with any sense would know we’d make it for a frame.”

“Yeah, that’s so.”

“Well, I guess we might as well get started with the interrogations, Tony. Most of the tenants are home now.”

“I could use some coffee first, Herb. We’re in for a lot of work.”

“It would go pretty good, at that. Maybe you’d want to go down to the corner and bring some back. I’ll start in with that old guy on the second floor. The one who turned in the alarm. You can bring the coffee there when you get Jack.”

We went down to the second floor together, and Tony hurried on down to the street while I walked

along the hall to the old man’s room and knocked.

His name was Alfred Buckner, and he had told me he was a retired dining car steward. He was close to eighty, I’d say, completely bald and very stooped. But he was agile and alert, and no more senile than I was. He and the man who had been entertaining Mrs. Connor in his room were the only two tenants who didn’t have jobs, and that was the reason both had been home at the time of the fire. The blaze had been extinguished about four o’clock, and the other tenants had, most of them, started to straggle in shortly after five.

Buckner’s room was small, but neat and comfortable-looking. There were several photographs of locomotives on the walls and several more showing groups of men in trainmen’s uniforms. Buckner sat down in an easy chair near the window and I sat on the edge of the bed. He seemed eager to talk to me again, and I realized that this was probably the first excitement he’d had in some time.

“I know how police work,” he said confidentially. “They used to ride the trains, all the time.”

I grinned at him. “Glad to hear it. You’ll know the problems.”

“You bet I do.”

“I suppose you’ve heard that Mr. Connor’s death wasn’t accidental.”

"Yes, sir, I did. I heard people talking in the hall. Me, I stayed right here in my room, just like you told me to."

I took out the cigarette lighter. "This wouldn't be yours, would it, Mr. Buckner?"

"Not mine. I don't smoke."

"You ever see any of the other tenants with one like it?"

He frowned thoughtfully. "Well, I just don't know. Come to think of it, the only person around here I ever saw use a lighter was Mr. Miller."

"That the same Mr. Miller that lives on the first floor, next to the Connors?"

"That's right. But I never paid much attention to it. I couldn't say this is the same lighter, even if it wasn't burned so bad."

I slipped the lighter back into my pocket. "Mr. Buckner," I said, "I don't want you to take this wrong — but you're here at the house most of the time. If anyone has a good idea of what has been going on around here, you're the one."

"I see what you're driving at. Well, an old relic like me hears a lot — and sees a lot. Can't very well help himself, you know."

"It's like you said. You know how the police work. We have to ask a lot of questions . . ."

"Go right ahead, son. I never kept anything from the police in my life, and I'm sure not starting now. Besides, I don't owe anyone in this house any favors, and I

don't call any of them my friend. There's anything you want to know about them, go right ahead and ask me. I'm not squeamish — not even a little bit."

"Did you see the handyman and Mr. Miller carry Connor upstairs?"

"No. I always take a nap in the middle of the day."

"After you woke up, did you hear anyone going up the stairs?"

"No, I didn't hear a thing."

"Did Mr. and Mrs. Connor get along?"

He smiled. "Sure they did — like cats and dogs."

"You know that for a fact?"

"Sure do. Why, when she'd get to yelling at him you could hear it all over the house. All over the neighborhood, most likely."

"What seemed to be the trouble?"

"A lot of things, I guess. Lord knows why they stayed together. I sure never figured it out. I did hear that Mr. Connor was going to come into some money when he was thirty, and I guess maybe his missus thought she'd hang around and get her share of it. I kind of liked Connor, in a way. Kind of a cheerful, easy-going young man. But when he got drunk — look out! He was a mean one then, and no mistake. Stayed drunk most of the time, too, which is just another way of saying he was mean most of the time. He never did anything to *me*, mind you, but he used to bounce that wife of his off the wall pretty regular."

“He play around much?”

“Other women, you mean?” He shook his head. “Not Earl Connor. He had all the woman he could handle, right in his own caboose. His big trouble was the bottle.”

“How about Mrs. Connor?”

“I was waiting for you to ask me about that.” He hunched forward in his chair. “Now that’s a different story. Yes, sir!”

“You know who they were?”

“I know who *one* of them was, all right.” He paused, looking at me in that way old people have when they want you to coax them a little.

“Who?” I asked.

“Nobody but Bert Miller.”

“You sure this isn’t just hear-say?”

He slid out of the chair and walked to the hot air register and tapped it with a bony finger. “Just put your head down close to this once, son. Here, wait’ll I open the shutter. Be careful you don’t say anything when you’re close to it, though.”

I hesitated a moment, then moved to the register, kneeled down, and placed my ear close to it. I could hear the last few bars of a dance tune, and then an announcer’s voice. I straightened up and went back to the bed.

Alfred Buckner seemed almost too excited to sit down again. He paced back and forth before the bed, smiling at me triumphantly.

“You see?” he said. “If anybody

was talking down there, you could hear them as plain as anything.”

“You mean you’ve listened to Miller and Mrs. Connor?”

“Many’s the time, son.”

“You ever hear anything that you think might have a bearing on his murder?”

His smile faded a little. “Well . . . no. Mostly it was goo. Just plain goo.” He sank down in his chair again.

“Did Connor have any enemies that you know of?”

“Well, I don’t know as you’d call them enemies, exactly, but there were a couple of men who sure didn’t like him.”

“Who?”

“Pete Riley, for one. That’s the handyman. Earl Connor chewed him out the other day. I don’t know what about, but they really got to going around, down in the basement. Earl told him to stay away from here from now on, but Mrs. Connor went down there and got into it, and she told Pete not to pay any attention to Earl. He’s been back every day since then. That Pete’s a wild one. He hasn’t got the sense God gave a duck, and it doesn’t take much to get him riled. I wouldn’t put anything past him, once he gets his dander up.”

“You said there were a couple of men. Who was the other?”

“Fellow name of Jeff Daniels. He and young Connor had a hell of a fight a while back.”

“Over what?”

“Over Mrs. Connor. Seems like Daniels used to court her, before Connor came along. Then Daniels went off somewhere — with the army, I think — and when he came back, he tried to start up with her again. It didn’t make any difference to him that she was married. I heard all about it, through the register. Mrs. Connor and Miller were laughing about it. She’d already taken up with Miller, you see, and she didn’t want anything more to do with this guy Daniels. He kept coming back all the time, though, and one day Earl caught him in the hallway. That’s when the fight started. The way I heard it, it was Daniels that started it. But Connor finished it. He was a rough one, when he was of a mind to be.”

There was a knock on the door, and Tony Farrell came in with two cardboard containers of coffee. Alfred Buckner got a cup from his dresser and we split the coffee with him. We talked to him another ten minutes or so, but we got nothing more of any real help. We finished our coffee, thanked him, and went outside.

“What now?” Tony asked.

“See if you can round up the handyman. Pete Riley. Before you got back with the coffee, Mr. Buckner told me that Riley and Connor had some sort of fracas, down in the basement. If Buckner’s right about him, Riley isn’t too bright, along with being hot-tempered. And that’s

just the kind of bird we’re looking for.”

“Unless it was Mrs. Connor. She’s bright enough, for damn sure.”

“Yeah, but don’t forget what you said about the cat’s-paw.”

“I think she’s too bright to hook up with somebody who wasn’t bright *too*.”

I grinned. “Have it your own way, Tony. If you have any trouble picking up Pete Riley, call Communications and ask them to get out an alarm for him. Buckner can give you a description of him, if you need it. And I guess you’d better ask Headquarters to run his name through the IBM’s for us. I’ve got a hunch they might have a package on him.”

“Who are you going to talk to next?”

“Bert Miller. The guy Mrs. Connor was visiting when Buckner discovered the fire.”

“*Lover-boy?*”

“Yeah.”

“You going to ask for any help on this? It’s beginning to look like we’ll need it.”

“Maybe. Let’s see how we make out in the next couple of hours.”

“There are bound to be some spare cops asleep in the coop.”

“We’ll see,” I said. “And listen, Tony, while you’re about it, you might as well ask Headquarters to give you a run-through on a guy named Jeff Daniels. Buckner thinks he might be a soldier, so that should help. If they don’t have anything

on him under that name, ask Mrs. Connor for the info. He's an ex of hers."

"She's a popular kid."

"That she is. Well, you'd better get going, Tony."

"All right. Ask Lover-boy how he does it, will you?"

"Sure."

Bert Miller was something of a surprise. He was somewhere in his early forties, with a pleasant face, mild brown eyes, and a body built like a fire hydrant. If I'd met him under different circumstances, I'd probably have liked him on sight. I introduced myself and we sat down.

"I have a bottle, if you'd like a drink," Miller said.

I shook my head. "Thanks, just the same."

"It's been difficult to stay in the room," he said. "Mrs. Connor dropped in for a moment. I understand you think her husband was murdered."

"That's right."

"Are you certain of it?"

"Yes."

"That's terrible. It's bad enough to die the way he did, but to be *murdered* that way . . ."

I got out the cigarette lighter once more. "Is this yours, Mr. Miller?"

He shook it in his hand, peered at it closely, then nodded. "Yes. Yes, I believe it is. It's pretty badly burned, of course, but — do

you see that deep scratch on the bottom, near the plug-screw you take out to fill it?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, I made that scratch just the other day. Last Tuesday, I think it was. Anyhow, I was opening the plug-screw with the point of a knife, and the knife slipped." He handed the lighter back to me.

I put it in my pocket. "When did you miss it, Mr. Miller?"

"Yesterday afternoon. I was away from the house at the time, and I thought I must have left it in my room. But when I got back, I couldn't find it."

"I understand you helped carry Mr. Connor up the stairs this afternoon."

"Yes."

"Did you hear anyone going up or down the stairs after that?"

"No."

"Were you in your room all the time?"

"Well, the bath's down the hall. I went down there once. Just down and right back, though."

"Mrs. Connor was here with you, I believe."

He smiled. "Yes. She came in a few minutes after I came back from helping her husband to bed."

"And she was here all the time?"

"All the time."

"When you came down from the third floor, did the handyman come down with you?"

"We came down together. He went down to the basement — I

assume to finish whatever it was he had been doing when he found Mr. Connor down there."

"You're sure he didn't come up again?"

"I'm *almost* sure. That is, I think it's likely I'd have heard him in the hall or on the stairs."

"Not if he'd gone up the front stairs."

"I guess you're right, there. Pete always used the back stairs, and that's what I was thinking about. No, I don't suppose I would have heard him, on the front stairs — unless he made more noise than he usually did."

"Do you know anyone named Jeff Daniels?"

"Not personally. I know *of* him, though. He's an old friend of Mrs. Connor's."

"Where are you employed, Mr. Miller?"

"I'm not. I have a private income." He smiled again. "A rather small one, I'm afraid, but I find it adequate."

"Can you think of anyone who might have any motive to murder Mr. Connor?"

He studied me a moment. "No."

I got to my feet. "I guess that'll be all, for right now," I said. "We'd appreciate your staying near the house tonight, Mr. Miller."

He stood up too, and opened the door for me. "I understand. I'll be right here."

I went into the hallway just as Tony Farrell came in the front door.

"Our boy's gone, Herb," he said. "Pete Riley, you mean?"

"I found out he lived in a basement room a couple of houses down the street. I went over there to get him, and his landlady almost took my head off. Seems Pete came rushing in, threw his clothes in an old suitcase, and took off for parts unknown. She said he owed her a month's rent. I guess she thought I was a friend of his, because she sure started to give me what-for." He paused, grinning. "Sounds pretty good, doesn't it, Herb?"

"Sounds fine. Did you get out an alarm for him?"

"Sure. I called from the landlady's phone."

"How about our soldier friend, Jeff Daniels? Did you ask Headquarters for a run-through on him?"

"Didn't have time. I wanted to tell you about Pete Riley, so I hurried right back. I can call Headquarters now, if you want."

"We can't afford to miss any bets, Tony. There's a pay phone at the back of the hall you can use."

"When the hell do we eat? I've still got an appetite, even if you haven't."

"Pretty soon."

He fished in his pocket for coins. "I just remembered I had a date tonight. Guess I'd better call her up and tell her I can't make it."

"There'll be other nights, Tony."

"Not with this girl, there won't. This is the second time this week I've broken a date with her. It'll be

bye-bye, Tony, for sure." He moved off toward the phone, muttering darkly to himself.

I walked to the front door and stood beside the patrolman, looking out into the rapidly darkening street. "Go down to the corner and get yourself something to eat," I said.

"My relief hasn't shown up yet, sir," the patrolman said.

"Never mind that. I'll be your relief. Only don't be gone *too* damned long."

"Well . . . if you think it's all right. I *am* kind of hungry."

"All cops are hungry," I said. "All the time. Go on."

He grinned and went down the steps toward the sidewalk.

I stood there, watching the neon signs flashing on in the bar windows all along the far side of the street, and thinking about Mrs. Connor. Normally I would have questioned her at much greater length, but I had sensed that it would have been a waste of time. I'd decided that it would be better to let her ride until I had more ammunition. She'd been as unemotional as any psychopath I'd ever known — and yet I was fairly sure she wasn't psychopathic. You get so you can spot them, after a while, and she simply didn't have the characteristics.

It was hard to reconcile her actions with her obvious intelligence. If she had set fire to her husband — or got someone else to do it for her — she would have known enough to at least pretend normal shock and

horror. And if she'd had nothing to do with his death, she couldn't very well have helped showing *something*. Anything. Even that she was glad about it. But *something*.

I'm a hard guy to give the creeps, but she was beginning to give them to me.

Tony Farrell came back from telephoning. "It's okay," he said. "We've moved it up to Sunday."

"Good."

"Where's the cop?"

"I sent him down to get something to eat."

"That's right. Starve your own partner, just to make a name with the uniform force."

I grinned, and started to say something to him, when a woman stepped over the low fence from the next yard and walked up to us.

"Do you know where the policeman went? I want to talk to him." There was something strange about her voice, as if her mind were far away and she found it an effort to concentrate on her words.

"He'll be back soon, ma'am," I said. "Anything we can do for you?"

"I want to talk to the policeman."

"We're policemen." I flipped open my folder and showed her my badge. "What seems to be the trouble?"

She moistened her lips, then glanced back the way she had come. She was middle-aged and heavy-set, wearing a housedress and frayed carpet slippers. "I — I'd rather not

talk here. Can you step over next door a minute?"

"Wait for the patrolman, Tony," I said. "I'll give a look."

I followed the woman back across the yards. She led me to the basement entrance and down the steps. We walked along a dim corridor to the back of the basement and entered what I assumed was her apartment.

A man of about the same age as the woman sat on a sofa, holding a little boy on his lap. The boy was about four, and something seemed to be terrifying him.

"Where's the cop?" the man said.

"This man's a cop, Bill," the woman said.

The man nodded to me, then looked back at the little boy, running his fingers slowly through the boy's hair, as if to soothe him. "This is a policeman, Tommy. Tell him what you just told your mom and me."

The little boy stared at me, holding tightly to his father. "We was playing out back of the house . . . Dorrie and me . . ."

"That's the little girl next door," his mother said. "Little Doris Connor."

"And Dorrie told me who set fire to — to Mr. Connor's bed." He broke off, looking at his father.

"Go on, son," the man said.

Tommy looked back at me. "It was Dorrie that done it. She — she set the bed on fire."

I didn't say anything. Sometimes

kids' imaginations run away with them. I stepped close to the little boy and bent down close to him, keeping it very friendly. "You sure about this, Tommy?"

"Yes, sir. She — she just got through telling me. Just a couple minutes ago."

I studied his face. He was telling the truth.

I straightened up and turned toward the door. "Thanks," I said. "I'll be back to talk to you folks later."

"I don't want Dorrie to know I told on her," Tommy cried. "Don't you tell her, mister!"

"All right, Tommy," I said, and left the apartment.

When Mrs. Connor answered my knock, she had changed to a housecoat and mules. Doris was sitting on a hassock, working at a knot in one of her shoelaces.

"I'd like to speak to Doris a moment, Mrs. Connor," I said.

"Doris? *Why*, in heaven's name?"

I walked past her and lifted Doris up in my arms and carried her to the sofa. I sat her in my lap and reached down to help her with the shoelace.

"Doris," I said, "Mr. Miller lost his lighter yesterday. He's very sad about it. Did you see it?"

She watched me as I worked at the snarled lace. "I know where it is. It's upstairs."

"In the room where the fire was?"

She nodded. "It's under the bed."

Mrs. Connor still stood at the door, frowning at us.

"Did you put Mr. Miller's lighter there, Doris?" I asked.

"I've got a knot in my other shoe, too," she said.

"Did you put the lighter there, Doris?"

"Yes."

"Just after you set fire to the bed?"

She nodded. "Don't pull too hard or you'll break it."

Mrs. Connor took a step toward us, and now her face did show something, and the thing it showed was terrible to look at.

"Why, Doris?" I asked softly. "Why did you set fire to the bed?"

She reached down to inspect the new bow I'd tied for her. "Because I knew Mommie wanted me to. She was always telling Daddy she hoped he'd set the bed afire. She said it'd

teach him a good lesson. I knew she wanted Daddy punished, to teach him a lesson, and so I —"

"Doris!" Mrs. Connor's voice was just a hissing, incredulous whisper. "Oh, God . . . *Doris!*"

The little girl turned her head to look at her mother, and then suddenly she wriggled out of my arms and ran to her. She threw both arms about her mother's knees, whimpering.

I got to my feet and walked slowly to the door and through it to the hallway.

I went up to Tony Farrell, and after a long moment I said, "Call Communications and tell them to cancel that alarm on Pete Riley. He was just afraid we'd suspect him, that's all."

"Hey! What's happened, Herb?"

I told him, and then we were both sick for a while.



What's Your Verdict?

No. 9—The Domestic Killer

BY SAM ROSS

BIG SAM GRIMSHAW was a well-known figure around Frederick, Alabama. It didn't come as much of a surprise when the cops came knocking at Big Sam Grimshaw's door one day — the whole town knew that he'd as soon kill a man as look at him, and most of the town had avoided any contact whatever with Sam, just to be on the safe side. It wasn't long before the town found out what had happened, and when they did find out they were very much relieved that Sam was going to jail, out of harm's way.

The story went that Tommy Auler, a ten-year-old boy who lived nearby, had decided to pilfer some apples from the fine big tree which Sam and his wife tended in their front yard. Tommy had assumed, apparently, that the Grimshaws were out of town — but when Sam came charging out of the house brandishing a stick as thick as Tommy's wrist, Tommy found out differently. By that time it was too late. Sam started swinging the stick. When he was through, Tommy Auler was dead.

The story added some further de-

tails. Sam, it was said, had disposed of the body by burying it in the Frederick graveyard, under cover of night. But when the police got around to investigating the whole rumor, they couldn't find the body.

Actually, Sam had buried it a few miles out of town, in a vacant lot off the side of the road. Except for that detail, though, the story the townsfolk heard was quite an accurate one.

Sam was taken away to jail. His wife, Ethel, a brass-blonde woman with a voice like a factory-whistle and a temper to match, filed for divorce. It was late in May when the papers came through — and by then Sam was languishing in the city jail, waiting for his murder trial to begin in less than a month.

His lawyer talked things over with him. At first, he said, the case hadn't looked too bad. The only witness the prosecution had was Ethel Grimshaw — and, of course, a wife can't be forced to testify against her husband. But now that the papers on the divorce had come through, she wasn't a wife any more. She was perfectly free to testify — and her

testimony, as Big Sam Grimshaw and his lawyer both knew, would demolish any chance for acquittal. Even if the verdict were second-degree murder, which wasn't very likely, the sentence would be ten years in jail. First-degree murder in Alabama would carry life imprisonment, or the death penalty. None of these alternatives sounded very cheerful to Big Sam.

"But she's not your wife any more," the lawyer said. "You can't stop her from testifying."

"Oh, can't I?" said Big Sam Grimshaw. And after the lawyer had left he began thinking of ways to get on Ethel's good side. There was only one way to keep her from testifying, and that was to marry her again, in a hurry, before the trial opened. He had less than a month. He had to hurry.

That afternoon he wrote a letter to Ethel, an apologetic, tearful letter calculated to wring her heartstrings. Looking at Ethel, anyone in town would have bet she had no heartstrings to wring, but women are always a puzzle, and Ethel was at the jailhouse within forty-eight hours after Sam had written his letter.

"I want you to know," she said, "that I didn't come because I like you. I just wanted to see you suffering for the way you treated me."

"Treated you?" Big Sam asked. "I thought I treated you okay. I thought you were mad because of the Auler kid . . ."

"Oh, you just got angry. He was only a kid, a little brat. But all these years you neglected me and now at last I have a real reason for divorcing you, something a court understands. What do I care about that bratty little Auler kid? It's the way you misunderstood me and ignored me all these years . . ."

The discovery that Ethel was as heartless as he was about the murder made Big Sam feel a lot better. From then on it was easy. Sam played up to Ethel for a week or so and they were all ready to get remarried.

The wedding itself was planned as a simple one — just a small cell wedding, with Sam and Ethel, one of Ethel's buddies and Sam's lawyer acting as witnesses and the local Justice of the Peace doing the honors. It was while the wedding was actually in progress that the prosecution lawyer, a man named Bailey, barged into the cell shouting: "Hey! You can't do this! You can't get married!"

The ceremony stopped dead in its tracks. The Justice said, in a dignified manner: "I am conducting a wedding ceremony here. I'll thank you to remain quiet . . ."

"That's just it!" the prosecution lawyer said. "You can't marry this woman. She's our only witness!"

"Too bad," Big Sam Grimshaw told him. "I'm not proven guilty of anything yet. I'm still free. I can marry anybody I want to. Sorry it messes up your case, but you can't



Bailey was right. As soon as the prosecution lawyer stopped getting panicky he remembered one bit of law: that divorced couples, in Alabama as well as in forty-five other states of the Union, can't remarry for at least sixty days. Since the divorce papers had come through only a week before, there were still over fifty days before Sam and Ethel could marry again. Before that time, the case came up as scheduled, and Ethel's testimony served to send Sam up for life.

She testified, of course, because she was mad at Sam. The prosecutor

had explained to her Sam's only motive for the remarriage.

ANSWER:

expect me to put off my wedding on your account." "Grimshaw's right," said the defense lawyer. "But . . . you can't do it. It's against the law. She's the only witness the State has." "We all feel sorry for the State," the defense lawyer said. "But Grimshaw and his wife want to get married. There's nothing to stop them." Who was right? What's your verdict?

First Case



Miss Petty didn't tell anybody what she was doing. People would have thought she was silly — quitting a job just to attend a murder trial . . .

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

THE SILENCE in the little room shattered like a fragile teacup as the alarm clock clamored its warning that another day had dawned in the monotonous life of Miss Elsie

Petty. As usual, Miss Petty's slender, almost wasted little body, startled by the metal tympani, shot bolt upright in the bed, popping suddenly from the covers as a puppet emerges from the curtains in a Punch and Judy show. Her pale, blue-veined hand sought frantically for the little

lever that would still the clangorous urgency of the whirring mechanism. Miss Petty had dreamed for years that she might some day put by enough money to afford a clock radio so that she could be awakened to the sound of violins instead of the crash of cymbals, but, like all her other small dreams, this one had not come true.

The little furnished room in the house on Charles Street was scrupulously neat and even homelike. Miss Petty had brought the chintz curtains and the slipper chair and the Staffordshire pieces from the apartment she had occupied in more prosperous days.

The good print of the misty Renoir on the wall was hers, too. Mrs. Stearns, the buxom landlady, always said that Miss Petty's room was just the cosiest place and it only went to show that a person of good taste could turn even the smallest amount of living space into a pleasant home if they only would half try. Mrs. Stearns held Miss Petty up as a paragon of neatness to other tenants who were careless about their ashes and left their clothes strewn about for the cleaning woman to pick up.

Miss Petty was prim-looking and near-sighted and gray-haired and you'd have guessed her age at somewhere around sixty. Actually she had recently celebrated her forty-eighth birthday, although it hadn't been much celebration, really. She had eaten her dinner at the Old Rose

Tea Room that night. Dinner at the Old Rose cost a dollar-sixty-five, plus a quarter tip. Miss Petty usually ate at the Co-Op Cafeteria where you could get a nice nourishing meal for under a dollar if you ordered carefully.

Miss Petty sighed with relief as the demanding clatter of the alarm clock was finally stilled. She sat up in bed, her thin arms hugging her knees, and looked out her one window at the tree. The tree was shrouded in the early-morning mist of autumn and its branches had the gnarled and naked look of a spindly old man. The tree and Miss Petty had been friends for years now, ever since she had lost her copy-writing job at the advertising agency and given up her apartment on West Eleventh Street. There had been a tree outside her window back in Sandusky when she was a girl, she recalled.

Miss Petty reflected that it would be pleasant to slide down under the comforter again. The house was never quite warm at seven-thirty. There was really no hurry today. The trial would not begin till ten o'clock. But she didn't dare let Mrs. Stearns know she had given up her job. Mrs. Stearns would be horrified. After Miss Petty had lost her job at the agency, she'd got another, at much less salary, in the advertising department of Bernstein's Store. Then a few years ago, she'd lost that, too, and there had been weeks and weeks of looking for something

else and Mrs. Stearns had been patient about the rent. Bernstein's had finally hired her as a saleswoman in the bargain basement.

And now she had quit her job for no reason at all except that she wanted to attend a murder trial. Mrs. Stearns would never understand. Miss Petty would have to leave the house at the usual hour, as she had the past three mornings, so Mrs. Stearns wouldn't know. She had a hundred and eighteen dollars in the savings bank and she thought that would last a month if she was careful. The trial would almost certainly end today. Tomorrow she would scan the classified and try to find another job — somewhere.

It would have seemed incredible to the practical Mrs. Stearns that little Miss Petty would sacrifice the only security she had on earth for so frivolous a reason. It was a very ordinary murder trial and it hadn't been given more than an inch or two of space in the papers. It was the case of a penniless Puerto Rican girl named Maria Valdez who had smothered her new-born illegitimate child. Miss Petty had never heard of Maria Valdez before.

Miss Petty read the papers very thoroughly, for her whole life was lived vicariously. That is why she had happened to see the stick of type at all:

FAMED LAWYER'S SON TO DEFEND MURDERESS

Winston Knight, Jr., son of

the criminal lawyer who has been defense counsel at several of the most sensational murder trials of the last decade, has been appointed by the court as counsel for Maria Valdez, 20, accused of smothering her illegitimate infant child to death in a Harlem tenement.

It is the first important trial at which the younger Knight has appeared as counsel.

I had to see him, Miss Petty told herself. After all, he was almost my son. I had to know if he looked like Winston, if he had Winston's straight nose and fine eyes and curly hair and charm of manner.

Miss Petty had never attended a trial at which the elder Knight, who had been her lover long ago, had appeared. Curiously, she had never felt the slightest urge to see Winston in court. She had never loved anyone else, of course. But she had not continued to love Winston, either, after it was over. She simply felt nothing at all. That was the trouble. She felt nothing. She had shrivelled up because there was no inner core of warmth from which she could draw nourishment. That was why she had contributed no more of her sensitive little stories to the *avant-garde* magazines. That was why they had ceased to regard her as a promising young copy-writer at the agency. They said the copy she wrote about women's clothes and perfumes and Mediterranean cruises

had lost its sparkle. They'd assigned her drab tasks of writing factual words about kitchen utensils and laundry soaps instead. They'd never promoted her and finally they had fired her.

She had come to New York City out of Sandusky in that wonderful golden-hot summer of 1928 when the old Waldorf and its Peacock Alley were still at Thirty-fourth and Fifth and Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* began in the afternoon, had an intermission for dinner, and then began again and ran on into the night. She had moved at once to a little place in the Village, because she wanted to be a part of the wondrous world of writing and she thought that Greenwich Village was the center of the arts. She had been twenty-one then and although she had not been stupidly proud of such a sterile thing as chastity, she had been determined she would not give her clean body sordidly to some awkward, sweaty swain who wanted nothing more than animal release from her.

She had been in New York two months and she had her job at the agency and she had already sold one of the sensitive little stories to an *avant-garde* magazine for ten dollars and six free copies when she first met Winston Knight. He was the most overpoweringly masculine male she had ever encountered and yet there was a sweet, shy part of him that had been as endearing as his physical qualities were overwhelming. He

was a few years older than Elsie and was beginning his last year at Columbia Law School that autumn.

It was not exactly a whirlwind courtship. They had seen a lot of each other, though, and they had grown close gradually, at theaters, in little restaurants and speakeasies, and finally in her apartment. Winston's family was socially prominent and rich and he had taken her to the best places. Tony's, on Fifty-second Street, was her favorite. "Imagine!" she had written a girl friend in Sandusky. "Little Elsie sitting at a table right next to Tallulah Bankhead and big, shabby Heywood Broun just across the room, drinking rickeys and jotting down notes for his column!"

And then it had happened. She had gone to a doctor first before she told Winston. And it was true: she was going to have a baby.

She had been almost deliriously exultant about her pregnancy. She wanted the baby more than she had ever wanted anything, even more than she had wanted Winston. She knew what Winston would do, of course. He would insist upon marrying her right away. He was really quite conventional at base. But she would have been just as happy to have his baby outside wedlock. It was having Winston and being with him and bearing his child (she was sure it would be a boy) that counted. If he had wanted her to live with him without marriage, she would have done so, unquestioningly.

But Winston had not wanted that. And he had not wanted to marry her, either. Instead of being wildly happy about the wonderful thing that was happening to them, as she was, he had been downright terrified at the prospect of becoming a father. He had told her that if she had the baby and he married her he would have to quit law school and that his family would cut him off entirely. And his career would be ruined before it even began. The odd, dazed look had begun to come into her eyes then. Often, Mr. Briggs, the floor manager at Bernstein's, would be speaking to her and he would interrupt himself to say: "Miss Petty, please! Do you understand me? You have that far-away look in your eyes again!"

Her eyes, that had once been blue and gay as bachelor buttons, had begun to die that December day in 1928 when she told Winston about the baby, and they had been dead eyes ever since.

She had told him that day that he need not marry her, that she did not want money, even. All she wanted was to have his baby. But he had used all the persuasive powers that were later to make him the nation's foremost trial lawyer. He had said they must get rid of the baby, the baby that wasn't even born. He had made it sound as simple as dropping a sack of kittens into a pond.

There were certain arrangements he had to make, and they took time. They lasted over Christmas. She

had spent that Christmas alone in the house on West Eleventh Street, she remembered. She had not cried. She sat stiffly by the window, staring out at the snow flurries. The presents her family had sent from Sandusky were piled on a table, their snowy tissue festooned with bows and sprigs of holly. She did not open the presents for weeks.

That was Elsie Petty's first Christmas in New York.

Winston had come to take her to the brownstone house just before the New Year of 1929. It was all arranged, he said. She was not to worry. The house was on West Eighty-eighth Street, near the Drive. It was a very ordinary New York brownstone with the comfortable ugliness of Nineteenth Century architecture.

That nice Mrs. Myers, who had worked with Miss Petty in Bernstein's, had worried about Elsie's lonely life and had asked her to come up for dinner one night. As Mrs. Myers told it later, Miss Petty had "brightened up" and seemed quite eager to come until she'd found that Mrs. Myers lived on West Eighty-eighth Street, near the Drive. Then she'd gone pale as death and had clapped her hand to her mouth and cried, "Oh, I couldn't go *there!*"

"I'll tell you," Mrs. Myers had said, "the poor old thing is *touched.*"

The interior of the house Winston had taken her to that cold winter day was gloomy with heavy Victorian furniture and there had been

a grim-looking, middle-aged woman with heavy eyebrows who wore a nurse's uniform. There was a spot of red on the nurse's uniform and when Elsie stared at it, fascinated, the nurse had laughed. "Don't be frightened, dearie," she said. "It's only catsup. I was eating a sandwich in the kitchen."

The doctor was an old man who did not look like a doctor at all except he wore a white coat. His hands had not seemed clean to Elsie, even after he had sterilized them, and they trembled. His breath was sour with liquor.

They had made her remain in bed in the house for two days after that, in a tiny room with a slanting attic ceiling and an old-fashioned marble-top washstand. There'd been a picture on the wall, a steel engraving of a St. Bernard dog.

Once, years later, she had met a man in Washington Square Park who had a St. Bernard on a leash and she had barely managed to keep herself from fainting or screaming aloud.

Sometimes Miss Petty wondered if she was really crazy. She loved all animals, yet the sight of a big, clumsy, sad-eyed dog had almost driven her into hysterics. She had developed such a phobia that she would never venture much farther uptown than Columbus Circle at Fifty-ninth Street. And the mere sight of catsup made her want to vomit.

After she had finally left the brownstone house, Winston had

tried frantically to see her, but she had put him off. The dead look had settled permanently in her eyes by then and she felt nothing. Finally Winston did not attempt to see her any more. Soon after he received his law degree he married a pretty girl whose picture often appeared in the society pages. The next year they had a son, Winston, Jr. Winston had not taken the pretty girl whose picture appeared in the society pages to the brownstone house.

Miss Petty decided she could afford to stay in bed a little longer. She had kept to her working schedule religiously during the first three days of the trial and tomorrow she would have to rise early again to make the dreary rounds in seeking a new job. If I see Mrs. Stearns, she told herself, I'll just say I overslept the alarm. Even a drudge like me has a right to oversleep once a year.

She had been sorely disappointed so far in the boy who might have been her son. He had not made it clear to the jury how much the poor, dark-faced girl was suffering, what torture it had been for her to kill the unwanted baby. If he had really been her son, a part of her as well as a part of Winston, he would have known. He would have felt the girl's anguish so deeply that he could have made the jurors feel it, too. He could have persuaded them that it was not within their power to punish Maria Valdez more and that it would be inhuman to attempt to do so.

Miss Petty felt that the young

man who might have been her son had failed dismally so far. But she was sure he would redeem himself today. He was saving his impassioned revelation of the girl's suffering for the final summing-up.

He knows, Miss Petty assured herself. He knows, and he can convince the jury. He knows, because he's part of Winston and he was almost part of me.

Miss Petty dressed herself carefully in the cheap, neat clothes she bought at a thirty per cent discount in Bernstein's. She cooked an egg and boiled water for her instant coffee on the electric plate.

On the first day of the trial she had arrived very early and she'd had to wait for them to open the doors of the room in the Criminal Court. She had wanted to make sure of getting a seat near the front. But it wasn't necessary to arrive early. Few persons were interested in the fate of the dark girl named Maria Valdez. The courtroom had been more than half-empty on all the three days of the trial.

Miss Petty arrived at the courtroom at exactly ten o'clock and took a seat near the front where she could observe Winston Knight, Jr., closely.

The younger Knight resembled his father. He might even have been the law school student Miss Petty had met back in 1928. His hair was not quite so curly. His nose tipped up somewhat disdainfully where Winston's nose was straight-moulded. And the eyes were a little

harder than the fine eyes of the boy Elsie Petty had known. Miss Petty also felt that the elusive little quality of boyish shyness that had endeared Winston to her was lacking in his son. But she was confident the young man was good, that he had heart and soul and sensitivity and compassion. He would make the jury understand because he understood himself. He would save this poor girl with the dark face and dead, dazed eyes who sat beside him.

Miss Petty looked sadly at the Puerto Rican girl named Maria Valdez. The newspapers that had bothered to mention her at all had called her "sullen." But Miss Petty knew the dark girl was not sullen. The dark-faced girl was dead, just as Miss Petty herself had been dead for more than a quarter of a century. The girl's eyes looked straight ahead as her young attorney whispered to her. Did she hear his words? Miss Petty wondered. She thought of the floor manager at Bernstein's.

"Miss Petty, please! You have that dazed look again!"

The judge had not yet arrived from his chambers but the jury was filing into the box. Miss Petty peered through her spectacles at the jurors and studied their faces. There was a middle-aged woman with a gaunt face and sad eyes. *We can depend upon her*, Miss Petty's mind was telling the young defense counsel. *She has suffered and she will understand.*

There was a small, elderly man whose pink, bald skull was fringed with tufts of gray and who wore an expression of false cheeriness. *He is dangerous.* Miss Petty's mind warned Winston Knight, Jr. *You must be eloquent to convince him. He's the kind who laughs too readily. Life is all on the surface for him. It will be hard to make him understand the girl.*

There was a small commotion in the court. Necks strained toward the door, and there was the soft murmuring that always pays tribute to the appearance of a celebrity. A middle-aged, robust, faultlessly tailored man was entering the room. An aura of assurance seemed to accompany him as he strode across the room and took a place beside the defendant's counsel.

It was Winston.

Winston Knight, Sr., the famous criminal lawyer.

The man who had taken Elsie Petty to the brownstone house that cold winter day in 1928.

He's changed, Miss Petty thought. He's heavier. There's gray at his temples. And his face is florid, as if he drinks a bit too much. The little hint of shyness that was so appealing once is gone, too. He's hard now, hard and sure. But I would have known him. I would have known him anywhere.

The distinguished lawyer turned slightly in his seat at the counsel table and beamed at the people in the courtroom, as if he were ac-

knowledging their murmured tributes, their recognition of him. For a fleeting second he looked directly into the pinched face of the little old lady who sat near the front. Elsie Petty returned his gaze.

He did not know her. She was another stranger to him.

Winston bent his head and spoke earnestly to his son and to others at the table. He paid no attention to the dark girl with the dead eyes. He barely glanced at her. It was plain that to him this was a well-rehearsed performance in which his son was the central figure. The girl charged with murdering her infant child was merely an incidental character in the cast. She did not count.

The judge came to the bench, the robe of justice billowing about him, and Miss Petty thought he seemed to float toward his high place as if borne on a scudding dark cloud. He was a lean man, with a stern, intelligent face. He is fair, Miss Petty thought. He is fair, according to his lights. But to him the rules are everything. He will interpret the rules as if they were the laws of God instead of the laws of men. He has no true understanding of the dead-eyed girl. He is like my father, Miss Petty thought. My father was honest and upright and he could never have understood the thing that happened in the brownstone house or the girl it happened to, even though she was his daughter.

A fragile old man with an ascetic's

face was beating with a gavel and the thin piping of his voice was informing them that the court was now in session and the case of The People Against Maria Valdez was being tried.

The People, Miss Petty thought. Who were The People? The old man made The People sound as if they were some darkly menacing nightmare figure waiting to pounce upon a frightened girl and tear her to shreds. But The People were not like that. The People were not just a rubber-stamp on a legal document. The People were human beings like herself who pursued small aims through the gray monotony of their daily lives and The People felt compassion because they, too, had suffered, just as she had suffered, just as the dark girl who was the object of their wrath had suffered. The People, who were made to sound so ominous and frightening when the fragile old man reduced them to rounded syllables, were the only hope. The People were capable of understanding if only the boy who could have been her son would explain it properly.

The time had come.

The handsome young man was rising to the defense, approaching the jury box for his final plea, for the summing-up.

He seemed almost as assured as his father had seemed when he strode through the courtroom. This disturbed Miss Petty. The jurors might mistake his assurance for arro-

gance or even for contempt. He had a hard task and he should approach it with humility, with full consciousness of the gravity of the thing he had to do.

It was a tremendous thing he had to do, and suddenly, despairingly, Miss Petty knew the young man was not equal to it. He had to take The People out of the jury box and place them in the prisoner's chair and make them lose their separate identities and their mass identity as The People and become for a moment the dark girl who had killed her child. A moment would be enough. Miss Petty had lived the suffering of the dark girl for more than a quarter of a century but a moment would be enough for the jurors who had suddenly become The People.

Young Winston Knight's voice was deep and musical and impressive. His enunciation was clear and clipped. As a lawyer arguing points of law, he was convincing, superb. But Miss Petty knew that this had nothing at all to do with points of law. This was a case of a compassionate human being who had to explain another human being and make The People understand.

In such a role this handsome young man was completely and utterly a failure.

He was speaking now of the findings of psychiatrists who had examined the dark girl and he was mouthing the scientific jargon that bearded doctors in Vienna had written into textbooks. The jurors

followed him politely with no expression in their eyes.

He was telling them at length of the definition of legal insanity as if a set of rules propounded by learned judges could chart the dark paths of the human mind and erect boundary posts in the mazes men call madness. The jurors' eyes were glazed with boredom, for the district attorney had told them all this already in a different way.

And then he dwelt upon precedents of law and this was his greatest mistake, for you could sense that the jurors resented his gloating over old cases in which The Defense had triumphed and The People had been beaten. You could almost hear the jurors saying to themselves, "But that was The People Against Corey in 1919. This is a different People and a different time. We are The People now and we know our duty and you shan't persuade us from discharging it."

Miss Petty was screaming silently at the assured young man.

No! No! This is not the way. Tell them about the girl. Tell them to look into her dead eyes. Tell them how all her life kindly people will look at her solicitously and say, "Are you ill, my dear? You have such a queer expression." And how rude people will snap their fingers at her and cry, "Hey! You asleep? You got a dopey look, kind of."

Tell them about the room where she killed the child. There must have been some features she remembers. A

hole in the rug or a crack in the ceiling. There must have been a picture on the wall, a picture of a house or a flower or a sad-eyed dog. And perhaps there was a bottle of catsup on a shelf. Tell them how those simple, homely things will haunt her.

Suddenly Miss Petty knew for sure that this young man could not tell them because he did not know and he could not understand.

There was only one young man who could have saved the dark girl with the dead eyes. He had been her son and they had murdered him in a brownstone house a long, long time ago.

It took the jury only seventeen minutes to bring in the expected verdict.

Knight clutched his son's shoulder tightly. "Don't take it hard, boy," he said. "It was impossible from the start. You did your best, all that anyone could do. And don't forget, your old man lost *his* first case, too."

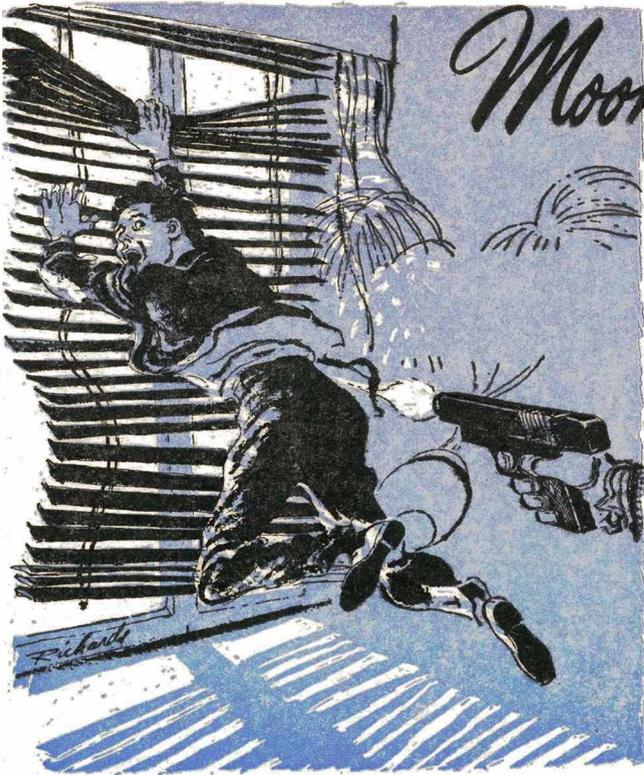
A woman was screaming.

The young lawyer turned a startled face toward the old lady who had been sitting near the front. She had risen and was pointing a thin, trembling finger at his father.

"Murderer!" she screamed. "Murderer! Murderer!"

The young man said, "What the . . . What on earth? Who *is* she?" His father shrugged.

"Some crazy old woman," he replied. "You get a lot of crazy people at murder trials."



The guy left Jim's house just as Jim came home. He could have been a delivery man — but Jim didn't think so . . .

BY GIL BREWER

SHE WOULDN'T be expecting me home from work this early. I'd planned on that. I parked the coupé four houses down, got my lunch pail off the seat, and started along the sidewalk. It looked all right down there. Our five-year-old twins,

Denise and Danny, were playing around a palm tree with young Gregory from next door.

I began walking on the grass, watching the front bedroom window; the Venetian blinds. Luckily the kids didn't see me, and then

the blinds flicked open and shut. I walked a little faster around the side of the house, by the Australian pine hedge. I didn't want to run.

The back door slammed and I heard him running like hell for the alley. I came around the side of the house and saw a flash of yellow sweater. The alley gate was still swinging. A car door whammed shut, and he gunned it down the alley, out of sight in a rattling shower of gravel.

He figured he'd made it again. Well, I stood there and it all washed around inside me like a kind of filthy sludge. For too long, I'd asked myself what I was supposed to do. Now I knew this had happened once too often.

I went inside. Supper wasn't on yet, and she was in there parked on the couch, knitting. She sure could knit.

"Oh," she said. "You home already, honey?"

I carefully set my lunch pail on the shelf in the kitchen and went over to the sink. For a moment I just stood there, hanging onto the edge of the sink, staring down at the drain, remembering all those things you try so hard to forget. Finally, I washed my hands, dried them, combed my hair and walked into the living room.

She was humming and knitting. She glanced up and smiled. The guilt was all through her. You could smell it. Her lipstick was on a bit cockeyed. She was barefoot and I

knew she didn't have a stitch on under that red skirt. I always wondered how she kept her smooth blonde hair combed at times like this; maybe they had it worked so she could put her head in a box, or something.

"You surprised me," she said.

I sat down and looked at her.

"Supper isn't ready," she said. "I'll get right at it. How come you're early?"

"Never mind supper just yet."

She laid down her knitting, smiling and humming, not looking at me.

"You see the children?" she said.

"No. Where are they? They weren't around the house."

She jumped up, a little frantic, but not really showing it. Most of the time she had everything under control. But I had studied her for a long while. She was easy to read. She went over by one of the front windows, then turned grinning.

"You kidder," she said. "They're right out there."

"Oh, are they?"

She walked past me, breezing the way they do, humming again. I watched her hips sway back and forth under that red skirt. I knew what I had to do, but I wondered whether it should be him or her?

"Where's the car?" she called from the kitchen. "Didn't hear you drive in, Jim."

"I parked it down the block."

There was a long silence and she rattled some pans. She was troubled. "Why ever did you do that?"

“It was heated up.”

She came bouncing back into the living room, holding her hair flat against her head with both hands. She was wearing one of my T-shirts.

“I clean forgot!” she said. She ran over and slipped onto my lap. Her lipstick was very neat now. “You were going to trade it in today. That’s why you’re home so early. You didn’t go yet?”

Hell, I thought. She wants to call him back. So, right then I made up my mind.

“No,” I said. “I’m just going. Can you hold supper?”

“Sure.”

Her body was really hot under her clothes.

“It’ll be swell for the kids,” she said, “having a larger car. Things are so tight in the coupé.”

“Maybe we should keep both cars,” I said.

She went for that. She kissed me and hugged me. She was thrilled. I thought about how much better back seats were and said, “I could use the coupé for work and leave the other one home, so you could run errands and stuff.”

She got carried away. I shoved her off my lap. You’d think she’d be a little tired because she didn’t eat much.

I went into the bedroom and got out my key and unlocked my foot locker. It hadn’t been tampered with. I just looked at my .45 automatic there, for a minute, kind of holding my breath. Then I picked

it up. It was loaded. I stuck it in my jacket pocket, closed the foot locker and went into the living room.

“Did you want something?” she said.

“No. I’ll run along.”

She was practically dancing, standing still. She wanted to make contact with him again, so I’d have to hurry like hell.

Out front, I ran for the car, got in and drove away thinking about the kids. I headed fast for this gin mill over on Tangerine. He was there every day at this hour. I found him at the bar, alone, working on some port wine. When he saw me come in, he choked, turned red, and you could see him think of the back door. Then he pulled the nonchalant act.

“Hi,” I said. “How you doing?”

“Oh, great!”

“Give me a beer,” I said to the barman. “Draft. You have another?” I said to him, turning and looking straight into those baby blue eyes. I honest to God could smell her on him.

“Well, no,” he said. “I gotta be running.”

“Stick around, have a drink.” I made it imperative, bending it a little tight and banking on his character.

“Well, O. K.,” he said. He laughed, looked at the barman and wiped a long finger of black hair out of his eyes. “Yeah, gimme another port.” He turned to me, tight dungarees, tight yellow sweater over

his broad shoulders, white teeth and all. "How's it going?" He was breathing hard.

"All right."

For a minute I thought *he* was going to hum.

We got our drinks. He had stubby fingered hands and they were shaky. He was sweating a lot, but it was a cool early evening. Twilight marched down Tangerine.

"I'll have to be going right after this," he said.

"Stick around. What's there to do?"

He grinned. "Yeah," he said. "This town's real dead."

"All how you look at it."

We sat there a while and I kept thinking about Denise and Danny, remembering how they looked playing in the front yard. The barman was picking his teeth, staring out the window, waiting for the after-supper crowd.

"Everybody's eating," he said. "Guess I should ought to go eat." He stretched and yawned, turned around on his bar stool.

"No supper for me tonight."

"No?" He held it, sticking to the bar stool. "How come?" He yawned. He was forcing a lot of yawns.

"Fight with the wife," I said. "Think I'll run over to Tampa. Change my luck. I know a good place."

He thought that over.

He laughed, nudged my arm. "Not going home and smooth it over, eh?"

"The hell with that," I said.

There was a good long silence. I ordered another beer and another wine for him before he could do anything. I decided to bank on his character all the way.

"I should really get going," he said.

I'll bet, I thought. She's called him and he doesn't know what in hell to do. She figured she's got maybe an hour. There were some blonde hairs sticking to his yellow sweater, and he had the short sleeves of the sweater rolled up tight against his shoulders. There was a red smear of lipstick on his left shoulder, and in my mind's eye I could see her lips putting it there. He was some filthy character, all right.

But you could tell he really didn't want to go. He wanted to sit right here and drink with me. Can you beat that? We were like brothers, I suppose; something, anyway. He couldn't help himself now. He had to stay with me. Maybe he was just nuts, I couldn't tell.

"You remember my wife," I said. "You met her when you worked in that gas station, remember?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure — now I remember. Blonde, nice-looking blonde." He drank some of his wine, turned and grinned. The black hair was in his eyes again. Everything was rosy now. He was sure I knew nothing. This was going to be a hot one to tell the boys, all right. "Hell," he said. "It's silly, you wanting to stay away from *her*."

I shrugged. "Wait'll you're married."

"I suppose so. I suppose you can even get tired of your wife."

You louse, I thought. You dirty louse, you're talking too much.

I swallowed. "Sure," I said. "I know a couple good ones over in Tampa. Real nice, full of fun. Full of everything." I forced a laugh and drank some beer. "Say," I said. "Why don't you come along? This blonde I know of, she goes for guys like you. Black hair. We could make a night of it."

"Yeah?"

"Sure," I said. "She'll make your toenails curl up."

"Well, I don't know."

I looked at the clock over the bar. "We can get going early."

"I'm broke."

"Hell, I just got paid."

"I can't use your money."

"I'm going to spend it anyway," I said, thinking about his wonderful ethics and then how he didn't have to worry about money at all. "You want something that'll dry out your eyeballs, let's get going."

I knew he was thinking, This is a hell of a one. Wait'll I tell her about this.

"I already called the one I plan to meet," I told him. "She said something about her girl friend not having a date, so it's a cinch." I winked at him. "Date, hell," I said. "Your nose won't run for a week."

"What'll we do," he said. "Take both cars?"

"No. We'll take my car."

"I got a sedan."

"They know my car. Besides, we won't be in a car."

After we were on Fourth Street, heading out toward Gandy Bridge, he got a little quiet. The wine was wearing off and he was leaving his stamping grounds. He was conscious of being with the husband of the woman he was sleeping with at least once a day.

"Maybe I ought to stop off home," he said. "These clothes. I ought to put on some clean clothes."

"Where you're going, you won't need clothes," I said. "You won't wear any clothes."

I grinned at him but he didn't say anything.

We came along past all the bright-colored motels and trailer parks, the beer joints and the alligator farms. After a while, we were nearing the bridge. I turned the car off on a dirt road that slanted through some jungle toward the bay. I could feel the sweat beginning under my shirt and my palms were slippery on the wheel.

He went along with it, but he was scared, right off.

Finally, he said, "Where we going?" He tried to make it nonchalant.

"A fishing camp, down here. I just want to stop for a minute. I told a friend of mine I'd go out with him tomorrow morning. Have to put it off."

"Oh, hell, yes. You won't want to fish."

I didn't say anything. It was as if everything were ordered and there was nothing I could do about it. It wasn't too good. You feel as if you might burst, yet you feel numb, and dark around the eyes.

The road began to peter out in the jungle. It was a noisy stretch through here, bull frogs, crickets, birds screeching. It was night now and the headlights cut a bright swath in darkness and then the road quit altogether.

"He's right up through here," I said. "We'll have to walk the rest of the way."

"I'll just wait for you."

"No. Come on along. I'll introduce you to him. Fix it so you can get a free boat — any time you want to go fishing."

He said he didn't fish. He cleared his throat. "I'll just wait here."

I went around and opened the door on his side.

"Come on," I said. "We can get a drink. He always has a drink handy. Moonshine. It's terrific stuff."

"Yeah?"

"Hell, yes. Come on, now."

He couldn't very well do anything else, because I was going to stand right there and argue with him till he came. He sensed that. I give him that much credit. He got out and I slammed the door.

"Watch your step," I said. "Snakes, you know?"

"Oh, yeah — snakes."

We came along a path in the jungle. You could smell the sulphur

from the bay. The crickets were so loud the noise got in your ears. We came along until there was a break in some mangroves.

"Right through here," I said. "Just down a ways."

"How in hell does anybody find his place?"

I didn't even answer now. The hell with it. We came out onto the beach. The crabs streamed away from us on the stinking gray sands, like waves of dry leaves. It was as though even the crabs knew what was going on and didn't want any part of me. You could hear the water licking at the shore.

"Well," I said, "brother. How you like the moonshine?"

He stared at me. The moon was big and white and bright on his face and his mouth was open. The moon was in my throat. I took out the forty-five and watched the fear grow in him until it winked in his eyes.

"What are you doing!" he said. His voice went shrill and it was like his eyes screamed too.

I shot him twice in the face. He fell down. I stood there looking at the gun in my hand, listening to the echo of the explosions rattle out across the bay. The crickets had ceased. Then one by one they picked up their song again and the water gurgled on the sands. I flipped the safety on and put the gun in my jacket pocket, thinking about her back there at the house and of how it had once been, and now this.

I stripped naked and hauled him out in the bay. I swam as far as I could. He was a heavy load. Finally I could feel the tide. There's a really strong tide by Gandy Bridge. With any luck he'd sail right out into the Gulf — but it didn't really matter.

I came back and dressed and got the car and drove toward town. Maybe there was a chance, now. Maybe she would be all right, and the kids would be all right. We would be together and everything would be all right — the way we should be.

When I reached the gin mill on Tangerine Avenue, there were two or three guys at the bar.

"Say," I said to the barman. "You seen that bird I was drinking with a little while ago? He went home, said he'd meet me here. He come back?"

"He didn't come back," the barman said.

"Well, he comes back, you tell him it's all off for tonight. I got to get on home. O. K.?"

I went on out and drove home and parked the car in the carport. She came running out into the living room as I entered the front door.

"Oh," she said. "It's you."

The kids were playing at the far end of the living room. I went over there and grabbed them up, one in each arm, holding them as tight as I could. It went all through me.

"Hi, Daddy!" Denise said. She gave me a big wet kiss.

"Everything's fine," I said to the

kids, putting them down again. "You hear?"

My wife said, "The — uh, did you get the car?"

I turned and looked at her, then walked over to where she was standing.

"No. I figured you should come along, too."

"Oh," she said. "That's nice. Yes. Sure." She swatted her hips back and forth beneath that red skirt, just standing there. Then she breezed by me toward the kitchen, paused, turned and looked back at me. She was some woman, all right.

I wondered what in hell was the matter with her. She looked troubled.

"Supper ready?" I said.

"I thought I ought to wait for you," she said. "I didn't know when you'd get back."

"All right."

I started for the bedroom. She took two quick steps toward me, then stopped, one hand up, grinning.

"Something the matter?"

"No, I was just going to ask you what you wanted for supper." She swallowed, watching me.

"Anything," I told her. "Anything at all."

She kept on watching me. Hell. I went into the bedroom. It was dark and the moonlight came through the Venetian blinds in ribbons of bright white. I went over to the closet and stood there, taking off my jacket. I got it off, took the

gun out of the pocket and reached in and hung the jacket on a man's face.

He busted out of there and rammed into me. He turned toward the wrong side of the room, heading for the window. I shot him in the back. He fell over against the bed and drooped there, dying. I went over and looked at him. He sprawled onto the floor, dead. One of his heels kept scraping as his leg straightened out. His face was in the moonlight. It was a guy who lived two blocks down from our house. I remembered seeing him talking to my wife in the front yard once. He didn't have a car. I kept looking at him, knowing everything was gone now — everything.

"Jim!" my wife said. "Jim!"

She was in the doorway and the kids were trying to push past her.

"Get out of here," I said. I herded them into the living room. The kids kept trying to run back into the bedroom. I had the gun in my hand and I had done the other one for my kids and now things were getting out of hand. They kept trying to get past me into the bedroom.

She looked at me, her face white as the moonlight, her mouth torn with fright.

The kids were laughing. They thought it was a game. They kept trying to rush past me into the bedroom.

"I took care of the other one, too," I said. "The one that was the gas station attendant? He was here

this afternoon?" I hesitated. "I didn't know what to do about this one."

She began to cry, standing there with her hands stiff along her sides, the tears busting out of her face.

"I did it for the kids," I said.

She sobbed and went on crying, standing stiff and straight, with my T-shirt on and the red skirt mussed and wrinkled and the lipstick smeared and sweat on her upper lip and her forehead. Her hair was mussed a little, too. Not much, though.

"It's got out of hand," I said.

She kept on crying, standing there and she began to tremble all through her body.

"Can't you see?" I said, trying to explain something that I could never explain to her. "It's hopeless, it's all gone. The kids and all, and us. All gone to hell. You had too many of them, ramming through here, all the time." My voice got hoarse and I knew I wasn't reaching her. "I couldn't stand it. You see?"

Her head began to bob up and down.

She whirled and ran for the kitchen. I went after her, caught her arm, turned her around. I let go of her and she began to get real wild.

"Please!" she cried. "Jim — I'll do anything!"

Now, just what the hell could she do? She'd done it all, there wasn't anything left. I shot her. She started to scream but it changed into a kind of hot bubbling. She fell down.

The kids went quiet. They walked over by me and stood there looking at her on the floor.

“Daddy,” Denise whispered. “Why did you do that?”

I couldn’t speak. I couldn’t even think right. I checked the clip in the gun and my hand was trembling, and then it was real steady. I didn’t dare look at the kids. I went into the bedroom and stepped over him and got into the footlocker. I loaded the clip and socked one into the breach.

“Daddy,” Denise said. “What you doing?”

I began to talk wild and crazy. I got down there on the floor and held my kids and I could hear my voice spilling all kinds of crazy stuff. I kept sweating and talking and trying to tell them that everything was all right.”

“Is Mommy sick?” Danny said.

“Daddy,” Denise said, squirming in my arms. “What’s the matter with Herbie?”

“What?” I said. “What? Who’s Herbie?”

“There, on the floor,” Denise said. “That’s Herbie. We ain’t s’posed to tell. Is Mommy sick?”

I stood up and looked at my kids. It was all gone and there wasn’t any use.

I was shaking just a little bit, light and easy, and when I spoke, the shaking was in my voice.

“Here,” I said. I went over and sat on the bed. I looked at them and they looked at me. You could hear the crickets outside in the grass. “You two kids stand there by the dresser. That’s it, right there. Now, stand still. We’ll all be together in a minute.”

I lifted the gun. Moonlight was bright on their faces.



THE TALKATIVE barber may be a cliché of fiction, but Robert S. James, owner of a six-chair shop at Eighth and Olive Streets in downtown Los Angeles, was one in real life. His customers were on the receiving end of a non-stop flow of one-way conversation during which he discoursed freely on politics and women, on sports and women, on foreign affairs and women, and sometimes, just to vary the monotony, on only one topic — women.

At the age of 39, with five

The Bite



marriages to his credit, the red-haired master barber considered himself an authority on his favorite subject. Many of his listeners were inclined to agree.

On Monday, August 5th,

The police were suspicious, but the barber couldn't have killed his wife. He was miles away when she died.

BY EDWARD D. RADIN

he added a new topic to his list. Arriving at his customary time of 8:30 in the morning, he soon spread word that Mary, his bride of three months, was going to have a baby.

"Just think," he boasted. "Four other wives and no kids and I was wondering if there was something wrong with me. Now I'm going to be a father."

The news was of more than passing interest to his regular clients. Until her recent marriage, Mary Busch, a beautiful and shapely tall blonde, had worked in the barber shop as a manicurist.

During the afternoon, James telephoned the news to Jim Pemberton and Viola Luecks, friends of his bride, and arranged to drive them to his home for a surprise visit and an impromptu celebration. "Mary hasn't been feeling well," he confided. "She's been getting dizzy spells and needs cheering up."

It was shortly after 8 o'clock that night when James, accompanied by his guests, arrived at his home in the north Pasadena hills. The doll-like bungalow, set back some 100 feet from Verdugo Road and screened from the street by lush tropical growth, was in darkness. James blasted his car horn and called out, "Mary, I'm home with Viola and Jim."

There was no answering call and the trio entered the bungalow where James clicked on the lights and looked into the different rooms. He returned with a puzzled frown and

reported, "She's not here. She shouldn't be out in the dark in her condition."

Viola laughed. "In her condition," she mimicked. "She's only six weeks pregnant, so take it easy."

The barber shook his head. "There's no place for her to go. Maybe she got sick while feeding the chickens and rabbits out in the back and fell down." He opened a drawer and removed a flashlight. The couple exchanged amused glances. Pemberton picked up a second flashlight. "Okay, I'll look around the front," he said to humor his host.

It was Pemberton who found Mary. The 27-year-old bride was dead, her head submerged in a shallow concrete ornamental fish pool at the side of the house. James broke into convulsive sobs and had to be restrained from dragging the body from the pool. "It's too late," Pemberton said, shepherding him into the house. "The police will want to see her as we found her."

Deputy Sheriffs J. H. Jones and J. P. Twohey made a quick run from the nearby Montrose sub-station to the bungalow. For once the talkative barber was silent. He sat dazed in a chair, staring with unseeing eyes at the officials. Pemberton answered their questions and led them to the pool.

The officers set up strong portable lights and examined the body. They noticed that Mary was dressed in a flowered housecoat and slippers.

There was a raised concrete border around the pool and her legs stuck up awkwardly in the air. There were no signs of a scuffle around the pool. Her left leg was somewhat discolored and badly swollen.

One of the deputies plunged his hand into the water and looked up in surprise. "Why, it's only eight inches deep."

With prodding, the deputies managed to get James to answer a few questions. He had last seen his wife at seven that morning when he left for his shop. She had made him breakfast but had complained of nausea and of feeling light-headed. Her doctor had explained that it was a common symptom during the early stages of pregnancy.

James added that he had warned his wife to stay away from the pond. She had liked to lean over and watch the colorful goldfish swimming. "I told her not to do it any more because she might get dizzy and fall in," he said, and once again broke into sobs.

Asked about her swollen left leg, he looked blank. "She was all right this morning."

The officers searched the bungalow and found no signs of disorder. They noticed an unsealed envelope on the living room desk, addressed to Mrs. R. H. Stewart, Las Vegas.

"That's Mary's sister," Viola explained.

One of the deputies opened the letter and read it. It was a brief note, reading:

"Dear Sis: Just a line to let you know I am sick. My leg is all swollen. Something bit me while I was watering the flowers. This is old blue Monday, but my daddy will be home early tonight, and he takes good care of me.

Mary"

The officers telephoned a report of their findings to the coroner who directed them to send the body to the morgue pending an inquest. At Pemberton's insistence, James agreed to spend the night with him and the bungalow was locked.

The following morning James appeared to have fully recovered from the shock and was his old loquacious self when he entered headquarters for questioning. Officers had difficulty stemming his torrent of words.

"I want to get the record straight on one thing," he said at the outset. "My real name actually is Major Lisenba. It's awful, so I changed it to Robert S. James years ago."

"Glad you told me," his questioner said, blocking him off. "Now answer a few questions."

His replies merely substantiated what the deputies had learned the previous night.

One new point did emerge. Asked if there was any insurance on his wife, James answered promptly.

"Two five-thousand-dollar policies with different companies, both have double indemnity clauses, and I don't like it."

"Why?" asked the surprised investigator.

"Well, you see, my third wife drowned in Colorado and now my fifth wife. I know cops don't like two things like that, and it puts me on a spot."

James was right. The investigators did not like the coincidence of two drownings and conducted a thorough inquiry. Mrs. James' physician confirmed that she had complained about dizzy spells. A retired English Army officer, who lived next door, told the officers that he had gone to his back yard at 9:30 the previous morning and through the high hedges that separates the property had caught a glimpse of a tall blonde woman with a "nice form," standing near the chicken coops. His description matched that of Mrs. James.

All employees in the barber shop agreed that James had been there all day Monday from 8:30 A.M. until 7 P.M. when he left with his guests.

"Since she was still alive at 9:30 in the morning that puts him in the clear," the investigators reported back to the sheriff.

The autopsy failed to shed any new light. The coroner's physician said that death had been due to drowning and listed acute cellulitis of the left foot as a contributing factor. He explained that cellulitis meant inflammation of certain cells, probably due to a bite of some kind.

"Isn't it unusual for a leg to swell up like that from an insect bite?" he was asked.

"Not necessarily. Some people are very allergic to them."

The inquest also developed nothing new and with no actual witnesses to the mishap the Coroner's Jury returned with the expected open verdict of accident, suicide, or murder. With all the facts pointing to accidental drowning, the case was closed out.

Detective Captain Jack Southard disagreed. Experienced detectives are guided frequently by what they call instinct; actually, it is a feeling that something doesn't quite ring true although they are unable to place their finger exactly on the point that disturbs them. To Southard the case just didn't "smell" right. He thought James might have been a shade too glib in volunteering all that he did. It was if he had been beating the officers to the punch with any surprise information they might dig up against him. Also, he had recovered remarkably fast from his grief, even for a man married five times.

But his fellow officers scoffed at his suspicions. "She was alive at 9:30 Monday morning and he was miles away in his barber shop at that time. You can't get around that fact."

"Witnesses have been mistaken before," Southard pointed out. "That wasn't much water to drown in. All she had to do was lift her head."

"So she fainted and toppled in head first. James suggested that at

the inquest and he probably was right.”

Captain Southard was stubborn. “Water usually revives a person,” he remarked.

He decided to plug away quietly on the case, at least get enough information about the drowning of the third wife to satisfy his curiosity. James had married Winona Wallace, wife No. 3, three years earlier in Los Angeles. Her death had occurred that same year while they were at a cabin in Manitou, Colorado.

Southard wrote to authorities there requesting information. The report he received did nothing to allay his suspicions, even though this one, too, had been closed out as an accident.

The information showed that James had left on a delayed honeymoon with Winona some three months after their marriage. They planned to take a motor trip that would finally bring them to Fargo, North Dakota, Winona’s home town. On their way they made a trip up the famous toll road to Pike’s Peak. Some time after they started down, James suddenly appeared at the toll booth and reported that his wife, who had been driving, had lost control of the car on a sharp turn and it had plunged off the mountain side. He had managed to leap from the car just before it went over.

A rescue party was organized and the car was found caught on a boulder about 150 feet below the

shoulder of the road. Winona was unconscious inside and was rushed to a hospital with skull injuries. State troopers were puzzled by blood stains on the back of her seat and by the presence of a bloodstained hammer lying on the rear seat of the car. The troopers made certain that James remained around until she regained consciousness. But the accident seemed to have blotted out her memory of how it had happened. All she could tell was that she had been driving and the next thing she knew she woke up in the hospital.

Her injuries were not critical and after several days she was released from the hospital. The couple then left for Manitou where they rented a cabin for several days. One afternoon James drove to town to do some shopping and upon his return found Winona dead in the bathtub. He told Colorado investigators that she must have tried to wash her hair in the tub although the doctor who had treated her for the skull injuries warned her that she might faint if she did.

Winona also had carried insurance on her life, \$14,000 worth including the double indemnity.

It was the proceeds of this insurance money that had enabled James to buy his present barber shop.

“Too many coincidences, is right,” Captain Southard murmured when he finished the report. He ticked them off. Two deaths by drowning. Both occurring three months after marriage. And each supposedly due

to a fainting or dizzy spell. Yet, both so logical that each had been closed out as accidental.

Still questing for a lead, Southard visited the barber shop. He noticed that the manicurist was a pretty, 20-year-old brunette with a southern drawl, who glanced frequently at James. The detective captain decided to have a manicure.

He engaged her in small talk and when he observed her send another glance at James, remarked genially, "Say, the boss is a good-looking fellow. Ever go out with him?"

The girl laughed. "Sure, lots of times."

"Too bad about his wife," he said."

"Yes," the girl sighed. "Poor Uncle Bob."

"Uncle Bob?"

"I thought all the customers here knew it," she replied. "He's my uncle, my mother's brother. He brought me up from Alabama several years ago and trained me to take Mary's place when he married her."

Captain Southard let the conversation slide after that. Another dead end.

Insurance companies, echoing the captain's suspicions, refused to pay the policies and in November James brought suit against one of the companies. The firm countered with a claim of fraud on the ground that James had not been legally married to Mary Busch at the time she applied for the policy as Mrs. James.

The barber admitted on the stand

that he had had a fake wedding ceremony performed, hiring a man for \$10 to pose as a minister and read the marriage vows. He explained it away on the grounds that the final decree of his annulment to his fourth wife had not come through. Later, though, he confessed to Mary and on July 19, just 17 days before she died, they went through a legal ceremony in Santa Ana, California. He said Mary had not known of the hoax at the time she applied for the insurance. Afraid to take a chance with a jury after James' statement, plus the fact that he did produce a bona fide marriage certificate, the insurance company settled the case out of court for \$3,500, less than half of the face value of the policy.

The second insurance company, however, elected to fight it out before a jury and won its case.

By now some eight months had passed since Mary's death. The action by the jury, plus James' public admission that he had tricked her with the fake marriage, swung others to Southard's side, and District Attorney Burton Fitts ordered the case officially reopened.

James was questioned once again but he no longer volunteered information nor would he answer many questions.

The officers returned to the task of requesting the original witnesses but all repeated the same story. This time, though, a more thorough check was made in Pasadena hills and the officers interviewed the other

next-door neighbor, Mrs. William Cruickshank. She flatly contradicted the retired English Army officer. She claimed that on the morning of August 5th she had been out on a rear terrace which overlooked the James' backyard and she had not seen her neighbor in the yard at any time that day. She was certain she had been on the terrace at 9:30 when the Englishman said he saw Mrs. James. "I didn't see her and I couldn't have missed her," she insisted.

The English officer was again questioned but he refused to budge from his original statement that he had seen Mrs. James at 9:30 that morning.

"Well, at least one cancels the other," Captain Southard commented. "So it's possible that James may not have an alibi after all."

The captain had been keeping tabs on James and knew that the barber had moved from his honeymoon bungalow to a rented house in the 3800 block on South La Salle Street in Los Angeles proper, where he was living with his niece. The house next door was vacant.

Southard suggested that authorities rent the vacant house next door and plant several dictaphones in James' cottage. If he had murdered Mary and had any accomplices, something might come out.

The plan was put into effect on April 3rd when Southard and Investigator Scott Littleton rented the house next door and moved in.

The following day while James and his niece were at the barber shop, special sound experts from the police department slipped into the cottage and hid two small microphones, one in the bedroom and the other in the living room. Concealed wires were run to the house occupied by the detectives and crews of men were stationed to man the listening posts with recordings to be made of all conversations.

For two weeks the officers maintained a constant vigil but not once did they hear any conversation dealing with Mary's death. However, the officers did learn that James was sleeping with his young niece, a violation of the blood relationship morals law (incest). On Sunday, April 19, when the hidden mike indicated that the couple were in bed, officers crashed in through a bedroom window. James was booked on three morals charges while his niece was detained as a material witness.

The frightened girl said that her family had been very poor in Alabama; they frequently had to accept charity, and she had worked since she was a young child. Shortly after the death of his third wife, James had turned up in his home town for a visit. She had just turned 18 and when her uncle learned her age he suggested to her mother that he bring her to California where she might find a good paying job.

Their love making began on this trip when James registered her as his wife and took a single room on their

first night away from home. They lived together for a month in Los Angeles and he then brought her back home. Some months later he once again brought her to California and this time they lived together until his fake marriage to Mary Busch. During this time she worked for her uncle and for the first six months he paid her no salary, explaining that he wasn't charging her anything for teaching her to be a manicurist. After that he allowed her to keep her earnings, deducting \$15 a month for rent, although she had moved to her own apartment. Several months after Mary had been found in the pool, James told her to move in with him.

Asked why she kept on working for her uncle, the girl said she was afraid of him. But when the officers hopefully turned to the death of Mary they ran into a stone wall. The niece had no information.

The arrest of the five-times-married barber was a page one story in all Los Angeles newspapers and reporters hinted broadly that the prisoner was suspected of having murdered his wife in the fish pond.

Although James was now behind bars, Southard was far from satisfied. He still wanted to prove that James had murdered his fifth wife, and probably his third as well.

Several days after the arrest the owner of a liquor store called on the detective captain. "I know this sounds crazy," he told the officer, "and I don't believe it myself, but

I was just reading about the James case and it reminded me of something."

"Go on," Southard encouraged.

The man said that one morning during the previous summer he had arrived at his place of business to open it up and found a customer waiting for him. The man was shaking and trembling and after buying a bottle of cheap wine almost consumed it with one gulp. He then babbled about having watched a man kill his wife with a rattlesnake. The customer was so incoherent the liquor dealer could make little sense out of his story. He dismissed it as nothing more than the rantings of a man whose mind was clouded by alcohol and forgot about it.

Southard stared at his caller. The story made little sense. "What has this got to do with James?" he asked.

"That's the name he mentioned. I was humoring him, trying to see if I could make head or tail of what he was talking about and I asked him who did it and he said a man named Bob James."

The liquor dealer added that he thought his customer's name was Hope. He knew that he owned a green Buick but had not seen him since that time and didn't know where he lived. He described him as having a flat nose.

A short time later Southard was in conference with Prosecutor Fitts. "This sounds fantastic," he remarked. "Rattlesnakes!" He paused and glanced through his records on

the case. "She did have some kind of a bite on her foot that caused it to swell. But it's still unbelievable."

Southard shrugged. "So if it doesn't pan out, we haven't lost anything."

Fitts continued to look through the file. "Yes, here's the letter she wrote. She said she was bitten by an insect, and the handwriting in the letter is genuine; we had it checked by experts."

When Southard said he was still willing to check on the lead, Fitts assigned his assistant, Eugene D. Williams, to work with the detective captain.

Southard requested the motor vehicle bureau to send him a list of all registered car owners in the Los Angeles area named Hope. The list was surprisingly lengthy. The detective captain refused to delegate the task to his men and, with Investigator Littleton, checked each owner personally. They interviewed several owners of green Buicks but none matched the description of the man furnished by the liquor dealer. After three days just one name remained on the list, a Charles H. Hope on Normandie Avenue. They had called several times at the address, an apartment house, only to be informed that Hope was out of town. This time they found a green Buick with license plates issued to Hope parked in front of the building.

A woman answered their knock on the door and told them that Hope was away.

"But his car's parked out front," Southard replied.

"Oh, I'm using it," she replied.

Inventing a story that they were from the insurance company and had to get in touch with Hope, the Captain asked where he could be reached.

"He's running a café in Hermosa Beach," the woman told them, supplying the address.

A short time later the officers were in the beach town. As they entered the restaurant, Southard and Littleton exchanged glances. A broad-nosed man was behind the counter.

He readily admitted his identity and said he knew Bob James, the barber.

Wondering what would be the best approach, Southard decided on a frontal attack, and told Hope that he was arresting him for the murder of Mary James.

Although Hope turned pale, the tactic did not work. "I don't know what you're talking about," was his reply, and he still was making the same answer several hours later while being questioned at Los Angeles headquarters.

Finally, after a long siege of steady interrogation, Hope cracked a little. He said that late Sunday night he had driven out to the honeymoon bungalow to see James and the barber had told him that Mary was dead, she had drowned in the bathtub. James had asked him to help carry her body out to the fish pond. Hope said he was drunk at the time

and that was all he remembered.

The officials decided to let him sleep on it and the next morning took him to the bungalow where they obtained permission from the new occupant to reenact the crime. The officers noticed that Hope seemed reluctant to enter the bathroom and they had him go in and out of the bathroom repeatedly, demonstrating just what he and James had done.

The psychology worked. Each time Hope was forced to enter the bathroom, he became more and more nervous until he screamed, "I'll talk, only get me away."

Hope said that he had known James for about 7 years and that, shortly after, the barber had married Mary, he had dropped into the shop to see if he could touch James for a loan. He was out of a job at the time. Instead of a handout, James offered him \$100 if he would get some live rattlesnakes. James told him that a friend wanted them.

Hope knew where live rattlers could be bought at a reptile house in Long Beach, and thought it was an easy way to make some money. James gave him a \$20 advance and he purchased three snakes and delivered them to the barber.

Several days later when he returned for the balance of the money, James told him the rattlers were no good, that one had died and the other two refused to strike at a live rabbit that had been placed in a box with them.

"They have to be real vicious," James told him. Hope obtained two more but these also turned out to be unsatisfactory. Finally he went to "Snake Joe's," a reptile dealer on Pasadena Boulevard, where he bought two "hot" rattlers, whose venomous fangs had not been removed. The snakes were named Lethal and Lightning. Hope made the delivery to James on Saturday night, August 3rd.

The following morning, wondering what the barber wanted with the snakes he drove up to the bungalow.

"I got there a little before noon," his statement reads. "Bob had his wife roped to the breakfast table. There was adhesive tape over her mouth and eyes. When he saw me he said, 'You can't get out of this thing.' He then stuck his wife's bare foot into the box with the hot snakes."

During this time Mrs. James had been unable to make any outcry because of the tape over her mouth. Hope said he did not look to see if one of the rattlers bit her, but he thought one must have because James told him to return the snakes to the dealer. He drove off in the barber's car and did not return, spending Sunday night at home playing cards with his wife and friends. He finally brought the car back early Monday morning. "She's not dead yet," he quoted James as greeting him and the barber then told him he was going to take her into the bathroom and drown her.

Hope added that he sat outside in the car for three hours drinking himself into a stupor on liquor supplied by the barber. Finally at 4 A.M. James came out and told him that he had drowned her, adding, "The snake didn't do the work fast enough." James returned to the house, cleaned up and later had him help carry her body to the fish pond.

The prisoner said James gave him two different reasons for the murder. First he said he wanted to collect the insurance money but later claimed it was because he didn't want any children.

Hope also was able to clear up the letter. James had written to her sister. He said that James had boasted about his perfect alibi and told him that he had forced Mary to write the letter.

Hope said he had blurted out the story to the liquor dealer only several hours after the murder and almost 12 hours before the body was found.

After the prisoner signed the confession, James was brought in from the county jail where he was being held. He was led into a room where

he could see Hope and then taken to another room where the confession was read to him.

James, in his statement, tried to shift all the blame on Hope and on his murdered wife. He advanced the novel thought that Mary had wanted an abortion and that Hope used the snake bite as a means of inducing one. Later, he added, while he was out of the house, Hope became frightened and killed her.

On June 19, 1936, Hope pleaded guilty to murder for his part in the plot and three days later took the stand against James. During the barber's month-long trial, Hope demonstrated to the jury just how James had forced his wife's foot into the box containing the hot snakes. Adding a bizzare touch to the proceedings was a large glass-enclosed box containing Lethal and Lightning, the two snakes used in the murder.

James was found guilty of first degree murder and on July 25th was sentenced to hang, but a long legal battle saved his life until May 1, 1942, when he became the last man hanged in California. (The state now uses gas.) Hope was sentenced to life imprisonment.



THE TOWN knew Bailey in spite of the mustache, the lost weight, and the yellowish tan he'd acquired after three years building roads for PanAm Oil in the torrid lowlands of Venezuela. Along Jefferson, the main drag in Hartsville, he drew the long looks, an occasional nod, and once a smile started only to scuttle back into a collar turned up against thin slanting March rain. The mood was with him. Nothing was good, nothing beautiful, least of all Hartsville.

The town combined a studied ornate ugliness with the discouraged brown of the flood years. A brawling, flesh-loving distillery town where City Hall stood back-to-back with the biggest gambling house in the south end of the state. Mud and rococo; corruption and river stink — hell, he knew all about it. Four years as city engineer, until politics chucked him, and he knew Hartsville, surface and guts.

It was a good town for murder.

Bailey paused under the dripping marquee of the Hotel Scobee. There were iron pillars, benches, no door-man, a kid selling papers. Bailey rested his bag on a bench, said, "Nuh-uh," to the kid, thin brown fingers occupied with the wrapper of a green-dappled cigar while his gaze crossed the narrow brick-paved street clogged with late afternoon

The girl was very beautiful, and Bailey might have fallen in love with her, except for one thing. He was sure she'd killed his brother.

Welcome

A Complete Novel

BY G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

traffic. Above Garlicht's Drugstore there was a small central window blacked out with paint where lower case letters in silver spelled out: *jack bailey — foto-arts studio*. A door at street level carried the same legend and evidently closed on a stair leading to the studio-apartment above. Bailey put the cigar in his teeth — a movement that partially concealed a smile that was not pleasant.

He carried the bag into the hotel, asked at the desk for a room with a view of the street. When he signed the register he used the name

Home

Illustration by Ray Houlihan



“Edward W. Johnson” which he combined with a Louisville address, gambling on the possibility that Ivy might not recognize him from whatever snapshots Jack might have showed her.

Bailey sent the bag up to his room and went out immediately under the marquee. There was a grinning toothless character in an old army overcoat sitting on one of the benches. Bailey shivered and turned east, into the rain, striding, drawing the long looks, an occasional nod, and the smile that started out from Perry Cade’s collar. There was no way to avoid Perry Cade; there never had been. Bailey turned right, Perry Cade left, deliberately, so that they met head-on. Perry Cade of the *Courier*, no respecter of moods, an old friend who caught Bailey’s hand and pulled him into the entryway of a shoestore.

“Norb. Norb Bailey. Not me, you don’t.” Perry Cade earnestly pumped Bailey’s hand. He was small and slight, retaining pink-cheeked boyishness well into his thirties. He must have liked the way he looked because his blond hair was crew-cut, he wore no hat, and his speckled gray topcoat had joe-college lines.

Bailey got his hand back and pretended to listen while Perry Cade said how sorry he was about Jack.

“. . . and when you didn’t get here for the funeral, we wondered—”

“We?” Bailey mocked. Hartsville must have wondered. “You tell

them, Perry. Tell them that woman never heard of a telephone. She wrote me a letter.”

Perry Cade winced. He said defensively, “You didn’t come to the wedding.”

“Rub my nose in it.” Because, Bailey thought, if he’d come up for the wedding, there wouldn’t have been any goddamned wedding. He’d have talked the kid brother around, or bought off the woman, cash on the barrelhead. No wedding. No waiting. No murder.

“Norb, listen —” Round china blue eyes searched Bailey’s narrow face anxiously. “You don’t know her, Norb.”

Bailey looked off into slanting gray lines of rain. “Ivy,” he said softly. “A vine. It clings. Frail in itself, it possesses parasitic, strength-sapping attributes. Slow death to the host. . . Don’t tell me, Perry. I’ve got her typed and defined.” He turned to find little white lines bracketing the ends of Perry Cade’s compressed mouth. “Funny she used a gun. She must have been in one hell of a hurry.”

“Norb —” Perry Cade’s eyes were moist, pleading. “Used — that’s no word.”

“I like it,” Bailey said dryly.

“Nobody knew the gun was loaded. Even the insurance company isn’t trying for anything beyond negligence.” Sudden anger deepened the pink of Perry Cade’s cheeks. “Christ, you’ve never even seen her?”

Bailey had a photo-portrait of her that would have worked its way down in his trunk with the soiled linen. Where, he thought, it belonged. He remembered shy yet probing eyes. Also the shy smile, the demure neckline, halo lighting — all the tricks. Sure she looked like an angel. You just don't send leg-art to the family. But the legs were implied along with everything else it would take to sing in a joint like the Wharf House.

"I'll see her," he promised. He raised his right forearm to Perry Cade's chest — no pressure, only the strong implication of pressure. "I'm going after her, Perry. Any way that I've got to go — around, under, over anybody at all — that's the way I'm going."

Perry Cade stepped aside, turning his palms upward and outward in a helpless gesture. Bailey stepped out onto the sidewalk. He kept east to cross the spur track which, with Nassau Avenue, angled uphill toward the distillery. City Hall was just beyond.

Hartsville changed police chiefs as casually as you'd change your socks, sometimes for the same reason. This one was named Coogans, and Bailey found him leaning out of an unglazed window halfway up a pig-chute in the east side of City Hall. The chief was a graying fat man with amiable green eyes set in a ruddy face textured like pinseal leather. Bailey gave his name and, when the chief started to riffle through a

batch of summons duplicates, reached through the opening to take hold of the chief's badge, rubbing the gold embossed surface with his thumb. Bailey's yellow-brown eyes were narrow in contempt.

"So you're hell on traffic violations," he said. "This was a killing."

The chief's face sagged. "Oh," he said. "*That* Bailey. You sure took your time."

"Maracaibo to Hartsville. It takes time."

Coogans fumbled the duplicates, got Bailey's hand, and pumped it, saying, "Well, well! Mighty happy to know you." He looked merely annoyed. "Knew your brother. A terrible thing, a young boy like that just married six weeks. Terrible thing to happen."

Bailey pulled his hand free, clutched the sill and, leaning forward spoke rapidly, his voice low and without inflection. "Now you've touched on something. It didn't happen. You'd have an office where we could, talk maybe smoke a cigar. I can show you it didn't happen."

Coogans' eyes showed white entirely around the green. He swallowed. He said, "Okay," as though it were not entirely okay. As he turned away, the small room beyond became fully visible. There was Doyle, wearing plainclothes, sprawled in a chair, a brown hat tipped over his eyes and apparently asleep. Doyle, who headed the detective bureau, the real thing, a

fixture around City Hall, with Coogans or whoever happened to be chief at the time taking the heat. Doyle, with the brute jaw always needing a shave, with the flat black give-nothing-take-everything eyes. As soon as Coogans moved through a door in a gray-painted wood partition, Doyle slammed up out of his chair and strode after the chief. The door closed violently behind him.

Bailey dropped his chewed cigar on a floor already littered with cigarette butts. Farther back along the hall, a door had opened and Doyle reappeared. He glanced at Bailey.

"Hi," he rumbled, his manner pre-occupied. "Glad to see you."

"Me too," Bailey said. "Just as glad."

Doyle grunted and turned deeper into the building. Coogans edged halfway out of the same door and beckoned to Bailey.

It was a gray room smelling of disinfectant, with narrow windows, some steel cabinets, oak chairs, and a badly scarred oak desk that had been newly varnished. Coogans lowered his fat behind carefully into the swivel chair.

"Sit down, sit down," he invited, adding, "Yeah — thanks," as he grabbed the cigar Bailey extended toward him. Bailey sat in a chair at the end of the desk, tipped forward to hold a lighter for Coogans in a thin brown hand that trembled slightly. The fat man said thanks again, settled back, hooked a thick

ankle over a thicker knee and grasped the ankle with a hand that didn't seem to have any knuckles. He glanced uneasily at Bailey and then out the window at a patch of oyster colored sky.

"I know how you feel, Mr. Bailey," he began.

"You do?" Bailey leaned back. His narrow brown face wore a small stiff smile.

Coogans frowned anxiously at a shoetip. "It was just one of those things," he said. "Your brother bought this gun, bought it from a night watchman, brought it home, was showing it to his wife. She was fooling around with it — I know it sounds stupid, but they didn't know it was loaded."

He paused, looked at Bailey for comment. There was none. The thin brown man rested an elbow on the desk edge and fingered his left ear. The ear had no lobe; it lent his otherwise regular features a somewhat lopsided appearance.

Coogans said, "It happens all the time, Mr. Bailey. I'll show you in a minute how come they didn't know it was loaded. The girl, Mrs. Bailey, said something like she didn't see how anything that pretty could kill anybody. And then —" he shrugged — "it went off. That one slug."

"Where?"

"Under the right eye," Coogans said hastily. "Look —" He stood, trudged to one of the steel cabinets which he unlocked. He took out something in a brown manila en-

velope. Bailey sat there, his smile fixed. He clenched his hands. The palms were sweaty. Coogans was saying, "A thirty-two, an old bank gun somebody dolled up. We got its record clear back to the factory, and it's clean all the way. The ejection mechanism is worn at one point. It'll throw five and keep one."

The chief came back with a satin nickel-finished revolver that had simulated pearl grips. Bailey glanced at it out of the ends of yellowish eyes. Coogans broke the revolver. The ejector threw five cartridges into his hand while a sixth remained in the cylinder. He closed the gun.

"There you are," he said with a note of triumph. "All ready to play Russian roulette or just have an accident. That's what it was — an accident. You just ask Perry Cade."

Bailey looked up slowly, his eyes puzzled. "There's something about a police hand-out that makes it more convincing after you read it in print?"

"Hell, Perry Cade was there." Coogans placed the gun on the desk, sidled to his chair, and sat. "Perry Cade drove your brother home. Jack told Perry about the gun he'd just bought. Perry wanted to see it. They went up to the studio-apartment together. Mrs. Bailey was there. They all looked at the gun. Nobody knew it was loaded. It must have been cocked when your brother handed it to his wife. And that was the time."

"Simple," Bailey said, nodding.

"Yeah — a booby trap."

"So simple it stinks."

"Now Mr. Bailey —" Coogans' grizzled brows drew down toward a deepening V-shaped wrinkle above the bridge of his nose. "The wife shot your kid brother, sure. Then she fainted. We had her in the hospital that night and all next day with a bad case of hysteria."

"That's too bad," Bailey said dryly. "Why'd Jack buy the gun, Coogans?"

"Why?" The chief spread big hands. "Why does anybody buy a gun? I've got a collection. So's Judge Morris —"

"Why wasn't Jack in the army — a big husky kid like that?"

Coogans' lower lip sagged, showing yellow teeth. He looked reproachfully at the taut brown man. "A hell of a question."

Bailey nodded. "But it's the kind of a question I'd ask myself if I was a cop and I was thinking and I had anything to think with."

The chief flushed. He said irritably, "All right!"

"Listen." Bailey tipped forward in the chair. "Jack was thirteen. I thought it was about time he had a gun. So I bought him a little twenty-two rifle and we went out after squirrel. He was too young, sure, but it cost me an ear lobe to find out. It damn near killed him when he saw how close he'd come to killing me. He never got over it, never touched a gun after that. And if you'd had sense enough to go

into his draft record you'd have found out he was gun shy to the point of neurosis, and that's why he's got let out of the army."

Bailey, his thin face more yellowish than tan, leaned back to watch uneasiness stir in Coogans' green eyes. The chief moistened fat lips. He didn't say anything.

Bailey said, "If Jack bought that gun something came into his life that he feared a hell of a lot more than he feared a gun. What? You haven't turned a hand to find out. You say nobody knew the gun was loaded, and you point to an ejection mechanism defect that doesn't prove one damned thing except that it *might* have happened like they say it happened. You've got Perry Cade's word, you've got the wife's word, and either one or both could be lying."

The chief stared moodily at the gun for a moment. "Could be," he admitted. He picked up the gun, broke it, fed cartridges into the vacant chambers. "You want this piece of iron?"

Bailey's eyes narrowed. "That all there is to it?"

"Well, you'd have to sign for the records. But it's yours, part of your brother's personal effects." He put the gun down, brought out a mimeographed form, made a penciled X on the proper line, pushed the paper toward Bailey. "That is, if you want it."

Bailey hesitated. "Where did Jack get it?"

"I told you — from a night watchman, name of Charlie Wilson. If you don't want it, it can stay right here."

Bailey took out a pen and signed the form. He stood, picked up the gun, and dropped it into his topcoat pocket.

"Er — don't carry it without a permit," Coogans cautioned. He took the form and busied himself filling in the rest of the blanks, all the while speaking evenly. "Everything you say may be true, Mr. Bailey. Maybe Perry Cade or the girl, maybe both of them lied. Chances are they didn't. Perry and the wife scarcely knew each other — no chance for a triangle. It's one of those things you can wonder about for the rest of your life and not get any closer to the truth than you are right now. All I can tell you is the matter is closed officially."

Bailey said quietly, "Suppose I open it, unofficially?"

Coogans leaned back, his expression pained. "I don't know how you could do that. Maybe you can —" he paused, his green eyes meeting Bailey's squarely. He shook his head. "I wouldn't."

2.

There was no furniture in the room at all, no rugs on the red rubber tile floor, no drapes on the windows though the shades were pulled. The hundred-watt bulb in

the ceiling fixture was naked and bright and the girl was nearly as bare as the room. She wore a towel. It was not a very large towel, but then she was not a very tall girl. Holding the towel across her breasts with her left arm, spreading it to maximum fullness at hip level with her right hand, its lower border reached just above mid-point on her thighs.

There she was. There also was the paunchy little man in the baggy twill raincoat and gray porkpie hat. Bailey had followed him up the stairs as far as the door of the studio-apartment over the drugstore. The paunchy little man had left the door open, and he stood a couple of paces within the room, long arms bowed out from his body in a crouching animal attitude, facing the girl, his back to Bailey.

Bailey stood in the shadows at the head of the stair. He had not grasped the situation within the barren room until he noticed the green feedbag purse hanging on a doorknob of what might have been a closet on the left side of the room. The girl had apparently taken a bath — there was a damp look about her pale gold, shoulder length hair — and she had needed something she'd left in her purse. She had come out wearing a towel. Wearing it, Bailey noticed, with such dignity that he could remember women in evening clothes who were nude by comparison. While there might have been initial panic in her gray eyes,

it was not there now. Her look was cool and scathing and she matched it with words like talking across the finely drawn sights of a loaded revolver.

“Get out of here, damn you, whoever you are.”

So Ivy was no vine and she did not cling, whatever else she might be and do.

Bailey had left the revolver in his room at the hotel. He took two quick steps into the room, not altogether soundless. The fat man wheeled, and they were so close they jostled — Bailey's shoulder and the fat man's head — and the porkpie hat fell off. Bailey brought his right heel down hard on the fat man's left instep and, at the same time, caught the open flaps of the raincoat to strip it off slope shoulders, binding the man's upper arms with the lapels. Splayed fingers of the fat man's right hand were hardly an inch from the exposed butt of an automatic worn under his left shoulder. The upturned face was considerably wider through the jowls than it was through the temples. A pear-shaped, melon-mouthed face attached to powerful shoulders with no discernible neck, with a small red lump of nose crowded by squint eyes that had more glitter than color. His head was bald except for a horseshoe shaped rim of black hair. Bailey knew him, and having seized him with both hands was a lot like picking up a stick of wood that turns out to be a snake.

Bailey tightened his hold until he could take both coat flaps in his right hand. His left pulled the gun, crossed on over so that he roughed Augie Dhiel's face with an elbow. He did this without knowing why except that when two men are in a room with a naked woman somebody is bound to get roughed. Augie Dhiel seemed to understand; he did not complain.

Bailey stepped back shifting the gun to his right hand. He kept his eyes on Augie Dhiel, but he was aware of Ivy there in the background. There were little pin-points of sweat glistening above the black line of Bailey's mustache.

He said to Ivy, "You'd better call the cops."

"The — the phone isn't connected."

"Get dressed and go find one. Phone or cop."

Ivy backed into the next room and elbowed the door shut. They could hear her pattering around back there collecting her clothes. Augie Dhiel watched her through the keyhole of his mind and leered.

Bailey said, "Your hairline always reminds me of the seat on a toilet, Augie. Grab your hands back of your head."

Augie Dhiel said coldly, "You just stepped on your own laugh, friend." But he got his hands up, and Bailey stepped in to gut-ram him lightly with the gun. He went through the little fat man's pockets, dropping an article at a time into the

upturned hat on the floor. A russet leather wallet. Loose change. A pack of chlorophyll breath tablets, badly needed. Cigarettes. Two paper match folders advertising some of the attractions to be found at Beauchamp's Paradise Island Casino, just off shore from Hartsville — dog racing, bathing, fine food, mixed drinks, dancing, with no mention at all of the variety of games from craps to roulette.

Bailey stepped back. "Go over into the corner. If there was anything to sit on, you could sit down."

Augie Dhiel moved to the southeast corner of the room where he squatted on his heels, forearms resting on thick knees, his hands loosely clasped. His mouth had a sullen droop, his eyes a hard brightness.

Ivy emerged from the door of the adjoining room wadding stockings she hadn't bother to put on into the pocket of a gray-green wool coat she had not yet buttoned. Her dress was a green-and-white print. Dangling a deep green velvet beret from the tips of her fingers, she raised gray eyes and divided a level glance between the two men. Memory brought a faint flush to her thin cheeks and a quick lowering of her lashes. She moved to the door of the closet where her purse hung. Her hair had the gleam of silk.

"I'll hurry," she promised, her voice small.

"Do that," Bailey said dryly and watched her open the green leather bag to take deft-fingered inventory.

"Need a dime for the phone, Mrs. Bailey?"

"I have one here, thanks." She didn't look at him as she walked toward the front door with controlled haste, high heels flashing in the glare of the unshaded bulb. It was as though she wanted to run. The clean sweet smell of her reached Bailey. Like Spring. Like, he added mentally as though the former thought alarmed him, one sweet cool little gal.

He said quietly, "You'd better come back with them, Mrs. Bailey. They like ends tied."

Ivy paused, one hand touching the trim of the door, head turned, small chin nestling against the gray-green wool of her coat. It was the shy yet probing glance of the photograph with just a twitch of a smile. Then she went out and her heels tapped neatly on the stair.

It occurred to Bailey that Ivy was all kinds of a woman and what he had set out to do could not be done easily.

"Kee-riste," Augie Dhiel sighed. "That I could bite and let it drag me to death." He got his eyes away from the empty doorway and looked in mock wonder at Bailey. "And you just stand there."

Bailey regarded the man in the corner, a somewhat puzzled expression on his lean face. A round man. A square corner. He couldn't, didn't want to fit him into Jack's life at all, yet apparently Ivy didn't know Augie Dhiel either. He had to fit

somewhere. There had always been a running feud between Beauchamp's Paradise Island mob and Hartsville's protected rackets—nothing violent but presenting the constant threat of violence. The island was under Kentucky jurisdiction, but Beauchamp always poured money into Hartsville's elections in an effort to turn the tide in his favor.

"Just what did you want with the lady?" Bailey asked.

Augie Dhiel grinned. "Are you kiddin'?"

Bailey nodded, his eyes on the other man's face. "That's just dandy. Doyle will love it. You talk yourself into an attempted assault charge, and nobody will give a good damn when Doyle puts a slug in your gut. With any kind of excuse he'll do that. It'll be just one less Beauchamp boy to worry about."

Augie Dhiel's wide flaccid mouth twisted into a sneer. "She won't be back, Bailey. That babe shot your brother a week, ten days ago, remember? She's still got the taste of copper in her mouth."

Bailey shoved the automatic into the pocket of his topcoat as he approached the man in the corner, his manner deliberate, a thoughtful, almost dreamy expression in his yellowish eyes. He leaned forward suddenly, caught Dhiel by the coat lapels, jerked him to his feet. Bailey drove his left fist into Dhiel's paunch below the beltline. The fat man doubled over, clutching himself with both hands. His left knee gave way

and, as he came down to the floor on his right knee, he pivoted half around on the ball of his left foot. He knelt with his face in the corner and retched. Bailey stood over him, his face pale and set.

"By God you're going to talk," he said softly. "You're going to tell me why you came here." He caught Dhiel by the back of the collar, lifted, straightened him out with a knee-kick. The fat man bleated, twisted around, and fell back into the corner, his legs braced wide apart. The fly of his pants gaped open revealing lavender shorts, and his right hand was bunched around the bigger part of a short-barreled revolver — a crotch gun which was not much, but at this close range it was plenty.

"The hands, Bailey," he gasped, his mouth drooling. "Up."

Bailey raised his hands shoulder high. Augie Dhiel hunched himself out of the corner. The whites of his tiny eyes were suffused with blood. He drove the muzzle of the crotch gun into Bailey's navel. He lifted the automatic, kept it in his left hand, pocketed the revolver to free his right hand for some expert searching. He got Bailey's wallet.

He said, "I'll leave you bus fare the hell out of town. Get your hands down, put them in your coat pockets, and leave them there. Okay, turn around." And as Bailey turned Augie Dhiel gun-shoved him toward the door through which Ivy had appeared. "Let's you and me see if

we can find us a couple more babes," Augie Dhiel said amiably. "Kind of a farewell party, huh, Bailey?"

They went through the door into a short hall which had a couple of rooms on either side. The one with the blacked-out window had probably served Jack as a darkroom. The other was the bath.

"Looks like babes in there, Bailey," Augie said. "Go on in."

As Bailey stepped into the bathroom he heard a warning rustle of twill topcoat behind him and instinctively ducked. The blow from Augie Dhiel's heavy automatic shaved Bailey's left ear and hammered into his left shoulder. Bailey reeled against the lavatory and hung on to white porcelain. The bathroom door slammed, a key snicked in the lock. Augie Dhiel, on the opposite side of the door, told Bailey what he could do in there.

There was no window in the bathroom, but Ivy had left the light on. Bailey sat down on the rim of the tub and tried to massage some feeling of life into his left shoulder. He could hear Augie Dhiel's footsteps tramping deeper into the apartment. Then there was a sound that suggested Augie had taken off his shoes and dropped them one at a time on the floor. Only Augie had the usual number of feet, and Bailey counted six shoes. This was followed by a faint chiming. Bailey concluded that the little fat gunman had found a closet where wire hangers jangled together on a rod.

Bailey got out a cigar and chewed on it. The damp towel beside him on the tub rim had the name Walford Hotel woven in white on its blue border. If that was where Ivy was living, Bailey could understand her coming here for her bath. The Walford had only one bath to a floor.

Augie Dhiel came back along the hall. His footsteps were hurried and he was cursing fluently. Bailey listened to the recession of sounds until finally he heard the door slam at the foot of the stairs. Then he got up, took the heavy porcelain lid off the water closet, used the lid as a ram to batter a slivered hole through the thin panel nearest the lock on the door. He got a hand through, found the key in the opposite side, turned it to let himself out. His wallet was lying on the rubber tile floor just outside the door. Augie had left him two sawbucks — bus fare out of town.

A large living-bedroom with an in-the-wall bed was at the end of the hall. There was an alcove kitchen off one corner. Neither room had any furniture and the bare rubber tile floor was clean. A telephone rested on the broad sill of the front window. A closet door stood open and a man's clothing, probably Jack's, was heaped on the floor along with a few pieces of luggage.

Bailey went to the window, sat on his heels to try the phone. He dialed "O" for the operator, got her, asked for the Walford Hotel, got that. He asked the switchboard

girl at the hotel if they had a Mrs. Jack Bailey. They had, and presently Ivy answered. How was it Jack had described her voice in a letter? Something like, "It reminds you of warm scented dark."

"This is Ed Johnson," Bailey said. "You know, Mrs. Bailey — thin, brown, black mustache, yellowish eyes? And you were going to send some police to cope with a little matter?" He added, trying for the light touch, "If you did they are coming via Cape Horn on a raft."

Ivy took that in her stride. "Mr. Johnson, I did not promise I would send the police —"

"I know, I know," he broke in. "You said you would hurry without saying where you would hurry to, and there was also some business about a dime which you didn't promise to spend on a phone call. It makes an honest woman of you on all counts except the phone here which seems to be working perfectly."

Ivy said, "I left an order this morning for the phone service to be discontinued. I'm sorry you're angry, Mr. Johnson, but you may not be fully aware of the circumstances."

"I may not be," Bailey said. "The thing is, our little fat friend is now on the loose. He seems to be looking for something. You wouldn't know what, would you?"

"I would not," she replied without hesitation. "I have disposed of everything in the studio-apartment except some clothing that belonged to my husband."

“Well, watch yourself,” Bailey said. “Or better still, have dinner with me, and I’ll do the watching.”

“Thanks, I’ve had dinner.”

“Then suppose I drop around to your hotel a bit later?” He could see, in his mind, her shy eyes probing. “It’s a business matter entirely. Your husband had some valuable pieces of photographic equipment.”

She said, “I let the Liberty Loan Company have all that on consignment. However,” she added after a moment’s hesitation, “I would like the opportunity to express properly my gratitude for your —” she uttered an odd little laugh — “shall we call it your gallant intervention, Mr. Johnson?”

“We won’t mention it at all, please,” Bailey said. “But I’ll be around in an hour or so, Mrs. Bailey.”

She said that would be fine, and they good-byed each other. Bailey hung up, recovered his cigar from the windowsill, stood, his moody gaze on the pile of Jack’s clothing in front of the closet. The tag-ends of a life that had meant more to him than his own, heaped forlornly on the floor of an empty room. In the war he had seen men buried like so much refuse. This struck him as much the same thing. He stuck his cigar in his mouth, stepped to the closet, and began to restore some sort of order — hats on the shelf, shoes on the rack, the suits and shirts on the hangers.

Among three pieces of luggage

there was a goatskin leather toilet kit that had belonged to Bailey’s dad. He recalled the shiny plain silver fittings each kept in its own watered silk pocket: the military brushes, comb, nailfile, separate cases for toothbrush, shaving stick, razor, and shaving brush. Kneeling there on the floor, he opened the goatskin case. Everything was just as he had remembered it except that a couple of items were missing — one military brush and the tubular case for a toothbrush. They might have been missing for years.

He put the toilet kit aside, straightened, and reached for another empty hanger. The last piece of clothing in the pile was a slightly soiled yellow shirt, and he was about to put it away with the rest when he noticed a brown-rimmed hole near the breast pocket. It might have been a cigarette burn. Or a bullet hole from a gun fired at close range . . . except that there was no blood.

He couldn’t think of any good reason why anybody would fire at an empty shirt, so maybe it was a cigarette burn. He hung the shirt in the closet, stooped, picked up the goatskin toilet kit, started to leave the room but paused, his eyes narrow in thought. He went back to the phone on the sill and called police headquarters. It was Chief Coogans who answered. Bailey identified himself.

“I’ve just been heisted out of something in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars,” he said.

"Augie Dhiel. Any time you pick him up, I'll be down to make a formal complaint."

Coogans said, "That's a damned shame, Mr. Bailey. We'll get on it. We'll get on it right away, don't you worry about that."

Bailey hung up, tucked the toilet kit under his arm, and left the studio-apartment, turning out lights and closing doors as he went.

Outside it was nearly dark. The wind had died, and the rain had settled in for the night, a steady soaking drizzle. Bailey's left shoulder ached where Augie Dhiel's gun had landed, and there was something deep within that needed numbing.

He turned south at the corner, crossed Jefferson and kept on downhill on Third toward Water Street. He was heading for Paley's tavern when he happened to notice the brilliantly lighted windows of a pawnshop across the street — the Liberty Loan Company to which Ivy had consigned Jack's photographic equipment. Bailey paused, chewing his cold cigar. Detective Lieutenant Doyle came out of the pawnshop, and his heavy sullen face wore a troubled scowl. He strode to the curb, ducked into a black sedan which took off down hill almost before he had slammed the door. The stoplight winked once before the car turned onto Water Street, its tires screaming.

Bailey crossed Third to the pawnshop, squinted against the glare from the window. Inside a radio was

wailing. "Do not for-sake me oh my dar-ling." He went in. The uncle looked more like a nephew — a sharp-featured young man with black hair brushed close to his head and wearing shiny rimless glasses. He eyed the goatskin leather kit under Bailey's arm as though no thanks he didn't want any. Bailey leaned an elbow on the counter, his cigar socketed firmly in his back teeth, and looked at the proprietor out of eye corners.

"Cops giving you a bad time?" he asked quietly without much movement of his lips.

The young man's frown hinted annoyance. "No indeed," he said primly. "We maintain the most cordial relations with the police." He reached across to switch off a portable radio and thus put the guitar-twanging vocalist out of his misery. He looked sharply at Bailey. "Why?"

"I saw Doyle leaving your place and I wondered."

"Lieutenant Doyle wanted to look over our stock of photographic equipment. It seems a dealer in Louisville was burglarized last night, and the local police got a flash to check pawnshops."

Bailey straightened, turning, and went out hurriedly. First Augie Dhiel and now Doyle; they were circling Jack's worldly possessions like a couple of vultures. Bailey crossed the street, the worrisome thing not numb but prodding him deep inside like a splintered bone.

Outside the neon-lit entrance of Paley's Tavern the rain fell blood red.

3.

A double bourbon was not enough, but the bargemen and distillery workers kept angling long looks at Bailey out of the backbar mirror. His was the only white shirt in the joint. He asked for a pint to go, and it came across the bar wrapped in a piece of old newspaper. He was waiting for his change when he smelled something foreign to tap-rooms. Wet sheep, he thought and glanced to the left. The same toothless character Bailey had noticed outside Hotel Scobee had slipped onto the next stool. The character grinned. He ducked his head. He had a neck like a piece of rope.

"Mr. Bailey," he said, "I'm your friend."

Bailey picked up his change with one hand and shoved the pint into his coat pocket with the other. "That's how it is — you buy a pint and right away you got friends." He looked around once more at the wrinkled yellow face under the navy blue knit wool cap. It had sly eyes, and one of them winked. The man started to claw under the stinking GI overcoat like the ants were with him, and pulled a lead-colored watch.

"I got fifteen minutes before I leave for work," he said. "I'll buy you an ale, Mr. Bailey. I'm Charlie Wilson."

Charlie Wilson, the night watchman who had sold Jack the gun. Bailey picked up the goatskin case and allowed himself to be dragged toward a booth at the rear of the room. On the way, the toothless man hailed the waitress and said, "Two ales back here, Mame."

They sat in the booth, and Bailey put the leather case beside him on the bench. Charlie Wilson leaned forward, forearms on the table, and spoke in a hurried earnest whisper.

"Honest to God, Mr. Bailey, I told your brother about that defective ejector. I *showed* it to him. And he said it wouldn't make any difference, what he wanted the gun for."

Bailey stared at the other man, his face expressionless. "Did he tell you why he wanted the gun?"

"Nope. I tried to throw in a box of ammo, and he said he had plenty. And I'm honest to God sure the gun wasn't loaded when I gave it to him."

The waitress came. Charlie Wilson winked at Bailey and said, "You've seen a Coke machine, Mr. Bailey? Lemme show you an ale machine." And as Mame leaned across the table, the toothless man tucked a fifty cent piece into the tight little crevice at the top of her dress. She slammed his bottle down on the table. Bailey's ale came sweetly to him with a smile for the gentleman. The woman went away, and Bailey watched Charlie Wilson ease ale into a glass.

"Night your brother was killed was my night off," Charlie Wilson said after he'd taken a drink. "A Saturday, two weeks ago next. You like to know what I saw that night?"

"If it means anything,"

"It means plenty." Charlie Wilson filled his glass again. "I'm a sick old man, Mr. Bailey. Nobody pays much attention to me, but I get around — City Hall, the Court House — and I pick up odds and ends." He half-emptied his glass in a couple of gulps, put the glass down, stared at it, his manner embarrassed. "I hate to ask, but I got to have a little something for my trouble."

Bailey's eyes held a harsh yellow gleam. "And I've got to see the merchandise before I buy."

The toothless man's head bobbed up and down on his scrawny neck. "How many people do you figure was in your brother's apartment when he got it?"

"Two. Jack's wife and Perry Cade."

The toothless grin spread slow and sly. Charlie Wilson held up three fingers. "My night off, and I was walking up Jefferson about the time it happened. Just me — nobody in two blocks, the kind of night it was. I was about up to the hardware store next the drugstore when Number Three comes down from up there in a hell of a hurry and jumps in a car. I didn't think anything about it until here comes the cop car."

Bailey took out his wallet, removed the remaining sawbuck. Charlie Wilson shook his head. Bailey added a five to the ten, which left him two bucks. "Raise you five and see you," he said.

"I got a little fat guy. Short and fat."

"Augie Dhiel?"

"I didn't get a good look. It could have been." Charlie Wilson took the money and stood. "There's a reason it could have been."

Bailey looked up into sly brown eyes. "Such as?"

The toothless man laughed. "You feel like dropping around to the Auction Barn tonight, with some *real* dough, I'll talk."

He moved to the door and out, and Bailey sat there dawdling over his ale, motionless until a shadow fell across the table. He looked up into a fleshy pink face with narrow ink-blue eyes, red brows, and thick red sideburns extending down from the brim of a rough-felted brown hat to the lobes of small close-set ears. Rough brown tweed added breadth to shoulders that were already too wide for the average doorway. Vince McCaslon stuck out a big pink hand to Bailey and smiled.

"Glad to see you home again, Norb." The big man's voice was a ridiculous squeak.

Bailey ignored the hand. "That's a lie, but we both know it so it's all right." He refilled his glass. "Slumming, aren't you?"

The redheaded man laughed. "I

own the joint. A man's got to look out after his business interests."

Bailey said, "And I came in here because I figured this was one place I could buy a drink without dropping any pennies into your piggy bank." He watched McCaslon weasel himself into the booth to sit at the opposite side of the table. "How's politics?"

McCaslon said, "I guess you heard Cole Pittman is sick."

Bailey shook his head. Pittman owned the distillery, a piece of the bank, and had ruled Hartsville's politics with a hand of iron. He'd imported Vince McCaslon from Detroit to handle some labor difficulty at the distillery, and McCaslon had stayed on to organize the town's divergent rackets into some kind of defense against possible encroachment from Beauchamp on Paradise Island. The island was under Kentucky jurisdiction. Beauchamp was rumored to have syndicate connections.

"You got it made, Vince," Bailey said. He polished off his ale, picked up the goatskin leather toilet kit, tucked it under his left arm.

McCaslon said, "Wait a minute —"

"Well?" Bailey looked at the other man with hostile eyes. McCaslon smiled and said, "Too bad about your brother."

"Is that all you've got to say?"

"No. I just wanted to tell you I did Jack a favor a little while back."

"You did?" Bailey's frown was

slight, incredulous. He stood out of the booth, his eyes on McCaslon's face. McCaslon sidled and stood, his ink-blue eyes shiny with malice.

"If you'd step out to my car, Norb — it's in the parking lot out back — I'd show you something. Some pictures." McCaslon ducked his head to indicate the rear exit and led the way. Bailey followed, uncasiness stirring within him.

Beyond the dirty kitchen was a door opening directly on the alley. The light above the door illuminated a step and two overflowing garbage containers on the right. The light did not penetrate as far as the parking area — a small nook walled in by the backs of buildings on the opposite side of the alley. As Bailey emerged from the door, following McCaslon, the dark of the parking area was punctured by orange-red pencils of gun flame — a rapid succession of three shots that blended into a single echoing roar. The big redheaded man lurched backward into Bailey who fended him off with a shove that was born of sheer panic. McCaslon crashed over onto the top of one of the garbage containers, lay there with his head and arms dangling. Bailey sprang to the opposite side of the door and, for an instant, flattened himself against the rear of the taproom before he pushed out from the wall and sprinted north along the alley through the rain. His heart was up in his throat, choking him.

He came out on Jefferson and re-

duced his pace to a rapid walk, entered Hotel Scobee and went immediately to his room. He dropped the goatskin toilet kit on the bed, stepped to the luggage rack at the foot of the bed. His bag was there, open, its contents disordered. He plunged a hand into the bag, searching for the nickel-plated revolver. It wasn't there; he hadn't really expected that it would be.

He stepped to the small writing desk where the phone was, hesitated, turned to the door and left the room. Out in the street, a siren wailed. He didn't wait for the elevator but ran down three flights of stairs to the lobby and from there into the street.

From a cigar store phone booth at the next corner, Bailey called the *Courier*. Perry Cade wasn't there, but somebody gave Bailey the phone number and address of the lodging house on Oak Street where Perry stayed. Presently his crisp, important, "Cade speaking," came from the receiver.

Bailey said reproachfully, "Why didn't you tell me you were there the night Jack was killed?"

"Norb, I tried." Perry's voice was quiet, patient.

Bailey drew a deep breath. "I need a car and money."

"I'll let you have my car — I've got the dog-watch at the office tonight — but I haven't your kind of money."

"Even a fin would help. Beauchamp will take a check, but I've

got to have enough to get to the island."

There was a noticeable pause before Perry Cade said, "Give me ten minutes, and I'll deliver anyplace downtown."

Bailey told his present location, hung up, and leaned back against the booth to pull his pint bottle from his pocket. As he took off the newspaper wrapping front page headlines stared him squarely in the face:

BRIDE SLAYS JACK BAILEY

It was an eight-day old copy of the *Hartsville Courier*, and as he stared at it, a thin smile twisted the corners of his mouth. He said under his breath, "All right, baby, let's see you squirm out of this one!"

4.

"Norb, I'm sorry as hell nobody gave the straight of it," Perry Cade said as Bailey got into the Plymouth coupe that pulled up in front of the cigar store. Bailey glanced sharply at the clean lines of the little man's profile against the glow from a show-window across the street.

"Why?"

Perry Cade's chin jutted a little farther forward. He didn't say anything until he'd started the car east on Jefferson. "Then my being a witness doesn't make any difference?"

Bailey made a sound like laughter. "Not unless you knew what was in Ivy's mind at the time. You know her that well?"

"I don't know her well at all," Cade confessed wistfully. "I met her at the wedding for the first time, though I'd heard her sing at McCaslon's Wharf House many an evening this winter." He made a methodical left turn and drove slowly uphill. "I know a little of her background. An orphan, respectable family, grade and high schools. She entered the Jordan Conservatory in Indianapolis, hoping to get a license to teach music, but she couldn't make it alone — not and clerk in a drugstore half the night. She got her first real break with this band that moved into the Wharf House, and then damned if she didn't lose her voice. Some virus infection."

"Should I burst into tears?" Bailey asked acidly.

"You *could* leave her alone," Cade snapped. Which could have led to a third silence had Bailey let it.

"What's this rumble I get about a third man at Jack's studio-apartment the night of the shooting?"

"Who's he supposed to be?" Cade made another turn.

"Some little fat guy." Bailey made it sound casual. "He's supposed to have left the place in a hurry shortly before the cops arrived."

Perry Cade said in disgust, "You can hear anything in this town." He berthed the Plymouth on Washington Street in front of the two-story building that housed the *Courier*.

Bailey asked, "Did you notice the shirt Jack was wearing that night?"

"I did," Perry replied without hesitation. "A yellow shirt. I remember distinctly because of the cigarette burn on the front of it. He was smoking at the time the gun went off. There was a smothered butt under him when the coroner made his cursory examination. Incidentally, Norb, Ivy fainted immediately after the gun went off. I carried her to the bed before I phoned the police. And I've seen enough unconscious people to know it was no fake."

Perry Cade lapsed into thoughtful silence but made no move to leave the car. Presently he said, "So that's why you're going to Paradise Island — Augie Dhiel is a fat little guy."

Bailey nodded. He watched Perry Cade shake a cigarette out of a pack. The round china blue eyes were earnest in lighter flame.

"Norb, there was nobody there that night except Jack and Ivy and me. Don't let gossip send you off to poke in a hornets' nest." Cade closed the lighter with a snap. "I don't know whether you know it or not, but the political situation in Hartsville is on the verge of disintegration. Cole Pittman is dying of cancer and can't keep a tight rein anymore."

Bailey said, "So I heard."

"McCaslon is still with us. He's the only thing that keeps Beauchamp off shore. McCaslon has enough on the city administration to keep it in line. Stuff he's got out of Cole Pittman — the graft, kick-

backs, and payoffs. I hear it's all down in a little black book that would go to the prosecutor if anything were to happen to McCaslon. That's his last line of defense, so he and his rackets get plenty of protection. The prosecutor is clean but ineffectual with the kind of police backing he gets. Chief Coogans is decent, but he likes his salary. And you know Doyle, as crooked as ever, watching to see that only the right people are touched. It's a hell of a situation, explosive, and some damn little thing could touch it off any time —"

"Something like McCaslon getting knocked off, huh?" Bailey said mildly.

"That would be it," the little man said, nodding. He put his hand in his pocket and brought out a five dollar bill. "Here's your fin. Sorry I've detained you."

Bailey took the bill. Perry Cade opened the car door, paused, reached down under the cowl, and brought out a revolver. The blued steel gleamed dully in light from the instrument panel.

"If you're going to the island, you'd better not have this with you," he said. "And I don't want it left in the car."

Bailey put a detaining hand on Cade's arm. "I may need it. I'm already charged with a rod I don't have." He took the gun from Cade's unresisting fingers and, noting the anxious expression on the other man's face, laughed quietly. "Perry,

for a guy who looks like a college freshman you behave a lot like an old woman at times."

Perry Cade shrugged, got out, slammed the door. Bailey put the gun into the right side pocket of his suitcoat and slid over under the wheel. He drove back to Jefferson and, as he passed the Hotel Scobee noticed the police prowler parked in front. He kept on west for four blocks. The Walford Hotel had a fancy neon sign suspended over a doorway at the foot of stairs leading to a second floor lobby over an auto supply store. That was the only fancy thing about the place — its sign.

The door of Ivy's fourth floor room was open. She was reading in a chair near the one window, light from a bridge lamp pouring down upon her pale gold hair. Bailey rapped on the doorframe. She put the book aside, stood without flurry and came to meet him wearing a dress of some soft clinging material, spice brown in color, with a wide tan leather belt that gave her a ridiculously tiny waist. She appeared somewhat taller than he remembered her. Her smile was different too — not shy but quick and meaningless — and under her makeup there were indications of strain. It was as though she had erected some defense between them, like a brittle shell, and he was, unaccountably, disappointed. Yet, he told himself, it would have been hell if she were soft.

"Let me have your hat and coat," she said.

Bailey kept his hat in his hands. "I thought we might go for a drive and then have a late supper somewhere."

Ivy pursed red lips. Her gray eyes met his in a kind of challenge. "I'd like that, Mr. Johnson. I like riding in the rain. But sit down, please. I'll be ready in a moment."

He sat in the one chair. There were six long-stemmed red roses in a cheap vase on the windowsill; they had just begun to wither. He watched Ivy's wonderful legs cross the room to the scarred dresser. She opened a drawer, came back with a box of chocolates. As she bent over him her hair fell forward and against thin cheeks, framing her delicate face like a silken hood.

"Have one. That is, if you're not afraid they're poison. After all, I killed my husband less than two weeks ago."

Bailey took a chocolate and said with a shrug, "What's a murder between strangers?" It was his first thrust, and it disclosed her shell less brittle than he had supposed. A barely perceptible widening of her gray eyes was the only indication that he had connected at all. She straightened, put the lid on the box as she turned and went back to the dresser. Bailey took a bite out of the chocolate, noticed that she glanced critically at herself in the mirror. She turned suddenly, leaning back, her hands clutching the dresser edge

behind her. She gave him a searching look.

"I wasn't fooling — what I said just now. I thought you ought to know before we're seen together in public."

He nodded, chewing. "I read about it," he said casually. "It's something not every woman can do and get away with it."

"Get away with it?" She stiffened, her guard down and suddenly alarmed. "It was an accident. You didn't read closely."

"Headlines," he said. "That's all I ever read. 'Bride slays Jack Bailey.' That doesn't mention accident."

"But if you had read further —" "I'm talking about the headline," he persisted. "The verb 'to slay' implied intent. If it was an accident, I think a good attorney would tell you you've got grounds for libel action against the *Courier*. You could ask for half a million or so."

"Oh."

Bailey leaned forward, amber-eyed. "Is that all you've got to say?"

"I was thinking." She pushed away from the dresser, moved to the closet from which she took her gray-green coat and the dark green beret. Bailey stood, joined her, and she handed him the coat. She stepped to the dresser, put the beret on carefully, tugging it to exactly the right angle. "It would take money to sue. Right now I have about twenty dollars and a stack of my husband's bills that can't be settled until I've sold the furniture, the photographic

equipment, or the insurance people stop quibbling about negligence.”

Bailey said, “The right attorney would take action on a percentage basis. Farbien in New Albany would be your man.”

Ivy took her green purse from a drawer, put it down on top of the dresser. “My coat, please —” And as Bailey helped her into the coat she repeated, “Farbien. I’ll remember.” She picked up the purse, turned to face him, her gray eyes coolly challenging. “I’ve decided to take your advice. I’ll sue.”

“Good girl,” he said with a slight smile.

“All my life I’ve been fighting, usually alone and for the merest essentials. It might be pleasant to fight for something worth while like — well, half a million dollars.”

Bailey said, “Of course you understand the *Courier’s* only defense will be to attempt to prove you murdered your husband.”

“I understand. Perfectly. Shall we go?”

They left the cheerless room, and Bailey was not at all sure that the first round was his.

On the drive out Water Street their talk was glib, meaningless, now and then striking a note of gaiety that was all pretense. They followed the shoreline, and presently the neon rainbow of the Paradise Island Casino was flashing through the rain and river mist on their left.

“Ever been out there?” he asked.
“Once.”

“Was it fun?”

“Not especially.” She added.
“But it might be.”

“We’ll see if it’s fun tonight,” he said, not entirely as though he expected it would be.

5.

Beauchamp’s landing was outside the city limits, kept there by Hartsville’s jealous rackets through McCaslon’s pressure on city officials. There were only half a dozen cars in the floodlighted parking area, and one of Beauchamp’s cabin cruisers was moored at the pier. A dark smiling young man in yachting clothes helped them aboard. The trip upstream and across to the island occupied less than eight minutes, and then they were following two other couples up broad steps to the Victorian monstrosity Beauchamp had converted into a night-spot. The reception hall was elegant with red plush and crystal glitter. Here a negro in a plum-colored uniform took their coats and directed them to the third floor.

The Montmartre Room was literally a garret which had suggested the artist’s studio motive of decoration. There were ugly foreshortened nudes on canvases in illuminated nooks. Members of the band wore long smocks and played music racked on easels. Waitresses balanced food and drinks on trays shaped like palletes, wore very short smocks, huge berets and apparently

little else. A draped statuesque model conducted Bailey and the girl to a small table up under a skylight where cold little fingers of rain tapped on the glass above their heads.

"Some of it must have leaked through into my Martini," Bailey later complained. Ivy pretended that was funny, but her gray eyes were strangers to the laugh.

The shrimp was either very good or Bailey was very hungry. He was just getting a good start when somebody touched his left shoulder and he looked up into the soft pale face of a youth of about eighteen wearing a fawn-colored suit. Bailey's right hand moved instinctively to the suitcoat pocket where he carried Perry Cade's gun. The youth spoke with scarcely any movement of his lips.

"The Beautiful Champ wants to see you."

Bailey glanced across at Ivy. She had returned a forkful of food to her plate, was stiffly erect, her eyes apprehensive.

Bailey said lightly, "By the merest coincidence, I want to see the Beautiful Champ. Will you excuse me?" He started to rise, managed to drop his napkin to the floor on the left side of his chair. As he leaned over to pick up the napkin he pulled the gun free from his pocket, extended it butt first beneath the table and into Ivy's lap. She must have grasped it without immediately knowing what it was.

Bailey straightened, noticed the expression of pure horror creeping into Ivy's face. But she did not drop the gun.

Bailey followed the youth to the mouth of a short hall scarcely ten feet from their table. The hall turned to the right and ended at a substantial door. The youth stopped, faced Bailey, a forty-five automatic in his fist.

"Reach."

"Angelina," Bailey said distinctly and with contempt; but he raised his hands. Two faint spots of color appeared on the kid's pasty face. He was thorough and rough as he searched Bailey's person for weapons. He then opened the door behind him, caught the thin brown man by the arm, and shoved him into a minaret room with a single sheet of curved glass enclosing half its perimeter. The kid remained outside and closed the door.

Beauchamp, wearing a black suit, sat behind a kidney-shaped desk. He was a square-shouldered ageless man with very white skin and negroid features. His close-cropped kinky hair had the lifeless gray look of something that has been swept out from under a bed. Beauchamp, whom somebody with a knack for fractured French had re-christened "the Beautiful Champ," slumped in his chair to toy with the cropped ears of a vicious looking Doberman. The dog's hackles rose as Bailey approached the desk, brushing angrily at the sleeve of his coat.

"The next time that lamb of yours lays hands on me, Beautiful, I'll kick his teeth in."

Beauchamp's laugh was quiet. "Not mine. I got normal tastes."

"Yeah?" Bailey appeared insultingly dubious.

The dog growled. Beauchamp cuffed it, straightened, frowned slightly at Bailey. "Sit down and cool off."

Bailey sat in a chair that was made of iron rods and canvas and didn't look much like a chair. He said, "We'll call it Augie Dhiel's lamb. Augie isn't here; we can insult him." He took out his checkbook and pen. "Can you let me have five hundred so I won't have to wash dishes?"

"Sure, sure. Any amount you want."

Bailey rested the checkbook on his knee, the pen poised. "Augie heisted me out of two hundred this afternoon," he said.

"Heisted you?" Beauchamp's black eyebrows raised arches of disbelief. "Augie?"

"Uh-huh. He was prowling my brother's flat with a gun. He left me twenty bucks to get out of town on."

Beauchamp shook his head, amazed. "He must be nuts."

"Maybe not." Bailey was watching the other man closely. "I get a rumble somebody who looked like Augie Dhiel left my brother's apartment in a hurry the night Jack was murdered."

Beauchamp drew in his thick lower lip. He shook his head. "Somebody's snowing you." He reached into his coat for his wallet. "Make the check for three, and I'll pay five."

Bailey filled in the check for three hundred dollars, traded it with the gambler for five one hundred dollar bills.

"Wait a minute," Beauchamp said as Bailey started to get up. "We got business. You took something from your brother's apartment this afternoon."

So, Bailey thought, they hadn't found it yet -- whatever it was. Probably Augie Dhiel had been in Bailey's room at the hotel at the time Bailey had left the apartment across the way. He settled back in the chair and extended thin legs, his ankles crossed. He said, "I picked up a leather toilet kit that belonged to my dad."

Beauchamp's brown eyes were steady and without expression. "You -- a sentimentalist? I think you're lying."

"Okay, so I'm lying."

"Don't get sore." The gambler rested forearms on the desk and leaned forward, smiling. "Cole Pittman is dying. Outside of Cole Pittman, nobody knows that Hartsville political setup as well as you do. I need a strong man in control."

"You do?" Bailey said with emphasis.

Beauchamp kept smiling. He had a mouthful of beautiful teeth. "I'm

moving in on Hartsville. I made a deal with McCaslon."

"You mean," Bailey said carefully, "you had McCaslon dealt with. Tonight. I was within three feet of him when he got it."

"McCaslon?" Beauchamp frowned. "You mean he's dead?"

Bailey stood. "If he isn't, he ought to be."

The gambler uttered a soft laugh. "Kind of puts you on a spot, doesn't it? Didn't McCaslon bump you out of your job as city engineer?"

Bailey answered neither question. He faced Beauchamp across the desk, his eyes burning with a harsh yellow light. "Listen, Beautiful, you can take over Hartsville or they can give it back to the Indians. All I want is my brother's killer."

Bailey started toward the door. Beauchamp said something that was not audible to Bailey and yet he turned, remembering the dog. The big Doberman had advanced to a point in front of the desk, had gathered itself for a spring, its fangs bared and snarling. Bailey, his face taut, took a backward step — the wrong move; maybe any move was wrong. The dog sprang at his throat. Bailey flung up his left arm. The Doberman's jaws clamped on hand and wrist as dog and man hit the floor, Bailey on his back, then rolling to his knees. He kept feeding the dog left hand while his right punched ineffectually at the Doberman's sleek belly. The door of the circular room burst open. There was an explosive

command from Beauchamp. The clamped jaws suddenly released Bailey's hand, and the animal wheeled to retire, growling, to its master's side.

Ivy stood in the door. Perry Cade's revolver was in her hand and leveled at Beauchamp's head. The gambler had not yet moved from the chair. His smile was frozen, his dark unblinking eyes on the girl. Bailey got onto shaky legs, wiped spittle from his mouth on a coat sleeve. He didn't look at the torn and bleeding left hand — he scarcely knew it was there — but went directly to Ivy and took the gun from her hand. Something gurgled up out of his throat; it sounded like, "Let's go."

In the hall outside Beauchamp's office, the pale youth was coming out of a room that had the glaring whiteness of a lavatory. His mouth was sullen. His eyes regarded the man and woman without comprehension.

They went on out. Nobody tried to stop them.

On the short trip back to shore, Ivy did what she could for his hand. She'd found a white scarf in the pocket of her coat, and she made a kind of bandage of it. Her face was drawn and very pale. She said nothing beyond a few essential orders like, "Turn it over," and, "Hold it up," delivered in a quiet monotone, and he knew she had gone a long way on sheer nerve; she could not go much farther. By the time

they had reached the pier there was blood on her coat as well as his, and his bandaged hand looked like a mop.

Her nerve lasted until they got into the car, then she flung her left arm up onto the ridge of the seat-back, and started to cry. He sat there and let her cry like he was letting it rain. There were words with her sobs: "You — you utter fool!" And: ". . . not easy for me . . . so soon after the other. . . . A gun in my hands . . ."

He didn't touch her; any contact at all would have established a relationship. He said angrily, "I wasn't counting on any rear guard action from you. I just knew I wouldn't get into Beauchamp's office with a gun."

He took out the gun, reached under the cowl to find the boot Perry Cade had provided to hold the revolver. He left it there, straightened, glanced at Ivy. She was watching him in the pale light that cutered through rain-streaked car windows. Her lips trembled.

"We're neither of us . . . very clever at expressing gratitude, are we?"

He said deliberately, "I guess not," and encircled her shoulders with his right arm, drawing her close, feeling for the first time the flesh and the substance of Ivy. He thought this would be expected of Ed Johnson. And possibly . . . a kiss? It was hardly that, when he got into it. It was more like a savage

mating of their mouths. And then she broke away, flung herself to the farthest extremity of the cushion, facing him, her back to the door, watching him out of wide luminous gray eyes. She looked small and cowed.

"Why do you hate me?"

"Hate you?" His lips were numb; there was a taste of blood.

"You hate me, Norb Bailey. Why?"

He stared at her stupidly. "How did you know I was Norb?"

"I knew from the moment you stepped into that room. Your eyes, I think; not everybody has amber eyes. And from the way you handled that man. Jack said you were like that — quick, fearless, a fighter. Which," she added with a trace of scorn, "he certainly was not."

Bailey closed his eyes for an instant. He saw a room — a room in the studio-apartment over the drug-store — and there was Jack, tall and blond, handing a nickel-plated revolver to his bride; handing it casually, with a kind of triumph in his handsome face as though he had mastered fear. . . . The picture slipped out of mind, and Bailey made no attempt to follow it to a logical conclusion. He groped for Perry Cade's keys, got the proper one into the ignition switch, and started the engine. He backed out of the parking area and onto the road, clumsy about it because of that mop of a left hand. He headed the car toward town. He did all this without

looking at Ivy, but he was aware of her — the rustle of her skirts, the seductive hiss of nylon as she crossed her wonderful legs.

She asked timidly, "Is there something about me that reminds you of . . . of that other woman?"

"What other woman?" His voice was harsh.

"The one you didn't marry because there was a kid brother you had to put through school." She was striving gently for some means of understanding him. He tried to laugh, remembering, as he did so, the stir of envy he had felt when he had taken Ivy's picture from the brown envelope in which it had been mailed. One look, and he had tossed the picture into his trunk; he had not seen it since. You could, he realized, work up a fairly genuine hate for something you have always wanted and have always been denied.

He felt small, even ridiculous. He said without thinking, "I guess I spoiled him." Then, thinking, "I guess I've been a fool most of my life." He whipped the Plymouth to the left, onto a side road, hind wheels slewing in loose gravel.

She asked worriedly, "Now where are we going?"

"The Auction Barn — know where that is?"

"Where I sent the furniture. But it's closed tonight."

"He'll be there — Charlie Wilson." He was driving too fast, taking his fury out on the gas pedal.

Ivy said sanely, "You ought to get that hand to a doctor."

"The hand is fine," he lied. Then he was tramping the brake with everything he had to skid the car to a stop with its front wheels on pavement. A huge truck barreled across their path, inches from the bumper, sloshing water on the windshield. The coupe rocked in the backwash of air. Bailey glanced at the girl's set pale face. His laugh was sheepish.

East on the state road the headlights of the coupe splashed on a huge sign: *Auction Every Saturday Nite*. There was the barn on the left side of the road, huge and dim, the white painted gate posts. Bailey drove through onto wet cinders and up close to the wide doors of the barn. Dingy yellow light showed through a dust-caked window.

"I'll only be a couple of minutes," he said to the girl as he got out of the car.

Bailey worked the thumb-latch on the barn door, found it unlocked, and stepped into the gloomy interior.

In front of the auction stage at the opposite end a dangling globe threw light on a section of the floor and, to the left, a group of household furnishings.

Somewhat to the right of the dusty furniture, the lank figure of a man in an army overcoat stretched at full length on the floor. There was a revolver clutched in his hand.

There was a lot of blood.

6.

Bailey's strides carried him to within a yard of the watchman. Charlie lay on his back, his mouth open and vacant, his eyes open and glazed. Some blood still flowed sluggishly from the bullet hole in his ropelike neck. There were other holes in chest and belly indicating extreme caution on the part of somebody. Charlie was meant to be dead. He was.

Bailey stepped around Charlie Wilson, stood just outside the group of furnishings on the left side of the room. The stuff was wrecked. Good modern pieces in blond wood with plastic upholstery had been ruined by the searcher's knife, the covers slashed, moss gutted from the inner springs. There was an old trunk — it had belonged to Bailey's mother — its lock broken, the bedding and linens it had contained heaped on the floor. Bailey picked his way into the mess, glanced at tags attached to the pieces as he went. It was all stuff that had belonged to Jack and Ivy. Nothing that looked as though it might have concealed anything had been spared.

He stood beside the trunk. There were a pair of pillows resting on the extended lid, the blue-and-white ticking ripped. White down bilged out of one of the slashes; out of the other, brownish chicken feathers. He turned away then paused, staring at a small table next to the trunk. The table had chrome

legs, a top and stretcher-shelf of clear lucite plastic. It had escaped vandalism because of its obvious innocence. Bailey stepped back, glancing down, wary of the blood on the floor. His yellowish brown eyes returned to the chrome and lucite table. The lower extremity of one of its legs was tarnished. Chrome didn't, tarnish. But silver — especially silver in contact with rubber, like a rubber tile floor —

He stepped forward again, picked up the table by the leg with the tarnished end. The leg was chrome from top to shelf. From the shelf to the floor, possibly eight inches, it was sterling silver — the missing toothbrush holder from the toilet kit. He could see the neat joint where the chrome tube had been hacksawed. Possibly a wood plug had been driven into the sawed end so that the cap of the toothbrush holder could be fastened to the chrome member with a wood screw. Bailey grasped the toothbrush holder with his right hand. It pulled free with a pop like that made by a cork withdrawn from a bottle. He transferred the silver tube to his bandaged left hand and pushed his right forefinger into the opening. He pulled out a narrow extending spiral of film.

Bailey swung around to face the light and elevated his hands. The film was too small to reveal anything without projection. He coiled it back into the tube which he then reinserted in its telescoping cap so

that the table leg was once more complete. He put the table down. On his way to the door he noticed a telephone on one of the uprights. He hesitated a moment, shook his head, and left the building.

"Cold?" he asked Ivy as he slid in under the wheel of the coupe.

"Not very." She gave him a faint smile. "How's the hand?"

"All right." He slammed the door, reached for the ignition switch, at the same time nodding toward the barn. "That was the man who sold Jack the gun."

"Oh?" It was a very small "oh"; he let it wait breathlessly while he got the car out onto the highway. He said, "If there's anything connected with Jack's death you think I ought to know, now would be the time."

She said tonelessly, "There's nothing."

"You and Jack and Perry — no one else in the apartment that night?"

"No — no one else."

"And you were holding the gun when it went off?"

"Yes. The last thing I remember . . . his face. Crumpling."

"You came to in the hospital?"

"No — right there, in the bed. Then they sent me to the hospital." She drew a shivering breath. "Why? What did *he* say, back there?"

"Charlie Wilson? He didn't say anything." Bailey made it sound casual. "Have you any idea why Jack bought the gun?"

"No. I just supposed he wanted a gun."

Bailey steadied the wheel with his bandaged left hand to strip a cigar with right hand and teeth. "You knew Vince McCaslon?"

"I met him. He owns the Wharf House where I used to sing."

Bailey's laugh was bitter. "He owned a number of things, and the Wharf House was the nicest of the lot. Once he even thought he owned me."

"Well —" she touched his thigh timidly with finger tips, "you're nice." Which was wholly disarming. She was all kinds of a woman, this Ivy, and Bailey remained thoughtfully silent the rest of the way to the Walford Hotel.

Detective Lieutenant Doyle sprawled out in the chair in Ivy's room, his hat worn low over flat black eyes, aimlessly pulling petals off a rose. That was Doyle, Bailey thought; as a boy Doyle must have spent a lot of time pulling wings off butterflies.

Doyle said, "Come in, you two."

They went in. There was another cop back of the door, and he caught Bailey's elbows from behind, pinning his arms. Doyle heaved out of the chair and advanced to search Bailey.

"Where's the gun, Bailey?"

"What gun?"

With no change of expression on his heavy face, with no warning beyond the tightening of his sullen mouth, Doyle slammed the back

of his hand across Bailey's thin face. The sharp cry of reproach came from Ivy.

Doyle said wearily, "Let's go down to the hall." His eyes flickered across Ivy's face. "You too, Mrs. Bailey."

7

A man's voice said, "That damned Doyle'll kill somebody one of these days. But then Bailey shouldn't have socked him."

There was a grunt close to Bailey's left ear. The sharp sting of antiseptic in the open lacerations on Bailey's left hand had brought him fully into consciousness. He opened his eyes to the painful glare of white painted brick walls in the basement of City Hall. He was in shirt sleeves and sitting on the concrete floor, his back against the wall. A plump gray-haired man wearing a brown suit squatted beside him to dress the chewed hand, while a young good-looking blond man, also wearing brown but of a deeper hue, lounged against the door of the room and smoked a cigarette. Bailey's eyes wandered to a corner and fixed on the baseball bat that stood there. His shudder was convulsive and the doctor said gruffly, "Hold still."

"You shouldn't have socked him, Bailey," the blond man said.

Doyle closed his eyes and let the doctor do what he wanted with the hand. From the questions Doyle had put to him between carefully

calculated blows across the mid-section, Bailey knew that Vince McCaslon was dead, that the bullets removed from his body matched the one that had killed Jack. The gun Doyle wanted was the nickel-plated revolver Jack had bought from Charlie Wilson and that had subsequently been stolen from Bailey's room at the Scobee. The frame was tight. But there was something missing from the procedure here at the Hall that lent a fishy odor to the inquisition: there had never been more than two men besides Bailey in the room — Doyle and one other — and neither had bothered to take down Bailey's statement, which had clung doggedly to the unconvincing truth.

"You'll do," the doctor said when he had placed the last piece of tape over the bandage. "And don't ask me if you'll be able to play the piano." He closed his bag with a snap, stood on short legs and took scurrying steps to the door. The blond man let him out, closed the door, and came over to Bailey.

"That damned Doyle," the blond man said. "Hung you over, huh? Think a little drink will help?"

Bailey said, "Gimme." His lips were caked and stiff. His garments smelled of his vomit.

The blond man took a half pint from his pocket, uncorked it, passed it to Bailey. The stuff was possibly whiskey, and it started a fire within, a counter-irritant for belly-cramp. He wondered dully where Ivy was,

if they were still holding her. He had another one from the bottle, shuddered, handed the bottle up, his yellowish eyes on the blond man's face.

"Where's Mrs. Bailey?"

The young cop tipped his head to the left. "In there. Doyle's got another angle, thinks maybe she *did* intend to kill your brother."

Bailey started to get up. The blond man gave him a hand. He asked, "You're sure you're all right?"

"I'm fine," Bailey said. He got as far as a chair, and the blond man pushed him into it. Sweat stood out on Bailey's taut face. He belched.

"Before you go in there, lemme give you a tip, Mr. Bailey. Don't smart off and don't sock Doyle again. You can get a deal with Doyle if you're reasonable."

Bailey kneaded his aching middle. "I deal with what?"

"Doyle thinks either you or your sister-in-law got a copy of McCaslon's black book — the one your brother made."

So that explained the unofficial air about the inquisition. Who killed McCaslon was not important. The important thing, to Doyle, was that he landed on the right side of the political fence now that an explosion in Hartsville was imminent. It indicated, Bailey thought, collusion between Doyle and Beauchamp. Odd there were such heavy penalties for murdering an individual

and none at all for murdering a town.

Bailey stood. The blond man conducted him to the door, let him out into the hall, led him to the door of the next room on the left.

"It's okay for you to go in, Mr. Bailey. I'll hang around out here."

Bailey opened the door, stepped into a room that was a mat for the one he had just left. Ivy was in there and Doyle — nobody else — and they were seated at a small table where a gooseneck lamp concentrated its rays on Ivy and allowed Doyle to remain in comparative shadow. Ivy's face was like a mask cut out of white paper. One small hand rested on the table tightly clenched on a wadded handkerchief. She did not glance in Bailey's direction, probably could not have seen him if she had because of the glare. Bailey moved within a yard of the table, intent on Doyle's monotonous grinding voice.

". . . Jack handed you the gun. That was opportunity. He was standing right there, facing you, and you had the gun in your hand. Weapon and opportunity. Now . . . motive. We know you visited a lawyer's office two days before — E. K. Cullen in the Life Building. Cullen was in. Maybe you wanted to start divorce proceedings."

Ivy said, "Yes," faintly and without moving her lips. Her eyes were fixed on some point on the surface of the table.

"Jack was in financial difficulty — we know that. There were some

gambling I.O.U.'s that were worrying him. Maybe that's why he bought the gun — afraid he'd be beaten up by some tough collector of gambling debts. Or did he buy the gun to try and force you into doing something you didn't want to do. Mrs. Bailey — something highly distasteful to you, entirely foreign to your character?"

Ivy did not answer. Her knuckles whitened, squeezing the handkerchief.

"Anyway," Doyle went on, "Jack needed money. He sold some photographs — peddled prints of them locally, shipped them to so-called novelty houses across the country. I don't think it was the first time, the connections he had. Call them art, pornography, or just plain smut. But there was one certain picture — here, I'll show you; I've got a copy right here. Maybe this one's art — not like the others. At least it's the only one of this woman in the group —"

Ivy uttered a low moan. Her weary eyes widened, followed Doyle's big hand as it moved into the pool of light upon the table. The hand carried a postcard held face down. Color flooded into Ivy's face. Her hands came up, fluttering, to cover her eyes. Doyle turned the postcard over. It was a picture of Ivy. She was entirely naked, stepping from a bathtub to reach for a towel. The photo was a sneak shot, the mechanics of its taking devised in some secret cranny of an unclean mind.

"He sold that with the others," the voice kept grinding. "His own wife, and possibly he told you, tormented you with the fact that he had sold it. Anyway, you knew of its existence — your reaction just now was proof enough — and there's your motive."

Bailey turned, lurching toward the door.

Doyle raised his voice. "Hey, Bailey —"

Bailey got the door open, stumbled into the hall. The blond man was there; he glanced uneasily at Bailey then quickly away. Bailey leaned against the wall. His face wore a sickly yellow pallor, his eyes a stunned look. He saw Doyle, who had followed him from the room, as though for the first time and said distinctly, "You filthy lug."

Doyle snorted. "You wanted her over a barrel."

"Let her alone," Bailey said tonelessly. "I'm not asking, I'm telling you to let her alone. I know where McCaslon's black book is. I'll take you there."

A slow smile of triumph started across Doyle's heavy face. "I thought you were the one." He turned to the blond man. "You take Mrs. Bailey back to her hotel. I'll get Bailey's coat and stuff." He dropped a heavy hand on Bailey's shoulder in what was meant as a friendly gesture. "No hard feelings?"

"No," Bailey lied.

"We got no worries about the copy that goes to the prosecutor.

That's all been taken care of, and he'll never see it because we got a plant in his office. It was the extra your brother made that had us worried. That stuff is dynamite —" he chuckled slyly, "as I guess you know. I guess the city engineer took his cut where he found it, huh?"

Bailey's smile was watery. "It's dynamite."

Doyle laughed. "Then we're all in the same boat." He winked; Bailey, the former fugitive, had suddenly become a fellow conspirator engaged in the murder of a town. Doyle leaned close to whisper, "Don't worry about that other — the McCaslon kill. Fall guys come a dime a dozen."

"Try Augie Dhiel," Bailey suggested, his smile fixed and rather horrible.

"It's an idea." Doyle laughed and started down the hall. "I'll get your stuff and be right with you."

Bailey leaned against the wall, his body shaking like that of a man who has been sick for a long time. The door opened, and the blond man came out. He said to Bailey, "She wants to see you a minute."

Bailey went into the room. Ivy was standing behind the table, dressed for the street. She'd been crying. She had done nothing to repair the damage to her makeup; it no longer mattered. Her gray eyes sought Bailey's, and her lips trembled over words.

"Norb, I — I'm sorry."

Sorry? He thought, *She never had*

a break. Not one damned break in her whole life. He moved to the table, opposite her, leaned against it to still the trembling in his legs. He did not trust himself to speak for at that moment he would willingly have killed his brother with his own hands.

"I — I'm sorry you had to know," she said faintly, her gray eyes searching his face.

He said, "You should have told me — written a letter —"

"Would you have believed?"

He stared down at the table, shook his head.

"He — he just wasn't —" she swallowed, "quite a man."

And then Doyle opened the door and called, "Come on, Bailey, let's get on our horse."

Bailey turned without looking at Ivy and went back into the hall. Doyle had Bailey's coats; he helped him find a sleeve opening with the bandaged left hand and, as he did so the big detective said: "I'll tell you how all this happened. We had your brother cold on this smut peddling, but McCaslon intervened, put on pressure, and got Jack off the hook. What McCaslon wanted Jack for was to get all this dope McCaslon had down on microfilm that was to go to the prosecutor in case anything happened to McCaslon. But Jack made an extra copy for himself, see, and we didn't know a damned thing about it until yesterday when it turns up your brother had been blackmailing the county

clerk on some printing contract kickback —”

Bailey turned savagely on Doyle. “Shut up, damn you. I’ll play your kind of ball, but I don’t have to listen to your goddamned resume of the game. Now let’s get going.”

Doyle shrugged big shoulders. “Suit yourself.”

They went up concrete basement steps together and left the City Hall. It had stopped raining. The night was dark.

8.

Doyle’s official car drove west on Jefferson at Bailey’s direction, and when they were in front of the Walford Hotel Bailey said, “Stop here a second. I want to lock Cade’s car.”

Doyle pulled up almost abreast of the Plymouth, and Bailey got out, climbed into the coupe, and let the door swing to without latching. He reached under the cowl, brought out Perry Cade’s gun, dropped it into the right hand pocket of his topcoat. He left the coupe and rejoined Doyle.

“Out Washington Street to the Auction Barn,” Bailey said.

Several times on the fast drive out to the edge of town, Bailey glanced back through the rear window of the police car. He thought they were dragging a tail, but he did not comment on this to Doyle. The detective turned into the cindered parking area and pulled up

alongside the barn doors. They got out, entered the building, and the scene was exactly as Bailey had left it two hours before, with the gaunt body of Charlie Wilson lying there in the puddle of light on the blood-stained floor. Doyle uttered an oath and strode ahead to drop on one knee beside the dead watchman.

Bailey said, “Want to bet you find the same slugs in him you took out of McCaslon and Jack?” He skirted the bloodstain and moved in among the furnishings that had come from Jack’s studio apartment. He stood beside the trunk, glanced across at Doyle who still crouched beside the corpse, his back somewhat toward Bailey. Bailey stooped to the chrome-legged, plastic-topped table, straightened as Doyle’s head turned. Doyle’s flat black eyes were on the table; they moved away to one of the riddled lounge chairs, but Bailey knew he’d tipped his hand, that Doyle was now aware the film was somewhere in the table.

Doyle said, “Jeez, did somebody beat us to it?” And then his eyes moved alertly toward the entrance, probing into the half-light. He came quickly to his feet, sprang back to where Bailey stood, the movement quiet and quick in spite of Doyle’s size, eyes still on the door. “Down, Bailey,” he whispered.

There was a faint stir of sound from the entrance. Doyle and Bailey crouched behind the trunk. The cop slipped his revolver from his shoulder holster. Bailey, his eyes on

Doyle's heavy-jawed profile, cautiously worked his right hand down into the pocket of his topcoat where it closed on the butt of Perry Cade's gun. They waited.

Somebody had opened the door and was now taking assured steps in their direction. They could see the figure dimly — a man, short and paunchy, wearing a hat, a coat of some light shade. Gray porkpie hat. Tan twill coat. Augie Dhiel, plump lips pursed but not actually whistling, his glittering little eyes scouting into corners. He waited too long to discover Charlie Wilson lying there to make the act convincing, and stopped well within the circle of light, mouth open in counterfeited surprise, eyes on the corpse. Doyle and Bailey stood up from behind the trunk, Doyle with the big police .38 in his fist.

"Reach and freeze, Augie," Doyle said.

Augie's gaze jumped to the trunk. His hands started up, kept moving until they were level with his wide shoulders.

Doyle stepped out from behind the trunk and to the edge of the grouped furnishings. Bailey kept close to him, stopped somewhat behind and to the right of Doyle. Bailey was watching Doyle — not Augie; let Doyle watch Augie. And in the topcoat pocket Bailey gripped Perry Cade's gun, muzzle tipped slightly up and about six inches from Doyle's right elbow.

Doyle eyed the little fat man

across the circle of yellow light. "Get his gun, Bailey."

"I don't think I want to," Bailey said evenly. "He'd have just one gun — a nickeled thirty-two registered in my name — and the second I get my hand on it, Doyle, you'll shoot me in the back. Fall guys *don't* come a dime a dozen."

At the merest suggestion that Doyle might turn in his direction, Bailey shot him through the right elbow. Doyle's big police gun spilled out of nerveless fingers, hit the floor, and Bailey kicked it away, jerking his own weapon free from his pocket. The little fat guy had turned in panic. Bailey aimed at Augie's running legs, and the hammer dropped on an empty chamber. Augie must have heard the click. It lulled him. He stopped on the thin fringe of light, wheeled, his expression one of triumph, the gun in his fist a blur of reflected light on nickel. His shot pierced the crown of Bailey's hat. Bailey, the shape of an oath on crusted lips, triggered without hope . . . and the gun jumped and roared. The little fat man took a wallowing forward step, stumbled, came down onto his knees, and finally keeled over onto his right side. He lay there, whimpering.

Bailey swung somewhat to the left, caught Doyle moving in the direction of where his gun had landed. Bailey said, "Nuh-uh." And Doyle faced around, his mouth bitter, his right arm dangling uselessly, its fingers cupping blood.

Bailey said with malice, "I'm sorry as hell I winged you with that first wild shot. Why, you may never be able to use that arm again."

"The hell with that," Doyle said. "Get the film. I want to see it burning."

Bailey said, "Right now you're going to phone for the prosecutor, the sheriff, and the meat wagon, in that order. The prosecutor — nobody else — gets the film."

Doyle stared at the thin man in stunned silence while, on the other side of the circle of light, Augie Dhiel was bleating for a doctor.

"Why, you crazy punk," Doyle said finally, "McCaslon wouldn't have left you off his list. He hated your guts."

Bailey nodded. "Because I couldn't be bought. Because, as city engineer, I never took a dime that wasn't part of my salary. That's why McCaslon had me bumped out of the organization, why he hated my guts, why I won't show up on the crap list." He motioned with the gun. "Now get moving. Or haven't there been enough killings?"

9.

At four A.M. Bailey parked Perry Cade's Plymouth on Oak Street hill in front of the white rooming house where Perry lived. He got out, used Perry's latch key on the front door, climbed carpeted stairs to a long hall dimly illuminated by a night light. Perry's door had a

name card tacked to it. Bailey knocked, got no answer, and used the proper skeleton key to operate the lock. He stepped in, flipped the switch to light a large pleasant room containing a desk with a phone and portable typewriter, a neatly made double bed, a comfortable chair with a reading lamp, some book shelves crowded to overflowing, a chest-of-drawers supporting a table model television set.

Bailey took out Perry Cade's gun, tipped out its cylinder. It contained three live cartridges and two that were spent, the latter separated by an empty chamber. As he crossed the room, Bailey closed the gun and put it down on top of the chest of drawers. He tossed his hat into the chair. He went to the bed, pulled the spread back from the pillows which were covered with clean starched white cases. He poked each pillow lightly with splayed fingers of his right hand. The one on the left was thin and inclined to lump, while the one on the right had an airy buoyancy. He picked up the latter, stood it on end, and worked the white case part way off the pillow. The pillow had the standard blue-and-white striped ticking. In its center was a small hole that might have been a cigarette burn but wasn't; the hole went entirely through the pillow. Bailey picked some white down out of the hole. He sighed. When he had jolted the pillow all the way back into its case, he put it in its proper place, sat

down on the edge of the bed, and took off his shoes. He did not remove his topcoat before stretching out at full length on the bed, his head on the pillow that had the hole. He closed his eyes and presently sheer exhaustion caught up with him. He went to sleep.

"Norb—" It was Perry Cade's voice, and Bailey opened his eyes on a room flooded with the gray light of the morning. Perry Cade was standing just within the door unbuttoning his topcoat. Weariness had robbed his cheeks of some of their boyish pink, but his china blue eyes were round and sleepless. He did not seem to be altogether pleased to find Bailey there and he shook his head and said, "You look like the wrath of God, Norb."

"Probably," Bailey said. He sat up, propped his back against the headboard. "How'd it go?"

Perry Cade took off his topcoat and crossed the room with it. "Tomorrow's headlines: 'Prosecutor promises cleanup of City Hall and Court House.' 'Dhiel confesses to murder of McCaslon and watchman; involves Beauchamp as accessory before—' What the hell is Beauchamp's first name, Norb?" Cade dropped his topcoat on the chair, turned to the man on the bed.

Bailey looked at the little man, half-eyed with sleep. "I never heard it."

"Nobody at the office knew either. Damn it, Norb, the most eventful night in the history of Hartsville,

and I get stuck with the city desk." Perry turned to the chest-of-drawers, got out a bottle and two clean glasses. He poured three fingers of Bourbon into each glass, carried both to the bed, handed one to Bailey. "Can you still drink it straight and warm?"

"I can drink it standing on my head in a canoe," Bailey said. He watched Cade go to the chair and sit on its arm. He raised his glass in toast.

"Here's to crime. May our city henceforth be free of it thanks to a guy from Venezuela." Cade added with a wistful glance at the man on the bed, "You always did get into the damnedest messes, Norb."

"You don't do too badly in that respect yourself," Bailey said. He drank some of the bourbon and then stared through the V of his stockinged feet at the little man in the chair. "There *was* a fat little guy who came out of Jack's apartment in a hell of a hurry that night."

Perry Cade lowered his glass slowly. His frown was slight.

Bailey said, "You."

"Hell, I may be little, but I'm not fat."

Bailey nodded, his head bumping the bed. "With a pillow stuffed under your topcoat, you'd be a fat little guy."

Perry Cade knocked off his drink, looked curiously at the man on the bed. "How did you figure it?"

"It wasn't too tough, Perry. From the beginning you overdid the frank

and open business, practically confessing you had a crush on Ivy, though she showed no interest in you. I suspect you've been sending her candy and flowers since the funeral. Then there's the crew haircut, your efforts to make yourself younger —"

"Do you know about the picture, Norb?" Perry Cade asked softly. "Did you really know your kid brother, that he had the mind of a pig?"

"I didn't," Bailey said. "I do now." He finished his drink, shuddering. "What with all that, the hole in the shirt, the empty chamber in your revolver — a thirty-two, by the way — and the bullet hole in this pillow I'm lying on — it adds."

"Go on, add it."

"Well, Jack bought the gun from Charlie Wilson but refused Wilson's offer of a box of ammo. So maybe Jack didn't intend to use bullets in the gun. Apparently he wanted the gun to scare somebody — Ivy, maybe; I don't give a damn. But he was always afraid of guns, a kind of neurosis he had. Now comes the hole in the shirt and Jack's carelessness in handling the gun that night. That adds to one thing: blank cartridges. When the gun went off in Ivy's hand, Jack took the muzzle blast from a blank cartridge against his chest. It burned the shirt and burned Jack painfully. Ivy said his face crumpled — actually a grimace of pain from the burn. And then Ivy fainted, dropping the gun."

"You left out something," Perry Cade said softly. "I'd brought my own gun up to the apartment. I don't think I had anything special in my mind — maybe back inside there was something — but I had my gun with me to compare it, I said, with Jack's."

Bailey nodded. "So Jack carried the unconscious Ivy to the bed. You picked up Jack's gun, broke it open, discovered the defect in the ejection mechanism, and that's when the thought hit you that you could kill a man who needed killing and get away with it."

"You removed the blanks, put one loaded cartridge into the chamber that had the ejection defect. But if the thing were to come off properly there mustn't be any chance that somebody outside the building might hear more than one shot. So you used a pillow to muffle the gun, came at Jack with the hammer rocked back and ready to tap that one live cartridge you'd chambered. When the job was done, you had two holes to fill in a hurry. The one in Jack's shirt could be accounted for by slipping a dead cigarette butt under his body about where the blank cartridge had burned him. But the hole in the pillow —"

"I forgot about the pillow," Perry Cade said. His face was pale and his eyes held an almost fanatic gleam. "That was the last thing. I'd even called the cops, and there was the damned pillow."

"So you stuck it under your top-

coat and ran down to your car with it, leaving it there," Bailey said. "Why the cops didn't wonder about there being only one pillow on a double bed is beyond me. Later you must have pulled a switch — one of your pillows for one of Ivy's. You traded chicken feathers for down, which wasn't a bad deal, hole and all." Bailey waved his empty glass. "Got any more of the local product?"

Perry Cade stood, went back to the chest-of-drawers for the bottle. The gun was there, but he didn't touch it. He brought the bottle over to the bed and poured generously. He went back to his chair.

"This damned town," Bailey said distastefully after he'd taken a drink. "Bourbon for breakfast! It's this damned town and its politics. You know, Perry, I found out something about myself last night. I found out when there's something I want badly and can't have, I build up a hate for it. You, on the other hand, are the kind of a guy who'll carry a torch all his life."

Bailey drained his glass with a flourish, sat up suddenly, long legs over the edge of the bed, and put on his shoes. He stood, said, "My hat's on the chair — would you mind?"

Perry Cade picked up Bailey's hat and sailed it to him. Bailey put it on and started for the door.

"Norb —"

Bailey paused, glanced back half expecting to see that Cade had the

gun in his hand. He didn't. He still sat on the arm of the chair, his small face puzzled; he looked suddenly old.

"What are you going to do, Norb?"

"Do?" Bailey shrugged. "I'm not going to do anything. You're the one who's got to live with it. Either you'll sleep nights or you won't. I'm not going to tell anyone except —" his amber eyes took on a malicious gleam, "except Ivy."

He left Perry Cade on the arm of the chair looking old.

10.

Bailey walked through the chill gray morning back to Hotel Scobee. He made only one stop on the way — the bus station, where he made an inquiry. From his room he phoned the Walford and asked for Mrs. Bailey.

"I hope I didn't get you out of bed," he said when Ivy answered.

"Oh, good morning, Norb." She sounded pleased. "You did, but I'm glad you did."

He said, "I just wanted to tell you to go ahead with the libel suit, as we'd planned. Farbien is the boy to manage it for you. I'll write you a long letter explaining everything when I get back to Maracaibo."

"You're going back so soon, Norb?"

"Uh-huh. I've got a road to push to beat the seasonal rains. There's a bus out of here in an hour for Louis-

ville where I can get a plane for Miami. I may stay there overnight before I hop off for Venezuela.”

“Oh,” she said. The small “oh” waiting alone.

“So —” he drew a breath, “this is good-by for now. When you collect that half million from the Courier, run on down and see me. We’ll sample the nightlife in Caracas.”

“Well,” she said slowly, “well, good-by, Norb.”

He turned from the phone, went to his bag for his shaving gear, soap, and a towel, and headed for the bath. He took his time under the shower, soaking the cramps out of his belly. He shaved carefully, dressed, found a cigar that wasn’t broken, and decided he still had time to catch breakfast in the coffee shop downstairs before going to the bus. He went to the door, opened it, and there was Ivy, one hand raised for door-knocking. She was wearing a smart black suit, a black hat with one cocky feather, and there was a suitcase on either side of her. She dropped her hand and her eyes. Color rushed into her face.

Bailey said, “You’re pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?”

“No,” she said in a small voice. She looked up out of anxious gray eyes. “I’m not sure at all. That’s why I’m asking. Norb, will you take me with you?”

He chewed on his cigar. “What about the libel suit?”

She shook her head. “I don’t want a half million dollars. I want —” she looked confusedly away from him and along the hall — “I want to go somewhere, a long ways from here and start over. And —” the gray eyes came back to him briefly and lowered — “and I don’t want to do it alone.”

He chewed thoughtfully, frowning. It might work. They’d had a mutual hurt, had shared the same bitter dregs of disillusionment. Maybe if you started with the dregs, the sweeter, headier stuff came later. They could build from the bottom, from the depths of the cup.

“Venezuela?” he said, thinking.

“Anywhere, Norb.”

“I was thinking, I might get a transfer to one of PanAm’s refineries on Curaçao. It’s a Dutch Indies island. You’d like Curaçao. You’d never be able to stand it in Maracaibo because it’s hotter than —”

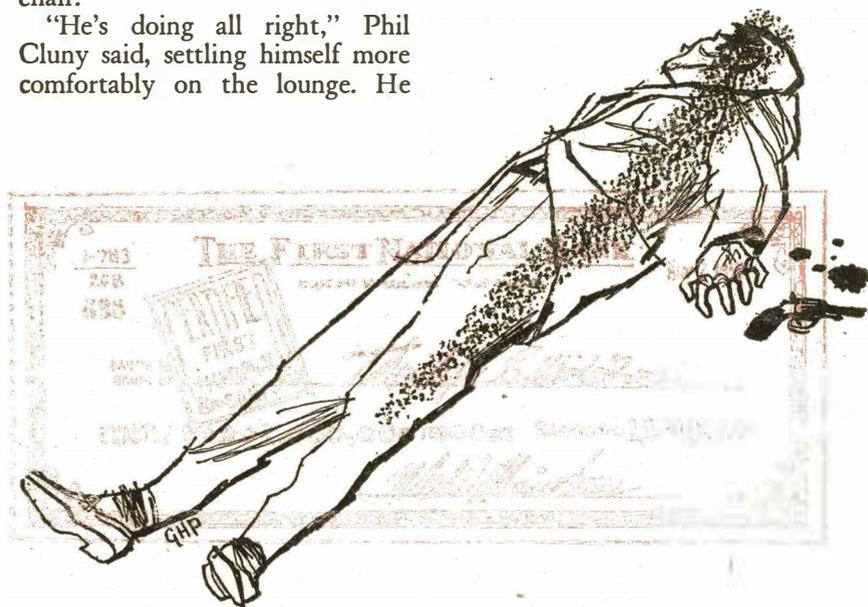
He could not mention hell.



THE ROOM was quiet and dim, and seemed to have a highlight in the oblong, luminous screen of a television console against one shadowy wall. Three men watched and listened, two from opposite ends of a deep lounge, the third from a big arm-chair.

"He's doing all right," Phil Cluny said, settling himself more comfortably on the lounge. He

The Jury



was a very thin, very long-legged man with almost bloodless lips and deeply-set gray eyes behind silver-rimmed spectacles. His voice was soft, without intonation. "It's too bad."

"Why?" Lloyd Staples asked, turning his round, flat-featured face from the television screen to look at the man who shared the

*"It's really too bad," one of the jury said.
"But what else can we do?"*

BY KENNETH FEARING

lounge with him. "Are you changing your mind, Phil?"

Phil did not make an immediate response. When he did speak again, his irresolution was plain. "It just seems too bad, that's all."

Both men now glanced at the man in the chair, Vernon Sharrod, as if waiting for some signal, some word or sign, to direct their thinking.

Vernon Sharrod was dark-haired and dark-eyed, a muscular, hipless man with broad spatulate fingers that were never still. He drummed his fingertips on the arms of his chair, staring first at Phil and then at Lloyd.

"I thought we had it settled," he said. "Now Phil doesn't seem so sure. How about you, Lloyd? You got any different ideas?"

Lloyd shook his head slowly, frowning a little. "Just that we might wait for a while," he said. "As Phil says, Thorndale is doing a good job up there. What's the harm in that stuff he's telling them? There's no hurry, the way I see it."

Phil spoke with jovial enthusiasm. "I'd like to see one of us do half as well. Just half." Then he added, with all the heartiness gone from his voice, "But that's not the point, is it? No matter what he says, that's got nothing to do with it, really."

There was a moment of silence, broken by the dry, reflective voice of the man in the armchair. "Or for that matter, what he doesn't say.

Either way, it makes no difference. The new arrangements are already made. The only question is what to do about Thorndale, and when to do it, and how."

"He's been a good front for us," Phil said.

"Sure," Vernon said. "But what good will he be to us after this investigating committee gets through with him? How much good will he be if he has to go to trial? Everybody knows how our syndicate's gone into legitimate business now. They know we put the syndicate take into real estate and hotels and insurance companies, and they know we put Thorndale in as director just as soon as we started taking over from the old syndicate." He paused "Thorndale looks honest, and he sounds honest, but he isn't conning that committee one damn bit. He started being through the minute the committee sent him that subpoena. Like I said, the only question is when we get rid of him, and how."

Now all three men again turned to the luminous screen on which, however the perspective shifted, the center of attention remained in a single individual. A close view showed the strong, controlled animation in the heavy face of a man in his fifties, features that were sometimes genial and often reserved, but always careful and never at a loss. At a distance, from an angle showing one or another of those questioning him, he was large, dignified, flawlessly clothed.

The electrical voices that issued from the cabinet were thin, but clear.

"Then who would you describe as your closest business associates, Mr. Thorndale?" one of the committeemen asked.

It was a question the face on the screen could enjoy. The smile flashed, the voice rolled. "Every employee, every businessman who has ever consulted with me, every official who has used my company's services, and the entire public, which has also reaped the benefits."

"Is Vernon Sharrod one of those associates, much closer than any of these?"

Thorndale's voice deepened, his face became grave. "I have met Mr. Sharrod, certainly. I believe he may have asked for advice, like anyone else. How close that makes him, you see, would be purely relative."

The television camera veered to a different committeeman, with Mr. Thorndale now in the background, and the committeeman asked, "Do Lloyd Staples and Philip Cluny make frequent payments to your company?"

The camera swung back to Mr. Thorndale, and for just an instant his large eyes peered directly into the room. Then they looked away.

"They may be investors," Mr. Thorndale said. His voice held exaggerated weariness. "Or they could be among our many thousands of subscribers. Offhand, I don't know. It would be quite normal, either way. It makes no difference."

Lloyd Staples made the short sound of a laugh. "I wonder if he knows we're watching him?" he said.

"He ought to," Vernon Sharrod said. "He practically begged me not to miss it. In the last week he told me half a dozen times what day, what hour, what channel to watch. I told him I'd try." He glanced toward the two men on the lounge. "And I forgot to tell you, he made me promise to remind you about it, too."

"Of course that would be only natural," Lloyd said. "All right. Any other way, that would be unnatural. But he'd know that. He'd realize we'd know it, too. And I wonder whether he knows anything else? Does he think there may be something wrong?"

Vernon reached into a humidor on the table beside his armchair, withdrew a cigar, bit off the end, lit it.

"I'm almost certain he does," he said, and raised his eyes to stare with somber deliberation first at one, then the other. They returned his gaze, caught, the screen forgotten. "I know the man who handles his life insurance. You know how Thorndale feels about his family, and he has always carried what used to be about enough. But last week he applied to carry five times that amount. Now, even with the most favorable conversion rates, I don't have to tell you what the premiums would be. He can't afford them. Not as a steady thing."

The two men on the lounge sat without motion, and as though not breathing. When Lloyd finally spoke, it was partly to himself.

"I didn't realize he was that bad off," he said. "The whole thing's pretty bad. That just makes it worse."

"It's the craziest thing I ever heard of," Phil said.

Vernon regarded Phil with cold amusement. "Well, I don't know. Is he so crazy? Maybe our friend is a mind reader." He paused for a long moment, rolling the cigar between his thumb and fingertips. "Or on the other hand, maybe he's given us an idea we didn't seriously think about, before." There was another quiet interval before he added, "Anyway, Lloyd, that's your answer to whether there's any hurry. If it's gone that far, we don't know what he'll do next. You see, we can't wait."

For a time the three men again watched the glowing features framed in the cabinet, now with a new respect, astonishment, and fear shading their expressions.

"I hate to do this," Lloyd said.

"We all do," Vernon said.

"It's crazy," Phil said. "Where did he ever get that crazy idea, in the first place?"

"A lot of ways," Vernon said. "Maybe from you."

"From me?"

"When we had lunch at the Annex. Remember? I never saw you so friendly."

"What of it?"

"You invited him to come down to that place of yours, the ranch. You wouldn't take no. Did you ever do that before?"

"Well, that was before we were sure which way this thing would go," Phil said. "I was only trying to prevent this, but in case it happened anyway, I didn't want him to get any wild ideas."

"Sure," Vernon said. "And that's exactly what he thought, too." He made a small gesture of dismissal. "But there are a lot of other ways he could have figured it out. He's been in the business long enough. He knows the signs, when a man's through. How often has he helped promote a new arrangement, himself?"

"I didn't realize he was in such bad shape," Lloyd said. "We should have done something about it sooner."

"What are we going to do about it now?" Vernon asked, sharply. "That's the point. That's why we're here. Let's stick to that."

Lloyd stood up without speaking and went to a small bar in the corner of the room, where he made himself a highball. A moment later Phil rose, too. He paced once across the room, then turned and moved again. He came to a halt directly in front of the television cabinet, and for a moment confronted the image of Thorndale's face.

"Want me to turn this off?" he asked.

“Better leave it on,” Vernon said. “He may ask me about it, later.”

Lloyd returned to his place on the lounge. Phil commenced a slow, heavy, aimless tread about the room.

“Well, since he’s through, and knows it . . .” Lloyd began, then fell silent. His voice was thin and harsh, when he abruptly finished, “Then I can’t see any other way, except to see that he really goes.”

“Nothing doing,” Phil said flatly. “That’s the one thing we can’t do. After all this stuff?” He indicated the screen with a jerk of his head, not turning to look at it. “That sudden life insurance deal, besides. Who does he think we are, hoodlums?”

“He hasn’t gotten the insurance yet,” Vernon said. “It may not be granted, either.”

“But he’s applied?” Phil asked.

“Yes,” Vernon said. “With at least one company, the one I know about. There might be others, besides.”

“Then it’s the same thing, as far as we’re concerned,” Phil said. “He’s gone on record. Where else would it point, except to us? That would wreck the old combination, if it wasn’t finished already, and I’d give the new one about a year, at the very best, with that kind of a target for the sharpshooters. They’d never let up.” Phil stopped pacing for a moment to stare from one to the other before adding, forcefully, “Anyway, I wouldn’t have anything to do with a thing like that.

That’s where I absolutely draw the line. Always have, always will.” He waited, frowning severely, but when there was no direct reply the frown gave way again to a look of aimless, withdrawn anxiety, and he resumed with the march across the length and breadth of the heavy rug.

“There are times when it’s simply got to be,” Lloyd said. “Thorndale’s in the way. That’s a fact, and we can’t get around it. He’s in trouble himself, even worse than we thought, and he can make a lot of trouble for everyone else. Any time he thinks he has to. There’s just nothing else to do about a fellow like that.”

“I know,” Phil said. “But there’s just no way of doing it. No matter how good it is, it’s never good enough. Even if it’s perfect, then it’s too perfect. That leads to nothing but rumors and fairy stories and still more gossip, and there would always be somebody who could take the stand. No. We’ve got to do something better.” He stopped and stared absently at the radiance of the speaking face, now urging a stronger stand for civic betterment. “There must be some way he could retire. Go away some place and take it easy for the rest of his life. He’s earned it.”

“Where?” Lloyd asked.

“South America, for instance. There are lots of wonderful places down there. I’ve been there, myself. My wife and I took a trip. Havana, Rio, B. A., Mexico on the way back. It was great.”

"How long were you gone?" Vernon asked.

"Three months. You should have seen me when I got back. I almost spoke the language."

"Three months," Vernon said. "And you knew you were coming back. Thorndale wouldn't stick it out even that long, knowing he never could. And you're forgetting a couple of other things, even more important. In the first place, if it works out that somebody has to hold still for the stuff they're bringing up about the old setup, Thorndale can be extradited from almost any place they have an electric light and a bathtub. Then what about his wife and kids? Do you think he'll agree never to see them again? You're crazy, if you think that."

"He could take them along," Phil said.

"Sure," Lloyd said. "There are places in North Africa, big cities, where they don't have extradition treaties. Lots of other Americans there, too."

Vernon Sharrod's voice hardened with exasperation. "Do you think a man like Thorndale would let his children become North Africans, South Americans, or anything else? Not a chance. Would any of us? Use your heads."

"Wait a minute," Phil said, with sudden liveliness. "There's Canada. That would be all right with him, wouldn't it? Well, he could go there and completely disappear. Then

after about a year, his family could quietly go up there and join him. They'd like it, it's just about the same as here."

"He might disappear for a while, but the whole family never could," Vernon said. "Not for very long. And if he actually does drop out of sight, with no trace, you know what that is going to look like."

"That's right," Lloyd said. "What kind of disappearance are you talking about, Phil? If Thorndale's seen again, then he can be found. And if it's permanent, we'd might as well make sure it's solid, hadn't we? And that brings us right back where we started."

"Yes," Vernon said. "We don't want any disappearance, no matter what kind. That's the worst yet."

Lloyd Staples drank the last of the highball, swallowing noisily in the stillness, arose from the lounge and also began to pace the floor. Lloyd traced the diagram of an invisible diamond, while Phil outlined the larger pattern of an irregular hourglass, and neither of them, when they passed, took notice of the other.

"That's pretty good," Vernon abruptly remarked, chuckling.

"What is?" Lloyd asked.

"You missed it," Vernon said, still smiling at the screen. "Thorndale just said he didn't mind being investigated, because it gave him such a wonderful opportunity to clear the air. I'll have to remember and tell him we liked that, especially."

Phil and Lloyd concentrated for a moment upon the phantom voices and faces, but the subject had changed. Their attention soon wandered, and they were again self-absorbed.

"Well, we could do this," Phil said, at last. "Somebody has to take the fall, anyway, for the evidence they've already got. Why not Thorndale? For whatever we give him, and we'll make it enough. What would he get? Five years, at most. And he's halfway in prison, anyway, right now."

Vernon had been shaking his head before the argument reached its end.

"You just don't understand Thorndale," he said. "There's a human element here, and it's as big as anything else, if not bigger. He has a lot of pride. He values his reputation, for his own sake, and for his family's sake. He would never stand still for anything like that. Never." He waited for this logic to make its impression, and when he saw that it had, he went on, "Besides, it's too thin. Who'd believe it? And then, how do we know what would accidentally come out at the trial? Things change so fast, some slip at the trial might undo all our work a couple of months later, and they can bring him back, just as if there never had been any trial. Why, we can't even be sure what the sentence would be, and he knows it. Forget that kind of proposition, altogether."

Lloyd abruptly turned and confronted Phil. "There's no other way, Phil. He goes. And don't give me another speech. If you've got anything to say, say it. But don't make a speech."

"No," Phil said. He removed the spectacles from a face that was haggard with indecision, and grim. He polished the lenses absently. "No, I wouldn't do that. What a spot." He replaced the glasses, and appealed to the man in the chair. "But listen, Vernon. Maybe we could put it up to Thorndale, himself. Either he can figure a way out of this — and it's got to be tighter than a bank vault — or he really gets it."

Vernon returned a long, unwavering stare. "You know we can't do anything like that, Phil," he said, musingly. Then the tone sharpened. "If we go to him at all, it can't be for advice, it's got to be with orders. And I think I've got the answer. Sure, he wants a lot of life insurance. All right. The regular companies won't give him enough of the right kind. But we will. With double indemnity, and even better than that. How high are we willing to go?"

"I don't get this," Lloyd said.

"How high?" Vernon repeated.

"Well," Phil said, "we thought about a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty, if he retired or did some time. Depending."

"We can do better than that," Vernon said. "We'll have to. For a deal like this, much better."

"You sound pretty sure," Lloyd said. "It would have to be good, for that much. What is it?"

"I'm so sure of this I'll come in with two hundred, personally," Vernon said. "This is better than good. It's exactly right. And you'll each put in two hundred. Then we'll hit some of the other boys for another four hundred. Call it a million dollars, altogether. And that will be about right, all around."

"For what?" Lloyd asked.

"He's going to kill himself," Vernon said.

"How?" Phil asked.

"It's no good, Vernon," Lloyd said. "No matter how it was done, it would be bound to show, just the same as a regular job on the street or somewhere."

"You don't understand," Vernon said. "This won't be arranged. He will really commit suicide. Himself."

"I think you're as crazy as he is," Phil said.

"Why should Thorndale do a thing like that?" Lloyd asked. "I don't follow this, Vernon."

"Because he'll have to, that's why," Vernon said. "If he wants to protect his name, and take care of his family, there won't be any other choice." He leaned forward, and began ticking off points on his fingers. "I'll go to him and explain that here is this money, in escrow on a dummy deal with a definite time limit, two weeks, his check for a million, which will be worthless, and ours for a

million, which will be certified, and he will know it is good. It is all due the estate of either party, in case of death from any cause, and the surviving party forfeits. Now, what choice will he have?"

Phil and Lloyd had returned to the lounge, where they now intently followed Vernon's reasoning.

"If he refuses," Vernon went on, "and does nothing, he knows we will have to do the job ourselves, and his name will be tied to every deal the old syndicate ever made, his family will be left with that to remember him by, and with nothing but the small change of his legitimate insurance. If he talks, or there is a trial, he will live, but the story that comes out will be even worse, and none of them will have a nickel. If he tries to run, the story will be the same, and what will he run with? Then, when he's caught and trapped, still the same."

Each of the three men sat engrossed, as though watching a scene that was neither in the room itself nor displayed in the luminous panel of the cabinet.

"How will he do it?" Phil asked.

"Any way he chooses," Vernon said. "Gun, tablets, out the window. His choice. Whatever he does, it will show."

"The publicity will be terrific," Lloyd said. "It's certain to backfire."

"No," Vernon said. "On the contrary. It will serve for exactly what we most need." Vernon spoke slowly

and with care, still formulating the design. "We will write the farewell note for him. That is part of the deal. It will be because of ill health, and the slanderous rumors spread by his enemies. He himself is innocent, but he will name the enemies. They will be some of the leftovers from the old syndicate, together with some of these wolves we're worried about now. We will supply the names, and just enough facts about tie-ups to hold attention for a while. Nobody will go behind them. The man who wrote the note will be dead. He was a martyr. When he copies out what we give him, he can add any fancy touches he wants. When it happens, neither we nor anyone we know will be within a hundred miles of him. The letter takes care of all loose ends, the suicide itself will be beyond question. He will go through with it, too. He has nerve, gentlemen. He will know it is the best way. For him, it will be the only way."

Lloyd stood up in quick decision. "That's it," he said. "That's it, all right. It wraps up everything."

Phil nodded, and spoke with the restrained tone of one unused to delivering praise. "It'll work. It's tailor-made. It fits. No matter what angle you take it from, it fits."

Only Vernon now sounded a little perplexed. "It wouldn't fit, if he had a different kind of character," he said. Then he added, still perplexed, "On the other hand, if he had a different character, we could

find some way to fit that one, too." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Thorndale will be over here as soon as the committee releases him. That gives us about three hours. Long enough to get the money together for that certified check, if we work at it."

"That's important," Lloyd said. "That check. If we hand it to him first thing, he'll know we mean business. He'll know he hasn't any choice at all."

Phil moved to the television set and turned it off. "Let's go to work," he said.

Three hours later, Vernon Sharrod motioned Thorndale to a chair in his office. When Thorndale and Vernon Sharrod were seated at opposite sides of the desk, Vernon glanced at Phil and Lloyd. He took a certified check for one million dollars from his pocket and handed it to Thorndale.

Thorndale stared at the check for fully half a minute, while the pleasant, genial expression faded slowly from his heavy features. His eyes gradually became bleak and cold. There was sickness there, and resignation, but there was no fear. At last he straightened his shoulders and his eyes came up to Vernon Sharrod's. But Thorndale's cold eyes looked through Vernon, and beyond him. It was as if Thorndale were looking not at the present, but at tomorrow or two weeks from

now. His eyes did not blink and he did not speak.

Vernon glanced at Phil and Lloyd again. Then he leaned across the desk and spoke slowly and quietly, staring directly into Thorndale's blank expression.

"The million dollars is for your family," Vernon said. He paused.

The room was very quiet. Thorndale had not moved. Phil and Lloyd sat tensely. Vernon continued without changing expression.

"They'll get the money as soon as you're dead," he said. "We've got it all worked out for you, Thorndale. Listen closely, and I'll tell you all about it."



CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Cops and Robbers

A break-in at the South Jersey Suburban Police Association training barracks netted the thief \$135 in cash and 14 cartons of cigarettes. Another thief at the policeman's ball in Lincoln, Neb., where an estimated 4000 enjoyed festivities, stole about \$40 worth of clothing. And in Kramer, N. D., a nonchalant thief helped himself to a self-service popcorn machine at a police benefit dance, carrying it out of the hall under the eyes of two members of the force. They said they thought he was carrying a TV set which was to be given away as a prize. But a sheepish officer in St. Louis had to admit a more subtle approach. Somebody bought tickets to the annual police circus from him with a counterfeit \$10 bill.

"None So Blind —"

Policewoman Julia Pearson of Wilmington, N. C., suggested to the desk sergeant that they'd better tow away a car in front of the station. For two days it had been parked there with its windshield plastered with her parking tickets. Looking over his records the sergeant found the car had been stolen from the police chief of nearby

Carolina Beach, Paul Wolfe, who had been futilely hunting for it for three days.

Night Alarm

When Fire Lt. Thomas Curran of Columbus, O., awakened on duty recently, he saw a man standing at the foot of his bed. As he let out a shout, the burglar shot down the shiny brass pole and fled, having ransacked the pockets of the sleeping firemen.

A Case of Identity

A month after Purcell's Restaurant in Boston, Mass., had had a hold-up, a man who introduced himself as a police inspector approached the proprietor. He had been assigned to take care of the cafe's receipts, because of the robbery, he said. Receipts totalling \$1429 were trustfully given to him to take to the bank, but the deposit was never made.

Jet-Propelled Justice

George Frantum, Baltimore, Md., service station attendant, is quick on the draw. Washing a car recently, he heard a man behind him bark, "Give me your money!" Whirling around, Frantum squirted his hose in the face of the bandit, who fled down the street with a yell.

Tin Pan Alley

On four occasions hotel owner Joseph Stewartz of Pottstown, Pa., has foiled thieves with his own version of burglar alarm—a weighty assortment of pots and pans rigged to fall on the heads of intruders.

Who, Indeed!

An editorial in the *Angolite*, a weekly paper published by inmates of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, aggrievedly complained of thefts by its readers. “The *Angolite* leaves 100 papers on sale and sells 54. Who swipes the other 46?”

Tit for Tat

Mrs. Mario A. Walsh, 54, of Camden, N. J., received a \$10,923 reward from the government for tattling on her employers in a tax evasion case. Recently she got a fine of \$5,000 and a 60-day jail sentence—because she hadn’t paid her own income tax on her governmental reward.

Crime Goes to Church

In Winston-Salem, N. C., Johnny Myers ducked into a convenient church service one Sunday night after revenue agents found moonshine in his parked car. Immediately after the benediction, he became a member of the church. Then he called authorities to report the “theft” of his car while he was attending the services. The tax men asked how long he’d been a member.

“‘Bout two years,” Myers said. “I’ve been singing in the choir nearly six months.”

“What’s the preacher’s name?”

Myers’ stammering confusion ended in confession.

Farther north, in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York City, Audrey Dryer, 31, a known pickpocket, was arrested for pilfering purses of communicants while they were up at the altar rail. Detectives, checking her recent whereabouts, learned that she had just left the hospital after an operation. The operation had been paid for with a stolen Blue Cross membership card.

Occupational Hazards

A Berkeley, Calif., burglar was probably ready for a nervous collapse after attempted robbery of the William Piper house. When he stumbled in the dark over a harmless-seeming object, the tinkling strains of *Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay* rose in the silence.

He had set off the mechanism of a musical chair.

Another burglar, this time in Benton Harbor, Mich., was literally scared out of his shoes on an early morning adventure. Entering through a bedroom window in the home of Samuel Brown, he deposited his shoes carefully inside, then discovered that the room was occupied.

A mighty dive took him back outside to safety, but the shoes remained behind as a memento.

Home-Owned Industry

On his third arrest for shoplifting, a Philadelphia man indignantly told the prosecutor, "It's fellows like me that keep fellows like you in business!"

For Whom the Bell Told

The alarm bell of St. Leo's Church, Chicago, tolled for burglar Joseph Kowalski, 46, when he attempted to loot the poor box. Police seized him in front of the church after the Rev. Patrick Molloy heard the alarm and called them. Acting Police Capt. William Hennessey said Kowalski had not succeeded in robbing the box, but they found stashed in his car an assortment of screwdrivers, 200 keys, and a list of 25 churches and orphanages.

Law and Disorder

A young woman approached Sheriff's Deputy W. O. Helm of Madera, Calif., with the frenzied request that he lock her up because she was afraid she'd shoot her husband. "You have to break a law to go to jail," he told her. Promptly she jerked off her shoe and pitched it through a plate glass window. As promptly, Helm locked her up.

Free Wheeling

Cab driver Kenneth Wheeler of Goldsboro, N. C., complained of a nery fare who got the local police innocently to cooperate with his theft. After driving the man from

Clinton to Goldsboro, Wheeler stopped in front of the police station at the request of his passenger who "wanted to borrow some money from his uncle." After a long wait, Wheeler entered and inquired. Yes, said the police, a character had wandered in, then wandered out — the back way.

Larceny Lure

William Engellis, 39, of New York City, seeing a prowler in his yard early one morning, dressed and pursued the man in his 1951 convertible. But when he had the man cornered, the prowler displayed a gun and escaped with \$71 of Engellis' money plus the convertible.

Once Upon a Time

Arraigning Joseph Thomas, 59, on a drunk charge, Judge Beverly Bousche of Memphis, Tenn., found him very cagey about a "previous arrest." Careful search of the records uncovered a previous arrest, all right — for speeding, as interpreted in 1913. Judge Bousche dismissed the case.

Dear Dead Days

Ex-convict Henry G. Holloway, 40, of Sydney, Australia, happened to be passing a reform school there when nostalgia overcame him. "I used to be an inmate here," he told an official, and pleaded to be shown around the place. After his tour of inspection, he grandly handed his host a check for five pounds. "Buy

a spread for the boys," he insisted. The check proved phony, and for this and a couple of other infractions, Holloway returned to prison for four years.

Bullpen Brief

Police in Lander, Wyoming, hunting for a man wanted for questioning about a car theft, found him in the city jail, where he'd begged for a bed.

Oriental Fakirs

A Cleveland, O., court sentenced John Henderson and Ernest Brown to 30 days in the workhouse. Police stated the pair tried to cash a check made out to "Kikuye Ishimatsu," explaining to the dubious store keeper that they were "from Tibet."

Dig That Crazy Crook!

Louisville police report an odd robbery. A man pulled a gun in a cafe there, crying "I dare anybody to move!" Taking \$130 from the cash register, he faced the customers with the order, "Lay out your money!" One of them, Fred Proctor, pleaded he needed his dough because his wife was having a baby. "Excuse me," begged the bandit, backing away. "I'm sorry I bothered you." But when David Chitlick, 60, also refused to comply, he hit Chitlick with the butt of his gun, adding peevishly, "I don't like you."

Before he had more than a few dollars from other patrons, a woman stuck her head in the door, yelling,

"Come on out, you've been in there long enough!"

And the zany bandit beat a retreat into the street.

Weighed and Found Wanting

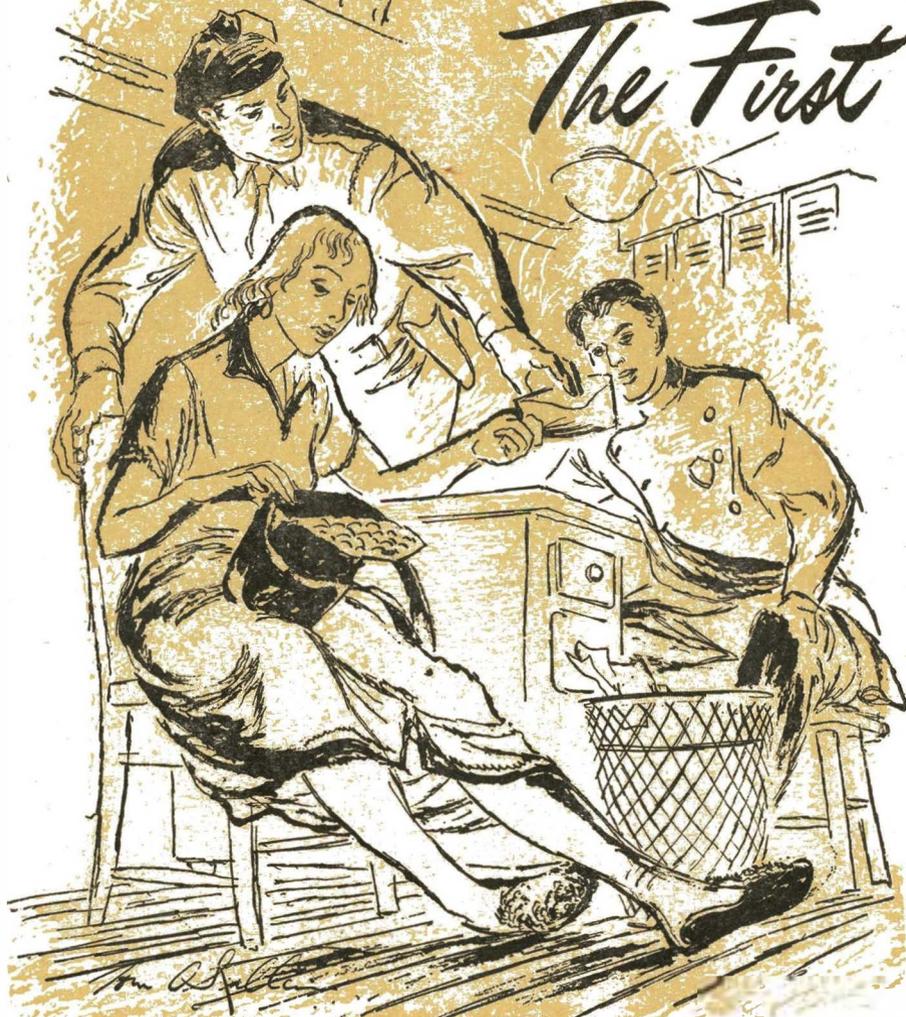
One of the champion con men of the 20's, William N. Coffey, was himself bluffed by a clever sheriff into a murder confession which ended his career, in Mauston, Wisconsin in 1927. After a long record of stealing funds collected for "religion" he bigamously married a widow, Mrs. Hattie Hales, took her on a long trip, and killed her for possession of valuable stocks. When caught, he admitted forging her name on the certificates, but claimed she had given them to him and then run away. The sheriff, Lyall Wright, and his deputy, sick of the oily scoundrel, cooked up a scheme that should immortalize them.

Carefully conversing within hearing distance of Coffey's cell, they spoke of an infallible new "Berlin" method of discovering guilt — weighing the prisoner twice a day. If guilty, a man inevitably lost weight from worry, they said.

Sure enough, Coffey lost weight daily, on the sheriff's craftily "fixed" scales. In despair he loaded his pockets to offset the "loss" but it continued to shocking lengths. Finally he broke and gave all details of his crime, including dismembering Mrs. Hale's body and burying the pieces along his route. He was sentenced to life in state prison at Waupun, Wis.

The woman was worried. She could make fifty thousand dollars — as soon as her husband blew up an airplane.

The First



Fifty Thousand

A Novelette

BY JACK WEBB

YOU can say what you want about the Airport Detail being out at the rear end of creation. But when the thermometer's stuck at eighty-seven and cave dwellers in town are breathing pure smog, I'll take the airport where it snuggles against the camel-humped dunes just a jet jump from the ocean.

On this particular had-we-but-known Thursday, Officer Wells and I were up on the flight deck outside the restaurant, hoping for a breeze and watching the squat, ugly mail helicopter sidle down for a landing among the big silver planes.

I said, "If we could borrow that eggbeater for an hour, I wonder how many females of the species we could spot sunbathing in the altogether."

Wells grinned. "The girls of Playa del Rey are nice girls. It's just

the ones who park along the ocean front to neck who are nicer."

"Still," I persisted, "with all those closed patios between us and the beach, there must be some girls lying around who hate to divide their points of interest with broad bands of tan and white."

"If you found one," Don Wells asked, interested, "would you call her a *corpus* delectable?"

"Depend on the corpus," I decided.

"Oh, there you are."

I turned my head. It was Lieutenant Diminian of Airport Protection. He was wearing a lightweight grey shirt and matching trousers. There was a grey cap with a black leather visor on his head. He looked cool and sharp. I wondered what kind of polish he used on his badge and cap device.

"I've got a lady in my office," he continued.

"They all make mistakes," I told him.

After a bit, he smiled. He had decided I was joking. "I think you had better see her, Sergeant."

"Ladies are out of my line," I said. "They're too much trouble, and after you've bought one a carload of martinis, what have you got?"

"A lady with two heads," Wells suggested.

"This is not a joking matter," Diminian snapped.

"O.K. what's the dope?"

"You'd better get it from her," Diminian said. Unconsciously, he touched his cap and adjusted it three millimeters more aslant.

We went off the flight deck, past the door to the cocktail lounge with the air coming out of the lounge as cool as though it had blown across a tray of frozen daiquiris, and down the steps to the walk. Wells asked, "What about Sewell?"

"What about her?"

"You said ladies were out of your line and she's a lady."

"But that's in another league," I said, "and I wish I were pitching."

"Don't you boys ever take anything seriously?" Diminian demanded.

"Sure," I told him, "the price of beer, the legs of girls and the chance of filling an inside straight."

"And don't forget the law," Wells

added, "that's what we're minions of."

2.

We were going along the sidewalk then, past the separate passenger terminals. A truck came down the street beside us, tossing a bundle of newspapers before each terminal that supported a newsstand. We had to skirt one of the stacks and I read the headlines.

VEGAS RESORT OWNER
SELLS FOR \$2,000,000 CASH!
DISAPPEARS!

TONY CAPUTO'S DUNES
SALE STARTLES STRIP

I grabbed a paper and tucked it under my arm.

Tony Caputo! Ten years since I'd seen the slob and I still could remember that intimate, rasping voice of his while his adam's apple bounced up and down under a curiously puckered scar. "*A 'C' note, baby, just between you and me. A case of scotch, a date with an angel, you name it, baby.*"

I'd named it, all right. I'd named the city limits and Tony had folded his floating crap game like the Arabs and as silently stolen away. That was fate for you. If I hadn't driven him out of town, he might still be a two-bit domino jockey instead of a two-millionaire.

It just went to show you, and I was working on what it went to show you when Diminian opened

the door to his office and revealed his *lady*.

You've seen puppets when nobody's pulling the strings. Lower jaws slack, all the joints loose, the painted faces idiotic. That's the way she was.

Diminian spoke. "Mrs. Talbot."

She turned her head slowly. "I'm scared," she said. "I'm scared." Voice of a child coming from a big blonde who might have been beautiful if she hadn't gone apart at the seams. Now we had Marilyn Monroe doing a Bette Davis in a pair of floppy house slippers and a dirty cotton housedress. Sitting on one of Diminian's straight guest chairs by the corner of his big desk, she apparently was just where he had left her to come and find us. I wondered what had held her in the chair.

I said to Wells, "Find out what gives. Get it started." I went past the girl and around the desk to pick up one of the phones. "Extension 47," I said. That gave me the infirmary.

"Who's on duty, Stark?"

"Sorry, sir," said the girl's voice at the switchboard, "there's no doctor in attendance at the moment. Doctor Answell is expected presently."

"Nurse Sewell there?"

"Just a moment, please."

I waited. Wells was going through his act over on the other side of the desk. He had drawn up a chair and was sitting facing the blonde

with his cigarettes out and a couple shaken partway free of the pack. Don has short cropped sandy hair, mild blue eyes and about ninety-seven freckles. For some reason this seems to make him a wow with children and nervous women.

"Thank you," said the little-girl voice. She did not move her hands.

"Light it for you?" Don asked.

She nodded. Her gaze wasn't quite so vacant now.

Poor Diminian. He was standing four-square with his arms folded and his shoulders straight. This one was beyond him.

"Nurse Sewell," said a voice.

"Mace, Ginny," I said softly. "I'm over in Diminian's office. We've got a beaut. Shock. Sort of *non compos* everything. We've got to find out why. Can you get over here and give us a hand?"

"Tell me about her," Ginny said, "there's all kinds of shock."

"She's got 'em." I hung up because the blonde's eyes were on me, big eyes, somewhere between grey and green. I sat down in the lieutenant's chair and examined my nails. Wells put a lighted cigarette gently between her lips.

"That help, Mrs. Talbot?"

She lifted a hand and got a couple of fingers around the cigarette. "Thank you," she said again.

Don said, "I'm Officer Wells. This is Sergeant Prouty. We're city police. Lieutenant Diminian believes you have something you should tell us."

Without speaking, she reached down and retrieved a black purse. The shiny plastic was cracked along the corner folds. She used both hands to open it. They were shaking. She spilled ash on her dress and paid it no attention. Wells leaned forward and brushed the flakes away. Doing so, he had a full look inside the purse. It was nice to watch him.

She removed an envelope and handed it to him. Don shook out the contents and unfolded the single sheet of paper which was printed on both sides and perforated along the edges. He studied it for a moment, frowning, and then handed it across the desk to me.

I glanced at the familiar form in my hands and then at the blonde. No longer empty, her eyes were desperate as though she were beseeching Don and me to find the same message in a perfectly ordinary air flight insurance policy that she had found there.

Sure, her name was on the form, hand printed in square pencilled letters, *Ann Talbot*, and that of a man, *Frank Talbot*, whom I presumed to be her husband. He had insured himself for fifty thousand bucks for a flight from Los Angeles to Seattle. So, he had stuck eight quarters into a slot machine in one of the airport terminals and bought a big hunk of insurance. I didn't get it. I had never seen a blonde so upset because a guy had spent two bucks on her. Particularly when the guy was her husband.

"This Frank Talbot, he is your husband?"

She nodded.

"And he's on his way to Seattle?"

Again she nodded, this time eagerly as though I were on the right track. I glanced over her shoulder at Diminian. I think he was happy with the thought that I was as lost as he had been. He took one hand from one elbow and made a number of circles in the area of his right ear. *Nuts* was as good an answer as any. I made another try with my guessing game.

"Your husband, Frank Talbot, is on a plane to Seattle and there's something wrong as hell about that?"

"Yes," she said, "yes, yes, yes!" Not the high child's voice now, but a whisper.

"What?"

"He's going to blow up the plane!" Ann Talbot whispered. She buried her frantic eyes in her hands. The cigarette Don had given her fell to the floor; he stepped on it automatically.

3.

I'd hit the jackpot all right. My hands were full of it. I jumped at the woman with my voice. "Listen to me, Mrs. Talbot. What plane is he on?"

"I don't know." That squeezed out between the palms of her hands.

"What do you mean you don't know?"

She raised her head. She had been

out of tears when we arrived. Somewhere, she had found a fresh supply. "He didn't tell me."

"You weren't here when he took off?"

She shook her head.

Lieutenant Diminian found his voice. "I'm going to call the tower."

"You do that," I said, and then, trying to square this thing for action, said, "Wait, better you go up there. Then Don can use your phone here to check the flight rosters through the reservation desks." I returned to Ann Talbot. "Do you know what time he left?"

She spoke quickly. "Right after lunch. I fixed him a sandwich. Frank called a cab. We argued about it. I didn't think we could afford one. I wanted to drive him over. I said Grace would take care of Tommy. He wouldn't let me."

The door opened behind us and Sewell came in. She was carrying a blanket and a handful of small bottles with medical labels. Even with all that stuff in her arms, she looked fine. Take her legs for example, not that there was time to take her legs.

I said, "You say he left home right after noon. Where's home?"

"El Segundo."

That was less than twenty minutes from the airport. I glanced at my watch. Depending on his flight time, he could have been on his way at least an hour. If they were touching down in Frisco, they could damned near be there.

I said to Ginny, "You've got a blanket. You want Mrs. Talbot to lie down?"

"I do," Ginny said.

"Use that couch." I indicated Diminian's green leather number along the wall. She came past Ann Talbot, watching her closely. She put the bottles on Diminian's desk, taking the blanket over to the couch and spreading it neatly so there would be a layer of wool under the woman and then another half of blanket to fold around her.

I swung back to Diminian who had his hand on the door Ginny had left ajar. "Don't tell 'em about the expected blow-up. Just tell 'em to stand by for an emergency. You can be doing that while I try to get the set-up and Wells finds out who's got Talbot for a passenger. I'll call you in five minutes at the tower. If the plane's a puddle jumper, making the local stops, maybe we can get it on the ground and keep it there."

"Right," Diminian said. I liked him then for not asking questions. Maybe he was only half the tin-soldier I had him figured for. "One thing more," I said. "If Johnston's not up at the tower, get him there. We're going to need some C.A.A. authority in a hurry."

"Right," said Diminian again. He went out the door and I could hear his heels clicking down the hall.

Don had picked up a phone. He talked to *Umied*.

With an arm around her, Ginny led Ann Talbot to the couch. She

got her down on it with a surprising amount of leg show. Good show when you considered how little those floppy, worn slippers and shabby cotton housedress had done for the girl.

I went over and stood above them.

Don said, "Thanks," to *United*, clicked the phone cradle button and asked for *Western*.

"Now," I said to her wide grey-green eyes, "I'm going to ask a lot of questions just as fast. You said your husband is going to blow up a plane. You've shown us a flight policy for fifty thousand. Do you mean he's going to blow himself up along with the plane so you can have the insurance?"

She nodded. The tears were coming strong, now.

"Why?" I demanded.

"We're broke," Mrs. Talbot said. "Things haven't gone right since we came out here. Tommy's been sick. So has Frank. Frank's not going to get well. Not ever, really. He's lost three jobs in the last four months."

"Because he was sick?"

She nodded.

"He tell you about not ever getting well?"

"No, he said if he could get this job at Boeing, it would be all right. He knew somebody up there in Inspection. He said the work wouldn't be so hard."

"So, why do you think he's not going to get well?"

"I," she faltered "I wash his handkerchiefs."

"They can cure that."

"It takes money. There's Tommy and me."

Sewell took a paper cup from Diminian's water cooler. She poured an inch or two of something from one of the bottles. Then, she came between me and Ann Talbot with her arm around the woman's shoulders, lifting her so she could swallow.

"What is it?" Mrs. Talbot demanded, suddenly fearful.

"Never you mind what it is," Ginny said. "You drink it."

The blonde's gaze moved to meet mine. "It's all right," I told her. Obediently, she drank.

At the desk, Don was talking to *Coast-Aire*.

I said, "You have pretty good reasons according to you for your husband to blow up the plane. Have you any idea how he planned to accomplish this?"

"The briefcase," Mrs. Talbot said.

"What about a briefcase?"

"He bought it new last week. Seventeen dollars. We had a fight."

Behind my back, Wells interrupted. "Got him Mace. He's on *Coast-Aire*, Flight 967."

"They land in Frisco?"

"Portland's the first stop," Don told me.

I swung back to Ann Talbot. "This time bomb, machine, whatever he's rigged up, it's in the briefcase?"

"Yes," she was back to a whisper.

"Describe the briefcase."

"Tan leather, two handles, a zipper." She worked her arms out from under the blanket. "This big."

I turned to Wells. "You know what we're looking for. Tell Diminian. See if Johnston will have them contact the ship with orders to get the briefcase. Don't have the stewardess try it. Let the pilot or copilot make the attempt. This guy may be crazy. When they get hold of it, tell 'em to stuff it down one of the toilets, clear down so it's submerged in the water, and leave it there. We'll have the Portland bomb squad alerted and waiting for 'em to come in."

Don was talking to the tower by the time I returned to Mrs. Talbot.

"You have any idea what kind of an explosion he was figuring on?"

Ginny said, "Sergeant, can I see you for a moment?"

"Wait till we get the facts," I said.

Nurse Sewell sniffed.

I glanced back at her surprised. "You sound like a Police Commissioner," she said.

"Cut the comedy," I said, and then to Mrs. Talbot, "About that briefcase, do you have any idea what he put in it?"

"My refrigerator bag," Mrs. Talbot said.

"What in the devil's a refrigerator bag?"

"Plastic," said Mrs. Talbot, "seals up greens. I think, that is, I'm sure Frank used it to line the brief case.

You know how they're made, Sergeant, square, with a zipper along one end."

"Hold liquid?" I could hear Wells talking to headquarters. That would take care of notifying Portland.

"In a leather case it would," Sewell offered. "Can I see you privately for a minute?" she added.

"You wait," I said, and to Mrs. Talbot, "Any idea what he put in it?"

"Gasoline. That's what got me started. I was out in the garage after he left. I could smell it. Then I found this piece of hose by the gas tank of the car. It smelled of gas strong. That bothered me. I remembered how carefully he carried the brief case and that bothered me, too, and I thought of the sealed envelope he had given me to keep for him. 'Till I get back,' he said. I opened it and found the policy. Then I knew. I knew!"

Her hand got out from under the blanket and clutched mine.

I snapped to Wells. "Tell that to the tower. It's not a time bomb, but I still think the septic tank's a good place for it." He nodded and went on talking to headquarters.

I could see that plane, all the passengers, two by two, enjoying the sights a quarter-mile high, and sitting among them, a sick man with a couple of gallons of raw gas and a folder of matches.

Sewell said, "Mace, if you don't step outside with me, I'll never speak to you again." Her level

brown eyes were deadly serious and so was her voice. And now I'd done my duty, there was no reason I shouldn't get back in to the league with Florence Nightingale.

"O.K., Ginny." I disengaged Mrs. Talbot's hand gently. "We've done everything we can," I told her. "We'll hope we're in time."

"Thank you," Ann Talbot said. Her eyes were softer, as though she, too, could relax now that she had told all. "You'll stay with me, Sergeant, until we know?"

"I'll stay with you," I promised.

"After he talks to me," Ginny said.

"That's right," I said, "I'll be right back, Mrs. Talbot."

"Please, Sergeant."

Ginny had hold of my arm.

"I'll just step out for a minute," I promised.

"Officer Wells will look after you," Ginny told the woman. "Won't you, Officer?" Her glance had moved to Don.

4

Then we were out of Diminian's office and Ginny had the door closed behind us and me backed up with my shoulders against the wall on the opposite side of the hall.

"You listen to me, Mace Prouty," she began, "particularly when I tell you I want to talk to you."

"But Ginny," I began, "you saw what we were up against in there."

"You bet I saw," her eyes were

snapping, "but did you, you tall drink of water?"

"Wait a minute . . ."

"You wait, you plain-clothes Diminian. Why do you think I gave you that display of her undies in there? To make your eyes pop out?"

I remembered the leg show Mrs. Talbot had provided when Ginny was helping her onto the sofa. "I thought you slipped."

"I never slip when I'm working — unlike some of our city's finest! I slipped to show you her slip."

"Slip, slipped, slip," I growled. "Will you make some sense?"

Ginny shrugged. "What I'm going to tell you doesn't. So maybe you can for a change. That woman in there is wearing a laundry-fresh, fairly new twenty-dollar silk slip under a worn-out two-ninety-eight house dress. Your desperate Mrs. Talbot wouldn't go across the street without lip, cheek and eye make-up on, and she's come running down here with it all off, all but the specks she missed here and there, probably because she's forgotten how to use a wash cloth on her face, or because she had to get ready for this act in such a hurry."

"You sure of this?" I was holding both her shoulders, and our eyes were meeting, level.

"Sure I'm sure. And let me tell you something else. You're pretty stupid to hold hands with a woman who's supposed to have been washing for a sick child and a sick hus-

band, and not even notice the skin on those hands hasn't ever been exposed to any more dish-or-wash-water than it would take to wash a pair of nylons and a couple of dirty old martini glasses." Ginny brought her arms up between mine and held her hands before my face. "Look at these hands, Mace. I work with them. She doesn't and never has."

I took my hands off her shoulders and shoved them in my pockets. They had started after Ginny's hands. That's why I put them in my pockets and kept them there. "But the shock," I persisted. "That woman was all apart. When we got there, she was one short jump from hysteria."

"One short jump from Hollywood and Vine," Ginny said. "Her kind are a dime a dozen out here. They've seen six Joan Crawford pictures and they think they're actresses. I'll tell you something else, too, just for the record. Her skin wasn't too hot or too cold. Her pulse and her respiration were normal, or so damned near it the excitement of the trick she was pulling would account for the difference."

"But why," I demanded. "There apparently is a guy by the name of Frank Talbot. He is on a plane for Seattle. How do you figure that?"

"You tell me," Ginny said, "You're the detective."

5.

She turned, then, and went back

in with Wells and Mrs. Talbot. That left me with the rabbit still in the damnedest hat you ever saw. If it was some grotesque practical joke, I was up foul creek without a canoe or paddle. The Portland Bomb Squad would be meeting the plane, an innocent guy might be in the custody of a pilot who would have had to take him without taking chances. And even a brand new briefcase was jamming up a john. *Smart boy, Prouty, they won't pin that medal on you, they'll make you eat it!*

I stayed there with my hands in my pockets and my back pressed against the wall. It felt like it belonged there. There had to be an answer somewhere. I supposed it was with Ann Talbot. I tried to see her without the phony shock and panic. I tried to see her with the kind of dress on that belonged over twenty bucks worth of slip. I added sheer hose and high heels, the makeup Ginny swore she wore normally, and then took a comb to her hair. The face and figure were emerging and they were familiar, not as an individual, but as a type.

I came out of it, then, knowing how to treat Mrs. Anne Talbot. But, before I took the kid gloves off to deal with a dame, there was something I had to do. I had to get to the control tower and try to undo what damage had been done. I didn't stop to talk to Don because that could wait. I was in no hurry to explain to Bill Cantrell down town

that I had been a damned fool, and I could see his face turning purple as he composed a second teletype to Portland calling off the Bomb Squad because one of his sergeants was a sucker and a jerk.

It still looked like the lousiest practical joke in history when I went out of the building and down the front steps. Her poor husband coughing his life away into handkerchiefs. Shades of Camille! I cut around the corner of the building and across the ten minute parking area on the way to the control tower.

That's when I saw the Cadillac. I don't suppose I'd even have given it a second look if the license plate hadn't hit me in the face. *Ohio*.

Remember the riddle you knew as a kid? What's high in the middle and round at both ends? O-hi-O. That was kid stuff. The next part of the riddle was strictly my own. It popped into my head just short enough of passing the car that I took a look at the driver. What's Ohio mean to a cop on the Airport Detail? Ohio means Cleveland. There are a number of boys who commute between here and Cleveland that Intelligence Division asks us to keep an eye on. Boys on business trips which are rather odd because the records we keep down town show our 'friends' as having no business, or, at least, *No visible means of support*.

The driver was alone in the car. He was sitting behind the wheel

with the engine running. A hell of a lot of car, that, and it was purring like a kitten. I wished Wells was trailing me. It had been years since that character in the driver's seat had attended a Boy Scout meeting. Casually, I unbuttoned my coat. For once, litte bouncing Betsy, snuggling along my belt line to the left of my navel in her neat leather holster, didn't feel like a damned nuisance.

At the open window beside a shoulder that looked like the rock of Alcatraz, I said, "May I see your operator's license, please?"

Those fine Irish eyes of his took me in. "Blow, bud," said his gentle voice.

With my left hand, I conjured the leather folder that held my badge and ID card and held it close enough that he could get the general idea whether he could read or not. "Police," I explained. "May I see your operator's license?" I repeated. The way the nearest ear to me was curled, he could have been hard of hearing.

His right hand slid under his coat a little too fast to be after a bill-fold. Because of the way his big frame was cramped behind the wheel, Betsy beat him to his offering by about two seconds.

"Keep it coming," I told him. "If your finger's within three inches of the trigger, I'll blow your brains out."

He told me what I could do with myself, but I got the gun as well as

the message. Heavy artillery, a fistful of .45.

"Stick your left arm out the window," I said.

He told me what I could do with myself again.

I dropped his gun into a side pocket, found my bracelets and hooked his left wrist. The remaining cuff I locked around the outside door handle. "You've got a free hand," I said. "Suppose you get me the keys to your heavenly hot-rod."

He told me what I could do with the keys. I put them in my pocket instead. All this time, I'd been trying to place him. He looked like a mug shot. He was a mug shot, one I had seen on an Intelligence briefing. The Ohio license plate pinpointed him, and then I had it without going through the awkwardness of getting into his inside breast pocket with no one to cover me.

"O.K. O'Hara, I'll see you later."

I left the Caddy and went into the terminal instead of on to Communications in the control tower. I didn't know what was happening on a north-bound *Coast-Aire* plane, or to a guy named Frank Talbot, or how nervous control tower talkers were getting up and down the coast, watching for that plane with a loaded firebug aboard. Well, it would have to remain a big happy joke for all of them, just like it had been for me, until I took care of this new business. O'Hara drove for

Johnny Rose. That meant Rose, or some of his representatives, were somewhere around the terminal. If I muffed this one like I had Mrs. Ann Talbot, I'd be reading the want-ads in the morning, the kind of help-wanted advertisements that don't require references. You know the sort: *Wanted, a boy, with or without bicycle.*

Heading for the Flight Schedules board, I thought about Johnny Rose. From what we guessed and gathered, he went in for piece work. That is to say, he owned a piece of a middle-weight fighter here in town, a piece of a stable down near the border by Galiente, a piece of the numbers racket out in the valley, a piece of *The Dunes* outside of Las Vegas.

6.

That did it, and by the time I'd remembered it, I had found the *Continental* flight from Las Vegas on the board — twenty minutes behind schedule! I glanced at my watch. I was eighteen minutes behind schedule myself thanks to the tête-à-tête I'd had with Mrs. Talbot.

With the picture coming in as big as *Cinema-Scope*, there was no time to get help now. I eased toward the doors facing on the field. The public address system was announcing the arrival of *Continental* Flight 782 from Las Vegas. My two minutes were running out.

I wasn't worried about who was coming off that plane. I could hear

his rasping voice, see the odd little puckered scar over his adam's apple, I could see his flashy clothes making him no more conspicuous among the other passengers than a beer truck in Beverly Hills. And most of all, I could see him coming up the ramp from the field as limited and well defined as a sitting duck in a shooting gallery.

Those things I could see even before the plane taxied into the unloading circle. What I had to spot in no time at all among the fifty odd lining the fence and both sides of the end of the ramp, waiting for the Vegas plane, was his reception committee, the men who were waiting for Tony Caputo and two million dollars.

Johnny Rose wasn't among them. I'd know him anywhere, the slope of his shoulders, the way he carried his head, the shape of his ears. Even from the back I'd know Johnny. That's the price for our kind of fame.

If he had imported his help, I'd have to guess.

The big DC-6 was taxiing closer. I could see the flight number, 782, in the window by the sealed metal door. This was a big one. There'd be a hell of a lot of passengers coming off it. My good friend Tony, my personal two-millionaire, wouldn't hesitate to use any or all of his fellow travelers as a shield if this turned into a shooting affair.

There was a big fellow standing against the rail with his hands in

the jacket pockets of a boxy sports coat. I eased up to him. I had to take the chance he wasn't left-handed. I bumped up against him and apologized. There was nothing in his right pocket except his hand. After a glance, he went back to watching the plane.

Across his shoulders, on down the line nearer the ramp, I saw a familiar profile. Willie 'the Cat' Sabine. A slim little guy with pointed ears in a neat gray gabardine, he'd been riding shotgun for Johnny for about ten years. I hadn't seen him from the terminal because of the way he was boxed in by two enormous women.

I moved up on the good soldier wondering what the two stout ones would think if they knew he had used their bountiful hills and dales as defensive terrain. There was no time for common courtesy. I nudged his ribs hard with bouncing Betsy's sight-pointed barrel. "O.K. Willie, who's your side-kick today?"

He didn't say anything. He gripped the rail before him hard with both hands. "You keep 'em right there," I told him, keeping my eyes as busy as they could be without quite letting 'the Cat' out of my sight.

The steps were up to the plane, now, and the hostess was opening the door, standing there briefly in her neat tan uniform. A well-dressed woman tethered to the hand of a boy four or five years of age was being dragged past the smiling girl

and on down the steps. Junior was coming home to Daddy, you could bet his life on that!

My hand went up under the left side of Willie's coat. I was getting real intimate, but I kept it going until it reached his shoulder holster. It came back out, holding a Luger. The sight of the gun caught on the fabric of his coat and made a tear. Willie swore.

The fifth passenger off was Tony Caputo. He didn't look much different than he had when I helped him leave our fair city. Just more expensive. Besides two hundred bucks worth of custom-tailored flannels, he was carrying one of those light-weight, shiny metal cases. I guess he thought money could burn. I wondered how he had lived so long when he had such a knack for being conspicuous.

I backed away from Willie Sabine with his Luger in my hip pocket. With his fangs pulled, he could wait. Except when Willie swore, the two fat women had not even glanced in our direction. They kept their eyes riveted on the plane. They must have been waiting for the only man who ever loved them, or more likely, another sister.

With the stakes what they were, Willie wouldn't be waiting for Caputo alone, not with a driver like O'Hara standing by in the car.

Tony disappeared into the tunnel leading to the ramp. I was back a bit, now, watching the crowd. I caught a glimpse of Willie 'the

Cat' pussy-footing from the scene of the crime that hadn't happened, and let him go.

Tony came up the ramp. He was close enough to the first of the group waiting on the outside for any one of them to have reached out and touched him.

7

On the other side of the ramp from Tony, a fat man with a balding head who looked like a bank executive down to meet his daughter, opened the mammoth tent he called a jacket. The butt of the shotgun had been jammed up under his armpit. The sleek twin barrels had been sawed off short. *A scatter gun in this crowd!* It was a good thing I didn't have time to think about it.

I brought Betsy up, using both hands. My right hand held the revolver, of course; my left hand held my wrist. I had one shot, one chance. There could be no mistake in this crowd around us.

The fat man had to push back from the rail.

He kept right on pushing until he was flat on his back.

My single shot had caught him somewhere in the middle and above the steel railing that had been waist high. I could truly thank heaven I had been aiming at a mountain.

There was no time, though, to give much thanks to anybody. I walked up and nailed Tony Caputo.

I walked up with my gun put away and my badge in my hand. I had to keep the crowd from panic. It was over now, all of it. The kid who had come off the plane was in his dad's arms. The kid was excited. His dad was scared. I knew what his dad was thinking —

There but for the Grace of God lies what could have happened to my son.

"Hello, Tony." I grabbed Caputo by the elbow. "You'd better come along with me. They'll want to talk to you down town."

"Sure," Tony said. "Sure, officer, you bet I will. Say," he added looking up at my face, "Say, baby, don't I know you?"

"Yeah," I said, "you can bet you do. I put you on your way to your first two million."

8.

I picked up Ginny Sewell at eight o'clock. I didn't take any particular credit for being able to make a date at the last minute. I knew as well as she did that she had to know what had happened.

She looked like a dream, standing there with the door open and lights of her little living room behind her. A dream all summer-frothy in one of those dress-up cottons. The kind of dream a tired business man can use, and I had had a busy day at the office.

"So you're a hero," Ginny said tenderly, "you're stupid, but you're a hero."

"That's me, a stupid hero."

"That's not what I said."

Lord, she looked good. I bent and kissed her.

"Why, Sergeant Prouty!" said Nurse Sewell's voice. But that was after she felt what had to come out, maybe the hunger, and maybe the little scared boy, and all the rest of the things that happen inside you after you kill a man. "Come on," I said, "it's a long time to dinner."

"Mace," Ginny said, "about Ann Talbot — she was connected with the rest of it?"

"Holiday House," I said. "It's twenty-five miles up the coast. Let's get going."

"Let me get my stole." She paused as she turned, "About Talbot?"

"She was connected."

Ginny wrapped the white knitted shawl-thing about her shoulders and came out of her apartment closing the door behind her and trying the knob to make sure it was locked. I held another door for her while she climbed into my coupe. She did things for the pumpkin coach.

On the coast road, running north past Malibu with a moon like a washtub riding sidesaddle on her shoulder, I filled in the pieces for Sewell.

I said, "First things first, but when I'm through with it, so are you. No kicking it around for the rest of the evening."

"I promise."

"O.K. Ann Talbot is Ann Ran-

kin. Her husband, Frank Rankin, was on the Seattle plane under the name of Frank Talbot. She's a small-time extra, gets a job through Central Casting now and then. He's a bookie, also small-time. He pays a percentage to Johnny Rose. They did the job for Johnny for five hundred bucks plus a round trip ticket and expenses for Frank. The object was to keep us of the Airport Detail, and the head of Airport Protection, tied up during the time flight 782 from Vegas disembarked its passengers.

"When you consider they had about two hours to work up the gag from the time Johnny Rose got word that Tony Caputo was leaving the desert with two million bucks, I think they did a good job, too damned good when you consider it took you to nail the phony."

Ginny moved over and settled against my shoulder. "Then her whole story was false?"

I grinned. "Not quite. Her husband was aboard that plane, he had taken out the insurance, he had bought a new briefcase, and he had stolen her plastic refrigerator bag."

"But why on earth?" Ginny demanded.

My big fat grin broadened. "Frank has an ulcer. The herb doctor treating him has him on natural foods. Frank took the plastic bag to line his over size briefcase so he could carry three small papayas. That's what the airline captain stuffed down the john."

Ginny laughed.

"The rest of it," I said soberly, "isn't so funny. Tony Caputo was front man for *The Dunes* in Las Vegas. Subrosa, he was backed by a Cleveland syndicate. For the last five years, Tony's been a good boy, but it finally got so that he couldn't stand the idea that he was being paid a measly fifteen grand a year when millions of dollars were being passed through his hands. He got to thinking about the fact that *on paper*, he owned *The Dunes*.

"Last month, a Jersey mob showed up in Nevada for a look around. A bad bunch. Tony approached the big boy with a proposition. For two million cash, he could sell them a going concern worth ten times that money. With the caliber of lawyers available in Nevada, they could probably make it stick, *legally*.

"Like I said, the Jersey mob's a tough one. They checked him on the legal angles, and then they took him up."

Ginny gasped. "You mean he had all that money in the tin suitcase?"

"Not by a long shot," I told her. "He had cleared with the tax people before he left the state. As far as we're concerned, he's clean."

"What'll happen to him, do you suppose?"

"In our town," I said grimly, "nothing. After we get him to the city limits, he's got to start running again. Run for the rest of his life this time, and if I know Johnny

Rose's boys, he may not even be out of breath before his running's over."

We drove for awhile in silence. The moon moved off her shoulder and farther out over the Pacific. I glanced at her from time to time and tried to think, "How beautiful!" My thinking wasn't running that straight yet. It was going round and round, faster and faster. I concentrated on driving.

Finally, Ginny said, "Mace, what's bothering you?"

"The first people off that plane," I said, "were a kid and his mother. Up on my side of the ramp, the one guy in their lives was waiting for them. About one half minute after they got by him, that fingerman from Cleveland pulled the sawed-off shotgun out of his coat. The first thing I saw after I fired was the father's face. I can't get rid of it."

Ginny snuggled closer. "You may be stupid about girls," she said, "but you're good, honey, you're good."

"The hell I am," I snapped. "Someday I'm going to have a kid of my own. I don't ever want him in the kind of world that kid was in for a few minutes this afternoon."

We rode a little longer without speaking.

"Mace."

"Yeah?" I glanced down. She was half smiling.

"About that son you're going to have?"

"Yeah?" I said again.

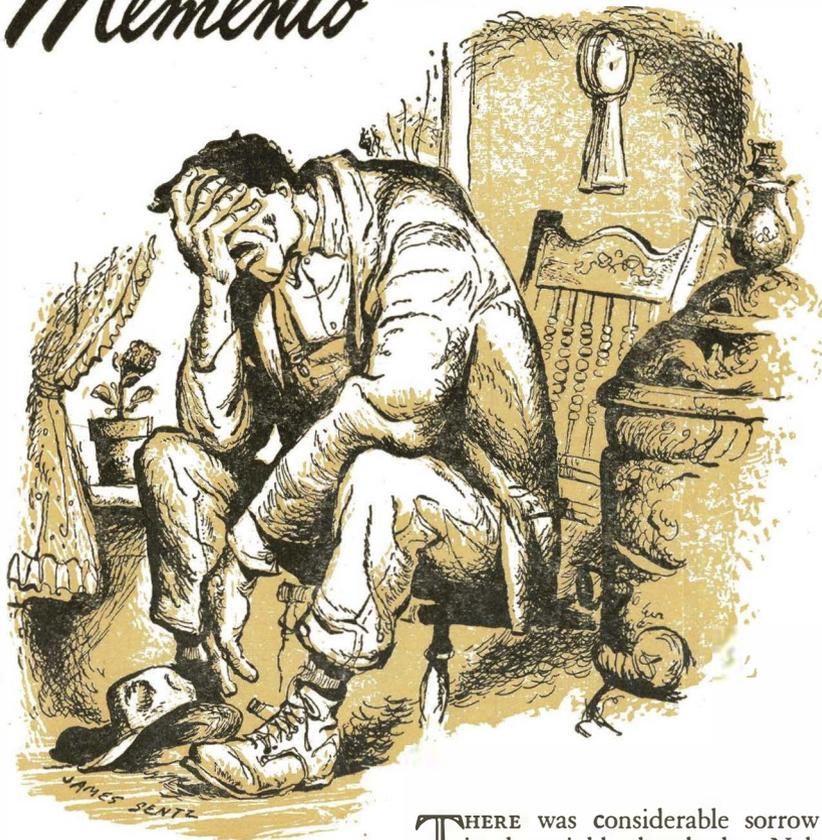
"Would you marry his mother?"

I took my foot off the gas and slid the coupe over off the sleek black asphalt of the highway. There was nothing I could do to turn off the moon.



Memento

Everybody was sorry when Nellie Stoddard died. Everybody wished Nellie's husband had died, instead . . .



BY ERSKINE CALDWELL

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THERE was considerable sorrow in the neighborhood when Nellie Stoddard fell down a flight of stairs after dark one night and passed away in her fiftieth year.

It was the talk among the neighbors, now that there was occasion to recollect, that Nellie had devoted the last thirty years of her life to baking cakes for brides, helping

mothers with colicky infants, shoeing flies from sickbeds, comforting the bereaved, and in general doing kindly deeds for all. She always managed to keep a tidy house and be wifely to Hame, and yet nobody could recall hearing Nellie say a single time that she was too tired or too busy in her own home to go to a neighbor's house and help out.

"If ever a good woman lived on this earth," said people from one end of Vetch County to the other, "that woman was Nellie Stoddard. There're a lot of sinners in this world, but nobody could say Nellie was one of them."

Some of the more outspoken neighbors said it was a shame Nellie had to spend the last thirty years of her life living with a wrongheaded and scoundrelly man like Hame Stoddard, and most of his relatives and all of her close kin said the world would have been better off if Hame had fallen down the cellar stairs and broken his neck instead of Nellie. In sickness or in health, she never missed the preaching services at the crossroads church on Sunday, and, even when the weather was blusterous and stormy, she would walk mile after mile to lend a helping hand to somebody in distress.

"Nellie Stoddard was a saintly woman," people said over and over again. "Nobody can truthfully say she ever did a sinful thing in her whole life. The only thing she could be criticized for was for marrying a man like Hame Stoddard."

Hame was close to his fifty-fifth year at the time of Nellie's death, and he had been contrary minded, self-willed, and headstrong in his ways every day of the thirty years he had lived with her. Through youth and early manhood he had been a blacksmith, and he was still a strong and husky man of two hundred and twenty-five pounds of bone and brawn. Hame had cinder-black hair with not a sign of gray to be seen and his thick heavy fingers always appeared to be grimy and gritty from firing a forge and hammering out angle irons and sickle heads. He had been running a little store at the upper crossroads in Vetch County since his retirement from blacksmithing and he made a comfortable living by selling canned goods and odds-and-ends of hardware and findings to the timbering and turpentine families living in the piney lowlands.

Hame went home that afternoon when the burial services were over and sat looking out the window at the late summer weeds in the doorway. He had stood stolidly in the cemetery all during the graveside ceremony without shedding a single tear, but when he realized that he was alone in the house for the first time in thirty years, he felt sad and forsaken. Tears came to his eyes for the first time since childhood. He missed Nellie and her care of him, and he wanted to think of ways of letting her know how lonely and disconsolate he was without her. The

sun went down and twilight came and he sat there weeping for hour after hour. The one thing in the whole world that mattered to him then was to be able to think of the most kindly and loving thing he could do in memory of her. He sat until past midnight in the darkness while grief and sorrow overcame him.

At daybreak the next morning Hame got up and dressed. He made coffee and cooked eggs, and then, as soon as he had finished eating breakfast, he got into his car and drove toward town ten miles away. When he got there, he had to wait on the courthouse steps for nearly an hour before the doors were unlocked for the day. Promptly at eight o'clock the bell in the courthouse belfry struck the hour, the janitor unlocked the doors, and Hame went straight to the recorder's office.

"I've got an important legal document here to get recorded on the county books," he told Henry Julian. "The paper's a little old and faded, but the reading's there to be seen. Now, I want you to hurry up and attend to it the way it should be."

"I can't make out what this is or is supposed to be," the recorder said, shaking his head. "The print and handwriting is just about all faded from sight. What is it, Hame?"

"Put on your reading glasses and you'll see what it is," Hame told him impatiently. "I read it myself this morning before the sun was up — read every last word of it."

Henry put on his reading glasses and lowered his head over the musty document.

"Hame, this is a marriage license," he said presently, looking up with an expression of sudden surprise. "What in the world! Where did it come from, Hame?"

"It may be a little old, but the time's come to record it properly on the county books. Now, you go ahead and attend to it like it's your business to do. I'm in a big hurry about it."

"It's not only a little old — it's too old," the recorder told him, shoving the paper across the desk in Hame's direction. "That marriage license was issued thirty years ago, if I was reading the date correctly. It's your and Nellie's license to wed. And it never was properly recorded when it should've been. And now it's too late, Hame. Thirty years too late."

"That don't make a bit of difference," Hame said determinedly. He pushed the paper back across the desk to Henry. "I paid the fee for it at the time, I used it, and now I want it properly recorded. It's your business to record legal documents like this, and not do all the talking you've been doing. I came in here on legal business, not to pass the time of day."

"Hame," Henry said sympathetically, "I'd like to do it for your late wife's sake — I mean, for Nellie's sake. It's a serious matter for a woman to live with a man as long as

she did, and not be married in the eyes of the law. The best you could say about it is that Nellie was your common law wife. Yes, I'd like to be able to record it for Nellie's sake, but it just can't be done. A marriage license expires five days after date of issue. That's the law of the state, Hame, and there's nothing me or you can do about it. I can cite you the law right here in this statute book. If anybody takes out a marriage license, but don't use and record it properly before the five days are up, then the whole thing is null and void. And, like I said, it makes the parties concerned not legally wed, if they go ahead and live together anyway."

"It wasn't so when I paid over the money and took it out," Hame said stubbornly. "They may've changed the law since then, but that license there is still good and legal. You or nobody else is going to keep me from having it properly recorded. I've got good reason for wanting it done."

Henry Julian put on his reading glasses again and bent over the musty document. He looked at the yellowed paper and faded ink for a long time. After several minutes he took off his reading glasses and solemnly shook his head.

"I'll go upstairs and see one of the circuit court judges about this, Hame," he said then, "but I don't think it'll do a bit of good. Anyway, I couldn't take the responsibility of recording it, under the circum-

stances, the law being what it is nowadays. I'm sworn to abide by the letter of the law."

"I don't care who you talk to," Hame said, sitting down on one of the wooden benches and making himself comfortable, "but I know I'm going to stay right here in this courthouse till the paper's properly recorded. I vowed and bedamned last night that I was going to get this matter attended to for Nellie's sake. The preacher went through the ceremony with Nellie and me. The witnesses signed their names at the proper places. And after that the preacher filled out all the lines on the license like he was supposed to do. That means everybody's done what was called for, except you. Now, you go ahead and do what the county recorder is supposed to do. I'll vow and bedamn if I'm going to be cheated out of legal marriage to Nellie after all this time has gone by."

"But why didn't the minister file this license for recording like he was supposed to do?" Henry asked. "He ought to've brought it in here to the courthouse right after performing the ceremony. I suppose he's dead and gone by now, and all the witnesses, too."

"He didn't bring it in because I wasn't sure at the time of the turn things might take. I wanted to be cautious about it and stay on safe ground just in case I decided I wanted to get out of the bargain at some time or other in the future. I

told myself I was putting Nellie on her good behavior till I was satisfied she was going to make the kind of wife I wanted to be bound to. That's why I told the preacher to hand over the license to me and I'd take care of it for him and save him the bother of coming all the way to town to record it at the courthouse. I put the license away in the attic, just waiting for the time to come when I was sure in my own mind that I was willing to be legally bound to any woman. Then last night, after the funeral, I decided the time had come to take the step. I was convinced that Nellie had proved herself. So I went up to the attic, got the license from where I'd hid it for safekeeping, and now here it is. I wouldn't be here with it now, if I hadn't made up my mind it's the thing I want done, now that Nellie's gone."

Henry was silent for a long time. Presently he put the reading glasses back into his pocket case.

"I wouldn't believe it, Hame," he said at last, "if I didn't know you like I do. I don't know another man in Vetch County who'd do a thing like that." He shook his head slowly. "I'm going upstairs and ask one of the circuit court judges to advise me what to do. I've never run across a peculiar thing like this before, and I've served six terms as county recorder."

"You'd better bring back word you're going to record the license like I told you to start with," Hame

warned him, "or I'll go up there and tell those judges I'll bring suit for big money against everybody in this courthouse. I've made up my mind for Nellie's sake to have this thing attended to properly, and I can find me a lawyer who'll see to it."

Henry Julian was away for half an hour or longer. When he came back to the recorder's office, Judge Prichard was with him.

"It looks like you're absolutely right about this matter, Hame," Judge Prichard said. "The law was changed to nullify unrecorded marriage licenses five days after date of issue, just like Henry told you, but that action took place after that license of yours was issued, and I can't find any wording in the statutes that would make the law retroactive. That means, in my opinion, that this particular license is still valid, and therefore it should be recorded. Go ahead, Henry. Record the marriage of Nellie Smithson and Hame Stoddard."

"I thought everybody would come around to seeing it like that," Hame said with satisfaction. "If you knew me like some other folks do, you'd know I'm in the habit of having my own way. I vowed and bedamned that I was going to have my way about recording this license, because it's all for Nellie's sake. I got to thinking things over last night, and I made up my mind that it was the proper thing to do, under the circumstances."

“Well, I’m glad it turned out this way for Nellie’s sake,” Judge Prichard told him. “And may the Lord have mercy on Nellie’s soul. She’s entitled to all the peace and comfort she can get, after living in sin for thirty years. And I reckon she’ll be forgiven, when it’s taken into account that she was tricked into believing she was a legally married woman all that time. I reckon the blessed thing about it all is that no children were born to that — to that union, I reckon you’d call it.”

Hame stood up and put on his hat.

“Tell me just one thing, Hame,” Judge Prichard said.

“What’s that?” Hame asked, pausing in the doorway.

“After all this time, and now that Nellie’s no longer with us, why were you so set and determined to have the marriage license legally recorded? I think it’s safe to say that nobody would’ve ever known the difference if you’d done nothing about it.”

“Because I’m going to put up a fine big headstone over Nellie’s grave and I want to have wording chiseled in the granite saying she’s mourned by her sorrowful husband of thirty years. An honest and truthful man couldn’t say that if he’d never been legally married to her.”

Judge Prichard nodded solemnly.

“No, I reckon he couldn’t,” he said. “An honest and truthful man wouldn’t say a thing like that.”



Portrait of a Killer

BY DAN SONTUP

HE WAS just about the last man on earth that you'd call the "great lover" type. He was middle-aged, thin, small in stature, and just about as unromantic a type as you could find. By the same token, you wouldn't call him a killer, either. Yet Everett Appelgate belied his looks on both counts — he was an accomplished lover as well as a deadly killer.

He knew how to get the women, how to make love to them, how to keep them around for as long as he wanted, but when it came to getting rid of them, he fumbled pretty badly. Instead of employing the usual finesse of his kind and giving his lady love a delicate brush-off, he could find no other way out than a very clumsy murder.

Actually, the killing might be said to be Everett's second error in judgment where women were concerned. Though he was a man who admired sleek and sexy women, he picked a wife who weighed 250 pounds. Naturally, for a man of Everett's inclinations, this wasn't a happy arrangement, and Ada Appelgate, his wife, didn't see too much of him.

Everett finally managed to work

out the ideal set-up. He met and was captivated by Frances Creighton, the wife of a friend of his. In planning his campaign to win Frances, Everett decided to make things easy for himself. He approached her husband John and suggested that the Creightons and the Appelgates cement their friendship even further by taking a house together and sharing it. Everett, of course, made no mention to John of sharing Frances with him, but that was his eventual goal.

It didn't take much persuasion on the part of Everett to bring the merger about, and it wasn't long before John and Frances Creighton, their teenage daughter Ruth, and the Appelgates were all nicely crowded together in a small, two-bedroom house. The Appelgates had one bedroom, the Creightons the other, and Ruth slept in the attic.

Once the whole thing had been arranged, Everett wasted no time in working things so that he and Frances were alone in the house one day. One day was all he needed, and by the time he had finished going through his great lover routine for Frances, Everett was in the enviable but slightly awkward posi-

tion of having a wife and a sweetheart under the same roof.

None of this bothered Everett, though. He went right on enjoying himself. Surprisingly enough, it lasted a full year without anyone catching on. Ada Appelgate was too busy putting on weight to pay much attention to what her husband was doing when she wasn't around, and John Creighton just didn't seem to catch on.

The whole thing might have gone on indefinitely, but Everett, true to type, soon began to tire of Frances and began to look around for other fields to conquer. He was faced with a bit of a problem here, though. You can't very easily kiss a sweetheart goodbye when she's living under the same roof with you. Everett, however, solved his problem in pretty slick fashion. He looked under the same roof — and there he found Ruth, the daughter, who had now grown into quite an appealing young girl.

So, while Everett gradually paid less and less attention to Frances, he began to plan the best way to win her daughter. At the start, he had to operate outside the home. For this purpose, he used his car, and it wasn't too long before Ruth followed the same path her mother had.

Now Everett had three women in the same house, and while his wife still posed no problem, he knew it would be difficult to put anything over on Frances. Nevertheless, he

tried, and when he got tired of using the car for his meetings with Ruth, he worked out a scheme whereby they could use his bedroom — with his wife still there.

Everett merely insisted that his wife take sleeping pills, since, as he said, she wasn't sleeping too well lately. Then, when Ada was sound asleep and not likely to waken, Ruth would come marching into the bedroom. John Creighton saw nothing to get alarmed about in his daughter occasionally sleeping with the Appelgates, and neither did Frances — at first. Then she started putting two and two together, and it added up to three people in the same bedroom, one of them her daughter, and another her former lover.

The whole thing came out in the open just about then because Ruth discovered she was pregnant. Ada Appelgate and John were the only ones who didn't know this. But Everett and Frances and Ruth were very deeply concerned. Frances forgot that she had been spurned by Everett in favor of her daughter, and the mother instinct in her came to the fore. She took Everett to one side, told him that he'd better do right by her daughter — and that meant marrying her. She left the ways and means up to Everett.

The idea of trading Ada for Ruth appealed to Everett, but he knew that he'd never get a divorce from his wife. So he finally threw his whole smooth-running operation out

of kilter by deciding to murder his wife.

He thought he was being smart about it, but he really went at it like the rankest of amateur killers, which he was. He used the old, old method of buying rat poison containing arsenic and feeding it a little at a time to his wife. Even though it was an outdated method of murder, Everett succeeded. The arsenic did its work in time, and Ada was soon dead.

But it was then that Everett found out why this particular way of getting rid of an unwanted spouse had been discarded by mur-

derers a long time ago. While the arsenic was effective, it also left unmistakable evidence as to the manner of death. The police, naturally, were well acquainted with all the symptoms of arsenic poisoning, and so a routine autopsy brought the whole thing to light.

Everett had his brief moment of publicity — the newspapers had a field day with the story of a man with a wife, another woman, and her daughter in the same house. But that was about all, and it must have been small compensation for Everett when he finally went to the electric chair — alone and unloved



Sweet Charlie

Peter Chambers was stuck with one of the strangest cases of his career. There were plenty of suspects — but they were all Charlies.

BY HENRY KANE

MY CLIENT'S name was Belinda Fear and she was as beautiful as her name was unusual. She was standing and I was sitting, and that was good for both of us. Sitting, I have my points: it makes me look more important. Standing, she had her points.

Let us not go into that.

Let us merely state that she had red hair, slit-green eyes, an oval face, and a figure that



made me look less important: it had me wriggling to get comfortable.

But you had to hand it to her.

When one is in the office of a private detective, one is in trouble, and when one is in trouble, one is nervous; but this one — in a strange atmosphere — had more poise than a strip-tease artist visiting at a nudist camp.

Except for the vein throbbing at the base of her throat.

Throat?

Ah, me.

Soft column of warm color rising imperious . . .

"I heard of you," she said, "through Scoop Conlon."

"Good old Scoop."

"Not, I mean, direct. I heard him mention your name a few times. He has a lot of respect for you, he thinks —"

"Yeah, good old Scoop."

Important or not important, I got up. I just couldn't sit there and wriggle. I lit a cigarette and walked around her. She didn't move. I sneaked a look: she was even more impressive from the rear. I said, "What do you do, Miss Fear? What's your business?"

She turned. "I'm a snake dancer."

"Snake dancer. What's that?"

"I dance with snakes."

"Mm. Dance with snakes. How?"

"I dance, covered with snakes. I've trained them."

"To do what?"

"To cover me. I mean . . . snakes . . . that's all I wear."

"Mm. Good for the snakes. Lucky old snakes."

Suddenly composure fell from her like all the snakes had dropped dead. Suddenly she was naked in terror. She said, "I want you to help me, Mr. Chambers." She was trembling. "I want somebody I can trust, somebody strong. They're going to kill me, I'm sure of it. I want help, Mr. Chambers. Somebody I can trust, somebody strong . . ."

I am strong. I went to her and showed her I was strong. Maybe I was taking advantage of a situation, but don't we all, in life, take advantage of certain situations? I smothered the vein pulsing in her throat, and I murmured, "Easy does it." For a moment, she pressed toward me, and some of her shuddering subsided. Even if I was not going to earn a fee out of this interview, I had already had sufficient recompense. But I *was* going to earn a fee, and faster than I'd thought.

She squeezed against me, hard, then broke from me. She went to her handbag, reached in, brought forth a sheaf of crisp bills, and placed them on the desk. I didn't look at the money, because I couldn't stop looking at her. She was falling apart again, gleam of fright in the wide slit-green eyes. "I . . . I . . ." she said.

"Easy does it, Miss Fear."

"I . . . I don't want to talk here. I want you to come to my apartment. Eight o'clock. Make it eight o'clock. I . . . I'll be ready to tell

you. Don't talk about it. Don't tell anybody. Eight o'clock."

She gave me her address and then she was gone and the office came back to shape: no more beauty, no more excitement, no more thrill to a throbbing vein . . . only the faint odor of her perfume and the green bills on my desk. I sighed, rubbed out the cigarette, went to the desk, picked up the money, sighed again . . . and the sigh choked in my throat.

My retaining fee was ten thousand dollars.

Well, sir, for ten thousand dollars, the client is entitled to some preliminary spade work. Belinda Fear had said eight o'clock and now it was early afternoon. I climbed on my white horse and charged down to Scoop Conlon's. Scoop was Chief Investigator for the District Attorney, only I knew Scoop from way back when his card read: Chas. R. Conlon, Private Investigator, Empire State Building, New York. Scoop had been in the racket until the racket had become a racket and then he'd busted out. He'd gone to work for one of the morning papers as a reporter and from there, what with Scoop's brain and connections, it had only been a step away to press agent. He had plugged at that for a while, had had some top clients, but again, his brains, connections, and experience had given him preferential choice when the Chief Investi-

gator's berth at the D.A.'s had become open. The D.A. had asked, and Scoop had grabbed, and he had been the Number One Boy, doing an excellent job and winning citations, for the past five years. Scoop was a bachelor; slender, grey-templed, blue-eyed and gracious; and, after I was announced, he opened his door for me and put an arm around my shoulders. "Peter Chambers," he said. "Always a pleasure."

"Hi, Scoop."

"And if I can be of service to you — a double pleasure. Sit down, pal."

I sat. I said, "Belinda Fear."

Scoop's eyebrows hung high over his blue eyes and he tried to hide a smile. "Where'd you come to that, sonny?"

"Confidential and all the rest of that stuff. Working on a case, and her name came up. Why?"

"Because, lay off." The smile was a grin now. "That's why."

"Belinda Fear?"

"Happens to be my girl friend. Plus, she's jammed."

"Girl friend? What happened to Charlene Lopez?"

"Happened what happens to all girl friends sooner or later. Got aired."

"Look out for that one, Daddy-o. That one's got a temper."

"Daddy-o knows all about it." He rubbed a knuckle against his chin. "You checking Rurok's death?"

"Am I supposed to?"

"That's where my sweetheart got jammed. If it *is* a jam."

"Belinda Fear?"

"Belinda Fear. Nice, huh?"

"I wouldn't know."

"You wouldn't, huh?" He dug in for cigarettes, tossed one to me, took one for himself. "Knowing you, brother, you would. But nothing's going to help you."

"Because why, Daddy-o?"

"Because that's Scoop's. Exclusive."

"And whose is Anthony Rurok?"

His chuckle was grim. "Nobody's yet. And may never be anybody's. That one's way up in the air, and it doesn't show any signs of coming down."

Anthony Rurok, distinguished widower, had been a producer of hit plays until two weeks ago, at which time all of his production had abruptly terminated. He had been murdered in his swank apartment, stabbed to death. The papers had done a lurid job for a couple of days and then had gone on to other lurid jobs.

"Belinda Fear," I said, "was mixed in that?"

Scoop nodded, smiled around his cigarette. "Yeah," he said. "Fine sweethearts I pick."

"Wanna tell me how?"

"Happy to. It's public knowledge, really. Ever hear of C. Charles Applegate?"

"Sure. I'm no exception. C. Charles Applegate, multimillionaire antique dealer. Married three times, and the last time to a gorgeous hunk of —"

"Yeah," Scoop said. "A rather prime suspect that dissipated into thin air."

"You mean the wife?"

"I mean C. Charles Applegate."

"Applegate is supposed to have knocked off Rurok?"

"That's what Applegate's wife says. Insists."

"And her name . . . ?"

"Nancy. Nancy Applegate, who seems to like them elderly and distinguished."

"Lemme hear, pal. Let me hear."

Scoop lit a new cigarette off the old one. "Rurok goes for Nancy. Nancy goes for Rurok. Old Applegate flips his wig. According to the wife, a jealous guy is old Applegate, capable of murder. Finally, when Nancy asks for a divorce, Applegate double-flips his wig, and blows his cork to boot. He calls Rurok for an appointment, and an appointment is set for twelve noon, two weeks ago, at Rurok's apartment."

"By the way, do you know this Applegate?"

"Charlie Applegate? Are you kidding? The guy used to be a client of mine, when I was a press agent. Wait, I'm coming to that."

"Excuse me."

"Anyway, Applegate gets to Rurok's place, rings the bell, and there's no answer. It's a very important appointment, and Applegate figures there's *got* to be an answer. He keeps ringing. No answer. He looks down, and he sees a key in the door, a regular kind of Yale-lock key. He

doesn't touch the key, but he tries the door. Door's locked. He figures something's cockeyed, maybe some kind of plant, these millionaire guys are awful suspicious. He goes downstairs and calls me."

"Why you?"

"Knows me well. Trusts me. Figures I'm the kind of guy who might help if some kind of frame job is cooking, what with my sort of official position. Anyway, I scoot up there, get the key out without leaving any marks on it, have the caretaker of the joint open the door . . . and there's Rurok, dead as the old doornail, stabbed to death, evidence of a terrific struggle all over the apartment. I call cops, and before they show . . . guess who *does* show?"

"Give up."

"Belinda Fear."

"You're kidding."

"Wish I were. But there she shows, big as life, and much more beautiful, as you know."

I tapped out my cigarette and looked enigmatic. Or so I hoped.

Scoop said, "I'll wrap it up for you. She claims she came there in response to a call from Rurok who wanted her for one of his shows. Claims she's never known Rurok before, never even seen him. But — *her fingerprints are on that key in the door.*"

"No!"

"Yes." He went to a file, pulled open a drawer. "Here, let me show you." He took out a couple of

large photos. Each had a fingerprint, blown up. One was marked: "Thumb." One was marked: "Index Finger." Both were clear, full, perfectly delineated.

"It's weird," I said.

"The thumb," Scoop said, "is off one side of the key. The index finger, off the other side of the key. Perfect prints, as you notice. And both belonging to Belinda Fear. No question she was the one who had either entered that apartment or tried to enter it. Yet, she brazens it one hundred percent."

"What about the prints on the knife that stabbed him?"

"Clean. No prints. Rurok's own knife, as a matter of fact. Clean, wiped clean, not a print."

"Where's that leave you people, and the cops?"

"Way out in the bleachers, that's where. We've got motive for Applegate, but that's all we've got, and that's not enough. We've got Belinda's prints on that key, but that's *all* we've got there. She says she never saw that key, never had any dealings with Rurok, and the most intensive investigation seems to bear her out. Can't prove a thing on either one of them, can't hold either one of them, and the case is up in the air, and can stay there forever, it's happened before."

"What do you think, Scoop?"

"Search me. A little bit, I'm stuck on Belinda, but . . . maybe she had something going with Rurok, maybe she did have a key to

the joint, but we simply can't prove it. On the other hand, Applegate's wife *admits* that *she* had a key to the place, and she insists that old Applegate stole it. But she hates the guy so much, she may be dreaming that up out of whole cloth just to pinpoint him. Again, no proof. Stinks, huh?"

"Yeah, stinks pretty good."

Our talk dribbled to chatter and then I stood up and I shook hands with Scoop and I climbed back on my white horse. I called Charlene Lopez, who was a fiery female photographer working for one of the picture magazines, but Charlene wasn't at her studio. Her Answering Service said she'd be back at six. So I tried C. Charles Applegate's home on upper Fifth Avenue. Charlie was at his place of business, but Nancy was at home.

Nancy Applegate. Small, black-eyed, curved, sensuous and slightly smelling of brandy. I told her I'd been retained by relatives of Rurok to check into his murder, and she let loose with a quick torrent:

"Charlie killed him. Charlie's getting away with murder. He stole my key, and he went there, and he killed him."

"What about Belinda Fear's prints on that key?"

"I don't know anything about that. I know nothing about any Belinda Fears. Maybe that was another key. I tell you Charlie killed him, Charlie killed him, Charlie killed him . . ."

C. Charles Applegate, *Objets D'Art*, was located at Fifty-seventh Street and Madison Avenue. He turned out to be a sturdy, thick-set guy, about sixty, with a weak chin, a large nose, and a loose slack-lipped mouth that looked like it wanted to drool. He looked scared when I told him what it was about, but I had nothing to poke into his scariness. I was a guy without a weapon, a guy asking questions, period. He told me nothing I didn't know, but I came away with the impression that if the cops did get anything on him, he'd crumple like shredded wheat in a wrestler's palm.

So I went to dinner, which I had with wine and cogitation, and I got much more out of the wine than the cogitation. Pretty soon it was six o'clock: time for Charlene Lopez; and, soon after six, I was at her studio on Central Park West trying hard not to ogle at La Lopez in tight black slacks, to say nothing of a tight silk blouse, but all of her in gorgeous proportion, mind you. Charlene had a big bosom and most of it kept heaving as she walked the carpet of the spacious room:

"I'll kill that rat as sure as you're alive. Nobody clips my man and gets away with it. I introduced those two, like a big dope, I did. Did some photos of her, and we sort of got friendly, but I'll kill that green-eyed louse. She's been ducking me, but she can't duck me forever."

"Look. Charlene."

"What?"

"Ever hear of C. Charles Apple-gate?"

"Everybody's heard of that slob."

"Know him?"

"Did some pictures of him, once, for the magazine. But I was talking about that Belinda Fear —"

"Your friends call you Charlie, don't they?"

"Yes, my friends call me Charlie. Now what the hell has that got to do with this? That bum Belinda Fear has been ducking me, but sooner or later, I'll catch up with her. She was supposed to go to work for Joe Reno — figured she couldn't scoot out on me there — but now I hear she even goofed on that. A thousand bucks a week, and she goofs out on it."

"Club Reno?"

"Ain't no other club that that mug owns."

So, you're on the old white horse again, charging about in no direction. Club Reno's on First Avenue and Fifty-second and Joe Reno's fit to bust all over the avenue when you mention Belinda Fear. Joe Reno, with a broken nose, and political connections, and a barrel chest, and political connections, and a bad reputation, and political connections, and an ugly temper, and political connections, and a good many arrests without convictions.

"Nobody," states Joe, "gives Joe the double-x, Mr. Peeper. And I mean, nobody. That dirty little broad, Belinda Fear, doubled on me,

but she ain't going to double no more on no one, take it from Joe."

"What happened, Joe?"

"Happened? That red-headed monkey worked up a rep with them snakes. She's got a following. I arrange with her for here, for a long bit, twenty-six weeks, at a thousand per. Pretty good, hey, for a dame that hides the spots with snakes? So, I close the whole joint for alterations. I spend gold like its growing on trees. I spend extra gold to give her a show to back her. I get a whole new band. So what happens? This happens. She powders on the whole goddam deal. Last week she says, 'Joe.' 'Joe,' she says, 'I'm through, I'm taking it easy for a while. Get yourself another gal.' That's what she says."

"Didn't you have a contract?"

"Joe don't need no contracts. Joe's got muscles. Furthermore, that tomato never signs no contracts. But I'll tell you this. Right now, I'll tell you this. Nobody powders on Joe. Nobody powders on Joe and gets away with it. I'm telling you that now, and I'm telling the whole cockeyed world. Nobody powders on Joe."

So . . . I went home. I showered and I shaved and I took a nap. Then I did the peacock bit with clothes, because I wanted to impress Belinda, but when I got to Belinda's place, it was too late for impressions.

Belinda Fear was dead.

The place seethed with unfamiliar faces of cops but there were many familiar faces for compensation. There was my good friend, Detective-Lieutenant Louis Parker, in charge of the investigation. And there was Scoop Conlon, and Joe Reno, and Charlene Lopez. C. Charles Applegate was not there, nor was Nancy Applegate; otherwise we'd have had a full quorum.

Parker gave me the dope.

Belinda Fear was dead with a letter-opener in her chest, her own hand clenched around it, and only her fingerprints on the letter-opener. The body had been discovered by Charlene Lopez, who had called the police. Looked like suicide, despite three peculiar items. Item One: Scuff marks on the entrance door near the bottom. Item Two: Ninety thousand dollars in cash found in her bedroom closet. Item Three: An unfinished letter on Belinda's desk, reading: *Dear Charlie: I'm through with the mess. I'm going to hide out for a while. Somebody's going to take over for me so I can try to get straightened out . . .*

Parker said, "Scuff marks on the door? So what? Money in the closet? Same so what? And that letter, it could have been begun at any time, could even have been yesterday. Looks like suicide, all right, from all the physical aspects."

Scoop Conlon said: "Looks like it, all right."

I said, "Mixed with the other?"

Parker said, "I know all about

that. I didn't handle that Ruruk murder, that was Lieutenant Harrington, working with Conlon. Nobody got any satisfaction from that, but this girl here, this Belinda Fear, she might finally have been bitten by conscience, happens, you know, happens all the time . . ."

I said, "How did Charlene Lopez happen to find her?"

"Come on," Parker said. "I'll let you talk to her."

Charlene talked.

She had come to visit. She had found the door ajar. She had walked in. She had heard footsteps rushing at her, had accumulated a bunched fist at her chin, and had been knocked off her feet while her assailant had scooted out. When she'd recovered, she had found Belinda on the floor, the letter-opener in her chest. She had called the police, and just as she had hung up, Joe Reno had strolled in.

"Just strolled in," Joe Reno said. "That's it, period. Just strolled in. I was coming to talk to that tramp."

Parker and Scoop and I discussed it alone.

"The way I figure," Scoop said, "the guy that batted Charlene was Joe Reno himself. He'd come here, found Belinda as she was, got scared, and was about to leave, when Charlene came. So he hit her, and ran. Then he came back, to make it look right; sort of, to cover up, just in case."

I said, "You think he might have murdered her?"

"Might have," Scoop said, "but it doesn't figure. He just didn't have enough against her for murder."

Parker said: "I dunno. On a murder angle — well, she broke an agreement with him, and even if we skip his loss of loot — there's the ancient matter of prestige, and you know how these gangster-types operate. Guys like Joe Reno like to keep their pride polished up. They hand out little lessons like these — just for future reference."

"Could be," Scoop said.

"Could be, too," said Parker, "that Charlene herself pulled it, and then comes up with a phony story."

"If," I said, "it's murder, not suicide."

Scoop wrinkled his eyes. "It's only suicide from the physical aspects . . ."

"What about the physical aspects of C. Charles Applegate, and spouse? Anybody been inquiring?"

Parker's smile was serious. "Each is supposed to be out strolling . . . so say the servants. We've got cops up there awaiting the return of the alleged separate strollers."

Cops worked. Statements were taken. Photographs were made. Every area was dusted for prints. C. Charles Applegate was brought in. He said he was strolling, period. Nancy Applegate was brought in. She said she was strolling, period. Finally, the body was taken out, and the uproar subsided, and then there

was nobody left but Parker and Conlon and myself. We helped ourselves to some of the late Belinda Fear's excellent Scotch, and we sat down to discuss it.

"Me?" I said. "I figure it for murder."

Conlon said, "As a bare theory, I like it. But for murder we need more than just figuring. From the actual physical aspects . . ."

"Yeah," Parker said. "When Scoop here was a private eye, he'd have come up quick with the same remark you made. But now that he's in the real business, he knows the difference. Theories are fine, but for murder you need proof. Figuring just isn't enough. I agree with Scoop. The physical aspects certainly point to suicide. Basis, guilt complex. The weapon in the hand of the girl herself, and only her prints on it. Nothing to pin on anybody, not even remotely. Scoop is in the business now. He understands. Suicide closes it out."

"Look . . ." I said.

"We just can't fly around with theories," Scoop said. "If we label it murder, we've got to have facts to substantiate it. If we have them, good. If not, we find them."

"Now you're talking," I said.

Scoop grinned. "Let'er rip, Pete. Out of the hunches of the private eyes come the completed cases of the constituted officials." He winked. "Only *we* get the credit."

"Credit, shmedit," I said. "You can have it. I'll take the fees."

"Let 'er rip, Peter me lad. Got a likely suspect?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Who?"

"You."

They both had their glasses up; they were both drinking, but the glasses came down quicker than a hoisted piano when a cable breaks. Remnants of whiskey choked in Parker's throat. "You crazy?" he gurgled. "Scoop Conlon?"

Scoop said, "Let him talk, Lieutenant. Let's see how crazy he can get."

"Scoop Conlon," I said. "A guy with a lot of brains and a lot of experience. He knows people just don't kill themselves — with letter-openers. A letter-opener, that's a snatch-up thing. Murder, yes. Suicide, no. People just don't kill themselves with letter-openers."

"But they might," Parker said.

"Scoop would have thought of it, pal. At least, he'd have mentioned it. But he didn't. Because he didn't want to. Because he'd love it if it got closed out as suicide."

"Why?" Parker said.

"Let's go back to the beginning."

"What beginning?" Parker said.

"Murder one. Anthony Rurok. Only one guy had motive for that murder, real motive. C. Charles Applegate. Want me to do a reenactment?"

Scoop smiled tiredly. "What've we got to lose?"

"Applegate came for his appointment. They got into a brawl. Rurok

showed his knife. They scuffled, and Applegate used Rurok's knife on Rurok. Okay, the guy's dead. Now what do you do? You're a multi-millionaire and, willy-nilly, you've just committed murder. What do you do? You think. And you come up with a very resourceful guy, a guy you know, a guy who used to be your press agent, a guy now with the D.A.'s office. So you call him. And the guy shows up, and — for dough — for a lot of dough — the guy figures an angle for you."

"Like what?" Parker said.

"Like using his girl friend to put her in the middle. Scoop is a shrewdie, well-versed in the law. Unless, by law, you can prove *beyond a reasonable doubt* that a guy's guilty, you've got no case. Rumble up the edges, and you lose the chief constituent — reasonable doubt."

"Rumble," Parker said, "like how?"

"He called Belinda down there. While she's on her way, he sends Applegate to pick up the key that his wife had to Rurok's apartment. Meanwhile he cleans up the murder knife. Then, when the girl shows up, they stick her prints on the key, shove it in the door, and cook up their story. Like that, there's a reasonable doubt for the two of them, but no straight proof that either did the murder. Like that, they're both out."

Parker said, "But why should the girl agree?"

"First, because she's Scoop's

sweetheart, and Scoop has a way with him. Second, for dough. She paid me a fee of ten thousand dollars, plus you found ninety thousand here. I'd say, simple arithmetic, round numbers . . . for a hundred thousand bananas. I'd say . . . Scoop got much more."

"Now wait a minute," Parker said. "How could you possibly jump to these kind of conclusions?"

"I didn't jump. I was led. By Scoop himself. He bamboozled Lieutenant Harrington, maybe — but he didn't bamboozle me."

Once again Parker said, "Like how?"

"This guy's got a lot of knowledge. There were a few cute but obvious flaws in that original situation that he wouldn't have flipped for. Unless he wanted to flip."

"Such as . . . ?" Parker said.

"Well, there were signs of a real scuffle in Rurok's place. Could a dame have fought like that? No. But Applegate could. You saw the guy, a thick-set powerful man. Then, the business of no fingerprints on the murder knife. Fine. But . . . if the fingerprints on the murder knife were wiped off, why would the prints be left on that key in the door? Why would the key *itself* be left in the door? All herrings; red, you should pardon the expression, herrings. Plus."

"Plus what?"

"Those very prints. The prints on the key. I saw blown-up photos of them. Clear as mid-morning in June.

Never happens. No prints off a used key would be that clear unless the prints were specially put on it, strictly for a plant. If I know that, Scoop would have known that. That's ABC. Plus."

"Now, plus what?"

"Figure with me, Lieutenant.

When one uses a key to open a door, the thumb print is on one side, but on the other side . . . you just never get a good print of the index finger. Because you just don't hold a key like that to open a door. Here. Try it." I flipped him a key, and he held it, and pretended to jab it into a keyhole. "See?" I said. "See? See how you're holding it? Thumb on one side, *fat part of the index finger* on the other side, the part between the first and second knuckles."

Parker was breathing hard.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah."

"Scoop would have known all that, because Scoop is a shrewd old bird. But Scoop didn't *want* to know it, because he was being paid *not* to know it. He was being paid to confuse the issue, and confuse he did. But then, like always, something happened."

"Yeah," Parker said. "What happened?" His jaw was set.

"The dame got scared, that's what happened. She was in the middle, and she got scared. She'd quit her work on the strength of the hundred gees, but then she thought about it, and thinking, she got scared. She was in the middle, and Scoop could

be a dangerous guy . . . so . . . she came to me. 'They're going to kill me,' she said. Get it? *They*. Not one person. *They*. More than one. Two, as a matter of fact. Scoop and old man Applegate."

Parker was on my side now. He scratched fingernails at his head, said: "But why this, now? Why the girl, now?"

"Because I was down to Scoop's office, talking about it, and he figured I was wiggling in, so he had to move fast. Like this, Lieutenant. Like this. He comes here, knocks on the door, probably makes with the Western Union bit, and she opens. He gets his foot in, and pushes the rest of the way."

"Yeah," Parker said. "Explains that scuff mark on the bottom of the door."

"She's in the midst of writing a letter. He grabs a look, and he knows it has to be now, right now. He sticks that letter-opener into her, cleans off the prints, and then . . . Charlene walks in; the door is still ajar. He hasn't time to snatch that unfinished letter. He belts Charlene before she sees who it is, and blows. Charlene comes back off the floor, calls cops, and Joe Reno appears. There's your story."

"And a good one it is," Parker stood up. "Now what about that letter she was writing? Any thoughts on that, because you've been thinking pretty good."

I went to the desk, picked it up, and read to him. *Dear Charlie: I'm*

through with the mess. I'm going to hide out for a while. Somebody's going to take over for me so I can try to get straightened out . . . "Me," I said. "I was that Somebody. She was going to tell me about it, and have me try to get her straightened away. Scoop closed her mouth. For good."

"Yeah, but who was that letter addressed to?"

"Pardon?"

"Just who would 'Dear Charlie' be?"

"Dear Charlie? Sweet Charlie. The sweetest of them all. Real smart and sugary. Charles R. Conlon. Straight monicker for good old Scoop here."

"Okay, gentlemen," Parker said. "Why don't we blow the joint? Let's go downtown and really gab it up." His .38, barely exposed and negligibly held, placed the stern stamp of approval upon his otherwise pleasantly-voiced suggestion.

C. Charles Applegate was easy. As per prediction, when he got pushed, he fell like a toppled tree. He squawked like a stuck bull, trying to shovel all the guilt for the conspiracy to Scoop. He had paid Scoop Conlon three hundred thousand dollars, which was recovered out of Scoop's vault; and he had paid Belinda Fear a hundred thousand dollars, ninety thousand of which was recovered out of Belinda's bedroom closet. Applegate and Scoop retained stylish lawyers who

fenced with the law admirably, but nonetheless they both drew life; while three hundred and ninety thousand cash bucks plunked resoundingly into Applegate's estate, most of which went to Nancy as

a booby prize. Nobody ever inquired about the missing ten thousand. That is, nobody ever inquired of me. Nobody even mentioned it was missing. I just don't think anybody had the nerve.



Incident in August

Nobody would listen to him. Nobody would believe that he was innocent, that he hadn't done a thing wrong.



WHEN the truck was brought to a stop Mal was surprised to find himself in one piece. During the drive from town, even when they had turned from the

BY G. H. WILLIAMS

highway onto the rutted dirt road, the hick beside him had kept his shotgun pressed against Mal's side.

"I guess they ain't here yet, George,"

the other hick, who was driving, said. He had parked the truck on the edge of the road. Looking around he saw only stunted pines and the sun baking the hard red soil.

"Don't look like it," the one called George answered. "They won't be long, I guess. It ain't a very long drive from Marvin's place."

Since they had ordered him from the local poolroom at gunpoint only George had spoken to him. The other one who was driving seemed anxious to go to work on him. Every time Mal had tried to speak the man had silenced him with a threat. Now, as he sat between them, he felt sick from the closeness of the truck's cab.

"I hope he speeds it up," George said. "I want to get back to town."

"Won't you guys tell me what this is all about?" When neither of them answered Mal said, "You know you can get slapped in the jug for pulling something like this. You aren't cops."

The driver glared at him. "Just sit still and keep shut up. Nobody's asking you nothing. Open your damn mouth one more time and I'll stomp you."

"Lay off him, Wyatt. I don't understand why you're getting so riled up. He ain't done nothing to us. All we're doing is payin' Marvin back for that favor he done us."

They sat silently while the truck grew hotter. Finally George said,

"Let's wait under the trees. No use frying our tails in here."

As George opened the door on his side, the driver said to Mal, "Don't try nothing smart. I'm just waiting for a chance to get you."

Mal got out of the truck and stood quietly. George had backed off a few steps keeping the shotgun cradled, ready for use.

The three of them walked over to a clump of pines and sat down.

"How long do you think they'll be, Wyatt?" George asked.

Wyatt, the driver, had stretched out and put his hat over his face. "Shouldn't be too long. Marvin sounded pretty anxious to get out here when I talked to him on the phone."

"Guess he won't be able to hurry too much because of that old Chevy of his," George said.

"Look," Mal blurted, "I don't know why you guys are pulling this but I could have you slapped in jail. If you let me go, though, I promise I won't go to the cops about it. Okay?"

"Pure as hell, ain't you?" Wyatt asked from beneath his hat. A fly landed on his ear and he slowly brushed it away. "I bet you ain't never done nothing."

George smiled, showing irregular yellow teeth. He was easier going than Wyatt who seemed willing to go to work on Mal at the first opportunity. "Might as well tell us the truth. It's not going to matter either way but it would sure save us

a lot of worrying." He yawned "Might as well be decent about this thing."

"Just what am I supposed to have done?"

Wyatt cut him short, sneering, "Still trying?"

George rested the shotgun across his knees. "I don't understand people like you." He took a bag of tobacco and some rolling papers out of his shirt pocket. Methodically he began to roll a cigarette. "Now, they's lots prettier gals around here than little old Clara. Why she's too damn scrawny." He added, "Besides, she's uglier than hell."

"You talk too much," Wyatt snapped.

George looked surprised. "What's got into you?"

"Nothing," Wyatt said. "Guys like this one get me mad. No better than mad dogs. Ought to be shot."

"You're sounding like you figure on running for mayor," George grinned. "You really are getting yourself fired up." He shook his head wonderingly. "Don't understand you."

"Just don't like guys like him," Wyatt said, slapping at a droning fly.

"Listen," Mal almost screamed, "I don't know what you're talking about. You guys have made a mistake. I just got in town and I can prove it. I . . ."

Before he could say anything more Wyatt rose to one knee and drove his right fist to Mal's mouth.

The blow split Mal's lip and blood ran down his chin, mixing with his sweat.

"That'll show you."

George stopped him from hitting Mal again by saying, "Leave him be. There's time enough for that." He blew a lungful of smoke at the flies. "You didn't have to do that. That was just snake meanness. That's all."

"I just don't like rail bums," Wyatt said, still glaring hard at Mal.

"That ain't got nothing to do with it," George wiped his face with his shirt sleeve. "I just can't understand why you're acting so crazy."

"I just thought we ought to get this bum now," Wyatt said.

George gave him a searching look and was about to say something else when they heard the sound of a car chugging toward them along the dirt road.

Mal paid no attention to the sound of the car. He was busy nursing his bleeding lip. "Didn't have to do that," he kept muttering.

"That's Marvin," Wyatt said. "I can tell by the sound of the car. I'd know that Chevy anywhere." He stood, pushing his hat to the back of his head and beating the red dust from his pants.

The car came around the bend in the road. It was an old four-door Chevrolet covered with a thin layer of dust. A wisp of steam curled up from the radiator. The driver parked it behind the truck.

“Glad you got here, Marvin,” Wyatt called, walking forward. “If you’d been much longer there wouldn’t have been much left of him.”

“Can’t understand Wyatt,” George mumbled. “Ain’t like him to be so hot-headed.” He shrugged it off.

A middle-aged man climbed out of the car. Like Wyatt and George, he was dressed in denim overalls and his face was deeply weathered by the sun. “Get sassy on you?”

“Not too much,” Wyatt said. “I whopped him one in the mouth and that shut him up.”

Marvin nodded. “That’s all these rail-rats understand.”

Wyatt looked in the car. “Didn’t see you there, Clara.” He turned back to Marvin and whispered, “How come you brought her?”

“She’s going to do it.”

Wyatt paled a bit but managed to say, “It’s your business.”

“That’s right.” Marvin opened the door for Clara. She got out of the car and stood blinking in the harsh sunlight. She was thin with dark hair that fell stringily to her shoulders. Her face was spattered with pimples that could be seen even through the heavy layer of makeup she wore.

They walked over to the trees under which George and Mal were sitting. Marvin looked down at Mal, who was still nursing his lip, occasionally spitting blood on the ground. “Don’t look like much.”

“No, he don’t.”

“I haven’t done nothing,” Mal grumbled.

“Stand him up,” Marvin ordered. George prodded Mal to his feet with the shotgun. He stood sullenly.

“You want to say something?” Marvin asked.

“Wouldn’t do any good,” Mal answered. “You already got your heads made up.”

“That’s right,” Wyatt said viciously. “We sure have.”

Marvin took some rope from his back pocket and tied Mal to one of the trees. “The stuff is in the back of the car,” he said to George over his shoulder.

“You sure you want to go through with with this?” George asked.

“You turning chicken on us, George?” Wyatt said nastily.

“I didn’t know she was going to be mixed up in it,” he nodded at Clara who stood nervously staring at Mal.

“I know what I’m doing,” Marvin finished tying Mal. “Get the noose.”

George leaned the shotgun against a pine. “If that’s the way you want it.”

“That’s the way,” Marvin answered.

George and Wyatt started for the car but Wyatt stopped and called back, “Is it in the trunk?”

“Hell,” Marvin said, “I’ll have to unlock the damn thing.” He followed them to the car, leaving Clara behind.

“Why are you lying?” Mal said

to the girl. "You know you never saw me before in your life. Just tell them the truth. That's all I want you to do."

She only stared at him, smiling crookedly. Mal struggled vainly with the ropes that bound his wrists.

The men, carrying a large wooden crate and a long, looped rope, returned from the car. George and Wyatt set the crate under a nearby tree and slung the noose over a high limb. Then, with Marvin helping them, they carried Mal over to the crate.

He went without struggling. To Mal the whole thing had become a nightmare from which he could not awaken.

Marvin fitted the noose around Mal's neck while George and Wyatt tied the other end of the rope to the base of the tree, making sure that it wouldn't slip in any way.

Mal began to fight with all his strength, but he was helpless. "For God's sake," he screamed, "she's lying. I can prove it if you just give me a chance."

Marvin said, "Clara, come here."

She stood beside him, her face blank and expressionless. Then she moved slowly toward the screaming and struggling figure standing on the old crate.

Mal tried to kick her, but she dodged.

After he tried another kick she got behind him and took hold of a rope attached to the crate. She held the rope for a minute, looking

up into Mal's screaming face. Then she pulled the crate quickly from under Mal's feet. His suspended body jerked for a minute, silently.

Then it was still.

George turned away, went behind the truck, and vomited. After he had finished he went to the truck and climbed in. He called to Wyatt: "I'm going back to town. If you want to, come on. Otherwise, stay here and when they go back you can go on with them."

Wyatt was grinning, intent on the suspended, still body. He did not answer. George waited for a short while. Then he shrugged and started the truck. He backed it around the car, turned, and drove down the road to the highway.

After a while Marvin said, "Let's go." He turned and moved toward the car without looking back over his shoulder.

As soon as his back was to them, Clara and Wyatt moved toward one another. They whispered rapidly to each other.

"That was close, too close," Wyatt said.

"When he found that torn piece of my dress that I wore the night we did it, I was scared silly. I didn't know what to do."

"That story you fed them, though," Wyatt said. "That was pretty damn good."

They began to follow Marvin, down the road to the car.

“We’d better take it easy,” Wyatt said without looking at her. “We’d just better.”

“Sure.”

Clara got in the back seat of the car while Wyatt sat in the front with Marvin. No one looked back

at the hanging figure.

The ride back to town was a quiet one, except for Clara, who sat without speaking in the back of the car.

Once or twice, quietly and as if to herself, she giggled.



MUGGED AND PRINTED

ERSKINE CALDWELL, world-famous author of *God's Little Acre* and many other best-selling books, including his latest novel, *Love And Money*, returns to *Manhunt* this month with one of the most unusual stories he's ever written: the surprising *Memento*. Caldwell gets a lot



of the material for his stories and novels in his occasional cross-country trips, stopping and meeting people in small towns or cities and then writing stories about their real-life problems or characters. He's now at work on a new book, and on some more of his fine stories for *Manhunt*.

EDWARD D. RADIN is renowned as the country's top fact-crime writer. Author of such best-selling books as *Twelve Against The Law*, *Twelve Against Crime*, *Headline Crimes Of The Year* and his latest, *Crimes Of Passion*, Radin got his early training through ten years as a police reporter for a New York newspaper. He still lives in New York, where he was born, though research may carry him all over the country or even abroad. In this issue of *Manhunt*, Radin makes his first appearance, with a crime feature about one of the most unusual killers in the history of the United States. The story's called *The Bste*.

GIL BREWER is the best-selling author of *13 French Street*, *Flight To Darkness* and *Killer Loose*, which will soon appear as a motion



picture. He's written five other Gold Medal books, and is one of the most popular authors on the Gold Medal list. Brewer lives in St. Petersburg, Florida, where he's now at work on a new book and on some more fine stories like his debut story for *Manhunt*, *Moonshine*, which appears in this issue. We think *Moonshine* is Brewer in top form — tough, fast and realistically believable.

KENNETH FEARING's first story for *Manhunt* appears in this issue. *The Jury* is the newest short story from the author of *The Big Clock*,



Dagger Of The Mind and, most recently, *The Generous Heart*. Fearing is noted for his unusual backgrounds (an art gallery in *Dagger Of The Mind*, a fund-raising outfit in *The Generous Heart* and, of course, the steel-and-chromium business offices

which were translated to the screen in the filming of *The Big Clock*). In *The Jury* he's come up with another original idea.

HAL ELLSON's newest story, *I Didn't See A Thing*, is in the tradition of his famous novels — he's the author of *Duke*, *Summer Street* and other fine books. ♦ DAVID ALEXANDER's come up with another startling and different story in *First Case*. He's the author of many fine books — the latest being his new Random House novel, *Paint The Town Black*. ♦ G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS makes his first appearance in *Manhunt* with the complete new novel, *Welcome Home*. He'll be remembered for his many fine stories in *Black Mask*, as well as for the numerous yarns of his that have appeared as motion pictures. ♦ HENRY KANE, whose *Sweet Charlie* appears in this issue, is now at work on a new Avon novel as well as more stories for *Manhunt*. *Sweet Charlie* features Kane's famous private peeper, Peter Chambers.

IN THIS ISSUE

- The story of a man who kept his mouth shut to the police because he liked pigeons . . .
- The story of a murder case that was confusing because it was full of Charlies . . .
- The story of a woman who was worried because her husband was going to make fifty thousand dollars — by blowing up an airplane . . .
- The story of a woman who had to watch a murder trial, because she wasn't involved at all . . .
- The story of a police officer who decided a man had been murdered because the man couldn't light a cigarette . . .
- Plus many other stories and crime features!

IN THIS ISSUE

- ERSKINE CALDWELL, author of *God's Little Acre*
- KENNETH FEARING, author of *The Big Clock*
- HAL ELLSON, author of *Duke*
- GIL BREWER, author of *13 French Street*, *Flight To Darkness* and *A Killer is Loose*
- JACK WEBB, author of *The Big Sin*, *The Naked Angel* and *The Damned Lovely*
- HENRY KANE, creator of Peter Chambers
- EDWARD D. RADIN, the country's top fact-crime writer

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